

Marchamont Nedham and mystery of state

Book or Report Section

Published Version

Foxley, R. (2013) *Marchamont Nedham and mystery of state*. In: Mahlberg, G. and Wiemann, D. (eds.) *European contexts for English republicanism. Politics and Culture in Europe, 1650–1750*. Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 49-62. ISBN 9781409455561 Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/29473/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: Ashgate

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Chapter 3

Marchamont Nedham and Mystery of State

Rachel Foxley

It is some measure of the extraordinary qualities of Marchamont Nedham that he managed to serve virtually all of the political causes and regimes of two of the most unstable decades of English history, and lived to fight another day. Having served both Parliament and king in the Civil Wars of the 1640s, and charted a precarious but profitable path through the shifting regimes and factions of the 1650s, he turned again after monarchy was restored, and just before his death in the later 1670s was accepting pay for his attacks on Shaftesbury.¹ His willingness to test the limits of his current political masters with audacious and provocative journalism was apparently matched only by his aptitude for slipping across political divides to serve new masters when circumstances – personal and national – demanded it.

The brilliance of Nedham's wit attracted his paymasters in the political turmoil of the Civil Wars and Interregnum, and it attracts scholars now. The apparent flexibility of his conscience has been more of an embarrassment, and interpretations of his career have tried to draw out some threads of political commitment which stayed unbroken through at least some of his switches of allegiance, pointing to his hostility to the Scots and their Presbyterian allies in England, or at the very least to his desire to secure freedom of conscience in England, or concern about the power of the army. While Jason McElligott has urged us to take seriously Nedham's commitment as a supporter of the king and editor of the royalist newsbook *Mercurius Pragmaticus* from 1647 to 1649, most commentators have seen Nedham as having a deeper commitment to republican

¹ Joseph Frank, *Cromwell's Press Agent: A Critical Biography of Marchamont Nedham, 1620–1678* (Washington, DC, 1980), is now supplemented by much recent work, including Joad Raymond, 'Nedham, Marchamont (bap. 1620, d. 1678)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), hereafter *ODNB*. For an analysis of some of the vicissitudes and turning-points of Nedham's career, see Raymond, "'A Mercury with a Winged Conscience': Marchamont Nedham, Monopoly and Censorship', *Media History*, 4 (1998), pp. 7–18; Jason McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 111–26; Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda During the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 280–87, 291–5. We should not forget that Nedham did not necessarily jump quickly when the balance of power shifted. McElligott emphasizes the trials he went through before making his peace with the new regime in 1649; Joad Raymond, 'The Cracking of the Republican Spokes', *Prose Studies*, 19 (1996), pp. 255–74, aligns him with Milton in holding out against restoration.

thought.² The plausibility of this rests not only on his parliamentarianism in his career up to 1646, which culminated in a series of controversial attacks on Charles I, but also on the quality of his writings under the republic and protectorate: he seemed keen, at least at times, to offer far more challenging models of republican government than his political masters were willing or able to implement.³ Indeed, compared to the sometimes aristocratic or godly republicanism even of his fellow republican theorists in the 1650s, Nedham's writings seem strikingly populist. In an influential brief assessment in his *Machiavellian Moment*, J.G.A. Pocock found Nedham's republican editorials for *Mercurius Politicus* 'consistently radical and democratic': 'the first sustained English exposition of republican democracy in classical and Machiavellian terms.'⁴ Many more recent writers have aligned Nedham's republicanism with radical thought in a similar way.⁵

Nedham's writings, republican and otherwise, display a strand of hard-edged political calculation which makes him an interesting exemplar of the deployment of controversial but increasingly influential contemporary modes of thought about politics. Thus his familiarity from early in his journalistic career with the interest theory of the duc de Rohan; his use of Machiavelli, from the anonymous *Vox Plebis* in 1646 to the treatises and newspaper editorials of the 1650s; and his willingness to deploy both Grotian and Hobbesian ideas in the cause of the new free state have all been noted.⁶ All these authors could certainly be used to think about the political challenges and exigencies of a new state, or of changes in the political balance, in ways which might have enabled changes of allegiance for subjects as

² McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship*, pp. 120–25; contrast Raymond, 'The Cracking of the Republican Spokes', p. 257.

³ On Nedham's views in his parliamentarian writing to 1646, see Joyce Macadam, 'Mercurius Britannicus on Charles I: An Exercise in Civil War Journalism and High Politics, August 1643 to May 1646', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), pp. 470–92; Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641–1649* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 42–8, but see Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, pp. 298–300; Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 241–7; on Nedham exceeding his brief in the 1650s, see Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, pp. 291–5; Blair Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 1649–1656', in David Wootton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649–1776* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 64–5.

⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), p. 382.

⁵ Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism', pp. 66–7; Paul Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 198–9, 233–4.

⁶ Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500–1700* (London, 1964), pp. 159–64; Marco Barducci, 'Machiavelli nella Cultura Politica Inglese', in Alessandro Arienzo and Gianfranco Borrelli (eds), *Anglo-American Faces of Machiavelli: Machiavelli e Machiavellismi Nella Cultura Anglo-Americana* (Milan, 2009), pp. 193–8; Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, pp. 175–244.

well as offering controversial prescriptions for rulers; and there is no doubt that they all contributed significantly to the distinctive character of Nedham's thought.

Nedham's range of reference, however, is much broader than this. His use of classical authors in citation and quotation, and his references to a wide range of more modern authorities, have facilitated his adoption into the canon of 'classical republicanism' and elicited a (cautious) admiration for his learning and the base of reading on which he built his topical and versatile political argumentation. His sources did not, of course, predetermine the direction of his political argument. As Blair Worden once nicely put it, Nedham's arguments had a habit of 'turning on their footnotes': the same material might be marshalled for or against a proposition as circumstances demanded.⁷ We should certainly never expect Nedham's relationship to his sources to be simple. Nonetheless, it is perhaps surprising that so little attention has been paid to Nedham's 'footnotes' – the marginal citations which appear only in a couple of his publications in the early Commonwealth period – as they turn out to tell us some surprising things about the way in which he wrote and the reading matter to which he most readily turned in the process of composition.

The two works which used marginal citation of authorities to bolster their arguments were *Certain Considerations Tendered in all Humility, to an Honorable Member of the Councill of State* (1 August 1649) and the much longer and better-known *Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated*, published in May 1650. Both were concerned with the problems faced by governors and people under the new regime of the Commonwealth. The first, a 14-page pamphlet, offered some advice to the Council of State on how to manage its potential opponents – advice which Nedham advertised as drawn out of 'the Opinion and Practice of many the most [sic] eminent *Statesmen*', but which was skilfully oriented towards the lenient treatment of Nedham himself (he had been thrown into prison) as well as the potential success of the new regime. The second, Nedham's 'job application' to his employers in the new regime,⁸ used brutal *de facto* arguments justifying the power of the sword as the only title to government, as well as analyses of the 'interest' of the different groups which found themselves in opposition to their new governors, and finally a classicizing peroration on the superiority of 'free states' to monarchies, to try and induce the new regime's unwilling population to offer it their obedience. Both texts cited an impressive mixture of ancient and modern texts in their marginal notes. There is little scholarly comment on *Certain Considerations*, but Joad Raymond finds it 'significant for its extensive use of Roman precedent', and suggests that it prefigures Nedham's phase of classical republican writing. Joseph Frank commented on its 'outpouring of classical

⁷ Blair Worden, "'Wit in a Roundhead": The Dilemma of Marchamont Nedham', in Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky (eds), *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown* (Manchester and New York, 1995), p. 301.

⁸ Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, p. 213.

allusions' and pronounced the tract 'judicious and learned'.⁹ Nigel Smith notes its 'solid references' to Seneca, Suetonius and Livy, and entertains the thought that it was the result of Nedham's reading of classical sources in prison, marking the 'emergence of the republican theory' which Nedham was then to develop in his editorials for *Mercurius Politicus*.¹⁰ *The Case of the Commonwealth* has received more scrutiny, and Philip Knachel's 1969 edition completed Nedham's citations and attempted – sometimes in vain – to collate them with the works cited. Knachel noticed some inaccuracy in quotation, lamented Nedham's 'casual habits' in citation and suspected him of 'short cuts', asking, 'Had he actually read each of the authors he quotes?' – a suspicion presumably fostered by the incidences noted in the footnotes where Knachel found citations of other works lifted from Gregor Richter's *Axiomatum Politicorum* of 1604 (Görlitz). Nonetheless, he concluded that Nedham's more obscure citations 'must have required some hard searching, which does suggest that he had read widely.'¹¹ More recent scholars, not forced to do such painstaking editorial work, have tended to look directly to the classical authors cited in the margins, and to pick out a few canonical names from early modern political thought, ignoring the rest of the scholarly trappings.

This is a mistake, as it turns out that Richter's *Axiomatum* was not the only Latin textbook by a German author that Nedham had on his desk as he wrote – or, in some cases, compiled – his tracts. Nedham seems to have been inordinately fond of the genre, and two other systematic and compendious treatises lie behind a large number of his citations. One is Arnold Clapmar's *De Arcanis Rerum Publicarum*, first published posthumously by his brother in 1605 (Bremen). This influential book took up many of the ideas of the Italian reason of state tradition – Clapmar had been a correspondent of Scipione Ammirato and was particularly heavily indebted to him – and repackaged them under the notion of 'arcana imperii', transforming 'reason' of state into 'mysteries' of state. Among the authors who followed Clapmar's lead in this analysis was the jurist Christoph Besold, whose short *De Arcanis Rerum Publicarum Dissertatio* was appended to some editions of Clapmar's work, including, I suspect, the one which Nedham used.¹² The second,

⁹ Raymond, 'Nedham', *ODNB*; Frank, *Cromwell's Press Agent*, p. 73.

¹⁰ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven and London, 1994), pp. 32–4.

¹¹ Marchamont Nedham, *The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated*, ed. P.A. Knachel (Charlottesville, 1969), pp. v, xxxiii, 10, 11, 13.

¹² Nedham's citation of this as a 'dissertatio' points towards an edition such as Arnold Clapmar, *De Arcanis Rerum Publicarum Libri Sex ... Accessit Chr. Besoldi De eadem materia Discursus* (Leiden, 1644) rather than the Elsevier edition (Amsterdam, 1644), which also includes the Besold tract but refers to it as a 'discursus' rather than a 'dissertatio'. I will cite the Leiden edition for both texts. The Camena project at Heidelberg and Mannheim has made this volume available conveniently online: <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camenahtdocs/camenaht.html>.

longer treatise used heavily by Nedham was Besold's own *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae*.¹³

Nedham's use of these texts was intensive, and to a modern reader could seem dishonest. *Certain Considerations* is effectively a tissue of material translated out of both Clapmar's and Besold's texts on the arcana, plus Clapmar's *Conclusiones*, also in the same volume, held together in some places by only the most tenuous connective phrases of Nedham's own. Nedham, of course, contributed his own unmistakable brio to some of his more paraphrastic translations, and to some extent reshaped his material by inserting notions which were not necessarily there in the original. He certainly drove home the message that these lessons were of paramount importance to the rulers of new states, and free states, altering not only the terminology of translations but also the wording of some of his Latin quotations. But in other respects he engaged in surprisingly little selection or reshaping: whole strings of references and quotations follow in a sequence which is almost identical to the original, so that in places a paragraph of Nedham can be traced directly to a page or two of Clapmar or Besold. The pamphlet is larded with marginal citations from learned authors, but Clapmar, to whom Nedham was most indebted, did not appear among them. Besold's *De Arcanis* was at least cited more than once, but in very small proportion to the amount of material which Nedham mined directly from it. *The Case of the Commonwealth* is a more considered piece and is certainly not as reliant on a dense use of second-hand sources as the shorter pamphlet, but sections of it are similarly derivative in the citation of authorities, exploiting Besold's *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae* as well as the arcana texts and evidently Richter. Thus the section on the Levellers illustrates the evils of extreme democracy with the help of references lifted directly from Besold's section on this.¹⁴

Of course, these compendious Latin texts were partly designed to be used in such ways. Books like Besold's *Synopsis* served in the realm of politics the same kind of purpose as the reference books and compendia discussed by Ann Blair, offering 'a stockpile of notes ready for use without the difficulties of taking them directly'.¹⁵ Nedham was not unusual, either in making use of these treasure-troves of thematically organized classical and modern quotations, or in failing to acknowledge them. Nonetheless, this does put Nedham's working methods, and his notoriously opportunistic use of his sources, in a new light. Scholars have tended to assume that Nedham's quotations from the central classical authors, at least, reflected some genuine influence from the thinking of those authors. When we find, in *Certain Considerations*, that a string of classical references – Cicero, Aristotle, Tacitus and Juvenal – has in fact been mined directly from Clapmar with

¹³ Christoph Besold, *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae: Editio Sexta* (Amsterdam, 1648).

¹⁴ For examples, references to Bodin, Pierre Gregoire, Contzen and Polybius (Nedham, *Case of the Commonwealth*, ed. Knachel, pp. 101, 103–4) are taken from Besold, *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae*, pp. 125–7.

¹⁵ Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010), p. 4.

only a slight change of order, the quality of that influence feels rather different.¹⁶ Of course, it does not preclude the possibility that Nedham did have a fair degree of familiarity with some of the authors he was citing. He had a classical education, at the free school in Burford and then at All Souls, Oxford: an education which led him to a job – which he kept patience with for only three years – at the Merchant Taylors' School in London.¹⁷ He worked comfortably from the Latin compendia and himself undertook a more taxing translation in the service of the republic, producing an English version of Selden's *Mare Clausum*.¹⁸ We cannot be sure what depth of knowledge underlay Nedham's use of snippets of the classical and modern texts excerpted in other sources. Mistakes, misattributions and misquotations point in one direction, but are entirely explicable by Nedham's own purposes and the speed with which he was assembling his materials.¹⁹ They may be partly counterbalanced by occasions when Nedham replaces Latin transcription of terms with Greek, or by cases where he seems to be using a classical text in ways which are more extensive than, or differ from, his usual sources.²⁰ When Nedham later set out some of the arcana of rule in *Mercurius Politicus*, he clearly drew on Clapmar in his editorial on the need for education appropriate to a free state. Here, however, Clapmar seems to have sent him back to the text of Tacitus, as Nedham accurately continued (in translation) the passage which Clapmar quoted incomplete.²¹ On the other side of the balance, Nedham cites three passages of Guicciardini in *Certain Considerations* and the *Case of the Commonwealth*: all are

¹⁶ Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, pp. 2–3; Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 307–9.

¹⁷ Frank, *Cromwell's Press Agent*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ John Selden, *Of the Dominion, or, Ownership of the Sea*, trans. Marchamont Nedham (London, 1652).

¹⁹ See for example Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, p. 8: the words 'opprobria' and '& suos' are Nedham's own; the quotation is from Tacitus, *Annals* 2.50, not Suetonius; Nedham takes it from Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 312. More than once Nedham credits a phrase to the wrong name from a selection cited on that point in his source text; he sometimes cites parts of Clapmar's or Besold's own wording as if they were quotations from another text.

²⁰ Nedham substituted Greek typography for 'Isonomia' when following Besold: Besold, *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae*, p. 125; Nedham, *Case of the Commonwealth*, ed. Knachel, p. 98; in Nedham's *Certain Considerations*, the quotations from Seneca are virtually the only Latin phrases which cannot be traced to the Clapmar/Besold volume on the arcana: Nedham was presumably using a different source (whether or not it was the original text) or working from memory.

²¹ *Mercurius Politicus* 104 (27 May–3 June 1652), p. 1629. The first part of the passage from Tacitus, *Annals* 1.3 is quoted in Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 295, and Nedham is clearly following Clapmar's argument about Augustus's superior guile compared to Caesar. The final part of the passage from Tacitus is quoted in Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 78; Nedham quotes from this page of Clapmar in this editorial, pp. 1625, 1627. The middle part of the Tacitus passage is not found in Clapmar and is accurately supplied by Nedham.

to be found in Besold, so we have no evidence that Nedham had read Guicciardini himself at this point.²²

In some ways, this insight into Nedham's way of writing and citing raises more questions than it answers: further work will be required to pin down the balance between sources which Nedham used in the original and those he used at second hand. What it does show us, however, is Nedham's deep familiarity with a genre of contemporary political books which have not been linked to Nedham in previous scholarship. This is interesting because it puts the more canonical contemporary influences on Nedham in a slightly different light. The German treatises which shaped so many of the sequences of classical and modern material which Nedham used in his arguments offered a rather different view of political morality from these more well-known sources, although one which had points of contact with, and complicated debts to, Machiavellian thought. They also belonged to a tradition which was not marked by any commitment to republicanism, and we should question the relationship between such materials and any republican message that Nedham derived from them.

On the face of it, the mystery of state tradition might seem to endorse a rather cynical approach to politics, lining up with the precepts of Machiavelli and enhancing our sense of Nedham as a pragmatic advocate of amoral political rationality. The German mystery of state writers, like the Italian reason of state theorists on whom they drew, did argue that rulers sometimes needed to disregard law and morality in defence of their states or of their own power. Clapmar grafted the category of 'arcana' or 'mysteries' onto these notions of reason of state, interpreting such acts of pragmatic political calculation as part of a tradition of secret political knowledge, hinted at in Aristotle's discussion of 'sophismata' and in Tacitus.²³ This gave the practice of reason of state a certain ancient and mystical pedigree, and it also brought to the fore the element of deception or simulation which might be involved. Clapmar's work divided its material up into superficially systematic, although sometimes overlapping, categories. The last book was devoted to a species of the arcana which he called 'simulacra'.²⁴ These were ways in which rulers could create the illusion of adherence to one constitutional form, even when it had in fact been changed for another. This naturally had particular relevance to new regimes, and, arguably, to propagandists, and Nedham was drawn to this section of the book for some of his material in the *Certain Considerations*.

Even beyond the tricks classified as 'simulacra', however, the theme of arcana as types of deception was prominent, and the aim was the management of potentially troublesome, factious or discontented subjects. For Besold, the enforcement of

²² Besold, *De Arcanis*, p. 22; Besold, *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae*, pp. 4–5, 314; Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, p. 3; Nedham, *Case of the Commonwealth*, ed. Knachel, title page, pp. 100, 117.

²³ Aristotle, *Politics*, 4.13, for example.

²⁴ Peter Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge and New York, 1988), pp. 113, 121–39.

legal penalties by lawyers was to be supplemented by politicians' use of guile and 'persuasiuncula' to secure subjects' obedience.²⁵ Nedham certainly seemed to be comfortable, at least at times, with the culture of political mystery which these writings promoted. In *Mercurius Politicus* in October 1651 he endorsed the Roman division between people and Senate, which allowed the 'secrets of Government' to be handled by men wise and experienced enough for such 'State-Affairs'.²⁶ A few issues later, he made a similar argument for the Athenians' placing of 'State Transactions' in the Areopagus.²⁷ Even while arguing for a form of government by elected legislative assemblies as the shibboleth of a truly free state, he reserved a place for political wisdom which was not to be found in or shared with the people. This is in sharp contrast with John Streater, the other great populist republican of the 1650s, for whom 'secret reasons of State' were anathema, and who argued that Rome's greatness was secured only when 'every member of that Common-wealth perfectly understood the mysteries of State'.²⁸

Streater's desire to dissolve secrets and mysteries into universal knowledge points up the fact that the literature endorsing mystery of state was far from populist. In constitutional terms, the theory was superficially neutral, and Clapmar's book was divided into sections which explained in turn how each of the three types of state, or particular regimes of each kind, might preserve themselves against threats from the other two types. But Clapmar's assumptions clearly tended against democracy: when he discussed the 'flagitia dominationis', the intolerable crimes which each type of regime might use to perpetuate itself, he took care to note with Cicero that the people, too, could be tyrannical, and argued that in fact the 'flagitia' were found far more in popular states than in others.²⁹ Both in Besold and in Clapmar, the emphasis on governors' use of various forms of flattery and deception to keep the people placid is tinged with a contempt for the ease with which the 'plebs' can be taken in by such tricks.³⁰

At the time when Nedham was making use of Clapmar and Besold in *Certain Considerations* and the *Case of the Commonwealth*, he was happy to endorse such a view of the people. He opened *Certain Considerations* by explaining to England's new governors that they were not to expect a rational or disciplined response to their current hardships from the people: 'It is not in their Power to consider the Circumstances of Reason'.³¹ Clapmar similarly commented in the first section of his book that applying laws and philosophical precepts was useless for

²⁵ Besold, *De Arcanis*, p. 7.

²⁶ *Mercurius Politicus* 70 (2–9 October 1651), p. 1111.

²⁷ *Mercurius Politicus* 73 (23–30 October 1651), p. 1158.

²⁸ John Streater, *A Glympe of that Jewel, Judicial, Just, Preserving Libertie* (London, 1653), p. 1; cf. the same, *Secret Reasons of State in Reference to the Affairs of these Nations, At the Interruption of this Present Parliament: Anno 1653. Discovered* (London, 1659).

²⁹ Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 239, 277–9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–4.

³¹ Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, p. 1.

those among whom there was no place for reason (the margin helpfully explained that this meant the people); therefore the plebs were to be handled by using tricks and obfuscations and images (simulacra).³² Nedham's recommendations were less explicitly deceptive, recommending instead a certain indulgence and lenity on the part of the new regime, but he was happy to lift from Clapmar Aristotle's thought that (in Nedham's translation) 'The common people are naturally of a loose disposition, so that if they may enjoy a kind of dissolute liberty, they like the present state of Government whatsoever it be.'³³ The anti-populist tone continued in Nedham's condemnation of the Levellers in the *Case of the Commonwealth*, where many of the anti-democratic tropes thrown at the Levellers were taken from Besold's account of 'democratia libera', the Greek stereotype of extreme democracy, as discussed in Besold's *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae*. Nedham also endorsed Clapmar's assertion that the 'flagitia' flourished in democratic states.³⁴

Even in making an argument for popular, electoral government in *Mercurius Politicus*, Nedham retained some of this attitude, arguing that the people's power was less to be feared than that of kings or grandees, as they were so easily contented with 'Panem, & Circenses' that they would not run into excesses of luxury.³⁵ He had cited Juvenal's line about bread and circuses in *Certain Considerations* two years earlier, straight out of Clapmar. Similarly, later in his great series of editorials defending popular government by successive assemblies, Nedham countered the objection that popular government was factious by asserting that the people themselves were 'purely passive', merely 'wrought upon by the subtil insinuations of the prime Engineers of each faction'.³⁶

Nedham wrote *Certain Considerations* under severely restricted circumstances: either in prison, or recently escaped and in hiding. He here publicly addressed a 'Member of the *Councill of State*', as he was also to do by more personal means, eventually securing his release after surrendering himself in November 1649.³⁷ That he apparently drew virtually all of his illustrative material from a single volume is thus hardly surprising; but Nedham's choice of a volume which allowed him to cite 'the Opinion and Practice of many the most eminent *Statesmen*' in manipulating the arcana of rule was perhaps pointed when directed at a Council of State whose hold on power had immediately become the focus of radical fury.

³² Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 2–3.

³³ Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, p. 2; Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 308; Aristotle, *Politics*, VI.4, on extreme democracy and the democratic indulgences offered by tyrants.

³⁴ Nedham, *Case of the Commonwealth*, ed. Knachel, p. 101.

³⁵ *Mercurius Politicus* 84 (8–15 January 1652), p. 1334; the fuller Juvenal quotation is also given in Latin on p. 2 of *Certain Considerations*, from Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 316.

³⁶ *Mercurius Politicus* 97 (8–15 April 1652), p. 1522.

³⁷ *The Oxinden and Peyton Letters, 1642–1670*, ed. Dorothy Gardiner (London, 1937), p. 161; Blair Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 45–7 on Bradshaw; Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, p. 283 on Nedham appealing to Thomas Scot.

Equally sly was Nedham's use of the arcana of rule. His condemnation of informers – naturally harsh, as it was just such an informer who had put him in prison – was facilitated by the inclusion of the use of informers as one of the impermissible 'flagitia' characteristic of kingly rule by Clapmar.³⁸ Virtually the whole of the rest of the pamphlet's more positive prescriptions from Clapmar, however, were drawn rather tellingly from Book 6, which dealt with 'simulacra'. Specifically, they were drawn from the sections which discussed the simulacra of democratic rule, that is, the ways in which a regime could make itself seem more democratic than it was. The democratic arcana were designed to pacify the people, by making the constitution seem more oriented towards their needs and desires than it really was.

In *Certain Considerations*, Nedham called on the democratic arcana from Clapmar, along with more general material from Besold's *De Arcanis*, in order to argue that a degree of indulgence towards the people was necessary for the regime. Emphasizing the precarious position of new regimes, he argued that the people – who were irrational but responsive to their immediate pains and pleasures – should be treated gently. Drawing on Besold's *De Arcanis*, he suggested that governments would do best to secure the love of their subjects, rather than punishing them over-harshly.³⁹ This apparently disinterested advice led into the core of Nedham's pamphlet, in which he pleaded the case for the tolerance of critical speeches and publications against the government, and argued that 'Pasquils and Pamphlets' should be allowed to circulate. Nedham's personal interest here is obvious: he wanted the authorities to overlook his publication of opposition newsbooks and endorse his release from prison, and he was making the case for his own trade. Nedham's political position here, however, is far less clear. Nigel Smith finds the pamphlet troublingly noncommittal and contradictory, an effect exacerbated when reading it in the light of its opportunistic mining of the volume on the arcana.⁴⁰ However, some of the material that Nedham used in *Certain Considerations* did point forward in intriguing ways to the later concerns of his more republican newsbook editorials: not in the simple use of certain classical sources, on which far too much weight has been placed as a marker of 'classical republican' sympathies, but in Nedham's hints about the complicated play of forms, names and reality.

Nedham was aware that he was counselling a regime which claimed to have founded a 'free state'. Condemning the 'flagitia' characteristic of monarchy was straightforward: the Commonwealth authorities should surely want to distance themselves from such practices. But Nedham did not generally choose his *positive* recommendations from those suited to popular or even aristocratic governments. Rather than advising the Council of State on how to implement and defend popular government, he explained how it could *disguise* the regime as a popular government. Allowing free speech, and accepting that 'rumusculi & pasquilli' (as

³⁸ Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, pp. 12–14; Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 267–9; *The Oxinden and Peyton Letters*, pp. 160–61.

³⁹ Besold, *De Arcanis*, pp. 18–22.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 32–4.

Clapmar calls them) could not be suppressed, were ways in which rulers could persuade a people that they were living in a more popular state than they really were. The examples with which Clapmar illustrated this section of his book were largely taken from Rome after the fall of the republic.⁴¹ Nedham slyly applied them to exactly the opposite constitutional situation: the replacement of a monarchy by a supposedly ‘free state’. He covered his back, saying ‘If Emperors then allowed so great a liberty of writing and speaking, much more may it be expected in a *free State* and *Common-wealth*.’⁴² But within a few lines he slipped back away from the notion of real freedom, and wrote that ‘this licence is to be reckoned *inter simulacra libertatis*’.⁴³ In a phrase which he did not translate into the vernacular, Nedham thus slyly drew attention to the provocative suggestion that the new regime had no desire to bring about true liberty. Nedham did not declare that he was prescribing the deliberate simulation of democratic government, and he did not disclose his source. But an alert reader, particularly one with the minimal Latin required to pick up the hint about simulated liberty, would surely notice that it was odd to advise a state which had just thrown off monarchy by recommending the wiles of Augustus, Tiberius and Lorenzo de’ Medici.⁴⁴

None of this shows, of course, that Nedham at this stage wanted a truly popular government rather than a simulation; or on the contrary that he positively wanted what on the face of it he recommended: a stable new regime which did just enough to seem like a free state. His slowness to abandon the royalist cause and make his peace with the new regime may suggest that he merely noted a certain hypocrisy in a government whose crackdown on opposition in print was at odds with its profession to be a free state. Nedham was adding his own gloss to Clapmar’s and Besold’s material when he pointed out that ‘above all others’ the governors of a free state ‘must bear with these things, and take heed of crossing the people in this licentious humor’.⁴⁵ Why was the new free state so frightened of its own people?

As he established himself as an indispensable servant of the new regime, and as that regime established itself more securely in power, Nedham offered a far less ambiguous commentary on the shadow and substance of liberty, and the appearance and reality of constitutional forms. His vocabulary and some of his material show that in his republican editorials for *Mercurius Politicus* Nedham was still drawing on the mysteries and simulacra of rule derived from Clapmar and Besold, although the direct influence of Machiavelli also became more prominent.⁴⁶ In a series of

⁴¹ Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 309–12, naturally drawing heavily on Tacitus.

⁴² Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, p. 9.

⁴³ ‘[A]mong the simulacra of liberty’. Nedham, *Certain Considerations*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8; cf. Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 312; Besold, *De Arcanis*, pp. 42–3.

⁴⁶ Nedham’s use of Clapmar’s terminology: ‘flagitious Enormities’, *Mercurius Politicus* 100 (29 April–6 May 1652), p. 1572; ‘*inter flagitia Dominationis* ... one of the peculiar enormities, that attends the *Lordly interest of Domination*’, *Mercurius Politicus* 96 (1–8 April 1652), p. 1506.

editorials beginning in the autumn of 1651, he set out to show that liberty would be best preserved by the people electing their own successive assemblies. When he came to refute objections, one urgent task was to answer the objection that ‘*Arcana Imperii, secrets of State*’ could never be effectively handled by the mass of new members elected to each new successive assembly. Rather than rejecting the need for the arcana, he agreed that they were ‘of a nature remote from ordinary Apprehensions’, but argued that they could safely be entrusted to a council answerable to the sovereign legislative assembly.⁴⁷ Alongside this defence of the necessity of arcana, remade as executive power and integrated into his argument for the separation of powers, Nedham used the analytical tools offered by the mystery of state tradition to understand the mistakes of previous regimes and the ways in which anti-popular interests would try to practise upon the people. Indeed, he argued that these arcana had to be divulged in order for the people to defend their liberty: ‘the mysteries of domination have been still kept under Lock and Key’. In a rare allusion to his reading of these texts, he claimed to have ‘made brief Collections out of the monuments of this kind of learning’ which he would now expound.⁴⁸ He duly proceeded over a series of editorials to analyse ‘those *Rules*, which have been practised in time past by divers Nations, for the keeping of their Freedom when they once had gotten it’, alongside the errors which other nations had made in not sufficiently warding off threats to liberty from others’ practice of such arcana.⁴⁹ Unsurprisingly, much of this material came from Clapmar, and while Nedham still drew from various sections of the work, he recommended not the ways in which other regimes could simulate democracy, but the ways in which democratic and aristocratic regimes could preserve themselves against the threat of monarchy.⁵⁰

In his attempt to avert threats to the republic, Nedham returned constantly to the danger that liberty might become ‘a meer name and shadow’ – language which comes directly from Clapmar’s discussion of the nature of simulacra – or that absolute monarchy might lose ‘its own *Name*’ in the ‘shifting of *Forms*’ while ‘the Thing in it self’ persisted in disguise.⁵¹ Here Nedham’s reading of Clapmar appears to be fused with the notions of Machiavelli and Tacitus, which fed into the reason of state tradition which Clapmar drew on, and with Livy’s analysis of early Roman history, upon which Machiavelli had offered his famous commentary

⁴⁷ *Mercurius Politicus* 94 (18–25 March 1652), p. 1474.

⁴⁸ *Mercurius Politicus* 101 (6–13 May 1652), pp. 1585–6.

⁴⁹ *Mercurius Politicus* 102 (13–20 May 1652), p. 1593.

⁵⁰ *Mercurius Politicus* 101, pp. 1586, 1588–9; 102, p. 1594; cf. Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 82–3 (aristocratic arcana), 88–90 (democratic arcana).

⁵¹ *Mercurius Politicus* 110 (8–15 July 1652), p. 1725; cf. Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, pp. 284–5; *Mercurius Politicus* 100 (29 April–6 May 1652), p. 1570. Joad Raymond, ‘The King Is a Thing’, in Graham Parry and Joad Raymond (eds), *Milton and the Terms of Liberty* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 69–94.

in the *Discorsi*.⁵² His view of a political world full of disguises was not purely the creation of the German mystery of state tradition. How to operate in that world was the key question, to which Machiavelli and subsequent writers had offered slightly differing answers. Nedham had a double strategy, of exposing the arcana of monarchy and domination while exploiting the arcana of successful resistance against the return of monarchy. But how far did the German tradition of the arcana shape Nedham's view of political morality, and how far could the requirements of the state – or of a free state – justify the exploitation of the tricks of the mystery of state tradition, or its Italian cousin, reason of state?

For all their discussion of apparently amoral strategies for deceiving and manipulating the ruled, the reason of state and mystery of state traditions set themselves in conscious, and sometimes over-protesting, opposition to Machiavelli. According to Donaldson, the reason of state authors were always concerned to *justify* the exercise of reason of state;⁵³ and that meant that categories of morality and divine law could not be sidestepped completely in the name of preserving the state or the ruler's own power. Reason of state or the *arcana imperii* were deviations from human laws and from the ordinary prescriptions of morality, but they were deviations in fulfilment of higher laws. Besold characteristically upheld Clapmar's limits to the arcana – *religio, fides, pudor* – against Machiavelli's willingness to dispense with them.⁵⁴ Clapmar accepted Frachetta's original distinction between good and bad reason of state, adopting Ammirato's Tacitean term of 'flagitia' for the 'cattiva ragion di stato', and devoted a book of his treatise to these illegitimate arcana.⁵⁵ While other scholars have emphasized the political morality already there in the Italian reason of state writings, Richard Tuck has seen this reinforced in Clapmar and Besold through a distinctive recombination of the Tacitean tradition with a more conservatively Aristotelian viewpoint.⁵⁶ Kenneth Schellhase is alone in seeing Clapmar as an unapologetic user of Machiavellian principle via his endorsement of Tacitus.⁵⁷

Nedham's dependence on these writings points towards a less aggressive disregard for political morality than we might expect from his apparently pre-existing engagement with Machiavelli. Yet Nedham shared his contemporaries' caution about Machiavelli, rejecting his counsel on the need to be dishonest in a perfidious world as 'a sad inference, and fit onely for the practice of *Italy* where he wrot [*sic*] it'. He drew a distinction between Machiavelli's 'many noble Principles'

⁵² Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, ed. and trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford, 1997), pp. 79–80, book 1, ch. 25.

⁵³ Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State*, pp. 111–12.

⁵⁴ Besold, *De Arcanis*, p. 10; Clapmar, *De Arcanis*, p. 187.

⁵⁵ 'Bad reason of state'; Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State*, pp. 112–13, 118–21.

⁵⁶ Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 124–7.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Schellhase, *Tacitus in Renaissance Political Thought* (Chicago and London, 1976), pp. 154–5.

of popular liberty and the ‘pernitious sprinklings’ of such cynical policy to be found in his work, particularly ‘in that unworthy Book of his entitled *The Prince*’.⁵⁸ Paul Rahe expresses surprise that Nedham, who had ‘long championed *raison d’état*’, should ‘shy away’ from recommending Machiavelli’s political techniques alongside his republican principles. Smith, too, sees Nedham’s repudiation of Machiavelli in *Certain Considerations* as disingenuous in a thoroughly Machiavellian text. Yet the sentiments which Rahe quotes from Nedham’s *Excellency of a Free State* (already expressed in *Mercurius Politicus*) are precisely those of the reason of state/mystery of state tradition, rejecting ‘that reason of state’ which arises from the statesman’s personal ambition, will and lust, while accepting some elements of the reason of state tradition.⁵⁹ Theorists of reason or arcana of state insisted that – although the ruler’s survival was a legitimate aim, alongside the survival of the form of government – the ultimate end for which (legitimate) reason of state was practised was the good of the state and not the ruler’s private good. Nedham’s concern for effective political technique, not tied in exceptional times to ordinary courses (as he argues at the end of the *Case of the Commonwealth*) might still be tempered by an ethical sense of what the ultimate ends of these actions were.⁶⁰

In one sense, Nedham’s use of the German authors on mystery of state places him exactly where we knew he was already – in the reason of state tradition, as a sharp calculator of political rationality attracted to new theories of the operation of interest in politics. But it also casts a new light on these allegiances, showing – both in his alignment with the mystery of state material and his divergences from it – something of his political assumptions as well as his constitutional preferences. Nedham was deeply influenced by this tradition, but he exploited its conventions and assumptions rather than being bound by them. He was, of course, personally involved in the exercise of these political arcana as a paid propagandist. He had read the textbook, but he proceeded both to copy from it and to play with it.

⁵⁸ *Mercurius Politicus* 112 (22–29 July 1652), pp. 1753–4; 113 (29 July–5 August 1652), p. 1769.

⁵⁹ Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, p. 243; Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 34; *Mercurius Politicus* 108 (24 June–1 July 1652), p. 1690; Besold, *De Arcanis*, pp. 9–13.

⁶⁰ Nedham, *Case of the Commonwealth*, ed. Knachel, pp. 126–7.