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Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Machiavelli for the Good of England

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Research for this thesis was conducted by reading *Richard II* by William Shakespeare and *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli. Other texts by these authors were also consulted, and critical texts relating to these works were researched and read. The reign of King Richard II signaled a beginning of a move out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. The play tells the story of King Richard II, an inept ruler who lost the crown to Henry Bolingbroke, who then became King Henry IV. The failures of Richard and the success of Bolingbroke can be closely linked to instruction put forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Bolingbroke is a Machiavellian, and so with *Richard II*, Shakespeare acknowledges that Machiavellianism can be the basis for good rule as England grew out of its medieval roots and into a Renaissance power.

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I. Elizabethan England, Shakespeare, and Machiavelli

The governed are concerned with their governments. The people of Elizabethan England were no different, and as an artist Shakespeare expressed his concern through his work. While not always a central issue in his plays, an element present in most of them is an examination of good rule. Leaders - kings, dukes, generals, and so on - are often the protagonists, and this is certainly true in Shakespeare's histories. These plays were a way for Shakespeare to examine and comment on the nature of good rule and what was best for England, and it can be argued that England itself is the true protagonist of these plays. Often the rulers in these plays possessed qualities that can be seen as Machiavellian, yet Shakespeare often approves, because those that "win" are those that are best for their country. This is true in *Richard II*, and the failure of Richard and the success of Bolingbroke can be closely linked to advice put forth by Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince*. With this play, Shakespeare looks back to this Middle Age period of King Richard II through a 16th century Renaissance lens and allows that 16th century Machiavellian political thinking and methodology can be the cornerstone of good rule as England began a move away from its medieval roots and into a Renaissance power.

Marjorie Garber calls the history plays "perpetually timely," operating in three time frames: the period in which the action takes place, the period in which they were written, and the period in which they are performed (239). It is no

coincidence that Olivier's *Henry V* was very popular during World War II, and even today, people often cite George W. Bush when quoting King Henry IV's advice to his son:

Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels..." (IV.iii.341-2)

Elizabethan times were no different. History plays were extremely popular.

Henry IV Part One was one of Shakespeare's most successful plays, and over two hundred history plays were written in England in the twelve years following the defeat of the Spanish Armada (Garber 239). The Audiences would watch a history play and not only experience a sense of history and national pride, but they would also have their own leaders in mind. Monarchies need monarchs and citizens want good ones, or at least ones that are good for the country.

Under Elizabeth I, England grew into a major world power, and the defeat of Spanish Armada in 1588 cemented England's place in the world stage and gave its citizens an increased sense of security, as well as national pride. Under Elizabeth I, stability and order ruled, and many attribute this to Elizabeth's acumen as a Machiavellian politician (McDonald 311). As will be seen, Machiavellian principles are associated with duplicity and treachery, but as will also be shown, these methods can work for the good of a nation, the central concern of Shakespeare's history plays. *Henry V* is often cited as a celebration of England's greatest King, who also happened to be the consummate Machiavellian

politician. This is true, but Shakespeare's embrace of Machiavellianism began earlier, with Hal's father, in *Richard II*.

The name Machiavelli has negative connotations, and this way of thinking is not new. Throughout Europe, in Shakespeare's time and earlier, Machiavellianism was associated with unscrupulous abuse of power, and Machiavellian methods were seen as immoral and evil. In England the name Machiavelli became inextricably linked to an episode in France that took place in 1572, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. In Paris, the entire Huguenot population was murdered, and similar incidents took place throughout France. The man behind these attacks was the Duke of Guise, a French statesman. He was labeled a Machiavellian, in part because the French Queen at the time, Catherine de' Medici was part of the Medici family. The Medici had been a powerful family in Italy for centuries, producing leaders of Italian courts, including dukes and popes. A century before the slaughter, Machiavelli had dedicated *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici, the Florentine ruler at the time. The Medici name was enough to tenuously connect the act with Machiavelli, but the Queen's actions made the connections concrete. She had advised her husband, Charles IX, to "connive at the slaughter" (Roe 5). As will be discussed throughout this paper, conniving is a Machiavellian act, and her actions were labeled as such. As Huguenot refugees fled to England, the slaughter, as well as the name Machiavelli, received a great deal of negative attention and notoriety in England. (Roe 5-6). It was not long

before the name Machiavelli moved beyond political discussions and into the realm of theater. The name became associated with stage villainy and the stock villain, and these stock villains were often called Machiavel.

A character named Machiavel is the villain in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. In this play, Machiavel takes credit for the heinous acts of Barabas, the mass-murdering Jew of the title. These Machiavellian stock villains can be seen in Shakespeare's plays as well, although operating under other names, such as Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*. Not only did Shakespeare make use of this Machiavellian villain in his tragedies and comedies, but they operate with abandon in the histories as well, including his most popular history play, *Richard III*. One of Shakespeare's most famous villains is Richard of Gloucester, later King Richard III. Even the character associates himself with the Machiavel as he soliloquizes on his plans for the crown in *Henry VI, Part III*.

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
And cry 'Content' to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.
I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down. (III.ii.182-95)

Here we see the most basic associations with Machiavelli, associations that have become maxims for immoral behavior: “The ends justify the means,” and “Appearance is more important than reality.” Concerning the later, Richard will, among other things, deceive, fake tears, and be more chameleon-like than even the chameleon. Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli often notes that one does not have to have an admirable trait, but he should appear to have it, and thus be admired for having it. Dissemblance can be a social and political tool, and this is why Richard will compose his face to fit the occasion. After the long list of methodology, he tells us he will put the “the murderous Machiavel to school.” Reminiscent of the Huguenot slaughter, here Machiavelli is associated with grabbing and maintaining power through deception and murder. The ends justify the means, even if the means are murder. The associations with Machiavellianism are clear, and that these associations are negative is apparent. To some degree, these methods work; Richard of Gloucester becomes King Richard III, but his reign is brief. The means become too much, including the murder of children (Roe 27), and ultimately Richard fails.

In looking at the failure of Richard III and other Shakespearean Machiavels, it might be argued that Shakespeare does not see Machiavellian principles as a proper use of power, and therefore cannot be used for effective rule. Even in *Richard II*, Bolingbroke behaves in some of the same ways as Richard III. He, like Richard of Gloucester, will be one thing while appearing to

be another. He will also murder, although not with his own hands, yet Shakespeare does approve. As critics such as Grady have suggested, Shakespeare's attitude toward Machiavellian politics move from earlier rejection, e.g. Richard III, toward acceptance if not outright endorsement in *The Henriad*.

Shakespeare approves, not because the application of Machiavellian policies works, but because it works for the good of England. Richard II is a king who ravaged his country, while Bolingbroke is the man that saved it. There is a difference between the villainous Machiavel and a Machiavellian. While *The Prince* does not paint a flattering picture of mankind, and it certainly allows for immoral behavior that led to the maxims cited above, it is actually a complex treatise on statecraft, a detailed handbook meant to "lay down instructions" for effective rule (Machiavelli 3). These instructions are seen at work in the play. Richard is a failed king, and his failures are closely linked to the failures of a leader as outlined by Machiavelli, while Bolingbroke's successes are due in large part to his role as a Machiavellian. The ways of Richard II are ineffective and associated with the ways of the Middle Ages, while the ways of Bolingbroke are effective and are associated with ways of the Renaissance. *Richard II* signals a shift in the power system of the society, moving from one based on a medieval system centered around the Great Chain of Being, to a more "modern" view of society and power.

II. The Failures of King Richard II

As *Richard II* opens, we are in the midst of a medieval court, ruled by King Richard II. It is seen to be the medieval world of the Great Chain of Being, where chivalry and honor take center stage. At the top of this chain sits King Richard II, and we are reminded of this throughout the first three scenes of the play. Richard speaks like a king, “Then call them to our presence” (I.i.14), notes his “sacred blood” (I.i.119), and acts the part of a king, confidently commanding his nobles throughout the early scenes of the play. Shakespeare adds the trappings of a monarch as well; thrones, heralds, and warders are all an important part of the ceremonious accusations and confrontations between Mowbry and Bolingbroke. They have come before the King in a rite of formal accusation, “...to appeal each other of high treason” (I.i.27), each requiring justice from the King. Bolingbroke accuses Mowbry of treason for misusing the King’s funds and for the murder of the King’s and Bolingbroke’s uncle, Thomas of Woodstock. Mowbry counter-charges treason, calling Bolingbroke a liar. Amid the accusations, the royal Richard plays his part, the lord of all, ready to dispense justice. However, as will become clear, there is a problem.

Richard’s grandfather, Edward III, was the previous King. He had seven sons, including the oldest, Richard’s father, Edward the Black Prince. Only three of his sons were still alive when Edward III died. They were Edmund of Langley, York in the play; John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke’s father; and Thomas of

Woodstock. At the time of Edward III's death, the crown passed to the eldest son's son, Richard; however, Richard was only ten at the time and his uncles did much of the ruling. Later, as Richard came of age Woodstock did what he could to maintain his power, including organizing Parliament to his own advantage, but in the end Richard won out (Assimov 259-65). But, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Richard is not a good King, so it would be reasonable to assume that Woodstock may have been acting in the best interest of the country when Richard had him killed. Indeed, Edward III and his sons are all spoken of reverently throughout the play, and for the survivors, Gaunt and York, England always comes first. Thus, we can assume they are correct, for as suggested earlier, those that are for England, or at least good for England, are the "good guys." So again, it is reasonable assume that Woodstock had England's interests at heart, thereby making Richard's actions suspect.

It would seem that most know that Richard is responsible for Woodstock's murder. In the second scene, Woodstock's widow, the Duchess of Gloucester, discusses the matter with Gaunt. They know Richard has "caused his [Woodstock's] death" (II.ii.39). If they know, it can be assumed that Bolingbroke, and others of importance know, but as Bolingbroke's banishment shows, there is nothing that can be done to a king. Even a powerful noble like Gaunt will not move against Richard to avenge his brother's murder. He tells Woodstock's widow:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death: the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister. (I.ii.37-41)

These five lines define the nature of Richard's standing and power. Simply put, Richard II is the rightful King of England, anointed by God, and this alone appears to be enough to exercise and maintain his control. The power of an English monarch flows from God to his deputy the king, to the king's subjects. This is the way God and nature intend things to be in the Great Chain of Being. In a place like England, a monarch, even a poor one, is a monarch for life. Gaunt is not the only one who recognizes Richard's place. Everyone in the chain knows their place, including Richard. For example, when he later hears of Bolingbroke's threat to the crown, he says:

The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord. (III.ii.52-3)

In medieval England, a poor ruler might have been seen to signify God's displeasure with the people. That is the way of the world under the Great Chain of Being, but as the play shows, the world is changing.

Machiavelli does not acknowledge a God-given right to everlasting rule; however, at the outset of *The Prince*, he does note that if a prince who has inherited the throne is "just ordinarily industrious, he can always keep his position" (4). As the legitimate King, Richard should have a relatively easy time

in maintaining power, yet he does not. Inheritance, blood, and reliance on the natural order of things in a medieval monarchical world are not enough, because Richard is not ordinarily industrious; in fact, he is quite incompetent, incompetent enough to lose his position as God's substitute. The reasons are many; they will unfold throughout the first two acts of the play, closely paralleling warnings Machiavelli puts forth in *The Prince*.

Machiavelli states that "a prudent man should always follow in the footsteps of the great and imitate those who have been supreme" (17). Others in the play do respect their heritage and the greatness of past English monarchs. In the famous, patriotic "sceptered isle" speech, John of Gaunt exalts England as another Eden (II.i.42). He goes on to pay tribute to the men of England who have kept it safe and made it great:

Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry,
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son... (II.i.49-55)

Gaunt speaks of prior kings and leaders of England, men of great birth and blood who kept the English safe at home while winning victories abroad, in the crusades. This is in sharp contrast to Richard. He may have the blood of his grandfather, Edward III, he even looks like his father, Edward the Black Prince

(II.i.177), but that is where the resemblance ends. He does not imitate great leaders. Not only does he not follow in their footsteps, Richard does not respect his heritage, nor does he honor the blood of his grandfather. He is responsible for the murder of his father's brother; he has spilled "one vial full of Edward's sacred blood" (I.ii.17).

However, this is about more than Richard's lack of honor and respect. Machiavelli is concerned with effective rule, as is Shakespeare. Therefore, Gaunt's speech is more than a jingoistic celebration of England, it is also used to illuminate the problems with Richard, and thus the problems inflicted on England. Gaunt offers keen insight into the problems with Richard's rule predicting it cannot last:

His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last,
For violent fires soon burn out themselves;
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short;
He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes;
With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder:
Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself. (II.i.33-9)

Richard is described as riotous, impetuous, vain and greedy. These are not the qualities of a good man, and they can only lead to a quick demise. If Richard was an ordinary citizen, it would not matter. Of course, Richard is the leader of England and so this is also trouble for England. Problems with the King obviously translate into problems with the country. The power and efficacy of a monarch have incredible influence on the country and its citizens, and Gaunt

laments that England, due to Richard's misrule, "[h]ath made a shameful conquest of itself" (II.i.66).

Besides not imitating the great men who came before him, Richard does not care to heed the advice of those who share his noble blood and heritage, those portrayed as patriotic and wise by Shakespeare. Presumably Woodstock tried to counter Richard's ways, and Gaunt tells us nothing has come of his own prior attempts counsel Richard:

Though Richards my life's counsel would not hear,
My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear. (II.i.35-36).

Gaunt has been ignored, but on his deathbed he hopes to try one last time to set Richard right. Of course his hopes will prove fruitless as Richard's arrogance and greed will take center stage. Upon hearing of his uncle's present demise, Richard thinks only of Gaunt's riches, noting that he will meet with his uncle "to help him to his grave immediately" (I.iv.59).

Gaunt does get his say and he fully excoriates Richard. He tells Richard that Edward III would have deposed him before he was even King for killing his sons, and for leasing out royal lands. He goes on to call Richard a landlord rather than a King but is soon cut off. (II.i. 104-115). Not only does Richard ignore the counsel of Shakespeare's wise elder, he has nothing but contempt for Gaunt, telling him he should "run [his] head from [his] unreverent shoulders (II.i.124). Gaunt's diatribe has fallen upon deaf ears. Richard's arrogance is predictable; the

Duke of York previously warned Gaunt: “For all in vain comes counsel to his ear” (II.i.4), which “is stopped with other flattering sounds” (II.i.37).

Shunning the advice of the noble Edward III’s sons, those with England’s interests at heart, Richard instead relies on the advice and counsel of flatterers. This, according to Machiavelli, is problematic on many levels. First, counselors “will be good or bad, depending on [the prince’s] judgment” (63). The choosing of Bushy, Baggot, and Green shows more than poor judgment on Richard’s part. It also indicates a lack of shrewdness, for as Machiavelli notes, “a prince who is not shrewd himself, cannot get good counseling,” leading the prince to “self-deception” (65). Furthermore, he says that this will lead to a low opinion of the prince or king: “The first notion one gets of a prince’s intelligence comes from the men around him” (63). Richard’s reliance on flatterers does indeed lead to a low opinion of his rule from the most powerful nobles in the land. As will be seen later, support of powerful nobles is crucial for a king, or prince, to maintain power and control. These nobles correctly see a connection between Richard’s poor rule, and his advisors. Besides York’s remarks above, Gaunt tells Richard that he “lie[s] in reputation sick (II.i.96), because “[a] thousand flatterers sit within [his] crown” (II.i.100). Later, Northumberland notes that the King is “basely led” by these flatterers (II.i.242). It is common knowledge Richard’s court is the seat of misrule. Bushy, Bagot and Green are not mere hangers-on, they are advisors that have influence with the King; their counsel combined with

Richard's own arrogance and lack of skill has negatively influenced policy, and thus negatively affected the country.

This court of flatterers, combined with a lack of good counsel, leads to wastefulness, triviality, and excess. Machiavelli warns against being trifling and effeminate, yet Richard's being enamored with the latest fashions and trends combined with his eagerness to embrace any new vanity on a whim suggest that Richard is indeed trifling and effeminate. Further, he shows a lack of concern for important matters and a lack of good sense, desire supersedes judgment. Richard is gluttonous to the point of wanting what he wants with little or no regard of the consequences, or as Gaunt puts it "where will doth mutiny with wit's regard" (II.i.28). Richard lives lavishly and to excess, and even he recognizes this:

...[o]ur coffers with too great a court
And liberal largess are grown somewhat light. (I.iv.42-43)

However, the difference between him and his uncle is that Gaunt sees the actions *and* their consequences, while Richard, blinded by his vanity, cannot. Richard simply knows that he has drained the coffers of the state and they must be replenished. Machiavelli describes the significance, and consequences, of a ruler's lavish lifestyle:

[H]e will have to load his people with exorbitant taxes and squeeze money out of them in every way he can...making him odious to his subjects; for when he is poor, nobody will respect him. The, when he has angered many...at the first approach of danger, down he goes. (43-44)

Machiavelli may see the danger of such methods, but Richard does not. Richard must raise money, and his arrogance and lack of foresight dictate the solution:

We are enforced to farm our royal realm;
The revenue whereof shall furnish us
For our affairs in hand: if that come short,
Our substitutes at home shall have blank charters;
Whereto, when they shall know what men are rich,
They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold
And send them after to supply our wants. (I.iv.45-52)

Unlike other kings and princes, including Richard's his father, Richard does not spend what he takes from his enemies (II.i.180-183), but instead he decides to take from his own people. This is the catalyst of Richard's downfall, but his lack of foresight and appropriate counsel, combined with his magisterial arrogance blind him to these dangers. Richard's policies become an economic drain on the nation. England is racked with economic hardship, touching all of his subjects.

Shakespeare uses two of his common tropes, a garden metaphor and the common man, to illustrate England's plight. Shakespeare often uses the metaphor of a garden in his work, including several times in this play as a metaphor for England. Gaunt's earlier comparison of England to the Garden of Eden is in sharp contrast to what this garden has become under Richard. As he often does, Shakespeare uses the common man, in this case the gardener and his man, to show how policy affects people. One of the Gardener's men speaks of England in terms of a garden:

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 choked up,
Her fruit-trees all upturned, her hedges ruin'd,
Her knots disorder'd and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars? (III.iv.41-47)

The gardener knows what everyone knows, that “the wasteful king... hath suffered this disordered spring” (III.iv.49-56). Richard’s garden is a far cry from Gaunt’s Eden. The King’s policies have far-reaching consequences and as a result the country is in economic shambles. These commoners confirm what York and Gaunt have earlier described; England is a mess. Their laments were not simply the complaints or exaggerations of a few wealthy nobles; we can see that all of Richard’s subjects, the citizens of England, suffer. According to Machiavelli, Richard has failed to perform one of the most important tasks of a ruler: “Well organized states and prudent princes have always [made] every effort to keep the aristocracy from desperation and to satisfy the populace by making them content (51). King Richard II is not prudent and he has little regard for his subjects. As a result, he takes the scope of his fund raising one step too far.

In addition to the methods of revenue collection mentioned earlier, upon Gaunt’s death, Richard decides to seize “the plate, coin, revenues and moveables,” of his uncle (II.i.160). Richard will seize *everything* Gaunt possessed. According to English tradition and law, everything should be

Bolingbroke's, including his father's title, the Duke of Lancaster. York is amazed at Richard's decision:

Take Hereford's rights away, and take from Time
His charters and his customary rights;
Let not to-morrow then ensue to-day;
Be not thyself; for how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession? (II.i.196-200)

York is speaking of more than the laws and rights in England. He is speaking of the natural order of things, nature's law under the Great Chain of Being in which this society operates. This medieval, feudal system of *Richard II* has rules and laws. Denying these things to Bolingbroke is Richard's blunder, literally his fatal mistake. Machiavelli states: "...but above all [a prince] should not confiscate people's property, because men are quicker to forget the death of their father than the loss of a patrimony" (46). Richard has gone from taxation and forced loans to something much more egregious. His actions are akin to theft; however, he has stolen much more than property. Bolingbroke describes his own situation:

From my own windows torn my household coat,
Razed out of my imprese, leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman. (III.i.24-27)

The nobles of England take their names from their land; they derive their identity from their holdings. Richard strips Bolingbroke of his legal inheritance: land, money, and title, in short, his identity as an Englishman and as a human being. Richard denied Bolingbroke of his "tongue's office" (I.iii.245) by banishing him

from England, and Bolingbroke seemed to accept this, but being “gelded of his patrimony” (II.i.298) is something that cannot stand.

Richard’s end will stem from the action of the play’s beginning as his handling of Bolingbroke, and the banishment itself, will come back to haunt him. Machiavelli states that in the “controversies of his subjects, he should be sure that his judgment once passed is irrevocable” (50). Richard equivocates. First, he appears irresolute by calling for the victor’s chivalry and then amid the pageantry of the event, calling it off. Next he passes judgment in banishing Mowbry for life and Bolingbroke for ten years, but again changes his mind and reduces Bolingbroke’s sentence. This is not a major error, but it is indicative of Richard’s lack of skill. Furthermore, he may have believed he was solving his problem by getting rid of Bolingbroke and Mowbry, but in effect he was remaining neutral, something that Machiavelli warns against (61). Early in *The Prince*, Machiavelli says that in regard to possible reprisals, men should either be “caressed or destroyed...any harm you do to a man should be done in such a way that you do not fear his revenge” (7). Richard had an opportunity to either kill Bolingbroke or possibly make him an ally, but he chose a middle, ineffectual solution. Instead, this banishment allows Bolingbroke the opportunity for revenge, and it will cost the King his crown.

Richard has wronged the most powerful noble in the country, a savvy one at that. According to Machiavelli, “The nobles have more foresight and are more

astute, they always act in time to safeguard their interests” (31). Bolingbroke does act to safeguard his own interests; however, he is one man, and one man alone against a king is powerless. He cannot single handedly right his wrongs, Bolingbroke needs help and he gets it from his fellow nobles. They join Henry’s cause, but not simply out of loyalty to him. Rather, as Northumberland suggests, they also wish to protect their own interests. Northumberland speaks for his fellow nobles when he cites one reason for joining Bolingbroke:

Now, afore God, 'tis shame such wrongs are borne
In him, a royal prince, and many more
Of noble blood in this declining land.
The king is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers; and what they will inform,
Merely in hate, 'gainst any of us all,
That will the king severely prosecute
'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs.
(II.i.239-246)

Northumberland acknowledges Bolingbroke’s royal blood and sympathizes with his injustice, but these men are fighting for much more than Bolingbroke. They are fighting for themselves, their children and for the future generations of England. They know that they could be next; these men, or their heirs, could be stripped of their rights. York warned Richard when he seized Gaunt’s estate:

You pluck a thousand dangers on your head
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts. (II.i.206-7)

This is exactly what happens. Richard loses the loyalty of nearly all of the nobles, including the lord steward of his own household, and even the man with the utmost respect for law, natural and otherwise, the noble Duke of York.

If Richard had the support of the people, things may have been different and perhaps the rebel force would not be so formidable. Richard may have survived this crisis. Machiavelli says that “a prince should not worry too much about conspiracies, as long as the people are devoted to him; but when they are hostile and feel hatred toward him he should fear everything” (51). Ironically, Richard’s advisors see the problem as Richard’s world collapses around him.

Bagot, speaks of being close to the King and thus close to hatred:

BAGOT And that's the wavering commons: for
their love
Lies in their purses, and whoso empties them
By so much fills their hearts with deadly hate.
BUSHY Wherein the king stands generally
condemn'd. (II.ii.129-132)

As discussed, England is sickly; Richard has taxed the country into economic depression, thereby causing him to lose the goodwill of the people. Bagot is right for the commons do hate Richard. They are suffering and they know who to blame and who to join. Scrope describes them:

White-beards have arm'd their thin and hairless scalps
Against thy majesty; boys, with women's voices
Strive to speak big and clap their female joints
In stiff unwieldy arms against thy crown.
Thy very beadsmen learn to bend their bows
Of double-fatal yew against thy state.

Yea, distaff-women manage rusty bills
Against thy seat. Both young and old rebel,
And all goes worse than I have power to tell.
(III.ii.108-116).

Scrope describes a cross-section of the commoners. Richard's subjects have all become rebels, men, women, young and old. The entire nation stands against Richard and this lack of popular support is the final nail in his coffin. Richard loses the nobles *and* the commoners, and he is left virtually alone. As York notes of the rebellion: "Now comes the sick hour that his surfeit made" (II.ii.84). Richard has caused his own destruction. His arrogance, vanity, gluttony, and above all incompetence as a ruler, have brought the rebels. Richard has lost his subjects, and thus his country. Bolingbroke easily deposes Richard.

Machiavelli states that "The prince will suffer a double disgrace if he was born to the purple and then through his own lack of good sense lost it" (66). This is the fate of Richard II. He is disgraced and humiliated as the people vent their anger and take back their nation from the man who harmed it. King Richard II, "God's substitute" (I.iii.37), was born a prince and became a king. He inherited a kingdom through God and blood, yet through incompetence he lost it. Of course there have been incompetent leaders throughout history who have managed to hold on to their crowns, yet Richard does not. As seen, this required major blunders on Richard's part, but as will be seen, it also required a man of great prowess to take the throne from an English king.

III. The Successes of Henry Bolingbroke

If we are to apply *The Prince* as a manual on statecraft to this play, not only does Richard do almost everything wrong according to Machiavelli, but Bolingbroke does almost everything right. Henry is not the villainous Machiavel, but instead he is a Machiavellian, a man of political and military prowess, a politician and a prince, and as Machiavelli puts it, he is a fox to “defend himself from the wolves,” and a lion to “overawe the wolves” (48). All of these traits can be seen in Bolingbroke as he maneuvers throughout the play, eventually overtaking and overawing Richard, the wolf.

Even though being Machiavellian is much more than the maxim “Appearances are more important than reality,” it is certainly an important tenet in *The Prince*, and Bolingbroke applies this right from the beginning of the play. Machiavelli states that it is not necessary to have admirable qualities, “but it is very necessary that he should seem to have them” (48). This is the role of the fox, and it is the role Bolingbroke plays in the formally accusing Mowbray of treason.

To prove, by God's grace and my body's valour,
In lists, on Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk,
That he is a traitor, foul and dangerous,
To God of heaven, King Richard and to me;
And as I truly fight, defend me heaven! (I.iii.37-41)

Bolingbroke had earlier detailed Mowbray's treason as the misuse of the King's funds and the murder of Woodstock, but here the central point of the speech is treason. He lists himself last because even though Mowbray is a traitor to

Bolingbroke, it is much more important for Bolingbroke to note that Mowbry is a traitor to God and King. In making this accusation Bolingbroke appears to be a loyal noble to Richard, but he is also putting these men in a difficult position because Mowby cannot speak the truth: the King in is behind the murder of Woodstock. By defeating Mowbry, Richard's instrument, Bolingbroke will, according to medieval beliefs and the system of trial by combat, "prove" his accusations. Of course Richard cannot allow this, and so he decides to banish both men. It appears that the wolf has outfoxed the fox and Bolingbroke has lost; however, the loss is temporary. He will return as the lion, but before he can do so, he must gather support. To do this he must be the politician.

It is not enough that elements of society are opposed to Richard; they must be for Bolingbroke if he is to be successful. Richard has made this job easier, but Bolingbroke still must gain their backing. Early in the play Bolingbroke woos the common man, as described by the King himself.

Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green
Observed his courtship to the common people;
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
Wooring poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
And patient underbearing of his fortune,
As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well
And had the tribute of his supple knee,
With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends;'
As were our England in reversion his,

And he our subjects' next degree in hope. (I.iv.22-35)

This is an important speech by Richard for several reasons. First, it shows his own disdain for the common man. As seen earlier, the people suffer under the King's policies, but Richard shows no regard for them. Second, it shows a lack of political savvy. Richard should have been concerned by Bolingbroke's actions, but he was not. Finally, this shows Bolingbroke as the politician, "wooing" the common man. According to Machiavelli, "The prince must have the people well disposed towards him" (29), and this is Machiavellian advice that Bolingbroke takes seriously. Whether or not Bolingbroke is sincere in his love of the common man, or sincere in any matter, is ultimately irrelevant. Either way he is acting as a Machiavellian political animal, first by recognizing the importance of the support of the people, and second by either being sincere, or at least appearing to be. Finally, this speech's last two lines are prophetic, hinting at what is to come. Bolingbroke will indeed become England's savior, and since a rightful king cannot be deposed, England and the Great Chain of Being will be in reversion as the Richard, the rightful King, is replaced.

While support of the commoners is essential, it is not enough.

Bolingbroke must have the support of the nobles; they are the ones that can provide the means for war. Machiavelli warns that nobles may not only abandon a ruler, but "attack him directly. They are more farsighted and shrewder, taking timely steps to protect themselves and ingratiate themselves with the man they

expect to win” (28). Again, Richard has made Bolingbroke’s job easier by taxing them relentlessly and arousing their fear of being robbed of their own patrimony, but Bolingbroke still must sway them to his side, and he does.

Many critics note that Bolingbroke is a man of few words. On stage this is generally correct, he has many fewer lines than other characters in his scenes, but offstage Bolingbroke seems to be a man of words, a persuasive speaker.

Bolingbroke’s wooing of the commoners, as described by Richard above, is an example. Margorie Garber cites another example of this in Bolingbroke’s winning over of Northumberland. It is described by the Northumberland himself in speaking to Henry:

...your fair discourse hath been as sugar,
Making the hard way sweet and delectable. (II.iii.6-7)

Garbor notes that “Bolingbroke is not a courtier – he is a politician, and his ‘fair discourse’ is not flattery but policy (257). Similarly, Bolingbroke’s most powerful act of policy and persuasion is not seen on stage, and furthermore, it is not even reported; however, it can be inferred. Machiavelli states a good ruler is made with “good arms” (34), and those who study the art of war are capable of rising from “private citizens to princely fortunes” (40). Besides the backing of commoners and nobles, Bolingbroke must have arms and soldiers, and so he gets them. Northumberland speaks of Henry’s return to England, telling his fellow nobles that he is coming with many other nobles, “well furnished,” with eight

ships and three thousand soldiers (II.i.287-8). Implicit in this action is Bolingbroke's ability to persuade others to arm him and join him in a rebellion against the King of England, the rightful monarch who sits atop the Great Chain of Being. This certainly requires great political skill, and Bolingbroke succeeds, returning to England as the lion, ready to "overawe the wolf," yet he simultaneously continues to play the fox.

Henry can speak persuasively, but as the shrewd politician he also knows how to be his own advisor and keep his plans to himself. Returning to England, Bolingbroke never states an intention for the crown. Upon meeting York, Henry first sweet talks him by calling York the replacement of his dead father, and then eloquently states his case that he has been wronged, all the while maintaining that he has only "come for Lancaster" (II.iii.113). Northumberland reasserts this goal to York:

The noble duke hath sworn his coming is
But for his own..." (II.iii.147-8)

Political goals are more easily achieved when one has good arms and York, noting he is powerless against Bolingbroke's forces, declares himself neutral. At this point, Bolingbroke makes known another of his objectives as the garden metaphor reappears. Bolingbroke will go to Bristol Castle to seek

Bushy, Bagot and their complices,
The caterpillars of the commonwealth,
Which [Henry has] sworn to weed and pluck away. (164-7)

This is exactly what he does. Again, at this point, Bolingbroke does not attack the King directly, but blames all that is wrong with England, and all of the wrongs suffered by himself, on Bushy and Green. He sentences them to death, and in the next breath inquires of the well being of the Queen.

My Lord Northumberland, see them dispatch'd.
Uncle, you say the queen is at your house;
For God's sake, fairly let her be entreated:
Tell her I send to her my kind commends;
Take special care my greetings be deliver'd. (III.i.35-39)

In five short lines, Bolingbroke shows himself a man to be feared, while simultaneously giving the appearance of having the admirable quality of being humane and caring towards others. This is very Machiavellian. According to Machiavelli, “to be feared is much safer than to be loved” (46). Furthermore, regarding the Queen, it is not important in a Machiavellian sense whether or not Henry actually does personally care about her, but it is good policy to appear to care. And so, having dispatched the “caterpillars,” Bolingbroke moves on to the King.

Upon his meeting with Richard, Bolingbroke kneels and reasserts his publicly stated intentions: “My gracious lord, I come but for mine own” (III.iii.194). Like others before him, Richard acknowledges the power of Bolingbroke’s force:

What you will have, I'll give, and willing too;
For do we must what force will have us do. (204-5)

However, Bolingbroke never asks for the crown, but continues to manipulate events until Richard willingly concedes the crown to him. The Bishop of Carlisle is outraged:

What subject can give sentence on his king?
And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?
Thieves are not judged but they are by to hear,
Although apparent guilt be seen in them;
And shall the figure of God's majesty,
His captain, steward, deputy-elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judged by subject and inferior breath,
And he himself not present? O, forfend it, God,
That in a Christian climate souls refined
Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed! (IV.i.112-122)

Carlisle espouses the prevailing view of the time. Richard is the King, God's representative on earth, and therefore is not subject to the will of any of his subjects. Richard is below God, and all others are below Richard. Deposing Richard is more than simply wrong or illegal. It is unnatural, an act against God. Many would agree, and so given this, Bolingbroke must continue to manipulate events. Although Richard is essentially a prisoner, Bolingbroke keeps up appearances:

Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender; so we shall proceed
Without suspicion. (IV.i.146-8)

A public surrender and a private assumption of the crown is again keeping within Machiavellian principles and strategy. The powerful Bolingbroke is now in the position to have a King "fetched" for him, yet he must be ever mindful of those

whose support he needs, the public. He cannot take the crown, but through circumstances he, the fox and the lion, has created, the wolf is overawed, and the powerless Richard resigns the crown. Bolingbroke becomes King Henry IV. In reality, he has come for, and gets, more than Lancaster; however, his work is not complete. He must solidify his position, and his final step as the Machiavellian prince of the play will be to get rid of Richard.

As discussed earlier, by banishing Bolingbroke, Richard left open the opportunity for revenge. King Henry IV does not make the same mistake, and Richard does not survive. In doing away with him, Henry does what Machiavelli advises the wise ruler to do: “You have to keep an eye not only on present troubles, but on those of the future, and make every effort to avoid them” (8). A former King of England, deposed or not, could certainly pose a threat to Henry’s reign. This threat is something Henry calls his “living fear,” and so according to Exton’s report, Henry wishes for a “friend who will rid [him] of this living fear” (V.iv.2). As Machiavelli suggests, Henry delegates unpleasant jobs to other people (52), by “wishing” for Richard’s death. Furthermore, he claims to be outraged and saddened by the death of Richard, thereby giving the appearance of one innocent. If the deposing of a king is, as Carlilse labels it, a “black deed,” then the murder of God’s “anointed” is much worse, and so it is an act that Henry prudently distances himself from. True to Machiavellian principles, Henry has gotten rid of a potential threat to his rule, had someone do it for him, while

maintaining an appearance of goodness. Richard is dead, and the play ends with the Machiavellian Bolingboke, now King Henry IV, sitting on the throne.

Even though Bolingbroke succeeds and *The Prince* can be seen as something of a manual, it is not simply a manual that anyone can follow. There is specific advice for rulers that Richard ignored and Henry did not, but there is more to good or bad rule than simply following or ignoring procedures. Not anyone could do what Bolingbroke does. Gaining the support of the common citizens and the nobles and then deposing a King is obviously much easier said than done. This is implicit in Machiavelli's text. There must be something inside the man, something that defines who he is and what he believes in. He often uses the word *virtu*, which can be translated in a number of ways, depending on the context, but is often simply used to denote talent, skill and strength of mind. Such a man's actions will "bespeak greatness, courage, seriousness of purpose, and strength" (50). Bolingbroke is such a man. Grady summarizes Bolingbroke's prowess, according to Machiavelli, in one sentence: "Bolingbroke proves the truth of this observation with his bold, decree-breaking return to England in Richard's absence, his skillful organization of military support of his cause, his neutralization of the Lord Regent York, and his peremptory arrest and execution of Richard's advisers Bushy and Green" (Grady 73). Grady neglects the final demonstration of Henry's prowess, achieving the crown. Bolingbroke has as many roles as he does names. In the play he is a patriot, a politician, soldier,

rebel, usurper, and King. It takes skill and talent to be such a man, but in addition to this, a successful prince must also have a particular set of beliefs, modern ones that go beyond the Great Chain of Being and the natural, cosmic order of the world in medieval England. To succeed in this new world of the Renaissance, a prince must think like a Renaissance man, away from the world of God and toward the world of man.

IV. Fortune vs. Free Will

As *The Prince* moves toward its conclusion, Machiavelli turns his attention towards fortune and the free will of men. He saves this very important discussion for the end. It is the penultimate chapter, prior to his exhortation to restore Italy. He calls this discussion “The Influence of Luck on Human Affairs and the Ways to Counter It.” Fortune and fate were often seen as inevitable forces beyond one’s control. This was true in medieval times of *Richard II*, as well as during the Renaissance in which Machiavelli, and later Shakespeare, wrote; however, as man moved into the Renaissance period, more people came to believe that free will could influence and even change fate. This is what Machiavelli advocates: “I think it may be true that Fortune governs half of our actions, but that even so she leaves the other half more or less in our power to control” (67). He acknowledges the forces of fortune, even capitalizing the word, but he also allows that man has a great input into his own fate and that of others. Man can, with foresight, planning, and determination, deal with or even shape fortune, and when

it presents opportunities the successful ruler will “seize” them (16). Seize is an entirely appropriate word, for Machiavelli goes on to say that fortune is a woman, “and the man who wants to hold her down must beat and bully her” (69). This is the key to Bolingbroke’s success. Possessing talent and executing the proper political and military maneuvers is crucial, but perhaps most importantly, Bolingbroke does not accept his condition thrust upon him by Richard. He does not see his actions as Carlisle does and he does not accept as complete truth the natural order of things under the Great Chain of Being. Fortune is not fixed, rather it is something to be beaten, bullied, shaped, and seized. Through these beliefs, Renaissance beliefs, Henry is able to change his own fate as well as that of Richard, whose own take on fortune is quite different, quite medieval. Circumstances throughout the play illustrate Richard’s beliefs, but one scene in particular highlights this.

Richard’s words and actions upon his return from Ireland, knowing that Bolingbroke has arrived, illustrate his belief system and his assumptions on Fortune. He will call on God and nature to defend and maintain the crown:

Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs:
As a long-parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,
So, weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands. (III.ii.4-11)

Stepping onto dry land, the King greets the land and then attempts to conjure it. True to his character, Richard behaves as though England, and nature itself, are his to manipulate and conjure. This is in stark contrast to others in the play. Gaunt, York and others speak of man serving England, not England serving man. Further, Shakespeare creates a similar scene that helps to illustrate the difference between Richard and Henry's attitude toward England. Like Richard, Bolingbroke also speaks to the soil, in his case as he prepares to leave his country:

Then, England's ground, farewell; sweet soil, adieu;
My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet! (I.iii.269-70).

Bolingbroke shows a respect for the substance of his country, his progenitor and sustainer, and unlike Richard, he does not ask it for favors. Richard, relying on the land and fortune to save him, continues his attempted conjuration and defense:

Feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth,
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense;
But let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom,
And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet
Which with usurping steps do trample thee:
Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies;
And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower,
Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder
Whose double tongue may with a mortal touch
Throw death upon thy sovereign's enemies. (III.ii.12-22)

The earth and nature should not be kind to those who would oppose the King, but rather they should act to attack the rebels and defend the monarch. Insects, animals, and plants are all a part of the arsenal Richard calls on to defend him.

Greenblatt points out that Medieval histories are full of such narratives: the ground opens up and swallows an atheist; lightning strikes a perjurer dead” (Greenblatt 946). While Richard’s beliefs may be outdated, he does have the sense to know he’ll need soldiers as well, and so he calls on God to provide them. After invoking the earth, he attempts to invoke the angel’s of God to fight for God’s deputy.

For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right. (III.ii.54-8)

Richard behaves as though simply being the King of England is enough to have fortune on his side. He has no army, yet he’ll conjure one. Nature must defend the natural order and God will send an army to defend his deputy. Grady calls the above sequence in the play an “outright demonstration of the inadequacy of divine-right theory” (80). Of course he is correct, no defense is forthcoming.

V. Machiavelli for the Good of England

Machiavelli states that “so long as Fortune varies and men stand still, they will prosper while they suit the times, and fail when they do not” (69). Under the Great Chain of Being, Richard has no other need but to “stand still”; however, the old way no longer suits the times. The Great Chain of Being counts on the natural order of things to be maintained, and for nature to correct imbalances (Kernan 214). In the rebellion, Richard sees an imbalance and calls on fortune to correct

it. Bolingbroke sees an imbalance as well. In a sense, nature is out of balance as a greedy, callous, incompetent king sits on the throne and drives his country into shambles. Bolingbroke does not call on fortune, but instead, he acts to correct this imbalance himself. A Machiavellian politician seizes fortune and the crown, and the people of England approve:

[A]ll tongues cried 'God save thee, Bolingbroke!
You would have thought the very windows spake,
So many greedy looks of young and old
Through casements darted their desiring eyes
Upon his visage, and that all the walls
With painted imagery had said at once
'Jesu preserve thee! Welcome, Bolingbroke!'
(V.ii.11-17)

As for the man he rescues it from:

[W]ith much more contempt, men's eyes
Did scowl on gentle Richard. No man cried 'God save him!'
No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home;
But dust was thrown upon his sacred head.
(V.ii.27-30)

London gives Bolingbroke a hero's welcome. Regardless of the legality of his maneuvering, he is seen as England's rescuer. Bolingbroke is not a character Shakespeare paints as very likable. For example, he is not funny, nor does he not woo a lady, typical traits of Shakespeare's endearing characters. He is not even entirely sympathetic. If anything, as the play progresses Richard becomes the sympathetic character. Bolingbroke is simply a man of business, and as stated earlier, the way he goes about his business "bespeak[s] greatness, courage,

seriousness of purpose, and strength” (50). His business is to avenge the murder of Woodstock, and later his business is to ensure his patrimony and save England from those that have harmed it. It turns out that his business is England’s business, and for Shakespeare that is what matters.

With *Richard II*, England begins to move away from Medievalism. It is no longer simply enough to be of a royal birth; competent rule is required for the nation to survive and thrive. This is the way of the Renaissance. This new way, the way of Machiavelli and Bolingbroke, “suits the times.” More importantly, it suits the country, and thus, it is also the way of Shakespeare. In the mid 1590s, the decade in which Shakespeare wrote *Richard II* and the rest of The Henriad, Queen Elizabeth I was getting old and had not named a successor to the throne. In this stable, prosperous land, with an aging ruler and no clear plan for succession it is natural that the citizens of England would be concerned with the future leadership of their country. Most of these citizen’s did not have a voice, but Shakespeare did. The history plays were a way for him to comment on good rule, past, present and future, and with *Richard II*, Shakespeare allows that Machiavellianism can be the cornerstone of such rule.

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