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Spying and Surveillance in Shakespeare's Dramatic Courts

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration of originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all sources appropriately. No part of this thesis has been submitted for examination at another institution.

Signed: Richard Angus Smith

Date: 02/07/2014

Abstract

This thesis examines representations of spying and surveillance in Shakespearean drama in conjunction with historical practices of espionage in later sixteenth-century England. The introductory chapter outlines how spying operations were conducted in Elizabethan England, with specific attention to the complex attitudes and behaviour of individual agents working in the broader context of the religious wars, both hot and cold, taking place between Protestant England and the Catholic powers of continental Europe. It also provides some analysis of the organisational structures within which those agents worked and examines a wide range of particular cases to illustrate how surveillance operations might play out in practice. The memory of Sir Francis Walsingham, often described as the ‘spymaster’ of Elizabeth’s government and noted for his skill in intelligence work, would have loomed large for any dramatist thinking about espionage at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Subsequent chapters each examine a specific play in light of the material presented in the introduction, comprising *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. Each chapter seeks to elucidate how Shakespeare draws upon the world of Elizabethan espionage to provide vital structural components in his dramatic plotting, especially as regards inter-personal relationships between courtiers, secretaries and agents on the ground. Real individuals and the spies depicted in Shakespeare’s plays all behave in a manner that is personally inflected to a profound degree, and it is this particular aspect of early-modern espionage that provides the single most important connection between history and drama. Periodically, this thesis also reflects upon the metatheatrical relationship between characters’ schemes and Shakespeare’s own plotting as a dramatist.

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Note on editions used

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to works by Shakespeare are to the following edition:

William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, Second Edition, ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005).

1. Introduction: Elizabethan espionage and the behavioural equivocation of Elizabethan spies

This thesis examines representations of spying and surveillance in Shakespearean drama in conjunction with historical practices of espionage in later sixteenth-century England. The first chapter outlines how spying operations were conducted in Elizabethan England, with specific attention to the complex attitudes and behaviour of individual agents working in the broader context of the religious wars, both hot and cold, taking place between Protestant England and Catholic powers in continental Europe. Subsequent chapters each examine a specific play in light of the material presented in this introduction, comprising *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, *Henry V* and *Hamlet*. At heart, this thesis argues that Shakespeare's widely varied use of concepts relating to espionage throughout his dramatic writing draws on the prevalence of such behaviour in later sixteenth-century England.

This introductory chapter is split into two parts. The first half provides some general background about the purpose and nature of spying operations in later sixteenth-century England, with significant attention paid to the political career of Sir Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary to Elizabeth I from 1573 until his death in 1590, often described as the 'spymaster' of her government. It also sets up some connections between that culture of espionage and the practice of early-modern theatre, including Shakespeare himself. The second half of the chapter examines the roles played by five government agents in the context of specific spying operations during the 1580s and 1590s. Often such individuals feigned allegiance to the Catholic faith in order to penetrate organisations plotting to overthrow Elizabeth and her Protestant government, allowing them to provide intelligence about such plots to Walsingham and his secretaries. These spies were quite willing to alter their behaviour and attitudes as occasion demanded, thus indicating that the success or failure of spying missions became critically dependent on the whim of such agents. Real individuals and the spies depicted in Shakespeare's plays all behave in a manner that is personally inflected to a profound degree, and it is this particular aspect of early-modern espionage that provides the single most important connection between history and drama.

Part 1: Elizabethan espionage

‘Spymaster’ Walsingham

The past decade has proved something of a boom time for interest in Elizabeth’s ‘spymaster,’ with the publication of no less than five new biographies on Walsingham.¹ All, however, owe a significant debt to the scholarly endeavours of Conyers Read, whose account of Sir Francis’s professional life in *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, first published in 1925, is little short of exhaustive.² As Read states in his preface, virtually all information about Walsingham’s life and work must be extracted from official records because there is no extant material of a more personal nature.³ Robert Beale, Walsingham’s private secretary for many years, noted in his pamphlet entitled ‘Instructions for a Principall Secretarie’ that ‘upon the death of Mr. Secretarie Walsingham all his papers and bookes both publicke and private weare seized on and carried away.’⁴ Exactly why this happened is unclear, but it certainly explains why Beale, anxious to ensure that Walsingham’s practices had not been scattered to the wind, decided to write about this issue.⁵ More simply, the intermingling of documents both public and private suggests that Walsingham’s career in public office demanded so much of him that there was precious little time left for personal matters. Arguably, he lived for the role of Principal Secretary.

So why the recent interest in Walsingham? Derek Wilson proposes that there are significant parallels between our own post-9/11 world and the one that Walsingham sought to influence through his position in Elizabeth’s government:

State-sponsored terrorism, hit men paid to eliminate heads of state, mobs fired up by hate-shrieking ‘holy’ men, fanatics ready to espouse martyrdom in the hope of heavenly reward, asylum-seekers, internment camps, the clash of totally irreconcilable ideologies. The list is familiar to us but as well as

¹ In order of publication they are: Alan Haynes, *Walsingham: Elizabethan Spymaster and Statesman* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004); Stephen Budiansky, *Her Majesty’s Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham and the Birth of Modern Espionage* (New York: Viking, 2005); Robert Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006); Derek Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham: A Courtier in an Age of Terror* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007); and John Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).

² Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 volumes (1925; Harwich Port, MA: Clock & Rose Press, 2003).

³ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, vii.

⁴ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 431.

⁵ Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent*, 43.

highlighting some of the problems of twenty-first-century Britain, it also offers an accurate picture of England 1570-90.⁶

Yet this should also sound a cautionary note, and one that has become prevalent in recent public discourse about the link between terrorism and religious practice: to what extent do the actions of extremists truly represent the wider body of any given religious sect? For practical purposes, that question is probably a moot point because Elizabeth's government made an express point of quashing the political ambitions of English Catholics, particularly those who were plotting to kill the Queen and install a Catholic monarch in her place. From the perspective of the Privy Council the Catholic faith presented a direct threat to the stability of Elizabeth's Protestant government and thus it was incumbent on Walsingham to seek out and foil plots against the Crown before they could be realised.

To describe Walsingham as the 'spymaster' of Elizabeth's government is, technically speaking, an anachronism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the first use of the word by *Time* magazine in 1943 in reference to 'the Nazi spymaster and Naval Attaché, Captain Dietrich Niebuhr' and the term comes to be most widely used in reference to espionage in the mid to late twentieth century, especially in the context of the Cold War. Similarly, the noun 'espionage,' which comes to English from the French 'espionnage,' only enters the language about two hundred years ago; the term 'spieri' was instead current during Elizabeth's reign.⁷ Although terms like 'spymaster' and 'espionage' were not current in Elizabethan England, they do, however, provide reasonable points of reference for describing the activities of the period and as such this thesis does not avoid using them.

The epitaph that hung over Walsingham's tomb in St Paul's Cathedral, probably written by his granddaughter Elizabeth, declared that 'In his Virile Age, he voluntarily (during the Reign of *Queen Mary*) / Forsook his Country for the preservation of his Religion.'⁸ This may have overstated the case. Although with hindsight Walsingham's stoic Protestantism seems to provide the most compelling reason for his absence from England during the reign of Catholic Mary I, this may not have been quite so apparent to the young Francis or other members of his family at the time. A more significant factor may have been the opportunity to gain crucial life

⁶ Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham*, ix.

⁷ Stephen Alford, *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 14.

⁸ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 255.

experience whilst studying abroad. For a time Walsingham read law at the University of Padua, where he held the position of ‘Consularius’ or leader of the English students at that institution for a number of months. His election to this office at the age of twenty-three, which gave him a seat on the University’s senate in addition to the more mundane task of overseeing the conduct of the other English students, indicates that he was already a young man of some political ability. Walsingham’s studies in Padua furthered his previous education prior to his departure from England, both at King’s College, Cambridge and Grey’s Inn in London.

In Padua Walsingham may have read Baldesar Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* in the original Italian, which subsequently proved an important model for the aspiring English courtier when it appeared in Thomas Hoby’s translation of 1561. More significant, however, was the opportunity to become acquainted with Italianate political culture and experience at first hand the courtly virtues prescribed in Castiglione’s book. As Walsingham later reflected, ‘books are but dead letters; it is the voice and conference of men that giveth them life and shall engender in you true knowledge.’⁹ The real significance of Walsingham’s time in Italy was the opportunity to interact with crafty Italian courtiers at first hand. Conyers Read summarises the kind of political machinations in the Italian city-states that would come to prove so important to Walsingham during his tenure as Elizabeth’s spymaster:

It was a difficult game to play which required not only alertness to seize an opportunity but knowledge to recognize the opportunity when it was offered. The successful Italian statesman had to be acquainted with the exact capacity and the exact position of every piece on the board. It was part of his creed that information could not be bought too dear. Consequently he employed countless agents and maintained elaborate systems of espionage to catch indiscreet whisperings through every keyhole and behind every arras.¹⁰

It is hard to avoid equating Walsingham’s later political exploits with the kind of practical education he received during his Italian sojourn. The portrait of him by John de Critz the Elder that hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London shows a figure dressed in sombre black, the ornate ruff and matching cuffs probably a concession to court fashion. The portrait dates from the mid-1580s, when Walsingham was in his early to mid fifties. John Cooper notes that ‘no effort has been made to conceal the encroaching signs of age’ and singles out Walsingham’s eyes as the dominant feature

⁹ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 23.

¹⁰ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 24.

of the portrait, ‘watchful and piercingly blue.’¹¹ Walsingham himself probably gave de Critz the commission.¹² This portrait thus belongs in a similar category to the ‘Rainbow Portrait’ of Elizabeth, painted in the early 1600s, in which the Queen’s dress is covered with ears and eyes to symbolise her government’s control over England. Around the time Walsingham’s portrait was taken James VI of Scotland, responding to a comment about the spymaster’s Puritanism, declared that Walsingham ‘notwithstanding his outward profession,’ was ‘a very Machiavel.’¹³ Elizabeth’s spymaster had by now gained a reputation in foreign courts for his adeptness in the kind of political intriguing to which he had first been exposed in Italy years earlier.

Walsingham’s first experience working in the political machine of Elizabeth’s government was as a private citizen. Roberto Ridolfi, a Florentine banker who had settled in England during the reign of Mary I, was under suspicion of channelling funds from the Pope to those Catholic nobles in the north of England who later carried out the failed coup known as the Northern Rising. William Cecil, later first Baron Burghley, at that time Principal Secretary to Elizabeth, decided to have Ridolfi interrogated in order to acquire hard evidence of his dealings in this matter, instructing Walsingham in a letter of 7 October 1569 to ‘have him remain in your house without conference until he may be examined of certain matters which touch her Majesty very nearly.’¹⁴ Ridolfi admitted to the charge of being a financial intermediary and, pleading for his freedom, promised that he would avoid associating himself with Catholic insurgents in the future.¹⁵

Ridolfi was subsequently released on a bond of £1,000, which was later returned to him along with his complete liberty. Somewhat bizarrely, Ridolfi seems to have convinced Walsingham of his innocence in the matter. Walsingham later wrote to Burghley recommending Ridolfi for a role as a political intermediary between England and Flanders: ‘Surely, sir, the late experiences that I have divers ways had of him, maketh me to believe that if he were employed in that behalf, he would deal both discreetly and uprightly, as one both wise and who standeth on terms of honesty and

¹¹ Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent*, 289.

¹² Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent*, 289.

¹³ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 266.

¹⁴ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 66.

¹⁵ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 67.

reputation.¹⁶ Or maybe Walsingham was not deceived after all. Most of the agents with whom he would deal throughout his career as Elizabeth's spymaster were not simply on his side or against it. Purely as a matter of expediency Walsingham knew that it was absolutely necessary to develop relationships with duplicitous individuals such as Ridolfi in order to acquire key pieces of intelligence for protecting Elizabeth's crown.

The watershed moment in Walsingham's political career occurred during his posting as ambassador to the French court in the early 1570s, an experience that provided him with what Stephen Budiansky describes as 'an unequalled lesson in political reality.'¹⁷ Quite aside from the political frustrations he experienced in his ultimately futile attempts to broker a marriage between Elizabeth and one of the two brothers of the French King Charles IX, the financial burden of maintaining such an office was crippling him. One year into the job expenses were running at £200 a month, he was already £1,600 in debt and had been forced to sell land and borrow against future income.¹⁸ Shortly before his recall to England in April 1573 Walsingham even reported that he no longer thought it possible to accompany the French court to their retreat at Fontainebleau: 'I shall be driven to remain here ... having neither furniture, money, nor credit.'¹⁹

Most significantly, Walsingham experienced at first hand the religious massacres of 1572 that began in Paris on 23 August, St Bartholomew's Day. Throughout that month Huguenot noblemen had filled the streets of the French capital, there to attend the wedding of their Protestant leader Henry of Navarre (later Henry IV of France), to the Catholic Margaret of Valois, sister of the reigning monarch Charles IX. The marriage took place on 18 August, but subsequent events proved that this was to be anything but a match of religious harmony. On 22 August, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, a Huguenot military leader, narrowly escaped being killed by a hired assassin. Fearful that the Huguenots would retaliate, the King permitted, perhaps even encouraged, Parisian Catholics to embark on a killing spree of Protestants that would last in the city for one week and spread throughout the French countryside for many more to come. The English embassy happened to be located in the Quai des Bernardins, on the opposite bank of the River Seine from

¹⁶ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 68.

¹⁷ Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster*, 29.

¹⁸ Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster*, 9.

¹⁹ Quoted in Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster*, 29.

where the massacre began. This probably saved Walsingham and his household from the carnage, but they still had to experience the horrific accounts of bloodshed related by other foreign Protestants who came to the door begging refuge.²⁰

Unfortunately there is no record of Walsingham's immediate reaction to these events. He did send a report to the Privy Council in England but, wary of what might result if a letter were to be intercepted at this most delicate of times, he had his diplomatic messenger Walter Williams commit the information to memory.²¹ Williams later became one of the four individuals whom Walsingham regularly employed as an agent throughout the 1580s. On 8 October Walsingham wrote to Sir Thomas Smith, a scholar and diplomat who subsequently held the office of Principal Secretary jointly with Walsingham until Smith's death in 1577, concerning the political fallout that had resulted from the massacre. In this letter Walsingham coined an aphorism that would prove crucial throughout his tenure as Principal Secretary to Elizabeth:

[Catholic plotters] omit nothing that may tend to our peril. I would we were as careful not to omit anything that may tend to our safety. It may be said that I fear too much. Surely, considering the state we stand in, *I think it less danger to fear too much than too little.*²²

The recent massacres probably confirmed Walsingham's worst fears about the evils of Catholicism. He was to spend the next two decades constantly seeking out and evaluating Catholic plots against Elizabeth's throne.

On a number of occasions Elizabeth referred to Walsingham as a 'rank Puritan,' but he does not appear to have used his position as Principal Secretary to push for further reform within the English Church, instead directing his energies towards surveilling and quashing Catholic plots against the throne.²³ According to Francis Bacon, Elizabeth, always somewhat secretive about the true nature of her religious beliefs, is supposed to have declared 'I would not open windows into men's souls.'²⁴ Even if Bacon's report is not verbally accurate, it would seem to summarise neatly the Queen's expectations in regard to her subjects' religion. Behavioural conformity to the practices of a church that she chose to describe not as Protestant but

²⁰ Facts about the St Bartholomew's Day massacres are drawn from: Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster*, 3-16; Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 76-83; Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 219-30.

²¹ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 51.

²² Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 237, my emphasis.

²³ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 262.

²⁴ Quoted in John N. King, 'Religious writing' in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1500-1600*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 104.

‘mere English’ was all she expected, even if particular individuals still wished to retain a kind of inner Catholicism.²⁵ Elizabeth’s apparent disinterest about the issue of religious creed was probably a defensive measure designed to ensure subjects’ loyalty to her person. She herself had attended Mass during the reign of her half-sister Mary, despite previously adhering to the brand of Protestantism promoted during the reign of her half-brother Edward VI. However, Elizabeth’s government still sought to enforce behavioural conformity: in 1581 recusancy fines were increased from the relatively affordable sum of one shilling a week to a crippling £20 per month.²⁶ Indirectly, Shakespeare himself benefited financially from this piece of legislation. The dramatist’s purchase of New Place in Stratford in 1597 provides solid evidence that his working life in the London theatre was allowing him to save substantial amounts of money. The vendor was a Catholic, William Underhill, forced into selling on account of recusancy fines he owed the government; Shakespeare’s involvement suggests both ‘a mixture of shrewd commercial calculation and semi-fraternal sympathy.’²⁷ The deed of sale records that New Place was purchased for £60, but Underhill probably received double that sum, as it was common practice for the two parties engaged in such transactions to employ complex legal loopholes in order to avoid declaring the true amount paid.²⁸ Even so, Shakespeare probably got a good deal as a result of Underhill’s need to sell.

Only in 1593 did the government introduce an ‘Act for restraining Popish recusants’, which suggests that before this date the Privy Council saw little use in adopting overt methods for restraining dissident English Catholics. In a memoir drawn up in December 1586, Walsingham outlined his thoughts on how to deal with the priests roaming England:

There are of these Seminaries two sorts, some learned and politic withal and of great persuasion, others simple, having more zeal than wit or learning.

For the first, they are to be sent to Wisbeach [prison] or some such like place where they may be under honest keepers and be restrained from access and intelligence, for that, being banished, they might do a great deal of harm.

For the second, they may be banished as others before, upon penalty to be executed if they return, and for the more terror, such as were banished and are returned, to be presently executed.²⁹

²⁵ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 31.

²⁶ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 70.

²⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005), 39.

²⁸ Lois Potter, *The Life of William Shakespeare: A Critical Biography* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 216.

²⁹ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 313.

Walsingham was well aware of the problems that martyrdom brought with it, which might only encourage further infiltration from the seminaries on the Continent. He thus considered it more appropriate to apply methods of a psychologically coercive nature: individuals whose fanaticism rendered them a continual threat were to be incarcerated in secure prisons that blocked all communication with the outside world, whilst those less dedicated to the cause could be sent into permanent exile with the assurance of certain death at the hands of the state if they ever returned.

Walsingham's Puritan disposition would, in general, have rendered him anathema to the supposed moral corruption of the theatre, yet he played a crucial role in the formation of the Queen's Men in 1583, a troupe that spent most of its time on tour in the English provinces, rather than fixed in the newly established theatrical heartland of London. Under normal circumstances it would have fallen to the Lord Chamberlain, in this instance the Earl of Sussex, to direct the Master of the Revels in the creation of the new troupe, but it appears that Walsingham himself intervened in this matter very deliberately, for reasons that did not reflect any personal love of the theatre. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean posit that the new troupe's touring schedule provided a subtle but highly useful tool in Walsingham's surveillance of potential dissidents in the English provinces:

The formation of the Queen's Men in 1583 should be regarded particularly in connection with the intelligence system – not because the Queen's Men were spies, but because Walsingham used licensed travellers of various kinds to give the impression of an extensive court influence within which the actual size and constitution of the spy system could not be detected. He was creating the impression of a larger intelligence system than he in fact possessed, and licensed travellers from court, who crossed the land on their own business, were serving as something of a smoke-screen to obscure the locations of a few flames.³⁰

Walsingham's deployment of the Queen's Men provides a good example of the kind of government surveillance that we would today describe in terms of Foucauldian panopticism. The parallel is worth noting in this instance, especially in connection with Foucault's analysis of tools of surveillance that ensure constant behavioural discipline on the part of the subject because it is impossible for him or her to determine whether he or she is under surveillance at any given moment in time.³¹ The Queen's Men were at once providing entertainment and spying out the land for the

³⁰ Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men and their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 27.

³¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1977), 195-228.

Principal Secretary. Ostensibly the troupe carry the monarch's name throughout the land, performing drama that has been pre-approved by government officials; simultaneously, even if the actors do not also double as spies for Walsingham or other courtiers, the troupe's constant movement throughout the countryside ensures that Catholic recusants and other political dissidents need constantly to be on the lookout for fear that reports of their attitudes or intended behaviour could make their way back to the government in London.

'A profession odious though necessary': procedures in Elizabethan espionage

In his recent book on Elizabethan spy networks Stephen Alford outlines the reasons why any given individual might offer his services as a government agent:

There were few rules and no vetting of volunteers, and so if some spies and informants were brilliantly effective, others were derelict as well as dangerous, spying out of greed or spite or for private revenge. Others wanted adventure, a chance to play the dangerous secret game: they thrived on the excitement. Visceral hatred of the enemy was another motive. Most 'espials' and 'intelligencers' (to Elizabethans the two words meant much the same thing) wrote at some time of their patriotic calling: they spied for God, queen and country.³²

Surveillance missions in sixteenth-century England were conducted by a very mixed group of characters. The only mainstays of the system, such as it existed, were courtiers like Walsingham and the personal secretaries that they employed. Agents on the ground came and went as a matter of course, otherwise finding more stable forms of employment as 'soldiers, academics, students, writers and musicians.'³³

Throughout the 1580s Walsingham received literally hundreds of letters a year from the roughly seventy agents that filed reports from various European courts.³⁴ Curtis C. Breight draws attention to the 'improvisational' nature of early-modern intelligence networks: "accidental sources," rewards, reports to local officials, and treacherous servants constitute part of a recognizable system, a culture of widespread informers.'³⁵ Most of the intelligence that made its way to the English court, both from home and abroad, was not provided by individuals that we would nowadays

³² Alford, *The Watchers*, 15.

³³ Alan Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services* (1992; Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), 14.

³⁴ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 15; Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 17.

³⁵ Curtis C. Breight, *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama in the Elizabethan Era* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 102.

think of as spies. The *ad hoc* nature of the system could at times prove frustrating for those at the top of the chain like Walsingham; the flip side was that vital pieces of information could suddenly appear from surprising or inconspicuous sources.

Many of the human elements pertaining to espionage will never change. To James Bond, the most recognisable spy in literature and film over the last sixty years, much of this would be familiar. It is a commonplace of the Bondian narrative – especially in the films, which often seek to deliver a lighter touch than Fleming’s novels – that Agent 007 is summoned for a conference with M, head of MI6, and ordered to abandon the martinis and alluring women in order to finish the job at hand. M is the figurehead of a secretive government department that employs a select group of highly qualified individuals to bring about the political and diplomatic goals of the modern British state. 007’s formal title of Commander Bond recalls his earlier naval career and M is named in full as Admiral Sir Miles Messervy in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, Fleming’s last novel.³⁶ Both figures thus come to the business of secret intelligence with experience in a closely related field of work, as well as a highly developed appreciation of the procedures pertaining to rank and bureaucracy.

While M is 007’s superior, the head of the British Secret Service is certainly no patron. The working relationship between the two individuals is determined by the manner in which each individual does or does not adhere to the rules prescribed by the British Secret Service. For the Elizabethan spy, on the other hand, success in the field of espionage depended just as much on the relationship one could develop with one’s patron and his secretaries as the validity and usefulness of intelligence supplied. There was thus a personal quirkiness inherent to early-modern intelligence operations that is largely lost nowadays. Codenames do appear in records pertaining to espionage in this period, but these are generally employed in written missives as a way of disguising the identity of particular individuals, should such letters happen to fall into enemy hands. For example, Robert Bowes, the English ambassador to Scotland, used the following cipher when communicating with Walsingham in April 1583: France – 54, Scotland – 70, James VI – 91, the Earl of Lennox – 870, Elizabeth – 32, and Mary, Queen of Scots – 23.³⁷ Unlike the case of M and 007, these textual scraps do not indicate the existence of organisations formulated through hierarchies in which any given individual effectively falls out of sight. In Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*,

³⁶ Ian Fleming, *The Man with the Golden Gun* (London: Gildrose, 1965), 11.

³⁷ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 23.

Maria plants a forged letter to lure the pompous Malvolio, ‘the trout that must be caught with tickling’ (2.5.20-21), into believing that his mistress Olivia is in love with him. Malvolio interprets the letters ‘M.O.A.I.’ (106) to be his own name in cipher: ‘to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of those letters are in my name’ (136-37). He thus decodes the riddling missive in such a fashion that he is able to convince himself erroneously ‘every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me’ (159-60).

Intelligence operations in the context of courtly patronage could prove to be very much a double-edged sword, both for influential courtiers and for those who sought employment as agents. When things came together well the courtier was able to extract important pieces of intelligence that would directly influence the flow of government policy, and the agent’s successful work would recommend him for future missions. When things fell apart, as they often did, the courtier was left with a mass of unreliable, if not useless, information, and the agent was simply dismissed from his role, or left to languish at the pleasure of whatever foreign power he might be subject to.

Intelligence chiefs today still have to grapple with the problem of determining both the reliability and significance of any unique piece of information, as well as keeping a wary eye out for the ever-present threat of double or triple agency. This has been made all the more challenging by the presence of the Wikileaks website, which, since its launch in 2007, has published countless pieces of information of a diplomatically sensitive nature, causing discomfort for governments around the world. However, in addition to more timeless problems, the everyday workings of the patronage system at the Elizabethan court (or any court in early-modern Europe for that matter) introduced yet another element of complexity. Whereas the bureaucracy inherent to the everyday functioning of MI6 ensures that Bond, whose remuneration comes via a regular salary, has nothing to gain by providing reports of an inaccurate or exaggerated nature, agents in the early-modern period frequently did so in order to enhance their own standing in relation to their patron, as well as angle for greater financial reward.³⁸

³⁸ In *Moonraker*, first published in 1955, Fleming states that Bond receives an annual salary of £1,500. See Ian Fleming, *Moonraker* (1955; London: Vintage, 2012), 9.

Both Alison Plowden and Alan Haynes use the phrase ‘Elizabethan secret service’ to describe government practices of espionage in later sixteenth-century England.³⁹ However, this should not give the impression that Walsingham ran a kind of early-modern MI6 with numerous personnel at his disposal.⁴⁰ Conyers Read argues that ‘regular employment of secret agents’ did not occur prior to 1581 and posits that this developed as a direct response to the return of missionary priests who had left England in the 1570s to train in seminaries on the Continent.⁴¹ Furthermore, Read identifies only four individuals – Robert Barnard, Maliverny Catlyn, Thomas Rogers (who also went by the alias Nicholas Berden) and Walter Williams – who worked for Walsingham during the 1580s for any extended period of time. In early 1584 Rogers wrote to Walsingham’s secretary Thomas Phelippes:

When so ever any occasion shall be offered wherein I may adventure some rare and desperate exploit such as may be for the honour of my country and my own credit, you shall always find me resolute and ready to perform the same ... This only I crave, that though I profess myself a spy (which is a profession odious though necessary) that I prosecute the same not for gain, but for the safety of my native country.⁴²

Presumably Rogers had learned that Walsingham was now employing more agents to surveil Catholic dissidents and decided to pursue this opportunity. In describing spying as ‘a profession odious though necessary,’ Rogers knew that his chosen vocation would require him to engage in behaviour of an ethically dubious nature. Whether Rogers really did believe himself to be offering his services in order to defend the ‘honour’ and ‘safety’ of England may not matter so much as the likelihood that he knew such statements of political principle would appeal directly to Walsingham’s Protestant patriotism. Equally, it is hard to believe that Walsingham paid much attention to such claims, being well aware that this was a business that depended upon individuals accomplished in the art of dissemblance.

Shakespeare frequently draws attention to ethical issues associated with espionage. The Duke in *Measure for Measure* temporarily quits his seat of government in order to test the moral integrity of the precise deputy Angelo. On the night before Agincourt a disguised Henry V is forced to confront his responsibilities

³⁹ Alison Plowden, *The Elizabethan Secret Service* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*.

⁴⁰ A list of individuals who worked as spies for Walsingham is given in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 275-92.

⁴¹ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 322.

⁴² Quoted in Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent*, 184.

as king and general during a heated exchange with some of the common soldiers in his army. Eager to please Claudius and Gertrude, the hapless Rosencrantz and Guildenstern willingly agree to spy on Hamlet, only to be caught out easily by their university friend, who is angry about their ready betrayal of his trust. Polonius dispatches his man Reynaldo in order to shadow Laertes's activities in Paris; Reynaldo is encouraged to probe for any disreputable behaviour that Laertes may be engaging in.

The most significant indication that Walsingham was maintaining what amounted to a government sanctioned 'secret service' throughout the 1580s is that he received regular payments from the crown treasury to finance such operations. From 1582 he received £750 a year in quarterly payments, rising to £2,000 a year for the period 1585-90.⁴³ These funds were withdrawn according to a warrant of the Privy Seal which stated that the money was to be used 'for such purposes as the Queen shall appoint.'⁴⁴ Such warrants were also used to authorise payments for many other activities of a more benign nature and consequently it is difficult to determine what fraction of such monies really did provide the financing for Walsingham's spy network. Perhaps more significant is the fact that Elizabeth herself agreed to such sustained levels of funding for a whole decade: the Queen was always loathe to part with treasury funds if an alternative source could be found, which indicates that she perceived the work done by Walsingham's spy network to be of paramount importance for the security of her realm.⁴⁵

It is almost certain that Walsingham supplemented these official funds out of his own pocket. His principal source of income came in the form of trade monopolies and other grants awarded by the crown. Walsingham made an annual profit of fifty-eight percent out of his administration of the customs, amounting to £2,053 in 1585-86, £3,852 in 1586-87, £6,695 in 1587-88 and £1,765 in 1588-89 (the sharp decrease in the latter two years is due to the disruption that the Spanish Armada caused to maritime trade).⁴⁶ Even allowing for the fact that some of this income would be set aside for other expenses, it is conceivable that Walsingham himself put hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds per year of his own money towards funding the government spy network. That additional money may well have made a crucial difference in

⁴³ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 371.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 370.

⁴⁵ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 371.

⁴⁶ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 245.

helping Elizabeth's spymaster to monitor and quash plots against the Queen and her government.

Unlike James Bond, no agents in this period received anything like a regular salary. It was unusual for agents to receive any kind of reward other than a one-off payment for a specific service. However, Gilbert Gifford did receive a pension of £100 a year for playing turncoat in the Babington plot, as did Anthony Standen for providing Walsingham with military intelligence from his post in Florence in the build up to the Spanish Armada. After Walsingham's death Nicholas Berden was granted the office of Purveyor of the Poultry. However, these are rare examples that more properly represent endowments given to an agent after his cover was blown and he could be of no more use to the government.

Still, that did not stop agents angling for a regular income. A letter that Robert Barnard wrote to Walsingham in 1582 gives a good idea of how an agent might use his status in the field to seek financial reward:

I owe my host in London above £4 who threatens to have me in prison for the same. I have not received anything from you in three months past. I beseech you to give me order whereby I may, with less trouble to your Honour, receive monthly that which it may seem good to you to bestow upon me. I was never in better credit with the papists, nor of so great acquaintance among them, for I have attained the means to have access to all the prisons in London, the Tower only excepted, whereby there is nothing that shall come over or go over, nor anything be done here within our country but I am assured to hear thereof.⁴⁷

Barnard's plea for ongoing monthly payments indicates that it was Walsingham's prerogative to determine the matter of agents' reimbursement. On the face of it, Barnard had been carrying out admirable work: he had succeeded in planting himself as a stool pigeon in virtually every prison in London; this allowed him, in the guise of an imprisoned Catholic, to probe other inmates for pieces of intelligence that he could then pass on to the spymaster. Yet the fact that Barnard was desperately short of money, which, ironically, might be leading to his own imprisonment for debt, suggests that he had not been having quite the success that he claims in his letter. It was one thing for a spy to put himself in a position where he might be able to gather useful intelligence and quite another to succeed in doing so. Walsingham may have been withholding these payments deliberately, either because Barnard's intelligence was not sufficiently useful or because the spymaster suspected that Barnard was

⁴⁷ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 337.

embellishing his reports in order to promote his own pecuniary interests. Given that Barnard was one of Walsingham's regular agents, the situation was probably much worse for those individuals who only gained rare or sporadic employment as a spy. Barnard's predicament indicates that a full time career as a government agent was largely unviable.

As a general rule of thumb surveillance missions in this period operated according to a tripartite structure of authority, running from influential courtier to personal secretary to agent on the ground. For example, during Walsingham's entrapment of Mary, Queen of Scots in the Babington plot (discussed in detail below), the agent Gilbert Gifford gave the incriminating letters to Walsingham's secretary Thomas Phelippes, who decoded them before passing on the information to Walsingham himself. Differing numbers of agents appear in the plays examined in subsequent chapters of this thesis, but they generally have an intimate, and sometimes problematic, relationship with the courtier-figure on whose behalf they work. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Borachio, agent and secretary to the villainous Don John, provides his master with a scheme to defame the heroine of the play. In *The Tempest* the magician-duke Prospero employs a single agent with magical powers, Ariel, to control the movements of the various shipwrecked parties scattered around the island. In *Measure for Measure* Duke Vincentio confides only in one Friar his plan to test the moral integrity of the deputy Angelo before going underground in religious garb to put his plan into effect. By contrast, the exposure of the traitors in *Henry V* relies on a background intelligence operation that is never staged; this is balanced against another scene in which the King privately conducts an undercover surveillance mission on the night before Agincourt to discover what his troops really think of his abilities as monarch and warrior. And lastly, although Horatio's relationship with Hamlet is more that of confidante than secretary or agent, the court of Elsinore contains several spies: Reynaldo operating as Polonius's man in Paris, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern summoned by the King and Queen to seek out the cause of Hamlet's lunacy, and Ophelia employed as a double agent by the King and Polonius in the 'To be, or not to be' / nunnery episode.

Shakespeare's fairly minimal use of agents in these plays must in part be put down to dramatic expediency. If, for example, over the course of three successive scenes, seven or eight agents each submit separate intelligence reports to three or four different secretaries, who then have to sift through this information and report back to

their masters, with some of the agents subsequently attempting to sell their intelligence twice in order to double their money, the play is in real danger of becoming swamped with reports that have minimal bearing on the overall trajectory of the plot. As well as being a feature of the comedic genre more generally, misreporting is integral to the plot of *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which many characters believe things simply because they are told that is the case. Good drama requires comparatively little information to keep the basic plot of a play moving, and consequently specific pieces of intelligence that Shakespeare feeds into his plots are of particular importance.

Entrapment: Walsingham, Mary, Queen of Scots and the Babington Plot

Walsingham's greatest coup as Elizabeth's spymaster came in the form of his entrapment of Mary, Queen of Scots, in the episode known as the Babington Plot. Like other key members of the Privy Council, Walsingham had had his sights on Mary for years. Prior to his ambassadorial posting in Paris he had written a pamphlet, perhaps at the prompting of William Cecil, entitled 'A Discourse touching the pretended matche between the D. of Norfolk and the Queene of Scotts,' which outlined the political evils that he believed would result from such a marriage. In particular, he posited at this early stage that Mary had designs on the English crown: 'In goodwill towards our soveraigne she hath shewed herself sundry waies very evill affected, whose ambition hath drawn her by bearing the Armes of England to decipher herself to be a Competitair of this Crowne, a thing publicly known.'⁴⁸ During the next few years he spent in Paris Walsingham kept a keen eye on the perceived threat that Mary posed, writing to Leicester on 31 January 1572, 'so long as that devilish woman lives neither her Majesty must make account to continue in quiet possession of her crown, nor her faithful servants assure themselves of safety of their lives.'⁴⁹ Walsingham himself seems very much to have thought of his rivalry with Mary in Biblical terms, his hateful epithet for her being 'the bosom serpent.'⁵⁰ Likewise, Mary realised at a very early stage that Walsingham would prove a far

⁴⁸ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. I, 69.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 342.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 169.

greater threat to her life than Elizabeth herself, describing him in a letter to her ambassador in Paris in August 1574 as ‘my mortal enemy.’⁵¹

A few years before the events of the Babington Plot, Walsingham had for a brief period come to the conclusion that Mary might prove less of a danger both to Elizabeth and the Protestant English state in general if she were released from house arrest. Specifically, he was hoping that, given appropriate ‘cautions and restrictions,’ Mary could act as Elizabeth’s emissary in political negotiations with James VI of Scotland, who had been crowned aged one year after his mother’s abdication and flight into England.⁵² Mary herself was enthusiastic about establishing a relationship with Walsingham based on mutual trust, as she wrote to Mauvissière, the French ambassador to the English court, in July 1583:

For truly, if I could be once assured that Walsingham would deal honestly, I would be very glad to establish a friendship with him, reserving always his duty to his mistress, for I hold him to be a frank and straightforward kind of man and I believe he would assort well with me if he knew me otherwise than by the reports of my enemies.⁵³

Walsingham does seem to have been overoptimistic about the viability of this proposal, which in any case did not go ahead on account of the discovery of the Throckmorton plot. In 1580 Sir Francis Throckmorton, himself from a staunchly Catholic family, had travelled to the Continent, where he made contact with English Catholic exiles in both France and Spain. Returning to England in 1583 he then channelled letters between Mary, Mauvissière and the Spanish ambassador Bernardino de Mendoza, who were plotting a military invasion of England to be led by Henry, Duke of Guise, with the aim of restoring a Catholic monarch to the English throne. Walsingham was able to obtain intelligence of their plans through Giordano Bruno, a guest at the French embassy, who was in reality the spymaster’s mole, communicating with Walsingham using the alias Henri Fagot.⁵⁴ Throckmorton was apprehended as he sat in his London house encrypting a letter to Mary, confessed under torture and was subsequently executed.⁵⁵ Mauvissière was only permitted to retain his post on the understanding that he cease to advocate for Mary and that in

⁵¹ Quoted in Budiansky, *Her Majesty’s Spymaster*, 106.

⁵² Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 392.

⁵³ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. II, 394.

⁵⁴ John Bossy gives a detailed account of this episode in *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1991).

⁵⁵ Budiansky, *Her Majesty’s Spymaster*, 129-31.

future he give Walsingham complete access to letters passing between the imprisoned Queen and her Parisian supporters. A furious de Mendoza was simply expelled.

In November 1584 Parliament hurried through an Act entitled ‘The Bond of Association for the Defense of Queen Elizabeth.’⁵⁶ In part, the Bond was a knee-jerk reaction to the failed Throckmorton plot: ‘for the furtherance and advertisement of some pretended titles to the crown of this realm it hath been manifest that the life of our gracious sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth, hath been most traitorously and devilishly sought.’ Yet it also provided legal grounding to assist in prosecuting anyone caught engaging in future plots against the crown. Although expressed in general terms, the Bond was clearly conceived with Mary as the prime target, regardless of the degree to which the imprisoned Queen might be complicit in future conspiracies. All those who signed the Act were to consider themselves ‘most justly bound with our bodies, lives, lands, and goods in her [Elizabeth’s] defense and for her safety to withstand, pursue, and suppress all such mischievous persons and all other her enemies, of what nation, condition, or degree soever they shall be, or by what color [i.e. show] or title they shall pretend to be her enemies or to attempt any harm to her person.’ Mary herself signed the Bond on 5 January 1585.⁵⁷ Elizabeth had little, if anything, to do with the formulation of the Bond of Association. In a speech to Parliament in November 1586 she declared ‘I assure you I never knew of it until three thousand hands with seals thereof were brought and showed unto me at Hampton Court.’⁵⁸ The Act was very much the brainchild of Walsingham and Burghley, both desperate to rid England of a political exile whose very existence presented a continual threat to the stability of the Elizabethan regime.

When she had fled to England in 1568 Mary had been apprehended and placed in the custody first of George Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury, and then Sir Ralph Sadler, a veteran courtier who had served under Henry VIII. During this period her confinement was relatively comfortable and although she was only permitted outside under strict supervision, Mary was allowed to retain her own substantial domestic staff. Although there is no evidence to suggest that either Shrewsbury or Sadler had been complicit in ongoing clandestine communications between their royal prisoner and external Catholic plotters, particularly those located in Paris, Walsingham was

⁵⁶ The Bond of Association is reprinted in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works* ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2000), 183-85.

⁵⁷ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 118.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 189.

becoming increasingly suspicious that their supervision of Mary was proving too lax. Consequently, in April 1585 Mary was transferred to the custody of Sir Amias Paulet, a Puritan and close political ally of Walsingham, who proceeded to restrict all possible channels of communication between Mary and the outside world. This included open censorship of all letters that Mary sent and received, as well as vigorous policing of the movements of her retinue. Paulet was scrupulous in his efforts and was later able to report to Walsingham: 'I have (I thank God) reformed no small number of abuses of dangerous consequence and experience doth inform me daily of other such new faults as might carry great peril, which I omit not to redress by little and little as I may.'⁵⁹

Mary's allies in Paris were anxious to re-establish communication with the imprisoned Queen in the face of this security clampdown. To this end Thomas Morgan, a staunch Catholic who had worked for Shrewsbury at the time Mary had been in the Earl's custody, dispatched one Gilbert Gifford to England, along with a letter of recommendation to the French ambassador in London. Morgan should have thought twice about Gifford's suitability for this role. During his time at the English Colleges in Douai, Rheims and Rome Gifford had proved to be a troublesome, even violent student; Edward Stafford, the ambassador to France, subsequently described him as 'the most notable double treble villain that ever lived, for he hath played upon all the hands in the world.'⁶⁰ When he landed in England Gifford was apprehended by the port searcher at Rye and brought before Walsingham. Unbeknownst to Mary or her allies, the spymaster successfully induced Gifford to work for the English government, although Gifford could hardly have had much choice in the matter as the only other options would have been permanent exile, imprisonment or even execution.

Walsingham now had the ideal opportunity to establish an apparently secret postal service between Mary and her allies, but one that he ultimately controlled, allowing him to surveil covertly every letter that passed between the conspirators without their knowledge. Once a week beer for the house at Chartley, where Mary was imprisoned, was delivered from the town of Burton. Gifford's job was to collect Mary's mail from the French embassy and pass it to Thomas Phelippes, Walsingham's secretary, who decoded and transcribed the letters. Gifford then took

⁵⁹ Quoted in Plowden, *The Elizabethan Secret Service*, 92.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham*, 208.

the original letters back from Phelippes and gave them to the brewer, styled 'the honest man' by Paulet, who inserted them into a beer barrel using a watertight container and then made his delivery. Walsingham was able to keep tabs on Gifford's integrity by instructing the brewer to hand the letters over to Paulet in person upon his arrival at Chartley before he proceeded to give them to Mary. By this means Paulet could ensure Gifford had not made additions warning Mary that her correspondence was being surreptitiously supervised, although this never appears to have been a problem.

Anthony Babington was born into a wealthy Catholic family in 1561 and first came into contact with Mary in the late 1570s, at which time he was employed as a pageboy in Shrewsbury's household. In 1580 he travelled to Paris and met Thomas Morgan, who used Babington to convey letters to Mary on a number of occasions in 1583 and 1584.⁶¹ Although his name is associated with this plot, Babington was really its 'weak link.'⁶² The driving force behind the conspiracy was the Catholic missionary John Ballard, a fiery individual who went by the alias Captain Fortescue to protect his identity. Ballard met with Babington in May 1586 and outlined a plan to invade England with 60,000 troops from France, Italy and Spain. Ballard wanted Babington to use his contacts within the Catholic community to garner support for this action and raise additional troops within England itself.

Babington was looking to keep his options open and to this end sought the help of Robert Poley in procuring a passport from the Privy Council; if the conspiracy fell apart this would allow him to flee England under legitimate pretences. Poley, however, was Walsingham's man. In 1583 Poley had approached the spymaster offering his services and was made 'prisoner in the Marshalsea upon Mr Secretary's commandment.'⁶³ Poley's primary task had been to gain the confidence of imprisoned Catholics and then use secret service funds to buy intelligence about plots against Elizabeth's throne. A few years later he managed to worm his way into Babington's confidence in the guise of one supportive of a Catholic rebellion. At the end of June 1586 Poley arranged for Babington to meet with Walsingham. Apparently the spymaster uttered 'many honourable speeches' to Babington and then slyly invited the conspirator to turn informer: 'come now, act with confidence, do not fear to converse

⁶¹ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 125.

⁶² Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (Revised Edition; London: Vintage, 2002), 174.

⁶³ Quoted in David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 144.

freely amongst Catholics on the subject of our affairs, so as to escape observation.’⁶⁴ Far from seeking to quash the plot before it had a chance to develop fully, Walsingham was in fact encouraging Babington to continue conspiring, falsely leading him to believe that he might at some later date be able to claim immunity.⁶⁵

It seems that Poley, who was about ten years older than Babington, had made quite an impression on the young nobleman. Just days before being arrested Babington wrote one final letter to Walsingham’s mole:

Farewell, sweet Robyn, if as I take thee, true to me. If not, adieu, *omnium bipedum nequissimus* [of all two-footed creatures the vilest]. Return me thine answer for my satisfaction, and my diamond, and what else thou wilt. The furnace is prepared wherein our faith must be tried. Farewell till we meet, which God knows when.⁶⁶

Babington’s language is testament to the psychological snare in which he found himself: homosocial, even homoerotic affection, shown particularly through his gift of a jewel, is mixed with a sense of foreboding that Poley might not be the bosom companion that Babington had taken him to be. Babington’s suspicions had probably been aroused at an earlier date when he had caught Poley in the act of transcribing one of the letters that Mary had sent through the secret post. Poley recalled this incident in the official story of the Babington plot that was later set down in the *Calendar of State Papers*: ‘all unawares he saw the abstract I had taken, and lest he should suspect me that I should show it to Mr Secretary I rent it before his face saying I would not keep any such papers.’⁶⁷ This episode also demonstrates that Poley himself was prone to being caught unawares and, on at least one occasion, had to resort to some quick thinking in order to reassure Babington that he truly was on the conspirators’ side.

On 6 July 1586 Babington wrote to Mary informing her of a plan devised by himself and six other gentlemen to assassinate Elizabeth and install Mary on the throne, aided by an invasion of England by Catholic forces from the Continent. His letter sounds a clear note of desperation, perhaps tinged with a little vanity, about the necessity of this action for the salvation of English Catholicism, which he described as ‘the last hope ever to recover the faith of our forefathers and to redeem ourselves from the servitude and bondage which has been imposed upon us with the loss of

⁶⁴ Quoted in Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 179.

⁶⁵ Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 179.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Spy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 146.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, 146.

thousands of souls.’⁶⁸ On 17 July Mary composed a lengthy letter in reply to Babington. She impressed on him the urgency of instituting a Catholic uprising and raised a number of practical issues pertaining to the intended overthrow of Elizabeth and her government, including the assembly of an army of English Catholics loyal to her cause and the safeguarding of ports to assist the landing of those forces joining them from France, Spain and the Low Countries. Mary also warned Babington to beware of ‘false brethren that are amongst you, especially of some priests, already practiced [subverted] by our enemies, for your discovery ... In any way, keep never any paper about you that in any sort may do harm; for from like errors have come the only condemnation of all such as have suffered heretofore, against whom there otherwise have been nothing proved.’⁶⁹ She ended her letter, ‘fail not to burn this privately and quickly.’⁷⁰

Despite all the details that Walsingham and Phelippes had managed to acquire of the plot over the past weeks they could not resist the opportunity to go one stage further. Before allowing Mary’s letter to pass on to Babington Phelippes added a postscript in the cipher that he had learnt so diligently: ‘I would be glad to know the names and qualities of the six gentlemen which are to accomplish the design for it may be, I shall be able upon knowledge of the parties to give you further advice necessary to be followed.’⁷¹ In the event, this insert proved to be of comparatively little consequence, as Babington never replied to Mary’s letter. Poley had not followed through on a promise to arrange another meeting between Babington and Walsingham. The conspirators became spooked and on 4 August fled into the countryside; they were apprehended ten days later, and subsequently tried and executed. Shakespeare deploys the device of a doctored letter as a key plot element in *Hamlet*. Whilst on the voyage to England the Prince surreptitiously reads the King’s commission and discovers that Claudius is sending him there not to collect a neglected tribute but instead to die at the hands of the English sovereign. Rewriting this document, Hamlet substitutes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in his place: the Prince’s cunning in discovering and doctoring the murderous missive thus plays a vital role in helping him return to Denmark to challenge Claudius once more.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 128.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 132.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 133.

⁷¹ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 134.

On balance the Babington plot did not present a significant threat to the stability of the Elizabethan regime. Like many other Catholic plotters before them, Ballard, Babington and their co-conspirators were overoptimistic, especially when it came to the practicalities of military logistics. This was a common mistake; even the Earl of Essex, whose military experience should have prepared him better, failed to gain the backing of the London populace as he expected during his abortive coup in 1601. Alan Gordon Smith has argued that the plot to depose Elizabeth was ‘never at any time more than the silly talk of boys’ and that the government was able to push through a guilty verdict against Mary ‘only by the wilful distortion and suppression of evidence.’⁷² He also proposed that:

The motive for establishing the ‘secret post’ was not defensive (for they were already assured she could have no other channel of communication), but offensive, to present Mary with the means and the temptation to intrigue against the government, and at the same time to enable themselves to collect evidence of such intriguing.⁷³

Entrapment is one of the most common methods that Shakespearean spies employ in order to encourage other parties to engage in serious misconduct or to expose guilty consciences. Granting Angelo the power to govern Vienna as he sees fits, Duke Vincentio is able to test his intuition that the deputy is not the ‘man of stricture and firm abstinence’ (1.3.12) that he appears to be. Forewarned about the traitorous intentions of three English noblemen, Henry V hands them each a document that appears to be a military commission, but actually states that he has acquired intelligence that they are guilty of planning treason. In a similar vein, Hamlet deploys the play-within-the-play to extract a tacit admission of guilt from Claudius.

On 11 August 1586 Mary was formally arrested and in October went on trial in Fotheringay Castle before a specially assembled court of thirty-six noblemen. Keenly aware that the result of her trial was to be a foregone conclusion, Mary objected to the rigged nature of the court proceedings: ‘I am willing to answer all questions, provided I am interrogated before a free Parliament and not before these commissioners who doubtless have been carefully chosen and who have probably already condemned me unheard.’⁷⁴ Despite the fact that she had signed the Bond of Association, Mary argued that her status as a foreign anointed sovereign made her

⁷² Alan Gordon Smith, *The Babington Plot* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 246.

⁷³ Smith, *The Babington Plot*, 244.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 155.

exempt from legal proceedings that applied to English subjects. Mary also pointed out that she was denied legal counsel and that she was not permitted to review the evidence that the prosecutors had gathered in order to charge her with treason. All these protests came to nothing. However, Mary could rely on the probability that the outcome of her trial would reverberate throughout Europe, as she pointed out to the commissioners: ‘Look to your consciences. Remember that the theatre of the whole world is wider than the kingdom of England.’⁷⁵ David Riggs has pointed out that the events of the Babington plot ‘lent new meaning to the familiar analogy between the world and the stage.’⁷⁶ The priest who gave Babington Holy Communion the night before his arrest described Walsingham as ‘the chief actor and contriver’ of the plot.⁷⁷ Writing several years later, the Jesuit Robert Southwell deemed Burghley, Leicester and Walsingham ‘the chief plotters’ and Poley the ‘chief actor in it here in England.’⁷⁸ Southwell also drew attention to what he saw as Walsingham’s devious behaviour in the entrapment of the plotters:

It is known to all that Poolie, being Sir Francis Walsingham’s man, and thoroughly seasoned to his master’s tooth, was the chief instrument to contrive and prosecute the matter, and to draw into the net such green wits, as (partly fearing the general oppression, partly angled with golden hooks) might easily be overwrought by Master Secretary’s subtle and sifting wit.⁷⁹

The metaphor of angling, with Walsingham as fisherman and Poley as bait, provides a particularly apt representation of the respective roles of spymaster and mole in the case of the Babington plot. It also proves important for Walsingham’s approach to the job of spymaster more generally: he rarely placed himself at the centre of the action, preferring instead to remain distant and manipulate other individuals to achieve his goals. The would-be spymaster Polonius employs a similar metaphor when he instructs Reynaldo in the art of sowing disinformation: ‘See you now, / Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth’ (*Hamlet* 2.1.61-62). Action at a distance is an important theme of this thesis.

Walsingham himself did not play a major role in the proceedings of Mary’s trial. Initially, Mary seemed confident that she could hold out against her prosecutors: ‘I knew not Babington. I never received any letters from him, nor wrote any to him. I

⁷⁵ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 146.

⁷⁶ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 154.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 154.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 154.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 192.

never plotted the destruction of the queen. If you want to prove it, then produce my letters signed with my own hand.⁸⁰ When the incriminating letter that Mary had written to Babington on 17 July was read out in court, she denounced it as a forgery, which drew Walsingham to his feet:

I call God to witness, that as a private person I have done nothing unbeseeming an honest man, nor, as I bear the place of a public man, have I done anything unworthy of my place. I confess that being very careful for the safety of the Queen and the realm, I have curiously searched out all the practices against the same. If Ballard had offered me his help I should not have refused it; yea, I would have recompensed the pains he had taken. If I have practised anything with him, why did he not utter it to save his life?⁸¹

Mary answered that she was satisfied with this response. It is worth noting, however, that Walsingham dodged the charge of forgery, of which he and Phelippes had been guilty in part by adding the postscript enquiring about the six gentlemen. Given that the spymaster had tried to lure Babington over to his side with false promises of immunity it is also highly unlikely that he would have ‘recompensed’ Ballard with anything less than execution. Walsingham’s rhetoric sounds good in the context of a rigged state trial – he had certainly done his job with a zeal that showed true commitment to the cause of the Protestant monarchy – yet it is hard to believe that he would not engage in even murkier conduct if that would bring about the desired ends. A tearful Mary was forced to fall back on protestations of a more general nature in her defence: ‘spies are men of doubtful credit, who dissemble one thing and speak another.’⁸² Surely Walsingham would have agreed with her, but in this case the spies – Gifford and Poley – were on his side.

The trial ended predictably, having been adjourned for ten days before moving to Westminster, where sentence was pronounced. Mary was found guilty of ‘tending to the hurt, death and destruction of the royal person of our said lady the Queen.’⁸³ The court had delivered its verdict but Elizabeth stalled, reluctant to set a precedent that might later rebound upon her if she readily agreed to sign the warrant that would send an anointed sovereign to her death. Elizabeth had always been ambivalent about how best to deal with Mary, probably hoping that the exiled Queen would die of natural causes during the two decades that she had been under house arrest in

⁸⁰ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 161.

⁸¹ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 53.

⁸² Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 166.

⁸³ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 167.

England.⁸⁴ It is certainly true that years of physical inactivity resulted in ongoing health problems for Mary. Undoubtedly the spectre of state sanctioned regicide also sparked memories of the death of Elizabeth's own mother, Anne Boleyn, beheaded in 1536 on trumped up charges of treason and adultery after failing to produce the male heir that Henry VIII had wanted so desperately. Elizabeth finally signed the warrant for Mary's death in February 1587 and it was couriered away post-haste to Fotheringay before the Queen could change her mind. In the event, Burghley only told a furious Elizabeth that the fatal document had been sent from London after the Scottish Queen had been executed.⁸⁵

If the Privy Council were expecting Mary to be cowed into submission and go to her death quietly, they were sorely mistaken. If anything, the rigged nature of the legal proceedings gave the condemned Queen moral grounds to die a Catholic martyr. This was the one thing that Walsingham had expressly sought to avoid when dealing with Catholic plots against the throne, as shown by his preference for banishing or imprisoning those priests who had infiltrated England from seminaries on the Continent, instead of having them executed. On the morning of 8 February 1587 Mary ascended the black-clad scaffold at Fotheringay Castle, accompanied by a number of her servants. She sat down and Robert Beale, Walsingham's secretary, read out the death warrant. The condemned Queen seemed unmoved, even relaxed. But when Richard Fletcher, the Dean of Peterborough, sought to administer to Mary's soul she brusquely interrupted him: 'Mr Dean! Trouble not yourself nor me, for know that I am settled in the ancient Catholic and Roman religion and in defence thereof, I mean, by God's help, to spend my blood.'⁸⁶ Falling to her knees, Mary tearfully began to recite her prayers in Latin; her servants followed suit and Fletcher was all but drowned out. Rising at last, Mary removed her outer garments. A gasp arose from the crowd, who saw that she was now dressed all in red, the colour of Catholic martyrdom.⁸⁷ Mary laid her head on the block and said her last pleas to God. Executioner Bull misplaced his first strike, which cut into Mary's skull; the second was accurate, but Bull still had to finish the job with a third. Grasping the severed head by its cap, Bull held it up before the crowd, crying out 'God save the Queen!'

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham*, 213.

⁸⁵ Stephen Alford, *Burghley: William Cecil at the Court of Elizabeth I* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2008), 291.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 192.

⁸⁷ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 193.

However, Mary had been wearing a wig. Without warning, the head itself dropped from Bull's grasp and bounced across the scaffold. Mary's lips continued to spasm for another fifteen minutes.⁸⁸

Walsingham and the other members of the Privy Council had finally got their wish in the form of Mary's execution. However, Mary herself, keenly aware that the theatrical potential of the situation could be harnessed for her own ends, had in some sense trumped the Protestant regime by going to the block as a Catholic martyr. Shrewsbury, her first keeper, had wept helplessly at the sight. If Walsingham had expected his workload to decrease after Mary's death he was sorely mistaken: this event proved an important spur to the long-anticipated Spanish invasion of England, keeping Elizabeth's spymaster very busy gathering and assessing intelligence reports over the coming months.

Shakespearean conspiracies

In *The Shakespeare Conspiracy* Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman propose that Shakespeare himself was a spy, operating as a government agent under the pseudonym William Hall, a name that appears in records detailing payments made by the government for courier work and the supply of covertly gleaned information.⁸⁹ The authors argue that Shakespeare/Hall was responsible for betraying Sir Walter Raleigh for that statesman's involvement in the Bye Plot against James I, which led to Raleigh's conviction and imprisonment in the Tower of London for the next thirteen years.⁹⁰ Even more bizarrely, Phillips and Keatman then go on to suggest that, after his release from the Tower, Raleigh employed agents to poison Shakespeare in a cold-blooded act of revenge.⁹¹ Unfortunately all of the foregoing is based on evidence that is purely circumstantial in nature and does not provide any foundation upon which to develop solid connections between depictions of spying in Shakespearean drama and events in the playwright's life.

⁸⁸ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 194.

⁸⁹ Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman, *The Shakespeare Conspiracy* (London: Century, 1994), 158-73.

⁹⁰ Phillips and Keatman, *The Shakespeare Conspiracy*, 174-87.

⁹¹ Phillips and Keatman, *The Shakespeare Conspiracy*, 194-96.

Like many parts of western and northern England, Shakespeare's home town of Stratford was still considered a Catholic stronghold. David N. Beauregard argues that 'it would have been virtually impossible for Shakespeare to have remained free of the theological orientation of Elizabethan culture,' which leads him to conclude that 'if Shakespeare was a Protestant he had nothing to lose by overtly expressing the doctrines and attitudes of the Church of England.'⁹² In a somewhat different vein, Richard Wilson has sought to explain what he describes as Shakespeare's 'total effacement of the religious politics of his age.'⁹³ Wilson then goes even deeper into the realms of biography, positing that 'Shakespeare wrote his plays with the conscious intention of secreting himself.'⁹⁴ One problem with such arguments is that they depend upon negative evidence – a claim that the absence of some piece of information is particularly significant – in order to derive the positive conclusion that Shakespeare himself was covertly Catholic, or at least sympathetic towards the cause of the outlawed faith. Both Beauregard and Wilson thus commit a methodological error similar to those who argue that someone other than the man from Stratford wrote the works attributed to William Shakespeare. As James Shapiro has recently demonstrated, such claims depend upon correlations between literature and life experience that only developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and do not generally hold true for Shakespeare's time.⁹⁵

Beauregard asserts that 'the documents of Shakespeare's baptism, marriage, and burial indicate nothing as to his religion except that he was a Christian.'⁹⁶ Even this may be going too far: the existence of such documents proves nothing beyond the fact that Shakespeare took part in three Christian rituals, all of which are common to both Protestant and Catholic persuasions of the faith. More importantly, they reveal nothing about what might be described (with due caution) as Shakespeare's innermost beliefs about religion, which may have altered markedly with time and experience. Based on the evidence contained in a religious testament that expressly employs the term 'true Catholike faith,' to which John Shakespeare put his name, Patrick

⁹² David N. Beauregard, *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays* (Delaware: Newark University of Delaware Press, 2008), 21-22.

⁹³ Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in theatre, religion and resistance* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004), 1.

⁹⁴ Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare*, 10-11.

⁹⁵ James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), esp. 297-316.

⁹⁶ Beauregard, *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*, 14.

Collinson argues for the probability that the playwright's father did indeed abide by the old faith, yet concludes that it is impossible to say what William himself thought.⁹⁷ The playwright's relationship with the two faiths, like those spies that take centre stage in the second half of this chapter, may simply have been a matter of expediency more than anything else. *Hamlet* in particular has long been seen as a meditation upon the conflicting loyalties of the protagonist. On the one hand, the Ghost of Old Hamlet – which, according to tradition, was first played by Shakespeare himself – returns from the distinctly Catholic space of purgatory with its charge to 'Remember me' (1.5.91).⁹⁸ Yet, as Huston Diehl has shown, 'Hamlet's tortured and unrelenting analysis of his own motives and actions manifests a distinctly Protestant habit of mind.'⁹⁹ Fascinated by the reforming potential of theatre Hamlet deploys the play-within-the-play to test 'the conscience of the King' (2.2.607) and hence the veracity of the Ghost's accusations against Claudius.¹⁰⁰ Thus in order to prove faithful to the Catholic entity of his father's Ghost Hamlet draws upon the reformist agenda of his Protestant education in Wittenberg.

The Bible provided both Shakespeare and his audience with the most readily accessible source for literary representations of spying. Stephen Alford draws attention to an important verse in the Old Testament, translated here in the 1560 Geneva version that was standard in later sixteenth-century Protestant England: 'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men out to search the land of Canaan which I give unto the children of Israel' (Numbers 13:1-2).¹⁰¹ Alford also notes the significance of the Geneva translators' decision to head that particular page with the all-important phrase 'The Spies' to describe the Israelite chiefs: 'it was plain to Elizabethans that a spy belonged to one of the oldest trades in the world.'¹⁰² However, the passage from Numbers, which portrays espionage as an activity undertaken for the exploitation of new territories, does not necessarily provide the best parallel for

⁹⁷ Patrick Collinson, 'William Shakespeare's Religious Inheritance and Environment,' reprinted in *Elizabethan Essays* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1994), 250-52. A transcript of the religious testament is printed on p. 218. F. W. Brownlow also comes to the same conclusion about John Shakespeare's religious beliefs in 'John Shakespeare's Recusancy: New Light on an Old Document,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.2 (1989), 186-91.

⁹⁸ For an extended discussion of the cultural resonances of this aspect of the play see Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001).

⁹⁹ Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1997), 90.

¹⁰⁰ For the reformist dimensions of Hamlet's interest in theatre see Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*, 81-93.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 14.

¹⁰² Alford, *The Watchers*, 14.

foregrounding the intimate personal relations that proved such an essential component of spying in both Elizabethan England and Shakespearean drama.

Shakespeare may have been more intrigued by an episode recounted in Genesis, Chapter 42, in which the plural noun ‘spies’ appears no less than seven times.¹⁰³ Earlier chapters of Genesis record how Joseph’s brothers, jealous of the special love that old Jacob bears towards this son in particular, sell Joseph to a company of Ishmaelite traders, who take Joseph with them into Egypt. However, God is on Joseph’s side and has favoured him with a special power to interpret dreams. Decoding the Pharaoh’s visions, Joseph is able to forecast that seven years of abundant harvests will be followed by seven years of dearth; the Egyptian government thus plan to save for the bad years during the good. As reward for his services, Joseph is made ruler of Egypt, second in authority only to the Pharaoh. When the famine comes, Egypt is the only country to have made stores of food and so Jacob sends his other sons from Canaan to purchase much needed sustenance. Joseph’s brothers bow before him and ask to purchase food. Joseph makes ‘him selfe strange toward them’ (7) and then manufactures a charge of espionage against his unsuspecting brothers: ‘Ye are spies, *and* are come to se the weakenes of the land’ (9). The wretched brethren protest nothing more than an interest in purchasing much needed sustenance: ‘we meane truely, and thy seruantes are no spies’ (11). Again Joseph accuses them of spying out ‘the weakenes of the land’ (12) and again his long-lost brothers assure him that they speak honestly, to which Joseph accuses them once more of engaging in espionage. Clearly Joseph’s brothers are extremely confused by the charge of espionage, although later amongst themselves they express guilt about their earlier mistreatment of Joseph.

A number of elements in this story would have interested Shakespeare. The physical disguise employed by the now-powerful Joseph looks forward to the tradition of disguised ruler plays in pre-Shakespearean drama of the sixteenth century, which in turn informs the use of cloaks for disguise by Shakespearean rulers such as Henry V and the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. The charge of espionage that Joseph manufactures against his brothers is strikingly similar to that which Prospero, himself a powerful lord with magical powers, devises in order to manipulate the shipwrecked Ferdinand in *The Tempest*: ‘thou hast put thyself / Upon this island as a spy, to win it /

¹⁰³ *The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* (Geneva, 1560), 20.

From me the lord on't' (1.2.457-59). Unbeknownst to Joseph's brothers, the episode also has a personal intimacy to it that is particularly important in Shakespearean drama, seen, for example, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, where Don John successfully convinces his brother soldiers that Hero is false. The barrage of accusation and denial that results in the recurrence of the plural noun 'spies' also foreshadows the equivocal behaviour of those agents who ally themselves with two political enemies simultaneously, a crucial aspect of early-modern espionage examined in more detail in the second part of this introduction. Ophelia is forced to play both sides of the machinations at the court of Elsinore, Polonius denying his daughter a relationship with her lover Hamlet and instead forcing her to take the part of a decoy in the 'To be, or not to be' / 'nunnery' episode. Although Shakespeare does not construct a spying episode quite like the one that appears in Genesis 42 there is thus good reason to believe that the well-known account of Joseph's interaction with his long-lost brothers provided the playwright with useful parallels for structuring his own plots.

It is sometimes suggested that Polonius, the King's counsellor in *Hamlet*, is a dramatic reincarnation of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, the most prominent member of Elizabeth's government from her accession in 1558 until his death forty years later. Such claims often draw attention to the similarity between a set of precepts that Burghley wrote for his son Robert in 1582 and the advice that Polonius gives Laertes prior to the latter's departure for Paris (*Hamlet*, 1.3.58-80); in his recent book on the Cecil family the historian David Loades actually opts to cite Polonius's lines instead of quoting from the document written by Burghley.¹⁰⁴ Stephen Alford, Burghley's most recent biographer, argues that such correlations are circular in nature and that there is little reason to assume writers need to base characters on real historical persons:

In this way we can chase our own tails, a pastime which suits some people more than it does others. Brilliant writers and dramatists do not need to have characters ready made for them, like mannequins to be dressed for a shop window: they come out of imagination and experience, from a deep creative resource. William Shakespeare did not need to study the life of Lord Burghley to write the character of Polonius.¹⁰⁵

There is no evidence to suggest that the first audiences of *Hamlet* perceived any connection between Polonius and Burghley. If that had been the case, it begs the

¹⁰⁴ David Loades, *The Cecils: Privilege and Power Behind the Throne* (2007; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 208-09.

¹⁰⁵ Alford, *Burghley*, 342.

question of why the Master of the Revels, or even Robert Cecil himself, by then the most important figure at the English court, did not summon the players to explain their public mockery of a figure whom Hamlet describes as a ‘wretched, rash, intruding fool’ (3.4.30).

Reflecting upon the temporal confluence of various misfortunes at a particularly acute apex in the drama of *Hamlet*, Claudius employs an image that is especially pertinent for this study: ‘When sorrows come they come not single spies, / But in battalions’ (4.5.76-77). This image revolves around a binary, the overt presence of a battalion of several hundred soldiers providing a stark physical contrast to the scattered presence of lone military scouts. Essentially the King’s point is that an overwhelming barrage of misfortunes, like the battalion of soldiers, simply cannot be hidden; it also reflects his own anxieties about concealing the murder of Old Hamlet, as well as apprehension about the fact that the people of Denmark now appear to favour Laertes as king.

Much like those ‘single spies’ to which Claudius refers, Shakespeare’s use of the term ‘spy’ or its variants – ‘spied’, ‘spies’, ‘spying’ and ‘spy’st’ – is scattered both widely and thinly throughout his writing. No one play uses the term with significantly greater frequency than any other. It is in fact scarce amongst the five plays that this thesis examines in detail, appearing only twice in *The Tempest* and once each in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Measure for Measure* and *Hamlet*; it is totally absent from *Henry V*.¹⁰⁶ As a result there is little mileage to be gained in attempting to correlate word trends in any play or group of plays with specific historical spying operations. Instead, this thesis compares the behaviour and attitudes of historical spies operating in later sixteenth-century England with those that appear in Shakespeare’s drama, specifically in terms of their equivocal behaviour as ‘single spies,’ agents who operate ultimately to satisfy their own interests. Close attention to the manner in which Shakespeare deploys the language of spying is given specific attention in individual readings of the plays, including parallels between the dramatist’s plotting and that of his main characters.

¹⁰⁶ This data can be viewed summarily in Marvin Spevack, *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1973), 1194, 1199.

Part 2: The behavioural equivocation of Elizabethan spies

The second half of this introduction looks more closely at the attitudes and behaviour of Elizabethan spies through a number of individual cases, namely Christopher Marlowe, Anthony Munday, William Parry, Anthony Standen and Robert Poley. A fuller synthesis of this material – particularly in terms of how such behaviour and attitudes prove important factors in Shakespeare’s drama – follows these five accounts.

Christopher Marlowe: allaying rumour

Despite the lack of evidence that Shakespeare ever worked as a spy, his contemporary Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) does appear in a number of records that hint at various involvements with government intelligence, both as agent and target.¹⁰⁷ The raw data of these records is notoriously inconclusive but provides at the very least a strong suggestion that Marlowe was engaged in more than just academic study and writing plays: in David Riggs’s formulation ‘there was tremendous “chatter” around Christopher Marlowe, an array of signals that implicated him in covert operations and high-level conspiracies.’¹⁰⁸ Between 1587 and 1592 Marlowe’s plays for the Lord Admiral’s Men had revolutionised London theatre and his work is often seen as the most significant precursor to that of Shakespeare.¹⁰⁹ It would be highly surprising if the two men had not had contact during this period, especially given that Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* plays were first performed by the same company.

Marlowe was educated at the King’s School in Canterbury before proceeding to Cambridge to take the BA degree, followed by the MA. It was in conjunction with his progress through the latter course of study that in June 1587 the Privy Council saw fit to intervene in concerns the university had raised about Marlowe’s attendance:

¹⁰⁷ Important extant documents relating to Marlowe’s life are reproduced in the Appendix to Constance Brown Kuriyama’s *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 173-240.

¹⁰⁸ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁹ For a recent study see Robert A. Logan, *Shakespeare’s Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare’s Artistry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See also the chapter on ‘Marlowe and Shakespeare’ in McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen’s Men and their Plays*, 155-69.

Whereas it was reported that Christopher Morley was determined to have gone beyond the seas to Reames and there to remaine their Lordships thought good to certefie that he had no such intent, but that in all his acions he had behaved him selfe orderlie and discretelie wherebie he had done her Majestie good service, and deserved to be rewarded for his faithfull dealinge: Their Lordships request was that the rumor thereof should be allaiied by all possible meanes, and that he should be furthered in the degree he was to take this next commencement: Because it was not her Majesties pleasure that anie one employed as he had been in matters touching the benefitt of his countrie should be defamed by those that are ignorant in th'affaires he went about.¹¹⁰

Two things are clear from this document: the Privy Council was evidently satisfied with the 'good service' Marlowe had carried out and, as a result, saw fit to overrule the university's concerns about his progress towards gaining the MA degree. When compared with other student records, Marlowe's periods of absence and attendance at the university were not abnormal, and it was common enough for epidemics to force students away from the university for extended periods.¹¹¹

More interestingly, the directive fails to specify exactly what this 'good service' entailed. It could simply indicate authoritarian brevity on the part of the Privy Council but it also opens up the possibility that the government had good reason to conceal the precise nature of Marlowe's duties, shown particularly by the use of the adjective 'discretelie' to describe this agent's work ethic. Furthermore, in ordering the university to quash the 'rumor' that Marlowe had independently decided to travel to Rheims they could have been protecting a mole charged with the task of penetrating the English College there. On the other hand, the rumour that Marlowe intended 'there to remaine' could indicate concern that the agent may have turned his allegiance towards the Catholic cause, although the Privy Council's issue of this document implicitly confirms that Marlowe did not follow such a course on this occasion.

Marlowe's next significant appearance in government records concerns his involvement in a bizarre coining escapade in Flushing in the Low Countries. On 26 January 1592, Robert Sidney, governor of Flushing and younger brother of the more famous Philip Sidney, composed a letter to Burghley to accompany the transportation of some coiners he had apprehended:

¹¹⁰ Reproduced in Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 202-03.

¹¹¹ Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 2, 6.

I have also given in charge to this bearer my anciant twoe other prisoners, the one named Christofer Marly by his profession a scholer and the other Gifford Gilbert a goldsmith taken heer for coining, and their mony I have sent over unto yowr Lo:[rdship] The matter was revealed unto me the day after it was done, by one Ri: Baines whome also my Anciant shal bring unto yowr Lo:[rdship] He was theyr chamber fellow, and fearing the succes made me acquainted with all. The men being examined apart never denied anything, onely protesting that what was done was onely to se the goldsmith's conning: and truly I ame of opinion that the poore man was onely browght in under that couler, what ever intent the other twoe had at that time. And indeed they do one accuse another to have been the inducers of him, and to have intended to practis yt heerafter: and have as it were justified him unto me.¹¹²

It is not clear why Marlowe was in Flushing in the first place but the most plausible explanation is that he was carrying out routine message conveyance or administrative work for the English government, rather than being embroiled in espionage.

Incidentally, there is no connection between the Gifford Gilbert referred to here and the Gilbert Gifford who played turncoat in the Babington plot. The involvement of Richard Baines in the role of informer is also telling, as Baines had previously been a mole for Elizabeth's government at the English College in Rheims, giving further weight to the notion that Marlowe kept company with spies.¹¹³ University graduates in this period often proceeded to government service on financial grounds as the correlation between academic brilliance and a decent income was virtually non-existent. Marlowe's presence in a counterfeiting scheme is most obviously explained by a desire to generate extra income on the quiet. However, coining was part of the royal prerogative and so considered a treasonous offense punishable by death. In theory, Marlowe was in real trouble, although Sidney also noted sardonically that the counterfeiters had only produced a single 'dutch shilling' made from 'plain peuter and with half an ey to be discovered.'¹¹⁴ Despite Sidney's declamation, Burghley, a member of the Privy Council that had issued the directive regarding Marlowe's MA degree, knew that he posed no threat to the political security of England. The Lord Treasurer presumably wanted to keep him on the books as an agent, although, as both Kendall and Kuriyama note, Marlowe would probably have been rebuked for this indiscretion and lost any payment due for his services as an agent in Flushing.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Reproduced in Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 210.

¹¹³ Roy Kendall, *Christopher Marlowe and Richard Baines: Journeys through the Elizabethan Underground* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 140.

¹¹⁴ Reproduced in Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 210.

¹¹⁵ Kendall, *Christopher Marlowe and Richard Baines*, 216; Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 111-12.

On 30 May 1593 Marlowe was stabbed to death in Deptford, after a day spent eating, drinking and conversing with three companions, Ingram Frazer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley. It is often taken for granted that Marlowe died as a result of a brawl in a rowdy tavern. However, as Charles Nicholl has shown, the Mrs Bull who ran this establishment took in customers on a more restricted basis:

More probably she ran a lodging-house or victualling-house, a private establishment which offered accommodation and food, rather than a public 'place of resort.' It was common for home-owners to have their house licensed for this purpose. Marlowe's own father did just that in Canterbury in 1604, and was licensed to 'keep common victualling in his now dwelling-house.'¹¹⁶

This point is important because it shows that the four men, rather than meeting by chance in the nearest tavern (of which there were many in Deptford), chose a location that would allow them to converse without interruption. Nicholl may be going too far in positing that Mrs Bull's (distant) family kinship to Lord Burghley implies that someone in the government sought out a convenient locale in which to do away with Marlowe the rogue agent.¹¹⁷ However, the privacy afforded to patrons in such establishments does suggest that the men met for more than just a casual drink.

According to the coronial inquest into Marlowe's death:

after dinner the aforesaid Ingram and the said Christopher Morley were in speech and publicly exchanged divers malicious words because they could not concur nor agree on the payment of the sum of pence, that is to say, *le recknynge* ... thus it befell that the aforesaid Christopher Morley suddenly and of malice aforethought towards the aforesaid Ingram then and there maliciously unsheathed the dagger of the aforesaid Ingram which was visible at his back and with the same aforesaid dagger then and there maliciously gave the aforesaid Ingram two wounds on his head ... And thus it befell in that affray that the said Ingram, in defense of his life and with the aforesaid dagger of the value of 12 pence, gave the aforesaid Christopher then and there a mortal wound above his right eye.¹¹⁸

The all-important term in this document is '*le recknynge*': for Nicholl the phrase hints at a larger backstory of intrigue leading to Marlowe's murder, whilst for sceptics like J. A. Downie it refers to nothing more than an argument over the bill.¹¹⁹ Marlowe's aggressive behaviour on this occasion would certainly seem to square with his earlier committal to Newgate prison in September 1589 as an accessory to the murder of one

¹¹⁶ Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 42-43.

¹¹⁸ Reproduced in Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 225.

¹¹⁹ Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 22-23; J. A. Downie, 'Marlowe: facts and fictions' in *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, ed. J. A. Downie and J. T. Parnell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 26.

William Bradley, a charge from which Marlowe was cleared at trial about six weeks later.¹²⁰ Perhaps, as Paul E. J. Hammer suggests, the other agents met Marlowe in order to recover a debt and it so happened that ‘Marlowe’s own notorious temper caused an overreaction, just as the participants deposed at the coronial inquiry.’¹²¹ Thus the truth about Marlowe’s death, if indeed it were possible to recover the full story with accuracy, may well lie somewhere between the points of view espoused by Nicholl and Downie.

Just how conclusive is the evidence that Marlowe really was a government agent? That depends upon the direction from which one approaches such claims. For Stephen Alford, such evidence is ‘sketchy and circumstantial,’ especially when compared with Robert Poley’s career as a government agent, during which Poley carried out no less than twenty-six missions over a period of thirteen years.¹²² On the other hand, while no single document relating to Marlowe’s supposed career as a spy reveals anything conclusive, David Riggs argues that the sum total of their contents presents a body of evidence ‘too substantial to be explained away.’¹²³ Like many aspiring young university-educated writers of this period, government work provided Marlowe with multiple benefits: ‘it puts money in his purse, gets him noticed, gives him *entrée* to influential circles.’¹²⁴ More importantly, as Riggs observes, ‘the plots and counterplots of this era taught Marlowe that spies and scriptwriters had a lot in common.’¹²⁵ So regardless of the degree to which Marlowe may have been involved with the Elizabethan secret service the underground political machinations of later sixteenth-century England certainly proved an important source for his drama.

Of Marlowe’s seven surviving plays *The Jew of Malta* (written c. 1589) provides perhaps the best example of how the author’s experience as a government agent may have influenced his literary career.¹²⁶ The figure of the scheming Jew would directly influence Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. Although it would be implausible to equate Marlowe himself with the protagonist Barabas, the play’s themes of usury, covert political bargaining and revenge have clear links with

¹²⁰ The relevant documents are reproduced in Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe*, 203-06.

¹²¹ Paul E. J. Hammer, ‘A Reckoning Reframed: the “Murder” of Christopher Marlowe Revisited,’ *English Literary Renaissance* 26.2 (1996), 240.

¹²² Alford, *The Watchers*, 317.

¹²³ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 5.

¹²⁴ Nicholl, *The Reckoning*, 199.

¹²⁵ Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 155.

¹²⁶ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* in *The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (London: Penguin, 2003), 241-340.

intelligence operations in the 1580s and 1590s in which Marlowe may have played a role:

Implicit in Marlowe's treatment of his *dramatis personae* is a sense that vices flourish when the state is most manipulative. He writes from the viewpoint of an agent and dramatist who knows something of official duplicity and subterfuge, and of the Tudor policy of encouraging popular fears of Catholic Europe. Even his villain-Jew is partly formed by the state, and, psychologically, Barabas is more dependent on illusions of control over his fate than on wealth itself.¹²⁷

The play was staged many times between 1592 and 1596, years of instability at the English court during which the new intelligence network developed by Anthony Bacon on behalf of the Earl of Essex was, on occasion, outcompeting that run by the Cecils.¹²⁸ Interestingly, the Epilogue spoken at court proffers the disclaimer 'And if aught here offend your ear or sight, / We only act, and speak, what others write.'¹²⁹ Aside from protesting the playing company's humility, this Epilogue, in contrast to the longer one that accompanies the printed edition of the play, may have been a conscious wink to those in the courtly audience who might have known about Marlowe's activities as an agent.

Throughout the play Barabas constantly dissembles for personal gain, weaving in and out of the larger picture of political dispute and outright war between Spain and Turkey. He is obsessed with devising and enacting 'policy' – a term used by several characters a total of thirteen times – that is always in his own best interests.¹³⁰ Arata Ide has proposed that Marlowe intends the fictional events in Malta to parallel those of 1580s England, exhibiting 'a popular anxiety about Machiavellian strangers who have exceptional powers of theatrics enabling them to manipulate their gullible neighbors.'¹³¹ In this respect Barabas is akin to those Elizabethan spies that spent the 1580s and 1590s working the religious cold war between England and the Continent, sometimes professing allegiance to the Catholic cause and at other times protesting that their loyalties lay with the English government.

¹²⁷ Honan, *Christopher Marlowe*, 262.

¹²⁸ Essex's intelligence network is discussed in more detail on pp. 52-57 below.

¹²⁹ Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 339.

¹³⁰ Howard S. Babb, 'Policy in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*,' *ELH* 24.2 (1957), 86.

¹³¹ Arata Ide, 'The Jew of Malta and the Diabolic Power of Theatrics in the 1580s,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.2 (2006), 266.

Ferneze, the governor of Malta, has confiscated all of the Jew's wealth and possessions to help pay the tribute demanded by the invading Turkish force. In a bid to get back a hidden portion of his treasure Barabas convinces his daughter Abigall to infiltrate herself into a new nunnery that now occupies the site of his old mansion, averring that 'religion / Hides many mischiefs from suspicion' (1.2.280-81). When Abigall protests that such a plan will surely arouse suspicion, Barabas declares:

Let 'em suspect, but be thou so precise
As they may think it done of holiness.
Entreat 'em fair, and give them friendly speech,
And seem to them as if thy sins were great,
Till thou hast gotten to be entertained. (1.2.283-87)

Certain that Abigall's entreaties will draw a wary reaction, Barabas's instructions to his daughter focus not so much on what she should say, as the manner she should assume in delivering her speech. Barabas's hope is that by adopting a penitent demeanour Abigall will be able to convince the Abbess that her utterances are sincere. The scheme proves successful and Abigall is able to pass a delighted Barabas his treasure under cover of night. However, Barabas does not repay his daughter in kind for her good service as his mole. To revenge himself on Ferneze, Barabas tricks the governor's son Lodowick into believing that Abigall is in love with him and then orchestrates a duel between Lodowick and Mathias, Abigall's real lover, in which the young men kill each other. Stricken by her father's duplicitous behaviour, Abigall this time decides to enter the nunnery out of unfeigned religious conviction, avowing that 'experience, purchasèd with grief, / Has made me see the difference of things' (3.3.64-65). Enraged by Abigall's decision to convert to Christianity, Barabas declares her 'False, credulous, inconstant' (3.4.27) and proceeds to poison all the inhabitants of the nunnery, including his unfortunate daughter.

In the closing Act of the play the invading general Calymath rewards Barabas with the governorship of Malta for his services in helping the Turkish army take the city by surprise. Despite having achieved high office, Barabas is not content to abandon his devious political meddling, assuring the captive Ferneze that for 'Great sums of money' (5.2.88) he will switch his loyalties once again and help to destroy the Turkish forces. Barabas remains supremely self-assured that he owes allegiance to no one but himself:

Thus, loving neither, will I live with both,
Making a profit of my policy;
And he from whom my most advantage comes
Shall be my friend. (5.2.111-14)

Barabas is intent on proving a false friend to everyone if it will only ensure his success. Even as he dies Barabas remains unrepentant about the extensive social and political havoc that he has wrought, declaring all those present to be ‘Damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels!’ (5.5.85).

Barabas’s legacy to early-modern drama is far reaching: ‘he may well be the first villain as playwright to tread the Renaissance stage, and, as such, the progenitor of an entire clan of villainous interior playwrights.’¹³² Most obviously Barabas is a forerunner to Shakespeare’s Richard III, Iago and Edmund. Like Barabas, the duplicitous behaviour in which these characters engage is consistently directed towards bettering their own social, political and financial status at the expense of others. However, many of the dramatic spies examined in this thesis are more ambivalent about how they ought to behave in a given situation, altering their perspectives over the course of a play in response to various events. Such equivocal attitudes underscore the skewed reasoning that Beatrice and Benedick employ to convince themselves of the affection they feel towards each other. It also helps explain why a disguised Henry V can dismiss personal accountability before his soldiers on the night before Agincourt, and then acknowledge to himself in private that he really does shoulder a grave moral responsibility in placing their lives at risk in order to realise his territorial ambitions. By contrast, Barabas’s equivocal behaviour is directed purely outwards and does not allow him to see that he is ultimately the cause of his own downfall because he should have been more wary about how he enacted policy in manipulating his various allegiances.

Anthony Munday: travel writer and Protestant propagandist

Among Shakespeareans Anthony Munday (1560-1633) is best known for the play *Sir Thomas More*, which he probably wrote in conjunction with Henry Chettle during the early 1590s. The text was subsequently revised by Chettle, Thomas

¹³² Sara Munson Deats and Lisa S. Starks, ‘“So neatly plotted, and so well perform’d”: Villain as Playwright in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*,’ *Theatre Journal* 44.3 (1992), 378.

Dekker, Thomas Heywood and Shakespeare some time after Elizabeth's death in 1603. Although the play may in part have seemed risqué on account of its sympathetic depiction of a Catholic martyr, the Master of the Revels, Edmund Tilney, was more concerned about the impact of those scenes that dealt with rebellion, marking at the beginning of the manuscript 'Leave out the insurrection wholly and the cause thereof ... at your own perils.' In any case the post-1603 revisions did not rectify the issues that had prompted Tilney's disapproval, but concerns about political uprisings had dissipated significantly with Elizabeth's death and the peaceful accession of James I.¹³³ The existence of this complex manuscript, notable because it contains the only lengthy sample of Shakespeare's handwriting, proves how dynamic and multi-layered the process of dramatic composition could be in early-modern London.

The first contemporary reference to Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist occurs in Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598), where Meres provides a list of Shakespeare's 'most excellent' comedies and tragedies.¹³⁴ Tantalizingly, Meres also describes Munday as 'our best plotter', but does not list particular examples of his work.¹³⁵ Munday was certainly working as an agent for the Vice-Chamberlain Sir Thomas Heneage by 1594.¹³⁶ Presumably Meres did not know about that but there is a good chance he had read Munday's account of his experiences as a student-turned-informer at a Roman seminary for English Catholic exiles in the year 1579.

Munday aspired to be a writer from an early age. Born in 1560 and then orphaned at age eleven, he was probably educated by a Huguenot refugee called Claude de Sainleins – during which time he learnt Latin, French and Italian – before apprenticing himself to the printer John Allde in 1576. Eager to travel, Munday worked for only two of the eight years to which he was bound to Allde. For his part, Allde willingly accepted Munday's decision, later testifying that his apprentice 'did his duty in all respects, as much as I could desire, without fraud, covin [treachery] or deceit.'¹³⁷ Along with his travelling companion Thomas Nowell, Munday first made for Amiens in France, before journeying on to the English College in Rome, a seminary founded by the former Oxford academic William Allen, who had been forced into exile by his opposition to the Church of England.

¹³³ Introduction to *Sir Thomas More* in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 813.

¹³⁴ Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury, Being the Second part of Wits Common wealth* (London, 1598), 282.

¹³⁵ Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, 284.

¹³⁶ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 146.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 58.

Munday's account of his experiences at this institution was published as *The English Roman Life* in 1582.¹³⁸ It was quite clearly designed to pander to Protestant concerns about conspiracies that exiled English Catholics were plotting against the Elizabethan government, as the opening ambit of the work declares:

discourging the lives of such Englishmen as by secret escape leave their own country to live in Rome under the servile yoke of the Pope's government. Also after what matter they spend their time there, practising and daily looking for the overthrow and ruin of their Princess and country.

(62-69)

This immediately raises the issue of why Munday decided to journey to such an institution in the first place. However, the author's stated wish to travel in foreign climes is probably best taken at face value: 'Whenas desire to see strange countries, as also affection to learn the languages, had persuaded me to leave my native country, and not any other intent or cause, God is my record' (84-87). Munday was simply a young man with an enthusiasm for new experiences.

Having arrived at the English College in Rome after various adventures in France, Munday states that he and Nowell were granted 'eight days' entertainment in the Hospital [i.e. the College], which by the Pope was granted to such Englishmen as came thither' (556-58). Such cordiality was standard practice for visitors to the institution. However, Munday was careful to elide from his narrative that he and Nowell had arrived at the College in a desperate state; the priest Robert Persons noted privately that the two youths were initially turned away, but later granted refuge on the grounds that they 'were like to perish in the streets for want.'¹³⁹

When he arrived at the College Munday falsely gave his surname as Hawley. Unfortunately this choice of alias was to prove problematic straight away. Shortly after their arrival Munday and Newell were surrounded by a number of College scholars, 'every one demanding so many questions that we knew not which to answer first' (572-74). Munday was then taken aside by a priest who 'desired to talk with me, because he said he knew my father well enough, using the name that I did [i.e. the alias Hawley]' (575-77). Asked the reason for his journey to Rome Munday simply replied, 'Trust me sir, only for the desire I had to see it, that when I came home again, I might say, once in my life I have been at Rome' (581-84). Unimpressed with this

¹³⁸ Anthony Munday, *The English Roman Life*, ed. Philip J. Ayres (1582; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Lines references are provided alongside subsequent citations.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 60.

response, the priest reproached Munday for coming there ‘more upon pleasure than any devotion’ (586), adding ‘in sooth I see, you remain in the same wildness you did when I lay at your father’s house, but I do not doubt now we have you here to make you a staid man ere you depart, that your father may have joy of you and all your friends receive comfort by you’ (588-94). Munday was now forced to think on his feet, as he indicates to the reader in a marginal note: ‘Mine own tale, which so well as I could, I made to agree with the priest’s discourse.’

As with many other episodes recounted in *The English Roman Life*, Munday’s extensive use of verbatim reporting gives his conversation with the priest a distinctly theatrical touch. It does seem incongruous that the priest, who must have been sitting in close proximity to Munday throughout this conversation, does not comment on any discrepancy in physical appearance between Munday and the actual son of the man named Hawley with whom the priest had stayed in England. Maybe Munday was fortunate enough to look similar to Hawley’s real son. However, this discrepancy raises the possibility that such a conversation did not even occur and that Munday, seeking to hone his skills as a dramatic plotter for the benefit of his Protestant readership, simply fabricated the whole episode because it suited the political ends of his publication. The priest’s vehement declamation of Elizabeth certainly has a theatrical air to it:

‘[True Catholics] must denounce that damnable heresy, crept into the Church of England, that proud usurping Jezebel’, meaning our dread and gracious Princess, ‘whom’, quoth he, ‘God reserveth to make her a notable spectacle to the whole world, for keeping that good Queen of Scots from her lawful rule; but I hope ere long the dogs shall tear her flesh, and those that be her props and upholders.’

(607-23)¹⁴⁰

Munday is careful to ensure that his own narrative voice remains distinct from the speech that he is reporting, the laudatory intercession to ‘our dread and gracious Princess’ reminding the reader that he or she is witnessing the priest’s declamation through the eyes of a narrator who is determined to present these events in a manner that pays court to anti-Catholic sensibilities.

¹⁴⁰ The priest’s reference to the ‘lawful rule’ of Mary, Queen of Scots probably relates to her forced abdication from the Scottish throne in 1567, although Mary did subsequently prove to be a focal point for political designs on the English crown, as episodes like the Babington Plot demonstrate.

In her analysis of Munday's career as a writer, Donna B. Hamilton has sought to demonstrate that he maintained a far more complicated and equivocal relationship with the English Catholic community than is generally assumed. She contends that 'Munday's religious sympathies lay in the direction of Catholicism' but that his interest in promoting a 'strong nation' resulted in his appearing to agree openly with the official Protestant line.¹⁴¹ In dedicating *The English Roman Life* to members of the Privy Council, Munday, confident that his work would appeal to their Protestant sensibilities, openly invited them to 'espy' (19) any 'malice' (18) that they might see therein. Yet, as Hamilton notes, the title of Munday's tract contains a '*double entendre*', providing both 'an analysis of the English College in Rome, but also one of the situation of the English Catholic in England.'¹⁴² Although he may not have been advocating for religious toleration of Catholics Munday was at the very least opening up a forum for debate of such issues. Stephen Alford also argues for the equivocal nature of Munday's Roman exploits:

He possessed all the paradoxes of a Tudor spy. He embraced an institution but kicked against its discipline. He made good friends but later betrayed them to the Elizabethan authorities. He was ambiguous about his faith. Why, after all, had he wanted to study in a Catholic seminary so far from home? Always elusive, at best he told only half a story but he did so with great style.¹⁴³

The luridly anti-Catholic bent that Munday weaves through *The English Roman Life* is designed to pander to the political and social tastes of his Protestant readership. However, this does not necessarily imply that Munday entered the English College as a mole with the express intention of gathering intelligence that would form the basis of a pre-planned publication. More probably, he ended up there out of a combination of sheer desperation mixed with a certain degree of conviction towards the Catholic faith. Perceiving that public mood was ripe to receive a publication on the evils of Catholicism upon his return to England, it may well have been the process of writing *The English Roman Life* that changed Munday from a politically non-committal youth with a desire for wanderlust into a grown man who made a career by espousing anti-Catholic convictions in his written work. In any case, the reader is certainly left in no doubt as to the pro-Protestant stance that Munday propagates at the conclusion of his tract: 'let us defy the Pope, his hellish abominations, continue in our duty to God,

¹⁴¹ Donna B. Hamilton, *Anthony Munday and the Catholics, 1560-1633* (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), xvi.

¹⁴² Hamilton, *Anthony Munday and the Catholics*, 47.

¹⁴³ Alford, *The Watchers*, 64.

faithful obedience to Her Majesty, and unity among us all as brethren: and then no doubt but we shall enter the land of the living, to our eternal comfort and consolation' (2960-66).

With the benefit of hindsight, Munday's experiences in Rome appear significant primarily because they document a Protestant agent's infiltration of a seminary for exiled English Catholics. Many who read *The English Roman Life* in 1580s England were probably left with the impression that the narrator had made a conscious decision to embed himself as a mole in that society. Yet Munday's frequently overblown rhetoric betrays a significant gap between lived experience and later report. More broadly, this suggests that agents such as Munday often fell into situations that they then chose to turn to their advantage in the quest for intelligence about Catholic plots against Elizabeth and her Protestant government.

William Parry: rhetoric of self-importance

William Parry (d. 1585) has a strong claim to be considered the most audacious of the five agents surveyed in this half of the introduction. He had a distinct flair for the theatrical that he used from his entry into the world of early-modern espionage as Burghley's Parisian agent until his execution for conceiving a plot to murder Elizabeth. Shortly after his death the government published a tract entitled *A true and plaine declaration of the horrible treasons, practised by William Parry the traitor, against the Queenes Maiestie*.¹⁴⁴ The document collected together various sources relating to Parry's actions, including a testimony from his fellow conspirator Edmund Neville, Parry's own 'voluntarie confession' of his actions, and apologies that Parry had written, both to Elizabeth, and to Burghley and Leicester. However, Parry's conspiracy lacked substance and the would-be assassin was always highly ambivalent about whether or not he should carry out the fateful deed. The episode proves far more about Parry's ambitions as a social climber in the Elizabethan court than it does about his commitment to any specific political or religious ideology.

In 1580 Parry was based in Paris and corresponding with Burghley via two means. One functioned as a decoy and took the form of letters couriered across the Channel in the general post; anyone intercepting those would conclude that Parry's

¹⁴⁴ *A true and plaine declaration of the horrible treasons, practised by William Parry the traitor, against the Queenes Maiestie* (London, 1585).

relationship with the Lord Treasurer was routine. Simultaneously, Parry conveyed secret missives to Burghley in the diplomatic bag of the English ambassador Sir Henry Cobham. Using this second form of communication Parry reported that he was poised to worm his way into the confidences of English Catholic émigrés living in Paris: ‘I doubt not within few months to be well able to discover their deepest practices.’¹⁴⁵ Burghley, ever the pragmatist, remained sceptical about Parry’s motives and never did bestow on him full rewards of patronage; this was probably a key factor in the frustrated Parry concocting the plot to kill Elizabeth. Resentment drives the main plot of *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which Don John, bitter about the favour bestowed on Claudio as a result of the recent wars, seeks out a means by which to thwart the young nobleman’s marriage.

In November 1580 Parry was found guilty of the attempted murder of Hugh Hare, a lawyer and financier who had lent Parry the enormous sum of £610 plus interest. In this instance a pardon from the Queen, probably after the intervention of Burghley, saved Parry from the gallows. Desperate to raise the money that he owed Hare, Parry then ingratiated himself into the company of a rich young nobleman named Sir Edward Hoby, who happened to be Burghley’s nephew. Parry very nearly succeeded in fleecing Hoby of a large portion of his fortune before the intervention of Hoby’s mother brought the assistance of the Lord Treasurer, who promptly had Parry thrown into jail. Unable to envisage any other means of securing his release, Parry again offered his services as Burghley’s agent in the French capital: ‘If my absence at Paris for three years may do any service to your lordship (thereby also to avoid the offence of all men here) I will gladly undertake it.’¹⁴⁶ Once he arrived on the Continent Parry proceeded to act more on his own behalf than on that of his patron – he relished travel, as well as dining with important company – although he did forward to Burghley a number of useful reports during this period.¹⁴⁷

Without approval from Burghley, whom he did not bother to consult in the matter, Parry then decided that his time would be spent most profitably as a double agent. To this end Parry sought and obtained the support of Cardinal Campeggio, the papal ambassador to Venice, to whom he appealed for an audience with the Pope:

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 82.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 143.

¹⁴⁷ Alford, *The Watchers*, 143.

I, William Parry, an English nobleman, after twelve years in the service of the Queen, was given a licence to travel abroad on secret and important business. Later, after pondering over the task committed to me and having conferred with some confidants of mine, men of judgment and education, I came to the conclusion that it was both dangerous to me and little to my honour. I have accordingly changed my mind and made a firm resolution to relinquish the project assigned to me and, with determined will, to employ all my strength and industry in the service of the Church and the Catholic faith.¹⁴⁸

This letter did arrive in Rome, but Parry himself did not; at this time the agent relocated from Venice to Lyons, although why is unclear. However, Parry had succeeded in opening a channel of communication with the highest authorities in Rome, as he reported triumphantly to Burghley:

If I be not deceived I have shaken the foundation of the English seminary in Rheims and utterly overthrown the credit of the English pensioners in Rome. My instruments were such as pass for great, honourable and grave. The course was extraordinary and strange, reasonably well devised, soundly followed and substantially executed without the assistance of any one of the English nation.¹⁴⁹

Parry was proud of the fact that he had achieved all this by himself. As the spy presented it to Burghley, he had created for himself the position of a double agent whose real sympathies lay with the English government. However, there was a complication. Unbeknownst to Burghley, Parry had actually resolved throw in his lot with the Catholic Church during his time in Paris in 1582. In 1584 he read William Allen's *A True, Sincere, and Modest Defence of English Catholiques that suffer for their Faith both at home and abroad*. Parry was captivated by Allen's work, which he later described as 'a warrant to a prepared mind: it taught that kings may be excommunicated, deprived, and violently handled: it proveth that all wars civil or foreign undertaken for religion, is [*sic*] honourable.'¹⁵⁰ The 'firm resolution' to which Parry had referred in his earlier letter to Campeggio now began to look less like bluff and more like reality.

Whilst in Paris in 1583 Parry had met with Thomas Morgan, the exiled secretary to Mary, Queen of Scots. Morgan convinced Parry to return to England in order to carry out the assassination of Elizabeth. Via his contacts at the English court, including Burghley and Sir Edward Stafford, Parry was able to obtain a private audience with the Queen, during which he revealed to Elizabeth that he had

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 147.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 147-48.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 184.

penetrated Jesuit society ‘to no other ende, but to discover the daungerous practises deuised and attempted against her Maiestie by her disloyall subiects and other malicious persons in forraine parts.’¹⁵¹ Parry hoped that by reporting such intelligence he would at last gain the more substantial rewards of patronage that he had been seeking. He was constantly unsure about whether he had the resolve to follow through with the deed of assassination, as he later recalled in his ‘voluntarie confession’:

I feared to be tempted, and therefore alwayes when I came neere her, I left my dagger at home. When I looked vpon her Maiestie, and remembred her many excellencies, I was greatly troubled: And yet I sawe no remedie, for my vowes were in heauen, my letters and promises in earth, and the case of ye Catholique recusaunts, and others little bettered.¹⁵²

By August 1584, frustrated by lack of advancement at the English court, Parry determined that regicide was the only course open to him. Edmund Neville, a gentleman with many contacts in the predominantly Catholic north of the country, stated that a ‘greatly discontented’ Parry had first approached him to plan the assassination ‘soone after his repulse in his suite for ye Mastership of S. Katherines.’¹⁵³ Parry proposed that the deed should take place either as the Queen rode in her coach in the park near Westminster or whilst she was at leisure in her garden at Whitehall. However, both Parry and Neville shied away from organising the precise details of the assassination and the plot lay fallow.

In November 1584 Parry won a seat in the House of Commons, probably on the recommendation of his new patron Sir Edward Hoby. It says much for Parry’s ability to sweet-talk his way into or out of any situation that he had managed to regain Hoby’s support at this time, as this was the very same individual upon whom Parry had played the role of financial trickster a few years earlier. The following month Parliament debated the proposed Bond of Association. Parry was vocal in his criticism of the Act, which he declared ‘carried nothing with it but blood, danger, terror, despair, [and] confiscation.’¹⁵⁴ He was brought before the Speaker and then the Privy Council for disciplinary action, and was forced to kneel before the House to apologise for his conduct. The way in which Parry was treated indicates just how determined the Privy Council and other powerful factions in the House of Commons were to see the Act pass; even opposition in open debate was deemed unacceptable.

¹⁵¹ *A true and plaine declaration*, 2.

¹⁵² *A true and plaine declaration*, 16.

¹⁵³ *A true and plaine declaration*, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 188.

One possibility is that Parry was using parliamentary debate as a public forum by which to advertise to Catholics both in England and abroad that he remained committed to their cause, regardless of whether his comments were sincere or intended as a front that would serve him well if he needed to re-infiltrate Catholic society at a later date.¹⁵⁵

In the event Neville could not bring himself to go through with the assassination and resolved to ‘lay open this his most traitorous and abhominable intention against her Maiestie.’¹⁵⁶ Neville surrendered himself to the authorities and spent the following decade in the Tower. Parry was apprehended and condemned to death. On the scaffold the would-be regicide declared that he was entirely innocent of any wrongdoing:

I die a true servant to Queen Elizabeth; from any evil thought that ever I had to harm her, it never came into my mind; she knoweth it and her conscience can tell her so ... I die guiltless and free in mind from ever thinking hurt to Her Majesty.¹⁵⁷

Yet Parry was unable to elicit any sympathy from the crowd, whose collective response was ‘away with him.’¹⁵⁸

Parry had become the first victim of the emergency legislation that he had contended so vigorously in Parliament. The government’s response to Parry’s plan to assassinate Elizabeth may seem over the top, but it has to be seen in light of the nervousness that had resulted in the Bond of Association and the threat that Mary, Queen of Scots presented to the English throne.¹⁵⁹ This has led one critic to propose that Parry had no intention of killing the Queen and that the conspiracy was manufactured by the Privy Council as a timely accompaniment to the passage of the Bond through Parliament.¹⁶⁰ At the very least, Parry’s ‘voluntarie confession’ has to be read as the work of one placed under enormous pressure to produce a testimony of his actions that would appeal to the government censors. Parry even wrote of Neville: ‘I joy and am glad in my soule, that it was his hap to discover me in time.’¹⁶¹ The

¹⁵⁵ Francis Edwards, *Plots and Plotters in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2002), 111.

¹⁵⁶ *A true and plaine declaration*, 10-11.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 192.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Edwards, *Plots and Plotters in the Reign of Elizabeth I*, 123.

¹⁵⁹ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 38-39.

¹⁶⁰ Curt Bright, ‘“Treason doth never prosper”: *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Treason,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.1 (1990), 6, 12.

¹⁶¹ *A true and plaine declaration*, 17.

three traitors in *Henry V* voice the same sentiment when their plot against the King's life is discovered, Grey exclaiming:

Never did faithful subject more rejoice
At the discovery of most dangerous treason
Than I do at this hour joy o'er myself. (2.2.157-59)

All this did not stop Parry from trying to ensure that Neville also received his share of the blame, asserting that his co-conspirator 'came often to mine house, put his finger in my dish, his hande in my purse, and the night wherein he accused me, was wrapped in my gowne.'¹⁶² Parry was keen to emphasise what he saw as the equally active role that Neville had played in plotting the assassination, although the fact that Neville turned informer suggests that he was even more ambivalent about the plot than Parry himself. It must have stung Parry to the core to discover that Neville had betrayed him whilst attired in the very garment he had once used to conceal his own identity.

Perhaps the most telling phrase of *A true and plaine declaration* occurs in Parry's apology to the Queen, where the hapless conspirator described his actions as 'the dangerous fruites of a discontented minde.'¹⁶³ Parry was obsessed with climbing the Elizabethan social ladder, a point the introduction to the tract was keen to make in describing him as 'a man of very meane and base parentage, but of a most proude and insolent spirite, bearing himselfe alwaies farre above the measure of his fortune.'¹⁶⁴ Parry was highly adept at convincing those from whom he sought patronage – including Campeggio, Hoby and even the sceptical Burghley – that he acted only in their best interests. In light of this it seems probable that Parry's real aim in life was to secure for himself rewards of money and office that he felt he so richly deserved, regardless of who actually provided them. Thus Parry's conspiracy against the Queen had more to do with gratifying his own desires for social improvement than achieving political or religious change within the English government. Powerful courtiers like Burghley and Walsingham had to be particularly careful when dealing with individuals like Parry, who were adept at playing the game of patronage from the bottom up. On the one hand Parry may not have contemplated assassinating the Queen if, sometime in the early 1580s, Burghley had bestowed on him the honours he felt he deserved. Yet, as Burghley was surely aware, to do so might only have

¹⁶² *A true and plaine declaration*, 17.

¹⁶³ *A true and plaine declaration*, 19.

¹⁶⁴ *A true and plaine declaration*, 1.

encouraged Parry to probe for even greater rewards, with no guarantee that he would remain faithful to the cause of Elizabeth's government.

Anthony Standen: playing both sides

Walsingham's success as 'spymaster' throughout the 1580s depended on the centralisation of intelligence gathering in the English government, a practice that discouraged factional sparring among key members of the Privy Council. Although some courtiers also operated their own privately funded intelligence networks, these did not generally interfere with the more central one run by Walsingham that was funded out of the treasury coffers. By contrast, the first half of the 1590s proved a turbulent time for intelligence gathering at the English court. Elizabeth did not appoint another Principal Secretary after Walsingham's death; in practice Burghley took on the necessary work, aided by his son Robert Cecil, who was eventually appointed to the role in 1596. The early 1590s also saw the rise of the Queen's new favourite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, whose wide-ranging political ambitions brought him into direct competition with the father-son team of Burghley and Cecil.¹⁶⁵

Elizabeth herself encouraged Essex's ambitions as court intelligencer, especially given his enthusiasm for English intervention in Continental affairs more generally.¹⁶⁶ Cleverly, the Cecils benignly allowed Essex to develop intelligence networks in locales more distant from England, particularly the city-states of northern Italy, themselves focusing on closer neighbours, such as Flanders, Scotland and Ireland.¹⁶⁷ As a result Essex had to spend greater sums of money to acquire intelligence reports transmitted through his network, simply because they had to be couriered over greater distances. Like Walsingham, Essex believed that worthwhile intelligence cost good money, but pursued this with a recklessness that was to prove the hallmark of his career at Elizabeth's court. On one occasion, when asked by one of his secretaries about payment for an agent, his response was 'take no pity of my

¹⁶⁵ A recent analysis of the Cecil-Essex rivalry appears in Loades, *The Cecils*, 226-55. See also Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Patronage at Court, faction and the earl of Essex' in *The reign of Elizabeth I: Court and culture in the last decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 65-86.

¹⁶⁶ Paul E. J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 152.

¹⁶⁷ Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, 194.

purse.¹⁶⁸ In 1594 Essex accused Elizabeth's physician, Dr Roderigo Lopez, of plotting to poison the Queen, an allegation that proved more about the Earl's desire to discover and quash a plot against the Queen's life – as Walsingham had done with Mary, Queen of Scots – than the veracity of the intelligence he had gathered to support his claim.¹⁶⁹ Burghley himself joined in the denouncement of the unfortunate physician, despite the fact that the Lord Treasurer had earlier used Lopez to gather information about Spanish spies operating in England.¹⁷⁰ Even Elizabeth's most experienced courtier had become so affected by the febrile wrangling over intelligence matters during recent years that he was prepared to cast his better judgement to the wind in order to leverage political acumen away from Essex.

It was into this heady mix of dubious intelligence and court factionalism that Anthony Standen (d. 1615), dubbed 'an Elizabethan spy who came in from the cold' by Paul E. J. Hammer, stepped when he at long last returned to England in 1593.¹⁷¹ Standen had started out as a courtier to Elizabeth in the 1560s before transferring his allegiance in favour of Stuart claims to the throne. He subsequently spent the next twenty-eight years in exile on the Continent, where he operated as a double agent in the pay of the crowns of both Spain and England. In the build up to the attempted Spanish invasion of England in 1588 Standen, who was at this time living in Florence, played a key role in providing the Privy Council with intelligence about military preparations in Spanish-controlled parts of northern Italy, adopting the alias Pompeo Pellegrini for the purpose of signing his letters.¹⁷² He was particularly lucky in gaining the personal trust of Walsingham. Forwarding one of Standen's missives to Burghley in June 1587, the Principal Secretary added the following postscript: 'I humbly pray your Lordship that Pompey's letter may be reserved to yourself. I would be loathe the gentleman should have any harm through my default.'¹⁷³ As a result of his efforts, and presumably on Walsingham's recommendation, the Queen granted Standen one of those rare pensions of £100 a year, as Gilbert Gifford had received for playing turncoat in the Babington plot.

¹⁶⁸ Paul E. J. Hammer, 'An Elizabethan Spy Who Came in from the Cold: the Return of Anthony Standen to England in 1593,' *Historical Research* 65 (1992), 288.

¹⁶⁹ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 145.

¹⁷⁰ Alford, *The Watchers*, 305.

¹⁷¹ Hammer, 'An Elizabethan Spy Who Came in from the Cold', 277-95. Subsequent facts about Standen's career as an agent in the early 1590s are drawn from this article.

¹⁷² Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 291.

¹⁷³ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 291.

In 1590 Standen was arrested in Bordeaux as a Spanish spy. He subsequently spent fourteen months in prison, during which time he learned of Walsingham's death. His Spanish paymasters were ignoring his pleas for help and he was accumulating heavy debts to pay for his maintenance in prison. Standen then had a stroke of luck in being able to make contact with Anthony Bacon, older brother of Francis Bacon and son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, a former Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. Bacon had spent the 1580s living in France and was subsequently able to obtain Burghley's patronage on Standen's behalf. Standen was clearly on the lookout for a patron to replace Walsingham, as a letter he wrote to Burghley from Bordeaux in June 1591 indicates:

Touching my endeavour heretofore, I may not doubt how her Majesty hath been duly informed of them, for so Sir F. Walsingham by his letters did assure me, as also of my reintegration to her Highness favour concerning my youthful forfeit, assuring me fully thereof and for a sufficient token told me of an hundred pounds pension it had liked her Majesty to have assigned yearly for my maintenance.¹⁷⁴

The 'youthful forfeit' to which Standen refers is his decision to abandon Elizabeth's court for that of the rival Stuart faction in 1565. Standen was keen to remind Burghley that he had managed to gain 'reintegration to her Highness favour' through the intelligence reports that he had sent Walsingham from the Continent, thus advertising his credentials as a future agent under the patronage of the Lord Treasurer.

After his release from prison Standen first travelled to Spain in order to renew his contacts there. He then settled for a few years in southern France, where he proceeded to send Burghley reports on Spanish military activity. During this time he simultaneously passed on intelligence to the Spanish court. Burghley was probably well aware that Standen was continuing his old tricks as a double agent, but his tolerance of such behaviour suggests that collateral damage of this sort was expected to be an inevitable part of such operations, perhaps even desirable if it resulted in more useful intelligence for the English government. Although Walsingham and Standen had communicated as early as 1582, regular correspondence did not begin until 1587.¹⁷⁵ Walsingham may have decided that he would have to take a risk on Standen's personal integrity in order to secure those crucial pieces of intelligence that related to the looming Spanish invasion of England.

¹⁷⁴ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 291-92.

¹⁷⁵ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 289.

Standen's return to England from southern France via Calais was initially supposed to take the form of a brief stop-over, prior to an intended relocation to Flanders, where he would continue to serve Burghley as an agent. Whilst at Calais Standen had dispatched key pieces of intelligence to Nicholas Faunt, Walsingham's former secretary, who currently worked as a clerk of the signet office. A Fleming who had been tailing Standen chased after the messenger and, having seized the crucial documents, handed this information on to some Spanish agents, whose presence in Calais had forced Standen to exercise caution in his movements around the port. Standen's cover was blown, yet he proceeded to cross the Channel and, in a move that surprised many, decided to stay put at the English court. Burghley was particularly annoyed with this now spent agent: after a single meeting with Standen, he abandoned him thereafter. Ever resourceful, the intermediary Bacon then brought Standen to the attention of Essex, who, perceiving that he could gain valuable military intelligence about Spain as part of his efforts to outshine the Lord Treasurer's intelligence network, declared the spy's return a 'greatt matter.'¹⁷⁶ During this period the Earl, again in opposition to Burghley, was sounding out the political possibilities for future toleration of Catholicism in England. Thomas Phelippes, who had transferred to Essex's service after the death of Walsingham, commented that Standen was 'very Catholike ... without dissimulation.'¹⁷⁷ Essex's patronage of Standen, who had infuriated Burghley by making little attempt to hide his adherence to the religion that had driven him from England in the first place, provides a notable instance of the Earl's attitudes in this regard.

When Bacon became ill and was unable to work towards the end of 1593, Standen was able to take his place. Although this role was more that of secretary than agent Standen was at last able to involve himself with intelligence matters on behalf of his new patron. Yet, keenly aware that both Burghley and the Queen were annoyed that Standen's usefulness as an agent had been compromised during his return to England, Essex did not support Standen as fully as he might have done, declining to let him reside at Essex House and leaving Bacon to support him financially. Thereafter, Standen was forced to haunt the court that he had abandoned so many years earlier, desperately seeking the political and social advancement he believed he deserved in recognition of his extensive career as an intelligencer in foreign locales.

¹⁷⁶ Hammer, 'An Elizabethan Spy Who Came in from the Cold', 290.

¹⁷⁷ Hammer, 'An Elizabethan Spy Who Came in from the Cold', 291.

Standen's principal problem was that he overrated his own political worth at this late stage of his career. The activities in which he had engaged during his decades-long absence from the country of his birth were liable to make any future patron view him with wariness, as Essex's half-hearted treatment of him demonstrates.¹⁷⁸

In what must have seemed to Standen nothing short of a personal insult, Antonio Perez, an exiled Spaniard who had tried and failed to play both sides of the intelligence operations pertaining to the rivalry between Philip II and his half-brother Don John of Austria in the late 1570s, was taken into Essex's service in 1594.¹⁷⁹ That same year Standen tried desperately to gain a permanent position at the English court, but failed to achieve an office, either as Garter King of Arms or as Clarenceux King of Arms.¹⁸⁰ Despite Standen's earlier description of Bacon as 'this noble gentleman of whose bounty I have so largely tasted,' communication between the two men broke off after 1596, probably because the mounting financial problems plaguing Essex meant that the Earl could no longer afford to fund a private intelligence service to rival that of the Cecils.¹⁸¹ Continuing to serve at the court of James I after Elizabeth's death, Standen was foolish enough to deliver gifts from the Pope to Queen Anne, herself newly converted to Catholicism, which resulted in his imprisonment in the Tower and then the Marshalsea. He subsequently withdrew to Rome, where he lived out his days on a pension from the Pope.¹⁸²

The ebb and flow of Standen's career as an intelligencer proves the significance of maintaining the trust of a well-connected patron at court. Standen was able to make up for his youthful misdemeanor in abandoning the Elizabethan court by providing the government with key pieces of military intelligence at a critical time in England's relationship with Spain. More than anything, Standen may simply have been in the right place at the right time, with the result that Walsingham was forced into relying on the intelligence that his Florentine agent provided, regardless of whether Standen was simultaneously in the pay of the enemy. The resultant surge in Standen's confidence encouraged him to believe that he could mould a future career for himself at the English court. However, following Walsingham's death and the subsequent splitting of intelligence gathering operations at the English court between

¹⁷⁸ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 151.

¹⁷⁹ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 152-53.

¹⁸⁰ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 152.

¹⁸¹ Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 132, 179-80.

¹⁸² Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, 180.

the rival Cecil and Essex factions, Standen was unable to develop the same kind of favour with other patrons that he had enjoyed whilst reporting to Walsingham. His reckless behaviour subsequent to this indicates that he had to resort to desperate measures to prove that he deserved his place at court, of which only he seems to have been convinced. Having spent his career as an agent playing both sides of the religious cold war between England and the Continent, Standen thus found it impossible to resettle in his native country as he wished.

Robert Poley: a question of trust

Robert Poley (fl. 1568-1602) has already appeared twice in this chapter, first as Walsingham's mole amongst Catholic conspirators in the Babington plot, and then present at the death of Christopher Marlowe. However, he deserves still more time onstage on account of the longevity of his career as an agent at the Elizabethan court. Poley appears at some particularly thrilling moments in the drama of Elizabethan espionage but it is also worth focusing on some of the more routine activities with which he busied himself. According to official records Poley was paid on twenty-six separate occasions for special courier missions carried out on behalf of the English government between 1588 and 1601.¹⁸³ During this time he travelled to Denmark, the Low Countries, Scotland, Belgium and France, conveying important diplomatic intelligence between the English court and its agents in other countries, or between the English court and its counterparts abroad. These records are of particular value for the present study because they prove that, despite his shadier dealings with the likes of Babington and Marlowe, Poley was also able to develop a position of significant trust amongst key members of the Privy Council. This does not preclude the possibility that Poley also operated as a spy or courier in the pay of individual courtiers during this time, but, more significantly, that he had managed to secure for himself an important position at court, probably on the recommendation of Walsingham for his efforts in helping uncover the Babington plot.

¹⁸³ These are collated in Eugénie de Kalb, 'Robert Poley's Movements as a Messenger of the Court, 1588 to 1601,' *The Review of English Studies* 9 (1933), 13-18.

All the payments are recorded via a standard formula, of which the first may provide an example:

To Roberte Poolye gent uppon a warrant signed by Mr Secretary Walsingham dated at the Courte xxvij^{mo} December 1588 for bringeinge lettres in poste for her majesties affaires from the King of Denmark to the Courte at Richmonde – xv^{li}.¹⁸⁴

Individual warrants for these payments were signed by one of four officials – Walsingham, Sir Thomas Heneage (the Vice-Chamberlain), Burghley or Robert Cecil – according to which individual happened to be managing such matters at that particular time. Poley most commonly received the sum of £10 for his services, although on two occasions he received £30 for missions to the Low Countries. None of the twenty-six records of payment provide any detail about the content of the messages that Poley conveyed. They do, however, indicate that these were often affairs of some consequence for relations between the English court and its foreign neighbours. In December 1592 Poley was paid for conveying messages ‘of greate importance’ to Scotland ‘and for his attendaunce in that place and service, and rydeinge in sondrye places within that province by the space of twoe whole monethes.’¹⁸⁵ Poley did not merely deliver pieces of paper to the Scottish court and return home again. The fact that he spent another two months travelling around that country on other business indicates that the Privy Council did not consider him merely a carrier of letters but rather an agent that could be entrusted to carry out tasks of a diplomatically sensitive nature.

According to these accounts Poley’s last mission as an official messenger for the English court took place sometime in 1601. He then disappears from the record until July of the following year. Things do not seem to be have been going well for him. A letter that Poley wrote to Robert Cecil indicates that the Principal Secretary has lost trust in him:

How half offended, you said to me I never made you good intelligence, nor did you Service worth reckoning, is the cause I have not since presented myself with offer of my duty, although I much desire my endeavours might please you, my necessities needing your favour.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in de Kalb, ‘Robert Poley’s Movements as a Messenger of the Court’, 15.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in de Kalb, ‘Robert Poley’s Movements as a Messenger of the Court’, 16.

¹⁸⁶ R. A. Roberts (editor), ‘Cecil Papers: July 1602, 11-20,’ Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, vol. 12: 1602-1603, *British History Online*, accessed 10 March 2013; available from <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=111914>

Unfortunately it is not possible to deduce why Poley had fallen out of favour. Once again, this letter proves that, minus the support of a willing patron, life as an agent could degenerate rapidly, even for one with as much experience as Poley. And so Robert Poley disappears from the drama of Elizabethan espionage for the last time, cut adrift by the man who had at length been able to outmaneuver the ill-fated Earl of Essex and would continue to consolidate his position at the centre of English politics with the accession of James I. Nothing more is known of Poley's life after this letter.

Years earlier, Walsingham had also harboured doubts about Poley's integrity. In the aftermath of the Babington plot, Poley had been imprisoned along with those conspirators whose confidence he had managed to gain. However, Poley was not brought to trial and Catholics soon realised that he had been operating as Walsingham's agent all along. Despite the key role that Poley had played in the Babington plot, Walsingham was still cautious about this agent's capacity for duplicity, confiding to his secretary Thomas Phelippes 'I do not find but that Poley hath dealt honestly with me, yet I am loath to lay myself any way open to him.'¹⁸⁷ Evidently Walsingham was able to come to terms with his doubts about Poley, as it was he who signed the first two warrants authorising payment for the agent's diplomatic missions to Denmark and Holland. Perhaps Walsingham just had to reassure himself – as he may have done when corresponding with Anthony Standen a few years earlier – that agents were inherently prone to duplicitous behaviour and that such pitfalls were unavoidable in this odious but necessary profession.

When imprisoned as Walsingham's mole in the Marshalsea in 1583 Poley had made sure that he enjoyed himself when he could, maintaining a private room for such purposes. The jailor Richard Ede noted that Poley was apathetic about his marriage, and that one Joan Yeomans 'often had recourse unto him and had many fine banquets in his chamber.'¹⁸⁸ More worryingly for Walsingham, it seemed that his mole was trying to play both sides: Poley had started to communicate with Morgan in Paris and was collecting pro-Catholic literature. When William Yeomans, the irate husband of Poley's feasting companion, challenged that Poley was engaging in duplicitous behaviour, the spy declared 'it is no matter for I will swear and forswear my self rather than I will accuse my self to do any harm.'¹⁸⁹ The self-assured Poley

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 257.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 144.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe*, 144.

was keenly aware that success in the business of espionage would only come if one remained constantly on the lookout for one's own interests, even at the expense of a relationship with a patron as powerful and important as Walsingham. Ironically, it was this very attitude that triggered the sudden demise of his relationship with Cecil years later.

Ben Jonson would not have been sorry if Poley had come to a bad end. When Jonson was imprisoned in the Marshalsea in 1597 as a result of the offence caused by his abortive play *The Isle of Dogs*, Poley was again planted there as a stool pigeon, and took the opportunity to probe Jonson for suspected Catholic sympathies. In his epigram 'Inviting a Friend to Supper,' Jonson later mused upon a fantasy world in which careless talk would no longer provide sustenance for opportunistic spies:

Of this we will sup free, but moderately,
And we will have no Poley or Parrot by,
Nor shall our cups make any guilty men:
But, at our parting, we will be as when
We innocently met. No simple word
That shall be uttered at our mirthful board
Shall make us sad next morning, or affright
The liberty that we'll enjoy tonight.¹⁹⁰

Incidentally, the other spy referred to here is probably the poet Henry Parrot, who had a stint as a government mole in Newgate in 1598. Perhaps Jonson knew something about those sumptuous dinners that Poley had provided for Joan Yeomans in earlier years and added this information to his epigram in order to mock the stool pigeon's self-indulgent behaviour. Regardless, the fact that Jonson had acquired intelligence that Poley was a government mole cannot have done Poley's career any good; however, the poem was not published until 1616, years after Poley's final pleading letter to Cecil. Furthermore, Jonson's implication that merely a 'simple word' could compromise a detainee's welfare suggests there was a pervasive culture of distrust between all manner of prison inmates in this period. This in turn indicates that stool pigeons such as Poley may not have been quite as effective in their work as they often claimed to be.

Poley's career as a government agent is remarkable both for its longevity – almost twenty years – and the highly ambiguous nature of the relationships he entertained with important government officials like Walsingham and Cecil.

¹⁹⁰ *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 5, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 168.

Doubtless he was relieved to gain a post as diplomatic messenger for the English court: that piece of good fortune probably did much to iron out his reckless behaviour in earlier years because it forced him to behave in a manner that was more openly trustworthy. Yet even that did not help Poley when the tables turned on him in 1602 and he found himself on the receiving end of Cecil's mistrust. Agents like Poley lived in a world where nothing could be taken for granted.

Conclusions: patronage, professions of allegiance, opportunity

Of these five agents, only one came to what might be described as a decent end. Having continued his career as a writer long after the publication of *The English Roman Life*, Munday died in his native London in 1633 at the very respectable age of seventy-two. Standen lived out his days in Rome on a papal pension, but had to cope with the fact that he had been forced into exile for a second time on account of his rash behaviour. After many years of government service Poley appears to have lost the confidence of his current patron Robert Cecil; although nothing further is known of Poley's life at this juncture he could well have ended his days in poverty. Most dramatically, two of these agents die violently, Marlowe in a knife fight (either by accident or design) and Parry on the scaffold after being convicted of treason.

The biographies sketched above provide some account of the kinds of activities in which Elizabethan spies might engage, as well as examining the various attitudes that accompanied such behaviour. No two of these experiences are alike, but three elements are common to all. First, a sound relationship with a politically influential patron not only provided employment in the first place but also the all-important compensation, either in hard cash or grants of offices; it also provided protection where necessary. However, associations that once were sound could be subject to change if the patron became dissatisfied either with the agent's behaviour or the intelligence being offered. This was the fate that met Robert Poley after many years of service as a trusted diplomatic messenger for the English government. Second, spies often professed allegiance to both sides of the religious divide, simultaneously claiming the sincerity of their Catholicism and fidelity to the English Protestant state. Such declarations were thus essentially strategic in nature, designed to cultivate political friendships that could work for the spy at that particular moment in time. By this means Anthony Standen was able to operate as a double agent on

behalf of the crowns of both England and Spain, perhaps with the knowledge of both parties. Even more dramatically, William Parry planned to assassinate Elizabeth whilst he was a Member of Parliament. Lastly, opportunity played a crucial factor in determining how agents might behave in any given situation. When Christopher Marlowe was apprehended in Flushing for coining and deported home he must have spent many hours rehearsing his defence on the boat back to England. Anthony Munday may well have sought refuge at the English College in Rome as much out of hunger as anything else. The melding of these three factors – patronage, professions of allegiance and opportunity – meant that all these agents inhabited a world that was essentially unstable in nature. Ultimately the spy could only rely on himself, with the result that he was forced into behaving in a manner that was personally inflected to a profound degree and required him to remain constantly alert to change.

Subsequent chapters will draw on some of the key practices of Elizabethan espionage that have been outlined in this introduction: these include letters, misinformation, deception, entrapment, eavesdropping, false friends, obscure intention and, perhaps most importantly, plotting and counter-plotting. In doing so this thesis traces the ways in which Shakespeare's drama is imbued with these important aspects of early-modern political culture. Simultaneously, it will demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between Shakespeare's dramatic plotting and the conspiracies of later sixteenth-century England.

2. Much Ado About Nothing: surveillance and self-deception

In Shakespeare's time the word 'nothing' was probably articulated as we would pronounce 'noting' today. The very title of *Much Ado About Nothing* is thus an invitation for audiences and readers to enter a world in which characters are obsessed with various forms of surveillance.¹⁹¹ The nothing/noting pun operates on several levels: the sexually inflected 'no thing' that underscores the powerlessness experienced by several of the female characters at various points in the play; 'nothing' could denote a dead person in early-modern English, present in the supposed death of Hero; the bastard Don John, a societal 'nothing' in comparison with his legitimate brother Don Pedro; and, perhaps most pertinently for the concerns of this thesis, the 'nothing' of Hero's supposed midnight tryst, an episode that lies at the centre of the play but never appears onstage.

This chapter will examine the four main surveillance episodes in *Much Ado* in terms of what each reveals about the personally inflected nature of characters' behaviour in each of these situations: the masked ball (2.1); the 'gulling' of Benedick and Beatrice in the garden (2.3 and 3.1); the midnight surveillance operation carried out by Borachio and Don John to convince Claudio and Don Pedro that Hero is disloyal (the episode itself takes place between 3.2 and 3.3); and the Friar's plan to restore Hero's reputation and ensure her eventual marriage to Claudio (which the Friar outlines after the abortive wedding in 4.1). In *Much Ado* all degrees of persons, from princes to servants, demonstrate an ability to engage in cunning acts of spying, but they also remain prone to spectacular errors of judgment. B. K. Lewalski notes of the play that 'the wise and the witless, the prudent and the foolish, the rational and the passionate, the good and the bad are alike liable to misapprehension and mistaking, and alike engage in deliberate duping and pretense.'¹⁹² Don John is the only character who does not belong in this world: constitutionally incapable of forsaking his melancholic disposition in order to enjoy the revels at Leonato's household, the

¹⁹¹ The following essays are useful on account of their direct engagement with the issue of 'noting': Paul A. Jorgensen, 'Much Ado About *Nothing*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5.3 (1954), 287-95; Dorothy C. Hockey, 'Notes Notes, Forsooth...', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 8.3 (1957), 353-58; Walter N. King, 'Much Ado About *Something*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.3 (1964), 143-55.

¹⁹² B. K. Lewalski, 'Love, Appearance and Reality: Much Ado about *Something*,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 8.2 (1968), 237.

bastard is cast as the serpent who delights in nothing but disrupting the Eden of Messina.¹⁹³ To manage the practical details of his malevolent scheme Don John relies on the skill of his retainer Borachio, whose abilities as a secretary prove key to the success of the midnight surveillance operation.

Subsequent chapters of this thesis examine plays that all have one readily identifiable protagonist and hence the arguments developed therein are closely tied to the attitudes and experiences of those individual characters. The same, however, is not true for *Much Ado*: in many ways Beatrice and Benedick eclipse Claudio and Hero – whose counterparts in Shakespeare’s source material are far more significant – and several other characters play crucial roles as the narrative develops. As a result, this chapter will instead use *Much Ado* to explore some key aspects of the manner in which spying episodes could play out on the early-modern stage; in the process it will establish a framework of cultural contexts that mediate between history and drama. These ideas are intended to function as a bridge between the historical material on later sixteenth-century spy networks presented in the introduction and the concerns of later chapters. *Much Ado* provides an exemplary case of the way that Shakespeare sought to suffuse his drama with a rich array of concepts relating to surveillance; such episodes are not merely ephemeral niceties but crucial for developing an enriched understanding of the play’s moment in history.

Excursions: eavesdropping and misreporting

The opening scene of *Much Ado* closes with an episode in which Don Pedro determines to woo Hero for Claudio by proxy. This is then followed by a scene in which Antonio reports to Leonato what his servant overheard of the soldiers’ conversation (1.2) and another in which Borachio reports to Don John how he hid behind an arras in order to eavesdrop upon this exchange (1.3). While Borachio learns both key aspects of the wooing scheme – that it will be carried out by Don Pedro, but on behalf of the socially inexperienced Claudio – somehow Antonio’s man only manages to gather the first of these two pieces of information, resulting in his report to Antonio that it is the Prince of Aragon who is seeking Hero’s hand in marriage. Why this servant, whom Antonio otherwise describes as ‘a good sharp fellow’

¹⁹³ David Lucking, ‘Bringing Deformed Forth: Engendering Meaning in *Much Ado About Nothing*,’ *Renaissance Forum* 2.1 (1997), 11.

(1.2.16), inadvertently commits this blunder ultimately remains something of a mystery and frequently results in 1.2 being cut in production for sake of clarity, or perhaps transposed to the beginning of the masked ball.¹⁹⁴ For his part Leonato is thrilled to learn this ‘strange news’ (1.2.4), but determines on a composed response that still allows for the possibility that the servant’s report is inaccurate or even altogether wrong: ‘We will hold it as a dream till it appear itself. But I will acquaint my daughter withal, that she may be the better prepared for an answer if peradventure this be true’ (1.2.18-21).

Whilst on their walk, where they pass through a room containing an arras (1.3.57) and promenade through the ‘thick-pleached alley’ (1.2.8) in Antonio’s garden, both of which provide ideal places of concealment, Claudio and Don Pedro exhibit no wariness of the possibility that eavesdroppers may be present, regardless of whether the latter are located there deliberately or by chance. This is particularly surprising given that later in the play Don Pedro demonstrates an acute awareness of humankind’s susceptibility to deception by carefully planted intelligence when he devises the gulling episodes in the garden in order ‘to bring Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection th’one with th’other’ (2.1.342-44). The manner in which characters in *Much Ado* seize upon, create, respond to, or ignore opportunities for surveillance is personally inflected to a profound degree. This crucial aspect of the play goes a long way to explaining why the obviously malicious Don John and his agent Borachio very nearly succeed in their scheme ‘to misuse the Prince, to vex Claudio, to undo Hero, and kill Leonato’ (2.2.25-26).

The masked ball (2.1) occupies only the middle third of one scene, yet presents a particularly rich series of vignettes showcasing the various techniques that characters employ in order to sound out the identity of their dancing partners. Aside from their immediate relevance in the playful context of the masked ball these brief

¹⁹⁴ See *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. John F. Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 104, 110. Antonio states that his servant overheard Claudio and Don Pedro ‘in mine orchard’ (1.2.8-9), which suggests that the servant was privy to a second conversation that took place at a different time and in a different location from that in which Borachio overhears the men. If this is indeed the case it raises the further problem of why Claudio and Don Pedro need to discuss the proxy wooing a second time. Maurice Hunt suggests that ‘the density of the foliage warps or muffles Don Pedro’s speech, permitting Antonio’s man to hear only part of the truth,’ whereas the arras behind which Borachio hides ‘does not in this case significantly damage acoustics’; see ‘The Reclamation of Language in *Much Ado About Nothing*,’ *Studies in Philology* 97.2 (2000), 173. A. R. Humphreys reasons that ‘the likeliest explanation is that Shakespeare scattered these references without troubling over consistency; an audience will hardly notice, and, if it should, the variations enhance that prevalence of hearsay and guesswork in which the play abounds’; see *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. A. R. Humphreys (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 230.

episodes provide important foregrounding for the manner in which characters convey and receive intelligence about each other in later episodes of *Much Ado*. Specifically, the incidents at the masked ball reveal humans' deadly blindspots in matters of love, as well as establishing that it is possible for characters to convince themselves that they have interpreted the external world accurately when in fact they are quite wrong.

Don Pedro is the first character to initiate movement during the masked ball, inviting Hero to dance with him: 'Lady, will you walk a bout with your friend?' (2.1.78-79). The term 'friend' connotes a partner or potential lover, as Don Pedro surely intends in his role as proxy wooer. Primed by her uncle to expect the Prince's approach, Hero is not slow to catch on to his meaning: 'I am yours for the walk; and especially when I walk away' (81-82); her response not only begins the steps of the dance but suggests that she is eager to part company from the other residents of Messina in order to seek a more secluded locale for the wooing. Furthermore, Hero proves to be anything but a demure maiden. When Don Pedro then questions 'With me in your company?' (83), Hero's response indicates that she is keen to play an active role in the dance, and by extension the process of wooing itself: 'I may say so when I please' (84). Their subsequent dialogue is considerably more risqué:

HERO When I like your favour; for God defend the lute should be like the
case.
DON PEDRO My visor is Philemon's roof. Within the house is Jove.
HERO Why, then, your visor should be thatched.
DON PEDRO Speak low if you speak love. (86-89)

At face value Hero associates Don Pedro with the lute and his mask with the case. However, Joost Daalder has argued that this curious exchange is also charged with sexual innuendo: the lute in its case refers to the union of male and female genitals; the allusion to Jove, the lascivious Roman god, implies that, behind his visor, Don Pedro is bursting with sexual energy; most obscurely, Hero picks up on the theme of her partner's erotic potency and insinuates oral sex by suggesting that his visor (or perhaps more accurately his face) is best matched with her own thatch or pubic hair.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Joost Daalder, 'The Thatched Visor in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Viola's Beard in *Twelfth Night*,' *AUMLA* 102 (2004), 1-12.

The bawdiness of this conversation complicates received notions that Hero, in contrast to the voluble Beatrice, embodies the ideal of the chaste young gentlewoman. To extend Daalder's argument, the saucy version of Hero is prefigured in the opening scene of the play, which critics usually draw on to provide over-determined evidence of that female character's powerlessness within the discourse of patriarchy.¹⁹⁶ Although Hero speaks only a single line, that brief utterance is important in foregrounding her dexterity with sexually inflected language. Both the Messenger and Leonato are bemused by Beatrice's enquiry after 'Signor Montanto' (1.1.29) – literally 'Lord Upthrust' – but Hero is able to inform the two men 'My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua' (34). Perhaps the supposition is that Hero, unlike the Messenger or Leonato, has heard Beatrice employ this term previously when referring to Benedick, but that does not preclude the possibility that this supposedly innocent young gentlewoman demonstrates an ability with sexual allusions to rival or even surpass that of the men around her. A few scenes later, in response to Borachio's report of the intended marriage, Don John also presents a coquettish version of Hero, describing her as 'A very forward March chick' (1.3.52). Given that Hero was silent throughout the villain's time onstage in the opening scene, Don John must have come by the notion that she is capable of sexual game-playing on a different occasion, although the text of the play does not fill in the details of this possibility.

Based on the inaccurate report obtained by Antonio's servant, it is worth remembering that at this particular point in time Hero still believes it is the Prince of Aragon himself who is seeking her hand in marriage. Hero must therefore employ enticing language during this exchange in order to promote a version of herself that she believes would make her more attractive to the Prince. Hero's agenda is twofold: she hopes to demonstrate to Don Pedro that she can behave saucily when away from the controlling influence of her father (and hence satisfy a future husband's sexual needs), and that she also has the capacity to match Beatrice's wit. If indeed Hero is attempting to mirror her cousin's volubility throughout this exchange, she is accurate in believing that Don Pedro would be attracted to such a woman: later in the scene, having succeeded in winning Hero on behalf of Claudio, the Prince explicitly asks

¹⁹⁶ See, for example: Carol Cook, '“The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor”: Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *PMLA* 101.2 (1986), 192; Michael D. Friedman, '“Hush'd on Purpose to Grace Harmony”: Wives and Silence in *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *Theatre Journal* 42.3 (1990), 350; Mark Taylor, 'Presence and Absence in *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *The Centennial Review* 33.1 (1989), 1-4.

Beatrice ‘Will you have me, lady?’ (2.1.305). Unsurprisingly, Beatrice dismisses such a possibility, protesting that Don Pedro is ‘too costly to wear every day’ (307-08) and that in any case she ‘was born to speak all mirth and no matter’ (308-09).

As Daalder reads the dancers’ exchange, Don Pedro’s final line ‘Speak low if you speak love’ (89) provides the most explicit suggestion yet that the couple is engaging in sexually inflected banter.¹⁹⁷ If so, it indicates that Don Pedro is perhaps nervous about being overheard in the act of corrupting the young gentlewoman, despite the fact that Hero has taken part in their banter with equal zest. Yet, as Harry Berger glosses the Prince’s response, Don Pedro is probably anxious to get on with the business of the proxy wooing without being distracted by mere play: ‘not so loud, not so fast, let’s go off by ourselves and be serious.’¹⁹⁸ Don Pedro has a complicated task before him, having to play along with Hero’s flirtatiousness in order to achieve his goal of wooing the young gentlewoman on behalf of his younger comrade.

Stanley Wells has shown that the version of *Much Ado* that comes down to us via the quarto of 1600 was printed from the author’s foul papers; this process resulted in the retention of a significant number of anomalies or abandoned material, including ‘ghost’ characters such as Innogen, the wife of Leonato, who appears in a couple of stage directions but never has a speaking part.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, if John Wain is correct in arguing that the banality of the Claudio-Hero plot constitutes a kind of ‘Shakespearean lie-detector’ – by which Wain means a measure of determining that the dramatist lost interest in this central element of the play – then Hero could be an unwitting victim of Shakespeare’s emerging enthusiasm for his own creation of the Beatrice-Benedick subplot.²⁰⁰ Perhaps the coquettish elements in Hero’s character are best understood as an element of the play that proves apt during Shakespeare’s opening excursions into issues of surveillance through the set-piece of the masked ball, but jars with the later representation of her as a slandered maiden.

Ursula and Antonio are the third couple to come forward. Caught in mid-conversation, it becomes evident that Antonio is engaged in a fruitless endeavour to convince Ursula that he is in fact someone else:

¹⁹⁷ Daalder, ‘The Thatched Visor in *Much Ado About Nothing*,’ 4.

¹⁹⁸ Harry Berger Jr, ‘Against the Sink-a-Pace: Sexual and Family Politics in *Much Ado About Nothing*,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33.3 (1982), 304.

¹⁹⁹ Stanley Wells, ‘Editorial Treatment of Foul-Paper Texts: *Much Ado About Nothing* as Test Case,’ *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 31 (1980), 1-16, esp. 3.

²⁰⁰ John Wain, ‘The Shakespearean lie-detector: Thoughts on ‘*Much Ado about Nothing*,’ *Critical Quarterly* 9 (1967), 27-42.

URSULA (*to Antonio*) I know you well enough, you are Signor Antonio.
ANTONIO At a word, I am not.
URSULA I know you by the wagging of your head. (102-05)

Antonio then tries a different approach, attempting to convince Ursula that the masked figure with whom she is speaking is engaged in a kind of double impersonation: 'To tell you true, I counterfeit him' (106). Reaching out to touch Antonio, Ursula then relies on a different sensory perception to confirm her suspicions about his identity: 'Here's his dry hand up and down' (108). The dryness of the hand is an indicator of old age, but Ursula's peculiarly intimate knowledge of the texture of Antonio's skin also suggests that she is or has been romantically intimate with him, which in turn implies that he stands little chance of attempting to convince Ursula that he is someone else. To read the characters' conversation with a different emphasis, perhaps the point of this exchange is to show Antonio teasing Ursula by continuing to deny her assertions, in spite of the fact that he has obviously been caught out.

The focus shifts next to Beatrice and Benedick, where Shakespeare continues to multiply the possibilities that the setting of the masked ball offers for various kinds of social reconnaissance, demonstrating how a character in an apparently superior position of surveillance – in this case Benedick – can fail to take advantage of such an opportunity. Benedick's light-hearted refusal to reveal his identity to an irritated Beatrice backfires on him, as Beatrice then proceeds to inform her dancing partner that Benedick is 'the Prince's jester, a very dull fool' (127), asserting that 'he both please men and angers them, and then they laugh at him, and beat him' (130-32). Yet Beatrice also tempers her obvious scorn for Benedick with a whimsical reference to a very different type of relationship, indicating that she wishes Benedick had taken advantage of her sexually: 'I would he had boarded me' (132-33). This suggests that her antagonism towards Benedick has in part been formulated by her own frustration about this unfulfilled desire, which also implies that Benedick was the less interested party (of which more later). There is some possibility that Beatrice is engaged in double bluff, attempting to trick the masked figure into believing that she does not know his real identity before proceeding to insult Benedick to his face, perhaps in a bid to lure him into unmasking himself in outrage. What is certain is that Benedick was able to establish he was speaking with Beatrice at the masked ball, although how is not made clear: later in the scene he indignantly recounts to Don Pedro 'She told

me – not thinking I had been myself – that I was the Prince’s jester’ (227-28), adding ‘She speaks poniards, and every word stabs’ (231-32). Although Benedick had succeeded in winning the opening scene’s battle of wits via a ‘jade’s trick’ (1.1.138), ‘three words’ conference with this harpy’ (2.1.253) now proves too much for him and he retires, declaring ‘I cannot endure my Lady Tongue’ (256-57). Despite his predilection for verbal acuity, Benedick is more like Claudio after this episode, a ‘poor hurt fowl’ (190) who simply retires when caught off-guard. Not only does Benedick object to being thought of as a mere accessory to Don Pedro rather than a soldier in his own right, he is aggrieved by the fact that Beatrice unwittingly succeeds in delivering a volley of insults towards him when, at least in theory, he held the upper hand during their conversation at the masked ball because he knew of her identity whilst she did not know his.

Things turn sinister with the fifth and final vignette of the masked ball, in which Don John succeeds (albeit temporarily) in convincing Claudio that Don Pedro has gone back on his word and decided to woo Hero for himself.²⁰¹ Bluffing, Don John questions the masked figure ‘Are not you Signor Benedick?’ (151). Claudio thinks he is being clever by assuring Don John this is the case, but the real upshot is that the young count tricks himself into believing that he has come by a decent opportunity to acquire useful intelligence, regardless of what that might prove to be. Self-assured of his own primacy in the present situation, Claudio does not stop to consider who the person behind the mask might be, or if that person might be engaging in manipulative behaviour.²⁰² Don John, jealous of the regard that Claudio has won from Don Pedro in the recent wars, appeals to the young nobleman’s sense of moral integrity by advising him to dissuade the Prince from a match with Hero: ‘She is no equal for his birth. You may do the part of an honest man in it’ (155-56). When Claudio questions how the masked figure knows this to be the case, all Don John needs to do is manufacture a report of his brother’s words: ‘I heard him swear his

²⁰¹ Before addressing Claudio directly, Don John says ‘Sure my brother is amorous on Hero, and hath withdrawn her father to break with him about it’ (2.1.145-47). The Oxford editors add the stage direction ‘*aside to Borachio*’, which is not present in the 1600 quarto text. However, it would be surprising if Don John suddenly forgot the details of the report delivered to him by Borachio in 1.3; perhaps Don John intends that Claudio overhear his utterance, whilst Borachio is a beat behind his master in observing that the masked figure is indeed Claudio; see *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. F. H. Mares (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 84; *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Claire McEachern (London: Thomson, 2006), 187.

²⁰² Nancy E. Wright, ‘Legal Interpretation of Defamation in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*,’ *Ben Jonson Journal* 13 (2006), 99.

affection' (158). Once Don John and Borachio have departed a dispirited Claudio bemoans that 'Friendship is constant in all other things / Save in the office and affairs of love' (165-66). Bizarrely, he then goes on to state 'Let every eye negotiate for itself, / And trust no agent' (168-69). Claudio seems totally unaware that he has just practised the antithesis of his aphorism through his willingness to believe the assertions of an unidentified emissary. There are two important differences between Don John's behaviour as a manipulative agent in this instance and in the more developed episode of the midnight surveillance operation: the villain does not protest his own unreliability as a reporter and he does not provide any proof – however dubious – of his accusations. In part this must simply be put down to the brevity of the episode, but it highlights the highly credulous nature of Claudio's character, which Don John will rely on again to ensure the success of the midnight surveillance operation.

The purpose of providing some close analysis of the various ways in which characters interact with one another during the masked ball is to demonstrate the kind of complexities that can arise when interpreting characters' attitudes and intentions during surveillance operations, regardless of whether they are brief, as in case of the masked ball, or extended throughout the course of an entire play. One must always remain open to a variety of possible explanations as to why a character behaves as he or she does in any given situation and, where possible, seek to understand that behaviour in conjunction with his or her behaviour in other episodes within the same play (or even, in cases like Henry V/Prince Hal, in other plays too). Like many Shakespearean villains, Don John presents a straightforward case: we know he has a strong motivation to deceive Claudio at the masked ball (even if nothing comes of it in this instance) because his loathing of the young count has been made apparent during an earlier scene. Hamlet lies at the other end of this spectrum of the degree to which we can measure the reasons for a character's behaviour, if, to take one instance, the myriad interpretations that the 'To be, or not to be' speech has inspired are anything to go by. However, many characters lie somewhere between these two polarities: at times their intentions can be crystal clear both to themselves and the audience, but experience can cause them (and us) to question the validity of earlier attitudes and behaviour. Such problems also proved a fundamental hazard for spies operating in later sixteenth-century Europe, many of whom experienced both considerable success and failure due to recklessness over the course of a career;

sometimes events were simply outside their control. The introductory chapter has already cited a number of instances of such equivocal behaviour, including Marlowe's involvement in the coining escapade in Flushing and William Parry's double life as Burghley's agent and would-be regicide. The complexities of characters' beliefs and intentions are nowhere more apparent than in the gulling scenes in *Much Ado*, to which this chapter now turns.

The 'gulling' scenes: planted intelligence and self-deception

The gulling episodes commence with Benedick walking alone in Leonato's garden, during which he delivers a soliloquy on how love can convert men. Benedick is stunned by Claudio's newfound affection for Hero, principally because it has disrupted the homosocial comradeship between himself and his 'new sworn brother' (1.1.69). 'The drum and the fife' of the soldier on campaign are replaced by 'the tabor and the pipe' of the dreamy suitor, 'good armour' now disregarded by a fashion obsessed fiancé who would rather 'lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet' (2.3.13-18). Benedick is so taken aback by the transformation in Claudio that he even starts to question whether a change in his own attitudes might be forthcoming:

May I be so converted, and see with these eyes? I cannot tell. I think not. I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me he shall never make me such a fool.

(21-26)

Simple as it may seem, Benedick's admission that he lacks the ability to predict his own future mental states will ultimately prove vital in allowing him to contest Claudio's unfounded belief that Hero is unchaste. In discussing connections between *Much Ado* and Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* Philip D. Collington has shown that Benedick, by demonstrating an ability to alter his own attitudes in light of experience, comes to embody the well-rounded courtier presented in that manual, 'in stark contrast with Claudio and Don Pedro's personal stasis and increasing boorishness.'²⁰³ Whereas Claudio and Don Pedro mutually reinforce each other's mistaken belief in the veracity of Don John's accusations, Benedick ultimately chooses to defy his

²⁰³ Philip D. Collington, ' "Stuffed with all honourable virtues": *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Book of the Courtier*, ' *Studies in Philology* 103.3 (2006), 295.

Prince, siding with Beatrice and the Friar in defending the distressed young woman against the fury of Claudio, Don Pedro and Leonato.

However, that transformation is still to come. At present Benedick is far more interested in taking advantage of the layout of the garden in a bid to discover whether the men's conversation will yield interesting news: 'Ha! The Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbour' (34-35). Like Borachio earlier in the play, Benedick does not have time to consider exactly what his motives are in doing this; his automatic response is simply to conceal himself. This eavesdropper is thinking on the run, relying on the mistaken assumption that his position relative to the other characters will allow him to surveil their conversation from a privileged perspective; at the very least, the opportunity is too good to miss, even if the trio's exchanges do in the end prove banal. Whereas Borachio was fortunate in that Claudio and Don Pedro remained unaware of his hidden presence behind the arras, Benedick has no such luck. Upon entering the garden the soldiers, via asides, declare their intention to 'fit the hid-fox with a pennyworth' (41); although other locations within Leonato's property might also prove suitable for the gulling scheme, Don Pedro may well have been waiting to take advantage of the multifarious opportunities for concealment inherent to the layout of the garden. The Prince of Aragon figures here as the antithesis of his bastard brother, a benevolent serpent harnessing the physical space of the garden in order to lure Benedick into a false sense of security; as humans tame nature through horticulture, so Don Pedro seeks to refashion Benedick's scorn for women and fit him with a suitable partner.

Some critics argue that Beatrice and Benedick had some kind of romantically inflected relationship in the 'pre-history' of the play and so are predisposed to fall in love; the verbal sparring that epitomises their relationship in public is thus a mechanism for denying the affection they truly feel for one another.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, Jean E. Howard has argued that any possible 'pre-history' between the two characters has little bearing on Don Pedro's decision to 'undertake one of Hercules' labours' (2.1.341-42) in cultivating a romantic relationship between them:

²⁰⁴ Joost Daalder, 'The 'Pre-History' of Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *English Studies* 85.6 (2004), 520-27; Daalder assembles those passages from the play 'implying an earlier commitment' between the two characters in an Appendix, 526-27. See also Stephen B. Dobranski, 'Children of the Mind: Miscarried Narratives in *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.2 (1998), 233-50, esp. 236-42.

Far from *discovering* Benedick's and Beatrice's pre-existent love, Don Pedro works hard to *create* it. ... He never indicates that he sees a repressed attraction between Benedick and Beatrice, nor does he present his fictions as simply revealing that truth. Instead, his object is to create love where its existence seems impossible and thus to control the social world around him.²⁰⁵

Time and time again throughout *Much Ado* characters sow misinformation in order to manipulate others into creating new realities about the world around them. In this instance, the gullers' strategy is not simply to invent stories about how the supposedly lovelorn Beatrice has been behaving of late, but also to ensure that Benedick takes this false intelligence to heart. To this end it is important that the men constantly monitor how Benedick is responding to their fabrications. This task falls to Claudio, who periodically delivers an aside reporting on their progress:

O, ay, stalk on, stalk on. The fowl sits. (93)

Bait the hook well. This fish will bite. (108)

He hath ta'en th'infection. Hold it up. (120)

If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation. (201-02)

Apparently the count is endowed with the ability to determine how Benedick is responding to the planted intelligence. This implies that Claudio is able to surveil Benedick whilst Benedick is surveilling him, without Benedick becoming fully aware of what Claudio is up to. Given Claudio's immaturity in comparison with Benedick, a willing suspension of disbelief seems in order if one is to accept that the younger soldier really is capable of outmanoeuvring his more sophisticated comrade. Yet this discrepancy goes to the heart of why the gullers succeed in their scheme to deceive Benedick. A. A. Ansari notes that the 'pleached bower' is 'the symbol of whatever is circuitous and labyrinthine', a motif that draws attention to the convoluted processes by which characters can deceive both others and themselves.²⁰⁶ Leonato's orchard functions as a cultivated version of the green worlds of other Shakespearean comedies in which characters rediscover identity away from the trappings of civilisation; whilst the garden itself symbolizes humans' capacity to tame nature, it also provides the setting for the gullers' covert nurturing of the affection that Benedick is able to feel towards Beatrice.

²⁰⁵ Jean E. Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 65.

²⁰⁶ A. A. Ansari, 'Much Ado About Nothing and the Masks of Reality,' *Aligarh Journal of English Studies* 5 (1980), 179.

Benedick remains suspicious of his friends' intentions, but comes to the conclusion that the presence of Leonato necessarily confers credibility on the reports he is hearing: 'I should think this a gull, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence' (117-19). It is Leonato, however, who plants some of the most crucial pieces of false intelligence about Beatrice's supposed love for Benedick, including reports, purportedly provided by Hero, about the anguished state of mind in which the proud Beatrice finds herself: 'I measure him,' says she, 'by my own spirit, for I should flout him if he writ to me, yea, though I love him I should' (139-41). These manufactured reports have a maze-like quality, luring the eavesdropper deeper and deeper inside his mental processes, leaving him thoroughly absorbed in the prospect that he might have misread Beatrice. At no point do the gullers make any attempt to lure Benedick out of his hiding place in the tree; it suits their strategy that the eavesdropper remains concealed in that location so that they can focus instead on how best to propagate misinformation about Beatrice.

Once the men have exited, Benedick, by now thoroughly convinced about the veracity of what he has heard, comes forward: 'This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero' (209-11). Don Pedro's scheme depends upon the combined efforts of many characters working together to fool one who is isolated; from the perspective of the eavesdropper, all these separate components mutually reinforce each other, thereby persuading him or her that the reports he or she hears are reliable. Benedick is now faced with a problem: in order to pursue a relationship with Beatrice he will have to abandon his disdainful attitudes towards women and marriage that have been such a defining feature of his rhetoric throughout the play thus far. Yet, to give Benedick credit where it is due, he is prepared to face the possibility that such a marked change in his attitude towards women will make him the butt of his comrades' jokes: 'I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me because I have railed so long against marriage; but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age' (223-27). This soliloquy captures Benedick in the act of convincing himself that change is acceptable, even desirable, foregrounding his realisation that one's desires alter both with circumstance and the development of one's personal and social maturity.

In the meantime Don Pedro has given instructions that Beatrice be asked to call Benedick in to dinner. As Beatrice approaches him Benedick declares ‘By this day, she’s a fair lady! I do spy some marks of love in her’ (233-34). Based on the false reports that he found so convincing, Benedick now considers himself well equipped to translate Beatrice’s curtness into hidden affection:

Ha! ‘Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.’ There’s a double meaning in that. ‘I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me.’ That’s as much as to say ‘Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks.’

(245-49)

Benedick does not stop to ponder the stark difference in tone between his own words and those of Beatrice, an aspect of the exchange that is completely obvious to audiences and readers and provides its essential comedy. Caught up on the wave of his own enthusiasm, Benedick bends his interpretation of Beatrice’s words in order to assimilate with the intelligence he has just obtained from the gullers. So certain is Benedick of his own primacy in the present situation that he throws caution to the wind, disregarding the possibility that his reading of Beatrice might rely on flawed assumptions, substituting in its place a view of the world that gratifies his own sense of achievement in the role of eavesdropper.

Hero and Ursula employ a scheme to parallel that used by the male gullers: as the men were able to convince Benedick of Beatrice’s repressed affection by manufacturing reports of Hero’s comments on the matter, so Hero and Ursula claim that Benedick is pining away because he has no opportunity to express his true feelings for the disdainful Beatrice. Hero asserts that Beatrice is her own worst enemy, innate pride forestalling any opportunity for her to find a suitable partner:

But nature never framed a woman’s heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on, and her wit
Values itself so highly that to her
All matter else seems weak.

(3.1.49-54)

Beatrice’s wit, denoting intellectual ability or quick humour, has a range of connotations in the specific context of the gulling episode: by emphasising Beatrice’s mental dexterity, Hero subtly invites her cousin to put this asset to work in order to discover juicy snippets of intelligence about Benedick’s supposed regard for her, implying that through such a process Beatrice will be able to discover herself anew.

Adam Piette has drawn attention to the link between the female gullers' rhetorical strategy and the manner in which Beatrice responds to their fabricated assertions: 'Hero and Ursula are really staging public versions of Beatrice and Benedick, which raises the possibility that private emotions are generated by social pressures and role status.'²⁰⁷ Understanding the strategies that characters employ when mediating between public and private personas will prove of central importance in subsequent chapters, all of which explore plays in which the protagonist finds himself struggling to reconcile the demands of public office with his personal desires and ambitions.

Once Hero and Ursula have exited, Beatrice comes forward to express her bewilderment at what she has just heard:

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu.
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And, Benedick, love on. I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand. (107-12)

Whereas Benedick's soliloquy after the exit of the male gullers focused on how he could reconcile his previous disdain for women with his developing feelings for Beatrice, here Beatrice centres in on adverse effects that her egotism is causing for her position within the community at Messina. Beatrice lets emotion cloud reason and, like so many other characters in the play, renders herself incapable of taking into account the possibility that Hero and Ursula might be planting false intelligence in a bid to lure her into developing conclusions that are either inaccurate or downright wrong. The process by which Beatrice comes to this conclusion is illogical, maintaining that she ought to love Benedick in order to quash her friends' alleged view of her disdainfulness, when in fact those two things are only related incidentally, not as a matter of necessity. Beatrice's conclusion – 'For others say thou dost deserve, and I / Believe it better than reportingly' (115-16) – betrays her total immersion in the fantasy that she and Benedick could prove an ideal match; having accepted the truth of the gullers' reports, it is but a short step for Beatrice to internalise such beliefs. While the gulling scenes are one of the comedic highlights of the play, it can also be a frustrating experience to watch two otherwise sharp individuals become ensnared by their own warped reasoning in response to false intelligence planted by characters

²⁰⁷ Adam Piette, 'Performance, Subjectivity and Slander in *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *Early Modern Literary Studies* 7.2 (2001), 4.14.

with less mental dexterity. The gullers play upon the emotional weaknesses of the eavesdroppers, luring them into constructing privately held opinions of one another that contradict their publicly expressed disdain.

Unlike Don John, whose malevolent scheme is dependent upon second hand intelligence provided by Borachio, the gullers have no need to seek out such information because they already have intimate knowledge about Beatrice and Benedick and so are primed to plant intelligence that they know will prove successful in luring them both. Even though all those engaged in the act of gulling do so for the amusement of bringing together two antagonistic personages, it perhaps does not reflect well on the gullers that they are prepared to go behind friends' backs in order to achieve this end. In a darker illustration of how intelligence operations can destroy friendships, Hamlet is clearly infuriated by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's decision to side with the King and Queen rather than him (although the Prince wilfully ignores the fact that his friends really have no say in the matter); Hamlet's casual disregard for their fate at the hands of the English King provides chilling proof that the hero of the play is quite happy to abandon intimate relationships in order to safeguard his own interests.

Nova Myhill theorises that, through its multifarious representations of misreporting and misinterpreting, *Much Ado* effectively collapses many functional distinctions between viewer and viewed:

By presenting the manipulation of interpretation and questioning the privileged status of the spectator, the play challenges the idea of omniscience in any spectator, or the possibility of any spectator having the sort of automatic access to truth that the position implies for both characters in the play and the theater audience ... The discrepancy between their spectatorial position and the one they believe they occupy leads characters to accept what they hear as truth, and model themselves accordingly.²⁰⁸

The gulling episodes are significant not only for the manner in which they demonstrate that romantic relationships can be developed by false means. Positioned just prior to Don John's appearance with the accusation of infidelity against Hero, the gulling scenes are also important structural precursors to the unstaged midnight surveillance operation, the 'nothing' that lies at the heart of the play. The gulling episodes foreshadow characters' inclination to assume that any intelligence they

²⁰⁸ Nova Myhill, 'Spectatorship in/of *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39.2 (1999), 295.

gather whilst in a concealed location must perforce be accurate. It is thus particularly ironic that Don Pedro and Claudio accept so readily that they have seen ‘Hero’ being wooed that night by another man, as they have just been using a very similar strategy to convince Benedick that Beatrice is in love with him. Clearly such attitudes are inherently bound up with male characters’ desire for patriarchal control; it is hard to imagine Don John’s accusations working so easily if they were made against another man.²⁰⁹ The villain draws on his own experiences of enforced rejection as personally inflected rationale for the midnight surveillance operation: although this scheme aims specifically to destroy the marriage between Claudio and Hero, its wider ambit is to undermine the foundations of those heteronormative social structures that proscribe Don John’s status in relation to his legitimate brother.

Secretaryship and the midnight surveillance operation

Unlike Shakespeare’s other Machiavellian villains – Richard III, Iago, Edmund – who devise their own malicious schemes that they put into practice themselves, Don John relies on the skill of his retainer Borachio to help devise a plot to exact revenge on Claudio. This is a mutually advantageous relationship: in the context of the planning and execution of the midnight surveillance operation Borachio can be thought of as secretary to Don John, one entrusted with managing the practical aspects of his master’s schemes, much as Thomas Phelippes handled many of the details pertaining to Walsingham’s entrapment of Mary, Queen of Scots through the supervised postal system. The importance of secretaryship in early-modern court life has received significant attention in recent decades, perhaps most notably in Richard Rambuss’s reassessment of Spenser’s literary output in light of the poet’s career as a private secretary and civic administrator. In discussing *The Shepheardes Calender*, Rambuss concludes that the poem’s obsession with displays of secrecy ultimately functions to advertise Spenser’s own secretarial skills within the courtly circles in which the manuscript of the poem was circulating.²¹⁰ The content of any given secret is thus immaterial in comparison with Spenser’s facility for managing information of

²⁰⁹ Diana E. Henderson, ‘Mind the Gaps: The Ear, the Eye, and the Sense of a Woman in *Much Ado About Nothing*’ in *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment and Cognition*, ed. Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 197.

²¹⁰ Richard Rambuss, *Spenser’s Secret Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 57.

a politically sensitive nature in a manner that bespeaks discretion and trustworthiness.²¹¹

A few years after Walsingham's death, two of his former personal secretaries published tracts outlining the wide-ranging responsibilities of a Principal Secretary. Both were well placed to provide comprehensive accounts of Walsingham's practices during his tenure in office: Nicholas Faunt had worked for him since about 1580 and Robert Beale, who was also Walsingham's brother-in-law and a clerk to the Privy Council, since Walsingham's ambassadorial posting to Paris in the early 1570s; Beale and Faunt had thus been personally involved in many intelligence-gathering operations masterminded by Walsingham throughout the 1580s. Despite their admiration for Walsingham's skill in the role overall, both were critical of his practice of distributing secretarial work among many individuals. Beale compared Walsingham's approach with that of his predecessor Burghley:

Burthen not yourselfe with to many Clercks or servants as Sir Francis Walsingham did. Lett your secrett services be knowne to a few, the Lord Threasurer Burghley, being Secretarie, had not above two or three. Some you may traine up for the first in wrightinge out and compiling such bookes as are necessarie for your service, whom uppon preferment of your other servantes, and after some time of prooffe, you may call neerer unto you as they shall deserve and you shall see cause.²¹²

Beale draws attention to the importance of testing an individual's trustworthiness through routine administrative work before promotion to any role requiring the handling of more sensitive information and hence a greater need for discretion. Burghley's practice of confining important matters of intelligence to a few individuals is significant for Beale because security leaks are far less likely to occur in such a tight-knit working community. Faunt paints the same picture of disorder arising from Walsingham's methods of disparate work allocation, emphasizing the confusion it created among under-secretaries:

²¹¹ Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret Career*, 53, 57.

²¹² Robert Beale, 'Instructions for a Principall Secretarie, observed by R. B. for Sir Edwarde Wotton: Anno Domini, 1592,' reprinted in Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 volumes (1925; Harwich Port, MA: Clock & Rose Press, 2003), vol. I, 427.

By experience I canne say that the multitude of servantes in this kinde is hurtfull and of late yeares hath bredde much confusion with want of secrecie and dispatch in that place, for if in a principall servant to y^e secretarie, secrecie and faithfulness bee chiefly required what trust canne therebee reposed in manie, and if manie bee imployed in matters of secrecie, whoe shall thinke himself principall in trust?²¹³

Faunt argues that the only way for the Principal Secretary to eradicate, or at the very least, minimise this problem is to select a single trustworthy individual to administer to the most important matters of intelligence: ‘his owne penne, his mouth, his eye, his eare, and keeper of his most secrett Cabinet.’²¹⁴ This trusted personal secretary becomes in effect an extension of the physical body of the Principal Secretary, his own faculties of sight, sound and speech authorized to substitute for that of his employer. Neither Beale nor Faunt give specific examples of how the problem of disparate work allocation might have compromised the security of Walsingham’s intelligence operations, but the fact that both men concur on this issue suggests that many of Walsingham’s staff felt uneasy about such practices.

Unlike the puritanically inclined Walsingham, the villain of *Much Ado* is not driven by any political imperatives other than those that will satisfy his thirst for vengeance on Claudio and Don Pedro. As a result, critics generally pay scant attention to Don John, dismissing him as a paltry forerunner to Iago and Edmund.²¹⁵ By contrast, Peter Holbrook has recently proposed that Don John can be seen as more than simply a half-baked Machiavel: ‘there is something gravely dignified about his determination to be himself and his refusal to truckle to those in command – he is in any case quite possibly to be preferred to the bland and “most exquisite” Claudio.’²¹⁶ Disgusted by the social posturing and witty repartee that define the play world of Messina, Don John is adamant that he simply cannot adapt his own melancholic demeanour in order to assimilate with those around him:

I cannot hide what I am. I must be sad when I have cause, and smile at no man’s jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man’s leisure; sleep when I am drowsy, and tend on no man’s business; laugh when I am merry, and claw no man in his humour.

(1.3.12-17)

²¹³ Charles Hughes, ‘Nicholas Faunt’s Discourse touching the Office of Principal Secretary of Estate, &c. 1592,’ *The English Historical Review* 20 (1905), 500-01.

²¹⁴ Hughes, ‘Nicholas Faunt’s Discourse,’ 501.

²¹⁵ John A. Allen, ‘Dogberry,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24.1 (1973), 36; Ansari, ‘*Much Ado About Nothing* and the Masks of Reality,’ 181.

²¹⁶ Peter Holbrook, *Shakespeare’s Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 37.

In Brian Vickers' formulation, Don John is 'a brutal user of language', the rigid symmetry of these clauses foregrounding his 'uncompromising egotism.'²¹⁷ Jonas A. Barish also picks up on the harshness of the villain's speech, contending that 'he sees the world in sharp and irreconcilable contraries – blacks and whites, loves and hates, friends and enemies. It is a world without shadows, half-lights, or gradations of any kind.'²¹⁸ Don John can succeed in creating havoc at Messina because he so obviously does not belong within that society, yet to do so he requires the assistance of a personal secretary with the capacity to draw on covertly gleaned intelligence in order to plot a suitable scheme for revenge.

The scene in which Borachio outlines to Don John the details of the feigned midnight tryst reveals that it is the secretary who is the real mastermind of the operation. Perhaps because he is so preoccupied with feeling 'sick in displeasure' (2.2.5) towards Claudio, Don John is at first slow to appreciate the significance of Borachio's plan to 'appoint Margaret to look out at her lady's chamber window' (16): 'What life is in that to be the death of this marriage?' (17-18). Borachio then establishes that the success of the scheme depends on his master's ability to convince the other soldiers that the supposedly unchaste Hero is not fit to be associated with men of such integrity:

The poison of that lies in you to temper. Go you to the Prince your brother.
Spare not to tell him that he hath wronged his honour in marrying the
renowned Claudio – whose estimation do you mightily hold up – to a
contaminated stale, such a one as Hero.

(19-23)

Well aware that Don John is far from the best person to convey such intelligence to Claudio and Don Pedro, Borachio also instructs his master to inform them that Hero has been engaging in such behaviour for some time: 'They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at her chamber window' (36-38). The success of Borachio's scheme does not rely on anything inherent to the evidence that Don John purports to provide. Instead, it depends on the villain's ability to convince Don Pedro and Claudio that they are really seeing 'Hero' engage in an act of infidelity; as Nova Myhill puts it, 'their eyes

²¹⁷ Brian Vickers, *The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose* (London: Methuen, 1968), 177.

²¹⁸ Jonas A. Barish, 'Pattern and Purpose in the Prose of *Much Ado about Nothing*,' *Rice University Studies* 60.2 (1974), 21-22.

are extensions of Don John's vision, *not* their own.'²¹⁹ Determined to lure the two soldiers into believing that Hero is false, the villain presents himself as an agent bearing intelligence that is both accurate and independently verifiable, when in fact his real intention is to sow misinformation in order to manipulate his unwitting victims into believing his lies.

In the event, Claudio and Don Pedro prove far more willing to entertain the plausibility of Don John's accusations than either Borachio or his master might have hoped. Anthony B. Dawson has drawn attention to the conviction with which Don John delivers his concocted reports, which 'lure their hearers with the promise of directness and certainty in a world of uncertainty and obliqueness.'²²⁰ Despite the delight they have taken in deceiving Benedick, Claudio and Don Pedro become affronted when they learn of the possibility that they too might be subject to another's deceptive practices through Hero's supposed infidelity. Cleverly, Don John opens with reference to the prior rift between himself and Claudio: 'You may think I love you not. Let that appear hereafter, and aim better at me by that I now will manifest' (85-87). Initially the two soldiers are sceptical about such a possibility, but Don John continues to ply his smooth rhetoric, with particular focus on the disparities between the upstanding young count and his supposedly disloyal fiancée: 'I could say she were worse. Think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it ... But it would better fit your honour to change your mind' (100-06). Claudio's response is unequivocal: 'If I see *anything* tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow, in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her' (113-15, my emphasis). Don Pedro, selfishly motivated by the stain that Hero's behaviour might leave on him in his role as the proxy wooer, rushes to assure the young count of his support: 'And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her' (116-17). The absolutism of the men's response suggests that Don John may not even need to take them on the midnight surveillance operation in order to furnish proof of his accusations.²²¹ Claudio's gullibility is entirely plausible given his youth, but the more important question arises of why Don Pedro is so readily to believe Don John's accusations.²²²

²¹⁹ Myhill, 'Spectatorship in/of *Much Ado About Nothing*,' 292.

²²⁰ Anthony B. Dawson, 'Much Ado About Signifying,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 22.2 (1982), 214.

²²¹ Wright, 'Legal Interpretation of Defamation in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*,' 95.

²²² The precise nature of the dispute between the bastard Don John and his legitimate brother Don Pedro in the pre-history of the play remains something of a mystery. One editor asserts that Don Pedro defeated Don John in the recent war, another that Claudio was personally responsible for capturing the

The Prince of Aragon's willingness to entertain the bastard's false reports demonstrates the degree to which men in positions of authority will go to defend any possible stain on the patriarchal order. Don John plays upon the men's weakness in this regard, triggering a kneejerk reaction on their part that ignores any need to subject the agent's intelligence to thorough scrutiny.

According to Borachio's later recount of the midnight surveillance operation, the eavesdroppers were not located in close proximity to the window, but were instead positioned 'afar off in the orchard' (3.3.144-45).²²³ This detail, not mentioned by the secretary when he outlined his plan in 2.2, suggests that Don John had taken the precautionary measure of positioning himself and the other soldiers at some remove from the action in case Claudio and Don Pedro noticed that the woman at the widow was actually Margaret; Borachio also notes that 'the dark night' (149-50) is an important factor in the success of the deception. Not that either of these two factors provide good reason for Don Pedro and Claudio to believe that it was Hero they saw at the window: the soldiers' willingness to jump to a conclusion that concurs with the villain's accusation suggests that they have little interest in questioning whether or not they are viewing an instance of Hero's alleged misconduct under optimal or even adequate viewing conditions.

In the book that accompanied his 1993 film version of the play, Kenneth Branagh outlined the rationale for presenting the midnight surveillance operation itself onscreen:

bastard; see respectively Stanley Wells's Introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing* in the Oxford *Complete Works*, 569; *Much Ado*, ed. McEachern, 176. On the other hand, F. H. Mares takes Conrad's reference to his master having 'of late stood out against your brother' (1.3.19-20) in a more tentative light: 'this is the clearest indication of the cause of the war and Don John's disgrace: it is not very clear'; see *Much Ado*, ed. Mares, 77. The events of the war are significant only insofar as they provide a backdrop for the present state of affairs, and most importantly that Don John has little intention of abiding by any reconciliation that did take place, except insofar as it enables him to maintain a social front whilst he engages in manipulative schemes. For an extended discussion of how warfare continues to permeate peacetime Messina see Elisabeth Bronfen, 'The Day After Battle: *Much Ado about Nothing* and the Continuation of War with other Means,' *Poetica* 43.1-2 (2011), 63-80.

²²³ There is a discrepancy between what Don John tells the soldiers will occur prior to the midnight surveillance operation – 'you shall see [Hero's] chamber window entered' (3.2.102-03) – and what Borachio tells Conrad of the scheme later that night, where Margaret 'leans me out at her mistress' chamber window, bids me a thousand times good night' (3.3.140-42). This could be another case of slight misreporting or an oversight on Shakespeare's part as he revised the play. Either way, this does not alter the fact that Claudio and Don Pedro really do believe they saw Hero engaged in an act of infidelity.

The deception of Claudio was most important in this screen adaptation. In theatrical versions this character is often dismissed for his gullibility. Hero's alleged infidelity (her 'talking' to a man at a window) is described as happening offstage. It seemed that if we saw this occur on screen, it would add a new dimension to our understanding of Claudio.²²⁴

William Brugger has calculated that, on a scene by scene basis, Branagh's film cut an average of half the lines contained in Shakespeare's text.²²⁵ In some cases, editing was even more severe, including the episode in which Borachio outlines the mechanics of the midnight surveillance operation to Don John; this had the effect of reducing the villain's secretary from his position as 'the true mastermind' of the plot to 'a mere informer.'²²⁶ Branagh's film excels at providing romantic spectacle – the gulling scenes are particularly entertaining – but it does so at the expense of specific aspects of surveillance that root the play more directly in the espionage cultures of later sixteenth-century England, especially those that revolve around secretarial practice.

Whilst declaring it 'truly remarkable' that Shakespeare chose not to stage the balcony scene, Geoffrey Bullough concluded that this decision provided the essential contrast between *Much Ado* and its sources: 'Shakespeare refused to use it, I suspect, in order to draw attention to his major theme of hearsay and false report.'²²⁷ On a biographical note, it is always tempting to speculate what Shakespeare himself knew of contemporary spying operations, especially those involving individuals who also worked in the London theatres. Did Marlowe ever offer an account of his intentions in travelling to the seminary at Rheims? Did Jonson provide bitter anecdotes about how the stool pigeon Robert Poley sounded out Jonson's alleged Catholic sympathies during his stint in the Marshalsea? Positing such questions always runs the risk of circularity: it is tempting to assimilate the fictional exploits of dramatic characters with the life experiences of real individuals, but to do so raises questions about the extent to which drama or other literary genres can influence life simultaneously. The latter point is borne out by Anthony Munday's experiences at the English College in Rome, which, prior to the composition and publication of *The English Roman Life*

²²⁴ Kenneth Branagh, *Much Ado About Nothing: Screenplay, Introduction, and Notes on the Making of the Film* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), xv.

²²⁵ William Brugger, 'Sins of Omission: Textual Deletions in Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 3 (2003), 3.

²²⁶ Brugger, 'Sins of Omission,' 3.

²²⁷ Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), vol. II, 76.

upon Munday's return to London, functioned as an exercise in intelligence gathering about the seminary and its students. Even if Shakespeare knew no specific details about the real life exploits of Jonson or Marlowe, his keen awareness of the wide-ranging dramatic possibilities of spy activities such as eavesdropping and reporting testifies that plays such as *Much Ado* are thoroughly permeated by the broader environment of Elizabethan espionage.

Ultimately Borachio falls victim to the very mode of surveillance that he had employed to gather intelligence of both the intended marriage and Don Pedro's proxy wooing. Flushed with the success of his scheme, not to mention the alcohol he has been imbibing, Borachio engages in careless talk, oblivious to the possibilities for surveillance offered by the penthouse under which he and Conrad stand to avoid the rain (3.3.100-102). This scene introduces the Watch, Messina's proto police force, who have the good fortune to be positioned within earshot of Borachio's comprehensive account of the midnight surveillance operation. Curiously enough, a few days before Babington and his co-conspirators were apprehended after their flight into the countryside, Elizabeth's Lord Treasurer happened upon England's own version of this well meaning but inept collective of citizens. On 10 August 1586 Burghley wrote to Walsingham, informing the spymaster that plans for seizing the fugitives had been compromised:

Sir – As I cam from London homward, in my coche, I sawe at every townes end the number of x or xii, standyng, with long staves, and untill I cam to Enfield I thought no other of them, but that they had stayd for avoyding of the rayne, or to drynk at some alehowse, for so they did stand under pentyces [i.e. penthouses] at ale howses. But at Enfield fyndyng a dosen in a plump, when ther was no rayne, I bethought my self that they war appointed as watchmen, for the apprehendyng of such as are missyng [i.e. Babington and his co-conspirators]; and there uppon I called some of them to me apart, and asked them wherfor they stood there? and one of them answered, 'To take 3 yong men.' And demandyng how they should know the persons, one answered with these wordes: 'Marry, my Lord, by intelligence of ther favor.' 'What meane you by that?' quoth I. 'Marry', sayd they, 'one of the partyes hath a hooked nose.' 'And have you,' quoth I, 'no other mark?' – 'No', sayth they. And then I asked who apoynted them; and they answered one Bankes, a Head Constable, whom I willed to be sent to me. Surely, sir, who ever had the chardge from yow hath used the matter negligently for these watchmen stand so openly in plumps, as no suspected person will come neare them; and if they be no better instructed but to fynd 3 persons by one of them havyng a hooked nose, they may miss thereof. And thus I thought good to advertise yow, that

the Iustices that had the chardge, as I thynk, may use the matter more circumspectly.²²⁸

One might be inclined to dismiss this as over-zealous attention to detail; after all, the fact that the conspirators were caught affirms that other sections of Walsingham's police system did function adequately. However, Burghley himself had considerable experience running surveillance operations and, given the potential threat of the scheme devised by Mary and Babington, the Lord Treasurer's irritation with the complacent ignorance of Bankes and his watch is understandable. Burghley's trepidation complements that of Walsingham's personal secretaries Beale and Faunt, both of whom perceived the spymaster's practice of disparate work allocation to pose a threat to the integrity of his office. Shakespeare also employs the stereotype of the thick-headed constable through Dull in *Love's Labour's Lost* and Elbow in *Measure for Measure*, and, as Burghley's complaint affirms, local administrative bodies often had difficulty finding suitable individuals to fill such roles.²²⁹ Even so, it is equally hard to believe that Walsingham was unaware of such problems; perhaps he simply viewed the incompetence of such individuals as an unfortunate but inevitable consequence of the game of spying and trusted that at least some of those charged with performing such operations would be able to conduct themselves in a discreet manner.

Unlike Borachio, who takes an active interest in discovering useful pieces of intelligence and using them to formulate a scheme to prove himself a worthy secretary to his master, the Watch are characterised by their incompetence and apathy. Where Borachio leaps behind an arras to eavesdrop on Claudio and Don Pedro, the Watch opt to 'sit here upon the church bench till two, and then all to bed' (3.3.86-87); where the secretary is apparently the intellectual superior of his master (shown by the fact that it takes Don John some time to catch on to the point of Borachio's scheme in 2.2), one of the first problems that confronts Dogberry's men is to find amongst them a constable who can read and write (3.3.8-15); where the entrepreneurial Borachio earns the princely sum of 'a thousand ducats' (2.2.48, 3.3.105-06) by masterminding the midnight surveillance operation, the Watch will receive no pay for their night-time

²²⁸ Quoted in *Much Ado*, ed. Humphreys, 22-23. It would be pleasing to think that Shakespeare derives the penthouse under which Borachio and Conrad stand to avoid the rain (3.3.100-102) from this historical episode, but, as Humphreys notes, that is 'doubtless sheer coincidence.'

²²⁹ Hugh C. Evans, 'Comic Constables – Fictional and Historical,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20.4 (1969), 427-33; Joan R. Kent, *The English Village Constable, 1580-1642: A Social and Administrative Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), esp. 57-79.

work.²³⁰ The distinction becomes clear: Borachio has a strong incentive to behave in a manner that will advance his prospects within the secretarial profession, while the poor old Watch have no chance of any reward other than being thought ‘good men and true’ (3.3.1). It is also unclear what Dogberry himself will be doing that night. He is not personally taking responsibility for the security operation around ‘Leonato’s door’ (89) as that is his last charge to the Watch. The most he promises is to be on hand should the need arise: ‘An there be any matter of weight chances, call up me’ (81-82). One suspects he might just sit at home using Verges as a sounding board for his next wave of malapropisms.

In light of the foregoing, it is perfectly understandable that Borachio should feel ashamed about being caught out by Messina’s proto police force:

What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light, who in the night overheard me confessing to this man how Don John your brother incensed me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard and saw me court Margaret in Hero’s garments, how you disgraced her when you should marry her. My villainy they have upon record, which I had rather seal with my death than repeat over to my shame.

(5.1.225-33)

Borachio is genuinely repentant for what he has done, yet this raises the issue of whether he is merely contrite about the social damage caused by his scheme or whether he is equally concerned about the impact this will have on his employment prospects in secretarial roles in the future. By unwittingly disclosing details about the midnight surveillance operation of his own volition, Borachio violates the most fundamental aspect of secretaryship, that is, capacity for discretion. Where Spenser sought to advertise his secretarial skills at court via his poetry, Borachio’s public disgracing indicates that career has been throttled, at least amongst present company, and probably their wider contacts too. Borachio’s plea for his own death is also an acknowledgment of the passing of the secretarial career that he has moulded for himself.

²³⁰ Peter Holland calculates that a thousand ducats is worth roughly GB£90,000 today; see ‘*The Merchant of Venice* and the Value of Money,’ *Cahiers élisabéthains* 60 (2001), 25. Kent writes: ‘Constables, like all such local officials during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were unpaid. Handbooks warned them that they must not accept anything from individuals for their work in the office because this constituted extortion, and was punishable by fine and imprisonment’ *The English Village Constable*, 172.

Margaret, Borachio's accomplice during the midnight surveillance operation, is, like Hero, another silenced woman. As Carol Cook notes, 'logically speaking, Margaret must have known of the accusations against Hero and would inevitably recognize the source of error, that she herself had been mistaken for Hero as she talked with Borachio from Hero's window.'²³¹ However, the text of *Much Ado* does not provide any instances of Margaret attempting to remedy the problem that she has unwittingly created; understandably, some directors have seen fit to clarify this issue during the abortive wedding, variously assigning her 'a swift exit, ashamed of her part in Hero's defamation' or portraying her 'aghast with dawning realisation.'²³² Contending that Margaret wore Hero's wedding dress during her midnight assignation with Borachio, Alison Findlay has suggested that the waiting-gentlewoman did not stop to consider possible consequences of her actions:

Borachio is thinking about the scenario from the point of view of Margaret and himself rather than the intended onstage audience. Margaret, he assumes, will be unable to resist the temptation of playing her mistress's role opposite his Claudio in a courtship that would appeal to her as a frustrated social climber. Margaret's absence of guilt at this encounter is perhaps explained by her total involvement in the scenario as fantastic play.²³³

The final scene of the play opens with Leonato reasoning away Margaret's behaviour on the grounds that she had been coerced into taking part in Borachio's scheme:

But Margaret was in some fault for this,
Although against her will as it appears
In the true course of all the question. (5.4.4-6)

Unfortunately, probing for any further detail proves fruitless: as A. R. Humphreys contends 'Shakespeare performs sleight-of-hand tricks to juggle her fault away without ever explaining it ... her state of mind would be a distracting complication, so he veils it from us.'²³⁴ When Borachio is brought before Leonato to confess his wrongdoing, the secretary defends Margaret, declaring that she 'knew not what she did when she spoke to me, / But always hath been just and virtuous / In anything that I do know her by' (5.1.293-95). Borachio's declaration may not reflect well on Margaret's intelligence – it would seem strange that she had no inkling that she was taking part in something odd – but it does at least absolve her of blame.

²³¹ Cook, '“The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor”,' 199.

²³² *Much Ado*, ed. Cox, 179.

²³³ Alison Findlay, 'Much Ado About Nothing' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume III: The Comedies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 399-400.

²³⁴ *Much Ado*, ed. Humphreys, 67.

Reading Hero's blushes

The crisis of the play comes the day after the midnight surveillance operation, when at the wedding ceremony the soldiers publicly denounce Hero for what they suppose to be her infidelity. As Janice Hays has shown, Claudio is particularly fragile at this point in time: so far the young count has done everything to ensure he has behaved honourably towards Hero (at least in his own eyes), with the result that 'such a blow [to his self-esteem] would mobilize a narcissistic rage that could be appeased only by vindictive punishing of the guilty party.'²³⁵ Without providing any detail about what happened the previous night, Claudio proceeds to inform those assembled that his bride has been leading a double life:

She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.
Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
O, what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!

(4.1.33-36)

Throughout his tirade Claudio does not give any specific reason for why he thinks his bride has behaved dishonourably; well might the bemused Hero respond 'O God defend me, how am I beset! / What kind of catechizing call you this?' (78-79).

Eventually Don Pedro reveals to those assembled what he believes happened the previous night:

Upon mine honour,
Myself, my brother and this grievèd Count
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber window,
Who hath indeed, most like a liberal villain,
Confessed the vile encounters they have had
A thousand times in secret.

(89-95)

The Prince's reference to confessions made by the 'liberal villain' – namely, Borachio – is particularly intriguing. Editors concur, however, that the implication is not that Claudio and Don Pedro spoke to Don John's secretary in person about his role as

²³⁵ Janice Hays, 'Those "soft and delicate desires": *Much Ado* and the Distrust of Women' in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, Chicago and London: U of Illinois P, 1980), 87. In addition, Michael D. Friedman notes: 'True to the double standard of sexual morality in Messina, Claudio's virginity is never at issue, nor does the text ever discuss the wedding apparel of the groom'; see ' "For man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion": Fashion and *Much Ado About Nothing*, ' *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13 (1993), 276.

‘Hero’s’ lover, but rather that this snippet of news provides yet another instance of the soldiers’ willingness to accept the bastard’s false rhetoric without proper scrutiny.²³⁶

Throughout the abortive wedding Don John has to be very careful that he does not draw attention to himself by contradicting his earlier claim to be ‘not of many words’ (1.1.150). His first utterance in this scene, directed towards the bride’s father, simply affirms the soldiers’ allegations: ‘Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true’ (67). When Don Pedro tells those assembled of the ‘vile encounters’ between Hero and her supposed lover, the villain swiftly interjects, silencing his brother on the grounds that the bride’s alleged misdemeanours are a topic not fit for polite company:

Fie, fie, they are
Not to be named, my lord, not to be spoke of.
There is not chastity enough in language
Without offence to utter them. Thus, pretty lady,
I am sorry for thy much misgovernment. (4.1.95-99)

Yet Don John has a far more important agenda in hand: at this critical juncture, when the wedding guests finally become aware of why Claudio has harangued his bride at such length, it is crucial that the villain does not give anyone the opportunity to question whether such accusations are in fact true. By interrupting Don Pedro and then proceeding to admonish Hero once more, Don John refocuses attention on the slandered bride and away from the midnight surveillance operation itself. When the young woman, overcome with trauma, falls to the ground senseless, Don John seizes upon this as definitive proof of her infidelity, taking the opportunity to remove Don Pedro and Claudio from the church before anyone can question them further about what happened the previous night: ‘Come. Let us go. These things come thus to light / Smother her spirits up’ (111-12). Throughout this episode Don John carefully monitors the intelligence that Don Pedro makes public about the midnight surveillance operation and interjects before the Prince has the opportunity to reveal more precise details about what may have happened that night, thereby forestalling any awkward questions from the wedding guests.

As Don John surely hoped for, the bride’s father also credits the false intelligence about Hero’s supposed infidelity. Leonato, conveniently overlooking the plot to gull Benedick, simply cannot believe that Claudio and Don Pedro are capable of concocting falsehoods. (On this point specifically, Leonato is correct, as both

²³⁶ *Much Ado*, ed. Humphreys, 176; *Much Ado*, ed. McEachern, 263.

soldiers believe they have read ‘Hero’s’ behaviour correctly, yet that in turn relies on their willingness to credit the bastard’s fabricated accusations). The fact that Beatrice cannot corroborate Hero’s denials because she did not share a bed with her cousin the previous night is enough to persuade Leonato that male accusation necessarily takes precedence over female denial:

Confirmed, confirmed. O, that is stronger made
Which was before barred up with ribs of iron.
Would the two princes lie? And Claudio lie,
Who loved her so that, speaking of her foulness,
Washed it with tears? (151-55)

Leonato does not press the soldiers to provide further proof of Hero’s infidelity and in doing so privileges the interests of the patriarchal order at the expense of his daughter’s wellbeing. S. P. Cerasano has shown that Hero’s plight as a slandered young woman struggling to find redress would have resonated strongly with the play’s first audiences: ‘denied full status as a citizen,’ a woman wishing to fight accusations against her character in court was dependent on a male guardian to act as her legal proxy.²³⁷ Leonato’s readiness to believe the charges made against his daughter is thus doubly hurtful it leaves Hero without a legal guardian. Yet Leonato himself is also subject to the coercive demands of the patriarchal order: Camille Wells Slight points out that Messina was subject to Spanish rule and thus Don Pedro is not merely Leonato’s guest but also his overlord.²³⁸ Leonato’s decision to side with the Prince’s perspective also represents a pragmatic interest in protecting the stability of his own position as governor of Messina.

While Claudio asserts ‘Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty’ (42) and Leonato maintains that his daughter cannot ‘deny / The story that is printed in her blood’ (122-23), the Friar reasons that the colouring in Hero’s face actually signifies the reverse:

I have marked
A thousand blushing apparitions
To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames
In angel whiteness beat away those blushes,
And in her eye there hath appeared a fire
To burn the errors that these princes hold
Against her maiden truth. (160-66)

²³⁷ S. P. Cerasano, ‘Half a Dozen Dangerous Words’ in *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 171.

²³⁸ Camille Wells Slight, ‘The Unauthorized Language of *Much Ado About Nothing*’ in *The Elizabethan Theatre XII*, ed. A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee (Toronto: Meany, 1993), 121.

David Bevington notes that Hero's blushes signify three different things for three different viewers: 'they are false signs of innocence, or the signs of guilt, or true signs of innocence.'²³⁹ Bevington also observes that, despite making frequent use of stock gestures, Shakespeare generally did so in manner indicating a 'perception that they are inherently limited by their conventional nature and hence prone to exaggeration and distortion.'²⁴⁰ Terence Hawkes elaborates on how these contradictory readings of the young woman's discomfiture initiates a disturbing disintegration of meaning:

The best example of volatile, uncontrollable, non-verbal communication is Hero's blushing when confronted with her supposed guilt. Indeed, the narrative which, as a result, is seen to be 'printed in her blood' generates one of the most upsetting entities that a culture can confront: a plural text from which unitary, coherent, totalizing verbal truth has abdicated, and in which competing meanings, competing truths, battle for supremacy. That which is uncontrollable is perforce, if reading is controlling, unreadable.²⁴¹

In the abstract, Hero's blushing is simply a physiological response and hence any meaning is ascribed by different observers, all with different agendas. Guilt or innocence means nothing outside of a context superimposed by external observers. Claudio, for example, does not pay attention to the fact that it is his furious tirade that has caused Hero to become distraught in the first place. From Claudio's point of view, Hero's blushing is *fait accompli* and simply confirms that Don John's accusations carry weight. As Benedick spied 'marks of love' (2.3.233-34) in Beatrice because he had managed to convince himself that such a thing was possible by lapping up the gullers' false intelligence, so Claudio is predisposed to deduce that Hero's blushes indicate shame because Don John has primed the gullible young count to expect such a result.

The Friar proposes to counter the soldiers' allegations with a scheme of his own, advising Leonato to conceal Hero from public view and circulate false intelligence that she has died as a result of the soldiers' harangues. This, the Friar asserts, will induce mourning in Claudio, who will 'wish he had not so accusèd her, / No, though he thought his accusation true' (234-35). Essentially, the Friar's scheme is to fight fire with fire, and to this end he directs other characters to deploy counter-

²³⁹ David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard UP, 1984), 97.

²⁴⁰ Bevington, *Action is Eloquence*, 98.

²⁴¹ Terence Hawkes, 'Shakespeare's Spooks, or Someone to Watch Over Me' in *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, ed. Michael Hattaway, Boika Sokolova and Derek Roper (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 201.

intelligence in a bid to challenge the soldiers' ill-founded beliefs. Furthermore, the Friar contends that his religious office endows him with a unique ability to discern truth from falsehood:

Call me a fool,
Trust not my reading nor my observations,
Which with experimental seal doth warrant
The tenor of my book. Trust not my age,
My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
Under some biting error. (166-72)

Once again, trust is key, although for audiences and readers alarm bells might well be ringing again as this statement is akin to Don John's protests of integrity before taking Claudio and Don Pedro on the midnight surveillance operation. All things told, perhaps the best indicator of the Friar's ability to read Hero's blushes aright lies in his willingness to let the victimised young woman tell her own version of the story; as Nova Myhill observes, until the Friar does so, 'her body is the only available object of interpretation.'²⁴² While other characters present at the wedding are all too keen to ascribe blame – Benedick's assertion that 'The practice of it lives in John the bastard' (190) is particularly startling as this is his first comment on that character so far – the Friar has no agenda other than restoring harmony within the community. His scheme is benevolent in that he wants to guide Claudio and Don Pedro into understanding that they have made a grievous error in slandering Hero, instead of simply taking revenge on the soldiers.

Despite good intentions, the Friar himself is also complicit in propagating the patriarchal order, Graham Holderness observing that his scheme is 'simply a strategy for restoring the status quo.'²⁴³ More pertinently for the concerns of this thesis, the Friar's plan does not work as he claimed it would. The Friar contended that, upon hearing the news of Hero's death, Claudio would immediately regret his behaviour towards his bride at the abortive wedding, but, as Gavin Edwards has shown, the count alters his point of view only after hearing Borachio's confession:

²⁴² Myhill, 'Spectatorship in/of *Much Ado About Nothing*,' 304.

²⁴³ Graham Holderness, 'The Winter's Tale: Country into Court' in *Shakespeare: Out of Court: Dramatizations of Court Society* by Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 233.

The Friar anticipated that Claudio would think well of Hero again because he would be affected by her supposed death; in fact he is affected by her supposed death because – discovering that his accusations against her were not true – he thinks well of her again.²⁴⁴

When Leonato plants counter-intelligence about Hero's supposed death, the count responds to his host in a manner that is downright dismissive: 'Away, I will not have to do with you' (5.1.77). Claudio's indifference to the fate of his bride provides yet more evidence of his narcissistic predisposition to value the patriarchal order above all else.²⁴⁵ Likewise, Don Pedro continues to support his younger comrade, still insisting that Hero 'was charged with nothing / But what was true and very full of proof' (106-07). Only when Borachio violates the principal tenet of his secretarial office through careless talk do the soldiers realise that their accusations are groundless.

To analyse the Friar's scheme solely in terms of the result it seeks to produce inevitably generates the conclusion that his strategy is successful and, by extension, that his claim to possess superior skill at evaluating other characters' dispositions is borne out in practice. Yet to do so situates the critic amongst those characters in *Much Ado* who resolve the paradoxes generated through the multifarious perspectives on the midnight surveillance operation by concluding that Don John is 'the author of all' (5.2.89). In contradistinction to every other character in the play, at no point does Don John fail in his mission to wreak social havoc at Messina, despite the fact that it is his own secretary who gives the game away. Whereas the Friar incorrectly believes he can envisage how the soldiers will respond to the counter-intelligence about Hero's supposed death, Don John accurately predicts how Claudio and Don Pedro will react to the false allegations concerning Hero's infidelity, guiding his malevolent scheme in response to the soldiers' emotional instability in this respect. One can abhor the villain's outlook on life and still recognise his abilities at reading other characters' temperaments prior to using such judgments to manipulate those around him.

Assumptions that protagonists rely on throughout the planning and execution of spying missions, particularly with respect to predictions they make about how other characters will fall in with or respond to their schemes, will prove an important strand of analysis in subsequent chapters. To foreshadow how this can play out in practice, a

²⁴⁴ Gavin Edwards, 'Anticipation and Retrospect in *Much Ado About Nothing*,' *Essays in Criticism* 41.1 (1991), 282.

²⁴⁵ Cook, '“The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor”,' 197.

few examples will suffice. In *Measure for Measure*, the prisoner Barnardine's refusal to submit to execution on account of his drunkenness temporarily disrupts the Duke's plan to substitute Angelo's head with that of another character. When Hamlet stabs the figure concealed behind the arras during his private conference with Gertrude he does so in the unfounded belief that it is the King hidden there, not his counsellor Polonius; on account of this rash action the prince thereby makes himself a target of revenge at the hands of Laertes. These two instances lie at different points on a sliding scale of the degree to which any given incident in a play affects other outcomes: the former is a temporary disruption until conveniently timed news of the pirate Ragozine's death materialises, but the latter directly causes the prince's poisoning in the final moments of that play. Time and time again protagonists devise schemes based on unfounded assumptions about their ability to predict accurately how other characters will behave and, by extension, that they also possess the capacity to manipulate other characters at whim. This aspect of Shakespeare's dramaturgy demonstrates the degree to which such protagonists are predisposed to behave in a manner that is personally inflected to a profound degree.

Conclusion

By looking at the wide variety of spying episodes presented in *Much Ado About Nothing* this chapter has sought to open up various channels through which representations of spying and surveillance in Shakespearean drama can be understood with reference to the wider context of espionage in later sixteenth-century England. In particular, it has focused on the kinds of practices that characters employ when cast as spies, either when determining how best to interpret specific pieces of intelligence or when orchestrating and executing plots to deceive others; this work thus extends notions of patronage, professions of allegiance and opportunity explored in the Introduction in the specific context of one play by Shakespeare. Subsequent chapters harness similar modes of analysis, and in doing so elucidate the central argument of this thesis, namely that the personally inflected nature of spying operations in Shakespearean drama draws upon the operation of such practices in Elizabethan England.

3. The Tempest: the political rehabilitation of spymaster Prospero

Walsingham's patronage of English maritime enterprise

So far this thesis has been interested in Walsingham's role as the 'spymaster' of Elizabeth's government. Simultaneously, he played a crucial role in championing transatlantic exploration by English mariners, particularly for access to natural resources and ensuing trade benefits. This was not merely a sideline activity: there is ample evidence to show that Walsingham took an active and ongoing interest in such endeavours throughout the 1560s, 1570s and 1580s, although for him personally overseas travel was always limited to diplomatic missions in neighbouring European countries. Given the sheer volume of work he undertook as Principal Secretary it is easy to overlook Walsingham's patronage of English maritime exploration, yet this aspect of his political career provides fascinating insights into his personal ambitions in supporting such projects.²⁴⁶ As patron to these early explorers, Walsingham was well positioned to represent their case before the Queen, thereby opening up the possibility of access to the royal coffers; he also invested substantial amounts of his own capital in such expeditions through the purchase of shares. The Walsingham portrayed in my Introduction is a careful man, one who spent countless hours skilfully weighing up copious amounts of intelligence in order to craft and execute a political agenda that helped to propagate his vision of the Protestant English state. However, a somewhat different proposition arises when one reflects upon his role as an advocate of early colonial enterprise: in addition to his commercial interests in New World trade, perhaps we also see Walsingham backing such enterprises for the sheer thrill of it and, as such, we see Elizabeth's spymaster at play.

Walsingham's initial forays into foreign trade occurred as a result of his first marriage to the widow Anna Carleill, daughter of Sir George Barnes, Lord Mayor of London in 1552-53, who had been elected Consul of the Russia Company upon its

²⁴⁶ Of Walsingham's five recent biographers, only two go into this aspect of his life in any detail: Alan Haynes, *Walsingham: Elizabethan Spymaster and Statesman* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004), 34-44, 140-47, 245-50; John Cooper, *The Queen's Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 234-88. Conyers Read devoted only one chapter out of eighteen to Walsingham's interest in maritime exploration and foreign trade: *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 volumes (1925; Harwich Port, MA: Clock & Rose Press, 2003), vol. III, 370-410.

formation in 1555.²⁴⁷ Anna's first husband, Alexander Carleill, was himself a founding member of that entity and the probability is that Alexander's holdings passed to Walsingham when he married Anna in 1562.²⁴⁸ Anna had a son by her first marriage named Christopher, whom she left in the care of Walsingham upon her death in 1564. The younger Carleill made a name for himself as a military officer in the Low Countries in the 1570s. In 1582 Christopher Carleill commanded a naval escort for vessels of the Russia Company voyaging to that state during the Russo-Danish war; the escort proved instrumental in deflecting confrontations with the Danish fleet, and Carleill also succeeded in conveying a Russian envoy back to Elizabeth's court.²⁴⁹ In 1566 Walsingham wed Ursula St Barbe: his new wife was the daughter of Henry St Barbe, another figurehead of the Russia Company, who subsequently helped install Walsingham as an 'assistant' in that organisation, the term being roughly equivalent to board director today. There is no evidence that Walsingham took any active part in managing the affairs of the Russia Company after 1569, but his appetite for foreign trade had certainly been whetted.²⁵⁰ As noted in the Introduction (see p. 14), trade monopolies provided the bulk of Walsingham's income throughout his tenure as Principal Secretary, and the probability is that a significant proportion of this directly funded his espionage networks. From this one might infer that Walsingham, assuming he had determined on a career at the English court by his mid to late twenties, realised the importance of diversifying his financial holdings in order to provide essential backing for his political career as Elizabeth's spymaster.

At least four travel narratives were dedicated to Walsingham during his tenure as Principal Secretary, including Thomas Nicholas's *The Pleasant Historie of the Conquest of the West India* (1578), George Peckham's *A True Reporte, of the late discoveries, and possession, taken in right of the Crowne of England, of the Newfound Landes* (1583), Richard Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English nation* (1589), and Jerome Horsey's *Observations in Seventeene Yeeres Travels* (reprinted in the 1626 edition of Samuel Purchas's voluminous *Puchas His Pilgrimes*). Peckham lauded Walsingham as 'a principall Patron of this Action' and

²⁴⁷ Some sources denote this trading entity as the Muscovy Company; the terms are synonymous.

²⁴⁸ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 370.

²⁴⁹ D. J. B. Trim, 'Carleill, Christopher (1551?–1593),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, January 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4668>, accessed 2 July 2013].

²⁵⁰ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 371.

Hakluyt recalled ‘my particular duty to your honour.’²⁵¹ Nicholas made special note of the instrumental role that Walsingham played in advocating on behalf of Elizabethan voyagers at court:

And calling to remembrance the greate zeale and good will which your honor hath alwayes extended to good and profitable attemptes, and especially in the proceedings of the new discouery, youre honor hath not only used liberalitie in your aduentures, but also taken greate paynes in Courte, to aduance and further the voyage, a number I saye of Gentlemen, Marriners, and other artificers, shal haue great cause to pray for your honor.²⁵²

Keenly aware that England’s nascent colonial endeavours not only needed financial support but the political backing of the Queen and her close advisors if such voyages were to prove a success, Nicholas spoke on behalf of all sailors in expressing the personal gratitude that those involved in running the nation’s unofficial merchant navy owed to Walsingham. Another early explorer, John Davis, named Cape Walsingham on Baffin Island after his patron; perhaps ironically, perhaps fittingly, this is today the only point on the globe, aside from the site of Walsingham’s London residence in Seething Lane, where the spymaster’s name is memorialised in the landscape.²⁵³

The first time that Walsingham subscribed capital to a transatlantic expedition was for Martin Frobisher’s 1576 voyage to chart the Northwest Passage, at that time considered the Holy Grail of navigational intelligence; discovery of that sea route would establish easier access to trading nations in eastern Asia, thereby allowing merchants to avoid hazardous journeys over land. On this occasion Walsingham contributed £25, most likely to oblige Ambrose Dudley, third Earl of Warwick, Frobisher’s chief patron for this expedition; however, it should also be noted that Warwick himself only contributed £50 to a modest total capital of £875.²⁵⁴ As far as the longed for sea-route itself was concerned, all that Frobisher’s expedition achieved was to encourage hopes that the Northwest Passage might one day be charted, although that did not occur until Roald Amundsen’s successful attempt in 1906. Frobisher did, however, return with a sample of iron pyrite or fool’s gold, which, upon analysis by the Italian alchemist Baptista Agnello, was reported to contain the

²⁵¹ See respectively Peckham, ‘The Epistle Dedicatorie’ to *A True Reporte*; Hakluyt, ‘The Epistle Dedicatorie’ to *Principall Navigations*.

²⁵² Nicholas, ‘The Epistle Dedicatory’ to *The Pleasant Historie of the Conquest of the West India*.

²⁵³ Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent*, 264.

²⁵⁴ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 392.

precious metal in commercially viable quantities.²⁵⁵ Ever cautious, Walsingham submitted samples to the London goldsmiths' corporation on two separate occasions; both times that organisation declared the substance to be nothing special.²⁵⁶ Frobisher himself was unable to accept such conclusions and proceeded to organise another expedition the following year, to which the Queen subscribed £1,000, Burghley £100 and Walsingham, surprisingly enough, £200.²⁵⁷ From this, Conyers Read infers that Walsingham's 'better judgement had been undermined by the contagion of the gold fever which swept the Court.'²⁵⁸ Such a conclusion is perhaps too conservative in its assessment of why Walsingham was lured by the prospects of New World resources in the first place. It seems more probable that Elizabeth's spymaster realised in advance the economic benefits that might eventually flow to him personally if he supported such projects from their inception. In 1585 Walsingham was at length granted control of the excise duties gathered at English ports that bordered the Atlantic Ocean, and therefore had a direct interest in ensuring the viability of transatlantic trade, as that would result in a concomitant increase in taxes flowing directly to his pocket.²⁵⁹ Frobisher's second voyage yielded more fool's gold, but London investors were still undeterred and a third voyage took place in 1578, to which Walsingham subscribed £800. It all came to nothing: the first Canadian gold rush had proved to be a phantom, as had Frobisher's attempts to found a permanent colony in what is now Iqaluit in the territory of Nunavut, the latter scuppered by infighting amongst the would-be settlers.

With that figure of £800 in mind – forty times the annual income of a shipmaster – it is worth reflecting upon correlations between the investments Walsingham made in foreign exploration and those he made in developing his intelligence networks.²⁶⁰ Both enterprises required substantial sums of money that had to be sourced from his personal fortune. Both came with no guarantees of return, be that commercial or political. Lastly, and most intriguingly, there are notable parallels between the roles that Walsingham himself played in both ventures: situated at the

²⁵⁵ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 392.

²⁵⁶ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 392-93.

²⁵⁷ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 393.

²⁵⁸ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 393.

²⁵⁹ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 260.

²⁶⁰ For an outline of monetary values in later sixteenth-century England see Stephen Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham and the Birth of Modern Espionage* (New York: Viking, 2005), xvi.

centre of events, spider-like, he authorised agents to act on his behalf as they engaged in the task of spying out the land, be that for resources in North America or intelligence about Catholic plots in England. Inevitably, given the investigative nature of both types of enterprise, a significant proportion of information gathered would be off-target or simply of no practical use. Such disappointments were an integral part of life for any courtier with aspirations to run an intelligence network; one measure of Walsingham's accomplishments, both as spymaster and as a patron of early exploration, was simply his ability to press on despite hardship, confident that anticipated rewards would make all the effort worthwhile.

In 1577, the year of Frobisher's second voyage, the polymath Dr John Dee published his *General and Rare Memorials pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation*. While the gold hunter busied himself seeking financial backing for another expedition to North America, the man styled Queen Elizabeth's 'philosopher' was engaged in something far bigger. *General and Rare Memorials* was one of the first printed texts to employ the term 'Brytish Impire' and was produced in a limited release of one hundred copies, which implies that its author wished it to circulate solely amongst the courtly elite who would have considerable personal investment in the ideas contained in his book.²⁶¹ Dee's tract was dedicated to Christopher Hatton, the Queen's vice-chamberlain, who in December of that year was knighted at the same ceremony as Walsingham. The illustration on the title page presented readers with a forthright depiction of the parallels between political administration and maritime navigation, as John Cooper explains:

An outsize Queen Elizabeth steers the ship of state towards the coast, watched over by St Michael and the Hebrew Tetragrammaton standing for the power of God in Protestant iconography. The rudder is emblazoned with the royal arms, which appears again with Tudor roses at the top of the page. The chi-rho (XP) monogram of Christ tops both the masts, while three councillors – Hatton, Walsingham and Burghley perhaps – stand on deck. A border in Greek sums up the image as a 'hieroglyph of Britain'.²⁶²

Drawing on Geoffrey of Monmouth's assessment of the mythical King Arthur's conquests in Ireland, Dee set out to prove that Elizabeth had not merely the right, but the divinely prescribed duty to establish and rule over an empire extending far beyond the bounds of the British Isles. The practical essence of Dee's plot or 'plat,' as he

²⁶¹ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 235.

²⁶² Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 235.

termed it, was to establish a ‘Pety-Navy-Royall,’ which, the author asserted, ought ‘continually to be mainteyned, for manifold great Commodities procuring to this Brytish Monarchie: (which, no other way, can be brought to pas:) and among them all, the Perpetuall Politick Securitie and better preservation of this famous Kingdom, from all Forrein danger.’²⁶³ It was precisely this kind of dual-purpose mission that Carleill found himself engaged in five years later when he commanded the naval escort that accompanied those vessels operated by the Russia Company. Dee had put his finger on the pulse of imperial success and history would subsequently confirm the strategic accuracy of his ‘plat,’ as the practice of maintaining a robust navy proved integral to the political and economic dominance of the British Empire throughout subsequent centuries.

Circulation of Dee’s book was limited to courtly circles, but at the same time the fact that it was printed at all suggests that the author had no particularly good reason to conceal his proposals from a moderately wide reading public. By contrast, Richard Hakluyt’s *Discourse of Western Planting* (1584), precursor to the author’s *Principall Navigations*, was penned with confidentiality a foremost concern: until its eventual publication in 1877, the work existed in only two manuscript copies, one of which was presented to Elizabeth in October of that year and another copied out for Walsingham’s records.²⁶⁴ With Anglo-Spanish tensions on the rise throughout the 1580s, Hakluyt’s *Discourse* was a direct invention in foreign policy and sought to address concerns of a far more pressing nature than those outlined by Dee:

Speedy planting in divers fit places is most necessary upon these last lucky western discoveries for fear of the danger of being prevented by other nations which have the like intention, with the order thereof and other reasons therewith all alleged.²⁶⁵

Whether Hakluyt genuinely believed that England was in imminent danger of losing out to the Spanish in the New World may be something of a moot point. What is certain, given both Walsingham’s contention that it presented ‘less danger to fear too much than too little’ (see Introduction, p. 7) and the present state of Anglo-Spanish political relations, is that Hakluyt knew his petition would at least receive a thorough hearing by the Queen and her Privy Council. For reasons that will become clear

²⁶³ ‘An Advertisement to the Reader’ in Dee, *General and Rare Memorials*, [no pagination].

²⁶⁴ Cooper, *The Queen’s Agent*, 272.

²⁶⁵ A modern transcription of the manuscript is available from <http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/exploration/text5/hakluyt.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2013).

below, the probability is that Hakluyt penned his *Discourse* in the study of Walsingham's London residence at Seething Lane, making use of the spymaster's maps and books as necessary.²⁶⁶ This political manifesto was thus born in the same private workspace that saw the inception and ongoing monitoring of countless other plots, drawing closer the links between nascent English colonial endeavour and the workaday life of Elizabeth's spymaster.

The plot thickens. In return for the services he was able to render Carleill and Hakluyt as a patron of, and investor in, those plans for early voyages, Walsingham engaged both men as agents in his spy network. Carleill's first foray into the world of intelligence came in the late 1570s, when he conveyed letters for his stepfather between England and the Low Countries, before returning to the latter in a military capacity in 1580. During this period he acquired a reputation for political acumen, one comrade praising his 'minde, prowes ... and pollicy, attained by learning and study.'²⁶⁷ It is known that Carleill carried out a diplomatic mission for Walsingham in Scotland between late 1587 and early 1588, perhaps akin to the kind of assignments that various member of the Privy Council entrusted to Robert Poley in the 1590s (see Introduction, pp. 57-58); unfortunately, details are scant, which could indicate that Walsingham preferred to employ family members where possible in order to ensure high levels of confidentiality.²⁶⁸ Walsingham's approval of his stepson's conduct during the Scottish mission is best demonstrated by the fact that he was then able to use his position at court to help secure the governorship of Ulster for Carleill, one contemporary noting that the Principal Secretary 'had procured him a fyne and proffyttable gouernment in Irelande wurthe more than 300 pounds yerly.'²⁶⁹ After Carleill's death the chronicler William Camden observed that 'some have Registered him for a Navigator, but the trueth is his most inclination, and profession, was chiefly for lande service.'²⁷⁰ Unwittingly, Camden missed an important point in overlooking the parallels between maritime navigation on the one hand and intelligence gathering of a more strictly political nature on the other, both of which require considerable skill in reading and interpreting signals in order to take best advantage of the situation. Carleill's expertise in both professions provides evidence for what we would

²⁶⁶ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 272.

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Trim, 'Carleill.'

²⁶⁸ Trim, 'Carleill.'

²⁶⁹ Quoted in Trim, 'Carleill.'

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Trim, 'Carleill.'

nowadays refer to as generic or transferable skills, and by extension, that others in a similar position would also take an active interest in diversifying such mutually compatible skillsets in order to enhance the rewards that their patrons might be able to offer them.

For all Hakluyt's interests as a promoter of English maritime endeavours in far-flung locations, the irony is that he personally only ever travelled as far as France. In September 1583 Walsingham sent Hakluyt to Paris as chaplain to Sir Edward Stafford, the English ambassador. Walsingham suspected that Stafford might have been operating as a double agent, harnessing his position to sell intelligence to the Spanish, and so Hakluyt was charged with keeping the ambassador under surveillance. Incidentally, definitive proof of Stafford's duplicity has never materialised and, as was the case with Anthony Standen, being in the pay of the enemy probably gave Stafford access to intelligence useful to Walsingham that would otherwise have been very hard to obtain.²⁷¹ Hakluyt also made himself useful spying out French and Spanish interests in New World trade, including gaining access to the warehouse run by the royal furrier, conferring with various ships' captains in the employ of Don Antonio (the pretender to the Portuguese throne), and journeying to Rouen in order to probe French plans to establish trading bases along the Atlantic coast of North America.²⁷² In April 1584 Hakluyt wrote to Walsingham, who was at that time suffering from a bout of illness whilst maintaining a heavy workload pertaining to domestic affairs, 'I thought it not meet to trouble your honour with such things as I had carefully sought out here in France, concerning the furtherance of the western discoveries, but chose rather to impart the same with Mr Carlile.'²⁷³ Evidently Walsingham's stepson had been briefed on the scope of Hakluyt's mission and was able to fulfil secretarial duties as required. All told, Hakluyt's French adventures proved highly successful: he might not have unearthed any outright intelligence coups, but the breadth and depth of his subtle probing provided Walsingham with a strong base from which to make further assessments about the challenges posed by foreign trade interests of the Continental powers. Hakluyt had earned the use of Walsingham's study.

²⁷¹ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 173-74; Derek Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham: A Courtier in an Age of Terror* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007), 185-87.

²⁷² Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 271.

²⁷³ Quoted in Haynes, *Walsingham*, 41.

The three biographers who give consideration to Walsingham's interests in English foreign trade come to various conclusions about what one can infer from the available evidence. John Cooper sees Elizabeth's spymaster as a political visionary: 'his patronage of Hakluyt and friendship with Dee pinpoint Walsingham as a believer in colonisation for its own sake, a generation before such ideas became conventional in English government.'²⁷⁴ Alan Haynes provides a more limited assessment, emphasising the mercenary aspect of Walsingham's ambition as a patron of, and investor in, English colonial enterprises: 'Walsingham's interest in exploration and overseas discoveries was driven by the notion that it was the key to wealth, and, unlike Dee or Raleigh, he had no vision of Empire beyond defeating the global ambitions of the vast Spanish collective.'²⁷⁵ Conyers Read characterises Walsingham as 'a very zealous promoter of English exploration and discovery,' but states elsewhere in his chapter that Sir Francis had 'a decided taste for speculation.'²⁷⁶

There is little evidence of what Walsingham did for pleasure. In part this is due to the fact that virtually no records of a personal nature survive, but more significant are the demands made upon the individual who bore the office of Principal Secretary, which could only be undertaken by those of a workaholic disposition. Even when bedridden with the urinary infections and other illnesses that plagued him at frequent intervals – surely not aided by his attempts to self-medicate with a variety of dubious medicines – Walsingham still continued to carry out his duties via his trustworthy personal secretaries.²⁷⁷ As discussed earlier, Walsingham's involvement in the formation of the Queen's Men provided an opportunity to extend surveillance of the English provinces and does not suggest that he personally cared for the theatre. A rare reference to Walsingham at play comes in 1573, the year he returned from his French embassy, when one Richard Arnold of Gloucestershire presented him with a 'brace of greyhounds'; this implies that Walsingham hunted hares in his spare time (or at the very least that Arnold believed Walsingham enjoyed such a pastime).²⁷⁸ Elizabeth's spymaster was also presented with a falcon on at least two occasions.²⁷⁹ Then again, the spying-hunting analogy is clear: hounds and falcons, like

²⁷⁴ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 277-78.

²⁷⁵ Haynes, *Walsingham*, 44.

²⁷⁶ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 410 and 391 respectively.

²⁷⁷ On Walsingham's illnesses see Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 248-52.

²⁷⁸ Robert Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006), 59.

²⁷⁹ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 44, 176.

Walsingham's human agents, are tasked with surveilling the land and seeking out quarry on behalf of their master.

In a recent study that examines playgoer reactions to early-modern voyage drama, David McInnis argues for the vicarious nature of such experiences:

When playgoers entered the playhouse they engaged with the players in a collaborative form of what I term 'mind-travelling', and the result was an experience of stage-travel that was predicated on pleasure. Mind-travelling readers and playgoers sought a simulation of the travel experience, irrespective of whether they were likely to voyage anywhere physically. Throughout this experience, the reader/playgoer imaginatively constructs a vivid psycho-physiological experience of distant lands without leaving the home/theatre.²⁸⁰

For a host of socio-economic reasons, many of those who attended performances at the Southwark theatres would never have the opportunity to travel to the New World: the only viable way for the London poor to travel abroad was to enter military service, but that could be tantamount to a death sentence; likewise, a voyage across the Atlantic would to many seem as daunting as it would for us to travel to another planet today. Given that Walsingham's talents lay in the sphere of political management, not action on the ground, it is perhaps not surprising that he too never expressed an interest in taking part in a transatlantic voyage himself. More to the point, he simply could not afford to be absent from court for any length of time in case there were important developments in any of the numerous surveillance operations that he was masterminding, as Essex learned to his cost during the 1590s whilst he attempted to juggle the often incompatible roles of spymaster and military commander. My contention is that, given it was impractical for Walsingham to undertake such voyages himself, Elizabeth's spymaster lived such expeditions vicariously and, whilst his role as a patron to early explorers had significant political and economic consequences, it also created the opportunity for indulgent moments of other-worldly fantasy that would provide a welcome, if all too brief, escape from the rigours of workaday life at Elizabeth's court. Walsingham may have had Puritan inclinations, but even he needed some form of respite from the demands of his secretarial office and, as subsequent events proved, it was the English Puritan community that went on to become the founders of the American nation as we know it today. It is indeed unfortunate that Walsingham's papers of a more personal nature were appropriated shortly after his

²⁸⁰ David McInnis, *Mind-Travelling and Voyage Drama in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

death because they might have provided important insights into such aspects of the spymaster's mental world.

How might one align Walsingham's interests in maritime exploration and foreign trade with notions of voyaging and colonialism as they appear in *The Tempest*? Gone are the days when critics like G. Wilson Knight could advocate for a reading of Shakespeare's play with reference to received visions of British colonial endeavour:

Suppose that Britain's contribution were being assessed some ten thousand years hence by an enlightened historian. [Amongst other things] he would probably point to ... her colonizing, especially her will to raise savage peoples from superstition and blood-sacrifices, taboos and witchcraft and the attendant fears and slaveries, to a more enlightened existence. Little ingenuity is needed to find correspondences with Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban.²⁸¹

Such 'correspondences' were also obvious to later generations of critics, but by now the tide had turned and the last three decades of the twentieth century saw scholarly work on *The Tempest* become saturated with postcolonial readings of the play.²⁸²

However, as David Bevington argues, one has to be mindful that the protagonist of the play is not a colonialist in the mercenary sense that individuals like Carleill and Frobisher were:

²⁸¹ G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays* (1947; London: Methuen, 1961), 255.

²⁸² Those interested in tracing the broader development of this trend can do so through the following representative sample: Stephen J. Greenblatt, 'Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century' in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli, co-eds Michael J. B. Allen and Robert L. Benson, vol. II (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1976), 561-80; Charles Frey, 'The Tempest and the New World,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.1 (1979), 29-41; Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The discursive con-texts of *The Tempest*' in *Alternative Shakespeares*, Second Edition, ed. John Drakakis (1985; London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 195-209; Paul Brown, '“This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine”': *The Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism' in *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985), 48-71; Greenblatt's chapter entitled 'Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne' in his *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 129-63; Meredith Anne Skura, 'Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.1 (1989), 42-69; Leo Salingar, 'The New World in "The Tempest"' in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, ed. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 209-22; David J. Baker, 'Where is Ireland in *The Tempest*?' in *Shakespeare and Ireland: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 68-88; Barbara Fuchs, 'Conquering Islands: Contextualizing *The Tempest*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.1 (1997), 45-62; the essays in *'The Tempest' and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); David Scott Wilson-Okamura, 'Virgilian Models of Colonization in Shakespeare's *Tempest*,' *ELH* 70.3 (2003), 709-37.

Prospero sets up no commercial scheme by which he might exploit the island's inhabitant(s) or natural resources. The real colonialists in *The Tempest* are Trinculo, Stephano, Antonio, and Sebastian, all of whom immediately conceive of the idea of exploiting Caliban as a kind of marketable freak the moment they lay eyes on him.²⁸³

Whereas Elizabethan voyagers expended significant effort in securing the all-important financial backing that would equip their expeditions to the New World, Prospero, in recalling the details of his expulsion from Milan, is at pains to emphasise both the inadequacy of the vessel in which he was cast off and his inability to navigate:

In few, they hurried us aboard a barque,
Bore us some leagues to sea, where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigged,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast – the very rats
Instinctively have quit it. There they hoist us,
To cry to th' sea that roared to us, to sigh
To th' winds, whose pity, sighing back again,
Did us but loving wrong. (1.2.144-51)

This journey was not so much a voyage, a term that implies the notion of seeking some desirable entity, but a directionless roaming through ocean. Perhaps the biggest miracle in *The Tempest* is that Prospero and Miranda make it to the island without dying; by conjuring up the storm at the start of the play the magician certainly means to give the court party a dose of what he himself experienced at sea twelve years previously.²⁸⁴ Yet Walsingham himself never went on a transatlantic voyage and his

²⁸³ David Bevington, 'Shakespeare's Dream of Retirement' in *The Renaissance World*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 518.

²⁸⁴ William Strachey's 'A true repertory of the wracke, and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates Knight; upon, and from the Hands of the Bermudas' is an important source for this particular aspect of Shakespeare's play; extracts of Strachey's letter are reprinted in *The Tempest*, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Cengage, 1999), 287-302. Given that it did not see print until 1625, there has been some debate about whether Strachey's letter is a viable source for Shakespeare's play. Arthur F. Kinney argues that Shakespeare could not have seen a manuscript that circulated at court; see 'Revisiting *The Tempest*,' *Modern Philology* 93 (1995), 161-77, esp. 166. Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky gather evidence to contend that Strachey could not have completed writing the document until after Shakespeare had composed his play; see 'Shakespeare and the Voyagers Revisited,' *The Review of English Studies* 58 (2007), 447-72, esp. 461. On the other hand, Alden T. Vaughan denies the plausibility of both these arguments by tracing the carriage of Strachey's letter from North America to England; see 'William Strachey's "True Reportory" and Shakespeare: A Closer Look at the Evidence,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.3 (2008), 245-73. In support of Vaughan's point of view, Tom Reedy provides a textual comparison between the original letter, its later publication and other documents; see 'Dating William Strachey's 'A True Reportory of the Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates': A Comparative Textual Study,' *The Review of English Studies* 61 (2010), 529-52. In a similar vein, Michael Neill has shown that many of the noises represented in *The Tempest* have their linguistic genesis in Strachey's letter; see ' "Noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs": The Burden of Shakespeare's *Tempest*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.1 (2008), 36-59.

interests in colonial endeavour seem to have been weighted more towards the potential that the New World offered in terms of raw materials and trade, rather than a vision centred on establishing political outposts; in this respect Elizabeth's spymaster seems more akin to Antonio or Trinculo than the play's protagonist.

It is perhaps more valuable to hypothesise about what Walsingham himself might have seen in a production of *The Tempest*, had he been alive to see Richard Burbage play Prospero at the Blackfriars theatre in 1611. Sir Francis may have taken some interest in the play's depictions of European colonialism at work, but its protagonist, a spymaster who employs an agent with special powers in order to surveil and entrap his enemies, would have fascinated him. Shakespeare's play creates the fantasy of a near-perfect surveillance system, an elusive ideal Walsingham worked so hard to develop throughout the 1570s and 1580s, culminating in his greatest success, the entrapment of Mary, Queen of Scots. Yet, as Walsingham was surely aware, such achievements could generate other problems: Elizabeth's fury at the manner in which the Privy Council rushed through Mary's execution must have caused the spymaster some consternation, given that all his careful work thereby went unappreciated by his Queen; Prospero must feel a similar sort of disappointment when he is unable to generate feelings of repentance in his brother Antonio in the final act of *The Tempest*. In the figure of Caliban and his plot to overpower Prospero, Walsingham would also have recognised one of the problems inherent to espionage networks built about systems of patronage, namely the disgruntled agent who switches allegiance to a new master and then proceeds to plot against his former patron. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to analysing the nuances of Prospero's espionage practices, with particular reference to the interpersonal relations between the spymaster, his agent Ariel and the defector Caliban.

‘Now does my project gather to a head’: spymaster Prospero and agent Ariel

The pre-history of *The Tempest* detailed in Prospero’s opening narrative is, in Stephen Orgel’s words, ‘a strange mixture of guilt and blame.’²⁸⁵ On the one hand, Prospero freely admits his disinterest in being ruler of Milan:

The government I cast upon my brother,
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies. (1.2.75-77)

Yet he also expresses anger at the subsequent arousal of Antonio’s ‘evil nature’ (93) and frustration at his own gullibility in exhibiting a trust ‘which had indeed no limit, / A confidence sans bound’ (96-97). Philip Voss, who played Prospero during James MacDonald’s production that toured the UK in 2000-2001, draws attention to the personally inflected nature of the protagonist’s wrath: ‘The “tempest” doesn’t exist. It is a fabrication. The tempest is within Prospero: twelve years of repressing resentment, hatred and thoughts of revenge have distorted him.’²⁸⁶ Peter Lindenbaum has argued that Prospero’s ire signifies a tacit admission that his own inattention to the practical details of statesmanship directly influenced Antonio’s rise to power: ‘Prospero’s reminders and repetition look very much like the efforts of someone forcing himself to concentrate upon his mistakes of twelve years back, lest he make the same mistake again.’²⁸⁷ Walsingham, on the other hand, was far less prone to such naïve behaviour. If Elizabeth’s spymaster did once believe that political agendas could be crafted and executed without recourse to Machiavellian methods, such a mindset vanished forever after his stint as ambassador to the French court: both the ongoing frustrations Walsingham experienced as he attempted to interest himself in the ultimately futile negotiations for a marriage between Elizabeth and one of the French princes, and, more starkly, the horrors of the St Bartholomew’s Day massacre, were more than enough to convince him that policy could only prove successful if implemented or guaranteed via underhand methods.

At least for practical purposes, Prospero is physically static throughout the play; despite the depth of his book learning, the protagonist is reliant upon Ariel to help implement his intertwined agendas of regaining his dukedom and ensuring the

²⁸⁵ *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 15. See also Arlene Oseman, ‘The Machiavellian Prince in *The Tempest*,’ *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 22 (2010), 10.

²⁸⁶ Philip Voss, ‘Prospero in *The Tempest*’ in *Players of Shakespeare* 5, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 18.

²⁸⁷ Peter Lindenbaum, ‘Prospero’s Anger,’ *The Massachusetts Review* 25.1 (1984), 167.

continuity of his dynasty through the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. Michael J. Redmond has drawn attention to the crucial role that Ariel plays in allowing Prospero to perform action at a distance, thereby rendering the lines of command between spymaster and agent visible to the audience:

While Caliban may learn to curse, disguised rulers learn how to spy. Prospero distinguishes himself from earlier stage dukes only because his magical powers allow him to outsource the act of surveillance. By controlling the action on the island, through Ariel's 'observation strange,' Prospero gathers the intelligence he needs to manoeuvre against his enemies without getting his own hands dirty (3.3.87).²⁸⁸

Ariel provides the mechanical means by which Prospero is able to effect the numerous magical events that occur over the course of a single afternoon: he causes the storm that opens the play, leads Ferdinand to Prospero and Miranda (1.2.377-410), frustrates the attempt by Antonio and Sebastian to kill the other members of the court party (2.1.302-332), tricks the renegades Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo by mimicking voices and then draws them away with music to a filthy pond (3.2.42-155), dresses as a harpy and interrupts the magical banquet that Prospero has conjured for the court party (3.3.53-82), sets spirits in the shape of dogs on the renegades (4.1.255-66), and, in the concluding act of the play, fetches the disparate groups scattered about the island before Prospero.

Alvin B. Kernan has seen in Ariel the figure of the ideal actor, one whose supernatural abilities allowed the playwright to fantasise about the possibilities of performance without limits:

In Ariel, the spirit of fancy and playfulness, and his 'rabble' of 'meaner fellows,' the playwright at last finds the perfect actors who are bound to serve his will absolutely, execute his commands exactly with lightning swiftness, take any shape desired in an instant, without limits in their Protean ability to transform themselves into any image the artist conceives.²⁸⁹

Perhaps Shakespeare did permit himself such indulgences, a welcome break from the usual work of creating roles that he knew would be played by specific actors. However, given that the role of the protagonist was created for Richard Burbage, Prospero should perhaps also be cast as a senior actor charged with the responsibility of supervising those with less experience, particularly the boy playing Ariel.

²⁸⁸ Michael J. Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 141.

²⁸⁹ Alvin B. Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theater* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979), 136-37.

Walsingham too had to work with the all too real limits of his human agents and, had he seen *The Tempest* in performance, Elizabeth's spymaster would surely have relished the fantasy of casting himself as Prospero, able to rely on Ariel to gather intelligence and carry out missions effortlessly. Maybe Walsingham had attained a status akin to that of Prospero by the mid-1580s: while no single human agent had anything like Ariel's capacity for work, the purpose of developing a pan-European surveillance network was to account for such limitations, multiple exertions of individual spies combining to give the spymaster in London a nuanced perspective on a wide range of political affairs. In this context, perhaps Ariel is best understood as representing an idealistic summation of many agents, all providing intelligence that contributes to the spymaster's overview of the world.

Save for Prospero, Ariel is the only other character that knows about all the events that take place in the course of the play.²⁹⁰ From the spymaster's point of view, it is imperative that his supernatural agent remains a closely guarded secret, as demonstrated in the exposition scene when Prospero sends Miranda to sleep before summoning Ariel and debriefing him about what happened during the storm. Despite this clandestine practice, it would appear that other characters do gain intelligence about Ariel's presence on the island. Prospero is careful to keep Caliban and Ariel physically separate during the exposition scene, but the slave does know of his master's other servant, if Stefano's complaint after being dunked in the filthy pond is anything to go by: 'Monster, your fairy, which you say is a harmless fairy, has done little better than played the Jack with us' (4.1.196-98). Vaughan and Vaughan are the only recent editors to gloss Stefano's comment, deducing that Ariel and Caliban 'must have been acquainted before Prospero and Miranda arrived on the island, and Sycorax would presumably (if she lived until Caliban reached the age of understanding) have informed her son about the recalcitrant spirit-servant she confined for twelve years in *a cloven pine* (1.2.274-77).'²⁹¹ Even so, Caliban himself does not respond to Stefano in a manner that sheds any light on the relationship between Prospero's two servants, principally because the renegade is so absorbed by the thought of pushing through his scheme to thwart Prospero and seize Miranda at any cost: 'Be patient, for the prize I'll bring thee to / Shall hoodwink this mischance' (4.1.205-06). By disregarding the all-

²⁹⁰ Gabriel Egan, 'Ariel's Costume in the Original Staging of *The Tempest*,' *Theatre Notebook* 51.2 (1997), 62; Ian Ferguson, 'Contradictory Natures: The Function of Prospero, his Agent and his Slave in *The Tempest*,' *Unisa English Studies* 28.2 (1990), 2.

²⁹¹ *The Tempest*, ed. Vaughan and Vaughan, 257.

important relationship between spymaster and supernatural agent, Caliban renders himself incapable of understanding why his plot against Prospero fails.

The manuscript of *The Tempest* used to prepare the 1623 First Folio (which opens with the sole surviving early version of the play) was one of a number prepared for that volume by the legal scrivener Ralph Crane, who was also responsible for collating the list of roles appended to the play, in which Ariel is described as ‘an airy spirit.’²⁹² Various suggestions have been made to account for the genesis of the character. W. Stacy Johnson notes that John Dee had a favourite spirit named Uriel and that, according to Isaiah 29, the name was also synonymous with the city of Jerusalem: ‘The Ebrewes word Ariel signifieth the Lyon of God and it signifieth the Altar, because y^e Altar seemed to devour the Sacrifice that was offered to God.’²⁹³ Robert R. Reed suggests that Shakespeare derived his character from that of Shrimp in Munday’s comedy *John a Kent and John a Cumber*, first performed sometime in the late 1580s.²⁹⁴ Shrimp, like Ariel, has the power of instantaneous travel and in one scene also employs music to lure other characters into following him.²⁹⁵ There is also the intriguing possibility that Shakespeare’s character grew out of a costume. It is crucial to Ariel’s ability to carry out his tasks successfully that he remain invisible to all characters except Prospero, and this is the first transformation that the spymaster requires of his agent:

Go make thyself like a nymph o’th’ sea. Be subject
To no sight but thine and mine, invisible
To every eyeball else. Go take this shape,
And hither come in’t. Go; hence with diligence! (1.2.303-05)

The water-nymph costume was originally made for use in a sea-pageant performed on the River Thames in May 1610 to celebrate Prince Henry’s investiture as Prince of Wales, when it was worn by John Rice, one of the boy actors in the King’s Men. The company acquired the costume soon afterwards and, given the exquisite nature of this apparel, Michael Baird Saenger has conjectured that it formed ‘one of the seeds from

²⁹² John Jowett, ‘New Created Creatures: Ralph Crane and the Stage Directions in “The Tempest”’, *Shakespeare Survey* 36 (1983), 107-20.

²⁹³ W. Stacy Johnson, ‘The Genesis of Ariel’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 2.3 (1951), 206.

²⁹⁴ Robert R. Reed, Jr., ‘The Probable Origin of Ariel’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11.1 (1960), 61-65.

²⁹⁵ Munday’s play is available in a modern edition: *An Edition of Anthony Munday’s John a Kent and John a Cumber*, ed. Arthur E. Pennell (New York and London: Garland, 1980). The stage direction at the beginning of 4.1 reads ‘Enter Shrimp playing on some instrument, a prettie way before the Countesse, Sydanen, Marian, Oswen and Amerye’ (p. 122 of Pennell’s edition). In a similar fashion, the exposition scene of *The Tempest* contains the stage direction ‘Enter Ariel like a water-nymph, playing and singing, invisible to Ferdinand, who follows’ (1.2.377).

which the play grew.²⁹⁶ When Ariel is wearing the water-nymph costume this provides a signal to the audience that the character cannot be perceived visually by any other character present onstage save Prospero, and, later in the play, this invisibility plays a key role in the spirit's ability to trick the renegades Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo by mimicking voices.

Prospero exhibits a high degree of possessiveness when addressing his agent, variously styling him 'my Ariel' (1.2.189), 'my brave spirit' (1.2.207) and 'my industrious servant' (4.1.33).²⁹⁷ Ariel's supernatural powers are an integral component of Prospero's magical surveillance system, but the agent himself remains constantly subject to the watchful eye of his master. Graham Holderness notes that the exposition scene portrays Ariel as both 'an obedient agent of Prospero's power' and 'an independent spirit given to expressions of defiance and gestures of rebellion.'²⁹⁸ Prospero, by virtue of his magical powers, is in the fortunate position of being able to develop a sound working relationship with one highly reliable agent, instead of being beholden to the constant turnover of dubious personalities that proved such a problem for courtiers and secretaries attempting to coordinate spying missions in early-modern England. Furthermore, that relationship has developed over a period of twelve years, something unheard of in Walsingham's time.

The expository dialogue between Prospero and Ariel, which runs for about one hundred lines, foregrounds various complexities that might arise in the working relationship between a spymaster and his agent. Whereas the secretary Borachio devises the plot to deceive Claudio and Don Pedro on behalf of his master in *Much Ado*, Ariel only carries out Prospero's directives. Prospero pushes his agent hard over the course of the afternoon in which the action of the play takes place, first praising Ariel for the good work he has done in bringing about the shipwreck, but also reminding him that his duties are far from complete: 'Ariel, thy charge / Exactly is performed; but there's more work' (1.2.238-39). The play offers no insights about the kind of work that Ariel may have carried out for Prospero prior to that afternoon, in

²⁹⁶ Michael Baird Saenger, 'The Costumes of Caliban and Ariel qua Sea-Nymph,' *Notes and Queries* 42.3 (1995), 336. Saenger notes that the sea-pageant also featured Richard Burbage performing the role of Amphion, a monstrous sea triton; the King's Men also acquired the costume worn by Burbage on that occasion and Saenger conjectures that it was then worn by the actor playing Caliban, whose piscine qualities are the subject of comment by various members of the court party.

²⁹⁷ Edward I. Berry, 'Prospero's "Brave Spirit",' *Studies in Philology* 76.1 (1979), 38.

²⁹⁸ Graham Holderness, 'The Tempest: Spectacles of Disenchantment' in *Shakespeare: Out of Court: Dramatizations of Court Society* by Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 165.

contrast to Caliban, whose lot is defined by the menial round of household chores: 'He does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us' (1.2.313-315). Even if Prospero and Ariel had conducted trial exercises in preparation for the arrival of the court party, the spymaster is still dependent upon his agent being able to function at peak performance that afternoon.

Buoyed by his master's praise, Ariel then attempts to remind Prospero about the terms of his employment as an agent:

Remember I have done thee worthy service,
Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, served
Without or grudge or grumblings. Thou did promise
To bate me a full year. (1.2.248-251)

Ariel's petition suggests that twelve years earlier he had entered into a verbal contract with Prospero that contained a clause permitting the agent's early release from service if his work were of a sufficiently high quality. There is little chance of Ariel defecting to another patron, but Prospero still feels compelled to remind his agent periodically of the debt he owes for being released from the cloven pine in which the witch Sycorax had imprisoned him: 'I must / Once in a month recount what thou hast been, / Which thou forget'st' (1.2.262-64). Prospero's language swiftly takes a disciplinary turn, establishing that the spymaster has no qualms about asserting authority over his agent when required:

PROSPERO
If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,
And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
Thou hast howled away twelve winters.
ARIEL Pardon, master.
I will be correspondent to command,
And do my spriting gently.
PROSPERO Do so, and after two days
I will discharge thee.
ARIEL That's my noble master!
What shall I do? Say what, what shall I do? (1.2.295-302)

Prospero employs the threat of imprisonment to ensure that Ariel does not overstep the mark by persistently reminding his master about his imminent freedom. However, the spymaster himself must also be aware that this piece of rhetoric functions as something of a decoy because on this particular afternoon Prospero simply cannot afford to have his special agent doing time in gaol because that would render him incapable of implementing all his various stratagems to compel political submission

from the various members of the court party. Ariel's response is suitably downcast, affirming that it is the spymaster who wields unidirectional power in this relationship, yet when Prospero agrees to release his agent from service if his work is satisfactory, Ariel immediately becomes upbeat once again, eagerly enquiring about his next task. The relationship between Prospero and Ariel is mutually beneficial: not only does Ariel seem enthusiastic about his work, but Prospero has had the unique opportunity to spend many years developing a surveillance system that harnesses the skills of an agent with special powers. It is also exploitative: given the sheer magnitude of Prospero's power, Ariel has no choice but to obey.

On balance, Ariel is a remarkably loyal agent, certainly more so than most of those individuals that Walsingham employed as spies throughout the 1570s and 1580s. However, it would be inaccurate to argue that the protagonist of *The Tempest* is a disinterestedly benevolent patron. Andrew Gurr has framed the association between Prospero and Ariel with respect to notions of early-modern apprenticeship:

Prospero is not so much a colonist as a master-citizen, an indigenous and short-tempered Londoner, patriarch of his family household with its routine complement of children, apprentices and house servants, a role that is now all too easily replaced with the colonial patriarch and the hierarchy of power he represents.²⁹⁹

In a similar vein, David Evett argues for a reading of the characters' relationship in the context of master-servant relations, seeing in Ariel 'a kind of all-purpose upper servant' who is controlled 'by fear only.'³⁰⁰ Gurr and Evett provide valuable insights about representations of domestic power structures in *The Tempest*, but both readings are limited by virtue of the fact that they can only provide a relatively weak account of the spectre of imprisonment that underscores Ariel's bond with Prospero. While a servant or apprentice might well have considered his or her relationship with a master to be a form of captivity, be that corporeal or psychological, the physical space of gaol was an ever-present reality for all early-modern spies. Some, such as Robert Poley, forged a career as a stool pigeon in the London prisons; others, such as William Parry, were able to secure their release by promising to offer good service as an agent. For every one of these individuals the threat of incarceration, either by one's own spymaster or at the hands of a foreign power, remained a distinct possibility in the

²⁹⁹ Andrew Gurr, 'Industrious Ariel and idle Caliban' in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, ed. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 205.

³⁰⁰ David Evett, *Discourses of Service in Shakespeare's England* (New York and Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 191.

event that an operation went awry or if the spy himself engaged in misconduct. Throughout the course of the play Prospero never expresses anything other than satisfaction with Ariel's work, but the spymaster still relies on threats of imprisonment to ensure that his agent remains focused on the task at hand, instead of dreaming about his imminent release from bondage. One can imagine Burghley employing a similar sort of rhetoric in order to keep the flamboyant Parry in line, although in that case presumably the threats were as much focused on money as the more abstract idea of freedom. Ultimately, it was the spymaster, not the agent, who wielded power in the relationship: all agents had good reason to fear their employers because it was difficult to assess how spymasters might respond to manipulative behaviour on the part of the agent.

The final act of the play contains a particularly poignant exchange between Prospero and Ariel, signifying an affective relationship between the two characters of a peculiarly intense nature:

ARIEL Your charm so strongly works 'em
 That if you now beheld them your affections
 Would become tender.
 PROSPERO Dost thou think so, spirit?
 ARIEL
 Mine would, sir, were I human.
 PROSPERO And mine shall. (5.1.17-20)

As Cosmo Corfield notes, ‘Ariel seems partly responsible for the change in Prospero’s mind – the change which leads to forgiveness.’³⁰¹ If this is indeed the case, it follows that the agent himself enjoys an unusually high degree of counsel with his spymaster, certainly more so than any experienced by agents in Elizabethan England. In the closing moments of the play, Prospero charges Ariel with one final task – raising good winds for those returning to Milan – and then grants his agent the reward he has been awaiting for twelve long years:

 My Ariel, chick,
 That is thy charge. Then to the elements
 Be free, and fare thou well. (5.1.320-22)

Although Ariel does not respond verbally, his master's use of the affectionate term ‘chick,’ coupled with the explicit declaration of hope for Ariel's future wellbeing, affirms that Prospero really does wish to end the relationship with his agent on a high

³⁰¹ Cosmo Corfield, ‘Why Does Prospero Abjure His “Rough Magic”?’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.1 (1985), 40.

note. In a move reminiscent of those numerous spies that disappeared from the historical record without trace, Ariel then vanishes into the elements, at one with the island once again.

In Sam Mendes's 1993 production of *The Tempest* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Ariel, played by Simon Russell Beale, spat at Prospero after being granted his freedom; this interpretation prompted gasps of outrage from the audience and was dropped after a few performances.³⁰² However, as Katherine Steele Brokaw notes, 'when Prospero finally frees him, the text gives Ariel no lines and no stage directions.'³⁰³ Arguably Beale and Mendes overstepped the mark in rendering an Ariel who exhibits high levels of resentment towards his master, especially given that there is little authority in Shakespeare's text to support such a one-sided interpretation of the characters' relationship. At the end of the play, Ariel has no particular reason to feel antipathy towards his patron: Prospero has kept his promise to release his agent one year early in recognition of good service and, by setting Ariel free on the island once more, in effect bestows on him a sizeable land grant. Given that land grants were the kind of reward reserved for courtiers who rendered good service to the crown – certainly not the kind of gift a secretary or agent might expect to receive – Prospero's reward provides compelling proof that he does hold his agent in very high regard, even if on occasion he needed to employ threats of reimprisonment to keep Ariel in line. Incidentally, Elizabeth granted to Walter Raleigh the lands that Babington had forfeited after being arrested for treason, much to the chagrin of Walsingham, whose puritanical disposition ran counter to Raleigh's polished charms.³⁰⁴

As the exposition scene makes clear, Ariel has a period of only four hours in which to perform all the tasks that Prospero requires of him:

PROSPERO

What is the time o'th' day?

ARIEL

Past the mid season.

PROSPERO

At least two glasses. The time 'twixt six and now

Must by us both be spent most preciousy.

(1.2.240-42)

Yet Prospero does not simply order Ariel to work and then sit back. On the contrary, the spymaster is keenly aware that if his multilayered plot to compel submission from those shipwrecked on the island is to prove a success, it is essential that he too

³⁰² *The Tempest*, ed. Vaughan and Vaughan, 116-17.

³⁰³ Katherine Steele Brokaw, 'Ariel's Liberty,' *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26.1 (2008), 37.

³⁰⁴ Cooper, *The Queen's Agent*, 272.

remains focused on the pressures that time exerts upon him, as he explains to

Miranda:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. (1.2.179-85)

Given the sheer magnitude of the power that Prospero is able to wield over other characters, either directly or through Ariel's exertions, the crucial premise contained in Prospero's declaration can easily drop out of sight. The spymaster may be formidable but he is not omnipotent: Caliban may be Prospero's slave but Prospero himself is a slave to time and simply must complete the tasks he has set himself within these temporal limits if he is able to pull off his triumphant and long-desired return to Milan. So while Ariel is speeding around the island performing work of a physical nature, the spymaster must put his mind to work, ensuring that he remembers to pull together all the various threads of his plot.

In discussing Prospero's status as protagonist-cum-dramatist David Bevington succinctly observes that 'the plot of *The Tempest* is his plot.'³⁰⁵ Curt Bright – whose contention that the Privy Council manufactured William Parry's plot to assassinate Elizabeth in order to aid the passage of the Bond of Association through Parliament has already been cited (Introduction, p. 51) – argues for a correlation between Prospero's exertions during the play and an Elizabethan 'discourse of treason':

Shakespeare casts Prospero as stage manager of conspiracy in episodes that directly resemble contemporary treason cases and documents. Nearly all the characters *inside* the play are physically and psychologically subjected by Prospero in his bid for political rehabilitation through mystification of his power as a divinely protected figure. But the audience exists *outside* Prospero's manipulation of characters and situations and is thereby enabled to perceive Shakespeare's clever demystification of various official strategies within the discourse of treason. The audience is allowed to see that conspiracy is often a fiction, or a construct, or a real yet wholly containable piece of social theatre.³⁰⁶

As Bright argues, a key problem with conspiratorial narrative is that one can only continue to manufacture such assertions for a limited period of time: 'in a culture

³⁰⁵ David Bevington, *Shakespeare* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 213.

³⁰⁶ Curt Bright, '“Treason doth never prosper”: *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Treason,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.1 (1990), 1.

featuring the quasi-annual announcement, from about 1581 to 1605, that a given conspiracy had been miraculously contained, the government's wolf-cry ultimately became a bit thin.³⁰⁷ By contrast, Prospero does not have to worry about such difficulties because all the conspiracies in *The Tempest* (excepting Antonio's coup in the pre-history of the play) take place over a period of only a few hours. Although the spymaster's project has been in planning for the past twelve years, the fact that it plays out over the course of a single afternoon ensures that no-one has sufficient time to develop and execute a viable counter-plot, even though a number of characters – Antonio and Sebastian in 2.1, and Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo in 3.2 – convince themselves that they have the capacity to orchestrate and carry off swiftly formulated conspiracies. Prospero's handling of the attempts to depose both Alonso and himself demonstrates that he is capable of orchestrating a complex range of responses to conspiracies within a severely restricted timeframe, thereby proving that he is once again capable of managing a dukedom.

One of the few physical actions that Prospero performs during the course of the afternoon is to charm Ferdinand into immobility when the young nobleman draws his sword in protest at the charge of conspiracy that the spymaster has just levelled against him. Ferdinand and Miranda fall for each other instantly, but Prospero decides that it will not do for the future of his dynasty to be determined so quickly:

(Aside) They are both in either's powers. But this swift business
 I must uneasy make, lest too light winning
 Make the prize light. (To Ferdinand) One word more. I charge thee
 That thou attend me. Thou dost here usurp
 The name thou ow'st not; and hast put thyself
 Upon this island as a spy, to win it
 From me, the lord on't. (1.2.453-59)

To take Prospero's aside at face value, the spymaster's actions at this point in time result simply from his desire to play the figure of the blocking father, thereby ensuring that his daughter's suitor is prepared to fight for her hand. When Prospero commands Ferdinand to 'Follow!' (467), the young nobleman gallantly responds that it is not his place to do battle with a man of advancing years: 'No. / I will resist such entertainment till / Mine enemy has more power' (467-69). Recent editors of *The Tempest* gloss the word 'entertainment' as 'treatment,' principally because the

³⁰⁷ Breight, 'The Tempest and the Discourse of Treason,' 16.

semantic range of the word has shifted during the past four hundred years.³⁰⁸ Yet there is an irony to Ferdinand's use of the term at this particular juncture because the spymaster is also engaging in a form of play tinged with vindictiveness or, in Stephen Greenblatt's words, 'the romance equivalent of martial law.'³⁰⁹ Still angry with himself for the manner in which he forfeited his dukedom, Prospero seizes every available opportunity to promulgate random acts of power over other characters, regardless of whether it really is necessary for him to do so. The spymaster's overbearing treatment of his future son-in-law may not exactly be gratuitous – after all, Prospero himself expounds the view that suitors ought not to win a wife too easily – but it clearly extends beyond the bounds of necessity. By contrast, Prospero's shadowing of the couple throughout 3.1, during which he observes their conversation from a distance rather than controlling Ferdinand's body, suggests that he is also willing to engage in more benign methods of surveillance when appropriate.

B. J. Sokol observes that 'if seen on the Globe stage in an afternoon performance, the often-commented-upon stage time of *The Tempest* would have nearly coincided with the actual diurnal time during the play's running.'³¹⁰ To watch the spymaster and his agent perform all their various tasks within the space of a few hours would have seemed truly remarkable to anyone in the audience who had experience working in real-life spying operations. It would also have seemed totally unviable. For example, Walsingham's machinations to entrap Mary, Queen of Scots in 1586 developed over a period of several months, but Elizabeth's spymaster had been waiting for a suitable opportunity since the early 1570s, and had already had one missed opportunity when the imprisoned Queen could not be linked more fully to those conspirators involved in the Throckmorton Plot of 1583 (see Introduction, pp. 18-19). Prospero's twelve year wait to take revenge on his enemies is thus on the same time scale as Walsingham's to bring down Mary. Sokol also proposes that Prospero utilises the island of *The Tempest* as a 'laboratory' or 'experimental station', where 'parallel, artificially devised, testing ordeals (for example concurrent temptations to seize power or usurp) are kept strictly apart, as if to test for any

³⁰⁸ *The Tempest*, ed. Orgel, 126; *The Tempest*, ed. Vaughan and Vaughan, 183; *The Tempest*, ed. David Lindley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 126.

³⁰⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 156.

³¹⁰ B. J. Sokol, *A Brave New World of Knowledge: Shakespeare's The Tempest and Early Modern Epistemology* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 127.

diverging results.’³¹¹ This is an interesting concept, but errs in suggesting that Prospero’s schemes can fruitfully be understood with reference to empirical science. Political machinations in any age are considerably more scrappy than an experiment in a laboratory, as any Elizabethan courtier who had read the works of Machiavelli and had aspirations to work in intelligence circles surely appreciated. More to the point, Prospero shows absolutely no interest in running another such experiment to corroborate the results of that afternoon’s work, as any self-respecting empirical scientist would surely do. In fact, as the Epilogue makes plain, the protagonist is desperate to leave the island as soon as possible:

Let me not,
 Since I have my dukedom got,
 And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
 In this bare island by your spell;
 But release me from my bands
 With the help of your good hands. (5-10)

Prospero’s desire to control the various members of the court party is limited to the action of the play itself and he gives no indication that he wishes to continue to engage in such behaviour once he has returned to Milan. Vaughan and Vaughan contend that ‘through the union of Ferdinand and Miranda, Prospero hopes to see his dynasty continue in peace and prosperity, with his grandchildren as heirs to both Milan and Naples.’³¹² Far from wishing to spend the rest of his days as a mad scientist locked away in his laboratory/island performing experiments on unsuspecting victims, Prospero is all too keen to return to the normal round of human behaviour.

Stephen Orgel is surely closer to the mark than Sokol in positing that ‘what the play’s action presents is not experiments and empiric studies but a fantasy about controlling other people’s minds.’³¹³ Ultimately, Prospero’s efforts to control other characters is personally inflected, a belated response to his own indifference in matters of state that resulted in his deposition at the hands of his brother twelve years earlier. This is Prospero’s way of dealing with the insecurities he feels in his role as duke of Milan. In large part the spymaster of *The Tempest* is successful in his bid to compel other characters to acquiesce to his view of the world. There, are however, two exceptions. While Alonso readily admits his own fault in conspiring to overthrow

³¹¹ Sokol, *A Brave New World of Knowledge*, 129.

³¹² *The Tempest*, ed. Vaughan and Vaughan, 71. A similar view is expressed by A. Lynne Magnusson in ‘Interruption in *The Tempest*,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37.1 (1986), 59.

³¹³ Stephen Orgel, ‘Prospero’s Wife,’ *Representations* 8 (1984), 9.

Prospero – ‘Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat / Thou pardon me my wrongs’ (5.1.120-21) – Antonio says nothing when Prospero pardons him. As Christine Dymkowski documents, at this particular juncture ‘actors have run the gamut from humble gratitude to sneering villainy.’³¹⁴ Orgel suggests that the playwright himself preferred the latter interpretation:

Nothing, not all Prospero’s magic, can redeem Antonio from his essential badness. Since Shakespeare was free to have Antonio repent if that is what he had in mind – half a line would have done for critics craving a reconciliation – we ought to take seriously the possibility that that is not what he had in mind.³¹⁵

Yet it is also worth bearing in mind that Prospero does not offer his pardon with good grace. While the protagonist embraces both Alonso and Gonzalo (5.1.113, 124), he does not make any effort to initiate physical contact with Antonio and his language is that of demand instead of courtesy:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault, all of them, and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know
Thou must restore. (5.1.132-35)

It would seem that Prospero cannot bring himself to absolve his brother of blame, despite his best efforts to be seen to do so in public view in the final scene of the play. As First Lord Dumaine notes in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, ‘the web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together’ (4.3.74-75). For Prospero, a key part of his personal journey involves realising that genuine reconciliation with Antonio is by this stage unviable, despite the success the spymaster has had in securing the future of his dynasty through the union of Ferdinand and Miranda. The other character whose presence the spymaster must begrudgingly accept is his rogue agent Caliban, to whom this chapter now turns.

³¹⁴ *The Tempest*, ed. Christine Dymkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 312.

³¹⁵ Orgel, ‘Prospero’s Wife,’ 10.

‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’: Prospero’s rogue agent

At first pass it may seem to be stretching the point to argue that Caliban can be cast as Prospero’s rogue agent, principally because the spymaster has never employed him as a spy. It is, however, worth remembering that none of the individuals that dabbled in espionage in Elizabethan England did so in the expectation of a life-long career and a respectable salary. No courtier or secretary would have engaged them on such grounds, principally to prevent unscrupulous individuals working the system for their own political and financial gain. Most of those who worked as agents did so to supplement workaday jobs and many fell into spying in a fashion that was half-accidental, particularly if they already had access to useful pieces of intelligence via their regular occupation, information that could then be sold on to secretaries and spymasters. Caliban does not escape slavery with the express intention of devising a plot to undermine his former master. Instead, that plot develops once the monster has acquired a new master – Stefano – a factor that Caliban mistakenly believes will prove important in helping him mount a rebellion against Prospero. In this respect Caliban is akin to agents like Anthony Standen, whose career as an agent was ultimately compromised by an inability to develop a relationship with a spymaster who could provide for his needs adequately (see Introduction, pp. 52-57). Both Shakespeare’s drama and the historical record portray a world in which opportunity – and the potential for failure – was at the forefront of everyone’s minds.

Caliban, despite expressing contempt for Prospero at quite some length in the exposition scene, also declares via an aside that he simply has no choice but to submit to the spymaster’s directives:

I must obey. His art is of such power
It would control my dam’s god Setebos,
And make a vassal of him. (1.2.374-76)

The theme of Caliban’s subservience continues when the monster appears by himself a few scenes later, cursing his master while he goes about the task of gathering wood.

Thunder resounds:

His spirits hear me,
And yet I needs must curse. But they’ll nor pinch,
Fright me with urchin-shows, pitch me i’th’ mire,
Nor lead me like a fire-brand in the dark
Out of my way, unless he bid ’em. But
For every trifle are they set upon me. (2.2.3-8)

Despite his status as indigene, Caliban's knowledge of the island is rendered useless by the fact that the spymaster has the capability to maintain constant surveillance of his slave's behaviour, employing various supernatural agents to ensure that Caliban labours instead of complaining or plotting his defection. What makes Caliban truly fearful is the unpredictable nature of such penalties: Prospero applies corporal punishment in order to correct the slightest misdemeanour, thereby ensuring that the monster remains in a state of perpetual anxiety. Yet the spymaster's despotic power also has an element of negative feedback: Caliban's anxiety is a key factor in sustaining the resentment that bubbles dangerously below the surface of the characters' relationship.

Whereas the relationship between Prospero and Ariel is cooperative and mutually beneficial – albeit tempered by regular threats of reimprisonment on the part of the spymaster – relations between Prospero and Caliban are thoroughly negative and unidirectional in nature. Postcolonial discourse has taught us to sympathise with Caliban but such emotions on the part of the critic become complicated by the fact that the monster is totally unrepentant about his attempted rape of Miranda:

O ho, O ho! Would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans. (1.2.351-53)

Whether Caliban was fully aware of what he was doing or not – one might assume that his behaviour exemplifies raw nature instead of premeditated action – the monster has already had one shot at creating anarchy within Prospero's household. If Miranda had become pregnant as a result of Caliban's actions, any children born may well have been cast aside, but such an outcome would frustrate Prospero's long-term plan to populate his dukedom with legitimate heirs. Although he may not know it, Caliban already has experience in attempting to infiltrate the miniature society controlled by his master-cum-enemy, even though his actions proved unsuccessful in this instance.

When Trinculo appears in 2.2, Caliban does not initially spy the possibility of defection but instead, fearing that Prospero has sent yet another supernatural agent to brutalise him into working harder, lies down in order to conceal himself:

Here's comes a spirit of his, and to torment me
For bringing wood in slowly. I'll fall flat.
Perchance he will not mind me. (15-17)

The jester, having sized up the commercial possibilities that this ‘strange fish’ (27) might offer, then crawls under Caliban’s gabardine in order to escape the returning storm. This action only increases the panic experienced by the poor monster, who believes that his master is deploying agents to penetrate the private space of his attire in order to cause him yet more suffering:

Thou dost me yet but little hurt. Thou wilt anon, I know it by thy trembling.
Now Prosper works upon thee.

(79-81)

Stefano, thoroughly bemused by the ontological status of the double-headed creature that he stumbles upon a few moments later, decides that a hearty dose of liquor is required to revive this strange being: ‘If all the wine in my bottle will recover him, I will help his ague’ (92-93). As Christine Dymkowski notes, ‘Stephano gives Caliban his first taste of liquor during these lines, but both the degree of Stephano’s coerciveness and the extent of Caliban’s initial enthusiasm are open to directorial discretion.’³¹⁶ This is an important episode for productions of Shakespeare’s play that seek to emphasise aspects of early-modern cultural imperialism. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that Stefano’s primary interest is simply to revive the being lying in front of him so that he can then make a fuller assessment of what it is that he has found. Stefano is certainly not offering the liquor as a reward because Caliban has not yet performed any sort of service for him. Nor does the drunken butler ply the monster with drink in order to lure him into defecting. Only later in the scene, after freely offering his service to Stefano as a native scout and gatherer of food, does Caliban reveal that he already serves another master:

I’ll show thee the best springs; I’ll pluck thee berries;
I’ll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.
A plague upon the tyrant that I serve!
I’ll bear him no more sticks, but follow thee,
Thou wondrous man.

(159-63)

Yet, as Trinculo notes drily, Caliban is nothing but a fool to believe that Stefano is capable of playing the part of a rich, well-connected courtier: ‘A most ridiculous monster, to make a wonder of a poor drunkard!’ (164-65). Caliban’s eagerness to offer himself in service to this new master without even considering Stefano’s suitability for the role – after all, the drunken butler is, by definition, also a working man rather than a gentleman or aristocrat – is testament to the constant fear that the

³¹⁶ *The Tempest*, ed. Dymkowski, 223.

monster experiences under Prospero's tyranny. Oddly enough, while Caliban willingly offers to fish and gather fuel for Stefano, he later sings:

No more dams I'll make for fish,
Nor fetch in firing
At requiring. (179-81)

Clearly what is at stake here is not the actual work of fishing or gathering firewood, menial though it may be, but Caliban's choice to undertake those activities of his own free will, instead of being compelled to do so by a domineering master; that was certainly the case in those happier days when Prospero and Miranda first arrived on the island and the indigene revealed to them 'all the qualities o'th' isle' (1.2.339). Caliban is willing to work but also wants some degree of self-definition as he performs acts of service for his master. It should also be noted that when Stefano offers his new servant the bottle of liquor he requires Caliban to 'kiss the book' (2.2.141), thereby mocking the act of kissing the Bible, an important gesture during the Catholic Mass.³¹⁷ Caliban, however, is completely unaware of the significance of this instruction and hence there is no possibility that he knowingly defects to a Catholic power. Furthermore, given that all the characters in the play hail from Italy it makes little sense to think of Prospero as Protestant anyway.

The relationship between the credulous defector and the ineffectual patron is formed on the spur of the moment and each party errs in believing that the other is capable of behaving in a manner that will prove mutually beneficial to them both. Stefano is certainly no spymaster and, not being of the courtier class, does not have the ability to provide appropriate remuneration or political protection for his agent. Caliban's principal blunder is offer himself in service without probing to see what his new patron might be able to do for him, aside from providing regular doses of a mind-altering substance. In any case Stefano leaps at the opportunity to fill the power gap that he supposes to exist on the island at the present moment, based on his false assumption that Alonso and all the other courtiers have perished in the storm:

I prithee now, lead the way without any more talking. – Trinculo, the King and all our company else being drowned, we will inherit here. – Here, bear my bottle. – Fellow Trinculo, we'll fill him by and by again. (172-75)

³¹⁷ James Kearney, 'The Book and the Fetish: The Materiality of Prospero's Text,' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.2 (2002), 461-62.

Editors note the indeterminacy of the word ‘him’, which could be taken to refer either to Caliban or to the bottle of liquor.³¹⁸ This could be written off as poor syntax on the part of the drunkard, but this collapse in the normally distinct nature of the pronoun also suggests that Stefano is aware of the correlation between possession of the intoxicating substance and his attempts to gain political control of the island, as if fuelling the monster with regular doses of liquor is the first step in mounting a rebellion against this as-yet-unnamed tyrant to whom Caliban has alluded.

William Hazlitt was one of the first critics to recognise that Prospero’s two servants are juxtaposed together:

Shakespeare has, as it were by design, drawn off from Caliban the elements of whatever is ethereal and refined, to compound them in the unearthly mould of Ariel. Nothing was ever more finely conceived than this contrast between the material and the spiritual, the gross and the delicate.³¹⁹

Yet the differences between the two characters go far beyond the earth/air binary. One of the most interesting aspects of 3.2, the scene in which Caliban devises the plot to overthrow Prospero, is that the loyal agent Ariel is also present to counter the rebel’s scheme, as he was to undermine Antonio’s attempt on Alonso’s life in 2.1. Invisible to the conspirators, Ariel achieves this by planting misinformation that is deceptively simple but highly effective, ventriloquising on behalf of Trinculo three times the phrase ‘thou liest’ (3.2.45, 63, 76). As Don John does in *Much Ado* when planting the misinformation that Hero is false, Ariel presumes – correctly – that the individuals he is targeting will respond as he wishes them to. In itself, this specific piece of work does not achieve much, aside from allowing Ariel to play around with the simple-minded conspirators: the net result is that Stefano strikes Trinculo for persisting in supposed deceits, despite the jester’s protests of innocence and much to Caliban’s amusement. It quickly becomes apparent that Prospero’s supernatural agent is dealing with an incompetent trio of plotters, all of whom have limited intellectual capacities, shown by their inability to think imaginatively about what might be happening to them. More importantly, Ariel is also present to gather intelligence about the plot that Caliban is preparing, which he can then relay back to Prospero: ‘This will I tell my master’ (3.2.117). The buffoonery of this episode is entertaining but, on a more

³¹⁸ *The Tempest*, ed. Orgel, 151; *The Tempest*, ed. Vaughan and Vaughan, 217. By contrast, David Lindley states that ‘him’ refers to the bottle only; see *The Tempest*, ed. Lindley, 155.

³¹⁹ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, Third Edition (London: John Templeman, 1838), 119.

serious note, Ariel's behaviour provides yet more evidence of his abilities as an agent, demonstrating his skill in probing for intelligence that his master might find of use.

Hazlitt also notes that 'in conducting Stephano and Trinculo to Prospero's cell, Caliban shows the superiority of natural capacity over greater knowledge and greater folly.'³²⁰ Presumably that last conjunctive could be edited to read 'but also,' because, when it comes down to it, Caliban's skill as a native scout does not live up to expectations, especially when the dim-witted rogue agent is set against Ariel's dexterity. Having already tricked the aural faculties of the lower-class conspirators via the repeated charge of dishonesty, Ariel then proceeds to torment them further using the island's natural resources, as he later recounts to Prospero:

So I charmed their ears
That calf-like they my lowing followed, through
Toothed briars, sharp furzes, pricking gorse, and thorns,
Which entered their frail shins. At last I left them
I'th' filthy-mantled pool beyond your cell,
There dancing up to th'chins, that the foul lake
O'er-stunk their feet. (4.1.178-84)

It would appear that Caliban is not so capable as native scout after all, or rather that he does not have the ability to counter Ariel's clever manipulation of the island's resources with a similar kind of work. The odds are stacked against the lower class conspirators.

Prospero's supernatural abilities derive in part from the knowledge base he has acquired through having had many years to study the 'volumes' (1.2.168) given him by the kindly Gonzalo before he was expelled from Milan. Barbara A. Mowat notes that 'the play presents Prospero's always-offstage book as crucial to his rule over the island,' while also pointing out that 'the play emphasizes Prospero's use of spirits much more than it does his dependence on a particular book for the power to so use them.'³²¹ Caliban is certainly under the impression that his former master would be rendered powerless without his library, asserting that Prospero's surveillance network would then disintegrate as other disgruntled agents also abandoned the spymaster:

³²⁰ Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 118.

³²¹ Barbara A. Mowat, 'Prospero's Book,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52.1 (2001), 1. For another consideration of the volumes contained in Prospero's library see David Adamson, 'Authority and Illusion: The Power of Prospero's Book,' *Comitatus* 20 (1989), 9-18.

Remember
First to possess his books, for without them
He's but a sot as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command – they all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books. (3.2.92-95)

It is impossible to ascertain whether or not Caliban speaks any degree of truth when he claims that all of Prospero's supernatural agents hate him as much as he does. We know that Ariel is also subject to periodic threats of reimprisonment but, as argued above, the relationship between Prospero and that magical agent also has positive elements of mutual benefit to both parties. Aside from that, the text of *The Tempest* provides no evidence about what these other agents think of their spymaster, which leads one to the conclusion that Caliban's assertion is essentially fictitious. This does not mean, however, that the monster is manufacturing this piece of information in order to be manipulative. It seems far more likely that Caliban's words are personally inflected and, instead of providing any useful intelligence about how Stefano ought to go about developing a scheme to undermine Prospero's rule over the island, actually signify the anger and frustration the monster feels at being subject to Prospero's tyranny. This problem also raises two other issues, neither of which the lower class conspirators take into consideration. First, it seems improbable that Caliban or any other individual could become as powerful as Prospero merely by possessing his books. One reason that Prospero has had to wait twelve years to enact his revenge is that it has taken him that length of time to digest all the information contained in those volumes. Secondly, Prospero surely does not need to have his book on hand as a sort of crib text while he performs his various magical operations. In a society where rote-learning was widely accepted as the pre-eminent method of education, it would have gone without saying that, having pored over his books in detail over the course of twelve years, Prospero would then be able to recall specific pieces of intelligence at will. In essence, Caliban's plot fails because it is formulated on a whim, rather than taking full account of his enemy's powers before developing a suitable strategy to counter the high levels of control that Prospero is able to wield over other characters.

The most peculiar moment in the play occurs when Prospero, claiming he has forgotten about the scheme being undertaken by the lower class conspirators, brings to an abrupt halt the masque that he is presenting to entertain Ferdinand and Miranda:

I had forgot that foul conspiracy
Of the beast Caliban and his confederates
Against my life. The minute of their plot
Is almost come. (4.1.139-42)

At stake is not simply the possibility that Prospero, lulled by the music, has wandered temporarily into a sort of mental fantasyland. Rather, there arises the curious proposition that, despite having numerous spirits at his beck and call, the spymaster is genuinely anxious about the threat posed by the imminent appearance of the lower class conspirators, as he explains to Ferdinand:

Sir, I am vexed.
Bear with my weakness. My old brain is troubled.
Be not disturbed with my infirmity.
If you be pleased, retire into my cell,
And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk
To still my beating mind. (4.1.158-63)

Critics are divided over the issue of whether Caliban's plot really does constitute a significant threat to Prospero's dominance over other characters present on the island. On the one hand, Kevin R. McNamara queries the validity of Prospero's anxiety: 'are we expected to believe that a mage who can raise tempests and place men under spells is in any serious danger from three sotted louts who are currently dancing in a pit latrine full of horse piss?'³²² By contrast, Harold Bloom contends that Ariel's presence in the scene reveals the seriousness of the monster's scheme: 'not once in the play does Ariel act without a specific order from Prospero, so perhaps the danger from Caliban's plot was more real than many critics concede.'³²³ Francis Barker and Peter Hulme provide a more balanced outlook: 'Prospero reduces Caliban to a role in the supporting sub-plot, as instigator of a mutiny that is programmed to fail, thereby forging an equivalence between Antonio's initial *putsch* and Caliban's revolt.'³²⁴ Stephen Greenblatt holds a similar view:

³²² Kevin R. McNamara, 'Golden Worlds at Court: *The Tempest* and Its Masque,' *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987), 195.

³²³ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 681.

³²⁴ Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The discursive con-texts of *The Tempest*' in *Alternative Shakespeares*, Second Edition, ed. John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 205.

Since Prospero's art has in effect created the conspiracy as well as the defense against the conspiracy, and since the profession of infirmity comes at the moment of his greatest strength, we may conclude that we are witnessing the practice of salutary anxiety operating at the center of the play's world, in the consciousness of Prospero himself, magician, artist, and prince.³²⁵

Ultimately it is hard to ascertain exactly how one ought to interpret Prospero's mental state after the collapse of the masque. The various critical responses cited above suggest that opinions vary according to the degree to which the individual scholar believes that Prospero is inclined to engage in manipulative behaviour, both in this instance specifically and in the play as a whole. It is more certain that Prospero concurs with Walsingham's view that it always proves 'less danger to fear too much than too little' (see Introduction, p. 7). Prospero has become so immersed in his own mental processes over the past twelve years that, for him, it hardly matters whether or not any given plot poses a viable threat to the stability of his rule over the island. What is important to the spymaster is that he is able to exercise high-level mental control in order to quell any plots against him that might arise, thereby allaying his own ingrained fears that he might be politically incompetent.

Caliban, perhaps beginning to develop a hangover, ultimately regrets his decision to defect to a new master and seems more than willing to settle for his former existence of repetitive drudgery under Prospero's despotism:

PROSPERO

Go, sirrah, to my cell.

Take with you your companions. As you look
To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.

CALIBAN

Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter,
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
Was I to take this drunkard for a god,
And worship this dull fool!

(5.1.295-301)

Clearly Caliban is embarrassed by his inability to perceive that Stefano was nothing more than a mercenary charlatan and his offerings of alcohol mere bribery instead of a reward truly worth having. Yet maybe life will turn out better for Caliban than one might suppose upon hearing these words, the last time the monster speaks in the play. Far from abandoning his slave, Prospero still values Caliban enough to keep him amongst his retinue, declaring 'this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine' (5.1.278-79). The spymaster thus accepts responsibility for the conduct of his rogue

³²⁵ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 145.

agent, which implies that he recognises the importance of keeping the rebel close to him in order to prevent the possibility of further conspiracies. Yet, as Lorie Jerrell Leininger points out, Prospero's utterance is personally inflected, a recognition that the spymaster himself has had to engage in manipulative behaviour in order to regain his dukedom: 'the word "acknowledge" implies self-discovery and revelation; it implies confession of guilt or acceptance of responsibility at some personal cost – specifically, here, for the darkness in one's own nature.'³²⁶ Paul Brown also suggests that otherwise clear-cut distinctions between spymaster and rebel may start to disintegrate at this particular juncture in the play: 'Prospero is in danger of becoming the other to the narrative declaration of his own project, which is precisely the ambivalent position Caliban occupies.'³²⁷

If Walsingham had had enough of the behaviour of any particular agent, he could simply drop that individual from his spy network. Not only is Prospero more limited in his choice of potential agents, he cannot ignore the affective bonds between himself and Caliban, bonds of which the monster is keenly aware when, earlier in the play, he reminds his master that 'You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse' (1.2.365-66). Prospero's acceptance of Caliban recalls instances like Marlowe being called before the Privy Council and rebuked for getting involved in the abortive coining episode in Flushing, or Walsingham's need to employ individuals of a thoroughly deceitful disposition such as Robert Poley. More broadly, Prospero's portentous phrase intimates the profound connection between spymasters' plans and agents' failures, one of the hard realities of espionage that Walsingham himself must have experienced on countless occasions. To be close to darkness was essential for all courtiers who aspired to the role of spymaster.

Conclusion

Walsingham's patronage of English maritime enterprise draws out parallels between that aspect of his political career and his work as Elizabeth's spymaster. In particular, attention was drawn to the crucial issue of mediated action performed at a distance and the importance that patronage played in both activities. Both these aspects of early-modern English court culture underscore the relationship between the

³²⁶ Lorie Jerrell Leininger, 'Cracking the code of *The Tempest*,' *Bucknell Review* 25 (1980), 127.

³²⁷ Brown, 'The *Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism,' 68.

dramatic spymaster Prospero and his magical agent Ariel, showing how both characters cooperate in order to ensure Prospero's return to power via various surveillance operations. This chapter also examined the relationship between Prospero and the rebel Caliban, who defects to a new patron and conspires against his former master. Despite Caliban's woeful failure in that enterprise, the play closes with Prospero begrudgingly accepting responsibility for his rogue agent, a decision that could parallel one made by spymasters in Elizabethan England.

4. Measure for Measure: manipulation in the space of the prison

‘In our remove be thou at full ourself’: the cultural complexity of the Duke’s motives

Duke Vincentio of *Measure for Measure* and spymaster Prospero of *The Tempest* share a number of character traits, the most conspicuous being that both were uninterested in taking a proactive role in affairs of state in the pre-history of their respective plays. Writing in 1949, G. Wilson Knight argued that the parallels between the two protagonists run deep, contending that both are empowered with a quasi-divine ability to compel other characters to behave in a morally virtuous manner:

The Duke, lord of this play in the exact sense that Prospero is lord of *The Tempest*, is the prophet of an enlightened ethic. He controls the action from start to finish, he allots, as it were, praise and blame, he is lit at moments with divine suggestion comparable with his almost divine power of fore-knowledge, and control, and wisdom.³²⁸

Few nowadays would concur with Knight’s view of *Measure for Measure*. The work of New Historicist and Cultural Materialist critics throughout the 1980s and 1990s put paid to the vision of a benevolent protagonist whose schemes are designed purely with the moral betterment of his subjects in mind, replacing that figure with a Duke whose Machiavellian cunning causes unnecessary angst for other characters.³²⁹ Despite, or perhaps because of, this process of critical revision, Knight’s work still retains some value, not because one might wish to argue for his point of view, but because, when read in opposition to more recent (and more sceptical) views of Shakespeare’s play, his writing allows one to develop a robust sense of what kind of figure the Duke of *Measure for Measure* is not. Peter Corbin outlines the case for this negative appraisal of Vincentio’s machinations:

³²⁸ G. Wilson Knight, ‘*Measure for Measure* and the Gospels’ in *The Wheel of Fire*, 4th edition (London: Methuen, 1949), 74.

³²⁹ Important pieces include: Marcia Riefer, ‘“Instruments of Some More Mightier Member”: The Constriction of Female Power in *Measure for Measure*,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.2 (1984), 157-69; Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Transgression and surveillance in *Measure for Measure*’ in *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985), 72-87; Anthony B. Dawson, ‘*Measure for Measure*, New Historicism, and Theatrical Power,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.3 (1988), 328-41; Laura Lungler Knoppers, ‘(En)gendering Shame: *Measure for Measure* and the Spectacles of Power,’ *English Literary Renaissance* 23.3 (1993), 450-71; Richard Wilson, ‘Prince of Darkness: Foucault’s Shakespeare’ in *Measure for Measure*, ed. Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open UP, 1996), 133-78.

Far from being a ‘power divine’ (5.1.370), he is an incompetent and reactive intriguer, continually frustrated by Angelo’s hypocritical severity. He fails to foresee or prepare for Angelo’s betrayal of the bargain struck over the bed trick and is reduced to seeking to persuade the incorrigible Barnardine to provide the substitute head for that of the executed Claudio.³³⁰

Instead of being a quasi-divine figure who effortlessly manoeuvres other characters around at will for their own moral benefit, Vincentio is a flawed individual who backs himself into a corner over his management of the plot to save Claudio’s life and is forced to rely on some spur-of-the-moment scheming in order to counter Angelo’s duplicity and Barnardine’s refusal to submit to his need for a head to substitute for that of Claudio. In terms of the ambit of this thesis more generally, this cynical analysis of the Duke’s behaviour elucidates further the idea that early-modern spies, both historical and dramatic, are usually forced to rework schemes on the run, instead of simply being on hand to supervise the implementation of a pre-determined plan.

William Hazlitt pre-empted recent late twentieth-century critics of the Duke when he too drew attention to the self-interested nature of the protagonist’s behaviour:

As to the Duke, who makes a very imposing and mysterious stage-character, he is more absorbed in his own plots and gravity than anxious for the welfare of the state; more tenacious of his own character than attentive to the feelings and apprehensions of others.³³¹

Writing a century and a half after Hazlitt, William Witherle Lawrence also observed that the Duke’s behaviour must be personally inflected because the protagonist could have chosen to abandon his disguise at a much earlier stage in the action of the play:

The Duke’s character cannot be estimated on a rationalistic basis. If he really wished to set matters right between Angelo, Isabella, Mariana, Claudio, and the rest, he had a short and easy way of doing it. He was in full possession of the facts; he could have revealed himself, brought all before the bar of his authority, freed the innocent and punished the guilty in short order, and this would have saved Isabella and Claudio much suffering.³³²

Clearly the play would end far too quickly if the disguised friar were to reveal himself sometime in Act 2, but Lawrence raises an important issue in pointing out that the Duke does not merely elect to go undercover at the beginning of the play but, more

³³⁰ Peter Corbin, ‘Performing *Measure for Measure*’ in *Measure for Measure*, ed. Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open UP, 1996), 29.

³³¹ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, Third Edition (London: John Templeman, 1838), 293-94.

³³² William Witherle Lawrence, *Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies*, 2nd edition (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960), 104.

problematically, decides to retain the use of his disguise until the closing moments of Act 5, despite the fact that Claudio and Isabella experience prolonged torment as a result of his decision.

In the sources that Shakespeare drew on when composing *Measure for Measure* the Duke-figure functions essentially as a *deus ex machina*, appearing towards the end of the narrative in order to hear the plight of the Isabella-figure, before overriding the sentences passed during the government of the corrupt deputy.³³³ By contrast, Shakespeare's Duke, disguised as a friar, goes undercover, weaving in and out of the various institutions of the city-state that he appears to have temporarily abandoned in order to micromanage the details of his scheme to defame Angelo. Shakespeare's Duke is indebted to early-modern spying culture, particularly in the way that he seeks to control intelligence about his scheme to defame Angelo.

Of the multitude of cultural referents that underscore critical interpretation of *Measure for Measure* two are particularly significant, namely the relationship between Shakespeare's playing company and England's new monarch, James I, and the dramatic inheritance of disguised ruler comedies from the Elizabethan period. This chapter seeks to add a third by advocating for the fundamental importance of early-modern spying to any interpretation of the play; this is not an optional extra, but a necessity for understanding why the Duke behaves as he does.

On 19 May 1603, a few months after his accession to the English throne, James I became patron of Shakespeare's playing company, which henceforth became known as the King's Men. David L. Stevenson outlines the case for the correlation between Duke Vincentio and England's new monarch:

As one of the principal directing members of this company, Shakespeare undoubtedly wished to foster its recently acquired royal sponsorship and to encourage, if possible, a direct personal attachment of the King for the royal players. Shakespeare, indeed, may even have felt under obligation to identify his first Jacobean comedy with the ideas of the new ruler. At any rate, I am convinced that he deliberately sketched in Duke Vincentio a character whose behavior as a ruler would be attractive to James (and therefore to a Jacobean audience) because it followed patterns which the King has publicly advocated.³³⁴

³³³ Extracts of the sources for Shakespeare's play are reprinted in *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever (London: Methuen, 1965), 151-200.

³³⁴ David L. Stevenson, 'The Role of James I in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*,' *ELH* 26.2 (1959), 189.

Following Stevenson's lead, Josephine Waters Bennett inferred that Shakespeare actively sought to incorporate precepts expressed in James's published work into his new play:

With Shakespeare as the Duke, his various styles of speech glance humorously at other plays he has written, and his principles of government can be borrowed out of the King's book without any danger of his seeming to impersonate the King. He is dramatizing the *Basilikon Doron*, making a play of it as William Willymat made a book of epigrams, and Henry Peacham a book of emblems out of it. He is the King's playwright, producing a play which exemplifies the highest ideals of justice and mercy which King James had prescribed for 'myself and mine.'³³⁵

James wrote *Basilikon Doron*, which translates from the Greek as 'Royal Gift,' in 1599 as a conduct book for his eldest son and heir, Henry, outlining his views on the qualities of a wise Christian monarch. Originally only seven copies were printed for private use but in early 1603, to counter attacks on the treatise by his opponents in the Scottish church, James revised the original text and had it republished in both Edinburgh and London, conveniently allowing readers in the English capital to glean intelligence about the political views of the King who was shortly to succeed Elizabeth as monarch. One of the problems that James addressed concerns the consequences of lax government of the sort that Duke Vincentio is facing:

For if otherwise ye kithe your clemency at the first, the offences would soon come to such heaps and the contempt of you grow so great that when ye would fall to punish, the number of them to be punished would exceed the innocent, and ye would be troubled to resolve whom at to begin and against your nature would be compelled then to wrack many whom the chastisement of few in the beginning might have preserved.³³⁶

James also commented on the inherently theatrical nature of the monarch's position in relation to his or her people:

It is a true old saying 'that a king is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures all the people gazingly do behold.' And therefore, although a king be never so precise in the discharging of his office, the people, who seeth but the outward part, will ever judge of the substance by the circumstances; and according to the outward appearance, if his behaviour be

³³⁵ Josephine Waters Bennett, *Measure for Measure as Royal Entertainment* (New York and London: Columbia UP, 1966), 148-49.

³³⁶ James I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies and Basilikon Doron: A modernized edition*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1996), 116. At this juncture the editors provide a footnote observing the similarity between James's text and Duke Vincentio's comments on his own leniency in *Measure for Measure* 1.3.19-31.

light or dissolute, will conceive preoccupied conceits of the king's inward intention.³³⁷

The precise relationship between James's published writings and *Measure for Measure* has, however, been a contentious issue and some scholars argue that such connections are merely circumstantial and do not provide sufficient evidence that Shakespeare explicitly sought to invoke his patron's views on matters of government. In his polemic against what he termed 'the King James version of *Measure for Measure*,' Richard Levin proposed that there is actually a better correlation between the style of government that Angelo enforces in practising the literal letter of the law and the ideals of absolutist monarchy that James espouses in *Basilikon Doron*:

We are thus faced with the embarrassing fact that, in a drama which was supposedly written to flatter the King by exemplifying the principles set forth in his book, the person who most clearly attempts to put this particular principle into practice is not the 'idealized image' of James at all but the villain of the piece.³³⁸

Yet, as Levin notes with a rhetorical sigh at the end of his essay, he does not expect his arguments to have any impact on those convinced of the robust link between King and play.³³⁹ A cursory review of scholarship on *Measure for Measure* since the publication of Levin's essay bears out the sceptic's foreboding, although this later work is in general more alert to the pitfalls of advocating such a methodology.³⁴⁰

In addition, Levin's argument is compromised when one takes into account what courtiers had to say about James in the early years of the seventeenth century. Writing in June 1602, the English diplomat Sir Henry Wotton noted that 'in the handling of affairs of state he is held to be one of the closest Princes in the world, but he does not settle even the smallest matters without counsel.'³⁴¹ Assuming that Wotton's account contains at least a modicum of truth, James was willing to take

³³⁷ James I, *Basilikon Doron*, 155.

³³⁸ Richard Levin, 'The King James Version of *Measure for Measure*,' *Clio* 3.2 (1974), 145.

³³⁹ Levin, 'The King James Version of *Measure for Measure*,' 160.

³⁴⁰ Terrell L. Tebbetts, 'Talking Back to the King: *Measure for Measure* and the *Basilikon Doron*,' *College Literature* 12.2 (1985), 122-34; Craig A. Bernthal, 'Staging Justice: James I and the Trial Scenes of *Measure for Measure*,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32.2 (1992), 247-69; Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995), 50-70; Carolyn E. Brown, 'Duke Vincentio of *Measure for Measure* and King James I of England: "The Poorest Princes in Christendom",' *Clio* 26.1 (1996), 51-78. Most recently, Kevin A. Quarmby has argued that the Duke-as-James theory is an anachronism that emerged during the mid-eighteenth century, the work of Whig historians who sought to contrast their own constitutional monarchy with James's views on divine right kingship; see *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 117-30.

³⁴¹ Quoted in *James I by his Contemporaries: An account of his career and character as seen by some of his contemporaries*, ed. Robert Ashton (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 4.

advice from trusted counsellors but also perceived the value of retaining discretionary judgement, much as Vincentio does in keeping his scheme to himself until the closing moments of *Measure for Measure*. In 1607, the year after the failed Gunpowder Plot, the Venetian ambassador Nicolo Mollin remarked on James's aversion to displaying his person in public:

He does not caress the people nor make them that good cheer the late Queen did, whereby she won their loves: for the English adore their Sovereigns, and if the King passed through the same street a hundred times a day the people would still run to see him; they like their King to show pleasure at their devotion, as the late Queen knew well how to do; but this King manifests no taste for them but rather contempt and dislike.³⁴²

Mollin, who described James as 'a bitter enemy of our [Catholic] religion,' is certainly not an impartial witness.³⁴³ Even so, his opinion on the matter of James's dislike for public display can be substantiated on the grounds that many others who commented on this issue, whether English or foreigner, held a similar view.³⁴⁴ It is therefore reasonable to assume that Shakespeare himself was aware of such character traits in his patron, even if he did not actively seek to create a mirror image of James through Duke Vincentio.

Attempts to source Duke Vincentio's methods of government in the writings of James I may simply reflect a broader notion that all people in such positions, whether dramatic or historical, experience similar predicaments. James's use of quotation marks in his discussion of the monarch's theatricality does not indicate citation from a specific source but instead refers to an idea from time immemorial, or, as he describes it, 'a true old saying.' There is a middle course between the polar attitudes of critics insisting on a special relationship between King and play and those dismissing such a notion as wishful thinking. Shakespeare may not have written a stage version of *Basilikon Doron* but London theatregoers would certainly have been alive to the theme of good governance in the period following a change of monarch. When Vincentio hands over power to Angelo he does not tell the deputy how he ought to govern. Although Angelo's personality ensures that the course taken is that of enforcing the letter of the law whilst abusing his power in order to gain access to Isabella's body, Shakespeare more broadly allows the events of the play to function as a kind of debate about fair government. This idea underscores Vincentio's return at

³⁴² Quoted in *James I by his Contemporaries*, ed. Ashton, 10.

³⁴³ Quoted in *James I by his Contemporaries*, ed. Ashton, 9.

³⁴⁴ See Ashton's comment on this matter in *James I by his Contemporaries*, ed. Ashton, 8.

the end of the play to mete out justice: although not every character seems content with his or her lot, at least all have been relieved of Angelo's comparatively harsher rule.

Only one relevant fact is known for certain about the link between monarch and play, that on St Stephen's Night (December 26) 1604, a performance of *Measure for Measure* was given by the King's Men in the Great Hall at Whitehall before the English court.³⁴⁵ Yet, as N. W. Bawcutt notes, this event in itself provides slim evidence that James saw anything special in the play, particularly when one takes into consideration that a few months later the King commanded a repeat performance of *The Merchant of Venice* (written sometime between 1596 and 1598), but did not do so in the case of *Measure for Measure*.³⁴⁶ In the absence of further information this suggests that James valued his players because they provided him with diverting entertainments, rather than because he relished the opportunity of being presented with more advice about how to govern his realm. James I and Vincentio do, however, share two significant character traits. Like Shakespeare's Duke, the King himself was particularly sensitive to the issue of slander:

An act of 1585 by the Scottish parliament made it treason to slander the king, and in 1596 a second act extended the offence to cover remarks made about the king's parents and ancestors. There were at least three executions in Scotland under the provisions of these acts, and James asked Burghley to punish Edmund Spenser for his portrayal of Mary Queen of Scots in *The Faerie Queene*, 5.9.38-50.³⁴⁷

Secondly, and despite readily acknowledging in *Basilikon Doron* that the monarch, by virtue of his or her position in society, was inevitably and constantly open to public view, James had a strong dislike of crowds, a situation that was not improved when throngs of Londoners pressed into the streets clamouring for a view of their new king when he made his first official entry into the English capital the year before *Measure for Measure* was first staged.³⁴⁸ This could in part explain why James often elected to spend his time hunting in the countryside rather than governing from London,

³⁴⁵ See 'Appendix A: Theatrical Calendar of the King's Men at Court, 1603-14' in Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright*, 205. John Wasson has argued that the extant Folio version of *Measure for Measure* records a text for performance at court; see 'Measure for Measure: A Text for Court Performance?' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21.1 (1970), 17-24. However, it is probable that the play was first performed at the open-air Globe, and then adapted and taken to court once the actors had had time to perfect their performances; see Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright*, xvii.

³⁴⁶ *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 6.

³⁴⁷ *Measure for Measure*, ed. Bawcutt, 4-5.

³⁴⁸ Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright*, 63-64.

although other issues such as the presence of the plague in the capital cannot be discounted.³⁴⁹ In addition, James had received a first-rate education and his numerous publications on matters both political and religious attest to a life-long interest in, and deep engagement with, such issues.³⁵⁰ This interest, however, does seem to have been more academic than practical, suggesting a desire to live an existence removed from worldly pressures that James has in common with both Vincentio and Prospero. But whereas James absented himself from London in order to escape political matters, Vincentio feigns leaving Vienna precisely because he wants to regain a firm hand on his control of his subjects, resorting to the underhand practice of employing a corrupt deputy as a decoy in order to succeed in this mission.³⁵¹

In a recent monograph, Kevin A. Quarmby argues for the impact of earlier disguised ruler plays on Shakespearean drama, concluding that ‘Shakespeare obviously expected his audience to recognize the romantic heritage preceding the Duke’s friar’s disguise. James’s accession, in this instance, seems of no consequence whatsoever.’³⁵² To substantiate this claim with reference to the text of *Measure for Measure* itself, Quarmby points to a meta-theatrical moment in 1.3, which opens with the Duke replying to a friar’s enquiry about whether the fallout from a romantic experience has forced him to seek refuge in the monastery:

No, holy father, throw away that thought.
Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
Can pierce a complete bosom. Why I desire thee
To give me secret harbour hath a purpose
More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends
Of burning youth. (1.3.1-6)

Nowadays the Duke’s emphatic denial might well come across as feeble protest in spite of the obvious. However, as Quarmby contends, at this particular juncture Shakespeare anticipates and then forestalls his early seventeenth-century audiences’

³⁴⁹ Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King’s Playwright*, 107-08.

³⁵⁰ Jenny Wormald, ‘James VI and I (1566–1625),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, May 2011
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14592>, accessed 19 Aug 2013].

³⁵¹ According to legend, the King’s grandfather, James V of Scotland, liked to wander amongst his people incognito. However, this snippet of information stems from the writings of the Scottish reformers John Knox and George Buchanan, who, after his death, sought to present James V as a weak monarch under the influence of a morally corrupt clergy. The assertions made by Knox and Buchanan should probably be viewed with caution and in any case provide no indication that the younger James also liked to engage in such behaviour. See Andrea Thomas, ‘James V (1512–1542),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14591>, accessed 19 Aug 2013].

³⁵² Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 111.

expectations that they will shortly be settling into another familiar narrative that revolves around the protagonist's romantic problems:

For Friar Thomas, and the play's first audiences, such a mistake is natural, especially since youthful desire 'burning' in a statesman's heart traditionally gives rise to those convoluted romance narratives that finally resolve themselves in self-enlightenment and a safe return to power.³⁵³

Extending Quarmby's argument, the protagonist is being serious not just with the Friar but also with those watching the play, momentarily taking on a choral role in order to advise the audience explicitly that they ought to expect the unexpected. At the close of the scene Vincentio declares, 'Hence shall we see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be' (53-54). Quite simply, the Duke does not know exactly what will happen when Angelo is granted authority to govern Vienna as he sees fit. Along with *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure* is sometimes typecast as a 'problem play' on account of its incongruous blend of bawdy comedy and narrowly averted tragedy, topped off with a set of marriages that leave a number of characters doomed to an unhappy existence in the afterlife of the drama.³⁵⁴ *Measure for Measure* might also have seemed problematic for its first audiences, not necessarily on account of its generic complexity but, more straightforwardly, because it is hard to follow the Duke's scheming with any confidence that one really knows what he is doing.

Despite its current status as one of the more regularly performed plays by Shakespeare, many of the ethical considerations that arise during the course of *Measure for Measure* are alien to present-day audiences, particularly the issue of whether a man ought to be condemned to death because his partner became pregnant before they had completed the full legal requirements of their marriage.³⁵⁵ Yet, as Leah S. Marcus has shown, the subject of sexual lawmaking was a hot topic in Jacobean England and provides common ground between the historical London of 1604 and the fictional Vienna of *Measure for Measure*:

³⁵³ Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, 106.

³⁵⁴ Some critics argue that other plays by Shakespeare can also be styled in this vein but in any case there is general consensus that these three at least sit within the 'problem play' category. For two recent studies see: David Margolies, *Shakespeare's Irrational Endings: The Problem Plays* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 56-85; E. L. Ridsden, *Shakespeare and the Problem Play: Complex Forms, Crossed Genres and Moral Quandries* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 90-112.

³⁵⁵ For an analysis of the various social and legal complexities pertaining to marriage in early-modern England in the context of *Measure for Measure* see Alberto Cacicedo, ' "She is fast my wife": Sex, Marriage, and Ducal Authority in *Measure for Measure*, ' *Shakespeare Studies* 23 (1995), 187-209.

The chief area of jurisprudential conflict in the ‘Vienna’ of *Measure for Measure* is the matter of sexual incontinence – how it is to be defined and how it should be punished. The same matter was also a well-known battle ground between competing legal systems in the London of 1604 . . . If the tolerance for exceptions was not complicated enough, there was also the problem that canon law itself had just altered. As a result of the Hampton Court Conference between James I, key bishops, and selected Puritan divines, a new canon revising the definition of lawful marriage took effect in 1604, the same year as *Measure for Measure*.³⁵⁶

Robert N. Watson has also shown that the question of how a ruler ought to control the sexual behaviour of the Viennese population permeates the action of the play:

Measure for Measure comes closer than any other Shakespeare play to having a schematic, articulable moral. Its primary topic is sexuality, and its primary argument is that neither individuals nor societies can thrive unless license and repression keep each other in balance. Naturally critics are reluctant to admit that sexual morality is what the play is about, because that is what it seems to be about. But in this case it may pay to surrender our ingenuity in the face of the obvious.³⁵⁷

By contrast, earlier critics were often inclined to express disdain for the overt sexuality of the play. George C. D. Odell, for example, railed against ‘the offensive underworld matter of bawds and pandars and gentlemen of loose living’ and praised those eighteenth-century adaptors of Shakespeare who rewrote the text of the play so as to minimise such elements.³⁵⁸ However, this ‘underworld matter’ was an essential fact of the London liberty of Southwark and thus the line between a patron’s experience of *Measure for Measure* at the Globe and possible sexual encounters in neighbouring establishments could well have seemed indistinct.

This chapter seeks to explain the spying intrigues of *Measure for Measure* against the background of this fictional Southwark-Viennese sexuality, arguing that the Duke temporarily abandons his government of the city and takes up disguise as a friar in order to avoid being personally implicated in the apparent degeneration of sexual morals over which he presided for many years. The Duke creates a decoy for his own suspect governing through the figure of the puritanical Angelo and, by prying into Angelo’s character, can undermine the deputy’s temporary government and hence enforce his own status as the morally legitimate ruler of Vienna. However, the

³⁵⁶ Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 171-72.

³⁵⁷ Robert N. Watson, ‘False Immortality in *Measure for Measure*: Comic Means, Tragic Ends,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.4 (1990), 412.

³⁵⁸ George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare: from Betterton to Irving* (1920; New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1963), vol. II, 23.

Duke also has to deal with the gossip Lucio, whose presence threatens to undermine the Duke's return to power. It does not matter whether the intelligence that Lucio claims to have about the Duke's sex life has any basis in fact or if Lucio's threats to speak out on this issue represent nothing more than idle bluff. From the Duke's point of view, it is absolutely critical that Lucio is not allowed to broadcast this intelligence to the Viennese population because that would undermine the Duke's return to power, especially given that he uses similar strategies to entrap Angelo.

The remit for governance that Vincentio bestows on Angelo prior to his supposed departure from Vienna is broad-based. Most significantly, it seeks to dissolve boundaries between the abstract entity of the law and the way that Angelo might interpret those rules during his tenure in office:

In our remove be thou at full ourself.
Mortality and mercy in Vienna
Live in thy tongue and heart. (1.1.43-45)

The Duke's proclamation sets in train two parallel moral codes that come into conflict when Angelo's aspiration to uphold the letter of the law becomes compromised by his desire for sexual union with Isabella. On the one hand, Angelo is fully entitled to pass sentence of death through verbal decree, but on the other he is advised to show compassion when dealing with any unfortunate individual who comes before the bar of his authority and deserves to be treated with clemency instead of severity. Notably, the Duke does not inform either Escalus or Angelo why he is leaving, brushing aside the deputy's plea that 'there be some more test made of my metal' (1.1.48) and hurrying away as soon as the formal handover of government has concluded, signified by the hand-fasting of Vincentio and Angelo at line 66. Kate Chedgzoy observes that the manner in which the opening scene is staged is crucial for setting up any given production's take on the links between authority and surveillance of those who hold public office:

The question of whether this opening scene involves a low-key transaction of business in the Duke's private closet, or a public ceremonial for the ostentatious handover of power, is not just relevant to deciding how the scene should be staged, but has implications for the whole question of how power is exercised in Vienna.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ Kate Chedgzoy, *William Shakespeare: Measure for Measure* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2000), 8-9.

Although this scene opens with the stage direction ‘*Enter the Duke, Escalus, and other lords,*’ which would seem to indicate the presence of a retinue of several non-speaking characters, only one lord is required in order to carry out the Duke’s command, ‘I say bid come before us, Angelo’ (1.1.15). Furthermore, the Duke’s assertion that ‘I love the people, / But do not like to stage me to their eyes’ (67-68) argues for a minimum of ceremony and hence a minimum of additional characters. If a director is prepared to overlook the first stage direction, confining the opening scene to a hushed conference between the Duke, Escalus, Angelo and a single functionary lord creates a secretive atmosphere that sets the tone for the Duke’s spying activities throughout the play.

‘Here in the prison’: the Duke’s work in ‘dark corners’

Prior to his very public entry into Vienna in his own persona at the beginning of Act 5 most of the Duke’s work as an undercover agent takes place in the prison in which Claudio is incarcerated. The sole exception to this is when Vincentio visits Mariana in 4.1, an exercise that is directly connected with his scheme to catch out Angelo by drawing on intelligence about the sexual history of the corrupt deputy. In effect, the Duke plants himself in prison as a stool pigeon, harnessing his position in order to gather intelligence about other prisoners and their families, sow misinformation, and ultimately pull together the various threads of his scheme to bring about Angelo’s political downfall. Yet the disguised Duke is not in the pay of a courtier and has no superior to whom he must report. Even the Friar who appears in 1.3 is a mere accessory who is useful primarily because he can provide Vincentio with a monk’s habit, although the fact that the Duke tells him of the scheme to defame Angelo may indicate that Vincentio does feel some level of guilt about his decision to engage in deceptive behaviour.

In terms of the kind of operatives represented onstage, there is a fundamental difference between *Measure for Measure* and the two plays already examined in detail in this thesis. Whereas Don John relies on his secretary Borachio to mastermind the scheme to defame Hero, and Prospero cannot put his plot into practice without the help of his magical agent Ariel, Vincentio plans and executes the mission to entrap Angelo and ensure his own return to power all by himself. Essentially, the protagonist’s machinations are a one-man effort, Vincentio functioning as courtier,

secretary and agent rolled into one. At one level, this melding of the tripartite structure of personnel commonly employed in espionage networks in early-modern England could explain the Duke's ultimate success, as those inter-personal relationships that so often proved to be the cause of friction between agents on the ground on the one hand, and secretaries and courtiers on the other, simply cease to exist. However, the Duke still mismanages or fails to anticipate a number of important factors that affect his scheme to defame Angelo, which suggests that problems of this nature never disappear, but in this case are simply reduced to being the fault or responsibility of one individual instead of several.

The Duke chooses to carry out his scheme in the prison because there he can gain access to vulnerable individuals – both prisoners and members of their family – who are in desperate need of emotional support and spiritual comfort, and hence are easy to manipulate. Adopting the guise of a friar not only gives Vincentio access to the physical space of the prison but also provides him with a unique cover for his machinations because one would expect that someone holding such an office would behave in a morally virtuous manner as a matter of course. It is precisely this gambit that Vincentio employs when he requests leave of the Provost to enter the prison:

Bound by my charity and my blest order,
I come to visit the afflicted spirits
Here in the prison. Do me the common right
To let me see them, and to make me know
The nature of their crimes, that I may minister
To them accordingly. (2.3.3-8)

The Provost, eager to make use of charity when it comes knocking, needs no convincing that this friar ought to be granted entry to the prison. Even before the disguised Duke has actually passed over the threshold of the main door he is seeking out information about the inmates, ostensibly to carry out his duties as confessor. However, such intelligence also allows him to build a broader picture of the society within the prison, an important first step for anyone determined to work as a stool pigeon. The historian Alan Haynes proposes that the particular disguise Vincentio assumes allows him to gain exceptionally good access to the minds of other characters, especially those undergoing spiritual trauma:

In *Measure for Measure* the Duke is more than a mere spy; he is the impresario of the whole plot, unique in the disguise he adopts. He sets aside one mantle of authority for another which allows him the ultimate triumph of the spy – reaching the inner recesses of souls.³⁶⁰

Haynes's evaluation suggests some useful correlations between the Duke's actions and the behaviour of spies in Elizabethan England. It calls to mind episodes such as Robert Poley's success in ingratiating himself in the confidence of Anthony Babington, despite the latter's lingering suspicions that the man he termed 'sweet Robin' could actually have been an agent in Walsingham's employ (see Introduction, p. 22). Having worked as a stool pigeon in various London prisons, Poley certainly understood the value of being able to read other people's emotional weak points before exploiting them in order to gain intelligence about any plots that such individuals might be in the process of hatching. Duke Vincentio employs a similar strategy when dealing with other characters in *Measure for Measure*, first gathering information that allows him to assess their fears and desires before harnessing that intelligence in order to manipulate them into subservience.

Some of the Duke's behaviour in the prison seems unjustified: on a number of occasions he manipulates other characters simply to gratify his own curiosity about how far he can go in bending them to his will. His first action upon entering the prison is to admonish Juliet for becoming pregnant prior to the completion of her martial union with Claudio:

I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,
And try your penitence if it be sound
Or hollowly put on. (2.3.22-24)

However, Vincentio's timing is nothing short of cruel. In the previous scene the Provost states that the 'groaning Juliet' is 'very near her hour' (2.2.15-16) and, when he brings the young woman before the Duke, the Provost also informs her 'I have provided for you. Stay a while, / And you shall be conducted' (2.3.18-19). Juliet is yet to give birth and thus it follows that the Duke is procuring repentance from a woman who is in labour. The Duke seems incapable of comprehending that there is a right time and place for everything, or, worse still, is fully aware of the harsh nature of his behaviour but persists with it anyway. Furthermore, Vincentio also seems as misguided as Angelo if he really is intent on extracting confession of sin from a

³⁶⁰ Alan Haynes, *The Elizabethan Secret Services* (1992; Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2009), 187.

woman whose pregnancy resulted from ‘most mutual entertainment’ (1.2.142) with her husband-to-be, instead of targeting those individuals who manage Vienna’s brothels. The Duke wastes no time in proceeding to admonish others for their supposedly immoral behaviour, and, by presenting himself as one empowered to make judgements about other people’s conduct, draws attention away from the fact that he is himself engaging in devious behaviour. Furthermore, Vincentio’s deceit is doubly reprehensible because he masquerades as one whose adopted office requires of him a sensitivity to human suffering to which he pays little attention, so absorbed is he in indulging his own need to exercise power over a vulnerable individual, instead of helping Juliet prepare for the birth of her baby, or at least waiting for a more suitable opportunity before probing her for confession.

Vincentio safeguards his work as an undercover agent by deploying a multitude of untruths about his temporary absence from Vienna, some of which take the form of epistolary decoys and some of which stem from the mouth of the disguised Duke himself. The function of these lies is to ensure that other characters are fully convinced he has quit the city. In addition, the Duke leads others to believe he has travelled hundreds of miles abroad and therefore is not capable of returning to Vienna on the quiet, let alone being able to penetrate the space of the prison in disguise. The first occasion on which such misinformation surfaces is during the Duke’s expository discussion with Friar Peter: Vincentio declares that Angelo ‘supposes me travelled to Poland – / For so I have strewed it in the common ear, / And so it is received’ (1.3.14-16). Later, Lucio provides a different assessment of the gossip about the Duke currently circulating Vienna: ‘Some say he is with the Emperor of Russia; other some, he is in Rome’ (3.1.354-55). Later still the disguised Duke informs Escalus that the Pope has detailed him for a special mission in Vienna:

I am a brother
Of gracious order, late come from the See
In special business from his Holiness. (3.1.476-78)

Lastly, prior to his supposed return to Vienna the Duke sends a barrage of conflicting missives to the deputy and his secondary, the former of whom begins to suspect that Vincentio may have had a nervous breakdown:

ESCALUS Every letter he hath writ hath disvouched other.
ANGELO In most uneven and distracted manner. His actions show much
 like to madness. Pray heaven his wisdom be not tainted. (4.4.1-4)

Angelo and Escalus do not know what to think, yet this is precisely the effect that Vincentio is hoping to create. Like Hamlet, the Duke may well be feigning an ‘antic disposition’ in order to convince other characters that he has gone mad. As Alan Stewart has shown, Shakespeare frequently makes use of contradictory communiqués in order to create a sense of confusion amongst the recipients of such documents:

Shakespeare uses these letters with a sophisticated twist, which usually tends to undermine stability. News letters come thick and fast, often in groups of three, carrying news that changes by the minute, or intelligence reports that contradict each other.³⁶¹

To some extent the precise substance of all these contradictory scraps of intelligence about the Duke’s whereabouts is immaterial. What is important is that all those living in Vienna are left utterly confused about what to make of Vincentio’s present whereabouts; even the deputy Angelo seems to know only as much as the man-about-town Lucio. The Duke’s success in creating a sense of bewilderment amongst other characters is an integral part of his work as a stool pigeon because it allows him to carry out his operations in the prison without anyone suspecting the friar figure of foul play.

Despite his skill in deploying misinformation relating to his supposed absence from Vienna, the Duke has a far harder time of things as he proceeds to implement his various schemes in the prison. Even his own officers of state unwittingly create bumps in the road in their earnestness to ensure that they are carrying out their duties in a responsible manner. When the disguised Duke asks the Provost to have Barnardine executed and the prisoner’s head taken to Angelo, the Provost first protests ‘Angelo hath seen them both, and will discover the favour’ (4.2.173-74) and then declares courteously that the remit of his office does not permit him to overstep the bounds of his authority in such a fashion: ‘Pardon me, good father, it is against my oath’ (182). As a result of the Provost’s integrity, Vincentio is forced to play a trump card, revealing that he is in possession of a letter stamped with the Duke’s seal of state:

Yet since I see you fearful, that neither my coat, integrity, nor persuasion can with ease attempt you, I will go further than I meant, to pluck all fears out of you. (*Showing a letter*) Look you, sir, here is the hand and seal of the Duke. You know the character, I doubt not, and the signet is not strange to you?

(4.2.188-94)

³⁶¹ Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare’s Letters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 20.

At one level the Duke must be pleased to see that the Provost is carrying out the duties of his office with such diligence. However, the Provost's scepticism momentarily forces Vincentio onto the back foot, necessitating some quick thinking before this rigorous official thwarts his plan. This episode also creates another problem for Vincentio as it raises the question of why this friar is in possession of such an important document and, furthermore, why the absent Duke would entrust such a dispatch to a person whose primary office is to minister to people's souls, instead of directing state-sanctioned executions. More bluntly, it would not take much for the Provost to reconsider the present situation with a sceptical eye and come to the conclusion that this hooded figure might indeed be the absent Duke. Thankfully for Vincentio, the Provost does not think to raise such questions and is happy to accede to the Duke's demand for Barnardine's head.

Yet Barnardine refuses to play along and, given that the fundamental objective for any stool pigeon is to manipulate other prisoners into compromising positions, the disguised Duke fails spectacularly in his bid to bend the impenitent murderer to his will. For Harold Bloom, Barnardine functions as the moral centrepiece of the degenerate Vienna represented in *Measure for Measure*, despite being a minor character who only speaks seven times in a single scene:

The idea of order in Vincentio's Vienna ultimately is an idea of death; Barnardine, refusing all order, declines to die, and Shakespeare seconds Barnardine, when he has the Duke finally pardon this confessed murderer.³⁶²

It transpires that Barnardine has been kept in indefinite detention for the past nine years; Vincentio himself seems simply to have forgotten about this wretched prisoner, whose case only reappeared on the political radar once the efficient and task-orientated Angelo took office. Yet, in conversation with the Provost, the disguised Duke asserts that his own method of government was in fact as diligent at producing results as that of the deputy:

³⁶² Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 375.

DUKE How came it that the absent Duke had not either delivered him to his liberty or executed him? I have heard it was ever his manner to do so.
 PROVOST His friends still wrought reprieves for him; and indeed his fact, til now in the government of Lord Angelo, came not to an undoubtful proof.
 DUKE It is now apparent?
 PROVOST Most manifest, and not denied by himself.

(4.2.134-41)

Once again, the Duke's assertions are lies. Vincentio simply did not care to apply himself to the everyday work of government and thus it is a nasty shock to find that the case of Barnardine has resurfaced during the Duke's supposed absence from Vienna.

As Kaori Ashizu has shown, Barnardine plays a vital role, albeit unintentionally so, in exposing Vincentio's incompetence as ruler:

Everything we learn about Barnardine bears significantly on that problem of how to regard the Duke. Whatever Barnardine says, does, does not say, does not do, and also what we learn of his previous history, reflects adversely on the Duke.³⁶³

Barnardine is the embodiment of all that was and is wrong with Vincentio's style of management, be that overtly in his office as governor of Vienna or covertly as he wanders the space of the prison disguised as a friar. That does not stop the disguised Duke from proceeding with his machinations; if anything, it makes him even more determined to accelerate the processes that will lead to Barnardine's execution and thus supply a head to substitute for that of Claudio. The exchange between the disguised Duke and the unrepentant prisoner, in all its glorious brevity, runs thus:

DUKE Sir, induced by my charity, and hearing how hastily you are to depart, I am come to advise you, comfort you, and pray with you.
 BARNARDINE Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.
 DUKE
 O sir, you must; and therefore, I beseech you,
 Look forward on the journey you shall go.
 BARNARDINE I swear I will not die today, for any man's persuasion.
 DUKE But hear you –
 BARNARDINE Not a word. If you have anything to say to me, come to my ward, for thence will not I today.

(4.3.47-60)

³⁶³ Kaori Ashizu, ' "Pardon Me?" – Judging Barnardine's Judge,' *English Studies* 78.5 (1997), 418.

Not only does Barnardine openly defy the friar's entreaty to prepare himself for death, he remains adamant that his vision of fate is the one that will prevail over all others, regardless of whether or not he is being addressed by his spiritual superior. Like the Provost, Barnardine gives no indication that he is able to see through the Duke's disguise. For a brief but ludicrous moment, an even blacker form of carnival enters the world of *Measure for Measure*: Barnardine inverts his lowly status with that of the Duke, demanding that Vincentio visit him in state in his prison cell if he has any case to plead. Nearly a decade in prison has transformed Barnardine into a being who is 'insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal' (4.2.146-47): nothing matters to him any more, save access to copious quantities of alcohol and time alone to stare down a future devoid of any possibility of spiritual regeneration. The Duke himself must bear responsibility for Barnardine's mental state as the prisoner has become convinced by experience that he will never be executed.

The net result of Barnardine's obstinacy is to encourage an angry Vincentio to pursue a course of action that causes even more trauma for poor Isabella. Bloom argues that Barnardine's refusal to be manipulated has the direct result of encouraging the Duke to play a particularly depraved game with the young woman's already fraught emotions:

The moral comedy of this comedy is Shakespeare's riposte to anyone in the audience capable of being taken in by Vincentio. It is after we have absorbed Barnardine's dissent that Shakespeare has the Duke-Friar descend to the sadistic degradation of lying to Isabella that her brother has been executed.³⁶⁴

At one level the Duke's behaviour in response to Barnardine's indifference to life is simply a knee-jerk reaction to a problem that he did not suppose would arise. However, Vincentio's pre-emptive move against Isabella is particularly merciless, even for one as accomplished as he is in manipulating other characters' impressions of the world:

DUKE
 Good morning to you, fair and gracious daughter.
ISABELLA
 The better, given me by so holy a man.
 Hath yet the deputy sent my brother's pardon?
DUKE
 He hath released him, Isabel, from the world.
 His head is off and sent to Angelo.
ISABELLA

³⁶⁴ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 379.

Why is the Duke so determined to execute Barnardine a few hours earlier, if he really finds Barnardine in such a mental state as this? – Because the Duke’s scheme depends upon having Barnardine’s head now. Only after betraying such a coercive aspect of the Duke, Shakespeare lets the Provost introduce the timely news of Ragusine’s head.³⁶⁵

Apart from demonstrating just how demanding and self-interested Vincentio has become as the play reaches this specific crisis, the episode also threatens to expose the disguised Duke because it raises the additional question of why the friar would change his mind so quickly about whether or not Barnardine is prepared for death. In this instance the reductive answer – that Barnardine’s life is of no consequence compared with the Duke’s scheme to find a suitable head – is most convincing as it best demonstrates the degree to which Vincentio cares only about how others can be of use to him, instead of living up to his assumed persona as the friar and attending to others’ spiritual needs in a sensitive and selfless fashion. In the final scene of the play the Duke pardons Barnardine, declaring:

Thou’rt condemned;
But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all,
And pray thee take this mercy to provide
For better times to come. (5.1.481-84)

In effect, Vincentio’s sudden show of clemency is a tacit admission of the guilt he bears for leaving Barnardine to rot away in prison for nine years instead of deciding whether the criminal deserved to live or die. Yet this also suits the Duke’s strategy of manipulating other characters for his own ends: Barnardine is no longer of use because a head could be procured as a result of Ragusine’s convenient demise and thus the felon may as well live, regardless of whether he still poses a threat to public safety in Vienna. In sum, the episode with Barnardine, although brief, demonstrates the degree to which agents such as Vincentio are dependent on people, place, events and time coalescing in a suitable fashion; if these disparate elements cannot be combined successfully the spy becomes threatened with exposure.

Lastly, there is the curious case of how the Duke came to know of Angelo’s broken-off engagement to Mariana. It is not until halfway through Act Three that Vincentio informs Isabella – as Shakespeare does his audience – that he has intelligence about Angelo’s abandonment of Mariana in the pre-history of the play. However, it is impossible to ascertain exactly how or when the Duke came by this

³⁶⁵ Ashizu, ‘Judging Barnardine’s Judge,’ 422.

information, rendering the critic like one of those characters in the play who are forced to take Vincentio's intelligence on trust. Isabella's avowal, 'I have heard of the lady, and good words went with her name' (3.1.213-14), suggests that the average citizen of Vienna does know something about Mariana's place in society. However, the novice's response to the Duke's intelligence, 'Can this be so? Did Angelo so leave her?' (226), indicates genuine surprise that anyone could treat Mariana in such a fashion, although Isabella should by now have learned to be far more sceptical of the deputy's character. Another oddity is that the Duke, despite having no qualms about reprimanding Juliet while she is in labour, seems uncomfortable, even embarrassed, when it comes to informing Mariana about the bedtrick he is plotting, leaving it to Isabella to convey such intelligence to her:

DUKE (*addressing Isabella*)
 I have not yet made known to Mariana
 A word of this. – What ho, within! Come forth!
Enter Mariana
 (*To Mariana*) I pray you be acquainted with this maid.
 She comes to do you good. (4.1.48-51)

In a charitable sense, perhaps the Duke is hoping to give Isabella some level of control in her revenge on Angelo. Alternatively, Vincentio may well be employing Isabella to undertake a task that he finds to be distasteful. Louise Schleiner contends that Mariana effectively becomes a prostitute for the Duke's scheme:

The redemptive substitution here suffers a radical diminution. If the Duke playing God the tester seems a moral usurer, if Angelo playing God the judge sounds tyrannous (even before his lust), the Duke and Isabella soliciting Mariana to play Christ the substitute victim gives off a whiff of procurement.³⁶⁶

To extend Schleiner's argument with reference to the general argument of this chapter, Vincentio needs a figure like Mariana in order to carry out his scheme to undermine Angelo's political credibility by drawing on the deputy's sexual history. At the same time, the Duke needs to be seen to have as little as possible to do with Mariana herself so that other characters do not start to ask questions about why he opts for this method of sexual blackmail: to do so could well raise questions about the Duke's disinterested style of government and the responsibility he bears for the continuing existence of Vienna's brothels. To this end, Isabella is of particular convenience because the Duke can rely on the probability that her all-consuming

³⁶⁶ Louise Schleiner, 'Providential Improvisation in *Measure for Measure*,' *PMLA* 97.2 (1982), 232.

desire for revenge makes it unlikely that she will start questioning his motives. By contrast, Lucio remains an ever-present threat to the Duke because he refuses to be distracted by misinformation or otherwise influenced by Vincentio's manipulation of given situations. Lucio's insistence on commenting at length on the sexual predilections of the supposedly absent Duke proves a real source of worry for Vincentio, and it is to the nuances of the relationship between these two characters that this chapter now turns.

'Dark deeds darkly answered': Lucio's role as counter-spy

Lucio, described in the *Dramatis Personae* of the 1623 Folio as 'a fantastic,' provides much needed comic relief from the general gloom of *Measure for Measure*. J. W. Lever describes his role as 'extremely heterogeneous': 'he is jester, butt, and intermediary, a cold-blooded lecher, and a kindly, sympathetic friend to both Isabella and Claudio.'³⁶⁷ Lucio also dogs the disguised Duke as a kind of counter-spy throughout the play and proves to be of significant concern for Vincentio because he claims to have come by unsavoury intelligence about Vincentio's sex life that could undermine the disguised Duke's covert bid to reassert his authority in Vienna. Given that Shakespeare never provides Lucio with a soliloquy or other dramatic device by which the character can confirm or deny the veracity of his allegations, it is not possible to ascertain whether Lucio's claims have any degree of accuracy or are instead misleading statements planted in order to call the disguised Duke's bluff. By contrast, figures such as Richard Gloucester in *Richard III* and Edmund in *King Lear* reveal their malevolent intentions via soliloquy early in the play and thus, while other characters may be deceived by the villains' rhetoric and behaviour, it is clear to the audience that Richard and Edmund have compelling motives for manipulating other characters, regardless of whether or not one empathises with their disaffected visions of the world.

The preceding section of this chapter argued that the disguised Duke operates as an agent, secretary and courtier rolled into one. Lucio, on the other hand, is from that class of people who might occasionally be able to gain employment as an agent on the ground, but would never be able to rise to the office of secretary or courtier.

³⁶⁷ *Measure for Measure*, ed. Lever, xcvi.

Lucio's first entrance, during which he appears onstage in discussion with two other gentlemen about the war currently raging between the King of Hungary and a collective of other dukes in central Europe that includes Vincentio, suggests he takes a keen interest in military matters:

LUCIO If the Duke with the other dukes come not to composition with the
King of Hungary, why then, all the dukes fall upon the King.
FIRST GENTLEMAN Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of
Hungary's!
SECOND GENTLEMAN Amen.

(1.2.1-6)

The text of *Measure for Measure* provides no authority for the supposition that Lucio has performed military service as a citizen of Vienna but such an inference seems reasonable and at the very least cannot be dismissed as implausible. According to Leah S. Marcus, 'if Lucio and the two gentlemen are imagined to be speaking as proper Austrians and soldiers under the empire, then their interchange relates more than anything else to a fear of lost employment.'³⁶⁸ Given that those who aspired to work as an agent on the ground in the early-modern period often looked to the army to provide a regular source of income (see Introduction, p. 10), Lucio is thus introduced into the play in a manner that intimates his association with both kinds of lifestyle. If Lucio is not currently fighting in the Viennese army, then it would appear he has shifted his attention to gathering intelligence about the absent Duke.

Yet Lucio's motivation for doing so remains something of a puzzle. Borachio stands to gain a princely sum if the scheme to defame Hero proves successful, and Caliban's rebellion is motivated by the slave's disaffection for Prospero, but Lucio seems interested neither in money nor revenge. As a result, the precise nature of his relationship with Vincentio is far harder to determine than for those depicted in *Much Ado* and *The Tempest*. Lucio appears to hold no grudge against the Duke and makes no attempt to sell intelligence about Vincentio to the new deputy or any other person with influence at court. Even so, as Carolyn E. Brown notes, 'that Lucio is the only character who suspects the Duke is doing more than he professes allows for the possibility that he is an insider of the court.'³⁶⁹ In conversation with the disguised Duke, Lucio asserts that Vincentio is 'A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow' (3.1.401) but a moment later declares 'I know him and I love him' (410).

³⁶⁸ Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, 188.

³⁶⁹ Brown, 'Duke Vincentio of *Measure for Measure* and King James I of England,' 67.

Strictly speaking the two remarks are not incompatible – one can still feel warm regard for a fool – but Lucio’s rhetoric is inconsistent, suggesting that the fantastic is playing a game to determine how he ought to regard his relationship with Vincentio. In the other episode in which Lucio converses with the disguised Duke, the fantastic alleges ‘I can tell thee pretty tales of the Duke’ (4.3.159-60). He also seems determined to ensure that the friar does not slip from his grasp, following him offstage with the words ‘I am a kind of burr; I shall stick’ (172). Whatever it is Lucio is doing, he seems determined that this friar in particular should know about it.

In 1955 Nevill Coghill proposed that Lucio knows throughout the entire play that the friar is really Vincentio in disguise.³⁷⁰ This argument is based on two pieces of textual evidence. First, when Lucio converses with Isabella at the convent he asserts that the Duke’s ‘givings out were of an infinite distance / From his true-meant design’ (1.4.53-54), which Coghill takes as indirect proof that Lucio has intelligence about the Duke’s plot to go undercover in Vienna, although this does not explain how Lucio came by such information, especially when Angelo and Escalus remain ignorant of it. Secondly, in the first of his two conversations with the disguised Duke Lucio declares ‘Come, sir, I know what I know’ (3.1.413), which leads Coghill to conclude ‘if Lucio did not know, but was pretending to, it was an amazing guess, just as it was a rare coincidence that he should broach such a subject to the Duke himself, and to him only.’³⁷¹ The notion that Lucio is aware of the friar’s true identity has never taken off, either amongst academics or theatre practitioners, principally because it jars so obviously with Lucio’s inadvertent unmasking of the friar-Duke in the final scene of the play.³⁷² Yet for Coghill this common-sense reading of the play proved no barrier:

For an instant Lucio strikes the pose of a conjuror who has produced a white rabbit out of a black hat, and then he slinks tiptoe away, leaving stage-centre to more important characters, with a line that carries a grimace and raises a laugh: ‘This may prove worse than hanging.’³⁷³

Ultimately Coghill’s argument miscarries because it does not provide a sufficiently good account of why Lucio would invite punishment by pulling off the friar’s hood in

³⁷⁰ Nevill Coghill, ‘Comic Form in *Measure for Measure*,’ *Shakespeare Survey* 8 (1955), 23-24.

³⁷¹ Coghill, ‘Comic Form in *Measure for Measure*,’ 24.

³⁷² Rejoinders to Coghill’s argument include: Christopher Spencer, ‘Lucio and the Friar’s Hood,’ *English Language Notes* 3.1 (1965), 21; T. A. Stroud, ‘Lucio and the Balanced Structure of *Measure for Measure*,’ *English Studies* 74.1 (1993), 90.

³⁷³ Coghill, ‘Comic Form in *Measure for Measure*,’ 25.

the closing moments of the play. Perhaps Lucio thought that in doing so he could publicly expose Vincentio and undermine the Duke's covert operation to reinstate his political authority in Vienna. However, this does not explain why Lucio tries to slip away instead of denouncing Vincentio for his manipulative behaviour before those assembled.

There is another episode that provides more concrete proof that Lucio is unaware of the friar's true persona. Here Lucio informs the disguised Duke 'I was once before him for getting a wench with child' (4.3.163-64), and then proceeds to admit that he lied about having done so: 'I was fain to forswear it' (166). It seems implausible that Lucio would have admitted to impregnating Kate Keepdown had he been aware he was actually making this statement to Vincentio, as shown by his feeble protest at the close of the play: 'marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging' (5.1.521-22).

However, Coghill's argument is not entirely spurious because in labelling Lucio a 'conjurer' he draws attention to parallels between that character and the disguised Duke that have proved increasingly important in criticism of the play. R. D. Bedford summarises the similarities between the characters thus:

The Duke's most significant antagonist and rival director/producer/scriptwriter in the play is Lucio, resonantly functioning not only as a mirror and a player but also as a 'fantastic,' an artist-critic who, however dislikeable modern audiences may find him, is the Duke's most rigorous and subtle critic and satirist.³⁷⁴

Bedford's concept reflects the idea that Lucio is not merely another clown figure – that role already belongs to Pompey – but a multi-layered character who, through his intimate knowledge of Viennese society, poses a considerable threat to the integrity and ultimate success of the Duke's one-man underground surveillance network. One might consider Lucio morally corrupt because of his evident delight in the sexual pleasures that Vienna has to offer, but as Charles Swann observes, it is also worth locating the root cause of this corruption: 'is Lucio not, very largely, the product of the Duke's Vienna – and as such an embodied criticism of the Duke's régime – as well as in a position to make criticisms?'³⁷⁵ Mark Taylor notes that Lucio is the only

³⁷⁴ R. D. Bedford, 'Performing the Fantastic in *Measure for Measure*,' *Parergon* 16.1 (1998), 56. A similar point is made by Mary Ellen Lamb in 'Shakespeare's "Theatrics": Ambivalence toward Theater in *Measure for Measure*,' *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988), 138.

³⁷⁵ Charles Swann, 'Lucio: benefactor or malefactor?' *Critical Quarterly* 29.1 (1987), 57.

character to draw attention to potentially negative aspects of the Duke's personality, thereby incurring an uncompromising response from Vincentio as the plays closes:

The Duke's displeasure in everything Lucio says about him ... his determination to defend himself from the charges, and his final punishment of his detractor all suggest that Lucio is forcing him to confront latent and, for some reason (which we can never know), disagreeable possibilities within himself.³⁷⁶

Taylor's idea neatly summarises the frustration that critics often feel with the Duke, who seems to be hiding something within himself that, from a practical point of view, triggers his decision to remove himself temporarily from government. Vincentio may well be trying to hide his own participation in the underground sexual activities that Vienna has to offer, and this could explain why he cannot bring himself to enforce a set of laws that seek to censure such behaviour. Even if one does not concur with this view of the Duke on the grounds that such a claim cannot be substantiated unequivocally with reference to the text of the play, it is clear at the very least that Vincentio is fearful that the citizens of Vienna might formulate such an opinion of him based on Lucio's slanders, regardless of whether that character's assertions constitute credible evidence or mere bluff.

In his exchange with the disguised Duke in 3.1 Lucio makes a number of claims about the ruler's sex life and it is as a result of this episode that Vincentio becomes fully aware of the threat that Lucio poses to his plans for reasserting political authority in Vienna. The following analysis assumes that Lucio is unaware he is conversing with Vincentio himself. However, that issue is to some extent moot because Vincentio cannot afford to reveal his true identity, regardless of whether or not Lucio knows that the friar is really the Duke in disguise. If Vincentio were to remove the hood and either confirm Lucio's suspicions or surprise him, then Lucio could report this intelligence to Angelo or use it to substantiate rumours about Vincentio in the streets of Vienna, thereby ruining the Duke's personal and political credibility before the revelations of the play's closing act. The ambidextrous quality of Lucio's claims is a key factor in the problem that the character's presence causes for the disguised Duke. Lucio makes the following claims about Vincentio's sex life:

³⁷⁶ Mark Taylor, 'Farther Privileges: Conflict and Change in *Measure for Measure*,' *Philological Quarterly* 73.2 (1994), 179.

1. He fathered a number of illegitimate children.
2. He paid old female beggars for sex.
3. He had sex with prostitutes.
4. He is beyond his sexual prime but still kisses foul-smelling vagabonds.

Lucio does not deliver his statements so overtly because he hides his accusations by punning; the above four points correspond to these sources in the text of the play:

1. ‘Ere he would have hanged a man for the getting a hundred bastards, he would have paid for the nursing a thousand. He had some feeling of the sport...’ (378-81)
2. ‘Yes, your beggar of fifty; and his use was to put a ducat in her clack-dish. The Duke had crotchets in him.’ (387-89)
3. ‘The Duke – I say to thee again – would eat mutton on Fridays.’ (438-39)
4. ‘He’s now past it, yet – and I say to thee – he would mouth with a beggar though she smelt brown bread and garlic.’ (439-41)

To reiterate the point, there is no way to test the validity of Lucio’s claims because no other character in the play makes any statement about the Duke’s sex life, either explicitly or implicitly. To this end it does not matter whether Lucio has precise information about such matters, has gathered together a set of dubious claims based on city gossip, or is simply creating fiction for the sheer amusement of baiting Vincentio. Possibly Lucio himself has first-hand experience of the Duke’s sexuality, as Carolyn E. Brown conjectures:

Undoubtedly Lucio shows signs of being a braggart and of taking creative license with the truth. But Shakespeare allows for some personal basis from which Lucio speaks. Lucio’s numerous references to the Duke’s sexual proclivities and the confident manner in which he asserts them suggest that he has intimate knowledge of the Duke himself, that he knows of the Duke’s desires because he has experienced them himself.³⁷⁷

Regardless of the viability of this speculation, it is significant that Lucio’s assertions about the Duke’s sexuality have the potential to spread like wildfire among the inhabitants of Vienna, thereby compromising Vincentio’s political stature even further. As frequently happens nowadays, sex scandals can prove the downfall of high profile politicians and celebrities, even if their behaviour in private has no bearing on their work in the public arena. Vincentio has more than ample reason to be worried, even if he knows within himself that Lucio’s allegations are fabricated.

³⁷⁷ Carolyn E. Brown, ‘The Homoeroticism of Duke Vincentio: “Some Feeling of the Sport”,’ *Studies in Philology* 94.2 (1997), 206.

Many recent productions of *Measure for Measure* have sought to emphasise the play's obsession with the mechanics of intelligence gathering by installing surveillance cameras on the set.³⁷⁸ Such props help explicate the play's abiding concern with issues of surveillance for present-day audiences, who are themselves regularly exposed to scrutiny by closed-circuit video recording. However, the concept of the omniscient visual gaze is already embodied in the figure of Lucio, as was used to good effect in Robin Phillips's production at Stratford, Ontario in 1975:

Normally Lucio is seen as a rascal – Mr. Phillips makes him, rather than the Duke, the conscience of the play, the ironic, Brechtian commentator, who stands at the center of the action, all-knowing, all-seeing, half-shocked and half-amused.³⁷⁹

Phillips's decision to depict a Lucio with serious moral depth or 'conscience' provides an early instance of the discomfort that many critics now feel with the Duke's manipulative strategies and was particularly valuable in suggesting that the character might in fact be the equal of the play's protagonist in terms of his ability to seek out intelligence about other characters, especially the Duke himself. Harold Bloom sees in Shakespeare's 'fantastic' the kind of figure that has become the bane of politicians' existence nowadays: 'Lucio the flaneur is the journalist of Vincentio's Vienna, and his lies ring out some wounding truths ... Vincentio is his own Vienna; he is the disease he purports to cure.'³⁸⁰ More than anything, Lucio poses a danger to Vincentio's status as ruler of Vienna because of his talent for calling into question the moral veracity of the Duke's behaviour. Lucio's claims may well just be hypotheses that he verbalises in order to test their accuracy, but the Duke's self-consciousness about these issues does suggest that this wily man-about-town has hit a raw nerve.

One of the key problems with determining whether or not Lucio's allegations have any basis in fact is that the Duke never addresses that issue explicitly when he speaks in soliloquy. Roger Allam, who played the Duke in the Royal Shakespeare Company production of 1987-88, notes that this state of affairs makes it difficult to formulate a convincing view of a protagonist who otherwise dominates the action of

³⁷⁸ Penny Gay, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 105.

³⁷⁹ Clive Barnes, 'The Theater: A Double-Bill Crescendo in Ontario,' *New York Times* (June 13, 1975), 22.

³⁸⁰ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 371.

the play.³⁸¹ Although the Duke speaks in soliloquy a total of three times, two of those utterances are only five or six lines long, and all three speeches occur within the space of less than two hundred lines across two separate episodes, during that section of the play in which Vincentio is planning the bedtrick. In the longest of these three speeches (of which part is quoted below), the Duke asserts that it is morally impermissible for any ruler to engage in conduct that he or she censures in others:

He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe,
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand, and virtue go,
More nor less to others paying
Than by self-offences weighing.
Shame to him whose cruel striking
Kills for faults of his own liking!
Twice treble shame on Angelo,
To weed my vice, and let his grow!
O, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side!

(3.1.517-28)

This speech concludes a lengthy episode involving many characters that is spoken in prose, and is stylistically abnormal on account of its use of shorter gnomic couplets, instead of Shakespeare's standard iambic pentameter. These couplets give the utterance a chant-like quality that could suggest the Duke is at this point assuming a choral role instead of speaking more directly in his own person.³⁸² However, when read in the wider context of the Duke's scheme to defame Angelo, the speech does reveal some interesting aspects of the protagonist's temperament. Reflecting upon the similarities and differences between the conduct of the Duke and that of his deputy, N. W. Bawcutt contends that Vincentio is irate at Angelo's duplicitous actions:

The Duke is angry because the man he chose as his substitute, while busily weeding out the vice for which the Duke feels personally responsible, is simultaneously creating a fresh crop of his own. This brings out the main emphasis of the Duke's complaint: what he objects to is not Angelo's severity but his hypocrisy.³⁸³

³⁸¹ Roger Allam, 'The Duke in *Measure for Measure*' in *Players of Shakespeare 3: Further essays in Shakespearean performance by players with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 21.

³⁸² Many early commentators disliked the speech and considered it the work of a reviser, although that view has lost influence nowadays. For more discussion of the soliloquy's verbal qualities see *Measure for Measure*, ed. Bawcutt, 235.

³⁸³ N. W. Bawcutt, ' "He Who the Sword of Heaven Will Bear": The Duke versus Angelo in "Measure for Measure"', *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984), 95.

Bawcutt's skilful analysis of this piece of text provides a compelling insight into the Duke's response to Angelo's deceitful behaviour at this particular juncture, but does not consider more fully how that state of affairs came to be. Surely the Duke's anger must also be personally inflected in the sense that he alone was responsible for bestowing the deputyship on Angelo, despite that character's protests that he was as yet incapable of bearing such high office. It also suggests that such anger has come about because the Duke himself is a hypocrite, explicitly stating his desire for a temporary absence from Vienna but staying on in disguise to spy on his subjects and to plot the downfall of those who pose a threat to his return to power. The Duke is worried not only because Angelo has shown himself capable of engaging in deceitful behaviour, but also because the deputy's skill in blackmailing Isabella may mean that Angelo could unintentionally beat the Duke at his own game. Likewise, the 'fantastic' Lucio places the Duke in a similar quandary.

Arguably, the two shorter soliloquies come more directly to the point in revealing the Duke's feelings of helplessness as he comes to grips with the possibility that no amount of skilful undercover work on his part may be able to prevent unsavoury intelligence about his own sexual predilections seeping into the everyday conversation of Viennese citizens. The first is spoken immediately after Lucio has made his allegations about the Duke's sex life:

No might nor greatness in mortality
 Can censure scape; back-wounding calumny
 The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong
 Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue? (3.1.444-47)

It is at this point that the audience becomes fully aware of the danger of Lucio's wily rhetoric: regardless of whether the Duke knows the character's statements to be accurate or simply lies, the threat of Lucio's slanders lies in their ability to convince others without evidence and, by placing the Duke on the back foot, these statements deny the accused any reasonable opportunity to question the accuracy of such intelligence. The second of the Duke's brief soliloquies occurs when Isabella has drawn Mariana offstage in order to reveal the mechanics of the bedtrick:

O place and greatness, millions of false eyes
 Are stuck upon thee; volumes of report
 Run with their false and most contrarious quest
 Upon thy doings; thousand escapes of wit
 Make thee the father of their idle dream,
 And rack thee in their fancies. (4.1.58-63)

Whereas the 'Rainbow Portrait' of Elizabeth, painted only a few years before Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure*, foregrounded the monarch's capacity for surveillance through the presence of numerous eyes and ears on the Queen's dress (see Introduction, p. 5), the Duke inverts that image, depicting himself as the helpless victim of a suspicious citizenry seeking to gather unsavoury intelligence about their ruler. The Duke has probably duped himself into taking a catastrophic stance on this issue, as his only evidence that any inhabitant of Vienna is engaged in such behaviour stems from Lucio's slanders. However, the Duke's catastrophism demonstrates the profound degree to which he feels self-conscious about being physically present in public and provides an emotionally compelling rationale for his decision to bring about political change in Vienna by operating undercover as a spy. The two shorter soliloquies may actually reveal more about Vincentio's state of mind than the longer speech in which he criticises Angelo's hypocrisy. Their brevity is indicative of Vincentio's realisation that, while a ruler may control his subjects' bodies through force, controlling their views about rulers is a far more difficult task. If anything, the Duke's own work as a spy, particularly his interactions with Barnardine and Lucio, has made him acutely aware of the possibility that his manipulative behaviour could backfire and expose him as a hypocrite who is more interested in covert political manoeuvres than ensuring he develops the capacity to govern his subjects wisely.

The Duke believed his undercover disguise would render him immune from surveillance by others but, as Michael J. Redmond observes, 'of all the characters in the play, Lucio is the only one who recognizes that Vincentio's sudden disappearance is a political stratagem.'³⁸⁴ Lucio's familiarity with most other characters in the play, from the Duke to young gentlefolk such as Claudio and Juliet to bawds such as Pompey and Mistress Overdone, demonstrates his skill at interacting with all levels of Viennese society. From the Duke's point of view this also means that Lucio poses far more of a threat than figures like Pompey because, whereas the bawd's disposition can be assessed straightforwardly, Lucio is a far more indeterminate character who, like successful historical spies, has the aptitude to penetrate all walks of life and thereby the capability to gather a wide-ranging variety of intelligence from a diverse cross-section of society. The reliability of Lucio's intelligence about the Duke is another matter altogether, but the character's power over Vincentio derives directly

³⁸⁴ Michael J. Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 153.

from the fact that he too takes a keen interest in seeking out intelligence about the lifestyles of Vienna's inhabitants, and is arguably just as adept at doing this as Vincentio himself.

'Like power divine': from frustrated agent to ruler triumphant

The lengthy concluding act of *Measure for Measure*, which opens with the Duke's formal re-entry into the city, moves away from the confined space of the prison and into the streets of Vienna. In effect, the play recommences with Vincentio operating in his normal persona in full public view, instead of sneaking around the city as an undercover agent. As Josephine Waters Bennett observes, 'Act 5 of *Measure for Measure* is a complete five-act play in miniature, directed by the Duke, its author, except, apparently, for one element in it, the repeated interruptions and impertinences of Lucio.'³⁸⁵ The final section of this chapter will argue that Vincentio returns as ruler of Vienna in a fashion as hasty as his exit because his work as an undercover agent was beset by numerous problems, not least because characters like Barnardine and Lucio did not feel themselves beholden to side with the worldview of the friar figure, thereby rendering Vincentio's exertions in that guise far more challenging than he might have hoped. Ultimately, Vincentio has discovered that to operate as an undercover agent is a less effective method of social control than to distribute power overtly as an autocratic head of state. Only by reassuming his ducal role is Vincentio finally able to silence and punish the voluble Lucio, as well as ensuring that other characters are dealt with appropriately, at least according to the Duke's own perception of how justice ought to be distributed in his state.

Unlike historical agents on the ground in the early-modern period, who were simply cast aside by courtiers and secretaries if their exertions proved fruitless or abortive, the Duke has the luxury of being able to resort to overt methods of political control when his self-directed undercover assignment proves ineffective. As Michael J. Redmond notes:

³⁸⁵ Bennett, *Measure for Measure as Royal Entertainment*, 132.

The fate of the Duke of Vienna is never at stake. Confident in his ability to return, Shakespeare's Duke chooses of his own accord to avoid the popular view for a brief period. In spite of Angelo's eagerness to abuse his temporary position, the deputy does not show any ambition to seize permanent authority.³⁸⁶

Redmond's analysis corroborates one of the key claims of this chapter, namely that Vincentio's short-lived absence from the state stems from the protagonist's desire to ensure that the citizens of Vienna come to perceive him in a new light, replacing the vision of a retiring figure with one who exhibits power by verbal decree in the city streets. Throughout Act 5, as with his undercover work in earlier sections of the play, the Duke constantly seeks to influence characters' impressions of their inter-personal relationships, and in doing so diverts attention away from the central role that he plays in orchestrating the problems and resolutions pertaining to those relationships. To this end, Lucio poses such a significant a threat to the Duke's public standing precisely because his vociferous rhetoric directly challenges Vincentio's aspirations to manipulate and censor the opinions of his subjects.

The argument that Vincentio's work as an undercover agent has been beset with problems can be demonstrated most effectively by analyzing how other characters treat him when he once again appears onstage disguised as a friar in the middle of Act 5. Having dispatched attendants to apprehend the slanderous friar – that is, his assumed persona – Vincentio must once more quit the scene, again leaving Angelo with the task of distributing justice as he sees fit, this time to sanction Isabella and Mariana for their slanderous charges against the deputy:

And you, my noble and well-warranted cousin,
Whom it concerns to hear this matter forth,
Do with your injuries as seems you best
In any chastisement. I for a while will leave you,
But stir not till you have well determined
Upon these slanderers. (5.1.252-57)

Strangely enough, no one thinks to question why the Duke elects to absent himself at this critical juncture and no one seems able to identify the temporal correlation between Vincentio's departure and the friar's appearance onstage. One might have expected higher levels of suspicion among those present, especially given the erratic nature of the Duke's letters prior to his supposed return to Vienna; perhaps the

³⁸⁶ Michael J. Redmond, 'The politics of plot: *Measure for Measure* and the Italianate disguised duke play' in *Shakespeare, Italy, and intertextuality*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2004), 163.

implication is that everyone has become thoroughly absorbed by the allegations of hypocrisy levelled against Angelo and are therefore distracted from raising such questions.

Mathew Winston, who contends that Lucio derives in part from the Vice figure found in earlier Tudor drama, notes that, in keeping with that stock character, ‘Lucio also has a double face; for example, he denounces the Duke to the Friar and the friar to the Duke.’³⁸⁷ No other character provides any sort of evidence to corroborate the allegations that Lucio continues to level against the friar in Act 5. In fact, those charges all derive from the ‘fantastic’ imagination of Lucio himself: the sole evidence that Lucio employs to back up his assertions, which is not really any form of evidence at all, is simply his own scandalous rhetoric. If anything, Lucio’s attitude towards the friar is even more vociferous in Act 5 than in his earlier encounters with the disguised Duke. One reason for this is that Escalus takes Lucio to be a reliable witness and intends to rely on that character’s intelligence when charging the friar with devious dealings against the state and its officers:

ESCALUS Signor Lucio, did not you say you knew that Friar Lodowick to be a dishonest person?

LUCIO *Cucullus non facit monachum*: honest in nothing but in his clothes; and one that hath spoke most villainous speeches of the Duke.

ESCALUS We shall entreat you to abide here till he come, and enforce them against him. We shall find this friar a notable fellow.

LUCIO As any in Vienna, on my word.

(258-66)

Exactly why Escalus is prepared to rely upon the word of the ‘fantastic’ remains something of a mystery, but does perhaps suggest that even wise counsellors such as he have taken leave of their senses in a desperate bid to make sense of the copious reports of dubious authenticity currently circulating the streets of Vienna. Then again, this state of affairs could provide more evidence for the heterogeneity of Lucio’s character, when even this experienced officer of state is willing to rely on the word of an individual whom to others is nothing more than a braggart. Lucio’s ability to inveigle himself into all walks of life in Vienna, from brothel to law court, provides compelling (if circumstantial) evidence that Shakespeare himself was aware of the shape-shifting persona of early-modern spies, regardless of whether or not the playwright had any intimate personal connections with such individuals.

³⁸⁷ Mathew Winston, ‘“Craft Against Vice”: Morality Play Elements in *Measure for Measure*,’ *Shakespeare Studies* 14 (1981), 237.

When the friar-Duke appears onstage once again, Escalus wastes no time in proposing torture in a bid to extract a confession of political intrigue from the hooded figure:

Why, thou unreverend and unhallowed friar,
Is't not enough thou hast suborned these women
To accuse this worthy man but, in foul mouth,
And in the witness of his proper ear,
To call him villain, and then to glance from him
To th' Duke himself, to tax him with injustice?
Take him hence; to th' rack with him. We'll touse you
Joint by joint – but we will know his purpose. (302-09)

When dealing with Froth and Pompey in 2.1, Escalus, loathe to waste time and energy on trifling matters, simply lets both go free with a stern warning. (Even so, Escalus remains true to his word to have Pompey rearrested when the bawd continues to ply his trade in defiance of the lenient ruling he was lucky to receive). Yet this time the wise old counselor shows no intention of allowing the suspect a second chance and his resolution to apply corporal punishment betrays his sensitivity to slanders made against the state of Vienna. Escalus, who so far has played the moderate to Angelo's severity, now appears in the guise of a spymaster determined to employ any method available in a bid to cut down an enemy agent whose machinations threaten the very foundations of the Viennese body politic, from citizens such as Isabella and Mariana, to officers of state such as Angelo, to the ruler of the state himself.

Yet of course it is actually Vincentio who is the source of these slanders, and the protagonist ultimately deploys these specific pieces of false intelligence with great success. Nowhere in the play is this clearer than at that critical moment when Lucio, blissfully unaware of the punishment that he will bring down on himself, pulls back the friar's hood to reveal Vincentio:

LUCIO Come, sir; come, sir; come, sir! Foh, sir! Why, you bald-pated lying rascal, you must be hooded, must you? Show your knave's visage, with a pox to you! Show your sheep-biting face, and be hanged an hour! Will't not off?

He pulls off the friar's hood, and discovers the Duke.

DUKE

Thou art the first knave that e'er madest a duke.
First, Provost, let me bail these gentle three.
(*To Lucio*) Sneak not away, sir, for the friar and you
Must have a word anon. (*To one or more*) Lay hold on him.

LUCIO This may prove worse than hanging. (348-57)

Whether or not the Duke was hoping that an over-confident Lucio might be tempted to de-hood him, Lucio's act places the ball squarely in Vincentio's court. As the Duke suddenly reemerges from obscurity, so the deputy perceives instantaneously that his own corrupt authority has been compromised:

O my dread lord,
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness
To think I can be undiscernible,
When I perceive your grace, like power divine,
Hath looked upon my passes. (363-67)

Intelligence about the Duke's undercover operation against the deputy suddenly comes into full public view in the streets of Vienna and with that comes a realisation on Angelo's part that any further attempt to deny the accusations that Isabella has levelled against him will be of no use. Accounting for the nuances pertaining to the sudden revelation that the Duke has in fact been surveilling Angelo's deputyship at close quarters, Andrew Barnaby and Joan Wry suggest that 'what had once seemed simply laxity in enforcing the laws (or even complicity in their violation, as Lucio constantly suggests) now appears, miraculously, as a watchful waiting for an appropriate opportunity to punish.'³⁸⁸ Richard A. Levin argues that the deputy actually deludes himself into believing that he alone is responsible for the present state of affairs:

As Angelo puts it, the Duke has appeared 'like power divine'; he is indeed like a providential figure. But Angelo naively misses the point. The Duke has made Angelo seem the source of all evil, and himself the source of all goodness.³⁸⁹

Audiences and readers have the privilege of the length of a play to prepare themselves for this moment, but the revelations of these closing moments are an enormous shock for most characters. At one level the Duke's sudden reappearance is simplicity itself, but that action is rendered enormously complex by our knowledge of all those espionage activities that preceded it, including notable failures such as the episode involving Barnardine. More broadly, Angelo made the critical mistake of assuming that the supposedly absolute power of his deputyship rendered him immune to surveillance by undercover operatives. As suggested earlier, the shame that Borachio

³⁸⁸ Andrew Barnaby and Joan Wry, 'Authorized Versions: *Measure for Measure* and the Politics of Biblical Translation,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.4 (1998), 1246.

³⁸⁹ Richard A. Levin, 'Duke Vincentio and Angelo: Would "A Feather Turn the Scale"?' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 22.2 (1982), 268.

feels about carelessly disclosing the details of the midnight surveillance operation stems from understanding that he has betrayed the principles of his secretarial office, and Angelo experiences the same kinds of emotions in the closing moments of *Measure for Measure*.

Despite his dexterity in planting slanderous material about the Duke's sex life earlier in the play, Lucio himself suffers from an inability to control intelligence about his own sexual behaviour. Once again, as Borachio foolishly leaks a secret without any need for external prompting, so Lucio takes it upon himself to inform the friar that he lied under oath when, on a previous occasion, he was brought before the Duke and charged with fornication:

LUCIO I was once before him for getting a wench with child.
DUKE Did you such a thing?
LUCIO Yes, marry, did I; but I was fain to forswear it. They would else
have married me to the rotten medlar.
(4.3.163-67)

Perhaps at this particular juncture one might loosely compare Lucio with Robert Poley, who also bragged about his capacity to 'swear and forswear my self' (see Introduction, p. 59). Poley's livelihood as a trusted messenger at court had yet to take off, and thus it seems entirely probable that his sexual pastimes with other men's wives did his career prospects no harm. For Lucio, however, the opposite occurs: if the 'fantastic' is to be imagined as some sort of hanger-on at court, or at the very least a soldier in the Viennese army, then it seems that any hope that Lucio might have of being able to revitalise a personal confidence with the Duke is long gone:

LUCIO I beseech your highness, do not marry me to a whore. Your highness
said even now I made you a duke; good my lord, do not recompense me in
making me a cuckold.
DUKE
Upon mine honour, thou shalt marry her.
Thy slanders I forgive, and therewithal
Remit thy other forfeits. – Take him to prison,
And see herein our pleasure executed.
LUCIO Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and
hanging.
DUKE Slandering a prince deserves it.
(5.1.513-23)

His bravado vanquished, Lucio now resorts to begging for forgiveness, even slyly suggesting that figures such as he are important in 'making' – recognising the true authority of – the Duke. Yet Vincentio will have none of it, and, as M. Lindsay

Kaplan has shown, it is imperative that the Duke silences Lucio in order to protect his own monopoly on the use of slanderous rhetoric:

Lucio's extremely harsh punishment for slander, not fornication, exposes and calls into question the Duke's own defamatory practices while raising questions about the punishment owing to the more dangerous slanderer. Lucio's slanders of the Duke are dangerous precisely because they ultimately expose the danger of the Duke's slanders.³⁹⁰

Jeffrey S. Doty suggests that Lucio is 'less as an individual than a synecdoche of the public itself' and therefore that the Duke's 'ability to silence Lucio will become the proof of his ability to manage public voices more generally.'³⁹¹ Still, the events of the last third of Act 5 – after Lucio has discovered the Duke under the friar's hood – would seem to challenge such a reading of the play. As soon as he re-enters the city formally, the Duke once again has absolute power in Vienna, and all other characters, with the sole exception of Lucio, show him due deference. The Duke's unforgiving treatment of the 'fantastic' is personally inflected to a profound degree and occurs precisely because Vincentio simply cannot afford to have anyone wrest control from him during the present situation, braggart or not.

At one level the Duke's return to power could not have taken place without his work as an undercover agent: his exertions in that guise allow him to monitor Angelo's behaviour in office, as well as to plan and execute the bedtrick to entrap the corrupt deputy. On the other hand, the events of Act 5 would seem to indicate that it is actually far more effective for a ruler to display and dispense his or her power overtly, instead of relying on underhand methods of surveillance and manipulation.³⁹² Roger Allam observes that 'the play stops rather than ends, leaving many possibilities in the air.'³⁹³ Isabella's silence in response to the Duke's proposal of marriage – which does not preclude any number of gestures on the part of the novice – is the most notorious

³⁹⁰ M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The culture of slander in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 108.

³⁹¹ Jeffrey S. Doty, 'Measure for Measure and the Problem of Popularity,' *English Literary Renaissance* 42.1 (2012), 47.

³⁹² For a view of *Measure for Measure* that runs counter to the prevailing notion that the play ultimately exposes the Duke as a self-serving hypocrite see Ivo Kamps, 'Ruling Fantasies and the Fantasies of Rule: *The Phoenix* and *Measure for Measure*,' *Studies in Philology* 92.2 (1995), 248-73. Kamps writes: 'Dramas like *Measure for Measure* endeavor to eliminate some of the anxiety about monarchical practices by offering the audience a behind-the-scene look at the watchman at work. At the very least, these dramas try to sooth public apprehension by offering a fantasy showing the ruler in disguise engaged in decision-making process; they comfort audiences by filling a vacuum in their knowledge of their monarch with an accessible vision of the sovereign as a strong, resourceful protector of law and order who is resolved to guard the lives and well-being of all obedient subjects' (272).

³⁹³ Allam, 'The Duke in *Measure for Measure*,' 40.

of these. Richard S. Ide argues that the Duke's proposition stands as the culmination of the protagonist's machinations throughout the final act, and indeed the play as a whole:

The marriage proposal, following hard upon the shocking revelation that Claudio is alive, cannot but suggest that the Duke's strategy is designed to sweep Isabella off her feet into his own beneficent arms. With the pardon of Claudio serving so obviously as prologue to the marriage proposal, the implication of an ulterior, obviously partial motive for the Duke's merciful disposition of Claudio seems inevitable.³⁹⁴

I prefer an interpretation in which Isabella expresses outrage and disappointment upon discovering that the one person who had the power to intervene swiftly and efficiently in Angelo's corrupt practices did not do so, but instead used her as a prostitute of sorts for his own ends. However, such a reading could perhaps only come about after reflection, meaning that Isabella's silence at that precise moment in time may make more sense if expressed as bewilderment at discovering that the friar in whose decision-making she placed so much faith has in fact been operating as a spy and, furthermore, that the friar's actions in that guise ultimately tended towards helping his own ends rather than hers. The Duke's personally inflected behaviour as an undercover agent may aid his return to power, but it does not inspire confidence in his ability to build trust amongst those whom he would have closest to him.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed four different aspects of early-modern espionage as represented in *Measure for Measure*. The first section outlined some of the historical and literary complexities pertaining to the Duke's machinations in light of the protagonist's self-imposed temporary removal from office. Secondly, close attention was given to the Duke's undercover work as a stool pigeon in the prison in Vienna, with specific emphasis on the problems that he encounters in that guise, of which the most notable is the impenitent prisoner Barnardine. Next, the chapter analysed the role that the 'fantastic' Lucio plays as a kind of counter-spy, particularly as regards that character's claims to have come by unsavoury intelligence about the Duke's sex life, which could threaten Vincentio's bid to restore his own political credibility. The

³⁹⁴ Richard S. Ide, 'Shakespeare's Revisionism: Homiletic Tragicomedy and the Ending of *Measure for Measure*,' *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988), 121.

final section of this chapter looked in detail at the concluding act of the play, with a view to examining how the Duke employs his friar-disguise in successfully coopting other characters into once again recognising him as the rightful ruler of Vienna.

5. Henry V: surveillance operations during a hot war

Walsingham at war: surveillance and the Spanish Armada

No assessment of Walsingham's career as Elizabeth's spymaster would be complete without some consideration of the role that he and his intelligence networks played in defending England against the Spanish Armada of 1588. In the popular imagination that year is remembered for the daring feats of English naval captains and Elizabeth's 'heart and stomach of a king' speech to her troops at Tilbury. Arguably, Walsingham's secretarial work behind the scenes was more fundamental to the successful defence of the realm. Walsingham died on 6 April 1590 and, given that the last two years of his life were plagued by ill health, it transpired that intelligence work pertaining to the attempted Spanish invasion of England was to be his last major involvement in European politics.³⁹⁵ The year 1588 was also significant because at last the cold war that had been simmering between England and Spain for most of Elizabeth's reign erupted into a hot war that threatened to topple the English Protestant regime whose security had occupied Walsingham's career as Principal Secretary. This state of affairs did not render Sir Francis's work as spymaster redundant. If anything, the reality of a hot war with Spain necessitated intelligence gathering on an unprecedented scale. The parsimonious Elizabeth was evidently convinced of the need for such efforts, as shown by the noticeable rise in treasury funds allocated to intelligence work during the later 1580s (see Introduction, p. 14).

For years the Spanish had been aggrieved at the damage that English pirates wrought by plundering their haul of bullion from the New World. Broadly speaking, the turning point came in 1585, the year that saw both Drake's mercenary voyage to the West Indies and the commencement of Leicester's martial ventures into the

³⁹⁵ Walsingham had suffered from urinary tract problems for many years and probably developed a kidney stone. The historian William Camden recorded that Sir Francis died as a result of testicular cancer, but also believed that his death was accelerated by the use of medicines of dubious efficacy (Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 448). In 1586 the imprudent Robert Poley alleged that 'he hath his old disease the which is the pox in his yard [penis] the which he got of a lady in France' (quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 261). For more on Walsingham's ill health and death see: Conyers Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 volumes (1925; Harwich Port, MA: Clock & Rose Press, 2003), vol. III, 445-48; Robert Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster: Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006), 248-52; John Cooper, *The Queen's Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 323; Stephen Alford, *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 260-61.

Spanish-controlled Low Countries.³⁹⁶ By now it was clear to King Philip II and his advisers that open war was necessary and so preparations for a full scale invasion got underway in earnest. On 1 February 1587, only a week before Mary, Queen of Scots was executed, the English naval commander John Hawkins wrote to Walsingham, advising that it were better for England to engage Spain in a hot war sooner rather than later:

In my mind, our profit and best assurance is to seek our peace by a determined and resolute war, which in doubt, would be both less charge, more assurance of safety and would best discern our friends from our foes abroad and at home and satisfy the people generally throughout the whole realm. By open wars, all the Jesuits and ill-affected persons would be discerned and cut off from the hope of their malicious practices.³⁹⁷

Hawkins had been lobbying various members of the Privy Council to engage in ‘open wars’ with Spain since the beginning of the decade.³⁹⁸ Given Mary’s impending death, perhaps Hawkins was hoping to capitalise on a presumed backlash from foreign Catholic powers in order to push through his agenda. In any case, Hawkins was certainly correct in assuming that Mary’s execution would galvanise the Catholics into action. Throughout the first half of 1587, William Allen, the exiled English priest whose writing had proved so inspirational to the ill-fated William Parry a few years earlier (see Introduction, p. 48), lobbied Philip II to ‘crown his glorious efforts in the holy cause of Christ by punishing this woman [Elizabeth], hated of God and man, and restoring the country to its ancient glory and liberty.’³⁹⁹ In July of that year the Spanish King and Pope Sixtus V reached a formal agreement about what they termed the ‘Enterprise of England’, with the Vatican agreeing to supply money to aid the restoration of the old faith once military victory had been achieved.⁴⁰⁰ In recognition of Allen’s efforts the Pontiff awarded him the title ‘Cardinal of England’ and tasked him with managing the practicalities pertaining to the reinstatement of Catholicism in that country.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁶ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 216-17; Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 203.

³⁹⁷ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 207.

³⁹⁸ Basil Morgan, ‘Hawkins, Sir John (1532–1595),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, October 2007 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12672>, accessed 11 Nov 2013].

³⁹⁹ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 250.

⁴⁰⁰ Alford, *The Watchers*, 250.

⁴⁰¹ Eamon Duffy, ‘Allen, William (1532–1594),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford UP, 2004; online edition, October 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/391>, accessed 13 November 2013].

In 1588 Allen published in Antwerp a tract entitled *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland concerninge the present warres made for the execution of his Holines sentence, by the highe and mightie Kinge Catholike of Spaine*. Audaciously, Allen did not use his given names on the title page of the tract but instead styled himself ‘Cardinal of Englande.’ Much of Allen’s vitriol was directed at Elizabeth specifically, but he was also well aware of the important role that English intelligence networks played in undermining the political ambitions of Spain and Rome. Although Allen does not refer to Walsingham by name, the Principal Secretary is probably the author’s main target in the following passage:

She hath by the execrable practises of sum of her cheefe ministers, as by their owne handes, letters, and instructions, and by the parties confessions it may be proued, sent abrode excedinge greate numbers of intelligensers, spies, and practisers, in to moste princes courtes, citties, and communwealthes in Christendom, not onely to take and giue secret notice of princes intentions, but to deale with the discontented of euerie state for the attemptinge of sum what against their lordes and superiors, namely againste his holines and the Kinge of Spaine his maiestie, whose sacred persons they haue soughte many waies wickedly to destroie.⁴⁰²

Allen’s allegations would seem to confirm that by the late 1580s Walsingham had indeed developed a pan-European intelligence network capable of fomenting political unrest in foreign countries. Then again, Allen could be overstating the case in order to hammer home his point about the evils of English Machiavellianism. Allen may even have believed that Walsingham had at his disposal an intelligence network that was more wide-ranging than was actually the case. If so, Elizabeth’s spymaster had once again succeeded in creating an illusion of omnipresent surveillance beneath which only a moderate number of agents operated, as he had done in the English counties earlier in the decade by deploying the Queen’s Men as licensed agents of the crown (see Introduction, pp. 9-10).

At the very least, Allen was correct in asserting that Walsingham regularly deployed agents abroad to stir up unrest against Philip of Spain. One of the more oblique instances of this occurred at the Turkish court in Constantinople, where William Harborne had been stationed since 1582, charged with maintaining trade privileges for England in the face of competition from France and the Italian states.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² William Allen, *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland* (Antwerp, 1588), xxiii-xxiv.

⁴⁰³ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 225.

On 8 October 1585 Walsingham wrote to Harborne, asking him to probe the Sultan and his advisers about the possibility of conflict between Turkey and Spain:

Her Majesty being, upon the success of the said King of Spain's affairs in the Low Countries, now fully resolved to oppose herself against his proceedings in defence of that distressed nation, whereof it is not otherwise likely but hot wars between him and us, wills me again to require you effectually to use all your endeavour and industry in that behalf, the rather for that it is most evident that if the said king might be kept thoroughly occupied, either by some incursion from the coast of Africa in itself or by the galleys of the Grand Seigneur in his dominions of Italy or otherwise, as may be best considered of you in those parts, with the order taken to annoy him from this side of Europe, his power should be so weakened and divided as it would be no small advantage to her Majesty presently, but to all Christendom hereafter.⁴⁰⁴

The date of Walsingham's letter is informative as it demonstrates that by late 1585 Elizabeth's Privy Council realised that open conflict with Spain was inevitable. Sir Francis was attempting to force Philip to commit military resources to a war on an eastern front that would render the Spanish incapable of invading England simultaneously. Walsingham was not proposing an Anglo-Turkish alliance but was instead hoping that Constantinople might be prompted into a course of action that would alleviate some of the immediate pressure on England. Furthermore, the prospect of a war between Catholics and Muslims cannot but have appealed the Protestant spymaster. Harborne's involvement in this matter also provides more evidence of the fluidity of roles undertaken by agents or secretaries as occasion demanded. While Harborne's work at the Turkish court initially concerned the promotion of English trade interests, the existence of this letter demonstrates that Walsingham judged him capable of carrying out a diplomatic mission of a more directly political nature. Finally, Walsingham's use of the term 'hot wars' is particularly fascinating as it signals a shift in thinking on the part of Elizabeth's spymaster, who was now steeling himself for covert surveillance work that would underscore, and have a direct impact on, open conflict between England and Spain.

Surprisingly enough, Walsingham had very few agents operating in Spain in the mid 1580s and thus, as Conyers Read deduces, 'he seems to have depended in the main for his information out of Spain upon the chance observations of such English merchants as still ventured there in spite of the Spanish embargo upon English

⁴⁰⁴ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 226.

shipping.⁴⁰⁵ In any case planting paid spies in Iberian ports was probably unnecessary, as Stephen Alford notes:

The Great Armada of Spain was probably the worst-kept secret in sixteenth-century Europe. Philip's government was notoriously leaky; indeed some of the king's most secret planning was known in the states of Italy, long skilled at gathering foreign intelligence, within weeks of being decided in Spain.⁴⁰⁶

This state of affairs explains why Anthony Standen was able to gather intelligence about Spanish naval preparations, even though he was located in Florence during this period (see Introduction, p. 53). Standen could rely on the Italians to do the legwork gathering such information before seeking out and passing on to Walsingham the more significant aspects of those reports.

In the spring of 1587 Walsingham drew up a memorandum entitled 'A Plot for Intelligence out of Spain.' What makes this document so intriguing is that it demonstrates the pan-European dimensions of the spymaster's efforts to gather information about Spain's military capabilities. Here is Read's transcription:

1. Sir Edward Stafford to draw what he can from the Venetian ambassador.
2. To procure some correspondence with the French King's ambassador in Spain.
3. To take order with some at Rouen to have frequent advertisements from such as arrive out of Spain at Nantes, Newhaven and Dieppe.
4. To make choice of two especial persons French, Flemings or Italians to go along the coast to see what preparations are a making there. To furnish them with letters of credit.
5. To have intelligence at the Court of Spain, one of Finale, one of Genoa.
6. To have intelligence at Brussels and Leyden.
7. To employ the Lord of Dunsany.⁴⁰⁷

It transpires that the phrase 'out of Spain' has two meanings. While Walsingham is ultimately interested in news about Philip's military preparations, this memorandum reveals that it was often most expedient to source that intelligence in countries other than Spain itself. Walsingham even seems to have preferred to employ agents from other nations. Perhaps this was because he believed that these individuals were more astute at intelligence gathering than Englishmen were, but such a strategy also suggests a plan to disavow English involvement in such exercises should the Spanish apprehend those agents. Ambassadorial relationships also seem to have been important and although Walsingham must have been fully aware that foreign envoys could be feeding his agents misinformation, the spymaster's plans indicate a

⁴⁰⁵ Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 218.

⁴⁰⁶ Alford, *The Watchers*, 251-52.

⁴⁰⁷ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 286-87.

perception that there was a net benefit to be gained from such a course of action. At heart, Walsingham's memorandum makes plain his awareness that news from one part of the Continent could have important consequences elsewhere.

Although surveillance work pertaining to the Armada proceeded over the coming months, Walsingham himself became ever more anxious about England's ability to maintain pace with the Spaniards. On 24 March 1586 he had written to Leicester that an invasion 'will prove nothing this year and I hope less the next.'⁴⁰⁸ However, his timing was out, as that very month Philip approved the invasion plans that his advisers had drawn up: in essence, the Armada would defeat the English navy before towing across the North Sea on barges 30,000 of the Duke of Parma's soldiers currently serving in the Low Countries, and that army would constitute the actual invading force.⁴⁰⁹ Drake's raid on Cadiz the following year impeded Spain's preparations, but it certainly did not halt them. More worryingly for Walsingham, English forces had not taken full advantage of the time gained by Drake's actions. In another missive to Leicester, dated 12 November 1587, Walsingham sounds desperate:

The manner of our cold and careless proceeding here in this time of peril and danger maketh me to take no comfort of my recovery of health, for that I see apparently, unless it shall please God in mercy and miraculously to preserve us, we cannot long stand.⁴¹⁰

While eighteen months earlier Walsingham had been quite happy to bide his time in order to entrap Mary, Queen of Scots, now he was jittery about a lack of activity. Despite his skill in managing cold wars, Elizabeth's spymaster also seems to have recognised that his own field of expertise had clear limitations and that beyond a certain limit surveillance operations could only do so much to protect a country.

The following year saw Walsingham take an active interest in the preparedness of England's defence forces, as recorded in a memorandum of April 1588 entitled 'A Consideration What Were Fit to be Done When the Realm shall be Assailed':

⁴⁰⁸ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 205.

⁴⁰⁹ Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 206.

⁴¹⁰ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 296.

The defence to be made by sea and land.
The defence by sea committed to the Lord Admiral.
Defence by land –
 To be considered
 What number of men are put in readiness throughout the realm, horse and foot.
 How they are directed to assist upon any invasion.
 Who be the lieutenants of the shires and captains of the men both trained and untrained.
 What pioneers [military labour] appointed for every band and what carriages [for supply of equipment].
 What powder appointed for every band.
 What field pieces and munition is placed in certain of the maritime counties.⁴¹¹

Despite the fact that Walsingham did not have a military background, the skills that he had developed throughout his secretarial career rendered him well suited to the task of overseeing such a complex logistical operation. In particular, this note displays a keen awareness that foresight and advance planning are essential for the success of such undertakings, principles that Walsingham had employed time and time again when managing covert surveillance operations. Also evident is his knowledge of the chains of command within the defence force and an awareness that good internal communication would be key for the smooth functioning of its various parts.

To the royal bodyguard Walsingham contributed 200 infantry and sixty mounted soldiers.⁴¹² Sir Francis also seems to have been prepared to swap pen for sword if the fact that he ordered a new suit of armour from the Low Countries in July 1588 is anything to go by.⁴¹³ This curious detail leads Derek Wilson to remark that ‘the thought of the semi-invalid, fifty-eight-year-old councillor in breastplate and helmet riding out in the queen’s train to Tilbury on 9 August 1588 to be present at the most famous PR exercise of the reign borders on the bizarre.’⁴¹⁴ Yet perhaps one should give the secretary the benefit of the doubt: Walsingham was not prone to do anything by halves and, even if he was somewhat overoptimistic about his own martial prowess, it also seems plausible that he really did intend to put his life on the line to defend the Protestant state whose security lay at the heart of his political

⁴¹¹ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 303.

⁴¹² Derek Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham: A Courtier in an Age of Terror* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007), 237.

⁴¹³ A letter to Walsingham dated 15 July 1588 states that ‘Adrian the armourer is gone to Utrecht and Amsterdam to get your armour done, in which there shall be no want of diligence used that your honour may be served speedily’; quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth’s Spymaster*, 333.

⁴¹⁴ Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham*, 237.

career. More to the point, Walsingham's realisation that he might have to make the transition from secretary to soldier suggests just how seriously he took the threat of a Spanish invasion.

Walsingham was not involved in the sea battles that took place in the English Channel in July and August, remaining in London throughout that period.⁴¹⁵ However, English naval captains still held Walsingham's secretarial work pertaining to the Armada in high regard, despite the fact that the spymaster never did get an opportunity to test out his new suit of armour. On 18 August 1588 Lord Henry Seymour wrote to Walsingham, declaring that the spymaster's intelligence work had been more essential to the war effort than the endeavours of English sailors:

I will not flatter you, but you have fought more with your pen than many have in our English navy fought with their enemies, and but that your place and most necessary attendance about her Majesty cannot be spared, your valour and deserts in such places opposite to the enemy had showed itself.⁴¹⁶

It was not only members of the English court who realised just how integral Walsingham's work had been to the defeat of the Armada. When Philip II received a letter from a representative in London a few years later informing him 'Secretary Walsingham has just expired, at which there is much sorrow,' the Spanish King wrote in the margin 'There, yes! But it is good news here.'⁴¹⁷ That Walsingham's enemy breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing of his death confirms the spymaster's prominent position amongst the intelligence gatherers of Western Europe.

Walsingham himself remained apprehensive about the English triumph of 1588, averring that 'our half doings doth breed dishonour and leaveth the disease uncured.'⁴¹⁸ Still living by his aphorism 'I think it less danger to fear too much than too little' (see Introduction, p. 7), Elizabeth's spymaster was of the opinion that this particular victory, although decisive, had not buried Spanish imperial ambitions permanently. He was not the only one to hold this view. The Duke of Parma, speaking to an English envoy only a few days before the conflict began, also believed that the Spanish were more than capable of launching another offensive in the coming years if this particular operation proved fruitless:

⁴¹⁵ For a recent study of the conflict, with specific focus on military intelligence, see Robert Hutchinson, *The Spanish Armada* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2013).

⁴¹⁶ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 325-26.

⁴¹⁷ Quoted in Read, *Mr Secretary Walsingham*, vol. III, 448.

⁴¹⁸ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 256.

In mine opinion you have more cause to desire peace than we, for that if the king my master do lose a battle he shall be able to recover it well enough without harm to himself, being far enough off in Spain; and if the battle be lost of your side, it may be to lose the kingdom and all.⁴¹⁹

Both men were right: hostilities between the two nations continued intermittently until the signing of the Treaty of London in 1604. So too did spying operations, although Walsingham's death meant that the relative unity among Elizabeth's courtiers in regard to such matters disintegrated during the 1590s as Cecil and Essex sought to outcompete each other through rival intelligence networks (see Introduction, pp. 52-53).

In his role as military commander the figure of Essex himself appears in *Henry V*, in what Gary Taylor describes as 'the only explicit, extra-dramatic, incontestable reference to a contemporary event anywhere in the canon.'⁴²⁰ This occurs during the Chorus to Act 5, which draws a comparison between the protagonist's triumphant return to London and that hoped for of Essex, who, on 27 March 1599, had departed the capital to lead the latest English campaign in Ireland:

Were now the General of our gracious Empress –
As in good time he may – from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him! (5.0.30-34)

In the event, Essex's expedition proved a spectacular failure, and he returned to England on 28 September, in defiance of Elizabeth's express desire that he remain at his post until victory was achieved.⁴²¹ The composition of *Henry V* can thus be placed with confidence in the summer months of 1599. Interesting as this passing reference is, it registers only one instance of extensive and ongoing English military operations in various European countries throughout the 1580s and 1590s, as Andrew Gurr explains:

⁴¹⁹ Quoted in Alford, *The Watchers*, 256.

⁴²⁰ *Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982), 7.

⁴²¹ Most scholars take the Essex allusion as read, although it has also been suggested that the 'General' may instead be Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, who succeeded Essex as commander of the English forces in Ireland and ultimately defeated the Irish in resounding terms at the battle of Kinsale on 24 December 1601. For more on the viability of the Mountjoy allusion see Warren D. Smith, 'The *Henry V* Choruses in the First Folio,' *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 53 (1954), 40-45; Richard Dutton, '“Methinks the truth should live from age to age”: The Dating and Contexts of *Henry V*,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68.1-2 (2005), 196-200.

It was a militaristic decade, starting with vivid memories of the Armada of 1588 heightened by a renewed Spanish attempt at invasion in 1592, and marked by the long campaigns that has begun across the North Sea in the 1580s, where English armies were aiding the Protestants of the Netherlands against their Spanish masters. London was full of news about these campaigns, and periodically full of soldiers discharged or on leave.⁴²²

The first audiences of *Henry V* were thus well attuned to hearing the latest information about English campaigns in Ireland and the Low Countries, much as we have become accustomed to daily news reports on the war in Afghanistan over the past decade. In addition, at least some proportion of those who attended the first performances of Shakespeare's play at the Globe must have recognised their dramatic counterparts in the form of common soldiers like Pistol and Williams.

Yet Shakespeare's play does not deliver pitched battles on stage, despite the proclivity of some nineteenth-century directors to alter this state of affairs.⁴²³ Representations of war in *Henry V* are essentially rhetorical in nature, as Gurr observes:

In the event, the nearest the audience gets to a battle is Henry's speech rallying his retreating troops at Harfleur, a Chorus marked by gunfire, and drums beating the alarm. At Agincourt itself the only flourishing of swords is Ancient Pistol threatening the trembling M. Le Fer.⁴²⁴

Despite the paucity of staged battle scenes, Shakespeare's play is strongly invested in demonstrating how undercover intelligence operations remain critical to any war effort, even in the midst of hostilities. While it would be implausible to suggest that Shakespeare ever met Walsingham in person, the aura of Elizabeth's spymaster must still have loomed large for any dramatist thinking about the relationship between hot wars and surveillance at the end of the 1590s. In particular, Walsingham must have seemed significant because of his efforts to centralise intelligence gathering at the English court, much as Shakespeare's Henry V seeks to unify disparate elements of his nation through war with France. Jonathan Baldo has already argued for the importance of memorial perspective in *Henry V*:

⁴²² *King Henry V*, ed. Andrew Gurr, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 1.

⁴²³ *Henry V*, ed. Taylor, 48-50.

⁴²⁴ *King Henry V*, ed. Gurr, 7.

Most of the battles in the play are over memory, the importance of which to the formation and strength of a sovereign national state is evident throughout. This play, so singularly unimpressive as a representation of the epochal battle of Agincourt, is nonetheless a remarkable study of how a nation remembers.⁴²⁵

Obliquely, Shakespeare's play registers nostalgia for Walsingham's role as Elizabeth's spymaster, and seeks to recall his legacy as the pre-eminent intelligencer at the English court. To examine this crucial aspect of *Henry V* in detail the remainder of this chapter will look at two episodes in which issues of surveillance and their relationship to war come to the fore, namely the traitors' scene (2.2) and the night before Agincourt (4.1).

The traitors' scene: 'discovery of most dangerous treason'

The episode in which Henry exposes the traitors' plot to kill him and then sentences them to death (2.2) is notable principally for the fact that it relies on a covert surveillance operation that is not presented onstage. While one would expect Henry himself to receive regular reports about how this operation was proceeding, it also seems reasonable to infer the existence of a spymaster such as Walsingham directing the operation in conjunction with his secretaries, sifting through the evidence provided by agents on the ground. However, the text of the play makes no mention of any individuals working within such an organisation, and the mechanisms by which the various pieces of intelligence relating to the traitors' plot were discovered also remain a mystery. Later in the play this state of affairs is offset by the events of the night before Agincourt, where Shakespeare explicitly stages the King on an undercover surveillance mission that does not go to plan, and ultimately reveals that Henry, despite his public bravado, experiences high levels of anxiety about his claim to the English throne.

We first hear of the traitors' plot in the Chorus to Act Two, which introduces the idea that 'three corrupted men' (2.0.22) intend to kill Henry 'Ere he take ship for France' (30). The Chorus, while morally condemning the traitors, provides no specific intelligence as to what will occur in the forthcoming episode, concluding 'But till the

⁴²⁵ Jonathan Baldo, 'Wars of Memory in *Henry V*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.2 (1996), 132. In a similar vein, James Shapiro has explored how *Henry V* reminiscences about both Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays and the 1588 Armada; see 'Revisiting *Tamburlaine: Henry V* as Shakespeare's Belated Armada Play,' *Criticism* 31.4 (1989), 351-66.

King come forth, and not till then, / Unto Southampton do we shift our scene' (41-42). As it happens the action then cuts to an unrelated scene at the tavern in Eastcheap.⁴²⁶ However, the notion of the King 'coming forth' refers not only to Henry's subsequent reappearance onstage, but simultaneously and more subtly hints at the idea that he will in some manner cunningly expose the traitors' plot.

Intelligence gathering about the traitors' intentions is most accurately described as a counter-surveillance operation because, as the Chorus to Act 2 explains, it is the French who initiate schemes to forestall the anticipated invasion of their country:

The French, advised by good intelligence
Of this most dreadful preparation,
Shake in their fear, and with pale policy
Seek to divert the English purposes. (2.0.12-15)

As with the counter-surveillance operation against the traitors, the most intriguing aspect of the Chorus's reference to 'good intelligence' is that none of this action appears onstage: names of French agents and their social and political networks, methods of operation, as well as the all-important details of the information they gather, are totally elided. However, it is abundantly clear that cold war strategies are of vital importance once a hot war has been declared: spies are the frontline forces that precede any military offensive and are thus an essential part of any war effort. The Chorus's assertion that the French employ 'pale policy' or fear-driven plotting in an attempt to head off Henry's belligerent intentions is suspect, given that a large nation such as France would by default hold the upper hand against the invading English force. In historical terms, the French probably use espionage because it is far more cost-effective, both in monetary terms and in respect of human life. In early 1587 Charles Howard, the Admiral of the English Fleet, wrote to Walsingham, 'this I am sure of: if her majesty would have spent but 1,000 crowns to have had some intelligence, it would have saved her twenty times as much.'⁴²⁷ Over a year before the Spanish Armada set sail, the head of the English navy was already starting to

⁴²⁶ According to Gary Taylor, 'that the Chorus does nothing to prepare us for the scene which immediately follows is hardly surprising: the Prologue does nothing to prepare us for 1.1, either. In both cases, Shakespeare arouses an expectation and then (temporarily) frustrates it, using the expectation not only as a contrast to the foreground scene, but as a means of sustaining our interest, assuring us of the main line of development, during an intermediate and subordinate action'; see *Henry V*, ed. Taylor, 291.

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Hutchinson, *Elizabeth's Spymaster*, 203.

appreciate the benefits of deploying spies instead of raising the far greater sums of money needed to equip military personnel.

We are not told how the French were able to buy off Cambridge, Scrope and Grey, that ‘nest of hollow bosoms, which they fill / With treacherous crowns’ (2.0.21-22), merely that this is the result of the English nobles’ secret meetings with unnamed French agents. Again, the audience is presented only with the consequences of what occurs behind closed doors, rather than with the action that leads to those decisions. The episode involving the traitors is the direct result of a huge amount of background intelligence work in both the English and the French political camps. However, given the prominence of espionage in Elizabethan culture throughout the 1580s and 1590s, those audiences watching the first productions of *Henry V* in 1599 could readily infer the occurrence of such intelligence operations, even if they did not appear onstage.

In his position as the top French diplomat in England the Ambassador is probably the pivotal figure in this episode, particularly as a result of experiencing Henry’s wrath when he delivers the Dauphin’s present of tennis balls, which only inspires the English King to ‘rouse me in my throne of France’ (1.2.275). This episode could only have confirmed the Ambassador’s worst fears of the very real military and political threat that Henry poses to his nation. The Ambassador does not respond verbally to Henry’s belligerent speech, which probably indicates that Henry’s intentions are so unequivocal that little could be said anyway and time is of the essence if a plot to kill or at least divert Henry is to be organised. The Ambassador’s working life in the English court would bring him into direct contact with the nobility of that country and, most importantly, give him the chance to seek out those disgruntled with Henry’s status as monarch and to probe for opportunities to disrupt the political status quo in England.

At no point does the Chorus or any other figure within the play suggest that the French Ambassador was instrumental in encouraging the plot against Henry’s life, but it would be equally hard to believe that he did not play a pivotal role in these machinations. Furthermore, although the Chorus is not entirely falsifying the situation when it states that French bribes corrupted Cambridge, Scrope and Grey, it is also not providing an impartial or thoroughly considered view of the longer-term historical events that led those nobles to conspire against Henry. To take the Chorus at face value is to accept as wholly true a statement to the effect that bribes, and bribes alone, were the sole cause of the traitors’ scheme to murder Henry. While French crowns

may have proved the tipping point in terms of transforming the plot from theory into practice, it cannot have been fundamental for the reason that these high-ranking nobles are already rich men.⁴²⁸ Their position in society does not make them akin to those historical agents on the ground, whose interest in espionage was often motivated by the need for a subsistence income. The nobles' grudge against their sovereign is motivated by deep resentment about the manner in which Henry's family came to the throne and so the traitors are seeking redress for an action that they believe does not just affect them personally but the health of the English body politic as a whole. Presumably their feelings about this are muddled by the fact that Henry has elevated them to positions of great power within his kingdom, but their commitment to this cause at the expense of their relationship with the King demonstrates the extent to which they believe Henry's family to be the cause of political disunity in England.

Apart from Henry himself, the other speaking characters in the traitors' scene fall into two categories: the traitors, who initially have no idea that the King has discovered their design on his life, and three other nobles – Gloucester, Exeter and Westmoreland – who know in advance that Henry has intelligence of the plot. Prior to the entry of the larger military party headed by the King the trio of loyal nobles marvel at Henry's skill in feigning ignorance of the traitors' plotting:

GLOUCESTER

Fore God, his grace is bold to trust these traitors.

EXETER

They shall be apprehended by and by.

WESTMORLAND

How smooth and even they do bear themselves,
As if allegiance in their bosoms sat,
Crownèd with faith and constant loyalty.

GLOUCESTER

The King hath note of all that they intend,
By interception which they dream not of.

EXETER

Nay, but the man that was his bedfellow,
Whom he hath dulled and cloyed with gracious favours –
That he should for a foreign purse so sell

⁴²⁸ The historian Juliet Barker writes: 'Some contemporaries, baffled especially by Scrope's involvement, believed that they had been corrupted by French gold. This was not impossible, for both Cambridge and Grey were in severe financial difficulties that their expenditure on preparations for the Agincourt expedition could only have compounded. What is more, the French ambassadors were still in England in July and knew of rumours that there might be a rebellion in favour of either the earl of March or the duke of Clarence once Henry V had left the country. Supporting a rebellion – and such rumours – was in France's interest, even if it only temporarily delayed or diverted Henry from his purpose.' See *Agincourt: Henry V and the Battle That Made England* (New York: Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 80.

His sovereign's life to death and treachery. (2.2.1-11)

The extent to which the loyal nobles were involved in gathering intelligence about the traitors remains unclear, as do the precise levels of information to which they have access. By omitting any reference to spymaster, secretaries or agents on the ground, the loyal nobles help to foster an image of an omnipotent Henry who personally manages the majority of the work pertaining to the counter-intelligence operation. In strict historical terms, perhaps the real individual who ruled England between 1413 and 1422 did have more personal involvement in the operation that snared the traitors, but by the time Shakespeare wrote his play at the end of the sixteenth century, it would have seemed implausible to elide a tripartite surveillance network of the sort managed by courtly figures such as Walsingham, Essex or Robert Cecil.

In one of the most influential essays on *Henry V* in recent decades, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield argue that the omnipotence of the protagonist is reinforced by the lacklustre personas of the other English nobles:

Henry V was a powerful Elizabethan fantasy simply because it represented a single source of power in the state. Nothing is allowed to compete with the authority of the King. The noblemen are so lacking in distinctive qualities that they are commonly reorganized or cut in production. And the point where the issue might have presented itself – the plot of Cambridge, Scrope and Grey – is hardly allowed its actual historical significance.⁴²⁹

The semi-fictional world of Henry's court is not akin to that of Elizabeth, as she was often forced, albeit reluctantly, to accept the results of her courtiers' political machinations, the downfall of Mary, Queen of Scots being a prime example. At the same time Elizabeth did have a keen appreciation of the political value of espionage, primarily because it allowed her to disavow involvement in such activities, leaving courtiers, secretaries and agents on the ground to resolve any unforeseen consequences of their actions. Perhaps Gloucester hints at the possibility of a spy network when he states that 'The King hath note of all that they intend': the idea of 'noting' could refer either to an intelligence briefing the spymaster provides to his sovereign or to news supplied via written communication.

⁴²⁹ Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and ideology: the instance of *Henry V*' in *Alternative Shakespeares*, Second Edition, ed. John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 224.

According to the chroniclers Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed, Henry was ‘credibly informed’ of the conspirators’ intentions.⁴³⁰ However, the historians’ use of the passive voice functions to conceal the identity of those who provided such intelligence. In contrast to Hall and Holinshed, Shakespeare omits an explanation of the reasons for the Cambridge plot.⁴³¹ As Lawrence Danson observes, to include it would undermine the spectacular manner in which Henry exposes the traitors’ plotting:

Our interest is less in the eventual outcome (of which we are assured) than in its technique, its self-conscious theatrical means. We regard Henry aesthetically, as a performer, and our ideas about theatricalism in everyday life are therefore engaged. Since the traitors are also playing roles (that is, pretending loyalty), we have here both play and counterplay, theatricalism becoming a form of craftiness in which the best actor is literally the winner.⁴³²

At first, all seems good-humoured between the King and the traitors. Grey even goes so far as to profess that the civil wars that characterized the reign of Henry’s father are a thing of the past:

Those that were your father’s enemies
Have steeped their galls in honey, and do serve you
With hearts create of duty and of zeal. (29-31)

The King creates a sense of false security among Cambridge, Scrope and Grey by suggesting that he ought to show clemency towards a prisoner recently arrested for slander, despite the conspirators’ counsel that the man should be punished severely as an example to others:

Alas, your too much love and care of me
Are heavy orisons ’gainst this poor wretch.
If little faults proceeding on distemper
Shall not be winked at, how shall we stretch our eye
When capital crimes, chewed, swallowed, and digested,
Appear before us? We’ll yet enlarge that man,
Though Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey, in their dear care
And tender preservation of our person,
Would have him punished. And now to our French causes.
Who are the late commissioners? (51-60)

⁴³⁰ Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke* (London, 1548), xliii; Raphael Holinshed, *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (London, 1577), 1172.

⁴³¹ Hall, *Lancastre [and] Yorke*, xlv; Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, 1173. Laurence Olivier’s 1944 film version, first screened shortly before the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France, omitted the episode involving the traitors altogether, probably to disavow the possibility of conspiratorial undercurrents in wartime Britain.

⁴³² Lawrence Danson, ‘Henry V: King, Chorus, and Critics,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34.1 (1983), 37.

Henry plays with the conspirators as a cat does with a mouse, restraining a full show of force until he has manoeuvred them into a position that is thoroughly compromising. The King's language is laced with irony, particularly when he remarks on the apparent concern that the conspirators feel for his wellbeing as sovereign. As William F. Friedman notes, 'Shakespeare uses the word *late* with an ironic double meaning – "Who are the newly appointed (*and soon to be late*) commissioners?"'⁴³³ All this seems to pass by the traitors, although if they do happen to feel misgivings about the King's attitude towards them they are hardly in a position to comment about that openly, and the dramatist does not provide them with asides to do so furtively. The traitors are reduced to looking like overenthusiastic children who attempt to conceal a misdemeanor by exhibiting abnormally good behaviour in the presence of a teacher or parent.

Taking note of the striking absence of letters in *Henry V*, Alan Stewart argues that in this play Shakespeare emphasises the power of oratory over and above the written word:

Alone among the English history plays, which are usually riddled with letters, *Henry V* dispenses with strictly epistolary communications, despite the fact that the chronicles insist on that king's especial facility with the letter form: instead, Shakespeare's *Henry V* is obsessed with the spoken word, whether it be the rousing oratory of the king's speeches, the conversations heard by the king in disguise, or the scenes of multiple, often conflicting tongues that point the play's intra-national and international focus.⁴³⁴

However, the single most important piece of intelligence that comes to light in the traitors' scene does occur in the form of written communication. Precisely what is written on the commissions that Henry hands to the three conspirators is not revealed, but it suddenly becomes clear that the plot on Henry's life now has no chance of succeeding:

Why, how now, gentlemen?
 What see you in those papers, that you lose
 So much complexion? – Look ye how they change:
 Their cheeks are paper. – Why, what read you there
 That hath so cowarded and chased your blood
 Out of appearance? (68-73)

⁴³³ William F. Friedman, 'Shakespeare, Secret Intelligence, and Statecraft,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106.5 (1962), 404.

⁴³⁴ Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 4-5.

The pallor of the traitors' faces evokes the French 'pale policy' that was motivated by Henry's belligerent intentions and so the conspirators' guilt becomes self-evident in their complexions. Henry's mocking tone goes into overdrive; while earlier in the scene his comments on the traitors' care for his person had a mischievous edge to them, now he hammers home his point by asking questions whose redundancy is self-evident through the speaker's sarcasm. Letters normally provide a mechanism by which writer and addressee can share information when they cannot confer in person. However, in this instance Henry employs the written word precisely because his physical intimacy with the conspirators, especially his bedfellow Scrope, necessitates that he feign ignorance of the plot on his life until springing the trap. From the conspirators' point of view, it is nothing short of mortifying to discover that they have been beaten at their own game. Although Henry himself takes all the credit for the counter-surveillance operation, the conspirators must be aware that the King could not do so without background work undertaken by a spymaster, secretaries and agents on the ground, precisely because their own scheme would have been dependent on such operational structures.

Henry's furious denunciation of the traitors is the longest uninterrupted speech in the entire play (66 lines), marginally exceeding Canterbury's lengthy oration on Salic Law in the second scene (63 lines). In particular, Henry is barely able to find words to describe his disgust at Scrope's betrayal of the intimate homosocial bonds between them:

But O
What shall I say to thee, Lord Scrope, thou cruel,
Ingrateful, savage, and inhuman creature?
Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,
That knew'st the very bottom of my soul,
That almost mightst ha' coined me into gold
Wouldst thou ha' practised on me for thy use. (90-96)

Scrope holds an important office at Henry's court analogous to the post of Principal Secretary. In effect, it is as if Walsingham had betrayed Elizabeth for his own gain. But whereas the Queen's relationship with Walsingham was essentially political in nature, it would seem that Henry also confided in Scrope about personal matters. From Henry's point of view, if his relationship with such a figure has become compromised, then it raises the distinct possibility that he can no longer trust any of his courtly officials, and thus that his grip on the English throne is weaker than he had

thought. Henry goes so far as to magnify the significance of Scroop's underhand conduct to the point where it comes to represent the traitorous behaviour of humankind in general:

I will weep for thee,
For this revolt of thine methinks is like
Another fall of man. (137-39)

To those of us not in Henry's position, this may seem extreme: the King may even come close to blasphemy in uttering these words, as his invocation of the fall in Eden positions Scroop as the 'man' engaged in an act of disobedience, with the implication that this 'revolt' has taken place against a divine being, which in this context could only be Henry himself. It is vital that one recognises the degree to which Henry's response to Scroop is personally inflected: it is not humankind in general shedding angry tears for what has happened but the 'I' identified uniquely with Henry, and it is Henry's thought processes – 'methinks' – that lead him to compare the situation in which he finds himself with those events reported in Genesis.

Donald R. Riccomini has suggested that the King is ultimately successful in repressing his personally inflected response to the traitors' betrayal of personal trust:

Henry purposely subordinates the emotion of his private, lived self, expressed in the hurt he feels from the disloyalty of Cambridge and especially Scrope, to the legal process represented by his public self, and which he must follow rigorously: despite the emotional connection, the traitors are found guilty, condemned, and executed.⁴³⁵

However, Riccomini misses a subtle but important point about Henry's resort to the strictures of legal process: it is precisely because of the King's anger and disappointment in the traitors' behaviour, a response that is personally inflected to a profound degree, that the impersonal entity of the law provides the only possible avenue by which Henry can come to terms with the deep hurt that he is experiencing. Far from being able to cope with his emotions adequately, Henry is desperately seeking a solution to a problem that threatens to compromise not only his invasion of France but also the stability of his position on the English throne.

While it is undoubtedly true that the episode as a whole functions to reinforce Henry's dominance over other characters, there is one all-important element for which he and the loyal nobles fail to account. The most intriguing aspect of the scene

⁴³⁵ Donald R. Riccomini, 'Governance and the Warrior Ethic in *Macbeth* and *Henry V*,' *The Upstart Crow* 30 (2011), 56.

is not Henry's all-too-understandable rage or even the clever scheme by which he snares the traitors, but the manner in which Shakespeare has the traitors wholeheartedly agree with the King's damning assessment of their behaviour:

SCROPE

Our purposes God justly hath discovered,
And I repent my fault more than my death,
Which I beseech your highness to forgive
Although my body pay the price of it.

CAMBRIDGE

For me, the gold of France did not seduce,
Although I did admit it as a motive
The sooner to effect what I intended.
But God be thankèd for prevention,
Which heartily in sufferance will rejoice,
Beseeching God and you to pardon me.

GREY

Never did faithful subject more rejoice
At the discovery of most dangerous treason
Than I do at this hour joy o'er myself,
Prevented from a damnèd enterprise.
My fault, but not my body, pardon, sovereign.

(2.2.147-61)

It seems totally implausible that anyone could 'rejoice' at being apprehended for treason, yet that is exactly what all three characters do here.⁴³⁶ As Mark Taylor notes, 'if Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey do not speak as they might reasonably be expected to speak under the circumstances, they do speak exactly as Henry would have them speak.'⁴³⁷ Perhaps Shakespeare is invoking the memory of the hapless William Parry, who also declared relief at the discovery of his own plot on a sovereign's life (see Introduction, p. 50). The only explanation grounded in any sort of reality is Cambridge's claim that French bribes encouraged his behaviour, but even he states that financial incentive merely accelerated the timeframe of the plot, rather than instituting it.

⁴³⁶ The historical Scrope did put up a fight. According to Juliet Barker, 'Cambridge and Grey pleaded guilty, but Scrope demonstrated greater courage and probity. He denied absolutely any involvement in an assassination plot, or indeed any other plot, and claimed that his only crime had been that he knew about the conspiracy but had failed to tell the King ... Scrope had to suffer the full rigour of the law. The reason for this is not entirely clear. Henry may not have believed his professions of innocence: if French gold had underwritten the plot, then Scrope, who had played a crucial role in delicate diplomatic missions abroad, was the obvious person to have negotiated a treasonous deal. His disloyalty certainly caused the King the greatest personal pain, and as a Knight of the Garter (the most illustrious order of knights) he also deserved greater punishment for betraying the high standards of his order. Alternatively, the reason may have been that he alone refused to confess to having committed high treason. Concealing treason fell outside the provisions of the Statute of Treasons and was therefore effectively a new category of crime.' See Barker, *Agincourt*, 80-81.

⁴³⁷ Mark Taylor, 'Imitation and Perspective in *Henry V*,' *Clio* 16.1 (1986), 39.

Interestingly, neither Henry nor any of the other nobles question why the traitors respond to their apprehension with such enthusiasm. This is somewhat surprising given that the King has shown great cunning in running a covert surveillance operation that allows him to employ the mechanism of the commissions to spring the trap that finally snares the traitors. This state of affairs perhaps provides indirect proof that Henry really is in an emotionally heightened state of mind and hence unable to reason beyond the concerns of this particular point in time. As Karl P. Wentersdorf explains, the traitors' extraordinary rhetoric is designed to make Henry feel that he has succeeded fully in his task of punishing them, thereby distracting the King from pursuing total annihilation of their lineages:

Traitors lost not merely their lives: their titles and possessions were also forfeited to the crown. This meant that the widow and children of an executed traitor were left destitute and stripped of all the rights and privileges to which the dead man's rank in society had entitled him and his family. In such a situation, it would be folly of the worst sort for the plotters to antagonize the king still further by reminding the 'world' that he is the son of a usurper, and that Cambridge's young son has a clearer legal claim to the throne than the incumbent. The conspirators remain silent on this point because they do not want to jeopardise the survival of their families: they hope that the king will acknowledge their restraint by mitigating the almost inevitable suffering of their innocent wives and children.⁴³⁸

The traitors are thus in damage control, attempting to mitigate any effects their arrest may have on succeeding generations, although whether this is of use ultimately remains a moot point because their deaths will ensure that they will never learn whether their bizarre concordance with Henry's rhetoric turned out to be of any use; even if the King did agree to spare the traitors' families he could just as easily revoke such an agreement after the executions had taken place. Just as importantly, the traitors' submissive response betrays the fact that they simply do not know how far Henry's intelligence network might spread, as well as the degree to which that secretive organisation has been able to infiltrate their own. The traitors are rendered powerless not only because of Henry's vigorous rhetoric, but also because they are unable to fathom the extent of the spy network that underscores the King's control of his realm.

⁴³⁸ Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'The Conspiracy of Silence in *Henry V*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 27.3 (1976), 280.

Henry himself makes no mention of any intelligence network, opting instead to ascribe the traitors' downfall to divine intervention:

We doubt not of a fair and lucky war,
Since God so graciously hath brought to light
This dangerous treason lurking in our way
To hinder our beginnings. We doubt not now
But every rub is smoothèd on our way. (181-85)

Once again, this is a clever piece of propaganda on Henry's part, particularly when one considers that he speaks in the presence of a group of men upon whom he is more reliant than he might care to acknowledge for the stability of his regal office. Henry knows that, on the longer historical view, his father's deposition of Richard II provided the fundamental motive for the traitors' plot against his life, and so by claiming that God is directly responsible for favouring his claim to the throne over that of the traitors Henry is able to aver that his rule is divinely sanctioned. Yet in doing so the King deliberately overlooks the fundamental role that intelligence networks play in allowing him to make such claims. As we find out during his prayer on the night before Agincourt, the King actually thinks that victory over the French is the real determinant in proving whether or not he rules England by divine right.

As Graham Holderness observes, the net effect of the traitors' scene, in dramatic terms, is to privilege Henry's standpoint over and above that of Cambridge, Scrope and Grey:

The three men arraigned here historically represented the cause of the deposed Richard II; the Earl of Cambridge's ulterior motive was that of re-establishing the legitimate dynasty toppled by the Lancastrians' usurpation. Ultimately they succeeded in forming the Yorkist power in the Wars of the Roses, in murdering Henry's son and in putting three kings on the English throne. The narrowing-down of this complex constitutional problem to a simple focus on the question of political loyalty is a characteristic achievement of Henry's style of government, and of course a familiar mechanism of ideological coercion in times of war.⁴³⁹

If the worldview portrayed in this scene were repeated consistently throughout the play then one might reasonably conclude that Shakespeare actively sought to position himself firmly on the side of his protagonist. However, other episodes in the play, of which the events of the night before Agincourt provide a prime example, portray Henry in a far more problematic light. Employing the gestaltist's image of the

⁴³⁹ Graham Holderness, 'What ish my nation?': Shakespeare and national identities,' *Textual Practice* 5.1 (1991), 81.

rabbit/duck line drawing, whose meaning changes depending on one's point of view, Norman Rabkin has argued that it is ultimately impossible to determine one way or the other where the dramatist's sympathies lie in relation to his protagonist:

Leaving the theatre at the end of the first performance, some members of the audience knew that they had seen a rabbit, others a duck. Still others, and I would suggest that they were Shakespeare's best audience, knew terrifyingly that they did not know what to think.⁴⁴⁰

This problematic binary becomes especially apparent when one compares scenes 2.2 and 4.1, those two episodes in which issues of spying and surveillance come to the fore. While one might well feel sympathy for Henry at the conclusion of the traitors' scene, arguably the events of the night before Agincourt leave one with the impression that the King has little interest in the spy networks that safeguard his grip on power. By failing to refer to the unstaged intelligence gathering that allows him to ensnare the traitors, Henry is able to pass off the efforts of others as his own work, and thus to present the apprehension of the conspirators as an outcome that relies entirely on him. However, when the King himself is forced to take on the role of a spy on the night before Agincourt, he finds that to gather intelligence covertly is far more demanding than he supposed: Henry's sovereignty is far more dependent on surveillance work than he is prepared to acknowledge.

The night before Agincourt: 'I will speak my conscience of the King'

The historian Juliet Barker has suggested that Shakespeare's portrayal of an undercover Henry may derive from incidents that occurred during the siege of Harfleur:

Henry was indefatigable in his personal supervision of the siege. No one, not even his brother, knew when or where he would appear next. 'The King daylie and nightlie in his owne person visited and searched the watches, orders, and stacions of everie part of his hoast, and whome he founde dilligent he praised and thanked, and the negligent he corrected and chasticed.' Jehan Waurin, the fifteen-year-old illegitimate son of the seneschal of Flanders, believed that 'King Henry, who was very cunning, often went around the town in disguise to identify the weakest and most suitable place by which he could take it.' Whether true or not, the circulation of such stories was a tribute to the power of the King's character and a highly effective way of keeping his men

⁴⁴⁰ Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28.3 (1977), 285.

up to the mark. (They also would inspire Shakespeare's 'little touch of Harry in the night' scene).⁴⁴¹

Waurin's account of Henry's behaviour at Harfleur, which Barker herself describes in terms of belief rather than knowledge, may well be inaccurate. More problematic is Barker's assertion that there is a direct causal link between what the historical Henry may have done at Harfleur and the behaviour of Shakespeare's protagonist in 4.1. While Barker has access to French accounts of Henry's warmongering, Shakespeare derived his view of Henry from Hall and Holinshed, neither of whom makes any reference to a surveillance mission conducted by the English King on the night before Agincourt. Instead, the chroniclers emphasise the King's command that silence be observed throughout the camp.⁴⁴² The circumstances detailed in 4.1 showcase dramatic invention instead of historical fact, balancing out the formidable image of the King portrayed in 2.2: Shakespeare intimates that under other conditions Henry is far more vulnerable a figure than the events of the traitors' scene would suggest. Specifically, when the King himself is forced to operate as a spy, he discovers that it is far more demanding a task than he might have supposed, which leads one to infer that in the traitors' episode Henry merely presented the results of the covert surveillance operation that underscored his public entrapment of the conspirators, instead of taking any direct interest in the efforts of that spy network. Alone on the night before Agincourt, Henry is desperate for the counsel of a spymaster like Walsingham to guide him through this most difficult of hours.

In contrast to the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, who borrows a friar's robe with the express purpose of going undercover to surveil and manipulate his subjects, Henry initially has no intention of operating as a spy on the night before Agincourt. While Shakespeare devotes an entire scene to Vincentio's explanation of why he has resorted to espionage (1.3), Henry, having borrowed the cloak belonging to Sir Thomas Erpingham, simply informs his senior officers that he wishes to be left alone: 'I and my bosom must debate awhile, / And then I would no other company' (4.1.32-33). The fact that Shakespeare does not provide his protagonist with an utterance to contradict this at any point during 4.1 indicates that Henry's statement must be taken at face value. Furthermore, none of the nobles present at the start of the scene register any form of protest at the King's words. In 1415 it actually did rain torrentially on the

⁴⁴¹ Barker, *Agincourt*, 179-80.

⁴⁴² Hall, *Lancastre [and] Yorke*, xlvi; Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, 1178.

eve of battle so the most plausible explanation for Henry borrowing Erpingham's cloak is for protection against the weather.⁴⁴³

Once the nobles exit, Henry is present onstage for the remainder of 4.1. Most significantly, the three groups of soldiers that appear at various points throughout the episode – Pistol, then Fluellen and Gower, and then Bates, Court and Williams – approach Henry; the King does not seek them out, as Vincentio does in *Measure for Measure*. This state of affairs is made explicit in the stage direction that opens scene 11 of the 1600 quarto of *Henry V*, which reads ‘*Enter the KING disguised, to him PISTOL.*’⁴⁴⁴ By contrast, the 1623 Folio version simply states ‘*Enter PISTOL.*’ Thus, if one accepts that the early quartos provide a compelling, if problematic, record of Shakespeare's plays as they were first performed, it seems likely that an audience watching *Henry V* at the Globe in 1599 saw the soldiers approach the disguised King, rather than vice versa.⁴⁴⁵ One way to visualise this is to locate Henry downstage, providing a focal point to which other characters can gravitate and recede as required. Such blocking would have been especially effective on a thrust stage like the Globe and Shakespeare could well have had this in mind during composition. Given its central location within the geography of a round playhouse, this position on the thrust stage would also be most suitable for the actor playing Henry to deliver the soliloquy that occurs later in the scene.

Working on the assumption that Henry does not intentionally seek out the other soldiers, his attempts to be alone for reflection prove anything but successful. Possibly Shakespeare intended some kind of stage business or gesture from the actor playing Henry to indicate attempts at private reflection before he is interrupted, but this is not recorded in either the character's speech or any accompanying stage directions. Regardless, before he has a chance to proceed with any private meditation Henry is challenged by Pistol. The King is clearly placed on the back foot, required to demonstrate the legitimacy of his presence by a soldier far inferior in rank to him:

⁴⁴³ Barker, *Agincourt*, 258.

⁴⁴⁴ *The First Quarto of King Henry V*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 58.

⁴⁴⁵ For more discussion of textual discrepancies between the quarto and folio versions of *Henry V* see: *The First Quarto of King Henry V*, ed. Gurr, 1-31; *Henry V*, ed. Taylor, 12-26; *King Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1995), 11-32.

PISTOL *Qui vous là?*
 KING A friend.
 PISTOL
 Discuss unto me: art thou officer,
 Or art thou base, common, and popular?
 KING I am a gentleman of a company. (36-40)

Henry does not answer Pistol according to that character's binary interrogation, but instead portrays himself as belonging to a different category of soldier, as Gary Taylor explains:

A 'gentleman of a company' was a volunteer who received no pay, provided his own clothing and equipment, chose the captain or general under whom he served, and was beyond the reach of normal military discipline (which accounts for their notorious indiscipline). Henry as king meets all the qualifications but the (implied) last; he chooses a humble and inferentially mutinous role.⁴⁴⁶

The 'base, common, and popular' Pistol would thus realise that he was addressing an individual who was of superior rank, but held no direct authority over him; in effect a 'gentleman of a company' lay parallel to the power structure of the army that Pistol's question presupposes.⁴⁴⁷ Perhaps Henry is hoping that by assuming such an identity Pistol will be satisfied at finding himself amongst such company and simply move on after a brief conversation. Yet, whether he intends to or not, the King presents himself as precisely the kind of versatile figure who, under different circumstances, might find work as a spy. Unless he were of an extraordinarily patriotic bent, such an individual would probably have gone on campaign in the hope of winning courtly offices for his deeds on the battlefield, or to use his casual status within the army in order to acquire the economic spoils of war without much fear of disciplinary action been taken against him. Although Henry, in response to Bardolph's thievery a few scenes earlier, had declared a wish to 'have all such offenders so cut off' (3.6.108), the King must surely be aware of the problems of enforcing such punitive action against volunteers from this class. Furthermore, those men must have been more prone to mutiny or desertion than common soldiers, and so by declaring himself a 'gentleman of a company', the disguised King is in effect probing to see if Pistol harbours such thoughts.

⁴⁴⁶ *Henry V*, ed. Taylor, 208.

⁴⁴⁷ Falstaff numbers such individuals among his unit in *1 Henry IV* 4.2.25.

From Henry's point of view, the encounter with Pistol does generate one positive result. Without prompting, and totally ignorant of the true identity of the cloaked figure with whom he is speaking, Pistol goes on to affirm allegiance to his general in unequivocal terms:

The King's a bawcock and a heart-of-gold,
A lad of life, an imp of fame,
Of parents good, of fist most valiant.
I kiss his dirty shoe, and from heartstring
I love the lovely bully. What is thy name? (45-49)

Without seeking it, Henry has suddenly come upon a piece of intelligence that will raise his spirits at this otherwise depressing time. Despite being forced to endure awful conditions throughout the French campaign, it would seem that the common soldier still enthusiastically supports his leader. Furthermore, the fact that Henry has managed to come by this information without revealing his identity proves that Pistol must be speaking 'from heartstring,' instead of mouthing platitudes to flatter his sovereign. In short, Henry will not have a mutiny on his hands the next day. While it is true that later in the scene Henry fails to convince the thoughtful Michael Williams that his French cause is just, one should also note that Williams does not actually propose insubordination, but instead focuses on the moral veracity of the King's war from the point of view of those who will suffer most, namely the common soldiers. Buoyed by Pistol's declaration of loyalty, Henry can make a joke at the soldier's expense, styling himself 'Harry *le roi*' (50). The King's witticism confirms that, having gained intelligence about Pistol's state of mind, Henry now feels more comfortable about the reliability of his soldiers and can afford to relax a little.

Next, Gower and Fluellen appear, and the Welsh captain lectures his English comrade verbosely on being less vocal in camp. However, neither character demonstrates any awareness that there is a cloaked figure also present, which indicates not only that Henry successfully remains out of sight on this occasion but, more importantly, that this is a conscious decision on his part. Having been surprised by Pistol a few moments earlier, Henry is learning fast that if he really does want to be alone for reflection he must constantly surveil his surroundings in order to ensure that his own men do not challenge him. That night, the two armies were camped in close proximity to one another, as the Chorus outlines:

From camp to camp through the foul womb of night
The hum of either army stilly sounds,
That the fixed sentinels almost receive
The secret whispers of each other's watch.
Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames
Each battle sees the other's umbered face. (4.0.4-9)

This was in fact historically accurate, as Anne Curry relates:

All accounts suggest that the two camps were quite close. In Titus Livius, 250 paces is cited. In the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, no measurement is given but the camps were near enough to be in earshot. This point is also made by Le Fèvre and Waurin, with a distance of a quarter of a league mentioned. Monstrelet expresses the gap as three bowshots, Fenin as four. A bowshot can be taken to be about 150 metres.⁴⁴⁸

If the English and French were separated by the order of a mere 300 to 600 metres, it would be entirely plausible for spies from either side to infiltrate the enemy camp under cover of darkness, perhaps to eavesdrop on tactical discussions pertaining to the forthcoming battle, or even to assassinate a senior officer. By electing to be alone, Henry is placing himself in a decidedly compromised situation: with his royal insignia absent from view, it is entirely possible that a jumpy English soldier, assuming that a French agent has infiltrated the camp, could kill him on the spot. Comedy aside, Fluellen is also contravening important protocol through idle chatter. However, Henry, perhaps glad to have escaped being noticed, is prepared to forgive the captain this indiscretion: 'Though it appear a little out of fashion, / There is much care and valour in this Welshman' (83-84). As in his encounter with Pistol, Henry can again reassure himself that his troops are good at heart. More than anything, the King wants to glean intelligence that will help to bolster his self-confidence when he knows full well that the military odds are stacked against him.

Henry's decision to conceal his real identity can also be explained with reference to the context of military preparations on the night before battle. As Nina Taunton explains, manuals of the period emphasise the need for rigid adherence to chains of command at such a critical time:

⁴⁴⁸ Anne Curry, *Agincourt: A New History* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2005), 168.

Each individual knows his place and function in the camp as well as on the battlefield, and wanders off on his own initiative on pain of severe punishment. This must include the general, for on his unique position at the still centre of the various ordered activities depends the safety and correct functioning of the entire force.⁴⁴⁹

Leaving aside the issue of how one might discipline a general for deserting his post, it is thus clear that Henry's behaviour on the night before Agincourt runs contrary to what is expected of him. While presumably it is acceptable for a general to have time alone to prepare his soul for battle, to masquerade as someone else when his own soldiers challenge him to reveal his identity does compromise important codes of practice. Henry's decision to indulge his own sensibilities at the expense of military protocol demonstrates the degree to which his anxiety about the outcome of the approaching battle drives him to otherwise irrational behaviour.

During the third encounter that night Henry is far more proactive about sowing misinformation amongst his troops, perhaps because he feels buoyed by the optimistic news he has been able to gather about morale in the English camp thus far and so decides to probe his soldiers for more intelligence of this nature. As Pistol does earlier in the scene, Williams challenges the cloaked figure primarily to determine whether or not he is a spy from the French camp:

WILLIAMS Who goes there?

KING A friend.

WILLIAMS Under what captain serve you?

KING Under Sir Thomas Erpingham.

WILLIAMS A good old commander and a most kind gentleman. I pray you, what thinks he of our estate?

KING Even as men wrecked upon a sand, that look to be washed off the next tide.

(90-98)

Henry first lies in stating that he serves under Erpingham and then proceeds to compound this falsehood by claiming that the old captain believes the English army to be facing annihilation. Henry must be hoping that none of the three soldiers have heard Erpingham speak about such matters recently, as there is no evidence whatsoever that the captain holds this point of view. On the contrary, earlier in the scene Erpingham dismisses the King's assertion that old soldiers deserve to be exempt from the rigours of life on campaign:

⁴⁴⁹ Nina Taunton, *1590s Drama and Militarism: Portrayals of War in Marlowe, Chapman and Shakespeare's Henry V* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 175.

KING

A good soft pillow for that good white head
Were better than a churlish turf of France.

ERPINGHAM

Not so, my liege. This lodging likes me better,
Since I may say, 'Now lie I like a king.' (14-17)

Whereas in the traitors' scene Henry had ample time to prepare his thoughts in advance of denouncing the conspirators, on the night before Agincourt the King is forced to think on his feet. It is entirely possible that Henry just blurts out the first suitable thing that comes into his head, which could in part account for why he struggles to cope with Williams's refusal to cede ground during their argument. As an actor, Henry is far more comfortable with set pieces than improvisation: therefore, when displaced from his normal courtly theatre and forced to take on the role of an agent on the ground he is far less likely to be successful.

According to Rabkin's rabbit/duck model, it is understandable that one should feel ambivalent about Shakespeare's protagonist, and that such sentiments will alter as one considers different episodes in the play. By contrast, the trio of common soldiers who appear in 4.1 inspire no such equivocation on the part of an audience, as Graham Bradshaw explains:

Everybody likes Court, Bates, and Williams; significantly, they are the first thoroughly decent soldiers we've encountered in the ranks rather than the officer class; and there is much that should disturb Henry in Williams's quietly unassuming but morally somber comments on the responsibility the King must bear if he is waging an unjust war.⁴⁵⁰

The power of Williams's rhetoric lies in its bluntness. Certain that his opinion about Henry's responsibility for the war is borne out by the evidence, Williams quite simply refuses to believe that the King could remain immune from such charges:

I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle, for how can they charitably dispose of anything, when blood is their argument? Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it – who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection.

(140-45)

Understandably enough, Henry responds by lecturing Williams on the intricacies of why the King is not necessarily responsible for the spiritual state of his soldiers, averring that 'Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own'

⁴⁵⁰ Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1993), 42.

(175-76). By this point in the scene Henry has thrown caution to the wind and is speaking with his own voice instead of ventriloquising on behalf of the common soldier whom he claims to be. This is a dangerous manoeuvre for any spy: when one's rhetoric does not match one's assumed persona, exposure may only be moments away.

Despite his vulnerability at the present time, Henry persists in attempting to bring Williams round to his point of view. Now the misinformation that the reluctant agent feeds the common soldier stems not from what a third party is alleged to have said, but from Henry's own feelings about the matter of ransom:

KING I myself heard the King say he would not be ransomed.
WILLIAMS Ay, he said so, to make us fight cheerfully, but when our throats are cut he may be ransomed, and we ne'er the wiser.
KING If I live to see it, I will never trust his word after.
WILLIAMS You pay him then! That's a perilous shot out of an elder-gun, that a poor and a private displeasure can do against a monarch. You may as well go about to turn the sun to ice with fanning in his face with a peacock's feather. You'll never trust his word after! Come, 'tis a foolish saying.
KING Your reproof is something too round. I should be angry with you, if the time were convenient.
WILLIAMS Let it be a quarrel between us, if you live.
KING I embrace it.

(189-205)

Henry's repeated use of the personal pronoun demonstrates the degree to which he fails to distance his inner emotional state from his role as agent. When the cloaked figure states 'I should be angry with you, if the time were convenient,' that 'I' most certainly represents an affective rhetorical gesture from the heart of Henry himself, instead of the common soldier that he is currently pretending to be. As with his highly subjective response to Scrope's treachery in the traitors' scene, Henry's reaction to the tenor of Williams's argument is personally inflected to a profound degree, and it is this uncontrollable impulse that ultimately renders the King unsuccessful as an agent on the ground.

According to Mark Taylor, there is good reason to think that the three actors who played Cambridge, Scrope and Grey in 2.2 reappear again as Bates, Court and Williams in 4.1.⁴⁵¹ Taylor suggests that such doubling would elucidate the markedly

⁴⁵¹ Taylor, 'Imitation and Perspective in *Henry V*,' 42. In the doubling chart appended to his edition of the play, T. W. Craik concurs with Taylor's surmise; see *King Henry V*, ed. Craik, 404-05.

different ways in which nobles and commoners react to Henry's underhand political strategies:

Right or wrong, Henry wishes to persuade Williams, and the others, of his position – which fundamentally is that it is proper that they should be fighting and perhaps dying for him – and this he fails to do. Here, in signal contrast with 2.2, he encounters men who do not and will not see everything his way. Here, he finds that the real world has what we might call a will of its own, beyond the control of any individual's self-serving vision; and here we find that Henry's is not the only, and perhaps not the truest or best, way of seeing.⁴⁵²

While the King may command both his soldiers' outward obedience and the exertions of their bodies for his war effort, Henry ultimately learns the grim lesson that he cannot control their inner thoughts and moral judgments, especially when he appears before them in disguise. In contrast with the traitors' scene, where the duplicitous nobles are only too keen to comply with the King's rhetoric in a bid to divert him from running their families, Henry's encounter with Williams is striking because of that soldier's refusal to concede the moral high ground.

Kenneth Branagh writes that he found it particularly challenging to establish whether or not there was a causal relationship between Williams's criticisms of the King and Henry's soliloquy that follows immediately afterwards:

There was the constant turmoil of thought on how to approach 'Upon the King,' and indeed all of the night-time section of the play. I think I finally came to the conclusion that Henry answers no questions in that scene and the 'Upon the King' soliloquy emerges because of the terrible certainty of what Williams has said.⁴⁵³

Branagh ultimately settled on an approach that was by its very nature overdetermined. What Henry finds so distressing about Williams's reasoning is that he can find absolutely no way to deny the validity of the soldier's argument. The office of a king requires constant surveillance if one is to avoid the civil strife that characterised the reign of Henry's father:

The slave, a member of the country's peace,
Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots
What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace,
Whose hours the peasant best advantages. (278-81)

⁴⁵² Taylor, 'Imitation and Perspective in *Henry V*,' 45.

⁴⁵³ Kenneth Branagh, 'Henry V' in *Players of Shakespeare 2: Further essays in Shakespearean performance by players with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 103.

Once again Henry fails to mention the exertions of those courtiers, secretaries and agents whose work underscores the security of his sovereignty and ultimately does allow him to sleep more easily at night. Yet unlike 2.2, when Henry deliberately suppresses any mention of those intelligence networks in order to concentrate all the power of state within his own person, this time the elision signifies the loneliness that he has had to experience when forced to operate as a lone agent on the night before Agincourt. Momentarily, Henry, distraught by the possibility that his reign could be remembered for an ignominious defeat at the hands of the French, seems to forget that he actually does have well-functioning surveillance mechanisms at his disposal, including those common soldiers who do their duty by apprehending suspicious-looking cloaked figures who appear in the English camp.

As Duke Vincentio does with troublesome figures like Lucio and Barnardine in the final act of *Measure for Measure*, Henry also resorts to distributing power overtly as an autocratic head of state in order to resolve the problems that arose from his undercover machinations. In this instance the King employs the unsuspecting Fluellen as a decoy, and thus Williams, seeing the fateful glove in the Welsh captain's cap, assaults that officer once the battle is over:

FLUELLEN God's plood, and his! An arrant traitor as any's in the universal world, or in France, or in England.
GOWER (*to Williams*) How now, sir? You villain!
WILLIAMS Do you think I'll be forsworn?
FLUELLEN Stand away, Captain Gower. I will give treason his payment into plows, I warrant you.
WILLIAMS I am no traitor.
FLUELLEN That's a lie in thy throat. I charge you in his majesty's name, apprehend him.

(4.8.10-18)

Fluellen's allegations of treason, absurd though they are, perform exactly the rhetorical function that Henry would wish, namely to designate any rogue elements in the King's entourage as conspirators who can then be apprehended and punished according to the law. Yet, while Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey decide to comply with Henry's formidable oration in a bid to save face, the self-assured Williams simply denies the validity of Fluellen's bombast.

Even when he comes face to face with Henry, the individual actually responsible for orchestrating this plot in miniature, Williams still persists in refusing to accept that he is in the wrong, principally on account of the King's devious behaviour the previous night:

Your majesty came not like yourself. You appeared to me but as a common man. Witness the night, your garments, your lowliness. And what your highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you take it for your own fault, and not mine, for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence. Therefore I beseech your highness pardon me.

(46-57)

When Henry orders Fluellen to give Williams the glove filled with crowns, Williams responds, 'I will none of your money' (68). Clearly Williams does not want to be seen to acquiesce to the Welsh captain, but, given that the money actually belongs to Henry rather than Fluellen, Williams is simultaneously and not very subtly refusing to comply with the King's view of the world. As Gary Taylor argues, it seems likely that Williams does take the money, as 'continued refusal would surely elicit some verbal reaction from Henry or the others.'⁴⁵⁴ In effect, Henry buys the soldier's submission so Williams, like the traitors, is in some sense forced to comply with Henry's view of the world. However, as Marilyn L. Williamson contends, Williams still emerges as the victor in moral terms:

The point of argument between Henry and Williams was the question of whether Henry might ransom himself to the French, and the matter is constantly kept before us in the surrounding action by the repeated trips of the French herald Montjoy to the English camp to offer that Henry pay ransom to stop the war. Though Henry does not pay off that quarrel, he does fulfill Williams's prophecy about him in small by stopping their quarrel with payment. He does not, then, ransom his life to the French, but his oath to Williams.⁴⁵⁵

Whereas the traitors comply with the King's rhetoric because they are unable to fathom the extent of the spy network that underscores Henry's capacity to apprehend their plotting, Williams's experience has instead taught him to question the validity of Henry's exertions as an undercover agent. This turn of events suggests more broadly that the monarch is well advised to steer clear of the chaos that accompanies any surveillance operation, and instead be thankful for the presence of that tripartite

⁴⁵⁴ *Henry V*, ed. Taylor, 255.

⁴⁵⁵ Marilyn L. Williamson, 'The Episode with Williams in *Henry V*,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 9.2 (1969), 280.

structure of courtiers, secretaries and agents whose clandestine labours allow him or her to rule more easily.

Conclusion

Walsingham's secretarial work in relation to the Spanish Armada demonstrates that intelligence gathering plays a vital role in underpinning military endeavours during a hot war. Both Catholic insurgents and Elizabeth's naval officers were keenly aware that England may not have succeeded in defeating the Armada were it not for the spymaster's efforts in this regard throughout 1587 and 1588. To demonstrate how Shakespeare's *Henry V* engages with the connections between intelligence and hot wars this chapter compared the traitors' scene (2.2) with the events of the night before Agincourt (4.1). Henry's awesome exposure and denunciation of the conspirators could not have taken place without the secretive exertions of a spy network, but the King does not refer to such an organisation in order to give the impression that all such power exists solely within his own person. By contrast, when Henry himself is forced to operate as an agent on the ground he discovers that such work is considerably more demanding than he supposed. The King did not initially set out to spy but when forced to do so he gets more than he bargained for, some of which buoys his spirits in advance of battle and some of which makes him feel even more anxious about it. Taken together, these two episodes demonstrate Shakespeare's awareness of the important link between spying operations and the success or failure of a military campaign.

6. Hamlet: dangerous play at the Danish court

‘Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye’: Claudius’s spy network

The action of *Hamlet* pitches two ‘mighty opposites’ (5.2.63) – Claudius and Hamlet – against one another in a battle of wits dominated by spying. The new King, aware from the outset that Hamlet poses a direct threat to the stability of his regime, is proactive in managing the problem that his nephew poses. Thus, while Laertes is granted leave to return to his course of study in Paris, Claudius effectively places Hamlet under house arrest in Elsinore:

For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire,
And we beseech you bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son. (1.2.112-17)

As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note, ‘Claudius is certainly masterly in his deployment of second person pronouns – *our*, *us*, *we* – which slide from the royal “we” to include the whole Court in his discourse.’⁴⁵⁶ This expository scene thus establishes Claudius’s expertise at convincing members of the Danish court that they too share his point of view and therefore that his rule is morally justified, as Alvin Kernan explains:

Intelligent, crafty, never appearing to be doing what he is actually doing, affable, relentless in his drive to power, Claudius is cynical and pragmatic. And like the new-style ruler Machiavelli idealizes in *The Prince*, Claudius understands the necessity of legitimizing his rule by all available means. He creates the appearance of an uninterrupted continuation of the old order by marrying the queen of the brother he has killed and treating the rightful heir as his son and successor.⁴⁵⁷

However, these two actions alone are not sufficient to ensure that Claudius maintains his grip on power and so the King makes extensive use of a spy network to keep his disgruntled nephew under constant surveillance. This most definitely does not signify ‘cheer and comfort’ on the part of the King, but instead an obsession with seeking out what Hamlet has ‘within which passeth show’ (1.2.85). Claudius’s most important

⁴⁵⁶ *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Cengage, 2006), 165.

⁴⁵⁷ Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995), 35.

ally is the counsellor Polonius, whose primary function is to orchestrate many of the details pertaining to the King's scrutiny of Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, by contrast, are totally new to the world of espionage and their ardent desire to render the King and Queen any service possible necessarily places them at odds with their former school friend.

The list of 'Persons Represented' that appears in the 1676 sixth quarto of *Hamlet* describes Polonius as 'Lord Chamberlain,' and that designation is also used in the eighteenth-century German version of Shakespeare's play known in English as *Fratricide Punished*.⁴⁵⁸ In his 1934 edition of the play John Dover Wilson, drawing on Polonius's description of himself as 'assistant for a state' (2.2.168), styled the character 'Principal Secretary of State.'⁴⁵⁹ However, as noted earlier, it seems implausible to associate a dramatic character such as Polonius with a historical figure such as Burghley or Walsingham (see Introduction, pp. 32-33). None of the three earliest printed texts of *Hamlet* contains a list of roles, and the only other clue about the character occurs in the 1604 second quarto, which prints the stage direction 'Enter Old Polonius' at 2.1.0. Michael Sacks elaborates on this textual detail:

Shakespeare hardly ever includes adjectives in his stage directions, so when he does, it seems reasonable to suppose that the adjective carries particular importance. Granted, age might be taken as an indication of wisdom (Polonius would surely think so), but by and large his old age functions to connote senility.⁴⁶⁰

Hamlet would surely agree with this assessment, at one point mocking the counsellor with reference to this issue specifically: 'For you yourself, sir, should be old as I am – if, like a crab, you could go backward' (2.2.205-06). In the 1603 first quarto the King's counsellor is instead called Corambis, meaning twice-boiled cabbage, which implies that the character is both old and tedious. In addition, Gertrude's demand that Polonius use 'more matter with less art' (2.2.96) indicates that the counsellor's long-windedness constitutes one of the more tiresome aspects of life at the Danish court, which may in part result from old age. However, when the Queen informs Claudius of Polonius's untimely death later in the play, she describes him as 'the unseen good old man' (4.1.11), which implies that, even if Gertrude does find Polonius something of a bore, she most certainly does not wish him harm.

⁴⁵⁸ *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, 142.

⁴⁵⁹ *Hamlet*, ed. John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1934), 141.

⁴⁶⁰ Michael Sacks, 'Conniving and Bumbling, yet Sometimes Wise: An Examination of the Many Facets of Polonius,' *The Shakespeare Newsletter* 60 (2010), 55.

Claudius himself places great faith in Polonius's abilities as an intelligence gatherer and clearly appreciates the value of maintaining a close working relationship with this 'man faithful and honourable' (2.2.131). When Polonius first brings news of Hamlet's lunacy the King signifies that the counsellor has always proved a reliable source of information:

KING (*to Gertrude*) Do you think 'tis this?
QUEEN It may be; very likely.
POLONIUS
Hath there been such a time – I'd fain know that –
That I have positively said ' 'Tis so'
When it proved otherwise?
KING Not that I know. (2.2.153-57)

Given that Claudius has only been on the throne for a few months it does seem incongruous that an exchange such as this could take place unless the two men had worked together prior to the death of Old Hamlet. Bernice W. Kliman suggests that Polonius has belonged to Claudius's courtly faction for some time:

The play does not tell us much about Polonius's history. Many infer that Polonius had been the counsellor of Hamlet's father, and, if he were, that would suggest another motive for Hamlet's dislike: the old man's easy shift in loyalty. A more attractive idea to me is that the counsellor had been part of Claudius's court. There is support for the notion of royals having their own courts, their own courtiers and followers.⁴⁶¹

Hamlet's loathing of Polonius would thus result as much from that courtier's alliance with the usurping King as opposed to any more personal dislike on the part of the Prince, although Polonius's other role as the father of Hamlet's love interest complicates matters further still. Polonius may not be a dramatic incarnation of a real-life Elizabethan courtier, but the enduring nature of the counsellor's relationship with Claudius specifically, instead of other Danish monarchs such as Old Hamlet, does raise the spectre of factional rivalry, of which the most recent high profile example in England was that which occurred between Cecil and Essex during the early to mid 1590s. Given that intelligence operations constituted one of the most significant areas of courtly endeavour in which this rivalry played out in practice (see Introduction, pp. 52-53), there is thus particularly good reason to consider Polonius as a dramatic archetype of such operatives, but one far enough removed from contemporary events not to generate censorship problems for the dramatist or his playing company.

⁴⁶¹ Bernice W. Kliman, 'Three Notes on Polonius: Position, Residence, and Name,' *Shakespeare Bulletin* 20.2 (2002), 5.

There is one crucial limit to the relationship between the King and Polonius: the counsellor does not know how Old Hamlet met his death, and therefore cannot have colluded with Claudius when the latter plotted and carried out the fateful deed in the pre-history of the play. Evidence of this comes just before Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech, when, in response to Polonius's musings on the nature of duplicity, the King at last confirms in an aside that he is indeed guilty of murder:

POLONIUS

'Tis too much proved that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.

KING

O, 'tis too true.

(Aside) How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience.
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word.
O heavy burden!

(3.1.49-56)

First flattering Polonius by concurring with the counsellor's aphorism, the King's subsequent guarded speech allows one to infer that he has discussed the murder of Old Hamlet with no one, not even his closest adviser. Nor does Polonius ever feel the need to raise questions about whether the new King came to the throne by foul means: he has been the direct beneficiary of Claudius's accession, gaining a secretarial office without peer. In part, Polonius's attitude in this regard results from the fact that Denmark had for centuries practised elective monarchy, a situation of which Hamlet shows a keen awareness when he remarks bitterly that Claudius 'popped in between th'election and my hopes' (5.2.66).⁴⁶² Assuming Polonius was a key operative in Claudius's faction during the reign of Old Hamlet, it would have been in the counsellor's interests to promote his own leader ahead of Young Hamlet when the Danish court assembled to elect a new monarch. Claudius himself was well aware that murdering Old Hamlet would not necessarily result in his own accession, and prudently raises the issue of factional support during his opening speech to the court:

Nor have we herein barred
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along. For all, our thanks.

(1.2.14-16)

⁴⁶² For more on the theory and practice of elective monarchy in sixteenth-century Denmark see Gunnar Sjögren, 'Hamlet and the Coronation of Christian IV,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 16.2 (1965), 155-60. Depictions of elective monarchy in Shakespeare's sources are discussed in A. P. Stabler's 'Elective Monarchy in the Sources of *Hamlet*,' *Studies in Philology* 62.5 (1965), 654-61.

Claudius may be a malevolent figure, but he is still dependent on the express support of a majority of the court if he is to maintain his grip on power in a manner that at least displays an outward fashion of equanimity. And just because he has gained that support at one point in time, it does not mean it will last forever. The King has to be particularly careful about how he manages Young Hamlet, who seems to enjoy a public affection that Claudius himself cannot command:

He's loved of the distracted multitude,
Who like not in their judgement but their eyes,
And where 'tis so, th'offender's scourge is weighed,
But never the offence. (4.3.4-7)

Claudius believes that the average Dane would readily excuse any transgression on the part of the Prince simply because they idolise Hamlet; this implies that, regardless of whether or not intelligence about the murder of Old Hamlet ever became public, the populace could suddenly rise up against a ruler they dislike. Likewise, common support for Laertes when that young man returns to avenge his father's death also threatens the stability of Claudius's regime.

For these very reasons it is imperative that Claudius deploy a wide variety of political strategies in order to maintain his grip on power. Some of these take the form of overt practices, such as the diplomatic mission to Norway, in which Voltmand and Cornelius are dispatched in a bid to prevent Young Fortinbras's belligerent intentions via dialogue with the zealous warrior's bedridden uncle. Most, however, are covert in nature and tightly focused within the space of the castle at Elsinore, which explains why a figure such as Polonius proves so essential for the routine functioning of Claudius's surveillance network. Myron Taylor argues emphatically that the counsellor's conduct is deliberately fraudulent:

For the Elizabethan audience, Polonius must well have stood as a clear representation of the Machiavellian villain. He speaks the line that reveals his method and his nature: 'By indirection find direction out.' This not only fits his nature as a perennial spy, but his rhetoric as well. The periphrasis and verbosity of his language employs the same kind of indirection as he constantly seeks to employ in his dealings with Hamlet.⁴⁶³

However, Taylor's use of the word 'villain' is contentious, as it seems to imply that Polonius is able to perceive of himself in those terms. Thus, while Richard Gloucester declares in his opening soliloquy, 'I am determinèd to prove a villain' (*Richard III*,

⁴⁶³ Myron Taylor, 'Tragic Justice and the House of Polonius,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 8.2 (1968), 275.

1.1.30), Polonius protests to Gertrude, ‘Madam, I swear I use no art at all’ (2.2.97). Granted, Polonius may simply be lying, but it seems far more likely that he truly believes in the sincerity of his rhetoric and thus his verbosity is a symptom of a bona fide attempt to provide the King and Queen with wise counsel. Bert Cardullo develops this idea with regard to the manner in which Polonius delivers intelligence about Hamlet’s madness:

When he hesitates so long to tell Claudius and Gertrude what he thinks is causing Hamlet’s madness, it is not to anger or alienate the King and Queen, but to tease or titillate them with the ‘facts’ (and to savour his own ‘discovery’) he believes they want so much to hear.⁴⁶⁴

Polonius is thus engaging in a form of self-deception and would not be out of place in the world of *Much Ado*, where characters display an uncanny ability to convince themselves of the veracity of certain pieces of intelligence because that information corroborates their personally-inflected views about self and society.

Shakespeare devotes a significant portion of one scene (2.1) to expounding Polonius’s practices as a manager of agents on the ground. Yet Reynaldo never appears onstage again and we never learn whether his mission to spy on Laertes proves successful. This suggests that the dramatic import of the episode lies more squarely in what it reveals about Polonius’s life as an intelligencer than the tangential issue of Laertes’s activities as a student in Paris. Most notably, the conversation between Polonius and Reynaldo discloses the profound degree to which the counsellor’s work as a secretary is informed by a desire to surveil and manipulate his own children, an issue that directly impacts upon how he approaches his ongoing surveillance of Hamlet on behalf of Claudius. Polonius is an adherent of the ‘softly, softly’ approach, advising Reynaldo first to seek advance news about Laertes’s behaviour, then to set that within the broader context of Danish student culture in Paris, and finally to probe for juicy details of potential misdemeanours by disseminating misinformation about Laertes’s conduct:

there put on him
What forgeries you please – marry, none so rank
As may dishonour him, take heed of that –
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty. (2.1.19-24)

⁴⁶⁴ Bert Cardullo, ‘Polonius’ Delay,’ *Massachusetts Studies in English* 9.1 (1983), 40.

Reynaldo, probably a recent recruit to the world of espionage and therefore unused to its circuitous methods of operation, seems to miss the point when he protests that such devious practices would bring ‘dishonour’ (28) to Laertes. Yet, as Polonius insists in reply, Reynaldo should lay such charges to give the impression that Laertes is doing these things because he is a lively young student outside of the immediate control of his father, rather than because he is an inherently immoral individual: ‘breathe his faults so quaintly / That they may seem the taints of liberty’ (32-33).

As shown during his parting injunctions to Laertes, Polonius is an inveterate user of precepts, and the counsellor does at length distil his spying strategies into one convenient aphorism:

See you now,
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth;
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach
With windlasses and with assays of bias
By indirections find directions out. (61-65)

Maurice Charney explains the connection between spying and bowling that inspires Polonius’s language of surveillance:

‘Assays of bias’ is a bowling image, since the bowling course was constructed on the bias, or curved, so that a player cannot throw his bowl directly at the jack. He has to take account of the curvature of the bowling green.⁴⁶⁵

To consider another suitable image, while military scouts spy out the lie of the land in advance of a military offensive, the agent who seeks intelligence via social interaction must approach his human targets in a manner that takes account of obstacles that could impede or stall progress. Accomplished bowlers exhibit a superior ability to predict movement ahead of time and, by extension, successful spies also have an innate capacity to approach a problem from a number of different angles, or even change tack during an operation.

The broader question remains of why Polonius is so obsessed with finding out what Laertes gets up to in Paris, especially given that he seems to start with the assumption that his son is going to engage in drinking, gaming and whoring as a matter of course. One even expects that Polonius would be surprised to find that Laertes was not doing those things. The mother of Laertes and Ophelia does not appear in the play and so the counsellor’s overzealous scrutiny of his children perhaps

⁴⁶⁵ Maurice Charney, ‘“To be, or not to be?”: The Plain Language of Hamlet’s Soliloquy,’ *The Shakespeare Newsletter* (Fall 2008), 50.

results from a desire to safeguard the memory of his deceased wife by indirect means. When Polonius declares ‘I have a daughter – have whilst she is mine’ (2.2.107) he is most obviously referring to the fact that he may lose control of Ophelia to a future husband, but that comment also suggests that he cannot bear to be alone. The counsellor’s role as intelligencer is thus informed as much by agonising personal experience as desire to render faithful service to the King, and those two factors remain constantly in a state of tension. Anthony Brennan elaborates on how this problem manifests itself as Polonius proceeds with the business of spying on Hamlet:

Polonius’s instructions to Reynaldo, in elaborately periphrastic speeches, on how to spy on Laertes so his ‘bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth’ are a political primer on the indirect strategies employed in almost every scene of the play. Polonius swallows a bait of falsehood immediately on Ophelia’s report of Hamlet’s visit to her ‘in the very ecstasy of love’.⁴⁶⁶

Given that Hamlet’s mad behaviour towards Ophelia takes place shortly after the Prince has declared his intention ‘to put an antic disposition on’ (1.5.173), one can in this instance assume a high degree of correlation between intention and action. Despite Polonius’s rhetoric earlier in the scene about the value of spying via indirections the irony is that he too falls for his own strategies through his willingness to believe that Hamlet’s madness is real:

I am sorry that with better speed and judgement
I had not quoted him. I feared he did but trifle
And meant to wreck thee. But beshrew my jealousy!
By heaven, it is as proper to our age
To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions
As it is common for the younger sort
To lack discretion. 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.

(2.1.112-20)

In this context the word ‘quoted’ means noted or observed and thus Polonius berates himself for not moving swiftly enough to protect his daughter from the wild affections of a madman. Yet the counsellor’s words also exhibit apprehension about what Hamlet’s lunacy might portend for Claudius, hence the need to deliver this intelligence to the King at once. This is the first time Polonius speaks about Hamlet directly, but the counsellor was present to witness the Prince’s public display of

⁴⁶⁶ Anthony Brennan, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Structures* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 133.

contempt towards the new King in 1.2 and Polonius's presumed support of Claudius during the recent monarchical election necessarily places him at odds with Hamlet.

So far this thesis has applied the term 'spymaster' to only one of Shakespeare's dramatic characters, namely Prospero in *The Tempest*. Yet even the powerful mage has problems to contend with as he goes about the business of operating his surveillance network, especially in regards to his relationship with the rogue agent Caliban (see pp. 124-33). Whilst it is also tempting to style Polonius 'spymaster,' to do so would commit the error of assuming that the counsellor is genuinely interested in harnessing surveillance strategies for broader political gains, when his speeches demonstrate time and time again that his compulsion to spy results fundamentally from a desire to control the behaviour of his own children. Polonius is the King's well-regarded secretary and a man with significant power, but he lacks Walsingham's shrewdness and a commitment to using intelligence to further more abstract political and religious ideals.

Unlike Polonius, whose extensive secretarial experience underscores his position as Claudius's valued counsellor, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are presumably new to the world of espionage and may also have minimal prior experience of courtly life. Thus, while Horatio attends the funeral of Old Hamlet and seems familiar with the workings of the Danish court in general (of which more later), Rosencrantz and Guildenstern travel to Elsinore at the express command of the King:

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. (2.2.1-4)

Claudius's assertion that he has been eager to meet Hamlet's friends for some time sounds disingenuous, particularly when set against the pressing political need he has for deploying them as spies. Claudius has not been on the throne for long but there is a direct causal link between the King's desire to discover the cause of Hamlet's distemper and the summoning of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Well aware that Hamlet is inherently suspicious of both himself and Polonius, the King changes tack, operating on the principle that the generation gap is stifling his ability to obtain reliable intelligence about the Prince's state of mind:

I entreat you both
 That, being of so young days brought up with him,
 And sith so neighboured to his youth and humour,
 That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
 Some little time, so by your companies
 To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather,
 So much as from occasions you may glean,
 Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus
 That, opened, lies within our remedy. (10-18)

This is merely one of several occasions on which Claudius deploys intermediaries to get around a fundamental problem that he faces as he masterminds his surveillance operations, namely that Hamlet, by and large, refuses to speak with him. This issue comes to the fore in the opening court scene, where the Prince, pointedly disregarding his uncle's words, instead promises his mother, 'I shall in all my best obey you, madam' (1.2.120). In fact, as Anthony Brennan has calculated, one of the most striking aspects of the dramatic structure of the play is just how infrequently the two main figures address one another directly:

Hamlet, with over 1400 lines, is the longest part Shakespeare ever wrote, and Claudius speaks over 500 lines. The two characters between them speak over half the lines of the play. But in direct exchange with each other they share less than 100 lines of speech, about one fortieth of the play.⁴⁶⁷

The upshot is that Claudius has to take a leaf out of Polonius's book and proceed by indirection, as Michael E. Holstein explains:

An especially virulent form of spying involves setting up political enemies so that they are lured into place by a seemingly innocuous invitation, engaged in some distracting pretense, surprised, and compromised. This tactic is the hallmark of the King's intelligence operations: the interviews between Ophelia and Hamlet, Polonius and Hamlet, Gertrude and Hamlet, and Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Hamlet are all stratagems designed to get Hamlet to tip his hand.⁴⁶⁸

Yet Claudius makes a fundamental error in choosing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for the job. While the King has extensive experience of working with Polonius, the two students are an unknown quantity. Precisely because Hamlet knows them so well, it is unlikely that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will prove effective in their role as agents of the King, and the upshot is that the Prince easily catches them out when they first meet.

⁴⁶⁷ Brennan, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Structures*, 140.

⁴⁶⁸ Michael E. Holstein, ' "actions that a man might play": Dirty Tricks at Elsinore and the Politics of Play,' *Philological Quarterly* 55 (1976), 331.

The actor Simon Russell Beale writes of his belief that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not quite as naïve as may appear when it comes to political matters:

I enjoy the idea (supported by nothing in the text) that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are undergraduates of that not uncommon type who have, despite their innocence, a shrewd eye on their future careers, students for whom their studies are not an end in themselves.⁴⁶⁹

Beale actually does himself a disservice in stating that there is no textual evidence for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's aspirational conduct, a curious position compounded by the fact that Beale himself has also played Guildenstern in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and so has had ample opportunity to reflect upon the social forces driving the two characters.⁴⁷⁰ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may not say as much, but every one of their speeches to the King and Queen betrays their fervent attempts to blend into courtly life at Elsinore: the two students are snared in a uncomfortable situation where they are not only desperate to please Claudius and Gertrude, but cannot afford to refuse. As Malcolm Pittock notes in respect of Henry V's assertion on the morning of the battle of Agincourt, 'he which hath no stomach to this fight, / Let him depart' (4.3.35-36), 'any soldier rash enough to take up Henry's all expenses paid offer of a journey home if he did not fancy fighting would pretty certainly have found himself in trouble.'⁴⁷¹ Like so many other rulers in Shakespearean drama, Claudius, simply by virtue of his regal office, can require other characters to do his bidding, regardless of whether that be for dubious ends or not.

In essence, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are desperate to live up to the virtues of the ideal courtier; one can imagine them frantically reading Castiglione's manual during their journey from Wittenberg to Elsinore, highlighting passages that they believe will help them adapt to court life most readily. More bluntly, they are most certainly not in a position to disregard the entreaties of the King and Queen, as their individual responses make plain:

⁴⁶⁹ Simon Russell Beale, 'Hamlet' in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 165.

⁴⁷⁰ Beale, 'Hamlet,' 145.

⁴⁷¹ Malcolm Pittock, 'The Problem of *Henry V*,' *Neophilologus* 93 (2009), 187.

I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and Queen moult no feather. I have of late – but wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory.

(295-301)

Hamlet swiftly moves outwards to the general without stopping to consider the particular, employing ostentatious musings on the value of life in order to prevent himself from having to reveal the true causes of his depression, which are, as revealed during his first soliloquy and the encounter with the Ghost in Act 1, tightly focused around his inter-personal relationships with his father, mother and uncle. This strategy will also prove important when Hamlet delivers the ‘To be, or not to be’ speech in the next scene.

In a carefully considered reading of the precise nature of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s activities at Elsinore, Peter B. Murray argues that the two students do not necessarily consider themselves agents of the King:

These friends of his (and Hamlet himself insists that they have been good friends) have been told that Hamlet is mad, and so far as they know, the only purpose of the King and Queen in sending them to Hamlet is to help him recover by finding out what is troubling him. There is no hint here that they think of themselves as the King’s spies: this is Hamlet’s inference and it is important to see how he arrives at it.⁴⁷²

Murray then goes on to discuss the passages from the play quoted above, reasoning that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s confusion about how to respond to Hamlet’s interrogations indicates genuine bewilderment rather than deliberate evasion. But the two students would have to be incredibly naïve not to realise they are acting as agents of the King and it is still true that the wily Claudius has pressing reason to discover the cause of his nephew’s distemper, even though the King does not use the word ‘spy’ or a synonymous term during his injunctions to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the start of the scene. Perhaps Claudius’s greatest error is to assume that the two students can instantly come up to speed on the fundamentals of courtly life that will then allow them to function as successful spies. While Castiglione’s manual, had they read it, would certainly be of assistance, there is no substitute for practical experience, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s deficiency in this regard thus bears out

⁴⁷² Peter B. Murray, *Shakespeare’s Imagined Persons: The Psychology of Role-Playing and Acting* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996), 71.

Walsingham's estimation that 'the voice and conference of men giveth books life and shall engender in you true knowledge' (see Introduction, p. 4). More generally, this aspect of *Hamlet* provides compelling (albeit circumstantial) evidence to support the notion that espionage is one of the more highly developed forms of courtly endeavour, and success can only come with prior experience in other areas of courtly life.

To keep Hamlet under constant surveillance Claudius is dependent on a spy network because the Prince refuses to engage with him directly. Yet none of the King's operatives are particularly adept in their assigned roles. Polonius has considerable secretarial experience but his obsessive desire to control Ophelia results in him coming to conclusions about Hamlet's erratic behaviour that reflect his own fatherly anxiety instead of a more fully considered assessment of the situation. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may be eager to serve the King and Queen in any way possible, but enthusiasm does not imply skill: precisely because of the intimate nature of their relationship with Hamlet, the Prince immediately sounds out Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's intentions, and hence the two novice agents are rendered incapable of providing Claudius with useful intelligence. Despite their protests to the contrary, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern all behave in a manner that is personally inflected to a profound degree, and this mindset necessarily informs their behaviour as agents of the King.

Catching consciences: Hamlet's intelligence operations in Act 3

Whereas Claudius relies on Polonius and, to a lesser extent, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in order to maintain near-constant surveillance of his nephew, Hamlet, by and large, conducts his intelligence operations as a lone agent. Of all the protagonists considered so far in this thesis the Prince is thus most akin to Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*, who subsumes the tripartite structure of courtier, secretary and agent within his own person in order to avoid the problem of intelligence leaks, seen most prominently in *Much Ado* when Borachio commits the simple but vital error of careless talk. If Hamlet were to employ a surveillance network like Prospero or Henry V it would necessarily compromise the individuality that is commonly taken to be his defining trait. Enter Horatio, who occupies a curious position as both an ally of the Prince and a participant in courtly life at Elsinore more

generally. Thus, while in 1.5 Horatio swears to Hamlet that he will not reveal intelligence about the existence of the Ghost, he also acts on behalf of the King later in the play when Claudius charges him to give the mad Ophelia ‘good watch’ (4.5.73). The net result is a patchwork character that is part scholar, part soldier, part courtier, and part confidant to the protagonist, the last being of most relevance for the concerns of this chapter.⁴⁷³

Bert O. States ponders the predicament that Shakespeare faced when fashioning a suitable ally for a protagonist such as Hamlet:

Consider the problem of creating a companion for Hamlet: he must be a good listener, patient to a fault; a spy of sorts, but not one who will uncover too much and thereby speed progress; he must be a man docile enough to demand no strenuous life of his own, even when he is on his own, for it is self-evident that a passionate companion, like Mercutio or Enobarbus, would crowd Hamlet’s style and lead to complications this play could not afford.⁴⁷⁴

Horatio sets the main plot in motion by bringing Hamlet intelligence of the Ghost’s appearance, but then recedes into the background, more likely to murmur a modest ‘Here, sweet lord, at your service’ (3.2.51) than to proffer a cunning plan to further the Prince’s revenge. However, in preparing the casting charts to accompany their edition of the play Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor came to the conclusion that, along with Hamlet and Gertrude, the actor playing Horatio is one of only three players who cannot feasibly double any other part.⁴⁷⁵ While in a technical sense this state of affairs arises from a combinatorial problem about when specific actors are available to play a second or third role, the fact that Horatio enjoys this privileged status also implies the importance of his relationship with the protagonist. Most importantly, Horatio is on hand for the play-within-the-play to confirm Hamlet’s assessment of Claudius’s guilty conscience. Yet Horatio’s relationship with Hamlet is essentially passive in nature. Perhaps that is a dramatic necessity, as the Prince already has his hands full trying to deal with two other individuals dear to him who would probably have proved useful allies in his struggle against the King, namely Ophelia and Gertrude. The issue of betrayal comes to a head in Act 3 of *Hamlet*, arguably Shakespeare’s most sustained

⁴⁷³ For more discussion on the complexity of Horatio’s character see: Alex Newell, ‘The Etiology of Horatio’s Inconsistencies’ in “*Bad*” *Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*, ed. Maurice Charney (London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1988), 143-56; Lars Engle, ‘How Is Horatio Just? How Just is Horatio?’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.2 (2011), 256-62.

⁴⁷⁴ Bert O. States, *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 147.

⁴⁷⁵ *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, 565.

dramatic meditation on the personally inflected nature of intelligence operations in early-modern court culture.

Act 3 opens with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reporting back to the King on the indeterminate result of their mission to glean intelligence about Hamlet's state of mind:

ROSENCRANTZ

He does confess he feels himself distracted,
But from what cause a will by no means speak.

GUILDENSTERN

Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,
But with a crafty madness keeps aloof
When we would bring him on to some confession
Of his true state. (3.1.5-10)

Claudius is no further forward in sounding out the cause of his nephew's distemper, but, ever the energetic politician, he welcomes the news of the players' arrival and proceeds to redeploy Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in order to encourage the Prince's passion for theatre: 'Give him a further edge, and drive his purpose on / To these delights' (27-28). That Claudius perceives the political value to be gained from distracting Hamlet in this fashion is shown more explicitly in the 1603 first quarto, in which the King grants Rosencraft and Gilderstone *carte blanche* with the royal treasury:

Gentlemen, seek still to increase his mirth;
Spare for no cost, our coffers shall be open,
And we unto yourselves will still be thankful. (8.14-16)⁴⁷⁶

It seems unlikely that the King intends his novice agents to receive additional reward for surveilling Hamlet. More probably, the money is to be used solely to provide the players with a handsome fee as they keep the Prince occupied and therefore divert him from plotting against the King. However, whereas Walsingham sought to utilise the Queen's Men for surveillance of the English provinces, Claudius does not seem to appreciate that theatre has such capacities and as a result unwittingly plays into Hamlet's hands by providing the Prince with a mechanism that allows him to obtain compelling evidence of his uncle's guilt in full view of the Danish court.

⁴⁷⁶ *The First Quarto of Hamlet*, ed. Kathleen O. Irace (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Further references to Q1 are also to this edition.

Once Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit, the King and Polonius proceed to implement the counsellor's plot to use Ophelia as bait to lure Hamlet into dropping his guard, as Claudius explains to Gertrude:

For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia.
Her father and myself, lawful espials,
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If't be th'affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for. (3.1.31-39)

Despite his buoyant rhetoric, the King does not seem entirely sure what sort of intelligence he is seeking by spying on Hamlet's behaviour towards Ophelia. Claudius posits two alternatives: the Prince's conduct will demonstrate either that his madness results from lovesickness or it will negate that option. The latter possibility might still not actually render any useful information about Hamlet's state of mind, but merely allow the eavesdroppers to deduce that the lovesickness option is inadequate to explain Hamlet's behaviour fully. The King's indeterminacy is clearly correlated to his desire not to leak details about the murder of Old Hamlet to other members of the court, particularly the Queen. However, it also suggests that the wily Claudius is open to new ways of looking at the world, and therefore intends to use the surveillance mission to sound out Hamlet without commitment to a pre-defined answer.

In the context of a thesis that focuses on the personally inflected nature of spies' behaviour, Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech necessarily presents a problem because of its decidedly impersonal rhetorical stance. As G. R. Hibbard notes, 'one thing can be said with some confidence about this much discussed and debated soliloquy: it is cast in general terms. Hamlet speaks of *we*, *us*, *who*, and *he*, without using *I* or *me* once.'⁴⁷⁷ When Claudius addresses the court at the opening of 1.2 he uses second person pronouns as a means of co-opting everyone else into his vision of a united Denmark. By contrast, Hamlet's speech divorces both speaker and concealed listeners from its general concerns via the use of abstractions:

⁴⁷⁷ *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 239.

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (3.1.85-90)

Where Claudius aimed for a positive gloss on recent events in 1.2, now Hamlet asserts that nothing is possible and that all humans are inherently flawed, and therefore unable to engage with life in constructive ways. Perhaps, as James Hirsh has argued, the speech is a 'feigned soliloquy' that Hamlet plants in order to deceive the eavesdroppers about his true state of mind and further his scheme to display an 'antic disposition.'⁴⁷⁸ This is certainly plausible when one compares 'To be' with Hamlet's other soliloquies, which all employ first person pronouns, as well as engaging more directly with the central issue of avenging the death of Old Hamlet.⁴⁷⁹ However, as Edna Zwick Boris notes, it is virtually impossible to determine whether or not Hamlet actually does intend to feed misinformation to the eavesdroppers:

The stage directions that precede and follow Hamlet's 'To be' speech in all three versions of the play are so scant as to leave ambiguous whether the speech is a soliloquy that Hamlet speaks believing himself alone or a calculated performance that Hamlet speaks knowing he is overheard.⁴⁸⁰

Furthermore, in discussing the relationship between 'To be' and the broader action of *Hamlet*, Richard Levin concludes that 'we cannot even say that this soliloquy is expository, since it does not shed any light upon Hamlet's actions before or after it, which never turn on the question of suicide.'⁴⁸¹ 'To be' is a critical dead end and even Claudius and Polonius do not think to discuss why Hamlet speaks in such abstract terms when they emerge from behind the arras towards the end of the scene.

The principal reason for this is that the import of the entire episode alters significantly during Hamlet's subsequent tirade against Ophelia, during which the Prince expresses outrage and frustration because he can no longer rely upon her as an ally in his clandestine struggle against the King. Hamlet could still be feigning

⁴⁷⁸ James Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 231-77.

⁴⁷⁹ Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*, 246-55.

⁴⁸⁰ Edna Zwick Boris, 'To Soliloquize or Not to Soliloquize – Hamlet's "To be" Speech in Q1 and Q2/F' in *Stage Directions in Hamlet: New Essays and New Directions*, ed. Hardin L. Aasand, (Madison, NJ and London, England: Fairleigh Dickinson UP and Associated UP, 2003), 115.

⁴⁸¹ Richard Levin, 'Hamlet's Dramatic Soliloquies' in *Style: Essays on Renaissance and Restoration Literature and Culture in Memory of Harriett Hawkins*, ed. Allen Michie and Eric Buckley (Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 2005), 116.

madness, but it is equally plausible that he is by now starting to realise more fully the magnitude of the task facing him and is beginning to crack under pressure, as Simon Russell Beale writes:

It is almost as if this scene is written in code, a code so impenetrable that Ophelia cannot understand what Hamlet is trying to tell her. Indeed, what Hamlet would really like to say is now hidden so well that the pain is evident, even if the reasons for it are not. The building pressure of keeping so much dangerous information hidden, even from those he loves, must sometimes be unbearable.⁴⁸²

Bearing in mind Horatio's passivity as an ally, if Hamlet has only his own word against that of everyone else, it becomes a trivial matter for the King to have the Prince declared mad and demoted from his position as 'chiefest courtier.' Hamlet quite literally contradicts himself as he proceeds to outline why he is angry at Ophelia's indifferent conduct towards him:

OPHELIA Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?
HAMLET Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty
 from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into
 his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof.
 I did love you once.
OPHELIA Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
HAMLET You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate
 our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.
OPHELIA I was the more deceived.

(111-18)

Well might Ophelia feel betrayed if she finds herself associating with a man who one minute declares that he did love her and then immediately disavows his own account of their relationship. While a critic like Hirsh interprets Hamlet's frenzied rhetoric as another instance of the 'antic disposition,' it is equally plausible to interpret the Prince's language as an indicator of genuine distress causing irrational thought.⁴⁸³ Hamlet also seems to interrupt his 'nunnery' rant with the unrelated question 'Where's your father?' (132). Hirsh takes the line to be a barbed attack on the concealed counsellor, but editors of *Hamlet* concur in thinking that the Prince does not necessarily believe Polonius is hidden behind the arras.⁴⁸⁴ According to Harold Jenkins:

⁴⁸² Beale, 'Hamlet,' 170.

⁴⁸³ Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*, 250.

⁴⁸⁴ Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*, 235. For sceptical assessments see: *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 283; *Hamlet*, ed. Hibbard, 244; *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*,

Hamlet's love for Ophelia has all along been entangled with her father. It is her father on whom he has projected his inarticulate feelings about her sexual nature – her 'honesty,' her potentiality for mating and breeding; and now when these come to a climax in his encounter with Ophelia herself, he suddenly thinks of her father.⁴⁸⁵

Thus, regardless of whether or not Hamlet suspects he is being watched, the Prince's tirade reflects his views about the extent to which Polonius's overbearing attitude towards his daughter is hampering his own efforts to win over and retain allies of his own. Part of the problem is that the unfortunate Ophelia has been co-opted as bait by her father. Yet, as Hirsh notes, 'Ophelia is naive, inexperienced, unskilled in the art of deception, and therefore unsuited to the role she has been assigned.'⁴⁸⁶ So desperate is Polonius to prove his theory about Hamlet's lovesickness that he readily stoops to such lows without pondering whether such a scheme is really workable. In this respect Polonius errs as Claudius did when falsely assuming that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would make good spies. In both cases the mechanisms set up gripping theatre based on spying, even if the plotters do not achieve their covert fictive aims of discovering the 'truth' about Hamlet's melancholic disposition.

One way to deal with the critical impasse about the 'To be'/'nunnery' episode is simply to take a cue from the two eavesdroppers, and examine what Claudius and Polonius say when they emerge from behind the arras towards the close of the scene. Polonius is a highly unreliable witness because of his preoccupation with controlling Ophelia's sexuality and so his assertion that 'the origin and commencement of this grief / Sprung from neglected love' (180-81) comes as no surprise. Polonius's use of the verb 'sprung' in the past tense betrays the fact that he had already come to such a conclusion about the cause of Hamlet's incongruous behaviour before orchestrating this particular spying operation, and his view on this matter is simply confirmed by the outrageous manner in which Hamlet behaves towards Ophelia. Perhaps the critic most deserving of attention is Claudius, for it is he who comes to the conclusion that the episode does not render up any intelligible meaning, insofar as it does not allow him to gain any specific pieces of intelligence about Hamlet's state of mind:

ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 161. The most recent Arden editors remain neutral about this issue: see *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, 290.

⁴⁸⁵ *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, 497.

⁴⁸⁶ Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*, 244.

Love? His affections do not that way tend,
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger. (165-70)

In fact, the result of Hamlet's indecipherable behaviour is to encourage the King's propensity for executive decision-making:

I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.
Haply the seas and countries different,
With variable objects, shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
From fashion of himself. (171-78)

An astute politician, Claudius is well aware of the need to keep things moving, regardless of whether one has just had the luck of an intelligence coup, or, as at the present moment, the information available does not permit one to come to any sort of workable conclusion about an enemy's intentions. If Hamlet was intending to feed the eavesdroppers misinformation about his state of mind in order to disrupt their plotting, that scheme has failed resoundingly, as it has actually had the net effect of prompting Claudius to take decisive action to eliminate the threat that his nephew poses. The King may at this point in time have determined on the plan to use the English to kill his nephew, but, if that is indeed the case, as per his usual *modus operandi* Claudius keeps this aspect of the plot to himself.

Despite his anger and disappointment at Ophelia's apparent choice to side with her father, Hamlet's mood brightens in the following scene, for it is at this point that the Prince finally has the chance to test the veracity of the Ghost's allegations in full view of the court. Anthony Brennan outlines how Hamlet's strategy parallels that just used by Claudius and Polonius:

The play-scene is as devious and indirect a method of sneaking up on a decisive confrontation as Hamlet has been able to imagine. It is an ingenious variation on the eavesdropping practised against him. Claudius's behind-the-arras work has yielded little harvest. Hamlet and Horatio, though in full view, are figuratively behind the arras.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁷ Brennan, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Structures*, 135.

However, unlike Claudius, who remains cautious about how to interpret his nephew's behaviour in 3.1, Hamlet is determined to elicit a well-defined solution to the question of the King's guilt, as he explains to Horatio:

There is a play tonight before the King.
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee of my father's death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after we will both our judgements join
To censure of his seeming. (3.2.73-85)

It remains unclear whether Hamlet is expecting the King to admit his guilt verbally or instead to blanch when he hears the incriminating lines that his nephew has inserted into the player's script; the latter seems more likely given the Prince's earlier avowal, 'If a but blench, / I know my course' (2.2.599-600). Hamlet is utterly convinced that the mere whitening of Claudius's visage will be proof positive of a guilty conscience. More precisely, the Prince has convinced himself of the veracity of this not-so-subtle method of surveillance, regardless of whether or not it will prove effective.

Hamlet relies on his 'antic disposition' throughout the play-scene in order to behave in a tactless manner, but that does not entail others failing to notice his rash conduct. Claudius himself is quick to censure the ends to which his nephew appears to be using the play:

KING Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?
HAMLET No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest. No offence i'th' world.
KING What do you call the play?
HAMLET *The Mousetrap*. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image
of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the Duke's name, his wife
Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work; but what o'
that? Your majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not.
(221-30)

Perhaps the point is that it is hard to determine whether or not Hamlet is being ironic, but, from Claudius's point of view, the most striking change is that his nephew is now prepared to engage in extended conversation, instead of muttering in sarcastic undertones, as happened in 1.2. Ophelia can justly complain that Hamlet is 'as good

as a chorus' (233), for the Prince now takes it upon himself to provide unnecessary explication of the play, as Michael J. Redmond explains:

Hamlet intervenes to remove any indeterminacy or complexity by offering overt indications to guide the reactions of the spectators. It is not a coincidence that, as the aggrieved prince betrays his personal investment in the play, Claudius begins to address his questions about 'the argument' and potential 'offence' of the tragedy directly to him (3.2.221-22).⁴⁸⁸

If the wily Claudius were to believe that the action he is seeing onstage bears no relation to his own crime, it would be like early seventeenth-century audiences at the Globe thinking that the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* bore no similarity to the world of tavern-brothels in contemporary Southwark. Perhaps it is for this reason that Hamlet makes virtually no attempt to conceal the import of his confrontational rhetoric. In addition, the focus of Claudius's question 'What do *you* call the play?' (emphasis added) suggests that the King already has a premonition that Hamlet himself has taken an active role in rewriting sections of the plot to implicate his uncle as a regicide.

In the event, Hamlet gets exactly what he wants. When Claudius sees Lucianus pour poison in the ear of the Player King, he makes a dash for the exit:

OPHELIA The King rises.
HAMLET What, frightened with false fire?
QUEEN (*to Claudius*) How fares my lord?
POLONIUS Give o'er the play.
KING Give me some light. Away.
COURTIERS Lights, lights, lights! (253-58)

However, Claudius's five words do not literally implicate him as a regicide and it is important to remember that we too are expecting him to behave in this fashion because Hamlet has expended a considerable number of lines preparing us for such an outcome. Evidently Gertrude is concerned for the welfare of her husband and the solicitous Polonius takes it upon himself to halt the production. Hamlet is absolutely convinced that his plotting has resulted in highly accurate intelligence that confirms the Ghost's accusations most emphatically:

⁴⁸⁸ Michael J. Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 20-21.

HAMLET O good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound.
 Didst perceive?
 HORATIO Very well, my lord.
 HAMLET Upon the talk of the pois'ning?
 HORATIO I did very well note him. (274-78)

However, as Michael Shurgot notes, 'while Hamlet is now certain of the King's guilt, achieving certitude has proved costly: the entire court has heard him threaten the King and insult the Queen.'⁴⁸⁹ Hamlet relies upon Horatio to confirm his assessment of the King's behaviour, but, given Horatio's proclivity for passivity, he should not necessarily be taken as a reliable witness. Imagine how disappointed Hamlet would feel if his only real ally expressed doubt about his interpretation of what has just happened! It is more noteworthy that no other member of the Court, particularly Gertrude or Polonius, thinks to question why the King left the performance in such haste. Granted, one could posit the existence of any number of hushed conversations about this matter that take place offstage, but it is surely significant that Shakespeare does not explicitly introduce them into the dramatic dialogue. The Queen herself seems completely incapable of fathoming the possibility that Claudius is a regicide, as becomes clear when Hamlet confronts his mother in her closet a few scenes later.

On his way to that location Hamlet comes upon the King at prayer. Unlike the other three eavesdropping episodes in Act 3 (the 'To be'/'nunnery scene', the play-within-the-play and the scene in Gertrude's closet), all of which occur as a direct result of spies' plotting, this scene is notable for the fact that the two characters end up alone in the same location simply by chance. Exactly why that happens is something of a mystery: if Claudius does want to pray alone he would surely do so well away from the route that Hamlet would follow whilst walking to Gertrude's closet from the public space where the play-scene took place. Then again, early-modern buildings did not have corridors: one moved from the communal to the private by progressing through a series of adjoining rooms that became ever more sequestered in nature.⁴⁹⁰ Given her status as Queen, Gertrude's closet is probably located at the very end of this sequence of chambers. Perhaps the implication is that the physical structure of the household at Elsinore does not even grant the King total privacy as he attempts repentance.

⁴⁸⁹ Michael Shurgot, '“Get you a place”: Staging the Mousetrap at the Globe Theatre,' *Shakespeare Bulletin* 12.3 (1994), 7.

⁴⁹⁰ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 219-32.

Joseph Sterrett argues that ‘this quiet scene is the lynchpin of the play’s programme of incertitude, for it is the point when the plot divides observers on the “inside” and what they “know,” from observers on the “outside,” the audience.’⁴⁹¹ At last the audience is given unequivocal proof that the King is indeed guilty of regicide and, more significantly, that Claudius’s sinful state is prohibiting his ability to engage with God meaningfully:

My fault is past – but O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? ‘Forgive me my foul murder’?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder –
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th’offence? (3.3.51-56)

The dramatic crux of the episode lies in the fact that the Prince enters after the King has spoken his soliloquy and proceeded with the prayer itself. Hamlet assumes that Claudius’s petition for divine forgiveness will be successful simply because the King is making an effort in this regard. The Prince also believes that it is incumbent on him as a revenger to wait for a more appropriate opportunity to kill his uncle:

Am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No. (84-87)

For a brief but crucial moment Hamlet thinks like those characters in *Much Ado* who assume that their apparently privileged positions of surveillance allow them to gather intelligence of unparalleled accuracy. Once the Prince sheathes his sword and exits, the King reveals that his prayer has been a failure:

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go. (97-98)

As James Hirsh notes, ‘the irony is that if Hamlet had remained onstage for just a moment longer and kept his mouth shut, he would have overheard Claudius’s admission of his failure to repent.’⁴⁹² While it would be going too far to claim that Hamlet is naïve for making this assumption about Claudius’s spiritual state, the episode does show that even the craftiest of spies are prone to make errors of

⁴⁹¹ Joseph Sterrett, ‘Confessing Claudius: sovereignty, fraternity and isolation at the heart of *Hamlet*,’ *Textual Practice* 23.5 (2009), 739.

⁴⁹² Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*, 160.

judgement because they operate in a manner that privileges their own views about how others' mental processes operate.

Although Gertrude and Polonius do not query why Claudius was so offended by what he saw onstage, both Queen and counsellor feel it their duty to hold Hamlet accountable for upsetting the King. Thus Polonius explains to Gertrude what she should do whilst he eavesdrops behind the arras once more:

A will come straight. Look you lay home to him.
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
And that your grace hath screened and stood between
Much heat and him. I'll silence me e'en here.
Pray you be round with him. (3.4.1-5)

For anyone still in doubt as to whether Polonius is sexist that question can now be answered unequivocally in the affirmative: once again a woman functions as bait while the spy seeks intelligence about Hamlet's state of mind, and once again the old counsellor simply does not trust members of the other sex to interpret the Prince's behaviour judiciously. Patricia Parker points to the close link between female sexuality and spying in the play:

The sense of *close* as 'secret' or 'hid' in relation to the sexual 'privitie' of woman informs the network of associations between this private female place and the language of spying, informing, or espial central to *Hamlet*, including the scene in a queen's 'closet' to which a secret informer, or delator, comes as a spy.⁴⁹³

The counsellor's prejudice in this regard comes through strongly when he outlines his plan to the King in the preceding scene:

Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home.
And, as you said – and wisely was it said –
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear
The speech of vantage. (3.3.28-33)

Yet it was actually Polonius himself, not the King, who devised this second eavesdropping scheme at the close of 3.1. Philip Edwards suggests that 'Polonius's transfer of responsibility for the scheme is a matter of prudence as well as deference' and G. R. Hibbard notes that 'he flatteringly gives the King the credit for it while

⁴⁹³ Patricia Parker, 'Othello and Hamlet: Dilation, Spying and the "Secret Place" of Woman,' *Representations* 44 (1993), 64.

simultaneously congratulating himself on its ingenuity.⁴⁹⁴ By attributing this piece of plotting to the King, Polonius, at least in his own mind, is also able to offload his sexist attitudes onto Claudius and hence to absolve himself of responsibility, should the scheme not go to plan. The counsellor has good reason to do this in light of what happened in 3.1. Whether or not Polonius believed that Hamlet's 'Where's your father?' was a spiteful remark intended for his hearing at that precise moment, or, as recent editors of the play would have it, a more general comment triggered by the negative associations that Hamlet makes between Ophelia and her father, the counsellor must by now be feeling more wary of what the aggrieved Prince might do to him. From Polonius's point of view, it is essential that he convince himself that his undercover spy work arises from a need to protect the interests of the Danish sovereign, instead of simply reflecting an ignoble desire to deploy the bodies of women in order to gratify his propensity for chauvinism. We may not believe Polonius's convoluted rhetoric but it would appear that the counsellor is ultimately more adept at deceiving himself than others.

Catherine Richardson argues that the space of Gertrude's closet functions as a decoy for luring Hamlet into thinking that this meeting with his mother is simply personal in nature, when in fact issues of Danish court politics are also at play, not least because of Polonius's hidden presence behind the arras:

The fact that Polonius speaks first, that he does so in such a directive way, and that the matter he raises is entirely political rather than domestic in the quotidian sense, plays against the sense of privacy and controllability suggested by the location's interior qualities, making Gertrude's closet seem an extension of her husband's court rather than her own private quarters.⁴⁹⁵

Yet Gertrude begins by addressing her son in a manner familial instead of political: 'Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended' (3.4.9). Still unable to comprehend why Hamlet is experiencing such intense grief at the loss of his father, Gertrude readily collapses the distinction between Claudius and Old Hamlet that the Prince characterised earlier as that of 'Hyperion to a satyr' (1.2.140). All that matters to the Queen is that Hamlet has a father figure in his life who claims to have the Prince's best interest at heart, as Claudius avows so emphatically in 1.2. Furthermore, the text of the play gives no indication that Gertrude remarried with the specific intention of disowning the memory of her late husband or causing spitefulness in her son. As

⁴⁹⁴ *Hamlet*, ed. Edwards, 183; *Hamlet*, ed. Hibbard, 272.

⁴⁹⁵ Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 112.

Richard Levin has detailed at some length, the only evidence that the play provides about any intentionally devious behaviour on the part of the Queen stems from speeches delivered by Hamlet and the Ghost, both of whom have good reason to feel aggrieved at her conduct:

Unfortunately for her, Gertrude is the victim of a bad press, not only on the stage and screen and in the critical arena, but also within Shakespeare's text, since she and her libido are constructed for us by the two men who have grievances against her and so must be considered hostile and therefore unreliable witnesses, while she herself is given no opportunity to testify on her own behalf.⁴⁹⁶

Like Ophelia before her, Gertrude is forced to make a choice between an older man with authority at court and a younger man who feels himself shunned by the system. In a strikingly common-sense reading of Gertrude's role in the play, Rebecca Smith argues that the Queen's personal tragedy stems from her desire not to express preference for either Hamlet or Claudius:

The traditional depiction of Gertrude as a sensual, deceitful woman is a false one, because what *her* words and actions actually create is a soft, obedient, dependent, unimaginative woman who is caught miserably at the center of a desperate struggle between two 'mighty opposites,' her 'heart cleft in twain' by divided loyalties to husband and son. She loves both Claudius and Hamlet, and their conflict leaves her bewildered and unhappy.⁴⁹⁷

Hamlet's hatred of the King renders him incapable of comprehending why his mother would want harmony at court and so the Prince, eager to bolster his lacklustre spy network, sets out to convince Gertrude that she ought to abandon her relationship with Claudius and ally herself with him instead. To achieve this, Hamlet forces Gertrude into a chair, compelling the Queen to reflect upon her conduct at court:

Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you. (3.4.18-20)

⁴⁹⁶ Richard Levin, 'Gertrude's Elusive Libido and Shakespeare's Unreliable Narrators,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 48.2 (2008), 323.

⁴⁹⁷ Rebecca Smith, 'A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude' in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, Chicago and London: U of Illinois P, 1980), 194. A similar point is made by G. B. Shand: 'The actor setting out to play Gertrude quickly becomes aware of strict constraints in the world of her character, constraints no less oppressive for the fact that Gertrude is Queen ... She endures a condition of sexual and emotional isolation, of generally unconsidered male domination and violence, and of implicitly prescribed silence.' See 'Realising Gertrude: The Suicide Option' in *The Elizabethan Theatre XIII*, ed. A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee (Toronto: Meany, 1994), 101.

Hamlet naively assumes that because he has a compulsive proclivity for self-reflection, his mother must at least be prepared to think upon her own conduct periodically. Yet the fact that Hamlet has to compel her to sit demonstrates that Gertrude does not share the same psychological predilections as her son. Instead, she assumes that Hamlet is now directing his mad behaviour towards her:

QUEEN

What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?

Help, help, ho!

POLONIUS (*behind the arras*) What ho! Help, help, help!

HAMLET

How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead.

He thrusts his sword through the arras

POLONIUS

O, I am slain!

QUEEN (*to Hamlet*) O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET

Nay, I know not. Is it the King?

(21-25)

All hell breaks loose: Gertrude, mistaking Hamlet's rough handling of her for an act of homicide, cries out for assistance; Polonius, forgetting that to speak will make his presence known and thus endanger him, raises the alarm; and Hamlet at last abandons indecision for impetuous action. None of the editions of the play that I have consulted comment upon Hamlet's words at line 25. I take that utterance to be disingenuous: either the Prince really believes that the spy is Claudius and is being overemphatic, or he recognises Polonius's voice immediately and, fed up with the counsellor's sly schemes, takes the opportunity to dispatch him once and for all. However, the binary that I have posited could well be a moot point as it relies too closely on determining the degree to which the arras might muffle Polonius's voice, possibly leading Hamlet to mistake the counsellor for the King. Alternatively, Hamlet genuinely may have no idea who is hidden behind the arras. Evidently this is an insoluble detail that actors and directors might ponder as they discuss Hamlet's motives in this episode. More broadly, Hamlet's rash behaviour provides an unparalleled example of how casual actions can have profound consequences: as a direct result of this deed Hamlet, himself a revenger, also becomes a target at the hands of Laertes. For all his protracted rhetoric, the irony is that Hamlet's fate is decided as a consequence of a bodily movement that took mere seconds. The Prince thus sets in train a mirror plot in which he becomes the patricide who is the object of a son's revenge agenda.

Polonius's demise is one of the most vital plot elements in *Hamlet*, yet the counsellor is dead with seven-eighths of 3.4 still to be played. Having dispatched the counsellor, Hamlet continues with his mission to 'speak daggers' (3.2.385) to his mother. The Prince applies psychological pressure, using portraits of Old Hamlet and Claudius to compel Gertrude to side with his view about the reckless nature of her behaviour:

This *was* your husband. Look you now what follows.
Here *is* your husband, like a mildewed ear
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes? (62-66)

Hamlet's key point is that Gertrude herself is not guilty of anything *per se* but must still be held accountable for what he takes to be her voluntary association with Claudius. Yet, as this chapter has already shown, Claudius is a highly adept rhetorician and if Gertrude is, as Rebecca Smith argues above, a 'dependent, unimaginative woman,' then she stands little chance of asserting herself in opposition to the new King. Hamlet does not even try to explain to his mother the complexities of the covert surveillance operations that have come to symbolise the convoluted relationship that he endures with Claudius and his agents, but merely asks Gertrude to examine her interpersonal relationships in the plain light of day. At the same time the Prince's repeated question 'have you eyes?' is necessarily loaded, not only because Hamlet continues to berate his mother without giving her an opportunity to answer, but also because he is by now realising that his fury may be to no avail. Most hurtfully for Hamlet, Gertrude is unable to perceive the Ghost when it returns to examine the revenger's conscience:

This is the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in. (128-30)

By now the Queen has come to the conclusion that her son is indeed mad. At this stage of the action there is still a faint chance that Gertrude is feigning ignorance of the Ghost's existence in order to sound out Hamlet's mental processes, but that possibility disappears altogether when Shakespeare does not introduce another episode in which the Queen explains why she behaved deviously, and in any case that would be highly incompatible with her benign conduct elsewhere in the play.

Gertrude is not in the same league as those spies at Elsinore who relentlessly employ such furtive techniques to elicit intelligence covertly.

Gertrude may not be able to comprehend what it is that is causing Hamlet so much distress, but she is evidently overcome with emotion by the end of the scene:

Be thou assured, if words be made of breath,
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me. (181-83)

The only result of Hamlet's furious rhetoric is that the Queen too experiences the same sort of world-weariness that afflicts her son throughout the play. Hamlet's mission to convince his mother that she ought to ally herself with him instead of the King has thus proved a resounding failure. If anything, Gertrude is now more likely to err in Claudius's favour because at least the King does not engage in penetrating and hurtful examinations of her conscience. In addition, Claudius does not seem to be mad: his cover of political normalcy works far more effectively on Gertrude than does Hamlet's 'antic disposition.'

In contrast to the fuller 1604 second quarto and 1623 first folio texts, the closet scene in the 1603 first quarto of *Hamlet* is particularly significant because the Queen makes a conscious decision to become her son's ally. As G. B. Shand observes, 'not only does the closet scene move the Queen efficiently to Hamlet's side, but it does so with clear theatrical intelligence, without inviting the actor to deal with complicating alternatives.'⁴⁹⁸ First, Gertrude avows total ignorance of how Old Hamlet met his death: 'But as I have a soul, I swear by heaven, / I never knew of this most horrid murder' (11.83-84). Secondly, she declares that she will keep her knowledge of this intelligence secret, and also that she will aid Hamlet in his plotting against the King:

Hamlet, I vow by that majesty
That knows our thoughts and looks into our hearts,
I will conceal, consent, and do my best,
What stratagem soe'er thou shalt devise. (11.95-98)

Later, in a scene unique to Q1, Horatio brings the Queen intelligence of Hamlet's sudden return to Denmark in spite of the 'subtle treason that the King has plotted'

⁴⁹⁸ G. B. Shand, 'Gertrude, Captive Queen of the First Quarto' in *Shakespearean Illuminations: Essays in Honor of Marvin Rosenberg*, ed. Jay L. Halio and Hugh Richmond (Newark, DE and London, England: U of Delaware P and Associated UP, 1998), 40.

(14.4). The Queen, realising that she has mistaken the King's demeanour entirely, states that she will help by distracting her husband with idle pastimes:

Then I perceive there's treason in his looks
That seemed to sugar o'er his villainy.
But I will soothe and please him for a time,
For murderous minds are always jealous. (14.10-13)

As a result of these two episodes Queen Gertrud of Q1 is presented as a less equivocal character who makes a conscious decision to take sides, as well as exhibiting a capacity to engage in deceptive behaviour, at least insofar as she intends to feign ignorance of the murder when in the presence of the King.⁴⁹⁹

Whereas the Gertrude of Q2/F does not seem able to comprehend the necessity of espionage, the Gertrud of Q1, like the other lead roles, thinks much more like a spy. However, as Maurice Hunt notes, the Queen's stated intention to help her son does not materialise into any specific action:

In the remainder of Q1 *Hamlet*, Gertrud never does anything that can be construed as assisting her son's stratagem to punish the King. Nor does Hamlet ever ask her again to assist him in taking revenge against the King. Given that she is prepared to assist her son, Gertrud has put Hamlet before Claudius and therefore has sufficiently demonstrated her remorse.⁵⁰⁰

Perhaps, as Hunt implies, the greatest and most important change in the Queen, at least from Hamlet's point of view, is that she is prepared to acknowledge her mistakes, unintentional though they were. But taken as a whole, the fact that Hamlet does not specifically ask her to assist him suggests that what the Prince really wants is her moral support, regardless of whether the Queen can also help him in practical ways. Gertrud's lack of decided action in Q1 thus renders her a stunted or stillborn spy player.

On the other hand, given that Q1 seeks to eliminate some of the more ambiguous elements present in the longer texts of the play, the lack of correlation between intention and action on the part of Gertrud can be confusing.⁵⁰¹ This state of affairs adds weight to argument that Q1 is not authorial, as Shakespeare would surely

⁴⁹⁹ My view on this matter runs contrary to that of Dorothea Kehler, who writes: 'So dependent is Gertrud, Claudius's pale accessory and echo, that she appears foreordained to remarry. Her precipitate second marriage casts her as a lusty widow, but despite the stereotype, her speeches and actions are characterized almost exclusively by meekness and silence. For one thing, Gertrud is neutralized politically, being largely overlooked by Claudius and slighted by Cormabis.' See 'The First Quarto of *Hamlet*: Reforming Widow Gertrud,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46.4 (1995), 404.

⁵⁰⁰ Maurice Hunt, 'Gertrude's Interiority,' *Cahiers élisabéthains* 78 (2010), 17.

⁵⁰¹ For discussion of how Q1 reworks the plot of Q2/F see: *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, 33-34; *Hamlet*, ed. Hibbard, 73-74; *The First Quarto of Hamlet*, ed. Irace, 11-12.

have thought to follow through on this important new element of the plot, probably at some stage during the duel between Hamlet and Laertes. Instead, as Hunt notes, ‘the Queen takes the poisoned cup clearly intended for Hamlet and drinks from it, seemingly forgetful of having been told that her husband is a treacherous criminal and so not to be trusted with anything meant for her son.’⁵⁰² Then again, if Q1 postdates Q2/F, it would probably be too great an alteration to the ending of the play if the Queen were to engage in manipulative behaviour that might have the knock-on consequence of averting or otherwise complicating her accidental death.

Spying operations dominate Act 3 of *Hamlet*. While Claudius and Hamlet go about the business of sounding out one another’s intentions, Ophelia and Gertrude, who are to Polonius nothing more than bait, remain caught helplessly in the middle of eavesdropping schemes. Of necessity the two women must defer to the patriarchal authority that the King and his counsellor wield, the women’s powerlessness underscoring the extent to which political influence affects, and is affected by, espionage practices in the early-modern period. Hamlet has no ally aside from the docile Horatio and thus the Prince’s confrontations with Ophelia and Gertrude are bitterly poignant because they reveal his distress at having to operate as a lone agent in the otherwise claustrophobic atmosphere at Elsinore. Q1 does show the potential to turn the Queen into a covert player on Hamlet’s side, but that particular aspect of the plot remains an undeveloped lead. Most strikingly, the various episodes in Act 3 demonstrate the degree to which strategy and opportunity intermingle to determine the outcome of spies’ plotting, and it is to this aspect of the play in particular that the final section of this chapter now turns to discuss the final two acts of *Hamlet*.

⁵⁰² Hunt, ‘Gertrude’s Interiority,’ 18.

‘We defy augury’: plotting versus fate

When, after his return to Denmark, Hamlet recounts to Horatio how he was able to sidestep the King’s plot to have him killed in England, the Prince claims that he escaped due to divine intervention:

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly –
And praised be rashness for it: let us know
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will. (5.2.4-11)

Hamlet now deems ‘rashness’ to be a good quality in an agent, which flies in the face of his earlier assessment of the eavesdropping Polonius as a ‘rash, intruding fool’ (3.4.30). Hamlet’s verbal use or abuse of that trait as it suits him provides a none-too-subtle example of how the Prince’s personally inflected view of the world renders him blind to his hypocrisy (although Polonius too is guilty in that regard). More significantly, Hamlet asserts that his rash behaviour occurred as a direct result of God’s will. At this point Hamlet sounds like Henry V, who, having sprung his trap on the traitorous nobles, declares that ‘God so graciously hath brought to light / This dangerous treason lurking in our way’ (2.2.182-83).⁵⁰³ Yet, as demonstrated earlier, it is implausible for Henry to attribute the success of that mission to God alone because in practice the traitors could not have been apprehended without extensive surveillance work carried out by human agents, although those machinations do not appear onstage (see p. 197). It suits Henry’s rhetorical style to make this claim because to do so demonstrates Christian piety and strengthens his dubious claim to the English throne, but at the same time common sense dictates the unseen presence of a spy network whose job it is to protect the King from conspiratorial factions.

⁵⁰³ Employing a ‘genetic metaphor,’ Bert O. States contends that there is a close relationship between the two protagonists: ‘Henry and Hamlet are not clones, but more like brothers who have gone their ways to separate destinies, carrying much the same personal style and wit, the same system of preferences and values, much the same view of what is good or detestable, and most significantly the same degree of detachment from the world.’ However, shortly before this comment States remarks that ‘unlike Hamlet, Henry is heavily given to the praise of God and the rhetoric of office, or what Hamlet would disparagingly call “fair” speaking.’ While he rightly points out Henry’s proclivity for religious discourse, States fails to note that Hamlet does periodically engage with the concept of divine will, although to a lesser degree than Henry. See *Hamlet and the Concept of Character*, 158.

In a similar fashion, Hamlet claims that God expressly intervened in Claudius's wicked scheme, triggering in the Prince a restless night that prompted him to arise and steal the commission from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me in the dark,
Groped I to find out them, had my desire,
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew
To mine own room again, making so bold,
My fears forgetting manners, to unseal
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio –
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. (5.2.13-26)

Yet Hamlet's description of his actions that night has a real-world focus: the verbs 'groped' and 'fingered' denote the night-time setting but also provide the connotation that Hamlet himself is not totally sure why he is going about the secretive business of acquiring intelligence not intended for his eyes. The concept of divine intervention is not totally irrelevant, essentially because of its ubiquity in early-modern culture, but at the same time the Prince does not give himself sufficient credit for his own actions that night, particularly those spur-of-the-moment decisions that helped to save his life. Hamlet is shocked to discover Claudius's plot to have him killed, but he is also genuinely surprised at the speed with which he is able to counteract that scheme with a plot of his own:

Being thus benetted round with villanies –
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,
They had begun the play – I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and laboured much
How to forget that learning; but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. (30-37)

As in the play-within-the-play, Hamlet makes an explicit link between dramatic plotting and espionage, thus fashioning the metaphor of spy-as-playwright; Shakespeare himself, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, must surely have appreciated the metatheatrical implications of his protagonist's words. Hamlet recalls that certain mental processes outstripped others and that as a result he was barely able to keep

pace with his own plotting. Once again, the implication is that God must be responsible for this state of affairs because Hamlet himself is so used to surveilling the causal relationship between intention and action through the medium of soliloquy, instead of actually doing things. Yet there are precedents elsewhere in the play to show that Hamlet is also capable of spontaneous behaviour as occasion demands, of which the stabbing of Polonius provides a less positive example. In the words of A. C. Bradley:

The text does not bear out the idea that Hamlet was one-sidedly reflective and indisposed to action. Nobody who knew him seems to have noticed this weakness. Nobody regards him as a mere scholar who has never formed a resolution or executed a deed. In a court which certainly would not much admire such a person he is the observed of all observers.⁵⁰⁴

In his longest soliloquy the Prince explicitly berates himself for verbosity at the expense of action, and it is this very frustration that prompts him to plot the play-within-the-play in order to determine Claudius's guilt:

Why, what an ass am I? Ay, sure, this is most brave,
That I, the son of the dear murderèd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! Fie upon't, foh! – About, my brain. (2.2.585-90)

One can think of Hamlet as a character whose principal task is to speak in soliloquy, but, as Bradley realised, the situation is more complicated than that. Despite his reckless behaviour throughout the play-within-the-play, Hamlet also seems more upbeat in that episode than in any other part of the drama, perhaps because he is able to translate plotting into practice.

My argument is that, as with Henry's declarations at the end of the traitors' scene, Hamlet is being disingenuous in claiming that human agency had minimal impact in preventing him from harm whilst on the sea voyage to England. This is not to say that Hamlet does not believe in the mysterious workings of divinity, but that his words and actions elsewhere in the play create the image of a protagonist deeply invested in determining his own fate. Furthermore, even though the Prince claims 'I know not "seems" ' (1.2.76), this chapter has shown that, as an integral part of his spy role, Hamlet actively seeks to dissimulate.

⁵⁰⁴ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (1904; London: Penguin, 1991), 109.

Margreta de Grazia expresses the vital question about the temporal complexity of Hamlet's revenge as follows:

Why does Hamlet delay? That a single question should be seen from one generation to the next as *the* question to ask of the play is a unique phenomenon in the history of criticism ... 'Why does Hamlet delay?' 'Hamlet delays because of _____.' Fill in the blank, and you have the answer to Hamlet's character. And that answer is also the key to the play – and the play that is at the heart of Shakespeare's canon.⁵⁰⁵

To my mind, this question is a moot point because it presupposes the teleological certainty of a solution (including one with multiple factors), when Hamlet himself struggles to think of his plight in those terms:

I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do',
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
To do't.

(Additional passage J.34-37)⁵⁰⁶

It is far more in keeping with the behaviour of historical spies in the early-modern period that agents have little control over the timeframe of operations. Delay is an almost inevitable consequence of espionage because individual agents represent only one factor in much larger plots, be they historical or dramatic. In particular, dissimulation results in delay because one cannot be sure how others will respond; the chance that devious behaviour will produce exactly the outcome that a specific agent desires is relatively small, not least because the probability is that others are also behaving deceptively towards that agent at the same point in time (seen, for example, in the complexities of the 'To be'/'nunnery' episode). Duke Vincentio is fortunate enough to have some control over the pace of events in *Measure for Measure*, but even his plotting is disrupted by figures such as the recalcitrant Barnardine (see pp. 150-53). Hamlet, on the other hand, does not have the opportunity to employ a physical disguise and therefore his plotting is restricted by the need to conduct operations in a manner that relies solely on the use of an 'antic disposition.' Hamlet's delay is correlated with the complex realities of spying operations that unfold piece by piece and that agents must deal with patiently.

⁵⁰⁵ Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 158.

⁵⁰⁶ These lines only appear in Q2 and hence the editors of the Oxford *Complete Works*, who take F as their copy-text, print it as an additional passage.

One of the most significant comments that Hamlet makes regarding his ability to control his own fate as an agent occurs at the end of the closet scene:

There's letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows –
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged –
They bear the mandate, they must sweep my way
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,
For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard; and't shall go hard
But I will delve one yard below their mines
And blow them at the moon. O, 'tis most sweet
When in one line two crafts directly meet.

(Additional passage H.1-9)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are certainly having a hard time of it: even though Hamlet is well aware that, unlike Polonius, the novice agents have virtually no say in the King's plotting, the Prince is determined to make them pay for being allies of Claudius. To this end Hamlet, delighting in his own deviousness, turns his thoughts to siege warfare, imagining a scenario in which he will ruthlessly dispatch his false friends by countermining. Yet this scheme will still miss its principal target – the King – and even though Hamlet will live to plot another day his revenge will be delayed further still.

It is also important to note that the 'adders fanged' passage only appears in Q2 and thus the Hamlet of that text seems more focused on human agency, specifically his counterplotting against the King, whereas the Hamlet of F seems not only more willingly to accept his fate at the hands of God, but also to believe that divine intervention is necessary to protect him from Claudius's schemes. Incidentally, the passage is also absent from Q1, but at the concurrent point in that much shorter text Gertrude has just agreed to side with Hamlet instead of the King and so the audience is necessarily focused on the broader implications of the Queen's decision. Harold Jenkins, whose edition derives from Q2, rationalises that 'Hamlet's confidence in the outcome will prepare the audience for it, but affords no justification for supposing that he has any precise plan for bringing it about, which he ultimately does by sudden inspiration.'⁵⁰⁷ If F represents an authorial revision of Q2 then it is possible that Shakespeare himself came to the conclusion that Hamlet's views on strategy in 3.4 contradicted those on fate in 5.2. However, as Jenkins argues, the two statements are

⁵⁰⁷ *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, 331-32. For further editorial comment on this matter see: *Hamlet*, ed. Edwards, 15; *Hamlet*, ed. Hibbard, 361.

not necessarily incompatible because of the protagonist's obsession with plotting throughout the play, much of which must be carried out in a manner that is *ad hoc* rather than predetermined.

Some critics have even suggested that Hamlet is able to plot the meeting with the pirate ship in advance of his voyage to England.⁵⁰⁸ However, the term 'craft' (as in 'two crafts directly meet') never designates a sea-going vessel in Shakespearean English.⁵⁰⁹ Rather, Hamlet is musing on a situation 'where two pieces of cunning collide with each other (as a countermine meets a mine).'⁵¹⁰ It would be implausible, both dramatically and historically, for Hamlet to have such precise knowledge in advance how Claudius's scheme might play out in practice. However, as Karl P. Wentersdorf points out:

On board Claudius's ship and before the pirates overtook the Danish vessel, Hamlet had already taken the initiative to meet whatever danger threatened him. He had recognized that he was in danger while still in Elsinore, and he had voiced his suspicions during the scene in Gertrude's chamber.⁵¹¹

To reiterate a recurrent theme of this thesis, spies cannot know in advance how a plot will unfold because they have comparatively little control over the multitude of competing factors that intermingle to produce any given result. Furthermore, if Hamlet were to know about the pirate ship in advance it would actually render his own agency meaningless and there would be little point in him counterplotting against a predetermined outcome. Hamlet's fate is not written in the stars but dependent on his skill as a spy, particularly as regards his ability to respond to Claudius's subtle scheming in real time.

After the untimely death of Polonius, Claudius experiences heightened levels of anxiety in realising that he has just had a lucky escape, as he laments to Gertrude:

O heavy deed!
It had been so with us had we been there.
His liberty is full of threats to all –
To you yourself, to us, to everyone. (4.1.11-14)

⁵⁰⁸ Martin Stevens, 'Hamlet and the Pirates: A Critical Reconsideration,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26.3 (1975), 276-84; David Farley-Hills, 'Hamlet's Account of the Pirates,' *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 50 (1999), 320-31.

⁵⁰⁹ *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, 332. The first citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from 1671, but the compilers also note that the term may well have been in use colloquially for some time amongst seafarers prior to that. Shakespeare may have been aware of the nautical meaning of 'craft' but Hamlet's use of the word in this passage most obviously sits within the context of spying strategies.

⁵¹⁰ *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, 354.

⁵¹¹ Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'Hamlet's Encounter with the Pirates,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34.4 (1983), 435.

Although Claudius had already decided to send Hamlet to England at the conclusion of the ‘nunnery’ episode, that course of action now becomes temporally imperative: whereas the threat that Hamlet posed at the beginning of Act 3 was more hypothetical in nature, in the aftermath of the closet scene the King realises that his nephew must be removed from the court as swiftly as possible if he is to avoid a fate similar to that of Polonius. The King’s first decision is to consult with his courtiers:

Come, Gertrude, we’ll call up our wisest friends
And let them know both what we mean to do
And what’s untimely done. (37-39)

Yet it is unclear who these ‘wisest friends’ might be. Of all the members of Claudius’s court that appear onstage Voltmand and Cornelius are the most likely candidates but, unlike Polonius, those characters do not have a close personal relationship with the King. Voltmand and Cornelius play a diplomatic role on behalf of the King when they travel to the Norwegian court, but one gets the impression that Claudius is unlikely to confide in them about delicate personal matters. Polonius’s death leaves a significant fissure in Claudius’s spy network and forces the King to plot surveillance missions without the assistance of his much-trusted counsellor.

As a result, it is little wonder that Claudius starts to panic as Act 4 progresses. Of particular note is the King’s assessment of how various plot strands are starting to accumulate in a manner that spells disaster for his ability to control the court:

O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come they come not single spies,
But in battalions. First, her father slain;
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
Of his own just remove; the people muddied,
Thick and unwholesome in thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius’ death, and we have done but greenly
In hugger-mugger to inter him; poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgement,
Without the which we are pictures or mere beasts;
Last, and as much containing as all these,
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on this wonder, keeps himself in clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father’s death;
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murd’ring-piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death. (4.5.75-94)

Notwithstanding Claudius's evil nature, and perhaps even because of it, this passage, at least to my mind, is one of the most emotionally compelling in the Shakespearean corpus. Claudius's anxiety is foregrounded by his apostrophes to Gertrude at both the beginning and the end of this speech, demonstrating that even a cunning politician such as he has need for emotional comfort when the world of which he thought he was master starts to collapse around him. Polonius has been buried hurriedly, perhaps because the King feels indirectly responsible for his counsellor's death and does not want to give the court time to ponder why he did not act more swiftly to detain his lunatic nephew. Ophelia has gone mad with grief and Claudius may feel himself partially accountable for that state of affairs too. Lastly, whereas in the expository court scene Laertes sought the King's 'leave and favour to return to France' (1.2.51), now he travels home without advance notification. Incidentally, the fact that Claudius knows of Laertes's 'secret' return suggests that the King's surveillance network is still able to gather useful intelligence, even if its principal operative is now dead. Yet there are still numerous 'buzzers' spreading rumour in Denmark, whose presence may turn the incensed Laertes against Claudius.

Earlier in the play, Claudius's major concern is to keep Hamlet under constant surveillance, thereby allowing him to act should the need arise. By now, however, the consequences of the Prince's erratic behaviour have transformed that single factor into a multitude of problems that threaten to undermine Claudius's rule. Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech may or may not apply to the Prince's situation earlier in the play, but Claudius is certainly facing a 'sea of troubles' (3.1.61) by this point in time, particularly with his trusted counsellor dead. Instead of 'single spies' (4.5.76) – lone military scouts, whose presence portends trouble but does not in itself pose immediate danger – the King now conjures up an image of an entire army of 'sorrows' bearing down upon him. There is good reason to infer that, in contrast to Old Hamlet, Claudius is inept as a soldier or disinterested in martial life. Whereas Horatio recounts how 'our valiant Hamlet' (1.1.83) slew Old Fortinbras in single combat, the play never gives any indication that Claudius has a penchant for physical activity, aside from ducking behind an arras or 'making love / Over the nasty sty' (3.4.83-84). In the words of Michael E. Holstein, 'not a strong right arm but an agile tongue and, more especially, an attentive ear are the organs of state for the King.'⁵¹² But with the irate

⁵¹² Holstein, 'Dirty Tricks at Elsinore and the Politics of Play,' 330.

Laertes about to burst into the castle with his followers, Claudius's key weapons may no longer help to protect him.

To give him credit, Claudius is ultimately able to control his angst and channel that energy into persuading Laertes to join him in plotting against Hamlet. This requires significant rhetorical skill given that Laertes would simply rather 'cut his throat i'th' church' (4.7.99). The most interesting aspect of this plot is that the device of the poisoned rapier has a back up plan:

If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
'Twere better not essayed. Therefore this project
Should have a back or second that might hold
If this should blast in proof. Soft, let me see.
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings ...
I ha't! When in your motion you are hot and dry –
As make your bouts more violent to that end –
And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepared him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,
Our purpose may hold there. (123-34)

Although Laertes may be considering thrusting his rapier deep inside Hamlet's body to effect his revenge, such overt violence would not aid the King's plan to dispatch of his nephew via more surreptitious methods. At the same time it would clearly be improbable for Hamlet to die within moments of receiving a less serious wound, unless he had been poisoned simultaneously. In short, the success or failure of Claudius's scheme will be dictated by whether or not Hamlet can be poisoned, either by rapier or wine, before the Prince suspects foul play and demands that the judges investigate. Once the fateful deed is done neither Claudius nor Laertes will necessarily be able to control the court's reaction to Hamlet's demise, and the plotters will need to think on their feet in order to distract attention from themselves. In one sense that will not matter because Claudius and Laertes will have achieved their objective. However, the fact that the King does not advise Laertes on how he ought to behave after Hamlet's death suggests that there comes a point when spies simply cannot plan for every contingency and must instead rely on fate working to their advantage. It should also be noted that Claudius's plotting is interrupted (at 5.2.134) by the arrival of Gertrude bringing news of Ophelia's death. Perhaps Shakespeare used the Queen's entrance as a convenient device to break off an element of his own plotting that he could not resolve satisfactorily, specifically the issue of how Claudius

and Laertes could poison Hamlet in full view of the court without anyone becoming suspicious. The notion that playwrights and characters could share the same quandary provides yet more evidence to underscore the metatheatrical correlation between Shakespeare's plotting and that of his dramatic spies.

Curiously enough, Hamlet throws caution to the wind when summoned to duel with Laertes. On this occasion the normally passive Horatio actually takes it upon himself to warn Hamlet against taking part in the contest. Yet Hamlet dismisses this advice on the grounds that he can do no more to ready himself for the inevitable showdown with fate:

HORATIO If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

HAMLET Not a whit. We defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

(5.2.163-70)

As I have been arguing, Hamlet does not believe that fate dictates his every move, but at the same time there comes a point when even he has to be content with his planning and hope that he has the wherewithal to cope with obstacles as they arise. What Hamlet is referring to in the above passage, however, is not the duel specifically but the broader issue of his own death, whenever that might occur. While Christian piety dictates that Hamlet should accept whatever God has in mind for him, the Prince's words also demonstrate an acceptance that his own death may well be a requisite part of his revenge, as Philip Edwards explains: 'Hamlet knows the King will be making a second attempt to murder him. He must also have in mind the final confrontation when he will "quit" Claudius, even if it costs him his life.'⁵¹³ Yet that argument also relies on the assumption that Hamlet himself has a quasi-divine ability to foretell the future, when in fact he explicitly states 'we defy augury.' To a pious Christian necromancy and divine foresight are certainly not equivalent but, more to the point, they do fall in the same broad category of prediction instead of thinking on the run. Throughout the play Hamlet has been able to do some plotting in advance, but is more often forced to react to particular situations in real time.

⁵¹³ *Hamlet*, ed. Edwards, 246.

If any of the historical spies referred to in this thesis were to comment on Hamlet's forays into the world of espionage, those individuals would probably emphasise the protagonist's need to respond swiftly and decisively to given circumstances, instead of adhering rigidly to a predetermined plan. In the event, that is precisely how Hamlet is able to dispatch his murderous uncle: 'The point envenomed too? Then, venom, to thy work' (274). Reacting promptly to Laertes's confession that the rapier is poisoned, Hamlet realises in an instant the deed that has cost him an entire play's worth of deliberation.

Espionage permeates the action of *Hamlet* thoroughly and Horatio's account of recent events at Elsinore in the dying moments of the play takes full account of that state of affairs:

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 th'inventors' heads. All this can I
Truly deliver. (334-40)

Horatio's words attest to the fact that most spies do not exist in a world that allows them to control events at will. Prospero's experience in *The Tempest* is almost unique in this regard, and even he has to cope with the problems that arise when the rogue agent Caliban defects to a new master. Claudius, despite his overt political skill at using masterful rhetoric to control the Danish court, still resorts to espionage in order to keep his nephew under constant surveillance. The very fact that Claudius has come to the throne by foul means actually necessitates such underhand practices because he cannot afford this vital piece of intelligence to be leaked to anyone, not even his long-time counsellor Polonius. Embittered by the court's decision to create Claudius monarch instead of him, Hamlet also decides to engage in espionage instead of running the risk of treason by accusing his uncle of regicide without sufficient evidence. Both protagonist and antagonist thus propel themselves into a situation in which they must sound each other out opportunistically, building on every useful piece of intelligence gleaned in a subtle and temporally non-linear game of political one-upmanship.

Conclusion

Hamlet constitutes Shakespeare's deepest dramatic engagement with espionage practices in early-modern court culture. This chapter has examined three specific elements of the covert machinations between those 'mighty opposites' Hamlet and Claudius. First, this chapter examined the practices of the King's spy network, which consists of Polonius, his trusted counsellor, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, recent recruits to the world of espionage. Secondly, close attention was given to the nuances of Hamlet's multifarious spying operations in Act 3, demonstrating in particular the profound hurt that the Prince experiences upon discovering that he cannot create allies out of Ophelia and Gertrude. The chapter concluded by analysing the relative importance of plotting versus fate in the final two acts of the play, arguing that Hamlet, despite claiming on occasion that God alone determines his fate, is also deeply invested in controlling his own destiny via conspiratorial behaviour.

7. Conclusion: plotting a thesis on espionage

This thesis has argued for the correlation between Shakespeare's drama and espionage practices in Elizabethan England. The Introduction provided a wide-ranging evaluation of spying and surveillance in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, with particular focus on how Elizabeth's courtiers used intelligence operations to protect the interests of the Protestant English state in the face of threats from Catholic powers in continental Europe. The most important figure in this regard is Sir Francis Walsingham, sometimes dubbed Elizabeth's 'spymaster,' who, in his role as Principal Secretary, masterminded spying operations at court for nearly twenty years; notable achievements included the entrapment of Mary, Queen of Scots and vital intelligence work pertaining to the Spanish Armada. While courtiers like Walsingham employed a number of trusted personal secretaries, it was rare for individuals who operated as agents on the ground to gain any sort of tenure. Although an ability to dissemble was a vital attribute for the ambitious spy, courtiers and secretaries had to face the reality that this trait also rendered agents prone to devious behaviour towards them too, such as sharing intelligence with, or even defecting to, the enemy. Spies often engaged in a process of behavioural equivocation, with the result that surveillance missions were frequently characterised by indecision on the part of the agent. Furthermore, missions were temporally non-linear: an intelligence coup on one day could be followed by a careless error on the next and a need to reshuffle priorities in order to achieve the desired outcome.

Subsequent chapters on individual plays explored Shakespeare's engagement with these concepts across a range of dramatic genres. The core plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* revolves around the scheme devised by the secretary Borachio to convince Claudio and Don Pedro that Hero is false. Importantly, Borachio's scheme succeeds (at least initially) because Claudio and Don Pedro convince themselves that they have been able to gain access to accurate intelligence about the underhand behaviour of the bride-to-be, when in fact they should have focused their attention on the mechanics of Borachio's deceit. The parallel plot in which Beatrice and Benedick eavesdrop in order to 'discover' news about each other's undeclared affection reinforces the notion that spies are inherently prone to believe intelligence simply because it gratifies their view of an idealistic world.

The Tempest stages the spymaster-agent team of Prospero and Ariel engaged in the business of plotting and carrying out a series of surveillance missions that will allow the shipwrecked mage finally to revenge himself on his enemies. The unusually short timeframe of the dramatic action – three hours – emphasises the duo’s skill at their work, as well as giving audiences the opportunity to experience how intelligence operations might unfold in real time. Although Ariel has supernatural powers, his bond with Prospero is overshadowed by the space of the prison; the spymaster uses threats of incarceration to exert authority over his agent, as happened to many spies in early-modern England. Simultaneously, Prospero has to quash the political ambitions of the defector Caliban, but ultimately assumes responsibility for him at the close of the play, thereby emphasising the fraught nature of inter-personal relationships between courtiers and agents in the world of early-modern espionage.

Adopting a disguise as a friar, the Duke in *Measure for Measure* penetrates the space of the prison as a stool pigeon, using his assumed spiritual office to manipulate vulnerable individuals into compromising positions. Vincentio sidesteps the potential problem of intelligence leaks by subsuming the tripartite division of early-modern spy structures – courtier, secretary and agent – into his own person. However, the Duke still has to work and rework his schemes on the run, particularly in response to the incorrigible prisoner Barnardine, who refuses to comply with Vincentio’s scheme to find a substitute head for that of Claudio, and the counter-spy Lucio, who threatens to compromise Vincentio’s credibility by revealing unsavoury intelligence about his sex life. Although the Duke ultimately succeeds in reinforcing his status as ruler of Vienna, the problematic marriages that close the play suggest that Vincentio’s intelligence operations have not enhanced the moral legitimacy of his ducal office.

Henry V demonstrates the fundamental importance of intelligence operations during a hot war. The King attributes the discovery of the traitors’ scheme to God alone, but would not have been able to make such a claim had it not been for the secretive exertions of a spy network whose machinations never appear onstage. While Henry appears all-powerful in that episode, the events of the night before Agincourt demonstrate that to function as an agent on the ground is considerably more challenging than simply using the results of an intelligence operation to spring a trap on one’s enemies. The disguised King, who does not set out to spy on his troops but falls into that situation by virtue of the fact that his soldiers are conscientious in

keeping watch prior to battle, confronts a number of challenging propositions from the common soldier Williams, which ultimately force Henry to reconsider the legitimacy of the war against France and his kingship more generally. The final play of Shakespeare's *Henriad* thus emphasises the crucial link between surveillance and political survival in a world in which courtly factions compete for supremacy.

Spying operations permeate many aspects of *Hamlet*, which pitches the disgruntled Prince against his murderous uncle in a battle of conspiratorial dexterity. Claudius relies on the machinations of his trusted counsellor Polonius to keep his nephew under constant surveillance, as well as deploying the inexperienced Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in a bid to ascertain Hamlet's state of mind by any means possible. By contrast, Hamlet conducts operations largely by himself, although he does occasionally rely upon Horatio to confirm the accuracy of the intelligence he has gathered. Act 3 is particularly dense in spying operations, through which it becomes apparent that one of Hamlet's principal grievances is his inability to fashion allies out of Ophelia and Gertrude. Hamlet's delay, a recurrent theme for critics of the play, can be reconceived as a complex matrix of conspiratorial cause and effect: like historical agents in early-modern England, the Prince must deal patiently with the intricate realities of spying operations as they unfold. This state of affairs also explains Hamlet's investment in determining his own destiny through plotting, instead of simply relying on fate dealing him a lucky hand.

Like those who gained employment as agents in early-modern England, Shakespeare's dramatic spies behave in a manner that is personally inflected to a profound degree. This is not because these characters are egotistical simpletons with no capacity to consider the needs of others. Rather, the numerous pitfalls associated with the murky world of espionage necessitates scepticism about one's allies, who can quite easily turn out to be false friends. From a practical point of view, one simply has to put oneself first in order to survive. Even when a character claims to be operating in the interests of a particular courtly faction, such rhetoric demonstrates more fundamentally that individual's desire to mould the political culture of the court using espionage, and thereby elevate his or her prominence within that faction. Characters frequently deceive themselves about their own ability as spies, perhaps because they have underestimated those they are surveilling, or because they adhere to a predetermined plan instead of responding to situations in real time, or even because they become distracted and make careless errors. Such scenarios heighten the

dramatic interest of the play and help to enrich our understanding of characters' motives for practising espionage.

Shakespeare's engagement with espionage through his dramatic work was profound and far-reaching and to date has not received the critical attention it deserves. This thesis seeks to rectify this omission. All of Shakespeare's plays make reference to spying and surveillance in one way or another and some, such as the five considered in this thesis, would be altered beyond comprehension if such vital elements of the plot were removed. If anything, my work has been limited more by the practical strictures of the research degree than by the available material. For example, I could have included chapters analysing the disguised Kent's secretarial loyalty in *King Lear*, or the link between spying operations and gender confusion in *Twelfth Night*, or Iago's use of false intelligence to turn former allies against one another in *Othello*, all of which would have contributed to a fuller appreciation of Shakespeare's fascination with the metatheatrical relationship between characters' schemes and his own plotting as a dramatist.

It is also noteworthy that the five plays analysed in this thesis are among the most frequently staged and studied in the Shakespearean canon, which suggests that the core issue of espionage inspires audiences and scholars alike, and even provides a fundamental driver for the perceived cultural value of theatre more generally. Yet this thesis has not employed a 'presentist' mode of analysis, tempting as it may be for the author to protest that his interest in the subject stems from the fact that he has simultaneously been leading a double life as an agent, and regularly receives personal telephone calls from the head of ASIO in the middle of the night detailing his next daring mission behind enemy lines. (While I would be loathe to write that excuse on a university form I do, however, like the idea that the present-day equivalent of Elizabeth's Privy Council might intervene on my behalf regarding the award of a degree, as happened to Marlowe in 1587). Fantasy aside, the principal driver behind the decision to centre this thesis historically instead of in the present derives from the manner in which early-modern court culture moulded surveillance networks. While today's spy organisations are often monolithic government structures to which agents pay abstract loyalty, spies in Elizabethan England sought the protection of powerful courtiers to whom they owed personal allegiance. As a result, inter-personal relationships between courtiers, secretaries and spies frequently

determined the success or failure of a mission, and Shakespeare reflects such concerns time and time again in his dramatic work.

Finally, the process of writing this thesis has made me acutely aware of the sorts of problems associated with the world of espionage because I too have had to contend with what at times seemed a bewildering array of factors when plotting both the overall argument and the numerous details of specific chapters. On many occasions I did not know how a particular idea might develop, and, like an agent whose mission has temporarily stalled, simply had to wait for a workable solution to become apparent. As Shakespeare himself surely appreciated, writing, like espionage, is a complex process where cause and effect can seem indistinguishable: an apparently easy problem proves insurmountable, then a complex issue can be tackled by looking at it in a different light, and then it proves expedient to abandon a dead end in favour of an alternative plot. Outcomes are not predetermined but dependent on skilful manipulation of all the available information, and so the art of plotting, both for writers and spies, is to follow the trail and remain alert for every available opportunity.

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