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**Can Shakespeare's Richard III be referred to as a**

**“Machiavellian villain”?**

**An analysis of the final play of the Henry VI series**

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## Foreword

Richard, Duke of Gloucester in *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Richard III* is a character who is often described as a Machiavellian villain. However, one may be taken aback by this statement when they encounter Machiavelli's treatise *Il Principe*. This is because, a lot of the time, Richard's behaviour does not seem to reflect what Machiavelli opined in his treatise: in fact, it may even be said that there is discrepancy between Machiavelli's *Principe* and the behaviour of Shakespeare's Richard in the play. The final aim of this thesis is therefore to explore this discrepancy further. Some specific instances in which the concepts Machiavelli expressed in *Il Principe* appear to be totally absent from the behaviour or attitude that audiences perceive in Shakespeare's Richard will be examined. The thesis will conclude by discussing the extent to which this character may be referred to as Machiavellian.

The thesis begins with an exploration of how Machiavelli and his *Principe* were received in Europe throughout the course of the sixteenth century, from the first appearance of *Il Principe* until the time at which Shakespeare's *Henriad* plays first reached the stage. It also features a brief discussion of whether Shakespeare was likely to have been familiar with *Il Principe* or other works by Machiavelli.

Circulation of Machiavelli's *Principe* is known to have begun as early as the 1530s in the British Isles. It is noteworthy that references to Machiavelli and his work were frequently made in literature which discussed the break with the Roman Catholic Church instigated by Henry VIII in the 1530s. Machiavelli was used as a rhetorical device to both attack and defend this event. A prominent example of one who put Machiavelli to use in defending the schism was Richard Moryson, who is known to have found Machiavelli particularly useful in providing detailed evidence against the papacy. Moryson defended in his written elaborations the divorce between the first wife of King Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon, and the king. Conversely, Machiavelli also appeared as a

rhetorical device to attack the schism. One well-known instance of this is found in Reginald Pole's disparaging references to Machiavelli in his essay *Apologia Ad Carolum Quintum*. The essay purports that Machiavelli's *Principe* had been the reason why Henry VIII had decided to break with the Church of Rome, declare himself head of a separate church and seize the property of the English monasteries. The text features imagery evoking temptation and the diabolical, which he portrays as the cause of Henry VIII's decision to initiate the schism. Pole went so far as to refer to the *Principe* as having been "written by the enemy of the human race...written with the finger of Satan".

A similar trend of Machiavelli's name and his *Principe* being used as a rhetorical device in political literature emerged over the decades to follow. However, with time the target of such invectives shifted from the break from Rome to individuals who were considered a danger to the state. For some, Machiavelli's work was a valuable didactic tool, particularly for those in a position of political influence, while others appear to have found his treatises outrageous. The British Isles saw Machiavelli's name used as a weapon to attack political opponents, which often had little meaning beyond a person who constituted a political threat, or simply an individual who ought to be shunned because their ideas were dangerous. The naming of William Maitland, secretary to Mary Queen of Scots, as "a scholar of Machiavelli's lair" in a 1572 broadsheet and "a false Machiavellian" in *A Rhyme in Defence of the Queen of Scots against the Earl of Murray* is an example of this. In the latter half of the century, this dehumanising and diabolical image of Machiavelli eventually shifted into theatrical literature, with the result that the "Machiavel" character became a trope of late sixteenth-century theatre.

Machiavelli's *Principe* sparked controversy from the outset in mainland Europe, attracting a great deal of hostility as knowledge of his work expanded from the author's native Florence. Although Machiavelli was initially admired by his first readers for his method of searching for general precepts for government with examples from history, his work also caused outrage. Among those who objected to *Il Principe* were several prominent individuals within the Roman Catholic

Church, with the result that Machiavelli's name was added to various editions of the *Index Librororum Prohibitorum* over the sixteenth century. Interestingly, in the years of the culture war between Protestantism and Catholicism in mainland Europe in the middle of the century, it would appear that Machiavelli and his works became a tool used by sympathisers with both sides. One of the best-known denunciations of Machiavelli is an essay originally entitled *Discours sur les Moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Principauté - Contre-Machiavel, Florentin* by Innocent Gentillet. In his essay, Gentillet fiercely criticised Machiavelli and purported that *Il Principe* had played a role in the radicalisation which led to the genocide against the Huguenot Protestant communities in and around Paris of 1571, which would become known as the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

The thesis finally turns its focus back to the conclusion of the Henry VI plays, Richard III. Several excerpts from this play are analysed. These excerpts constitute several instances in which Richard's behaviour appears not to align with the argumentation Machiavelli originally expressed in *Il Principe*. What ultimately would prevent Richard from being referred to as a Machiavellian villain is his inner corruption and the vanity and the void of his desire to become king. This is because the eighteenth chapter of *Il Principe* notably contains an argument that the result of an action cannot be considered good if its agent strays from the side of what is right, a precept which seems to underpin the principal argumentation of the entire treatise. In light of this, as well as various other points articulated in *Il Principe*, it is difficult to view Shakespeare's Richard as he is presented in *Richard III* as Machiavellian.

Although in many respects Richard's behaviour recalls very little what Machiavelli expressed in his *Prince*, it seems that certain reasoning expressed by Machiavelli in the same work are in fact reflected not in the actions and dialogue of Richard but by those of other characters. Firstly, we encounter early in the play the character of the Duke of Buckingham, whose real name was Henry Stafford. When providing critical support to Richard so that the latter can reach the throne,

Buckingham often demonstrates behaviour which, unlike that of Richard, matches Machiavelli's argument in *Il Principe*. A very clear example of this is found in the seventh scene of the third act, at which point Buckingham explains to Richard the importance of appearing to have religious faith and to present oneself in front of others as gentle and mild, and therefore advises him to feign these properties when he meets the Mayor of London. These abilities allow Buckingham to operate in politics very effectively. It is in light of this that the principles Machiavelli discussed in *Il Principe* are observable in the character of Buckingham, rather than in that of Richard.

Similarly, the Duke of Richmond, or Henry Tudor, also demonstrates traits that could be referred to as "Machiavellian", and it is in fact with the application of such traits that this character manages to bring down the evil King Richard. In addition, Henry Tudor proves himself to be Machiavellian in his desire to maintain an orderly and stable state that brings benefits to the populace, even with the use of violent strategies that he successfully applies in war. For this reason, the actions of Henry Tudor would appear to align more closely with the argumentation in *Il Principe* than do any of Richard's.



## Chapter 1: The meaning of *Il Principe*

The exact time at which *Il Principe* was written is not known. It is commonly thought to have been written around 1513, although it was not published until 1532<sup>1</sup>. It includes a dedication to one specific person, Lorenzo de Medici. The work is believed to have begun in 1513 after Machiavelli had retreated from Florence to his farm in Sant'Andrea to the south of the city following an accusation of conspiracy against the Medici family and subsequent imprisonment. While in Sant'Andrea, Machiavelli wrote a series of letters to his former colleague, Francesco Vettori, who had since become governor of Rome. Machiavelli explained in a letter dated 10 December that he was investing his time in contemplating the rules of statecraft by studying history, as well as by systematically reflecting on his diplomatic experience. The outcome thereof, he wrote, was that he had created a small book he called "On Principalities". This would eventually become *Il Principe*, and the letter from 10 December indicates that it was drafted in the latter half of 1513<sup>2</sup>. Machiavelli explained to Vettori that his highest hope was that the treaty would gain the attention of the Medici rulers of Florence and consequently their favour. His main concern was to make it clear to the Medici that he was a man worth employing<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1 Themes and argumentation in *Il Principe*

As regards its content and themes, *Il Principe* is, of course, open to interpretation, as all creative expression is. However, to speak of the treatise in general terms, the following assertions may be made.

Firstly, *Il Principe* is not an instruction manual on how to acquire power; in fact, evidence suggests that it was written with someone who was to assume or had already assumed the position

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<sup>1</sup>University of Cambridge, "Quincentenary of *Il Principe*", <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/italian-collections/about-collections/spotlight-archive/quincentenary-il>, (accessed on 2 May 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Skinner, Quentin, *Machiavelli, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 24-26.

<sup>3</sup> Skinner, pp. 24-26.

legitimately in mind. The predominant purpose of *Il Principe* is to lay out some guidelines regarding how to employ power and also to avoid losing it, rather than how to obtain control of a situation. Only one chapter, the ninth, mentions methods people who have minimal or indeed no hereditary legitimacy to a given regime (to whom Machiavelli refers as “cittadini privati”) may adopt in order to rise into a position of influence. In the fourteenth chapter of the essay, Machiavelli advises on how to attain military success by using one’s own knowledge and ingenuity, and states straightaway that a ruler must understand military theory and be ready to effectively apply it in practice, always regarding warfare as a principal concern. He proceeds to cite some practices a ruler can carry out in peacetime so that they are well prepared for a situation of belligerence when conflict does eventually break out<sup>4</sup>.

One main purpose of *Il Principe* can certainly be said to be to outline some precepts for successful governance. The advice is highly practical in nature, moving away from idealism and ideology to focus on what is likely to be successful at a practical level. There is a particular emphasis on the extent to which the outcome of an action’s result can determine whether a particular decision was a good one. In particular, Machiavelli highlights that taking an action which you or other people consider to be “good” may not necessarily be so if the result of that action is not taken into consideration. He furthermore opines that thinking of “good” and “bad” as polar opposites which never interlink nor interact is not always helpful in deciding the actions a ruler should take (Chapter 18).

Although the text does feature controversial asseverations and violent exhortations, there are also parts of *Il Principe* which indicate an approach that is far from radical or extreme. For example, towards the end of the essay Machiavelli opines that extreme care must be taken when acts that will normally be considered atrocious are committed, because, his writing appears to intimate, under no circumstances must a ruler allow their behaviour or actions to contaminate their inner essence. In

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<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolò, *Il Principe*, ed. by Martina di Febo, Milano: Rizzoli, 2022. This is the version used throughout.

Chapter 18 of the essay, Machiavelli underlines that a ruler who causes suffering for other people as an inevitable part of their role must not allow their actions to influence their nature. His counsel is to keep actions and essence firmly separate and thus remain in control of inner nature. The need to commit acts of violence, therefore, must not make you a truly violent person. The argumentation appears to be based on the premise that someone who has allowed an unvirtuous action to make them a morally corrupt person cannot achieve a virtuous result, so any means they employ will not justify whatever end they achieve.

John F. Tinkler has highlighted that *Il Principe* has often been compared to another political essay, *Utopia* by Thomas More, and purports that while the former essay concerns political action and the duties of political leadership, the latter presents the portrait of a “perfect commonwealth” in which political action has remarkably little place<sup>5</sup>. In addition, he asserts that while both authors share affiliations to two classical rhetorical forms-- the “demonstrative” art of praise and the “deliberative” art of political advice – *Il Principe* is an attack on a humanist tradition of imaginative praise. Moreover, Tinkler’s essay also states that in *Il Principe*, Machiavelli searches for a union of *virtus* and *fortuna* (as does More in *Utopia*); the essay deals with the question of how to bring the two into conformity. *Il Principe* indicates, according to Tinkler, that Machiavelli strongly tended to think of *virtus* in terms of the inherent characteristics of a man, and less as an abstract virtue that a man ought to acquire than as a quality of character from which he cannot deviate without changing his nature. Success for Machiavelli is therefore a fortunate or “happy” conjunction of *virtus* or *fortuna*, which can be understood through the fact that *virtus* did not always guarantee worldly success in antiquity. Towards the end of his essay, Tinkler asserts that what makes *Il Principe* so shocking is that Machiavelli approaches the delineation of an ideal from the perspective of a practical deliberator, introducing the criteria for success into what is intended to be an exhortation

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<sup>5</sup> Tinkler, John. F., “Praise and Advice: Rhetorical Approaches in More's Utopia and Machiavelli's The Prince”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988), pp. 187-207.

to virtue. In the same essay, it is stated that, in the view of E. Harris Harbison, if a work such as *Utopia* by Thomas More represents the “moralist”, *Il Principe* represents the “realist”<sup>6</sup>. At a practical level, therefore, several points are articulated in the essay. Once more, how they are received by readers may vary according to interpretation. However, it appears that much of Machiavelli’s argumentation was born of his relationship with Florence and the Medici family. In *Il Principe*, Machiavelli disregards the idea of a dominion and states that what are often regarded as “dominions” are, in fact, either republics or principalities, and subsequently that principalities are either hereditary or new. Machiavelli then, in turn, explains that some principalities can be “completely new”. It is these which are acquired and held either through one’s own arms and *virtus*, or those of others. History shows, Machiavelli argues, that those who have acquired a totally new principality by employing the former method have been the best leaders. Machiavelli then asseverates that the need for expert advice is particularly strong when a ruler has come to power through foreign arms or purely by luck. This suggests that *Il Principe* encouraged its original readers to focus their attention on the situation in Florence, where the Medici family had received a powerful supply of foreign arms from Ferdinand I of Spain, as well as ascending to power as a result of pure luck, rather than, as Machiavelli perceived, of meritocracy<sup>7</sup>.

## 1.2 Allusions to Machiavelli in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* plays

What is also opportune to discuss is how Machiavelli’s name and any other lexical words which were born thereof were used in the period during which the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* first appeared. According to the Oxford English Dictionary's historical thesaurus, the adjective “Machiavellian” has been in use since 1566<sup>8</sup>, even if it features very little in Shakespeare’s plays or poetry. In addition, we find a noun substantive referring to Machiavelli which can be said to have

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<sup>6</sup> Tinkler, p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> Skinner, pp. 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, “Machiavellianism”, [Machiavellian, n. & adj. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary \(oed.com\)](https://www.oed.com) (accessed on 1 August 2023).

fallen out of use in contemporary English in several literary texts of this period. This is the singular noun substantive “Machiavel”. It is a word which appears twice in the plays involving Henry VI, even though the adjective “Machiavellian” does not feature in any of them.

PUCELLE. You are deceiv'd; my child is none of his:  
It was Alençon that enjoy'd my love.  
YORK. Alençon, that notorious Machiavel!  
It dies, as if it had a thousand lives. (4, 4, 73-75).

*In Henry VI Part 1*, Alençon is referred to as a “Machiavel” by the Duke of York. As can be inferred from the context, the word carries a decidedly pejorative meaning. The noun substantive is pre-modified by the adjective “notorious”, demonstrating that Machiavelli had acquired in some form a bad reputation. Additionally, in this particular context the word appears to have been used with political and jingoistic overtones.

It has been said by John Roe that referring to the character, John II of Alençon, whose title was also Duke of Alençon in such terms was an implicit reference to the Duke of Alençon. He was a suitor for the hand of the Queen who was a persistent reminder of the relatively recent genocide against the Huguenot Protestant community in and around Paris in 1571, which would become known as the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre.<sup>9</sup> This particular event had become associated with Machiavelli, for reasons which will be explored later in this essay.

The noun does not appear in *Henry VI, Part 2*, but makes a significant appearance in *Henry VI, Part 3*, and is uttered by Richard, at this point named in the play as the Duke of Gloucester, himself in a soliloquy as he relates his plans to the audience to reach the position of monarch through the use of clever and deceitful methods to which both dictionary definitions mentioned previously allude. In addition, it is pre-modified by the adjective “murderous”, instantly resulting in an association with unjustified killing for anyone who hears the word “Machiavel” in this context. The

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<sup>9</sup> Roe, John, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*. Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002, p. 5.

alliteration of the voiced bilabial nasal consonant /m/ adds to the listener associating the two words with each other:

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;  
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;  
I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,  
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,  
And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.  
I can add colours to the chameleon,  
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,  
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.  
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown? (3,2, 205-13).

This entire soliloquy features violent rhetoric which acts as a prelude to the events which are to unfold in the sequel. In this soliloquy, Richard purports that he will become even worse than “the murderous Machiavel” through a ruthless, unscrupulous quest to obtain the position of ultimate power, the throne. However, the extent to which this character’s behaviour in the following play can be considered “Machiavellian” is highly debatable as much of it appears notably incongruent with what Machiavelli actually advised in *Il Principe*.

### 1.3. The reception of Machiavelli and *Il Principe* in the British Isles in the sixteenth century

There is evidence that circulation of Machiavelli’s writing in the British Isles began as early as the 1530s in England<sup>10</sup>. It appears that circulation began before the end of the 1530s, but long before translations into other languages were made<sup>11</sup>. Well before 1558, Machiavelli had featured in texts pertaining to the break from the Roman Catholic Church which had been instigated by Henry VIII in the 1520s and early 1530s. Already at this point in the century, Machiavelli was often adopted as a rhetorical device through which to argue the case for politico-religious exclusionism<sup>12</sup>; the use of

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<sup>10</sup> Petrina, Alessandra, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, London: Routledge, 2019, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p.15.

<sup>12</sup> Anglo, Sydney, *Machiavelli, The First Century. Studies in Enthusiasm, Hostility and Irrelevance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.97.

his name, works and connotations as a literary trope often used to allude to political questions would continue throughout the course of the sixteenth century.

A series of examples can support this assertion. Firstly, an apologist for the violent suppression of insurgents in a 1536 uprising against the break from Rome, Richard Moryson, is known to have found Machiavelli particularly useful in providing detailed evidence against the papacy. Moryson defended in his written works the divorce between the first wife of King Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon, and the king. He found Machiavelli particularly useful in providing detailed evidence against the papacy, as well as in illuminating difficult issues such as sedition. Moryson found Machiavelli congenial for establishing a realistic approach to political affairs. *Il Principe* is never cited directly, but Moryson is known to have read the *Istorie Fiorentine* as well as the *Discorsi su Tito Livio*<sup>13</sup>. There does not appear to have been any hostility or negativity in these particular allusions to Machiavelli.

In a letter dated 13 February 1539, Lord Morley, Henry Parker, urged Thomas Cromwell to read Machiavelli's *Principe*, as well as the *Istorie Fiorentine*, recommending *Il Principe* in particular. Again, no hostility towards Machiavelli featured in his letter; in fact, *Il Principe* was spoken of in very positive terms, as Morley told his colleague that it would be "a good thing for your Lordship and for our Sovereign Lord in Council"<sup>14</sup>. This provides an example of the esteem in which Machiavelli was held by at least one person in a position of influence. However, in the same year, a text appeared which would tarnish perceptions of Machiavelli in the years to follow. Reginald Pole, a theologian and the last person to hold the position of Archbishop of Canterbury as a Catholic who played a significant role in the Council of Trent<sup>15</sup>, made allusions to Machiavelli in his essay *Apologia ad Carolum Quintum*. His references to Machiavelli were far from approving. The author

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<sup>13</sup> Anglo, pp. 98-99.

<sup>14</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Petrina, Alessandra, "Reginald Pole and the Reception of the Principe in Henrician England", in Alessandro Arienzo and Alessandra Petrina, eds., *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, p.16.

purported in this essay to have learned from a conversation with the chief advisor to Henry VIII from 1536 until 1540, Thomas Cromwell, that Machiavelli's *Il Principe* had been the reason why Henry VIII had decided to break with the Church of Rome, declare himself head of a separate church and seize the property of the English monasteries. The text Pole produced features imagery evoking temptation and the diabolical, which he portrays as the cause of Henry VIII's decision to initiate the schism<sup>16</sup>. Crucially, Pole refers to the *Principe* as "written by the enemy of the human race...written with the finger of Satan"<sup>17</sup>. The association of *Il Principe* with these qualities is central to the early modern understanding of Machiavelli's text and can therefore be said to have opened the way for a reading that has become associated with reception of Machiavellianism in the Tudor period<sup>18</sup>. It is also noteworthy that, even though it expresses disagreement with what Machiavelli had written in the *Principe*, *Apologia ad Carolum Quintum* appears to be based on a close reading of the text<sup>19</sup>, suggesting that it was accessible.

Henry VIII's recent break with the Roman Church continued to constitute an issue which inspired political essays, and many of these featured allusions to Machiavelli. A decade after Reginald Pole's *Apologia ad Carolum Quintum*, a scholar named William Thomas provided a topical analysis on the basis of Machiavelli's work.<sup>20</sup> In addition to this, an essay Thomas produced in 1549 entitled *History of Italy* would be deemed by another student of Machiavelli, Gabriel Harvey, as "a necessary introduction to Machiavel".<sup>21</sup> Thomas himself acknowledged Machiavelli as a source for this work. Further allusions to Machiavelli were made by Thomas in early 1551, when he offered himself as an adviser to the very young King Edward VI. Given the new king's total lack of experience, Thomas compiled a list of 85 questions posing political problems for the

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<sup>16</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Petrina, "Reginald Pole and the Reception of the Principe in Henrician England", p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Anglo, p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> Anglo, p. 104.



king to reflect upon. These questions were principally derived from chapter headings of both *Discorsi su Tito Livio* and *Il Principe*. Thomas also made further allusions to Machiavelli when in early 1551 he offered himself to Edward VI as an adviser on political issues and compiled a list of 85 questions posing political problems upon which he hoped the king would reflect. The questions were principally derived from the chapter headings of books of both *Discorsi su Tito Livio* and *Il Principe*. The possibility that Thomas recognised his own situation in the wise counsellors Machiavelli described in Chapter 22 cannot be ruled out. In sharp contrast to Reginald Pole's invective of a decade before, neither of Thomas's essays evoke any pejorative or diabolical image of Machiavelli, and it seems that Thomas, like Moryson before him, perceived Machiavelli's ideas as useful for debate and discussion.<sup>22</sup>

The 1550s saw George Rainsford, another political writer and student of Machiavelli, apply his knowledge of *Il Principe*, as well as the *Discorsi*, in the face of the contentious marriage between Mary Tudor and Phillip II of Spain in 1554. His intention was to prepare a work which would introduce the Spanish monarch to the history of the British Isles, as well as the intricacies and possible procedures of governance. The work is entitled *Ragionamento dell'advenimento delli Inglesi e Normanni in Britannia* and makes extensive and first-hand use of Machiavelli's *Principe*<sup>23</sup>.

In light of all the above, it can be said that there was familiarity with, if not first-hand knowledge of, Machiavelli and *Il Principe* in the first half of the sixteenth century. It can furthermore be inferred from the aforementioned examples that Machiavelli was at this point already referenced in writing pertaining to a wide variety of political issues. What is particularly interesting is how Machiavelli was used by Richard Moryson and Reginald Pole respectively to attack but also defend Henry VIII's break with Rome, a contentious matter between the third and fifth decades of the century. The use of Machiavelli to substantiate argument both against and in favour of the schism

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<sup>22</sup> Anglo, pp. 104-106.

<sup>23</sup> Anglo, p. 109.

provides a clear example of how the writer had become a rhetorical device to attack or defend the same issue.

It was in the second half of the sixteenth century that allusions to Machiavelli peaked, and continued to be used as a means by which to either attack or defend a contemporary issue of power. By the 1560s, it would appear that the use of Machiavelli's name took on a particular trend which, interestingly, moved back towards the image of Machiavelli that had been evoked by Reginald Pole years before in 1539. Machiavelli's name and literary repertoire became widely used as an attempt to slander the reputation of a contemporary person, and such instances often associated his name with malice and the diabolical, just as had Reginald Pole two decades before. Once again, Machiavelli was referenced in both attacks on and defences of one particular issue, as had also been the case in the polemic surrounding the break from Rome in the 1530s.

This can be observed in literature pertaining to political questions not only in England, but also in Scotland. Examples of this can be found in various pieces of writing on the potential claim to the throne of England on the part of Mary, Queen of Scots, mother of the future James VI and otherwise known as Mary Stuart. This matter constituted one of the most incendiary political issues of the time and inspired many essays on the subject. In fact, several writers in Scotland adopted Machiavelli's name and writing to put forward different standpoints regarding the situation of Mary holding the English crown as well as that of Scotland; again, his name was very often used with a negative bias. For example, a pamphlet in favour of Mary's ascension, *A Treatise of Treasons against Queen Elizabeth and the Crown of England*, was published anonymously in 1572 and named three of Mary's counsellors as traitors and "a lawless faction of Machiavellian libertines"<sup>24</sup>. In this case, we find Machiavelli's name in an adjectival form modifying the substantive "libertines" (the term "libertine" has carried several meanings throughout history, but in this particular context it was presumably intended to mean a person whose behaviour was unrestrained by any moral or

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in: Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 38.

ethical parameters). The meaning of this noun phrase is decidedly pejorative. Its preface also warns against the dangers of creating a “Machiavellian state”<sup>25</sup>.

There are several other instances of Machiavelli’s name being used to tarnish the reputation of ministers in a similar role. The secretary to Mary Stuart, William Maitland, had himself fallen under the allegation of being akin to Machiavelli in a text published a few years before in 1568. Another anonymous text entitled *A Rhyme in Defence of the Queen of Scots against the Earl of Murray* named Maitland as a “false Machiavellian”<sup>26</sup>. In this case, Machiavelli’s name appears in its nominal form and is pre-modified by a decidedly negative adjective denoting dishonesty and treacherousness, creating another noun phrase that is far from neutral in tone. Maitland was once again referenced in such terms in a broadsheet printed in Edinburgh in 1572 which referenced him as “a scholar of Machiauellus lair”<sup>27</sup>. To describe Machiavelli as one who dwells in a lair is to equate him with a wild animal which poses a threat to humans, thus adding an element of dehumanisation to the image of Machiavelli. Two years later in 1574, another broadsheet, this time printed in St Andrews, stated that Maitland and his followers were of “Macheuillis Scuilis”<sup>28</sup>. What these examples demonstrate is that Machiavelli was again being used as a rhetorical device to attack individuals towards whom objections were held. Whether the Scottish royal family themselves encountered the *Principe* first hand is unknown, but King James VI is understood to have possessed literature which referenced Machiavelli<sup>29</sup>.

The years to follow saw the emergence of a trend of Machiavelli being referred to in such terms in both countries. In the 1570s, a particularly poignant connotation of Machiavelli appeared in literature and the theatre as an agent of malice, as various references to Machiavelli in Shakespeare, such as those mentioned earlier, demonstrate. It is thought that one particular piece of writing and

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<sup>25</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p.34.

<sup>27</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p.34.

<sup>28</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p.35.

<sup>29</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 41.

its translation into English played a major role in this. This piece was an essay originally entitled *Discours sur les Moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Principauté - Contre-Machiavel, Florentin* by French law student and politician Innocent Gentillet. In his essay, Gentillet fiercely criticised Machiavelli, listing him as an agent of the genocide against the Huguenot Protestant communities in and around Paris in 1571, which would become known as the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Gentillet perceived many elements of the political world in Machiavelli's writings as amoral, and attempted in his essay to demonstrate that in a just world the right thing to do is irrefutably so, thus reconciling political discourse with a moral basis<sup>30</sup>. In addition to associating him with the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Gentillet ascribed the wider policy of the French royal family, largely resented by sectors of the population, throughout the sixteenth century to Machiavelli's writings, and accused him of "Contempt of God, perfidy, sodomy, tyranny, cruelty, pillage, foreign usury and other detestable vices"<sup>31</sup>.

Gentillet's influence on connotations of Machiavelli in the British Isles is traditionally thought to have been strong, although the idea that it was the predominant influence of reception of Machiavelli has been debated. Nigel W. Bawcutt pointed out that Edward Meyer thought that the subjects of Elizabeth I got their knowledge of Machiavelli exclusively through Gentillet, but during the twentieth century evidence emerged that this was not the case, and that access to Machiavelli was available to the Elizabethans through translations<sup>32</sup>. In addition, after the crisis of civil war in France gave rise to innumerable books and pamphlets on politics and religion in which Machiavelli's name was a frequent occurrence, many of the works circulated in England in either French or English and helped to introduce continental ideas about Machiavelli into English political

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<sup>30</sup> Hadfield, p. 214.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Lewis, p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer, Edward, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama*, Weimar: Felber, 1897, pp. 7-9, in Bawcutt, Nigel W., "The Myth of Gentillet Reconsidered", *The Modern Language Review*, 4 (2004), p. 863.

thought. It can therefore be said that Gentillet was one of many French subjects to have discussed Machiavelli at the time<sup>33</sup>.

However, it must be underlined that Gentillet's influence on Elizabeth I's subjects' perceptions of Machiavelli was strong. It was largely through *Discours contre Machiavel* that *Il Principe* in particular had become associated with an individual who had incited a large degree of mistrust and hostility in majority-Protestant communities. This was Caterina de' Medici of the Florentine noble family and, incidentally, the daughter of Lorenzo de' Medici<sup>34</sup>, to whom the *Principe* was originally dedicated. By the 1570s, Caterina de' Medici had become Queen Consort of the French king Henri II, but in the aftermath of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, she was perceived by the population in England as having galvanised the radicalisation which resulted in this event<sup>35</sup>. This collective image had not faded by the end of the century, particularly not in Protestant Europe<sup>36</sup>.

Machiavelli came to be associated with qualities such as those implied by Gentillet, as well as with atheism. It has been suggested that such attitudes were not confined solely to Machiavelli, but extended to most of Catholic Europe, particularly the Italian Peninsula, as F.J. Levy in *Tudor Historical Thought* states:

Machiavellian history writing made its first great impression through the work of Guicciardini, with Machiavelli's own reputation acting as a brake. That much of the distaste was irrelevant to Machiavelli's own thought hardly mattered. Some of it pertained to that distrust of contemporary Italy which all good Englishmen felt: "An Englishman Italianate is a devil incarnate".<sup>37</sup>

This distrust was not lessened by Italy's position as the headquarters of Catholicism. At the same time, men accused Machiavelli of atheism, principally because he considered religion from a political point of view. The entire vocabulary of Machiavellian political theory developed connotations which made it suspect. Such words as "policy" and "practice", "aphorism" and

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<sup>33</sup> Bawcutt, Nigel W., "Some Elizabethan Allusions to Machiavelli", *English Miscellany* 20 (1969), p.64.

<sup>34</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, p. 69-70.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis, pp. 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> Levy, F.J. *Tudor Historical Thought*. San Marino (CA): Huntington Library, 1967, pp. 240.

“maxim” implied something sinister and best kept in darkness, which made it difficult to discuss political realities without implying that any such discussion was, and had to be, immoral. This, along with the inevitably moralistic outlook of the typical Elizabethan, made it virtually impossible to take a reasonable attitude towards Machiavelli<sup>38</sup>.

After this, a text known as *Leicester's Commonwealth*, whose authors have never been identified, began to circulate in manuscript in the years following 1584 (the text is thought to have been written in 1583). The text constituted a vehement invective against a favourite adviser of Queen Elizabeth I, Robert Dudley, as well as several other aspects of the governance<sup>39</sup>. The anonymous pamphlet contains several references to Machiavelli and, furthermore, directly employs his method of offering historical examples as frameworks for solving contemporary problems. It also features a passage which references Machiavelli as an authority for Dudley<sup>40</sup>. Once more, Machiavelli's name was used as a political weapon to tarnish the image of an individual who was perceived as a rival or a potential threat.

Interestingly, Machiavelli is alluded to in a very similar way in an essay written by the well-known writer Philip Sidney, a writer born in 1554 (only a decade before Shakespeare). This essay was in fact written as a reaction to *Leicester's Commonwealth* and was entitled *Defence of the Earl of Leicester*. Sidney references Machiavelli in similarly negative terms to those we find in the very text it was intended to call into question. Written between 1584 and 1585, *Defence of the Earl of Leicester* discusses how one can succeed “when he plaies the Statist wringing veru unlukkili some of Machiavels axioms to serve his purpos”<sup>41</sup>. The image of Machiavelli is again strongly pejorative, in this case one of a self-serving and false politician who feigns certain qualities to gain an

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<sup>38</sup> Levy, pp. 240-241.

<sup>39</sup> Beal, Peter. “Catalogue of English Library Manuscripts 1450-1700.” <https://celm-ms.org.uk/introductions/AnonLeicestersCommonwealth.html> Accessed: 22 August 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>41</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 17.

advantage, but Machiavelli's image features as a political weapon, just as had been the case in *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

What is even more surprising is that Sidney actually recommended Machiavelli's works in a letter to his brother, Robert, and also mentioned Machiavelli in another letter, dated 29 April 1574, as part of a correspondence with Hubert Languet, a French diplomat and writer who was also in contact with the person who printed the first Latin-language version of *Il Principe* in Basel, Pietro Perna. Sidney's letter to Languet opens with an admission that Machiavelli had actually been right about the need to avoid excessive clemency<sup>42</sup>.

Machiavelli was also mentioned several times in a correspondence between another writer, Edmund Spenser, and his friend, Gabriel Harvey. The latter named Machiavelli directly in terms far from pejorative, citing him as a "great man". Harvey also provided more details of the fame the *Principe* and several other works were acquiring in Cambridge, as well as of his own familiarity with Machiavelli's works<sup>43</sup>. Sir Phillip Sidney, therefore, was one who showed significant variation in the ideas he expressed of Machiavelli.

The following years continued to see texts produced which, as had previously happened many times in the century, alluded to Machiavelli as an agent and advocate of malice and often associated him with the diabolical. A significant example is found in an essay by a particularly outspoken opponent of Machiavelli in the British Isles, John Case. A philosopher and physician born in Oxfordshire in 1564 who was a graduate and later a fellow of St John's College, Oxford, Case wrote various essays on polemical topics, often touching on political issues. One such essay was *Sphaera Civitatis*, a lengthy commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*<sup>44</sup>. Published in Oxford in 1588 and frequently reprinted in England (as well as in Germany), the essay demonstrates that Case had no sympathy for Machiavelli and considered him a serious threat to the predominant scholasticism.

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*: p.16.

<sup>43</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, pp.16-18.

<sup>44</sup> Malone, Edward E. "Case, John", <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4853>, (accessed on 12 July 2023).

Following its publication, *Sphaera Civitatis* would become a major work in the history of English anti-Machiavellianism<sup>45</sup>. The purpose of *Sphaera civitatis* was to show that the ancient Greek models of state are preferable to what Machiavelli had proposed. It was so influential that anyone who had been awarded a bachelor's degree from the University of Oxford was under obligation from university statute to purchase a copy. *Sphaera Civitatis* is at times explicit in its attacks on Machiavelli. For example, in his opening remarks to "the Christian Reader", Case reminds princes and governors of God's hand in the establishment of worldly governments and inquires why they do not execrate Machiavelli and other idols of pseudo-politicians. He exhorts them to eschew atheists like Machiavelli and return to religion, reminding them that a prince without religion is like a human without a soul<sup>46</sup>.

Similarly, another writer called Thomas Nashe made various allusions to Machiavelli as an agent of malice in his writing. For instance, in a satirical prose essay called *Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Divell*, Thomas Nashe was allegedly referring to Machiavelli when he addressed the allegorical character for "Envy" "Enuie, awake, for thou must appear before Nicalao Maleuolo, great Muster maister of hell." Furthermore, Nashe is believed to have linked Machiavelli to Puritanism under the heading of "hypocrisy" in a later line from the same essay<sup>47</sup>. These examples underline how Machiavelli's name and literary repertoire gained very negative connotations in the British Isles as the century neared its end, and also show how Machiavelli was used as a rhetorical device in writing which pertained to a wide variety of political matters.

Although the above examples show that allusions to Machiavelli were often made at a very superficial level in political essays, evidence suggests that his work was in fact read and studied. The fact that no published translation of *Il Principe* and of *I Discorsi su Tito Livio* existed prior to

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<sup>45</sup> Pirillo, Diego, "Republicanism and Religious Dissent: Machiavelli and the Italian Protestant Reformers", in Alessandro Arienzo and Alessandra Petrina, eds., *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 129-130.

<sup>46</sup> Allen, Don Cameron, "An Unmentioned Elizabethan Opponent of Machiavelli." *Italica*, 14(3) (1937), pp. 90-92.

<sup>47</sup> Bauer, Matthias, "Count Malvolio, Machiavelli and Vice", *Connotations*, 1.2 (1991), pp. 231-232.



1636 and 1640 is not sufficient evidence to assume that there was no familiarity with Machiavelli's literary repertoire in Elizabethan England. In fact, this is an assumption which has been conclusively disproven, and it is now known that Elizabethans read Machiavelli in Italian, French and Latin<sup>48</sup>. Machiavelli was widely read as a Republican theorist in late sixteenth century England, and several items of the author's literary repertoire were studied. The author was seen as an advocate of oligarchical, republican government who had argued in *Discorsi* that republican governance was the best and most stable form of political existence, even though it has also been noted that Machiavelli was known as "a sly adviser to princes"<sup>49</sup>.

In addition to the fact that manuscript translations circulated in Latin and English, *Il Principe* and other works by Machiavelli were studied in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and *Il Principe* was known in the British Isles because it was frequently read, along with the *Istorie Fiorentine*<sup>50</sup>. London bookseller Thomas Chard sent a parcel of books among which "*Discours de Machiavel*" and "*Machiavelli Princeps*" featured as titles. The parcel was sent to Queen's College in Cambridge<sup>51</sup>. Several members of the aristocracy are known to have possessed copies of *Il Principe*, in addition to writings which discussed Machiavelli. John Lumley, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Lumley, possessed a volume listed in a catalogue as "Libri tres de consilio, religione, et politia adversus Nicolaum Machiavellum, innominate autore"; in addition, a copy of the translation by Silvestro Tegli into Latin appears in a catalogue of his library<sup>52</sup>. Thomas Smith, principal Secretary of State to King Edward VI and Elizabeth I, is understood to have possessed Italian-language editions of *Il Principe*, as a catalogue of his library from August 1566 shows; Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, who served as English Ambassador to Scotland between 1561 and 1567, owned a copy of a French

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<sup>48</sup> Bawcutt, Nigel W., "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans: A New Examination". *Études Anglaises* 30 (1977), p. 456.

<sup>49</sup> Hadfield, Andrew, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, London, Methuen, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Pirillo, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 19.

translation of *Il Principe*<sup>53</sup>. A copy of Machiavelli's works is listed in a 1556 inventory of the goods of a nobleman living in Surrey, Sir William More. This man's library includes "bokes of macheavels works, in Italian"<sup>54</sup>. It can therefore be surmised that *Il Principe* was indeed known and read in various languages within literate and aristocratic sectors of the population, who often held political influence.

The availability of Machiavelli's work in England reached a peak in the 1580s. At this point, a famous reprinting of some of Machiavelli's works by John Wolfe, the most prolific printer of Italian texts in Elizabethan England<sup>55</sup> and active between 1579 and 1601<sup>56</sup>, took place in London between 1584 and 1588. This is believed to have radically changed the situation of Machiavelli's relative obscurity in the British Isles thitherto; prior to 1584, only *L'Arte della Guerra* had been published in England. This same year saw the publication of the *Discorsi*, followed by another volume with *Il Principe*, the *Vita di Castruccio Castracani* as well as other earlier political works which included the *Ritratto di cose di Francia e della Magna* and *Il modo che tenne il duca Valentino per ammazzar Vitellozzo*. John Wolfe would carry out further reprints towards the end of the 1580s, including a publication of *L'Arte della Guerra* and the *Istorie Fiorentine* in 1587, and several others in the following year. Incidentally, John Wolfe became one of the many people to be referred to as "Machiavellian" in an attempt to defame him. In 1588, an allegation was written that he had seized and destroyed the press of a rival printer, Robert Waldegrave. Therein, Wolfe was described as "John Woolfe, alias Machiuill, most tormenting executioner of Waldegruaes goods"<sup>57</sup>. An explanation for this paradoxical situation has been put forward by John Rowe, who has purported that a printed edition did not appear in English until 1640 because censorship broke down in the

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<sup>53</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> Pirillo, p. 128.

<sup>56</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 25.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 26.

same year, so the market was inundated with books which had accumulated over some time<sup>58</sup>. Although five manuscripts have been identified, there were in fact only two translations<sup>59</sup>.

In light of all the above, there can be no doubt that Machiavelli was known of in English-speaking contexts, and was referenced in political writings throughout the course of the sixteenth century with hugely varying overtones. It may seem likely that Shakespeare would have heard of Machiavelli, if not read a version of his works directly.

#### 1.4 Shakespeare and Machiavelli

The question of whether Shakespeare himself had ever read either a translated version of *Il Principe* or the original remains to be confirmed with certainty. While there is no direct evidence that Shakespeare read Machiavelli<sup>60</sup>, Shakespeare may have known of him<sup>61</sup>. Andrew Hadfield also agrees that Shakespeare is likely to have known of Machiavelli's work<sup>62</sup>. Moreover, even if Shakespeare never encountered anything written by Machiavelli himself, it has been surmised that Shakespeare had read works in which Machiavelli and his writings are discussed. Shakespeare is likely to have been familiar with Gentillet's *Discours sur les Moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Principauté - Contre-Machiavel, Florentin*. It is worth noting, however, that although it has been purported that the knowledge and perception that Elizabethan dramatists had of Machiavelli was predominantly influenced by Gentillet and his *Discours contre Machiavel*<sup>63</sup>, evidence has since emerged that the subjects of Elizabeth I had access to Machiavelli and his works in other forms.

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<sup>58</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 48.

<sup>59</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Spiekerman, Tim, *Shakespeare's Political Realism. The English History Plays*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 156.

<sup>61</sup> Spiekerman, p. 25.

<sup>62</sup> Hadfield, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Lewis, p. 71.

There may be some overlap between some themes explored in Shakespeare's plays and Machiavelli's *Principe*. John Roe indeed says, "the relationship of Shakespeare to Machiavelli remains a matter of vagueness and perplexity." He furthermore underlines that the characters who display behaviour which recalls so-called "Machiavellian" reasoning are not limited to the traditionally "bad" characters such as king Richard III in the *Henry VI* plays, Iago in *Othello* and Edmund in *King Lear*, and that many characters use Machiavellian reasoning to obtain their ends<sup>64</sup>. In the case of *Richard III*, attention has been paid to how Shakespeare builds the case against Richard III, which camouflages the black spots in his opponent, Richmond, for instance.

One major theme of Machiavelli's *Principe* is the role played by fortune in the outcome of a ruler's situation, and the extent to which it alone can determine this. Towards the end of the essay, Machiavelli warns that while fortune can account for the ruin of a ruler, the damage fortune may wreak upon them and their regime can be curtailed through meticulous planning and taking precautions while the situation is still stable. Therefore, if a ruler is well-prepared for adversity before an unfortunate situation arises, misfortune can only account for half of what may befall them; if they are not prepared, the responsibility of the ruler is much greater. The portrayal of fortune in the case of many of Shakespeare's plays can be said to be based on Machiavelli's reasoning about fortune; the Machiavellian idea of fortune also contributes to Shakespeare's understanding of providence; in another respect, Shakespeare's Machiavellian awareness can help Shakespeare to renew or revitalise various genres, sometimes in quite unexpected ways<sup>65</sup>.

By 1584, it is likely that Shakespeare, then aged 20, had accessed Machiavelli, either directly or at a slight remove, and the controversial themes of *Il Principe* would without a doubt have been a topic of discussion beyond any mention of them that we find in contemporary sources<sup>66</sup>. If this is considered in light of the array of plays Shakespeare wrote which explored English history and

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<sup>64</sup> Roe, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Roe, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Roe, p. 4.

governance, there may well be a case for stating that ideas from Machiavelli's *Principe* are reflected in many of Shakespeare's plays. As Roe notes, no other contemporary dramatist explored English monarchical history to this extent, and Machiavellian questions abound in the plays. Much has been said about Richard III as a caricature of the "Machiavel", but which kind of Machiavellianism the play expresses is less clear<sup>67</sup>. The same can be said in the case of Hamlet. What holds Hamlet back is the very thing that pushes Richard in *Henry VI* and *Richard III* forward—that there is no moral significance to what happens in the world<sup>68</sup>. Machiavellian ideas are reflected in both *Richard III* as well as in *Hamlet*; notably, the role played by fortune in both plays<sup>69</sup>.

The chapter differentiates between "Machiavelli" and "Machiavel"; therein, the former term denotes nothing more than the author of *Il Principe*, whereas the latter term is used when referring to the characters who have been said to exercise Machiavelli's philosophy, but do so with unjustifiable intentions, with the result that they are inherently evil. Moreover, Bawcutt explains in *English Literary Renaissance* explains that the "Machiavel" figure of which critics such as John Roe speak is a byproduct of the way in which the concept of "policy" was portrayed in earlier Tudor drama throughout the course of the sixteenth century. The image of Machiavelli as a synonym for nefarious intentions or characters came after the emergence of several allegorical figures in Elizabethan drama which were all related to their understanding of "policy". By the time the later Elizabethans came to respond to Machiavelli, the connotations of "policy" had developed in such a way that they could consequently also apply to Machiavelli, and the image of "Machiavellianism" was therefore distorted by "policy"<sup>70</sup>.

There could be said to have been a twofold Elizabethan response to Machiavelli in theatre: on the one hand, Machiavelli featured as popular stage burlesque, and this image derived from attackers

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<sup>67</sup> Roe, pp. 16-17.

<sup>68</sup> Roe, p.21.

<sup>69</sup> Roe, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Bawcutt, Nigel W., "Policy, Machiavellianism and the Earlier Tudor Drama." *English Literary Renaissance*, 3, (1971), pp. 208-209.

of Machiavelli such as Gentillet. In contrast, drama did at times also portray Machiavelli in a way which exposed his true philosophy seriously: in such cases, the image of the author was directly inspired by his own writings<sup>71</sup>. However, Bawcutt has pointed out that the “Machiavel” figure of Elizabethan drama may derive more from classical sources such as Seneca and existing stereotypes of the evil counsellor, the Vice, and the trickster of the medieval morality plays than it does from Gentillet<sup>72</sup>.

### 1.5 Reception of *Il Principe* and Machiavelli in continental Europe

As regards the reception of Machiavelli and his *Principe* in the rest of Europe, it would appear to have been extremely varied, just as was the case in the British Isles. From the outset, Machiavelli’s works attracted a degree of hostility as knowledge of and access to his writing expanded from Florence. In 1514 and 1516, the *Principe* was only circulating in manuscript<sup>73</sup>. However, even at this point, supporters and proponents of Machiavelli were quick to understand a necessity to defend the ideas he expressed in *Il Principe*. For example, between 1514 and 1516, a former friend of Machiavelli, Buonaccorsi, declared that those who appreciated his friend’s spirit must be prepared to defend him fiercely against those who through malignity and envy, might “bite or tear him”<sup>74</sup>. Later, in 1532, *Il Principe* was printed by Bernardo di Giunta in Florence, but the printer felt obliged to exhort the man to whom it was dedicated to defend the work against those who attacked it<sup>75</sup>. This strongly suggests that the essay had given rise to controversy, which was to be substantiated by subsequent attacks in the years to follow. He was initially admired by his first readers who imitated his method of searching for general rules for governance in both history and

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<sup>71</sup> Ribner, Irving. “Marlowe and Machiavelli”, *Comparative Literature* 6 (1954), p.355, in Bawcutt, Nigel W., “The ‘Myth of Gentillet’ Reconsidered: An Aspect of Elizabethan Machiavellianism”, *Modern Language Review* 99 (2004), p. 874.

<sup>72</sup> Bawcutt, “The Myth of Gentillet’ Reconsidered: An Aspect of Elizabethan Machiavellianism”, p.874.

<sup>73</sup> Anglo, p. 165.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Anglo, p. 165.

<sup>75</sup> Anglo, pp. 165-166.

contemporary experience<sup>76</sup>. Machiavelli was read alongside other writers, both ancient and modern, and was above all read alongside Aristotle. For instance, in 1523, Agostino Nifo da Sessa published his *De Regnandi Peritia ad Carolum V, Imper Caesarem Semper Augustum*, which was essentially a reworking in Latin of Machiavelli's *Principe*. This initiated a long line of reception of Machiavelli<sup>77</sup>.

The 1530s saw several writings criticising Machiavelli published in and beyond Italy. One prominent example is *Democrates primus* by the Spanish philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Published in 1535, this work criticised those who claimed that the Christian religion made men weak. Although no names were mentioned in the version published in 1535 by Blado, it was later discovered that a manuscript of this work conserved in the Biblioteca Vaticana contained an explicit reference to Machiavelli, whose *Discorsi su Tito Livio* had been understood to have attacked the Christian doctrine per se<sup>78</sup>. A similar criticism of Machiavelli was made by the Portuguese philosopher Jeronimo Osorio da Fonseca in *De nobilitate christiana*, although Machiavelli is not explicitly named therein<sup>79</sup>.

It is worth noting that a significant number of historians attempting to document historical events in writing in the Italian peninsula made references to Machiavelli in the sixteenth century. Such references were not always made explicit; in the instances which saw Machiavelli openly named, the writer's stance on him and his work was usually negative. A particularly vehement invective is found in the example of a theologian, Ambrogio Catarino, who was prominent at early sessions of the Council of Trent and wrote a short diatribe against Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and *Il Principe*. It features an invective against Machiavelli, in which Catarino expressed his astonishment that books by Machiavelli were present in any land ruled by Christians. Catarino pointed out that Machiavelli,

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<sup>76</sup> Procacci, Giuliano, *Machiavelli nella cultura europea dell'età moderna*, Bari: Editori Laterza, 1995, p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> Howard, Keith David, *The Reception of Machiavelli in Early Modern Spain*, Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2014, pp. 5-6.

<sup>78</sup> Howard, p. 48.

<sup>79</sup> Howard, p. 48.

in spite of considering God as a matter of human opinion and persuasion, exhorted his readers to profess belief. Caterino's conclusion was that this was a technique of heretics<sup>80</sup>.

This same author's tirade against Machiavelli continued as Catarino asseverated that an idea which defiled his age was the act of seeming rather than being. This does indeed recall Machiavelli's assertion in *Il Principe* that a ruler must be understood by others to possess certain qualities, including religious devotion, regardless of whether or not their true nature is reflected in such a façade. There then follows in Catarino's essay a translation of the first three quarters of the eighteenth chapter of *Il Principe*, in which Machiavelli opined that those who had historically given little importance to faith sometimes overcame those who had kept their word. Catarino deemed such an approach as being of "enormous stupidity" and exhorted Christian princes to take heed of his denunciation<sup>81</sup>.

The 1550s saw the emergence of a movement of hostility towards Machiavelli and his work, in which the several additions of his name to various revisions of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* were likely to have played a role. Machiavelli was one of the few authors whose entire works were officially condemned and vetoed by the Roman Catholic Church three times, and this series of prohibitions appears to have been one of the most influential factors to influence the reputation of Machiavelli and his writing. Machiavelli was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of 1557, and then again in the 1559 revision. Although the remonstrance against the perceived radicalism of the *Index* meant that a *Moderatio Indicis Librorum Prohibitorum* was created in 1561 under Pope Pius IV<sup>82</sup>, Machiavelli's name was added a third time on the 1564 revision of the *Index*<sup>83</sup>, known as the *Tridentine Index* and compiled by the Council of Trent<sup>84</sup>. This particular *Index* was especially significant in light of its role as an attempt to curtail the spread of the Reformation. In Post-

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<sup>80</sup> Anglo, pp. 167-168.

<sup>81</sup> Anglo, pp. 170-171.

<sup>82</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p.5.

<sup>83</sup> Anglo, p. 172.

<sup>84</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 5.



Tridentine Italy it became inopportune to admit to having knowledge of Machiavelli. Moreover, although several treatises dealing with military strategy demonstrate the extent to which Italian writers remained conversant with Machiavelli's military ingenuity, as well as how several appeared to have been familiar with the original texts that were subject to the papal bans, it was deemed by many writers prudent not to advertise their debt to Machiavelli at all<sup>85</sup>.

In 1550, Girolamo Muzio da Capodistria wrote a letter to the Roman Inquisitors in which he listed Machiavelli as one of the "infedeli" as opposed to the "heretici", purporting that Machiavelli had openly encouraged readers not to observe faith, charity or religion and had said that these must be used in order to maintain a virtuous appearance; two years later, an essay by Dominican canon lawyer Ambrogio Catarino Politi, *Enarrationes*, was printed in Rome. This essay included criticism of Machiavelli and named him as an atheist, citing from Chapter 18 of *Il Principe*<sup>86</sup>. In addition to this, Machiavelli's argumentation was even incorporated into the fashioning in Spain of an aggressive, Catholic imperial ideology in the latter half of the sixteenth century<sup>87</sup>. Although Machiavelli's works had not been proscribed by Valdes in the Index of 1559, they were condemned in the Spanish Index of May 1583, and this ultimately ruled out any chance of Machiavelli being well-received in Spain<sup>88</sup>.

However, it should also be remembered that these papal embargoes were not always completely effective. Firstly, Machiavelli's works were printed surreptitiously and seldom featured their author's name; in addition to this, the papal bans were more effective in some locations than they were in others. Whereas the insertion of Machiavelli in the 1557 Index was almost completely successful in Italy and Spain, it was far less so in France, where numerous translations appeared<sup>89</sup>. Furthermore, although Machiavelli was met with an extensive degree of hostility, the reception of

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<sup>85</sup> Anglo, pp. 180-181.

<sup>86</sup> Howard, p. 48.

<sup>87</sup> Howard, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Anglo, p. 176.

<sup>89</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, pp. 5-6.

his writing was often positive, and versions of his work were made available in the final four decades of the sixteenth century. The *Moderatio* of 1561 gave rise to some loopholes in the liceity of Machiavelli's works. Such loopholes which were used to print them surreptitiously<sup>90</sup>.

In addition, Machiavelli's name to some extent became widespread in continental Europe as a result of the papal embargo, rather than in spite of it. Along with London, Basel and Geneva were cities in which editions of Machiavelli's works were surreptitiously produced<sup>91</sup>, while several translations appeared in France. The first manuscript translation of *Il Principe* by Jacques de Vintemille appeared in 1546, followed in 1553 by the two earliest printed translations by Guillaume Cappel and Gaspard d'Auvergne. None of these translations were in any way clandestine. Cappel's version featured a preface in which he expressed appreciation of the good use to which Machiavelli put his knowledge of history. Moreover, this preface featured praise of what Cappel understood to be Machiavelli's approach that the ultimate goal of an author and political leader was to build and maintain states, and that understanding history would provide a good foundation upon which to do this<sup>92</sup>. D'Auvergne underlined in his dedication the practicality of Machiavelli's address of political issues in *Il Principe*, and stated that his realisation thereof constituted his greatest contribution to the diffusion of Machiavelli in Europe. In making Machiavelli useful, as opposed to controversial, D'Auvergne may have instigated a critical change in the reading of Machiavelli in France<sup>93</sup>.

It was not until 1576 that Gentillet's essay *Discours contre Machiavel* was published in Geneva<sup>94</sup>. The initial reactions to the essay came from the Italian emigrant community in the same city, where it had been published anonymously. The way in which their Florentine compatriot had been attacked generated such vociferous and bitter complaints among this community that Gentillet eventually published another essay entitled *Declaration de l'Auteur des Discours contre Machiavel*,

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<sup>90</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, pp. 5-11.

<sup>93</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p.13.

<sup>94</sup> Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*, p. 42.

*pour satisfaire aux plaintifs d'aucuns Italiens*, in which he claimed that his intention in *Discours contre Machiavel* had not been to outrage the entire community but merely to denounce Machiavelli<sup>95</sup>. The *Discours contre Machiavel*, therefore, was controversial from the outset.

An ideological battle against the Roman Church and the *Index* in several parts of Europe very clearly appears to have existed, with Wolfe's reprints of Machiavelli again being crucial among the Italian religious exiles. Machiavelli exerted a decisive influence on the Italian Reformation, no less considerable than that of Erasmus or Luther. The close association between political radicalism and religious dissent between aspirations for Church reform and republicanism drew the Italian religious dissidents towards the writings of Machiavelli, who had denounced the responsibility of the Papacy in the sixteenth-century Italian religious crisis. The *Discorsi* includes a chapter which states that whereas in France and Germany there were still the ancient "goodness" and "religion", in Italy the Roman Church had dissolved any religious sentiments. The Roman Court in particular was responsible, Machiavelli would appear to have opined, for the extinction in Italy of all devotion and religion. This accusation allegedly made by Machiavelli, together with the strong anticlerical Italian tradition and the growing wave of religious dissent, had a significant impact on the Italian heretical movement which was emerging and growing<sup>96</sup>.

Evidence also suggests that Italians who resided outside Italy were significantly less hesitant to talk about Machiavelli from the middle of the sixteenth century until its end. Machiavelli was more openly alluded to or indeed lauded in countries beyond the Italian peninsula<sup>97</sup>. This was especially the case for refugees. One refugee who had fled his native city of Florence under the Medici family, Giovanni Michele Bruto, published an attack of the city whence he had escaped while living in Lyon in 1562. This invective made extended use of Machiavelli's work and acknowledged his intelligence and style. It was printed in 1566, again in Lyon, by Federigo Albertini as part of a

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<sup>95</sup> Anglo, p. 325.

<sup>96</sup> Pirillo, p. 128.

<sup>97</sup> Anglo, p. 179.

collection defending Florentines against the false calumniations by the historian and biographer Giovo<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, the reign of Edward VI from 1547 until 1553 had seen an influx of Italian religious exiles to England who participated directly in the English theological debates. While taking part in the English Reformation, the Italian reformers also contributed to the diffusion of Italian secular learning and literature, publishing authors and texts prohibited or censored in Italy at the time, including Machiavelli<sup>99</sup>.

One agent who made a version of *Il Principe* more widely available in the 1580s was Pietro Perna, a prominent printer based in Basel originally from the Republic of Lucca. In 1580, he reprinted a version of *Il Principe* which had been translated into Latin by Silvestro Tegli twenty years previously. Perna added a preface which stated that rather than being an advocate of tyranny, Machiavelli supported the true prince. The Italian Protestant community in Basel was profoundly influenced by Machiavelli's republicanism<sup>100</sup>.

## 1.6 Final considerations

Machiavelli was a controversial writer throughout the sixteenth century, and the reception of his *Principe* varied enormously. Some of the texts written in English which reference Machiavelli and his *Principe* hitherto mentioned in this essay demonstrate a very superficial understanding of the text, if indeed any, whereas others suggest a more profound elaboration. What cannot be denied is that Machiavelli was adapted in the British Isles as a rhetorical instrument used to attack an individual or group perceived as a political enemy or threat. The fact that his name was adapted in both attacks and defences of the very same person or issue, as seen in the polemics in the 1530s regarding Henry VIII's break with Rome, as well as the controversy surrounding Robert Dudley in the 1580s, highlights how Machiavelli's name was used in propagandistic rhetoric as a synonym

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<sup>98</sup> Anglo, pp. 178-179.

<sup>99</sup> Pirillo, pp. 124-127.

<sup>100</sup> Pirillo, pp. 129-130.

for anything that should be avoided. This appears to have resulted in Machiavelli gaining connotations of the insidious and diabolical in the latter half of the century, and would explain why allusions to him in Shakespeare's plays also carry similar imagery.

By the time Shakespeare was active, Machiavelli was undoubtedly known, but the extent to which the earliest audiences of his plays would have known of him is highly debatable. It is likely that the comprehension of Machiavelli and his works was extremely limited in the general population, and that a certain idea of Machiavelli as a synonym for morally corrupt actions or behaviour was the only one which could be understood by the majority of Elizabethan theatre-goers<sup>101</sup>. This is indeed likely to have been the case given that, although the literate and often multilingual aristocratic sector of the population had access to copies of *Il Principe* in some language, the relatively low literacy rates in the general population at the end of the sixteenth century meant that first-hand experience of the text remained impossible for the majority of Shakespeare's original audiences. In any case, as noted by Levy in *Tudor Historical Thought*, the huge degree of variation in how Machiavelli was portrayed in Elizabethan England would have made it very difficult to form an unbiased view of him<sup>102</sup>. This would have been the case even for a literate and educated person.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting that plots and ideas expressed in literary texts are frequently simplified or sensationalised when referenced in other poetry, prose or theatrical performances. This phenomenon is by no means unique to Shakespeare. Artists have often modified stories when preparing a particular retelling. When this happens, the plotline, characters and dialogue are usually modified so that the performance appeals to and attracts a much wider audience than the one for whom the story was originally intended. Similarly, stories which were originally or previously told in an erstwhile epoch are very often changed, often with sensationalism, to reflect

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<sup>101</sup> Stanic, Enrico, "Machiavellianism in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*", in Alessandro Arienzo and Alessandra Petrina, eds., *Machiavellian Encounters in Tudor and Stuart England*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, p. 80.

<sup>102</sup> Levy, pp. 240-241.

the concerns of the artist's own time; once more, this is even more likely to be the case if a staging is particularly expensive to produce and needs to sell. Examples of both these tendencies abound in theatrical works produced throughout the time separating the sixteenth century from us. Therefore, sensationalism has always featured in entertainment and popular culture, so using a controversial figure such as Machiavelli as a theatrical device for dramatic effect should, arguably, come as no surprise.

## Chapter 2: *Il Principe* and Shakespeare's *Richard III*

### 2.1 The *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*

Shakespeare's various historical dramas are usually classified as "history plays", although it may be more accurate to consider the "historical" category as a subgenre of comedy or tragedy<sup>103</sup>. *Henry VI Part 1*, *Henry VI Part 2*, *Henry VI Part 3* and *Richard III* are usually categorised as part of a wider sequence of plays documenting the English kings known as the Henriad. Without any doubt, the historical accuracy of the *Henry VI* plays, along with all of Shakespeare's history plays, is highly debateable. The *Henry VI* plays depict the very complex story of the transition from the conflict between two noble families for control of the country and the consequent civil war to the reign of the Tudors. The series does not include the subsequent story of Henry VII, and the reason for this is not known<sup>104</sup>. Among the principal sources of information regarding this event was *The History of King Richard III* by Sir Thomas More, and the characterisation of Richard as a self-delighting ironist builds upon More's depiction<sup>105</sup>.

The Elizabethan age was more historically minded than most: in fact, by the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, books with historical content accounted for a substantial percentage of total book production<sup>106</sup>. There was a notion in this society that discerning a just course of action could be based on reading the right historical accounts, and, along with an interest in translating accounts of stories from antiquity, an inclination to translate more recent histories concurrently emerged<sup>107</sup>. Towards the end of the century there grew a new form of history writing which featured an insistence that the purpose of writing history was to teach men political wisdom<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> Stanco, Michele, "Shakespeare, Poeta/Artigiano: il canone, le forme drammatiche, i modelli culturali", in Stanco, Michele, ed., *La letteratura inglese dall'umanesimo al rinascimento*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, p. 314.

<sup>104</sup> Stanco, p.316.

<sup>105</sup> Wells, Stanley, Taylor, Gary, Jowett, John, Montgomery, Willian and Schoenbaum, S., eds., *The Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 183.

<sup>106</sup> Levy, p. 202.

<sup>107</sup> Levy, p. 204.

<sup>108</sup> Levy, p. 237.

Elizabeth I faced a number of challenges regarding her right to the throne. The Tudor dynasty had no undisputed right to rule, and there were numerous other claimants to the throne throughout their reign. The first of the Tudor line, King Henry VII, naturally features as the ultimate hero in both *Henry VI, Part 3* and in *Richard III* under his noble title, the Earl of Richmond. The former play features a prophecy on the part of King Henry VI which foreshadows the young Earl of Richmond's aptitude for kingship; the latter play depicts Richmond's offensive on forces supporting Richard III at Bosworth and his subsequent victory and ascension as King Henry VII. However, although he could solidly claim Lancastrian descent, Henry VII was essentially a usurper whose claim to the throne was very weak: his claim lay in the bloodline of his mother, Margaret Beaufort, who was a descendant of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III<sup>109</sup>. In addition to this, the claim of the Tudors was made even more fraught by a serious religious issue. Since Henry VIII had broken with the Roman Catholic Church in 1533, his daughter Elizabeth was declared a heretic and therefore a usurper by the Roman Catholic Church once she had ascended following the death of her siblings. In February 1570, Pope Pius V declared that the Catholic Church in Rome did not see Elizabeth as a legitimate ruler, and that her Catholic subjects should depose her. This resulted in widespread political persecution of Elizabeth's Catholic subjects: many of them were forced to declare their loyalty to avoid being fined or stripped of their estate or, worse still, accused of treason. Consequently, many treatises in defence of the rights of Catholics to rebel and depose heretical rulers ensued<sup>110</sup>. Elizabeth I was cordially detested in Catholic Europe, especially by her reluctant subjects in Ireland.<sup>111</sup> There can be little doubt, therefore, that it would have been extremely difficult not only to stabilise but also to legitimise the Tudor dynasty in the eyes of the general population.

The hero of *Henry VI, Part 1* is arguably Respublica, the commonweal of England, and the action centres on the effects of England of the personal ambition of overweening noblemen. The

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<sup>109</sup> Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, p.2.

<sup>111</sup> Davidson, Peter, "Opposing Elizabeth", in Alessandra Petrina, ed., *Queen and Country: The Relation between the Monarch and the People in the Development of the English Nation*, Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2011, p. 173.



fluctuation of the dénouement on either side of the channel symbolises the contrast between the disunity at home and the concentration of the French; similarly, the self-interest of the courtiers is contrasted to the singlemindedness of Talbot. All the jealousy and ambition displayed by the characters resulted in the loss of France. The play furthermore makes clear that Henry VI did not have the strength required to stabilise the discord which had emerged as a result of the overthrow of Richard II by Henry IV<sup>112</sup>. A central element of the trilogy is a study in kingship and its failure, as well as a study of discord: when dissent did eventually preside over the state as in *Richard III*, the order of the universe became unbalanced and consequently collapsed. This constituted a crisis which could only be overcome by the end of usurpation and the advent of concord, or by a strong monarch. This story recounted in the conclusion of the series indeed resembles this principle. In this way, Shakespeare managed to hold together the whole tetralogy of the series as a singular story<sup>113</sup>.

Shakespeare's retelling of the rise to power of the Tudor dynasty appears in *Richard III*. The exact details of the events as they truly happened continue to be a topic of debate, but it is widely accepted that Henry Tudor, born in 1457 as Harri Tudur at Pembroke Castle in Wales<sup>114</sup>, did indeed return to the British Isles from his life as a refugee in Brittany. It is also agreed that he organised his own militia and successfully overthrew Richard III at Bosworth. Consequently, Henry Tudor ascended as King Henry VII, dismantled the ancient regime and established the new Tudor dynasty. The penultimate scenes of this play document the conflict of 1485, known as the Battle of Bosworth, which historians universally accept as decisive in this regime change. For many historians, this event also marks the end of the Middle Ages, at least in the British Isles.

Naturally, the conclusion of *Richard III* recounts the Battle of Bosworth (albeit with highly debateable accuracy). The fact that *Henry VI, Part 3* concludes with Richard, then Duke of

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<sup>112</sup> Levy, p. 226.

<sup>113</sup> Levy, p. 227.

<sup>114</sup> "Pembroke Castle", <https://pembrokecastle.co.uk/about-us/history> Accessed on: 12.10.23

Gloucester, revealing his ambitions for the crown suggests that Shakespeare already had a conclusion in mind before *Richard III* appeared<sup>115</sup>.

It is overall unlikely that the sequence of events which gave rise to Richard III's ascension is reflected accurately in *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Richard III*: in fact, the real monarch is now thought to have been innocent of at least four of the assassinations with which he has traditionally been associated. Moreover, historians consider it unlikely that this king's physical impediments were as debilitating as they are shown to be in Shakespeare's plays. Historians also maintain that these depictions are a result of Tudor propaganda and in all likelihood do not portray Richard III of England in any accurate way<sup>116</sup>.

## 2.2 Shakespeare's Richard III as a Machiavellian villain

The next section is dedicated to Shakespeare's Richard as he has developed from the Duke of Gloucester to Richard III. However, I shall also use passages from other characters' speeches when they seem to indicate Machiavelli's influence. Coincidentally, there is significant proximity between the imagery used by Shakespeare and that used by Machiavelli. As seen in the previous chapter, Machiavelli was certainly known of and read in Elizabethan England. Machiavelli's name was used with various undertones in literature pertaining to questions of regency and conflict.

A number of plays attributed to Shakespeare feature characters who have been described as "Machiavellian". Such characters are always antagonists to the story since they are responsible for death and the destruction of relationships between other characters. Crucially, their speech has been said to feature allusions to ideas Machiavelli expressed in *Il Principe*. One well-known and very commonly cited example is Iago in Shakespeare's 1603 tragedy *Othello*: through manipulating several characters, principally the Venetian general from whom the play takes its name, Iago

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<sup>115</sup> Wells, p. 183.

<sup>116</sup> Richard III Society, "Richard III and his world", <https://richardiii.net/richard-iii-his-world/>, accessed on 15 October 2023.

achieves his objective of destroying most of the principal characters by sowing dissent and distrust among them, while identifying their weaknesses and using them to his advantage.

The conclusion of the *Henry VI* plays, *Richard III*, features a plotline which bears some resemblance to *Othello*: Shakespeare's Richard is shown as being wont to manipulate other characters in order to eliminate them (however, unlike those of Iago, Richard's actions appear to be driven by a specific intention, which is to secure his place as king; in contrast, Iago in *Othello* appears to have no reason for carrying out such vindictive actions, beyond his resentment at not having been given a promotion he thought he was owed).

As mentioned before, in *Henry VI, Part III*, the Duke of Gloucester purports that he would "send the murderous Machiavel to school". Like Iago, Richard Duke of Gloucester is often considered an embodiment of Machiavelli's ideal prince, but it has been noted that this is only true to some extent: although the character does possess the ambition, determination and deceptive skills recommended by Machiavelli, he is also motivated by vain and selfish desires, a drive against which Machiavelli warned in *Il Principe*<sup>117</sup>. Indeed, someone who has read *Il Principe* may notice that there is little resemblance between the behaviour on the part of Shakespeare's caricature of King Richard III and the ideal hypothetical ruler Machiavelli described in his treatise.

### 2.3 Act 3, Scene 7

Much of Act 3 involves Richard carrying out several steps in his plan to secure the throne. He is actively assisted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Buckingham, whose full name in real life was Henry Stafford. Although later in the play he will himself become another of Richard's eliminated victims, most of the plan for Richard to reach the throne is devised by Buckingham, rather than by Richard himself. By the third act of the play, it is Buckingham who appears to effectively be controlling the situation.

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<sup>117</sup> Loder, Conny, "Tyranny, Theatricality and Machiavelli", in Alessandra Petrina, ed., *Queen and Country: The Relation between the Monarch and the People in the Development of the English Nation*, Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2011, p. 202.

In the third act of Scene 7, the two men, having just convinced the Lord Mayor of London that one governor, the Duke of Hastings, was treacherous and a danger to the state, are now faced with the task of convincing the populace that Richard is the best candidate to be king. However, as this scene opens, it appears to have been Buckingham who has been addressing the public and attempting to convince them of Richard's aptitude to be king, rather than Richard himself. The latter had requested Buckingham to deliver a public speech in his place in the fifth scene of this act, and Buckingham accordingly delivers it in the seventh. The audiences never hear this speech, but can infer that it contained disparaging rhetoric about his brother Edward IV and his remaining heirs.

BUCKINGHAM

Withal, I did infer your lineaments,  
Being the right idea of your father,  
Both in your form and nobleness of mind;  
Laid open all your victories in Scotland,  
Your discipline in war, wisdom in peace,  
Your bounty, virtue, fair humility;  
Untouched or slightly handled in discourse.  
And when mine oratory drew toward end,  
I bid them that did love their country's good  
Cry "God save Richard, England's royal king!"

RICHARD

And did they so?

BUCKINGHAM

No. So God help me, they spake not a word  
But, like dumb statues or breathing stones,  
Started each on other and looked deadly pale. (3, 7, 12- 26)

We understand from this that Richard has evoked no esteem from the populace. However, this is strange if he is associated with Machiavelli, as Machiavelli actually reiterated the importance of maintaining the favour of the populace several times in *Il Principe*. In Chapter 19, he opined that popular support is fundamental, especially when you lose the favour of the nobility.

The discrepancy between Richard's behaviour and Machiavelli's standpoint regarding popular support can be seen when the above scene is contrasted with Chapter 19 of *Il Principe*.

...uno de' più potenti remedi che abbia uno principe contro alle coniuere è non essere odiato da lo universale: perché sempre chi coniuera crede con la morte del principe soddisfare al popolo, ma quando creda offenderlo non piglia animo a prendere simile partito....Per ridurre la cose in brevi termini, dico che la parte del coniuante non è se non paura, gelosia e sospetto di pena che lo sbigottisce: ma da la parte del principe è la maestà del principato, le leggi, le difese delli amici e dello stato che lo difendono. Talmente che, aggiunto a queste cose la benivolenza popolare, è impossibile che alcuno

sia sì temerario che congiuri: perché dove, per l'ordinario, uno congiurante ha a temere innanzi alla esecuzione del male, in questo caso debbe temere ancora poi, avendo per nimico il popolo, seguito lo eccesso, né potendo per questo sperare refugio alcuno. (De Febo, 2022, p.152)

Concludo (pertanto) che uno principe debbe tenere delle congiure poco conto, quando il popolo gli sia benivolo: ma quando il popolo gli sia nimico e abbilo in odio, debbe temere d'ogni cosa e d'ognuno. E li stato bene ordinati ed e' principi savi hanno con ogni diligenza pensato di non disperare e' grandi e satisfare al popolo e tenerlo contento: perché questa è una delle più importanti materie che abbi uno principe. (De Febo, 2022, p.154)

... non potendo e' principi mancare di non essere odiati da qualcuno, si debbano sforzare prima di non essere odiati dalle università, e quando non possono conseguire questo, debbono fuggire con ogni industria l'odio di quelle università che sono più potenti. (De Febo, 2022, p.158)

Chapter 19 suggests that Machiavelli believed popular support to be essential in maintaining control of a state, especially when the ruler risks hostile reception from the nobility. His elaboration is based on the fact that as long as a ruler manages not to be hated, no danger will emerge from other “infamie” of which they may become a target. He concludes that, when the population is favourable to its ruler, the need to worry about internal conspiracies from influential people such as nobles or ministers is minimised. Machiavelli also underlined earlier in the ninth chapter of his treatise that popular support is in many ways more valuable than support from the nobility, because whereas the favour from the populace is generally solid and robust, one will encounter a significant degree of rivalry from nobles. In addition, he pointed out that reliance on popular support is only unstable when it is a “cittadino privato” who has relied on it to achieve a position of influence; however, when the ruler has been assisted by the nobility in their rise to power, they must also earn popular support.

Concluderò solo che a uno principe è necessario avere il popolo amico: altrimenti non ha nelle avversità remedio. (De Febo, 2022, p.92)

If we evaluate Shakespeare's Richard according to this part of Chapter 19, we would expect him to elicit a positive response from the populace and win their support himself, rather than sending a counsellor in his place to garner his favour. If we adopt Machiavelli's stance towards popular support, it is troubling to watch this particular part of Act 3, Scene 7: the king cannot garner any

support from the populace and is effectively allowing a counsellor to carry out duties which should be done by him.

Furthermore, when advising about ministers in Chapter 23, Machiavelli also warned against placing too much responsibility in the hands of one minister, as doing so involves the risk of losing control to that person.

Uno principe, il quale non sia savio per sé stesso, non può essere consigliato bene, se già a sorte non rimettessi in uno solo che al tutto lo governassi, che fussi uomo prudentissimo. In questo caso, potrebbe ben essere, ma durerebbe poco, perché quel governatore lo torrebbe lo stato; ma, consigliandosi con più d'uno, uno principe che non sia savio non arà mai e' consigli uniti, non saprà per sé stesso unirli: de' consiglieri, ciascuno penserà alla proprietà sua; lui non li saprà correggere, né conoscere... Si conclude che li buoni consigli, da qualunque venghino, conviene naschino dalla prudenzia del principe, e non la prudenza del principe da' buoni consigli. (De Febo, 2022, p. 192)

In *Richard III*, Richard has consciously placed the responsibility of gaining the favour of the populace in the hands of a counsellor, the Duke of Buckingham, who is portrayed as being exceptionally intelligent with an aptitude for governance. This is the case in spite of the fact that gaining popular support was described several times by Machiavelli as essential for a ruler, particularly so for one who has only relied on the nobility to come to power. Therefore, the behaviour of Shakespeare's Richard in this scene features little that can be said to be "Machiavellian" if we judge the behaviour of Shakespeare's Richard by *Il Principe*.

## 2.4 *Richard III*, Act 4

Another example of the incongruence between Machiavelli's reasoning in *Il Principe* and the behaviour of Shakespeare's Richard is found in Act 4. Several times in the fourth act, Richard is informed that Henry Tudor, named in the script as the Earl of Richmond, is approaching, and that Richard's former allies are forming alliances with him.

In the fourth scene of the act, Richard is informed that one of his most important former counsellors, the Duke of Buckingham, has fled Richard's threats on his life and is willing to assist the approaching adversary.

RATCLIFFE

Most mighty sovereign, on the western coast  
Rideth a puissant navy. To our shores  
Throng many doubtful hollow-hearted friends,  
Unarmed and unresolved to beat them back.  
'Tis thought that Richmond is their admiral;  
And there they hull, expecting but the aid  
Of Buckingham to welcome them ashore. (4, 4, 456-462).

The reaction of the king to receiving such news is far from what would be expected from a character based on Machiavelli's *Principe*. This can be said because the fourteenth chapter of Machiavelli's *Principe* features content which could certainly discredit descriptions of this character as "Machiavellian". In Chapter 14, Machiavelli opines that a ruler, obviously in a critical position of responsibility for their state, should never leave war far from their mind, even in times of peace. A ruler, according to Machiavelli, must not, even in peacetime, neglect the pursuit of activities that prepare them for combat both mentally and physically. His reason for this is simple: that it is only by being well prepared for war that one has a solid foundation for attack and defence. This is, according to Machiavelli, all the more true in light of the point made in the previous chapter that a reign is only stable if it can rely on its own armed forces for defence.

Debbe dunque uno principe non avere altro obiettivo né altro pensiero né prendere cosa alcuna per sua arte, fuora della guerra e ordini e disciplina di essa: perché quella è sola arte che si aspetta a chi comanda [...] E per avverso si vede che, quando e' principi hanno pensato più alle delicatezze che alle arme, hanno perso lo stato loro: e la prima cagione che ti fa perdere quello è negligere questa arte, e la cagione che te lo fa acquistare è lo essere professo di questa arte [...] Perché, in tra le altre cagioni che ti arreca di male, lo essere disarmato ti fa contennendo, la quale è una di quelle infamie delle quali el principe si debbe guardare. E però uno principe che della milizia non si intenda, oltre alle altre infelicità, come è detto, non può essere stimato da' suoi soldati né fidarsi di loro.

Debbe pertanto mai levare il pensiero da questo esercizio della guerra; [e nella pace vi si debbe più esercitare che nella guerra,] il che può fare in dua modi: l'uno, con le opere; l'altro, con la mente. E quanto alle opere, oltre al tenere bene ordinati ed esercitati e' suoi, debbe stare sempre in su le cacce; e mediante quelle assuefare il corpo a' disagi, e parte imparare la natura de' siti, e conoscere come surgono e' monti, come imboccano le valle, come iaciono e' piani, e intendere la natura de' siti, e conoscere el suo paese, può meglio intendere le difese di esso [...] E quel principe che manca di questa perizia, manca della prima parte che vuole avere uno capitano: perché questa t'insegna trovare el nimico, pigliare gli alloggiamenti, condurre gli eserciti, ordinare le giornate, campeggiare le terre con tuo vantaggio. [...] Questi simili modi debbe osservare uno principe savio; e mai ne' tempi pacifici stare ozioso, ma con industria farne capitale per potersene valere nelle avversità, acciò che la fortuna, quando si muta, lo truovi parato a resisterle. (De Febo, 2022, pp. 124-126.)

It is clear from this that Richard does not align with Machiavelli's precept that a ruler's preparation for warfare should begin before combat actually breaks out in order to be as well

prepared as possible. Instead of immediately effectuating the preparation for combat Machiavelli recommended, Richard's reaction is simply to inform another counsellor, the Duke of Norfolk, without troubling to consult him personally. We are therefore presented with a leader who has no military strategy at all, and who appears to have left war far from his mind, even upon being told that a threat is imminent. The king's immediate reply to the news is as follows:

RICHARD  
Some light foot friend post to the Duke of Norfolk —  
Ratcliffe thyself, or Catesby. Where is he?  
CATESBY  
Here, my good lord.  
RICHARD  
Catesby, fly to the Duke.  
CATESBY  
I will, my lord, with all convenient haste. (4, 4, 463-467).

This dialogue confirms that even when a potential threat to the state or reign is present, Shakespeare's Richard is a king who chooses to take no direct action to prepare for what could become an offensive: rather, he delegates the issue to another, the Duke of Norfolk, giving Catesby the duty of informing him. In addition to this, the king's handling of this situation is made even more portentous by his subsequent insulting of the man to whom he has just entrusted with the responsibility of passing such an important message to the Duke of Norfolk. This is made even graver by the fact that Catesby appears to be a loyal subordinate who, as seen in the last line of the above extract, vows to deliver the message as quickly as he can.

After Richard insults this man, another counsellor, Lord Stanley, upon his entry, presently repeats the news of Henry Tudor's advancement.

STANLEY  
Richmond is on the seas.  
RICHARD  
There let him sink, and be the seas on him!  
White-livered runagate, what doth he there?  
STANLEY  
I know not, mighty sovereign, but by guess.  
RICHARD  
Well, as you guess?  
STANLEY



Stirred up by Dorset, Buckingham and Morton,  
 He makes for England, here to claim the crown.  
 RICHARD  
 Is the chair empty? Is the sword unswayed?  
 Is the King dead, the empire unpossessed?  
 What heir of York is there alive but we?  
 And who is England's king but great York's heir?  
 Then tell me, what makes he upon the seas?  
 STANLEY  
 Unless for that, my liege, I cannot guess.  
 RICHARD  
 Unless for that he comes to be your liege,  
 You cannot guess wherefore the Welshman comes. (4, 4, 393-407).

From this dialogue, audiences are given the impression that the king is making no efforts to understand how his enemy could approach, and is not interested in attempting to locate them. Arguably, this is already a sign that there is little which bears similarity to *Il Principe* in his actions.

The same scene also recalls the twenty-fifth and penultimate chapter of *Il Principe*. Therein, Machiavelli discussed the extent to which fortune can be held accountable for the outcome of a situation. The crux of Machiavelli's argumentation is that fortune may be accountable for half of an individual's actions, but, equally, the individual holds full responsibility for the remaining half.

[...] iudico potere essere vero che la fortuna sia arbitra della meta delle azioni nostre, ma che etiam lei ne lasci governare l'altra meta, o presso, a noi. (De Febo, 2022, p. 198)

Fortune is described through the metaphor of a river which, in the aftermath of heavy rain, may overflow and flood the surrounding land.

E assomiglio quella a uno di questi fiumi rovinosi che, quando si adirano, allagano e' piani, rovinano li arbori e li edifizii, lievano da questa parte terreno, pongono da quella altra: ciascuno fugge loto dinanzi, ognuno cede all'impeto loro senza potervi in alcuna parte ostare. (De Febo, 2022, p.198)

Machiavelli maintains that the damage the subsequent flooding causes the land can be curtailed or even avoided completely if adequate defences have been put into place. Essentially, fortune can be controlled to some extent because a river is devastating for those who are unprepared, so its

consequences will be disastrous if adequate protection has not been installed. Preparation for preventing a flood should therefore begin as soon as adverse weather is understood to be imminent.

E, benché sieno così fatti, non resta però che gli uomini, quando vedono tempi quieti, non vi potessino fare provvedimento e con ripari e con argini: in modo che, crescendo poi, o eglino andrebbero per uno canale o l'impeto loro non sarebbe né sì dannoso né sì licenzioso. (De Febo, 2022, p. 198)

King Richard receives once more unfavourable news of how his situation is developing from three messengers. He is subsequently informed that several of his former allies have deserted him to collaborate with his adversaries. Incidentally, the image of rising water as a metaphor for adversity as used by Machiavelli is also found in this extract.

Enter a Messenger.  
[FIRST] MESSENGER  
My gracious sovereign, now in Devonshire,  
As I by friends am well advertised,  
Sir Edward Courtney and the haughty prelate,  
Bishop of Exeter, his elder brother,  
With many more confederates are now in arms.  
Enter another Messenger.  
[SECOND] MESSENGER  
In Kent, my liege, the Guilfords are in arms,  
And every hour more competitors  
Flock to the rebels, and their power grows strong.  
Enter another Messenger.  
[THIRD] MESSENGER  
My lord, the army of great Buckingham –  
RICHARD  
Out on, you, owls! Nothing but songs of death.  
He striketh him.  
There, take that til thou bring better news.  
[THIRD] MESSENGER  
The news I have to tell your majesty,  
Is that by sudden floods and fall of waters  
Buckingham's army is dispersed and scattered,  
And he himself wandered away alone,  
No man knows wither. (4, 4, 526-542).

From this dialogue, we once again understand that this king is making no preparations to curtail the consequences of fortune. Having been presented five times with news that an adverse situation is developing, Richard does not endeavour to confront the imminent threat in any way. Instead of devising plans for a defence or counteroffensive, he reacts to the news in ways which seem the polar

opposite of Machiavelli's counsel. Firstly, when Ratcliffe breaks the news that the naval force led by the Earl of Richmond is approaching, Richard immediately delegates the responsibility to a third party and insults the man to whom he entrusts the delivery of the message.

Shortly after this, at the warning from Lord Stanley that this enemy militia is now approaching by sea, Richard casually dismisses the news with a joke. In addition, Richard makes no proactive effort to understand the situation or how it could evolve. The only action he takes is asking Stanley further questions, which the latter cannot answer. Thirdly, Richard routinely refuses the news born by the three messengers that people who had previously been loyal to him are now assisting the approaching enemy. By the time the third messenger delivers the news, audiences understand that fortune is not working in Richard's favour, but those among them familiar with *Il Principe* will also understand that the king is actually doing the opposite of what Machiavelli would most likely advise in this situation.

Furthermore, it may be argued that there is some discrepancy between Chapters 22 and 23 of *Il Principe* and the situation depicted in Act 4 Scene 4 of *Richard III*. The twenty-second and twenty-third chapters of *Il Principe* feature elaborations on how a ruler should manage the society with whom they work closely. The twenty-second chapter examines the criteria according to which ministers should be selected, while the scope of the twenty-third appears to be to offer guidance on how to avoid falling victim to treason.

The above extract from *Richard III* also recalls elements of these two chapters. However, it seems that neither of the guidelines Machiavelli articulated in this section of *Il Principe* are respected in this scene. In fact, it would once again appear that Shakespeare's Richard is doing the exact opposite.

Furthermore, this part of Act 4, Scene 4 shows that, by this point in the play, Richard has lost most of his erstwhile advisers because they decide to abandon him, with the Duke of Buckingham, previously the counsellor closest to Richard, even assisting the approaching enemy. It seems likely

that the counsellors who remain with Richard will eventually desert him as well, as the king eschews no credibility which could secure their loyalty. After Richard violently refuses to hear any further updates about the Duke of Buckingham, seemingly for fear that they will feature more portentous news, the third messenger immediately delivers news that Buckingham's militia has dissipated and that Buckingham himself has disappeared.

A reading of the twenty-third chapter of *Il Principe* will reveal that Machiavelli wrote that advice from certain counsellors should indeed be sought by a ruler, possibly in order to make them feel as though they are playing an active role in governance. However, it must be rulers themselves who actively seek this advice, rather than someone else acting in their place: in fact, the ruler must discourage offers of advice which are not requested. Equally, the ruler needs to have their entourage understand that they are neither afraid of nor offended by the truth: failure to achieve this will also result in the loss of credibility.

Uno principe debbe consigliarsi sempre, ma quando lui vuole e non quando altri vuole: anzi debbe torre animo a ciascuno di consigliarlo di alcuna cosa, se non gliene domanda; ma lui debbe bene essere largo domandatore, e di poi, circa alle cose domandate, paziente auditore del vero: anzi, intendendo che alcuno per alcuno rispetto non gnene dica, turbarsene. E perche molti estimano che alcuno principe, il quale dà da sé opinione di prudente, sia così tenuto non per sua natura ma per buoni consigli che lui ha d'intorno, senza dubio s'ingannano. (De Febo, 2022, p. 192)

Turning back to Act 4 Scene 4 of *Richard III*, the act of imploring a messenger to bring better news purely because he has born news unfavourable to the king cannot be said to complement Machiavelli's precept.

Enter a Messenger.  
[FIRST] MESSENGER  
My gracious sovereign, now in Devonshire,  
As I by friends am well advertised,  
Sir Edward Courtney and the haughty prelate,  
Bishop of Exeter, his elder brother,  
With many more confederates are now in arms.  
Enter another Messenger.  
[SECOND] MESSENGER  
In Kent, my liege, the Guilfords are in arms,  
And every hour more competitors  
Flock to the rebels, and their power grows strong.  
Enter another Messenger.  
[THIRD] MESSENGER

My lord, the army of great Buckingham –  
RICHARD  
Out on, you, owls! Nothing but songs of death.  
He striketh him.  
There, take that til thou bring better news.  
[THIRD] MESSENGER  
The news I have to tell your majesty,  
Is that by sudden floods and fall of waters  
Buckingham's army is dispersed and scattered,  
And he himself wandered away alone,  
No man knows wither. (4, 4, 527-542)

Whereas Machiavelli's argumentation is that a solid method of exerting stable leadership is to make it clear that the truth does not offend you, Shakespeare's Richard is visibly outraged and upset by reality. In addition to this, it also seems as though Machiavelli's counsel that a ruler's credibility is lost if anyone feels they can state the facts as they really are to them is neglected in this scene, as there appears to be no small group of carefully selected counsellors whom Richard could allow to disclose their views, as recommended by Machiavelli in Chapter 23 of *Il Principe*.

Another point Machiavelli made in this same chapter is articulated as follows:

Uno principe, il quale non sia savio per sé stesso, non può essere consigliato bene se già a sorte non si rimettessi in uno solo che al tutto lo governassi, che fussi uomo prudentissimo. In questo caso potrebbe bene essere, ma durerebbe poco: perché' quel governatore in breve tempo gli torrebbe lo stato. Ma consigliandosi con più d'uno, uno principe che non sia savio non ara' mai è consigli utili; non saprà per s' stesso unirgli: de' consiglieri, ciascuno penserà alla proprietà sua; lui non gli saprà né correggere né conoscere: e non si possono trovare altrimenti, perché' gli uomini sempre ti riusciranno tristi, se da una necessità non sono fatti buoni. Si conclude che e' buoni consigli, da qualunque venghino, conviene naschino dalla prudenza del principe, e non la prudenza del principe da' buoni consiglieri. (De' Febo, 2022, p.192)

It seems as though Machiavelli opined that vice governors and ministers, whether many or just one, do not constitute in themselves a solid basis for governance: whereas placing too much responsibility in the hands of just one person leaves one vulnerable to subversion on the part of that individual, the presence of too many ministers means that no agreements will ever be reached. Therefore, according to Machiavelli, solid governance can only be achieved if decisions ultimately lie with rulers themselves. In light of this, it would appear that Machiavelli's ideal ruler must be able to govern independently and maintain control of a situation without the assistance of others. This also underlines another discrepancy between Shakespeare's Richard in *Richard III* and *Il*

*Principe*. Shakespeare's Richard, even now as king, does not appear to be able to take any decisions independently in Act 4 Scene 4. He lacks the knowledge of the situation evolving around him necessary to take sensible action, has routinely ignored warnings of potential dangers and shows no interest in understanding how the external threat could develop.

#### 2.4 Chapter 18 of *Il Principe: Quomodo fides a principibus sit servanda* and Richard's overall behaviour

The eighteenth chapter of *Il Principe* is arguably the most important chapter as it appears to contain the reasoning upon which most of the points Machiavelli makes throughout the treatise are based. This chapter of *Il Principe* is of particular interest when discussing Shakespeare's Richard because it seems to contain argumentation which not only recalls his behaviour but also contradicts it throughout the play.

In the opening paragraph of this chapter, we find the following statement:

Quanto sia laudabile in uno principe il mantenere la fede e vivere con integrità e non con astuzia, ciascuno lo intende; nondimanco si vede per esperienza ne' nostri tempi quelli principi avere fatto gran cose, che della fede hanno tenuto poco conto e che hanno saputo con l'astuzia aggirare e' cervelli delli uomini: e alla fine hanno superato quelli che si sono fondati in su la lealtà. (De Febo, 2022, p. 144).

This long sentence can be said to align with many aspects of Shakespeare's Richard's behaviour in *Richard III*. Firstly, the principle expressed by this sentence may be reflected in Richard's treachery towards his counsellors, the Duke of Buckingham and the Duke of Hastings: both assisted him in his devious rise to power, but were executed as soon as their help was no longer needed. The plotline presents these betrayals as central in Richard's accession to the throne. Furthermore, it could also be said to reflect the attitude he expresses as Shakespeare depicts his seduction of Lady Anne Neville in the second act of the first scene (although this almost certainly never happened in reality).

Machiavelli continues his reasoning by subsequently explaining that:

Dovete adunque sapere come e' sono dua generazioni di combattere: l'uno con le leggi, l'altro con la forza. Quel primo e' proprio dell'uomo; quel secondo, delle bestie. Ma perché' molte volte el primo non basta, conviene ricorrere al secondo: pertanto a uno principe e' necessario bene usare la bestia e lo uomo. (De Febo, 2022, p. 114)

A uno principe non e necessario avere in fatto tutte le soprascritte qualità, ma e bene necessario parere di averle; anzi ardirò di dire questo: che, avendole e osservandole sempre, sono dannose, e, parendo di averle, sono utili; come parere piatoso, fedele, umano, intero, religioso, ed essere: ma stare in modo edificato con lo animo che, bisognando non essere, tu possa e sappia diventare il contrario. E hassi a intendere questo, che uno principe e massime uno principe nuovo non può osservare tutte quelle cose per le quali gli uomini sono chiamati buoni, sendo spesso necessitato, per mantenere lo stato, operare contro alla fede, contro alla carità, contro alla umanità, contro alla religione. (De Febo, 2022, p. 146-148)

It could, therefore, be said that Shakespeare's Richard is Machiavellian if the above passage from *Il Principe* is taken at face value. However, immediately after this passage, a reader also encounters an important point which is articulated as follows:

E pero bisogna che egli abbia uno animo disposto a volgersi secondo e' venti della fortuna e la variazione delle cose gli comandano; e, come di sopra dissi, non partirsi dal bene, potendo, ma sapere entrare nel male, necessitato. (De Febo, 2022, p. 148).

Shortly after this, Machiavelli states that the principal concern for most people will be the final result of actions taken, and the majority of people will therefore overlook more questionable actions if one achieves a good result which benefits them.

...e quelli pochi non ardiscono opporsi alla opinione di molti che abbino la maesta dello stato che gli difenda; e nelle azioni di tutti li uomini, e massimi de' principi, dove non e iudizi a chi reclamare, si guarda al fine. (De Febo, 2022, p.148).

Machiavelli thus specifies that, while you may need to stray from what you or other people consider to be good in order to safeguard or work towards a "greater good", you must remain on the side of what is right. If we judge Shakespeare's caricature of King Richard III according to this reasoning, we again find discrepancy between what Machiavelli advised and this character. One intimation of this chapter in Machiavelli's treatise is that doing the right thing is rarely as easy as anyone would like to think: in fact, doing what is right may be extremely complicated, as well as very difficult at a practical level. Moreover, it specifies that the result of the actions one chooses to take must remain good if those actions are to be justified.

If a character's aims do not stretch beyond the desire to become king, it is difficult to think of that same character as an embodiment of Machiavelli. It is from this point of view that the incompatibility of Shakespeare's Richard with Machiavelli is similar to that of Iago in *Othello*: if there is no noble finality to motivate one's actions, a condition Machiavelli implied was essential, those actions cannot be considered good. Both characters leave justice far away from them, and none is to be found in their actions. Richard as portrayed in Shakespeare's retelling, at least in the final play of the series, cannot be said to be Machiavellian because he is not interested in creating a state which is stable and brings benefits to the population, which appears to be what Machiavelli was implying can be considered an end which is worth justifying.

## 2.6 Final considerations

Before concluding, it must be highlighted that there are undoubtedly some elements from Shakespeare's Richard in the final *Henriad* play which do recall Machiavelli's *Principe*, and appear to substantiate it. However, it appears that, equally, there is a degree of deviation from many of the standpoints Machiavelli expressed in the same treatise.

It can also be said that, incidentally, argumentation expressed in Machiavelli's *Principe* is discernible in *Richard III*, but, rather than coming from Richard himself, it is actually more obvious in other characters than it is in him. The character in the play of Henry Stafford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Buckingham, is an example of this. The Duke of Buckingham utters some speech which recalls several elements of *Il Principe* much more than anything uttered by Richard. This can be seen, for example, in the seventh scene of Act 3, in which both men are preparing to receive the Mayor of London so as to eventually convince him their former colleague, the Duke of Hastings, was a traitor. As Buckingham, by this point clearly commanding the situation, advises Richard on how to receive him, he puts forward several suggestions which reflect the argumentation in *Il Principe*.

BUCKINGHAM

The Mayor is here at hand. Intend some fear:



Be not you spoke but with mighty suit.  
And look you get a prayer book in your hand  
And stand between two churchmen, good my lord,  
For on that ground I'll make a holy descant.  
And be not easily won to our requests.  
Play the maid's part: still answer "nay" and take it. (4, 7, 45-51)

This advice given by the Duke of Buckingham to Shakespeare's Richard can be said to resemble that given by Machiavelli to his readership in Chapter 18 of *Il Principe*. Specifically, it recalls the section towards the beginning of the chapter in which Machiavelli states that certain qualities must be understood by other people to be ones that a ruler possesses, even if this is not actually the case. Among these qualities, he lists religiosity.

Debbe adunque uno principe avere gran cura che non gli esca mai di bocca cos'ache non sia piena delle soprascritte cinque qualità; e paia, a udirlo e vederlo, tutto pietà, tutto fede, tutto integrità, tutto umanità, tutto religione: e non è cosa più necessaria a parere di avere, che questa ultima qualità. (De Febo, 2022, page 148)

Machiavelli's advice from Chapter 18 aligns with the imperatives Buckingham uses to address Richard in the dialogue above from Act 3 Scene 7.

Similarly, we encounter several aspects of Machiavelli's advice when Henry Tudor makes an appearance. He is, of course, still the Earl of Richmond at this point in the story. We encounter him for the first time in *Richard III* in the second scene of Act 5 as he is haranguing his armed force before they proceed to Bosworth.

Scene 2  
*Enter Richmond, Oxford, Blunt, Herbert, and others.*  
RICHMOND  
Fellows in arms, and my most loving friends,  
Bruised underneath the yoke of tyranny,  
Thus far into the bowels of the land  
Have we marched on without impediment,  
And here receive we from our father Stanley  
Lines of fair comfort and encouragement.  
The wretched, bloody and usurping boar,  
That spoiled your summer fields and fruitful vines,  
Swills your warm blood like wash, and makes his trough  
In your embowelled bosoms—this foul swine  
Is now even in the centre of this isle,  
Near to the town of Leicester, as we learn.  
From Tamworth thither is but one day's march.  
In God's name, cheerly on, courageous friends,  
To reap the harvest of perpetual peace  
By this one bloody trial of sharp war. (4, 5, 1-16)

This speech can be said to coincide closely with several chapters of *Il Principe*. Firstly, it satisfies Machiavelli's requirement in Chapter 22 for a leader to remain in control of his subordinates by taking decisions himself and not allocating too much agency in decision-making to someone else. Richard, in contrast, does not meet these criteria as he is shown throughout the play to be too dependent on people such as the Duke of Buckingham who, as seen above, often addresses him in the imperative form. Moreover, whereas the above dialogue demonstrates how Richmond meets the requirement described by Machiavelli in Chapter 14 that it is essential to be prepared for combat long before a conflict begins, the same cannot be said for Richard, who is shown to have no military strategy and no autonomy in taking decisions as we witness the consequences of his disastrous military strategy in the play's concluding scenes. It could be argued, therefore, that characters other than Richard himself bear more similarity to Machiavelli's ideal ruler he described in *Il Principe*. This phenomenon is in all likelihood just a coincidence, but it could certainly show that Shakespeare's Richard III has much less in common with Machiavelli's ideal ruler as described in *Il Principe* than we might expect.

As mentioned in the first chapter, it is not known whether Shakespeare ever read *Il Principe* in any language, but it is almost certain that he knew of the treatise and its themes. It is also worth mentioning the likelihood that Shakespeare's history plays, along with several other types of plays, were probably not written solely by him: evidence suggests that various people were in fact involved in the production of plays often thought of today as having been written by Shakespeare<sup>118</sup>. In light of this, it may be said that the standpoints expressed by Machiavelli in his *Principe*, or indeed the contradiction thereof, that we find in *Richard III* may have resulted from the very wide variation in reception of Machiavelli in Shakespeare's temporal and geographical location, a situation which would appear to be reflected in the language we find in the literature of the time. At this point, it is worth analysing the language. As many of the examples hitherto mentioned in the first chapter of

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<sup>118</sup> Stanco, p.240.

this thesis demonstrate, there is a noun substantive, “Machiavel”. This term, as seen in the examples previously mentioned, is frequently found in sixteenth-century literature and, in light of the fact that its use is overwhelmingly negative in all the examples mentioned in this thesis, would appear to carry decidedly pejorative connotations. However, although the term “Machiavel” clearly derives from Machiavelli’s name, it does not necessarily imply any of Machiavelli’s argumentation or ideas. The term in fact seems to be little more than a synonym for a person who intends to rise to occupy a position of power but whose behaviour is morally abhorrent. If the term “Machiavel” carries such connotations, it can certainly be said to apply to the character of the last Plantagenet king who features in *Richard III*. What is more difficult to say, however, is that the character of King Richard III as portrayed in the play named after him can be described as “Machiavellian”. It is certainly true that the Duke of Gloucester who features in *Henry VI, Part 2* and *Henry VI, Part 3* does show similarities to the characteristics Machiavelli outlined for effective governance in *Il Principe*: at his first appearance in the story, he is a soldier who is prepared to personally carry out the duties of a soldier: namely, to take the life of another person. His reason for this seems clear: that his dynasty is the best one to govern this domain, and that this state should be maintained. Insofar as he is willing to take human life for what he considers a worthwhile cause that will result in more benefits for people than it harms, the Duke of Gloucester could be considered Machiavellian. However, since Machiavelli in *Il Principe* insisted on the obligation to appear to remain on the side of justice, it is very difficult to describe the same character after he begins to eliminate his various victims in *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Richard III*. Although his motivation for this is the desire to be king, he does not appear to want this for any worthwhile reason; neither does he resolve to improve the country or the lives of the citizens in any way once he has reached the throne. It is in light of this that the character of King Richard III portrayed in the plays attributed to Shakespeare can only be described as the theatrical trope “Machiavel”, but can hardly be said to be Machiavellian as he bears little resemblance to the precepts for governance upon which Machiavelli reflected in *Il Principe*.



## Riassunto

Riccardo, Duca di Gloucester nell'*Enrico VI, Parte 3* e nel *Riccardo III* di William Shakespeare, è stato spesso descritto come un “machiavelliano malvagio”. Questa definizione, però, sembra inappropriata ad una attenta lettura del trattato *Il Principe* di Machiavelli. Il comportamento di Riccardo, infatti, non sembra quasi mai riflettere ciò che Machiavelli espresse nella sua opera, anzi, si può affermare che il più delle volte lo contraddice. Lo scopo di questa tesi è quello di esplorare questa discrepanza e di esaminare qualche esempio specifico nel quale i concetti espressi da Machiavelli ne *Il Principe* appaiono totalmente assenti dalla mentalità e dal comportamento del Riccardo di Shakespeare.

Il primo capitolo della tesi contiene una ricognizione di come Machiavelli fosse percepito nell'Europa del sedicesimo secolo, dalla prima apparizione de *Il Principe* fino al tempo in cui le opere teatrali del *Henriad* di Shakespeare sono state messe in scena per la prima volta. La parte finale del capitolo cerca di esaminare anche fino a che punto Shakespeare avesse familiarità con *Il Principe* o con altri lavori di Machiavelli.

È opinione comune che la diffusione de *Il Principe* di Machiavelli nelle isole Britanniche sia iniziata all'inizio degli anni trenta del cinquecento. Si trovano spesso nella letteratura del tempo riferimenti espliciti a Machiavelli nelle discussioni relative alla rottura con la chiesa romana ad opera di Enrico VIII. Machiavelli è stato usato come uno strumento retorico sia per attaccare, sia per difendere questo evento. Un esempio di retorica difensiva si trova negli scritti di Richard Moryson, il quale ha trovato Machiavelli particolarmente utile nelle sue trattazioni contro il papato. Moryson difese il divorzio tra Enrico VIII e la sua prima moglie, Caterina d'Aragona, e usò Machiavelli per discutere di temi delicati come la sedizione. Per Moryson, Machiavelli era utile per stabilire un approccio realistico con questioni spinose. Tuttavia, Machiavelli è stato anche usato come strumento retorico per attaccare lo scisma. Un esempio ben conosciuto è dato dai riferimenti

diffamatori nei confronti di Machiavelli che Reginald Pole fa nella sua opera *Apologia Ad Carolum Quintum*. Questo saggio sostiene che *Il Principe* di Machiavelli fosse la ragione per cui Enrico VIII ha deciso di rompere con la chiesa di Roma, dichiarando sé stesso capo di una chiesa separata e appropriandosi delle proprietà dei monasteri inglesi. Il testo include immagini che evocano la tentazione e il diabolico, a cui l'autore attribuisce la causa della decisione di Enrico VIII di iniziare lo scisma. Pole si spinge oltre, riferendosi a *Il Principe* come "scritto da un nemico della razza umana... scritto con le dita di Satana".

La tendenza a usare il nome di Machiavelli e il suo *Il Principe* come espediente retorico nella letteratura politica è emersa anche nelle decadi seguenti, anche se l'obiettivo di tali invettive è passato dalla rottura con Roma a individui considerati pericolosi per lo stato. Per alcuni il lavoro di Machiavelli fu un prezioso strumento didattico, particolarmente per coloro che godevano di una posizione politicamente influente, mentre altri trovarono questo trattato oltraggioso. Nelle isole Britanniche il nome di Machiavelli fu usato come un'arma per attaccare oppositori politici, e spesso il suo nome aveva altro significato che quello di una persona pericolosa, o semplicemente di una persona che sarebbe stato opportuno evitare. Il fatto che William Maitland, segretario di Maria regina degli Scozzesi, fosse considerato "uno scolaro del covo di Machiavelli", lo dimostra. Lo stesso Maitland fu anche ritenuto "un machiavelliano menzognero" nel testo anonimo *A Rhyme in Defence of the Queen of Scots against the Earl of Murray*. Nella seconda metà del secolo, questa immagine disumanizzata e diabolica di Machiavelli si è spostata nella letteratura teatrale, col risultato che il personaggio "machiavelliano" divenne un tropo del teatro del tardo cinquecento.

Il lavoro di Machiavelli ha alimentato controversie fin dall'inizio anche in Europa continentale, suscitando una ostilità via via crescente, a mano a mano che la conoscenza de *Il Principe* si espandeva dalla nativa Firenze. Sebbene Machiavelli fosse inizialmente ammirato dai suoi primi lettori per il suo metodo di cercare i precetti generali del governare dagli esempi della storia, *Il Principe* ha anche suscitato indignazione, soprattutto tra i membri della chiesa cattolica romana e

nel corso del sedicesimo secolo, il nome di Machiavelli fu inserito in molte edizioni del *Index Librororum Prohibitorum*. Allo stesso modo, Machiavelli fu anche recepito negativamente nei circoli protestanti. Uno dei più famosi testi contro Machiavelli fu scritto da Innocent Gentillet, che, nel suo *Discours contre Machiavel*, affermò che le argomentazioni in *Il Principe* avevano contribuito alla radicalizzazione che provocò il massacro del giorno di San Bartolomeo, un genocidio contro le comunità di protestanti Ugonotti nei sobborghi e all'interno della città di Parigi avvenuto nel 1571. Curiosamente, sembra che Machiavelli e le sue opere diventassero uno strumento per attacchi reciproci nella guerra culturale tra cattolici e protestanti nell'Europa continentale della metà del secolo.

Il secondo capitolo della tesi prende in esame la conclusione delle opere teatrali di Enrico VI, *Richard III*, fornendo un quadro d'insieme del contesto storico in cui si svolgono gli accadimenti di questo racconto. Il fulcro principale è Riccardo, Duca di Gloucester, così come è rappresentato da Shakespeare nel tentativo di portare avanti il suo piano inarrestabile e moralmente vuoto di diventare re nell'opera finale della serie. Sebbene sia stato affermato che la natura di tale comportamento sia machiavellica, chiunque abbia letto *Il Principe* può restare perplesso di fronte a una tale affermazione, dal momento che ci sono ben poche similitudini tra i precetti che Machiavelli ha descritto nel suo trattato e il comportamento del personaggio shakespeariano. Il capitolo si sviluppa fornendo esempi di come il comportamento di Riccardo non sembra allineato con i pensieri espressi da Machiavelli ne *Il Principe*. Presumibilmente, quello che in ultima analisi permette di affermare che Riccardo non sia un "machiavelliano malvagio" è la sua corruzione interiore e il suo vuoto desiderio di diventare re.

Sebbene da molti punti di vista il comportamento di Riccardo richiami assai poco ciò che espresse Machiavelli nel suo *Principe*, sembra che alcuni ragionamenti espressi da Machiavelli siano rispecchiati nelle azioni e nei dialoghi di altri personaggi. Innanzitutto, incontriamo nell'opera il personaggio del Duca di Buckingham, il cui vero nome era Henry Stafford. Costui, nell'aiutare

in maniera critica Riccardo a raggiungere il trono, dimostra spesso un comportamento che, a differenza di quello di Riccardo, combacia con l'argomentazione di Machiavelli ne *Il Principe*. Un esempio molto evidente di tale similitudine si trova nella settima scena del terzo atto, quando Buckingham sottolinea davanti a Riccardo l'importanza di sembrare credente e mite, e gli consiglia di fingere queste proprietà davanti al sindaco di Londra. In generale, Buckingham rispecchia bene i principi espressi ne *Il Principe*, e questo si riflette in una spiccata capacità di agire politicamente in maniera molto efficace.

Allo stesso modo, il Duca di Richmond, ossia Henry Tudor, dimostra degli aspetti che si potrebbero definire "machiavellici". Ha una strategia militare, è preparato per la guerra, sa comandare e gestire le persone anche in una situazione critica di guerra, ed è grazie a queste sue qualità che riesce a far cadere re Riccardo. In aggiunta, Henry Tudor si dimostra un machiavelliano nel suo voler mantenere lo stato ordinato e stabile, in modo che porti benefici al popolo, anche con l'uso di strategie ed espedienti violenti, che applica con successo in guerra, al contrario di Riccardo, che non dimostra alcuna intenzione di perseguire queste finalità.



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