莎士比亞兩輯四部曲中的馬基維利思想：

英王理查三世與亨利四世

Shakespeare’s Machiavellianism in Two Tetralogies:

King Richard III and King Henry IV

指導教授 蘇其康教授
Advisor: Professor Francis K. H. So

研究生 吳宗雯
Tsung-wen Wu

國立中山大學外國語文研究所

碩士論文

A Thesis Submitted to
The Institute of Foreign Languages and Literature
National Sun Yat-Sen University

中華民國九十年七月
July 2001
Acknowledgements

I am especially indebted to my advisor, Professor Francis K. H. So, who constantly urges me to improve my writing ability and to sharpen my mind. And he never fails to offer me timely help whenever I feel confused or discouraged. Without his encouragement and enlightenment, this thesis would have been impossible.

I am grateful to Professor Yuan-kuei Chiu and Professor I-chun Wang for their careful reading and insightful questions. I have also received important suggestions and great help from Shih-ting Hsu, Man-ping Ling, Chao-hua Chen, Li-lin Chang, and Hui-kuan Huang. I thank my husband Chun-kuei for allowing the presence of Shakespeare in his life for so long.

Finally my thanks go to my parents, whose love and support have made me what I am. I would like to dedicate the thesis to them.
Abstract

Machiavelli creates his model of an ideal prince in his famous book *The Prince*. He abandons the Christian criteria set for a prince, such as generosity, morality, and piety. Instead, he claims that it is harmful for a prince to follow all the moral principles, and it is necessary for a prince to be well versed in the use of evil and treachery. Machiavelli’s contemporaries, including the Tudors, are shocked by his vision of a prince unfettered by the constraints of traditional morality. Most of the Tudors regard his doctrines as atheism and immorality. Only some accept certain parts of his doctrines. This thesis intends to explore how Shakespeare deals with Machiavellianism in his two tetralogies. Does Shakespeare agree with Machiavelli in the definition of an ideal prince? How does Shakespeare think of the pragmatism Machiavelli advocates?

Among the kings Shakespeare portrays in his two tetralogies, I choose King Richard III and Henry IV for my discussion, for these two kings correspond to the kinds of princes whom Machiavelli wants to offer advice to in his treaty, i.e., the new princes, or the princes who gain power recently. It is interesting that although both Richard III and Henry IV are usurpers and they both adopt Machiavellian statecraft, the way Shakespeare presents them proves very different. When portraying Richard III, Shakespeare follows the convention of the hero villain and makes him a stage Machiavelli. When portraying Bolingbroke, later Henry IV, he presents him as a man who revolts against the tyranny of his king, and a man who wins the crown with calmness, intelligence, and
justice. Whenever Richard makes use of evil, he arouses detest and horror. When Henry adopts evil, it turns out to be necessary evil. However, the accounts and evidence recently found about Richard show us that the king, unlike what Shakespeare portrays, is not a hunchback, nor is he a murderous monster. On the contrary, he is a ruler of efficiency and responsibility. In my opinion, the reason why Shakespeare distorts Richard is that he intentionally portrays a king who fully demonstrates the dangerous teachings of Machiavelli in order to warn his contemporaries against the danger of accepting Machiavellianism. Obviously, he still cannot appreciate pragmatism and realism advocated by Machiavelli. Years after, when he composes the second tetralogy and writes about Henry IV, Shakespeare alters his attitude and comes to realize that it is not enough for a king to be good and virtuous; he has to be wise, active, resolute, and treacherous, if necessary—to put it in another way: he has to be a Machiavellian prince.

To sum up, as he grows older, a powerful and efficient monarch rather than a virtuous and pious prince becomes what Shakespeare longs for. We can say that Shakespeare matures in public affairs. Therefore, we see a Shakespeare crossing the boundaries of idealism and realism.
Table of Contents

Chapter One     Introduction                                 1

Chapter Two     Machiavellianism and the Tudor Response        6

Chapter Three    Richard III—the Stage Machiavelli             28

Chapter Four     Henry IV—the Machiavellian King that Wins
                  Popular Support                                        49

Chapter Five     Conclusion                                71

Figure 1.                                                  75

Works Cited                                               76
Chapter One
Introduction

With the meager information we can gather on Shakespeare’s life, it is challenging to link him with Machiavellianism. Though the term “Machiavelli” appears three times in his plays¹, there is no evidence of Shakespeare’s having read The Prince or Discourses. We are not even sure whether he has ever discussed with his friends the Machiavellian doctrines. All we know is that many Elizabethans read the two books (See detailed description in Chapter Two). Shakespeare’s friends in the Southampton Circle, such as Edmund Spenser and Sir Walter Raleigh, read Machiavelli and quoted his words in their books. E. M.W. Tillyard points out that an inference may be made from Shakespeare’s association with the Southampton Circle: “it can hardly be doubted that…Shakespeare knew Machiavelli, too” (Tillyard 30). This conjecture stands a big chance to be true. Still, it is a conjecture, not a solid proof. Whether Shakespeare has read Machiavelli would probably remain a question that has no definite “Yes” or “No” answer. Nevertheless, judging from his history plays, we may infer further that Shakespeare is familiar with the fundamental principles of Machiavellianism, for there are two of his kings (Henry IV and Henry V)

¹ The term “Machiavelli” appears in 1 Henry VI, 3 Henry VI, and The Merry Wives of Windsor. It carries a negative connotation with it whenever it is used: “Alanson, that notorious machevile?” (Henry VI, 5.4.74); “and set the murtherous machevil to school” (3 Henry VI, 3.2.193); “am I a Machiavel?” (Merry Wives, 3.1.104). See The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare.
in his tetralogies behaving to correspond to the definitions of Machiavellian kings. His Richard III turns out to be a more complicated case in that his portrayal is based on a model of misinterpreted Machiavellian prince, the “stage Machiavelli”, as critics call it. The fact that Shakespeare approaches Machiavellianism both in a positive and a negative way implies that he is familiar with the Machiavellian doctrines.

To begin with, it is necessary for us to distinguish the stage Machiavelli from the real life Machiavellian prince. The stage Machiavelli is the kind of villain that is ambitious, unprincipled, and bent on personal glorification. He usually revels in villainous stratagem to the horrified enjoyment of audiences and to the profit of theatrical entrepreneurs. There was already the “stage Machiavelli” in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean plays. Around the time Shakespeare formulated his Machiavellian kings, his contemporaries had seen, for example, Lorenzo in The Spanish Tragedy (1587), Tamburlaine in Tamburlaine (1587), Barabas in The Jew of Malta (1589), and Mortimer in Edward II (1592). In the early Jacobean drama, Shakespeare’s audience had Mendoza in The Malcontent (1603-04) and Tharsalio in Widowers’ Tears (1605).² Shakespeare himself created in Othello (1604) an infamous stage Machiavelli—Iago.

There are some similarities in these characters. First, they are unscrupulous manipulators who desire to control the people around them

² The playwrights of the drama mentioned are as follows: Thomas Kyd (1558-1594), The Spanish Tragedy; Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), Tamburlaine, The Jew of Malta, and Edward II; John Marston (1576-1634), The Malcontent; George Chapman (1559-1634), Widowers’ Tears.
for the fulfillment of their hunger for power or for the demonstration of
their penchant for hypocrisy. Besides, they are equivalent to the
incarnation of moral vice and the personification of the spirit of boldness,
defiance, and determination to test the limitations of human ability.
They usually regard themselves as the masters of their own destiny and
are determined to find no one strong enough to defy them.

Strictly speaking, most of the Machiavellian villains on stage are a
misinterpretation or distortion of Machiavelli’s doctrines. That is why
they are called stage Machiavelli, to be distinguished from the model
described in *The Prince* (1513). Machiavelli’s doctrines center on the
prince as monarch in particular, who acts for the benefit of the whole
nation, while some of the characters mentioned above are social-climbers
who try to gain or regain power for personal glorification. What is more
important, the prince Machiavelli describes in his book is the one who
learns subtlety and craft in order to acquire and maintain his power—not
just for personal glory, but often for the benefit of the entire
commonwealth. Contrary to popular belief, a Machiavellian prince does
not endorse evil for its own sake. Any morally reprehensible activity he
undertakes is strictly for the purposes of survival (Keller 7). In this
sense, the prince who amuses himself by demonstrating his superior
penchant for cunning and treachery, for example, Shakespeare’s Richard
III, does not belong to the real life Machiavellian prince. Both
definitions, i.e., the stage Machiavelli and the real life imitation of the
Machiavellian prince, are adopted in my discussion of Machiavellian
princes in Shakespeare’s plays, but they are carefully clarified whenever
they appear in this thesis.

My thesis develops with an introduction to Machiavellianism, its difference from the mainstream political thoughts of the Middle Ages, together with the Tudor response toward Machiavellianism in Chapter Two. Chapter Three focuses on Shakespeare’s *King Richard III*, in which the king demonstrates to the full the evil teachings in Machiavellianism and he is shown to be defeated by the pious and virtuous Richmond. Chapter Four focuses on King Henry IV, who appears as Bolingbroke in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and as Henry IV in *1 & 2 of Henry IV*. In this chapter I argue that Henry is a successful usurper and a true Machiavellian prince. His Machiavellian statecraft contributes to his replacement of King Richard II and helps him in dealing with rebellion and consolidating his reign.

Henry V is excluded from this thesis, though he nonetheless possesses the characteristics of a Machiavellian prince, and is often regarded by critics as the model prince who brings England to the summit of glory. The exclusion is based on the fact that he inherits the throne rather than usurps it. Richard III and Bolingbroke are both usurpers or the new princes who gain power recently, the kind of princes Machiavelli wants to offer his advice to in his treaty. The similarity in their identity as usurpers invites me to delve into Shakespeare’s mind to explore the reasons why he treats them differently. I also have to explain why I discuss these two kings according to the date Shakespeare composes them
instead of their actual historical sequence.¹ I choose this sequence because I intend to inspect whether Shakespeare alters his attitude toward Machiavellianism when he moves along with the presentation of these two kings. And if so, what makes the playwright change his attitude?

During the analysis and reference to Shakespeare’s plays, I shall use informatively some historical facts of Richard III and Henry IV, the Elizabethan notion of the function of history, and justification of kingship to authenticate and to explicate Shakespeare’s intention in the making of his dramatic characters. So my thesis is basically a study of Shakespeare’s Machiavellian kings with special reference to the Tudor conception of kingship and the reasons that give rise to it.

¹ Historically Henry IV reigns from 1399-1413 and Richard III from 1483-1485. Shakespeare, however, composed Richard III in 1592-1593, Richard II in 1595, 1 Henry IV in 1596, and 2 Henry IV in 1598.
Chapter Two

Machiavellianism and the Tudor Response

The Tudors have been terrified by Machiavellianism since it was introduced to England. Most scholars show their abhorrence and loathing toward it. Only some accept part of it. But how come most Tudors react so vehemently and repulsively to Machiavelli’s notion? The answer lies in its great departure from the doctrines of Christianity. The political thinkers in the Middle Ages emphasize the importance of moral principles in administering public affairs. A good prince should comply with the Christian teachings. Niccolo Machiavelli, a Renaissance thinker, treats religion as nothing but a set of beliefs to help ensure social order and cohesion. What he emphasizes is the social function rather than the spiritual function of religion. His English contemporaries are terrified by his ignoring Christian teachings completely (and by his pragmatism). We would understand more of the shock he brings to the Tudors if we analyze the difference between the political thoughts in the Middle Ages and his doctrines.

The political thoughts in the Middle Ages

One of the crucial questions Shakespeare’s histories center around is: what is a good prince? This question does not arouse intense scholarly interest until the sixteenth century. Before that, scholars (mostly theologians) devote their energy on the debate of Christianity’s supremacy over paganism, the reconciliation between Christianity and
Platonism or Aristotelianism, and the argument concerning the authority of the Church and monarchy. Little is said on being a good prince, especially in the early Middle Ages, when theologians are busy asserting the supremacy of Christianity. All they ask of a ruler is a Christian prince who will abide by God’s law. St. Augustine (334-430), for his great works and achievements, best represents such a school in the early Middle Ages. With the downfall of the Roman Empire, many scholars lay the blame on the conversion of Christianity. Trying to defend the church against the blame, Augustine fashions his theory of the two cities in his famous book *The City of God* in which he describes two cities, the City of God and the City of Man. All the subjects in the City of God are Christians, who follow God’s law and live in peace and love. On the other hand, the subjects of the City of Man are mixed believers and pagans, who succumb to the law of the state. The City of Man is an earthly city whose nature is greed and power. Based on Augustine’s theory, the earthly city is designed by God to punish human beings and the ultimate purpose of man is to be admitted to the City of God. However, only through God’s grace can man receive salvation; that is to say, only the believers will be permitted to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Scholars in the Middle Ages, no matter how hard they search and struggle, are never able to decide the exact boundaries between the two cities, for the powers of the two cities are in eternal conflict in the soul of every man (Randall 61). But the embodiment of the City of God on earth is clear—it is the Church, while the City of Man is the lay society.
Thus, the polarity of the two cities symbolizes not only the contrast between the spiritual and mundane, but also the supremacy of the Church over the state. Augustine boosts the authority of the Church and encourages man to quest for the spiritual world.

Soon Augustine’s theory becomes the mainstream of Medieval thinking. Later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) continues Augustine’s argument that the king of the state should be subject to the authority of Church. Aside from that, he discusses more on the best way of governance and responsibilities of kings. His assertion begins with the necessity of man living in a group:

Man is called by nature to live in society; for he needs many things which are necessary to his life, and which by himself he cannot procure for himself. Whence it follows that man naturally becomes part of a group, to procure him the means of living well. He needs this assistance for two reasons. First, in order that he may obtain the elementary necessities of life...But there is a second reason why the individual is helped by the group...And this is, that he may not only live, but live the good life—which is enabled by the opportunities of social intercourse. (Commentary on Nicomachean Ethics, Lib. I.) Each man is a member of society, in which he has his God-appointed function and recognized obligations. Only through his participation in this group life can he attain his own ends, and conversely, only with the aid of every individual can society afford the appropriate setting for the fullest life of its individual members. Aquinas believes that there is an
end for man and all the actions of his life are directed towards it. The end for man is to live a good life, a life that provides sufficiency of the material goods; the end of living well on earth is final happiness after death, *beatitudo*, as he called it. Society provides setting for man to reach this highest goal—that is the irreplaceable function of society.

Since men are social animals, men need rulers. In *De regimine principum* (*The Governance of Rulers*, 1265-67) Aquinas argues three kinds of governance: rule by one man (the king), rule by the few (the aristocrats), and rule by the people (democracy). He considers the first type as the best just as a ship is in need of a captain. If there is no one to guide it into the port, it would move in different directions and would never reach its destination. Second, the government under one man is the best for it is in accordance with God’s management, just as he made David the king of Israel. The most important duty of a king is to ensure that the society under him lives well. This involves three things—first, he should establish the good life of the community (*multitudine*) under him; second, he should defend it once it is established; and third, once secured he should foster its improvement (Sigmund 28).

But what if the king turns out to be a tyrant? Aquinas advises the subjects to tolerate a “mild tyranny” rather than take action against it, for the attempt to overthrow the tyrant “may bring on many dangers that are worse than the tyranny itself” (Sigmund 23), such as chaos, divisions, or

---

4 In 1265 Aquinas was asked to write a treatise on kingship for the king of Cyprus. He left it unfinished in 1267, probably because of the king’s death. It was later completed by Polemy of Lucca.

5 *Ezekiel*, 37:24. King David ruled over Israel in the 10th century B.C.
a tyrant even worse than the previous one. If the tyrant goes too far, several solutions can be applied to correct the evils. First of all, if the tyrant is appointed by a given community, the community can depose him or restrict his power. The community should not be accused of disloyalty in doing so, since the tyrant did not rule the community as the office of king requires. If, on the other hand, the tyrant is appointed by a higher authority, then the remedy for the evils is to be sought from that authority, i.e., men can ask the higher authority to depose the ruler. Finally, if no human aid is possible against the tyrant, men can make recourse to God, for God is the king of all, who will help those in tribulation. However, they should first expiate their sin, since “God allows the impious to rule as a punishment for sin” (Sigmund 25).

Aquinas is against rebellion; for he thinks that both good or bad kings are deputies of God. The only difference is that the good kings lead man to a good life while the bad ones serve as tools for punishment. This is the Medieval concept of kingship: the anointed king is the deputy of God. Thus any opposition toward the king is forbidden.

Aside from the earthly king, there is a spiritual leader, the priest. The king is important in that he is responsible for bringing to man good life, the intermediate end for man; the priest is important for spiritual guidance to eternal happiness, beatitudo, the ultimate end for man. Therefore, the one who is responsible for intermediate ends, i.e. the king, should be subject to the one who is responsible for the ultimate end, i.e. the priest:

So that spiritual and earthly things may be kept distinct, the
ministry of this kingdom is entrusted not to earthly kings but to priests, and especially to the Highest Priest, the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the Roman Pontiff, to whom all kings over Christian peoples should be subject as to Christ himself.

(Sigmund 27-28)

Aquinas places the Roman Pontiff before kings. He, like St. Augustine and his followers, asserts that the Church rules supreme and acknowledges utmost significance in the pursuit of spiritual life. However, unlike Augustine, whose first and foremost goal is to rebuke paganism and build Christendom, Aquinas pays more attention to the mundane by discussing more on the kings’ governance, responsibilities, and sovereignty. His anti-rebellion theory prevails in the Middle Ages and is adopted by many scholars in the Renaissance.

The Political Thoughts of the Tudors

Tudor scholars continue to justify the prevalence and behavior of Christian rulers, but they begin to bring up the issue of punishing tyrants. To put it briefly, the orthodox Tudor justifies monarchical rule as: the ruler is God’s representative on earth. Thus any opposition must be regarded as opposition to God’s Will, unless it can be demonstrated that the government prevailing is not the proper manifestation of Providence (Raab 14). We can see that the first part of this theory corresponds to what Aquinas advocates—kings are deputies of God. Yet the second part is a new product of the new age. With the uprising of nationalism and patriotism, Renaissance men start to yearn for efficient government.
They need a good captain to steer the nation through the turbulent sea to reach the glorious shore. They eagerly look for a king who is able to defend the nation from foreign attack, to bring prosperity to society, and to create a great history for the people. The medieval ideal of a united Christendom no longer appeals to them. Accordingly, the authority shifts from the Church to the civil government.

Within this large context, Shakespeare fully expresses the love for England in his history plays:

Gaunt. This royal throne of kings, this scept’ red isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier land;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

\textit{(Richard II, 2.1.40-50)}

It is not difficult to understand, under such patriotic sentiment, a king’s competence is put to harsh trial and undergoes strict scrutiny. However, if we read the writings of this age on the education of a prince, in which scholars often advise their prince to promote the “other Eden”, or the “sea-walled garden”, we shall realize the reasons
of the discrepancy between theory and practice.

In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) writes *Education of a Christian Prince*, a treaty dedicated to Charles of Burgundy, later Charles V of France. Erasmus attempts to describe the ideal education for an ideal prince. He emphasizes especially the relationship between kingship and national peace. The model of a prince is one that is submitted to the laws of Christ, and thus one who is in love with peace, for Christ is “the Prince of Peace” who “left a kingdom unstained by blood and he would have it remain unstained.”

Basically, Erasmus concludes that a young prince must take Christian teachings as his guide to behaviors. What he does or what he should abstain from depends upon them. Felix Raab sums up that “morals” rather than “maxim” prevail throughout the book:

> [T]he work is pious, optimistic—and completely unreal.

*Seldom does it touch on the practical realities of rule with which the young prince’s ancestors were not entirely unfamiliar and in which he [the prince] soon to be involved himself.* (11)

In short, the book turns out to be unpractical to the prince. It actually reflects the embarrassing situation of this great philosopher in his times. Erasmus is surely the epitome of the ideal humanist, but his narrow interests of the new world explain the impotence of his influence upon

---

7 Erasmus cared nothing for the marvelous art of his generation and is bitterly hostile to science, regarding it as turning men’s minds from the problems of morality. He prides himself on being the Christianizer of the Renaissance and the humanizer of Christianity, yet he is rejected alike by the priests of the old and the humanists of
his age, inclusive of the political arena.

Thomas Elyot (1490-1546) also elaborates on the appropriate man to govern England in *The Book Named the Governour* (1531). Such a man, like Plato’s ideal king, should be both leader and philosopher, possessing all kinds of virtues. Elyot regards virtue as the element that justifies man’s claim to rank high in the universal order. Elyot has read Erasmus and approves his teachings wholeheartedly. Basically, his own book proves an echo of *Education of a Christian Prince*, especially in justifying the ruler’s power. The only difference is that he emphasizes more on the effect of the king’s not acting according to Christian doctrines. So he and Erasmus actually approach toward the same destination, though in different ways. Like Erasmus, Elyot, too, is more concerned with a moral “should” rather than a political “must” in defining the role and character of the governor (Raab 12).

Thus far, we see justification of these scholars is helpful in consolidating sovereignty of monarchs, convenient in rebuking uprising of rebellion, yet unpractical in real management of government. The advice to the prince, in spite of its good intention and sincerity, fails to materialize with it the practice necessary in administering the state. Modern men have become so familiar with tactics and tricks in politics that they almost cannot believe how “naïve” their ancestors were. The world view of the twenty-first century is totally different from that in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. However, we should keep in mind that

---

the new. See the section of “The Modernity and the Tragedy of Erasmus” in Randall 132-134.
the bond of Christianity in that age is so strong that it manages to hold the Christian society together, and that most men at that time still believe the world they live is ordained by God. Though some of them have sensed that there is a difference in the way scholars meditated politics and the way things actually happen in the real world, the tension evolved is below the surface until Machiavelli launches a huge rock into the calm lake. After seeing the above sampling of philosophy, we come to comprehend why Machiavellianism receives so much blame when it is introduced to England. Detailed analyses of the tension are as follows.

**Machiavellianism**

In a letter to his friend in 1513, Machiavelli said that he had composed a little book, in which he delved as deeply as he could into discussing the subject of principalities. This “little book” turns out to be Machiavelli’s masterpiece, *The Prince*. Machiavelli’s highest hope is that this book could bring him to the attention of the Medici family, the new rulers of Italy at that time, and would win him a position in the court. He does not expect the impact of his book to be so great that it not only influences the political thought of the Renaissance but remains central to the discussion or debate of political ideas until today. Machiavelli’s name has since been linked with unscrupulous duplicity: to be a Machiavellian is to behave in a way which is not to be trusted. What is it in his doctrines that makes so many people abhorred or terrified? The question is likened to asking “What is the biggest gap between the treaties of humanist moralists and Machiavellianism?”
The answer is that they differ most in what the prince aims for. For humanist moralists, when they think about their society, it is essentially an expression of Divine Will. God is the beginning and the end of everything; he is the explanation of all the phenomena, including social and political activities. The prince, being the deputy of God on earth, is supposed to act according to God’s will. He ought to rule wisely, not to mention virtuously, and put the welfare of his subjects before his own. As for the worldly riches and glory, he should avoid their temptation in order to attain heavenly rewards. Machiavelli, on the contrary, totally ignores Christian orthodoxy. He states that the noblest aim for a “prudent and virtuoso” prince must be to introduce a form of government “that will bring him honour” and make him glorious (The Prince 84). As for the new rulers, they even have a chance of winning a “double glory”, for they will “begin a new princedom” and “strengthen it with good laws, good arms, and good examples” (80). He praises Ferdinand of Spain, for the latter has done such “great things” as to bring himself “fame and glory” in a high degree (73). Obviously, in Machiavelli’s view, the highest goal is not the attainment of heavenly rewards, but worldly honor and glory.

Machiavelli’s view of Fortune is also quite different from the Christians’ and in fact, more classical in tradition. Quaint Skinner’s article on “Machiavelli” introduces the classical heritage in Machiavelli’s thinking. He points out that Roman moralists never thought of Fortune as an inexorably malign force. On the contrary, they saw her as a “good goddess,” a “potential ally whose attention it is well worth trying to
attract” (Skinner 33). If men could win her friendship, she will grant them honor, riches, and power. Since she is a woman, she is most attracted by the *vir*, the man of true manliness. Fortune favors the brave, and the quality she admires most is *virtus*, “the eponymous attribute of the truly manly man”.

With the advent of Christianity, this classical Roman understanding of Fortune undergoes a great change. We see the best presentation of Christian view in Boethius’ *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in which Fortune is depicted as a “blind power,” a “pitiless force”. Her symbol changes from the cornucopia to the whirling wheel that turns inexorably “like the ebb and flow of the tide” (Skinner 34). No one stays forever on top of her wheel, nor does anyone know when he will fall. In *Consolation*, Philosophy allows Fortune to explain her act of turning the wheel:

> [T]his is my perennial sport. I turn my wheel on its whirling course, and take delight in switching the base to the summit, and the summit to the base. So mount upward, if you will, but on condition that you do not regard yourself as ill-treated if you plummet down when my humor so demands and takes its course.

(Boethius 22)

The fluidity of Fortune provides us a new sense of significance—men cannot count on her for happiness, and all the worldly gifts she grants are not worthy of our pursuit, for they are temporal and will not last. On the other hand, heavenly happiness is what men should look after, for the human soul is immortal, and it cannot be satisfied with the kind of
happiness which ends with the death of the body.

Boethius’ assertion that heavenly happiness is worthier than earthly happiness reminds us of what St. Augustine describes in *The City of God*: the ultimate purpose of man is to be admitted to the City of God. However, Fortune plays an important role in God’s providence; she is an agent of it. God places the control of the world’s goods in her hands in order to show man that true happiness is within, founded on the rational possession of one’s self; it cannot be found in the transitory, external gifts of unstable Fortune.

Machiavelli, by contrast, does not treat Fortune as an agent of God’s providence. Neither does he treat worldly glory as worthless. He recognizes the capricious nature in Fortune, but claims that men are able to deal with her. He judges that “fortune is the arbiter of one half of our actions, but that she still leaves the control of the other half, or almost that to us” (82). He compares Fortune to ruinous rivers that tear down everything on earth when they become enraged. But there is always “clam weather,” and men can build embankments and dikes to channel the water, so when the water rises up again, the damage won’t be so great. This analogy shows us the force of Fortune, yet men still have a chance to deal with her.

Machiavelli, like the Roman moralists, regards Fortune as a woman who despises those who lack courage, and in the later part of Chapter 15 describes a twist between Fortune and men:

I am certainly convinced of this: that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, in
order to keep her down, to beat her and to struggle with her. And it is seen that she more often allows herself to be taken over by men who are impetuous than by those who make cold advances. (84)

This passage conveys a clear notion that men have to pluck up courage and manliness while facing the invincible force, and if they do, they will not fall under the sway of the goddess but wins her gift.

The implication for the princes, especially the fledging ones, seems that they cannot rely passively on Fortune. In order to attain the highest worldly achievement, they should make Fortune cast her smiles on them; that is, to win her over to their sides by _virtu_. Romans have discussed the concept at length. Machiavelli follows his classical predecessors in defining the function of _virtu_, but departs from them in method.

Classical scholars treat _virtu_ as the quality which enables a prince to attract Fortune’s favor, to withstand her blows, and to rise to the height of the throne, winning honor and glory for himself and security for his government. In terms of the methods a prince adopts to govern his state; however, Machiavelli abandons the familiar humanist principles, such as being honest, liberal, and merciful. He attacks many writers for imagining republics and principalities that have never existed in reality:

[T]here is such a gap between _how one lives_ and _how one ought to live_ that anyone who abandons what is done for what ought to be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation: for a man who wishes to profess goodness at all times will come to ruin among so many who are not good. (52; emphasis mine)
He advises the prince that it is good to be thought of as virtuous, but it is necessary to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge when necessity calls for it.

From chapter 15 to 19, Machiavelli presents his argument as to “why not to be good.” He advises the new prince better to be a miser than to be a man of generosity, for if he wishes to maintain his reputation for generosity, it is necessary for him to display lavishly, and the result is to burden the people with excessive taxes. This is a kind of doing that would “offend many and reward few” (53). Thus, if a prince has to spend money, he should spend what does not belong to him or his subjects, i.e., the money he gains by “looting, sacking, and ransoms” while going out with his troops. “[I]t is wiser to live with the reputation of a miser, which produces reproach without hatred, than to be forced to incur the reputation of rapacity, which produces reproach along with hatred” (55).

On the doctrine of Christian virtue of mercy, Machiavelli concludes that it is better to be cruel and feared than to be merciful and loved, for new states are “full of dangers” and a compassionate prince, owing to his “excessive mercy”, will permit the rise of disorders, murders, and plundering (55). Then the originally beloved prince would be hated for his failing to maintain a secure realm for his subjects. Evil in human nature provides another reason for the new prince to stay cruel: “men are less hesitant about harming someone who makes himself loved than someone who makes himself feared” (56). A prince that is feared has a better chance to maintain his government than a beloved one.
To the classical moralists, moral virtue was the defining characteristic of the *vir*, the man of manliness. Men cannot abandon virtue; if they do, they descend to the level of beasts. To Machiavelli, by contrast, *manliness* is not enough; sometimes the prince has to learn from the beasts. Among all the beasts, the lion and the fox are the best, for the lion can frighten the wolves, while the fox can escape the traps. For example, in discussing whether a prince should keep his words, Machiavelli recommends the prince to behave like a fox. That is, if keeping the word is to the prince’s disadvantage, or “when the reasons which made him promise are removed”, he should break his promise. This is not a serious violation of ethics for he claims that “men are a contemptible lot and will not keep their promises to you”, so neither should the prince (59).

What about the classical princely virtues? Does it mean a Machiavellian prince should abandon all the virtuous qualities? The answer to the question is both yes and no. To the pragmatic Machiavelli, having all the virtues and practicing them is impossible and harmful, but the prince should make every effort to win the fame of being virtuous and avoid the bad reputation of leading an evil life, for this reputation will make him lose his state. Therefore, all the prince has to do is to “appear to have them” (59). In other words, how people think of him is more important than what he really is. The prince can disguise himself well, like a fox, to be “a great hypocrite and a liar” (59). It is advantageous for him to appear “merciful, faithful, humane, trustworthy, religious, and to be so, but should it become necessary not to be so, he should change to
the contrary. He should not feel undue, because, in order to maintain the state, he is often obliged to “act against promise, against charity, against humanity, and against religion” (59).

We see how Machiavelli departs from the Christian teachings from the above: the ultimate goal of the Machiavellian prince is worldly glory instead of heavenly happiness. Fortune ceases to be the agent of God, whose duty on earth is to remind men of fortuity of earthly glory and happiness; instead, the Goddess can be the benefactress of the prince, thus he should try his best to win her over. As to the cultivation of morality in a prince, Machiavelli suggests it is not that necessary and is harmful if the ruler tries to direct every move of his with moral principle. At any rate, a prince is the one responsible for the public welfare, so he should not be judged by the principle of private morality. In short, pragmatism is the guide for a Machiavellian prince. The welfare of his subjects, stability of society, and glory of his nation are his major concerns. Compared with spiritual fulfillment in Christianity, these are down-to-earth concerns. While Aquinas and Erasmus place their ladder on heaven, Machiavelli places his ladder on earth. However, for the English ears that have grown accustomed to Christian doctrines, Machiavelli’s treaty sounds like harsh noise in their ears.

**English reception of Machiavellianism**

Despite the popularity of Machiavellianism in continental Europe, the same political thinking receives its blame in Tudor England. Most Englishmen are shocked at Machiavelli’s departure from the doctrines of
Christianity. Reginald Pole is among the first who read of Machiavellian doctrines, and expresses his horror of them. He condemns the author as an enemy of mankind, who offers “means whereby religion, goodness and all the fruits of virtue may easily be destroyed.”

Roger Ascham, the Protestant theorist, shares the same reaction with Pole. He is unwilling to relegate politics to a sphere separate from religion and he calls Machiavellian principles “pagan, opportunistic, and immoral.”

Only a few Englishmen treat Machiavellianism differently, of whom Richard Morison is one. He regards Machiavelli as a wise observer whose reflections on the real world carries some weight of authority. Another Tudor gentleman who shows appreciation of Machiavelli is William Thomas. His work *The hystorye of Italye* investigates the origins of state, the effects of good and evil policy, the mutability of fortune, and the question of disunity. There is no mention of God, either as the origin of temporal power, or as the hand of punishment for misused power. To Thomas, authority well managed will bring “immortall fame of honour and preise” to the ruler, while tyranny and bad government “eternal sklanderry and shame”. And he claims the effects of temporal power are matters of this world and the judgment of men, not of God. Such blatant secularism is jangling discord in English society, and Thomas’ book is regarded as ungodly. It does not mean that, either

---


10 Quoted by Raab p. 40. (*The hystorye*, Preface.)
Morison or Thomas, accepts Machiavelli completely. Both Morison and Thomas have different opinions from Machiavelli on certain points. What distinguishes these two thinkers from their contemporaries is their willingness to place political action in the secular context.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, due to the contribution of public theater, Englishmen hear more of Machiavelli. As stated in Chapter One, most of the interpretation of Machiavellian doctrines prove distorted. Basically, the stage villain has two characteristics in common: one is a love of complicated stratagem; the other is atheism. Machiavellianism, in fact, is constantly attacked with these two features. Meanwhile Machiavelli’s name has became a convenient weapon to attack enemy. The name-calling occurs most often during theological polemic. For example, Protestants use his name as a stick to beat Catholics, particularly the Jesuits. They associate the Jesuits with Machiavelli for their deceitful machinations. Catholics, in turn, use the term to assault Protestants. Thomas Nashe used to link Machiavellianism, Puritanism, and all underhand actions together. It is interesting that there is no specific direction for this brand of mud to be flung to. As long as people want to smear their enemy, they resort to “Machiavelli.” Obviously, people are afraid of the consequence of accepting Machiavellian doctrines, and most of them do not want to be included in his camp.

Though from the middle ‘eighties onward Machiavelli was being

\[\text{Raab has displayed some examples of name-calling between Catholics and Protestants in p. 59.}\]
quite widely read in England;\textsuperscript{12} still, men felt uneasy for atheism in his doctrines. Like Morison and Thomas, political thinkers and writers in Elizabethan times had managed to absorb some of his practical teachings and preserved their own view of the world (though in a dualist way). Sir Thomas Smith, Edmund Spenser, Bishop Jewel, Thomas Nashe, and Richard Hooker are among the list. Even John Levitt, who in 1599 translated \textit{The Discourse} and highly praised Machiavelli, could not concur with him completely. Levitt defends Machiavelli against those who maliciously fault him, and pleads for a fair hearing of him. However, no matter how hard Levitt tries, he still can not reconcile Machiavellianism with Christianity.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is another example. If we read Bacon’s \textit{De Augmentis}(1623), the influence of Machiavelli is even more evident. He quotes \textit{The Prince} many times and shares some of Machiavelli’s ideas. For instance, Bacon, like Machiavelli, recognizes the evil nature in men, and he agrees that in order to “correct and reclaim” the wicked persons, an honest man should first explore “all the depths and recesses of their

\textsuperscript{12} According to Raab, there were printed Italian editions of Machiavelli’s works circulating during the ‘eighties, though most of them were printed illegally and with false imprints. Furthermore, there were printed English translations: the \textit{Arte of Warre} in 1563, 1573, and 1588; the \textit{Florentine Historie} in 1595; \textit{The Discourses} and \textit{The Prince} in 1636 and 1640 respectively. Though the printed translations of \textit{The Discourses} and \textit{The Prince} did not appear until the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, there were manuscripts—three editions of the former and seven of the latter. Besides, in Scotland, there was a French translation of \textit{The Prince} (1553), along with Latin and Italian editions of Machiavelli’s other works, which English travelers must have picked up abroad. pp. 52-53.
malice” (Raab 75). To be acquainted with the nature of evil is necessary in dealing with wicked persons. What distinguishes Bacon from Machiavelli is their different treatment of the knowledge of evil. For the former, the knowledge serves as a tool to guide evil men to the right path, while for the latter, it is employed as an indispensable means in maintaining the state. As to the goodness in man, Bacon says that every man should be good to the extent of his capacity and no more, otherwise he will ruin himself. For instance, St. Paul is a good model for men, but not every man can reach his perfection. Thus, for the more earthly men, it is better to stick to more earthly virtues.

Bacon is not an atheist, nor does he deny the existence of God. Yet he thinks that the standard set by theologians is too high for common people and thus becomes impracticable. It is necessary to find a way to compromise between the ideal and the realistic. Bacon has accepted to some extent the difference between the God-oriented universe and the political world, i.e., men may adopt one set of principles in this earthly world, and recognize that there is another set of principles that call for the absolute and prefect.

Machiavelli provokes an issue of the discrepancy between the ideal world and reality. He tries to separate politics from religion, and isolates it in an independent realm. People today take this separation as self-evident, for which we owe a great deal to him. However, though his doctrines are now considered the foundation of modern political thought, Englishmen in the Renaissance treats them as a scorpion. The majority of Englishmen reject him completely, such as Pole and Ascham. Some
accept part of him, for example, Morison, Thomas, Levitt, and Bacon.
But none follows him without hesitation.

Shakespeare, too, does not approve of Machiavelli completely.
Approval and criticism of Machiavelli’s doctrines exist simultaneously in his plays. In a way, Shakespeare approaches the issue of being a Machiavellian prince in a more complicated way. He departs from Machiavelli in his insight of the weakness of being a Machiavellian prince. So we can see not only the shrewdness and efficiency of Shakespeare’s Machiavellian kings, but the cost of their success.
Chapter Three
Richard III—the Stage Machiavelli

Of all the kings in Shakespeare’s histories, Richard III is the most notorious and the one that reminds people of a “Machiavellian prince”, for he is cruel, blood-thirsty, and likes to play underhand stratagem. In order to seize the power of the state, he kills all the people who stand between him and the throne.

By spreading a rumor that a man with an initial “G” in his name would rebel and replace the king (Clarence’s first name happens to be “George”), Richard successfully directs Edward IV’s suspicion toward Clarence, causing the latter to spend the rest of his life in the Tower. After the king dies, Richard grabs the two princes from Queen Elizabeth’s faction and imprisons them in the Tower so that they never have another chance to breathe the fresh air outside the notorious jail. Now that Richard manages to get the princes out of his way, he zealously counts the arrival of his coronation day. Lord Hastings, the old chamberlain who insists Prince Edward be crowned, is accused of playing witchcraft on Richard and is executed right away without even any trial. Duke of Buckingham, the “other self”, “oracle”, “prophet” of Richard, finds himself fall from Fortune’s wheel as soon as the crown nestled on his lord’s head. When he hesitates in promising Richard to eradicate the two princes for him, the changed countenance of his lord assures him the ensuing danger, so he flees back to Brecknock, gathering a force to fight against Richard. Unfortunately his army is dispersed by a sudden flood
and fall of rain. He is caught and comes to meet his fatal end. Richard even treats his queen Anne as a stepping stone to his throne. He woos her for her bounteous dowry and poisons her for the sake of remarrying Elizabeth. Counting all the people that die on Richard’s order, we have at least nine of them—Clarence, Prince Edward, Edward’s brother Duke of York, Lord Rivers, Lord Grey, the Marques of Dorset, Hastings, Buckingham, and Queen Anne. All of them are his relatives: brothers, niece, cousin, or wife. No doubt Shakespeare’s Richard is assumed to be the most blood-thirsty monarch, for his knife knows no kin.

However, like other stage Machiavelli in *The Jew of Malta*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, or *The Spanish Tragedy*, Richard in *Richard III* does not correspond to the model monarch in *The Prince*. To put it briefly, the stage Machiavelli is a character based on a Machiavellian prince rid of any moral principle; thus he is more like a mingle of “superman genius” and “tyrannical equivocator” (Ruffo-Fiore 141). It is true that Machiavelli admits that sometimes a prince should make use of evil in order to gain power and maintain his rule. However, he does so not for personal glory, but for the principality. Though he claims that the highest goal for a Machiavellian prince is to achieve earthly glory and honor rather than heavenly reward, it doesn’t mean that his prince should be a man with no principle of morality. If a Machiavellian prince adopts evil means, he does it out of necessity, for the stability or the welfare of his state, but not for personal profit.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare’s Richard sheds too much blood. He is always killing someone or planning others’ death, and his knife
knows no comrade, brother, niece, or wife. What he does deviates from normality so much so that everyone detests him. As Machiavelli warns in *The Prince* that it is unwise for a prince to have the bad reputation, Richard is eventually drawn down from the throne because of the bad reputation.

Five hundred years after Richard’s reign, literary critics, novelists, and movie directors are still interested in King Richard’s character and his motivation, and their argument encapsulates the twin traditions: some try to restore the Shakespearian and Thomas More’s full-blown picture of Richard, treating him as a murderous hunchbacked Machiavelli; others attempt to prove Richard as a loyal, idealistic and tragically misunderstood hero, seeking to rule England with wisdom and justice. Between these two extremes, present-day historians have labored in finding available shred of surviving evidence to try to establish the truth about Richard. Jeffrey Richards presents some new findings in “The Riddle of Richard III” (1983), an article written in the anniversary year of Richard’s accession to the English throne (1483). He first refutes the common notion of Richard’s hunchback, for the contemporary accounts and two surviving portraits of the king show us a man of “slight, dark, rather frail figure, with a stern, wary, thin-lipped visage, who may perhaps have had one shoulder slightly higher than the other” (19). Richard did not murder his wife Anne, who died in 1485 from what appears to have been consumption.\(^\text{13}\) He did not contrive the

\[^{13}\text{Some historians, for example, Peter Saccio and Jeffrey Richards, suggest her only son’s death in 1484 resulted in Anne’s consumption.}\]
elimination of his brother Clarence, who was put to death in the Tower in 1478 on the direct authority of Edward IV. Recent research has shown that the Woodvilles (the Queen’s faction) played a prominent part in pressing Edward IV to get rid of Clarence (Richards 23).

The reason why Richard is remembered as a murdering monster is because of the fate of “the Princes in the Tower.” It is likely that they were murdered on Richard’s orders in August 1483. Though there is no direct evidence for it, present-day historians generally agree on Richard’s involvement and the most likely instrument of the murder was Sir James Tyrrell, who confessed to the crime before his execution by Henry VII in 1502. Richard, like the wicked uncle of the fairy stories, is seen by Shakespeare as disposing of the innocent “babes” because they stood between him and the throne he coveted. However, Jeffrey Richards directs our attention to the factional rivalry between the Woodvilles and Richard, which has existed during the reign of Edward IV. Edward IV secretly married Elizabeth Woodville, widow of the Lancastrian Sir John Grey, in 1464, and brought to court a lot of new powers—his father and brothers-in-law, perhaps with a view to counterweighing the overpowerful Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick (the Kingmaker). The Woodvilles were a large, ambitious and acquisitive family. They acquired many important posts, and their pre-eminence at court resulted
in further split of Warwick with Edward.\textsuperscript{14} Warwick was ultimately
eliminated during the strife, and the Woodville faction soon tried to
persuade Edward to dispose of his brother Clarence, for Clarence proved
disloyal during the strife—he supported the Kingmaker, no doubt hoping
to replace Edward as king.

With the glowing power of the Woodville faction and the death of
Clarence, it is not hard to see why Richard perceived himself to be under
threat. The Woodville-dominated council rejected his protectorship in
1483, and Marquis of Dorset (the eldest son of the Queen by her first
husband) was reported to declare that they didn’t need the King’s uncle
for making and enforcing any decisions, for they could handle it
themselves. Richard, though a protector, hardly knew his nephew, who
had been raised all the way by the Woodvilles. With so many hostile
maternal uncles surrounding his nephew, Richard had reasons to fear that
he might have the same fate as his brother Clarence. Just as they had
turned Edward IV against Clarence, so too could they turn Edward V
against him.

Shakespeare also portrays the tension between the two factions in
controlling the future king. In \textit{Richard III} Lord Rivers, the Queen’s
brother, reminds his sister:

\textsuperscript{14} Following the marriage of Elizabeth to Edward IV, her father became Earl Rivers,
Constable and Treasurer of England. Her eldest brother Anthony, Lord Scales,
became Governor of the Isle of Wight. Five of her sisters were married
prestigiously, to the Duke of Buckingham and to the heirs of the Earls of Kent,
Arundel and Essex and Lord Herbert, thus scooping up almost the entire lucrative
marriage market. Elizabeth’s eldest son by her first husband, Thomas Grey,
became Marquis of Dorset. Her brother Lionel became Dean of Exeter and later
Bishop of Salisbury.
RIV. Madam, bethink you, like a careful mother,
    Of the young prince your son: send straight for him;
    Let him be crown’d; in him your comfort lives.
    Drown despe arate sorrow in dead Edward’s grave,
    And plant your joys in living Edward’s throne.

    (2.2.96-100)

While Rivers points out the emergency of securing the prince in their hands, Buckingham also reminds Richard of it:

    BUCK. My Lord, whoever journeys to the Prince,
        For God’s sake let not us two stay at home:
        For by the way I’ll sort occasion,
        As index to the story we late talk’d of,
        To part the Queen’s proud kindred from the Prince.

    (2.2.146-150)

Richard hurries to Ludlow right away, arriving earlier than the Queen’s men and successfully “part[ing] the Queen’s proud kindred from the Prince.”

Present-day historians possess an exactly contemporary account of the course of events written by an Italian visitor to England, Dominic Mancini, who completed his account on December 1, 1483. This is a valuable source because Mancini was a detached and apparently disinterested foreign observer who was able to report what he saw and heard with no axe to grind. He wrote of Richard’s seizing the throne:

    It seems that in claiming the throne Richard was actuated not only by ambition and lust for power, for he also proclaimed
that he was harassed by the ignoble family of the Queen and
the affronts of Edward’s relatives by marriage.\textsuperscript{15}

What Mancini described was confirmed in Richard’s summons of June 10,
1483, to the men of York to come under arms to assist him

“against the Queen, her blood adherents and affinity, which
have intended and daily doth intend, to murder and utterly
destroy us and our cousin the duke of Buckingham, and the
old royal blood of this realm.”\textsuperscript{16}

Richard’s position remained insecure with the Woodvilles in power, and
there was no guarantee that he would have been safe if he carried on as
Protector until Edward V came of age. Richard cannot have been
unaware of the fate of the two previous dukes of Gloucester, both of
whom had exercised power during the youth of their nephews. Thomas
of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, uncle of Richard II, had been arrested
and murdered, most probably by his nephew’s orders. Duke Humphrey
of Gloucester, uncle of Henry VI, had also been murdered at the
instructions of the ruling Suffolk faction. Richard was a realist. He
decided that the best way to secure his position was to claim the throne.

Once the course of action was decided upon, Richard efficiently removed
all the opposition against him—executing or imprisoning those who stood
against him in the parliament, and having the parliament decree the
illegitimacy of the two princes.

From the evidence and contemporary accounts that are found, we

\textsuperscript{15} See Richards p.23.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
gradually grasp a truer picture of Richard’s character and the practical concerns he had when seizing the throne. Richard in Shakespeare’s history play is a villain who takes pleasure in appreciating his own deformed shadow in the sun, determining to play the devil’s part:

RICH. I, that am curtail’d of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
Deform’d, unfinish’d, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up—

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity.
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

(1.1. 18-21, 24-31)

Shakespeare’s Richard has no fancy for pleasant, peaceful times; he curses Nature that makes him suffer deformity, vowing to revenge on those happy people by arousing a troubled era with his audacity. All he does, in Shakespeare’s interpretation, is for his personal glory—the kind of glory that costs other people’s life and social stability. There is no mention of Richard’s political dilemma (to be a loyal Protector under threat and a usurper), nor his capability of managing public affairs.
If we put aside the murder and usurpation for a while, what else do we know about Richard in history? Prior to 1483, Richard proved himself a loyal servant of Edward IV. When Edward quarreled with Warwick, the Kingmaker, and was forced in 1470 to flee to the Continent, only a handful of faithful supporters went with him. Richard was one of them. In 1471 Edward returned and defeated the army of Warwick at Barnet; at Tewkesbury, he smashed the Lancastrian army under Prince Edward (Henry VI’s son). In both battles, Richard commanded the vanguard and fought bravely. Edward rewarded Richard’s loyalty by making him viceroy of the north.

From 1471 to 1483 Richard ran the north of England with concern and efficiency, creating around him a devoted circle of northern knights and gentlemen, his Northern affinity. Dominic Mancini’s writing in 1483 showed that Richard was a rather popular, generous and efficient ruler:

He kept himself within his own lands and set out to acquire the loyalty of his people through favours and justice. The good reputation of his private life and public activities powerfully attracted the esteem of strangers. Such was his renown in warfare that whenever a difficult and dangerous policy had to be undertaken, it would be entrusted to his discretion and his generalship.17

Similarly, after he became king, Richard showed himself to be devout,

17 See Richards p. 19.
generous, courageous and conscientious. He was a patron of the church. His parliament passed some sensible and beneficial legislation. He took firm action to suppress piracy in the Channel. He provided for the government of the north by setting up the Council of the North, which continued in the form he devised until 1641. He ruled the kingdom with competency. If he had won the battle at Bosworth, reigned for another thirty years and done great things, men might forget Edward V and accepted him.

Up to now we see the difference between Richard in the play and Richard in history. Richard in history was not the sinister, sardonic hunchback monster in Shakespeare’s play. The stage villain image is derived from Thomas More’s *History of King Richard the Third*, in which Richard is described as a witty villain in ironical terms by the author. As lord chancellor of Henry VIII, the highest office under the crown, More is believed by many critics to be a Tudor propagandist, who besmears Richard III for the justification for the rule of the Tudor monarchs. Richard Marius puts forth another explanation of More’s purpose. “More obviously believed what he wrote,” says Marius (120). Marius offers us various evidence that all the possible sources More acquires tell him that Richard is a man of hypocrisy, and that More intends to make his *History* a moral teaching.

More’s characterization of Richard is adopted by several chroniclers and so comes down to Shakespeare, whose *Richard III* fixes the portrait
of Richard as a deformed and malicious villain. Though he has made some alternation, basically Shakespeare is true to the tone of More’s book. Attempting to explain the gap between history and Shakespeare’s Richard III, Antony Hammond reminds us of the function of history in the Elizabethan times, that “the Elizabethan concept of history was both more didactic and aesthetic, and less circumscribed by a regard for precise detail, than our own” (75). It is true that Shakespeare invents more villainies for Richard than More or anyone else, which makes the play deviate from historical facts, but for the Elizabethans “the fact is less important as such than the moral truth, the detail less important than the general principle” (Hammond 76).

It is the privilege of playwrights to enjoy the free play of imagination when composing their works, as long as they do not reverse the major historical facts. If we follow Hammond, we shouldn’t blame Shakespeare too severely for his failing to “dig out the truth” before he sets out for his history plays. However, we can see what the playwright intends for his play through his departure of history. Shakespeare’s depiction of Richard III complies with the development of the Elizabethan and Jacobean hero-villain after Christopher Marlowe; i.e., the stage Machiavelli mentioned in the early part of this chapter. Shakespeare intends to illustrate a usurper failed on account of lacking morality. Shakespeare’s Richard is the one who lives out the motto of “The end determines the means.” In order to achieve his aim, he would

18 Chroniclers such as Hardying (1543), Halle (1548), and Grafton (1568-69) follow More’s characterization of Richard III.
use all kinds of means to persuade, to woo, to cheat, or to kill. Moral principles are never his concerns.

However, if we delve deeply into Machiavellianism, we will come to notice the difference between Richard’s motto and the implication of Machiavellianism in “the end justifies the means.” In Chapter 8 of The Prince, Machiavelli discusses the use of evil:

> Well used are those cruelties (if it is permitted to speak well of evil) that are carried out in a single stroke, done out of necessity to protect oneself, and are not continued but are instead converted into the greatest possible benefits for the subjects. (32)

Machiavelli continues his theory that though the people suffer the evil means the prince adopts when grasping the power, as long as the prince brings prosperity and stability to his people, he can win them over. Therefore, Machiavelli is not against the use of evil. He believes if evil can be well used, it will eventually benefit the people. However, Richard in the play adopts evil not for the benefit of his people, but for his personal glorification. He is actually more like Agathocles, the tyrant of Syracuse described in The Prince, than the ideal prince of Machiavelli.

Agathocles, we are told, “lived a wicked life” at every stage of his career and was known to be a man of extreme cruelty and inhumanity. Though he was born of low and abject status (a potter’s son), he possessed such strength of mind and body that he rose in the military ranks and became commander of Syracuse. One day, he called together
all the rich citizens and senators as if he were going to discuss things concerning the state; and with a prearranged signal, he had his troops kill all of them. After that, he seized the rule of the city “without any opposition from the citizenry” (The Prince 30). Later, although he was twice defeated by the Carthaginians and besieged, not only was Agathocles able to defend his city, but took brave and dangerous actions to free Syracuse from the siege, forcing the Carthaginians to make peace with him and stay away from Sicily.

However, Machiavelli does not place Agathocles among the “most excellent of men”, for “it cannot be called ingenuity to kill one’s fellow citizens, to betray friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; by these means one can acquire power but not glory” (Ibid.). Once again, Machiavelli reminds us that the highest goal of a prince is glory and honor, but not power alone. Shakespeare’s Richard III, likewise, can not be included in Machiavelli’s list of great prince. On the contrary, he serves as an example of a failure, for his bad reputation results in his loss of popular support and finally costs him his reign.

As what is stated, Machiavelli is not against the use of evil, and if a prince manages to use it well, it will benefit his people. Here comes a dilemma—how can a prince achieve the highest goal, the glory and honor, if he has to exercise evil at the same time? Is there any definite line that can separate acceptable and intolerable tyranny? If so, where is the limit? Machiavelli does not answer the question. Maybe it is too hard a question for anyone to offer an answer. Instead of setting the limit, Machiavelli comes up with a theory of pretence: it is not necessary for a
prince to have all of the qualities usually considered good, but it is very necessary for him “to appear to have them” (59). It is good for a prince to be considered generous, it is sensible to be merciful and not cruel, and it is wonderful to be reputable of keeping the word. Nevertheless, oftentimes it is impossible for a prince to maintain all these names. Machiavelli goes even further in suggesting that “having them and practicing them at all times is harmful; and appearing to have them is useful” (59). So the solution to the dilemma is to adopt the skill of pretence, learning how to addle the brains of men with trickery and make them believe his pretence.

When it comes to pretence, Shakespeare’s Richard is second to none. We see him fully demonstrate his talent in this aspect: he sheds tears before his brother Clarence, promised to ask for him the king’s mercy, but soliloquizes behind Clarence’s back that he will “shortly send [his] soul to Heaven” (1.1.119). Afterwards, he weeps and kisses the children of Clarence with feigned kindness, telling them that the king and the queen should be responsible for their father’s death (2.2.). He woos Anne Neville with sweet words and bold action; seeing her accept the ring he offers, he says to himself “I’ll have her, but I will not keep her long” (1.2.234). The scene that fully delineates Richard’s “Machiavellianism” is when Buckingham “pleads” Richard to be their king before the Mayor and citizens of London. In Act III scene vii, Buckingham tries every means to arouse the citizens of London to support Richard, including mentioning the bastardy of the two princes, even of King Edward IV himself. However, “they spake not a word./ But like dumb statues or
breathing stones/ Star’d each on other, and look’d deadly pale” (3.7.24-26).

The response of the citizens attests their shock as well as their lacking trust in Richard. The reason Richard offers for deposening his nephew cannot satisfy people. Bastardy of a prince can be, and has long been an issue provoked by political opportunists. However, a figurative bastard (one who lacks morality) is much worse than a ruler who may be a bastard in the technical sense of the word, but with moral character. Maurice Hunt suggests that “Physically twisted, resembling the shape of neither his mother nor his father, Richard feels like a bastard, even though he is by all accounts legitimately born” (133). Michael Neill also links Richard with bastardy by remarking around “the ‘rudely stamped’ Richard of Gloucester[‘s] … monstrous birth and physical deformity hang metaphoric suggestions of the very bastardy with which he stigmatizes his own nephews” (283). What concerns people is not bastardy of Edward’s two young princes but Richard’s figurative bastardy—his cruelty and inhumanity. The problematics of bastardy sounds familiar to the Tudor audience. Henry VII, Mary I, and Elizabeth I were harassed by the same issue. And the audience identified easily with subjects of Richard that it is the competence of the ruler rather than his/her birth that matters. Shakespeare’s Richard fails to recognize that winning people’s hearts proves far more crucial than claiming his nephew’s bastardy. He is busy removing his enemies and punishing his old supporters, but falls short in creating affinity with great lords and the commons. The citizens’ deadly silence attests his lack of
popular support.

Seeing everyone “look pale”, Buckingham and Richard decide to win them over through the spell of religion:

BUCK: And look you get a prayer-book in your hand,  
And stand between two churchmen, good my lord:  
For on that ground I’l build a holy descant.
And be not easily won to our requests:  
Play the maid’ s part: still answer nay, and take it.  

(3.7. 46-50)

Buckingham is a good director; he knows what effect a pious man can achieve. In other words, he and Richard are making political use of religion—to win followers through religion. In terms of this, they are good Machiavellian disciples. Machiavelli never includes piety as a necessary quality a prince should possess. Religion for him is a set of beliefs, if subtly manipulated, that can help ensure social order and cohesion. A Machiavellian prince doesn’t have to be pious; all he has to do is to appear to be.

Later, when the citizens arrive at the Tower, Catesby announces that Richard refuses to see them, for he is “divinely bent to meditation” (3.7.61). When he finally shows up with two bishops, even the Mayor, who remains silent all the way, is impressed with the scene, and exclaims, “See where his Grace stands, ‘tween two clergymen!” (3.7.94) The spell of religion works. There exists an irony in this scene: Buckingham has tried every way to persuade people to accept Richard as their king, but in vain. It is the feigned piety of Richard that moves the people.
Shakespeare is mocking that men are easily fooled by the endorsement of religion.

However, people soon penetrate Richard’s hypocrisy and run to Richmond, the surrogate of piety and God’s will. Richard, throughout the play, is depicted as a murdering monster, who gleefully slaughters all the way to the throne. Nowhere in the play can we find his concern for the welfare of his subjects, his contribution to the official affairs, or affection towards his family. The crown is the only thing that matters to Shakespeare’s Richard. Compared with Bolingbroke in Richard II, Richard is a selfish usurper who brings England only disaster and terror. Both Richard and Bolingbroke are usurpers, both of them are good at calculation, and neither of them leaves the deposed monarchs alive. So why is Richard presented as a monster while Bolingbroke a competent monarch? The different characters of these two rulers and the cause for usurpation yield different consequences. Bolingbroke, though a usurper, revolts against the injustice and tyranny of his king. He owns popular support and later reigns England with competence and efficiency, while Richard drives away his people and builds his throne on a fragile excuse of bastardy.

If we compare Richmond, the contrast of Richard in the play, with Richard, we will get a better picture of the cause of Richard’s failure. Richmond is portrayed throughout as an honest and pious man. He often reminds his followers that God is with them, just as what he inspires them in the oration before they fight with Richard:

RICHMOND: Yet remember this:
God, and our good cause, fight upon our side;
The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls,
Like high-rear’d bulwarks, stand before our faces.

(5.3.240-243)

He then calls Richard “a bloody tyrant and a homicide” and “God’s enemy”, whom “if you fight against … /God will, in justice, ward you as his soldiers” (5.3.254-255). Compared with Richmond’s calling God’s name for several times, Richard inspires his army with patriotism; he encourages them to dispel mercenary, the Bretons Richmond brings with him from France:

RICH. Remember whom you are to cope with withal:
A sort of vagabonds, rascals, and runaways;
A scum of Bretons and base lackey peasants,
Whom their o’er-cloyed country vomits forth
To desperate adventures and assur’d destruction.

If we be conquer’d, let men conquer us!
And not these bastard Bretons, whom our fathers
Have in their own land beaten, bobb’d, and thump’d,
And in record left them the heirs of shame.

(5.3.316-319, 333-336)

Calling the Bretons “vagabonds”, “rascals”, and the ones that have been defeated by their fathers, Richard tries to inspire his army to defend their dear land against foreigners. Richard neither mentions God’s name nor calls for his blessing in his oration. This corresponds with
Shakespeare’s characterization of him—Richard never counts on God for granting his reign; he puts trust in himself rather than in God.

Another crucial difference that distinguishes Richmond from Richard is the popular support. Several lords join Richmond as soon as they become aware of his uprising. Lord Stanley, whose son is taken by the king as a hostage to prevent him from joining Richmond, visits Richmond secretly and swears to stand by his side. On the other hand, Richard finds himself deserted by everyone:

RICH. There is no creature loves me,

And if I die, no soul will pity me—

And wherefore should they, since that I myself

Find in myself no pity to myself?

(5.3.201-204)

It is before the battle at Bosworth when Richard realizes the people have fled from him. He has become a king without the people.

Many critics, such as Sanders and Frey, mention that Richmond is a rather flat character. It seems so because he appears in the very last of the play, and the impression he gives us is being virtuous and pious. Is he, like Richard, also good at calculation? Or would he take advantage of others’ weakness? We cannot see these in the play, and the only thing that distinguishes him from Richard is his virtue and faith. Therefore, it is obvious that the playwright intends to tell us that lack of morality is the main cause of Richard’s failure. No matter how good Richard is at making pretence, how skilled he is in making use of evil, or even how well he knows the way to make political use of religion, he is doomed to
fail for his evil nature. In a way, the play represents Shakespeare’s response to the weakness in Machiavellianism—that is, to its ignorance of moral principles and atheism. Like most of his contemporaries, Shakespeare is shocked by Machiavelli’s provocative vision of a prince unfettered by the constraints of traditional morality. He still cannot appreciate pragmatism and realism advocated by Machiavelli. That is why Shakespeare portrays a stage Machiavelli that goes so far in his evil doings as to lose his crown. In other words, he creates a figure that fully displays the evil endeavors in Machiavelli’s teachings in order to manifest the danger of following his teachings.

I would like to infer, once again, that the play deviates from history in the interpretation of Richard’s fall. In the early part of this chapter, contemporary accounts and evidence provided have shown that Richard in history is a generous and efficient ruler. He is not as evil as what Shakespeare and More would like to make him. According to Jeffrey Richards, just as it was factional rivalry that had raised Richard, it was factional rivalry that destroyed Richard in the end. His two principal rivals in the north—Lord Stanley, who happened to be married to Henry Tudor’s mother, and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, did not come to his aid at Bosworth and held back their forces until the outcome of the battle was clear. Rosemary Horrox, likewise, points out that Richard falsely believed that he could call on the support of his brother’s men after he claimed the throne. Several Edward’s loyal lords rose against him after his usurpation. The failure of Richard is a failure in affinity (Horrox 26).
Richard in history failed in affinity or factional rivalry; Richard in Shakespeare’s play fails because of his evil character. Some critics infer that Shakespeare, as well as More, belongs to the Tudor propagandist camp, so he joins in the smearing of Tudor enemy, debasing Richard so much that Richmond appears to be a perfect hero to replace Richard. Some bring forth the scheme of divine providence, claiming that the two tetralogies start with Richard II’s disposition, treat the civil war during Henry VI’s reign as the punishment of Bolingbroke’s usurpation, and hail the success of Richmond as he joins the two families together and ends the War of the Roses. I agree with Hammond that it is belittling or misleading to see Shakespeare as parroting Tudor propaganda (Hammond 119). Nor do I treat Richard III as the closing play in the providential grand scheme. In my opinion, Shakespeare regards Machiavellian doctrines as cynical principles fit only for evil tyrants and tells us that the model of his ideal king is embodied in Richmond. A Christian prince like Richmond, the one who combines piety and morality within himself, eventually defeats the evil, atheistic Richard, and successfully joins the Lancaster and York families together. Richmond’s marrying Elizabeth carries with it a significant meaning: virtue and piety (Richmond) finally joins with the right to reign (Elizabeth).
Chapter Four

Henry IV:
the Machiavellian King that Wins Popular Support

After Richard III, the next usurper Shakespeare portrays is Bolingbroke (later Henry IV), whose political arena is in Richard II (1595) and 1 and 2 of Henry IV (1596, 1598). The first play focuses on how Bolingbroke replaces King Richard II to be the new ruler of England. The latter two plays see how King Henry successfully suppresses the rebellion and passes his crown to Prince Hal. Like Richard III, Bolingbroke is a usurper but his reign lasts longer. Furthermore, in Shakespeare’s sketch, Richard III is a blood-thirty monster who trades his throne with violence and terror, while Bolingbroke builds his throne upon popular support. Unlike what he does in Richard III, Shakespeare sticks to historical facts most of the time when he portrays Bolingbroke. Basically Bolingbroke is presented as a man who revolts against the tyranny of his king, and a man who wins the crown through his calmness, intelligence, and justice.

It is interesting that the two usurpers receive such different treatment in Shakespeare’s plays. The cruelty of Richard III in contrast to the justice of Bolingbroke explains the failure of the first and the success of the second. There extends from Richard III to Richard II a motif that the tide of public opinion determines the right to rule. Shakespeare’s reception of Machiavellianism is another issue to be argued in this chapter: he treats Machiavellianism as dangerous doctrines when
composing *Richard III*, but he recognizes and accepts more of the pragmatism in Machiavellianism when writing about Bolingbroke.

**Bolingbroke, a successful usurper**

Bolingbroke, though a usurper, is a successful one both in history and in Shakespeare’s play, for the Englishmen welcome him as their new ruler. On 1 Sept. 1399, when Bolingbroke brought the captive Richard II back to London, the mayor and citizens came out to congratulate Bolingbroke. The famous gardener’s scene in *Richard II*, in which Queen Isabel overhears the talk between the gardener and his servant, best represents people’s disappointment toward King Richard:

> Man. Why should we, in the compass of a pale,  
> Keep law and form and due proportion,  
> Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,  
> When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,  
> Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chok’d up,  
> Her fruit-trees all unprun’d, her hedges ruin’d,  
> Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs  
> Swarming with caterpillars?  
> (3.4.40-47; emphasis mine)

The servant complains that Richard fails to nourish his “sea-walled garden” (England) with “law and form”, and leaves it nibbled by Bushy, Greene, and Bagot—the

---

“caterpillars”. The gardener continues:

Gard. O, what pity is it

That he had not so trimm’d and dress’d his land
As we this garden!

Had he done so to great and growing men,
They might have liv’d to bear, and he to taste
Their fruits of duty. Superfluous branches
We lop away, that bearing boughs may live;
Had he done so, himself had borne the crown,
Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.

(3.4.55-57, 61-66)

These lines are a critique to Richard’s mismanagement of the state. He chops down “great and growing man” (Woodstock, Arundel, and Warwick) but lets “superfluous branches” (Bushy, Greene, and Bagot) choke his realm. That this critique is overheard by the Queen increases its truth, for people tend to speak out their minds when the man criticized is absent. And why the gardener’s comment? England is often called “this other Eden” (John of Gaunt’s phrase, 2.1.42), so the gardener is equivalent to Adam in the garden of Eden. As the first ruler in Eden, the old Adam has every reason to comment on the king’s behaviors.

Richard’s misconduct provides justification for Bolingbroke’s usurpation. Another reason why Bolingbroke succeeds is that he knows

20 Queen Isabel actually calls the gardener “Old Adam’s likeness” in III, iv, 73.
what people expect of a good ruler. Throughout *Richard II*, Bolingbroke appears (or tries to appear) as a man who can right the wrongs and do justice. In act I scene i, superficially he accuses Mowbray for murdering his uncle Gloucester; in fact, the king is the target of his accusation. It is commonly known that Richard plots the murder of Gloucester; Mowbray only acts as a tool of the king. This is no secret in the Lancastrian family, and Bolingbroke knows whom to blame for he says “[Gloucester’ s] blood, like sacrificing Abel’ s cries/ from the tongueless caverns of the earth” (1.1.104-105). Abel is killed by his own brother, but Mowbray is no kinsman of Gloucester; Richard is. So Bolingbroke plays the role of a knight who bravely challenges his evil king, swearing that “by the glorious worth of my descent,/ This arm shall do it, or this life be spent” (1.1.107-108). Richard recognizes his challenge, and responds ironically: “How high a pitch his resolution soars!” (1. 1. 109).

Later, Richard stops the combat designed to resolve the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, one of the reasons being that Mowbray is so strongly suspected of being the king’ s agent in the murder that had he been defeated by Bolingbroke, popular feeling would hail it as Bolingbroke’ s personal defeat of the king. This episode presents Bolingbroke as a representative of courage and justice.

The cause of Gloucester’ s death is not mentioned in Shakespeare’ s play; historically he died because of the strife with King Richard. He, along with two other great lords, Arundel and Warwick, resented young Richard’ s determination to rule through an upstart like Suffolk and a young courtier like Earl of Oxford. The three lords joined together,
forced the king to surrender to their decision, and banished those young lords. When the king came of age, he declared that he would choose his own counselors, and set his mind on revenging the three old lords. During the rivalry, Bolingbroke and Mowbray stood with Richard. The king’s old enemies were arrested and condemned to death as traitors. Gloucester was taken into custody by Mowbray, and was later reported to be dead. Gloucester had been ill when arrested, but there was strong evidence that he did not die a natural death. Afterwards, the worried Mowbray informed Bolingbroke that he suspected that the king’s vengeance would extend to them. Bolingbroke betrayed him to the king, and secured himself, as he thought, by a full pardon for the past.

So Bolingbroke actually took part in the arrest of Gloucester. Afterwards, he and Mowbray were made Duke of Hereford and Lord of Norfolk for their loyalty and support to the king. His charge of Mowbray at court was based on the account of Mowbray’s treason against the king, not of Gloucester’s death. However, to Bolingbroke’s surprise, instead of waiting for the outcome of the combat, Richard took the combat into his hand, and exiled both of them. If Shakespeare sticks to history, Bolingbroke will become a traitor as well as a sacrifice of Richard’s scheme, who trades Mowbray for his own security but is finally set up by Richard as well. Nevertheless, Shakespeare decides to portray his Bolingbroke as a man who earnestly seeks justice for his uncle.

21 Before Richard assumed power, Bolingbroke and Mowbray joined the three lords in arresting and executing some of Richard’s followers. See J.T. “Richard II”, D.N.B. p. 1038.
Another crucial matter to be dealt with in the play is Bolingbroke’s execution of those “caterpillars of the commonwealth”, Bushy and Greene, after he comes back from his exile. These two men, along with Bagot, have long been regarded as the King’s parasites that should be plucked away. Bolingbroke, upon landing, lays siege to Bristow castle and eliminates the King’s confidants right away. He accuses them of misleading King Richard, and most unforgivable of all, causing himself to “breathe in foreign clouds” and “eat the bitter bread of banishment” while they ravish his signory and destroy his household (3.1.20-21). We should take note that this is the second time he blames the king’s men instead of the king himself. (The last time he does so is when challenging Mowbray for Gloucester’s death.) Confiscating John of Gaunt’s property is Richard’s own idea, and Bolingbroke knows this by heart. However, he keeps silent about it. Throughout Richard II, Bolingbroke never utters a word against Richard, either to his face or behind his back. However, his action speaks his intention. The action of arresting and executing the King’s confidants carries its significance in two ways. First, through convicting Bushy and Greene’s crimes, Bolingbroke proclaims that Richard does him injustice. What is more important, he proves himself a powerful ruler who can right the wrongs and eradicate the “weeds” in the “sea-walled garden” (3.4.43). By contrast, Richard is surrounded by flatterers, who, like weeds, seem to hold him up but consume him at last. His failure in recognizing the harm flatterers do to his kingdom testifies his impotence to rule England wisely and thus provides a contrast to Bolingbroke’s capability to be an
arbitrator and judge, a *de facto* king.

By challenging Mowbray and executing Bushy and Greene, Bolingbroke has proved his competence to be a ruler of justice. By proving this, he at the same time offers people a chance to choose between him and Richard. Richard’s kingship is built on a theory of the divine right; Bolingbroke builds his kingship on popular support. We hear of Bolingbroke’s popularity from Richard in the scene when people crowd to see him off to France: “Observe’d his courtship to the common people,/ How he did seem to dive into their hearts/ With humble and familiar courtesy” (1.4.23-25). Bolingbroke wins people’s hearts, and when he comes back to England, several lords join him; neither does Duke of York, the regent of Richard, stand against him. By contrast, King Richard is left alone. After York’s proclamation of his neutrality and the death of Bushy and Greene, there remains no alliance for Richard. When the king comes back from Ireland, finding that the Welsh have deserted him, he suddenly grows pale:

RICH. But now the blood of twenty thousand men
    Did triumph in my face, and they are fled;
    And till so much blood thither come again,
    Have I not reason to look pale and dead?

    (3.2.76-79)

Donna Hamilton points out that, in equating the blood of twenty thousand men with the blood that should be in his face, Richard acknowledges for the first time that a king should be one with the people (9). The loss of people is the loss of “blood” for the king’s body politic. Hamilton then
provides us with *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*, a standard and respectable source written by John Fortescue in 1470, in which the same notion is mentioned. Comparing the body politic with the body natural, Fortescue explains that just as the heart and blood give life to the body natural,

“sembably in a bodye politike the intent of the people is the first lively thing, having within it bloud, that is to say, politike provision for the utilitie and wealth of the same people, which it dealeth furth & imparteth as wel to the head as to al the members of the same body wherby the body is nourished & maintained.”

The life-blood that flows to the king from the people allows the body politic to function well. Without the people’s support, no matter how hard Richard claims that the balm on his body cannot be washed away by “all the water in the rough rude sea” and “the breath of worldly men” cannot depose the deputy of God (3.2.54-57), he knows what lies ahead: “let them[the king’s followers] hence away,/ From Richard’s night, to Bolingbroke’s fair day” (3.2.217-218). Richard, the one who formally believes in the supremacy of the anointed king, has to admit that people now turn their back on him, the setting sun, and their face towards Bolingbroke, the rising sun.

Shakespeare conveys an idea through the play that the kingship built on popular support is more solid than the one on divine right. This

---

theme appears again when King Henry warns Prince Hal that Percy has a better claim to the state than he with the shadow of succession:

King. For all the world
As thou art to this hour was Richard then
When I from France set foot at Ravenspurch, And even as I was then is Percy now.
Now by my scepter, and my soul to boot, He hath more worthy interest to the state Than thou the shadow of succession.

(I Henry IV, 3.2.93-99)

Percy gains men’s reverence through the honor he wins in the battlefields, but Hal has only royal blood to rely upon. The king informs his son that the kingship built on royal blood proves unstable, for that is how he replaces Richard II.

This notion reflects the Tudor justification for kingship: the king is God’s representative on earth; thus any opposition is opposition to God’s Will, unless it can be demonstrated that the government prevailing is not the proper manifestation of Providence (Raab 14). This is how rebellion is justified, and exactly how Bolingbroke justifies his rule. If we refer to Thomas Aquinas’ theory of anti-rebellion introduced in Chapter Two, we see that Bolingbroke has deviated from the medieval thought. For Aquinas, the anointed king is the deputy of God. Even if the king turns out to be a tyrant, his subjects still have to tolerate him, for rebellion against God’s anointed king is forbidden. In fact, Bolingbroke’s father John of Gaunt holds the same attitude as Aquinas. In act I, scene ii,
when the Duchess of Gloucester comes to Gaunt, asking him to revenge for her husband’s death, Gaunt replies:

Gaunt. God’s is the quarrel—for God’s substitute,
   His deputy anointed in His sight,
   Hath caus’d his death; the which if wrongfully,
   Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
   An angry arm against His minister.

Duch. Where then, alas, may I complain myself?
Gaunt. To God, the widow’s champion and defence.

(1.2.37-43)

Gaunt leaves Richard to God, refusing to “lift an angry arm against” his king. He is Aquinas’ disciple, who submits to the tyranny and endures it silently. Like Aquinas, who advises men to make recourse to God when the tyrant goes too far, Gaunt tells the Duchess to ask for God’s help, for he is “the widow’s champion and defence.”

While Gaunt insists on the divine mandate of the king, his son Bolingbroke revolts against the traditional notion. The theory Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke adopts is similar to that of the Tudors: if it can be manifested that the king fails to live up to the expectation of Providence, rebellion is allowed. Before Bolingbroke succeeds the throne, he intends to make Richard accuse himself by reading a renunciation notice of the crown, in which the king declares that he is not a worthy ruler and expresses a wish that Lancaster should be his successor. In the deposition scene, Northumberland keeps pressing Richard to read over in public the articles drawn up against him:
NORTH.                but that you read

Committed by your person and your followers
Against the state and profit of this land;
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily depos’d.

(4. 1. 222-227)

The self-accusation is humiliating and cruel to the deposed king, and yet, it is necessary and crucial for the new king, for it makes him a lawful heir.

Ernst H. Kantorowicz brings up the issue of the separation of the king’s two bodies: “The Tragedy of King Richard II is the tragedy of the King’s Two Bodies” (26). In medieval time, there exists a fiction of the oneness of the double body of the king: body natural with body politic. While body natural is mortal, body politic never dies. However, in Shakespeare’s play, Richard II begins to realize that he is only mortal, and his body politic will soon die with him. Kantorowicz comments:

Not only does the king’s manhood prevail over the godhead of the Crown, and mortality over immortality; but, worse than that, kingship itself seems to have changed its essence. Instead of being unaffected “by Nonage or Old Age and other natural Defects and Imbecilities,” kingship itself comes to mean Death, and nothing but Death. (30)

The kingship Richard represents—the Godhead of the Crown “comes to death.” Gone is the oneness of the body natural with the immortal body politic. Gone also is the fiction of royal prerogatives of any kind. What arises is the kingship Bolingbroke represents—the head of the
people.

After the deposition of Richard, Bolingbroke claims the crown as Henry IV and begins the sixty-one years of the Lancastrian dynasty. However, Henry IV’s reign is troubled and insecure. Conspirators inflame rebellions in different corners of the land, and there are wars imposed by the French and launched by the Scots and Welsh. Henry never again enjoys the success as in the audacious stroke which initially wins him the kingdom. Though he enjoys little peace in his reign, he successfully suppresses the rebellions, securing his throne and passing it on to Prince Hal.

**Bolingbroke/King Henry: a Machiavellian prince**

Itala Rutter argues that the concept of Machiavellian *virtus* is never accurately represented in the drama of the English Renaissance, except in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, in which Bolingbroke serves as a successful example (Rutter 20-22). One can not deny that Machiavelli’s theories are continuously misrepresented in the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, but not every critic agrees that Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke is the sole successful example. Nevertheless, it is true that Bolingbroke complies with the Machiavellian concept of *vir*, a man of manliness. Machiavelli in *The Prince* implies that Fortune, being a goddess, is most attracted by a man who displays his courage. Fortune likes to follow and even wait upon *virtus*, and generally smiles on those who exhibit it. Bolingbroke’s success can be explained in terms of the fact that he wins Fortune over by wisdom, justice, and courage.
I have described in the early part of this chapter that Bolingbroke proves himself a ruler of justice, who protests against King Richard’s rudeness of breaking the law, and the one who can right the wrongs for his people. However, without his audacity and ambition, Bolingbroke will not become King of England. I disagree with Barbara Baines’ claim that Bolingbroke claims the crown because Richard gives it up easily:

In Shakespeare’s play Richard rejects the course or resistance offered by Aumerle and Carlisle and retires to Flint Castle, where he quickly and without advice acknowledges Bolingbroke as king. Shakespeare’s Richard clearly has an alternative to abdication. The alternative would require that he acknowledge the injustice of some of his decision.

(Baines 30)

Baines suggests that if Richard acknowledges his own faults, returns the property to Bolingbroke, and promises to expel some of his favorites, he can still stay on to rule as the king. Baines’ suggestion is too romantic in the political world, nor does it happen in Shakespeare’s play. It is true that Shakespeare’s Bolingbroke, when arriving at Flint Castle with his army, offers himself as an obedient subject who humbly asks the king to return what rightfully belongs to him. There is no demand for the throne in Bolingbroke’s speech; however, after the humble words comes the real threat:

BOL. If not, I’ll use the advantage of my power
And lay the summer’s dust with showers of blood
Rain’d from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen—
The which, how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke
It is such crimson tempest should bedrench
The fresh green lap of fair King Richard’s land,
My stooping duty tenderly shall show.

(Richard II, 3.3.42-48)

Bolingbroke expresses himself very clearly that he possesses the power to force the king to consent to whatever he demands, including deposition. He is a practical man, not as some critics argue, an opportunist who happens to take what Fortune grants him.²³ Bolingbroke, the Machiavellian king, is a king of action who makes the goddess cast her smile on him by *virtus*.

Bolingbroke never says that he intends to replace the king. Because he never speaks out his mind, it results in difficulty in defining where his ambition starts. Critics have different opinions on when he sets his mind on the throne. My argument is that Bolingbroke has intended to overthrow Richard the moment he brings the army from France to claim for his right of inheritance. He knows very well that he is the hero of the people, especially after the duel in which he charges Mowbray to be responsible for his uncle Gloucester’s death. With Richard’s confiscating his father’s land and depriving him of his rightful inheritance, he has a good cause to revolt. He comes back from exile with “eight tall ships, three thousand men” well furnished by the Duke of Brittany (2.2.285-286). With such a force and other nobles’ support,

---
²³ Besides Baines, Brents Stirling holds a similar opinion.
Bolingbroke is able to force the king to consent to his claim (whatever it is). It is almost out of the question for any rebel to disperse his force and continue to play the role of an obedient subject after he compels his king to consent to his request with arms. Anyone would be unique, and uniquely foolhardy (like the rebels leaders in the battle of Gaultree) in doing so, for a king will never forgive the humiliation the rebellion brings about, and, if reassuming his power, will inevitably take revenge. A wise man like Bolingbroke will certainly take this into account before he makes his move.

In the episode of the battle of Gaultree, King Henry’s representatives, Prince John (his second son) and Westmoreland manifest a Machiavellian statesmanship. In 2 of Henry IV, the royal army meet with the rebels led by Archbishop of York, Hastings and Mowbray. Prince John is aware of the fact that the rebels’ force is far stronger than his, so he designs a trick to trap the opposed leaders. He suggests that both sides meet between the two armies, he then accepts the leaders’ articles, promises to “redress all the griefs” (4.2.59) and asks them to discharge their armies.

Prince John is a real image of his father, a true Machiavellian prince, who dissolves the rebels’ army with one word while he orders his own army to stand still, waiting for his further instructions. His embracing the rebel leaders before their army together with his order of dismissing his army: “Go, my lord./ And let our army be discharged too” are merely deceitful gestures (4. 2. 91-92). And he takes note to witness that his

---

24 The episode of Gaultree is in 2 Henry IV, Act IV, Scene ii.
opponents disarm themselves first.

On the other hand, the rebel leaders are too naïve. They act according to the Prince’s word without assuring their own safety first; neither do they confirm the dispersal of the Prince’s army. When Hastings reports that their army is dispersed. Prince John tears down his mask of knight and arrests all of them. Nor does he, like a cunning fox, forget to pursue the stragglers. Prince John is no medieval knight, who treasures his word and emphasizes fair play. He is a Machiavellian prince, who never forgives treason and will never rest until all the rebels are beheaded.

As the Archbishop of York accuses him, Prince John betrays his words. If we stand on the side of Lancaster, we will agree the prince’s decision is the most beneficial for Henry’s reign. The willful rebel leaders, especially the powerful ones, must be extinguished in order to avoid the repetition of rebellion. Machiavelli’s lines serve as the best footnote to Prince John’s behavior:

How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his word and to live by integrity and not by deceit everyone knows; nevertheless, one sees from the experience of our times that the princes who have accomplished great deeds are those who have cared little for keeping their promises and who have known how to manipulate the minds of men by shrewdness. … A wise ruler, therefore, cannot and should not keep his words when such an observance of faith would be to his disadvantage and when the reasons which made him promise are removed. (The Prince 58,59)
This is exactly what Prince John does: after he confirms that the rebels’ army is dispersed (“when the reasons which made him promise are removed”), he breaks his words and arrests the rebel leaders.

Historically Prince John did not join the battle at Gaultree. Westmoreland was sent by Henry to deal with the rebellion. Later the rebellion collapsed with the surrender of the archbishop and Mowbray to Westmoreland on May 29, 1405. The Earl of Arundel and Thomas Beaufort urged Henry to make a terrible example of the treacherous prelate and Mowbray, and later had them executed after a hasty trial.\(^{25}\)

In Shakespeare’s play, the involvement of Prince John in the episode makes John another follower of Machiavelli. In other words, all the Lancaster family—Prince John, his father Henry IV, and his brother the later Henry V, are Machiavellian kings.\(^ {26}\)

Morality is a stranger in Henry’s house, and has never been invited as a guest to speak at their dinner table. It is well-noted that Prince Hal is a madcap youth, and Henry often regards him as a scourge for his usurpation.\(^ {27}\) However, no matter how displeased he feels for his son, he still grabs every chance to instruct him the way to be a king. Henry’s edification takes place twice in the plays, and each time he expels all the other people and holds a private conference with his son. Why does the conference call for privacy? First, each time Henry talks with Hal, he


\(^{26}\) On Henry V as a Machiavellian king, see Stephen Hollingshead.

\(^{27}\) Henry once told Hal: “Thou art only mark’d/ For the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven,/ To punish my mistreadings” (\textit{Henry IV}, 3. 2. 9-11)
blames him severely for his absurd behaviors. After all, Hal is the Heir Apparent so Henry has to save some face for the future king. What is more important, the principles he inculcates are very Machiavellian, and thus can only be taught in private. During the first talks, he advises the prince to treasure his own feathers, and not to expose himself too often before the commoners. The king is worried that Hal will become another Richard II, “a companion to the common streets” or “a cuckoo in June” that loses people’s admiration (*I Henry IV*, 3.2.68,75). There is no mention of moral principles in Henry’s royal edification. The king does not blame Hal for going astray, or shows any concern of Hal’s being misled by his lawless, dubious companions. What he fears is that familiarity breeds contempt, and that may finally cost Hal his throne. Henry is concerned more about the securing of the throne than about cultivating morality in the prince.

In *2 Henry IV*, Henry gives Hal another and the last counsel at his bedside. The King is seriously ill and still worries about the stability of Hal’s reign. He tells Hal that his own reign is full of turmoil, but when the crown falls upon Hal’s head, he can wear it with more ease, for “all the soil (=moral stain) of the achievement goes/ with me (Henry) into the earth” (4.5.197-198). However, Hal should not be content with the situation as it is.

King. Yet though thou stand’st more sure than I could do,
Thou art not firm enough, since griefs are green;
And all my friends, which thou must make thy friends,
Have but their stings and teeth newly ta’en out;
By whose fell working I was first advanc’d,
And by whose power I well might lodge a fear
To be again displac’d; which to avoid
I cut them off, and had a purpose now
To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out
May waste the memory of the former days.

(4.5.202-215)

This is Henry’s shrewdness: to wear out those hostile powers through crusades to prevent them from coveting the throne. In fact, visiting the Holy Land has long been Henry’s plan. He announces over the dead body of King Richard that “I’ll make a voyage to the Holy Land./ To wash this blood off from my guilty hand” (Richard II, 5.6.49-50). Seeing his state broiled with turmoil, he again comes up with the idea to “breathe short-winded accents of new broils/ to be commenc’d in strands afar remote” (1 Henry IV, 1.1.3-4). Now he again advises Hal to “busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels.” We do not know how sincerely Henry repents for the murder of Richard. In my opinion, it is mere religious hypocrisy. Anyway, one thing is clear: Henry is good at exercising pragmatism. Under the banner of freeing the Holy Land, he can acquire fame and get rid of his enemies at the same time.

We can perceive Henry’s theory of manipulating political affairs
through these two precepts he gives Hal. For Henry, the first and the foremost duty for a prince is to guarantee the continuity of the reign, or the stability of society. Henry holds a creed that, as long as a prince brings his people stability and prosperity, the unfair methods he adopts while trying to achieve this effect will soon be forgotten. Once again, this is a typical Machiavellian teaching: the end justifies the means. And Henry is eager to transmit to Prince Hal his political wisdom that in administering the state affairs it is efficiency of a prince rather than morality or anything else that matters. Evidently, Hal takes his father’s teachings to heart. He successfully suppresses a rebellion during his reign, wages a war on France, which pushes him to the summit of glory, and thus fulfills his father’s expectations for him.

What we have in Richard II, 1 & 2 Henry IV is a king who achieves a new kind of kingship and struggles to maintain it through competence, responsibility, and Machiavellian statecraft. This is a king who builds his kingship on popular support as opposed to Richard II who builds his kingship on the theory of divine right. Shakespeare’s Richard, as Brents Stirling analyzes, is a royal sentimentalist, a defeatist who reigns the throne as though he prefers acting the role of tragedy to one of a ruling king (Stirling 27). We hear him mourn for his deposition, amuse himself with the stories of the dead kings, and tease the fragility of his name. He is a man of words, almost a poet. However, actions speak louder than words in government administration. And that is why he is usurped

---

28 See Shakespeare’s play Henry V.
by Bolingbroke.

On the other hand, Shakespeare does not fail to see the frailties in Henry the Machiavellian king. As we see in this chapter, what Henry places in high esteem is the appearance of matters rather than the essence inside. That is why he educates his son on the importance of maintaining a good image, but ignores the cultivation of true nobility in his character. What Henry cares is the result rather than the means adopted, evil or otherwise. That is why Prince John, in order to eliminate all the rebels, tricks the rebel leaders at the Battle of Gaultree. And that is why Henry is eager to sap the power of the opposed barons in the crusade to the Holy Land. Shakespeare has manifested the frailty of being a Machiavellian king, and that is the lack of morality.

The deposition scene in *Richard II* can be a real mock at Henry. Usually the new prince receives the crown from the Archbishop in solemn ritual. However, when York asks Richard to hand over the crown to Bolingbroke, Richard performs it with absurdity:

Rich. Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown.

Here, cousin,

On this side my hand, and on that side thine.

Now, mark me how I will undo myself.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,

With mine own hands I give away my crown,

With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.

(4.1.181-183, 203, 207-290)

The audience watch Richard seize one side of the crown with Bolingbroke seizing the other. The crown becomes a bowl of salad that can be passed at will! We can assume that Henry later ascends the throne in formal coronation fashion, but we cannot see it on stage. In other words, Shakespeare makes us witness a ridiculous deposition scene instead of a solemn ceremony. The playwright’s arrangement carries with it a critique of Henry—that he nonetheless is a usurper.

In Shakespeare’s world of mixed right and wrong, characters are not to be measured by rigid moral standards. Thus we see the two sides of Henry. Henry the usurper who wins popular support, and Henry the Machiavellian prince who manages to maintain the stability of his reign. The two-side presentation of Henry proves that Shakespeare is neither an apologist nor a critic of Tudor doctrines. He is a shrewd political analyst who performs different roles at different times.
I agree with Tillyard that in Richard III we see “the working out of God’s plan to restore England to prosperity” (Tillyard 205). There are many articulate representatives of such a view. Jones sees in the play’s characterization and structure a “conception of a supernatural order that surrounds and contains the main action and from which judgment will eventually come.” Moody Prior calls the ghosts “ritual messengers of divine vengeance on Richard and of fulfillment of divine promise for Richmond.” Hammond thinks of Richard III as “providential ritual.”

Richard, for all his intriguing malignity, proves to be a clear inferior to Richmond in terms of piety and justice. The stage villain is condemned in omens, dreams, prophecies, and by ghosts. The sky frowns at him the day he fights his final battle. In sharp contrast, Richmond finds in the bright sunset “token of a goodly day to morrow” at the eve of the battle (5.3.21). Signs after signs foreshadow the fall of Richard. Through these, Shakespeare tells his audience that morality and piety are indispensable qualities in his ideal king, and the atheistic Machiavellian king is doomed to fail.

However, the playwright’s attitude toward Machiavellian statecraft alters when he molds his Henry IV. What we have in Richard II, 1 & 2 Henry IV is a king who wins popular support, ascends the throne, and

---

29 As to the critics who are for or against the perceptions of providence in Richard III, see Hassel’s Songs of Death p. 90.
struggles to maintain it through competence, responsibility, and pragmatism. Compared with Richard II, Henry is a king who relies upon events, not upon declarations, to clarify his purposes. He is a man of action, who creates his own future by winning the favor of Fortune with his *virtus*. Machiavellian king as he is, he is a monarch of efficiency and competence, but not necessarily one of morality.

In *Richard III* morality appears to be the most important quality that attracts popular support, while in *Richard II*, a king of efficiency is what people expect for. In other words, people reject a king who is impotent in administering state affairs. The shift of focus on the king’s qualification reveals Shakespeare’s altered attitude towards Machiavellian doctrines. Though Shakespeare does not accept all of Machiavellianism, he begins to see the practical sides in it.

This alteration in Shakespeare’s attitude is not to be explained by proclaiming Shakespeare a Tudor propagandist. Shakespeare certainly bears in mind the relationship between the Tudor monarchs and the Lancastrian faction. He is very careful in dealing with sensitive issues when portraying Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. For example, historically, Richard II is starved to death in prison. Little chance stands that King Henry is totally unaware of the fact. However, in Shakespeare’s play, Richard is murdered by Exton, who “misreads” the king’s wish and is finally expelled for the sin. This invention makes Henry get away from the accusation of murdering a king. However, Shakespeare does not overlook the frailties of the Lancastrian kings, either. As what is stated in Chapter Four, Henry IV ignores the danger
he causes by destroying the order of sovereignty. Thus anyone with a self-assumed just cause will be able to justify his rebellion against the king. As to Henry V, the “star of England”, we see his heartless rejection of Falstaff, the self-serving motives with which the church justifies his invasion of France, and the slaughter of the French prisoners. The above shows that Shakespeare is a political analyst, who presents two sides of a monarch, rather than a Tudor propagandist, who tries to promote people’s support toward the Tudor dynasty in a partial way.

This alteration in Shakespeare’s attitude toward Machiavellianism will be better understood if we put it in the context of the English history. Around the time Shakespeare writes his English history plays (1589-1599), the patriotic mood prevails the whole nation due to the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588). Between the victory of Agincourt led by Henry V and the Armada year, England has scarcely won any victory abroad. After so many years of silence in national glory, the Armada episode makes the English’s patriotism soar high in the sky. However, England is not without enemies. Defense of the realm comes first: even after the defeat of Spain’s greatest effort, the danger of invasion from Spain remains present. Furthermore, England has to face its old enemy—Ireland. Ireland is a danger spot from the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and nearly fatal to Elizabeth’s policy after 1595 when rebellion there joins hands with the national enemy (Elton 357). With the soaring patriotism of the people and the potential danger the kingdom has to face, it is not hard to understand why the English, including Shakespeare, yearn for a powerful monarch.
comes to realize it is not enough for a king to be good and virtuous. He
has to be wise, active, resolute, and sometimes treacherous—to put it in
another way: a Machiavellian prince.

To sum up, when Shakespeare writes of Richard III, he intends to
show us that Machiavellian doctrines are cynical principles fit only for
evil tyrants, and that a king without morality is doomed to be overthrown.
While Shakespeare praises Henry IV’s competence, he recognizes and
approves more of the pragmatism in Machiavellianism. Shakespeare,
like his contemporaries, worries about the effect Machiavellian doctrines
may bring about, and he responds to Machiavelli in his history plays.

From what I observe in the study of four of his tetralogies, he begins to
accept some of the doctrines, yet he does not fail in pointing out the
weakness in them. We can say Shakespeare matures in public affairs.
As he grows older, he becomes more flexible in moral norm. Thus, we
see a Shakespeare crossing the boundaries of idealism and realism.
Fig. 1. The House of Plantagenet
Works Cited

I. Primary Sources:

Shakespeare, William. *The Arden Shakespeare: King Richard III.*


II. Secondary Sources:


Garber, Marjorie. “Descanting on Deformity: Richard III and the Shape of History.” *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture.* Ed. Heather Dubrow and


Knights, L. C. “Shakespeare’s Politics.” Henry V. Ed. Michael


Sir Stephen, Leslie and Sir Sidney Lee Eds. *Dictionary of National


