

## INTRODUCTION

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Britain experienced an extraordinary and unprecedented vogue for texts calling themselves 'secret histories'. Secret history undermines received or official accounts of the recent political past by exposing the seamy side of public life. As an early commentator on the form puts it, the orthodox historian 'considers almost ever Men in Publick', whereas the secret historian 'only examines 'em in private':

Th'one thinks he has perform'd his duty, when he draws them such as they were in the Army, or in the tumult of Cities, and th'other endeavours by all means to get open their Closet-door; th'one sees them in Ceremony, and th'other in Conversation; th'one fixes principally upon their Actions, and th'other wou'd be a Witness of their inward Life, and assist at the most private hours of their Leisure: In a word, the one has barely Command and Authority for Object, and the other makes his Main of what occurs in Secret and Solitude.<sup>1</sup>

Inside the closets and cabinets of those in power, secret historians discover sexual intrigue and political chicanery. They reveal that monarchs and ministers routinely attempt to dupe their people in an effort to extend their own power. Secret history presents itself as a defender of British political liberties at the vanguard of the battle against French-style absolute rule. But secret history is also self-conscious about its status as a literary form. A revisionist mode of historiography, it re-plots received accounts of recent political history along partisan lines. It encourages its readers to consider the relationship between historical narratives and political power and the function of secrecy and revelation in each.

The discoveries that secret historians make in the cabinets and closets of the powerful vary according to period. The first English text to bear the title 'secret history' is *The Secret History of the Court of the Emperor Justinian* (1674), an anonymous translation of the *Anekdotia* or 'unpublished things' by the sixth-century Byzantine historian, Procopius of Caesarea. This secret history's revelations about the debauched and tyrannical behaviour of the Emperor Justinian were interpreted by many contemporaries as reflections upon Charles II. Later secret historians were more direct in their attacks on the Stuart monarchs. In the wake of the Revolution of 1688–9, at the height of secret history's popularity in

England, almost all secret histories reveal the political and sexual secrets of the Stuart kings, Charles II and James II, and the French monarch, Louis XIV. Texts such as *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* (1690), *The Secret History of the Duchess of Portsmouth* (1690), *The Cabinet Open'd: or, the Secret History of the Amours of Madam de Maintenon with the French King* (1690) and *The Royal Mistresses of France, or, The Secret History of the Amours of All the French Kings* (1695) focus on the power of royal mistresses at both the Stuart and Bourbon Courts. They give their readers a titillating glimpse of kings and courtesans in a state of undress, but they also reinforce important political ideas: in particular, that France gained insidious control over Charles II through his mistress, Louise de K eroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth; more generally, that absolute or would-be absolute monarchs are, in fact, ruled by the women at their Courts. Arbitrary government, secret historians claim, is little more than petticoat government.

Other closet discoveries are more overtly and straightforwardly political. Secret leagues between England and France – to the detriment of the Protestant religion and political liberty – occupy much space in *The Secret History of White-hall* (1697) and *The True Secret History of the Reigns of All the Kings and Queens of England* (1702). Among these conspiratorial leagues to enslave the English people, the secret treaty of Dover consistently generates the highest level of interest among secret historians. Signed by Charles II and Louis XIV in 1670, it annihilated the defensive Triple League between the Protestant nations, England, the United Provinces and Sweden. Within two years, England was at war against the United Provinces on the side of Roman Catholic France. The fact that the Duchess of Orl ans, Charles II's sister, died soon after the treaty was signed led to allegations that she had been poisoned by the French having played her part in the negotiations.<sup>2</sup> Scandal, sensation and polemic are the stuff of post-Revolution secret history, which thrills and shocks its readership into believing that their political liberties had only very recently been in the greatest peril.

During the eighteenth century, the detail of secret historians' closet discoveries changes, but secret history's intrusive character and iconoclastic purpose endure. With the Stuart Court in exile at St Germain-en-Laye, Jacobite conspirators, assisted by French finances, represented a new threat to British political liberties. Secret histories of this period focus not so much on the Jacobite plotters themselves as on the intrigues of Queen Anne's Tory ministers. The Whig opponents of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, argued that these ministers were secret supporters of the Pretender attempting to undermine limited monarchy in Britain. During the early eighteenth century, then, secret historians shift their attention from monarchs to ministers and they narrow their focus so that sexual intrigue becomes less impor-

tant to their arguments than political scheming. But they continue to oppose the threat of arbitrary government, even when the nature of that threat alters.

The first three decades of the eighteenth century witness not only changes in the typical content of secret history, but also the appropriation and adaptation of this form's generic conventions by writers working in genres other than secret history itself. Between 1709 and 1725, texts as diverse as Delarivier Manley's scandalous *roman à clef*, *The New Atalantis* (1709), the polite periodical, *The Spectator* (1711–14), and Daniel Defoe's dark, late novel, *Roxana* (1724) – to name just a few – manipulate in a variety of different ways secret history's central claim to disclose previously undiscovered intelligence. Eighteenth-century authors create a range of rhetorical effects out of raw material provided by secret history's revelatory narratives. In each case, however, the act of adaptation can be read as a political statement. Sometimes these writers affirm the connection between secret history and the Whig opposition to excessive royal prerogative but more often they modify, question or even challenge it. During the early eighteenth century, allusions to secret history are used to shore up support for the Tory party, condemn Robert Harley's intelligence-based style of political management, celebrate the triumph of Whiggism after the accession of George I to the throne, decry the ministerial Whigs' abandonment of Revolution principles, and attack the prime minister, Robert Walpole. The sheer range of political uses to which secret history's literary conventions are put reveals the flexibility and enduring appeal of this polemical form of historiography over the course of a turbulent half-century in British politics.

### Secret History's Cultural Contexts

The fifty years on which this study focuses are an age of plots and plotting.<sup>3</sup> The later seventeenth century witnessed a cluster of high profile conspiracies, including the Popish Plot of 1679 (an alleged Jesuit conspiracy to assassinate Charles II and install his Roman Catholic brother, James Duke of York, to the throne), the Rye-House Plot of 1683 (a plot to murder both Charles II and his brother, James, by Exclusionists, or proto-Whigs, seeking to prevent the accession of a Roman Catholic monarch to the English throne), and the Assassination Plot of 1696 (in which Jacobite agents were convicted of conspiring to murder William III). Rebellions against the monarch, from the Monmouth uprising in 1685 to attempted Jacobite invasions in 1692, 1708 and 1715, add to the sense that conspiracy was never far from the surface of British politics during this period.

Early modern writers represented the Stuart monarchs not only as potential victims of conspiracy, however, but also as its perpetrators. Opposition polemicists accused Charles II, James II and their supporters of conspiring to undermine the political and religious freedoms of the British people. In his *Account of the*

*Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government* (1677), Andrew Marvell repeatedly describes the parliamentary Court party as ‘conspirators’ against the nation, in league with the French king. The Revolution of 1688–9 was justified not only on the grounds that James II had fled to France and therefore vacated or abdicated his throne, but also that he had conspired to impose Roman Catholicism and arbitrary government upon his subjects and had thus forfeited their loyalty. James, his consort Mary of Modena and their counsellors were popularly believed to have conspired together to procure a suppositious heir to the throne: the infant Prince of Wales, later the Pretender, was allegedly smuggled into the birthing chamber in a warming pan.<sup>4</sup> Even Queen Anne was (albeit falsely) suspected in many quarters of conspiring to make the Pretender her successor, rather than the Protestant Hanoverians.<sup>5</sup> Secret history encourages its readers to believe that their rulers are in league against them and encourages suspicion of Courts in general, arguing that monarchs and ministers operate within a secret sphere of clandestine political activity. If late-Stuart Britain did, indeed, witness the emergence of a ‘public sphere’, then secret history undermines the idea that its foundations were the rational and free exchange of information and opinion. Secret history suggests that the contemporary reading public was both prurient and fearful about what it did not know. Each revelation of previously concealed intelligence increased awareness of the limits of public knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

The political culture of plots and plotting out of which secret history emerges raises difficult epistemic and generic questions about the relationship between fact and fiction and – even more significantly for secret history – about the ways in which historical events are turned into historical narratives. Where the discovery of secret conspiracy is concerned, it is easy to claim that plots have been invented, especially where there are obvious motives for covering up or fabricating evidence. Sceptical contemporaries speculated that Charles II or his supporters or even Whig activists invented the Rye-House Plot in order to damage their political opponents.<sup>7</sup> Reports of Jacobite conspiracies could, likewise, be dismissed as *ignes fatui* designed by the government to quell a factious public into political submission. The deregulation of the press that occurred as a result of a temporary lapse of the Licensing Act in 1679 and a permanent lapse of this Act from 1695 allowed the proliferation of printed accounts of the recent past. In this milieu it was difficult to tell what to believe, since behind every account of contemporary political history lay the potential for numerous, competing versions of past.

Connections between the epistemic problems raised by late Stuart political culture and contemporary literary interest in the concepts of fact and fiction have been explored in much recent scholarship, most notably by Mark Knights and Kate Loveman.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between political and literary questions about how to determine what to believe and similar enquiries in variety of

spheres – among them the law, natural philosophy, religion and accounts of travels in far-flung places – has also received substantial critical attention over recent decades.<sup>9</sup> It has less often been observed, however, that such questions about belief necessarily lead on to questions about the business of plotting the past.<sup>10</sup> Asserting the credibility of a previously undiscovered piece of intelligence inevitably involves making an adjustment to received historical narratives. Indeed, even if readers refuse to believe that a particular piece of information is true, the rhetorical act of revelation encourages them to consider the ways in which narratives of the past are constructed out of a selected and therefore contingent set of events. The act of disclosure demonstrates that secrets are narratives, created by rearranging sequences of events in such a way as to obscure the truth. It is the connections between secrecy, revelation, narrative and political power, more than questions about fact and fiction *per se*, that preoccupy early modern secret historians.

Secret history, with its claims to discover previously concealed intelligence, invites from its readers the same kind of scepticism as contemporary political plots. But secret histories differ from most other contemporary accounts of conspiracy and political intrigue because of the highly self-conscious approach that they adopt towards the discourse of disclosure. Secret history not only claims to reveal secrets but also scrutinizes the ethical, epistemic, historiographical and political implications of its own revelatory gestures. Instead of seeking to convince its readers that the claims it makes are unquestionably true, secret histories often acknowledge and even make political capital out of the precarious position that they occupy on the borders of history and fiction. They draw attention to the impact of the disclosure of secrets upon received or familiar narratives of the past. They suggest that all historical narrative, including secret history itself, might be revised or reinterpreted should further information come to light, and that any version of events might be built on fictional rather than factual foundations. Its self-reflexive character makes secret history one of the early modern period's most complex forms of polemical writing.

In order to understand secret history fully, it is vital that we try to situate its distinctive polemical strategies within the partisan milieu that it seeks to influence. This study seeks to provide the first integrated account of early modern secret history, in which both its literary and its partisan characteristics are considered, in detail, together. And it is also the first account of secret history's influence upon a particular set of early eighteenth-century texts, each of which engages with both the literary and political conventions of this polemical form of historiography. The following chapters provide a secret history of secret history by revealing the complexity of this form and the central position that it occupies within early modern literary and political culture. But as it discloses secret history's own secrets, this study also illuminates hidden aspects of the culture of

which secret history forms part. For instance, by demonstrating that many of secret history's polemical strategies are counter-intuitive rather than logical and straightforward, it suggests the existence of a politicized reading public capable not only of sophisticated analyses of individual texts but also comparing the rhetorical devices used by a variety of different authors within and across genres. It also shows that early modern party politics – the personalities involved as well as the ideas discussed – precipitated tremendous literary innovation during this period by encouraging a highly self-conscious approach towards questions of genre and narrative form. As the next section demonstrates, secret history's formal characteristics are tailored to its primary political function: opposing arbitrary government. The subsequent two sections explore the more complex and self-conscious rhetorical facets of this polemical form of historiography.

### Secret History and the Opposition to Arbitrary Government

Secret history is a form of historiography designed to oppose arbitrary government. It responds to the importance of secrecy in the theory and practice of absolute rule.<sup>11</sup> One recent historian of European absolutism during the early modern period suggests that, 'under absolutism, the concept of secrecy had become morally neutral, far removed from its earlier association with deceit'.<sup>12</sup> Secrecy-based concepts such as political 'prudence', simulation (pretending to be what one is not), dissimulation (pretending not to be what one really is) and *arcana imperii*, or secrets of state, were central to early modern absolutism. These concepts underpinned *raison d'état* or 'reason of state': the adoption of extra-legal or apparently immoral methods of rule, ostensibly for the good of the country.<sup>13</sup> Some early modern writers castigated reason of state as Machiavelian; in other quarters, however, it was applauded as the best means to establish a strong, stable political system.<sup>14</sup> As well as being crucial to reason of state, secrecy was also an intrinsic element of the theological rationale for absolute rule. Absolute monarchs were deemed accountable to God alone and analogous to God as all-powerful rulers. Their motives and secret purposes were inscrutable.<sup>15</sup> In Britain, the association of absolutism with Roman Catholicism (evident in the collocation 'popery and arbitrary government') further added to the perception that mystery sustains arbitrary rule. In absolutist, Roman Catholic states such as France, secrecy appeared to uphold a system of civil and ecclesiastical government in which monarch and priests conspired to control and suppress the people by keeping them in ignorance.<sup>16</sup>

Against the clandestine world of the backstairs and closet, secret history pits the populist medium of print.<sup>17</sup> While secrets are created in private, passed on through whispers or manuscripts that can be destroyed at a moment's notice, secret historians expose secrets in a printed and therefore highly public form. The

medium in which their texts appear is thus central to their iconoclastic political aims.<sup>18</sup> But if secret history's general claim to reveal secrets in print is in itself an assault on arbitrary government, then the particular nature of the secrets exposed by secret historians adds weight to the attack. Secret history offer its readers tales of sexual as well as political intrigue gathered from the closets and bedchambers of those who occupy positions of power. The capacity of secret history to titillate was not only commercially advantageous, but also politically significant. Secret history focuses attention on the body of the monarch, thereby compromising regal dignity and undermining the reverential distance between monarch and people.<sup>19</sup> It also presents the foundations of arbitrary rule as unsteady by locating them in the personal whims and appetites of an absolute ruler. When they depict bedchamber intrigues as the root cause of recent political events, secret historians are not necessarily arguing that the king's sexual appetite is the sole reason behind all political history (although, as we shall see, they do sometimes suggest that this is the case). Rather, salacious secret history reveals what happens when men, rather than laws, govern.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between secret history and pre-existing versions of recent political history reinforces secret history's oppositional political aims. Secret history is never a standalone account of past events; it always supplements and revises earlier historical narratives. Procopius's *Anekdotia* was written to undermine his *History of the Wars*, a laudatory account of the battles between the Roman army and the Persians, Goths and Vandals. David Jones's *Secret History of White-hall* claims to be a 'Supplemental Part, as well for the detecting of past Falsties, as for the perfecting of past Discoveries' in Sir William Temple's *Memoirs* (1691) and Roger Coke's *Detection of the Court and State of England during the Four Last Reigns* (1694).<sup>21</sup> In his *True Secret History*, John Somers prefaces his secret history of each reign with an account of that reign's 'General History', thus highlighting the difference between the two.<sup>22</sup> Yet even when secret historians do not specify particular versions of events that their narratives challenge, secret history is still a revisionist form of historiography. By claiming to bring secrets to light, secret history sets out to undermine prevailing orthodoxies about the character of the reigns that it describes. Secret history's revisionist tendencies also demonstrate the political role of historians, who create or destroy the narratives that surround absolute rulers. This self-reflexive function of secret history had particular resonance for English historians and readers during the later seventeenth century: secret history represents a concerted effort to highlight the iconoclastic potential of historical narrative at a time when Courts across Europe were introducing the post of royal historiographer to promote official versions of the past.<sup>23</sup> Secret history's reflections upon its own status as a genre of iconoclastic historiography represent one of its most powerful polemical strategies.

So far, there appears to be a fairly straightforward political rationale behind secret history's principal rhetorical strategies. In order to attack the aura of secrecy that surrounds absolute rulers, secret history exposes their secrets; in order to highlight the unstable foundations of personal rule and to deprive monarchs of regal dignity, secret history reveals them in a state of undress; and in order to assert the role of the historian in sustaining or undermining arbitrary power, secret history supplements and challenges pre-existing accounts of the recent political past. But such a logical relationship between the political aims and stylistic characteristics of secret history only takes us some of the way towards appreciating the rhetorical strategies of this sophisticated form of historiography. If we look closely at secret histories written during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, we often find in them a self-conscious approach towards the central motif of revelation that is more hermeneutically demanding than recent scholarly accounts of this genre have acknowledged.

Given its generic title, secret history might logically be expected to reveal secrets and to make strong claims to historicity. Many of its early critics, however, protest that it fails to meet these expectations. One early, Latin commentary on secret history suggests that it should be classed as common satire rather than the prestigious genre of history, and that the information it contains is more accurately described as gossip than as secrets.<sup>24</sup> A later writer likewise observes that the 'Objection ... generally made to all *Anecdotes*' is that their intelligence is 'either False or Common.'<sup>25</sup> According to objectors against secret histories, these texts pretend to give their readers intelligence that is both historically accurate and previously undiscovered while peddling invented stories or common gossip. But do secret historians really claim to tell secrets? And do they genuinely regard their texts as history? The next two sections (respectively) address these questions. The answers that emerge reveal the rhetorical complexities of secret history, and the often counter-intuitive ways in which practitioners of this genre pursue their polemical ends.

#### A Rhetorical Approach towards the Motif of Revelation; or, Does Secret History Really Tell Secrets?

In order to understand secret history's more complex rhetorical strategies, it helps to begin by asking a simple question: in what sense does secret history tell secrets? The period under consideration does witness the publication of texts which reveal genuine secrets: that is, information never before published and probably unknown to the majority of its readers. Into this category we might place Marvell's *Account of the Growth of Popery*, which reveals the ongoing 'conspiracy' between the Court faction and France to introduce French-style arbitrary government into England through secret leagues.<sup>26</sup> Marvell provides

his readers with verbatim reports of speeches from inside the *sanctum sanctorum*, the House of Commons – a practice that was illegal in and of itself – as well as incriminating documentary evidence of the Court faction’s underhand activities.<sup>27</sup> In the early eighteenth century, Jonathan Swift’s *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711) also tells its readers secrets. Swift asserts that ‘the true Spring or Motive’ of the War of Spanish Succession, which had raged since 1702, ‘was the aggrandizing a particular Family’ – that is, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough and the Earl of Godolphin who stood to benefit politically and financially from the war’s prolongation.<sup>28</sup> Swift’s close contact with the Tory Lord Treasurer, Robert Harley, gave him access to privileged information which he exposed, at Harley’s behest, in this propagandist pamphlet.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the period under consideration, writers of polemic clearly understood the importance of putting previously undiscovered intelligence into print as a means of manipulating public opinion.

Many self-professed secret historians likewise claim that their texts provide their readers with genuine, previously undiscovered intelligence. In the preface to *The Secret History of White-hall*, David Jones asserts that his text is intended ‘to obviate a vulgar Error and Objection that I foresee would be made upon this Subject, *That all that could be Writ has been written already, concerning the late Reigns*’. Jones challenges ‘the Objector’ to state

where it is he meets with an exact Account of the *Private League* between King *Charles II.* and the *French King*; The Duke of *York’s* secret Correspondence with that Court; *Coleman’s* intervention with both for his own Advantage; The Interest the *French* made both in *England* and *Holland* among the several *Sects* and *Parties* of Men, to prevent the late Queen’s being married to his present Majesty: The Methods concerted to trapan her into *France* with her Father’s concurrence, and how prevented; Father *St Germain’s* attempting King *Charles* the Second in his Religion, with the King’s Answer, &c. His unseasonable boasting of it, the Occasion of his flight into *France*, and the Censure he underwent from those of his Order for it; *Coleman’s* Wife’s Petition to the *French King*, the Answer, and her destroying her self; Monsieur *Le Tellier’s* Speech about the *Invasion* of *England*; The Duke of *York* his perversion to the Church of *Rome*; King *James’s* *Private League* with *France*, when Regnant; the Essay made by *Don Ronquillo*, the *Spanish* Ambassador, to draw him into the *Austrian* Interest, with his Answer, and Refusal in favour of *France*; How Father *Petre* came to be made a Privy Councillor; wherefore Mr *Skelton* was imprisoned in the *Tower* &c. ... to name no more, though the rest are of equal Curiosity.<sup>30</sup>

This sensationalist preface *cum* table of contents is designed to advertise the novelty of Jones’s revelations, but its brash tone perhaps raises more suspicions about the freshness and reliability of the intelligence contained in this text than it quells. Indeed, despite Jones’s rhetoric of revelation, much of the information that he claims is new had long circulated in the public domain in printed form. Andrew Marvell had alerted his readers to ‘the *Private League* between King *Charles* the Second, and the *French King*’ – commonly known as the secret

treaty of Dover – twenty years earlier in his *Account of the Growth of Popery*.<sup>31</sup> The secret treaty is the main topic of works such as *An Account of the Reasons Which Induced Charles II. King of England to Declare War Against the States-General of the United Pouvines [sic] in 1672. And of the private league which he entred into at the same time with the French king to carry it on* (1689), which in turn was based on Primi Fassola di San Maiolo's suppressed account of the Third Dutch War, *Historia della guerra d'Olanda* (1682). The conspiracies between the Duke of York and the French Court to which Jones alludes had also been publicized in *An Account of the Private League betwixt the Late King James II and the French King. In a Letter from a Gentleman in London, to a Gentleman in the Country* (1689).

Many texts that proudly display the phrase 'secret history' on their title pages deal in similarly recycled material. *The Secret History of the Chevalier de St George* (1714), for instance, rehearses exactly the same stories about the birth of the Pretender that had circulated ever since the warming-pan scandal first broke in 1689, although its author claims to 'enumerate what others have carelessly or artfully pass'd by'.<sup>32</sup> And as late as 1718, John Dunton asserts in *The Hanover-Spy; or, Secret History of St. James's* that Charles II and James II's Roman Catholicism was 'a great Secret hitherto', which 'I positively affirm to be Matter of Fact' – a claim little short of laughable in the context of political events during the previous thirty years.<sup>33</sup> How are we to interpret the motif of revelation in texts like these, which clearly contain little that might be described, in any ordinary sense of the term, as secret?

In the almost total absence of archival evidence, it is impossible to know how readers responded to the claims made by secret histories to reveal secret intelligence, let alone to evaluate variations in the reception of these texts in metropolitan centres and the provinces, by readers with knowledge of the Court and those outside such privileged circles, or among readers of different political persuasions.<sup>34</sup> Even without firm evidence, however, it is safe to assume that readers of secret histories received these texts in a wide variety of different ways. At least some are likely to have approached the information contained in secret histories as genuine secrets – that is, as information brought to light for the first time. With the benefit of hindsight it is evident that much of the content of secret histories was already available to readers in printed form, and it is easy to suspect that still more was common political gossip in and around the Court and City of London. It is nonetheless reasonable to believe that there were many individual readers who really had never encountered the claims made by particular secret histories. The secret historian John Oldmixon seems particularly conscious of such a potential readership in his *Secret History of Europe* (1712–15) – a text which is comprised not of 'such Anecdotes, as are no where else to be met with', but rather of information scattered through so many disparate texts that it 'prob-

ably would never have fallen into the Hands of one Man' had Oldmixon not gathered it together.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, there were readers who remained resolutely sceptical about any information conveyed in the form of a secret history because of the genre's reputation for invented, malicious scandal: as we will see shortly, secret history met with many critics keen to portray its claims to reveal secret intelligence as nothing more than unreliable partisan propaganda and/or profiteering. Most readers probably fell somewhere between these two extremes, evaluating the revelations made by individual texts on their own merits.

If we are to consider the full range of potential responses towards secret history, however, we need to adopt a rhetorical rather than a positivist approach towards the motif of revelation. Instead of attempting to deduce whether secret histories really revealed secrets or to conjecture about how actual readers responded to secret history, this study analyses the authorial strategies that are founded upon the claim to disclose secrets. Such an approach illuminates the possibility that many secret historians did not intend their claims to disclose secret intelligence to be taken as literally true but, rather, that they regarded such gestures as a rhetorical device. For many writers in this genre, the claim to reveal secrets is a statement in support of the Whig opposition to arbitrary government. Whig writers use secret history's central motif of revelation to present their political party as the party of openness rather than concealment, of candour rather than conspiracy, regardless of the quality of the intelligence contained in the secret histories themselves.

Interpreting the motif of revelation as rhetorical has significant implications for the way in which I approach early modern secret history. It means that I am not concerned to discover the real secrets of late Stuart politics, but rather to analyse the ways in which secret historians handled the discourse of disclosure. In this context, the actual details of the secrets that are revealed in any given text are important only insofar as they illuminate the rhetorical act of revelation. So, for instance, the fact that John Dunton claims to expose Charles II's and James II's Roman Catholicism is significant because it connects Dunton's text with an established tradition of Whig secret history and because, as a revelation made in 1718, its putative status as secret intelligence is so entirely implausible. Chapter 3 demonstrates that, although Dunton's text does not in a positive sense reveal secrets in the way that it claims to, its engagement with the discourse of disclosure is, nonetheless, politically motivated. Dunton's approach towards the motif of revelation is far from unusual in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. We will see that, instead of expressing embarrassment or concern at the lack of secrets in their texts, many writers who engage with the conventions of secret history ostentatiously draw attention to the mismatch between their texts' claims to expose secrets and their contents. Although, at first, Dunton's claim that the Stuart kings' sympathy for the Roman Catholic Church is 'a great Secret

hitherto' appears risible, further analysis reveals that a wide disparity between the claim to reveal secret intelligence and the kind of information contained in a given text is a vital part of the polemical strategy of many secret historians.

A rhetorical approach towards the motif of revelation also draws attention to secret historians' ambivalent attitude towards the printed text as a revelatory mechanism. Secret historians contrast the publicity of print with the secrecy of underhand, political machinations but the act of doing so creates a paradox: the printed secret. In the preface to his translation of Antoine Varillas's *Anek-dota Heterouika; Or, The Secret History of the House of Medicis* (1686), Ferrand Spence testily pre-empts any critics who might take issue with his use of the phrase 'secret history' on the grounds that the information in his text had already appeared in print:

Some will, perhaps, carp at me, for calling my Traduction a Secret History, whereas the Original had already made the matter Publick; but against this, and other Cavils and Objections, I shall not stand to make a Defence, having, for what I have done, the Authority of all *Procopius* his Translators.<sup>36</sup>

Spence falls back on the same kinds of argument as the French neoclassical critic whose work he translates. He claims that the authority of precedents, particularly those closely related to an ancient text, negates the significance of any contradictions in secret history's claim to reveal secrets. Yet, when compared with later secret historians, Spence's defensive arguments represent something of a failure of imagination. When they describe information published in printed form as 'secret', secret historians create an inconsistency that becomes, for many of them, fertile rhetorical ground.

The fact that so many secret histories fail to provide their readers with genuine secret intelligence in spite of their claims to reveal secrets must have a bearing upon the ways in which we approach these texts. Instead of regarding secret history as a form that actually reveals secrets, we need to think of it as a form that *claims* to reveal secrets and often fails, quite deliberately, to live up to the expectations that it generates. As we shall see, secret historians manipulate the disparity between claim and content in a variety of ways, according to their particular rhetorical and partisan purposes. The coexistence of straightforward and counter-intuitive rhetorical strategies is, however, a feature of almost all secret histories published during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This peculiar characteristic of secret history is very much in evidence in its distinctive, self-conscious approach towards questions of genre and narrative form.

### A Generic Approach towards the Motif of Revelation; or, is Secret History Really Historical?

Throughout the period of secret history's prominence, ill-disposed commentators repeatedly attack this form's pretensions to historicity. Many of them do so on the grounds that secret history is more fiction than fact. *The Blatant Beast Muzzl'd* (1691) – an extended critique of secret history by writer who identifies himself only as N. N. – declares that *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* (1690) is 'Fantastick Stuff' which is 'so full of Forgery, that it disgraces *History* by being nam'd such, having scarce as much Truth in it as is generally Found in Romances'.<sup>37</sup> The French historiographer Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy likewise condemns the 'loose Imaginations' of secret historians, which blur the boundary between fact and fiction. 'Because in them are found some Truth', he asserts, 'therefore it is believed that there is nothing false', when in fact 'we shou'd regard the whole as false, upon Account of the Difficulty we have to trace out the Truth so enwrapped with Falsehood'.<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Swift has Gulliver discover and denounce 'the Roguery and Ignorance of those who pretend to write *Anecdotes*, or secret History; who send so many Kings to their Graves with a cup of Poison; will repeat the Discourse between a Prince and a chief Minister, where no Witness was by; unlock the Thoughts and Cabinets of Embassadors and Secretaries of State; and have the perpetual Misfortune to be mistaken'.<sup>39</sup> Gulliver implies that the ignorant rogues who write secret history invent the stuff that fills their narratives.

Gulliver's observations show that the motif of revelation, which is secret history's most distinctive characteristic, renders this genre particularly vulnerable to criticism, since intelligence about things that took place 'where no Witness was by' is nearly impossible to verify. Some secret histories advertise the fact that the information they contain was 'undiscoverable by any other Hand' – a claim that asserts the uniqueness and, hence, the high value of their contents.<sup>40</sup> But such claims also preclude the possibility of introducing the corroborative accounts of other witnesses. Secret history's main selling point – its claim to provide undiscovered secret intelligence – thus becomes a historiographical weakness.<sup>41</sup>

Critics of secret history regularly capitalize on this particular vulnerability. Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy asserts, with a degree of irony, that 'indeed difficult it is to know that which passes only between two where it is their Interest to conceal it'.<sup>42</sup> With rather more rancour, the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzl'd* demands:

In the Name of Wonder, how comes this inconsiderable Wretch [the author of *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II*] to be better acquainted with the *Secrets* of State, than all the Heard [*sic*] of Mankind besides[?]. . . Was he ever Secretary to any of those several Princes or Popes, that he should be so well Vers't in

their *most private* Transactions, and pronounce upon them with such a Confidence? Yet, he must be more than that; he must be of their *Cabinet-Council* too. Nor, will even such an intimate Familiarity with their *Persons* and *Outward* Transactions, justify the abominable Suggestions that are delivered as so many Certain & Evident Truths in this Libel of his. He assumes to himself yet a far greater Privilege, than the knowing all the *Arcana Imperii*. This is too *superficial* an Object for his reaching Brain. He Fancies himself a little God Almighty, and dives into their very *Thoughts*; and (which is a Prerogative peculiar to the Divinity) searches their very Hearts and most retrue Intentions; and when he has done, he turns their Consciences inside-outwards.<sup>43</sup>

Secret history's pretensions to report on secret meetings, intimate conversations, and even private thoughts, beggar belief; they turn the eyewitness narrator of true history into an omniscient narrator more characteristic of romance. Secret history's central motif of revelation makes it impossible to determine whether or not its claims should be regarded as fact or fiction.

Several secret historians attempt to defend their chosen form against accusations of invention. In the preface to his *True Secret History*, John Somers contends with what he takes to be 'the main Objection against *Secret Histories* (that they are seldom True)'.<sup>44</sup> Somers cites his personal credentials to affirm the veracity of the information contained in his text. As a peer of the realm and former minister of state, he presents himself as a trustworthy eyewitness of many of the events he describes. He also notes that he has access to intelligence from 'the Rever[e]nd Mr. W. – Who was a Spy in the French Court, and by that means, took Minutes of the most Secret Transactions between *England* and *France* for many Years'.<sup>45</sup> Somers's personal wealth allows him to acquire 'all those scarce and Valuable Pieces of *Secret History* which were to be purchas'd', while his elevated social status grants him access to both 'Publick and Private Libraries' to see 'Authentick Authors and Manuscripts of Undoubted Credit'.<sup>46</sup> Somers thus advertises the fact that his secret history fulfils high standards of historical proof: his is an eyewitness narrative written by a participant in the events described; for earlier reigns and events that took place outside the Somers's immediate sphere of activity, the best documentary evidence – including unpublished, private material contained in manuscripts – is used to provide as full and factual an account as possible.

Other secret historians who lack Somers's social and political privileges use different criteria to assert the veracity of their accounts. David Jones affirms that the secrets revealed in his text can be corroborated 'not only by the Connection they have with many material passages in Sir *William Temple's Memoirs*, Mr. *Coke's Detection of the Court and State of England during the Four last Reigns*, &c. but by so natural an unfolding of what is obscurely, or but transiently hinted at by those learned Authors, who could not see beyond their Light'.<sup>47</sup> Jones thus

highlights the revisionist character of secret history even as he attempts to substantiate his own revelations. The anonymous author of *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* employs yet another tactic, insisting that, ‘as for the Truth of what is here contain’d, I will not Apologize for it; for as to the more secret Transactions, the Consequences and Events are my Testimonies; and for what was more publickly carried, there are the loud and general Complaints of the Kingdom to confirm it.’<sup>48</sup> While Somers’s position as a Tacitean statesman-historian serves to underwrite the reliability of his account, and Jones encourages his readers to compare his account against other historical narratives, *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* appeals to the common experience of the people, his readers, reinforcing the iconoclastic political aims of this work.

The dubious reliability of the evidence put forward by secret history is not, however, the only ground upon which its critics attack its pretensions to historicity. Some opponents of secret history also assert that, whether it is true or false, the scandalous nature of secret history’s contents violates generic decorum. In his commentary on a Latin translation of Procopius’s *Anekdotia*, an English jurist named Thomas Ryves rails against the title *Arcana Historia* (‘secret history’) because it makes too audacious a claim for Procopius’s work. Ryves argues that the *Anekdotia* is not a history – a prestigious generic label – but a ‘satire of vices.’<sup>49</sup>

Even those writers who allow the *Anekdotia* to be history criticize its historiographical method. In his *Instructions for History*, translated into English in 1680, René Rapin attacks Procopius’s *Anekdotia* on the grounds that it ‘forget[s] to circumstance what is important, and is very careful in circumstancing what is not so.’<sup>50</sup> In particular, Rapin condemns secret history’s efforts to explain historical change by reference to human passions and appetites. He mocks the idea ‘that *Pericles* occasioned the *Peloponnesian* War, upon the score of his Amours to the Curtezan *Aspasia*. That *Xerxes* carried into *Greece* that dreadful Army, of which Historians give us an account, onely out of a design to eat Figs there. That *Anthony* lost the Empire, onely to avoid losing *Cleopatra*. That *Francis* the First of *France* had no motive to bring an Army into *Italy*, but the fair Eyes of a *Milanese* Lady named *Claricia*.’<sup>51</sup> Rapin denigrates this kind of historical method not only because its focus on love and sexual desire undermines the dignity of history, but also because it represents a highly reductive approach towards complex questions of historical causation. Indeed, Rapin’s analysis seems designed to highlight the proximity of secret history and French *histoire galante*, which also prioritizes love as a causal force behind historical events.<sup>52</sup>

In making this implicit comparison, Rapin is, in fact, highlighting a generic relationship that is acknowledged in many secret histories. Changes in title between English and French editions of particular texts point towards corre-

spondences between secret history and *histoire galante*: *The Royal Mistresses of France; or, the Secret History of the Amours of all the French Kings* (1695) is a translation of Claude Vanel's *Galanteries des Rois de France* (1694), while *The Court of St. Germain; or, The Secret History of James II* (1695) is translated from *La Cour de St. Germain, ou, les intrigues galantes du roy et de la reine d'Angleterre, depuis leur séjour en France* (1695). Secret histories that advertise their affiliation with *histoire galante* often do exhibit a simplistic sense of historical causation. The preface to the French translation of *The Secret History of the Duchess of Portsmouth* (1690), for instance, declares that 'if [Charles II] acted in a way that so little conformed to his judgement, to his powerful intelligence, to politics, to the interests not only of many nations in general, but also to his own realm, then it was a woman, it was the Duchess of Portsmouth, who drove him to it by means of the love that she had inspired in him, by her machinations, and by her power over his mind'.<sup>53</sup> Secret history's association with *histoire galante* draws together both of the principal criticisms against it: that it contains a promiscuous blend of fictional and factual material, and that it violates literary decorum by introducing frivolous, trivial subjects such as love and sexual desire into a serious genre designed to educate its readers through an analysis of the past.

While some secret historians – particularly those who translate works into or out of French – advertise secret history's proximity to *histoire galante*, others attempt to distance these two literary traditions by highlighting the characteristics that secret history shares with neoclassical historiography. In the first extended analysis of Procopian secret history, the French critic Antoine Varillas declares the importance of setting down rules for 'the Art of writing secret History', which he claims 'is still unknown, almost in its whole Extent' because 'no Philosopher, hitherto, has taken the pains to draw up the Method of it, nor Critick dar'd to shew its Defects'.<sup>54</sup> To this end, Varillas informs his reader that he will 'impose Laws on my self, according to which, I pretend to be try'd by an equitable Reader, on Condition I neither borrow them from my Reason nor Caprice, but only from the Examples of *Procopius*, whom I will ever have in ken, seeing I cannot find any other Guide'.<sup>55</sup> Varillas vows to follow Procopius just as other neoclassical historians imitate their ancient exemplars. In doing so, he implicitly elevates his model to the status enjoyed by other classical histories. To justify such an elevation, he insists that the secret historian 'cannot dispence himself from any of the Rules that *Aristotle*, *Cicero*, *Plutarch* and other the Masters of th'Art have so judiciously prescrib'd for Publick History'.<sup>56</sup> According to Varillas, Procopius '[performs] the Duty of a perfect Historian'.<sup>57</sup> By claiming that the *Anekdotia* is 'perfect history', Varillas highlights the fact that it provides an account of the causes behind historical events as well as of the events themselves, according to the example of Procopius's own historiographical model, Thucydides.<sup>58</sup>

In fact, some of secret history's most forthright critics reveal the proximity of secret history to more orthodox forms of early modern perfect history. In his celebration of the best modern historical writing, René Rapin acknowledges that

nothing is more divertive in a Narration, than the decyphering of what is secret and of importance, in the designs and intentions of those whose Actions it divulges: and as History has not any thing curious comparably [*sic*] to that, so are there not any Historians of any fame, who have not endeavoured to signalize themselves upon that score. For nothing does more excite the Curiosity of men, than when they have discover'd to them what is most conceal'd in the Heart of man, that is to say, the secret Springs and Resorts, which make him act in the Enterprizes, which are ordinary to him.<sup>59</sup>

Like the perfect historians whom Rapin praises, the secret historians whom he condemns aim to 'excite the Curiosity of men' by revealing 'the secret Springs and Resorts' behind public events; indeed, the 'secret springs' metaphor is a trope that secret historians frequently deploy in their own narratives.<sup>60</sup> In particular, Tacitus – whom Rapin cites as an example of an historian for whom motives are particularly important – is often criticized in early modern analyses of history writing in terms that seem pertinent to secret history.<sup>61</sup> In his short essay, 'Observations upon Salust and Tacitus', Charles de Saint-Evremond suggests that Tacitus 'turns every thing into Policy' and 'gives too far fetcht Causes of some Actions, which are altogether Simple, Ordinary, and Natural'.<sup>62</sup> Rapin, too, accuses Tacitus of reading too much into every event, concluding that in the *Annals* and the *Histories*, 'the Political Reflection is the motive and general decypherer and disentangler of all things'.<sup>63</sup> As we will see, critics of secret history likewise accused its practitioners of seeing plots everywhere and over-interpreting historical events accordingly. If Tacitus wrote causal historical narratives that identify the reasons for the visible events of history as the secret motives and conspiracies of key figures, what is there to distinguish between orthodox and secret history?

In spite of the points of similarity between them, there are also several factors that set secret history apart from more orthodox forms of perfect history.<sup>64</sup> The first concerns the historian's qualification to narrate events. Tacitus and many of his latter-day imitators, such as Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, assert the importance of their participation in the events that they describe to their authority as historians.<sup>65</sup> Unlike these orthodox narratives written by statesmen-historians, however, many secret historians reveal that their sources are ethically dubious – if they cite their sources at all. John Somers's emphasis on his personal acquaintance with affairs of state is unusual. Rather than writing about their firsthand experiences, secret historians often claim to have their intelligence through intercepted letters, whispered news and gossip, the intelligence of spies and the grumbling of cast-off mistresses. They thus give their readers the impres-

sion that the information contained in their texts is passed on expressly against the will of the powerful figures whom it concerns. The overtly iconoclastic purpose of secret history also distinguishes it from Tacitean history, which could be interpreted either as supportive of absolute rule because it gives instructions in reason of state, or as a revelatory form of historiography along the lines of secret history.<sup>66</sup> Secret historians' prurient interest in bedchamber intrigues puts their chosen form still further outside the historical pale. Rapin asserts that true history deals in 'what is secret *and of importance*'<sup>67</sup> – a category that does not include amatory affairs. Although Thomas Ryves meant to condemn secret history by describing it as a 'satire of vices', his analysis is close to the truth: secret history provides an alternative vision of the recent political past, which deliberately chafes against official accounts and orthodox historiographical methods.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, secret history's self-conscious interest in the business of plotting and re-plotting the past suggests that it has more to do with historiography than most other contemporary forms of satire. Indeed, it is important to secret history's polemical purpose that it both resembles and also subverts contemporary perfect history.

Some defenders of secret history actually seek to suggest that this form represents a new kind of perfect history which is more accurate in its representation of the past than Tacitean or other neoclassical perfect history. In his commentary on Procopius, Antoine Varillas suggests that it is precisely by peering into the hidden recesses of bedchambers and closets that Procopius carries out 'the Duty of a perfect Historian,'<sup>69</sup> because it is only by doing so that the real causes of public events can be known. Indeed, Varillas insists that the interest that secret historians take in sexual intrigue not only allows them to provide a fuller account of the causes behind historical events than can other kinds of perfect historian, but that it also compels them to stick closer to historical facts than their more conventional counterparts. Varillas asserts that, 'what Liberty soever, not to say Libertinage, that's attributed to *Ανεκδοτα*, there is no kind of Writing more constrain'd, nor more reserv'd, since it has not a quarter of the Extent which the most scrupulous Historians propose to themselves; and that 'there's no kind of Slavery greater, for an Anecdoto-grapher, than to be ty'd to tell the truth in all its Circumstances, ev'n when he handles the nicest matters.'<sup>70</sup> Varillas implies that secret historians deal in sexual scandal – or, 'the nicest matters', as he modestly puts it – because it really is the driving force behind historical events, and not because they are prurient. Moreover, he affirms that the suspicion inevitably aroused by secret history's morally dubious content obliges practitioners of this form to adopt a particularly scrupulous approach towards questions of historical accuracy. Although he acknowledges it to be a 'Paradox,'<sup>71</sup> Varillas suggests that the characteristics of secret history which this form shares with *histoire galante* are, in fact, those that make it a reliable, accurate form of historiography.

That secret historians should wish to affirm the accuracy and propriety of their own narratives is, of course, a logical response to the accusations of invention and indecorum that were made against them. But, as we have seen, secret history does not always fulfil the expectations that might be generated by a strictly logical approach to its central motif of revelation. Indeed, some secret historians respond to the accusations made against them in ways that appear decidedly counter-intuitive. Several of them, for instance, draw their readers' attention to ethical difficulties that are created by their claim to reveal secret intelligence. Antoine Varillas's observation that the secret historian 'endeavours by all means to get open [the] Closet-door'<sup>72</sup> of those in power creates an immediate impression of prurience and underhand dealing, which does little to inspire confidence in the honesty of such a writer. Other secret historians acknowledge the moral difficulties involved in publishing secret intelligence. The act of acquiring information in private and disclosing it in public inevitably involves a degree of bad faith, even if it is carried out in support of a laudable political cause. The revelation of secrets always involves a betrayal of trust, and the deeper the secret penetrated, the more profound the treachery involved.<sup>73</sup> By acknowledging the dubious ethical provenance of the intelligence that fills their texts, secret historians destabilize their own narrative authority – often, it seems, quite deliberately so. The sense of frisson that secret history generates for its readers derives not only from its promise to give a glimpse into cabinets of power, but also from its refusal to confirm whether or not the information it presents is, in fact, a true account of the past.

When they draw attention to the ethical challenges raised by the motif of revelation, secret historians call into question both the reliability of their historical narratives and the idea that those narratives provide a definitive account of the past. In the preface to his *True Secret History*, John Somers promises to reveal 'the Secret Springs and real Causes from whence so many strange and various Effects have proceeded; which oftentimes has [*sic*] been very different from what has been pretended'.<sup>74</sup> Somers implies that, while public history gives a partial account, secret history presents a full picture, showing what really happened in the past – an argument that we have also seen rehearsed in Varillas's analysis of Procopian secret history. Other secret historians, including David Jones in *The Secret History of White-Hall* and Daniel Defoe in his *Secret History of the White-Staff* (1714–15), vary Somers's mechanistic metaphor to suggest that secret history exposes not only 'secret Springs' but also 'wheels within wheels'.<sup>75</sup> Both metaphors imply that the visible events of history are like the hands on a watch, which are turned by hidden mechanisms. They suggest that public events can be caused in any number of ways by various configurations of motives and causes which, for the most part, can only be deduced from surface appearances.

But the idea that historical causation is a set of interlocking wheels within wheels also raises a prospect that unsettles Somers and Varillas's approach towards secret history. Instead of providing a definitive account of the past, secret history opens up the way for future narratives inspired by the discovery of still deeper, darker secrets – or yet smaller wheels within wheels.<sup>76</sup> If secret history supplements and undermines public versions of history, then the methods by which it does so also elicit (either knowingly or unwittingly) further accounts of what really happened. *The Blatant Beast Muzzl'd* asserts, sardonically, that 'our Godly Times, luxuriantly fruitful of such immodest Productions, do frequently teem with' secret histories.<sup>77</sup> His sexualized language reflects what he regards as secret history's prurient obsession with the sexual exploits of the powerful. But it also draws attention to the fact that the motif of revelation is fecund, having the potential to generate endless, competing accounts of the past. Indeed, in spite of his criticism of secret history, the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzl'd* indulges in some scandalous revelations himself, asserting that Charles II's illegal act of closing down the exchequer was secretly 'done by the advice of the Earl of Shaftesbury to render that King odious.'<sup>78</sup> Even opponents of secret history, it seems, cannot resist exploiting its central motif of revelation. Yet as the number of narratives grows around any particular set of historical events, so the possibility of telling which are factual, and which fictional, diminishes. By taking the discourse of disclosure to its logical extreme, some secret historians suggest that all historical narrative, including secret history, is vulnerable to revision, reinterpretation, and fictional interpolation. These writers harness the iconoclastic force of secret history and direct it against secret history itself.

### The Scope of This Study

Any study based on a particular genre of writing assumes that certain texts fall within its remit and that others are excluded. But this assumption raises difficult questions about how to define the characteristics that constitute the genre under consideration. In the case of secret history, early modern writers lend some assistance in this process. Several self-styled secret historians pen extensive and theoretically acute prefaces designed to explain secret history as a genre and justify their own engagement with its conventions. Antoine Varillas's *Anekdotia Heterouiaika*, David Jones's *Secret History of White-hall* and John Somers's *True Secret History* all begin with detailed comments on the formal characteristics and/or the political functions of secret history. Critics of secret history also seek to define this form so that they might attack it with greater vigour. *The Blatant Beast Muzzl'd* is a book-length attack on *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* which, by analysing the polemical and rhetorical strategies used in one particular text, illuminates the entire genre to which it

belongs. More scattered, usually hostile, but critically astute comments on the form are found in the works of French critics such as René Rapin and Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy, and English historiographers such as Thomas Hearne and Roger North. Deductions based on the characteristics of those texts that call themselves secret histories provide yet another means of understanding what contemporaries understood by the term. There are, of course, difficulties inherent in this deductive method. One later eighteenth-century writer jested that the 'secret history' label was nothing more than a marketing scam designed to allure potential readers into buying a text, be its contents ever so innocuous.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, the decision to label a text a secret history suggests that booksellers and authors perceived some common characteristics among such texts – a suggestion usually borne out by their contents.

According to these sources, secret history has a number of distinctive conventions. It invariably claims to reveal secrets about those in positions of power. Its revelations are almost always of a scandalous nature, whether they concern the bedchamber or political intrigues of monarchs or ministers. Secret history is designed to shock and outrage its readers. Most contemporaries therefore associate secret history with Whig politics – whether this entails justified resistance to arbitrary government (according to secret history's supporters) or an attempt to undermine the entire institution of the monarchy (according to its opponents). Secret historians' desire to establish a core tradition of Whig secret history is evident in their use of common metaphors, like those of secret springs and wheels within wheels, and allusion to one another's works: as we will see, John Dunton and John Somers quote key passages from *The Secret History of White-hall* and *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II* in an attempt to reinforce the Whig heritage of this literary tradition.

Of equal importance to the act of revelation in defining secret history is the extent to which practitioners of and commentators on this form analyse its claim to expose secrets of state. Secret history's self-referential tendency is perhaps this genre's most distinctive characteristic. Often, it means that secret history's rhetorical and polemical strategies are counter-intuitive: some secret historians renounce the idea that their revelatory claims have historical authority; others reveal an awareness that their texts do not contain real secrets. Secret historians' scrutiny of the implications of their own claim to disclose intelligence is, however, an essential aspect of this form and one that clearly appealed to many of the writers who adapted its conventions. In its origins, then, secret history is a Whig form that not only claims to disclose secrets of state but that also examines the epistemic, historiographical and political consequences of its own revelatory tendencies. During the early eighteenth century, writers from across the political spectrum – Tories and Jacobites, Court Whigs and Old Whigs – exploit both secret history's early association with the Whig opposition to arbitrary govern-

ment and its self-reflexive literary characteristics as they rework its conventions to serve a variety of political causes.<sup>80</sup>

The structure of this study reflects my belief that secret history is, at its heart, a self-conscious form with Whig origins, which was nonetheless appropriated by eighteenth-century writers of different political opinions. The first section analyses what I take to be secret history's 'core tradition'. Each of the three chapters of this section provides a snapshot of secret history at a different stage in its historical development: during the 1670s, when the first self-styled secret history was published in England; during the reign of William III, when secret history became a distinctively English but also a surprisingly sceptical form of historiography; and in the wake of the Hanoverian accession of 1714, when the decline of secret history seemed to some practitioners of this form to reflect the fate of Revolution principles under the Whig ministries of George I's reign. The second section explores eighteenth-century adaptations of and variations on the core tradition of secret history. In four chapters, each of which focuses on a different author or text, it analyses the ways in which eighteenth-century writers manipulate and rework both the literary conventions and the political connotations of secret history. It shows the variety of political ends to which Delarivier Manley, the contributors to *The Spectator*, Daniel Defoe, and Eliza Haywood put secret history's conventions. The structure of my study is designed to support its central argument: that the complexity and sophistication of secret history's formal, literary characteristics render it peculiarly apt to engage with the political vicissitudes of the first age of party politics.

This study focuses on a fairly small range of texts in a substantial amount of detail. In each of the chapters – particularly the chapters of Section 2, which address variations and adaptations of secret history's conventions in the eighteenth century – close reading of the texts in question underpins a historicized analysis of the ways in which these texts engage in contemporary party political debate. One effect of my decision to focus on depth of analysis rather than breadth of coverage is that I have not addressed some texts which, while they share some of the rhetorical characteristics of the Whig tradition of secret history, nonetheless engage with it either at a relatively superficial level, or in a somewhat incidental way, or not at all. Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1685, 1685, 1687), collections of poems on affairs of state such as *Poems on Affairs of State from the Time of Oliver Cromwell to the Abdication of K. James the Second* (1697), the Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* (1702), Jonathan Swift's *Travels into Several Remote Regions of the World* (1726) – better known as *Gulliver's Travels* – and Gilbert Burnet's *History of His Own Times* (1724, 1734), engage in a variety of ways with ideas about secrecy.<sup>81</sup> None of them, however, reveal the combination of self-consciousness towards the rhetorical act of disclosure and the deployment of this self-consciousness to

a partisan end that characterize the Whig tradition of secret history and are central to the texts considered in Section 2 of this study.

My contextualized study of secret history's rhetorical characteristics represents a new departure in scholarship on this genre. Although secret history has enjoyed a considerable amount of critical attention in recent years, it has almost always been incorporated into broader narratives of early modern and eighteenth-century cultural, literary and political history. Among literary scholars, secret history has often been used to illuminate developments in other literary genres during the early modern period. Melinda Alliker Rabb, for instance, has recently suggested that secret history is crucial to understanding eighteenth-century satire.<sup>82</sup> Many more literary historians have incorporated secret history into accounts of the rise of the novel. According to Robert Mayer, secret history displays the kind of experimental attitude towards 'matters of fact' which was crucial to the novel's emergence.<sup>83</sup> Michael McKeon draws attention to the fact that, like the early novel, secret history claims to give its readers access to private spaces and to the private lives of public individuals, while William B. Warner argues that the erotic elements of secret history are assimilated and 'elevated' by the eighteenth century novel.<sup>84</sup> Secret history appears to be one of the many voices – belonging to both high and low cultural forms – that, according to Mikhail Bakhtin's highly influential analysis, make up this 'heteroglossic' genre.<sup>85</sup>

Recent scholarly interest in ephemeral forms of writing such as secret history has vastly increased our understanding of the culture out of which major genres such as the novel emerged.<sup>86</sup> But one effect of this movement has been the creation of teleological narratives of early eighteenth-century literary history in which distinctive genres such as secret history are subsumed into the history of the novel.<sup>87</sup> My study goes some way towards redressing this balance. It reveals facets of secret history that are invariably flattened out or passed over in accounts of the early novel. For instance, instead of attempting to establish grounds that would allow its readers to believe, with a degree of confidence, in its revelations, many secret historians draw attention to the idea that, where secrets are concerned, it is impossible to distinguish between fact and fiction. And because of its sceptical approach towards epistemic or generic questions of fact and fiction, secret history is much more self-conscious than any early novel (with the exception of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, discussed in Chapter 6) about narrative form and different ways of plotting the past.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, secret history – unlike the early novel – deploys its self-conscious approach towards genre and narrative form to an explicitly party-political end. Although this close engagement with party politics inevitably limits the readability of secret history for modern, general readers, it contributes enormously to our scholarly understanding of the complex ways in which early modern polemicists deploy essentially

literary devices in the services of highly partisan causes. As it reveals the narratological and political consequences of secret history's distinctive approach towards questions of fact and fiction, this study demonstrates that at least one of the minor genres out of which the novel emerges stands up to detailed scholarly analysis in its own right.

As well as being a subject of interest in recent literary history, secret history has also been considered as an index of broader changes in early modern political thought. Michael McKeon presents this genre as the epitome of a more general 'devolution of absolutism' that occurs between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. According to McKeon's analysis, secret history spreads knowledge and therefore power as its revelation of state secrets renders 'explicit' mysteries of state that, while only 'tacit', had underpinned absolute rule.<sup>89</sup> The idea that secret history articulates secrets of state in order to challenge royal prerogative is also put forward by Annabel Patterson. Patterson asserts that secret history is the preserve of 'the leftward or liberal side of the ideological spectrum', since its aim is 'to outsmart the government in its control of information'.<sup>90</sup> In my own study, I build on both of these earlier political analyses of secret history, but am more concerned than either Patterson or McKeon to connect secret history's conventions to the specific party political contexts of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Britain. Secret history is an iconoclastic form of historiography that was used by Whig polemicists to ward off a perceived threat of arbitrary government, but its literary conventions were appropriated and reworked by writers from across the eighteenth-century political spectrum in spite of or, more accurately, because of its early association with Whiggism. I suggest that the only way in which we can gauge the shades of political opinion expressed by the large number of writers who exploit the conventions of secret history is by attending closely to the stylistic, rhetorical and literary devices that they deploy. By adopting a more literary critical approach towards secret history than either McKeon or Patterson, I demonstrate the flexibility of this genre and the central role that it plays in the literary and political culture fostered by late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century party conflict.

As a site of party-political contest, secret history provides a new way of thinking about the relationship between political and literary culture during the early eighteenth century. Much previous scholarship in this area has focused on the importance of attending to the vocabulary of political argument during the early modern period as a way of accessing contemporary ideas and attitudes as well as modes of debate.<sup>91</sup> This linguistic approach has illuminated the political culture of the first age of party, when polemicists jostled over key terms as they promoted their own political beliefs and denigrated those of their opponents. Words such as 'loyalty', 'liberty', 'slavery', 'faction' and 'moderation' – to name but a few – were claimed and contested by partisans from all sides.<sup>92</sup> Mark Knights

has recently argued that late-Stuart politics created a culture in which partisan struggles over slogans, words and phrases undermined any basis for common understanding and precipitated enormous anxiety over the perpetual possibility of misrepresentation and misunderstanding.<sup>93</sup> Secret history, however, suggests that such partisan contests were not limited to individual words or even key phrases. It reveals that generic conventions also become sites of struggle in the febrile political atmosphere of early eighteenth-century Britain. Secret history's scandalous revelatory gestures and revisionist historiographical impulses originate as a form of Whig polemic, but they are reworked by writers of various political opinions in order to attack Whig partisans and promote other social and political causes.

Tracing the appropriation of conventions by competing interest groups is in many ways more problematic than charting the ways in which individual words and their cognates are used and abused, if only because they are more difficult to define. Secret history's central motif of revelation can sometimes be identified by an explicit promise to give readers information 'never before publish'd' or 'hitherto undiscoverable', but often it is evident in less direct ways – the use of spy narrators or private, courtly settings and allusions to earlier secret histories among them. Analysing the ways in which conventions are passed between authors and modified through time requires a literary critical approach towards secret history. It demands close attention to both the language and the tone that particular texts adopt when they claim to disclose secrets, and to the formal and structural characteristics of the texts in which such revelatory gestures are made. It suggests that early modern and eighteenth-century authors – even of popular and partisan texts – regarded close reading and the detailed interpretation of texts as activities of which their readership would be thoroughly capable.<sup>94</sup> But it also entails substantial risks of misreading and over-reading, as it places heavy hermeneutic demands upon its readers, both contemporary and modern. I hope that in this study I have avoided most of these potential pitfalls and done justice to the rhetorical complexities of a supremely sophisticated form of polemical writing.