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Towards a Poetics of the Tragedy of State:

The Raison d'État in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Ben Jonson's Sejanus His Fall

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ABSTRACT

The present research will study the poelitics of the Tragedy of State in relation to the politico-philosophical discourse of Reason of State. I will be introducing the new genre of the Tragedy of the State and argue for its poelitics. I will, also, be introducing the discourse of Reason of State to the literary scholarships of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and their contemporaries. The emerging early modern philosophical discourse has remained a gap in the scholarship despite its importance, not to say centrality, in political thought and the history of ideas. The two plays under study in the present research are Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall*. In addressing the emerging political thought in England and the continent, I will argue for a revisitation of the two plays that can only be possible with acknowledging the importance of Reason of State. As the title of my work indicates, reading the plays through this historically informed critical perspective will allow for the understanding of a new poelitical form that has long been dismissed as marginalia.

*To my parents,
My brothers,
My dearest ones...*

Who taught me love and perseverance

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Statement

I hereby declare that the present dissertation is my own work. Parts of the dissertation have been previously published in international journals included in the introduction and the list of references.

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INTRODUCTION

In the present work, I will be addressing the *poelitics* of *Raison d'État* in what I advance as the Tragedy of State, to which the two texts under study, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* belong.¹ I will be chiefly studying the reception of the new philosophical discourse on politics, Reason of State, in the two plays under study. In doing so, I will be relying on two different disciplines together, the first being the philosophical discourse of Reason of State theory, and the second being Shakespearean and Ben Jonson scholarships. The novelty that this work introduces is the study of the emerging politico-philosophical discourse in the contemporary dramatic texts.

After studying Reason of State in sixteenth century Europe and England, the task of working on the Tragedy of State becomes compulsory. The “sub-genre” that I will be discussing in the present work is one that centres on and discusses the emerging philosophical discourse of Reason of State. Therefore, I will be studying both the poetics and politics of the Tragedy of State—hence, its *poelitics*. In the present work, I will be using the term *poelitics* to refer to, on the one hand, the poetics of the state, its forms, typology, and politics of the stage that centre on Reason of State. The reason why I fuse the two is to further stress the centrality of Reason of State to the tragedies and to argue for a Tragedy of *the* State that was present parallelly to the political discourse under study.

Reason of State theory has always been dismissed as marginalia in the study of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama. There has been an unconscious and fragmentary awareness of its centrality and importance in the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama but no work dedicated to the subject matter has been offered. Andrew Hadfield in his *Shakespeare and Republicanism* tantalizes his reader with a brief mentioning of Reason of State (Hadfield 2005b, 163). Similarly, in the Shakespeare political comprehensive anthology, *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, (Armitage, Condren, and Fitzmaurice 2009) Reason of State has been pointed to only twice yet no analysis or deep discussion of it has been offered (Armitage, Condren, and Fitzmaurice 2009, 22; 174) despite the implicit recognition of it as central to the understanding of the texts under study. Nonetheless, the articles of the anthology do not address the theory *per se*. András Kiséry in *Hamlet's Moment* devotes a short sub-chapter entitled “Ophelia's Chastity and the Reason of State” (Kiséry 2016) in which he discusses the sexual politics in the play. Peter Burke, however, devotes one seminal article,

¹ Henceforth *Sejanus*.

entitled “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State” (Burke 2008), to the study of Reason of State and contemporary political theory. Thus, Reason of State has not been discussed as pivotal. Reason of State still remains on the peripheries of scholarly studies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatic texts that offer their stage to the emerging discourse. After surveying the body of political literature on the two plays under study, and contemporary drama in more general terms, the discourse remains a gap until the present in the dramatic scholarship.

A body of political literature on Reason of State started to emerge in the twentieth century. The first theorist who started addressing the gap in political thought is Quentin Skinner in his foundational oeuvre *The Foundations of Early Modern Political Thought* in which he argues that a radical shift in the understanding of and status of politics started to take place with Reason of State philosophy that brought about an abrupt break with early Humanist politics: “The clearest sign that a society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is, I take it, that a new vocabulary comes to be generated... we find the words “State” and l’État beginning to be used” (Skinner 2002, x).

Skinner devoted two volumes to the study of political thought in Europe by 1978. It was only by the last decade of the century that other theorists in political philosophy started addressing Reason of State as a pivotal moment in the history of on the one hand of political thought, and on the other in the formation of the modern state and the birth of the science of politics. To start with, Maurizio Viroli, following Skinner’s legacy, in 1992, devoted his oeuvre *From Politics to Reason of State* to the study of the emergence of Reason of State and political science. Viroli studies chiefly the transition of the age from the art of politics to the science of politics. He makes an attempt “to fill this gap in the history of political thought”, and he dissects mainly the emerging new language of politics that emerged which he calls “the revolution of politics” (Viroli 1992, 1). Politics “was no longer the means of fighting corruption, but the art of conforming to, and perpetuating it” (Viroli 1992, 1), displaying, hence, a degeneration from being the noblest human “science” to being the most ignoble and depraved field.

Richard Tuck devotes *Philosophy and Government*, in the same vein, to the study of the revolution of politics, “*raison d’État* in the late sixteenth century, the explicitly anti-constitutional (and often anti-ethical) literature which burgeoned so astonishingly in Europe from 1580 to 1620” (Tuck 1993, 1). Richard Tuck examines the radical change Reason of State philosophy brought to the status of politics leading to the emergence of political science and the later formation of the modern state instead of or replacing rather the art of politics in the Aristotelean and Humanist sense of the word.

Finally, Yves Charles Zarka writes a foundational volume in the philosophy of Reason of State in which he represents a comprehensive outlook on the theory, its emergence, and key principles. He devotes the book to what he too considers a gap in the history of political thought, “a major dimension of political thought, but also a historically singular phenomenon. The notion of Reason of State was formed and diversified during the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century” (Zarka 1994, 1).²

Therefore, Reason of State has not been central in the historiography of political thought until very recently, that is by the end of the twentieth century. It was only after the attention paid by these scholars that the theory has re-gained its place in political thought despite its importance.³ The above-mentioned sources are the foundational texts in the study of the Reason of State philosophy in contemporary political and philosophical theories. The literature on Reason of State has become immense.⁴ Political philosophy has recognized the importance of the theory in the history of political thought as well as history of ideas.

Political theorists, therefore, started canonizing the emerging political discourse of Reason of State and acknowledging its importance in the understanding not only of early modern political thought but also and most importantly in understanding state formation, political science as a discipline, political thought *per se*, and present-day politics. An understanding of *étatisme* in general cannot be possible without Reason of State theory and neither can an understanding of contemporary drama be possible without studying the significant political transition taking place at the time.

After showing the centrality of the new political language, a reading of late sixteenth and early seventeenth texts becomes incomplete without it. However, Reason of State theory is almost completely absent in political analyses of early modern drama. The new political discourse is indispensable to the reading of early modern dramas and particularly the tragedies and histories. This absence of Reason of State theory in political scholarly literature of early modern drama is particularly noteworthy given the significance of the new political discourse to the period’s broader political context.

²«une dimension majeure de la pensée politique, mais aussi un phénomène historiquement singulier. La notion de raison d’État se constitue et diversifie à la flexion des XVIe et XVIIe siècles ». (Translation mine)

³ In the introduction, I trace the first scholarly work of Reason of State. The above-mentioned sources are the foundational texts in the study of the Reason of State philosophy in contemporary political and philosophical theories. The literature on Reason of State is immense. Besides the mentioned foundational names, I will be discussing other theorists’ contribution to the field.

⁴ Check for example Gilbert (1996), Calarco and Decaroli (2007), Friedrich (2012), William Farr Church (2015), and Poole (2015).

Political readings of early modern drama started to take place in the twentieth century. Political Shakespeare, Shakespeare through history, reading Shakespeare politically, political drama all became key themes. The word politics became the vogue in early modern scholarship. Scholars began to take a more political approach to the study of early modern drama. This political turn in early modern scholarship indicated a greater awareness of the political dimensions of culture and society. Lisa Jardine argues for historical reading by “bring[ing] historical studies and text studies into constructive tension with one another, to encourage us to ‘read historically’” (Jardine 2007, 35). James Shapiro examines *Hamlet* in the year 1599, a “crossroad” (Shapiro 2006, 309) between two worldviews, medievalism, and early modernism. He particularly addresses the text’s interaction with the Essex rebellion. Hadfield directs his attention to the contemporary debate of republicanism versus monarchy (Hadfield 2005b). Annabel Patterson (Patterson 1989) and Margreta de Grazia (De Grazia 2007) devoted two seminal books to *Hamlet* being dissident, yet from two different perspectives. Patterson argues that the play voices the culture of popular protest and participates in it (Patterson 1989, 39). The play she says “enters into . . . less privileged language: mocking, dynamic, subversive, popular, ‘general’” (98). *Hamlet* is the play “in which Shakespeare invested his own conception of the popular theater” (99-100). De Grazia, likewise, argues that the play voices “class antagonism” (130) and opposes monarchy. The play voices contemporary antagonisms of popular sovereignty and monarchy. Historicism or what I would like to term as contextualism, in this regard, succeeds in restoring the historicity of the play and addressing the political as an indispensable element in reading the play.⁵

Addressing the poelitics of Ben Jonson’s tragedy has been an easier task for scholars. In *The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy*, Henry Buckley Charlton argues that Ben Jonson sought through *Sejanus His Fall* and *Catiline His Conspiracy* to offer “attempted reform of tragedy” (Charlton 1974, clxxiii). Charlton’s argument suggests that Ben Jonson sought to reform or introduce what I call in this research a Tragedy of State, yet without addressing the Reason of State discourse. Julie Sanders in *Ben Jonson’s Theatrical Republics* argued that for Ben Jonson, theatre was an institution that facilitates “the mobilisation of audiences” (Sanders 2001, 31). For him, theatre encouraged political dissidence and engagement in political life, that is the *vita activae*. I build on Sanders’s argument by suggesting that the Tragedy of State denounces the contemporary political transition to Reason of State. In a similar vein, Richard

⁵ The two rubrics historicism and contextualism in the present work will be used to refer to the two theories new historicism and cultural materialism. It does not refer to any other theory or approach outside the two.

Dutton argues that in choosing the Senate house as the main setting for his plays, Ben Jonson makes “the audience additional ranks of senators” (Dutton 1983, 61). By doing so, Dutton argues that Ben Jonson critiques the political institutions of his day. In general, Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* has been read by the previously mentioned critics as either a call for political action, a defence of republicanism, or a reflection on political issues contemporary to the play, that is James I’s rule.

Nonetheless, Reason of State has not been incorporated in the corpus of political criticism of the plays, be it *Hamlet* and *Sejanus*, or contemporary drama in general. The dismissal of the theory, as I have shown, caused therefore a gap in the scholarly study of early modern drama. Acknowledging the centrality of Reason of State theory in political thought has been accomplished only recently in political theory, but there still remains a gap in the political criticism of drama, despite the attempts advanced by the earliest new historicism and cultural materialism and Marxist criticism to restore a historicist and political approach to the readings of texts.

Historicism, an approach that has been introduced by the late 1970s, radicalized the study of literature. The English departments since then started to adapt to this paradigm of studying textuality, or, as deconstructionism has it, position itself against this approach in an attempt to reach self-*différance* and recover textual/formal analysis. Historicism attempted to introduce what can be worded as the historicity of the text and textuality of history. The approach, initially, argued for allowing for the exploration of not only con/textuality and the negotiations between both textuality and historicity but also the dissident and marginal voices and their restoration. New historicists reject the notion that literature can be studied in isolation from its historical context, and instead emphasize the importance of understanding how historical events, social norms, and political ideologies shape literary texts and their reception. However, they still did not succeed in addressing an important *event* in the history of politics, the shift towards Reason of State.

Alan Sinfield argues for the recovery of political readings of the text so as to “dislocate and disturb, laying bare the implicit ideological assumptions of established practices” (Sinfield 1992, 20). In the defence of New Historicism, Harold Veaser argues that it “has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating, history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed in all matters that deeply affect people’s practical lives” (Veaser 1989, xi). Also, in *Radical Tragedy*, Dollimore argues that Jacobean tragedy is a “critique of ideology, the demystification of political and power relations

and the decentering of ‘man’” (Dollimore 2010, 4). Therefore, in this regard, historicism will allow for an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary even, reading of the texts under study.

Before the advance of the two critical approaches, in his 1971 study, *The Tragedy of State*, Lever was the first to argue for a Tragedy of State and for centrality of the state in early modern drama. He observes that the “[s]tate for the Jacobean dramatists was not the embodiment of a sacrosanct, God-ordained authority. Nor was it merely the instrument of this or that ruling class. Though entrenched in a system of privilege and oppression, it was recognized as an autonomous, self-perpetuating entity, with its own breed of agents and informers” (Lever 2017, xx). Lever is the first to argue that Jacobean tragedy represents the state onstage not in its providentialist terms but rather or also as a political apparatus formed by a bureaucratic structure situated in the court and argued for such awareness in the plays and contemporary politics.

Therefore, in the present research my primary goal is to address what I call the poelitics of the Tragedy of State in light of the emergent political discourse of Reason of State that paves the way to state formation and the legal subject. In so doing, I will be arguing that the Tragedy of State denounces the new political discourse of Reason of State as unethical and illegitimate, and that in representing the new political discourse onstage, the Tragedy of State fuses the poetic and political to create its own grammar, though on the verge of its demise, that is both political, in that it comments on the poetics of the state, and poetic in that it self-reflexively comments on its political stage. By poetics of the state, I refer to the form, structure, and grammar of the state that was introduced by early modern political thinkers. Forms of the state, or in other terms, the poetics of the state, were both very central and problematic to early modern political philosophy as I will be showing in the rest of the present work. However, politics of the stage merely refers to the discourse of Reason of State onstage and its centrality, hence the concept the Tragedy of State. As I argue for a poetics of the state and politics of the stage, I am introducing in this work the term *poelitics* of the Tragedy of State, as the two are interrelated.

The question that this research attempts to answer is as follows: In representing *Raison d’État* onstage, in what terms does the Tragedy of State, and particularly the two texts under study, examine the legitimacy of the state in its nascent state, with regard to the contemporary political debates, political thought, and ancient theories of *étatisme*. In addition to the central question, I would like to answer another question central to my research that is to what extent can one speak of a poelitics of the Tragedy of State. This question is by no means a reductive one, nor does it seek to harmonize a ‘generic’ early modern poelitics. It seeks to address and

recognize the central concept of this research, Reason of State, on and off stage, particularly in its nascent phase in early modern Europe and draw attention to the awareness of this political phenomenon that is not only starting to adumbrate but also changing and marking a transition in the history of political thought. Therefore, I advance the concept the Tragedy of State, not for the sake of novelty, but to highlight a pattern within early modern tragedies that has been not addressed by scholars.

The Tragedy of State opens up with a state of disorder in the state order, a dissatisfaction, or in simpler terms a failure of its current political system, that of Reason of State and the political change it brings about. *Hamlet* takes place in twelfth century Denmark. The Dutch context reverberates with the issues of constitutionalism, legitimacy of monarchy, and republicanism. *Sejanus* has as protagonist the hero of Reason of State theory in England and the continent, Tiberius, and secondarily Sejanus, Caligula, and Nero. The play problematizes issues of tyranny and sovereignty. The two plays, therefore, discuss and represent onstage issues of governmentality and étatism.⁶ I will be referring to Foucault's governmentality in relation to Reason of State in this research, especially the ways in which the new political discourse fosters power and how it operates within court and on subjects and subjectivity. Reason of State introduces news ways to control and govern via a narrative that legitimizes it.

Studying the two plays from the perspective of Reason of State allows for new readings. *Hamlet* is the best example in that it offers a psycho-political play of characters in light of the new political transition. It is the only early modern play that explores the private space as such. *Sejanus*, on the other hand, introduces onstage the psycho-political play of the state. The play is that of the public space and for the public space. If one wants to study Reason of State onstage, *Sejanus* presides the list. In/action, is, also, central to the Tragedy of State. Tragical action is the centre of the plays. *Hamlet* advances political *poesis* as an alternative. Political *poesis* refers to what I called in the previous pages poetics of the state. As *Hamlet* is the play of inaction, one can argue for a political *poesis*. *Sejanus*, on the other hand, shows the limits of praxis and introduces what I call *poetic praxis*. The latter refers to, on the one hand, political action, and, therefore praxis, and the poetics of the state, on the other. The political *poesis* refers to chiefly the political discourse of Reason of State onstage and how the stage becomes a powerful apparatus in negotiating it. I will be arguing in the third chapter how contemporary political theory offers a lengthy analysis of the forms of governments and states, mechanisms of states

⁶ I will be arguing in the third chapter how contemporary political theory offers a lengthy analysis of the forms of governments and states, mechanisms in the state, and political apparatuses that are discussed onstage and particularly in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*.

and governments, and political apparatuses that are discussed onstage and particularly in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*.

Therefore, in the logic of this argument, bringing these two texts together will help outline the grammar of the early modern Tragedy of State, representations of Reason of State onstage, and, eventually, its rapport with the subject and subjectivity as I will be showing in the following parts.

In this study, the theoretical tools are threefold. I will be first relying on the theory of Reason of State. I will be dissecting the discourse through the primary sources of its theorists and writers. Then, for my analysis of the plays, I will be relying on close reading of the plays. To be able to outline the grammar of the Tragedy of State, I will be heavily relying on close analyses of the two plays. Finally, I will be relying on cultural materialism. I will also be referring to other theorists, particularly Arendt's triadic concept⁷ of work, labour, and action, Bourdieu's concept of the dynastic and bureaucratic state, and Foucault's concepts of governmentality and power.

The concept and the theory are early modern *par excellence*. Reason of State flourished first in Italy. It was first used by the Italian Giovanni Botero in *Della Ragion di Stato*. Many early modern theorists in the continent explored the theory including Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, Francesco Guicciardini, Montaigne, and Justus Lipsius. However, they did not write on Reason of State *ex nihilo*. They relied on the writings and translations of Tacitus, Cicero, and ancient histories of Rome. Reason of state can be, *grosso modo*, defined as the means rulers seek to employ so as to ensure the preservation of the state—in most cases tyranny—which is, in turn, the highest of all goods.⁸

⁷ In her phenomenological analysis, Arendt offers three activities of the human condition; labour that corresponds to the biological life of man as an animal; work that corresponds to the artificial world of objects that human beings build upon earth; and action that signifies our plurality as distinct individuals. Arendt's account of the human condition shows that action is the essence of the human condition. Action becomes problematic in light of the modern age with the new economic processes and the blurry lines between private and public sectors as Halpern argues. Action in the modern world is replaced with a model of politics to avoid the unpredictability of action in the public arena.

⁸ For a deeper understanding of the concept, I rely on: Ernest H. Kantorowicz's "Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and Its Late Mediaeval Origins," Peter Burke's "Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State," Friedrich Meinecke's *Machiavellianism: The Doctrine of Raison d'État and its Place in Modern History*, Yves Charles Zarka's *Raison et déraison d'État : Théoriciens et théories de la Raison d'État aux xvi^e et xvii^e siècles*, Maurizio Viroli's *From Politics to Reason of State: the Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600*, Richard Tuck's *Philosophy and Government*, and many others. The following volumes are central to the theory: Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* (1589), Machiavelli (*The Prince* 1532), Francesco Guicciardini (*Ricordi* 1530), Jean Bodin (*Six Books of the Commonwealth* 1576), Michel de Montaigne (*Essais* 1580), and Justus Lipsius (*Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction* 1589). These are the chief and foundational books on Reason of State theory. I will be analysing the theory at length in the rest of this work.

The theory I use for the analysis of the plays is contextualist. I choose the rubric contextualism to refer to cultural materialism. I situate the play in “early modernity”, and therefore, address the complex matrix of material practices. In the present study, I will be employing cultural materialism to address the complex political theory of Reason of State. Hence, I refer to it in terms of discursivity throughout the present work. I will be chiefly working on the discursive space in which the political discourse under study circulates.

For a brief overview of cultural materialism, Jonathan Dollimore defines it as a practice “appropriate for recovering the political dimension of Renaissance Drama. This entails a consideration of the theater as an institution and more generally literature as practice” (Dollimore 2010, 7). In other words, the text, accordingly, is regarded as a vehicle that contains the same potential for consent or dissent, or power and subversion.

Alan Sinfield defines cultural materialism as an exercise that reads “the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance” in the text under study (Sinfield 2006, 7). Sinfield’s argument goes beyond the binary model of “pro” or “anti” power. It is important to note, however, that a critic can still fall prey to the practice s/he exposes. Cultural materialism seeks “to dislocate and disturb, laying bare the implicit ideological assumptions of established practices” (Sinfield 2006, 20). In the present study, I will be working on the emergent political discourse, but will address the plays in terms of their counter-discursivity.

It is alleged that cultural materialism lost its novelty.⁹ A study of the text should not aim for novelty. Sinfield in this regard says that “[t]he demand that students be in fashion is part of the problem, not part of the solution” (Sinfield 2006, 2). A reading that ignores the text’s inherent politics is “quietistic” (Vickers 1995, 325). Shakespeare was pressed into service to teach reactionary social norms and justify imperialism (Brannigan 2001, 94). Contextualism queers, decolonizes, and restores the popular voice in the text. A critic’s task is twofold; examining the residual voices in the text and argue for a radical reading. The two texts, therefore, “present unfinished business in all the fields cultural materialists have addressed” (Sinfield 2006, 27).

It is still important, however, to note that in theoretical terms and, especially, in this particular research, cultural materialism can be limiting as the theory did not address the

⁹ See Veese, H. Aram. 1991. “Re-Membering a Deformed Past: (New) New Historicism.” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 24 (1): 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1315021>.

discourse of Reason of State *per se*. In this regard, I will be employing the theory to show how the plays denounce the emergent political discourse. Cultural materialism may not fully account for the emergence of this particular political discourse. However, the theory can still be useful in illuminating how the plays denounce this discourse. Cultural materialism can be used to explore how the plays reflect and challenge broader political context that enable the emergence of Reason of State discourse.

The present research includes parts of previous publications, chiefly the first chapter. My analysis and introduction to Reason of State philosophy is published in my paper “‘The Rotten State of Denmark’: The Discourse of Reason of State in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” (Aloui 2021a; Aloui 2022). I have also elaborated on central ideas I have been addressing in the past few years and that I published in other journals (Aloui 2018; Aloui 2021b; Aloui 2021d).

This work will be divided into five major chapters. I will be following two rationales: thematic and linear. As I aim at introducing the Tragedy of State, that is demonstrating an inherent structure to it, I will be devoting a chapter to each act, and starting my analysis from the first to the last act of the two plays. However, the analysis is not merely linear. As the tragedies have an inherent structure to them, the thematic analysis of the plays precedes the linear analysis. It is important at this phase of the work to stress that the plays are circular. I will be commenting on the plays’ political circularity in the fifth chapter.¹⁰

I will be devoting the first chapter to introducing at length Reason of State theory, its importance in political thought and state formation, and addressing its complexity. I will also be addressing an important aspect in relation to, or part of rather, *étatisme*, that is subjectivity. I will be introducing and arguing for an early modern political and judicial subjectivity that is dependent on the formation of the state and the awareness of the transition to modern *étatisme*. I will be shortly addressing the notion of subjectivity and its development in Western thought to show that legal subjectivity is central to it. I will be examining the formation of the subject parallelly to that of the state, as being its correlate. My major argument in this chapter will be that the formation of the subject can be understood as a correlate to that of the state, particularly with Reason of State, that can be found in the contemporary political literature that I will be analyzing at length in this chapter.

Having introduced *étatisme*, Reason of State theory, and political subjectivity, in the second chapter I will address the threshold to the poelitics of the Tragedy of State. In this

¹⁰ By political circularity, I refer to how the Tragedy of State opens with a state of disorder, in many cases a *coup d’État* takes place, and ends with the dismemberment of the body politics, offering, therefore, an inherent structure to it.

chapter, I will start the thematic and linear analyses of the plays. The second chapter offers a prologue to both Reason of State onstage and the Tragedy of State. The linear and thematic, in this regard, align. Therefore, my study relies on a certain political linearity that the Tragedy of State offers as part of its political circularity and a dramatic, or tragical to be more specific, thematic structure. The second chapter will be devoted to the first acts of the two plays, showing an inherent structure to the Tragedy of State. I will be showing a voiced dissatisfaction towards the political transition taking place, a nostalgic yearning for a glorious political past, an ethical and moral politics, and a philosophical reflection on étatism and its origins, that somehow contribute to demystifying the political discourse that relies on a certain narrative to vindicate étatism as such. In the first part of the chapter, I will discuss the origins of the state according to its contemporaries and how to preserve it. Then, I will be examining how the two plays discuss preservation of the state and its legitimacy in the opening scenes that start on the threshold of the state, that is the fortress in *Hamlet* and margins of the senate in *Sejanus*. I will be showing how the Tragedy of State opens, providing, therefore, the first element of its outline and poetics.

In the third chapter, I will be discussing how the two plays introduce Reason of State theory to their audience onstage. The third chapter is devoted to the poetics of the state. To do so, I will start first with addressing misconceptions in the literary scholarships under study. I have shown how Reason of State theory remains a gap in the political study of the plays. Reason of State theory has been introduced and stressed as a pivotal element in the history of ideas and political thought only by the second half of twentieth century. However, it has remained on the peripheries of political criticism in the Shakespeare and Ben Jonson scholarships and early modern drama in general. I will be arguing for conceptual precision. Therefore, I will be introducing the typology of states as presented by the contemporaries, one that is different from the Aristotelean one. The misconception of political theory led to a confusion in the analysis of the plays. As Reason of State theory did not enter the political enterprise of the two scholarships, misconceptions and conceptual imprecisions have been taking place, especially when it comes to the early modern typology of forms of state and governments. Then, I will move to discuss the representation of étatism onstage in line with contemporary politics and typology. The plays will mirror the poetics of the state, that is they will introduce to their audience the political mechanisms under Reason of State theory, through the examples of the Danish court and the Roman rule of Tiberius and Sejanus' aspiration to rise to power. This chapter will be devoted mostly to the analysis of the second and third acts of the plays.

Having introduced the political state of affairs in alliance with Reason of State theory that can be summarized in Sejanus' dictum that the "State is enough to make th'act just, them guilty" (Jonson 2007, II. 174), and offered a representation of the political discourse onstage and how the two plays in offering a bleak portrait do implicitly denounce the theory in attempt to invite the audience's reaction, the fourth chapter will be devoted to the radical counter-discourse contemporary to Reason of State theory and that is voiced in the play. The political episteme consolidating the tyranny of order had opposing voices. In this chapter, I will be introducing the political theories of George Buchanan on sovereignty and the judicial body. Reason of State theory introduced a particular conception of laws that was dissected by contemporary authors as invalid, including George Buchanan. Buchanan's theories are radical in that they offer fresh rethinking of laws and the presumable body politic. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be discussing the politics of the stage. The Tragedy of State foresees its demise resulting in a crisis in tragical action. I will be introducing a new element of the Tragedy of State that has long been ignored, that is political poesis and poetic praxis, leading to what I call in this thesis the *poelitics of action*. The fourth chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the fourth acts in which radical voices that denounce Reason of State theory and the emerging political discourse enter the stage.

Eventually, the fifth chapter will be a synthesis of the poelitics of the Tragedy of State. The plot of the two plays and of the tragedy in general is circular. It starts where it ends, making itself an unfinished business. I will be analysing the fifth acts and argue that the (open) ending is an enactment of the dismemberment of the body politic onstage. The two plays have brutal endings in both poetic and political terms. Having done so, I argue for a structure of the Tragedy of State, that with its demise, the modern state, the leviathan that is, has already been established.

CHAPTER I: Introduction to Early Modern Political Thought

In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical and critical approaches that I will be employing throughout the entire dissertation. I will be addressing how the Tragedy of State represents the politico-philosophical discourse of *Raison d'État* onstage and will be arguing for an awareness of the emergence of *étatisme* and the formation of the modern state that brought with it. I will also address the emergence of the subject, that is, I will be discussing the different critical approaches to subjectivity and argue for the centrality of the legal subject and its importance in relation to the discourse of Reason of State. To achieve this goal, I would like to start by introducing the approaches that I will use and define the major concepts. I will provide a brief account of what I like to call a 'prologue' to early modern political thought and the politico-philosophical concept of Reason of State, including Aristotelean politics and Scholasticism. Then, I will analyse early modern political thought, the philosophy of Reason of State, and the major voices that contributed to the articulation of the theory. Finally, I will be working on the emerging early modern concept of the subject and subjectivity, and issues of agency in relation to the political apparatus of the state. An analysis of *étatisme* and Reason of State, or, to put it simply, the state, can never be complete without its major protagonist, that is the subject. The shift in political thought that took place in the early modern era changed the understandings of 'subjectivity,' or rather led to an awareness of the 'subject' and its emergence in the modern sense of the term. In the present thesis, I will be, therefore, working on the how the subject is caught up in the constraints or authority of the state, that started to emerge in early modern Europe. In other words, I will be addressing what may be termed as the legal subject, or the subject of the *avant la lettre* social contract in the context of the political transition to the political philosophy of Reason of State.

1. A Prologue to Early Modern Political Thought

I would like to start by drawing attention to the radical transition of the early modern era in the continent—a transition that is political, philosophical, and economic. If one is to describe the early modern era in one word, it would be that of transitions, shifts, interregnums, mutability, and discontinuities. The time by which the two plays under study are produced is marked by a transition that is political, economic, and cultural. The economic and cultural transitions can be summed in the departure from a feudal and early- modern orders to the later capitalistic one.

My focus in this work is on the political transition from the state of pre-étatisme to an adumbration of the modern state and, in general terms, a global order of states—a transition from a transcendent natural law to the Great Chain of Beings. England and continental Europe in general were at the crossroads of two opposite orders; feudalism versus nascent capitalism and the rise of a new class of merchants; medievalism versus (early) ‘modernism’ and globalization;¹¹ religious and cultural faultlines (Sinfield 2001, 219). Political and socio-cultural foundations inherited from the medieval world started to wane and were shifting, particularly in the age of absolute monarchs, that is the early modern era. It was the age of controversies and negotiations of old and new. The question that can be asked in this regard is whether the transition to Reason of State philosophy can be considered pragmatic, progressive, or a degeneration from a medieval order to a more modern mediocrity, that I will largely elaborate on in the remaining chapters. My focus in this part will be devoted to the political transition; a transition from theological (Augustinian) politics to a more ‘secular’ one; from Ciceronianism to Tacitism; and from *recta ratio in agibulum*, that is right reason in acting, and *ratio civilis*, meaning civil reason, to *Raison d’État*. I will not be putting the two orders at each other’s throats. The ‘two’ orders were in constant negotiation and/or reconciliation that will allow for the birth of a new space that could be both or neither—a new body of thought in constant transferral and change. To do so, I will start by addressing the prologue to the political transition under study; that is the political discourse prior to Reason of State.

1. 1. Scholasticism: Aristotle in Europe

I would like to prologue the chapter with discussing the pre-Reason of State discourse in Europe, that is medieval political philosophy, which begins with Augustine. The two important aspects of medieval politics that I would like to bring into attention are the introduction of official legal systems and the emergence of universities.

It is important to stress, however, that Augustine did not devote his writings to the discipline of political philosophy *per se*, nor did he address the state as a political apparatus with mechanisms and institutions in the modern sense. His approach is ethical and theological. Commentaries on politics, nonetheless, can be found in his writings and particularly in *The City*

¹¹ Globalization in this regard refers to the economic transition that started to take place at the time (see Shapiro 2006, 309). However, the discourse of Reason of State started to pave the way for a more political globalization that allows for a global order of states as I will be showing in the second chapter.

of God in which he provides for clear division between the City of God and the Earthly City.¹² The former is governed by the ‘rule’ of the common good in compliance with Christian dicta. In the Earthly City, humans are governed by greed, ambition. Whereas in the City of Gods, where reason in the theological sense, instead of passions including ambition and greed, governs the ‘states’ of the people. In short, Augustine’s philosophy is based on the myth of the Fall—and hence the political societies are both a punishment and an atonement for sins. The law that governs the City of God is the divine law and has as a goal the promotion of the Word of God. However, the polis as a human creation, and therefore a political and public sphere, was introduced and studied via Aristotle works. In this section, I will start by introducing Aristotelean thought to the political landscape of Europe that was purely theological. The scholastic discourse contributes to the formation and emergence of the later early modern political discourse on, precisely, Reason of State that will be explained in the next part.

Scholasticism in Europe was introduced through the works of Aristotle. The Caliphate of Cordoba introduced Arabic translations of Aristotle’s works to twelfth century Europe that were followed by Latin translations. Aristotelean politics was at sharp contrast with contemporary, Augustinian medieval political philosophy, and was threatening to the prevailing Augustinian conceptions of Christian political thought. In Skinner’s formulation, Augustinian political thought “had pictured political society as a divinely ordained order imposed on fallen men as a remedy for their sins. But Aristotle’s *Politics* treats the police as a purely human creation, designed to fulfil purely mundane ends” (Skinner 1992, 50).

Aristotelean and Augustinian political thoughts were later reconciliated by Thomas Aquinas in, mainly, his treatise *The Rule of Princes*. The Aristotelean notion of the civic life and Augustinian Christianity were reconciliated by Thomas Aquinas’ political philosophy, helping the acceptance of Aristotle’s polis in the medieval philosophy of politics that was purely theological.¹³ Skinner comments:

It is a fact of overwhelming importance for the development of modern, naturalistic and secular view of political life that the initial feelings of hostility and condemnation which greeted the rediscovery of Aristotle’s moral and political writings were not allowed to stand”. (Skinner 1992, 50)

¹² See Brooks 2017.

¹³ See Thomas and Pegis 2007.

Political life came to be regarded as neither purely theological—a redemption for the Fall—nor purely dedicated to mundane problems of police, governance, etc. The two ‘Reasons’ of State were later reconciled by later medieval theorists, particularly in or via universities.

Aristotle’s works helped laying the major foundations of scholasticism. The reconciliation between Greek and Christian thought has been made in universities¹⁴. The translation of Aristotle to Latin and other Arabic works thrived in universities in Paris, Bologna, and later Northern Europe, as well as faculties of theology—hence, the “Renaissance of the twelfth century.” In this regard, the introduction of Aristotle and scholasticism to political thought was a slow a departure, although not complete, from medieval and Augustinian politics. In his book *On Kingship, to the King of Cyprus* (Aquinas 2000), belonging to the mirror of princes genre, Thomas Aquinas argues, contrary to previous theories claiming that the state is by definition a coercion, that politics *is* the natural state of things. In conclusion, the shift from the *City of Gods* to politics of *Summa Theologica* paved the way to the later early modern discourse of Reason of State. Following Aristotelian assets, Aquinas argues in his treatise for a mixed government (democracy, aristocracy, and kingship). Despite its overlap with the early modern discourse on the state and Reason of State, medieval politics is still ‘regressive’ compared to the next few centuries. It is, yet of vital importance to the development of a body of political literature on the state, laws, the natural state of men, or the types of government.

1. 2. Cicero and Civil Reason

By discussing Cicero, one is still on the threshold of the Reason of State discourse. Before Tacitism and Reason of State wipe away the humanist Christian discourse leading to absolutism, Cicero’s works were political guides for princes, principalities, and to some extent ‘states’ up to the thirteenth century. The Ciceronian discourse of politics was congruous with the previously discussed Aristotelean moral politics, or rather Ciceronian-Aristotelean politics were one and the same. Politics was, then, understood as the art of preserving the state without eclipsing the pursuit of virtues, justice, and equity. Reason of state, then, in its conventional sense already articulates its own *raison d’être*; preserving the state from external danger and enforcing the law in its conventional Ciceronian-Aristotelean sense:

¹⁴ See Skinner where he shows how the reconciliation has been achieved at the University of Paris by Albert the Great and his student Thomas Aquinas (Skinner 1992, 50-51).

As Cicero has taught us... law is the rational norm of human life. Though we say that law is a human creation, in fact true law comes from nature and as such its origin is ultimately divine. No human law can be called a true law if it violates the highest norm of equity, which is the precept of eternal reason. The task of political reason is that of introducing measure, proportion and justice into the human world -- a task accomplished through law, which is the arrangement and the rule of political reason (*politicae rationis institutio atque preceptio*). (Viroli 1998, 68)

The pre-Reason of State discourse, or the humanist Christian discourse, refers to the art of governing. The Ciceronian civil reason meant simply governing *selon raison et selon justice*.¹⁵ The thirteenth century political discourse and political diction per se, as in Skinner's notion of historical semantics (Martin Van Gelderen and Skinner 2002), refers to the commonwealth rather than the state and the republic as an ideal rather than the looming absolutism of the sixteenth century.

The shift from Augustinian political theology was infiltrated by Aristotelean Politics leading to the later humanist Christian discourse whose fountainhead was Cicero. The *art* of politics started, however, to see its own demise to be replaced later by the *science* of politics, governed essentially by the Reason of State. The central figure that had been revived in the study of the new political science is that of Cornelius Tacitus in the works of Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, and Francesco Guicciardini that I will be exploring in the next chapter and refer to in the subsequent chapters.

The shift from Cicero to Tacitus may seem radical and abrupt. Maurizio Viroli poses the question whether the shift from civil reason to Reason of State is degeneration or not: "Whether the transition from the former to the latter conception of politics should be regarded as an intellectual progress or as a decay is a highly contested matter, but it cannot be denied that the transition, did indeed take place; and it began when those two words, reason and state were put together" (Viroli 1998, 73). Peter Burke similarly argues that "stoics, for example believed in natural law; sceptics undermined it; Reason of State overrode it. Yet the intellectual movements which have been discussed here are at least connected in the sense of offering solutions to the same pressing problems of their day" (Burke 2008, 498). I would not subscribe to the opinion that an iron curtain separates every transition as I will be showing later. Replacing Cicero with Tacitean politics, however, equals a shift from the ideal of republics and liberty to that of

¹⁵ Early modern proverb. See Pascal 2008.

absolutism as I will be explaining in the next part. The question is not central to my research. Whether it is a degeneration or a progressive shift to political science is not a central question to my research. However, I stress the dilemma behind it as it has been central to the plays under study and how it has been regarded as a degeneration as I will be arguing in the next chapters.

2. Early modern Political thought

2.1. Early Modern Europe, Reason, State

Raison d'État is a politico-philosophical concept that was de rigueur in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continental Europe. The idea of the state, its origin, and forms started to occupy princes and political theorists leading to the emergence of an extensive body of political literature on the state, its reason, its secrets or what is known at the age as *arcana imperii*. *Raison d'État* was a problematic concept. It marks a transition in the political thought of Europe.

In an age marked by absolutist monarchy, it is no surprise that state had become a key word in the politics of early modern Europe. A new political language, hence, started to emerge. Quentin Skinner in the first volume of *The Foundations of Early Modern Political Thought* signals a shift in his analysis of early modern politics from history per se to historical semantics to argue for the rise of *étatisme* in early modern Europe:

The clearest sign that a society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is, I take it, that a new vocabulary comes to be generated, in terms of which the concept is then articulated and discussed. So I treat it as a decisive confirmation of my central thesis that by the end of the sixteenth century, at least in England or France, we find the words “State” and l’État beginning to be used for the first time in their modern sense. (Skinner 1992, x)

Étatisme, hence, started to enter the collective political consciousness of the early moderns. Before going further, despite its nuanced nature, the theory can be defined in simple terms. The locution was first used by the Italian Giovanni Botero in *Della Ragion di Stato* who played a key role in rethinking *étatisme* and its reason:

State is a stable ruler over a people and Reason of State is the knowledge of the means by which such a dominion may be founded, preserved and extended. Yet, although in the widest sense the term includes all these, it is concerned most nearly with extension than with foundation; for Reason of State assumes a ruler and a State (the one as artificer, the other as his material) whereas they are not assumed—indeed they are preceded—by foundation entirely and in part by extension. (Botero 2017, 3)

The definition provided by Botero is of course tenable by all contemporaries despite their differences in approaching Reason of State. Many early modern theorists in the continent wrote on Reason of State including Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, Francesco Guicciardini, Michel de Montaigne, Justus Lipsius, George Buchanan, Hugo Grotius, and others. Reason of State can be, *grosso modo*, defined as the means which rulers seek to employ so as to ensure the preservation of the state—in most cases tyranny—which is, in turn, the highest of all goods. Preservation is, hence, a key word.

However, they did not write on Reason of State *ex nihilo*. They, chiefly, relied on writings and translations of Tacitus—marking a shift from Ciceronian politics. The state of turbulences in the political life of the continent explains the rise of Tacitism. Cornelius Tacitus was re-created and re-thought in the political thought of early moderns, associating him, hence, with absolutism and tyranny. Ferenc Hörcher argues in the same vein:

The term Tacitism does not relate to the historical figure of a Roman author with that name, but refers to an early modern, late humanist intellectual “fashion”, which had such a dominant influence, and the name of the concrete author was only used here as a label, as an argument of authority. According to Borzsák, “the centuries long reception of Tacitus... is not the same as the modern concept of Tacitism.” (Borzsák, 1994: 281.) He even provides a definition of Tacitism as it was meant in the early modern period: in his view this term referred to that political literature which appeared in the period after the Renaissance, “in which the forbidden name of Machiavelli was replaced by that of Tacitus, who was not at all problematic, but who was regarded acceptable according to contemporary court standards.” (Borzsák, 1994: 290).¹⁶ (Hörcher 2021, 8)

¹⁶ Borzsák, István. 1994. *A Tacitizmus Kérdéséhez. In: Dragma. Válogatott Tanulmányok.* Budapest: Telosz Kiadó.

In his article “The Renaissance of political realism in early modern Europe: Giovanni Botero and the discourse of ‘reason of state’”, Hörcher discusses the rise of Taciticism and opposes the Tacitean Reason of State to Giovanni Botero’s rethinking of *étatisme* that I will be explaining later. In this part, I would like to show how the concept of Reason of State was problematic to some extent. As I have previously shown, Viroli highlights the controversy around the philosophical discourse. In this part, I would like to stress the fact that despite its canonization in the current history of ideas, the Reason of State is still problematic and remains a lacuna that needs to be addressed not only in political thought, but also, and most importantly via the dramas as I will be showing in the following chapters. In the same vein, Giovanni Botero, a contemporary of the Reason of State theory, prefaces his *Reason of State* with an exclamatory remark:

In Recent years I have been obliged by various circumstances to make journeys, both on my own account and in the service of friends and patrons, and to frequent, more than I should have wished, the courts of kings and great princes, in Italy and beyond the Alps. Among the things that I have observed, I have been greatly astonished to find Reason of State a constant subject of discussion and to hear the opinions of Niccolo Machiavelli and Cornelius Tacitus frequently quoted: the former for his precepts relating to the rule and government of peoples, the latter for his lively description of the arts employed by the Emperor Tiberius in acquiring and retaining the imperial title of Rome. (Botero 2017, xiii)

In my analysis of Ben Jonson’s play, I will address the early modern growing interest in Tacitism and the figures of tyrants like Tiberius, Nero, Caligula, and Sejanus.

The political concept of the Reason of State has not been unproblematic to its contemporaries. These reflections on the Reason of State often came in the form of lapidary reflections of what is known as *Furstenpiegel* meaning advice to a ruler. It can, also, be translated as mirror for princes—a metaphor that has been employed in *Hamlet*.¹⁷ These *Furstenpiegel* came in the form of essays, by Montaigne introducing the essay genre, with Bacon and others re-appropriating it later, *ricordi* or observations, maxims, or reflections,

¹⁷ *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) allowed for the flourishing of the genre which offers lessons and guides for statesmen and princes to follow. Check Herbert Grabes’ *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance* (1982).

notably dedicated to princes and rulers as in Buchanan, Lipsius, and Bodin. Peter Burke in trying to compare medicine to political science and how the science of Reason of State started to impose itself in early modern political thought remarks the following:

Political behaviour was generally considered to follow rules or principles, so that it could be reduced to maxims or ‘aphorisms’ (a term associated with the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates and so an extension of the medical metaphor). Like the rise of the reason-of-state genre itself, this work suggests that a serious attempt was being made to put the study of politics on a sound empirical basis by collecting detailed observations in a systematic manner, as was being done in medicine, botany, astronomy, and other disciplines. (Burke 2008, 483)

Then, I will be studying the concept in the dramatic enterprise, its reception, centrality, and representations. It would not be an exaggeration, hence, to claim that Reason of State was not only a key word in sixteenth century Europe, but rather a (political) science. Studying the political concept cannot in this regard be exclusively done from the political writings but would rather be more elaborate though the literary enterprise, that is the contemporary stage. The dramas devoted the stage to a key popular concern of the age, its politicians and subjects. I will, also, be showing how the latter is devoted to the study of the new philosophical concept.

Therefore, by doing a survey of the drama written and performed at the time, it is easy to notice that theatre lent itself to the discussion of Reason of State, or, further, that it became that of the Reason of State. The tragedies were devoted to infamous rulers in history, often discussed in the *Annals*. Referring to the genre “Tragedy of the State”, hence, would not be an exaggeration either. Tiberius, Sejanus, Caligula, Nero, and others were strongly present onstage, metaphorically at times, or through its heroes at others. Theatre problematized Reason of State and étatism even further. Shakespeare, in *The Tempest*, for instance comments on the commonwealth:

I’ th’ commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit. No name of magistrate.
Letters should not be known. Riches, poverty,
And use of service—none. Contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard—none.

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil.
No occupation. All men idle, all.
And women too, but innocent and pure.
No sovereignty. (II. 1. 146-155)

Gonzalo, an early modern, reads Montaigne's observations on the state, laws, and the natural state of men versus the contemporary ordered society of states in the age of absolute monarchies. Reason of State as Gonzalo shows extends its political boundaries to economic questions by introducing the theory of profit. Silius' speech in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* reverberates with Gonzalo's reflection and may have the similar political background as its source:

We, that (within these forescore years) were born
Free, equal lords of the triumphed world,
And knew no masters, but affections,
To which betraying our first liberties,
We since then became slaves to one man's lusts;
And now to many... (I. 59-64)

The comedies, also, rejoice in the golden world of pre-étatisme, a carnivalesque world of the clowns and the topsy-turvydom of the forest—the natural state of men prior to societies with mutual pacts and an organized political life.¹⁸ Theatre lent itself to this debate; plays and characters were echoing different opinions and reflections on the state.¹⁹ Political theory, hence, is strongly present onstage. Controversies are made even more problematic. Ben Jonson refers to Tacitus and Lipsius as well in his notes and openly acknowledges his debt to the *Annals*. It would not be possible, hence, to examine early modern drama independently from Reason of State. The latter has been widely addressed by political theorists, but, little dealt with in the early modern scholarship of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, or, at best, dismissed as marginalia. Early moderns, therefore, theorists, dramatists, princes, and otherwise, made Tacitus speak again, *Tacitum Laquentem*.

¹⁸ See Aloui 2018.

¹⁹ I comment further on the political state of disorder in Shakespeare's comedies in my paper "The Space of Dissent in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*" (2018). I discuss how the play "chronicles an unexpected 'regressive' move from 'civilization' to 'barbarism', from court to forest, and from a policed to an untamed state" (Aloui 2018, 75).

2.2. Tacitism and Reason of State

The political thought of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century continental Europe displayed an unprecedented revival of classical theories of the state, and particularly Greco-Roman political philosophies. The revival of classics was not merely part of the Renaissance project that sought to bring back the specters of the ancients, or part of an antiquarian quest or an appreciation of ancient history. Rather, or most probably, a stifling dissatisfaction with the contemporary political affairs brought back the ghosts of the ancients including *inter alia* Cornelius Tacitus, Cicero, Seneca, and Livy.

Ancient philosophies started filtering through early modern political theories. History of the state, the city republics, and ‘Roman monarchy’ became familiar to contemporaries, students, courtiers, political philosophers, and commoners alike. Translations²⁰ of ancient texts to different languages and the different editions provide an outline of their importance to contemporaries.²¹ Political philosophy was the subject of contemporary drama.

An extensive body of political literature negotiating contemporary politics started to emerge. Elizabethan *fin-de-siècle* and early Jacobean political theory departed from the earlier humanist Christian tradition that initially relied on the works and translations of Cicero. Politics was, then, understood as the art of *preserving* the state without eclipsing the pursuit of virtues, justice, and equity. The rise of Tacitism, however, marked a shift from the Ciceronian traditional framework that started waning with the earlier Elizabethan republicanism and ended with Jacobean politics.

The transition from the Christian humanist discourse of politics to Tacitism can be read as an articulation of responses to the question of the contemporary context. In the age of

²⁰ William Caxton was one of the first translators of Cicero (1481); Sir Henry Savile, Warden of Merton College, Oxford, and Greek tutor to Queen Elizabeth I, was the first English translator of Tacitus; William Jones translated Lipsius’ *Six Books*.

²¹ See Peter Burke’s article “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State” where he talks about Tacitus and his importance: “The statistics of editions, translations, and commentaries provide a mere outline of his influence” (488). Andras Kiséry, also, comments, in *Hamlet’s Moment*, on how politics and the political shift to Tacitism, to which reason of state is a central concept, became discussed not only in courts and private spheres, rather, it became a topic of discussion to nobles and commoners alike, signaling a transition in the understanding and practice of politics *per se*. Everyone became involved “in the culture of news, as a setting for an often raucous and scandalous discussion of the secrets of politics, of the reason of state” (13) in ‘coffeehouses’ and taverns.

absolute monarchs, Tacitism as an alternative to the Ciceronian traditional framework becomes, in fact, urgent and essential.²²

Early modern Tacitism does not merely refer to the works of Cornelius Tacitus. Most of the early modern political body of literature that emerged on how to rule and how to preserve a state can be grouped under the rubric term or concept Tacitism, or rather described as Tacitean. Early modern political thought, in the light of contemporary absolutism and monarchy, turned to the Tacitean alternative. Similarly to early modern Tacitists, Tacitus' writings, as pointed out by Burke, are initially hard to classify:

The political opinions of Cornelius Tacitus are not easy to discern. As the greatest modern authority has remarked, 'Tacitus gives little away' ... His ironic manner reveals a contempt for flattery and other forms of servility and also a certain impatience with theory but leaves ambiguous his attitude to the Roman monarchy. Although he obviously disliked what went with it, Tacitus may well have regarded the institution as the lesser evil. As a result of his ambiguity he could be claimed as an ally by both the opponents and the supporters of monarchy in early modern Europe, the 'red' and the 'black' Tacitists, as they were called in an essay published in Italy not long after the First World War. (Burke 2008, 484)

Although many early modern theorists use Tacitean philosophy as a defense of authority, including Francesco Guicciardini or Jean Bodin, Tacitus' theory was mainly used as an anti-absolutism argument, particularly onstage as I will be showing later. Francesco Guicciardini argues, or rather advises²³ in his *Maxims and Reflections*: "If You want to know what the thoughts of tyrants are, read in Cornelius Tacitus the last conversations of the dying Augustus with Tiberius" and that Tacitus "teaches those who live under tyrants how to live and act prudently; just as he teaches tyrants ways to secure their tyranny" (Guicciardini 2016, 44; 45). Other theorists, however, including Botero, rejected it all at once and considered Tacitism as a political degeneration:

²² See Richard Tuck's *Government and Philosophy* (1993). In the chapter entitled "The Beginnings of Tacitism," Tuck introduces the revival of Tacitism in early modern Europe (39). In fact, in the general continental context of tyranny and absolutism and English context with the fear and anxiety from the rule of James I, Ciceronian politics are no longer adequate. Reviving the works of Tacitus in this context became clear. Drama has appropriated these topics and has equally a source in the study of political thought.

²³ The generic term *advice for rulers* or *mirror for princes* (also the German *Furstenspiegel*) refers to books written and collected to rulers as 'guidebooks' on how to rule. See Herbert Grabes' *The mutable glass: mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance* (1982).

Among the things that I have observed, I have been greatly astonished to find reason of state a constant subject of discussion and to hear the opinions of Niccolô Machiavelli and Cornelius Tacitus frequently quoted: the former for his precepts relating to the rule and governments of peoples, the latter for his live description of the arts employed by the Emperor Tiberius in acquiring and retaining the imperial title of Rome... I was amazed that so impious an author and so wicked a tyrant should be held in such esteem that they are thought to provide ideal examples of the methods by which states be governed and administered; and I was moved to indignation rather amazement to find that this barbarous mode of government had won such acceptance. (Botero 2017, xiii)

In addition to the moderate voice of the Italian Giovanni Botero, master of *Raison d'État*, other theorists went more radical in spelling out the *vox populi*, including most importantly George Buchanan, who contrary to Tacitists, called for rebellion to the extent of tyrannicide, as I will be showing in the fourth chapter. George Buchanan invested in the stage as well and wrote Tacitean plays including *Jephthes* and *Baptistes*. Buchanan's theories were, also, negotiated onstage as I will be showing in chapter four.

Early modern plays brought to the stage figures like Tiberius, Sejanus, Caligula, Caesar, Nero, Coriolanus and the world's most famous tyrants.²⁴ The text under study, Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall*, hereafter *Sejanus*, retells the history of the world's most famous tyrants.

Before moving further, it is necessary to briefly define Tacitism which does not refer to the works of Cornelius Tacitus *per se*, but rather an early modern intellectual fashion. Works of Cornelius Tacitus were translated and widely circulated in early modern continental Europe, paving the way for the new political thought to be shaped. Peter Burke argues, in this regard, that the "interest in Tacitus as a political writer spread rapidly in the later sixteenth century. Between 1580 and 1700, more than 100 authors wrote commentaries on Tacitus, and the majority of these commentaries were political ones" (Burke 2008, 484).

²⁴ Burke talks about the central themes of early modern drama and particularly tragedies by saying that "It was this sense of the political relevance of Tacitus to an age of powerful favourites, absolute monarchs and civil wars which accounts for the growing interest in his writings in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" and that "Both Jonson and Lohenstein acknowledged their debts in their notes, Lohenstein citing Tacitus more than 200 times altogether, while Jonson referred to him 59 times in the notes to the first act of *Sejanus*. It is scarcely an exaggeration to claim that the true subject of these plays is reason of state, a phrase which Jonson was one of the first Englishmen to use" (488). However, I would like to address the importance of Ben Jonson's play in particular. Choosing the most famous character in early modern and Tacitist political thought, Tiberius in particular and Sejanus, Caligula, and Nero, should not go unnoticed.

The emergence of Tacitism can be read as part of the more general political context which, in England was characterized by an anxiety towards succession, the ‘authoritarian’ rule of James I, and the Monarchomach and parliamentary tensions, besides the politico-religious tensions. Writings on the state became vogueish. The transition to Tacitism marked, also, a departure from the looming moralism of the Ciceronian political discourse. The new body of political literature on the state, ways to rule, and secrets of the state, or rather *arcana imperii*, freed itself from the ethical aspect that used to be dominant in political thought and praxis, to embrace instead new political dogmas including, for instance, the *uso dictum*, constancy, and prudence.

Early modern political theorists did not only rely on the works of the ancients, but rather developed their own early modern political episteme. Early modern drama directed its attention to the emerging political thought.

3. The Subject

3.1. The Early Modern Subject

Botero defines the state as “a stable ruler over people,” a “dominion,” (Botero 2017, 3) to be preserved and/or extended. Reason of State, in this regard, is concerned with preservation of the state, in contrast to, as in Ciceronian civil reason, the interests of the people, its subjects, and the common good. It departs from an understanding of the state as a *respopuli*, the re/public of and for the people, the state as a social contract, a consensus that is, that serves the interests of the people and the *vox populi*. Civil reason and similar theories of the *avant la lettre* étatism were eclipsed, or rather, the ‘moral’ foundations forming the essence of the social contract were finally regarded as unrealistic, paving the way to Hobbes’s state as *the Leviathan*.

Politics, in this regard, is no longer understood as the ‘science’ of preserving a decent political life for its subjects through justice and equity. Politics becomes the science of uniquely preserving the state by any means. It is no longer seen as the ‘science’ of preserving or protecting a community of ‘men’ living together in justice.

The state, therefore, as has been pointed out above as well, becomes or can be essentially defined as a dominion over people, as essentially and by definition oppressive, violent, and seeking to only maintain its preservation through force—material and otherwise, that is

ideological, or as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, through the poet's fable²⁵. In Reason of State philosophy, awareness that the state originates in violence was articulated. Guicciardini, in an *avant lettre* Hobbesian logic, argues as follows:

Since the majority of men are either not very good or not very wise, one must rely more on severity than on kindness. Whoever thinks otherwise is mistaken. Surely, anyone who can skillfully mix and blend the one with the other would produce the sweetest possible accord and harmony. But heaven endows few with such talents; perhaps no one[...] Polemical power cannot be wielded according to the dictates of good conscience. If you consider its origin, you will always find it in violence—except in the case of republics within their territories, but not beyond. Not even the emperor is exempt from this rule; nor are the priests, whose violence is double, since they assault us with both temporal and spiritual arms. (Guicciardini 2016, 53-54)

Thus are subjects perceived in the philosophy of Reason of State. They are conquered enemies rather than a community of people formed for the common good of each 'individual'. Guicciardini and other Reason of State theorists including Bodin and Lipsius go further by arguing that subjects should submit to the power of *étatisme*, to the ruler, and even to tyrants. For instance, Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus His Fall* addresses whether subjects should rebel against a tyrant or obey one. Guicciardini in this regard replies to the question by saying:

Waste no time with revolutions that do not remove the causes of your complaints but that simply change the faces of those in charge. For you will still remain dissatisfied. To take an example: what good does it do to rid the Medici of Ser Giovanni da Poppi, if he is replaced by ser Bernardino da San Miniato, a man of the same quality and calibre? (Guicciardini 2016, 54)

And,

If you live under a tyrant, it is better to be his friend only to a certain extent rather than be completely intimate with him. In this way, if you are a respected citizen, you will

²⁵ In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, precisely in the chapter "A Poet's Fable," Greenblatt offers a short overview of the rise and fall of purgatory, and the rhetorics/poetics behind this doctrine/fable, or in other words, purgatory as an ideological or a discursive practice in modern parlance. He remarks, "the Protestants who attacked the doctrine of Purgatory had worked out an account of the poetics of Purgatory... human fears, longings, and fantasies were being shaped and exploited by an intellectual elite who carefully packaged fraudulent, profit-making innovations as if they were ancient traditions... though not Philosophers, yet Poets." What we call ideology, then, Renaissance England called poetry (45-46).

profit from his power - sometimes even more than do those closer to him. And if he should fall, you may still hope to save yourself. (Guicciardini 2016, 66)

Reason of State, hence, is that of preservation, rule, and control, not of subjects. George Buchanan's understanding of the law can be regarded as a dissenting voice to contemporary political theory. Buchanan denounces Reason of State altogether and introduces instead a naturalistic approach to law and espouses a radical theory of popular sovereignty. In his *De jure regni apud Scotos*, Buchanan sketches his theory of popular sovereignty and rule arguing that no person/subject in the state, including princes, should be above the law, which people through their representatives, enact:

B.—The law then is paramount to the king, and serves to direct and moderate his passions and actions.

M.—That is a concession already made.

B.—Is not then the voice of the people and of the law the same?

M.—The same.

B.—Which is the more powerful, the people or the law?

M.—The whole people, I imagine.

B.—Why do you entertain that idea?

M.—Because the people is the parent, or at least the author of the law, and has the power of its enactment or repeal at pleasure. (Buchanan 2016, 67-68)

With the formation of the modern state and emergence of the Reason of State philosophy, the political subject becomes erased. Birth and erosion of the subject are in this regard simultaneous. The birth of the modern state, as I have pointed out earlier, brings with it that of the subject which witnesses its immediate “erasure” in the sense that the subject, in early modernity, is understood as the docile individual to be deprived of agency. In the next part, I will be addressing the subject, the early modern, legal subject.

3.2. Subject/s of History

C'est d'abord dans *l'autre* que le sujet s'identifie.

Lacan, *ÉCRITS* 181.

In this part, I will be examining the emergence or formation of the subject parallelly to that of the modern state, as being its correlate. This part is devoted to the notion of the subject and how it developed through the history of Western thought. Despite its later erosion as I have shown in the previous part, the subject has always remained at the center of philosophical queries—it can be traced back to the early humanist essentialist discourse and up to the late twentieth century poststructuralist discourse that ‘massacred’ the subject. Erosion of the subject mainly refers to the political transition from Ciceronian politics to Tacitism. The latter erases the notions of equity, justice, and liberty to focus on preservation of the state. Hence, the subject was no longer part of or favored by the political and civic principles of the ‘state’ as an organism. Rather, Reason of State theory erases the subject in the literal sense and focuses instead on new principles such as preservation and self-interest.

My aim is not to provide a diachronic survey of the different understandings of the subject throughout various contexts. My approach of the two will not be aetiological, that is the subject and its formation will not be analyzed as a ‘product,’ a construct, of a certain con/text. Rather, I will be speaking of the modern subject (and its formation) as a correlate of the emergence of *étatisme*, or the modern state and vice versa, as we know it today, that can be traced back to the early modern political thought with the city republics and the politico-philosophical discourse of *Raison d’État*,²⁶ to which subjectivity is central. The understanding of the subject has been ‘reconstructed’ along with the emergence and the radical transformation of early modern politics, and particularly the emergence and equally the formation of the modern state. I will come back to the discourse of Reason of State in the next part.

However, different accounts of subjectivity²⁷ may raise a wry eyebrow to the claim of analysing subjectivity and *étatisme* as inseparable phenomena, two overlapping or intertwined ‘discourses,’ arborescently contributing to their own formation, from within. In this part, I will start by providing a general definition of what subjectivity is, list different approaches to the

²⁶ I am not claiming that the political and philosophical thought of the state started only in the early modern era. It can be traced to the texts of the ancients (Aristotle, Cornelius Tacitus, Livy, and others) as I will be showing later in this part. However, my concern is to address the early modern discourse of the state, which led to the conception of the modern state, similarly to the concept of the subject that started to emerge with that, *viz.* dependently, of the modern state. An analysis of the subject cannot be achieved independently from that of the state, its big Other in Lacanian parlance.

²⁷ The speaking subject of Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, and even further Wittgenstein or the Foucauldian rejection of the state as central to the understanding of subjectivity and deconstruction of the Althusserian ideological state apparatuses and the technologies of power / knowledge are central to the poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity. A resistance to the political dimension of subjectivity and its formation may be symptomatic of a political disinterestedness or academic isolationism.

concept of the subject, and finally speak of what I like to term as the subject of the social contract, in order to argue for its centrality in the context of Reason of State.

It is not possible to provide one definition of subjectivity as tenable. Subjectivity is defined, for instance, by Holdbrook (2013, 1) as the unified and harmonious consciousness of the individual. According to this definition, subjectivity may imply agency, that is “being able to act as one wants” (Holdbrook 2013, 1). This conception of subjectivity, can be easily undermined, for instance, by the crisis of inaction in *Hamlet* or the more general political chaos in Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*. Holdbrook prefaces his book *Shakespeare’s Individualism* with the claim that “Shakespeare is an author for a liberal, individualistic culture” (Holdbrook 2013, 1). The universalist claim of the individual or the subject as a willing and independent entity of the external world is not an innocent claim and it has been undermined by later claims and theories on subjectivity. He says:

If we associate modernity with individualism and self-realization, with choice, freedom, authenticity – if modernity means being true to yourself – we can agree with Emerson that the world has been ‘Shakespearized.’ ‘Individuality’ and ‘being true to oneself’ seem straightforward enough notions. Individual freedom is being able to act as one wants. (Holdbrook 2013, 1)

The claim that individualism, or in other words subjectivity as harmonious, was embraced by early moderns and early modern drama is debatable. In *Hamlet*, for instance, Polonius’s ‘individualism’ or ‘acting as one wants’²⁸ is caricatured in the play. Agency, in this regard, is only illusory, or at least partly illusory. I will come back to this notion in the following part.

The second definition of subjectivity completely undermines the concept of the subject as a whole—a unified and consistent self, an autonomous agent of perception. In brief, subjectivity can refer to “the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth that animate acting subjects... as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought and so on” (Ortner 3). According to these approaches that view subjectivity as such, one can speak of, on the one hand, a speaking subject, and to some extent the subject of history, of cultural formations. Therefore, accounts of

²⁸ This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee. (Shakespeare 2019, I. 3. 77-80)

subjectivity vary; from that of language, to that of its society and culture; the knowing subject becomes that of its own misrecognition.

Further, the different discourses and opinions on Reason of State can be better examined if one directs their attention to the notions of agency and the linkage, in this regard, not in its classical sense, between agency and power; the two texts I am working on in this research address the importance, or in other words, the validity of the notion of agency within a changing or shifting political ‘world view’, a shift from politics that is, allegedly, based on ethics and moralism, to that of Reason of State. Therefore, my interest in the subject and the different notions of subjectivity derives essentially from the importance of the early modern legal context. I would like to highlight the relationship between subjectivity and the emergence of the modern state and particularly the formation of the subject and the notion of agency in light of what came to be termed as Reason of State and the general early modern political context. In this context, I will be addressing what can be termed the modern subject that is understood as a correlate of the emergence of the modern state, that can be traced back to early modern continental Europe.²⁹ The acting subject has been brought back to theory with the view that individuals do at least have some degree of knowledge, reflexivity, and awareness, a penetrative perception into their reality, and therefore agency at the individual level. In Marxist theory, classical that is, or as some would call it crude Marxism, the subject is still viewed at a collective level. Ideology is defined as a system of ideas, a false consciousness, a *méconnaissance* to borrow from Lacanian diction. The subject, in this regard, has agency to disrupt this ‘system of ideas’ through revolutions. The question of agency has been extensively addressed in early modern political philosophy and drama in relation to its judicial context and the state in general. An awareness of the legal subject started to emerge and was later developed with theories of the social contract of the Enlightenment philosophers including Hobbes, Rousseau, and Descartes and his thinking subject. Reflections on the political and social order were shaped by a clear fear of the conceptual chaos outside political, social, and cultural organisms. The subject, in this regard, became to be seen as rational and acting entity consenting to, or rather ‘performing’, the social contract. The contractual subject was, therefore, born with the genesis of the political and the social. However, in more recent critical practices, the subject has become viewed as an entity *performed* in the social, political, cultural, and linguistic moment. Before

²⁹ I am not claiming that the origin of the modern state is early modern continental Europe. This claim is futile and invalid. To be brief, my argument is the modern state as one knows it today can be traced back to the transformation that took place in the early modern era. I will be briefly talking about the origin of the state, as seen by its contemporary theorists, in a different part.

moving to the political debates on the subject, I will briefly map the different approaches to subjectivity.

3.3. The subject and humanism

By going back to the humanist discourse, one can see how subjectivity or rather individuals came to be central and viewed as acting subjects rather than subjects deprived of will and consciousness. Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* describes individuals in the following terms: “as being somewhere between the beasts and the angels. However, God planted a divine image in them there are no limits to what man can accomplish” (Mirandola 2016). Mirandola’s perception of individuals reverberates with Hamlet’s:

What a piece of work is a man—how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties, in form and moving; how express and admirable in action; how like an angel in apprehension; how like a god; the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals. And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me.” (II. 2. 269-275)

‘Man’ is both a piece of work, like a god, but also a quintessence of dust. The claim that the Renaissance individual was viewed as an actor with free will—in the Faustian sense—is debatable to some extent. The Copernican revolution, the shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric world view brought along a shift from theodicies to a more secular understanding of the world order, creating a sense of futility, not to say nihilism, in contemporary philosophies impacting the understanding of subjectivity and equally politics.

The concept ‘subject’, in early modern textuality, mainly refers to the judicial subject—subject to sovereignty, to the laws, to the state, and to authority of the sovereign. A good example of the use of the term ‘subject’ in the context of the law can be Bolingbroke’s protesting claim in *Richard II*: “What would you have me do? I am a subject./ And I challenge law” (Shakespeare 2019, II. 3. 133-134). Robert Devereux, also, protests, I quote from Shapiro, against Elizabeth I by saying:

Say you, I must yield and submit: doth religion enforce me to sue? Or doth God require it? Is it impiety not to do it? What, cannot princes err? Cannot subjects receive wrong? Is it an earthly power or authority infinite? More was going on here than raging egotism. When the

principle of honour collided with those of an unconditional submission to a political authority, which prevailed? (Shapiro 2006, 59)

To take one more example from political writings, the use of the word ‘subject’ in the judicial context can be found in the famous treatise *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*³⁰ (1579) in the first chapter entitled “Whether subjects be bound, or ought, to obey princes who commend anything against the law of God.” In this regard, addressing subjectivity in the early modern context outside the political and the judicial aspect cannot be a successful exercise.

3.4. The Subject and the Social Contract

Notions of the subject, still in the legal or judicial context, became more pronounced with the Enlightenment. In the judicial context, understandings of the subject became tied to the judicial and legal practices. As mentioned earlier, the modern subject, in this regard, can be defined or identified as a correlate of the emergence of the modern state, that too became better articulated with political philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Descartes. The individual here can be seen as the contractual subject. Christopher Pye comments on the contractual subject in *Hamlet* by saying:

Bearing out claims made for the play by such critics as Francis Barker and Terry Eagleton, Hamlet enacts the advent of—calls forth—a modern subject, or what has been described as the liberal, proto- Kantian subject. In the process, the play reveals much about the precise sexual and political underpinnings of that familiar being. The homosocial calculus toward which the play works, a structuring associated with the contractual subject, devolves from a more archaic structure of political and erotic incorporation; the play intimates the erotic prehistory of modern economic subjectivity. (Pye 2000, 109)

Pye suggests that Hamlet represents the emergence of a modern, liberal subject, one that is shaped by political and sexual underpinnings, leading to the formation of the modern subject as such. Early modern politics and particularly the emergence of the discourse of Reason of State paved the way for the political project of the Enlightenment and the social contract. In

³⁰ Stephanius Iurii Brutus. 2003. *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos, Or, Concerning the Legitimate Power of a Prince over the People, and of the People over a Prince*. Translated by George Garnett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

this regard, in the present research, I will attempt to refer to the subject of the social contract and the earlier legal subject of early modernity to understand the construction and formation of not only the individual but also the constructions of social relations within the matrix of the state. I will be addressing dissident views of subjectivity in regard to the historiographic accounts of the contractual subject that is perceived as a self-contained and rational entity à la Descartes who ‘voluntarily’ participates in the act of the social contract.

The social contract and the emergence of the modern state were based on the understanding of the subject as an independent and performing actor in the political practice, who voluntarily participates in the social contract. Residues of the Humanist notion of the individual as an acting agent, Faustian freedom of the subject, and the notion of determinism became more articulated and served the inauguration of politico-philosophical theories on the state. The subject (and the individual) was that of the state.

Descartes defines subjectivity as an act of reasoning, a rational activity that is. The Cartesian subject, or the thinking subject rather, based on the maxim *cogito ergo sum*, initiated or paved the way rather to the later and more modern linguistic turn and shift to the speaking subject—the subject of enunciation. The modern subject is hard to imagine without Descartes’ contribution. The early modern and the later Enlightenment project of the social contract contributes to modern contributions and understandings of the subject.

3.5. The speaking subject:

Readings of subjectivity would not be possible without Lacan and his theory of the speaking subject. Similarly to Cartesian philosophy, psychoanalysis addresses the inner world of the human psyche instead of external powers,³¹ arguing that the unconscious is central to subject formation. The subject in Lacanian theory is erased, alienated, and deprived of any sense of agency:

Lacan’s emphasis on speech and his relative disregard for the language- system coincided with a sustained reflection upon the status of the subject in relation to the law of the symbolic order, or what Lacan designated as the Other. The subject should not be understood here as the unified, self- conscious being or the integrated personality so dear to many a psychologist, but as the subject of the unconscious – a subject that does

³¹ I am not arguing that psychoanalytical accounts dismiss completely the internal world to the subject. On the contrary, culture makes subjects. Subjectivity is a process of becoming in a De Beauvoirian rationale. One becomes a subject as one becomes a woman after their entrance into the symbolic order.

not function as the center of human thought and action, but which inhabits the mind as an elusive agency, controlling yet uncontrollable. (Nobus 2003, 61)

The Lacanian theory of the subject, in this regard, centers on language as the process in which the subject is constructed, and, also, the storehouse, of ideology, where social relations, and power relations emerge.³² Language in Lacanian theory alienates the individual, creating the split subject. The genesis of the subject occurs through entrance into language. Following de Saussure, Lacanian theory regards language, and not the subject, as primordial. The signifying system, or rather signifiers, mediate referentiality to reality. The point of symbolism is not present in language, but is re-presented. This representation cancels immediacy and creates a void. The linguistic system, therefore, causes what Lacan terms the split subject. Coward and Ellis comment:

The identity of the subject of the text is dissolved. The dissolution is a function of the dissolution of the fixed system of meanings found in classic representations. In this way, textual practice makes it felt that meaning and the subject are only produced in the discursive work of the text, and the subject is only experienced in process. In other words, language emerges in all its materialist implications as the specific milieu of productivity, practice and transformations. (Coward and Ellis 2017, 6)

The subject, therefore, is ‘constructed’ in relation to language—a signifying system that cancels immediacy. The signifiers constantly try to restore the sense of immediacy lost with language. The void, however, always remains. The lost immediacy that language creates makes communication doomed to fail and the Real unattainable. The subject keeps on speaking. To take the example of Hamlet, only in the moment of his death, he says that “the rest is silence” and “*dies*” (V. 2. 341). Terry Eagleton remarks in this line of thought:

Reality itself, things as they are, is thus a kind of blank, needing to be signified before it becomes anything determinate; there is a ‘nothing’ at the very core of the world, a pervasive absence infiltrating the whole of experience, which can be abolished only by the supplementary benefit of language. The problem, however, is that language itself

³² For a better understanding of the postmodern subject as such, see Kiss 2010 and Kiss 2011.

can be sort of nothing, as with Iago's insinuating fictions, punching a gaping hole in reality and inducing you to believe in what is not in fact that. (Eagleton 2000, 66)

In the same vein, he remarks on Hamlet's crisis: "But the irony of this, as in Othello, is that there is no heart of the mystery to be plucked out. Hamlet has no 'essence' of being whatsoever, no inner sanctum to be safeguarded: he is pure deferral and diffusion, a hollow void which offers nothing determinate to be known" (Eagleton 2000, 72). Hamlet, he says, is strung out between the traditional social order and the shift to bourgeois individualism. His crisis, in this regard, becomes a critique of both orders. Subjectivity is a problem for Hamlet. His crisis denounces subjectivity in the sense that it signifies being subject to its violence, the violence, not of language in its Lacanian sense, but in its more general sense, that is political. Hamlet refuses to yield to the violence of subjectivity—of being caught up in state violence and state authority.

3.6. The subject of interpellation

Althusser attempted to revisit Marx. As I have mentioned in the previous part, the subject becomes caught up in the 'violence' of the state and political authority. An analysis of subjectivity without one of *étatisme*, particularly in the context of the early modern transition towards the modern state and bourgeois individualism, is a futile one. Durkheim, in this regard, describes psychoanalytical analysis of the subject as a failure: "Whenever a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomena, we may be sure that the explanation is false" (Durkheim 1982, 129). Durkheim provides a long analysis of social phenomenon in his book *Rules for the Explanation of Social Facts*. I will not go in that direction and follow his argument. However, despite including social phenomena in the category of the Symbolic Order, the psychological analysis remains limited to some extent. I would like to direct my attention rather to the political and the role of the state in the formation of the subject and its analysis and vice versa.

On the one hand, in his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus", Althusser provides an analysis of the structure or the process of what he terms interpellation through state apparatuses, Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA).

On the other, the subject and its understanding in the rather Lacanian conservative view can be summed up in the following point: As I have showed earlier, upon entering the Symbolic order, the subject becomes alienated, in the sense that immediacy is lost and that desire is

unattainable. To this end, law, being a repressive apparatus, becomes a ‘liberating’ force. In Zupančič’s interpretation:

What we are dealing with is an inherent impossibility for desire ever to be (fully) satisfied, and this configuration is at the same time the motor and the impasse of desire. The intervention of the law, far from simply “repressing” our desire, helps us deal with the impasse or impossibility involved in the mechanism of the desire as such. To put it simply: the law gives a signifying form to the impossibility involved in the very phenomenon of desire. The fundamental operation of the law is always to forbid something that is in itself impossible...

The law condenses the impossible involved in desire into one exceptional “place.” Via this logic of exception, it liberates the field of the possible. This is why the intervention of the law can have a liberating effect on the subject. It makes it possible for Achilles not to spend every minute of his life trying to figure out why he cannot catch up with the tortoise, or trying obstinately to do so. It can make him a productive member of the community. This is the reason why Lacan, although he refuses to put analysis into the service of producing happy members of the community, also refuses to subscribe to the discourse advocating the liberation of desire from the repression and the spoils of law. His point is that the law supplements the impossibility involved in the very nature of desire by a symbolic interdiction, and that it is thus erroneous to assume that by eliminating this interdiction, we will also eliminate the impossibility involved in the desire. (Zupančič 2003, 175-178)

The analysis of the subject in relation to the law can somehow be symptomatic of the implicit academic isolationism and disinterestedness of the Lacanian approach. To sum up this part, my goal is not to posit different theories of the subject at each other’s’ throat, nor to emphasize one at the expense of the other. I have argued for a political reading of the subject in the context of early modernity and the emergence of the modern state. The theories may have contributed to each other’s’ development. Notions of alienation, the mirror, the imaginary, and many others have been found in all schools of thought. It would not be possible to provide a complete account of the theory of the subject in the present research. The concept will be used for the purpose of understanding the political and philosophical discourse of Reason of State and its representation in drama. A reading of the state would not be possible without an analysis of the subject either—the legal subject that I will be working on the rest of this thesis. As Lacan

claimed “*C’est d’abord dans l’autre que le sujet s’identifie,*” (Lacan 2014, 181) it is in the other that an approach identifies, and it is in the other that the subject identifies—that is the *state*.

CHAPTER II: Threshold to the Tragedy of State

In this part, I will demonstrate how the two plays under study contribute to the understanding of the very notion of the state and *étatisme*. The latter, as I have shown in the previous chapter, started to emerge by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To be able to do so, I would like to start by examining the origins of the state according to its contemporaries. I will start by studying the origins of the state according to early modern political thinkers and then move to the plays. I will analyse the opening scenes, providing a prologue to the Tragedy of State and the poetics of Reason of State. I will start with the threshold of Reason of State philosophy and then will start with a prologue of what I like to call the Tragedy of State. To be able to draw a grammar of what I call the Tragedy of State, it would be of extreme importance to study its opening. The poetic and political align in that the two plays, as I will be arguing in this chapter, open on the peripheries of the state—the fortress. I will be analysing the importance of fortresses in the Reason of State theory and the importance of political territorialism in early modern political philosophy. Reason of State, in a Bourdieusian sense, paves the way to the later bureaucratic state (Bourdieu 1997, 56) leading to the emergence of nationalism and the birth of the nation states and the modern state that totally breaks with the feudal residues of political institutionalism. In this chapter I will be drawing primarily on the early modern literature of the theory of Reason of State. I will be heavily relying on Giovanni Botero's analysis of territories and fortresses. I will, also, be studying the principle of public utility within the framework of the emerging political discourse, which leads to the discussion of the key idea of Reason of State theory, that of the *preservation* of state. I will also discuss Montaigne's criticism of the notion. I argue that Reason of State philosophy is not a progressive political discourse that breaks with medieval and feudal politics and paves the way to the modern state, but rather as one that is degenerate and regressive. I will also show how the two plays under study articulate a sense of distaste with the authoritarian political science about to emerge.

What do early modern philosophers and political thinkers mean when they refer to public utility and how could it be understood in relation to the principle of the preservation of the state? In fact, the central question of this chapter, and that seems to be questioned onstage as well, is the following: whose utility exactly is public utility in the pre-bureaucratic state. The state in the Reason of State theory is rather perceived as that of and for the king and, hence, Louis XIV's famous "L'État, c'est moi" (The state, it is me). In this chapter, I will be discussing the mechanisms of the political apparatuses as introduced in the

play and how they rather are put in place to protect princes. To do so, I will start with the genesis of the political discourse, that is the origins of the state as perceived by political thinkers and show how their “fable” serves to legitimate an ‘illegitimate’ rule.

To start reading the poetics of the new political and philosophical discourses, I would like to similarly start with demystifying the grammar of the Tragedy of State through, firstly, their opening scenes. The opening of the plays is important in that it guides its audience to the transition and shows a dissatisfaction with the change that is taking place; anxiety towards the new political order can be detected in the very first line of the two plays as I will be showing. Both offer what can be depicted as a claustrophobic prologue to a tumultuous political landscape.

1. Origin of the State

I would like to start by examining the origin of the state in early modern Reason of State discourse and political thought. I will be showing how the state, according to contemporary political thinkers, originated in violence. The mythos of étatism rooted in violence and force is used by its contemporaries to further vindicate Reason of State theory through a triad argument; that of public utility, constant external threats, and internal threats and conflict that should always be contained for the ultimate principle of preserving the state.

Therefore, this part will be divided to two sub-sections. I will start with introducing the concept of public utility in Reason of State Theory and how it helped with the emergence and formation of the new political discourse. Public utility, being an important element in the study of the origin of the state, constitutes a crucial concept that was used by early modern political thinkers to vindicate the authority of the state in its recent developments, and further contributed to the understanding and establishment of the Tacitean state. Then, I will move to analysing two central elements in the philosophy of the state that helped its emergence and had been widely discussed when it comes to studying its origins, which is conflict. I will devote one part to external conflicts and another to internal conflicts. Conflicts or threats, similarly to the principle of public utility, have been used as a way to justify authority on the one hand, and have been seen as the major factor of its emergence.

1.1. Public Utility

In studying the works of early modern political thinkers who started producing a scientific study of politics and produced what one today calls political science, there seems to be a consensus that the state, regardless of its form, originated in violence. I will argue, in this regard, that the discourse of Reason of State led to the formation of the modern state. The concept Reason of State resulted in the formation of the state as we know it today, political science, and international relations. Yves Charles Zarka, in this regard, says:

La notion de raison d'État se constitue et se diversifie à la flexion des XV^e et XVII^e siècles. Elle est mise en œuvre dans le cadre de doctrines qui visent à définir les modalités de la pratique gouvernementale dans un monde déchiré par les guerres de religion, l'opposition des désirs de domination et les prétentions hégémoniques des grandes monarchies européennes, un monde traversé par des crises spirituelles, politiques et sociales avec leur cortège de conflits, de révoltes et de répressions. Mais ce monde déchiré est aussi celui où se forment la réalité et le concept de l'État moderne à travers la redéfinition du concept de souveraineté et l'élaboration de théories du gouvernement³³. (Zarka 1994, 1)

As Zarka shows, the early modern context of disorder, be it political, religious, spiritual, or moral, and the more global state of instability, be it within Europe or that from the Eastern threat from the Ottoman Empire, necessitated a firm political science that imposes authority, power, and even violence that is legitimate. However, the notion of the state is different from the one we know today. In Early Modern Europe, the term state was by definition antithetical to that of the republic,³⁴ and art of the state too was antithetical to the Ciceronian and early Christian Humanist definition of the law as that based on the laws of nature, which makes it based on equity and justice. The art of the state is the antithesis of political science that started to take shape only with the Reason of State theory. The science of the state³⁵ centers mainly on

³³ The concept of Reason of State was formed during the 15th and 17th centuries. It was implemented within the framework of doctrines that aimed to define the modalities of governmental practice in a world torn apart by religious wars, ambition for domination, and the hegemonic pretensions of European monarchies, in a world full of spiritual, political, and social crises, revolts, and repressions. However, it is during this time that the reality and the concept of the modern state are forged through the redefinition of the concept of sovereignty and the theories of government. (translation mine)

³⁴ Early modern republicanism is very peculiar. I will deal with misconceptions in the literary scholarship about political theory in the third chapter.

³⁵ It is important to note the difference between the art of politics and science of politics. The first falls within the Ciceronian conception of politics and the second rather started to emerge with the Reason of State theory. Science

utility and dismisses the common good and interest of the subjects. The state becomes that of a prince or a sovereign and not of the people. Therefore, the state, has as a central purpose exercising power, and hence the principle of utility, the *uso* principle. The latter led to a total departure from the ideals of equity and justice—or in other words, a departure from the republic. The principle of justice, in Reason of State theory, is incompatible with that of the preservation of the state—which allegedly should too be serving the interest of its subjects.

The Hobbesian notion of the contractual subject³⁶ under the state receiving safety and security at the expense of liberty started to emerge with Reason of State philosophy. Private utility is eclipsed by the principle ‘public utility’ on which Michel de Montaigne comments: “Ce sont dangereux, rares et maladives exceptions à nos reigles naturelles. Il y faut ceder, mais avec grande moderation et circonspection ; aucune utilité privée n’est digne pour laquelle nous facions cet effort à nostre conscience ; la publique, bien lors qu’elle est et très-apparente et très-importante”³⁷ (De Montaigne 2019, III, 1, p. 778). Montaigne criticizes the principle of public utility and considers it oppressive to individual liberties and private utility. Despite its importance, public utility in its early modern political context, Montaigne argues, eclipses personal liberties, making it, hence, part of the modern discourse of Reason of State theory, breaking therefore completely from the Ciceronian political framework that has as one of its central values private utility, the individual, subjects, and their freedom and liberty.³⁸

The contractual subject³⁹ has been born parallelly to that of the state, but has been immediately erased; the subject receives security and safety from external dangers, including invasion or theft or confiscating one’s property, in return for their obedience and subservience to the state and to the prince’s unlimited authority, embodied in the notion of public utility and the common good. The common good, in this regard, is ruled and organized by the law, but not in the Ciceronian sense.

of politics and the science of the state rather refers to a political thought generated by the Reason of State and, hence, implies a departure from feudal ‘politics’.

³⁶ Please note that Hobbes, and Contractarian thought in general, came after the Reason of the State theory has already been established, that is a century later. However, it is thanks to the development of political thought leading to the emergence of a political science and Reason of State theory that Contractarian theories came to the fore. Contractarianism can be seen as a development of the Reason of State theory and. Of political science.

³⁷ These are dangerous, rare, and sickly exceptions to our natural laws. We can follow them, but with great moderation and circumspection; no private utility is worthy for which we make this effort to our conscience; the public one, although it is very apparent and very important. (translation mine)

³⁸ Some Shakespeare scholars discuss the parallels between *Hamlet* and Montaigne’s *Essays* that are both poetic and political. See Hugh Grady’s *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet*. (Grady 2002)

³⁹ Despite the terminology being used only later with Contractarians, I will be henceforth using the term the contractual subject to refer, on the one hand, to subjectivity in its political sense, and, also, the subject in relation to the state in Reason of State theory.

Cicero introduced a civil science based on the notion of the natural law that serves the interest of ruling the republic and provides the knowledge in doing so. Laws, according to Cicero, are natural in that they serve the highest ideal of serving the notions of justice and equity. The new political science and the philosophical discourse of Reason of State did break up with the 'political' tradition of civil reason and instead introduced a radical science that, in most cases, legitimates authority and violence. The notion of the state, according to its contemporaries, was already based on violence and on giving up liberties. The entire concept of 'private utility' as Montaigne shows is central to the understanding of the state. The birth of the new political science has been thus introduced, with no effort to embellish it.⁴⁰

Cicero's civil science proved inefficient to secure the preservation of the state, be it from internal threats, such as rebellions and civil wars, or external threats, such as wars and invasions. Even republics are threatened by external dangers and can be perceived as states towards other states as they exercise violence towards other states. Therefore, Reason of State theorists would in this case, favour, for instance, tyranny and security to liberty and constant threats. In the same vein, Zarka poses the question: "la détermination de la puissance d'un État en fonction de la configuration géopolitique du voisinage : comment assurer la conservation d'un État face à ceux qui l'entoure ? Quels sont les effets psycho-économiques de la guerre ?" (Zarka 1994, 2). Zarka explains resorting to authoritarianism (or even tyranny) instead of liberty by the state of convulsion in Europe and the fear of instability in general. As asked by Zarka, these questions, of one state vis-à-vis other states has been central to Reason of State theory. Public utility, therefore, has been introduced to replace private utility and Ciceronian ideals. The question of public utility, as Montaigne, a contemporary, shows supersedes that of morality and private utility. Zarka further argues:

C'est dire que les questions du bien et du mal en politique seront constamment croisées avec celles de l'utilité publique, de l'intérêt d'État et de la puissance économique ou guerrière. Entre la volonté, au moins déclarée, de restaurer la conformité du gouvernement des hommes à la loi divine et l'analyse de la nécessité interne qui préside à la vie de l'État, se trouve élaborées des conceptions de la rationalité politique dans des circonstances ordinaires ou extraordinaires. Reste que cette rationalité ne relèvera plus

⁴⁰ Despite Botero's attempt to refine the violence of the theory, contemporaries introduced radical and 'extremist' political ideas on the ways to rule, to govern, and to discipline, including for instance Francesco Guicciardini in his book *Maxims and Reflections* (1530), Jean Bodin in his book *Six Books of the Commonwealth* (1576) and Machiavelli in his *The Prince* (1532).

du concept commun de la raison et ne sera plus jugée à son aune.⁴¹ (Zarka 1994, 2, emphasis mine)

Public utility being the central principle of Reason of State theory shows how early modern theorists attempted to force étatism in its new form, with all its discontents, for the preservation of the state as such. The principle of public utility becomes the central element of the new political order that is born and in its way to shape the (early) modern state. Two elements further consolidate the emergent order, external and internal conflicts. A huge body of literature has been devoted to these two concepts; protecting the state from external threats, governmentality, and discipline. In the next section, I will discuss how theorists discussed threats and conflicts to further legitimate Reason of State theory, and as a next step I will discuss the concept's importance in the opening scenes of the two plays under study.

1.2. Constant Threats versus Preservation of the State

As Viroli asks in his article which reason is Reason of State (Viroli 1998, 67), with the emergent philosophical discourse in early modernity, the question becomes rather that of public utility, preservation, and violence. Giovanni Botero, a pioneer of what is known today as International Relations, first wrote his oeuvre *Relazioni Universali* (1630) in which he argued that Europe should defend itself from external threats through an organised order of states, a continental or even a global one. In his book, he offers an account of the different continents and 'countries' in the world, their beliefs, and subjects, and how this global mosaic of 'nations' rather represents a threat to the Christian continent, being, therefore, part of an imperialist and a rather paranoid White project, a theological—Christian—dystopia. Ferenc Hörcher comments on this project and Botero's approach by saying:

In the newly discovered global arena Europe defined its own task as that of keeping order and peace. This programme was announced by Botero in accordance with the literary heritage of the *Aeneis*, but his framework for Europe is, of course, already

⁴¹ "This means that the questions of good and evil in politics will constantly be linked to those of public utility, political and economic interests and warfare. Between the will to restore the divine law in governments and the analysis of the internal necessity which presides over the State, conceptions of political rationality in ordinary or extraordinary circumstances are elaborated. However, this rationality will no longer fall under the common concept of reason and will no longer be judged by it." (Translation mine)

Roman Christianity. He thought that the Spanish struggle for world dominance was easily understandable from his Northern Italian, Catholic – and for that matter Jesuit – perspective, too. In accordance with the Ciceronian, Humanist discourse, he added that the least developed peoples of the world, in order to be ready for “pacification”, also needed to reach an acceptable standard of “civility”. This target requires their being settled down, and their acquisition of literacy. Only a culture which satisfies these prerequisites can give due honour to God, or in the non-Judeo-Christian tradition, to the gods. Botero’s own programme of creating a global civilisation of high culture turns out to be, in the final analysis, a kind of this-worldly theodicy. (Hörcher 2021, 201-202)

Reason of State emerged due to the awareness that a preservation of the state necessitates a global order of states, a society of organized states, which cannot be read independently from European imperialism. Botero envisioned an organized society of states and his project was Roman Christian as Hörcher, unknowingly, shows. An established global order in Reason of State philosophy is necessary for the preservation of the state. In addition to its oppressive and violent aspects, Reason of State seeks to establish order to reinforce and protect its territoriality in the geopolitical sense. An internal order too is necessary as I will be showing in the next part.

The consensus that the state originated in violence is tenable by all contemporary theorists. The state is by definition founded on the idea of dominion. Michael J. Braddick in *State Formation in Early Modern England* provides a contemporary definition of the state as follows:

In what sense was there a ‘state’ in early modern England? The answer offered here is that there was a coordinated and territorially bounded network of agencies exercising political power, and this network was exclusive of the authority of other political organisations within those bounds. It is argued both that it is reasonable to refer to this as a state in terms of modern social theory – it is not a definition which empties the term of meaning for us – and that it is a view that would have been comprehensible to increasing numbers of contemporaries. What separates the early modern polity from the modern one is not the absence of a state, but the specific forms of political power embodied in the state. (Braddick 2004, 9)

Braddick comments on the geopolitical project advanced by the Reason of State philosophers. The only barrier to establishing a state that cannot be challenged by external threats is the

subjects who will question the principle of public utility. Early Modern political thinkers were aware that the state is founded on violence, dominion, and force, be it legitimate or not, and went further to vindicate authority and tyranny. Liberty, in this context, was secondary to security and order. It is important to note, however, that most of these political theorists were subsidized by the monarchies they worked with and held offices in courts. Contrary to the Ciceronian legacy, accepting the apparatus of the state as such was not a hard pill to swallow for political theorists. Theorists went further to legitimate any type of order or form of government at the expense of liberty; cruelty over justice; and violence over consensus. The state, then, often referred to the ensemble of subjects loyal, voluntarily or not, to the prince, the monarch, or the ruling family, unlike in a republic, in which the commonwealth was that of the people as a whole and which was legitimate through its subjects—it was the *res populi*.

To start with the most moderate theorist of the Reason of State theory, Giovanni Botero in *A Treatise concerning the Causes of the Magnificency and Greatness of Cities* defines the state or the city as “an assembly of people, a congregation drawn together to the end they may thereby live at their ease in their wealth and plenty... Now men are drawn together upon sundry causes and occasions thereunto them moving: some by authority, some by force, some by pleasure, and some by profit that proceedeth of it” (Botero 2017, 227). Botero attempts to refine theories of the state, yet slips into admitting that the state is essentially founded upon violence:

Cain was the first author of cities; but the poets (whom Cicero therein followed) the fable that in the old world men scattered here and there, on the mountains and the plains, led a life little different from brute beasts, without laws, without conformity of customs and manner of civil conversation. And that afterward there rose up some who, having with their wisdom and their eloquence won a special reputation and authority above the rest, declared to the rude and barbarous multitude how much and how great profit they were to enjoy if, drawing themselves to one place, they would unite. And by this means they first founded hamlets and villages, and after towns and villages. (Botero 2017, 227)

The state, hence, in the words of Botero, has been established and imposed through the violence of arms and/or words. The voluntary departure from Ciceronian philosophy already places Botero in the Early Modern Tacitean school of thought. Botero, then, may be familiar with the power of rhetoric, in its ideological terms, in taming the “barbarous multitudes” into obedient subjects to the “authority” of “one person” who succeeds in drawing them together, if not through language, will do so through force and violence.

In his advice to rulers, *The Reason of State*, Botero devotes most parts of the book to preservation of the state from enemies, both internal and external. After defining Reason of State, the first chapter that follows is entitled “The Classification of Dominion”, agreeing that the state is by definition a dominion rather than a voluntary congregation of people into a community. Then, he goes on to provide reasons for the downfall of cities and ways to prevent it: building fortresses, suppressing rebellions, and taming subjects of the ruler’s state and those of a newly conquered territory. The other chapters address discipline; both of individuals and societies. He provides ways to discipline subjects and to limit authority and power previously in the hands of subjects in the city states of Cicero and the republican tradition. Botero becomes a theorist of discipline and governmentality, by discussing techniques of control and discipline over subjects under the veil of consensus as I have shown earlier. Evoking the *avant la lettre* Max Weber’s philosophy of the state, Botero links the essence of the state to the control of political power. In *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, J A Guy evokes the syntax of étatism:

It is striking that, whereas in 1500 the word ‘state’ had possessed no political meaning in English beyond the ‘state or condition’ of the prince or the kingdom, by the second half of Elizabeth’s reign it was used to signify the ‘state’ in the modern sense. In the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII politicians had spoken only of ‘country’, ‘people’, ‘kingdom’, and ‘realm’, but by the 1590s they began to conceptualize the ‘state’. (Guy 2000, 352)

The awareness that a new political order, beyond the authority of one ruler or a dynasty over people, through mechanisms of discipline and control, and a more sophisticated network of offices organizing the entire apparatus, ideological and otherwise in Althusserian parlance, has become evident. Braddick, in the same vein, comments:

The court offered place and employment, particularly in the Household, but more importantly gave access to the monarch. Those with influence at court acted as mediators between petitioners and the king and therefore enjoyed power. Among these people alliances formed, seeking to influence decision-making. (Braddick 2004, 23)

Theorists of the state and authors of advice to rulers were part of the network that the new forms of state imposed. The dramas voice the reception of the political transition that I will be discussing in the next part.

Contrary to Giovanni Botero, Francesco Guicciardini was not implicit about the violence and authoritarianism explicitly legitimated by the new order of states in Early Modern Europe. He did not make any effort to refine the emergent theories of the state. Unsurprisingly, he is known to be the most immoral theorist of the early Cinquecento, competing with Machiavelli and all Tacitean authors. Divorcing politics from morals of the previous tradition, ethics, and even theology⁴² has been a successful task for him. Politics according to the Guicciardini school of thought should be based on the principle of utility and self-interest⁴³ rather than ethics and maxims of justice and equity. *Ricordi* 48⁴⁴ goes:

Political power cannot be wielded according to the dictates of good conscience. If you consider its origin, you will always find it in violence—except in the case of republics within their territories, but not beyond. Not even the emperor is exempt from this rule; nor are the priests, whose violence is double, since they assault us with both temporal and spiritual arms. (Guicciardini 2016)

Guicciardini implicitly argues that politics cannot be based on a good conscience, denying therefore any ideals and celebrated values of the previous art of politics. Having openly subscribed to the Tacitean thought, civil reason has been completely rejected as non-pragmatic and futile. Politics should, instead, be based on reason—the new Reason of the State. The state of Francesco Guicciardini is an authoritarian dystopia whereby the ruler, be it a tyrant or otherwise, should have their authority respected and obeyed, regardless of the context and its legitimacy. The subjects, in return, should offer unlimited obedience to their ruler. The prince should always have in mind that his subjects are like conquered enemies. Their liberties should be restrained because to speak of the people “is to speak of a madman, a monster full of

⁴² Guicciardini did not hesitate to express his abhorrence for religion interfering in politics and theologians, unlike Botero, for the obvious reason that religion is the opium of the people in Marxian words. He says in *ricordi* 32: “Never argue against religion or against things that seem to depend on God. These matters are too strongly rooted in the minds of fools”, in *ricordi* 33 “too much religion spoils the world, because it makes the mind effeminate, involves men in thousands of errors, and diverts them from many generous and virile enterprises,” and in *ricordi* 125: “Philosophers and theologians, and all those who investigate the supernatural and the invisible, say thousands of insane things. As a matter of fact, men are in the dark about such matters, and their investigation has served and serves more to exercise the intellect than to find truth.” Guicciardini politics was more pragmatic and abstract than that of Botero. The latter envisioned a Roman-Christian project for Europe. Guicciardini, however, is more interested in sovereignty *per se*. His project is secular rather than pagan, paving the way to the formation of the modern state.

⁴³ Self-interest intersects with public utility but does not refer to private utility. Self-interest is rather political and does not transcend the interest of the state or public utility.

⁴⁴ Guicciardini has various and fragmented maxims that are numbered.

confusion and errors, whose vain opinions are as far from the truth as Spain, according to Ptolemy, is from India” (Guicciardini 2016, 123). Being the advocate of authority, subjects should obey rulers including tyrants. In the case of tyranny, rebellions should be avoided because they can cause civil discord and internal conflict. Guicciardini advises against rebellion in *Ricordi* 50: “Waste no time with revolutions that do not remove the causes of your complaints but that simply change the faces of those in charge. For you will still remain dissatisfied. To take an example: what good does it do to rid the Medici of Ser Giovanni da Poppi, if he is replaced by ser Bernardino da San Miniato’s a man of the same quality and calibre?” therefore, the subject is erased under the new Reason of State theory. Despite its birth with the theory and with the science of politics, and despite the creation of the modern state is paralleled to and possible only with the birth of the subject, its agency is immediately suppressed and denied. The contractual subject has no status in Reason of State theory.

Tyranny can still offer stability, which should be the sole aim of the subjects. They should be content with tyranny as it provides security and its preservation. What Guicciardini suggests in his political project is a type of an Orwellian dystopia in which subjects should not be vocal about their ‘opinions’ which can be a threat to their lives: “Whenever a country falls into the hands of a tyrant, I think it the duty of good citizens to try and cooperate with him, and to use their influence to do good and avoid evil” (Guicciardini 2016, 32) and that a tyrant

will do everything possible to discover your secret thoughts. He will be affectionate, will talk to you at great length, will have you observed by men he has ordered to become intimate with you. It is difficult to guard yourself against all these snares. If you do not want him to know, think carefully, and guard yourself with consummate industry against anything that might give you away, using as much diligence to hide your secret thoughts as he uses to discover them” (Guicciardini 2016, 105).

An important part of early modern drama is devoted to the discussion of political subjects and subjectivity, including Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* centres on the political subject, the mob, and their agency. The silenced subject is to be discussed in Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*. Guicciardini spells out the most immoral, yet pragmatic, version of politics. Tacitean politics and the shift to Reason of State can seem shocking to contemporaries who inherited the Ciceronian ideals of the Italian city republics, including for instance the seemingly more moderate Botero who was:

greatly astonished to find Reason of State a constant subject of discussion and to hear the opinions of Niccolo Machiavelli and Cornelius Tacitus frequently quoted: the former for his precepts relating to the rule and government of peoples, the latter for his lively description of the arts employed by the Emperor Tiberius in acquiring and retaining the imperial the imperial title of Rome. (Botero 2017, xiii)

The legal subject in early modern Europe had to sacrifice its liberties for it will always desire more: “Princes should beware of allowing their subjects too many liberties. For men naturally desire freedom; and human nature is such that men will never be satisfied with their condition but will always seek to improve it. These appetites are stronger than the memory of the good life or of the benefits received under the prince” (Guicciardini 2016, 203). The transition to the new order has not been easy. I will show in the next part how the plays voiced the reception of the transition to the new political order.

Reason of State became discussed by ‘politicians’ and subjects or peasants alike. Accepting the transition was not an easy task. Guicciardini’s theory was the most radical and ‘immoral’ compared to those of his contemporaries. There are fewer radical voices, including that of Jean Bodin.

Jean Bodin provides a more or less, yet undeveloped and less sophisticated, detailed account of the very origins of the state, one that is very similar to that of Giovanni Botero, based on the very concept of a dominion, in the general sense, but also in the literal sense, of one man, more powerful than the rest, in words or swords, leading to the grouping of primitive communities. However, contrary to Botero, Bodin does not embellish the master slave dialectic birthed under the state. On the contrary he highlights the submissiveness of subjects under the state, to the authority of one man or one family, and defends it. In fact, for Bodin, obedience and submissiveness to the complete authority of the prince is the very essence of étatism, or the commonwealth in Bodin’s words.

Bodin’s personal experience during the civil war⁴⁵ inspired his convictions on authoritarianism and led him to abhor ‘anarchy’. Civil war in France and the anarchy that comes with it led him to defend his authoritarian views on the state that can be summed up in not only the absolute authority of the state, but, further, the absolute rule of one person over the rest of

⁴⁵ Jean Bodin lived in a period characterized by a great political and religious turmoil in France including the religious wars, which inspired his convictions on an authoritarian rule that forces order.

subjects, and that that power must be held in the grip of one ruler—that is monarchy in its most classical and traditional aspects. He, therefore, attempted to introduce a universal political science and a philosophy of the state to teach avoiding the atrocities of civil wars and conflicts—mostly internal ones. Richard Tuck comments on Bodin’s thought:

Because Bodin recognised that the *respublica* is in a way an *artificial* family, he was realistic about the non-natural character of political rulership, allowing democracies and aristocracies equal standing with monarchies. But he undoubtedly and explicitly favoured as ruler a figure resembling the single father in his isolated family, namely an hereditary and legally absolute monarch. (Tuck 2011, 27)

Bodin’s philosophy of the state originates in the Fall and his project is inspired by the Old Testament. The state and its absolute power are both necessary given that human nature is wicked in essence. The family, then, as it is in the Christian mythos, is not only the origin, but the principal element in the ordering of the commonwealth. He comments that “a commonwealth may well be defined as the rightly ordered government of a number of families, and of those things which are their common concern, by a sovereign power” (Bodin 1580, 1). The argument of the family being the true image of the commonwealth is strongly present in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The play is, in fact, a saga of family politics, treason, and betrayals. A rotten family, accordingly, leads to a rotten state⁴⁶. It is in family that the concept of authority originated and expanded to the macrocosmic level of the political—that is the state:

Before such things as cities and citizens, or any form of commonwealth whatsoever, were known among men, each head of a family was sovereign in his household, having power of life and death over his wife and children. But force, violence, ambition, avarice, and the passion for vengeance, armed men against one another. The result of the ensuing conflicts was to give victory to some, and to reduce the rest to slavery. Moreover the man who had been chosen captain and leader by the victors, under whose command success had been won, retained authority over his followers, who became his loyal and faithful adherents, and imposed it on the others, who became his slaves. Thus was lost the full and entire liberty of each man to live according to his own free will,

⁴⁶ The term rotten is used twice in *Hamlet*: “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark” and “if he be not rotten before he die” (I. 5. 100; V. 1. 169). The idea of the state being rotten along with the diction of the land permeates the play as I will be showing in the next chapters.

without subjection to anyone. It was completely lost to the vanquished and converted into unmitigated servitude; it was qualified in the case of the victors in that they now rendered obedience to a sovereign leader. Anyone who did not wish to abandon part of his liberty, and live under the laws and commands of another, lost it altogether. Thus the words, hitherto unknown, of master and servant, ruler and subject, came into use. (Bodin 1580, 18)

Bodin shows how the state *originates* in violence. Bodin's argument, therefore, more radical and violent though, is similar to that of Botero's. The force and violence of one man allow him to subordinate and dominate the rest. Similarly to all Early Modern Reason of State theorists, the state for Bodin originates in violence and is a violent apparatus: "Reason and common sense alike point to the conclusion that the origin and foundation of commonwealths was in force and violence" (Bodin 1580, 18). The consensus that the state in Early Modern Europe originates in violence has been established. The dialectic of master slave has been articulated and defended by Bodin in that, similar to a household, a state can have only "one head, one, master, one seigneur" (Bodin 1580, 10) and the "government of all commonwealths, colleges, corporate bodies, or households whatsoever, rests on the right to command on the one side, and the obligation to obey on the other" (Bodin 1580, 9). In fact, according to his dialectic, the power should rest only on the side of the sovereign. It is "neither the town nor its inhabitants that makes a city state, but their union under a sovereign ruler" (Bodin 1580, 7). In this part, I sought to argue that Reason of State is based on violence and 'tyranny'. It is not a progressive political shift but rather an aggressive departure from a just and equal art of politics advanced by the Ciceronian ideals.

A political science and a philosophy have thus been established in Early Modern Europe, highlighting the necessity of authoritarianism over liberties, by drawing a genealogy of étatism based on violence and dominion. The shift to reason of state along with Tacitism, erased the Ciceronian ideals of the city republics and eclipsed its subjects in favour of principles of public utility and the common good. In the next part, I will be addressing the reception of this political transition and the emergent theories of the state in the dramas of the contemporaries. I will be showing how the two plays under study deal with the same topic but from different angles. *Hamlet* studies politics in more philosophical terms and in the private sphere of court and family. *Sejanus His Fall* focuses more on the public reception of these changes, mediated through the most notorious tyrants in history, Tiberius and Sejanus.

2. Prologue to the Tragedy of State

In the previous part, I have shown how the transition to the new political order of Reason of State is based on several concepts including the principle of public utility and the constant presence of threats and conflicts. However, the theories and primary sources of political thinkers can be read as a prologue to understanding the new discourse on politics and the emergence of the new political science per se. To study a their reception and draw the political fault lines surrounding it, they are not enough. Burke brilliantly notes that for “the colouring we have to turn elsewhere, to the arts, and especially to the drama” (488). The plays under study may show the reception of these theories by their contemporaries. *Hamlet* may show the prince’s confusion and denial of the political degeneration in court and warfare. *Sejanus His Fall* discusses the reception of these political transitions by the mob of Rome. I will be showing how the opening scenes of the two plays introduce their audience to the political theme of the play.

2.1. *Hamlet*: On the Margins of the State

This section is devoted to the discussion of Reason of State and the emergent political discourse in *Hamlet*, chiefly their reception. After introducing the origins of state and showing that its early modern conception is based on violence and the force of arms, I will be moving to discuss how the stage too demystifies the political discourse. I start with the first acts of the plays to argue for a grammar of the Tragedy of State. I will be showing how it sets the tone for the theme of the play, that of Reason of State and the violence it brings with it. In this part, I will be addressing the anxiety already present in court and among subjects, an implied dissatisfaction towards the political transition that is taking place in Denmark.

The play opens in the periphery of the state, yet the most important element, metaphorically, in Reason of State theory—that is the fortress with guards, literally guarding the state⁴⁷. The opening, already, that is the first scene in the play, sets the tone of the play, transition to Reason of State. To quote Burke one more time, it would be scarcely an

⁴⁷ I talk further about the metaphor of guards in my paper entitled “‘The Rotten State of Denmark’: The Discourse of Reason of State in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.” I will elaborate on the metaphor in the fifth chapter.

exaggeration to state that the plays' focal topic is that of Reason of State⁴⁸. Burke, in this context, speaks of early modern drama and particularly Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* that I will be discussing in the next part. It is indeed fascinating to see that the play opens with the theme of preserving the state and negotiates, not only external threats, as the guards are working in a fortress, to protect the 'realm', to put it in more neutral terms at this stage, from invasions, particularly from Norway's Fortinbras that was defeated by King Hamlet, but also, internal threats, that I will be largely discussing in this section.

This part will be devoted three major themes; I will discuss first the idea of preservation. Then, I will address the theme of the political transition. Finally, I will talk about the theme of disturbances. *Hamlet* takes place in feudal Denmark. However, the stage depicts an early modern political context through mediation.

The play opens with the question "Who's there?" (I. 1. 1). The first line of the play should not pass unnoticed. The play opens, on the one hand, with a paranoid question, and on the other a guard of the state. Asking "who's there" highlights the essence of Reason of State theme; preservation of the state from threats and dangers. The guards play a double role in the play. They are the subjects of the state, its servants being on the periphery, yet protect and preserve it from external dangers and are alert to any alien element. The theme of fortresses and protection from alien threats has been discussed largely in Reason of State theory. As Elden argues in his *Shakespearean Territories*, both characters in the opening scene "are identifying themselves as those who have sworn to the land of Denmark, that is, the country or territory, and its King. It is important to recognize that the term Denmark functions as a synecdoche, both a place and as a person in the play. The dead King is sometimes referred to as Denmark" (Elden 2018, 31-32). The king of Denmark, therefore, embodies the state himself in this regard. The guards guard the state of the prince as in Reason of State theory.

Giovanni Botero stresses the importance of fortresses. In addition to many chapters in which he discusses preservation of the state from external threats and the preservation of the state from an ultimate downfall, he devotes an entire chapter from his book *Reason of State* to uniquely fortresses. Another chapter discusses how to build a fortress. To be more precise, Botero's volume contains ten books. Of those, an entire book (Book VI) is devoted to securing the state from external dangers, frontiers, and ways to expand the realm. He prefaces Book VI with the following:

⁴⁸ "It is scarcely an exaggeration to claim that the true subject of these plays is reason of state" (488).

Thus far we have spoken of the means by which subjects may be kept peaceful and obedient: now we will discuss how to insure against the causes of unrest and ruin which may come upon a state from without. It may be presumed that security consists in keeping the enemy and the danger at a distance, for the very proximity of the threat is a great part of the threat itself; and then in ensuring that however close it may come, it will be unable to do you harm. There are many means by which it may be kept at distance, and the first of these is the fortification of passes and frontiers, and by fortresses built for that purpose. (Botero 2017, 117)

For Botero, fortresses are a safeguard. It is nature that teaches us to protect ourselves from external danger, or what he calls *the art of fortification*, the same way “our brains and hearts are girt with bone and cartilage to safeguard our lives by keeping danger away” (Botero 2017, 117). Fortresses should be built in a certain way to keep danger at a distance and especially to protect a rich state, pointing, in this regard, to examples from history including Malta, Oran, and Tangiers. *Hamlet* opens with the theme of fortresses and preservation of the state from external dangers, having, therefore, Reason of State as a subtext from the very first line of the play, and from the mouth of a marginal character, to both the play and the state of Denmark, Bernardo. Though the threat may seem internal, the play is “also structured by external threats to the integrity of the state. In *Hamlet* the threats are Denmark’s tensions with Norway, the relation between both countries and Poland, and, more peripherally, Denmark’s links with England and France” (Elden 2018, 29). Unlike other plays of Shakespeare *Hamlet* offers an open spatiality recognizing the wider regional context that is essential in the understanding of the Reason of State theories (Elden 2018, 30).

The peripheral characters, in this regard, à la master and slave dialectic, plays the most important role in the state, more important than the king who sits on his throne, that of preserving the state despite being peripheral. It is this peripheral character who preserves the state, and not the prince. What the play does, hence, is subvert and demystify the political hierarchies and the emergent political philosophy that seeks to silence and erase the subject. The theme of the rebellion has been pointed to from the very beginning of the play, in scene one. The new philosophy brings with it a certain kind of paranoia for survival and fear of threats that is spelt out from the very beginning of the play, a death drive, à la Freud. The theme of fortresses is, therefore, not a marginal one, particularly in Reason of State philosophy. It highlights the idea of preservation central particularly to Reason of State theory.

The threat in *Hamlet*, also, comes from the inside. The answer to the question “Who’s there?” takes the audience/readers to the next theme I want to deal with, that of transition. Two antithetical answers are offered. First, Bernardo answers “Long live the King!” (I. 1. 3). Then, the question is aggressively posed one more time by Francisco: “Stand ho! Who is there?” (I. 1. 15), to which Horatio replies: “Friends to this ground” (I. 1. 16) and Marcellus “And liegemen to the Dane” (I. 1. 17). Bernardo’s answer is very assertive and affirmative, showing that the new political order has already been established.

Through an answer to a very simple question, Bernardo seeks to prove his unconditional support and loyalty to the new ruler of Denmark. He is almost swearing his allegiance to the new king, who is the perfect prince of Reason of State theory. Bernardo is the subject that Francesco Guicciardini talks about in his *Maxims and Reflections*, the person that should not express their opinion out loud in the realm except their allegiance to the tyrant in the authoritarian dystopia that he describes, that of Claudius in the play under study (Guicciardini 2016, 105). Bernardo, in this regard, one of the first characters introduced in the play, is the embodiment of the subject of Reason of State theory, obedient and seeks no alternative, passive and loyal. The legal subject has been imposed a new political order whereby he did not agree to anything and has no opinion to express except agreeing to the terms of the new political order that has been established. Having no ambitions, Bernardo has been first introduced to the audience/readers to serve his role as a prototype of the ‘perfect’ subject of the new political order. Bernardo is the type of subjects who will never strive for change, rebellion, or even ambition through favours. He is successful in guarding the state and doing the job assigned to him, which makes him a marginal character with no important role or impact in the course of action in the plot, unlike the rest of the guards.

Horatio and Marcellus’ answers are very intriguing. The two characters manifest no allegiance to the new King. They only express their allegiance to the Danes, the people, and to the state, not the political apparatus per se, but rather the country of Denmark, their land. However, Horatio makes a long eulogy to the previous king, as I will be showing shortly, showing, hence, a dissatisfaction with the present king. His dissatisfaction with Claudius is not some type of radical opposition to political orders or a rebellious spirit, rather, it is simply a rejection of the present king and the new political order.

Therefore, the two characters, being immediately introduced after Bernardo, as his antithesis, consider that the state is that of the people—a *res populi*. Horatio, throughout the play, will be depicted as the antique Roman citizen and the loyal friend, belonging therefore to the older political framework of the Ciceronian and humanist Christian tradition. His answer,

that is the first line assigned to him, hints already to the republican subtext of the city republics and implies a dissatisfaction with the current order of Claudius, the new tyrant of Reason of State theory. Subjects in the city republics seek equity and justice, at which Horatio hints by pointing to the Danes, that is the people, representing the state, and not the state represented in the figure of the prince as is the case with Bernardo.

In the opening scenes, the play comments on the lost past with King Hamlet saying “‘Tis gone and will not answer” (I. 1. 62). Hamlet’s ghost appears in the first scene to foreground the idea of disturbances. The guards protect the city from external dangers, yet, dormant disturbances start to resurface from the very first scene of the play. The question “Who’s there?” is, therefore, no longer a surprise. It affirms the idea of existing unrest in the state of Denmark, inside the closed walls of the fortress. A claustrophobic sentiment is felt from the very first lines of the play, in the political sense, of course. The fortress becomes, in this regard, a threat, to its subjects, rather than a protection as is presumed in Reason of State philosophy. The state, in the same vein, is, hence, a dominion. The state has been reduced to a narrow microcosmic space which paves the way for the metaphor of the land as a womb from scene one, it is the “womb of earth” (I. 1. 149).

The ghost can be read as an ominous element brought to the state of Denmark; the ghost usurps the realm (I. 1. 54). Marcellus, the antithesis of Bernardo, as I have already shown, comments on the apparition saying “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (I. 1. 100), hinting at the probable *coup d’État* to be discussed by Hamlet in the next acts. The ghost therefore does not usurp the realm. On the contrary, it reappears to show that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. Marcellus’ remark, already, shows a scepticism towards the recent and sudden change of rule, and most possibly a scepticism towards the legitimacy of Claudius’ rule. The ghost of the old king is a disturbance in the sense it brings back residues of the past, to complete an unfinished business. The way the old king is described is very intriguing. At this stage of the play, the audience does not know anything about Claudius, except an absolute allegiance from Bernardo. King Hamlet, however, is described at length. The first scene can almost be seen as a eulogy to King Hamlet. The old king represents a dead political past. His reappearance, along with Marcellus and Horatio’s loyalty to the Danes, gives the audience a hint of a repressed past, a past that has been usurped. The first line that describes the dead king goes as follows:

What art thou that usurp’st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march?
By heaven, I charge thee,
speak. (I. 1. 54-58)

The dead king represents “a world of heraldic law and mortal combat, of armoured men wielding broadswords, fighting to the death” (Shapiro 2006, 309). Horatio praises king Hamlet, who is introduced in his “fair” and “warlike form.” King Hamlet embodies the entire realm and carries the people within him, as such he is depicted as the majesty of *buried Denmark*. The theme of burial suggests the death of not only an entire past buried with the king, but also, the death of a political tradition with him. Claudius’ rule is, therefore, not merely an illegitimate rule that has been abducted by a *coup d’État*, but is also a usurpation of an entire political tradition. The political tradition of king Hamlet was that of the people, and hence the buried Denmark. The comment shows already the new political order of Reason of State.

In the next lines, Horatio continues to praise the king by recalling his war achievements and his ability to protect the state of Denmark from the foreign invasion from Norway and Fortinbras:

Such was the very armor he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated.
So frowned he once when, in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded
Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange. (I. 1. 71-75)

And,

At least the whisper goes so: our last king,
Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet
(For so this side of our known world esteemed him)
Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact,
Well ratified by law and heraldry,
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands

Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror.
Against the which a moiety competent
Was gagèd by our king, which had returned
To the inheritance of Fortinbras
Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same comart
And carriage of the article designed,
His fell to Hamlet. (I. 1. 92-107)

The honourable Horatio, on the other hand, identifies as an ancient/antique Roman more than a Dane. This antic disposition, being antique, alludes to Roman values that are slowly being ventriloquized with the rise of early étatism. Shortly written after *Julius Caesar*, the play resonates with the later Brutus who killed the “capitol” Julius Caesar (III. 2. 101) throughout the whole play as well. The resonances are not mere coincidences. The first Brutus whose name is initially Lucius chooses for himself the name Brutus that signifies “senseless dull” (Belsey 2008, 118). Horatio praises a political past gone with the dead king, introducing the audience, therefore, to a dull present of political manipulation and power.

In this regard, the idea of preservation advanced with Reason of State theory based on the principle of public utility and the existing of constant threats has already been refuted from the very first lines. The previous political tradition has been successful in securing the state and protect its subjects. The king is successful in defeating Norway and providing justice and equity to the subjects at the same time.

King Hamlet, in this context, is presented as the chivalrous ruler who relies on the power of swords and who is successful in protecting his subjects, as it is the case with princes of civil reason. He represents a chivalric past whereby the king protects his realm and subjects with power. The description shows a nostalgia to the lost past with the old king who represents a just political order. Claudius’ rule is the very opposite. He rather relies on his diplomatic skills to secure his throne. There is an expressed nostalgia to a republican past that has gone with king Hamlet, given particularly the Danish context of a republican monarchy. The nostalgia is expressed through the portrayal of King Hamlet who represents the republican ideal. Twelfth century Denmark was based on an elective system. The play brings back the ghost of the past to the stage, showing the political transition. The past becomes a disturbance, to the characters and to the contemporary audience. The threat as pointed in the beginning of this part that is signalled in the opening scene of the play is not only external or internal. It is, also, spatial and temporal.

To conclude this part, the play opens with a transition from the Ciceronian political framework to the early modern theory of Reason of State—based mainly on the principle of public utility. Hence, we see guards protecting the State that is represented solely in the character of the monarch Claudius to whom they swear allegiance to and protection from all types of threats except the characters who identify as antic Romans, representing therefore the ideal of the city republics and republican principles that I will be largely discussing in the third chapter.

2.2. *Sejanus*: On the Margins of the Stage

I have shown in the previous part how the play *Hamlet* opens with an intriguing question that starts to show the audience that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. Characters, in answering the question “Who’s there?” (I. 1. 1), are divided into two types; the type that follows orders blindly and is presumably satisfied with the current political situation and does not meddle in any political affairs of any sort. The latter just expresses their allegiance to the prince, unconditionally. The other characters show an implicit dissatisfaction with political affairs by expressing nostalgia to the precedent ruler, who via his portrait, the audience can understand the issue at stake; that of transition from a conservative and ethical political order to the new political science. In this part, I will try to show how Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus His Fall* opens with a similar note, though more articulated. In this section, I will be discussing, similarly to the previous part, the reception of the emergent political discourse in the opening scene of the play. The opening scene is divided to two sections. It starts with the senators’ dissatisfaction with the current affairs of politics. Then, Sejanus, the ‘prince’, enters the stage, enabling the audience to have a primary idea of what he is like, in a way that disturbs the characters’ dialogue and political reflections.

The play opens with a very similar line to that of *Hamlet*. Sabinus salutes Silius “Hail, Caius Silius!” (I. 1) who replies “Titius Sabinus, hail! / You’re rarely met in court!” (2-3). Ben Jonson highlights the names of characters, giving the impression that he wants his audience/readers to note the names of the two characters from the very beginning. The opening lines are intriguing in the sense that they at the same time salute the audience, but, unlike *Hamlet*, start with a sarcastic remark—that of being rarely seen at court which implies a kind of disgust from the current political affairs. Even further, Sabinus says “Therefore well met” (I. 4). Being absent from court, in the current political circumstances, according to these two

characters, is a positive in/action. The first thing to be concluded from these opening lines is that the characters, in a sarcastic manner, express a distaste from the current political affairs, which makes them absent, avoidant, and therefore 'well met.' I would like to stress one minor detail in the opening lines, that is the two characters, who play a major role in the plot in the entire play, are first presented as minor, on the periphery, rarely present at court. Contrary to *Hamlet*, the text does not open on the margin of the state, rather with characters that after being inactive and passive, on the peripheries of the political life, will have an impact on actions in the play, which would not be possible without them. The characters who rarely come to court to attend political matters will change the course of action in the play, and, most importantly, will twist the entire political state of the city.⁴⁹

Sabinus and Silius start with criticizing their inaction and sheer acceptance of the politics of Rome. They are enraged with court politics. Unlike in *Hamlet*, dissatisfaction with the current political affairs is clearly voiced. What the two characters criticize, in this regard, is being the Hamlets of the play for too long, which sets the tone for a coming change in the next scenes. Inaction is reduced by the two characters to a state of servitude:

No, Silius, we are no good engineers;
(...)
We have no shift of faces, no cleft tongues,
No soft and glutinous bodies, that can stick,
Like snails on painted walls; or, on our breasts,
Creep up, to fall from that proud height, to which
We did by slavery, not by service climb.
We are no guilty men, and then no great;
We have no place in court, office in state,
That we can say, we owe unto our crimes. (I. 4-14)

Sabinus, in this regard, describes their inaction towards the current state of affairs in court as a form of slavery. The play, therefore, is more direct in pronouncing the political affairs as corrupt and inaction as a servitude. The play could have been seen as extremely offensive or seen as

⁴⁹ I will discuss at length the contrast between inaction in *Hamlet* and action in *Sejanus His Fall* in relation to contemporary political theory in the fourth chapter. Shakespeare's play is more implicit, unlike Ben Jonson's that is more radical in articulating political theories vis-à-vis étatisme and tyranny. I will discuss how the two plays echo the theories of their Scottish contemporary George Buchanan and how the two deal with the issue of tyrannicide that is pointed to from the very first lines of the two plays.

critical to James I's rule at the time. Reverberations with the context are clear in the play. As Chernaik, also, suggests, there are "aspects of the *Sejanus* that might 'offend or grieve' a touchy James I" (Chernaik 2011, 11).

Hence, from the start of the play, the audience is aware of the corruption in Rome's politics and characters set the tone for political action⁵⁰ to come in the next acts. To confirm the corrupt politics at court, Ben Jonson offers the two characters more space to reveal the political mechanisms. By criticizing sycophants and flatterers, a topic central to political theory⁵¹ contemporary to the play including chiefly Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, the audience gets a glimpse of Sejanus' court. Flatterers are heavily caricatured:

These can lie,
Flatter, and swear, forswear, deprave, inform,
Smile, and betray; make guilty men; then beg
The forfeit lives, to get their livings; cut
Men's throats with whisp'rings; sell to gaping suitors
The empty smoke, that flies about the palace;
Laugh when their patron laughs; sweat when he sweats;
Be hot and cold with him; change every mood,
Habit, and garb, as often as he varies;
Observe him, as his watch observes his clock;
And true as turquoise in the dear lord's ring,
Look well or ill with him—ready to praise
His lordship, if he spit. (I. 27-39)

Sejanus is described as a ruler who enjoys surrounding himself by flatterers and his favourites, similarly to James I of England. In "the Rome of Tiberius and, Jonson hints, in the England of his own day, 'spies, intelligencers', as well as flatterers, those who know more than honest

⁵⁰ The theme of political action is of extreme importance in both the dramas under study and the political theory of early modern politics. The question that was very controversial whether one should take action against a prince when they abuse power, or shortly against tyrants, or try to accept the course of action, "to take arms against a sea of troubles / And, by opposing, end them" (III. 1. 67-68). I have shortly discussed the idea of action in the previous part. I will discuss it at length in the next chapters.

⁵¹ Guicciardini, for instance, warns of favours and flatterers in his *Ricordi* 41: "41. Men remember offenses longer than favors. Indeed, even if they remember the favor at all, they will consider it to be smaller than it really was and will believe they deserved more than they got. The opposite is true of offenses; they always hurt more than they reasonably should. Therefore, other things being equal, be careful not to please one man if you must thereby equally displease another. For the reason just stated, you will, on the whole, lose more than you gain."

counsels, flourish, seeking the favours of the prince and the prince's favourites. As a disaffected Roman says in the opening scene of *Sejanus*" (Chernaik 2011, 111). The characters express their disgust of flatterers and sycophants in the court. Silius caricatures not only flattery, but also contemporary political theory that advises as such which reverberates with Guicciardini *Maxims and Reflections*:

Cornelius Tacitus teaches those who live under tyrants how to live and act prudently... If you live under a tyrant, it is better to be his friend only to a certain extent rather than be completely intimate with him. In this way, if you are a respected citizen, you will profit from his power-sometimes even more than do those closer to him. And if he should fall, you may still hope to save yourself. (Guicciardini 2016, 100)

Invoking Tacitism, along with denouncing inaction towards tyranny and corrupt court politics, the play criticises contemporary political theory that advocates loyalty to any form of government, given that in early modern political thought, tyranny is one form of government that has been defended by many theorists, including Jean Bodin⁵², and denounced by radical theorists such as George Buchanan⁵³. After discussing the current political affairs, the play, in a very similar way to *Hamlet*, shows the political transition, yet in a more explicit way.

After showing that something is rotten in the state of Rome, the audience has been introduced to the political transition that took place in the court of Rome. The transition in the play reverberates with a transition in the political thought of early modern Europe. In this part, I will show how similarly to *Hamlet*, the transition is described as a degeneration rather than a progressive political shift. The transition is described at length. Before Sejanus' entrance onstage, they start with noting that Romans have shifted to a form of servitude, invoking Tacitism:

As oft Tuberous hath been heard,
Leaving the court, to cry, "O race of men;
Prepared for servitude!" –which showed that he,
Who least the public liberty could like,

⁵² See Jean Bodin's *Six Books of the Commonwealth* where he provides the benefits and shortcomings of all forms of government but ends up arguing that the best form of government is tyranny in chapters IV and V "Concerning Tyrannical Monarchy."

⁵³ George Buchanan is famous for his espousal of tyrannicide. See his *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos*.

As lothly brooked their flat servility. (I. 51-55)

In evoking Tiberius, the play already introduced the political theme of Tacitism from the very first lines. The play, therefore, makes it clear that it is a commentary on contemporary politics. The revival of Tacitism, along with the Roman background of the play, heavily foregrounds the thoughts of tyrants and particularly that of Tiberius⁵⁴. It is no coincidence that the play chooses history's most famous tyrants as its characters. Sejanus and Tiberius both enter the stage the same way the two have entered the collective consciousness of political theorists in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England. Cornelius Tacitus' annals are devoted to the life of Tiberius and other tyrants, including, among others, Sejanus, Nero, and Claudius.

After Sabinus' remark on Tiberius, a new character immediately enters the stage— Cordus, “a gentleman of Rome; one that has writ Annals of... Pompey's and Caius Caesar's” (Jonson 2007, I. 74-78). With the theme of writing, and the later to come censorship, the theme of republicanism is brought to the stage, being part of the commentaries on transitory politics. Blaming their inaction, they praise Brutus' principle of constancy, bringing forth a stoic subtext, in his attempt to end the tyrannical rule of Caesar, hinting at tyrannicide theory, that was controversial to the new art of the state:

Or where's the constant Brutus, that being proof
Against all charm of benefits, did strike
So brave a blow into the monster's heart
That sought unkindly to captive his country? (I. 93-96)

What the characters are doing in this regard is they are blaming themselves for the current situation of politics in Rome. They openly express their disgust with corruption and the introduced tyranny of Sejanus. In expressing a nostalgia to a republican past, the audience/readers can understand the relationship between Rome and the present England, and more generally Europe. Commenting on political issues are mediated through Rome and Denmark. A straightforward and unmediated discussion of politics would not be possible. The transition the play discusses in its opening scene is one that is based on a humanist Christian

⁵⁴ In *Ricordi 78 (Maxims and Reflections)*, Guicciardini claims that if “you want to know the thoughts of tyrants, read Cornelius Tacitus, where he cites the last conversations of Augustus with Tiberius.”

framework of politics, guarded by morality, ethics, and justice, to that of Reason of State, which is uniquely policed by preservation and pragmatic maxims. Sabinus and Silius rejoice in the republican past and denounce modern politics as “degenerate” (I. 89), that makes of its subject slaves, as argued and defended by Guicciardini. Silius summarizes transition in a lengthy monologue to the audience:

We, that (within these forescore years) were born
Free, equal lords of the triumphed world,
And knew no masters, but affections,
To which betraying our first liberties,
We since then became slaves to one man’s lusts;
And now to many... (I. 59-64)

And Arruntius:

Times? The men,
The men are not the same: ‘tis we are base,
Poor and degenerate from th’exalted strain
Of our great fathers. Where is now the soul
Of god-like Cato?—he that durst be good
When Caesar durst be evil; and had power,
As not to live his slave, to die his master. (I. 87-92)

Arruntius defies determinism and seems to evoke tyrannicide. The two monologues are directed to the audience; they denounce the political transition to Reason of State that subdues its subjects to servitude. The same way Horatio brings back the spectres of past politics, that is republicanism in its abstract terms, Sabinus, Silius, and Arruntius exalt the deeds of their great fathers who put an end to tyrants and tyranny. The contemporary audience is, therefore, invited to reflect on the rotten state of their contemporary state and politics, contrary to the Ciceronian past⁵⁵.

In this section, I sought to discuss the opening scenes of the two plays under study in an attempt to start drafting *Tragedy of State*. The plays start with showing a dissatisfaction with a

⁵⁵ He was a man most like to virtue; in all,
And every action, nearer to the gods,
Than men, in nature; of a body as fair
As was his mind; and no less reverend
In face than fame. (Jonson 2007, I. 124-128)

rotten political present, then invoke a triumphant political past based on equity and justice. *Sejanus His Fall* is more abstract and vocal. It starts directly in court, talking about offices and states. *Hamlet*, however, starts on the margin of the state and implies corrupted and degenerate politics in a very mediated way. The audience, therefore, has been introduced to the political transition and the new political order, its violence, and court politics and mechanisms. To conclude, this chapter is a prelude to study the threshold of the poelitics of the Tragedy of State. In addition to the thematic convergence, such as the principles of public utility, preservation of the state, and territoriality that is essentially geopolitical, an inherent grammar can be detected in the two texts. Starting in the margins, one play opens with the theme of the fortress, while in the other, the audience/reader can follow political flaneurs unsatisfied with the political transition. I devoted this chapter to show how the Tragedy of State has its inherent grammar. The tragedy has with a thematic opening of political transition and dissatisfaction with political affairs. This idea is described in the margins of this political organism. The Tragedy of State does not open in court or with a speech delivered by the king. It starts with peripheral and marginal characters.

CHAPTER III: Poetics of the State

In the third chapter, I will be studying the poetics of the state. By poetics of the state, I refer to the grammar, forms, and the outlines of contemporary political apparatuses. It is important, at this point, to note that by poetics of the state I do not intend to refer to or connote linguistic, rhetorical, or stylistic politics or political literature in the strict meaning of the word. I am rather using the concept to refer to an early modern typology of governments and states so as to highlight the contrast between a poetics of the state and a politics of the stage that I will be exploring in the fifth chapter.

For an accurate understanding of early modern politics, it is important to have an awareness of early moderners typology of states when entering the texts. A large of body of political literature has been devoted uniquely to the development of the earliest forms of states starting from Aristotle to the later dynastic and other formations of the new forms of governments. Early modern typology, hence, needs to be addressed as separate and unique to its own age, philosophical and political transitions, as well as economic transitions on a second level. A ‘misconceptual’ study of early modern politics will only be sterile.

After studying early modern political thought and Reason of State theory, I have noticed misconceptions and historical inaccuracies in the Shakespeare and Ben Jonson scholarships, due to a conceptual confusion, presentism, and the dismissal of Reason of State theory altogether that I will be addressing in this chapter. Therefore, my goal will be to study early modern typology of states and governments, addressing political confusions in the literary scholarship, and study the plays accordingly. In the first part, I will be working on early modern typology of states—one that is different from its precedents. I will be introducing Jean Bodin and his theory of sovereignty that is central to early modern political thought, and vital in the emergence of political science after the demise of the art of politics. In the second part, I will be analysing the plays accordingly. This chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the second acts of the two plays. I will be arguing how the Tragedy of State, after setting the tone of the play in the first act, moves to showing its audience the political mechanisms employed by Reason of State politics.

1. Early Modern Typology

1.1. Jean Bodin: Concepts and Misconceptions

In this part, I would like to direct my attention to an important dilemma in early modern political thought, that of forms of the state and forms of governments in Western Europe. I will be explaining in this part the importance of the difference between governments and states and how a hybrid form of both was dealt with by theorists of Reason of State in the early sixteenth century. To do so, I will chiefly rely on Jean Bodin's theory of the commonwealth. Although Bodin's theory might be a controversial one, yet it is the most developed compared to that of his contemporaries in Europe, paving the way to Hobbes's *Leviathan*⁵⁶ and later theories of the social contract with Rousseau and Locke. Jean Bodin's political science helped undermine a feudal past to pave the way to a more modern nationalism or a society of states to put it in more neutral terms.

Sixteenth century Europe was ravaged by faultlines⁵⁷ on political, cultural, and religious levels. Feudalism was waning and new political poetics were emerging, bringing to the fore new forms of government and states. Religious wars⁵⁸ were taking place in England and particularly France, leading to the theories of Jean Bodin, who defended 'authoritarian' rule⁵⁹ and sovereignty, as I will be showing in this part, against the rule of anarchy. The religious wars in France, the reformation in England, and the protestant versus Catholicism tension in the continent may have led theorists, including Bodin and Guicciardini, to argue for a stable political order based on authority and violence to force order and stability. Bodin's theory can be read in its context of the state of political convulsion taking place at the time in France. He defended the principle of the *indivisibility* of power against the rebellions and the ensuing anarchy in France as well as Monarchomachs in Europe at the time. Defending the state and its total sovereignty, erased liberty the emerging subject, as I showed in the previous chapter. The

⁵⁶ Jean Bodin's most important, yet most controversial, political concept is that of sovereignty. A crucial issue lies in the problems of translation from the French "souverainité" and Latin "imperium." Bodin experts face problems with the two translations. His *République* was self-translated by its author from French to Latin for a wider reach across Europe. He originally wrote it in French in 1576. The Latin version, *De republica libri sex*, produced in 1586, was rather a reworking of the original volume than a translation *per se*, whereby he wrote three prefaces in total to defend his theories against his opponents. Bodin greatly contributed, or rather developed, to the development of an independent political science with a political diction of its own, that later matured with theorists of the social contract. Bodin's political theory, particularly in his *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, can be regarded as a prologue, a preface rather, to Contractarianism.

⁵⁷ I use the term faultlines in the vein of Alan Sinfield in his *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992), in the sense that I examine the tension between two political orders "within which they produced diverse relation— of incorporation, conformity, negotiation, disjunction, subversion, and opposition" (Sinfield, 214).

⁵⁸ In his *Machiavélisme et raison d'État (XIIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, Michel Senellart, in the chapter "La politique, art de maintenir la paix", argues that the emerging philosophy of Reason of State seeks to preserve order and peace and avoid wars in the context of the reformation and religious wars, particularly in France.

⁵⁹ Or to be more exact, that is in Bodin's terms, Despotic Monarchy, that I will largely explaining in this part.

state is based on the erosion of the latter. The emerging “political science”⁶⁰ set by Bodin and his contemporaries almost undermined the last relics of feudalism and feudal rule⁶¹ for the emergence of the modern state.

Bodin’s oeuvre in which he discusses the most important contributions to political theory is his *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, published first in vernacular French in 1576, then translated by its author to Latin in 1586 as *De republica libri sex*. The book was translated to English in 1606 by Richard Knolles, who did not rely on either version, but rather produced a composite of the French and Latin versions⁶². The chief reason I decided to dedicate this part to uniquely Jean Bodin is that he offered a rigorous political scientific study of the state, or in his words, the commonwealth and sovereignty, by departing from Aristotelean thought altogether, similarly to contemporary political thinkers of the Reason of State philosophy, including Machiavelli, Botero, and Guicciardini, and forming a meticulous study of the state and government and its forms. Bodin provides a new division of types of a state and, particularly differentiates between a state and its types and a government and its types. Although extremely nuanced, Bodin’s argument settles on despotic monarchy as the best form of state and government by the very end. His argumentation, à la Plato, offers the positive and negative side of each form so as to convince the reader⁶³ that despotic monarchy is the only form of state that can last “till doomsday” (*Hamlet*, V. I. 60). Aristocratic, and especially popular states, can always be conceived as better, that is more democratic, alternatives to monarchy, but that is too ideal for the world he lives in and can only bring about chaos: “But be it noted that by a good and just king I mean one who is popularly accepted as such, and not some impossible ideal figure of heroic proportions, or a paragon of wisdom, justice, and piety, without blame or

⁶⁰ It is of extreme importance to note the contradiction between the art of politics and political science. The art of state has long been held as a noble endeavour that reassures liberty of subjects. However, political science has emerged with Reason of State.

⁶¹ Bodin openly expressed his contempt to feudalism in the sense that feudal lords shared power with the sovereign and that power was divisible, leading therefore to chaos and rebellions against the monarch. Bodin staunchly defended the indivisibility of power under the new theory of the state. The new theory of the state that he advances is based on power being held uniquely by the head of the state, that is the monarch, and the complete obedience of subjects, making any type of rebellion treason.

⁶² The two plays under study in the present research may have been produced before the Knolles’s translation reaches England. However, it is important to note that on the one hand the two plays have been produced and reproduced at the time. On the other, I would like to stress that regardless of the exact publication date, drama was part of a discursive space, in which Jean Bodin participated. The English translation may have arrived later than the plays’ initial performance date, but echoes of such radical theories have reached English courts and English public spaces where politics was becoming democratized. One interesting anecdote worth mentioning is that Jean Bodin aspired to marry Queen Elizabeth of England. His thought and theories of the state as such may have reached England before the English translation of 1606.

⁶³ The first publication written in French was directed to French ‘politicians.’ Only the later Latin translations were meant to be directed to an audience beyond the French political circle.

reproach. Such perfection is all too rare” (Bodin 1955, 62). In reading Bodin and contemporary political philosophy, it becomes easy to trace Contractarian ideas. Hobbes heavily relied on Bodin’s concepts and philosophy for his writing that can be considered a continuation of early modern political reflections on the state and the social contract.

Jean Bodin provides a very clear typology of states. He offers a triad that breaks with the Aristotelean division of states. He is very keen on scientific rigour and precision, being therefore one of the important thinkers of Reason of State philosophy and founders of political science as a discipline:

It is desirable to be exact in the use of these terms in order to avoid the confusion which has arisen as a result of the great variety of governments, good and bad. This has misled some into distinguishing more than three kinds of commonwealth. But if one adopts the principle of distinguishing between commonwealths according to the particular virtues and vices that are characteristic of each, one is soon faced with an infinity of variations. It is a principle of all sound definition that one should pay no regard to accidental properties, which are innumerable, but confine oneself to formal and essential distinctions. Otherwise one becomes entangled in a labyrinth which defies exact analysis. For there is no reason why one should stop short at the difference between good and bad. There are other inessential variations. (Bodin 1955, 52)

In the cited excerpt, the author breaks with the long-established Aristotelean art of the state. Instead, Bodin introduces an early modern typology of states and governments that aligns with a period of transition. Therefore, he strictly provides three types of states, monarchy, aristocracy, and popular states and rejects any additional form:

If sovereignty is vested in a single prince we call the state a monarchy. If all the people share in it, it is a popular state. If only a minority, it is an aristocracy... We conclude that there are only three types of state, or commonwealth, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. A state is called a monarchy when sovereignty is vested in one person, and the rest have only to obey. Democracy, or the popular state, is one in which all the people, or a majority among them, exercise sovereign power collectively. A state is an aristocracy when a minority collectively enjoy sovereign power and impose law on the rest, generally and severally. (Bodin 1955, 51)

Bodin devotes the longest part of his *Six Books of the Commonwealth* to monarchy and forms of government under monarchy but shortly discusses aristocratic and popular states, to only discredit their efficiency. I will start with the latter. To put it in simple terms, the aristocratic state is one in which a minority rules, be it by inheritance or wealth. In this case, in aristocratic states, power is held by a minority “assembled together as a corporate body” over the majority:

Aristocracy is that form of commonwealth in which the minority of the citizens have sovereign authority over the rest considered collectively, and over every citizen considered individually. It is therefore the opposite of the popular state, for there the majority of the citizens command the remainder considered collectively...Therefore whether the government is in the hands of men of birth, of merit, of wealth, a military caste, the poor, the workers, or a set of scoundrels, provided it is a minority that rules, that state I call an aristocracy. (Bodin 1955, 69-70)

Forms of government under the rule of the minority also vary. An aristocracy could be legitimate, despotic, or factitious. In this regard, Bodin criticizes aristocratic states as inefficient and unable to stand in the face of crises. Aristocracy encourages factions and division. In defending monarchy, he argues that power is and should be indivisible. Since “it is difficult, if not impossible, to erect a government which consists solely of honest men” (Bodin 1955, 69), Bodin shows that aristocracy is not, and has proven to be, futile. Not only is power divided, but also aristocracy breeds tension, factions, and rebellions:

It must also be conceded that there is no Prince or Imperial City which has sovereign authority. Each is a member of the Empire, governing the state under his authority subject to the laws and ordinances of the Empire ... It is only when the Empire is divided into hostile factions, as has so often happened, and the Princes banded together the one against the other, that the communal governments of the towns, and the subordinate jurisdictions of the Princes, are converted into a number of separate aristocracies and monarchies. Each member of the Empire then constitutes itself a particular sovereign state. (Bodin 1955, 72)

Bodin’s argument has been widely explored onstage. The best example among the early modern dramas is Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* that deals mainly with the dangers of factions and, in

Bodin's terms, the divisibility of political power. Despite it being rather under the rule of one man, Rome suffers the dangers of power divisions.

Casting away aristocracy as an inefficient form of state, Bodin deals with popular states in the same line of argument. Contrary to aristocracy, popular states are governed by the majority and power is divided equally:

A popular state is that form of commonwealth in which the majority of the people have collectively sovereign authority over the rest considered collectively, and over each several member considered individually. It is the necessary mark of the popular state that the greater part of the people have authority to command not only each particular citizen as such, but the minority of the people as a body. (Bodin 1955, 72-73)

And,

If the people have sovereign power and give lands and political privileges to all without respect of persons, or if all offices and benefices are filled by lot, the state is not only a popular state, but governed as such... In the same way, if the nobles or the wealthy alone govern the state, and reserve lands and honourable charges for their own class, one can say not only that the state is an aristocracy, but also that it is governed aristocratically. (Bodin 1955, 74)

Regardless of the form of government under popular rule, and as ideal as it seems, it is rejected as utopian, by relying on the human nature argument, that is strongly present in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall*, whereby people, particularly in Roman plays in general, are represented onstage as fickle and malleable, untrustworthy with power, and have tendency to vice:

For the true nature of a people is to seek unbridled liberty without restraint. They would make all equal in goods, honours, punishments, and rewards, without any respect whatsoever for noble birth, education, or virtue. As Plutarch said in his Symposia, they want everything decided by lot or by divination, without respect of persons. If the nobles or the wealthy show any signs of wishing to make their influence felt, they hasten to massacre or banish them, and divide their confiscated property among the poor. This happened at the foundation of the free Swiss republics, after the battle of Sempach.[10] The nobles were all but exterminated, and the remnant compelled to renounce their title to nobility, yet nevertheless they were ejected from their lands and offices, save in Zurich and Berne. (Bodin 1955, 74)

Any form of state besides monarchy is completely rejected. The state, for Bodin, is based on sovereignty and power. As mentioned in the previous chapter, power should be held in the grip of one person. Similarly to the head of a household, the king should be the one person embodying sovereignty and power. Subjects, like wives and children, should obey and never resist the monarch's power. The subject becomes all the more emasculated with the development of the modern state. His main argument is that if power is divided on different entities, which could be a magistrate, the council, or the people, it will lead to the collapse of the state. In fact, his dire criticism for shared power is clearly articulated:

If sovereignty is, of its very nature, indivisible, as we have shown, how can a prince, a ruling class, and the people, all have a part in it at the same time? The first attribute of sovereignty is the power to make law binding on the subject. But in such a case who will be the subjects that obey, if they also have a share in the law-making power? And who will be the law-giver if he is also himself forced to receive it from those upon whom he has imposed it? (Bodin 1955, 52)

Bodin, in this vein, advances the idea of sharing power as futile:

There are those who say, and have published in writing, that the constitution of France is a mixture of the three pure types, the *Parlement* representing aristocracy, the Estates-General democracy, and the King monarchy. But this is an opinion not only absurd but treasonable. It is treasonable to exalt the subjects to be the equals and colleagues of their sovereign prince. And what resemblance is there to a popular form of government in the Estates, seeing that each particular member and all in general, kneel in the king's presence, and address him by humble prayers and supplications, which he accepts or rejects as he thinks fit... The honour, glory, and power of princes lies in the obedience, homage, and service of their subjects. (Bodin 1955, 53-55)

Bodin attacks contemporary theories and political arguments which claim that the subjects can be equal to the prince⁶⁴. He considers similar ideas as treasonous and rebellious. The prince should hold unlimited power and subjects should obey. However, he offers three forms of

⁶⁴ I will discuss contemporary theories that stress equality between subjects and the prince in the next chapter. Buchanan, for instance, a Scottish contemporary, discusses equality between subjects and kings and goes further to claim that kings too should stand before the judge if they violate the law.

government under monarchies; royal or legitimate, despotic, and tyrannical⁶⁵. Bodin problematizes his already nuanced argument further. A legitimate monarch is one who governs according to the rules of nature. In other words, legitimate monarchy falls under civil reason and the monarch who governs accordingly is the Ciceronian prince par excellence. The tyrant on the other hand, disregards the laws of nature and governs his subjects as conquered slaves. The tyrant also governs territories after winning illegitimate wars:

A tyrannical monarchy is one in which the monarch tramples underfoot the laws of nature, in that he abuses the natural liberty of his subjects by making them his slaves, and invades the property of others by treating it as his own. The word tyrant, which in Greek was originally an honourable term, merely signified the prince who had come into power without the goodwill of his subjects, and from being an equal had raised himself to be their master. Such a one, even though he proved a wise and just prince, was called a tyrant. (Bodin 1955, 61)

Bodin distinguishes between the two radical extremes, but advances them as inefficient:

The most notable distinction between the king and the tyrant is that the king conforms to the laws of nature and the tyrant tramples them underfoot. The one is guided by piety, justice, and faith. The other denies his God, his faith, and the law. The one does that which he believes will further the common good, and the welfare of his subjects. The other consults only his own profit, vengeance, or pleasure. The one tries to enrich his subjects by any means he can discover. The other builds his prosperity on the ruin of other people's. The one avenges injuries done to his subjects but pardons those committed against himself. The other takes a cruel revenge for injuries done to himself but pardons those done to others. The one encourages free speech on the part of his subjects to the point of wise rebuke when he has failed in his duty. The other dislikes

⁶⁵ "All monarchies are either despotic, royal, or tyrannical. These however are not different species of commonwealth, but different modes of operation in their governments. It is important that a clear distinction be made between the form of the state, and the form of the government, which is merely the machinery of policing the state, though no one has yet considered it in that light. To illustrate, a state may be a monarchy, but it is governed democratically if the prince distributes lands, magistracies, offices, and honours indifferently to all, without regard to the claims of either birth or wealth or virtue. Or a monarchy can be governed aristocratically when the prince confines the distribution of lands and offices to the nobles, the most worthy, or the rich, as the case may be. Again, an aristocracy can conduct its government democratically if it bestows honours and rewards on all alike, or aristocratically if it reserves them for the rich and nobly born. This variety in forms of government has misled those who have written confusedly about politics, through failure to distinguish the form of the commonwealth from the form of the government." (56)

none so much as the serious, free-spirited, and virtuous citizen. The one tries to keep his subjects in peace and unity among themselves. The other sows dissensions, that his subjects may ruin one another, and he himself grow rich on the profits thereof. (Bodin 1955, 62)

Neither tyranny, nor royal monarchy succeed in preserving the state in the history of étatism. He rejects civil reason altogether, but still denounces tyranny as it breeds violence. Therefore, the third alternative, the ideal state and form of government according to Bodin, is what he calls *despotic monarchy*. It can be defined as “one in which the prince is lord and master of both the possessions and the persons of his subjects by right of conquest in a just war; he governs his subjects as absolutely as the head of a household governs his slaves” (Bodin 1955, 56). His discourse falls under Reason of State theory. Similarly to Botero’s political realism⁶⁶, Bodin attempts to provide an alternative that is not too radical yet not democratic. Reason of State theory was very radical that it needed to be refined. Bodin’s concept of despotic monarchy is a mere linguistic play—a poet’s fable, or a politician’s fable rather. Hence is Reason of State theory. Aware of its radicality, its theorists sought to refine it for its contemporaries and adversaries. The dramas sought to portray this radical discourse to the audience to denounce it.

Bodin’s political project is mainly addressed to work on concepts and misconceptions. His nuanced line of argumentation throughout the entire book and insistence on reworking on concepts and political legacies demonstrate his authoritarian tendencies. Bodin’s project is that of concepts and misconceptions. He unveils older misconceptions and introduces new mis/concepts to further support the emerging Reason of State discourse.

For instance, Bodin rejects what came to be then known as republican monarchy. He went to the extent of rejecting republicanism, or republican tendencies, under monarchies. He believed only in authoritarianism, even if he tried to advance it as a third alternative, different from the extremes of tyranny. On the one hand, he rejects division of power altogether:

But, someone may say, could you not have a commonwealth where the people appointed to office, controlled the expenditure of the revenue and had the right of pardon, which are three of the attributes of sovereignty; where the nobles made laws, determined peace

⁶⁶ Giovanni Botero is known for denouncing Reason of State theory and Tacitism in the early modern political discourse and denounces them as violent and brutal. However, it is important to note that he attempted to refine Reason of State and sought to depart from civil reason as well. He did not defend the Ciceronian ideals nonetheless. His political philosophy therefore defends “political realism”, a bleak one though as I will be showing in the plays, but one that succeeds in erasing the art of state for the emergence of political science as such. Botero introduces his political project in his *Ragion di Stato* (1589).

and war, and levied taxes, which are also attributes of sovereignty; and where there was a supreme magistrate set over all the rest, to whom liege-homage was due by all the people severally and collectively, and who was the final and absolute resort of justice. Would not such arrangements involve a division of sovereign rights, and imply a composite commonwealth which was at once monarchical, aristocratic and popular? I would reply that none such has ever existed, and could never exist or even be clearly imagined, seeing that the attributes of sovereignty are indivisible. (Bodin 1955, 55)

On the other, he dismisses republican monarchy as inefficient. Republican monarchies according to the French theorist are ineffective and will not succeed in preserving the state. He cites the example of Denmark, famous for its republicanism, and hence, the republican background in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as well:

Since the King of Denmark has been compelled to share sovereign power with the nobility, that kingdom has never enjoyed any secure peace. The same is true of Sweden, where the King is so mistrustful of the nobles that he employs a German as Chancellor, and a Norman gentleman called Varennes as Constable. (Bodin 1955, 55-56)

Royal monarchy is ineffective. Tyranny proves unsuccessful. When it comes to monarchy, the only form that he almost expresses utter hatred towards is republican monarchy.

It may seem like Bodin is offering a third alternative, not popular rule, neither tyranny. Tyranny is defined as an illegitimate rule of subjects through illegitimate wars. However, monarchies, despotic or not, can be extremely authoritarian, to the extent of being tyrannical in the modern sense of the word. The less radical and refined alternative that he offers, that is despotic monarchy, is a mere eulogy for absolute power and authority under one man's grip that is the prince.

Jean Bodin was one of the theorists who contributed to the emergence of Reason of State theory and openly denounced any alternative to monarchy and undivided power and sovereignty. He opposed other voices that still defended republican values and principles (henceforth republicanism). To avoid misconceptions and historical inaccuracies, I would like to briefly discuss 'republicanism' in the following part, and show how republican values and principles have been misused in the literary and critical scholarships of early modern drama under the concept "republicanism".

1.2. Republicanism: Concepts and Contexts

Speaking of republicanism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Europe and England poses a conceptual problem, though the idea of republicanism, in its ancient terms, has first appeared in Carthage, the first Republic in history, and later Rome⁶⁷. History books and historians of early modern republicanism trace republicanism in the late seventeenth centuries with Hobbes's *Leviathan*⁶⁸ in England and the brothers Johan and Pieter de La Court and Lieven de Beaufort in Denmark in the 1660s.⁶⁹ Early modern political thought, as I have shown in the previous part, divided the state and governmentality typology to three major forms; monarchy, aristocracy, and popular states. Early modern theorists in the first half of the seventeenth century address different forms of governments, being either democratic, aristocratic, royal, or tyrannical whereby an individual, a minority, or a majority holds power accordingly. Forms of the state and governments can be mixed. Types of states, however, are uniquely narrowed down to a classical triad different from the Aristotelean classical division.

Early modern republicanism prior to Hobbes and contemporary theorists can be defined otherwise. Conceptual vigour is of extreme importance in this context. What I would like to address in this part is, therefore, that republicanism should be read differently from that in the theories of the late seventeenth century, including particularly Hugo Grotius, and, particularly, in relationship to contemporary political thought and Reason of State philosophy. Republicanism as such cannot be read independently from Reason of State theory. Ancient theories of republicanism that have been employed in early modern thought and in the

⁶⁷ For a precise genealogy of the history of republicanism and its emergence see Crook, Lintott, and Rawsow 2006.

⁶⁸ Before Hobbes and the late seventeenth century theories on republicanism, Hugo Grotius has helped with the transition from the early modern republican values to republicanism as a distinguished form of state and government. Hugo Grotius has been mistakenly classified under the Reason of State timeline. However, being the fountainhead of republicanism, he rather belongs with the Enlightenment philosophers. Richard Tuck points in his *Philosophy and Government* that "Grotius was in some ways an even more important figure than his Enlightenment admirers recognised (or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say, than any one admirer recognised), for he took part in the construction of two theories about a political life which were to be of fundamental importance for the next two and a half or three centuries. As a young man, he participated in the development of a theory of republican liberty appropriate to the post-Tacitean age, and to the circumstances of an imperialist republic, his native United Provinces. After doing so, he turned his attention to the construction of a comprehensive post-sceptical moral science" (154).

⁶⁹ For a summary of republicanism as a political thought, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* edited by Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (two volumes) can be checked. Authors of the two anthologies provide accounts of republicanism across the continent (Denmark, England, Poland, and Germany). The anthology, being a historical pillar for the foundation of early modern republicanism, traces its mature formation in the late seventeenth century.

philosophical discourse of Reason of State derive from ancient ideas of republicanism based on ‘mixed’ forms of governments in Rome and the Italian city states. When speaking of republicanism in the early modern era, a key element to consider is what is termed as ‘mixed governments.’ As Bodin clearly argued in his *République*,

Someone may say, could you not have a commonwealth where the people appointed to office, controlled the expenditure of the revenue and had the right of pardon, which are three of the attributes of sovereignty; where the nobles made laws, determined peace and war, and levied taxes, which are also attributes of sovereignty; and where there was a supreme magistrate set over all the rest, to whom liege-homage was due by all the people severally and collectively, and who was the final and absolute resort of justice. Would not such arrangements involve a division of sovereign rights, and imply a composite commonwealth which was at once monarchical, aristocratic and popular? (Bodin 1955, 55)

He adds the example of “Rome, whose constitution, it is alleged, was a mixture of monarchy, democracy, and aristocracy, in such a way that according to Polybius the Consuls embody the monarchical principle, the Senate the aristocratic, the Estates of the people the democratic” (Bodin 1955, 53). The two citations may offer a portrait of what early modern republicanism was perceived as. My aim in this part is to redefine early modern republicanism in the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century—that is contemporary and necessary for the reading of the dramas. In addition to a conceptualization, how can republicanism be defined in regard to its ‘antithesis’, if it were one in the first place, monarchy? In other words, can republicanism be defined as an anti-monarchical sentiment, a voice of the people for the people or one form of monarchy?

I would like to start by pointing that republicanism is fundamentally based on the principle of *division* of powers in the two hypotheses provided, exactly what Bodin and contemporary theorists of Reason of State opposed:

If sovereignty is, of its very nature, indivisible, as we have shown, how can a prince, a ruling class, and the people, all have a part in it at the same time? The first attribute of sovereignty is the power to make law binding on the subject. But in such a case who will be the subjects that obey, if they also have a share in the law-making power? And who will be the law-giver if he is also himself forced to receive it from those upon whom

he has imposed it? One is forced to the conclusion that if no one in particular has the power to make law, but it belongs to all indifferently, then the commonwealth is a popular state. (Bodin 1955, 52)

Therefore, Reason of State philosophy cannot be read as an auxiliary to republicanism, especially in England. Shakespeare scholars have always read the two discourses separately.⁷⁰ Republicanism, hence, can be only dissected in the prism of the contemporary philosophical discourses and in relation to forms of the state. Richard Beacon in *Solon his Follie*⁷¹ has first pointed to republicanism being a form of government under monarchy, introducing what is now consensually termed as republican monarchy, that is a monarchical state with republican tendencies, as is the case with Elizabeth I's rule. Beacon dedicates the book to the queen with references to Livy and contemporary authors of Reason of State theory including Machiavelli, showing that it cannot be read separately and that the two political discourses are interdependent. Andrew Hadfield in *Shakespeare and Republicanism* discusses republican monarchy at length while referring to Reason of State discourse briefly and only once (Hadfield 2005b, 44).

Republicanism, being the antithesis of Reason of State ideology, seeks to divide or rather limit the unlimited political power of princes under monarchical states:

If republicanism stood for any clear and coherent doctrine in late sixteenth-century England, it was the intellectual conviction that it was necessary to control the powers of the crown by establishing a means of ensuring that a coterie of virtuous advisers and servants would always have the constitutional right to counsel the monarch, and so influence and control his or her actions within the limits of the law. (Hadfield 2005b, 17)

Hadfield's definition of early modern republicanism in England is tenable but incomplete and vague. Republicanism was more than a political attempt to limit power of the monarch and divide sovereignty among several members, that contemporaries pointed to its defaults and denounced, including Bodin and Guicciardini. Republicanism has been regarded by critics and

⁷⁰ See Sanders 2001, Hadfield 2005b, Cantor 2017, and Miola 2004.

⁷¹ See Beacon 2013.

historians as being derived from an anti-monarchical sentiment.⁷² Mixed governments have been mistaken for republicanism and any counter political discourse has been classified under republicanism. I would like to point to the scholarly misconception. Popular states and governments and aristocratic and governments have been classified under republicanism. Any departure from or rejection of tyranny and certain principles emerging under Reason of State of theory have been dismissed as republican.⁷³ Even calls for tyrannicide and regicide have been regarded as such.

Reconstructing contexts and concepts is necessary for the reading not only of contemporary drama and for the dissection of what I like to call Tragedy of the State but also and most notably for understanding early modern political thought and con/texts.

I would like to stress misconception and conceptual vagueness. It would be wrong to categorize Buchanan, for instance, as a republican apologist. His thoughts and theories call for popular sovereignty and are a reaction to Queen Mary's government. I will be discussing George Buchanan's theory in the next chapter. However, I would like to point that early modern political thought resists categorization. Reason of State theory paved the way for the emergence of the modern state as we know it today and the development of later theories of the social contract.

Reason of State theory centred on the preservation of the state and the suppression of the subject and human nature, of 'men' as governed by lust, ambition, instinct, and thirst for power. Thus (Reason of) State theory has perceived the subject. It crushed and erased the subject. The state is based on subjection, castration, nurtures hatred, envy, bigotry, suspension, and stimulates self-interest and survival 'instinct'. The Reason of State philosophy culminating in the later social contract and the modern nation-state is based on the subjugation of the subject. Principles like equity and justice are eclipsed by the founding principles of Reason of State

⁷² See for example Andrew Hadfield's *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (2005b), Thomas P. Anderson's *Shakespeare's Fugitive Politics* (2018), Daniel Juan Gil's *Shakespeare's Anti-Politics Sovereign Power and the Life of the Flesh* (2013), Warren L. Chernaik's *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (2013). The early modern critical scholarship has been showing a lack of conceptual precision or an awareness of the importance and centrality of the discourse of Reason of State in the understanding of texts and the political enterprise in general. Republicanism and its various definitions have mostly been vague and offered as an antithesis to monarchy without considering its context.

⁷³ A very important example is George Buchanan who has been classified as republican and even glamorized and celebrated as *the* republican figure of England and Europe (Erskine 2016). Buchanan, however, did not mention republicanism in his *De Jure*. He introduced novel and radical conceptions of law-making and popular sovereignty. He was the advocate of popular rule but does not speak about republicanism *per se*. A conceptual mistake has been recurring particularly in Shakespearean scholarship when analysing the works of Buchanan (including Andrew Hadfield in his *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, p.38). I will be returning to George Buchanan and his important contributions to continental political thought in the next chapters.

including self-preservation and utility. The subject, therefore, becomes secondary and auxiliary to the state.

These philosophical reflexions are voiced in *Tragedy of State*. To be able to read it, a conceptual redefinition becomes necessary. Characters in the plays are offered as probably the first victims of the tyranny of *étatisme*. The *Tragedy of State* seeks to voice these lapidary reflections. In the next part, I will be showing how the two plays under study represent the two ‘opposite’ theories of the state onstage.

2. Politics of the Tragedy of State

2.1. The Rotten State (of Denmark)

The issue of forms of states and governments is central to contemporary drama, and particularly *Tragedy of State*. As I have shown in the previous section, Shakespeare scholars only focus on two types of governments, republicanism and tyranny, which leads to a conceptual confusion and historical inaccuracies when it comes to understanding early modern political thought. I have argued that the two forms of government, and particularly republicanism, cannot be read independently from the discourse of Reason of State. Misconceptions include first the absence of distinction between forms of governments and forms of states. Early modern theorists of the state were very keen on addressing the difference between the two and typology in general. Misrecognizing the two eclipses any understanding of *étatisme*, and particularly the extreme importance of mixed governments.⁷⁴ Most scholarly works devote their attention to political regimes contemporary to the plays without paying attention to historical or conceptual precision.⁷⁵

To study early modern plays and particularly tragedies and histories, an awareness of how early modern political theorists understood politics is highly essential. Drama, in this regard, participated in the discursive political space and can be addressed as sources for

⁷⁴ One example can be Bodin’s argument that despotic monarchy is more effective than royal or tyrannical monarchies. Tyranny, for instance is a form of government and not state. A monarchy too can be aristocratic, though not effective. Shakespearean scholarship (in addition to the previous examples, see Greenblatt 2018 and Aloui 2021) has dealt with tyranny as a form of state that even differences between an empire that is tyrannical and a monarchy that is ruled by a tyrant have been treated as one and the same. See Bodin’s *Six Books of the Commonwealth* (1955).

⁷⁵ Shakespeare scholars rarely pay attention to the minute differences between political concepts. Multidisciplinarity is a challenging task. However, when reading the works of experts of the field, historians, political philosophers of Reason of State theory, a gap can be clearly noticed.

understanding particular political discourses including Reason of State. A quick survey of early modern drama would show how étatism and, to be more precise, poetics of the state are central subjects to the plays. Shakespeare devoted a large part of his plays to the study of political forms. The poem *Rape of Lucrece* addresses the genesis of the state. *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*, the *Henriad*, and the earliest *Titus Andronicus* all address crises within different forms of states and governments. Fulke Greville wrote his long poem *A Treatise of Monarchy* in the same vein. Ben Jonson wrote *Sejanus His Fall* and *Catiline His Conspiracy*. Other works, to name a few, include court plays such as *Respublica* or John Skelton's *Magnificence*, Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War*,⁷⁶ and George Buchanan's prose work *Chamaeleon*. The list is of course too long.

Therefore, the transition from medieval politics to Reason of State philosophy and its reception can be well traced in the plays. In this part, I argue how Shakespeare's *Hamlet* represents the political shift from medieval politics onstage and discusses political forms.

Andrew Hadfield comments on the play:

The cyclical nature of the play makes the history of Denmark seem very like that of Rome, raising the same issues of continuity, change and political form, and, without necessarily resolving any of them, shows how relevant those issues are for English audiences in those 1590s. (Hadfield 2005b, 191)

Hadfield says that the play, through the Danish and Roman background, chronicles a political transition. The political transition that Hadfield refers to is one from republicanism to tyranny in Rome and, hence, from a more 'democratic' or royal, in Bodin's terminology, to a more tyrannical rule without any precision. In fact, the play records a political transition—through its hero who is always already in a state of interregnum. Hadfield does not study the transition from civil reason to Reason of State politics in the continent. I have already discussed how *Hamlet*, and *Tragedy of State*, opens on a very paranoid note to portray a political climate that is shifting to culminate in the final formation of the modern state. The reader can visualize the claustrophobic sentiment at court. In this part, I will be moving on to show how the course of action in the play develops to discuss, therefore, forms of governments and states and how it represents the political transition.

⁷⁶ Shakespeare's *As You Like It* has been primarily based on Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590).

All characters have been introduced and portrayed to the audience. The tone for the play has been set. The audience, by the second act of the play, has been made aware that there is a political transition from a feudal political order, humanist Christian past, to the more modern Reason of State political philosophy. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the shift has been shown from the very first act of the play through highlighting the contrast between the King Hamlet who represents a conservative past, civil reason political discourse, and Claudius, who represents the present of the science of politics mainly based on the discourse of Reason of State. In the second act, the state of claustrophobia is further reinforced. Two characters enter the stage separately in two different scenes. Polonius enters the stage for the first time in the play. The way he is represented is very telling. He is first introduced as the father who spies on his son who is in France. He sends Reynaldo “to make inquire / Of his behaviour” (II. 1. 5-4). Polonius makes a comical entrance in the play. His role is very theatrical and short. He insists that Reynaldo succeeds in his mission. The character, in a self-reflexive way, seems like he is learning his lines by heart:

Marry, well said, very well said. Look you, sir,
 Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris;
 And how, and who, what means, and where they keep,
 What company, at what expense; and finding
 By this encompassment and drift of question
 That they do know my son, come you more nearer
 Than your particular demands will touch it. Take you, as 'twere, some distant
 knowledge of him,
 As thus: “I know his father and his friends
 And, in part, him.” Do you mark this, Reynaldo? (II.1. 7-17)

He adds,

POLONIUS And then, sir, does he this, he does— what was I about to say? By the Mass,
 REYNALDO I was about to say something. Where did I leave?
 At “closes in the consequence,” at “friend, or so,” and “gentleman.”
 POLONIUS At “closes in the consequence”— ay, marry—
 He closes thus: “I know the gentleman.
 I saw him yesterday,” or “th’ other day.” (II. 2. 56-63)

Polonius' entrance is not 'mere jest.' As the audience will see throughout the play, he is the perfect subject for Reason of State theory. He is obedient, has no ambitions, and a sycophant. He serves the sovereign without questioning his powers. Polonius is the one who draws further attention to Hamlet's madness and expresses his concern to Claudius. He represents himself to Claudius, and to the audience rather, as servile and in the service of authority:

My liege, and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.
"Mad" call I it, for, to define true madness,
What is 't but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go. (II. 2. 93-102)

Polonius is thus represented as the obedient subject who informs the sovereign of the new news in court. The theme of the transition, in the start of the second act, is further reinforced. The newer political generation, embodied in Claudius and Polonius, can be read on two levels. The conflict between two generations, that of fathers and sons in the play, can be read as one between two political generations or, even further, two political schools. The new political generation also seems to embrace and perfectly embody the new political discourse of Reason of State. The generation of sons, however, that of Hamlet and Laertes, seems to struggle with the dictatorship of the fathers' political generation. They can neither accept the new 'unethical' political discourse, nor act to change it. They are undecidable, passive, philosophical rather than practical, and melancholic, and eventually, often dismissed, displaced, physically and otherwise, and sent away.

Medievalism, embodied in the figure of the father King Hamlet, stands for chivalry and knighthood. Shapiro argues that he is "a ghostly relic of a chivalric age" and that he represents "a world of heraldic law and mortal combat, of armoured men wielding broadswords, fighting to the death" (Shapiro 2006, 309). It is a political world that centres on principles of equity and justice. He retains that the gap between the two world pictures is sharpened by the ghost's "martial appearance" (Shapiro 2006, 309). Shapiro pays particular attention to armor.

He adds that “[b]y 1599, such dress was an anachronism; only on Accession Day did knights still dress in otherwise rusting armor” (Shapiro 2006, 309). Likewise, Laertes’s weapon of choice is the dagger. He claims that “Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have been more attuned than we are to the difference between old and new ways of fighting and what kind of view each embodied. It was only in the second half of the sixteenth century that the rapier replaced the heavy sword as the weapon of choice” (309). Armor, however, does not only set two world pictures at each other’s throats, but has a further political implication. Blaming a present political order at the expense of a possibly triumphant and ‘moral’ political art demonstrates the newer generation’s dissatisfaction with the emerging political order and deems it as a degeneration.

The play shows three political generations. The first one is that of the dead king, the second is that of Claudius and Polonius, and finally that of Hamlet, Laertes, Horatio, and Ophelia. The latter, however, is undecidable. The “play is structured to dramatize the devolution from one generation to the next.” (De Grazia 2007, 97). The (de)generation is shown onstage via the conflict between fathers and sons, possibly a de/generation from an art of politics to a more degenerate science of politics. The degeneration is articulated via the last generation’s inability to accept the new order and a caricaturing of it through the fathers, Claudius and Polonius.

The audience, then, sees Claudius one more time onstage. He expresses his concern over Hamlet who has been withdrawing from court and rather becomes melancholic and does not engage in any event. He first expresses his concern to Gertrude who thinks he is still mourning his father’s death and then believes Polonius’ argument that he is madly in love with Ophelia. Claudius, however, feels threatened by Hamlet’s melancholy and his presence altogether in court. He summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to inquire for him the reason behind Hamlet’s melancholy:

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. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet’s transformation, so call it,
Sith nor th’ exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father’s death, that thus hath put him

So much from th' understanding of himself
I cannot dream of. I entreat you both
That, being of so young days brought up with him
And sith so neighbored to his youth and havior,
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 occasion you may glean,
Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus
That, opened, lies within our remedy. (II. 2. 1-18)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are similar to Polonius' spy, Reynaldo. They obey the king's orders despite their friendship with Hamlet. They betray their friendship for, what Reason of State theory advances as, the common good for the realm. They are ordered to kill Hamlet to preserve the (common good of the) state, Claudius' state. The first scene of the second act shows Polonius seeking to spy on his son. The second scene of the same act is devoted to Claudius seeking to know the real reason behind Hamlet's 'lunacy'. The two scenes are devoted to spying on potential princes. Claudius is threatened by Hamlet. Laertes is returning towards the end of the play as a potential prince. When talking to Hamlet and trying to understand the reason behind his current state, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are outwitted and confused by Hamlet's satire. Hamlet knows very well that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are spying on him:

HAMLET Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN Prison, my lord?

HAMLET Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ Then is the world one.

HAMLET A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' th' worst. (II. 2. 257-266)

Political themes become more articulate for the audience to understand. Hamlet introduces an almost treasonous remark and claims openly that Denmark is a prison, implying a dissatisfaction of what he considers a political degeneration. The political transition to

Claudius' rule and to Reason of State theory is perceived as such. The audience so far sees two types of characters; the obedient and servile, and the more 'liberal' characters who do not change with the transition including Hamlet and Horatio his friend. The latter represent "antique" (V. 1. 374) political principles of liberty and equity. Claudius' portrayal so far in the play has not been positive, neither the political transition that he brings about.

The political de/generation is also presented as one based on *coup d'États*, fratricide, and regicides, causing a rupture not only in the political order in its theoretical terms, but one in the political mechanism of the state. The older generation on the one hand fails to grant Hamlet his right of succession and, on the other, violates the 'natural' rules of succession. According to the common law, or what is known as *lex terrae*, and the law of succession *ius coronae* the eldest son is the one who inherits the father and the crown (De Grazia 2007, 87). This law is applicable in both twelfth century Denmark and sixteenth century England. Therefore, the new political order, as represented onstage, is shown as a rupture, a degeneration rather than being progressive.

By the second act, the audience has almost a complete picture of politics in the court, the sovereign, and subjects, and, therefore, of Reason of State politics. The second act adds to the first one and further reinforces the paranoid politics in the Danish court. To further highlight the political degeneration, the audience sees how Claudius summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern one more time in act three in the absence of the queen:

KING I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you.
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,
And he to England shall along with you.
The terms of our estate may not endure
Hazard so near 's as doth hourly grow
Out of his brows.

GUILDENSTERN We will ourselves provide.
Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many many bodies safe
That live and feed upon your Majesty. (III. 3. 1-11)

Reason of State politics is perfectly embodied in the cited lines. Claudius claims that the common good necessitates ending any threat, including Hamlet, for the preservation of the

state, the prince's state. Claudius introduces it as an emergent necessity for the common good of everyone in the realm. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in turn do obey without questioning anything. Claudius completely dismisses civil reason and natural laws. His rule is on the one hand introduced as illegitimate, and on the other as tyrannical:

O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin
And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offense? (III. 3. 40-51)

Claudius' tyrannical rule is embodied above all in the regicide he confesses to have committed. Besides the *coup d'État*, he seeks to eliminate any possible threat by excluding Hamlet from court in the one hand, and by ordering his murder on the other. The two actions violate natural laws and especially the *lex terrae* and *ius coronae* laws as I have shown.

Court politics under Claudius' rule, therefore, is not described in any positive terms. On the contrary, Denmark has become a prison. Contemporary theory may have introduced monarchy and despotic rule in general as the best form of government. The play, however, does not offer any glory or positive outcomes of the form of government or state advanced by Reason of State theory. Hamlet's famous soliloquy is very relevant in this regard. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spy on him, he produces his monologue on 'men' and human nature:

Earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'er hanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire— why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a

god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (II. 2. 296-276)

Though Hamlet's speech has also been interpreted either in light of the character's inner conflict and melancholy⁷⁷ or a contemporary humanist discourse, starting with Hardin Craig's *The Enchanted Glass: The Elizabethan Mind in Literature* (1936), the political aspect of Hamlet's famous monologue on 'Man' has been rarely addressed, especially in the context of the emerging political science. In his *Hamlet and the Rethinking of Man* (2008), Levy P. Eric studies the various philosophical discourses related to the interpretation of reason in sixteenth century England and addresses the concept of reason under two doctrines, stoicism and what he refers to as the Machiavellian opportunism, meaning the new philosophical discourse of Reason of State. Commenting on his philosophical abstractions and feigned madness, Levy concludes that the "altruism implicit in this attitude contrasts vividly with the opportunism rampant in the world of the play. Hamlet himself is at once its impassioned critic and exponent. As exponent of opportunism, he exploits his own melancholy as an opportunity to use madness as a disguise" (Levy 2008, 2016). Hamlet's monologue should be read historically, and besides humanist, psychoanalytical readings (Jardine 1996, 35). His madness, the antithesis of reason, the new political reason of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England is political—even if the "bourgeois-ideology" of the 'neo' liberal humanism⁷⁸ may go against it. Kiernan Ryan denounces the latter:

Viewed through the eyes of most orthodox and most radical critics of Shakespeare alike, the vision of the tragedies appears profoundly conservative. In the two dominant and complementary interpretive maneuvers, the tragedies are presented either as dramatizing the validity of the established social order and vindicating conventional beliefs and values, or as reconciling us to what is perceived as our intractably flawed

⁷⁷ These readings include psychoanalytical approaches to Hamlet's inner world starting with Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (original, 1915) and later Ernest Jones's *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1967).

⁷⁸ Hamlet's soliloquy has been long read as a commentary on an unchanged and universal human nature. A. L. Rowse by way of example reads Hamlet's soliloquy as follows: "Shakespeare was a conservative and a conformist. Like Montaigne he had too wise and profoundly skeptical view of human nature to think it sense to upset the natural arrangements of society for hypothetical gain and evident illusions. He was never the one to get into trouble with government for religious 'convictions' on either side, or for criticizing government or reflecting its beasts of burden. He realized what fools people are. That being so – and no one ever knew better the truth about human nature – he drew the proper conclusions, naturally, with complete consistency, with no difficulty or sense of strain" (Rowse 2000, 34).

human nature, and thus to the inescapable necessity of the given human condition, however monstrous and unbearable its cruelty and injustice (Ryan 1989, 44).

Contrary to the tradition of the Shakespearean invention of the human, the political concept of reason should be read as central to the play and Hamlet's soliloquy (Bloom 1998, 4). If read politically, Hamlet's comment on human nature is very intriguing. The audience is introduced to the unpleasant reality of contemporary politics, politics that blames human nature for being unreasonable and more beast-like that cannot be trusted with agency or political autonomy. As I showed in the previous part, Bodin comments on human nature as base, "the true nature of a people is to seek unbridled liberty without restraint. They would make all equal in goods, honours, punishments, and rewards, without any respect whatsoever for noble birth, education, or virtue" (Bodin 1955, 74). What Hamlet does, in this regard, is that he refutes the argument on which the whole theory of *étatisme* and Reason of State is based. His eulogy of human nature extremely contradicts contemporary political thought. His discourse reverberates rather with Ciceronian and antique ideals, making the audience realize or think of the true nature of the state. Hamlet's philosophical soliloquies can be read as an invitation to reflect on and rethink *dicta*, particularly political ones. The arguments that contemporary theorists introduce on how the state should be rather authoritarian for the common good of the people can be challenged by similar reflexions made by Hamlet.⁷⁹ The quintessence of dust, however, is that of modern politics, political degeneration, and the waning of virtues. The quintessence of dust could be that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, of Claudius, Polonius, and Ophelia who too participates in the collective conspiracy to spy on Hamlet—the only embodiment left of the prior political order, a humanist/Ciceronian relic. Hamlet clearly articulates his disgust from characters like Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and ultimately Ophelia.

Tragedy of State as such mirrors contemporary thought to its audience, showing it in more concrete terms, and demystifying it. In concretizing political theories, it guides its audience to a better understanding of it. It is the tragedy of the subject for the subject. It is the tragedy *of* the state and not *for* the state.

2.2. Sejanus' Reason of State: "State is enough to make th'act just":

⁷⁹ I will show later how, if the play refutes the discourse of human nature, relies instead on the philosophy of George Buchanan that advances popular sovereignty as an alternative.

Contrary to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall*, tyranny has already been established in court. In the first act, characters in the Agrippina faction lament the state of Rome held by the tight grip of one ruler, Tiberius Caesar Augustus, the second Roman Emperor (I. 59-69). The state of political affairs in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* are more tense and critical than the Danish court. Hamlet may have compared Denmark to a prison—a rotten state. In *Hamlet*, character development is more elaborate, the inner world of characters is explored, and private space is introduced onstage. However, contrary to Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, Ben Jonson gives less importance to character development and the psycho-political play of characters. However, what I would like to address in this part is how Ben Jonson instead aims at addressing the psycho-political world of the *state*. I will show how Ben Jonson represents the political mechanisms under Reason of State theory, mediated through Tiberius' Rome.

I have shown in the previous chapter that the Tragedy of State opens with setting the tone for the theme of Reason of State theory and how the political climate tends to be claustrophobic and tumultuous. In the two plays, the audience is introduced to the transition from civil reason to Reason of State; in *Hamlet*, the killed king Hamlet embodies the Christian humanist discourse that has been replaced with Claudius' modern politics of Reason of State. In *Sejanus*, Silius and Sabinus deplore the current state of affairs and the political degeneration of Rome to tyranny and servitude. I will be arguing in this part that the play aims at offering its audience a concrete image of the current state of political affairs that is rather bleak.

Peter Burke argues, as we will see in the quotation below, that it would be “scarcely an exaggeration to claim that the true subject of these plays is reason of state” (Burke 2008, 488). Burke refers to early modern plays in general and devotes his attention particularly to Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* and *Hamlet*. A play that has Tiberius as its protagonist cannot be read independently from Reason of State theory and Tacitism. Reason of State theorists referred to Tiberius through Tacitus' *Annals*. Tiberius was the protagonist of contemporary political theory that defended the transition to Reason of State, and hence the rise of Tacitism similarly to Reason of State. What Tacitism supports is an authoritarian rule that demands the total submission of subjects. Burke adds,

Tacitean dramas cluster around the figures of two emperors, Tiberius and Nero. The first group includes Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603), and Cyrano de Bergerac's *Mort d'Agrippine* (1653), which deals with the unsuccessful attempt at revenge by the widow

of Germanicus, the adoptive son of Tiberius who had been poisoned at his orders. (Burke 2008, 488)

As Burke shows, the two figures of Tiberius and Nero, the most famous tyrants in history, are particularly studied by political theorists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continental Europe as references and ideal leaders or princes to be followed by contemporary rulers.⁸⁰ The two 'Herods' of early modern political theory are present in the two plays. The figure of Tiberius in Ben Jonson's play is a clear reference to not only to Tacitism but Reason of State theory. Peter Burke shows:

These plays and others in the genre are Tacitean not only in the sense of taking their plots from Tacitus (whose *Annals* sometimes seem closer to melodrama than to normal history), but also in that of drawing on his maxims in a manner not far removed from that of the political commentators. Both Jonson and Lohenstein acknowledged their debts in their notes, Lohenstein citing Tacitus more than 200 times altogether, while Jonson referred to him 59 times in the notes to the first act of *Sejanus*. It is scarcely an exaggeration to claim that the true subject of these plays is reason of state, a phrase which Jonson was one of the first Englishmen to use. (Burke 2008, 488)

Constantly referring to Tacitus and paying attention to historical accuracy, Ben Jonson shows an awareness of the political transition to Reason of State theory. He, therefore, performed it onstage, through the most relatable figure of Tiberius, the tyrant. Ben Jonson, of course, paid more attention to his sources and to political and historical accuracies. His plays are more political than dramatic. Tacitus' Tiberius provides as Tuck argues:

an account of the techniques used by a ruthless and manipulative ruler, Tiberius, to overcome his equally ruthless and dishonourable enemies (techniques which also served to crush the few genuinely virtuous observers of events); the *Histories* told the story of the 'long but single year' of AD 69, the Year of the Four Emperors, in which the Roman empire was split by civil war but reconstructed by the military prowess and cynical

⁸⁰ Francesco Giucciardini for instance in his *Maxims and Reflections* advises rulers to read the *Annals* of Tacitus and particularly the parts devoted to Tiberius and his confessions.

policies of Vespasian. The application of Tacitus to contemporary issues began among these humanists in the early 1570s. (Tuck 2011, 41)

I interpret *Sejanus* as a political work and historical reference rather than a dramatic work. Early modern tragedies and histories are political dramas. As I have mentioned, early modern drama deals with Reason of State onstage. However, I would like to emphasize that Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* can be taken as the best example for the study of the political philosophy of the Reason of State and Tacitism. Ben Jonson openly chooses Tiberius and Sejanus as the protagonists of his play.

Theatre democratizes abstract political theory and makes it accessible to the public, outside court. Tragedy of State can be read in this regard as a political project. I started to trace the grammar of the Tragedy of State in the previous chapter. The two plays as I said start with introducing the audience to the political affairs in the two states. Silius and Sabinus deplore the loss of freedom and the transition to tyranny—contemporary synonym to Reason of State theory. The tyrant has been introduced onstage, along with flatterers, sycophants, and spies. Those who oppose the current political affairs, the antique Romans, have also been introduced to the audience. In the second act, similarly to *Hamlet*, two elements are established: spies and the fear of disobedience.

The second act opens with Sejanus and Livia plotting to kill Drusus. Throughout the play, Sejanus aims to hew all the threatening opponents. He starts with Tiberius' son Drusus Senior:

Physician, thou art worthy of a province
For the great favours done unto our loves;
And, but that greatest Livia bears a part
In the requital of thy services,
I should alone despair of aught like means
To give them worthy satisfaction. (II. 1-6)

Sejanus starts with stating the most threatening potential to power and then moves to his second plan, that of marrying Livia, Tiberius' daughter in law. He woos her into marrying him few lines after their shared plot to kill Drusus

Royal lady,

Though I have loved you long, and with that height
Of zeal and duty (like the fire, which more
It mounts, it trembles), thinking nought could add
Unto the fervour which your eye had kindled,
Yet, now I see your wisdom, judgement, strength,
Quickness, and will to apprehend the means
To your own good and greatness, I protest
Myself through-rarefied, and turned all flame
In your affection. Such a spirit as yours
Was not created for the idle second
To a poor flash as Drusus, but to shine
Bright, as the moon, among the lesser lights,
And share the sov'reignty of all the world. (II. 24-37)

Similarly to *Hamlet*, *Sejanus* portrays a tyrant's plan to rise to or to preserve power. Sejanus' plan is to hew all his enemies and potential threats. To 'espouse' the state, he plans a political marriage with Livia. Sejanus being a real historical figure and Claudius, in *Hamlet*, a fictional one, the Tragedy of State has the same political structure; the poetic and political align.

Through their marriages, Sejanus and Claudius plan to espouse the state in the meaning of the Reason of State theory. Sejanus' plot to raise to power is to marry Livia, reverberating with *Hamlet* that opens with Claudius' marriage to Gertrude. Claudius became king after his marriage to Gertrude that he compared to marrying the state:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we (as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,

With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole)
Taken to wife. (I. 2. 1-14)

The two marriages are political projects. Claudius marries the “imperial jointress to this warlike state” (I.2. 9). Sejanus plots to share “sovereignty” of all the world through his marriage to Livia. The two characters use a political diction to describe their alliances. Pierre Bourdieu comments on what he calls “dynastic state” that precedes, in his genealogy, the bureaucratic state saying that:

L'Etat dynastique, organisé autour de la famille royale et de son patrimoine, comme maison, est le lieu d'une contradiction spécifique liée à la coexistence d'un pouvoir personnel et d'une bureaucratie naissante, c'est-à-dire de deux principes contradictoires de domination (incarnés par les frères du roi et les ministres du roi) et de deux modes de reproduction, par la famille ou par l'Ecole. Ce sont les conflits fondés dans cette contradiction qui conduisent de la maison du roi à la raison d'Etat, assurant peu à peu le triomphe du principe « étatique » sur le principe dynastique. (Bourdieu 1972, 577)

The dynastic state, organised around the royal family and its patrimony, being a house, is the site of a certain contradiction linked to the coexistence of individual power and a nascent bureaucracy. Two contradictory principles of domination (embodied by the king's brothers and ministers) and two modes of reproduction, through the family or through education. It is the conflicts based on this contradiction that leads from the king's house to reason of state, gradually ensuring the triumph of the principle of the state over the dynastic one. (Translation mine)

Bourdieu explains that in the dynastic state, the state is embodied in the king⁸¹ even with the emergence of the Reason of State discourse that paves the way for the bureaucratic state. commenting further on the dynastic state and its mechanisms, Bourdieu argues in his article “De la maison du roi à la raison d'État Un modèle de la genèse du champ bureaucratique” (1977) that “le roi, agissant en « chef de maison » , se sert des propriétés de la maison (et en particulier... le mariage” (Bourdieu 1997, 56) ; (the king, acting as the ‘head of the house’,

⁸¹ Bourdieu uses the proverbial reference of Louis XIV “L'État c'est moi” (Bourdieu 1997, 57).

uses the properties of the house and in particular... the marriage. Translation mine).⁸² In the dynastic state, in Bourdieusian parlance, the public and private spheres are still inseparable. The example in the two plays is thus far that of the political marriages made. Bourdieu comments:

Thus, the first affirmation of the distinction between the public and the private is achieved in the sphere of power. It leads to the constitution of a properly political order of public powers, endowed with its own logic (Reason of State), its autonomous values, its specific language and distinct from the domestic (royal) and the private. This distinction will have to be extended later to the whole of social life; but it must in some way begin with the king, in the minds of the king and his milieu, who are led by a kind of institutional narcissism to confuse the resources or interests of the institution with the resources or interests of the individual (Bourdieu 1997, 63, translation mine).⁸³

With Reason of State theory, the distinction between both spheres, the public and private, starts to take place but is still incomplete. Only with the bureaucratic state as Bourdieu shows that the division extends to the social, cultural, and religious paving the way to secularism (Bourdieu 1997, 64).

After introducing the political marriage, the characters move to further securing their power. Claudius plots on killing Hamlet. In *Sejanus*, spies have been sent to listen to Cordus the historian and his friends. In the first act, Cordus enters the stage, Latarius and Natto observe them. Throughout the whole play, the Aggripina group has been suspected. Their death or arrest get plotted consequently.

Elements of the Tragedy of State have been introduced similarly in the two plays. The political tension, spies, flatterers, and sycophants furnish the opening acts of the play. Ben Jonson offers his audience a tyranny that in Reason of State theory should be preserved. However, the audience can understand the attack, not on tyranny *per se*, but on any abuse of liberties as Sabinus and Silius state in the first act. Tiberius fears a civil revolt and joins Sejanus

⁸² The king, acting as 'master of the house', uses the properties of the house (and in particular... the marriage). (Translation mine)

⁸³ Ainsi, la première affirmation de la distinction du public et du privé s'accomplit dans la sphère du pouvoir. Elle conduit à la constitution d'un ordre proprement politique des pouvoirs publics, doté de sa logique propre (la raison d'État), de ses valeurs autonomes, de son langage spécifique et distinct du domestique (royal) et du privé. Cette distinction devra s'étendre ultérieurement à toute la vie sociale ; mais elle doit en quelque sorte commencer avec le roi, dans l'esprit du roi et de son entourage, que tout porte à confondre, par une sorte de narcissisme d'institution, les ressources où les intérêts de l'institution et les ressources ou les intérêts de la personne. (Bourdieu 1997, 63)

in plotting against suspects. The state is secure for the presumable common good but is rife with tension and political unrest. The emperor's confident plots against him and the Agrippina group oppose the tyranny of Tiberius and fear Sejanus' ascension to power after him. Tiberius, in this regard, still not aware of Sejanus' ploy, focuses chiefly on the Agrippina group:

Tiberius: That nature, blood, and laws of kind forbid.

Sejanus: Do policy and state forbid it?

Tiberius: No.

Sejanus: The rest of poor respects, then let go by;

State is enough to make th'act just, them guilty.

...

Sejanus: All for a crown.

The prince, who shames a tyrant's name to bear,

Shall never dare do anything but fear.

...

Whole empires fall, swayed by those nice respects.

It is the licence of dark deeds protects

Eve'n states most hated, when no laws resist (II. 170-180)

Sejanus, aspiring to rise to power, addresses Tiberius and the audience by summarizing Reason of State theory that most contemporary theorists defend and introduces the motto, a dictum rather, very brief to be remembered and easily captured, on how the state is just regardless of the presence of proof that the Agrippina faction is guilty or not by saying as shown in the cited lines above "the State is enough to make th'act just, them guilty" (II. 174). The prince, be it a tyrant or not, the state, and the laws are always to be preserved regardless of the context. As shown in the quoted excerpt, Reason of State is less refined onstage (compared to for instance how Botero seeks to do as I have shown in the previous chapter). It is presented as one that is equal to tyranny. Even under tyranny, as many contemporary theorists argue, order of the state should be kept. The religious background of *étatisme*, unlike in *Hamlet*, is almost absent. In *Hamlet*, we see the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See Sinfield 1992 and Greenblatt 2013. They both discuss the religious tensions in *Hamlet* particularly the conflict between Protestant and Catholic beliefs in Elizabethan England.

The state is dealt with and represented in very abstract terms. Under tyranny, the state and laws are enough to make the suspects guilty, introducing the more modern motto, the legitimate violence of the state. In the previous chapter, I introduced external and internal threats to the state. The plays start on the margins of the state, be it in the fortress, that has been discussed by contemporary theorists,⁸⁵ and then move to discussing keeping peace and securing the state and power of the sovereign by removing all internal threats. In *Hamlet*, Claudius fears rebellion from Hamlet who may have discovered his plot of killing his father and marrying Gertrude. However, in *Sejanus*, Ben Jonson offers a bleaker image of tyranny that is closer to the rule of James I than that of Elizabethan rule. Tyrants repress their subjects and consequently fear rebellion. Tyranny is threatened by courtiers and powerful men who represent real threat to the preservation of a tyrant's state, (*l'État, c'est moi*) Tiberius and Sejanus in this case. Guicciardini referred to Tiberius as a model for tyrants to be followed in securing the state various times: "If you want to know the thoughts of tyrants, read Cornelius Tacitus, where he cites the last conversations of Augustus with Tiberius" (115). The Tiberius of the play shows a real awareness that tyranny cannot be preserved unless he proceeds to remove all suspects⁸⁶ from the political scene:

Sejanus: 'Tis Agrippina?

Tiberius: She, and her proud race.

Sejanus: Proud? Dangerous, Caesar. For in them apace

The father's spirit shoots up. Germanicus

Lives in their looks, their gait, their form, t'upbraid us

With his close death, if not revenge the same.

...

Tiberius: It is as dangerous to make them hence,

⁸⁵ As I have shown in the previous chapter, the idea of preservation of the state is of extreme importance. Bodin and Botero, chiefly, addressed preservation of the state from external dangers through for instance fortresses, or internal threats. The second idea is enacted onstage. Tiberius throughout the play, along with Sejanus, plot on removing any existing threat and start their killbillesque endeavour by killing all political opponents or threats. In Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, the audience sees the circularity of the play. Similarly to *Hamlet*, where the audience sees two plays, the play itself and *The Murder of Gonzago*, and the play ending where it starts, in *Sejanus*, there is no play-within-play. However, one sees the downfall of two tyrants—Tiberius' fall offers Sejanus' fall as a play-within-play. I will be discussing the poetics of the Tragedy of State in the next chapter at more length and address particularly the *political* theatricality of Ben Jonson's play.

⁸⁶ Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Macbeth* can also be read in the same light. *Richard III* shows how the king, being crippled, seeks to secure power through deceit and manipulation in a Machiavellian sense. He hews all possible threats to power including his brothers and nephews. *Macbeth* on the other hand is different in the sense that when arising to power, Macbeth in a killbillesque way kills all his opponents and what he sees as possible threats.

If nothing but their birth be their offence. (II. 190-201)

Having no proof of treason against the Agrippina faction, Tiberius and Sejanus both agree to proceed with their plot offering two arguments, that of state power being legitimate and their birth. The portrait that Ben Jonson draws of tyranny is not in any way a positive one. Tyranny onstage is represented as a warning to its audience. The question to pose, in this regard, is whether tyranny should not be challenged still? The play starts with showing a dissatisfaction with a rotten political present, then invokes a triumphant political past based on equity and justice. The second act discusses forms of governments and states advanced in contemporary political theories as ideal. Reason of State theory is concretized onstage. Two different political actors have been represented; the one that seeks to secure power and preserve the state; and the one that denounces Reason of State of theory and dismisses as 'tyrannical' and indecent for the Ciceronian political heritage. In this part, I sought to address one part of the Tragedy of State. After showing the political transition and the political state of affairs in the first act, the play offers a more 'graphic' image of politics and its mechanisms under Tiberius' tyranny that widely circulated in England to support Reason of State theory under the more voguish Tacitism.

CHAPTER IV: Politics of the Stage

In this chapter, I will be dealing with the poetics and politics of action in the Tragedy of State. The early modern era paves the way to a transition towards a new political and economic order that puts an end to feudalism in its political sense. The notion of sovereignty in the early modern era starts to take a new shape, leading to absolutist rule in the continent and will later evolve into the Rousseauvian understanding of étatism. The state in its modern sense, as I have shown in previous chapters, started to adumbrate essentially thanks to the early modern philosophy of Reason of State, leading to the nation-state in its modern terms with more modern mechanisms and modern understandings of sovereignty and political rule, as well as state apparatuses. The birth of the nation-state as one knows it today, however, can be ‘officially’ traced back to the year 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia was concluded in Germany ending the Thirty Years’ War.⁸⁷ Though only at a continental level at first, with the Peace of Westphalia, international relations as a field became independent and an acknowledged science. In his *Relazioni Universali* (1630), Giovanni Botero, a Reason of State theorist, started drafting international relations in Europe to argue for an undivided Europe from either external (the Ottoman empire) or internal threats (religious conflicts and civil wars). The absolutist state, one that imposes order within itself and a more geopolitical order of states, therefore, becomes a necessity. In medieval politics, sovereignty and the power that comes with it rest essentially within the grip of a single ruler, the monarch. With the early modern theory of Reason of State, it became further consolidated due to the destabilizing threats to the state, culminating, by the end of the seventeenth century, in the Peace of Westphalia. Arnauld Blin comments:

Finally, they all understood that the survival of Europe was threatened and that it is based on the general interest of the ‘community’ of European nations. It is this last point that will become the basis of modern inter-state relations, whose mechanisms set up in 1648 had as their raison d’être the survival of the system as such. (Blin 2006, 148, translation mine)⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Blin, Arnauld. 2006. *1648, La Paix de Westphalie : Ou La Naissance de l’Europe Politique Moderne*. Bruxelles: Complexe: « Enfin, tous avaient compris que la survie de l’Europe était menacée et que l’intérêt général de la « communauté » des nations européennes. C’est ce dernier point qui va devenir la base des rapports interétatiques modernes dont les mécanismes mis en place en 1648 eurent pour raison d’être la survie du système en tant que tel. »

⁸⁸ “Finally, they all understood that the survival of Europe and the general interest of the ‘community’ of European nations were at stake. It is this last point that will become the basis of modern inter-state relations, whose mechanisms set up in 1648 had as their raison d’être the survival of the system as such” (Blin 2006, 148).

With Reason of State theory, what Salter calls “political bargains” starts to take place (Salter 2015). The absolutism advanced was very radical and, hence, brought with it dissenting voices that sought to deconstruct the entire discourse. The prince is the law and the law is that of the prince. Political power and sovereignty rested only in the hands of the prince:

In this conception the sovereign (usually a king) was simply the final source of appeal, with a specific (and hence limited) set of rights and duties, in a rigid socio-political hierarchy. The sovereign was not above the law, and certainly was not a legislator... Absolutist theories of sovereignty became more prominent, most notably the divine right of kings... Obedience to Divine-law—was used to place the monarch above the law (*rex legibus solutes*) in early modern Europe. The monarch, as a sovereign could not be limited by any other authority, or else the limiting authority, and not the monarch, would be sovereign. (Salter 215, 80)

Philosophical and political quarrels on how should political sovereignty should be un/divided have started to mature towards the social contract and post-Enlightenment conceptions of the state. On the other hand, George Buchanan becomes the opponent of absolutism and authoritarian discourses and argues for popular sovereignty. He offers *action* as the main duty of subjects and restores to some extent the Ciceronian discourse from a different perspective. Action is central to drama. However, it becomes more problematic in the Tragedy of State and, hence, my choice of the two particular plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Hamlet resists action, making the play negate its very tragical essence becoming the play of political inaction. In *Sejanus*, however, Ben Jonson experiments with poetic action. Thus, the two plays address the consequence of tragical action and not that of the human design. This chapter will be devoted to the analysis of tragical action and how it is introduced in the Tragedy of State.

Tragical action becomes critical in the political sense. Inaction in *Hamlet* has always been problematic in the play. However, *Sejanus* can be seen as the antithesis of *Hamlet* when it comes to tragical action. Action starts taking place in the play in the very opening scenes and continues until the end. It is dense in terms of action. Foreseeing its ultimate demise, Tragedy of State can no longer offer a tragical action as a political alternative. Hence, the protagonist of the play will be caught in this political/economic transition taking place in the fictional world of the play as well as the contemporary political context that I am seeking to shed light on. The stage is no longer able to offer political action with the emergence of Reason of State and the more general transition taking place in the era. The continent back then was at the crossroads of dying feudalism and the emerging globalization, with the looming of industrialization and

the entire change in the global order—that is political and economic. Tragical action becomes, in this regard, in crisis. This chapter is therefore divided into three major parts. In the first part, I will be discussing George Buchanan’s radical theory of popular sovereignty that still opposes Reason of State and the emerging political order. Signalling the presence of a political alternative, I will be working on whether the plays accept the political alternative or dismiss it as futile. In the second part, I will be analysing tragical action in *Hamlet* and *Sejanus* in light of the presence of political alternative and its futility. In the third part, I will be discussing neo-stoicism and the possibility of having the stoic protagonist or character in Tragedy of State and the new political order offstage.

1. *Déraison d’État* and Popular Sovereignty

In the previous chapters, I have implicitly pointed to a central theme in sixteenth and seventeenth-century political theory and tragedies, that is regicide, and to some extent tyrannicide. According to contemporary political theory, Claudius in *Hamlet* is a tyrant due to the illegitimate coup d’état he threw and the incestual political play through his alliance with, that is marriage to, Gertrude. In *Sejanus*, the tyranny of Tiberius and future ruler Sejanus is undoubtful. Contemporary political theory sought to establish a political order, one that should not be resisted at all costs, through the political bargains over sovereignty that I will be showing shortly with George Buchanan, a dissenting voice to the emerging absolutism. Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* offers a motto that summarizes Reason of State theory and étatisme at once, “State is enough to make th’act just, them guilty” (II). Various narratives are offered to resist the anarchy of regicide. Sermons, most notably *An Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* (Church of England [1571] 2016), regarded disobedience and rebellion as not only a violation of order, but as an abomination against God and Man to vindicate étatisme. The sermon argues that Princes rule with complete power, power that derives its legitimacy from God, making therefore rebellion and resistance not only ‘illegal’, a threat to order and to the state, but also to god, a sinful act. The political narrative relied on a religious background for its self-vindication. Rebellion against a monarch equals the rejection of god—a most despised sin, that infects and poisons the whole population—a metaphor alluded to in *Hamlet*, on how political mistakes plague the entire state as one political organism. Kings are appointed by god and therefore should not be disobeyed, including tyrants:

As God the creator and Lord of all things appointed his angels and heavenly creatures in all obedience to serve and to honor his majesty: so was it his will that man, his chief creature upon the earth, should live under the obedience of his creator and Lord: and for that cause, God, as soon as he had created man, gave unto him a certain precept and law, which he (being yet in the state of innocence, and remaining in Paradise) should observe as a pledge and token of his due and bounden obedience, with denunciation of death if he did transgress and break the said law and commandment. And as God would have man to be his obedient subject, so did he make all earthly creatures subject unto man, who kept their due obedience unto man, so long as man remained in his obedience unto God: in the which obedience if man had continued still, there had been no poverty, no diseases, no sickness, no death, nor other miseries wherewith mankind is now infinitely and most miserably afflicted and oppressed. (The First Part)

The *Homily* is one of the pamphlets and narratives that came to advance and reinforce the divine rights of king doctrine in defence of absolutist monarchy. The sermon legitimates the power of Princes as such, being god's representative on earth. Princely power therefore becomes divine and directly acquired from god. Hence, subjects should only and uniquely show endless obedience to their godly appointed prince. Accordingly, princely sovereignty is not subject to manmade laws that subjects do and must obey. The political context prepared the ground for the legitimization of a political doctrine marked by absolutism and radical 'authoritarianism'. The *Homily*, again, determines:

What shall Subjects do then? Shall they obey valiant, stout, wise, and good Princes, and contemn, disobey, and rebel against children being their Princes, or against indiscreet and evil governors? God forbid: for first what a perilous thing were it to commit unto the Subjects the judgment which Prince is wise and godly, and his government good, and which is otherwise... For who else be they that are most inclined to rebellion, but such haughty spirits? From whom springs such foul ruin of realms? Is not rebellion the greatest of all mischief? And who are most ready to the greatest mischief, but the worst men? Rebels therefore the worst of all Subjects are most ready to rebellion, as being the worst of all vices, and farthest from the duty of a good subject. (The First Part)

The divine right of kings played an essential role in what Salter describes as political bargains over power and sovereignty. It played, along with similar contemporary doctrines, an essential

role in shaping the Western understanding of étatism and in the development of political theory. It “made the theory of sovereignty concrete, thus facilitating its growth” (Burgess 1992, 838). A rigid cultural and political hierarchy has been argued, in which the prince became the source of judiciary legitimacy, and laws their prerogatives.

The early modern political episteme introduced a narrative to consolidate power and order, viz. étatism. A new conception of laws has been introduced. The Ciceronian and Humanist Christian frameworks used to address, or rather centre on, principles of equity and justice. Political ‘theory’ used to revolve around the subject rather than the prince. Reason of State theory, however, shows an unprecedented preoccupation with state power and the unconditional obedience of its subjects. A new conception of laws started to emerge, legitimating the force and violence of the state at the expense of the liberties and freedom of subjects. Theorists start to argue that human nature is vile and that the mass should be controlled by the state.⁸⁹

Politics therefore appropriated a new Reason of State; one that allows for the unlimited use of power and that is unsatisfied with principles of civic equity and justice; one that seeks to undermine civic ‘reason’ and establish a new rationale, a new grammar that is, for princes, rulers, and subjects to follow. Skinner argues:

In the definition of politics, “reason” stands for the Ciceronian reason –the *recta ratio*— which teaches us the universal principles of equity that must govern our decisions in legislating, counselling, ruling and administering justice. In the case of reason of state, “reason, has an instrumental sense, meaning the capacity to calculate the appropriate means of preserving the state. (Skinner 1992, 3-4)

In addition to the religious doctrine of the divine-right of kings, Reason of State relied on the narrative of order to legitimate itself, and, hence, becoming rather secular. A new reason was needed to legitimate ‘irrational’ and radical political practices. A new conception of the laws to hold a tight grip over the people and to mould new political dynamics in favour of the power of the state at the expense of liberties and all principles of justice and equality. Skinner argues on the new “Reason” of State:

⁸⁹ I have shown in previous chapters how Reason of State theory relies on the argument of human nature, paving the way to Contractarianism and to the full development of the modern state, to legitimate authority and control. One example includes Francesco Guicciardini’s radical thought in his *Maxims and Reflexions*: “Since the nature of peoples, like that of individuals, is such that they always want more than they have. It is wise, therefore, to deny them their first demand” (53). Jean Bodin also relies on the same argument (74)

Given the identification of politics and reason, the only way to provide some sort of justification for the art of the state was to invent another reason and assert the impossibility of ignoring it. Waging an unjust war, treating the citizens unjustly, using public institutions for private purposes – all practices that the language of politics regarded as contrary to reason – attained, through the new concept of reason of state, a justification of some sort. They were no longer practices that contravened the principles of reason, but practices accomplished on behalf of a new notion of reason: the reason of the states. (Skinner 1992, 7)

The state, being established as such, introduces itself as the sole source of power and control. It is legitimate and so is its power. Just like Sejanus says, the state is always legitimate and the people guilty. However, the new political reason was not peacefully accepted. Political bargains still took place with resisting voices calling for popular sovereignty and a total refusal of absolutism and tyranny.

In this part, I will be discussing the dissenting philosophy of George Buchanan and his reinterpretation of the law in light of the contemporary political discourse, as well as Montaigne's reading of laws. George Buchanan refuted the contemporary absolutist politics, and participated in the political disputes arguing for rather a popular sovereignty. In this part, I will be chiefly analysing Buchanan's readings of the law and politics in general and particularly his oeuvre *De jure regni apud Scotos. Or, A dialogue, concerning the due priviledge of government in the kingdom of Scotland. Betwixt George Buchanan and Thomas Maitland* first published in 1579 and Montaigne's *Essays*. Montaigne, similarly to Buchanan, denounces customs by arguing that they are arbitrary and have no legitimate logic behind them, similarly to the way Buchanan denounces law.

Controversy has surrounded George Buchanan and his radical theories. He has been classified as a republican author for his views by some theorists.⁹⁰ Most importantly, he has been known for his defence of regicide. As I have shown, later generations cut themselves from the civil reason of the Ciceronian Aristotelian political framework celebrated by the quattrocento humanists. A new mixture of political ideologies came to the fore instead leading

⁹⁰ His defence of equity and justice and the necessity of a legal system that protects citizens not only against each other but from kings and princes as well made many theorists conclude that he is a republican author. Andrew Hadfield, for instance, in his *Shakespeare and Republicanism* claims "the theories of George Buchanan, undoubtedly the most important republican theorist to have lived in the British Isles before the Interregnum, were developed in large part in opposition to Mary." (18-19)

to the birth of reason of state theory that became central to the understanding of politics. George Buchanan is mostly famous for his espousal of popular sovereignty, that is not necessarily synonymous to republicanism. His political theory deals with justifying the rights of resistance against a tyrant ruler. He, therefore, became associated with the radical principles of resistance, regicide, and political assassination. In his *De Jure*, Buchanan sketches his political theory on the limits of monarchy and absolutist rule and popular sovereignty. He discusses the limits of monarchy, laws, and the consequences of a ruler's failure. His *De Jure* comes in the framework of anti-Marian propaganda.⁹¹

Buchanan is an interesting case to study when it comes to studying law in early modern Europe. As I have shown earlier, reason of state emerged to 'rationalize' authority and power. Its very *raison d'être* implies absence of legitimacy. Montaigne, though in a different context, shows an awareness that laws have no actual legitimacy behind them:

'Lawes are . . . maintained in credit, not because they are essentially just, but because they are lawes. It is the mysticall foundation of their authority; they have none other; which availes them much: they are often made by fooles; more often by men, who in hatred of equality, have want of equity. . . . There is nothing so grossely and largely offending, nor so ordinarily wronging as the Lawes' (De Montaigne 1989, III. 331).

In the same vein, Montaigne signals that laws are made out of hatred for equality and for the purpose of political power. Buchanan goes further, in this regard, and provides a philosophical analysis of laws and their legitimacy. His *De Jure* is cast in the form of a dialogue between Thomas Maitland (who regards his king as sacred and above the law) and Buchanan who discusses defends popular sovereignty.

Buchanan puts it verbatim that laws are made to serve rulers and are not in the interest of the people. The laws, he argues, "are mere cobwebs, which entangle flies, and leave a free passage to large insects" (Buchanan 2016, 71). He starts with an attempt to dismantle the political dogma offered by the new political discourse of reason of state. Buchanan's distaste from political tyranny is voiced out loud. What I would like to address is the new political and

⁹¹ To avoid reductionist contextual readings, I will footnote Buchanan's position towards Queen Mary. Queen Mary was forced to abdicate and her half-brother assume the regency of Scotland. Allegations of murder, adultery, and conspiracy were made against the Queen. Anti-Marian propaganda and tracts portrayed her as morally corrupt and politically incompetent. Buchanan, in this regard, became one of her most violent detractors. He wrote *De Maria Scoturm Regina* in which he justifies her deposition. Then he published his *De Jure*, that can be read more or less in this context, and one that is more abstract and theoretical.

judicial system he offers. I showed in the previous chapters that contemporary theorists argue that the state originates in violence to support the narrative of “order” under étatism. Montaigne and Buchanan showed an awareness that the narrative behind the legitimacy of the state and laws is ‘vulnerable’, almost illegitimate, if not in-existent. Buchanan, therefore, offers a new rereading of the laws and étatism in a manner, almost similar to yet more radical than the Ciceronian narrative, that of popular sovereignty. À la Aristotle, in his dialogue he keeps interrogating his interlocutor to show the gaps in reason of state theory to ultimately advance a democratic reading of étatism and laws, a popular one, of and for the people. Buchanan’s philosophy reached England through diplomatic relationships. Phillips determines that: “Buchanan’s friendships in England were exclusively with men who were members of this circle or closely identified with it. Chief among these was Thomas Randolph, who as Elizabeth’s ambassador to Scotland spent as much time in Buchanan’s country as he did in England” (Phillips 1948, 24).

Buchanan goes back to the genesis of the state and argues that laws are made to keep order—order between the people, order of the city-state that is. Laws are made to protect the people and not the prince—a point that *Sejanus* perfectly addresses, saying hence that the play could be experimenting with Buchanan’s ideas or advancing it as an alternative. Reason of State theory argues that laws derive their legitimacy from the prince *per se*. He embodies the laws, the people, and the realm. The subject is completely erased from this understanding. The subject becomes *écrasé/d*. Buchanan’s major argument is that the laws should serve and be in the benefit of the subjects and their mundane interests and that they have no other purpose. To go even further, Buchanan’s radical “innovation” is that the law ordering people’s lives, for them and against those who transgress it, binds everyone in the territory where the laws are valid. Buchanan asserts unequivocally that any person who puts himself outside the law, obedience to which is the condition of being a member in a ‘civilized’ society, or in a community, unlike in the *communitas*, becomes a public enemy. In this case, the individual who transgresses the law is the enemy of the civic community. Therefore, it is their duty, under the law, to exercise justice and the law on him/her.

To clarify it further, the law works on all individuals in these civic societies, including princes. The prince, too, is subject to (and *of*) the law. He bases his argument on two major points. The first one is that the judges derive their power from divinity. Buchanan, ironically, not only demystifies the contemporary political narrative, but also, reverses it. Princes should stand before judges when committing a grave error:

And yet kings and men of the first quality think this circumstance no degradation from their dignity. Indeed, if we should once acknowledge it as a received maxim that the judge must always be, in every respect, superior to the defendant, the poor must wait in patient expectation till the king has either inclination or leisure to enquire into any charge of injustice preferred against a noble culprit. Besides, their complaint is not only unjust, but false; for none that comes before a judge comes before an inferior; especially as God himself honours the tribe of judges so far as to call them, not only kings, but even gods, and thus to communicate to them, as far as the thing is possible, his own dignity. (Buchanan 2016, 71-72)

Buchanan's argument is both revolutionary and vanguard. It paves the way for later Contractarian theories. Princes, unlike in the contemporary theories discussed above, should be subject to the laws made by men, *étatist* rules that seek to establish civil order and organize inter-citizen relationships, including those between subjects and princes. Laws function, in this regard, to limit the unlimited power of sovereigns and to protect subjects. In the same vein, Buchanan argues that laws are made to protect the subject. He, ironically, poses the question that if the prince violates their rights, the law is supposed, in this case, to protect them from princes' unlimited authority. Kings are elected by their subjects to serve them and to maintain civil order. The cited excerpt summarizes Buchanan's theory of popular sovereignty and his staunch abhorrence of Reason of State theory and contemporary absolutist doctrines. The dialogue goes as follows:

B.—We also agreed that a king, for being a man of consummate virtue, was chosen as a guardian to the society.

M.—That is true.

B.—And, as the mutual quarrels of the people had introduced the necessity of creating kings, so the injuries done by kings to their subjects occasioned the desire of laws.

M.—I own it.

B.—Laws, therefore, we judged a specimen of the regal art, as the precepts of medicine are of the medical art. (Buchanan 2016, 19)

Laws, therefore, in this regard, are legitimate only when they serve their purpose, that of protecting subjects and organising civil life. A prince's duty is to provide justice among his subjects: "The first point, then, which we ascertained was, that kings were created for the

maintenance of civil society; and we established it as an axiom, that it was their duty to administer justice to every man according to the directions of the law” (Buchanan 2016, 41). The argument, hence, implies that laws derive their legitimacy from the people. Buchanan, however, does not imply it. He says:

B.—According to this representation, then, let us compare the king, the law, and the people. Hence we shall find the voice of the king and of the law to be the same. But whence is their authority derived? The king’s from the law or the law’s from the king?

M.—The king’s from the law.

B.—How do you come at that conclusion?

M.—By considering that a king is not intended for restraining the law, but the law for restraining the king; and it is from the law that a king derives his quality of royalty; since without it he would be a tyrant.

B.—The law then is paramount to the king, and serves to direct and moderate his passions and actions.

M.—That is a concession already made.

B.—Is not then the voice of the people and of the law the same?

M.—The same.

B.—Which is the more powerful, the people or the law?

M.—The whole people, I imagine. (Buchanan 2016, 67)

Buchanan’s theory of popular sovereignty can therefore be summarized in these few lines. The law derives its legitimacy from the people. It is the voice of the people and it aims at protecting them from tyranny and the unlimited authority of princes and rulers.

Having discussed Buchanan’s political theory that annihilates Reason of State altogether as illegitimate, I will be moving to discussing how the poetics of Tragedy in general intersects essentially with the politics of the state. Tragedy is political par excellence. In the next part, I will be addressing tragedy and democracy and how tragical in/action becomes the human essence of political sovereignty.

2. Tragedy and the Crisis of In/action

2.1.Hamlet and Tragical Inaction

The two terms tragedy and democracy, intersecting both though the poetic and the political, poesis and praxis, have been first invented by the Greeks who realized the importance of the two institutions in supporting each other. Greek tragedy embraces the political through its protagonist, the king. Richard Halpern comments on political action:

The plot of Greek tragedy generally embraces the political dimensions of action in a straightforward way: the tragic protagonist is also a monarch, and thus directly embodies the state. . . In the actions of tragic protagonists, the fate of the state itself is at issue, and the individual deed has political consequence. If the disastrous decisions of these sovereigns convey an implicitly democratic message, the catastrophes they entail bespeak a dignity that attaches to action only in its political reach. This is a solution that will outlast the Greeks. The fall of Shakespearean kings produces disorders that are cosmic as well as dynastic. . . Although modernist playwrights display a sometimes confounding nostalgia for the figure of the sovereign, modern tragedy in general ejects the figure of the king, substituting middle-class protagonists for royal or aristocratic ones. (Halpern 2017, 14)

Tragical action becomes problematic with the demise of the genre in its classical sense, along with that of a political economy and the emergence of political capitalism. Halpern studies in/action in *Hamlet* in relation to political economy. He sought to redefine it against “making a poesis instead? What if the counterpart to action is not doing nothing but rather making something?” (Halpern 2017, 138). Halpern offers a reading that contextualizes action in early capitalism and links it to production. Hamlet’s crisis of inaction is symptomatic of the transition to the new world order—a world order in which humans should adjust themselves to the metabolism of production and nature. He goes on analysing the crisis of inaction in Hamlet from a Marxist perspective and on Arendt’s triadic concept⁹² of work, labour, and action:

Like political economy’s concept of production, Hamlet’s thought—insofar as it is merely symptom—lacks any goal or telos. It simply churns on, producing ever new yet

⁹² In her phenomenological analysis, Arendt offers three activities of the human condition; labour that corresponds to the biological life of man as an animal; work that corresponds to the artificial world of objects that human beings build upon earth; and action that signifies our plurality as distinct individuals. Arendt’s account of the human condition shows that action is the essence of the human condition (Arendt 1958). Action becomes problematic in light of the modern age with the new economic processes and the blurry lines between private and public sectors as Halpern argues. Action in the modern world is replaced with a model of politics to avoid the unpredictability of action in the public arena (Halpern 2017).

increasingly repetitive material. In this sense, *the symptom is the characteristic thought-form of the age of political economy*—the mental counterpart to production as such. (Halpern 2017, 149)

In this part, I will be studying Hamlet's in/action from the political perspective I have been discussing in the present work, in addition to Halpern's and Arendt's concept of action.

Hamlet can be described in one word, the play of inaction. There is a critical history of the idea that Hamlet is the play of inaction including Bradley 2007, Northrop Frye 2020, Greenblatt 2013, Robertson 2023, Ryan 1989, Bloom 1998, and De Grazia 2007. Hamlet's inaction has been addressed as a reflection of his psychological and philosophical struggles, or as an attempt to explore the limitations of human knowledge and agency. Inaction has been explored from economic, religious, and universal terms. The protagonist refuses to take any action, but keeps on delaying. The hero of the play is always already delaying his revenge, producing philosophical abstractions, "words, words, words" (II. 2. 191), and brooding onstage making the play all the more problematic. The audience does not know why the hero keeps delaying and chooses inaction. Even choosing inaction is not evident for Hamlet. However, addressing the audience, Hamlet produces his longest and most famous monologue on action and the legitimacy of taking action:

To be or not to be—that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And, by opposing, end them. (III. 1. 64-68)

It may seem at first that Hamlet is philosophizing about taking action or not, that is avenging his father or not. Read in its political context, the monologue can be read otherwise. Hamlet does not interrogate the human, and, therefore, tragical, design. Rather he questions human (and tragical) action. If Hamlet's question is to take action or not, the offence to take action against is Claudius' *coup d'état* and fratricide, and the political transition that is taking place and advanced by Claudius as I have shown in the second chapter is that of reason of state, then a new hypothesis, in this sense, can be advanced. The monologue perfectly articulates the new mixture of ideologies contemporary to it. If it is nobler to suffer the tyrannies of one's time,

Hamlet chooses scepticism. If he opts for the violence, he will be opting for the more radical alternative, both political and private.

Tragical action becomes problematic in this sense. Hamlet's dramatic purpose could be to avenge his father and restore the older political order. However, the dramatic rupture offered in the play can be read otherwise. Having explained that the play falls in the crossroads of a political transition from civil reason to reason of state, along with religious, cultural, and economic fault lines, the protagonist in/action can be read as a political choice, a praxis rather to not take action by being aware of its probable futility. Hamlet shows an awareness that the older political order is not efficient. It cannot succeed in securing itself as it allows tyranny to replace it. Neither can he yield to the tyranny of the present political order of Claudius and of reason of state *per se*.

Hamlet's philosophy voices that of George Buchanan. His philosophical abstractions are radical, if not anarchical. The monologue poses one of the most important questions haunting political theory at the time, whether one should kill a tyrant or not. Hamlet's thoughts reverberate with Buchanan's answer, that it is a subject's duty to kill a tyrant. After accidentally killing Polonius, Hamlet cynically addresses Claudius by saying that Polonius is at supper:

A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but one table. That's the end. . . . A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of the worm. . . . how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar. (IV. 3. 19-31)

The royal assembly and progress become a convocation of politic worms. Hamlet's philosophical answer totally undermines the Reason of State philosophical discourse. Hamlet becomes the observer. He notices the tyranny of his times and chooses not to be part of it; neither by obeying a tyrant nor by becoming a ruler.⁹³ By showing how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar, Hamlet concludes how the king is not above his subjects. In so doing, Hamlet echoes Buchanan's thoughts onstage. In Buchanan's philosophy, "the mutual quarrels of the people had introduced the necessity of creating kings, so the injuries done by

⁹³ "Whenever a country falls into the bands of a tyrant, I think it is the duty of good citizens to try to cooperate with him and to use their influence to do good and avoid evil. Certainly it is in the interests of the city to have good men in positions of authority at all times" (Guicciardini 1965, 98).

kings to their subjects occasioned the desire for laws” (Buchanan 2016, 19) which contrary to Reason of State, make the king the servant of the people rather than their master. The king is not above the law but is subject to the law, that derives its legitimacy from the people. Similarly to Buchanan, Hamlet demystifies the royal institution. Another character in the play that contributes to the same idea is the gravedigger. The gravedigger rejoices in singing, on the periphery of the state, when ‘working’:

Song.

A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet;
O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

[Throws up another skull.] (V. 1. 87-90)

These ballads are a typical expression of the popular voice. The gravedigger sings and digs, and throws skulls, regardless of their previous state. Patterson claims that “as a professional digger, this laborer is symbolically inscribed at the heart of an egalitarianism that equated property with land, and with equal shares in the earth at the beginning and at the end” (Patterson 1989, 101). Hamlet the radical philosopher joins the world of labour of the gravediggers, who voice more radical thoughts, faux-pas, and subversive allusions. Putatively, Patterson remarks: “Radical Hamlet, the Hamlet who spoke the language of popular sports and inversion rituals, when faced with a competing popular consciousness and the upward mobility of wit, rejoins the aristocracy” (Patterson 1989, 103). The gravedigger is radically subversive and disturbing so much so that he intimidates the Radical Hamlet. He comments on the sight of skulls:

Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? . . . This fellow might be in’s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his discoveries. [Is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries,] to have his fine part full of dirt?” (V. 1. 91-100)

In the gravediggers’ world, hierarchy is dismissed, and so are “the quiddities,” “quillities,” and “statutes” of each person. The gravedigger being the monarch of this mortuary dynasty expresses a sense of pride in doing what he does, singing and digging (V. 1. 56). His imaginary

house lasts for eternity, unlike any dynasty on earth. The gravediggers are proud of their profession, their labour, or action that allows them to not only bury royalty, but also allows them to build mortuary houses that last “till doomsday” (V. 1. 56). The gravediggers declare themselves Kings of the *land*.

Hamlet’s occupation with the land should not go unnoticed. The metaphors of land and earth and property permeate the play, particularly clay, dust, womb and garden, and the *lax terrae*. The very name Hamlet derives from the Germanic word “hamme” meaning home. Denmark can no longer be perceived as one, and is a “rotten . . . state” (I. 4. 90). De Grazia puts it this way: “Amidst so many instances of the close kinship between human and humus, man and manor, titles and entitlements, dominus and domus, even the protagonist’s name begins to resonate. Hamme, as the earliest dictionaries establish, derives from the Germanic word for home. A hamlet is a cluster of homes: a kingdom in miniatures” (De Grazia 2007, 6). By tracing the name of Hamlet to “Hamme”, De Grazia draws an analogy between Hamlet and land. Indeed, Hamlet self-consciously examines this conflict of Man and Land, master and slave, and dominus and domus, *maître et maison*. The gravedigger subverts the master slave established dialectic under the new political order and makes himself king over the land, the state. He rejoices in his labour, unlike the dispossessed prince.

Class division manifests itself not only onstage but also off-stage. A radical theory of tragedy is necessarily and primarily directed to an audience. Away from rushing into the sloppy conclusion that Shakespeare views his theatre as “caviary to the general,” (II. 2. 425-6) an examination of the “general” would show how theatre was not elitist. Shakespeare’s audience was socially heterogeneous, yet the lower stratum of peasants, cobblers, artisans, and apprentices and even prostitutes, and criminals formed the majority of this heterocosm (Patterson 1989, 16). In private theatres, hierarchy, based mainly on economy, was present.

However, public theatres were different. Stephen Orgel claims in *The Illusion of Power* that “the public theater may be seen as a democratizing institution” (Orgel 1975, 8). Further, he claims that “all spectators were equal; nothing in the structure of the playhouse or the quality of the theatrical experience distinguished the lord who paid his threepence from the merchant who paid his” (Orgel 1975, 8). The audience pays a penny a day to see what aristocratic life is like, since companies used to buy attires from aristocrats for a cheap price. Theatre, at essence, violates hierarchy and order through violating the dressing codes. Therefore, it transvestites social, economic, and gender norms. The mimesis of monarchs onstage desacralizes this institution, particularly the myth of Gloriana, the prince who allegedly never errs.

An examination of the theatre as an institution can be further examined in the self-reflexive play-within-play Hamlet chooses to stage. The play is probably the only action Hamlet takes. Following Botero's advice to rulers to read history as it provides them with stories of tyrants, rulers, and their mistakes so as to avoid them, Hamlet decides to stage a play. Botero comments on theatres:

A far greater field of study is provided by the writings of those are already dead, for they cover the entire history of the world, in all its parts. History is the most pleasant theatre imaginable: for there a man learns for himself at the expense of others, there he can see shipwrecks without fear, war without danger, the customs and institutions of many nations with expense. There he learns the origins, means and ends, and the causes of the growth and downfall of empires, there he learns why some princes reign in tranquillity and others are burdened with many troubles, some flourish through the arts of peace. (Botero 2017, 37)

Botero highlights the importance of history in political life. His argument seems to be incorporated through the play-within-play and drama in general that shows the tragical fate of tyrants. History, according to Botero, is like a theatre where one can witness the rise and fall of empires, the causes of wars and conflicts, and the reasons behind the rise or fall of leaders and states.

Hamlet stages a play to hold the mirror up to princes, thereby hinting at the political genre of the mirror for princes. The self-reflexive motif of the play-within-play introduces the political subtext of early modern drama. Hamlet describes his play as the abstract and brief and chronicle of time (II. 2. 462-463) to which Claudius' conscience is unveiled. As Botero argues, there Hamlet learns of his uncle's deed, there he sees the means and ends and the downfall of an empire, the rotten state of Denmark. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* puts theatre next to the mirror-for-princes genre and becomes part of the Tragedy of State. Hamlet's delay seems to be so important in this regard. The main action that takes place in the play is Hamlet not taking any action. Exploring his philosophical reflexions in the light of the contemporary political debates, however, is very relevant. Hamlet starts and ends on the same note. It is circular; it starts in media res and its ending resists closure; or rather ends where it starts. Hadfield describes the play as "a neatly circular work, with its end and its beginning" (Hadfield 2005b, 190).

Hamlet's in/action does not result from his inability to act *per se*. It can be seen as a resistance to the immorality of reason of state and the new contemporary political discourse

that seems to infiltrate the court and undermine the traditional discourse of civil reason. The play, therefore, ends with a foreign invasion by Fortinbras, the perfect prince in Botero's theory of Reason of State. He is valiant, excellent in martial arts, and hence, the play on words "fort in bras,"⁹⁴ and scholar, who, unlike Hamlet, is neither speculative, nor melancholic. Fortinbras is not introduced as the tyrant of Reason of State theory. The play, hence, ends with the triumph of Giovanni Botero's political realism that becomes the unescapable alternative—the perpetuity of the state. However, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the play subscribes to the political realism of Reason of State and Giovanni Botero. The play "ends" openly on a pessimistic tone, or at least a tone of undecidability—like that of its protagonist. Its circularity resists a final closure. The political transition is unfinished business and so is the play.

My argument in this part is that in/action in *Hamlet* should not be read as a delay or an inability to act. Rather, it is a political alternative. On a Derridean note, in/action is a political dis/play between absence and presence. The most political act is choosing not to act. It is an interruption of all political alternatives offered to its character. The play 'closes' with its protagonist addressing the importance of storytelling, the poelitics of the Tragedy of State, that of keeping the story going. Horatio is committed to tell the history of Denmark, Hamlet, and the downfall of the state, à la Botero. Hamlet concluding that the rest is silence, choosing not to take part in the political dis/play that the play offers, gives Horatio the mission of taking the story to the rest, pointing to the intersection between drama and politics—poesis and praxis, aiming to save tragedy from its downfall with the contemporary political degeneration to reason of state. Unable to act, Hamlet blames himself as a "rogue" and "a peasant" (II. 2. 577). The blame is not directed to the protagonist's inability to act, but to a general human condition characterized by an inability to control the result of its action in the political sense, which is further consolidated by Ben Jonson. *Sejanus* opens with a similar note, that of the realization of the danger of the fable, censoring Cordus, killing him, and burning his annals.

2.1.Silius and Tragical Action

Having analysed political in/action in *Hamlet* and its significance on and off-stage, I would like to return to political action in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* in relation to the contemporary political discourse of reason of state and compare and contrast it to Shakespeare's play. The protagonist

⁹⁴ French for strong-in-arms

of the play, Sejanus, the antagonist of Hamlet, in attempting to encourage Tiberius to take immediate action against the Agrippina faction, says that “we shall misspend / The time of action” (II. 322-323). Upon his realization that his father was murdered by his uncle, Hamlet comments on the current state of disorder that “time is out of joint” and despises the idea that he has to act and “set it right” (I. 5. 210). In *Reason of State*, Botero warns of delay in political action: “When you have completed preparations for some undertaking, do not waste time before acting, for delay is likely to upset your plans. *Nocuit semper differ paratis*” (Botero 2017, 43-4). Tiberius and Sejanus show an awareness that they should strike without any further delay, which makes them the perfect Reason of State ‘sovereigns’.

To comment on the plot of the play, action, in very abstract terms, starts to take place from the very first act until the very last lines. *Sejanus* is the play of action, unlike *Hamlet*. Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* directs its attention to *praxis*. However, I would like to stress that *praxis* in this regard is *poelitical*. Political in/action is both poetic and political at the same time. The theatrical and political both intersect in action. Praxis in the play becomes highly poetical, theatrical that is. In this part, I will be showing how Ben Jonson succeeds at fusing the poetic and political in terms of action. When addressing Tiberius, Sejanus goes:

We shall misspend.
The time of action...
Acts of this close kind.
Thrive more by execution than advice:
There is no ling’ring in that work begun,
Which cannot praised be, until through done. (II. 321-327)

The proverbial note that Sejanus gives to Tiberius is from Tacitus’ *Histories* (Tacitus 1968, I. xxi). When he says “a man must not delay when inactivity is more ruinous than rash action”, the statement is very relevant in this context. It shows an awareness of the futile human condition of action. With the course of action that the two characters undertake, a *theatrical* play begins.

Sejanus does not include any play-within-play. However, Ben Jonson stages some scenes in an extremely theatrical manner, that almost become a play-within-play, similar to Hamlet’s *The Murder of Gonzago*. In dramatical terms, the play is not a very sophisticated one. However, the most theatrical scenes in the entire play are the ones of the executions. The political executions taking place in the play are what I refer to as *action*. They are political

actions that imply agency. Action in *Sejanus* is synonymous to the evil human condition and the enterprise of tragical action. It becomes futile. The political and poetic emerge in the same instance, being part of the elements of the Tragedy of State. The poetic, that is the theatrical actions onstage, fuse with the political, that is the action of killing *per se*.

I would like to start studying the scenes in which Tiberius decides to execute his political enemies. I will be starting with Silius. The latter is called to answer charges in the Senate. As I have shown in the second chapter, the play opens with Silius and other characters deploring the loss of liberties under the rule of Tiberius. Ben Jonson portrays tyranny in an Orwellian way, spreading spies all over the state/stage and making all thoughts heard, reverberating with Guicciardini's *ricordi* in which he advises subjects not to voice their thoughts under the rule of tyrants:

The tyrant will make every effort to discover your views and to know whether you are content with his government. He will observe your movements, he will pump those who talk with you, he will discuss various things with you, proposing questions and asking your opinion. If you want to hide your thoughts, you must guard yourself with great care against the means he uses. You must not use terms that might arouse suspicion; you must watch what you say even to your close friends; and you must speak and reply to him in such a way that he cannot catch you. If you always keep in mind that he is doing everything possible to ensnare you, you will succeed. (Guicciardini 2016, 115-116)

Ben Jonson represents onstage the court of Tiberius as such. When Silius is brought to the Senate, he is accused by Tiberius of treason. Having sent his spies and heard his thoughts on his government, Tiberius decides that Silius shall not live. The mechanisms in Tiberius' state, of spies, tyrants, ambition, and corruption. Evans comments:

Sejanus could easily pass for an accurate account of a modern police-state, with its ubiquitous spies and informers, where citizens are paralyzed with fear as rumors of the leader's intentions change hourly, and prominent people are imprisoned without proper trial and never seen again, and in which there abound statues or other outward signs of the omnipresence of the dictator. It is, of course, Jonson's conception of a Machiavellian state, in which government is conducted by violence and fraud. (Evans 1971, 253)

The theatrical play, that is essentially political, starts to take place. The two characters start producing political commentaries on étatism and political rule. Silius accuses Tiberius of “fraud... worse than violence” (III. 209). Silius, in his political play-within-play, accuses Tiberius of tyranny and fraud, fraud that is in using the judicial system to his advantage. However, to go further, Silius’ comments can be read as commentaries on a set of political systems, forms of governments and states, that reverberate with the contemporary political discourse of reason of state. Tiberius had been held as the epitome of the perfect ruler of reason of state theory.

A body of political literature had been propagated and his monologues and dialogues with Augustus on political rule were widely circulating in the early modern England of Ben Jonson. Tiberius, similar to Claudius, is the ruler who, besides putting a definitive end to his enemies or to any threat to *his* state, uses the judicial system, that is laws, for his benefit. Hence, he tries to legitimate his action by swearing by “The Capitol / And all our gods, but that the dear Republic, / Our sacred laws, and just authority” (III. 216-219), to which Silius replies that he is only “an enemy to the state. / Because I am an enemy to thee” (III. 234-235). Silius demands a just application of the law, that has disappeared under the tyranny of the new political system and Tiberius, and that of reason of state:

Afer: He shall have justice.

Silius: Nay, I shall have law...

I would no more;

Nor less—Might I enjoy it natural,

Not taught to speak unto your present ends,

Free from thine, his, and all your unkind handling,

Furious enforcing, most unjust presuming,

Malicious and manifold applying,

Foul wrestling, and impossible construction. (III. 221-228)

Silius’ play-within-play starts with these reflections on Tiberius’ tyranny. His political commentaries are rather directed to the audience who can relate Tiberius’ Rome to present day England, that of James I. He starts with confronting Tiberius and articulating the grand-narrative advanced by Tiberius, his laws, his presumable republic, and political actions *per se*. Silius’ remarkable use of the superlative shows his disgust from the political system, but is also most theatrical.

Silius refuses Tiberius' presumable "justice" and asks instead for law, in, again, a theatrical manner, he demands it, not the laws of tyrannical rules or reason of state politics, but the natural laws. Silius' discourse is directed to the Jacobean audience. He asks for natural laws as in civil reason. His radicalism onstage is a representation of George Buchanan political theories. A rejection of reason of state theory is articulated onstage. Instead, the stage calls for restoring natural laws and, in more general terms, the humanist and Ciceronian understanding of politics, one that is based on equity, justice, and natural laws—the laws of nature that enforce freedom and liberties. Reason of state theory leads to what one sees onstage; executions and loss of liberties, in both plays. Tiberius, the sixteenth and seventeenth century epitome of reason of state theory and sovereign to be followed, has it in his "nature to make all men slaves" (III. 309).

The play mocks the understanding of laws under reason of state theory. Silius' remark on Tiberius' narrative of justice and the law echoes with Buchanan's commentaries on laws:

And that all
This boast of law, and law, is but a form,
A net of Vulcan's filing, a mere engine,
To take that life by a pretext of justice
Which you pursue in malice. (III. 234-247)

Silius almost cites Buchanan's commentary on the law as "mere cobwebs, which entangle flies, and leave a free passage to large insects" (Buchanan 2016, 71). Becoming a free man, free from the tyranny of Tiberius and his politics, Silius voices his thoughts. A dying character onstage takes the space to comment what can be regarded as seditious and a traitor to the state (Jonson 2007, III. 189) and an insolence (III. 248) to the state. Following Tacitus' *Annals*, Ben Jonson makes Silius anticipate his own death and stabs himself (IV. Xix). Before doing so, he comments:

All that can happen in humanity,
The frown of Caesar, proud Sejanus' hatred,
Base Varro's spleen, and Afer's bloodying tongue,
The Senate's servile flattery, and these
Mustered to kill, I'm fortified against,
And can look down upon: they are beneath me.

It is not life whereof I stand enamoured;
Nor shall my end make me accuse my fate.
The coward and valiant men must fall;
Only the cause, and manner how, discerns them,
Which then are gladdest, when they cost us dearest.
Romans, if any here be in this Senate,
Would know to mock Tiberius' tyranny,
Look upon Silius, and so learn to die. (III. 326-338)

Unlike Hamlet who cannot act *on concrete terms*, reason of state theory necessitates someone to act, politically and poetically as well. Silius presents himself as a true Roman, an antique Roman, who dies of the state's tyranny. However, Silius' death, though voluntary, is similar to Hamlet's. Both advance their deaths as a story to be told, making the political and poetic intersect one more time. The play can be read as a warning against tyranny. However, it can be seen as more than that. Silius' abstract comments on laws and legal systems suggest that the play advances itself as a political manifesto advocating against reason of state.

3. Reason of State and Neo-stoicism

In this part, I will be addressing neo-stoicism through the two characters of Hamlet and Silius. I will be problematizing the issue further in light of in/action in the Tragedy of State. Seneca's stoicism was influential in early modern political philosophy along with the revival of Tacitus. The political world has been influenced by the two Roman figures that were brought onstage. They were relevant in relation to absolutism and the preoccupying question of the era whether or not to accept absolutism (and tyranny) and, in other words, its relevance in relation to (tragic) action. Salmon comments on their relevance saying:

The present endeavor to explain the significance of the vogue for Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England argues that the moral philosophy of the first, and the history of the Roman principate composed by the second, were as parts of a single ethical and political movement that colored contemporary perception of the Jacobean court. Modern commentaries on Senecan and Tacitean influence in this period have treated each other

separately, Seneca in terms of literary allusions and Tacitus in term historiography and, to a lesser extent, of political ideas. (Salmon 1989, 199)

Stoicism, similarly to Tacitism, has been appropriated onstage to experiment with the condition of action. Silius' and Hamlet's death belong to a literary representation of the early modern neo-stoicism. Generally, the stoic hero is the saviour of the community. He appears and acts according to the dictates of his conscience. It would be interesting, however, to provide a re-reading of stoicism in light of the new philosophical discourse of reason of state. Upon his death, Hamlet addresses Horatio:

O, I die, Horatio!
The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England.
But I do prophesy th' election lights
On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th' occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited—the rest is silence. (V. 2. 389-395)

Hamlet insists on having a posthumous voice. The death scene shows an unvoluntarily triumph of the Reason of State politics, which implies the realization that a new political order is emerging leading to the modern state of the eighteenth century. The rise of Reason of State is denounced via the death of the characters who may be seen as a representation of a dying past order. Silius, on the other hand, asks Romans in the Senate, to behold his death as a political lesson. The two heroes offer their lives, voluntarily or not, to the state. The question to pose, in this regard, is whether one can speak of a stoic hero in light of the new philosophy of reason of state and the death of tragedy altogether. Stoicism can be defined as:

Stoicism, in its ethical dimension, can be characterized as a philosophy that believes that: (a) the 'soul' of the Universe is rational and benevolent; (b) absolute moral truth exists; (c) truth is available through common sense; and (d) life is fully realized through obedience to the (unwritten) moral law. (Casellas 2004, 94)

What I would like to stress is that stoicism in general terms cannot coexist with reason of state theory. Stoicism, unlike the latter, is based on the conception of natural laws. Roman stoicism,

revived in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England and continental Europe, is based on the notion of the individual as responsible for the community and the entire cosmic plan. The individual, that is the subject, is central to stoicism, unlike reason of state theory. Its revival has its source chiefly from Cicero's *De Officiis* and *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* which "spread the notion of the good man as a public servant, or, in other words, turned self-sufficiency into self-sacrifice, a transformation of the utmost relevance" (Casellas 2004, 97). Stoicism requires the hero to take action that aligns with the common good, in the Ciceronian sense of the word, of the civil society that allows him/her to live in harmony. The task of the legal subject within the new philosophical discourse becomes problematic. As portrayed in the plays, the two antique characters, Hamlet and Silius, and even Horatio and the rest of the Agrippina faction, do not succeed in either realizing their political goals, or in attaining harmony. The plays as I have argued open with a tense sense of political discord and end on the same note. According to stoicism:

The law of nature demands that we do our duty... and that all our direct actions be in accordance with the hierarchical system (that is, the status quo) and reason. The law of nature, then, embodies the same attitude as our previous topic (it could not be otherwise) although with a technique, now, of active cooperation. This implies a life of social activity, and this is promoted by Aristotle and, above all, Cicero. Finally, the wise man is the one who lives according to the law of nature and acquires, thus, peace of mind on Earth. To do this, he has to be virtuous (in the Stoic sense of resignation and integration within the system) and plain (or 'stoic', in the modern sense of the word). (Casellas 2004, 98)

Hamlet and Silius fail in their tragical role—in the poetic/theatrical sense, that is as the two stoic heroes who are offered as scapegoats for the community, and in their political roles. In the new Tragedy of State, it is no longer possible to speak of the (stoic) hero. The Tragedy of State, as well as the new versions of étatisme, killed the subject. Under reason of state theory, the subject fails to be one. Subjectivity is lost. Étatisme as such leads not only to the more concrete loss of liberties that is deplored in the two plays, but, further, to the death of the subject. The Tragedy of State, being in crisis, political that is, kills its subject before its ultimate death. The Tragedy of State is the new *Leviathan*, *avant la lettre*, or a criticism of one.

What I wanted to emphasize in this part is the crisis of action in the Tragedy of State. The moment Hamlet takes action (even involuntarily), he dies onstage, signalling the end of the

Tragedy, that has already been showing symptoms of its demise from the very beginning. Action in *Sejanus* is futile. The neo-stoic representation of characters is caricatured. A stoic protagonist is no longer possible in light of the political and economic transition of the world order. It was still incomprehensible and ungraspable. The Tragedy however succeeded in portraying the transition. Classical tragedy as such has died paving the way to new poelitics that can be in harmony with the new political order. The new poelitics include the tragedy of the common people.

CHAPTER V: Poelitics of the Tragedy of State

The cover book of Hobbes' *Leviathan*⁹⁵ shows a portrait of the body politic that includes the subjects presided by the king's head. Referring to the collective political identity of a society, the concept was a way of conceptualizing the relationship between the state and its subjects. During the early modern era, the concept was closely tied to the rise of absolute monarchy, generally as theorized in Reason of State theory, and the idea of the state as a sovereign entity with the power to regulate and control. In this view, the body politic was seen as a hierarchical structure in which the monarch, as the head of state, held absolute authority over all individuals and groups within the society. Reason of State theorists celebrated the body politic, including Bodin who argued that the body politic was a natural and necessary entity, and that the king or monarch was the embodiment of the state, representing its power and authority (Bodin 1580). Later, Hobbes developed the theory into the social contract between individuals and the state, in which citizens ceded their individual liberties and rights in exchange for protection and security provided by the state.

In a similar way to theatre, and particularly *Hamlet* and *Sejanus*, the frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan* chronicles the body politic in the poelitical sense. Hobbes developed the representational logic of the state and étatism adjacent to the theories of early modern political thinkers of the state and Reason of State. Or, one can say that the theory of étatism of Hobbes came as a continuation of Reason of State theories. His political treatise, *Leviathan*, is a seminal work that revolutionized political philosophy in the early modern era. The cover of *Leviathan* depicts what is known as the body politic, a metaphorical representation of the state as a unified body, with the king's head symbolizing its sovereignty, power, and authority. This image encapsulates Hobbes's theory of the state, which emphasizes the importance of the monarch in maintaining social order and stability. Hobbes's ideas of étatism and forms and types of states and their relationship to subjects were heavily influenced by the political thinkers of his time, particularly those who developed theories of Reason of State. Further, Hobbes argued that the only way to prevent social chaos, anarchy, and violence was to establish a strong and centralized state, with an absolute monarch as its head, arguing hence, for monarchy and authoritarian rule as the best form of state and government. His conception of the state as a unified body, with the

⁹⁵ Most editions use the emblematic representation of the state on the cover including Oxford UP and Penguin Classics. However, the edition I am using is the Cambridge edition (1966). For critical analyses of Hobbes's *Leviathan* frontispiece see Skinner 2002b, Pettit 2012, and Snyder 1999.

king as its head, finally introduced a total departure from the Ciceronian political ideas that still had residues during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century politics that emphasized the importance of individual rights, equity, and freedoms. Hobbes believed that subjects were naturally inclined towards conflict and aggression, and that only a strong and centralized state could prevent them from descending into a state of “war of all against all” (Hobbes 1996, 186). In *Leviathan*, he famously argued that life in a state of nature was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,” (Hobbes 1996, 77) and that the only way to escape this condition was to surrender individual rights and freedoms to the state. Hobbes’s theory of the state was deeply influential in the development of modern political philosophy. His emphasis on the need for a strong and centralized state continues to be a key feature of modern political theory, particularly in discussions of authoritarianism and democracy.⁹⁶ However, his theory has also been subject to criticism from contemporaries,⁹⁷ particularly for its emphasis on the absolute authority of the monarch and its neglect of individual rights and freedoms.

Despite the enduring influence of Hobbes’s emphasis on a strong and centralized state, his theory is still subject to significant criticism. Pateman argues that Hobbes’s theory of the social contract is based on a patriarchal model that subordinates women and neglects individual rights and freedoms (Pateman 1988). Rawls, similarly, critiques Hobbes’s emphasis on the absolute authority of the monarch, arguing that it is incompatible with a just society that values individual rights and freedoms (Rawls 1971). Finally, Berlin emphasizes the importance of balancing the need for a strong state with the need to protect individual liberties, arguing that Hobbes’s theory neglects this important balance. Together, these critiques suggest that while Hobbes’ emphasis on a strong and centralized state has been influential, it has also been subject to significant criticism for its neglect of individual rights and freedoms (Berlin 1969).

Hobbes’s theory of étatism, or the continuation of a Reason of State theory, was still denounced by contemporaries. Vindicating the unlimited power of the state and the subjugation of the citizens, contemporaries of Hobbes still could not accept the unethical framework advanced by his theory and by the prior discourse of Reason of State.

⁹⁶ See Arendt Lijphart (1999), Fukuyama (2015), and Ronald Beiner (2014). In his book, Lijphart discusses the importance of a strong state in maintaining a stable democracy, citing Hobbes’s ideas as an important precursor to modern democratic theory. Similarly, Fukuyama explores the relationship between political order and democracy, arguing that a strong state is essential for the development of a stable democracy. He cites Hobbes as one of the earliest and most influential proponents of this idea. In his introductory text, Beiner discusses Hobbes’s emphasis on the need for a strong and centralized state in the context of modern debates about authoritarianism and democracy. He argues that Hobbes’s ideas continue to be relevant in contemporary political theory.

⁹⁷ Many contemporary philosophers rejected Hobbes’s theories including John Locke, Robert Filmer, and Blaise Pascal.

The Reason of State theory and Hobbes's social contract theory both emphasize the need for a strong and centralized state. The Reason of State theory prioritizes the state's (that is the prince's) self-interest and security, even if it means violating moral and legal rights of the subjects. This theory emphasizes the concept of the body politic, as it highlights the need for a strong and centralized state that can ensure the well-being and stability of the whole.

The emblematic representational logic of the state as such, however, can be traced prior to Hobbes' *Leviathan*. The Tragedy of the State offers such an emblem of the state. However, as I will be showing in this part, the Tragedy of State portrays a dismemberment of the body politic, of this Leviathan. I will discuss the latter idea in the two plays under study and will address the meaning behind the dismembering the body politic and its political significance in the two plays.

In this chapter, I will be moving to the final acts of the two plays. An inherent structure of the Tragedy of State can be outlined. The two plays end with the dismemberment of the body politic in a very theatrical and poetic sense as I will be showing in this chapter. The demise of the Tragedy of State, that is early modern tragedy of the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth centuries, dies with the older political order. This chapter, hence, will be devoted to the dismemberment of the body politic and poetic 'body', that is death of the tragedy. The final chapter will, also, be a synthesis of the *poelitics of the Tragedy of State* that has long been dismissed in the literary scholarship. I will also attempt to answer various questions: What does the dismemberment of the body politic suggest? What does it imply in the political context of the plays? Finally, what is its *poelitical* significance?

1. Anatomy of the State in Hamlet: The Horror, the Horror!

Hamlet portrays the emerging political Leviathan as a "prison" (II. 2. 270). When reading the play, two metaphors permeate the play, that of the land and the womb. The anatomies of the state as represented as poisoned, rotten, and incestuous. The public and private space intersect. The sheets of Denmark (I. 2. 162) become incestuous with Claudius and Gertrude's marriage. As I have argued in the opening chapter, the play opens with the ghost of the dead king on the peripheries of the state, that is the fortress. The ghost warns Hamlet of the incestuous beast Claudius (I. 5. 49) and ends on the same note. In his first appearance onstage and in the state, the ghost warns Hamlet:

O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damnèd incest. (I. 5. 87-90)

In the play, the state is depicted as a Leviathan, along with the metaphors of the land and the womb that permeate the play (III. 2. 390) to refer to the larger political theme of Reason of State. The play offers a portrayal of the political anatomy of the state so as to dissect it towards the end as I will be showing. The body politic is often associated with the idea of a ‘mother’ or ‘womb’ that nurtures and protects its subjects. Bodin uses the metaphor saying:

The mother of peace and friendship is equality, which is nothing other than natural equity, distributing resources to each of the subjects, to the best of their ability; of which equality even thieves and robbers cannot do without, if they wish to live together (Bodin 1580, 212)⁹⁸

Commenting on the anatomy of the state, Francis Bacon, in his essay *Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates* (1605), writes that “the state resembleth the person of a man: for as the person of a man hath his work and his rest, his waking and his sleeping, his times of pleasure and his times of labour, and the like; so also hath the state” (Bacon 1905, 199). Similarly, in *Coriolanus*, Volumnia, the mother of Coriolanus, delivers a speech in which she compares herself to the “womb” that gave birth to her son and nurtured him, and the city of Rome to a “mother” that nourished and protected him (I.III.100-114). The early modern state of course was patriarchal in the sense that it subordinates not only the subjects but also the female body in the political sense. Gertrude, through the womb metaphor, has been used only as a tool for political power. By espousing her, Claudius espoused the state. His sovereignty becomes, therefore, limitless. Kantorowicz claims:

Medieval political theory conceived of the king’s two bodies in order to explain the paradox of a king’s mortal, physical body and his immortal, political one. [...] The king’s physical body was subject to the same natural laws and mortal fate as any other man,

⁹⁸ “La mère nourrice de paix et amitié est l’égalité, qui n’est autre chose que l’équité naturelle, distribuant les loyers, les états, les honneurs, et les choses communes à chacun des sujets, au mieux que faire se peut ; de laquelle égalité, les voleurs même et brigands ne sauraient se passer, s’ils veulent vivre ensemble”

but his political body transcended these limitations, as it was seen as a symbolic extension of his divine authority. This idea of the king's two bodies extended to the body politic, which was viewed as a nurturing mother who gave birth to and sustained her subjects. (Kantorowicz 1997, 8-9)

The idea of the womb as the body politic that is meant to protect its subjects is represented in a differently in the play. With its self-enclosed and claustrophobic aspects, the state, represented via the womb that is supposed to be nurturing and protective, becomes rather a prison for its subjects. The womb that the play portrays is poisoned by the corrupted politics of the emerging politics of Reason of State.

The private/domestic space is, hence, penetrated by the public/political. In *Hamlet*, the division between public and private is blurred, even non-existent. The state of Denmark has been poisoned by the incestuous marriage. Dismemberment of the body politic as such starts in the sheets of the royal bed of the state to the most political and private space. In fact, the royal sheets of Denmark, that is the most private space in the play, becomes the most political space in the state/stage. The corruption in the state of Denmark brought by the new political order is embodied in the violation/penetration of the womb—the feminine space that is supposed to protect its subjects. This transformation is linked to the penetration of the private space by the public sphere, as the political corruption infects and destroys the domestic realm, leading to the disintegration of the body politic.

From the very beginning of the play, Marcellus notes that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (I. 4. 90). Hamlet, also, remarks that Denmark is an “unweeded garden” (I. 2. 135). The “incestuous sheets” of Denmark are underscored (I. 2. 157). The incestuous sheets, in other words Gertrude's marriage, poison the family that stands as a microcosm to the commonwealth. Her incestuous marriage, causing her garden, that is womb and consequently the state, to become “unweeded” and “rotten,” stands as an obstacle to the *lex terrae*, land law. *Lex terrae* is the Latin equivalent to common law but *terrae* can also designate earth/land. According to this law, Hamlet is next to the throne as in primogeniture law. On a different note, Hamlet's delay and refusal to act can be read as a reflection of the larger political corruption that infects the family, specifically, and the state and political affairs in general. Furthermore, Hamlet's obsession with his mother's sexual relationship with Claudius and his desire to avenge his father's murder are also linked to the metaphor of the womb. Hamlet's struggle to come to terms with his mother's betrayal of his father and her complicity with Claudius reflects the larger struggle of the state to reconcile with the violation of the maternal role of the body politic.

In this regard, the metaphor of the womb and the body politic in Hamlet illustrates the complex relationship between the public and private spheres in early modern political thought. The violation of the womb not only represents the corruption of the state by the new Reason of State theory, but also the blurring of boundaries between public and private space, and the resulting destruction of both, that leads to the dismemberment of the body politic.

The reverberations between land and womb are unlikely to be a mere coincidence. Hamlet, before going to his mother's closet, a quintessentially private space, says that he "will speak daggers to her, but use none" (III. 2. 390). In the first folio, when entering this private space, Hamlet puns on the word mother by screaming the Latin word "mater," that is translated to womb, three times, and the F stage directions call for shouts from "within" (De Grazia 2007, 103). Hamlet alludes to "Nero's notorious desire to see his mother Agrippina's womb," who adds that the "mention of daggers in the context of Nero and his mother recalls accounts in which the emperor, whose stepfather was also named Claudius, after committing incest with his mother, had her killed and her body opened so that he might see the womb that bore him" (De Grazia 2007, 103). Hamlet seeks to purge the public land being poisoned and rotten, and the private garden being degenerate and unweeded. He fails. They all die.

Hamlet's occupation with the land is underscored in the play, the land of Denmark, that starts in Gertrude's womb and extends to the most public space. The metaphors of land and earth and property permeate the play, particularly clay, dust, womb and garden, and the *lax terrae*. The very name Hamlet derives from the Germanic word "hamme" meaning home, as I showed in the previous chapter. The reference to Hamlet, in the political sense of the word, that is as in states and civil societies and communities circulates in contemporary political theory. Jean Bodin remarks on hamlets and states:

The origin of all corporate associations and guilds is rooted in the family. As the principal stem put forth branches, so it was necessary to found separate households, hamlets, and villages, so that the family spread over a whole neighbourhood. But with the increase in numbers, it became no longer possible for them all to inhabit and find sustenance in a single place, and they were compelled to spread abroad. Gradually the villages grew into towns, each with its separate interests and distinct locality. As these communities were originally without laws, without magistrates, and without sovereign rulers, quarrels easily arose over such things as ownership of some spring or well. (Bodin 1955, 97-98)

At this point, it could not be denied that the play's occupation with the land, womb, and states is not a mere coincidence. Both Hamlet and the ghost offer an understanding of the state as one based on the individual. Hamlet stands for the older order of 'states', hamlets that is, the golden age of civil communities or probably the popular sovereignty advanced by George Buchanan. The etymology of the play's protagonist's name points to a civil order governed by equity and justice. In this regard, *Tragedy of State* can be read as an interregnum, a yearning for a utopia that birthed itself before the final political transition to the modern state. However, it is important to note that the play does not offer any naïve political order as an alternative. It succumbs to the political realism that will come after Botero. It foresees the looming Contractarianism that will lead to the formation of the modern state. Hence, the state in the *Tragedy of State* is portrayed as the Leviathan that will definitely put an end to the humanist Christian political framework and civil reason. With the dismemberment of the body politic, the *Tragedy of State* also sees its own demise, and hence the political order comes to an end with a new one.

The body politic relies, as Bodin argues, on the individual, subject. As the state erases the subject, the body politic is dismembered by the end of the play. The anatomy of the state, as offered in the *Tragedy of State*, relies on the subject rather than the prince. It struggles to bring the subject to the fore paving the way, hence, to the modernist tragedies of later centuries. The *Tragedy of State* dies with the death of the subject. The political and poetic intertwine, as well as the public and private. Being based on the erosion of the agency of the subject, undermining it as futile, and erasing the principles of the older political framework, the *Tragedy of State* portrays the death of *the* subject onstage in the context of the new political order. Reason of the State, therefore, terminates the subject of the tragedy. *Tragedy of State* shows, henceforth, its own demise onstage—a political demise, via the dismemberment of the body politic.

The play voices the political thought of George Buchanan in that it defends popular sovereignty and hence the appearance of the gravediggers in the play and their radical claim that it is them who actually owns the land. The populist voice of the gravedigger outwits that of Hamlet who throughout the play manages to beat every other character with his linguistic bravado. Hamlet comments on the sight of skulls:

Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? . . . This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his discoveries.

[Is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries,] to have his fine part full of dirt?" (V. 1. 91-100)

The gravedigger being the monarch of this mortuary dynasty expresses, in performing his labour, singing and digging (V. 1. 56). His imaginary house lasts for eternity, unlike any dynasty on earth. The Tragedy of State foresees not only the political but also economic transition that is about to take place. It foresees the shift in the world order.

The imagery of skulls remains a topic of interest in the scholarly study of *Hamlet* but is rarely contextualized in the political discourse of the state. Paul Gottschalk argues that the imagery of skulls represents a reminder for Hamlet of mortality and allows him to transcend revenge (Gottschalk 1973, 162). The gravedigger scene, however, is read as a subversive commentary on traditional ideas of death and decay (Conn Liebler 2002).

The graveyard becomes an expression of class division in the play. Class-consciousness, or almost, can be metaphorically related to the land. Margreta de Grazia, in "*Hamlet*" without *Hamlet*, observes that "[t]he graveyard here turns from the object of quiet meditation to the site and cause of an outrageous skirmish. . . . The graveyard would seem an odd setting for the voicing of class antagonism. Death is, after all, the Great Leveler, felling high and low alike with its scythe, eliminating social inequalities among 'even Christians'" (De Grazia 2007, 130). Therefore, accordingly, death is the equalizer. Likewise, Patterson claims that "as a professional digger, this laborer is symbolically inscribed at the heart of an egalitarianism that equated property with land, and with equal shares in the earth at the beginning and at the end" (Patterson 1989, 101). This argument that permeates the whole play reverberates with a famous commentary on (the theory of) stage in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The play shows an egalitarian land, via its stage, that fosters equality, equity, and justice. It goes as follows:

All the world is a stage,
And all men and women merely players;
They have their exits and entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages...
Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans every thing. (II. 7. 138-65)

Tragedy of State, therefore, fuses the poetic and political into what I like to call poelitical. The microcosmic representation of the state has been shown as poisoned, incestuous, and rotten. Gertrude's womb, the most private space in the play that has been conquered by the public and the political, is shown to be poisoned, represented, therefore, as the nucleus of the state which is rotten and unweeded. The body politic, in more concrete terms, has been depicted as poisoned from the beginning of the play. The state's anatomy has been conquered by illness, a political degeneration in other words. The idea of the state represented as such circulated in the political theories contemporary to the play. Burke comments:

As for false reason of state, it was agreed that this was something the ruler needed to know about, just as the physician needs to know about poisons. Variations on this medical metaphor recur frequently in this literature. (It may not have been only a metaphor: some of the works on reason of state were actually written by physicians.) The state, or 'body politic' is described as being subject to 'illness', so that the ruler or minister has to be able to interpret pathological symptoms, just like a good physician... The physician of the state needs to be able to guide his patient through its various 'crises'; 'crisis' was still an essentially medical term at this period, and referred to the turning point in an illness, when the fate of the patient was decided. (Burke 2008, 482)

And,

Cavriana is one of the authors whose work suggests that modern historians should not be too quick to dismiss the idea of the body politic as mere metaphor. A physician by profession, Cavriana had a particular admiration for two ancient writers, Tacitus and Hippocrates, and he considered that they had much in common... He believed that "illnesses affect states as they do human bodies, but they can be cured by wise statesmen in the same way that skilled physicians cure bodily ills"... As Hippocrates taught medicine by means of aphorisms, so Cavriana taught politics, or rather, allowed Tacitus to do the teaching, by extracting aphorisms from his narrative. (Burke 2008, 486)

The state has been represented as plagued by an 'ill' from the very opening scenes of the play, a dying one rather, and ends on the same note. It is, as I have argued, circular. The state finally eats itself and everyone within. However, what remains is the tragedy *per se*. A history of the tragical history of Denmark, or in more general terms *étatisme*, is what remains. *Hamlet*, and Tragedy of State, is *the* early modern Leviathan, one that denounces the tyrannies of the emerging political *body* and refuses to succumb to new poetics. The dismemberment of the body politic in *Hamlet* is represented in the literal deaths of all the characters onstage in the last

act. The collective deaths that took place embody the dismemberment of the body politic and the failure, or refusal, of the immorality of a new emerging political theory, that of the Reason of State. The anatomy of the state as such is, hence, dissected. Claudius, the head of the state as in body politic theory, is finished onstage by Hamlet, signifying, therefore, the total rejection of the new political order advanced by Reason of State.

The dismemberment of the body politic in *Hamlet* is reflected in the deaths of the main characters in the final act. The death of the King, the Queen, Hamlet, and Laertes can be interpreted as the fragmentation and destruction of the new and illegitimate political order in Denmark. The play suggests that the political structure as such is corrupted. The death of all the characters merely signals its final collapse. The dismemberment of the body politic, therefore, is a metaphorical representation of the fragmentation and illegitimacy of the new political order. Moreover, the on-stage deaths of the characters underscore the idea that this kind of new body politic has disastrous effects on the subjects in that it erases and suppresses the subjects. After the killbillesque scene onstage, Hamlet reminds us that the “rest is silence” (V. II. 395). The silence articulated onstage does not convey a closure—neither poetic, nor political. The silence signals a pessimistic and almost nihilistic absence of alternative and the realization that the older order is dead and a new one is born, despite the death of the current sovereign. Peter Stallybrass comments on the dismemberment of the body politic in the *Tragedy of State*: “The body of the monarch and the body of the state were both sites of anxiety and desire, of fear and pleasure. These two bodies were not separate, but rather intersected and interacted in complex ways. When the monarch was represented as being diseased, the body politic was also diseased” (Stallybrass 1986, 15). Peter Stallybrass underscores the intimate connection between the monarch and the body politic in early modern political discourse.

The political marriage with Gertrude, being incestuous, transcends the private sphere to poison the public space, the state. Sexual politics contribute to the state of crisis in the play and directly, being part of a corrupted politics, leads to the dismemberment of the body politic. In Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*, the dismemberment of the body politic is more explicit and dramatic. The final act ends on the same note, that of the dismemberment of the body politic.

2. Anatomy of the State in *Sejanus*: A Great and Monstruous Serpent

In this part, I will be similarly dealing with the final act of *Sejanus*. The final act depicts dismemberment of the body politic, yet in a more brutal and violent way than Shakespeare’s

Hamlet. The fifth act of the play offers a literal depiction of the dismemberment of the body politic through Sejanus' head being torn off by the subjects of Rome. The metaphorical depiction of the dissection of the head of state shows, similarly to *Hamlet*, an interest in the anatomy of the state that has been plagued by the poison of ambition and tyranny.

In the final act of *Sejanus*, the play depicts a literal and violent dismemberment of the body politic. This dismemberment is portrayed through the gruesome scene of Sejanus' head being torn off by the people. The scene is a metaphorical depiction of the anatomy of the state that has been poisoned by the ambition and tyranny of Sejanus and other courtiers. The portrayal of the dissection of the head of state highlights the idea that the body politic is a fragile and vulnerable entity, susceptible to corruption and destruction, contrary to what the religious and political narrative of the body politic advances. The violence emphasizes the severity of the decadence of the new political order. The entire political body of Rome is diseased and plagued to the extent that it saw its own demise despite its utter control and tight grip over the subjects.

Having hewn all his enemies and any potential threat to his rise to power, Sejanus is still confident about his plan. All threats have been exterminated, Drusus/Castor, Livia, Silius, Sabinus, Cordus, Sosia, Claudia Pulchra, Furnius, and Gallus. Sejanus is now close to realizing his plan of ascending to power. However, he starts to fear his fall as the omens start taking place. In a political act of power pomp, Sejanus orders establishing his statue at Pompey's theatre in a very symbolic manner. Power has been established. Sejanus thinks his plan has been successful. However, Tiberius, having realized his plea, orders his execution for treason. The last act of the play describes Sejanus' fall.

The consequences of Sejanus' ambitions are acted onstage. The dismemberment of the body politic in this play is depicted through the violent and literal dissection of Sejanus' head, symbolizing the destruction of his corrupt and ambitious hold on Rome. Whether the play serves as a warning against the dangers of unchecked ambition and the abuse of power in politics or not is not the point. It becomes more urgent to read the play in light of the emerging political order of Reason of State and what the dismemberment of the body politic in the Tragedy of State signifies. Similarly to *Hamlet*, yet in more brutal terms, the play ends on killbillesque terms, killing all its characters by the end, resulting in a political void, anarchy, and the disintegration of social order. *Sejanus* does not merely underscore tyranny. It portrays a larger emerging political order that can be based on tyranny as shown in the third chapter.

The audience sees the dismemberment of the body politic, through Sejanus' statue. The statue does not uniquely refer to the body politic of Sejanus *per se*. The fall of the statue is a representation of the fall of an 'unethical' political order, be it that of Tiberius or that of Sejanus

that he never succeeded to establish. Before his fall, Sejanus enters the stage in the last act saying triumphantly:

Swell, swell, my joys, and faint not to declare
Yourselves as ample as your causes.
I did not live till now, this is my first hour,
Wherein I see my thoughts reached by my power.
But this, and gripe my wishes, Great, and high,
The world knows only two, that's Rome and I. (V. 1-6)

This quote by Sejanus in the final act of the play reveals his arrogance and overconfidence in his power. Sejanus expresses his joy and satisfaction, indicating that he has achieved his goals and that his ambition to rise to power has been fulfilled. He emphasizes his belief that his power and influence have surpassed all others, even Rome itself. Sejanus' reference to Rome and himself as the only two great and powerful entities underscores his delusions of grandeur, highlighting his belief that he has reached a level of power beyond that of the state. However, Sejanus' downfall soon follows, revealing the fragility of his power, or in other words, the delusional body politic. The audience sees that Sejanus' triumph will be short-lived.

The idea of the body politic as a metaphorical representation of the state did not exist in Sejanus' Rome as it did in early modern Europe. However, the play emphasizes the concept through its historical context. The play takes place during the reign of Tiberius and portrays the disintegration of the Roman state due to the corruption of the politics of Reason of State. While the metaphor of the body politic did not exist in Sejanus' Rome, the play draws on the language and imagery of ancient Rome to create an analogy Rome and James I's England. This is seen in the way Sejanus is depicted as a cancer or disease that infects the body politic.

James I was a proponent of the theory of the body politic with his "Divine Rights of Kings" theory, which viewed the monarch as the head of the political and social body composed of all the subjects of the realm. According to this theory, just as the head is the most important part of the human body and directs its actions, so too the monarch is the most important member of society and directs the actions of the state. James I's theory of the body politic was intended to reinforce the idea of absolute monarchy, which was increasingly under attack in the early

modern period.⁹⁹ In the play, the emphasis on the dismemberment of the body politic can be seen as a critique of James I's theory of the body politic. At the time of James I, England was consolidating its power and establishing itself as a force in the global and continental order of states. James I was a strong advocate of the divine right of kings, which held that the monarch was appointed by God and was therefore entitled to absolute power.¹⁰⁰ James I saw religious unity as an essential element of state formation. He sought to unify the country by consolidating the centrality and legitimacy of the Church of England.¹⁰¹

The hero of the play reaches higher only to fall the farther as Arruntius says "You will say / It is to make his fall more steep and grievous? / It may be so" (V. 441-443). Unlike Claudius, Sejanus does not succeed in marrying Livia. Therefore, he almost reaches power but sees his own fall shortly. Sejanus, unlike Claudius, does not succeed in securing his state. He comments ironically in his monologue that it is "place / Not blood, discerns the noble and the base" (V. 11-12). The hero's fall is both unexpected and brutal. The whole play chronicles his plans to get a grip of the empire and when he finally reaches power, his fall gets announced at the very last act of the play, in the very last lines. However, what is even more intriguing in Sejanus' fall is the mob's anger manifested in the streets before his actual fall:

Terentius: I meet it violent in the people's mouths,
Who run, in routs to Pompey's theatre
To view your statue, which, they say, sends forth
A smoke from a furnace, black and dreadful. (V. 28-30)

And,

The head, my lord, already is ta'en off,
I saw it; and, at op'ning, there leapt out
A great and monstrous serpent. (V. 35-37)

Then Natta goes,

May it please

⁹⁹ In early modern England, the theory of the divine rights of kings was challenged by various groups, including the Puritans, Parliamentarians, and humanist scholars. Puritans argued that the king's authority was subject to the laws of God and that his power should be limited by the church and parliament. Parliamentarians believed that the king's power should be balanced by the power of parliament and that the monarch should be accountable to the people. Humanist scholars, including Machiavelli (Machiavelli [1531] 2008), questioned the idea of the divine right of kings on the basis of reason and natural law.

¹⁰⁰ See Sharpe 2017,

¹⁰¹ See Patterson 2000, Doran 1996, and Charles 2019 that discusses James I's efforts to promote religious unity and how he sought to promote conformity through the enforcement of religious laws and the suppression of dissenting groups.

The most divine Sejanus, in my days—
And by his sacred fortune I affirm it—
I have not seen a more extended, grown,
Foul, spotted, venomous, ugly— (V. 42-44)

These dialogues highlight the ominous and foreboding atmosphere surrounding the dismemberment of the body politic. The first quote shows the fear and anxiety from the power the subjects summoned as they gather to destroy Sejanus' statue, which they believe emits smoke from a furnace. This fear is further emphasized in the second excerpt, where the sight of a monstrous serpent emerging from Sejanus' severed head serves as a grotesque and terrifying reminder of the corrupt political affairs. The final words of Natta further underscore the horror of the dismemberment of the statue and the political power held at hands of the sovereigns, as he describes the body politic as being "foul, spotted, venomous, ugly". Power transforming to the hands of the subjects, the Roman mob, is threatening, violent, and anarchical. It shows the vulnerability of the political power and structure of the state. The violence of the mob reflects that of the state and its corrupt politics.

The ominous events already start to take place before Macro announces Sejanus' fall. The play, only towards the end, starts to portray the poisonous and poisoned body politic. The audience, in this regard, sees one more time, similarly to *Hamlet*, how the body politic dismembers itself. The same anatomical representation of the state is offered in *Sejanus*. The mob dismembers Sejanus' body after hearing of his fall. They rejoice in his tragedy:

Minutius tells us here, my lord,
That, a new head being set upon your statue,
A rope is since found weathed about it; and,
But now, a fiery meteor, in the form,
Of a great ball, was seen to roll along
The troubled air, where yet it hangs, unperfect,
The amazing'wonder of the multitude! (V. 215-221)

The dismemberment of the body politic is depicted through the use of supernatural omens and portents. The hanging rope around the Sejanus' head symbolizes the people's dissatisfaction and resentment towards him, which threatens to topple him from his position of power. The violence does only imply the mob's hate towards Sejanus, but also a hatred and a rejection of

the politics of Reason of State. The fiery meteor seen rolling along the troubled air reflects the unrest and chaos that Sejanus' rule has brought to Rome. Therefore, the mob's reactions to these omens and their violent reaction to political affairs reveal their belief in the interconnectedness of the state, the ruler, and the subjects, contrary to the iconographical representation of the body politic of the ruler/king as the head of the political body. Power in the hands of the ruler is not 'real'. The dismemberment of the power politic in the two plays shows that power in the hands of the ruler, à la Buchanan, is only futile and can be defeated by the will of the subjects. Similarly to the tyranny and corruption of political rulers, subjects too can exercise political violence, underlying the dangers of political power.

As Bates argues the "play's grotesque dismemberment of Sejanus's body enacts the political consequences of his corrupt ambition" (Bates 2008, 144). I would go further by claiming that the play refutes the emerging political order of Reason of State and the concept of the body politic altogether. It shows that power could never be absolute and taken for granted. The subjects too can claim power—and power remains, whether at the hands of one ruler or the people, dangerous.

Thus is portrayed the dismemberment of the state in *Sejanus his Fall*. It offers a choreography of the body politic and then portrays its fall by the multitude. Unlike *Hamlet*, the popular voice triumphs by the end. However, the play does not offer a closure. It is circular, unfinished. Being an unfinished business, it probably invites its audience to take action—hence is the Tragedy of State. Despite the dangers that power presents, the play seeks to show the audience that power exercised on them is indeed fragile and that it can be challenged.

Similarly to *Hamlet*, the anatomy of the state, being a poisoned and plagued one, hence the reference to the "great and monstrous serpent" (V. 37), has been challenged. However, in *Sejanus*, the public space is highlighted. In *Hamlet*, the focus is on the individual—the prince who does not act. Political action in *Sejanus* is public. It is enacted onstage, democratizing politics and political action. The absence of alternative, however, shows a realization of the political order that is about to impose itself and puts an end to the humanist order—to the art of the state with all that denotes, liberty of the subjects, equity, and justice. The new political order bases itself on the grounds that human nature is essentially vicious.

Therefore, with the death of the older political order, the humanist Christian framework and the Ciceronian ideals, and the ultimate triumph of Reason of State politics instead, leading to the near emergence of the modern state with the treaty of Westphalia, the Tragedy is ended. Reason of State helped the emergence of diplomacy and the science of international relations in modern terms. The treaties marked a turning point in European history and political thought,

as they helped to establish the principle of state sovereignty and the idea of a system of sovereign states that interacted with each other based on international law. The Treaty of Westphalia is often seen as the first modern peace treaty, with its focus on diplomacy, negotiations, and compromise., marking, hence, the triumph of Reason of State over the older political framework. It established a new framework for international relations, where disputes between states could be resolved peacefully through negotiations and diplomacy, rather than through war and conquest. The ideas of the Treaty of Westphalia have continued to influence international law and diplomacy up to the present day.

In *Hamlet*, the concept of state sovereignty is relevant in the sense that it reinforces the idea of a stable and legitimate political order in the modern sense. Hamlet's death, along with the deaths of all characters onstage, leaves the throne of Denmark open for the taking, and it is uncertain who will assume power next. However, if we view the ending of *Hamlet* through the lens of state sovereignty, we can interpret it as the re-establishment of a stable political order. With Fortinbras of Norway assuming the throne of Denmark, there is a sense of continuity and legitimacy in the succession of power. However, a residue of the past is still lingering onstage, that of Horatio, the embodiment of the ideal of the city-states based on equity and justice rather than the new Reason of State. The play does not offer any ultimatum. It lets its sixteenth century audience decide its fate.

Jean Bethke Elshtain¹⁰² has argued that *Hamlet* raises questions about the relationship between the state and the individual, and the legitimacy of political authority. Elshtain notes that the play “presents us with a model of state power that is both overwhelming and enervated, brutal and weak” (Elshtain 1990, 54). She suggests that the play's focus on the corrupting influence of power and the tragic consequences of political ambition speaks to the larger political debates of early modern Europe, including those that led to the Treaty of Westphalia. The Tragedy of State foresees the future of politics and étatism in Europe. Aware that the older order is dying, the Tragedy itself sees its own demise. Being in a crisis, a political one, a poetic crisis is also inevitable. Being a tragedy of princes of the older political order and with the economic and political radical transformations towards modernism, the poetics of the older order witness their demise as well. Prince Hamlet is one of the last characters presented by the Tragedy of State and is struggling and unable to act in the newer political framework. A poetic crisis too is inevitable leading to the death of the Tragedy of State.

¹⁰² In her book *Sovereignty: God, State, and the Self*, Elshtain argues that sovereignty is a complex and multifaceted idea that has evolved over time. She examines how the concept of sovereignty has been used to justify political power and how it relates to individual self-determination.

Having mentioned that the Tragedy of State foresees the rise of the modern state, the ending scene of *Sejanus* depicts the dismemberment of the body politic, which can be seen as a metaphor for the death of the older political order that was based on the Aristotelean/Ciceronian framework. This framework emphasized the importance of virtue, civic duty, and the common good in the governance of the state. However, Sejanus and his co-conspirators represent a departure from this ideal, as they pursued their own personal interests at the expense of the state and its subjects. By showing the violent dismemberment of Sejanus' body, the play emphasizes the gruesome consequences of such a pervert deviation from the traditional political order. This can be seen as reflecting the wider societal and economic shift that was taking place during the early modern period, as the older feudal and monarchical structures were being replaced by the more centralized and bureaucratic modern state. The dismemberment of the body politic in *Sejanus* can thus be seen as a metaphor for the breakdown of the older political order and the emergence of the modern state, which would come to be characterized by a centralized power structure and a more impersonal approach to governance. This idea is further reinforced by the fact that the play ends on an unfinished and uncertain note, suggesting that the transition to this new political order was still ongoing and incomplete and that the play, similarly to *Hamlet*, invites the audience to *act*. The Tragedy of State presents of crisis of action—action in the poetic sense. With the emergence of modernity and the futility of action for the common and ordinary individual, in political and poetic terms, the Tragedy of State dies and the later tragedy of the common 'man' takes place. 'Ordinary', instead of kings and nobles, become the subject of drama, with their struggles and flaws.

In *Sejanus*, the open-endedness of the last act suggests that the question of how to govern effectively and maintain political stability remains unresolved. The old political order, based on the Aristotelian/Ciceronian framework, has been replaced by a corrupt political order. The extent of its corruption is reflected through the violence of the people of Rome and their total refusal of the new tyranny of Tiberius and Sejanus after him. Similarly to *Hamlet*, the poetics also witness their demise.

As I attempted to introduce the grammar of the Tragedy of State, I devoted this chapter to the last act of the political genre, via the two texts under study, *Hamlet* and *Sejanus*, and showed how it ends on the dismemberment of the body politic as a refusal of the new emerging political order of the Reason of State despite a bitter and implicit reckoning of its triumph and a historical and a radical change towards modern/ist politics and economical orders culminating in the rise of the modern bureaucratic state.

The significance of the final act lies in its depiction of the dismemberment of the body politic, which marks a refusal of the emerging political order of the Reason of State. While the Reason of State had already emerged during the early modern period, it did not fully take hold until the rise of the modern bureaucratic state. The dismemberment of the body politic in the final act can be seen as one that unwillingly accepts the triumph of the Reason of State and its devastating effects on the old political order.

The final act of the Tragedy of State is often the culmination of the political and personal conflicts that have been building throughout the play. It is in this final act that the full extent of the tragic consequences of political corruption, betrayal, and violence are revealed. In both *Hamlet* and *Sejanus*, the final act serves as a reflection of the dismemberment of the body politic, the fall of the old political order, and the illegitimacy and immorality of the new politics of the Reason of State. In *Hamlet*, the final act features a series of violent deaths that leave the stage littered with corpses. The tragic consequences of the corrupt and unstable political order are reflected in the personal tragedies that befall the characters. The death of Hamlet's father at the hands of his uncle, followed by Hamlet's descent into madness, the murder of Polonius, the suicide of Ophelia, and the eventual death of Hamlet himself, all highlight the breakdown of the social and political order. The final act shows how the state and its people suffer as a result of corruption and self-interest and other principles of Reason of State including the principle of preservation. Similarly, in *Sejanus*, the final act stages the literal dismemberment of the body politic through the brutal execution of Sejanus. The violence of the people of Rome and their total refusal of the new tyranny of Tiberius and Sejanus after him reflects the collapse of the new political order about to take place in contemporary England, a collapse in terms of moral and ethical goals. The play offers a choreography of the body politic to only then portray its fall.

Tragedy of State is not mere conceptual rigueur that I sought to offer in the present thesis. It is important to emphasize the significance of the Tragedy of State as a genre that captures the political and cultural climate of the early modern period. By focusing on the central theme of *étatisme*, the genre provides a unique lens through which to examine the emergence of Reason of State as a dominant political discourse. This discourse, which emphasizes the interests of the state over the subject, has long been overlooked in literary scholarship on early modern tragedy. I have tried to show an inherent structure of what may be called as such, of which the central theme is *étatisme* in light of the emergent political discourse of Reason of State that has long been ignored in the literary scholarship of early modern tragedy of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. I have attempted to outline the grammar of what can

be termed the Tragedy of State, a genre that sees its own demise and enacts it onstage, in both poetic and political terms. The dismemberment of the body politic is accompanied by that of the body poetic. The death of the Tragedy of State is inevitable with the political and economic transition taking place in the continent and above. The genre's awareness of the emergent political order leads to its death. The death of the Tragedy of State is inevitable as the genre becomes increasingly unable to grapple with the changing political landscape. This awareness of the limitations of the genre is what ultimately leads to its demise. The Tragedy of State highlights the challenges faced by early modern societies as they grappled with the transition to a new political and economic order.

CONCLUSION

The present research attempted to study Reason of State as it formed a constitutive aspect of early modern political tragedy. It delineated the importance of the politico- philosophical discourse in the study of early modern drama that has long been dismissed as marginalia and succeeded in introducing the Tragedy of State. I devoted the present work to show not only the importance of reason of state theory in the plays under study and their con/text, but most importantly introduced the Tragedy of (reason) State that exists thanks to and through the political discourse of Reason of State. I have shown its structure, elements, or in other words, its *poelitics*. The tragedies resisted succumbing to the tyranny of the new political transition to the modern state and, therefore, predicted its own demise with the emergence of a new political order, that of a global order of states, that totally departed from the noble art of politics that underscores equity, justice, and *dignitas*, to the more degenerate Machiavellian politics of the modern state. The death of Aristotelean politics brought with it the death of Aristotelean poetics.

I have introduced what I termed as the Tragedy of State. I introduced the new political literary/dramatic genre through two plays that articulate most the philosophical and political transition taking place in early modern England and the continent. In *Hamlet*, the audience/reader sees the emerging political preoccupation with the development of étatism and its mechanisms in the modern sense. I have analysed how the play portrays the modern state, or to say it in other words, the new political order, that was still unfathomable, to the contemporary audience, starting with borders and frontiers, discussing, hence, what became known as the science of international relations onstage, and ending with the principles and mechanisms of the new emerging political order. The Tragedy of State demonstrates a portrait of the state via its own poetics that I have discussed. It is a Tragedy that has its own grammar. With the birth of the modern state, the play explores the nuanced birth/erasure of the subject and its (absence of) agency under the birth of the modern state and the Reason of State philosophy.

In *Sejanus*, Ben Jonson questions the agency of the subject in its plural form under the new political order that seeks to castrate it. The Tragedy of State demonstrates how the new political order of Reason of State centralises power, castrates its subjects, erases any agency, and challenges any attempts of dissent, and redefines traditional power structures. Tragedy of State starts with building and enforcing territoriality and ends with dismemberment of the state as a way to express how the new political order is a corrupt and unethical one. Tragedy of State,

as I have shown in the fifth chapter, ends with a dismemberment of the body politic as a way to show how it denounces Reason of State politics and the modern state, *avant la lettre* as such.

In this research, I relied heavily on the study of contemporary political theorists and their works. I primarily focused on a close reading of the emergent body of political literature and studied their echoes in the plays. Hence, this work is transdisciplinary in that it brought together two topics of studies previously unaddressed—that is Reason of State and drama. I addressed the political transition from the humanist Christian politics, those relying on an Aristotelean/Ciceronian background, to the Tacitean politics of reason of state leading to the formation of the modern state along with that of modern subjectivity. I studied reception of the theories onstage through the two texts *Hamlet* and *Sejanus*. The plays denounce the political transition from civil reason to reason of state as a degeneration from a noble science to an ignoble praxis.

Therefore, I introduced Tragedy of State that includes not only the two texts under study but also contemporary plays, including *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, Ben Jonson's *Catiline His Conspiracy*, Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*. The histories and comedies too can be studied alike, including the pastoral world of *As You Like It* which chronicles an unexpected transition from the "civilization" of the court to the greenwood of the forest. Later John Milton devoted his *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* to a defense of the right of regicide against princes and tyrants.

A study of early modern poetics without addressing the transition to reason of state is an uncomplete work. In this work, I introduced the Tragedy of State, a study that has been unfinished by Lever in his work *The Tragedy of State* and continued by the present work. As I have shown throughout the present work, the study of Reason of State has been introduced only by the 1950s in political philosophy. It has been acknowledged as central to political thought. However, it still remains a gap in the literary scholarship that claims restoring the political aspects of the dramas. I aimed to bring reason of state and the study of étatism to center of political readings of not only to what I introduced as the Tragedy of State but also contemporary textuality in general including the comedies, poems, and Histories, that have a different *poelitics* that can be studied in a new work. I have, also, shown an inherent structure to the sub-generic Tragedy of State and explained its poelitics.

In *Hamlet*, the present work underscores the transition from civil reason to Reason of State, that is from the legitimate rule of King Hamlet to the illegitimate rule of Claudius, who rises to power by a *coup d'État*. I have shown how the play addresses étatism starting from the very margins of the state, in the opening act in the fortress and the latter is important in

reason of state theory, to the last act in which the body politic is dismembered. The anatomy of the state and the psycho-political play have been analyzed at length after dissecting the political mechanisms followed in court. The play's circularity introduces a sense of failure to establish just poelitics in light of the current political order, after the triumph of the political realism of Giovanni Botero and the ultimate loss of politics as such to the triumph of political science, that can be read as a degeneration and an ignoble art. The transition from the art of politics to political science is seen as a degeneration in the play. The way the body politic is dismembered at the end introduces the *avant la lettre* Leviathan—that is the modern state that swallows away civil reason and Ciceronian politics as an art.

Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* on the other hand is more explicit than *Hamlet* in voicing political issues. The play surely can be seen as a direct criticism of tyranny and James I's rule. However, it is more than that. The play voices the transition from the art of politics, that is the humanist Christian political framework, to the introduction of political science as a field, that is an ignoble science. Being a Tragedy of State, the play opens similarly to *Hamlet* on the same note. It starts in the margins of the state with characters deploring the political state of Rome and ends with a more brutal dramatic choreography of the dismemberment of the body politic. It is open-ended. The audience sees that Macro is not a better alternative than Sejanus or Tiberius.

In both plays the triumph of the political discourse of reason of state is not an adherence to it. On the contrary, the ending of the two plays show an involuntary triumph of reason of state and of modern étatism represented in the iconographic representation of the state as a Leviathan. The plays do not adhere to the new political order, nor do they offer an alternative—except the problematic undecidability and political in/action. It would be untenable to claim that the plays subscribe to the political realism of Reason of State and Giovanni Botero. The plays “end” openly on a pessimistic tone, or at least a tone of undecidability—like that of its protagonist in *Hamlet* and of desperation in *Sejanus*. The Tragedy of State's circularity resists a final closure. The political transition is unfinished business and so are the plays.

The present research refused the idea of safe, final closure to the plays, and accepted their open-endedness. It also presents an analysis of the plays within a framework that has long been dismissed. Hence, an introduction of the Tragedy of State and its poelitics becomes an essential task, and an unfinished one that I hope to continue in the future. The Tragedy of State foresees the demise of an older political order that brings with it the death of Tragedy as such, the tragedy of states and princes. The Tragedy of State has just seen its emergence and death simultaneously. It gave birth to itself to signal the death of the art of politics and the birth of

political science and the emergence of the modern state—a transition pivotal in the history of ideas and political thought as well as the history of *étatisme*.

One of the challenges of the study of *étatisme* and Reason of State and their representation in early modern tragedy is that it involves a complex interdisciplinary task. However, relying on political thought (early modern and otherwise) helps answering the question I posed at the beginning of this research, or, help a better understanding of the representation of *étatisme* onstage and, hence, off-stage as well. Exploring a new sub-discipline that has not been addressed before has also been a challenging task. However, covering the gap in the scholarship of early modern tragedy poses itself as a compulsory task.

The present work helped me understand and cover unexplored areas in the studies of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. I would like to stress that I do not seek novelty. On the contrary, my aim was to introduce an important concept, that is Tragedy of State and develop it, and work on the unexplored area of Reason of State onstage. In future research, I would like to further explore the reception of the discourses of reason of state and develop in greater detail the concept of the Tragedy of State.

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