



To the Members of the Editorial Committee of ESTAR(SER), and to the Readers of *Communiqués*:

Some time ago, the Editorial Cee of ESTAR(SER) received a sealed note from an individual in Amsterdam, addressed not to our research consortium but to the “Secretary [*sic*] of the Order of the Third Bird.” This individual hoped that we would forward the note to this unnamed representative of the Order. As the Corresponding Secretary of ESTAR(SER) (which, of course, devotes itself to historical evidences of the acts, practices, and influences of the Order and of other Bird-like parties), I have for some time been aware of the historical tradition of a “Permanent Secretary” of the Order, though I had been given to believe that this was a thoroughly premodern phenomenon, and quite possibly mythical. No actual Secretary (Permanent or otherwise) of the Order has been known to me or, as far as I am aware, to my colleagues and associates. It is in this context that I write to report on my recent personal contact with a figure who claims to be the “Secretary Locotenant” of the Order.

I must first explain why both positions – Permanent Secretary and Secretary Locotenant – must be distinguished from that of a Secretary proper.

Consider first the example of the Grand Secretariat (Nèigé) of the Ming Dynasty. It so happened that certain of the Ming Emperor’s chancellors had acquired too much power for his taste, so the Emperor decided to dismiss them all. This left him, however, with all the *paperasserie* formerly within their purview. So he hired a number of Grand Secretaries – impeccably trained scholars and *littérateurs* – to assist him. However, because these Secretaries, in order to fulfill their tasks to at least the minimum degree, had to be empowered both to sign imperial documents and to draft such documents on the Emperor’s behalf, and to stand as a bulwark between him and the various Ministries, dicasteries, and consistories, they themselves became, *de facto*, the most important policy-makers in the empire.

De facto, here, is the crucial phrase. Everything about the secretary, an agent of slippage and uncertainty, shuns the bright court-salons and throne rooms of *de jure*, and lingers in the dim corridors and back-channels of *de facto*. This is because secretaries are mediators, representers, standers-in-for, speakers-on-behalf-of. The function of the word “secretary” changes over time and between contexts, but

one thing that never changes is the secretary's power of correspondence. The secretary corresponds *for*, and corresponds *to*. He communicates with the voice, manner and authority of a sovereign or other powerful figure – in short, writes and answers the king's letters. He is an amanuensis, a writing hand that belongs not to itself but to another. Thus his hand corresponds to that of the king, is one of the king's limbs. And in his necessarily intimate relationship to a power *de jure*, he must exercise a power *de facto*, which tends to metastasize. Machiavelli, it must be remembered, was a secretary. And in fact, the secretary, that perennially double agent, keeps finding his way into the corridors of power, by virtue of his very nature.

A further word be said about the *intimacy* of secretaries. The secretary is, practically and etymologically, a bearer or repository of secrets. He is a privy counselor. The 1706 Dictionary titled *New World of Words* has it, in fact, that a secretary not only composes letters on behalf of a king or nobleman, but is also, quite often, a *valet de chambre*, or even that closest of advisors, a Groom of the Closet – a position that has been described as “an exquisite combination of intimacy, degradation and privilege.” It is the very degradation of this Groom that affords him power and charisma, for he possesses a perspective and subtle influence on the Sovereign Body that none other can attain. There is a kind of New Testament resonance in this conjoining of humility and exaltation, and in fact the Apostles of Christ were frequently, by the Church Fathers, called His secretaries. The present position of Secretary of State in the governing structure of the Vatican began as the comparatively lowly position of *Secretarius Intimus*. We recall the story of Pope Julius III (1550-1555) and his lover, the street urchin Innocenzo Ciochi del Monte. The boy proved himself incapable of the diplomatic and administrative duties tenderly assigned to him by the Pope. This presented the latter the problem of creating the illusion of power and prestige around the boy without giving him any real responsibility. Thus Innocenzo became the first Intimate Secretary. Other secretaries of the Church then followed, some living as beacons of austerity and learning, some living lives of luxury and art appreciation, others finding happy media between these.

There are letters, inevitably, that cannot be written or answered by secretaries. The boundaries of power's innermost sanctum are defined by that which the secretary cannot know and cannot speak for, or to; thus in a sense, power can be defined negatively in relation to its secretaries. The secretary's true relationship is with this inner sanctum, this negatively defined power, but this center is by definition inaccessible, and perhaps unthinkable, to the secretary, though the secretary gains his own power from it. The secretary occupies the place of what is, finally, an absence.

It is here that we must step back to reflect on the probable significance and function of the secretary in the Order of the Third Bird, for which these relations must hold somewhat differently if they hold at all.

The Order of the Third Bird, as we at ESTAR(SER) have come to know it, is acephalous and diffuse, and shirks the weight of any governing or administrative structure. One is troubled by the very idea that any entity at all should be capable and willing of command in a milieu – the Order – that

traditionally abhors the exercise of power. How, then, can a secretary function, in the absence of a sovereign, regent, president, or central concept or corpus?

Among the historical practices of the Order, one finds a tendency to attribute the authorship of its various rules and laws, insofar as these were necessary, not to any individual or group of individuals but to a rigorously and permanently empty seat of power, or *sedes vacans*. This empty place drew into itself and isolated all the unhealthy emanations of power that might trouble the Order. The Permanent Secretary, in turn, was understood to serve and to mediate this emptiness.

Now secretaries, as we know, tend over time to take on the aspects of those whom they serve. And it seems that whoever might fill the role of Permanent Secretary of the Order must come, gradually, to imbibe of the emptiness, the absence, of the *sedes vacans*, and became half absent himself. In the present state of the position, in fact, the actions of the Permanent Secretary can no longer be attributed to anyone in particular.

It would be impossible, in these circumstances, *by definition* (we might say), actually to communicate directly with the present Permanent Secretary of the Order, as our Amsterdam correspondent wishes. Inspired by her request, however, I have managed to make epistolary contact with an individual presently occupying the position of the Order's "Secretary Locotenant," who as Secretary to the Secretary, as it were, fulfills many of the tasks and duties of this latter, and who may, finally, have taken on some of the Permanent Secretary's now constitutive insubstantiality.

This individual has, by his own admission, been remiss in these duties for some time, having spent a decade carrying out unspecified research in Karakhoto. Now returned, and having once more taken up his role within the Order, he is quite forthcoming with information about the Permanent Secretary, but concedes that this information might be faulty, given the means of communication that the Permanent Secretary seems to prefer (the latter, it seems, composes all of his/her correspondence in Esperanto or in a number of other international auxiliary languages, and in a highly ornate and often near-illegible script.) The Locotenant signs his own correspondence "M. Gylhmat," "Dr. Gylhmat," or simply "Gylhmat."

According to Dr. Gylhmat, the position of Permanent Secretary and/or Secretary Locotenant of the Order of the Third Bird entails the following:

- 1) The Secretary receives, orders, archives, and occasionally distributes documents relating to the Order, both canonical and apocryphal, including those written by members and by outside entities, presumably including ESTAR(SER).

- 2) The Secretary acts as a liaison between the Order and the scholarly and wider community, responding on the Order's behalf to outside inquiries about the Order, or referring questions and topics of research from Order members and associates to the appropriate experts and vice versa.

- 3) The Secretary registers, archives, and comments upon new discoveries and inventions (protocols, techniques, and so forth) by members and associates of the Order.
- 4) The Secretary keeps account, to the extent possible, of all existing volées in all regions, and registers their appearance, disappearance, or occultation.
- 5) The Secretary sends out reports, circulars, rescripts, and research *motu proprio* to the members of the Order.
- 6) The Secretary nominates Ambassadors of the Order and sends them to the communities that have need of them or interest in receiving them.
- 7) The Secretary records and collates the statutes, rules, and laws of the Order and registers petitions for changes to these laws. The Secretary travels widely, often unannounced or in disguise, for the purpose of confirming that these rules and statutes are abided by, as well as to ensure that episodes of metempsychosis remain temporary. If not, it is the Secretary's duty to emerge from the shadows to deliver the appropriate homilies and guidances. Even when the Secretary is not present, his/her absence is understood to constitute and to emanate a manner of guidance.
- 8) The Secretary gives and keeps counsel with skill and discretion.
- 9) The Secretary signs the Dispatches of the Privy Seal of the Order.
- 10) The Secretary corresponds for the Order.
- 11) The Secretary corresponds to the Order.

M.

Corresponding Secretary of ESTAR(SER)
Eastern Consistory
corrsecretaryest@gmail.com