THE MURDEROUS MACHIAVEL

by

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C O N T E N T S

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text or in the footnotes.

A B S T R A C T

The thesis is intended primarily as an examination of the earlier Machiavels from their first appearance in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Jew of Malta*, through to 1604, which is probably the year in which *Othello* and *The Malcontent* were composed. It is also intended to prepare the ground for a more exhaustive study, which, in moving on to a scrutiny of the Jacobean Machiavels, might bring out certain contrasts between the early type and the later one.

In Chapter One the question of whether the Machiavels have anything in common with Machiavelli or with the political exemplars of *The Prince* and *The Discourses* is raised. Despite the widespread belief that the Elizabethans possessed little first-hand knowledge of Machiavelli and that the Machiavel embodies the distortion of Machiavellian theory presented in Gentillet's *Contre-Machiavel*, an examination of the evidence suggests different conclusions. It appears that a number of editions of Machiavelli's works were available in the sixteenth century; Elizabethan prose commentary reveals, often, a detailed knowledge of Machiavellian theory; beneath the sensational, legendary accretions there lies in both the prose and the drama an apparently informed and thoughtful critique of Machiavellianism in which the principal charges are those of atheism, amoral egoism, destructiveness and cunning.

In Chapter Two the substance of these charges is scrutinised. Some examination of *The Prince* and *The Discourses* suggests that the Elizabethans were wholly justified in interpreting Machiavelli's works as they did.

In the remaining four chapters the Machiavel is shown to be a peculiar type of villain, characterised by qualities which are essentially those inherent in Machiavelli's doctrines. By examining a wide range of characters and by drawing comparisons between the genuine Machiavellian and other figures, cast in different moulds, the central characteristics of the type are gradually defined. It is shown that although the Machiavel does not always reject God explicitly he is always the materialistic enemy of the God-centred world in which, commonly, the Elizabethan dramatist places him. Despite some apparent affection for others or sudden recantation, the Machiavel, while he remains true to type, is an egoist, dedicated to the ruthless and amoral pursuit of personal power and gratification. He is a destroyer of life and of order in the mind, the family, the state and the universe. Finally, in his "politic" cunning he employs reason in a limited but lethal fashion. Always, in the earlier plays, the Machiavel is eventually defeated by the forces of righteousness, but, at the same time, he can be understood only when he is recognised as an embodiment of the real and massive threat to Christian civilisation which the Elizabethans discerned in the doctrines of Machiavelli.

CHAPTER ONE

SOME INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS : THE ELIZABETHAN INDICTMENT

The number of Machiavellian villains who appear in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is extremely large; even when the parodies of the type that occur in comedy are excluded, the remaining number must be close to a hundred. Yet, so far as I am aware, since Meyer's study of 1897,[1] there has been no full-length examination of the whole group. Neither the Machiavel's relationship to Machiavellian theory, nor his distinguishing characteristics, nor his dramatic functions have been examined in detail. The changes that occur in the type after the turn of the century have been little explored or explained. This study is intended primarily as an examination of the earlier Machiavels from their first appearance in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Jew of Malta* through to 1604, which is probably the year in which *Othello* and *The Malcontent* were composed. It is also intended to prepare the ground for a more exhaustive study, which in moving on to a scrutiny of the Jacobean Machiavels, might bring out certain contrasts between the early type and the later one. It is appropriate to begin a study such as this by enquiring whether the Machiavels, in fact, have anything in common with the famous political writer from whose name their own derives.

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1 Edward Meyer, *Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Drama* (Weimar: Verlag Von Emil Felber, 1897).

It has long since become unfashionable to criticise Machiavelli's morality. In the late nineteenth century the traditional reluctance to accept Machiavelli's maxims without protest was still apparent in an editor like Burd, or a biographer like Villari, or a critic like De Sanctis. In this century the stream of comment has, as Eric Cochrane remarks, swollen to "a flood", so that between 1940 and 1960 there appeared "dozens of books and scores of articles, essays, notes and comments, written by philosophers, moralists, literary critics, linguists and political scientists as well as historians."[2] Since 1960 the flood has become a veritable torrent. Yet, while there is now a superabundance of scholarly discussion of Machiavelli's historical or "scientific" methods, of his language or his life, of every aspect of his environment and of his relation to his age and his contemporaries, critical assessment of his moral position has slowed to a trickle. Such assessment has been replaced very largely by apologetics, although the anti-Machiavels against whom the apologists seem anxious to protect Machiavelli have almost entirely vanished. "It is still common", remarks Sydney Anglo, "to see critics defending him against ancient accusations and frequently overcompensating in the process."[3]

The literature, then, is vast, the task of mastering it "almost impossible", so that, as Cochrane points out, commentators

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2 Eric W. Cochrane, "Machiavelli 1940-1960," *Journal of Modern History*, 33 (1961), p. 113.

3 Sydney Anglo, *Machiavelli* (London: Gollancz, 1969).

"are often led to mistake the part for the whole."[4] It may well be that my own sampling of the literature has been misleading. If so, this is not for lack of conducting a search for some hard-minded judgment of Machiavellian principles along what promised to be rewarding avenues of enquiry. One may turn, for instance, to the numerous discussions of Machiavelli's concept of "virtù": Neal Wood lists twenty such discussions.[5] One finds that if, as Wood complains, few of these reveal "a careful study of the context of usage", fewer still reveal any readiness to proceed from analysis to assessment. Again, one may turn to a recent work described as "iconoclastic",[6] only to find that it suggests that Machiavelli's "historical theory" is no more than "a rudimentary and largely unnecessary schema" or that his "science of politics" is, after all, a somewhat emotional affair.[7] What is surprising here is the calm, and quite correct assumption on the part of the bibliographer and of the iconoclast that Machiavelli has long since become one of our icons. Amongst works published since 1950, then, I have discovered only five or six which contain any real criticism of Machiavelli's moral stance; notable amongst there are Guiseppe Prezzolini's *Machiavelli Anticristo*; Herbert Butterfield's *The Statecraft of Machiavelli* and Father L.J. Walker's edition of *The Discourses*.

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4 Cochrane, p. 113.

5 Neal Wood, "Machiavelli's Concept of Virtù Reconsidered," *Political Studies*, 15 (1967), p. 159.

6 J.R. Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* (1961;rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 182. Hale uses the word of Anglo's *Machiavelli*.

7 Anglo, p. 272.

One result of the prevailing attitude to Machiavelli's moral principles has been a tendency to regard the Machiavel of the Elizabethan or Jacobean stage as the product of obscurantism, prejudice, ignorance or malice. The connection between the Machiavel and any ideas actually expressed by Machiavelli is usually considered so slight as to be unworthy of attention. Indeed, it is commonly accepted that the Elizabethans possessed little or no first hand knowledge of Machiavelli's writing but drew instead upon the *Contre-Machiavel* of Innocent Gentillet, which was published in 1576. Gentillet, a Huguenot, represented the Florentine as the tutor of Catherine de'Medici and "ascribed to his writings, not only the massacre of St Bartholomew but also the whole French policy, from Henry II to Charles IX and Henry III who were generally believed to be well read in 'the Queen-Mothers bible'."[8]

The idea that the Elizabethans relied almost exclusively upon Gentillet for their knowledge of Machiavelli was suggested first by Edward Meyer in 1897. Since that time Meyer's theory has been accorded unquestioning acceptance by the great majority of even the more temperate and thoughtful commentators. George Bull, for instance, remarks in his introduction to his admirable translation of *The Prince*: "The legend of Machiavelli's depravity was already established by the time the first English translation appeared in 1560", and "...the legend of Machiavelli's iniquity as an evil counsellor of princes came here from France, where it was fostered

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[8] Meyer, pp. 7-8.

by hostility to the rule of Catherine de'Medici."[9] Cochrane, in an acute and comprehensive survey of two decades of comment upon Machiavelli, cites three works on Machiavelli and the Elizabethans and dismisses the subject with: "A few, finally, have continued the study of the fate of Machiavelli among his successors. They have shown that his Elizabethan critics saw him exclusively through the eyes of Gentillet."[10]

It seems then that the Machiavels are to be seen as the progeny of Gentillet's Machiavelli, the tutor of evil French and Italian Catholics. Yet Meyer's evidence, on which so many later critics seem to depend, is, in fact, oddly self-contradictory. Having read his little book with some attention, one feels impelled to enquire whether, after all, the Machiavels might reflect both some real knowledge of Machiavelli's teaching and some assessment of that teaching not wholly dependent on the Protestant bias and partisan politics of the *Contre-Machiavel*.

This major question resolves itself into a series of minor questions. Was it possible for the Elizabethan reader to acquire any knowledge of Machiavelli other than through Gentillet? What texts of Machiavelli's works, if any, were available? Were these

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9 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 9. All subsequent quotations from *The Prince* are from this translation. I have also consulted *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. Allan Gilbert (N. Carolina: Duke University Press, 1958).

10 Cochrane, p. 128.

texts, if they existed, widely read? What central charges were made against Machiavelli by the Elizabethans? Is any foundation for these charges to be found in Machiavelli's own teaching?

First, how might the Elizabethans come to know of Machiavelli? Here, at once, one is struck by a fact, which in view of the widespread acceptance of Meyer's "Gentillet theory", is very strange. Simon Patericke translated the *Contre-Machiavel* into English in 1577, but the translation was not published until 1602. The Huguenot, we are to believe, exerted his extraordinary and overwhelming influence throughout almost the entire Elizabethan period through a work available only in the original French or in a Latin translation made shortly after the *Contre-Machiavel* was first published. This curious circumstance is commonly ignored. Instead, the disciples of Meyer make great play with the fact that Dacre's English translation of *The Prince* did not appear before 1640. Bull seems to conclude, along with many others, that before 1640 Machiavelli was known in English only through "legend" and French propaganda. Yet this is clearly not so.

It is *The Prince* and *The Discourses* which contain the pith of Machiavelli's teaching, and it was these which stuck in the throats of the Elizabethan censors, so that the printing of these two texts was banned in England during the sixteenth century. Yet, that many Elizabethans did read *The Prince* and *The Discourses* is now undeniable. Meyer tells us that he found that these two works "were not given to the English public in its own language until half

a century after the dramatists were making, or rather, thought they were making such prodigal use of the same"; whereupon Meyer set about ransacking the British Museum "for more light on the subject."[11] He came up with Gentillet's *Contre-Machiavel* and so solved the mystery of the dramatists' source to his own satisfaction and to that of nearly everyone else ever since. However, had Meyer continued his ransacking a little longer he might have come upon three separate Elizabethan translations of *The Prince*, contained in five different English manuscripts as well as an English translation of *The Discourses*, dated 1599. These were finally brought to light by Napoleone Orsini in the 1930s, together with two further manuscript translations of *The Prince*, one of which is in Oxford and one in America, and two further unfinished manuscript translations of *The Discourses*.[12]

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11 Meyer, p. x.

12 See: Napoleone Orsini, "Machiavelli's *Discourses*: a MSS Translation of 1599," *TLS*, 10th October, 1936, p. 820; Napoleone Orsini, "Elizabethan Manuscript Translations of Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (1937-38),166-69; Hardin Craig, ed., *Machiavelli's PRINCE: An Elizabethan Translation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), pp. v-xxxii.
Certain of Machiavelli's other works besides *The Prince* and *The Discourses* were translated into English well before 1600 and were available in a variety of editions. *The Art of War* was translated by Peter Whitethorne and printed in 1563, 1573 and 1588; *The History of Florence* was translated by Thomas Bedingfield and printed in 1595. Italian editions of these two works and of *The Golden Ass* also appeared. John Wolfe brought out two such editions of *The Art of War*, one undated and one in 1587; an edition of *The History of Florence*, also in 1587; and one of *The Golden Ass* in 1588.
It has been objected by Machiavelli's champions that the Florentine has been misunderstood and misrepresented because his more earnest and thoughtful works have been overshadowed by *The Prince*. The evidence suggests that sixteenth century readers of *The Prince* read with *The Discourses*, *The Art of War* and *The History of Florence* within reach.

These manuscripts, according to Irving Ribner, "were evidently widely circulated",[13] but they do not represent the only means by which Elizabethan readers might acquire a first-hand knowledge of Machiavelli's more controversial doctrines. There is also a French translation of *The Prince*, dedicated to the Earl of Arran in 1553, as well as editions of the Italian text of both *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, printed by John Wolfe in 1584. The latter were unlicensed and were issued with the false imprint "Palermo". Gerber's account of the career of Wolfe makes it plain that the printer was a shrewd and somewhat unscrupulous man of business, known, it seems, as Machivill to his contemporaries.[14] Wolfe took only calculated and profitable risks; in publishing unlicensed books he was incurring considerable danger and that he did so suggests that the demand for Machiavelli's original works must have been large enough to make the game appear well worth the candle. To this list of manuscripts and printed editions of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, Felix Raab would add an unknown number of missing copies, for, in his view: "Manuscripts and printed books are like snakes - for every one you see there are a hundred others hidden in the undergrowth". There were as well, Raab suggests, "Latin and Italian editions of Machiavelli's works which English travellers must have picked up abroad".[15]

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13 Irving Ribner, "The Significance of Gentillet's *Contre-Machiavel*," *MLQ*, 10 (1949), p. 154.

14 A. Gerber, "All of the Five Fictitious Italian Editions of the Writings of Machiavelli and Three of those of Pietro Aretino, Printed by John Wolfe of London (1584-88)," *MLN*, 22 (1907), 129-35; see also: L. Goldberg, "A Note of John Wolfe, Elizabethan Printer," *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 7 (1955), 55-61.

15 Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 53.

It seems odd that the painstaking research of Hardin Craig, of Ribner and of Orsini, which has brought this wealth of material to light, should have done so little to shake the widespread conviction that "the numerous explicit defamatory references to Machiavelli in Elizabethan drama *must have been* derived from Gentillet in the original or in translation."[16] On the contrary, it seems obvious that a dramatist like Marlowe would have had little difficulty in securing copies of Machiavelli's original works, less difficulty, perhaps, than was involved in obtaining a French or Latin edition of Gentillet or a manuscript copy of Simon Patericke's 1577 translation.

The evidence of the manuscripts and printed editions of Machiavelli's works, which suggests that there was a considerable demand, is supported by an abundance of comment, produced by Englishmen from as early as 1535 and revealing, often, an accurate and detailed knowledge of the texts. Cardinal Pole led the English attack on Machiavelli with his *Apologia ad Carolum Quintum*; he was followed by Roger Ascham, whose attempts to instruct the young Edward VI in the manners and doctrine proper to a Christian prince were counteracted in part by the remarkable William Thomas. Thomas' extensive knowledge of Machiavelli's works is plainly revealed in a series of political discourses which he addressed to Edward, "for the King's study." Gabriel Harvey, as even Meyer has to admit,[17]

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16 J.A. Mazzeo, *Renaissance and Seventeenth Century Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 118. (My italics).

17 Meyer, pp. 17-18; p. 25.

read Machiavelli at Cambridge, where "sum good fellowes amongst us begin nowe to be prettely well acquayntid with a certayne parlous booke callid...Il Principe di Niccolo Machiavelli."[18] Sidney reveals a good knowledge of Machiavelli in both the *Arcadia* and the *Discourse to the Queenes Majesty Touching Hir Mariage with Monsieur*;[19] Fulke Greville had read the Florentine's works[20] and so, of course, had Spenser, who cites a number of Machiavellian maxims in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*.[21] The anonymous author of *Leycester's Commonwealth* demonstrates an exact knowledge of *The Prince*,[22] as does the writer of the *Treatise of Treasons against Queen Elizabeth and the Crown of England*.[23] Nashe had read

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18 Gabriel Harvey, "A Third Letter of Harvey to Spenser," in *The Works of Gabriel Harvey, D.C.L.*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (The Huth Library, 1884), I, 138; see also: T.H. Jameson, "The Machiavellianism of Gabriel Harvey," *PMLA*, 56 (1941), 645-56.

19 Irving Ribner, "Machiavelli and Sidney's 'Discourse to the Queenes Majesty'," *Italica*, 26 (1949), 177-87; see also: "Sidney's 'Arcadia' and the Machiavelli Legend," *Italica*, 27 (1950), 225-33; "Machiavelli and Sidney: The 'Arcadia' of 1590," *Studies in Philology*, 47 (1950), 152-72.

20 Ronald A. Rebholz, *The Life of Fulke Greville* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 13; see also: P.H. Harris, "Within Machiavellism," *Italica*, 25 (1948), 28-41.

21 E.A. Greenlaw, "The Influence of Machiavelli on Spenser," *Modern Philology*, 7 (1909), pp. 187 ff.

22 The author cites Machiavelli three times and gives almost the exact words of *The Prince*. See Meyer, pp. 28-9 and Raab, p. 277.

23 The *Treatise* contains one of the most informed and incisive of Elizabethan attacks upon Machiavellian theory. For some discussion of the work and of its attribution to John Leslie, Bishop of Ross see Raab, p. 60.

Machiavelli,[24] and so had Hooker.[25] Ralegh and his circle, the School of Night, discussed Machiavelli's doctrines[26] and Ralegh, himself, drew heavily on *The Prince* when writing his *Maxims of State*.[27] Donne shows in *Ignatius his Conclave* that he was familiar, particularly, with *The Discourses*.[28] Above all, Bacon displays a wider knowledge of Machiavelli and a deeper sympathy with him than is found in any of his contemporaries.[29]

In turning to the dramatists one encounters certain difficulties. A play can hardly embody a systematic refutation of a long and complex argument, so that in a search for evidence of familiarity with the actual text of Machiavelli's works one meets

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24 Nashe refers to Machiavelli and Machiavellians some eighteen times and cites *The Prince* with accuracy and understanding in his "Epistle to the Reader" in the second edition of *Christs Teares over Jerusalem*.

25 Hooker's knowledge of Machiavelli is revealed particularly clearly in his discussion of the content of *The Discourses*, I.11-14. See: *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr Richard Hooker: With an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1845), I, 435.

26 See: M.C. Bradbrook, *The School of Night; A Study in the Literary Relationships of Sir Walter Raleigh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 72.

27 Mario Praz, "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 14 (1928), rpt. in *The Flaming Heart* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 123.

28 Praz, pp. 134-40.

29 Vincent Luciani, "Bacon and Machiavelli," *Italica*, 24 (1947), 26-40.

only with scattered maxims; sometimes even these derive more probably from Seneca, or from the classical sources upon which Machiavelli drew, or from other Machiavellian plays. Yet Meyer has to admit, rather grudgingly, that Kyd, "used the 'Principe' in portraying Lorenzo",[30] that Greene "had been long in Italy, and was well read in the Italian poets, in Guicciardini and Machiavelli"[31] and that Lodge "showed himself quite conversant with Machiavelli's writings: with the 'Prince', with the 'Discourses', 'The Art of War' and even 'Belphegor'."[32] There is not much doubt about Jonson; if *Sejanus* owes more to Seneca than to Machiavelli, *The Discoveries* contain abundant evidence of a close knowledge of the Italian text of *The Prince*.[33] Marston although not "entirely subjugated"[34] by Machiavelli as Wyndham Lewis suggests, displays some first hand knowledge of *The Prince* in *Sophonisba*. The case of Marlowe is instructive, since it illustrates both the difficulty of proving with absolute certainty that a given playwright had read Machiavelli's work and the unwisdom of insisting either that he could not possibly have done so, or that when he sat down to write he immediately forgot what he had read.

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30 Meyer, p. 33.

31 Meyer, p. 37.

32 Meyer, pp. 81-82.

33 C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52),XI, 248-50; see also: Daniel C. Boughner, *The Devil's Disciple* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1968), pp. 138-52 especially.

34 Wyndham Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox* (London: Grant Richards, 1927), p. 66.

The texts, as we have seen, were available; others were reading them, particularly, according to Harvey, in Cambridge, in 1579. Given Marlowe's temperament, his association with Ralegh and the School of Night and the fact that he went up to Cambridge in 1581, it seems rash indeed to assert that: "Marlowe is the mere opposite of those men who read in secret and openly deny their reading. His is the opposite hypocrisy: that of not reading and of claiming to have read."[35] It seems almost as rash to insist that "Barabas, a true Machiavel, was drawn from popular prejudice based upon Gentillet and not from Marlowe's own study",[36] or that when Marlowe wrote the prologue to *The Jew of Malta* he had before him not *The Prince*, but a Latin poem of Gabriel Harvey's, which again, we are told, "is simply Gentillet epitomised."[37] I shall have much to say of Barabas later; for the moment we might look briefly at Marlowe's prologue. "Careful scrutination will find but two thoughts in this whole passage which come from Machiavelli", says Meyer.[38] Whitfield is caustic about Marlowe's references to citadels.[39] Yet, in fact, the main points made by Marlowe's

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35 J.H. Whitfield, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1947), p. 1.

36 Meyer, p. 39.

37 Meyer, pp. 22-23.

38 Meyer, p. 40.

39 Whitfield, p. 1.

Machevill are not wholly at variance with the doctrines of *The Prince*. The statement

> I am Machevill[40]
> And weigh not men, and therefore not men's words
> (Prol. 7-8)

presents the gist of the notorious passage in the eighteenth chapter of *The Prince*: "because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them". Machevill goes on to claim that those who study his works attain to high office, in this case "Peter's chair" (Prol. 12), but when they neglect his advice these men "Are poison'd by my climbing followers" (Prol. 13). *The Prince* of course, is designed to instruct the ruler, and especially the new ruler, in the arts of acquiring and retaining power. Machiavelli does not, it is true, address himself to an intending Pope, but it is significant that, apart from one ironical passage in Chapter XI, *The Prince* treats of the Renaissance Popes as temporal rulers. In Chapter VII Machiavelli makes it clear that he sees the election of a Pope as dependent upon political manoeuvring and censures Cesare Borgia for allowing the election of Julius II. Again, *The Prince* is full of warnings against the ambition of potential rivals, who will, it is assumed, destroy the prince if they are given an opportunity to do so. Certainly, Machiavelli makes no specific mention of the use of poison, but that is hardly the main point. Machevill goes on to announce:

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[40] All quotations from Marlowe's plays are from *Complete Plays and Poems*, ed. E.D. Pendry and J.C. Maxwell (London: Dent, 1976).

> I count religion but a childish toy,
> And hold there is no sin but ignorance.
> (Prol. 14-15).

The question of Machiavelli's attitude to religion is a large one, which I shall examine in some detail later; for the moment it can safely be said that his insistence upon discussing statecraft in exclusively secular terms proved startling enough in a world accustomed to considering political issues in terms of the Augustinian universe, regulated by divine will. To anyone accustomed to the attitudes exemplified by Erasmus or Hooker, it might well appear that Machiavelli regarded religion as "a childish toy", or at most as social cement. The ruler is constantly exhorted not to think of Heaven, but to learn from the world about him and from the lessons of history.

Machevill's next major point is that might is the deciding factor in politics; force of arms, more than legal titles, makes kings; might "commands much more" than the letter of the law and indeed laws are "most sure" only when backed by force. Now this may, as Meyer suggests, come from Plutarch;[41] it is also absolutely central in the doctrines of *The Prince*. Machiavelli makes no bones about the title of the new prince to the territories that he acquires. "The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler; and it is so useful that besides enabling hereditary princes to maintain their rule it frequently enables ordinary citizens to become rulers" (P. XIV). Once in control, the prince must, before all else build up his own army; without "good arms" he will know no security; without "good arms" "you cannot have good laws" (P. XII).

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[41] Meyer, pp. 40-41.

Machiavelli's attitude to the part played by citadels in the military organisation of the prince is less clear cut than Whitfield suggests. In Chapter X he stresses the importance of well-fortified cities; in Chapter XX he displays an uncharacteristic uncertainty on the matter. When Machevill declares that:

> a strong built citadel
> Commands much more than letters can import
> (Prol. 23)

he is hardly contradicting the author of *The Prince*; indeed since the citadel may be seen here largely as a symbol of force, he is showing himself in complete accord with him.

All in all there is, then, no reason to suppose, on the evidence of the prologue to *The Jew of Malta*, either that Marlowe had not read *The Prince*, or that when he came to write his play he turned to Harvey or to Gentillet. The probabilities are that Marlowe had read Machiavelli with some care and that he remembered his reading well when he wrote.

Having surveyed the evidence and having now examined a small part of it in detail, one can conclude that the Elizabethans had access to Machiavelli's works and that many of them show plainly that they possessed a first-hand knowledge of the texts. In some cases, like that of Marlowe, one may not be able to produce absolute proof of first-hand knowledge, but one can certainly demonstrate the probability of a genuine acquaintance. No doubt, Gentillet was also read, although it is doubtful that he was well known in England before the publication of Patericke's translation in 1602. What is perfectly clear is that the Elizabethans were not

dependent upon Gentillet for their knowledge of Machiavellian doctrine. The "legend" of Machiavelli, and its embodiment, the stage Machiavel, grew up out of a real first-hand knowledge of the Florentine's writings.

That there was a "legend" in some sense cannot be denied. Before moving now to the question of the central charges brought against Machiavelli by his Elizabethan critics, it would, perhaps, be as well to look briefly at the more scurrilous and extravagant assertions which occur in the prose literature and which are reflected in the more sensational aspects of the stage Machiavel. For some, the lurid elements in the "legend" have obscured the existence of a stream of informed and, perhaps, judicious comment which, in turn, is related to the Machiavel's fundamental attitudes and characteristics. For this reason alone, then, it is worth clearing away the obvious nonsense before examining what lies beneath.

From the first, Machiavelli's opponents, however well read, were not always scrupulous in their choice of weapons. From the charge of atheism, levelled first by Pole and a host of continental adversaries,[42] such as the Dominican, Caterino, or the Portuguese bishop, Osorio, it was not a long step to assertions of diabolical allegiance. In "Religions Speech to Englands Children" contained

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42 Reginald Pole, *Apologia ad Carolum V* in *Epistolarum Reginaldi Poli*, (Brescia, 1744), I, pp. 137-52.
For discussion of Machiavelli's continental adversaries see: L. Arthur Burd, ed., *Il Principe di Niccolò Machiavelli*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), pp. 45-61.

in the *Polimanteia* of 1595, William Covell's "Religion" denounces Machiavelli in what, by this time, had become familiar terms: "But I am loath to rake in the dead cinders of polluted Machivell, who though Satan made an instrument to disgrace me, and with his dregges dangerouslie poysoned the best states: yet shall my trueth like the sunne from under a cloude shine clearely..."[43] Later John Davies of Hereford has Machiavelli's "poore silly innocent" paper complaining in a similar vein:

> A villaine vile, that sure in hell doth hang,
> Hight Mach-evill that evill none can match,
> Daub'd me with dev'llish Precepts, Soules to catch...[44]

The kind of punning on Machiavelli's name, in which Davies engages, was very common. As well as Mach-evill, Machiavelli became, amongst other things, "Hatch-evil" and, finally, "Old Nick."

As the devil's henchman, or even the devil incarnate, Machiavelli became associated with every kind of sin. The idea that *The Prince* is a spiritual poison occurs in Pole and in a host of later writers; everyone knew that the Italians and especially the Borgias, whom Machiavelli admired, spent a great part of their time in poisoning each other. Hence, it is not surprising to find Nashe representing Machiavelli as a specialist in "the art of Murther",[45]

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43 William Covell, "Religions Speech to Englands Children" in *Polimanteia or the Meanes Lawful* (Cambridge: 1595), sig Bb3-Bb3v. "England's Children" are Oxford, Cambridge and Lincolns Inn.

44 John Davies of Hereford, *Paper's Complaint* in *The Complete Works of John Davies of Hereford*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: 1878), II, p. 78.

45 Thomas Nashe, *Summers Last Will and Testament* in *Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R.B. McKerrow (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1910), III, p. 277.

an art which, elsewhere, he sees as an Italian speciality and most useful in the removal of a jealous husband, for it "will lend one a medicine which shall make him away, in the nature of that disease he is most subject to".[46] Perhaps because certain of Machiavelli's and of Aretino's works were banned in England, perhaps because John Wolfe secretly printed both, the two names became frequently linked. In any case, of course, the "secretary of hell" was capable of anything; as Aretino's twin he became "veneriall"[47] Machiavel, in lust second only to his notorious fellow countryman.

Along with the charge of lust, went that of greed. Praz has pointed out that one reason for the hatred aroused by the Italian favourites of Catherine de' Medici was their rapacity.[48] With the spreading of the idea that Catherine and her entourage drew all their policy from Machiavelli, inevitably the Florentine became associated with avarice. Hence, Gentillet writes: "Nous voyons a l'oeil et touchons au doigt l'avarice des Italiens [Machiavellistes] qui nous mine et ruine...."[49]

In England Machiavelli's long association with the devil, purveyor of every vice, could lead naturally enough to Marlowe's linking of Machevill with the avaricious Barabas, and the Jew, in

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46 Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell* in *Works*, I, p. 186.

47 Nashe, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* in *Works*, II, p. 153.

48 Praz, p. 92.

49 Innocent Gentillet, *Discours sur les Moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Pricipauté: Divisez en trois Parties; a savoir, du Conseil, de la Religion et Police que doit tenir un Prince: Contre Nicholas Machiavel, Florentin*, ed. C. Edward Rathé (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968), p. 42.

turn, did much to encourage the growth of a legend of Machiavellian rapacity. Thus, in Greene's *Groats-worth of Wit*, in the advice given to Lucanio, one reads: "thou shouldest not stand on conscience in causes of profit; but heap treasure upon treasure, for the time of neede....but Lucanio if thou reade well this book (and with that hee reacht him Machiavels workes at large) thou shalt se, what tis to be so foole-holy, as to make scruple of conscience where profit presents itselfe."[50] Suggestions of this kind were hardly fair and have little or no basis in Machiavelli's writings.

But perhaps the most unjust part of the whole "legend" resided in a failure to distinguish between Machiavelli's precepts and his practice. Machiavelli spent a great part of his life as a dedicated public servant, working tirelessly to advance the Florentine interest. He seems, however, to have done little to advance his own, and died, leaving his family in some poverty. He spent some years organising the Florentine militia, but he had no zest for killing and so far as one can tell, was never directly responsible for the death of any fellow being. When the Medici returned to power in 1512, Machiavelli, as protégé of the gonfalonier of the Republic, Soderini, was dismissed from office and forbidden to enter the Palazzo della Signoria. He retired to his small country estate and devoted himself to his writing; sometimes, during this period he whiled away his time with dice and cards in the local inn. Although, apparently, fond of his wife and family, he

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50 Robert Greene, *A Groats-worth of Wit*, ed.G.B. Harrison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), pp. 11-12.

also amused himself with love-affairs and late in life took a mistress called Barbera, to whom he was much attached. Despite some minor dissipation, then, Machiavelli's was hardly a vicious life. He died after making his confession, with his family and friends around him.

Yet for many Elizabethans, Machiavelli was as bad, or worse, than his Prince. He was accused of leading a wicked life and dying a bad death. He was, it was claimed, hated by his fellow Florentines and cast out of the city. "Ferraria could scarcely brooke Menardus a poysonous Phisitian", wrote Harvey, "Florence more hardly tollerate Macchiavel, a poysonous politician."[51] The idea that Machiavelli died blaspheming seems to have come from the Jesuit, Raynaud. Whatever their origins, these suggestions were taken up, combined and elaborated until, as in this passage from the *Groats-worth of Wit*, Machiavelli, living and dying, becomes a monster: "The brocher of this Diabolicall Atheisme is dead, and in his life had never the felicitie hee aymed at: but as he began in craft; lived in feare, and ended in despaire. Quam inscrutabilia sunt Dei judicia? This murderer of many brethren, had his conscience seared like Caine: this betrayer of him that gave his life for him, inherited the portion of Judas: this Apostata perished as ill as Julian..."[52] And yet Greene had read Machiavelli,

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51 Gabriel Harvey, *Pierce's Supererogation* in *The Works*, II, p. 94.

52 Greene, *Groats-worth*, p. 44

had visited his country and had studied the works of his contemporaries.[53] Behind the hysterical libelling lay an extensive first-hand knowledge of Machiavellian doctrine. It can hardly be stressed too strongly that Greene's experience and conduct represent, in extreme form, those of the Elizabethan public at large. Scandalous accretions of legend were gathered about the name of Machiavelli; these were read and repeated, and increased in number and luridity, but behind all this lay the informed reaction of a large body of readers, well versed in Machiavelli's original productions.

In the drama, the figure of the Machiavel reflects, in a rather more complex form, the Machiavelli of the prose literature. From the advent of Kyd's Lorenzo and Marlowe's Barabas, the stage Machiavel was often a compendium of all the vices, a devil incarnate. As such his origins can be traced back well beyond either the real Machiavelli or the purveyors of the legend, such as Gentillet. As Praz has shown, the Machiavel owes something to the villainous tyrant of Senecan tragedy;[54] indeed, sometimes, as in Jonson's *Sejanus* or Greene's *Selimus*, the Senecan figure merges so completely with the Machiavellian that the two cannot be distinguished. Again, the Machiavel derives some part of his character and of his role

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53 For some comment on Greene's travels and his knowledge of Italian see: J.L. Lievsay, "Robert Greene, Master of Arts, and 'Mayster Steeven Guazzo'," *Studies in Philology*, 36 (1939), 577-96, especially p. 579;
Mary Augusta Scott, *Elizabethan Translations from the Italian* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916).

54 Praz, p. 109.

from the Vice or the devil of the morality play; and just as a Davies might descant upon Machiavelli's delight in soul-catching, so some dramatists were ready to exploit the diabolical strain in the heredity of the Machiavel. Some of the most fiendish of the Machiavels are Moors, with faces of the devil's colour. A great number, including the Moorish group, exhibit the old stage devil's delight in evil for evil's sake. Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* laments that he cannot heap ten thousand more dreadful deeds upon those that he has done already, and Eleazar "the black Prince of Divels" looks forward to an eternity in hell, outacting his peers in "perfect villany."[55]

As well as being associated with stock figures of evil from earlier drama, the Elizabethan Machiavel, through the breadth of his villainy, is related to a whole range of contemporary stage types: the avenger; the malcontent; the pandar; the villainous Jew; the sorcerer; the rebel and even the comic entrepreneur. He becomes then, like the Machiavelli of popular legend, capable, in his various manifestations, of almost anything. Aaron and Eleazar are eminently lustful and Webster's Flamineo is a pandar. Barabas is enormously rapacious. Iago, although he delights above all in the cunning exercise of power, suggests, at times, that he lusts after Desdemona and that he is greedy of material gain.

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55 *Lust's Dominion*, I.i.90 and V.iii.166. The play is printed in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), IV. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. The play's early ascription to Marlowe is now generally rejected. "Instead, with some plausibility *Lust's Dominion* has been associated with *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy*, which Dekker, Day, and Haughton were writing for the Admiral's in February 1600", (Bowers, "Textual Introduction", p. 117).

There is in the drama very much less direct condemnation of Machiavelli's character and life than there is in the non-dramatic literature. The Machiavels often confess themselves Machiavelli's disciples; they follow his instructions and read his books, and it is on their heads that curses are heaped. The plays are full of denunciations of "the wretched Machiavelian" and "your Machiavellian villains", but when Machiavelli is condemned, it is almost always for the vile nature of his teaching rather than for the viciousness of his conduct. Marlowe, of course, brought Machiavelli on to the stage. The greater part of what Machevill has to say in his prologue is not quite so far from the maxims of *The Prince* as is generally supposed. Yet the real Machiavelli, transported in spirit from beyond the Alps, might well have been startled to find himself frolicking with the kind of friends that Marlowe seem to think he might have found congenial.

Certain conclusions can now be reached in this examination. First, the origins of the legend are older than Gentillet. J.C. Maxwell has substantiated this point, citing passages such as those which occur in Ascham's *A Report and Discourse...of the Affairs and State of Germany*.[56] Charges of atheism and of diabolical allegiance were levelled by Machiavelli's opponents from the time of Pole; stories of the Florentine's wicked life and bad death were current in England well before Gentillet became widely known. The Machiavel draws part, at least, of his colouring from images of wickedness familiar in

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56 J.C. Maxwell, "English Anti-Machiavellianism before Gentillet," *Notes and Queries*, New Series I (1954), p. 141.

England long before the French version of Machiavelli as the tutor of Catherine de' Medici was purveyed amongst the English. Gentillet contributed to the growth of the Machiavelli legend; he did not, as Meyer and his followers have suggested, create that legend.

Secondly, and more importantly, one may conclude that the legend, although fed by diverse elements, by prejudice and by superstition, grew, initially, from knowledge. We have seen that copies of Machiavelli's work were available to the Elizabethans; we have seen that these were read; we have seen that in particular instances, like that of Greene, and possibly Marlowe, a real acquaintance with Machiavellian doctrine lay behind extravagant contributions to the "legend". *A Groats-worth of Wit* and the figure of Barabas may not be the product of judicious assessment of Machiavelli's teaching, but they are not the product of ignorance or of exclusive dependence upon Gentillet. "This", says Irving Ribner, "is the undeniable fact which most scholars so far have failed to face; they have sought to explain the 'Machiavel' on the basis of Gentillet's work rather than on that of Machiavelli himself. And of all the factors which helped to build the monstrous legend with which his name was associated, Elizabethan acquaintance with his own works was the most important."[57]

Ribner is almost alone in admitting this much. However, even where this kind of admission is made, it is usually followed by an assertion that the Elizabethans did not understand what they read. Praz, for instance, demonstrates "that Gentillet's book was

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[57] Ribner, "The Significance of Gentillet's Contre-Machiavel," p. 155.

not the sole source for the English travesty of Machiavelli. This book, certainly, did much towards giving wide circulation to the Machiavellian scarecrow, and fixing its abiding characteristics, but the ground on which it fell had already been prepared to receive it."[58] But, very soon, Praz declares that Machiavelli's "original contribution to the theory of the modern state, his unprecedented method of study, could not be grasped by the contemporaries of the unfortunate Florentine."[59] Similarly, Ribner goes on to suggest that Machiavelli's contemporaries read his works "without the historical perspective that enables us to understand them today" and "failed also to realise that *The Prince* was an occasional work not meant to apply to conditions other than those of Italy in Machiavelli's day." He concludes: "The first reason, then, for the growth of the Machiavellian legend lay in the content of his works themselves and in the inability of the Elizabethan mind to see them in their proper perspective."[60] Thus the popular horror of Machiavelli, and the Machiavel, who reflects that horror, become now the product not of ignorance, but of misapprehension. The extent of that misapprehension will, I hope, become clearer when it is enquired, first, what the Elizabethans found most disturbing in Machiavelli's doctrines and, second, whether Machiavelli's own works supply any justification for their malaise.

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58 Praz, p. 94.

59 Praz, p. 96.

60 Ribner, "Contre-Machiavel," p. 155.

It was Machiavelli's "atheism" which from the time of Cardinal Pole most shocked and alarmed his major opponents. Since, as so many have been at pains to demonstrate, Machiavelli mentions God from time to time and does not actually deny his existence, I have so far treated Machiavelli's "atheism" largely as an ingredient in the sensational legend which grew up about his name. However, by no means all the charges of atheism proceed from the kind of hysteria displayed by Greene on his death-bed, so that it is worth enquiring what different suggestions are encompassed by the word atheist, as applied to Machiavelli, and what fundamental, unifying ideas underlie these suggestions.

The first kind of suggestion which sometimes, and apparently paradoxically, accompanied the charge of atheism was that Machiavelli favoured the wrong kind of religion; that he was, for instance, a pagan or an adherent to the Jesuits. Normally, however, this suggestion shaded off into condemnation of Machiavelli as the enemy of true religion; and true religion, according to the polemicist's allegiance, might be at one time the Roman Catholic faith, at another the Protestant, and at another Christianity in general.

It was largely Machiavelli's hostile attitude to the Papacy which led to his name being placed on the Index in 1559 and to his being burned in effigy by the Jesuits at Ingolstadt; it led also to the kind of attack exemplified by Thomas Bozio's *De Italiae statu antiquo et novo*. Bozio sets out to counter the argument, which Machiavelli presents in Chapter XII of *The Discourses*, where

the Roman Church is impugned for bringing Italy to ruin. Bozio seeks to establish that, on the contrary, the history of Italy reveals that "the Papacy has been the condition and cause of Italian prosperity."[61]

Despite Machiavelli's attitude to the Papacy and the detestation which this earned him, particularly amongst the Jesuits, for his Protestant critics Machiavelli and the members of the Society of Jesus appeared to have much in common. In *Ignatius his Conclave* Donne shows Machiavelli and Loyola both jockeying for position in the innermost chamber of Hell, and John Hull in *The Unmasking of the Politique Atheiste* sees the Jesuits as linked with Machiavelli by atheism and deceit.

More common than the specifically Catholic or Protestant attack, was that in which Machiavelli was condemned simply as pagan or as the enemy of the whole of Christendom. In The Epistle to the Reader, written by Thomas Bowes for the third English edition of Pierre de la Primaudaye's *Academie Française* there is this passage:

> In the fore-front of which companie [of Atheistes] the students of Machiavel's principles and practicers of his precepts may worthily be raunged. This bad fellowe whose works are no lesse accounted of among his followers than were Apollo's Oracles among the Heathen, nay then the sacred Scriptures are among sound Christians blusheth not to belch out these horrible blasphemies against pure religion,

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61 Burd (p. 58) sees this as Bozio's principal aim in *De Italiae statu antiquo et Novo*, IV (Col. Agr.: 1595).

> and so against God the author thereof, namely, That the religio of the heathen made them stout and courageous, whereas Christian religion maketh the professors thereof base-minded, timerous, and fitte to become a pray to everyone; that since men fell from the religion of the Heathen, they became so corrupt that they would beleeve neither God nor the Devil..." [62]

Bowes' argument is a little odd since he begins by suggesting that Machiavelli is a purveyor of atheism and goes on to attack him when he sees atheism as evidence of corruption; nonetheless the main point is clear: Machiavelli denies and attacks "pure religion" and thus denies "God the author thereof." For Bowes, as for others, there was little difficulty in reconciling Machiavelli the adherent to the wrong religion with Machiavelli the atheist.

Another charge constantly linked with that of atheism was that Machiavelli advocated the employment of religion in the interests of policy and suggested that piety be used to mask the politic design. There is no paradox here, since the assumption was always, of course, that there could be no genuine element in politic religion. Bowes, shifting his ground somewhat, accuses Machiavelli of wishing to "have all religion to be of like accompt with his disciples, except it be so farre forth as the pretence and shewe of religion may serve to set forward and effect their wicked pollicies."[63] Again, William Covell, having accused Machiavelli

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62 T. B[owes], "The Epistle to the Reader" in *The Second Part of the French Academie . . . By Peter de la Primaudaye . . . translated out of the second edition, which was revised and augmented by the Author* (London: 1594), n.pag.

63 B[owes], "The Epistle", n.pag.

of spreading atheism through Europe and of telling Princes "that there was no religion", goes on to ask: "Can any counsell bee more pernicious to the Common wealth? more dangerous to a Countrie? more fatall to a Prince? then...to seem to have that religion in shew, which he never meaneth to imbrace in trueth?"[64] The suggestion that Machiavelli was allied with the wrong religion, and the suggestion that he advocated the use of pretended religion to mask "wicked policies" both recur frequently in the literature with which we are concerned. Yet, as I have indicated, these suggestions are intended usually to amplify and not to replace the clear, central assertion that Machiavelli was indifferent to religious faith and failed to recognise God. Again and again one finds Machiavellians described as those "that neither care for God nor devill."[65] "For what shall I speake of Religion," asks Patericke, "whereof the Machiavellians had none...?"[66]

Already, behind the charges of favouring a false religion or of attacking Christianity, behind the suggestion that Machiavelli advocated politic religion or the plain, unvarnished accusation of denying God, one may discern a single, central idea: that Machiavelli put the things of this world, notably power and policy, first and put religion second or nowhere.

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64 Covell, sig. Bb^{v}.

65 Robert Greene, *The Second Part of Conny Catching*, ed. G.B. Harrison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p. 9.

66 Simon Patericke, "The Epistle Dedicatorie" in *A Discourse upon the Meanes of Wel Governing and Maintaining in Good Peace, a Kingdome ....Against Nicholas Machiavell*, translated into English by Simon Patericke (London: 1602), n.pag.

Behind the Jesuit defences of the Papacy lay the fundamental issue of the relation of Church and State, as Ribadeneyra, for instance, saw very clearly.[67] Behind the Protestant coupling of Machiavelli with the Jesuits lay the fear of the ruthless drive for temporal power, a drive in which, for men like Hull, the Jesuit seemed as ready as the Machiavel to set every religious principle aside. Behind the repeated assertions that Machiavelli was anti-Christian lay the idea that Machiavelli looked coolly upon all faiths and finally judged the religion of the Romans superior to Christianity, because he found this form of paganism more efficacious in securing temporal power. This, at least, is how John Levitt, translator of *The Discourses*, saw the matter in 1599. "Concerning my Author, it is objected against him, that (amongst other errors) in this booke, speaking of religions, he doth not distinguish them, nor preferreth the true and good, before the false and fained, as though hee would hold religion to be but a meere civil intention to hold the world in reverence and fear."[68]

With the charges of politic religion and hypocrisy, the basic idea concerning the order of Machiavelli's priorities comes clearly to the fore, and one can discern it again and again behind the straight forward denunciations of Machiavelli as an atheist, caring neither for God nor Devil. The anonymous author of *The Treatise of Treasons against Queen Elizabeth and the Crown of England*,

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67 See: Burd, pp. 56-57.

68 John Levitt, "The Epistle of the Translator to the Reader" in Napoleone Orsini, *Studii sul Rinascimento Italiano in Inghiltera* Firenze: Sansoni, 1937), p. 43.

for instance, makes no bones about Machiavelli's total lack of religion; he also reveals very clearly the alarming vision which called forth the cry of atheist, the vision of a world in which "civil policie" is dominant and religion the mere tool of the cynical ruler.

> And that it is, that I cal a Machiavellian State and Regiment: where Religion is put behind in the seconde and last place: where the civil Policie, I meane, is preferred before it, and not limited by any rules of Religion, but the Religion framed to serve the time and policy: when both by word and example of the Rulers, the ruled are taught with every change of Prince to change also the face of their faith and Religion: where in apparence and show only, a Religion is pretended, now one, now another, they force not greatly which, so that at hart there be none at all: where neither by hope nor fear of ought after this life, men are restrained from all manner vice, nor moved to any vertue what so ever: but where it is free to slaunder, to belie, to forswear, to accuse, to corrupt, to oppresse, to robbe, to murther, and to commit every other outrage, never so barbarous (that promiseth to advance the present Policie in hand) without scruple, fear, or conscience of hell or heaven, of God or Divil: and where no restraint or allurement is left in the heart of man, to bridle him from evil, nor to invite him to good: but for the vain fame only and fear of lay lawes, that reach no further then to this body and life: that I cal properly a Machiavellian State and Governance."[69]

This passage gives peculiarly clear and forceful expression to the central objection underlying a great number of the attacks upon Machiavelli, in which he was denounced as an atheist. The author of the *Treatise* makes no mention, however, of a second fundamental idea which lies behind a second group of charges of

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69 *Treatise of Treasons against Queen Elizabeth and the Crown of England* (1572), sig. a_5-a_5^v.

atheism. The *Treatise* reveals the secular state in all its horror, but says nothing to suggest that if men are wicked enough to divorce politics from religious faith, God will intervene in their affairs. The consequences will be terrible, but they are not here presented as proceeding from divine intervention. Yet for many, Machiavelli's cardinal error lay in ignoring the way in which the hand of God shaped human destiny, in explaining events in terms of virtù and fortune, in leaving God not only out of politics, but out of history. Machiavelli's remarks on David in *The Discourses* and on Moses in *The Prince* provoked widespread indignation, not because he spoke of these biblical heroes disparagingly, but because he failed to acknowledge God's responsibility for their success. Gentillet, for instance, writes: "C'est atheiste voulant monstrer toujours de plus fort, qu'il ne croit point aux sainctes Escritures, a bien osé vomir ce blaspheme, de dire que Moyse de sa propre vertu et par les armes s'est fait prince des Hebrieux...Moyse ne faisoit rien que par le conseil et puissance de Dieu seul."[70] William Covell, again, arraigns Machiavelli for counselling Princes to rely upon their own wisdom and "to ascribe felicitie to fortune, and not to vertue and true religion", and concludes: "I dare say thus much, that religious Princes, while confidently in a good cause, they have fullie relied upon God's assistance, they have notablie triumphed over all enemies: thus in the old Testament Abraham, Moses, Josua, Gedeon....all triumphed over multitudes of their enemies, because I [Religion] (howsoever contemned by prophane Machivel) was the sole conductor of all their armies."[71]

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70 Gentillet, *Contre-Machiavel*, p. 250.

71 Covell, sig. Bb^{v}-$Bb2^{v}$.

Not all Covell's contemporaries, of course, shared his certainty concerning God's willingness to uphold the champions of true religion and to utterly confound their enemies. Had they done so they might have found Machiavelli and his disciples less alarming than they did. As it was, the atheism of the Machiavellian was often seen as horrifying, not simply in itself, but in its consequences. For many, like the author of *The Treatise of Treasons*, once God was left out of man's calculations, once religion was reduced to a tool of policy, then the bedrock of morality was shattered and the chasm of universal chaos lay open.

Donne in *Ignatius his Conclave* has Ignatius attack Machiavelli for taking no more heed of the devil than of God: "This man, whilst he lived, attributed so much to his own wit, that hee never thought himselfe beholden to your [Lucifer's] helps...I must confesse, that hee had the same opinion of God also."[72] When Ignatius speaks, of course, Machiavelli's refusal to be guided by any authority other than "his own wit" has landed him in hell and rendered him eligible for a high place in the diabolical hierarchy. Clearly, in Donne's view, the man who looked only to himself in forging his code of conduct was bound to become closely allied to those evil powers, whose potency he refused to recognise. For Bacon, too, despite his admiration for much of Machiavelli's teaching, the disciple who was guided only by "an entire devotion

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72 John Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave*, ed. T.S. Healy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 33.

to the pressing of his fortune", and who consequently dispensed with "all the laws of charity and virtue",[73] would inevitably travel to his goal by foul ways.

The man who denied God in his heart and who shaped belief and conduct in accordance with his own unfettered ambition was seen as imperilling much more than his own soul. Cardinal Pole found that *The Prince* was the work of "an enemy of the human race" and "showed the means by which religion, goodness and all the fruits of virtue may be destroyed."[74] Patericke took up the idea of the destructive effects of Machiavellian principle and practice, declaring that in France the "continuall assault" of Machiavelli's books had "utterly destroyed, not this or that vertue, but even all vertues at once: Insomuch as it took Faith from princes; authoritie and majestie from lawes, libertie from the people; and peace and concord from all persons."[75]

Patericke's comment leads on to the chaotic effects which Machiavellian practices were seen as producing in the body politic. Tudor political theory was grounded in the conviction that the sovereign ruled under God and that the people should act always in accordance with divine will. While the argument might be turned various ways to justify various kinds of political conduct, there was little doubt that once God was set aside the way lay open to

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73 Francis Bacon, *De Augmentis* in *The Works*, ed. Spedding, Ellis and Heath (London: Longman, 1857-74), V, p. 17.

74 Pole, *Apologia*, p. 136.

75 Patericke, "The Epistle Dedicatorie", n.pag.

tyranny, to rebellion and to wholesale anarchy. The prince was free to act, governed only by considerations of his own policy and desire for "vain fame", and the people were free to sink into "all manner vice", checked only by "fear of lay laws, that reach no further then to this body and life."

The author of *The Treatise of Treasons* brings out very clearly the consequences of Machiavellism for the Christian monarchy. Donne takes matters a step further by representing Machiavellian practice as destructive not simply of one kind of stable government, but as destructive of every kind of political order. Donne's Machiavelli claims both to have taught how "a man might possesse, and usurpe upon the liberty of free Commonwealths"[76] and to have shown the people how to rebel and revenge themselves upon a prince.

As well as disruptive of political order, the Machiavellian atheist was seen as the enemy of the divine order of the universe. Since Machiavelli advocated that the prince should play the lion and the fox, he and his followers were represented as seeking to rob man of his natural, peculiarly human status. Alternatively, as Nicholas Breton pointed out,

> Where nothing for gaine must be forbidden
> ... divels in the shape of men are hidden.[77]

And for Greene, at least, a world filled with beasts and fiends in human shape could not long survive, but must fall in apocalyptic confusion:

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[76] Donne, *Ignatius*, p. 29.

[77] Nicholas Breton, *Mothers Blessing* in *The Works in Prose and Verse*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Privately printed: 1879), I, p. 8.

"What are his [Machiavelli's] rules but meere confused mockeries, able to extirpate in a small time, the generation of mankinde. For if sic volo, sic jubeo, hold in those that are able to command: and it be lawful Fas et ne fas to doe anything that is beneficiall, only Tyrants should possesse the earth, and they striving to exceed in tyranny, should each to other be the slaughter man; till the mightiest outliving all, one stroke were left for Death, that in one age man's life should ende."[78]

The Machiavellian, freed by his atheism from the bonds of morality, represented a frightful danger to individuals, to states, to everything which had been ordered under God. And the danger appeared all the more alarming because the Machiavellian, employing his reason in his own interests and calculating the odds in materialistic terms, exhibited a remarkable cunning. Blind he might be to the supramundane, to the ultimate significance of life and action, but his cold, hard logic could make him, for the pious, the scrupulous and the naive, a peculiarly formidable opponent.

Some, like John Melton, might comfort themselves with the reflection that the divorce of "reason and the discretion of present occasions" from "the triall of a good conscience" must lead to disaster, "for in reliquishing the same, for any present advantage, is not only very dangerous....but by degrees deprives a man utterly of his perfect judgement."[79] Others, however, were

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78 Greene, *Groats-worth*, pp. 43-44.

79 John Melton, *A Sixe-Folde Politician - Together with a Sixe-Folde Precept of Policy* (London: 1609), pp. 157-58.

all too well aware that the deceitful, carefully reasoned machination, the "politick arte" of Machiavelli's followers could be dangerous to others beside themselves. For instance, the anonymous author in his attack on Leicester in *Leycester's Commonwealth* writes that the Earl was able "to plunge his friend [Norfolk] over the eares in suspition and disgrace, in such sort, as he should never be able to draw himselfe out of the ditch againe, as indeed he was not, but died in the same. And herein you see also the same subtle and Machiavilian sleight, which I mentioned before, of driving men to attempt somewhat, whereby they may incure danger, or remaine in perpetuall suspition or disgrace. And this practice hee hath long used - and doth daily, against such as he hath will to destroy."[80]

The indictment brought against Machiavelli by writers other than the dramatists, is a substantial one. The main charges were that he was an atheist in that he reduced religion to a tool of power and policy and interpreted the events of history in wholly secular terms; that in cutting away Christian morality and setting up the individual will as the sole guide to conduct he opened the way to the destruction of virtue and to the disruption of order in man, the body politic and the encircling universe; and, finally, that although his teaching left his disciples free to commit any and every enormity, he specialised in instructing men in the use of reason to formulate deceitful "policy", to gain advancement by blind, ruthless cunning.

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80 *Lycester's Commonwealth* (1641), p. 149.

All this one finds mirrored in the central, distinguishing characteristics of the Machiavel. Some are not so much atheists as enemies of true religion, Moors or Jews, who are avowed enemies of all things Christian. Some are self-confessed atheists, like Selimus, who scorns religion as a disgrace to man, or the Guise in *The Massacre at Paris* who is ashamed that:

> a word of such a simple sound
> Of so great matter should be made the ground.
> (ii.68-69).

Almost all, even where there is no explicit denunciation of religion, simply ignore Heaven, and, like Edmund, put their faith in a material world, in their own virtù, and in the rule of force and fraud. Many use religion as a cloak for policy and delight in displaying a hypocritical piety, as Richard III does when he appears between two divines, or Barabas when he tells the holy friars:

> the burden of my sins
> Lie heavy on my soul; then pray you tell me
> Is't not too late now to turn Christian?
> (*The Jew of Malta*, IV.i.48-50).

The Machiavel is an egoist from the time of Lorenzo's "Ille trust my selfe, my selfe shall be my freend" (*The Spanish Tragedy*, III.ii.118).[81] As such he is amoral, recognising no traditional ethic, but drawing the imperatives for action from his own nature and his own needs, and his criteria from the success of his effects. He has no conscience and denies or negates any system which transcends himself. He is the enemy of traditional order, moral, social or universal. He is capable of anything; sometimes he is lustful; often he is greedy; always he is ambitious. Above all, he is destructive.

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81 All quotations from Kyd's works are from *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. Frederick S. Boas, 2nd ed. (1901; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

Like Iago he may throw innocent minds into turmoil and cause his victims to descend to the level of beasts. Like Bosola he may disrupt and destroy the bonds of kinship and love by treachery and murder; he may bring havoc and war to the state like Richard; finally, the chaos which he creates, like that wrought by the Arragonian brethren, may be reflected in images of a sterile and disordered universe, one of crooked trees, tempests, poison and disease.

In all this the reason of the Machiavel is employed not as the faculty which relates man to the divine, but as the tool which will enable him to grasp and hold power on earth. As Gostanzo says in Chapman's *All Fooles*:

> men have change
> Of speech and reason, even by Nature given them,
> Now to say one thing and another now,
> As best may serve their profitable ends.[82]
> (II.i.73-76).

The Machiavel is a consummate intriguer who, unfettered by any law but that of expediency, studies to become a master of the techniques of policy.

The reasoning of most earlier Machiavels is finally revealed as limited. God and goodness are commonly present in the plays, and since the Machiavel neither recognises nor respects these powerful forces he is normally defeated by them. Occasionally, as in the case of Edmund, it is, it seems, some spark of goodness in the Machiavel himself which kindles at the end, so that he strives

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82 All quotations from Chapman's works are from *The Plays and Poems of George Chapman*, ed. T.M. Parrott, 2 vols. (London: George Routledge and Sons, *Tragedies* 1910, *Comedies* 1914).

to frustrate his own scheming. Yet throughout the greater part of the plays the deceitful strategies of the Machiavel are usually remarkably successful. Most Machiavels are superb actors; like Muly Mahamet in *The Battle of Alcazar*, the Machiavel can

> Make show of friendship, promise, vow, and swear,
> Till, by the virtue of his fair pretence...
> He makes himself possessor of such fruits
> As grow upon such great advantages.[83]
> (II.iii.59-60; 62-63).

The superior cunning of the Machiavel and his insight into the weaknesses and vices, if not the virtues, of his victims enable him to outwit almost everyone. He is himself duped usually when he is no more than a comic aspirant, like poor Sir Politick Would-be, or when he is a tool-villain, who is destroyed by his Machiavellian master. Commonly he has things his own way until the final scene, and in some plays, particularly those of the later period, the cunning of the Machiavels is so great that some at least survive with their power undiminished. The nightmare world of *The White Devil* belongs finally to Francisco de Medicis, the supreme Machiavellian.

The Machiavel, then, reflects all those elements which the prose commentators saw as rendering Machiavelli's doctrines a threat to their ideology and to their civilisation. The question that now remains is whether the commentators and the dramatists in fact understood the true nature of these doctrines. Were they justified in seeing in Machiavellian theory a real and appalling danger to the foundations of their society?

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83 All quotations from Peele's works are from *The Works of George Peele*, ed. A.H. Bullen, 2 vols. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1888).

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ELIZABETHAN CHARGES

In presenting their case against Machiavelli the Elizabethans were fond of fastening upon separate maxims and passages which they found peculiarly objectionable. Much play was made with the comments on Christianity in *The Discourses* II.ii and III.i, which suggest that the "humility" and "abjectness" enjoined upon Christians have caused them to become feeble and "as prey to wicked men."[1] Similarly, a great deal was made of the statements in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince* concerning the need "to act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, or religion," while appearing always "a man of good faith, a man of integrity, a kind and a religious man." There is no doubt that Machiavelli wrote these passages; there is no doubt that those from *The Discourses* evince a certain dissatisfaction with Christian ethics and that the quotation from *The Prince* advocates the use of politic religion. The question at issue, however, is whether the Elizabethans understood the context in which the "wicked maxims"[2] occur. Did they simply gather together a collection of

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1 Quotations from *The Discourses* are in most instances from *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. Allan Gilbert. I have also consulted *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. Leslie J. Walker, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1950); and *The Prince and the Discourses*, intro. Max Lerner, Modern Library College Editions (New York: Random House, 1950).

2 The phrase is used ironically by Machiavelli's most indefatigable champion. Whitfield, p. 6.

excerpts which sounded hostile to Christianity or which exhorted princes to engage in hypocrisy and then leap to the conclusion that Machiavelli was an atheist and an enemy of order? Or did they base their charges of atheism and of breeding amorality, destruction and cunning upon a just and rational appraisal of the fundamental aims and doctrines underlying the main body of Machiavelli's work?

Atheism

Machiavelli's atheism was for the Elizabethans the foundation of all the error and evil in his teaching. Yet Machiavelli was, of course, no Selimus. He never steps forward with exhortations to "scorne religion", nor declares, "I count it sacriledge, for to be holy".[3] Indeed, Machiavelli can use pious phrases in a letter to a son; he can say in one place that "the gods did not judge the laws of this prince sufficient for so great an empire" (D.I.xi) and in another that a man seemed "ordained by God to redeem the country" (P.XXVI). In *The Discourses* Machiavelli can lavish praise upon the "heads and organizers of religion" (D.I.x), and in the final chapter of *The Prince* he can evince a prophetic fervour that has been likened to that of Savonarola.[4]

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[3] *Selimus*, ii. 251 and 245.
All quotations are from *The Tragical Reign of Selimus*, ed. W. Bang (1594; rpt. London: Malone Society, 1908). Bang remarks "that there is exactly the same evidence for ascribing *Selimus* to Greene, as for ascribing the *Battle of Alcazar* to Peele" (p. v).

[4] Whitfield, p. 66.

Conventional, affectionate phrases like "Christ keep you all"[5] are, however, probably less significant than the sort of thing that appears in a letter to Guicciardini, where Machiavelli assures his friend that there is no danger of his taking to religion.[6] The references to "the gods" and "God" are striking because the classical and Christian deities seem more or less interchangeable; he "forces not greatly which".[7] The eulogising of the "heads and organizers" of religion is particularly instructive. It occurs at the beginning of Chapter X of the first book of *The Discourses*, a chapter which, despite its opening sentence, turns out to be devoted entirely to questions of secular rule. In Chapter XI one meets Machiavelli's example of a man most worthy of eulogy as the "organizer" of a religion. This is Numa, "who pretended he was intimate with a nymph who advised him about what he was going to advise the people" and who, "finding a very savage people and wishing to bring it to obey the laws by means of the arts of peace, turned to religion as something altogether necessary if he wished to maintain a well-ordered state. And he established it in such a way that for many ages there was never so much fear of God as in that republic; this facilitated whatever undertaking the Senate or those great men of Rome planned to carry on".

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5 Machiavelli, A Letter to Guido Machiavelli, dated 2nd April, 1527 in *Machiavel: Toutes les lettres*, ed. Edmond Barincou (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), II, 540.

6 Machiavelli, A Letter to Guicciardini in reply to one of May 17th, 1521 in *Toutes les Lettres*, II, 446-47. (My translations).

7 *Treatise of Treasons*, sig. a3. Quoted above, p. 32.

Rather oddly, Meyer cites the chapter on Numa to support his contention that Machiavelli "was anything but an atheist"[8] and that the Elizabethans were misled by Gentillet into believing that he was. Levitt, one recalls, refers to Elizabethan commentators who object to *The Discourses* because Machiavelli makes no distinction between religions "as though hee would hold religion to be but a meere civil intention to hold the world in reverence and fear".[9] The ironies of all this are sufficiently plain.

The final chapter of *The Prince* is certainly fervent, and it is true that Machiavelli's fervour leads him to speak here, without any apparent strangeness, in the language of a prophet of the Old Testament. God is the friend of the house of Medici; "unheard wonders are to be seen, performed by God; the sea is divided, a cloud has shown you the way, water has gushed from the rock, it has rained manna". The chapter has occasioned an extraordinary amount of comment and controversy,[10] largely because it is so uncharacteristic of its author, because its tone, particularly, is exceptional. But this tone is not really the

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8 Meyer, p. 69.

9 Levitt, p. 48. Quoted above, p. 31.

10 See: Felix Gilbert, "The Nationalism of Machiavelli," in *Machiavelli: Cynic, Patriot, or Political Scientist*, ed. De Lamar Jensen (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1960), pp. 35-41, an extract from "The Concept of Nationalism in Machiavelli's Prince," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 1 (1954), 38-48; "The Humanist Concept of the Prince and *The Prince* of Machiavelli," *Journal of Modern History*, II (1939), 449-83; F. Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, trans. David Moore (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958), pp. 33-34; 99; F. Meinecke, ed. *Machiavelli, Der Fürst u.*

(cont'd overleaf)

product of religious feeling at all, but of an "emotional idealism"[11] that is nationalistic. Unlike Savonarola's, Machiavelli's hope and faith spring not from a vision of Christ as ruler of Florence, but from one of Italy as freed from the invading "barbari". Despite all their disagreements, most commentators reveal, sometimes implicitly, that it is extraordinary that Machiavelli should adopt the language of religion and that when he does so it is to give splendour and amplitude not to a religious idea, but to a political one.

Machiavelli is not always consistent. Sometimes, as Cochrane suggests, he hesitates to follow the logical consequences of his argument, horrified at what he has discovered.[12] Sometimes, according to Burd, the amorality that characterises his discussion of statecraft gives way to a "passing enthusiasm", to an "immense yearning to follow the good ages".[13] Even so there is nothing

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10 (Cont'd)
Kleinere Shriften (Berlin: R. Hobbing, 1923), I, 38-47. Much of the controversy surrounding the last chapter of *The Prince* has been concerned with the date at which the chapter was written and all of it has revolved around what Gilbert ("N. of M.") calls "the striking difference between the emotional idealism which pervades the national appeal of the last chapter of *The Prince* and the cold and realistic analysis of political forces which forms the distinguishing feature of the rest of the work." Gilbert and Meinecke explain the discrepancy by suggesting that the last chapter is a later addition. Chabod, on the other hand, insists that *The Prince* was dashed off as a whole between July, 1513 and the early months of 1514, and, in the final chapter, sees Machiavelli's scepticism "transformed into a heart-cry of hope and faith."

11 Gilbert, "The Nationalism of Machiavelli", p. 35.

12 Cochrane, p. 115.

13 Burd, p. 278, n. 17.

in Machiavelli's writings which suggests that the Elizabethans were deluded in seeing him as an atheist, nothing which demonstrates that Machiavelli, if not a Selimus, was not an atheist in the sense, common in the sixteenth century, of "a godless man",[14] nothing which negates the essentially godless nature of his central aims and doctrines.

Machiavelli's Aims

Machiavelli sets out, quite deliberately, to do something new. He makes this very clear in Chapter XV of *The Prince* and in the introduction to the first book of *The Discourses*. In *The Prince* he promises "an original set of rules" by which the ruler may govern his conduct. The rules will be original because "Many have dreamed up republics and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist", but Machiavelli will deal only with "things as they are in real truth", with "what is actually done", rather than with "what should be done". In the introduction to the first book of *The Discourses* Machiavelli announces that he has "determined to enter upon a path not yet trodden by anyone". He will turn to "books on history" not, as most men do, "to take pleasure in hearing of the various events they contain"; rather he intends to extract from the history of the ancient world certain lessons; in particular, lessons "in setting up states, in maintaining governments, in ruling kingdoms, in organising armies and managing war, in executing laws among subjects, in expanding an empire".

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[14] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. atheist.

In these almost casual statements of intention there is, then, a conscious rejection of traditional methods and assumptions; in writing *The Prince* Machiavelli is not concerned with imaginary, idealised states like those of Dante or Aquinas, nor with ideal princes, like those of the conventional medieval prince literature. Even the humanist contributions to the genre, though more secular in orientation than those of the middle ages, more prone to consider the political utility of princely virtue, and more apt to represent the ruler as an autonomous creative political force, do not go far enough for Machiavelli. As Felix Gilbert has shown, the humanist prince literature of Machiavelli's immediate predecessors still "sought to adapt and subordinate political theory to a theological or metaphysical pattern"[15] and still began "by accepting the traditional identity between the ideal prince and the ideal human being".[16] Machiavelli, taking "his stand on observation and experiences derived from political practice"[17] repudiates the idealist standpoint of all earlier prince literature, medieval and humanist alike.

Machiavelli's statement of intention, regarding the use of history in *The Discourses*, appears at first very much less revolutionary than his comments on his proposed treatment of

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15 Gilbert, "The Humanist Concept," p. 450.

16 Gilbert, "The Humanist Concept," p. 465.

17 Gilbert, "The Humanist Concept," p. 450.

political questions in *The Prince*. In turning to antiquity for guidance, for lessons in conduct, Machiavelli seems to be following not a new route but a very old one; the concept of history as a mirror, as a store-house of instructive exempla, like those of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, had become in the sixteenth century a time-honoured and familiar one. Yet the difference between Machiavelli's proposed use of history and that of Boccaccio is, in reality, very sharp. Unlike Boccaccio, Machiavelli does not intend to produce a series of exempla which will direct men to eschew the vanities of the world, to scorn the vagaries of fortune, and to seek the security of spiritual union with the divine. On the contrary, Machiavelli will elicit from his study of history guidance of a kind that will assist men to understand and to control the world in which they live, a world in which the forces which determine the course of events are largely political ones. And behind the difference in the kind of guidance offered by Machiavelli and that offered by Boccaccio there lies a more profound difference. Boccaccio, like the moralists and chroniclers of the middle ages, can be at times "realistic", but Chabod has drawn a very clear distinction between the incidental realism of medieval historiography and the "conceptual realism" of historians like Machiavelli and Guicciardini.[18] He remarks of the medieval writers:

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[18] Chabod, p. 175.

> If the detail is 'realistic', the general conception is not, inasmuch as the Prime Mover of life and of human history is located outside the world and the destinies of men are invariably determined by the will of God. The sensibility is 'human' and 'mundane'; but the spirit is nourished by an inner life whose centre lies outside the earthly city and carnal humanity. . . . With Machiavelli, on the other hand, there is no further intervention on the part of God or the devil, the Saints or the enemy of the human generation. Everything is determined by human agencies . . . Everything is reduced to a purely worldly level. There is no interference from the other world - unless it be a sort of natural almost mechanical fatality, a note of naturalistic determinism which has nothing to do with the Christian conception of history as expressed by men like St Augustine and Otto of Freisingen.[19]

Machiavelli, then, in rejecting the traditional methodologies, was rejecting also a whole body of underlying philosophical, religious and ethical assumptions. Earlier writers and even the humanist contributors to prince literature had seen the universe as organised in accordance with divine will. For them there was an ideal arrangement of parts and humours within the body and of faculties within the mind; man, the microcosm stood within a social hierarchy, with the ruler at its head; human society stood within a greater hierarchy between the ordered ranks of angels and beasts. Man inhabited a world, composed, like himself, of four proportioned elements and standing in its appointed place amongst the planets. Hence every object, every activity and every living being formed part of a vast, cohesive, hierarchical design, created and ordered by God. It was, of course, recognised that a man, even a prince,

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[19] Chabod, p. 180.

might fail to exhibit those virtues proper to his station and so disrupt the ideal order of the cosmos, but his failure was seen not simply as a crime against humanity but as a sin against God, who ultimately would punish the sinner and exalt the faithful.

Since this organic body of idealist doctrine formed the foundation upon which discussion of politics and history had been raised, that discussion had been necessarily much concerned with the nature and motivation of society, with the divine origin of princely power and with the subject's duty to the ruler whom God had anointed. It had sought to supply metaphysical answers to questions of why political conduct should be of a given kind, or of why historical events had taken a particular course. It had been concerned hardly at all with questions of "how", with the techniques of policy or with the practical business of exerting control over the destinies of governments, states and peoples.

Machiavelli, in insisting that he will take his stand on "things as they are in real truth" or "what is actually done" rather than "what should be done" at one stroke cuts away the whole idealist foundation of medieval political theory and medieval historical interpretation. "The universe for Machiavelli," writes Mazzeo, "no longer possessed the extraordinary degree of symmetrical and rational order that the scholastics had conferred upon it.... The old, highly specified, supernatural had become irrelevant and had been replaced with an indefinite natural world, imperfectly knowable, but certainly knowable in some sufficient degree to permit

successful action, at least at times".[20] Machiavelli, recognising that princes cannot exhibit ideal virtue, will jettison the idealist vision and cut his coat according to his cloth; he will begin with the world as he can see it, and what he sees is an Italy of new rulers whose success rests upon force and fraud, and whose authority is unhallowed by tradition or by divine sanction; in his Roman histories he sees accounts of a world where emperors and states rose and fell in accordance with their virtù, with their ability to resist the cyclical pull of history and the malignity of Fortune. "Thus", says Felix Gilbert, "all trace of the idealised human personality as such vanished from Machiavelli's portrait of the prince, and its place was taken by the super-personal conception of reasons of state".[21] More importantly, as the Elizabethans perceived, all trace of the supramundane origin of the ideal also vanished from Machiavelli's universe, and its place was taken by a mechanistic nature and an ambivalent Fortune.

Chabod links Machiavelli with Guicciardini; both are seen as rejecting the medieval Christian view of history. And Chabod, of course, is quite correct in seeing the two historians as adopting a new and humanistic approach to history. But Machiavelli, in the introduction to *The Discourses* does not simply see himself as a member of a revolutionary group; he insists that he is following an entirely new route. As in *The Prince* he dissociates himself from both his predecessors and his humanist contemporaries. Although he

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[20] Mazzeo, p. 92.

[21] Gilbert, "The Humanist Concept", p. 470.

may have much in common with Guicciardini, in some sense he sees himself as quite different; again he will go further than anyone has gone before.

Other men, says Machiavelli, see only variety in history and do not think of imitating the ancients "as if the sky, the sun, the elements, men were changed in motion, arrangement and power from what they were in antiquity" (D.I.Intro.). For Machiavelli the conduct of men is as unchanging as the motions of the planets. Fortune to a limited extent remains erratic and incalculable, but for the most part human activity is governed by laws as definable and fixed as the laws of physics. History, then, becomes a repository of scientific formulae, and once these are discovered and understood, Machiavelli is "able to create a science of politics in the sense of a body of rules upon which government should act and absolutely rely".[22] It is Machiavelli's discovery that history reveals a series of recurrent patterns, that actions which produced a given effect in one age, will produce it in another; hence an answer to contemporary problems is to be found in imitation of the successful strategies of the ancients. In this reduction of policy to a science, Machiavelli went far beyond his contemporaries. He insisted in effect, that political activity was governed by unchanging, definable laws of its own which existed quite independently of the will of a just and beneficent God. And in the examination of those laws and in the resulting formulation of

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22 Herbert Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli* (1940; rpt. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1955), p. 25.

maxims, Machiavelli attempted the adoption of a strictly scientific, inductive method of approach. All Machiavelli's questions were to be purely political ones and all answers were to be given in exclusively political terms. Whereas the medieval writer "deduces the prince's political duties from those principles of natural justice by which the prince himself was bound and which it was his duty to see applied",[23] Machiavelli recognises no lex aeterna, no natural justice, and no duty to anything beyond the political arena. The prince, approaching, say, the question of the extermination of the family of a deposed ruler, must consider only the political issues involved and must exclude the irrelevancies of morality and religion. In short, the prince must proceed like the Machiavel, for whom goodness and God have no meaning or reality.

Machiavelli sets out, then, to deal in concrete realities and, in so doing, closes off the political arena from anything which defies analysis in terms of his particular science. Anything as amorphous or irrelevant as God or Christian ethics is firmly excluded, and both question and answer regarding human conduct are framed in terms of the political science which Machiavelli may be said to have founded. Machiavelli proceeds by induction, building upon his observation of the realities of political conduct an "original set of rules". By means of these rules or maxims, Machiavelli aims at revealing how any and every political problem may be solved.

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[23] Gilbert, "The Humanist Concept", p. 460.

The implications of this last point are important. Machiavelli is not interested simply in "right knowledge" for its own sake; rather he is a teacher, a polemicist, seeking to demonstrate and to persuade. Obviously he is in part concerned to find solutions to the problems created by the weakness and instability both of Florence, the state he served, and of Italy as a whole. Yet to argue that Machiavelli, especially in *The Prince*, addresses himself only to the Medici or to Italy, or that the measures which he advocates are intended solely as drastic solutions to a quite exceptional problem is to misunderstand the entire nature of his enterprise. When Ribner accuses the Elizabethans of failing "to realise that *The Prince* was an occasional work not meant to apply to conditions other than those of Italy in Machiavelli's day"[24] there is revealed a failure of comprehension very much more profound than any of which the Elizabethans were guilty.

Machiavelli, as I have suggested, was convinced that human nature was unchanging and that historical events recurred in a ceaseless pattern. These convictions were part of the basis upon which his whole body of historical and political theory rested. Thus it was impossible for him to see the Italian situation as exceptional. Indeed, it was precisely because he did not see that situation as unique that he felt himself qualified to suggest remedies. He alone had discovered the fixed laws of history by a scientific examination of events parallel to those occurring in Italy; he alone was aware that what had saved other states could

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[24] Ribner, "Contre-Machiavel", p. 155.

save his own; he alone knew the value of exhorting a prince to imitate the lives and actions of men of other ages.

Machiavelli's main preoccupation is with the establishment of stable government anywhere and everywhere. Machiavelli is fond of medical metaphors and in some sense he is much like a physician who, using the methods of a science which he believes to be "universally valid",[25] gives to his plague stricken city in the first instance, and after that to the world, the infallible cure for a universal evil. But the trouble is that for Machiavelli the achievement of stable government becomes so supremely important that he seems sometimes very like a physician who is prepared to eradicate plague by killing his patients. For Machiavelli makes it quite clear that in the interests of stability, individuals, groups and even whole populations may be coerced, crushed and even eliminated. Stability is an end which justifies any means; "because when it is absolutely a question of the safety of one's country, there must be no consideration of just or unjust, of merciful or cruel, of praiseworthy or disgraceful; instead, setting aside every scruple, one must follow to the utmost any plan" (D.III.xli). Considerations of religion, of course, are not mentioned; and, indeed, where religion is "but a meere civil intention to hold the world in reverence and fear",[26] why should it stand as a barrier to the achievement of that stability which it exists only to promote?

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[25] Butterfield, p. 103.

[26] Levitt, p. 43.

Such then were Machiavelli's aims: the rejection of the methods of earlier political theorists and historians and hence the rejection of the medieval Christian view of the world; the substitution of a concept of politics as an autonomous area; the prosecution of enquiry within that area in purely scientific, inductive and necessarily amoral and irreligious terms, and the consequent establishment of a body of doctrine, designed to ensure political stability before all else. And all this, as the Elizabethans saw, although addressed to Italians and designed in in the first place to cure the ills of Italy, was seen as "permanently applicable and universally valid".[27] That may well be why the Elizabethans feared Machiavelli so much and descanted repeatedly upon the growth of his godless influence.

Machiavelli's Doctrines

In order to lend some further substance to these contentions, I must move now from an examination of the essentially atheistical nature of Machiavelli's aims to some exposition of his doctrines. Machiavelli's assumption that "men are wretched creatures" (P.XVIII) is, according to Burd, "the main postulate upon which all turns".[28] "As is demonstrated", states Machiavelli, "by all those who discuss life in a well ordered state - and history is full of examples - it is necessary for him who lays out a state and arranges laws for it to presuppose that all men are evil and that they are going to act according to the wickedness of their spirits whenever they have

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[27] Butterfield, p. 103.

[28] Burd, p. 303. Burd cites *The Discourses*, I.iii; I.ix; I.xxvii to support his contention.

free scope" (D.I.iii). If, at first, there appears to be some similarity between this assessment of humanity and the Augustinian emphasis upon original sin, one finds, ultimately, that the differences between the two views are particularly arresting. For Machiavelli there is no grace and no redemption save the political one brought by the strong hand of the law-giver. Machiavelli's man is the prisoner of his irredeemable nature and of a universe from which the supernatural transcendence of frustration is firmly excluded.

And human nature, as we have seen, does not change: "all cities and all peoples have the same desires and the same traits and ... they always have had them" (D.I.xxxix). Men, already much alike in all ages, "nearly always follow the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation" (P.VI). Thus it is that the history of mankind emerges as a series of recurrent patterns and that the governments set up by men pass through the same stages. Governments are formed and laws established which, with varying degrees of success, force men to subdue their instincts and to exhibit virtù; virtù brings peace, peace brings idleness and corruption and the state degenerates. Then, if the state is to survive, a new law-giver intervenes to establish a fresh constitution, which again forces men to limit their desires. But eventually the new government lapses again into anarchy.[29]

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29 The shape of the basic pattern of the state's development and decline is described in a number of places and forms one of the most important foundations of Machiavelli's political theory. The most exhaustive account is in *The Discourses* I.ii.

In this pattern the figure of the prince or law-giver assumes supreme importance. He is the source of morality; there is no natural law in Machiavelli's world, there is only the law of the law-giver, which, if it is well framed, forces men to recognise that their own interests will be served best by the recognition and protection of the public interest. Goodness and justice change their forms, then, from one age to another. Since they are not rooted in any supramundane truth, but solely in the will of the prince, they change as the laws of the state change.

In framing his laws and policies the prince should not consult conscience or religion, but should learn from the example of the ancients, following such rules as Machiavelli lays down. He must realise that the end of establishing stable government justifies any means, including ones such as Cesare Borgia employed to rid himself of the turbulent Orsini. "The duke used every device of diplomacy to reassure Paulo, giving him gifts of money, clothes and horses; and so their simplicity led the Orsini to Sinigaglia, into his hands. The leaders were destroyed and their followers were forced into the duke's camp. The duke had laid excellent foundations for his future power" (P.VII).

The establishment of stable government, which means at the crucial points in the state's cycle the establishment of the power of the law-giver, becomes for Machiavelli the sole criterion of action. When he advises the prince not to interfere with his subjects' women or not to load his people with taxes, when he advises

the encouragement of trade and agriculture, the motive is always the same. There is never any question of whether chastity or mercy or generosity are pleasing to God or intrinsically good, there is never any question of the value of human life or of the rights of a man as a human being or as a citizen or as the possessor of an immortal soul. The prince, says Machiavelli, "will be hated above all, if as I said, he is rapacious and aggressive with regard to the property and the women of his subjects. He should refrain from these. As long as he does not rob the great majority of their property or their honour, they remain content. He then has to contend only with the restlessness of a few, and that can be dealt with easily and in a variety of ways" (P.XIX).

Religion is simply grist to the prince's mill. This is brought out clearly in all three books of *The Discourses* and in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*. In Chapters XI-XV of the first book of *The Discourses* Machiavelli shows that "the Romans realised that religion has an important instrumental value as a system of fictions which can create and consolidate power through the belief of the ruled in the fictions offered to them by those who exercise power."[30] In Book III religion is seen as useful in disciplining the army (D.III.xxxiii), and in *The Prince* it becomes a necessary ingredient in the Machiavellian recipe for maintaining princely prestige.

According to Machiavelli's theory of history, the prince, if he follows the rules and exhibits virtù has a good chance of

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[30] Mazzeo, p. 110.

outwitting Fortune.[31] Indeed virtù is exactly that blend of qualities which enables a man to chart scientifically the course of events and to control it in the light of his knowledge, so that the area over which chance holds sway is reduced to a minimum.

The nature of chance or Fortune in Machiavelli's world is not always entirely clear. Sometimes Fortune is seen as a natural force, such as a river (P.XXV) and in this guise becomes part of a gigantic mechanism, operating in accordance with fixed laws. Thus, in the second book of *The Discourses* Machiavelli sees nature and the human race as linked in a necessary, ceaseless process of accumulation and spontaneous "purgation" (D.II.v). When it becomes necessary for the world to relieve itself of an excess of population, that excess is destroyed by pestilence, famine or inundations. Since inundations form part of a scientific process, a man of sufficient knowledge and foresight can understand and control their motions. Hence, when Fortune takes the form of a raging torrent, it can be tamed by the technical expertise of the builder of dykes and embankments (P.XXV).

But Fortune is not always seen as governed by the laws of nature and science. Shortly after describing Fortune as a river, Machiavelli likens her to a woman, who favours young men and who submits to impetuosity and force (P.XXV). At this point, and at

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31 Two of the most useful discussions of Machiavelli's concept of virtù are: Wood, "Machiavelli's Concept of Virtù Reconsidered," pp. 159-72, and Mazzeo pp.92-96 and 153-57. Both refer to a large number of other discussions, and Mazzeo includes comment on the interplay of virtù and Fortune.

others, Fortune becomes very like a pagan goddess, independent, capricious and often malign. All in all, Machiavelli seems to feel that there is no possibility of outwitting Fortune always and at every turn, but he is sure that the man of virtù can become at least "arbiter of half the things we do" (P.XXV). By this, of course, he does not mean that Fortune may destroy the body, but cannot touch the virtuous soul, - neither this form of medieval orthodoxy, nor the Dantesque vision of Fortune as an arm of God's providence have any place in Machiavelli's doctrine. He means simply that men who are, in Wood's phrase "predominantly warriors who triumph in circumstances of extreme danger, hardship and chance",[32] men who can foresee the future and "who adapt their policy to the time" (P. XXV) can remain impervious to all but the most deadly of Fortune's strokes.

In summary, Machiavelli's principal doctrines may be listed in the following way. Men are wretched creatures, guided always by self-interest; human nature does not change and one situation is rendered even more like another because men imitate their predecessors. Thus the history of every state follows a set pattern, an alternation of periods in which men are brought to see that their interests are best served by accepting the rule of law with periods in which men's irradicable greed and ambition create anarchy and corruption. It is, then, the law-giver who is chiefly responsible for rejuvenating the state and who is the source of the

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[32] Wood, p. 165.

standards by which conduct is governed; he is, himself, guided by no principle other than the achievement and preservation of political stability, but if he is wise he will chart his course in accordance with laws which emerge from a study of the recurrent patterns of history. Such wisdom, combined with military skill, physical prowess and cunning, constitutes virtù, the best defense against Fortune; for Fortune, although in part mysterious, is linked to some extent with the calculable march of historical events and with the mechanistic operations of nature, but never with the hand of God.

Amorality and Egoism

For the author of *The Treatise of Treasons*, once God was expelled from the state, the only solid ground of morality disappeared. There remained only "vain fame and fear of lay laws", to incite men to virtue and keep them from vice. I have spent some time in trying to show that Machiavelli did, indeed, think in terms of a godless world, and I have already said something to suggest that he was left with no real moral imperative, that the Elizabethans were right in seeing Machiavelli's universe as an amoral one in which men are guided solely by egoism and in which "sic volo, sic jubeo" alone holds.[33]

Those who insist that the Elizabethans were quite mistaken in regarding the Machiavellian universe as amoral, usually adopt one of two main lines or argument. One group of apologists insists that Machiavelli's teaching is, after all, essentially moral. This group,

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[33] Greene, *Groats-worth*, pp. 43-44. Quoted above p. 37.

while often admitting that Machiavelli excludes any supramundane source of moral sanctions, is much given to brandishing his "humanism". Sometimes humanism is used to mean simply intense interest in the exploration and imitation of the ancient world, and Machiavelli is seen as developing some kind of "civic religion" akin to that of the Romans, and forming the foundation of a stern and venerable ethic.[34] More often, Machiavelli is presented as "humanistic" in having some basic belief in the natural goodness and nobility of man, in being filled with boundless optimism and in revealing an intense desire to promote "benefit common to everybody" (D.I. Intro).

The second group of Machiavelli's champions see him less as a humanist than as a technician. The argument here is that Machiavelli recognised the need for an honest appraisal of political practice and that he made that appraisal in scientific, amoral terms. But, apparently, Machiavelli had no wish to exclude Christian morality from any area but the political one; nor even in his analysis of political factors did he actually deny the validity of traditional morals; he simply left them on one side. "To be sure", says Cassirer, "he had his personal feelings, his political ideals, his national aspirations. But he did not allow these things to affect his political judgement. His judgement was that of a scientist and a technician of political life."[35]

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34 Ernesto Landi, "The Political Philosophy of Machiavelli," trans. Maurice Cranston, *History Today*, 14 (1964), 550-55.

35 Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, (1946: rpt. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1955), p. 194.

In order to decide whether the Elizabethans were correct in asserting that Machiavelli saw man as essentially egoistic and taught that nothing remained but for the more powerful egoist to curb the weaker one, we must go on now to examine the various defences of Machiavellian morality that I have outlined. Machiavelli is undoubtedly a humanist in his dedication to the study and imitation of antiquity, above all, of ancient Rome. Machiavelli consults the classics at almost every point, citing more than twenty classical authors in *The Discourses*. Even in *The Prince*, with its more obvious concern with contemporary Italy, he turns constantly to a wide range of authorities, including Cicero, Polybius, Aristotle, Herodian, Xenophon and Livy. And, of course, Machiavelli repeatedly advocates imitation of the statecraft of the Romans; as I have tried to show such advocacy forms an integral part of his historical theory and provides the starting-point for *The Discourses*. But whether Machiavelli can be said also to have borrowed from the ancient world any philosophical basis for morality, or to have advocated imitation of the more refined Roman virtues, is very much more doubtful.

There are hints of Stoicism in Machiavelli's writing. His view of history as a series of cycles, for instance, has some resemblance to Stoic theory, but there is nothing in *The Prince* or in *The Discourses* of the Stoic doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man or of the consequent duty of benevolence and justice. Moreover, the Stoical movement towards detachment from, and independence of, the outer world is replaced by concentration upon

man's involvement in the mechanism of nature and in the interplay of political forces. Again, while certain Roman virtues, like military skill or valour, are much admired in, say, Romulus or Camillus or Scipio Africanus, Machiavelli's virtù, for all its shifts of meaning, remains usually a very much more limited concept than Roman "virtus". As Mazzeo shows, "virtù" normally "means sheer ability, prudence in the sense of practical insight and the power to act on it, without any ethical meaning attached".[36]

When Landi claims that Machiavelli wished to establish "his kind of republican ethos"[37] by setting up a new religion, based upon those of ancient Rome, a "civic religion, fostering patriotism and virtù", he seems to me to have been swept away by a rather wild enthusiasm. Certainly, Machiavelli insists that the prince must develop virtù in his subjects, and patriotism, in the sense of loyalty to the state or to the prince, is a very valuable quality in native troops. But neither of these qualities has much to do with any "ethos", with ethics or with morality; "virtù" is much as Mazzeo describes it, and patriotism, as is clear from *The Discourses*, III, xli, can be destructive of every ethical consideration. Nor is either quality sustained by anything which might be called a "civic religion." Rather, the people are thrust into virtù and patriotism by the law, and they accept the law either because they are induced to believe in some divine authority, more authoritative than the civil one, or because they are impressed by the goodness of

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36 Mazzeo, p. 156.

37 Landi, p. 552.

the law giver. But both the "divine authority" and the "goodness" of the law giver are, as Machiavelli makes plain, essentially spurious.

"For there are many good laws," writes Machiavelli, "the importance of which is known to the sagacious law giver, but the reasons for which are not sufficiently evident to enable him to persuade others to submit to them; and therefore do wise men, for the purpose of removing this difficulty resort to divine authority" (D.I.xi). Divine authority, that is, of the kind represented by Numa's imaginary nymph. Alternatively, the people may accept the law because they admire their prince; "men are won over by the present far more than by the past; and when they decide that what is being done here and now is good, they content themselves with that and do not go looking for anything else. Indeed, in that case they would do anything to defend their prince" (P.XXIV). But, again, of course, the "goodness" of the prince is as spurious as the reality of Numa's nymph; it is, as Machiavelli spends much time in demonstrating, a matter of carefully contrived appearances. What is left is not a "civic religion" or any other genuine source of morality, but simply blind acceptance of fraud, calculated to develop not ethical sensibility but political viability. We appear to have come back to the "sic volo, sic jubeo" of those that are able to command.

So far Machiavelli's humanism has not yielded any very solid alternative to the nightmare world of amorality and egoism envisaged by Robert Greene. But, perhaps, if one discards the

limited concept of humanism which has been examined in the preceding paragraphs for something broader and more inspiring, a new Machiavelli will emerge and we shall discover a thinker whose morality is grounded in some exalted vision of humanity. For, according to Whitfield, Machiavelli "speaking the language of the humanists" expresses a "spirit of optimism" which "is the starting point for the whole of the *Discourses*". Moreover, it is useless to counter this optimism by pointing to any pessimistic utterances, for these are merely "neo-classical precepts...that may belie the temperament of Machiavelli."

At times the remarkable subtlety of Whitfield's arguments is bewildering. When one attempts to analyse his various statements regarding Machiavelli's humanistic optimism, that bewilderment grows deeper. After suggesting that it does not really matter very much that Machiavelli thought men naturally bad, because Dante and Bossuet thought so too, Whitfield goes on to cite two passages from *The Discourses* which are intended to suggest that, after all, Machiavelli thought men naturally good.[38] The first of these two passages comes from Chapter X of the first book of *The Discourses*; Machiavelli is speaking here of the reaction of "any prince" to a reading of Roman history: "Without doubt, if a prince is of human birth, he will be frightened away from any imitation of wicked times and will be fired with an immense eagerness to follow the ways of good ones." The second passage is from the introduction to *The Discourses*, where Machiavelli describes himself as "driven by

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[38] Whitfield, p. 16.

the natural eagerness I have always felt for doing without any hesitation the things that I believe will bring benefit common to everybody." Continuing his argument, Whitfield goes on to suggest that "the presupposition of the *Discorsi* is that the ordini of the world are wrong, through lack of knowledge."[39] But Machiavelli intends to supply "right knowledge" and hopes, it seems, to bring about some profound change.

The first comment that might be made on all this is that whereas Dante and Bossuet did not see human wickedness as universal, permanent and irredeemable, Machiavelli begins with the basic assumption that men are guided entirely by self-interest. More important, perhaps, is that Machiavelli's solution to the problem of human nature is to appeal to that self-interest, or to resort to fraud and force, which are perfectly justified because everyone uses them and "men are wretched creatures." Neither Dante nor Bossuet, of course, appeals to man as bad, and neither finds in human wickedness a good reason for being wicked oneself. It is not very profitable, indeed it is quite "useless," to try to dismiss Machiavelli's statements on human nature as "neo-classical precepts" which are somehow extraneous; if one were to cut out all the neo-classical precepts in Machiavelli's writings one would not be left with much; if one were to cut out his fundamental postulate concerning the natural greed and selfishness of men, one would be left with even less. I have already tried to show how Machiavelli's political and historical theories evolve from his view of mankind.

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[39] Whitfield, pp. 16-17.

It might also be pointed out now that the form in which Machiavelli presents his advice to the prince and the nature of the details of that advice are alike determined by Machiavelli's pessimistic evaluation of the human race.

In both *The Prince* and *The Discourses* Machiavelli appeals almost always to the self-interest of the prince. Even when he is discussing Agathocles, who came to power by crime, Machiavelli seeks to dissuade the prince from employing "criminal" methods by appealing to a desire for glory. Troubled perhaps by the very striking resemblance between the tactics of Agathocles and those of his hero, Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli shifts his ground and holds up the Sicilian's use of cruelty as exemplary. But the nature of the appeal to the prince remains the same; he who employs cruelty wisely can "live securely in his own country and hold foreign enemies at bay, with never a conspiracy against him by his countrymen" (P. VIII). Whether exhorting the prince to shun the methods of an Agathocles or to emulate them, whether appealing to a love of glory or to a desire to maintain power in security, Machiavelli's advice is shaped by the same conviction: that the prince, like all other men, is motivated by self interest. And this conviction is still there beneath the rhetoric of Chapter X of *The Discourses*, the chapter which ends in a climax, of which the first of Whitfield's quotations forms a part. "It is impossible," says Machiavelli that if new rulers and established ones "were to read histories and get profit from the records of ancient things", they should not prefer to emulate men such as Scipio, Agesilaus, Timoleon and Dion rather than

ones such as Caesar, Nabis, Phalaris and Dionysius. And why? "Because they will see that the latter are censured to the utmost and the former exceedingly praised. They will see also that Timoleon and the others did not have in their native cities less authority than did Dionysius and Phalaris, and will see that by far they had more security." Machiavelli goes on to show that usually "wicked" rulers are assassinated while "good" ones normally die a natural death. It is clear then that the "immense eagerness" to follow the example of the good, for Machiavelli, becomes an immense eagerness to be admired, to remain secure and to stay alive. For him, there are no other motives which can prompt a prince to avoid the more obvious, foolish and dangerous forms of tyranny.

Of course, Whitfield's second quotation does suggest that in one way Machiavelli modifies his pessimistic view of mankind. In Machiavelli's opinion there is one person who is inspired by a natural altruism: that is himself. He alone is concerned with "benefit common to everybody". But, as I have already tried to show, Machiavelli, like so many promulgators of doctrinaire systems, loses sight of this common benefit in his obsession with an abstraction, in his case the stability of governments. It is to teach men how to promote stable government that *The Discourses* is written. But that in itself does not seem evidence of a very extraordinary optimism. Machiavelli does not expect to bring about any very great change; certainly he does not expect to change men, who are everywhere and always selfish and bad. Rather he hopes, by offering to the ruler some useful techniques which have been proved

efficacious, to postpone the inevitable decay of states. These techniques will achieve the desired result because they are framed in accordance with the knowledge, which Machiavelli alone holds, of the precise degree of ruthlessness and cunning required to manipulate the self-interest of individuals and groups. They are described not in any spirit of humanistic optimism, but in one of pessimism, allied with a strange vanity. Machiavelli's vision is not then "humanistic" in any broad and splendid sense; his world remains a machine inhabited by natural egoists, and since there is nothing beyond this world, human egoism remains a total, compelling reality. There is no possibility of escaping from it or of changing it, and no reason to attempt the impossible. One moves then a little closer to the Elizabethan idea that in the Machiavellian universe egoism is inevitable, and that, for Machiavelli, there is little point in pretending otherwise, except, of course, when one has to engage in the rhetoric of deceit.

Those who try to counter the charge of amorality, which the Elizabethans brought against Machiavelli's teaching, will not find any very solid ground for defense in Machiavelli's "humanism". Neither his borrowings from classical writers nor his advocacy of imitation of the ancients involves the transposal of any classical system of morality into the Machiavellian universe. To suggest that he erects some form of moral code upon what might be termed a "humanistic" vision of the nobility of man is simply to ignore the fundamental postulate which underlies both his theory and his method of presentation.

Some, however, have tried to show that Machiavellian theory may be amoral, but that, like any scientist, Machiavelli deals only in limited terms with a limited area. Cochrane, for instance, seems to suggest that Machiavelli sees politics as a special kind of activity, like botany or brick laying, with its own laws and its own techniques; beyond the political arena traditional morality remains intact. "Machiavelli did not deny the validity of Christian morality....Rather he discovered, following what Leonardo Bruni and Leon Battista Alberti had done in historiography and the arts and anticipating what Giambattista Vico was to do in aesthetics, that this morality simply did not hold in political affairs and that any policy based on the assumption that it did would end in disaster."[40] Similarly Chabod insists: "Nothing is further from Machiavelli's mind than to undermine common morality, replacing it with a new ethic; instead he says that in public affairs the only thing that counts is the political criterion by which he abides: let those who wish to remain faithful to the precepts of morality concern themselves with other things, not with politics."[41] There seem to be two closely linked propositions here; first, that in Machiavelli's view a man can, and indeed should, act in accordance with Christian morality when he is not engaged in political activity, and second that Machiavelli supplies one code for the prince, the political man, and another for the private citizen.

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[40] Cochrane, p. 115.

[41] Chabod, p. 142.

Now, the Elizabethans, particularly the dramatists, recognised no such distinctions. The Machiavels are sometimes political figures, kings or ministers or generals, engaged for much of their time in political affairs, such as seizing power or waging wars. But Richard III does not suddenly become a moral character when he retires with two divines or courts a wife. This is partly, of course, because the effect produced by his apparent piety, and his marriage with Anne are both important in his political programme and relevant to his political aims. Richard has no private life; but we shall have to enquire in a moment whether Machiavelli's prince has any either.

Many Elizabethan and Jacobean Machiavels are private citizens. It is perfectly clear that the playwrights, at least, did not see Machiavelli's teaching as the exclusive preserve of politicians. If a prince was instructed to break his word "when the reasons for which he made his promise no long exist" (P. XVIII), what was to prevent an ambitious young soldier or a poor hanger-on at court from taking a leaf out of the prince's book? If a prince was governed by nothing beyond his desire for securely established power, what should deter the Machiavellian commoner from "the pressing of his fortune" by any means available to him? Perhaps, in thinking in this way, the Elizabethans revealed a profound misunderstanding of Machiavelli's intentions and doctrines; this is the question which must now be examined.

First it must be pointed out that if Machiavelli set out to divorce political affairs from other forms of human activity he was

bound to encounter certain difficulties. It is not easy to draw a sharp line between the prince's "political affairs," which are to be conducted in an amoral and scientific manner, and his private concerns, which are, it seems, to be conducted in accordance with Christian morality. Nor is it easy to separate men into political beings and non-political ones. Unlike botany, politics involves human relationships; it also involves law, warfare, agriculture, trade, religion and a great range of other human activities. Moreover, the political activity of the prince impinges constantly upon the private lives of his subjects, and every subject, since he is a citizen of the state, is in some degree involved in political affairs.

Machiavelli's prince, as far as I can see, has no private life. Often, as Butterfield points out, he is concerned with government "under emergency conditions,"[42] with conspiracies, upheaval and war. In such circumstances, he is pre-eminently the political man, employing totally ruthless measures. But Machiavelli does not appear to see his prince as suddenly becoming moral or a-political when he turns to such matters as the establishment of settlements or the levying of taxes, to the manipulation of the relationship between the nobles and the people or to the choosing of ministers, to the treatment of flatterers or to the organisation of armies.

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[42] Butterfield, p. 89.

In all these things the prince is expected to act in accordance with Machiavelli's scientific and necessarily amoral precepts. While devising laws or making use of religion, while distributing rewards and punishments or negotiating with foreign powers, while regulating his own generosity, his own compassion, his own faith and his own piety the prince is expected to consider only "the political criterion." That is, while engaging in a whole range of different activities, which together constitute "politics," and while shaping and touching the lives of his subjects at almost every point, the prince is to be guided by nothing but the demands of the scientific establishment of stable government.

Machiavelli's prince is wholly political, and, hence, wholly amoral, because to a large extent he is identified with the state. He becomes in Burd's view "a force, an embodied idea, almost as impersonal as the state itself, and like the state, a law to itself."[43] But Machiavelli's prince is not simply a moral man, who in identifying himself with the state, accepts the need for amoral political conduct, which will ultimately achieve stability for the common benefit of all. Rather, he is seen as a supreme egoist, recognising no power which transcends himself and willing to establish strong government because he wants glory and personal security and power. Machiavelli appeals always to the prince as an egoist, as the product of a world in which no law but the law of the jungle prevails, and he attempts to show him that by establishing stable

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[43] Burd, p. 215.

government he can achieve the end at which all men aim: the gratification of self-interest. And where the prince's desire for power conflicts with a republic's love of liberty, Machiavelli is prepared to pander to the prince and advise the republic's destruction (P. V). As Butterfield shows, Machiavelli's "ethics" "can...be extended not merely to cover the crimes that Catherine de' Medici committed for the purpose of rescuing the country and saving central government in France, but to sanction a very different kind of case - the crimes that Catherine de' Medici may have committed purely to save her own position and power....The maxims of Machiavelli go beyond public welfare in this way and cater for the private purposes of an unscrupulous prince."[44] Machiavelli, then, does not envisage a moral world in which princes are sometimes forced to forget morality for political science. His prince is a dangerous beast, moving in a god-forsaken world of beasts; if he can be harnessed to the state he will, through his natural self-interest, haul it to security for a time; but sometimes he must be allowed to have his head.

If this is the kind of prince that Machiavelli shows us, and if there is no valid morality in the prince's world, it is very hard to see why private citizens, who inhabit the same world, should be expected to lead moral lives. In fact, Machiavelli expects the people to set aside self-interest only while they are successfully duped by a spurious religion or by the equally spurious goodness of their prince. At best, they will agree to act

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[44] Butterfield, p. 110.

in a civilised manner only while they are convinced that restraint will best serve their own selfish ends. It is absurd to argue that Machiavelli leaves the common morality of the mass untouched. The people are for him "an amorphous, scattered and truly anonymous mob";[45] they are simply political factors, inevitably involved in and dehumanised by the amorality of politics; and beyond the political arena what is there to support "common morality?" Nothing but the great machine of nature, the bestiality of the wild, and the wanton caprice of Fortune.

In portraying princes like Richard III, who have no life apart from politics and no motive apart from self-interest, the Elizabethan dramatists produced a range of characters who bear a very striking resemblance to Machiavelli's prince. In portraying Machiavels, who are private citizens, but who recognise no restraints upon their egoism, the dramatists produced characters who step out of Machiavelli's mob to become able disciples of the master. There are, however, two important differences between the Elizabethan Machiavels, whether they be kings or commoners, and the dramatis personae of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. The Machiavels appear more wicked than Machiavelli's characters and they are usually less successful; the earlier Machiavels, at least, never achieve the kind of security won by Machiavelli's man of virtù, but always in the end come to grief. But this, of course, is simply because the world of the plays is not Machiavelli's world. The Machiavels believe with Machiavelli that men are driven

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[45] Chabod, p. 65.

solely by self-interest and can be restrained only by deceit. In a world where God is present and Christian morality operative, this belief appears perverse and evil and is revealed, finally, as disastrously mistaken. The Machiavel does not evince any misunderstanding in the playwrights of the amoral nature of Machiavelli's universe. Rather he makes it plain that the Elizabethan dramatists understood the nature of Machiavellian amorality very well and, because they understood it, condemned it.

Destructiveness

For the Elizabethans, the man who saw the world as godless and who recognised no imperative but his own ambition was a danger to all order. He was the inevitable foe of piety and virtue; in the pursuit of his own desires he would murder individuals or even wipe out whole communities; if it suited his purpose, he would pull down kings, stir up revolts and throw the state into havoc; his destructiveness could even create reverberations in the realm of nature, until, finally, he brought destruction on himself and his soul was consigned to eternal damnation.

In trying to decide, now, whether Greene, say, was correct in seeing a world ruled by Machiavelli's disciples as doomed to destruction, or whether the Machiavel, in his destructiveness, is faithful to Machiavellian precepts, one is faced by certain difficulties. There is, as I have tried to show, ample evidence to support the Elizabethan contention that Machiavelli saw the world as godless and amoral, and that he set out to teach men to act

accordingly. But one can hardly argue that Machiavelli envisages his prince as destructive in the first way that I have mentioned, that he is presented as the destroyer of true piety and Christian virtue, when, in Machiavelli's world, these things simply do not exist.

The private citizens whom Machiavelli described as usurping the thrones of other rulers are judged simply in accordance with their efficiency in seizing and then establishing power. There is some discussion of the disadvantages involved in relying upon any aid other than one's own prowess and of the problems to be faced by those who have suddenly become princes (P. VII). There is, of course, not a word of usurpation as impious, or as involving the destruction of a divinely ordained hierarchical pattern, which naturally sustains and is sustained by religious duty. Those who rise from private citizens to emperors by corrupting the soldiers "rely on the goodwill and fortune of those who have elevated them, and both these are capricious, unstable things" (P. VII). To corrupt soldiers and then to rely upon their support is bad policy. But, again, there is nothing to suggest that those who corrupt an army are undermining Christian virtue, or leading the soldiers away from their moral duty. The conduct of the usurper and the judgements which Machiavelli passes upon it are alike godless and amoral; but, so long as one remains within the confines of Machiavelli's universe, one can hardly say that either the usurper or his mentor are destructive of piety or of Christian virtue or of institutions nourished by godly conduct and belief, because in the world which Machiavelli shares with his prince, these things have no reality.

When the Elizabethans charged Machiavelli with the destruction of piety and of "all vertues at once,"[46] they were not pointing to a process observable in the world of *The Prince*. Rather, they were speculating upon the effects which, in their view, Machiavelli's disciples might produce in their own world. Machiavelli's lawgiver must, at times, invent a new religion and devise new laws, which will ensure the stability of the state and secure his own power. In doing these things he is not replacing or denying anything of permanent value; sometimes, as when an established prince annexes a state of the same province, it is as well for him not to meddle with the laws of his new subjects (P. III), but more often the lawgiver is merely filling a void, or substituting the new and efficacious for the outworn. The Machiavel, however, who in the context of Elizabethan drama, seeks to exploit religion for his own ends or to persuade others to accept his authority and his precepts is necessarily the enemy of true religion, established order and real virtue. He is a blasphemer or a pagan or a hypocrite and he is seen as opposing his own egoistical ethic against established and sanctified codes of conduct, which are natural for man. Even where the policies of the Machiavellian prince are designed to promote the security of the state, their author is still condemned because he is not seeking to preserve God's order but to establish his own, and his own order is one which must inevitably emerge in the end as spurious and disruptive.

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[46] Patericke, n.pag. Quoted above p. 35.

Henry IV longs to bring England to peace and safety, but the political wisdom which he offers his son is still the tainted wisdom of the usurper who came to the throne by "indirect crook'd ways."[47] Henry remains trapped in the web of pretence that he has woven and doomed to endure the chaos which his attempts to secure his own power have bred. In one sense, at least, Hal's reply to his father is a rejection of the proffered advice and an appeal to the Christian ideal by which the Machiavel and Machiavellism are commonly judged:

> I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord,
> Be more my self.
> (*I Henry IV*, III.ii.92-93).

Hal will be the rightful heir, the chosen of God, the ideal Christian prince, and he will deal in honour more genuine than Hotspur's and in majesty intimately connected with personal worth in a way which his father, with his talk of political display, can hardly envisage.

There seems no doubt at all that the Elizabethans were correct in suggesting that the Machiavellian view was antagonistic to their religion and to their morality and that the dramatists did nothing to distort Machiavelli's teaching when they showed the Machiavel, let loose in a God-centred world, destroying all that their civilisation held most dear. If Machiavelli did not set out to undermine piety and virtue, he proposed a system of belief and conduct in which these things no longer mattered. He attacked and

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47 W. Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. A.R. Humphreys, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1966), IV.v.184. All quotations from the play are from this edition. All quotations from *I Henry IV* are from W. Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry IV*, ed. A.R. Humphreys, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1960).

destroyed not by direct onslaught but by the fostering of a seductive rival. If the power of that rival requires any further attestation, one has only to consider how readily and how widely Machiavelli's teachings are accepted by his modern disciples.

Of course, the Elizabethans saw the Machiavel as destructive of more than piety and virtue; he was also a murderer and an enemy of political order. People and states were real to Machiavelli in a way in which God or goodness were not, so that here one may ask and answer some quite simple questions. Does Machiavelli exhort his disciples to murder individuals or to exterminate populations? Does he, despite his obsession with stable government, give advice on the most efficient ways of destroying the fabric of an established state?

The first question can be answered quite shortly. There is no doubt at all that Machiavelli insists that murder is sometimes necessary and that occasionally he advises the extermination of the population of, say, an entire republic. Chapter VII of *The Prince* is made up of advice to those "who have acquired power through good fortune and the arms of others"; the "cogent examples," held up before such princes are those provided by Cesare Borgia. Cesare's conduct reveals the most efficacious means of taking all the steps necessary to the securing and maintaining of the prince's power, including the destruction of those "who can and will injure him." One of Cesare's virtues, which Machiavelli esteemed very highly, lay, it seems, in the ability to identify potential dangers and to remove them before any trouble could start; Cesare showed

himself a model prince in killing the innocent before they could have any chance of proving themselves guilty. Cesare is commended, then, for guarding against the possible hostility of his father's successor "by destroying all the families of the rulers he had despoiled, thus depriving the pope of the opportunity of using them against him."

The absolute necessity of wiping out the family of a deposed ruler is stressed again and again in *The Prince*. When discussing the annexation of states "of the same province," Machiavelli remarks that "to hold them securely it is enough to have destroyed the line of the former ruling prince" (P. III). In Chapter IV Machiavelli points to the difficulties involved in bringing down a kingdom in which the subjects "are all slaves bound in loyalty to their master." The key to successful usurpation lies, of course, in killing the head of such a state. After that "there is nothing to worry about except the ruler's family. When that has been wiped out there is no one left to fear." The folly of failing to exterminate anyone who might avenge a deposed prince is pointed out in the chapter on conspiracies in Book III of *The Discourses* (D.III.vi). There is no excuse for conspirators "when revengers are left alive through their imprudence or their negligence" and Machiavelli goes on to tell a cautionary tale of some foolish conspirators of Forli who killed the Count Girolamo, their lord, and then hesitated to dispose of the Countess and her children who were of tender age. Naturally such infirmity of purpose brought disaster, and the conspirators "with lifelong exile ... paid the penalty for their imprudence."

As well as wiping out the families of deposed rulers, the prince should not hesitate to remove other possible threats to his security. "Men must be either pampered or crushed, because they can get revenge for small injuries but not for fatal ones. So any injury a prince does a man should be of such a kind that there is no fear of revenge" (P. III). Clearly, the suggestion is that anyone likely to bear a grudge is better out of the way. Again, Cesare shows what needs to be done and how best to do it. When the Orsini became resentful of his growing power, he simply lured them to Sinigaglia. "The leaders were destroyed and their followers were forced into the duke's camp" (P. VII). In *The Discourses* Machiavelli makes it plain that the resentment felt by groups or individuals can threaten the security of a republic just as it can threaten the power of a prince. The sons of Brutus enjoyed extraordinary advantages under the kings, but lost them under the Consuls, so that "it seemed that the people's liberty had become their slavery" and, with other Roman youths, they began to conspire against the republic. Machiavelli again makes no bones about the remedies which should be employed in such a situation. "Therefore...the state that is free and that is newly established comes to have partisan enemies and not partisan friends. If a state wishes to provide against these troubles and disorders that the aforesaid difficulties bring with them, there is no more powerful remedy, nor more certain, nor more necessary than to kill the sons of Brutus. . . .and he who undertakes to govern a multitude, whether by the method of freedom or by that of a

princedom, and does not secure himself against those who are enemies to the new government, establishes a short-lived state" (D.I.xvi).[48]

Sometimes, of course, a prince or the leaders of a republic are faced by widespread hostility; "he who has the few as his enemies, early and without many occasions for violence makes him self safe" (D.I.xvi), but what is to be done when the mass of the people resents the power of the government? Machiavelli at a number of different points supplies several different answers to this question. In Chapter X of *The Prince* Machiavelli discusses the problem created by the resentment of subjects whose homes and possessions are destroyed in the course of a war waged by their prince. "My answer to this is that a powerful, courageous prince will always be able to overcome such difficulties, inspiring his subjects now with the hope that the ills they are enduring will not last long, now with fear of the enemy's cruelty, and taking effective measures against those who are too outspoken." In other circumstances, too, it is often enough to "take effective measures" against a few. "Executions ordered by a prince only affect individuals," but, as Machiavelli points out in Chapter XVII of *The Prince*, they engender fear of the ruler throughout the whole community. And, on the whole, it is very much better for a prince to be feared than to be loved; when he is campaigning with his troops a reputation for "inhuman cruelty," like Hannibal's, is particularly useful, and serves to keep the army united.

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[48] See also: *The Discourses*, III.v.

It does not seem to matter very much whether those whose executions are used to inspire fear are guilty of any offence. It is, Machiavelli admits, "always possible to find pretexts for confiscating someone's property....On the other hand, pretexts for executing someone are harder to find and they are less easily sustained" (P. XVII). But if one is sufficiently ingenious, pretexts can always be found; even pretexts for the killing of one's most devoted and efficient servants can be discovered by truly resourceful princes, like Cesare Borgia. And, in fact, the murder of trustworthy ministers, is sometimes more useful than any other killing. The resentment of a whole province can easily be quelled by disposing of the man who has done the prince's dirty work for him by enforcing order; such a death, at one stroke, fills the inhabitants with fear and removes the prime object of their hatred. Again, Cesare shows the way, and his conduct in this particular matter "deserves close study and imitation by others" (P. VII). Having won control of the Romagna, Cesare "decided...that it needed good government to pacify it and make it obedient to the sovereign authority. So he placed there messer Remirro de Orco, a cruel, efficient man, to whom he entrusted the fullest powers. In a short time this Remirro pacified and unified the Romagna." Once Remirro had done his work Cesare "determined to show that if cruelties had been inflicted they were not his doing but prompted by the harsh nature of his minister...one morning, Remirro's body was found cut in two pieces on the piazza at Cesena, with a block of wood and a bloody knife beside it. The brutality of this spectacle kept the people of the Romagna for a time appeased and stupefied" (P. VII).

Killings of this kind are often efficacious, then, in quieting whole populations. But sometimes Machiavelli is forced to admit that such temperate measures will not serve. In *The Discourses* Machiavelli discusses the problems facing a prince who "intends to win over a people that is hostile to him" (D.I.xvi). Such a prince will always find that the people want two things: "one, to avenge themselves on those who are the cause of their being slaves; the second to get their liberty again. The first wish the prince can satisfy wholly, the second in part. As to the first, here is an example to the point." What follows is an account of the career of Clearchus, tyrant of Heraclea, who gratified his people's desire for revenge simply by massacring every noble in the state, "to the utter satisfaction of the people." But a blood-bath, even of these proportions, is not always quite enough, for the people desire not only revenge but liberty. Most want liberty only to be able to live in greater security, and these "are easily satisfied by the making of ordinances and laws which provide for the general security and at the same time for the prince's own power." But there will always be a small number of commoners that "wishes to be free in order to rule". These, if they cannot be placated by public honours and offices, should go the same way as Clearchus' nobles and "because this is a small number, it is an easy thing to secure oneself against them" (D.I.xvi).

In Chapter V of *The Prince* Machiavelli faces the difficulties created by the most extreme form of resentment which a prince is

likely to encounter in a mass of subjects. When states newly acquired have been accustomed to living freely under their own laws "the memory of their ancient liberty does not and cannot let them rest." What is the prince to do with such a state? Rather wistfully, Machiavelli toys with the idea of setting up an oligarchy and letting the conquered republic keep its own laws, but the Spartans and the Romans attempted to subjugate republics by this method and failed. Reluctantly, perhaps, Machiavelli is driven to this conclusion: "Whoever becomes the master of a city accustomed to freedom, and does not destroy it, may expect to be destroyed himself." Does this mean that all the inhabitants are to be butchered? Again, Machiavelli, shies away from such a conclusion and then seems to force himself to face up to it. In the course of the chapter he speaks three times of such republics being "destroyed" and twice of "devastation." This sounds fairly conclusive, but then he speaks of the inhabitants being not killed but "dispersed and scattered." The final words of the chapter, however, leave little doubt as to what must in fact be done: "the surest way is to wipe them out." Again, Machiavelli clutches at a straw: "or to live there in person." But this is a possibility that he has barely considered and which cannot stand against the assertion that the prince, unless he destroys the republic, will himself be destroyed.

The answer to the question: Does Machiavelli exhort his disciples to murder individuals or to exterminate populations? is clear enough. The Machiavel is not untrue to his Florentine master

in murdering people who stand in his path or who threaten his security. Yet, sometimes, it must be admitted, these murders owe more to the spirit than to the letter of *The Prince*. The Elizabethan Machiavel, as I have already suggested, is as self-interested as any of the rulers presented by Machiavelli. Yet, unlike these rulers, he does not find gratification solely in political power. The murders of the Machiavel are not always political murders. Instead, they may sometimes be intended to smooth the path towards some quite different object, such as wealth or the enjoyment of a woman. Machiavelli, despite Nashe's opinion on the matter, has little interest in teaching lovers how to make away with jealous husbands. Yet it is difficult to see a character such as Webster's Brachiano as anything other than a product of Machiavellianism. Brachiano's sights are set upon Vittoria rather than upon a crown, yet his principles, and his attitudes to traditional morality, to his own egoism and to all other human beings, other than "the white devil", are wholly and authentically Machiavellian. In murdering Camillo and Isabella he differs from the exemplary politicians of *The Prince* only in the taste which he seeks to gratify.

Brachiano takes no especial delight in murder and in this he stands closer to Machiavelli's politicians than to some of his brother Machiavels. Indeed, perhaps the greatest difference between the Machiavellian prince and, say, Richard III is that whereas Richard can hug himself with unholy glee, the figures who inhabit the world of *The Prince* and *The Discourses* think always in

terms of self-gratification but never in terms of sheer pleasure. To them, troublesome beings like the inefficient conspirator or the children of the Count of Forli are not sources of self-congratulatory ecstasy, nor of paroxyms of sadistic delight. Such creatures are simply factors in a design: to Machiavelli's politician, as to Edmund, "a credulous father, and a brother noble"[49] are not more than x and y.[50]

The Machiavel, as I have already indicated, is often prepared to pass beyond the destruction of certain human beings to the disruption of the body politic. Sometimes he may actually start a rebellion or a civil war; sometimes he simply puts the state at risk by deposing the rightful ruler. At the outset of this part of the enquiry, I posed the question of whether in destroying political fabrics the Machiavel shows himself true to Machiavellian precept. Does Machiavelli, despite his obsession with stable government, give advice on the most efficient ways of dismantling established states?

Already, of course, in discussing the means which Machiavelli advocates for the conquest of states where the subjects "are all slaves bound in loyalty to their master" (P. VII), or of recalcitrant republics (P. V), I have gone some way towards answering this question. Machiavelli regards no kingdom as

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49 W. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare (1952; rev. and rpt. London: Methuen, 1966), I.ii.186.

50 A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 301.

sacrosanct and no republic as so admirable in its stability that it does not stand as fair game for anyone strong enough to overpower it. There is no question of the rights and wrongs of tearing down what exists or of constructing new political fabrics. The question is always whether such enterprises can be carried out successfully and, if so, by what means the desired end is to be achieved.

It is true, of course, that Machiavelli does not see the destruction of the body politic as an end in itself. In his universe such destruction is simply a step which is sometimes a necessary prelude to the erection of a new power or to the expansion of an established one. On the whole, Machiavelli is less interested in the processes of conspiracy, conquest or usurpation than in the maintenance of stable power once a new regime has taken control. And in order to ensure the stability of the new power, it is sometimes advisable to preserve at least some part of the constitution of the usurped or conquered state. In Chapter III of *The Prince* Machiavelli advises the prince who has added to his realm a state of the same province "that he must change neither their laws nor their taxes. In this way, in a very short space of time the new principality will be rolled into one with the old." Again, in *The Discourses*, Machiavelli explains that "he who wishes to remodel a government that has grown old in a free city should keep at least the shadow of the old methods" (D.I.xxv).

Yet, when all this has been said, it is still perfectly clear that Machiavelli has no scruples about the dismantling of established states. He is perfectly prepared to offer advice on the management of successful conspiracies (D.III.vi) or on "the many ways the Romans took cities" (D.II.xxxii) or on how one may "usurp supreme and absolute authority...in a free state" (D.III.viii). And, although, sometimes, he may counsel the preservation of an existing constitution, at other times he is prepared to offer very different advice. In *The Discourses* Machiavelli discusses the retention of at least "the shadow of the old methods" of government and concludes: "this, as I have said, he should observe who intends to organise a constitutional government, whether of the type of a republic or of a kingdom. But he who intends to set up an absolute power, such as historians call a tyranny, ought to renew everything" (D.I.xxv). And Machiavelli goes on to explain how, in the latter instance, the prince must model himself upon King David and Philip of Macedon and "leave nothing in that province untouched, and make sure that no rank or position or office or wealth is held by anyone who does not acknowledge it as from you" (D.I.xxvi).

The Machiavel, like his master, is wholly indifferent to a concept of society as bound by what Edwin Muir calls "a sort of piety and human fitness;"[51] to him, as to Machiavelli and to

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51 Edwin Muir, "The Politics of King Lear," in *Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 47.

Machiavelli's princes, the state is simply a political unit, held together by force and appetite. And the Machiavels, like Lear's daughters, feel sure that "what they have the power to do" they have "the right to do...they conceive they know the world as it is, and act in conformity with it, the source of all effective power."[52] Thus, the Machiavel, like Machiavelli's aspiring tyrant, recognises no moral barrier to usurpation, conquest or wholesale political reorganisation. The barriers are purely practical ones.

In overcoming these practical barriers to the attainment of political power, the Machiavels are usually less successful than Machiavelli's political figures. Either they never reach their ultimate goals, like Edmund, or, if they do, they are immediately and effectively assailed by the forces of righteousness and, like Richard III, laid low. Because of this the Machiavels of the Elizabethan drama may appear more intent upon the simple destruction of the body politic than do either Machiavelli or the actual or putative rulers that he discusses. Whereas Machiavelli is primarily concerned with the reconstruction or the establishment of stable power, once any necessary destruction has been carried out, the Machiavel is rarely, if ever, allowed to proceed to the creative stage. Even where, as in the case of Henry IV, a character with Machiavellian traits manages to establish some measure of effective political control, his efforts are inevitably doomed. In Elizabethan drama, if not always in Jacobean, crime does not pay; in the world in which the Machiavel moves there is no possibility of erecting stable political structures in isolation

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[52] Muir, pp. 38-39.

from the universal hierarchy which the political ambition of the Machiavel inevitably violates.

The Machiavel, then, in his political attitudes and his political enterprises may appear as a caricature of Machiavelli's prince. His destructiveness is emphasised and is revealed as impious and wicked; he is unable to supply any kind of justification for the chaos which he creates by going on to establish secure, efficient government. Yet the precepts upon which the Machiavel's political conduct is based are essentially the same as those by which Machiavelli's politicians are guided. In this area as in others, the Machiavel and the Machiavellians of *The Prince* and *The Discourses* are alike in attitudes and conduct; the great difference is between the judgements, overt or implied, of the literary contexts in which they appear.

Cunning

The fourth major charge which is levelled repeatedly against Machiavelli by the Elizabethans is that of instructing men in the use of reason to formulate deceitful "policy," to gain advancement by ruthless cunning. Machiavelli is attacked again and again by the prose writers as a "poysonous politician;" in the drama Machiavelli's disciples are always "politic villains." Warnings abound in non-dramatic literature against "Machiavelian artes, as Guile, Perfidie, and other Villanies."[53] The Machiavel is pre-eminently a clever schemer, who dedicates his intelligence to the

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[53] Patericke, n. pag.

pressing of his own fortune and to the construction of pitfalls for his victims. Above all, perhaps, the Machiavel is a masterly hypocrite who can mask his designs with a convincing display of piety or blunt honesty.

> Sir Machiavell such cunning nowe hath taught
> That words seem sweet when bitter is the thought.[54]

Yet in the Elizabethan drama and in some Jacobean plays, the cold logic of the Machiavel is the key to only a limited success. His rationality usually emerges as a perversion of reason; the premises upon which his logical structures are erected are revealed as false, and the Machiavel falls before those forces of righteousness and right order, which he has from the beginning excluded from his calculations.[55]

At this stage it seems unnecessary to point yet again to Machiavelli's insistence upon dealing with things as "they are in real truth," or to the wholly materialistic and amoral nature of this "realism." Nor, perhaps, is it necessary to stress again Machiavelli's essentially pessimistic assessment of the world about him, a world in which "men are wretched creatures" and in which the perfidy of others makes the imitation of the fox obligatory for

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[54] Thomas Howell, *Delightful Discourses to Sundry Purposes* in *The Poems of Thomas Howell*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1879), p. 221.

[55] Nicholas Breton's comment is pertinent:

> He that of Machavile doth take instruction
> To manage all the matters of his thought;
> And treades the way but to his own destruction,
> Til late repentance be too dearly bought
> Shall finde it true, that hath been often taught,
> As good be Idle as to goe to schoole,
> To come away with nothing but the Foole.
> "Pasquils Passion" in *The Works*, I, p. 25.

anyone who hopes to "come off best" (P. XVIII). The Machiavel begins from Machiavelli's position and shares his master's cynicism and carefully circumscribed rationality. Like Machiavelli he treats man as an element in nature and attempts to reason on this basis about his behaviour. So Edmund insists that in the eyes of Nature bastards are as good or better than legitimate issue and argues that there is no reason why he should

> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me.
> (*King Lear*,I.ii.3-4).

Once embarked upon his career, the Machiavel usually weaves a network of plots. He will, of course, use force when necessary and he has no scruples about wiping out whole nunneries or whole populations of Protestants if such measures will help him towards his ultimate goal. But, often, he prefers to use cunning rather than poison or the knife. He may, for instance, avoid committing murder himself by causing a victim to fall into disgrace, or by setting one pawn against another, or by using some innocent tool to carry out his behests. Are such displays of cunning in accordance with Machiavelli's teaching?

Butterfield, for one, is quite sure that they are. "In the political teaching of Machiavelli there is perceptible very frequently a certain flavour which it would not be unjust to impute to a love of stratagem."[56] And Butterfield goes on to cite an impressive array of examples. One of these comes from

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[56] Butterfield, p. 98.

Chapter xliv of the first book of *The Discourses*, where Machiavelli describes certain negotiations between the Roman people and two senators, Valerius and Horatius. The people, having withdrawn, armed, to the Mons Sacer, put a number of demands to the representatives of the senate; finally they urged "that all the Ten [Decemvirs] should be given to them, because they intended to burn them alive." Valerius and Horatius objected to this final demand and advised the people not to press the issue as they themselves would see that the Ten lost their office and authority and that the people afterwards "would not lack means for satisfying themselves." Machiavelli draws the following conclusions from the story: "Here it is plain how much folly and how little prudence there is in asking a thing and saying first: I wish to do such an evil with it. One should not show one's mind but try to get one's wish just the same, because it is enough to ask a man for his weapons without saying: I wish to kill you with them. For when you have the weapons in your hands you can satisfy your desire."

To this example it would be easy enough to add an abundance of others which reveal both Machiavelli's "love of stratagem," and his readiness to offer advice in particular instances. Machiavelli is convinced that to the aspiring ruler and to the established prince deceit and cunning are indispensable weapons. In the second book of *The Discourses* there is a chapter entitled "Men Go from High to Low Fortune More Often Through Fraud than Through Force" (D.II.xiii). The chapter is devoted to demonstating "this necessity for deceiving," and, having dealt

with the importance of fraud to aspiring princes, goes on to show that republics, too, must resort to fraud "until they have become powerful, and force alone is enough." In *The Prince* the need to learn from the fox is stressed and the prince is given many lessons in how to render himself secure by a judicious use of fraud. Cesare Borgia shows how, as Nashe puts it, one may "use men for my purpose and then cast them off."[57] And the lesson contained in the gruesome tale of Cesare's treatment of Remirro de Orco (P. VII) is one which seems to have been carefully noted by Barabas and by Mortimer.

Again, Machiavelli is full of advice concerning the prince's need "to appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, guileless and devout." "Everyone," he says, "sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are. And those few dare not gainsay the many who are backed by the majesty of the state. In the actions of all men, and especially of princes, when there is no court of appeal, one judges by the result." Admiringly, Machiavelli points in turn to Alexander VI and to Ferdinand of Aragon. Of the first he remarks: "There never was a man capable of such convincing asseverations, or so ready to swear to the truth of something, who would honour his word less. Nonetheless his deceptions always had the result he intended, because he was a past master in the art." Of Ferdinand Machiavelli says only this: "A certain contemporary ruler, whom it is better not to name, never preaches anything except peace and

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57 Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell Works*, I, p. 200.

good faith; and he is an enemy of both one and the other, and if he had ever honoured either of them he would have lost either his standing or his state many times over" (P. XVIII). This "underhand cloaking of bad actions with commonwealth pretences"[58] is the very stock in trade of the Machiavel. Almost every one of them is, like Alexander, a past master in the art of deception, and, like Ferdinand, protests an honesty, a piety or a virtue which, in his heart, he despises.

That Machiavelli has a pronounced taste for the cunning stratagem and that he advocates the use of particular tricks which are taken up with enthusiasm by the Machiavels seems incontrovertible. Yet, again, Machiavelli has his ingenious defenders, and, again, the defences which are advanced fall into two categories.

The first argument which is often advanced in Machiavelli's defence is that in depicting his prince as cunning and deceitful he is simply drawing from the life. From the time of Boccalini's *Advertisements from Parnassus* there have been attempts to present Machiavelli as the innocent recorder of the evil actions of others. Boccalini has Machiavelli putting his own case: "But if my writings contain nothing, but such Politick precepts, such rules of State, as I have taken out of the actions of Princes, which...I am ready to name, whose lives are nothing but doing and saying of evil things; what reason is there that they who have invented the

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58 Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, p. 220.

mad desperate policies written by me should be held for holy, and that I who am only the publisher of them should be esteemed a knave...?"[59]

There is no doubt, of course, that in some part of this there are several grains of truth. The princes of Machiavelli's Italy were certainly as unscrupulous and probably more depraved than the Borgias of *The Prince*. The European leaders who descended upon Italy in the sixteenth century were, in general, as rapacious and as faithless as Machiavelli suggests. In England, Henry VII had done much to prove that methods of the kind which Machiavelli advocates could bring not only security but adulation. And Richard III was generally believed to have outdone the Machiavellians at their own game without any prompting from the Florentine master.

But while it is true that the 'Politick precepts' and practices of sixteenth century Europe were often similar to those which Machiavelli discusses, it is not, of course, true that Machiavelli is nothing more than a dispassionate recorder. Even if he were, "it is not certain that to codify, to make accessible as recipes, a wickedness that already exists in fact is more excusable, or less dangerous, than to act it."[60] But Whitfield understates the case. Machiavelli does not simply "codify" or

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59 Trajano Boccalini, *I Ragguagli di Parnaso : or Advertisements from Parnassus in two centuries, with the politick Touchstone. Written originally in Italian...and now put into English, by the Right Honourable Henry [Carey] Earl of Monmouth* (London: 1669), I, p. lxxxix.

60 Whitfield, p. 2.

"make accessible as recipes" the fraudulent practices in which princes engage. Having interpreted the actions of contemporary rulers and of ancient republics in accordance with his own theories, Machiavelli positively presses advice upon prince and politician. He is exhortatory and quite categorical: "You must realize this: that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which give men a reputation for virtue, because in order to maintain his state he is often forced to act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, of religion," but, "A prince... should be very careful not to say a word which does not seem inspired by the...qualities I mentioned earlier" (P.VIII). Or: "From this can be drawn another noteworthy consideration: that princes should delegate to others the enactment of unpopular measures and keep in their own hands the distribution of favours" (P. XIX). This kind of advocacy is a long way from objective reporting. Boccalini's Machiavelli is correct in suggesting that he did not invent cunning and evil policy: he is disingenuous in denying that he has done nothing to perpetuate its employment.

The second principal line of defence that is adopted by those who wish to defend Machiavelli against the charge of fostering cunning and deceit, consists in scrutinising Machiavelli's use of the word "policy". In his article "The Politics of Machiavelli", J. H. Whitfield appears to argue in the following way: Machiavelli's name has become closely associated with "politics" and "policy", words which from as early as 1420 have carried sinister or pejorative meanings in English. Yet Machiavelli "has no knowledge of any pejorative use for policy" and "he knew no

noun equivalent to this, either for politics, or for politician".[61] Consequently suggestions, such as Butterfield's, that Machiavelli "was interested in politics at the point where we must expect them to be clever and crafty"[62] must be fallacious, because Machiavelli makes no association between craft or cunning and words such as "politico".

Whitfield has been justly praised for the thoroughness of his semantic studies.[63] But the argument which, in his article, Whitefield seeks to draw from his erudite examination of Machiavelli's usage, seems doubtful. It may well be that Machiavelli had no influence upon the "original emergence of the 'sinister' sense of policy"[64] in England. It may well be that Machiavelli employs words like "politico" in a wholly innocuous manner. But this is not to say that Machiavelli does not discuss statecraft and stratagem, that he does not advise the political figure to employ cunning and deceit, or that he does not devote a great part of his time to drawing together statecraft and cunning to produce an amalgam for which, in England, a name already existed. If, for Machiavelli, the word politician was unknown in a pejorative sense, or indeed, in any sense, the Elizabethans stood ready with a word that fitted Machiavelli's Alexanders and Ferdinands

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61 J.H. Whitfield, "The Politics of Machiavelli", *MLR*, 50 (1955), p. 435.

62 Butterfield, p. 96.

63 See: Wood, p. 160.

64 Here Whitfield ("Politics") quotes from N. Orsini, "'Policy' or the Language of Elizabethan Machiavellianism," *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 9 (1946), 122-34.

as neatly as a glove. If Machiavelli did not invent the kind of practice which the Elizabethans termed "policy," nor contribute to the early degeneration of the word in England, there is no doubt that he systematised and promoted a kind of conduct which matched perfectly with the practices which the English had long condemned as "politick." Machiavelli is not to be divorced from the "poysonous politician" or the "politick practise" because he used a different vocabulary; he knew the things, if not the words, well enough. Indeed, as Butterfield points out, he knew them better than most people. In his demand for "greater consistency in cunning" and "for a more consciously scientific study of method"[65] Machiavelli had something to teach the Renaissance prince - and, one might add, the Elizabethan Machiavel. "No recondite explanation," says Butterfield, "is needed for those dramatists who brought him on to the stage as a master of all that is crafty.... Only one twist of the screw - and a touch of spite - were needed to turn him into the preceptor of Barabas, the source of the miser's sins and ingenuities."[66]

I have pointed out that in their atheism, amorality and destructiveness the Elizabethan Machiavels are true disciples of Machiavelli. I have stressed that it is the world in which the Machiavel moves and the judgements which are passed upon him which cause him to appear somewhat different from the political figures

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65 Butterfield, p. 101.

66 Butterfield, p. 104.

whose actions Machiavelli holds up as exemplary. And so with Machiavellian cunning. In the world of *The Prince* it is an important key to success; on the Elizabethan stage it is a sure passport to disaster. The stratagems of Machiavelli's princes are based upon a realistic apprehension of the world as Machiavelli sees it. For the Elizabethan dramatists that "realism" is disastrously limited and fallacious.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VILLAINS : THE ATHEISM OF THE MACHIAVEL

In the last two chapters I have tried to make it plain that the Machiavel deserved his name, that he is a peculiar type of villain characterised by qualities and attitudes which are essentially those inherent in Machiavelli's doctrines and exhibited by the political figures held up as exemplary in *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. Obviously since Machiavelli's theory is erected upon a reading of history, the individual attributes and strategies of his ideal princes are not new. It is the underlying assumptions, the acceptance, codification and advocacy which are original. Similarly the Machiavel with his associations with the Vice or the Senecan tyrant, let alone observable human conduct, enunciates convictions and lays plots which are not always derived exclusively or unequivocably from Machiavelli. Yet in his peculiar combination of qualities, in the tone and stance that he adopts and in the threat that he poses, the Machiavel can be identified as a figure that is both generally distinguishable from other stage villains and genuinely representative of a full corpus of Machiavellian belief.

In attempting now to substantiate such claims by scrutinising the Machiavel, I have examined a wide range of villains and villain-heroes. Not all of them are true Machiavels. Some are too tormented by conscience or too concerned with honour to

to qualify as genuine examples of the type; some appear so briefly that they reveal no more than one or two suggestive characteristics. Yet only by engaging in a process of elimination and by constantly establishing contrasts did it prove possible to isolate and explore the truly Machiavellian combination of atheism, egoism, destructiveness and cunning. Again, I have found it necessary at times to begin an enquiry at some distance from the avowed object; the discussion of the Machiavel's atheism begins with some examination of the places and periods in which various plays are set. Only after such questions had been settled could one proceed to any authoritative canvassing of the main issues. Only when the background against which the Machiavel moves had been established could his view of religion be assessed in terms of the particular context created by the playwright.

Setting

It is natural enough to assume that nearly all the plays in which Machiavels appear are set in countries other than England. The Elizabethan hostility to Spain and the horror engendered by Italian tales of lust and violence, corruption and poison, as well as the vigorous patriotism that complemented such attitudes, are all well attested. The Lord Cromwell, in the play bearing his name, gives the stock reply to Wolsey's questions about his impressions of Europe:

> My Lords, no Court with England may compare,
> Neither for state nor civill government:
> Lust dwelles in France, in Italie and Spaine,
> From the poore pesant to the Princes traine ..[1]
> (III.iii.78-81).

Again, the obvious association between the black face of the Moor and the black heart of the Machiavel, together with the rapidly growing vogue for things Eastern, might suggest a predilection for still more exotic settings.

It is, of course, true that some of the more famous and influential of the early plays are set in Spain or Malta, Italy or North Africa. It is also true that after the first few years of the seventeenth century nearly all the Machiavels move against foreign backgrounds. But in the earlier period the number of Machiavellian plays set in England is surprisingly large. The English Machiavels outnumber any other national group by as much as four to one. Although *The Spanish Tragedy* exerted such a marked influence on the development of the Revenge Play, there is almost no attempt to follow Kyd in making the Machiavel a Spaniard. Although Barabas of *The Jew of Malta* vies with Kyd's Lorenzo for the title of founder of a long line of villainous progeny, no other Elizabethan Machiavel has his home in Malta. Despite Machiavelli, there are remarkably few Italian Machiavels until one

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1 Swinburne remarked of *Thomas Lord Cromwell* that it "is a piece of such utterly shapeless,spiritless,bodiless, soulless, senseless, helpless, worthless rubbish, that there is no known writer of Shakespeare's age to whom it could be ascribed without the infliction of an unwarrantable insult on that writer's memory." *A Study of Shakespeare*, 3rd ed.(1880: rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1895), p. 232. This seems rather harsh, although one must agree that the attempts of Tieck and Schlegel to prove Shakespeare's authorship were misguided. The edition used is in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908).

comes to *Antonio's Revenge*, *The Malcontent* and *Othello*.[2] France, Germany and ancient Rome are all used as settings, but very sparingly; there is *The Massacre at Paris* and *Bussy D'Ambois*; *Alphonsus, King of Germany*[3] and *The Tragedy of Hoffman*; *Titus Andronicus* and *Sejanus*. The Ottoman Empire is used in Greene's *Selimus*, but Persia and the East remained largely the property of closet dramatists like Fulke Greville and the Earl of Stirling. Finally, despite the number of Moorish Machiavels, African settings are uncommon. There is *The Battle of Alcazar*, of course, in which Muly Mahamet is a wicked "negro-moor" (II.prol.3) who attempts to usurp the throne of his virtuous uncle. The way in which Muly's colour reflects his evil nature is stressed; he is "Black in his look, and bloody in his deeds" (I.prol.16). But because the play is set in Barbary the effect of the emphasis is undercut. Muly's innocent victims are as black as their murderer, and the noble

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2 See: R.C. Jones, "Italian Settings and the 'World' of Elizabethan Tragedy," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 10 (1970), 251-68. Jones deals mainly with Jacobean plays and makes the point that when Italian settings occur "there is little use of the Italian scene itself as a setting for the action. In fact, the most vivid 'settings' . . . are created in large part through patterns of imagery . . . Italian settings function as one of the allusions through which the world of each play is created, but Italy is not the world of these plays.... The settings that are important in the literature of the period are emblematic or generalised, archetypal or imaginary: Arcadia, Faerie Land, Paradise, Prospero's Island, a garden, a wood."

3 The date and authorship of *Alphonsus* are both uncertain. There is, as Parrott points out in his introduction to the play in *The Tragedies of George Chapman*, a strong tradition associating *Alphonsus* with Peele (pp. 684; 688-90). Moreover, "the style of the blank verse, the choice of subject, and the dramatic treatment, all point back to a time not much later than the epoch making work of Marlowe" (p. 688). For these reasons I have grouped *Alphonsus* with the Machiavellian plays written before 1605. All quotations are from the version in *The Tragedies of George Chapman*, ed. Parrott.

Moors against whom Muly is set contrast with him in piety but not in complexion. In *Orlando Furioso* Africa stands simply as a remote land in which romantic extravagance and magic are unquestioned. It is a kind of wildly exotic Forest of Arden where even the emperor forgets the name of his realm and welcomes his guests to India. None of the inhabitants of Greene's Africa are apparently black, least of all the emperor's daughter, Angelica, whose beauty has drawn princes from Cuba, Mexico and Egypt to woo her. It seems that exploitation of the Moor's colour as an image of his inner quality became fully possible only when he left his home ground. Consequently the more notorious of the Moorish Machiavels are shown in societies in which their colour sets them apart; Aaron has made his way to Rome and Eleazar moves in a Spanish court that is predominantly white.

Sometimes there is movement in the plays between one country and another. There is a scene in France in *3 Henry VI*; Yarrington's *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is an interweaving of the story of a villainous Italian uncle with that of a young London publican; Thomas, Lord Cromwell travels to Antwerp and to Italy. Yet even if such plays with mixed settings are discounted and only those with exclusively English backgrounds are tallied up, one finds still that close to half of the earlier plays in which Machiavels appear are set in England. The remainder indicate that there was no strong second preference. Almost every country of Europe is used, as well as Barbary and the East, but no one of these places is the setting for more than three or four plays at the most. Despite the geographical vagaries of a Greene, all this is quite clear.

But when one passes from a survey of the places in which the plays are set to one of the various periods, a number of fresh difficulties arise. While a number of tragedies, ranging from *Sejanus* to *Arden of Faversham*, are based on classical histories or chronicles, some have no identifiable source. For instance, as Boas suggests, *The Spanish Tragedy* may represent "a dramatic perversion of incidents in the struggle between the two countries [Spain and Portugal] in 1580", but since there are strong objections to this theory and the greater part of the plot "is probably drawn from some lost romance"[4] it is impossible to date the action of the play with any certainty. Similarly, the source of *The Tragedy of Hoffman* is unknown, the only possible clue to the exact date of the action being a record of the execution of a Hans Hoffman at Danzig in 1580.[5]

Even where a tragedy is based on the account of a reputable chronicler like Holinshed one finds, of course, that the Elizabethan concept of history was very much broader and looser than the modern one. The line between legend and history was so indistinct that Holinshed could write: "Leir the son of Baldud was admitted ruler over Britain, in the year of the world 3105, at what time Joas reigned in Juda."[6] To the author of *The History of*

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4 F. Boas' Introduction in *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, pp. xxx-xxxi.

5 Harold Jenkins' Introduction in Henry Chettle, *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, ed. Harold Jenkins (1641; rpt. Oxford: Malone Society, 1950), p. v. All quotations from the play are from this edition.

6 Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: 1587), I, p. 12.

King Leir and, later, to Shakespeare Holinshed's account would almost certainly have appeared as historical material that was not essentially different from any other matter to be found in chronicle form. Yet the first author places the action of his play in a Christian Britain, while Shakespeare turns back to a distant, pagan past.

The action of the history plays can usually be ascribed at least to a particular reign, although Peele's *Edward I* turns out to be largely a medley of legends. Greene's *James IV*, like his *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, is little more than a peg on which to hand a patchwork of romance, legend and wild imaginings. The period in which the action of such plays is set has no more connection with any actual time than James or Alphonsus have with the historical figures whose names they carry. In the history plays proper there is more concern for accuracy. But for the Elizabethans history, correctly written, was never so much an accurate record of events as a demonstration of religious, moral and political doctrine. It was the mirror into which not only magistrates but kings and commoners might look for guidance and instruction regarding the conduct of their lives, the right ordering of society and the interpretation of God's will. This meant that it mattered very little if a chronicler touched up the facts in order to make plain the working out of God's purpose, or to hammer home the horrors of rebellion and civil war, or to exalt the Tudor dynasty.[7] The dramatists, naturally enough, made further changes for dramatic as

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[7] One of the most informative discussions of Elizabethan attitudes to history is contained in M.M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961).

well as didactic purposes. Marlowe has been traduced (quite unfairly) for a "reporter's realism, the kind which finally shirks a whole dimension of the real - the moral."[8] Yet even he, in *Edward II*, can transpose events and telescope time so that Edward begins the play as a giddy youth and ends in pathetic old age.

Despite these various problems it is still possible to divide a large group of plays in which Machiavels appear into at least broad categories, according to the period in which each play is set. There is "the distant past", pre-Christian in the case of Alexander's *Darius*, but Christian in the case of *King Leir*; there is Rome under the empire. Then there are plays like *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, *Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* and *Edward I* which are set in the thirteenth century or *Edward II* and *Woodstock* which are set in the fourteenth. But, so far as one can judge, the action of the great mass of plays takes place either in the fifteenth century or later still in the sixteenth century itself. Most of the Machiavels who are presented as living in the fifteenth century appear in English history plays. Almost all Shakespeare's histories, as well as plays such as Heywood's *Edward IV* or *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*[9] are set in this period. In

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8 Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 142.

9 *The True Tragedie* is, of course, a shortened and sometimes inaccurate version of *3 Henry VI*. Although it was seen by Malone and others as the principal source of Shakespeare's play, A.S. Cairncross, Dover Wilson and Peter Alexander have argued convincingly that *The True Tragedie* is no more than a bad quarto of the third part of the Shakespearean trilogy. Their view is now generally accepted. All quotations from the play are from *The Works of Shakespeare*, ed. William Aldis Wright, The Cambridge Shakespeare (London: Macmillan, 1905), IX.

addition there are several tragedies, like *Lust's Dominion*, which ends, apparently, in 1492 with the expulsion of the Moors from Spain.

When one comes to the plays set in the sixteenth century one finds a quite different situation. The number of English histories dealing with events so close to the reign of Elizabeth is very small. The Machiavels appear instead either in some few domestic tragedies,[10] or, much more frequently, in tragedies set in countries other than England. *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Battle of Alcazar* and *Bussy D'Ambois* are all based on accounts of recent happenings in France or Barbary. Other plays contain a greater measure of fiction; the Turks' seige of Malta in 1565 was unsuccessful; in the address to the reader which precedes *The Malcontent* Marston wrote, "in some things I have willingly erred, as in supposing a Duke of Genoa" (*ll*.5-6).[11] Yet Barabas' Malta is still the sixteenth century fortress of the Knights of St John, and Marston's Italy, as G.K. Hunter has shown, is unquestionably the Italy of Guicciardini,[12] and, one might add, of Machiavelli.

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10 The number of domestic tragedies that survive may well be a small fraction of the number written and played. H.H. Adams lists over twenty lost plays which may have been domestic tragedies in *English Domestic or Homilectic Tragedy* (1943; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), pp. 193-203.

11 John Marston, *The Malcontent*, ed. Bernard Harris, The New Mermaids (London: Ernest Benn, 1967), p. 5. Although I have found useful H. Harvey Wood's *The Plays of John Marston*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), I have used more recent editions of Marston's plays because Wood supplies no line numbers. The edition of *The Malcontent* cited above is used throughout.

12 G.K. Hunter, "English Folly and Italian Vice" in *Jacobean Theatre*, eds. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, I (New York: Crane-Russak, 1960), pp. 102-3.

This brief survey of the places and periods in which the earlier Machiavels move is intended primarily to prepare the way for some examination of the ethical and religious framework within which Machiavellian action is played, defined and assessed. Yet, already, one or two conclusions can be drawn which are, in themselves, of some interest.

There are more English Machiavels in the earlier plays than one might expect, but many of them belong to history plays set for the most part in the fifteenth century. Conversely the Machiavels who stand closer to the Elizabethans in time are usually distanced by the use of foreign settings. There is at least one obvious reason for a paucity of villains who belong to a recognisably Tudor England. Parodies of the Machiavel like Gostanzo, even figures who come as close to evil as Volpone, appear in comedy; but the fully-fledged Machiavellian villain belongs to history or to tragedy. The history plays deal naturally with the centres of power and the tragedies, when they are not domestic, deal still with high personages. The Machiavels are almost all frequenters of courts. But the risks attendant upon bringing Elizabeth's family, let alone the queen herself, on to the public stage hardly need to be stated. Chapman's *Conspiracy of Byron* contained originally a fourth act which dealt, it seems, with Byron's visit to England, during which the queen pointed out to him the heads of Essex and his followers, impaled on pikes. The act, together with other material which had offended the French ambassador, was almost entirely struck out by the censor. Chapman was left to lament his

"poor dismembered poems";[13] and where there was dismembering there was some danger that after the poems the poet might follow.

The practical reasons for excluding the Machiavel from Elizabethan England appear good and sufficient, yet a survey of the handful of histories and domestic tragedies with sixteenth century English settings suggests other, more cogent explanations of the situation. Plays set in London or the provinces in a time close to that in which the playwright and audience themselves lived tend, naturally enough, to contain an unusually large measure of realism. Yet the earlier Machiavels, of course, are not realistic characters; they belong rather to a drama of formal design and to a world of polarised evil and good. Transferred, then, from a setting more remote in place and time to one that is familiar and realistic, the Machiavel tends to partake of the realism of his background and to lose his distinctive line and colour. The difference between the Machiavel who is kept at a distance and his more human counterpart, who lives next door, is in some ways the difference between Volpone, the Italian magnifico, and Subtle, the London confidence trickster; or, more appositely, it is the difference between *Volpone*'s starkly drawn legacy hunters of beast fable and the more human and pitiable Drugger or Dapper, figures in whom avarice is crossed by petty anxieties and ambitions.

The difference is seen most clearly in the contrast between the two villains of *Two Lamentable Tragedies*. Fallerio,

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13 George Chapman, The Dedication of *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron* to Sir Thomas Walsingham and his Son in *The Tragedies*, ed. Parrott, p. 152. See Parrott's Introduction, p. 592.

who belongs to an Italy of extraordinary piety and equally extraordinary wickedness, is unquestionably a Machiavel. He is at first totally heartless and impious; he even makes the stock Machiavellian joke about hurrying the virtuous off to heaven, where they belong; his tool villain, the first murderer, reveals the sort of sadistic glee that is evident in Barabas or in Aaron. Fallerio's repentance is sudden and totally unrealistic; it is simply part of the patterning of the play in which remorse and an inability to protect a son from the consequences of filial piety are refinements of the divinely ordained punishment that follows brutal crime. But Merry, the London publican, is quite different. He belongs to the familiar London of shops and hostelries, of philosophic watermen, convivial merchants and gentlemen strolling in Paris garden. As such, despite one or two speeches in the true vein, Merry is not a Machiavel so much as a stupid and fearful creature, who yields to an impulse of discontent. He is never impious and always inefficient; he gets nothing but ten groats from the murder of Master Beech, fails to kill Beech's boy outright, fails to silence the witness Harry Williams, and fails to dispose effectively of Beech's body. His deeds are horrible; interestingly, when Merry chops up his victim's corpse on the stage, Truth, the chorus, comforts the audience with the assurance that it is all only a play. But Merry, the murderer is merely pitiful and squalid. Despite his neighbours' exclamations at the wonder of God's justice, Merry emerges as trapped by his own lack of design, rather than by the operation of divine providence.

When the Machiavel moves close, then, he tends to change his features and become a villain of a different kind. He is

modified by timidity or remorse like the seducer in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* or, perhaps, the rebel lords in *Sir Thomas Wyatt*. When in plays with sixteenth century English settings a totally evil character appears, he is usually very slightly drawn and becomes little more than a cog in the dramatic machinery in the manner of Dekker's Shafton.

It is not just that the early Machiavel is conceived in a different mode from a more realistic character like Merry. It is rather that the Machiavel is defined and placed by the moral and dramatic design of the play in which he appears, and under the pressure of a reporter's realism such a design may crack or disintegrate. In *Arden of Faversham*, say, or *Thomas Lord Cromwell* there is a vigorous attempt to impose a design upon the incoherence of events. In *Arden* there is a pattern of ironic, blind or blasphemous oath-taking and oath-breaking that stems from Mistress Arden's violation of her marriage vows, and in *Thomas Lord Cromwell* there is a set of contrasts between generosity and vindictiveness and, as the wheel of Fortune turns, between unforeseen rewards and penalties. But in *Arden* particularly the impulse simply to record seems to tug against the impulse to reconcile detail and to shape event.[14] Master Arden's virtue and patience as the wronged husband are never satisfactorily related to his apparently voracious hunger for land, so that when, at the end, the shape of his corpse remains imprinted on the land that he wrested from Dick Reede, the purport of the miracle is not clear.

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[14] See: Keith Sturgess' Introduction in *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 30.

This means that in turn Mosby, who is something of a Machiavel, is never properly defined in relation to his background. He may be a destroyer of the innocent in a world where ultimately innocence is still vindicated, or he may be the embodiment of a corrosive avarice in a society where goodness is a hypocritical display and justice is always arbitrary. The Machiavel may be either of these things; the trouble with Mosby is that the realism in his play undercuts the interpretative design, so that the nature and function of his evil are uncertain.

The next step in this enquiry must be to look more closely at the religious element in the different settings of the play. This is a rather complicated matter because while some plays obviously deal with pagan societies and some with Christian ones, a play set in Persia or Rome or ancient Britain may endorse piety and Christian values very much more strongly than one set in Renaissance Italy or Tudor England. Conversely a play like *The Spanish Tragedy*, which from one viewpoint is set in a Catholic Spain, can erect a supernatural framework which is more Senecan than Christian. Yet already from what has been said regarding the places and times in which the plays are set, one thing emerges clearly. The number of plays set in pre-Christian societies or in pagan ones of later date is extremely small; almost nine tenths of the plays in which Machiavels appear are set in Christian countries.

Julius Caesar started something of a vogue for Roman plays, but Machiavellian characters occur in very few, notably in two plays which stand in sharp contrast to each other: *Titus*

Andronicus, which is perhaps the least authentically Roman of all the Roman plays and Jonson's *Sejanus*, which is the most scholarly of all the reconstructions of the classical historians' Rome. *Titus Andronicus* is set in a Rome of fictional emperors and makes no attempt to recreate the world of Livy or Tacitus. Yet in some sense the world of the play is a classical one. Myth is constantly invoked in the imagery;[15] the rape of Lavinia is explicitly linked with that of Philomela, and Tamora, like Thyestes, banquets upon the flesh of her children; the gods whom Titus solicits are the familiar figures of myth, Jove, Apollo, Mars, Pallas, Mercury and Saturn. This emphasis on classical myth in the play sustains an appeal to fundamental, instinctive feelings and values: horror at the violation of chastity; love of children, relatives and friends; readiness to sacrifice oneself to protect one's progeny; fear of darkness and savage beasts; hatred of ingratitude as "heinous sin" (I.i.449).[16] In a comparatively crude and limited way *Titus Andronicus* endorses veneration of those bonds, those "offices of nature" (*Lear*, II.iv.180) which are violated by Lear's daughters and which are represented in the later play as basic needs, "material sap" (IV.ii.35), without which any human society, Christian or pagan, must grow monstrous and destroy itself. And in *Titus*, as in *King Lear*, the emphasis upon such fundamental values, common to the Christian and to the ancient world alike, leads on to the incorporation of specifically Christian ideas and images within an

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15 See: Sylvan Barnett's Introduction to *Titus Andronicus* in *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare* (1964; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), pp. 287-88.

16 All quotations from this play are from William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. J.C. Maxwell, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1963).

ostensibly pagan framework. In *Titus Andronicus* there are anachronistic references to a monastery, to "popish tricks and ceremonies" (V.i.76), to christening and damnation. Much more important is the linking of religion in Lucius with conscience, of Aaron's evil life with the prospect of "everlasting fire" (V.i.148), and of an oath by one god with absolute trust. In *Titus Andronicus* then, behind the human sacrifice to the dead Andronici and the talk of gods whom "warlike Goths adore" (II.i.61) lies the suggestion that horror follows upon the violation of certain fundamental bonds and pieties. Aaron, the Machiavel, like the figures of myth and the Vice of the morality play is more image than individual. In his almost total denial of proper human feeling, his "impiety", he is a universally recognisable figure of evil. In specifically Christian terms he is a "devil", a black denizen of hell, who repents of any good he may have done from his "very soul" (V.iii.190).

In *Sejanus* Jonson's reliance on the historians' own view of Roman religion and superstition militates against any wholesale translation of pagan into Christian. Even so, by emphasis and selection, Jonson is able to give prominence to values and beliefs common to ancient Rome and Christian Europe. The vices which Sabinus, Silius and their group deplore and the virtues which they exemplify are those recognised in the traditional European reconciliation of the classical and the Christian. Lust, self-seeking in individuals, corruption in government, deceit, betrayal, pride and flattery are cried down and steadfast integrity

in the face of persecution, honesty, self-sacrifice and courage are demonstrated as admirable. Above all, the impiety of Sejanus is revealed as the root and the inevitable accompaniment of his pride and his lack of moral restraint. Like Tamburlaine, he is prepared to "dare God out of heaven";[17] he urges his soul to

> start not in thy course;
> Though heav'n drop sulphure, and hell belch out fire.
> Laugh at the idle terrors: Tell proud Jove,
> Betweene his power, and thine, there is no oddes.
> 'Twas onely feare, first, in the world made gods.[18]
> (II.158-62).

Any peculiarly Roman quality in the Jove of such a passage is, of course, not insisted upon; he can shade almost into the Jove of a poem like "Lycidas" and becomes, almost imperceptibly, Lord of Heaven and Hell.

Sejanus moves still further into the orbit of Christian judgement in scouting Fortune and over-turning her altar, for if Fortune was not in Elizabethan England a divinity to be worshipped she was nonetheless an arm of God's Providence. On the stage the assertion that one stood above Fortune was an infallible sign of impiety and delusive pride, and usually a prelude to villainy. *Sejanus* ends with a warning "Not to grow proud and carelesse of the gods" (V.899). Throughout the play such carelessness has been castigated in authentic Roman terms, but, finally, it emerges as a

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17 Robert Greene, "The Epistle to the Gentlemen Readers" in *Perimedes the Blacksmith*, (1588).

18 All quotations from Jonson's plays are from *Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford and Simpson.

sin against divine power that is virtually indistinguishable from the God of Galatians, a God who is inexorable in his justice and who is not mocked.

In *Titus Andronicus* and *Sejanus* there is an exploration of ground common to Christian and pagan. This leads into the condemnation of an impiety which is essentially a denial of fundamental truth or divine power that supersedes "the gods" and even the goddess Fortune. In *Darius*, another play with a pre-Christian setting and a pair of Machiavels, there is less exploration than repeated assertion. The characters discover only what the chorus has insisted upon from the start: that the world is to be despised, that ambition, pomp and pride are impious folly, and that:

> There is some higher pow'r that can controull
> The Monarchs of the Earth, and censure all:
> Who once will call their actions to account,
> And them represse who to oppresse were prompt.[19]
> (V.ii.2219-22).

The wickedness of the villains, Bessus and Narbazanes, is rooted in an impiety which consists in worldly ambition, a longing for "wealth and honour, idols of my heart" (III.iii.973), a conviction that the strokes of Fortune can be countered by careful planning and decisive action, and a failure to recognise that even "monarchs of the earth" (V.ii.2220) are subject to divine retribution; "A crowne", says Bessus, "may cover any kind of

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19 All quotations are from *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander*, ed. L.E. Kastner and H.B. Charlton (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1921), I.

wrong" (III.iii.1038). In this play the fact that Bessus and Narbazanes are Persians or that they and others call upon "gods" hardly matters at all. *Darius* is a sermon in the tradition of contemptus mundi. The characters and their protestations exist solely as part of a rhetorical exemplum. If the style is Senecan and if specific reference to things Christian is avoided as indecorous, Persia, its king, its villains and its gods are still firmly contained within a choral framework of Christian assumption and traditional teaching. While, then, the presentation of divine power and its flouting, "impiety", involves in *Titus* and *Sejanus* some translation of shared certainty into familiar Christian terms, *Darius* never really admits of any terms other than those of late medieval Christianity.

If there are very few Machiavels in plays set in pre-Christian times so the number who appear in plays set in pagan societies of later date is equally small. Moreover the "paganism" of, say, *The Battle of Alcazar* and its villain are of a peculiar kind. For one thing the supernatural powers invoked in the play are not so much Moslem as classical and Senecan, so that the reconciliation of Nemesis and "the gods" with a Christian scheme is, if sometimes awkward, already conventional. The heavens are seen as aiding right and punishing the wicked. Abdelemec assures his soldiers that "rightful quarrels by heaven's aid/ Successful are" (I.i.57-58) and is sure that

> on this damned wretch, this traitor-king
> The gods shall pour down showers of sharp revenge.
> (I.i.87-88).

Such an expression of faith is, of course, an indication of virtue; it is also largely justified because although Abdelmelec dies before putting down the wicked Muly Mahamet, his brother goes on to lead the forces of right to victory and to give pious thanks to "the god of just revenge" (V.i.234) for yielding the foe into his hands. Muly himself, like Aaron, is castigated as "unbelieving" (I.Prol.32); he curses heaven and the stars, calls down chaos upon nature and is constantly associated with "Night and Erebus" (IV.ii.73). From the beginning his punishment is assured, and if, in Act I, the Presenter predicts that Muly will be cast down by Nemesis, by Act V the retributive power whom he offends and denies has merged into the virtuous victor's "god of kings" (V.i.188). This dissolution of the pagan in the Christian is facilitated by the proximity of the Christian world and by the appearance in the play of its representatives. Stukeley's companion expresses a confidence very like that of Abdelemec: "The heavens will right the wrongs that they sustain" (III.i.64). The young King of Portugal is mistaken, of course, in espousing Muly's cause, but this means only that the Machiavel becomes a blacker devil in deceiving the Christian Portuguese, and in using them with callous indifference to "hew a way for me unto the crown" (IV.ii.71). On the other hand, the pious Muly Mahamet Seth in honouring the dead Sebastian and setting free his Christian prisoners, moves still further on to the side of familiar angels.

In *Selimus* one sees even more clearly a similar dissolving of the pagan "gods" into a Christian scheme. Again the heavens

are seen as just, although they are slower to act than in *The Battle of Alcazar*. One is sure that Corcut's prophecy will be fulfilled:

> In Chiurlu shalt thou die a greevous death.
> And if thou wilt not change thy greedie mind,
> Thy soule shall be tormented in dark hell ...
> (xxii.2165-67).

But at the end of the play Selimus is still alive and planning fresh conquests. Presumably his end was to follow in the promised "second part", with its "greater murthers" (Conclusion *l*.7).

Again, as in Peele's play, piety and virtue are associated and faith finds expression in familiar Christian expectations. The unfortunate Bajazet, lamenting his follower, Cherseoli, is sure that:

> thy sweet soule in heaven for ever blest,
> Among the starres enjoyes eternall rest.
> (viii.702-03).

Bajazet's unnatural sons, Selimus and Acomat, scorn religion and virtue at once. Selimus counts it sacrilege to be holy or "reverence this thred-bare name of good" (ii.46). Acomat mocks the equal eye of the gods and rejects "Bare faith, pure vertue, poore integritie" (xv.1399). Both "set the law of Nature all at nought" (i.114) and Selimus is prepared to be a devil if he can be a king.

As in *The Battle of Alcazar* the Christian world stands near, and Corcut, Selimus' philosophical brother, embraces Christianity. The change from a Moslem religion of "holy votaries" (ii.266),of familiar ethics and familiar pieties does not seem

great. Aga even rejects revenge and addresses himself to that "supreme architect of all" (xv.14-39), whom Corcut claims to have discovered in converse with Christians. Yet Corcut's conversion and Selimus' mockery, Corcut's appeal to Selimus to repent and Selimus' prompt recourse to strangulation all assist in defining the Machiavel's villainy as grounded in an impiety that is explicitly anti-Christian.

Obviously there are very few Machiavels in plays with pre-Christian or pagan settings, and this is not because such settings were unpopular. *Titus Andronicus* and *Sejanus*, are not unusual in being Roman plays, but in bringing the Machiavel to Rome. There are numbers of other Elizabethan plays besides *Darius* or *Selimus* which are set in pre-Christian times or pagan countries. But plays such as *Locrine* or *Troilus and Cressida* or *The Misfortunes of Arthur* are all alike in containing no truly Machiavellian villains. It seems, then, that the Machiavel is rarely found in anything but a Christian world; an examination of those plays in which he does erupt in a pagan society suggests that his introduction is invariably accompanied by some translation of the pagan background into a Christian one. The gods may not always become God, but they become at least the guardians of sacred laws or bonds associated with His nature. Always the Machiavel denies divine power or breaks its laws, so that, if he is not invariably a devil, he is always a character who is wicked because he is impious or atheistic.

These conclusions may gain strength if one turns for a moment to examine some contrasts between the small group of plays that I have been examining and certain other plays which have pagan settings but no Machiavellians. In *Darius* or *The Battle of Alcazar* one is very much aware of what might be called the "divine background". One is reminded that supernatural forces are shaping events, or that the proud live under the equal eye of the gods, or that hell gapes for the wicked. But in the second group of plays the pagan setting seems often to be used to limit or exclude interpretation of events in terms of the supernatural. In *Julius Caesar* for instance, despite Caesar's ghost, events are explained principally in human and political terms. The murder of Caesar is not presented as the sacriligeous killing of the divinely anointed ruler, nor is what follows seen as the vengeance of just gods upon wicked men. Brutus kills Caesar because he is an idealist who insists upon seeing the man who is his friend as a factor in a political theory. It is this failure of imagination, this separation of judgement from human feeling that leads with inexorable logic to the horrible ironies of empty slogans cried out over a bloody corpse, to the mindless violence of the mob and the triumvirate's cynical trafficking in lives, and to the chaos of civil war.[20]

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20 See: L.C. Knights, "Personality and Politics in *Julius Caesar*" in *Further Explorations* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), pp. 33-53. Knights shows how Brutus' entry into "a world where 'impersonal' Reasons of State take the place of direct personal knowledge" leads to the illusion that "peace and liberty could be bought with 'red weapons'".
See also: Norman Rabkin, "Structure, Convention and Meaning in *Julius Caesar*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 63, (1964), 240-54. Rabkin stresses the way in which the similarities between Caesar and Brutus are brought out in the play, so that "Shakespeare has made the assassination rather a criminal mistake . . . than an act of public virtue".

Where in a play such as *The Misfortunes of Arthur* supernatural forces are admitted, they are usually unlike the gods of the Machiavellian plays in being uncompromisingly pagan and often amoral. Mordred commits huge crimes, but his fall is not so much a punishment for what he has done as the fulfilment of a curse brought upon his house by his grandfather, Uther Pendragon. The ghost of Gorlois is determined to exact full vengeance for "parents' crimes" (I.i.52),[21] and Arthur himself makes it plain that his son is the victim of Uther's wrong-doing and of his own incestuous union with Mordred's mother, Anne. Mordred is, inescapably, "an heire assignde to all our sinnes" (III.iv.23).

In *Selimus* or *Sejanus* good and evil are polarised and the characters tend to be types. They are pious or impious and usually wholly virtuous or fully Machiavellian. But in other plays with pagan settings, the virtual exclusion of supernatural elements, or the admission only of the hostile and malign, makes for a different situation. In *The Wounds of Civil War* responsibility for the wars is divided, and Marius and Sulla are neither all virtue nor all vice. Both are guilty of putting their own longings for power before the welfare of the state, but both can be brave, noble and magnanimous. Similarly, in *The Misfortunes of Arthur* the plight of the realm is attributed to much more than Mordred's adultery and usurpation. Mordred's guilt is weighed

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21 All quotations from *The Misfortunes of Arthur* are from *Early English Classical Tragedies*, ed. J.W. Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

against that of his father, and neither figure emerges as wholly evil or wholly good.[22] Brutus, Sulla and Mordred perform acts such as Machiavels perform. Sulla and Mordred, particularly, reveal a range of Machiavellian traits. Mordred cites more maxims from *The Prince* than do many villains. Yet all these characters are essentially different from Bessus or Selimus or Aaron. Because they are not defined and assessed in what are ultimately Christian terms, none becomes the personification of the threat posed to Christian civilisation by the Machiavellian creed.

In the great mass of plays set in Christian societies this threat and its embodiment, the Machiavel, are presented in a variety of ways. The extent to which one is reminded of the presence and power of a Christian God varies greatly from play to play. In *Richard III* one is perpetually made aware of God's guiding hand through the patterning of speech and action, through the interlocking curses, their fulfilment and recollection, and through the contrasting dreams and contrasting orations of Richard, God's enemy, and Richmond, God's champion. In *King Leir* Cordella is a pattern of unshakeable faith in "him which doth protect the just" (iii.331);[23] the Gallian King is the "myrrour of his time" (xiii.1070)

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22 Kyd's *Cornelia* is, again, a play from which the overtly Christian is excluded; events are controlled by Fate, Fortune and the ghost of Julia. And, again, there is no absolute villain. Caesar is predominantly a tyrant; his murders, and his craft are made plain. But Caesar's case is presented at length by Philip in Act III, by the chorus of friends in Act IV, and by Caesar himself.

23 All quotations from *King Leir* are from *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, ed. W.W. Greg (1605; rpt. Oxford: Malone Society, 1907).

for care to God and his subjects; Leir discovers in his contrition for offending against God's majesty that "fervent prayer much ill-hap withstands" (xix.1449). The play endorses his view, for God intervenes with thunder and lightning to terrify Leir's would-be murderer, and thanks for the final victory are rendered "first to the heavens" (xxxii.2635). Again, in such plays as *Woodstock* or *James IV* or *Edward I*, God and his justice are recalled in the protestations of the pious, or in the fearful repentance of the wicked, or in startling and miraculous events like Queen Elinor's sudden sinking into the earth.

Other plays, such as *The First Part of Jeronimo*[24] or *Hoffman*, show less overt insistence upon divine power and its operations; these are rather assumptions which underlie the moral judgements expressed in and through the plays and which inform the language that sustains such judgements. *Jeronimo*, for instance, contains no portents and no peals of thunder; there is no emphasis on prayers or curses; God's part in bringing the villain to book is not celebrated. Yet the play has a perfectly clear moral structure, with Lorenzo and all that he represents standing in contrast to the exemplary Andrea. And Lorenzo hates Andrea

> cause he aimes at honor,
> When my purest thoughts work in a pitchy vale,
> Which are as different as heaven and hell.
> (I.i.106-08).

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24 Of *Jeronimo* Hazlitt remarks:"'The First Part of Jeronimo' is so scarce that many have doubted whether it ever existed." He seems to assume that *Jeronimo* preceded *The Spanish Tragedy*. As Boas has shown this is almost certainly incorrect. *Jeronimo* is probably "the work of an anonymous playwright who took advantage of the excitement caused by the revival of *The Spanish Tragedy* in 1602 with Ben Jonson's Additions to bring out this so-called first part - a medley of farce and melodrama." See: *Dodsley's Old English Plays*, IV, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: Reeves and Turner, 1874), pp. 349-50; Boas, Introduction, p.xlii. All quotations from *Jeronimo* are from *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. Boas.

In still other plays, notably *The Spanish Tragedy*, the supernatural forces moving behind the action can be somewhat ambivalent. *The Spanish Tragedy* shows the figure of Revenge watching and apparently guiding the action; the ghost of Andrea comes from an underworld modelled on Virgil's,[25] where Pluto reigns and the souls of the dead cannot cross Acheron until rites of burial have been performed. Yet through the play this classical vision is penetrated and overlaid by a Christian one. Hieronimo in directing the Portuguese to Lorenzo's house describes a largely Christian hell, similar to Spenser's Cave of Despair,[26] and Isabella pictures her son sitting in heaven,

> Backt with a troup of fiery Cherubins,
> Dauncing about his newly healed wounds,
> Singing sweet hymnes and chanting heavenly notes:
> (III.viii.18-20).

The effect of all this is to underpin the climactic clash between two ethics that occurs in III.xiii. There Hieronimo finally rejects what Bowers[27] has correctly identified as the "Vindicta mihi" of the Christian God, and, like Andrea's ghost gives himself over to a pursuit of personal vengeance. If, then, at the end, Revenge and the ghost seem to triumph, the play allows of another

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25 See: Boas' notes to his edition of Kyd, p. 394.

26 See: Boas, p. 405.

27 Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* (1940; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press,1966),p.78,n.13; Fredson Bowers, "A Note on *The Spanish Tragedy*", *MLR*, 53(1938), 590-91. Bowers contests Boas' assertion that the line in question comes from the pseudo Senecan *Octavia*; "... the context of the following lines indicates that the reference is rather to the well-known 'Vindicta mihi', 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' (Romans XII:17, 19. See also: Deut. XXIII:25)."

perspective in which to lend oneself to the purposes of Revenge is a villainy and the deeds that come of such blind allegiance are "monstrous" (IV.iv.201).

Sometimes the divine background of a play set in a Christian society is neither assumed nor ambivalent; it is simply remote or inscrutable. The play focuses instead upon the protestations and practice of the professedly Christian society in the foreground. Thus when Ferneze at the end of *The Jew of Malta* attributes Barabas' fall "Neither to Fate nor Fortune, but to Heaven" (V.v.125), he is not concluding a demonstration of the workings of divine providence, but indicating the distance between his own pious pronouncement and the ruthless opportunism that has brought him victory.

Just as there is variety in the presentation of the divine background in different plays, so, too, the nature of the Christian society in which the Machiavel moves can vary from one play to another. The ruler may be a paragon of chivalry like King Richard in the earlier part of *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* and his subjects may be largely virtuous and devout. In such settings the Machiavels, like Sir Doncaster, appear as abominably wicked and, although dangerous, inevitably doomed. More often a society is shown as divided more evenly between the wicked or corrupt on the one hand and the loyal and pious on the other. So, in *Woodstock*, Richard II and his sycophants, including the Machiavel, Tresilian, confront Richard's worthy uncles and their followers. In *The Jew of Malta* or the three parts of *Henry VI* the

virtuous may be outnumbered by the self-seeking and the unscrupulous, so that the prominence given to Christian institutions or to the enunciation of pieties serves only to reveal the corruption and hypocrisy of society at large. In such a situation the Machiavel may act as a cynical commentator, as a touchstone, or as a figure in whom a pervasive evil is focused and given its extreme expression. So in the Henry VI plays, as England plunges deeper into the chaos that is her ordained punishment and purgation, one Machiavellian character after another emerges from the ruck of the self-seeking and the faithless. As England's plight grows more desperate and the crimes perpetrated by Yorkists and Lancastrians more atrocious, so the stature of the successive Machiavels increases. On the shoulders of Winchester and Suffolk rises York, until he, in his turn, is superceded by the villain who will "set the murderous Machiavel to school" (*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.193)[28], the supreme epitome of Machiavellian evil, Richard of Gloucester.

The Enemy of the True God

Having looked at some aspects of the setting in which the Machiavel appears, and having suggested several ways in which that setting may contribute to the definition and assessment of the Machiavel's nature, I want to go on to a closer scrutiny of the villain, and of his essential atheism and impiety.

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[28] All quotations from the three parts of *King Henry VI* are from The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare:
The First Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross (London: Methuen, 1962).
The Second Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross (London: Methuen, 1957).
The Third Part of King Henry VI, ed. Andrew S. Cairncross (London: Methuen, 1964).

Machiavels are much given to using the soliloquy. Conventionally, the character who soliloquizes tells the truth as he sees it, so that, in the mouth of the Machiavel, such confessions are a source of manifold ironies and of contrasts with lying and politic speeches used in bringing victims within the net. At the same time the Machiavel's soliloquies reveal often a distillation of the brutal colloquialism and irreverent, sadistic wit that throughout the play are evident in asides or in mockery of the ensnared. But above all, it is in the soliloquy that the Machiavel lays bare the foundations of his creed and so often makes explicit his hatred or contempt for religion and conscience. Not every Machiavel sets forth his views with the thoroughness of a Selimus, but a number provide clear echoes of Marlowe's Machevill's "I count religion but a childish toy" (*J. of M.* Prol. 14). Piero in *Antonio's Revenge* plans to "Pop out the light of bright religion" (IV.i.267).[29] Alphonsus in *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* goes to consult a "master" (I.i.50) who scorns superstition and teaches his pupils "to be religious as the ravenous wolf" (I.i.45). Muly Mahamet retires in defeat to "curse heaven" (I.ii.84). Even more frequently conscience and Christian virtue are explicitly rejected or as seen as evidence of a weakness that is to be despised. In *3 Henry VI*, Richard of Gloucester, already sure that "conscience is but a word that cowards use"

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29 All quotations from *Antonio's Revenge* are from John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge: The Second Part of Antonio and Mellida*, ed. G.K. Hunter, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (1965; rpt. London: Edward Arnold, 1966).

(*Richard III*,V.iii.310)[30], renounces love "which greybeards call divine" (V.vi.81) and reveals himself as one that has "neither pity, love, nor fear" (V.vi.68). Similarly Ragan in *King Leir* is contemptuous of "nature's sacred law" (x.898) and of virtuous human feeling:

> These foolish men are nothing but meere pity,
> And melt as butter doth against the Sun.
> Why should they have preeminence over us,
> Since we are creatures of more brave resolve?
> (xxv.2373-76).

Sometimes the significance of a soliloquy resides less in such explicit statement than in a sharp contrast with what has come before. Winchester in *1 Henry VI* never expresses contempt for the religion of his church in so many words. His attitude is simply implied in a rapid turning from avowed piety to confessions of ambition and hatred.

Most commonly the Machiavel in soliloquy reveals his atheism not by openly denouncing religion but by making plain his absolute trust in the power of gold or of ruthless force or of his own cunning; often he celebrates his total allegiance to evil or to his own ambition. So Lorenzo who believes that:

> Where words prevaile not, violence prevailes;
> But golde doth more then either of them both
> (II.i.108-09)

announces later: "Ile trust my selfe, my selfe shall be my friend" (III.ii.118). In other villains, like Marston's Piero, such dedication to self merges into a confession that "confusion and black murder guides/The organs of my spirit" (II.ii.222-23).

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30 All quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, ed. Mark Eccles, The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: The New American Library, 1964).

The atheism and impiety of the Machiavel are evinced not only in his soliloquies but in his dialogues with tool villains, in his asides and in his laconic humour. The Machiavel, like the Vice before him, is often a humorist who can sometimes make an audience laugh in spite of itself; at other times his sense of fun smacks too much of grand guignol. But, whatever the case, his humour, almost as much as his frank avowal of attitude and intention, is an important expression of his hostility or his contempt for all things holy. In *King Leir* the messenger comes upon the two old men that he has been hired to kill and is amused to find prayer books lying beside his sleeping victims:

> My youthes are here already,
> And with pure zeale have prayed themselves asleepe.
> I thinke, they know to what intent they came,
> And are provided for another world.
> (xix.1462-65).

Already in *2 Henry VI* Richard of Gloucester's wit begins to show itself in the rebuke to Young Clifford:

> Fie! charity, for shame! speak not in spite,
> For you shall sup with Jesu Christ tonight.
> (V.i.213-14).

And, in *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron, having deprived Titus of one hand, hides and laughs to see him raise the remaining one to heaven, while in *Lust's Dominion*, Eleazar,another Moor, engages in extended mockery of Christian practices. He prays to "Saint revenge" (V.iii.56), and, having had himself manacled as his prisoner, the Cardinal, is manacled, vows, laughing:

> This Iron engine on his head I'le clap,
> Like a Popes Miter, or a Cardinalls Cap.
> (V.iii.97-98).

The effect of such witticisms varies according to the degree of sympathy evoked by the victim; so the effect of Richard's remark that "perjur'd" Clarence will be "pack'd with post horse up to heaven" (*R.III*,I.i.146) is different from the effect produced by the same kind of joke when in Heywood's *2 Edward IV* it relates to the young princes, or when the First Murderer of *Two Lamentable Tragedies* contemplates the killing of Fallerio's innocent nephew:

> It is a charitable virtuous deed
> To end this princkocke from this sinfull world.[31]
> (sig.E3).

The effect varies again according to the degree of verve, subtlety, ebullience and histrionic ability displayed by the Machiavel himself. Richard III has enormous appeal in the earlier scenes of his play; his wit in overpowering Lady Anne is irresistible, but, by the time he tries to use the same tactics on Queen Elizabeth, he has lost his touch and his delight. The later scene in fact assists in setting Richard's evil in a proper perspective and prepares the audience to applaud his end with full satisfaction. The essence of the Machiavel's wit and humour resides in contrast: in contrast between masterly hypocrisy and delighted honesty; or between blunt, earthy interjections, like those of Kyd's Lorenzo, and a formal, patterned speech, like that of the lovers whom Lorenzo drags apart; or between conventional, complacent expectation and shocking, incongruous reversal. But at the core of the Machiavel's humour the contrast is one between proper feeling and heartlessness, and beyond that between reverence and blasphemy or belief and its denial.

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31 Quotations from this play are from Robert Yarrington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, ed. John S. Farmer (1601);facsimile rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970).

The Machiavel's atheism is, in the end, much more a matter of denying or discounting all religious belief than of adhering to a religion that is seen as false and hostile to the true faith. In Chapter I I suggested that some Machiavels are not so much downright atheists as enemies of true religion, Moors or Jews, who stand in opposition to Christians and Christianity. And it is, of course, true that a Machiavel's Jewishness or Moorishness can be used to explain in part his hatred of Christians and to emphasise his alienation from a Christian, or nominally Christian, community. Yet already an examination of those plays that are set in pre-Christian or pagan societies has made it clear that Machiavels such as Aaron and Selimus are not wicked because they adhere to the wrong religion but because they adhere to none at all. Selimus is not a Moslem who persecutes his Christian brother, Corcut, but an unbeliever who destroys anyone who stands in his path, and who is happy to strangle pious Moslems and Christians in turn. Even where the Jew or the Moor stands almost alone, surrounded by Christians, as Barabas does, or Eleazar, or Alexander in *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, he is nearly always presented as devoid of virtually all religious feeling and rarely displays any allegiance to supernatural forces, except, perhaps, the diabolic.

Barabas appeals to a Primus Motor for vengeance and prays to the God of the Israelites to help Abigail recover his wealth. But he is equally ready to accuse the heavens as "partial" (I.ii.258), and his pride in being Jewish does not seem to have much to do with respect for the religion of his fore-fathers; it

stems, rather, from admiration for commercial acumen and from contempt for the hypocritical piety of Christians:

> They say we are a scatter'd nation:
> I cannot tell; but we have scrambled up
> More wealth by far than those that brag of faith.
> (I.i.119-21).

Similarly, Eleazar, although he makes some mention of "all our Indian gods" (*L.D.*IV.ii.85), scorns Hell as "a dream" (II.ii.125), and prides himself not on adherence to a peculiar faith, but on his colour and royal lineage.

There are, as well as Jews and Moors, several Roman Catholic Machiavels. They appear, of course, in plays with a strongly Protestant bias and, like the Jews and Moors, commit their crimes in cynical disbelief rather than in misguided zeal. The Guise in *The Massacre at Paris* is quite explicit in his contempt for all religion, and quite unscrupulous in his use of Catholic support to advance his own ends. Gardiner, in *Thomas Lord Cromwell* admits to envy of his victim, and, having assured his false witnesses that their lies will be "in service for your God" (IV.v.20), absolves them with crucifix and holy water. Admittedly, both the Guise and Gardiner are allowed moments of apparently sincere faith; the Guise dies claiming that he has never offended God and crying, "Vive la messe!" (xxii.86), while Gardiner's denunciation of the dissolution of the monasteries is persuasive. Yet in neither character is a sudden pious conviction reconciled with a more sustained display of ruthless opportunism.

Whether the Machiavel be Jew or Moor, Catholic priest or venal courtier his atheism is made plain in his actions as well as in his words. Although he despises any and all religion, he often reveals a peculiar delight in mocking or violating or murdering Christians, especially when they are figures of unusual saintliness or members of religious orders. Although the Machiavel is not prompted by any genuine, sustained allegiance to some different religious faith, he is sometimes shown engaging in deliberate blasphemies or desecrating and misusing objects which the Christian holds sacred. Sir Doncaster in *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* pursues Robin with peculiar malice, largely, it seems, because his victim "saies his prayers, fasts eves, gives alms, does good" (iii.325).[32] Later Sir Doncaster admits to having raped a nun and to having made her dance naked and scourged her

> till her faire skinne
> With stripes was checkred like a vintners grate.
> (v.615-16).

Richard III mocks at King Henry's piety when he comes to murder him, and later disrupts the funeral procession, gains possession of the corpse and hustles Henry to his grave with scant respect. Barabas poisons a whole nunnery with porridge sent as alms, causes the deaths of two friars, and vies with Ithamore in describing hideous pranks practised upon Christian victims.

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32 All quotations from the play are from Anthony Munday, *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, ed. John C. Meagher (1601; rpt. Oxford: Malone Society, 1967).

The employment of the sword hilt as a cross occurs several times in different plays. Lorenzo makes his tool-villain, Pedringano, swear on such a cross that he is speaking the truth in betraying Bel-Imperia, and Gonzago in *The Massacre at Paris* calls on the Admiral to "kiss this cross" (vi.29) as he stabs him. The same sort of blasphemy is evident in Mosby's plan to kill Master Arden with a poisoned crucifix, or in Alice's tearing of the leaves from her prayer book to replace them with Mosby's love letters.

Even more common than the mockery and persecution of Christians or the open desecration of holy symbols and objects is the Machiavel's recourse to "politic religion". One of his most characteristic practices is the assumption of a cloak of piety to cover his evil. At the least, he habitually lays claim to a conscience more tender or to an honesty more stalwart than those of other men. Bessus and Narbazanes beg foregiveness

> With hands stretch'd up to Heaven, and humbled knees,
> With teares like those which Crocodiles doe shed.
> (V.ii.1973-74).

Selimus is also likened to a crocodile who smoothes his "subtill tongue" with "fained plaints" (iii.3); after murdering his father he gives a funeral oration that his subjects may:

> see me with religious pompe,
> To celebrate his tomb-blacke mortarie.
> (xxi.2001-02).

Richard III puts on a virtuoso performance wherever he appears. In *2 Edward IV* he cries "Amen!", laments the decay of conscience and true brotherhood, and exhorts himself to

> Seem a saint to men in outward show,
> Being a very devil in thy heart.[33]
> (V.iii).

In *Richard III* itself the display is even more accomplished. Richard shakes his head over the king's "evil diet" (I.i.139), appears before the citizens between two divines and, clothing his

> naked villainy
> With odd old ends stol'n forth of holy writ
> (I.iii.336),

succeeds in convincing a considerable number of dupes that he is, indeed, a saint when most he plays the devil.

Mortimer takes a leaf out of Richard's book in pretending to be reluctant to accept the Protectorship; he demurs "not unlike a bashful puritan" (*E.II*.V.iv.59) until persuaded to relent. In *King Lear*, the evil sisters actually know that the "love test" is to take place and plan their strategy accordingly:

> Nay, our revenge we will inflict on her,
> Shall be accounted piety in us:
> (ii.171-72).

If the claim to piety is not always as overt as this, there is still a display of unusual virtue. Iago laments that he sometimes lacks iniquity to do him service; Mendoza in *The Malcontent* declares himself "too honest for this age" (II.v.65); Fallerio admits that he is named as he is to deceive the world "with shew of truth

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33 All quotations from *2 Edward IV* are from Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. Barron Field (London: Shakespeare Society, 1842).

and honestie" (sig.D); Ateukin explains to James IV that he is not as many courtiers are, he is "no parasite" (*James IV*, I.i.342) and must "blush to beg a fee" (I.i.344).[34]

The Machiavel's claims to piety and virtue are, of course, rendered heavily ironic by the general tenor of his actions and his plans, all of which are usually open to the audience. And in nearly all that he does the Machiavel's contempt for religion, conscience and goodness is made steadily more apparent. It is, perhaps, especially plain in his use of deceit and in the readiness with which he will break a promise or an oath. So Barabas pretends friendship for Calymath while plotting to destroy his army and murder Calymath himself. Muly Mahamet misleads "the brave Sebastian and his noble peers" (IV.Prol. 7), praying that his soul, his son and his honour be consigned to hell,

> But I perform religiously to thee
> That I have holily erst underta'en!
> (III.iv.28-29).

Yet Muly is in fact luring Sebastian to a "bloody banket" (IV.Prol.6) and to his death. In much the same way Mosby engages in a seeming reconciliation with Arden:

> Hell-fire and wrathful vengeance light on me
> If I dishonour her or injure thee.[35]
> (i.336-37).

Like most oaths in the play, this one is quickly set aside; the adultery with Alice continues and Mosby puts up one plan after

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[34] Quotations from Greene's plays, other than *Selimus*, are from *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*, ed. J. Churton Collins, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

[35] Quotations from *Arden of Faversham* are from *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham*, ed. M.L. Wine, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen,1973).

another for the murder of her husband. Eleazar swears to the Cardinal that he wants only peace and will resign the crown, but, from the first, the oath is a mockery and designed to draw Mendoza into a trap.

> Cardinal: If you prove false -
>
> Eleazar: If I do, let fire fall -
>
> Cardinal: Amen.
>
> Eleazar: Upon thy head, and so it shall. (Aside). (*L.D.* IV.iii.87-88).

In all this the Machiavel treats hell as a fable[36] and makes it clear that he has no fear of divine retribution in this life or the next. Yet in some Machiavels a contempt for hell fire can run parallel with a delighted recognition of affinity with the devil. In the later plays especially, such a recognition can extend to the practice of black magic in the manner of Chapman's La Fin. But whether the Machiavel recognises a bond with the powers of hell or not, almost all the plays insist, by various means, that the Machiavel, as God's enemy, stands with the Adversary.

The Machiavel and the Devil

Often a contrast is established between the Machiavel and some figure of exceptional virtue and holiness, so that the two

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36 "I think hell's a fable" (*Dr Faustus*, II.i.130). Doctor Faustus, rallying Mephistophilis in Act II, displays a combination of attitudes common in the Machiavel. Hell at this stage in the play is unreal to him in that he has no imaginative grasp of its terrors and sees spiritual agony as weakness. At the same time he recognises the reality of the devils with whom he converses. Eleazar reveals a similar scepticism, while seeing himself at times as allied with diabolical powers.

characters stand, sometimes literally, in opposing mansions in a manner reminiscent of the morality play. *The Spanish Tragedy*, for instance, shows Lorenzo poised against Horatio, with Hieronimo describing to the Portuguese how Lorenzo can be found in hell, and Isabella picturing Horatio among the cherubim in heaven. At the end of *3 Henry VI* Richard, whom King Henry addresses as "good devil" (V.vi.4), is contrasted with his pious victim; at the end of *Richard III*, there is a much more elaborate contrast with Richmond. The camp of God's enemy stands opposite on the stage to that of God's champion and the ghosts utter curses on the one and blessings on the other.

In some plays similar, if less striking, contrasts occur repeatedly so that they contribute to the continuity of action, or even constitute in effect the dominant structural principle. Several plays contain Machiavellian figures who appear in succession; in *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, for instance, Bagot makes way for Gardiner, just as in *King Leir* Skalliger vanishes and is replaced by the evil messenger. These last two characters are both early variations of the type of the discontented courtier, but they are drawn closer still by being contrasted in turn with the faithful Perillus. In *2 Edward IV* minor Machiavels assist Richard of Gloucester in his schemes, and others appear in episode and sub-plot. The play can hardly be seen as having any very clearly unified theme or structure; that it has any at all is due largely to the recurrent establishment of parallel contrasts between the vicious and the virtuous. First, the Duke of Burgundy and the Constable of France,

false to each other and to the French and English kings, are set against Louis and Edward, who abide by their promises. Later, Shaw, the priest who abuses his office, is confronted by the ghost of the godly Friar Anselm and warned of damnation, while Rufford, who persecutes humble penitence in the shape of Jane Shore, is contrasted with Ayre who dies for his persistence in charity. Again, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is held together largely by a similar network of contrasts. Beech, the victim, is "godly occupied" (sig. B_3^v) when Merry calls him from home with sinister intent; Fallerio is opposed in turn to his pious, trusting brother and his virtuous son, who, though wholly innocent, takes the place of his guilty father. Even the two murderers, whom Fallerio hires, provide a contrast, with one developing an uneasy conscience and trying to save Pertillo, while the other puns on the word grace and reveals a taste in sport as perverted as Ithamore's, Barabas' or Aaron's:

> I respect no grace,
> But with a grace, to give a gracelesse stab,
> To chop folkes legges and armes off by the stumpes,
> To see what shift theile make to scramble home:
> Pick out mens eyes, and tell them that's the sport
> Of hood-man-blinde...
> (sig E_3).

In some plays the simple polarity of good and evil, black and white, god and devil is varied and manipulated to exhibit a more complex moral patterning or to heighten irony. *Othello*, for instance, lays ironic emphasis upon the dislocation of appearance and reality; as G.K. Hunter remarks: "Othello controls the reality of action; Iago the 'appearance' of talk about action", yet "Iago is the white man with the black soul while Othello is the black

man with the white soul."[37] In *Edward II* the stark contrast between the king and the ideal of kingship is at first indicated insistently by the nobles who oppose him. Mortimer points to the way in which Gaveston riots

> it with the treasure of the realm
> While soldiers mutiny for want of pay
> (I.iv.404-05),

resolves to sell his estates rather than tax the "murmuring commons" (II.ii.159) further, and condemns the king as England's scourge. Kent laments the ruin Edward is making in the realm, contrasts the king's indifference with his own "love to this our native land" (II.iii.1) and denounces the "unnatural king" (IV.i.8) as "butcher of thy friends" (IV.i.4). Yet, later in the play the pattern changes, so that Edward is contrasted with the ideal king less in his nature and his conduct than in his hideously inappropriate situation and his acute suffering. Mortimer is still the opponent of the king, for whose unseemly plight he is responsible, but he also stands now in opposition to the virtuous Kent, exhibiting many of Edward's earlier faults in monstrous form. He displays Edward's propensities to dissemble, to indulge a taste for cruelty, to wish chaos on his enemies, to consider himself before the commonwealth, and to enter upon a love pact which "hatcheth death and hate" (IV.v.24). The effect of such reversals and shifting contrasts is to reveal that corruption may spread like a stain from king to subject, so that the ruler is

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[37] G. K. Hunter, *Othello and Colour Prejudice*, Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 151.

destroyed by his own sins appearing in grosser, more horrible shape in those that rebel against him. Such a revelation goes beyond anything that proceeds from the contrasting of Lorenzo with Horatio or Skalliger with Perillus, yet it embraces and enhances Edward's passage to a "hell of grief" (V.v.89) and his linking of hell with his persecutor, the "cruel Mortimer" (IV.vi.74).

The use of such images and epithets, connecting the Machiavel with hell and the devil, is not always associated with the establishment of contrasts between particular characters. Indeed in almost every play either the Machiavel himself makes repeated reference to the powers of hell, or other characters revile him as "hell's black intelligencer", and as a "foul devil" and "devilish slave", who has come to create a hell on earth. Usually such references have a cumulative or climactic effect. Bagot is called a "damned divell" (*Crom* II.i.39); Cromwell scorns Bagot's practice of making a show of virtue while being "a divell within" (II.ii.57); finally, when cornered, Bagot longs to "run quick to hell" (II.iii.76) and confesses that "The divell ought me a shame, and now hath paid it" (II.iii.69). Piero, in *Antonio's Revenge*, is accused of a lie "as vast as spacious hell" (I.ii.263), enquires what his court has to do with virtue "in the devil's name" (II.i.90), and at the denouement is reviled as "Scum of the mud of hell" (V.iii.96). At Piero's death Antonio exhorts him to "Remember hell" (V.iii.100) and prays that his soul may be filled with terror as it descends to damnation. In a similar way, the constant references to Eleazar as a "black devil"

lead up to his dying boast that he will out-act all the devils of hell "in perfect villainy" (*L.D.* V.iii.166), and Iago's invocation of "the tribe of hell" (*Oth.*I.iii.351) and "hell and night" (I.iii.401) feeds into Othello's final vision of him as a "demi-devil" (V.ii.302).[38]

As well as being linked with the devil and hell, the Machiavel is frequently associated with chaos, darkness and fire. Sometimes he is presented as, himself, an unnatural creature because he is black in colour or deformed in body; more often he is "unnatural" simply in his lack of human feeling. In either case he may be shown as causing a disturbance in nature that reflects his own quality, as when Richard III causes the gashes in Henry VI's murdered corpse to bleed afresh. Alternatively his disruption of domestic, civil and moral order may be underscored by images of a wild, fierce or disordered nature. Hieronimo sees his enemies as men who will bear him down "as a wintrie storme upon a plaine" (*S.T.* III.xiii.37), and Alphonsus' Empress fears that her husband's

> cloudy brow foretells a sudden storm
> Of blood, not natural, but prodigous.
> (III.i.260-61).

Some Machiavels themselves envisage the prosecution of their aims as bringing chaos. The Guise, enraged at the marriage of Navarre to the Princess Margaret, prophesies:

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39 All quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1958).

> If ever Hymen lour'd at marriage-rites,
> And had his altars deck'd with dusky lights;
> If ever sun stain'd heaven with bloody clouds,
> And made it look with terror on the world;
> If ever day were turn'd to ugly night,
> And night made semblance of the hue of hell;
> This day, this hour, this fatal night,
> Shall fully show the fury of them all.
> (*Mass.* ii.1-8).

In a rather similar vein Eleazar threatens that he will "new mould" (*L.D.* V.ii.116) Spain and that his throne will be made of dead men's bones, while Hoffman sees himself as urged forward by the "frightfull aspects" (I.i.14) of heaven to give substance to the "ghastly apperitions, strange aspects" (I.i.117) which vex the eyes of Otho.

The invocation of chaos at the point of death is quite common. Sometimes it forms part of a general curse, but the Machiavel can also feel that only the total destruction of heaven and earth will form an appropriate accompaniment to his own demise. Sacrepant in *Orlando Furioso* sees himself as one "that livde worthie olde Nestors age" (V.i.1280), and calls on heaven to "turne to brasse, and earth to wedge of steel" (V.i.1285); finally he cries:

> Heaven, earth, men,beasts, and everie living thing,
> Consume and end with Countie Sacrepant!
> (V.i.1290-91).

Such invocations usually include some references to all enveloping darkness, with Phoebus exhorted to "put on thy sable suted wreath" (*O.F.* V.i.1281), yet the association of the Machiavel with night and blackness has some separate importance. Obviously night is often the time for carrying a plot a step

further or for doing murder. Iago brings about Cassio's disgrace at night; both Roderigo and Desdemona die in darkness; Darius is seized by night in his camp, and Horatio is hanged in the arbour when the stars "hold backe their twinkling shine/And Luna hides her selfe" (*S.T.* II.iv.18-19). But night is, of course, much more than a cloak for deeds that must be done in secret. It is presented as the image of hell, or as a personified force of evil, or as the harbourer of ill dreams, malign spirits and black thoughts. The Machiavel, then, calls on darkness to shield him, as Eleazar does:

> darknesse, horror,
> Thus I invoke your aid, your Act begin;
> Night is a glorious Roab, for th' ugliest sin
> (*L.D.* II.ii.164-66)

or Hoffman:

> Endymions love, muffle in cloudes thy face,
> And all ye yellow tapers of the heaven
> Vayle your cleare brightness in Ciamerian mists;
> Let not one light my blacke deed beautifie;
> (IV.ii.1747-50).

Both go beyond the simple association of darkness with concealment, and light with discovery to a linking of night with horror, ugliness, sin or hell. Hoffman also associates light with a love, clarity, brightness and beauty that are heavenly almost in a religious sense, and opposite to the nature of the deed that he intends almost in a moral one. Such suggestions can modulate into an actual identification of the Machiavel and his purposes with darkness or with its creatures. The Moors, inevitably, are themselves dark powers, performing "acts of black night". In *Darius* the approach of night's armies is also the movement of the traitors towards the king's tent, while the spread of

"shadowie horrours" (V.ii.2011) is also the panic that infects the camp. Richard's "cloudy wrath" (*R.III*.I.iii.267) brings darkness upon his victims, and Barabas likens himself to the raven that

> in the shadow of the silent night
> Doth shake contagion from her sable wings.
> (*J. of M.* II.i.3-4).

Most strikingly, Piero opens *Antonio's Revenge* with a passage in which he speaks as the fellow of "meager ghosts" and "black thoughts" (I.i.8);[39] almost he is the embodiment of night's evil, moving with the quiet of the air and bringing to his victims a "dull leaden"(I.i.4) sleep that is everlasting.

Just as the darkness of the Machiavel is also the darkness of hell, so the fire with which he is associated is never cheerful or purgative, but fierce, destructive and hellish. The "deep-engend'red thoughts" (*Mass*.ii.34) of the Guise are fiery and will burst forth in

> never-dying flames
> Which cannot be extinguish'd but by blood.
> (ii.35-36).

In *Woodstock*, Richard's rapacious flatterers, including Tresilian are

> Worse than consuming fires
> That eat up all their fury falls upon.[40]
> (I.iii.158-59).

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39. Jones, in "Italian Settings", sees *Antonio's Revenge* as set in "nocturnal shadows" rather than in Venice.

40 All quotations from *Woodstock* are from *Woodstock : A Moral History*, ed. A.P. Rossiter (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946).

And Alphonsus, feigning death by poison, describes his sensations in terms that presage the "endless pains of hell" (*Alph.Eg.G.* V.i.312), to which, later, Alexander tricks him into condemning his soul:

> I feel th'ascending flame lick up my blood;
> Mine entrails shrink together like a scroll
> Of burning parchment, and my marrow fries.
> (IV.ii.8-10).

Alphonsus, renouncing those "joys of Heaven" (V.i.310) that have never held any reality for him, is entirely typical of the group of villains to which he belongs. The Machiavels are, as Bussy D'Ambois says of Monsieur, those who will jest with God and their souls "to the devil tender" (III.ii.485). Their "political" heads are:

> the curs'd fount
> Of all the violence, rapine, cruelty,
> Tyranny, and atheism flowing through the realm.
> (III.ii.479-81).

Placed almost always in a setting that is either Christianised or overtly Christian in at least a nominal sense, the atheism of the Machiavel is revealed in his emnity to God or religion and conscience, and in his association with hell and the devil. Even when he does not openly scorn religion in soliloquy, his attitude is made plain in the trust that he reposes in money, force or fraud, above all, in his own superior cunning and ruthlessness. It is made yet plainer in a humour that is essentially heartless and blasphemous.

If he appears to adhere to a religion that is inimical to what is seen as the true faith, the allegiance is never genuine or sustained. Alexander is a Jew, but he believes only in revenge. Barabas takes some pride in being Jewish and in observing that Christians are less successful in commerce and more hypocritical than his own "scatter'd nation" (I.i.119), but the most "Jewish" of his speeches are not expressions of religious feeling; in one he amuses himself by insulting Lodowick, in another his aim is to persuade Abigail to deceive her suitor. Merry of *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is a Puritan, but his abandonment of religious principle underscores Truth's final assertion that murder and covetousness are the fruit of man's universal and enduring weakness. That Merry ever had a religion and that, in his terror, he turns back to it, sets him apart from the genuine Machiavel. The true Machiavellian villain makes manifest his atheism in his deeds as well as his words; he attacks and misuses holy figures and objects; he has recourse to "politic religion"; he deceives and breaks oaths without any conscientous scruple.

His affiliation with hell is plain. It may be revealed by a use of contrast or through imagery of hell and devils, chaos, darkness and fire. The Machiavel, in either case, emerges as a minister of hell who plays the devil, and who can become, in his own eyes or those of his victims, an incarnate fiend. He may be seen as associated with black magic or witch craft. The Palatine of the Rhein believes that Alphonsus cannot be at prayer but is, instead, studying a book of conjuration; Alice accuses Mosby of

seducing her "by witch-craft and meere sorcery" (*Arden* i.200), and in *Lust's Dominion* the King links the name of Eleazar with magic. Sometimes such charges are based on more than an awareness of the Machiavel's diabolic nature: Hume, who is employed by Winchester, Suffolk and the Duchess of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI* plots with a witch and a conjurer to raise a spirit "from depth of under ground" (I.ii.79); Monsieur has dealings with spirits, and Ateukin advertises himself as an astrologer who can accomplish all that James IV desires by the use of charms.

If the Machiavel does possess magical powers, these are never shown as associated with any kind of devil worship. They merely evince a peculiar cunning or a transient ability to manipulate men through spirits in the manner of Vandermast in *John of Bordeaux*. Such powers carry with them a delusive sense of dominance, like that expressed in the common assertion that Fortune is held captive and her wheel turned now by her conqueror, and, as I have suggested, such assertions are invariably a mark of impiety.

In my second chapter I spent a considerable time in demonstrating that Machiavelli's teaching is fundamentally atheistic. By now it seems clear that the Machiavel in this regard is a dedicated, if sometimes over-zealous, disciple. Naturally not all dramatists, nor all Machiavels, acknowledge a direct debt to the master, but there are many who do. Lorenzo, the mentor of Alphonsus, early in the play dictates to his pupil six maxims

deriving from *The Prince*; Ateukin has "annotations upon Machiavel" (*James IV*, III.ii.1228); Eleazar has a book "made in hell" (*L.D.* V.iii.66) which is almost certainly a work of Machiavelli. Other villains, if they do not admit to reading *The Prince*, admire the author or know something of his reputation. Stilt, the comic tool in *Hoffman*, hearing that Jerom will seek out his "notes of Machiavel .... an odd politician" (II.i.510-11), suggests that the oddity lies in Machiavelli's having "driven even honesty from all men's hearts" (II.i.512-13). Richard of Gloucester's determination to "set the murderous Machiavel to school" (*3 Henry VI*.III.ii.193) is too notorious to require comment.

However full the acknowledgement of Machiavelli's influence may be, there is almost no quotation from *The Prince* or *The Discourses* which evinces an explicit contempt for God or for religion. As I have already indicated, Machiavelli's atheism does not reveal itself in statements like those of Selimus or the Guise but in the whole tenor of his teaching. Like most Machiavels, Machiavelli does not fulminate against God but simply leaves him aside. Yet the Machiavel's "politic religion" is, it seems, often derived directly from Machiavelli. Lorenzo sets two maxims from Chapter XVIII of *The Prince* side by side in his advice to Alphonsus: "A prince above all things must seem devout; but there is nothing so dangerous to his state, as to regard his promise as his oath" (I.i.109-11). Barabas, like so many of his fellow Machiavels is adept in the use of religion to hide "many mischiefs from suspicion" (I.ii.281), and, as he explains to the audience, it was in Florence that he learned the art of hypocrisy.

Beyond this, it is clear that the Machiavels follow Machiavelli in discounting any divine or natural law and in seeing all law as merely the creation of the law-giver. Mordred, who is part Machiavel, asserts that: "The Lawes doe licence as the Soveraigne lists"(*M. of A.* II.ii.25); he is echoed by Tresilian and by Richard in *Woodstock*, by Selimus, who is thoroughly Machiavellian in his insistence that both religion and law are contrived for the ordering of states, and by Ateukin, who assures James that his will is law and that the king may scout any dictate of morality or religion in the interest of state-craft:

> 'Tis pollicie, my liege, in everie state,
> To cut off members that disturbe the head:
> (*James IV*, IV.v.1762-63).

Ateukin's advice gives expression in effect to the central assumption of both the Machiavel and Machiavelli: that in carving one's way to a goal considerations of religion and conscience are mere encumbrances. Lorenzo, again, sums up the gist of much of the counsel contained in *The Prince*: "To keep an usurped crown, a prince must swear, forswear, poison, murder, and commit all kinds of villainies, provided it be cunningly kept from the eye of the world" (I.i.162-64). Sejanus in his advice to Tiberius strikes a similar note:

> The prince, who shames a tyrannes name to beare,
> Shall neuer dare doe anything, but feare;
> All the command of scepters quite doth perish
> If it beginne religious thoughts to cherish:
> (II.ii.178-81).

This is reminiscent of Chapter XVII of *The Prince*, yet as Meyer points out in his dicussion of *Sejanus*: "Several passages contain

thoughts to be found in the Florentine's writings; but since Jonson never cites them as his authority and always goes back to Tacitus, Sallust, Livy etc.; it must be concluded, the coincidences in this 'prodigious rhetoric' and Machiavelli arise in having been drawn from the same sources."[41]

Meyer is probably right. The Machiavel's debt to Machiavelli is not always a matter of direct influence, nor, if it is, is this always acknowledged. Yet, in the end, one must conclude that in their fundamental atheism and in the practices which stem from it, the Machiavels bear a resemblance to the political figures of *The Prince* and *The Discourses* that is too marked to be entirely coincidental. If in the dark light of the fires of hell the resemblance seems less than clear, that is because Machiavelli's view of atheism and its fruits was entirely different from the views of the Elizabethan dramatists. Cesare Borgia is not presented as a devil in *The Prince*, but in the drama the devil's cap is found to fit very neatly upon the head of the Machiavel; he wears it sometimes with exultation and a certain panache.

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[41] Meyer, p. 101.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VILLAINS : THE EGOISM OF THE MACHIAVEL

From the time of Tamburlaine elated expressions of pride in power are, as we have seen, commonplace. Humber in *Locrine*

> Leades fortune tied in a chaine of gold,
> Constraining her to yield unto his will...[1]
> (II.i.15-16).

Yet, despite the way in which the ghost of Albanact gloats over Humber in defeat, harping upon "fell ambition" (IV.ii.93), usurpation and treachery, Humber is not guilty of much more than launching an attack on Britain and of taking Albanact's army in the rear. He is not a true Machiavel and his triumphing over Fortune has not quite the Machiavellian ring.

In the genuine Machiavellian, delight in the conquest of Fortune is associated often with assertions of dedication to the self, which alone is to be trusted and served, and with self-congratulation on the prowess or cunning that has brought pre-eminence. When Fortune has been less compliant, denunciation of her cruelty or cursing of the stars is very common, but the peculiarly Machiavellian reaction is one of defiance and, again, of confidence in the self to overcome adverse circumstances and to achieve the personal ambition that is all in all. Mortimer "Who now makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please" (*E.II.* V.ii.53), goes

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[1] Quotations from *Locrine* are from *Shakespeare's Apocrypha*, ed. Tucker Brooke.

on to review the extent of his power, rejoices in the cunning that causes men to "sue to me for that that I desire" (V.iv.57), and concludes: "Maior sum quam cui fortuna nocere" (V.iv.69). Hoffman enquires in surprise:

> Whats that Lorrique? what can fortune doe
> That may divert my straine of pollicy?
> (IV.i.1669-70).

Eleazar, though not yet in power, looks forward with relish to the accomplishing of his revenge, certain that his royalty in evil and his ability to await and seize opportunities, will enable him to conquer Fortune:

> let fools fear fate,
> Thus I defie my starrs, I care not I
> How low I tumble down, so I mount high.
> (*L.D.*I.i.177-79).

Similarly Sejanus sees his own brain as a "sparkling forge" which "created me an armor/T'encounter chance" (III.594-95); later, when Fortune turns away from him, he claims that she knows "her selfe the lesser deitie/And but my servant" (V. 208-09).

This kind of self-exaltation involves usually a contempt for the rest of mankind as well as for Fortune or the stars. Either the Machiavel, like Machiavelli, sees his fellow men as "wretched creatures", easily tempted and easily terrified, or he despises them for a simple dullness and an unprofitable honesty. In either case, he is usually convinced that he is superior to all others in knowledge of the world, craft and courage, and that, in consequence, he has the power to manipulate everyone about him. Monsieur in *Bussy D'Ambois* is sure that "gold and grace" (I.i.53) can overcome any man's aversion to the world; Muly Mahamet

believes that "gold is the glue, sinews and strength of war" (*Bo& A.* I.ii.8); Bagot thinks that Friskiball must reflect something of his own avarice and Cromwell something of his own hypocrisy; Fallerio knows that the murderers have their price, and Barabas, with some justification, sees all Christians as politic schemers, and believes that "every villain ambles after wealth" (*J. o& M.* III.iv.52). Gardiner and Lorenzo are typical of those who employ tool-villains in using a blend of bribery and threats to accomplish their purposes.

Contempt for other characters as fools rather than knaves is just as common. Aaron brackets together folly, virtue and a fair skin, all of which, of course, he sees as alien to himself:

> Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace,
> Aaron will have his soul black like his face.
> (*T.A.* III.i.204-05).

Sir Doncaster sees the picus Earl of Huntingdon as a fool. Marston's Mendoza believes that "God made honest fools to maintain crafty knaves" (*Mal.*II.v.99-100), and laughs at the "Honest fool duke" (I.vii.75). Selimus, one "whose bodie doth a glorious spirit beare" (ii.350), despises base fools who reverence family bonds. Iago, knowing Othello's "free and open nature" (I.iii.397), is sure that the Moor "will as tenderly be led by the nose ... As asses are" (I.iii.399-400).

Whether he sees men as "wretched creatures", as foolish, honest simpletons, or as a medley of the greedy, the pusillanimous, the weak and the blindly trusting, the Machiavel is rarely prepared to repose much trust in anyone but himself, or to admire anything but his own abilities, or to serve any cause but his own. Alphonsus

tells himself that he will trust no man "further than tends unto thy proper good" (*Alph.E.of G.* I.i.25), preens himself on his superior cunning, and is "zealous indeed of nothing but my good" (I.i.35). Lorenzo thinks:

> Tis hard to trust unto a multitude,
> Or any one, in mine opinion,
> When men themselves their secrets will reveale.
> (*S.T.* III.iv.47-49).

Yet he is sure that he can, himself, "By force, or faire meanes" (II.i.39) overcome all obstacles, and he determines to "trust my selfe, my selfe shall be my friend" (III.ii.118). This kind of egoism is one of the hall-marks of the Machiavel. His creed is that of Fallerio:

> But nature, love and reason tels thee thus,
> Thy selfe must yet be neerest to thy selfe.
> (*Two Lam Trag.* sig. C^{v}).

This is echoed by Richard in his famous "I am myself alone" (*3 Hen.VI*.V.vi.83), and by Barabas in "Ego mihimet sum semper proximus" (*J.of M*.I.i.187), a statement which Meyer, rather surprisingly, sees as "the very pith and gist of all Machiavelli's teachings."[2]

Because he regards nature as a collection of amoral forces, love as a strange weakness or "a lust of the blood, and a permission of the will", (*Oth*.I.iii.335-36), and reason as an implement to be used in achieving egoistical ambitions, the Machiavel stands apart

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[2] Meyer, p. 33.

from his society.[3] He normally recognises no bonds and so is bound by none. Sometimes he is an outsider in some further sense, which may explain or enhance his alienation in terms of thought and feeling. He may be poor, a discontented courtier who hangs about the ante-chambers of the great, picking up any commission, however dubious, and girding at a world that fails to see his worth and which infects him with its own corruption. He may be set apart from those about him because he is of a different colour or nationality or, at least nominally, of a different religion. He may be deformed or illegitimate.

The Machiavel as Outsider

In the earlier plays, the Machiavel who is of a social status inferior to that of most of those about him is not very common. It is usually the tool-villains, the minor Machiavels, who are discontented courtiers, poor gentlemen, or servants on the make.

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3 See: L.C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 17-18.
Knights associates the kind of individualism displayed by the Machiavel with "the new world of industrial enterprise", and the "standards of judgement" which the dramatists brought to bear with "an older world ... of small communities in which . . . 'human problems can be truly perceived, which in larger social structures must more or less necessarily be sacrificed'. . . When Dekker damns the 'City doctrine' -

> Nature sent man into the world, alone,
> Without all company, but to care for one -

it is clear that he has inherited a morality which the Middle Ages had found - shall we say? - expedient."

Some of the earlier Machiavels begin as rulers, like Alphonsus or Piero. Many are princes, temporal or spiritual, and are often closely related to the rightful monarch. They may be sons or daughters like Selimus and Acomat or Gonorill and Ragan. They may be brothers like Monsieur or Richard; they may be nephews like Muly Mahamet or the Lorenzo of both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Jeronimo*. If not close relatives of the ruler, they are often great nobles such as Burgundy and the Constable of France, Suffolk and York, Mortimer and the Guise, or even the County Sacrepant and Sir David, brother of the leader of the Welsh in *Edward I*. They may be princes of the church, like Winchester and Gardiner. Even if their origins have been lowly, as Sejanus' have or Tresilian's, they usually appear in their plays as figures who enjoy great power. In the domestic tragedies the instigators of evil often stand as high or higher than other characters. Shafton in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* seems to be of Mountford's class; Alice Arden is married to a man of substance and is of such good birth that Greene declares: "all Kent knows your parentage and what you are" (*Arden* I.491); Fallerio deceives his own brother and seeks to wrest an inheritance from his nephew.

Machiavels such as Mendoza, the indigent courtier; Ateukin, the poor scholar; Iago, "his worship's ancient" (*Oth.* I.i.33), and Mosby, the jumped-up "botcher" (*Arden* i.25), who is not allowed to forget his origins, are all, in the earlier plays, somewhat exceptional. They stand closer in status to the typical tool-villain, the figure who, in the later plays, often enjoys the

lime-light at the expense of his Machiavellian master. The tool-villains of the earlier plays are sometimes more comprehensible and so more human than those who employ them. Some remain mere thumb-nail sketches of evil, as Lightborn does, or Fallerio's first murderer, but others emerge as, in part at least, the victims of poverty and power. Lazaretto, for instance, while not particularly sympathetic and obsessively mercenary, is picked out and played along by Lorenzo because he is:

> A melancholy, discontented courtier,
> Whose famisht jawes look like the chap of death;
> (*Jer.* I.i.114-15).

In *King Leir* Skalliger explains that he can live only by flattery, and the messenger, enriched by bribes, finds that he is much more readily accepted in the world. When the times are bad enough, such views are endorsed by the virtuous who, like Sabinus and Silius, complain that integrity goes unrewarded and that the only road to advancement lies through flattery and guile.

Some major Machiavels, notably Aaron and Eleazar, are alienated from their societies partly by their colour. Barabas is despised as a Jew; Richard III has a hunched back and a withered arm; Alphonsus is a Spaniard, which is resented by the electors, Collen and Saxony; Winchester, like Edmund, is illegitimate. Yet, again, these are the exceptions. Just as most of the more prominent Machiavels are at least as highly placed as those about them, so, usually, they are set apart neither by colour nor nationality. If they differ from other characters in religion it is not because they espouse a peculiar faith but because they espouse

no faith at all, though, since most Machiavels are masterly hypocrites, this is not always apparent to anyone but the audience. Only the monstrous Richard is deformed, and in *2 Edward IV* little is said of the deformity. Winchester and the huddle of Beauforts are, so far as I know, the only illegitimate Machiavels in the earlier plays, with the doubtful exception of Mordred.[4]

Again, it is the tool-villains, more than their masters, who are distinguished by peculiarities of the kind that I have listed. Eleazar is served by a number of Moors; Abraham, the poisoner of Bajazet, and Alexander, Alphonsus' tool, are Jewish. Most strikingly, a considerable number of those hired to do murders are foreigners. Ithamore was born in Thrace and brought up in Arabia; the Guise uses two Spanish assassins, and Alexander is "of Toledo"; Frenchmen,who speak a kind of comic pidgin are employed in *James IV* and also in *The Wounds of Civil War*.[5]

Despite the tool-villains, it is clear that the Machiavel does not have to be in any obvious sense an outsider. What is, perhaps, more significant is that, in Elizabethan drama at large, the outsider does not have to be a Machiavel. These rather stark facts suggest several conclusions: first, that the dramatists felt

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[4] I am not, of course, concerned with comedy, but Don John should be remembered here, perhaps.

[5] Lorrique, the tool-villain in *Hoffman*, assumes the disguise of a French doctor when he supplies Jerom with poison. Foreign doctors, like the Frenchman, Dr Caius, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, seem to have been popular amongst the upper-classes. It may well be that in the sixteenth century the association of the physician and the assassin appeared inevitable.

no absolute need to explain the Machiavel's alienation from other men, or his total dedication to self in terms of some imposed difference or some sense of rejection. There was, it seems, at least until the time of Ford's reliance on *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, no feeling that evil had to be explicable and, consequently, no stock appeal equivalent to that of the psychiatrist to the deprived childhood. The corollary of this is that, in the drama, to be a Moor, a Jew or a bastard does not necessarily involve rejection, or that, if it does, rejection does not lead inevitably to the kind of wickedness that comes from living in a world with one citizen. Finally, one is faced with the conclusion that a black skin, a hunched back, or a bend sinister is never in the earlier plays a full excuse for a distorted nature; in a Machiavel it is, rather, an emblem of that distortion.

All this may become clearer, perhaps, if one pauses to examine certain differences between Othello and Eleazar or Shylock and Barabas. The Bastard Falconbridge looks as though he might become a Machiavel but goes on, instead, to denounce policy and rebellion and to deliver the patriotic exhortation that ends *King John*.[6] There is no hunch-back who is not a Machiavel to set

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[6] Falconbridge talks of "Sweet, sweet, sweet poison" (I.i.213); he is several times linked with the devil; he has something of the Machiavel's irreverent, salty wit, and in his soliloquy on "commodity" (II.i.561-598) he seems to move from cynical observation of political affairs to acceptance of the unprincipled self interest that is "the bias of the world." Yet, as Matchett remarks, "Many of the difficulties commentators have with the speech arise from their attempts to make of it a summation of the Bastard's character, a final position rather than a stage in his development." The speech is intended, I think, to mark a stage

beside Richard of Gloucester. It seems rather as though a hideously ugly body, like that of De Flores much later, remained the one infallible sign, though never the complete explanation, of a disposition as unnatural and grotesque as twisted limbs or a ravaged face.

In his essay on *Othello and Colour Prejudice* G.K. Hunter describes the development over many centuries of "a traditional view of what Moors are like, i.e., gross, disgusting, inferior, carrying the symbol of damnation on their skin."[7] Yet on the stage not all Moors had to be evil. As I have shown already, Muly Mahamet Seth in *The Battle of Alcazar* is presented as having justice and virtue on his side, despite the fact that he is a black man fighting against a white one. When the Moor became largely isolated in a white society he was, apparently, expected to have a "soul black like his face" (*T.A.* III.i.205) and usually the expectation was fulfilled, yet in *Othello* such expectations are turned back upon the audience and exploited to make plain the ease with which we assent to Roderigo's and Iago's picture of the Moor as "lascivious" (I.i.126) and a "devil" (I.i.91). As the

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in the audience's development as well as one in the Bastard's, for as the play proceeds and Falconbridge goes on to reject John's policy of compromise with Pandulph, and to berate the rebel lords, one is invited to revise not only one's assessment of the Bastard, but also the grounds on which that assessment has been based. See: William H. Matchett's Introduction to *King John* in *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare* (1965; rpt. 1972), p. 557. The edition of the play used is: William Shakespeare, *King John*, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1954).

7 G.K. Hunter, "Othello and Colour Prejudice", p. 150.

play proceeds, of course, Othello does turn away from the values of the white civilisation that he has upheld, and becomes, like the menacing Turk, a barbarian enemy of order, justice and truth. Othello's black face is, then, both a deceptive appearance and an image of that part of his nature which he has held in subjection until Iago takes from him the reason and prowess that have made him the champion of Venice. Finally, Othello's colour is an Achilles' heel, a weakness upon which Iago can play in the process of throwing the Moor back into barbarism. In some sense, then, Othello's colour is used to explain what he is and why he acts as he does. The same might be said of Eleazar, whose dedication to vengeance stems, it seems, from a furious sense of injury. He has been deprived of his royal inheritance and taken captive by the "Spanish Tyrant" (*L.D.* I.i.158), and now, in Spain, his royal blood means only that he is hated and mocked as "the black Prince of Divels" (I.i.90). But any similarity between Othello and Eleazar is superficial; the differences are striking and instructive.

Eleazar, though loved by the Queen of Spain and married to a white wife, is from the beginning an outsider in a way that Othello is not. He is bombarded with insults relating to his colour, but the insults are prompted by suspicions of lust and ambition that are all too well-founded. Eleazar begins *Lust's Dominion* as a Machiavel as well as a Moor; he is rejected not so much because he is black as because he is wicked. His colour becomes the emblem of genuine evil that his enemies make of it, and his own complaints of racial discrimination become a belated

justification of defiant delight in a black self. Like Aaron, Eleazar rejoices in the perfect matching of black face and black soul which together comprise a completely self- contained, completely self-absorbed identity.

Othello differs from Eleazar at every point. His colour may be too much for Brabantio when it comes to marriage with Desdemona, and Iago may insult him when his back is turned, but, in the Senate, Othello is accepted for what he is: a bulwark of Christendom and a noble general who is "far more fair than black" (I.iii.290). Initially, Othello's colour is not an emblem of his nature but a foil to virtues that his enemies fail to value at their true rate. Despite the strictures of F. R. Leavis,[8] Othello does not suffer from a tendency to idealise himself so much as from self doubt, and, at the end of the play, if he attempts to justify his errors, he does not harp on his colour. Rather, he himself rejects and condemns the inner barbarian to whom he has been betrayed, and in his suicide turns his sword against that part of himself that has proved an enemy to Venice.[9] It is at this point that the difference between Othello and Eleazar is most marked. Othello ends by cleaving away the darkness that has set him apart from other men; Eleazar, even in death, hugs it about himself like "a Roab imperiall" (I.i.173).

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8 F.R. Leavis, "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero" in *The Common Pursuit* (1952; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 136-60.

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> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian, and traduc'd the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him thus.
> (V.ii.353-57).

The contrast between Shylock and Barabas is not as sharp as that between the two Moors. Both are seen as outsiders by the Christians amongst whom they live, both are mistreated, and both want revenge. Yet Shylock's determination to have his pound of flesh, while not condoned in his play, is at least comprehensible and, in some sense, commensurate with his wrongs, while Barabas, although he suffers greater injustices than Shylock, plunges into an orgy of butchery and vengeance so monstrous that all that he has suffered dwindles into insignificance. The poisoning of the nuns and the blowing up of the garrison of soldiers are not to be explained in terms of resentment or even of policy. They become instead the products of that sheer love of evil which is evinced in Barabas' gloating with Ithamore over a life-time of gleeful atrocities. Barabas is, in fact, a true outsider, trusting none but himself, feeling for none but himself, and so delighting in the name of Jew as appropriate to what he is. Shylock clings, of course, to his Jewishness, but in him it is not an emblem of a total dedication to evil or to self, which has always and inevitably set him apart from the rest of humanity. Instead of revelling in isolation, at at least one point in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock insists upon the bonds that unite him, or ought to unite him, with his fellow men: "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" (III.i.52-54).[10]

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[10] All quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1955).

This contrasting of outsiders who are not Machiavels with Machiavels who are also outsiders would seem to endorse my earlier suggestions that the Machiavel is not to be explained in terms of any peculiarity, and that, in the drama, peculiarity, despite audience expectation, is not an infallible sign of evil. But, beyond this, at least one new point has perhaps emerged. The Machiavel seems not only to be the irreducible, final cause of his own isolation, but to welcome isolation from men as he welcomes alienation from God. He may complain with justice of persecution and suffer real injury to his pride or to his pocket, but in the end he seems to hug to himself the name of the outsider as properly his. Sometimes he may even flourish it as the emblem of his delighted egoism in much the way that he can parade an affinity with the devil. Interestingly, even that affinity is not allowed to impair the Machiavel's splendid isolation; even in hell he will out-act the devils "in perfect villainy", and so remain eternally the untarnished egoist, the inviolate outsider.

Standing apart as he does, the Machiavel is used sometimes to provide a peculiar vision of the world of his play. In later plays, like Webster's, where those of the tool-villain class, the discontented courtiers, achieve much greater importance, the Machiavel engages often in a virtual stream of satiric commentary. In the earlier plays this sort of denunciation of corruption usually comes from virtuous figures like Perillus, who laments "this wicked age" (*Leir* viii.753), or at least from characters like Marston's Antonio, who are supposed to have right on their side:

> Still striving to be more than man, he proves
> More than a devil; devilish suspect,
> Devilish cruelty, all hell-strain'd juice
> Is poured to his veins, making him drunk
> With fuming surquedries, contempt of heaven,
> Untam'd arrogance,lust, state, pride, murder.
> (III.i.119-24).

If Marston were Middleton (who is, I am convinced, the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*)[11] such a speech might be a mainspring of marvellous, cohesive ironies, or one of a series of mirrors reflecting images through the play as through a hall. As it is, *Antonio's Revenge* does little to enforce the idea that Antonio, the only avenger in Elizabethan drama who gets off scot-free, is looking at anything like his own reflection. However, not all the earlier dramatists remained indifferent to the dramatic capital to be accrued from giving something in Antonio's vein to a recognisable Machiavellian.

Inevitably, in revealing his assessment of other men as knaves or fools, the Machiavel sometimes engages in general comment which is important both in its revelation of his own character and in its contribution to an all-embracing irony. He may stand aloof, reducing chivalry, love and goodness to dust and ashes, rather in the manner of a Thersites. In doing this, he is, it

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11 See: S. Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 153-65; George R. Price, "The Authorship and the Bibliography of *The Revenger's Tragedy*," *The Library*, 5th series, 15 (1960), 262-77; Peter B. Murray, "The Authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy*," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 56 (1962), 195-218. The edition of the play used is Cyril Tourneur, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. R.A. Foakes, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1966).

seems, as B.J. Layman suggests of Webster's Flamineo,[12] tearing down everything about him to something that he can both understand and control. Thus, Iago, having designated Othello an "erring barbarian" and Desdemona "a super-subtle Venetian" is sure their "frail vow" will not be "too hard for my wits, and all the tribe of hell" (I.iii.356-58). The troubling thing about such assessments is that they are not all wrong. Othello is capable of becoming what Iago calls him, and Desdemona did deceive her father. Yet in so far as such judgements are incomplete they turn back upon the Machiavel and illuminate his limitations.

Richard of Gloucester's judgements are, at first, endorsed by his play. His victims are, as he suggests, shallow or lascivious or bloody, and they fail to recognise both the enormity of their sins or the imminence of retribution. Anne is contemptible in her readiness to forget Edward and Henry; Elizabeth and her husband did abandon Lancaster for York; Edward is lustful; Margaret did participate in the killing of Rutland and the taunting of York; Buckingham has been both "high-reaching" (IV.ii.31) and "deep-revolving" (IV.ii.42). All this is true as Richard claims it to be. Yet, latterly, Richard's judgements are proved false; Elizabeth in pretending to accede to a marriage proposal is neither "shallow" nor "changing" (IV.iv.431), and Richmond is never the figure that Richard derides in his address to his soldiers. The decline in the reliability of Richard's judgements is, then, one

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12 B.J. Layman, "The Equilibrium of Opposites in *The White Devil*: A Reinterpretation," *PMLA*, 74 (1959), 336-47.

of the indices of his passage from the role of hell's factor, to that of monstrous enemy of goodness and of God. The underlying irony is that in garnering up the guilty for hell, Richard fails to realise that he is, himself, the epitome of all the evil by which England is bedeviled and, hence, the ultimate object of the divine retribution which, unwittingly, he has served.

The society in which Barabas lives is, if anything, more profoundly corrupt than the England of Richard of Gloucester. Barabas' attacks on the hypocrisy, greed and lust of Christians are, in *The Jew of Malta*, largely justified. Yet Barabas, since like Richard he lives apart from other men, fails to see the ties that unite him with his enemies. If Barabas recognises that he is akin to his foes in both hypocrisy and greed, he believes until the end that he is superior in cunning. The great irony of the play is that Barabas' enemies are finally much closer to his own assessment of himself than he has acknowledged, and so, in the final scene, outwit him. In a very real sense it is Barabas himself who collapses the gallery above the boiling cauldron.

Later, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, this flickering of mirror images before a Machiavel too self-absorbed to know his own reflection becomes, in effect, the heart and soul of a play made up of one ironic reversal after another. For the time being, if there were no Vindices, there were still characters who, as total egoists, might provide images of themselves and of their societies which invite always some taxing reappraisal of reality.

The Motives of the Machiavel

Since the Machiavel is always an egoist, and since, in this as in other things, he is linked with the political figures of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, it would hardly be surprising to discover that he is much interested in power. What is, perhaps, a little surprising is that, when heads are counted, there is not a single Machiavel in any of the earlier plays who is not in some sense a power-seeker. This is true not only of the central, fully-drawn figures but also of the tool villains and of the mass of peripheral characters who might be fully Machiavellian if their backgrounds were a little different, or the presentation of their characters slightly more or less comprehensive.

As I have shown, the great mass of the earlier Machiavels are rulers, or the close relatives of rulers, or, at least, great nobles. For almost all of these the retention or achievement of power in the shape of what York calls "the golden circuit" (*2 Hen VI*.III.i.352) is the ultimate aim. The crown is, of course the mark of the great outsider who is recognised not only as unique but as supreme; consequently, to the egoist who recognises no "primogenity and due of birth" (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.106)[13], the crown is utterly desirable, the ultimate symbol of what he is assured "by nature, love and reason" he must be. The preservation

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13 Quotations from *Troilus and Cressida* are from William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Daniel Seltzer, The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: The New American Library, 1963).

or extension of power is all important to an Alphonsus or a Muly Mahamet, as well as to such figures as Mordred or Henry IV or the French kings in both *Edward III* and *King John*.

Most Elizabethan Machiavels do not begin their plays as kings but struggle with varying degrees of success to achieve supreme power. Even where there is no possibility of winning a throne, the aim is often to become the power behind it. Winchester, for instance, longs to "sit at chiefest stern of public weal" (*1 Hen VI*.I.i.177). Suffolk, having seen Margaret of Anjou married to Henry VI, expects to enjoy rule over "her, the King and realm" (*1 Hen VI*.V.v.108). The flatterers of Richard II in *Woodstock* want the king's uncles dead so that their influence will be unrestricted: "Had they been dead, we had ruled the realm and him" (I.ii.19). The Machiavels who are neither nobles nor court favourites, and most of the tool-villains, are usually eager for wealth, but, even in these cases, there is often emphasis on the power that wealth brings, or on "rising", or on the acquisition of some title. At the beginning of *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas is contemptuous of mere coin and revels instead in the thought of commanding the beauty of jewels, any one of which might serve "To ransom great kings from captivity" (I.i.32). In his yearning for "infinite riches in a little room" (I.i.37), the stress is more upon "infinite" than upon "riches". Alice Arden suspects that "Mosby loves me not but for my wealth" (viii.108), and, in a sense, she is right, but Mosby's resentment of Arden's reference to the "pressing iron" (xiv.235) suggests that he is

more interested in acquiring gentility than in the simple possession of money. Again, in *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon*, the Prior certainly covets his nephew's lands, but he seems even more attracted by the title of earl. Often, of course, the desire for power and advancement is blended with other motives; the most common of these are, perhaps, hatred of some rival or a desire for vengeance.

The Machiavellian sisters in *King Leir*, like Shakespeare's Goneril and Regan, look forward to the enjoyment of power, untroubled by their aged father. They feel themselves threatened by their younger sister, but their desire to discredit her stems less from the cool recognition of the danger Cordella represents than from jealous hatred:

> Besides, she is so nice and so demure;
> So sober, courteous, modest and precise,
> That all the Court hath worke ynough to do,
> To talk how she exceedeth me and you.
> (ii.105-08).

Similarly, Villuppo in *The Spanish Tragedy* hopes to advance himself by vilifying Alexandro, but is prompted also by hatred of an enemy. Winchester's desire for power is fed by a longing to make Gloucester stoop, and Gardiner, in bringing down Cromwell, wants not only to protect the combined interests of his church and himself, but to avenge a personal insult.

Vengeance as a motive that combines with the pursuit of power is yet more apparent in *Orlando Furioso*. Sacrepant aims initially at a crown and at marriage with Angelica, but when the princess rejects his advances he determines to avenge the insult.

His longing to become king continues unassuaged, but until his death, Sacrepant is also intent on the "quittance" of his "ills" (II.i.499). In much the same way both Selimus and Acomat strive for control of their father's empire and both are resentful when Bajazet refuses to recognise their claims. Acomat, especially, continues prompted by a blend of ambition and revenge, that "gnawes" (xv.1345) his soul.

Sometimes the ambition of the Machiavel is accompanised by a sheer delight in evil, or by a pleasure in the exercise of his own cunning so intense that it seems almost an end in itself. Enough has already been said of the sadistic glee of Aaron, Barabas and Fallerio's first murderer, and of the preening of Mortimer, Alphonsus and Richard. None of these characters is indifferent, of course, to a self-advancement which will enhance the satisfactions of alienation and of self-esteem.

While all the Machiavels are concerned to some extent with power, there are a handful whose motives are difficult to define at all accurately, and two or three more in whom the pursuit of power though not absent is less compelling than some other motive. The motivation of Kyd's Lorenzo is plain enough once he gets into his stride. He hates Horatio as a successful rival for glory, as a commoner unworthy of the affections of Bel-Imperia, and as an interloper who threatens to disrupt the scheme for marrying Bel-Imperia to Balthazar. After Horatio is dead, Lorenzo busies himself in covering his tracks. But quite why Lorenzo is so zealous in the promotion of Balthazar's suit in the first place

is never really explained. Obviously a match between Bel-Imperia and a prince of Portugal must be advantageous to Lorenzo's house, but Lorenzo being what he is, one searches for some more direct, personal benefit that will reward Lorenzo's pains; there is, it seems, none to be found.[14]

The "motiveless malignity" of Iago is notorious, but as Bradley has pointed out, Iago is not, in fact, "motiveless" at all;[15] on the contrary, he offers us too many motives for his ensnaring of Othello. For instance, in soliloquy, Iago announces that he suspects Othello of having made him a cuckold and that he intends to be revenged. One does not, of course, expect everything that is said in a soliloquy to be true; when a character claims that he holds Fortune captive the audience knows that it must be sceptical; nearly all tragic heroes are in some sense deluded and often reveal their delusions in soliloquy. Yet we expect the speaker himself to believe what he says, and the

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[14] It is, however, not unusual for a dramatist to get the situation he wants, to create what Oscar Mandel calls "the original configuration" by causing a character to act in a manner that is not wholly consistent with later actions. F.G. Schoff sees Lear's initial action as one "which, as he is shown elsewhere in the play, he would manifestly never perform", and suggests that it is simply the necessary induction to "a play about the fearful power of evil, into whose grip, through some misstep or accident, even the wisest and noblest man may plunge himself and us."
See: Oscar Mandel, "Towards a Stricter Definition of Tragedy", *University of Kansas City Review*, 25 (1959), 163-71;
F.G. Schoff, "*King Lear*: Moral Example or Tragic Protagonist", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13 (1962), 157-72.

[15] Bradley, pp. 207-37.

trouble with Iago is that we can neither believe in Othello's adultery nor in Iago's honesty when he lays the charge. Because one knows that Othello is of "a free and open nature" (I.iii.397), "constant, noble, loving" (II.i.284) it appears absurd that he should be accused of duping his wily ancient and of engaging in sexual intrigue with Emilia. Yet it is, of course, Iago who pays these reluctant tributes to the Moor, and who does so in the very soliloquies in which he reveals the suspicion of adultery. One is forced to conclude either that Shakespeare is turning the convention attaching to the soliloquy on its head and that Iago is lying to the audience, or that we are confronted with a character so fully self-deceived that he seeks to justify his courses to himself with the grossest and most palpable of falsehoods.

If one comes to Iago after reading some number of Elizabethan plays he is, perhaps, less perplexing than if one comes upon him fresh from Dostoevsky. Although the conjunction of irreconcilable statements is probably more striking in Iago's speeches than in those of other characters, he is not alone in supplying a cold but compliant rational faculty with a pretext for the acceptance of errant impulse. Dr Faustus, for instance, justifies his turning to magic by assuring himself that all men are sinners, that all sinners are damned, and that, in consequence, he may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb; and he does this by constructing a syllogism from two half-texts, both of which go on to give assurance of God's mercy to the penitent.[16] Faustus' self-deception is evident from the knowledge that an audience

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16 See: P.H. Kocher, *Christopher Marlowe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946), pp. 106-07.

brings to the play and from the whole fabric of the play itself. In the case of Iago, since we cannot always believe his disclosures and since everyone else in *Othello* is duped into thinking him honest, it is finally only from this total dramatic fabric that any key to his motives can be found.

The play as a whole reveals that Iago, like all Machiavels, is evil, and that the evil itself is not to be explained. His mind is, in a sense, the centre of his final silence, and the heart of that darkness which is contrasted repeatedly with images of light and purity. But if evil itself is inexplicable, it is, as I have suggested, some explanation of what is done. The evil of the Machiavel consists in a total self-absorption which alienates him from god and man and which drives him to seek endorsement of his isolation and self-adulation in the achievement of power. Thus *Othello* suggests that Iago, who declares "I am not what I am" (I.i.65), whose every relationship is a matter of pretence, and whose self-worship is apparent, derives his ultimate pleasure from the manipulation of other people. When he tells us with satisfaction that Othello can be led by the nose, we can believe that the satisfaction is real because throughout the play, Iago is at his most zestful when he is making others dance to his tune. The "pleasure, and action" that "make the hours seem short" (II.iii.369) are those involved in imposing his will upon nominal superiors, in bringing them, all unsuspecting, under his command. Such exercise feeds an ego which is galvanised by the typically Machiavellian desire to do evil for its own sake, to wreak

vengeance for some injury to the amour propre, and, above all, to achieve power over the destinies of others. Such motives become more compelling when, like Milton's Satan, the Machiavel realises that those whom he seeks to control are possessed of pleasures in which he can never share.

If the motives of Lorenzo and Iago are not easily defined, those of Hoffman and Marston's Piero are made abundantly clear. Each has an interest in gaining power or in extending the sphere of influence. Hoffman, having passed himself off as the heir to the Duchy of Luningberg, exclaims: "Dukedomes I well have them" (IV.ii.1906). Piero, already duke of Venice, plans to bring Florence under his rule by marrying his daughter to the young Galeazzo:

> Then Genoa mine by my Maria's match,
> Which I'll solemnize ere next setting Sun;
> Thus Venice, Florence, Genoa strongly leagu'd.
> Excellent, excellent! I'll conquer Rome ...
> (A.R.IV.i.263-66).

Yet neither Hoffman nor Piero are primarily power-seekers; they are unusual examples of the Machiavellian type in that both are, first and foremost, intent upon revenge. As I have suggested, desire to revenge some injury, real or imagined, is not uncommon in a character as egoistical, as adulatory of self, as the Machiavel. Yet normally, of course, the revenge motive is subservient to the dominant lust for power. Hoffman and Piero are interesting because, in combining the roles of Machiavel and of avenger, they are exceptional in two senses; if the earlier

Machiavels do not normally share their obsession with revenge, the earlier avengers are rarely as consistently Machiavellian.

The Elizabethans' attitude to revenge was, as Fredson Bowers has shown, oddly ambivalent.[17] On the one hand they were the heirs to a long tradition of private justice and could endorse the views of a Lord Sanquire: "I confess I was never willing to put up a wrong where, upon terms of honour, I might right myself, nor never willing to pardon where I had the power to revenge."[18] On the other hand the law, the moralists and the church, joined almost unanimously in denouncing the pursuit of private vengeance as a threat to the peace of the realm and as a contravention of God's pronouncement: "Vengeance is mine." The earlier dramatists usually had it both ways. If, in the end, their avengers were punished by death and could, in the meantime, become corrupt or mad, they normally began the plays as sympathetic and even admirable figures. Perhaps because of the increase in duelling under James, the condemnation of revenge became in the seventeenth century more widespread and more vehement. In the drama the avenger often, now, began as an obvious villain, or, like Vindice, turned out in retrospect to have been infected by corruption from the start.

Part of the interest of Piero and Hoffman would seem to lie, then, in their reflection of the growth of more general and more

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17 Bowers, "The Background of Revenge" in *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, pp. 3-40.

18 *Complete Collection of State Trials . . . from the Earliest Period . . . to 1783*, ed. Thomas Bayly Howell (London: 1816-1828), II, 747-51. Quoted in Bowers, p. 29.

overt hostility to private vengeance. In fact, in the case of Piero, almost the reverse is true; in *Antonio's Revenge* he is simply a variation on the theme, a wicked avenger contrasted with one whom, it seems, we are intended to accept as honourable and good. But Hoffman is altogether another matter. Chettle's play is important because it is one of the first to exploit fully the similarities which, under the surface, link two stage types. Beyond that it is one of the first to recognise how far the revenge ethic may be identified with the Machiavellian.

The avenger, renouncing the "Vindicta mihi" of the Lord, sets his own will above the divine in a manner very close to that of the atheistic Machiavel. Hoffman goes on to use piety as a cloak in bewailing the Duke of Prussia, and, in disguising himself as Otho, becomes the opposite of the pious hermit Roderick, who has renounced the world and repents of his earlier usurpation. At the end of the play, when Hoffman is exhorted to consider his soul, he turns his mind instead to a hell which he sees as awaiting those who executed his father, but this hell gapes for Hoffman himself. As both Machiavel and avenger Hoffman is cunning in devising the deaths of his enemies and destructive in the execution of his plans. His vengeful glee, when, after Lodowick and Austria have died, he "would sing a hymne unto the fates/Compos'd of laughing interjections" (III.i.1091-92) is very much in the vein of Aaron or Barabas. But, above all, Hoffman, like all Machiavels, is an egoist, and the play, I think, brings out that his desire for vengeance is a lust, just as his passion for Martha is a lust.

Although at first Hoffman appears to love Martha, this love is soon revealed as one which will countenance the rape and imprisonment of the beloved. The Martha incident throws a lurid light back upon Hoffman's earlier dedication to vengeance. It calls in question his apparent love for his dead father and suggests that both vengeance and sexual desire are different facets of the same blind drive towards self-aggrandisement, domination and the gratification of a perverted, amoral will.

The Virtues of the Machiavel

Sometimes the egoism of the Machiavel seems to be tempered by some feeling for a fellow human being which is closer to genuine love or concern than Hoffman's passion for Martha. Nearly always the object of such feeling is a woman, a wife, mistress or sister; a child; or a father. Acomat has some concern for his Queen, whom he accuses Selimus of strangling "without regard or care,/Of love or dutie" (xxx.2505-06); the Guise reproaches his unfaithful wife with:

> Is all my love forgot which held thee dear,
> Ay, dearer than the apple of mine eye?
> (*Mass.* xv.28-29).

And Muly Mahamet tries to cheer his fainting spouse with meat that he has wrested from a lioness. Mortimer bids farewell to his paramour in terms that suggest some affection, and Suffolk's parting from Queen Margaret seems filled with real grief. At the end of *Arden of Faversham* Mosby turns on Alice and reviles her as a strumpet, but his regret at being unable to save his sister from execution seems genuine enough. Fallerio finally confesses his

crimes in an attempt to protect his loyal Allenso; Piero "seems to condole his son" when Antonio thrusts before him "flesh and blood, which I am sure thou lov'st" (A.P.V.iii.80); Barabas in Act I of *The Jew of Malta* declares that he holds his daughter:

> as dear
> As Agamemnon did his Iphigen...
> (I.i.135-37).

And Aaron risks everything in his efforts to preserve the black child that Tamora has borne him. In *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* the tool-villain Alexander is desolated by the death of his father, Lorenzo, and determines to exact a "dire revenge" (I.ii.267). Richard of Gloucester in *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* declares:

> I had no father, I am like no father,
> I have no brothers, I am like no brothers...
> (V.vi.69-70).

But in the version of the speech that appears in *3 Henry VI* the line in which the father is rejected does not appear, and there is in the play a strong suggestion that, for Richard, York was the one person who mattered. It is only after York's death that Richard emerges as fully Machiavellian, expressing a new sense of isolation and displaying a ferocity that comes in part from a desire to avenge his father's death.

In some few instances such as these, the affection displayed remains, after scrutiny, a feeling that the play does nothing to diminish or undercut. But in these cases love and concern usually appear very suddenly, and may, equally suddenly, vanish after a single speech. Predictably, then, the Machiavels

who give way to genuine affection are often generally inconsistent, or even fragmented, characters. The Guise, for instance, after a thoroughly Machiavellian career, seems, on his death-bed, to express a real loyalty to the Catholic church. His love for his wife appears an aberration of a similar kind, introduced to supply a fresh motive for murder when the times are quiet. Again, Fallerio does not develop. He simply changes abruptly from a Machiavel to a penitent.

When the Machiavel's expression of love is neither obviously hypocritical nor aberrant, it is either tainted by policy or rooted in egoistical feeling for a character who is seen more as an extension of the Machiavel himself than as a discrete personality. Suffolk's love for Margaret and Mortimer's for Isabella are interlocked with treason and self-seeking. Acomat's Queen is an arm of his power, who supports her husband against Selimus and who must be supported if Acomat is to defeat his brother. Muly's feeding of Calipolis on "lyons flesh" (B. of A. II.iii.n.1) is an assertion of his own undaunted power and an emblem of the resurgence of ferocious courage needed to gain victory in the next battle:

> Feed and be fat, that we may meet the foe
> With strength and terror, to revenge our wrong.
> (II.iii.101-02).

Children, even more than wives or paramours, are usually presented as characters in whom the Machiavel sees and adores his own reflection. Roma Gill has this to say of Barabas' declaration of love for his daughter: "The interpreation of these lines is

crucial to the play, and Levin seems to miss the point when he observes that 'Agamemnon is less relevant than Jephtha might have been.' Though Iphigenia was dear to her father, he was prepared to sacrifice her for a greater good, a fair wind to Troy. Gold is Barabas's greater good; for this, and for his own security he is prepared to sacrifice Abigail."[19] If Levin has missed the point here, Gill has not quite grasped it. Her comment is true in part, but she fails to recognise the most important reason for Barabas' readiness to murder his daughter. The Jew promptly abandons all affection for Abigail when he learns that she has become a nun in earnest, and he does so because, in joining the Christians, Abigail has ceased to be an extension of himself. She no longer reflects the will of Barabas, the outsider, nor his amorality, nor his self-absorption.

> For she that varies from me in belief,
> Gives great presumption that she loves me not;
> Or loving doth dislike of something done.
> (III.iv.10-12).

When one turns to Aaron's devotion to his black baby, the essential egoism of the Machiavel's love for his children becomes even more apparent. Unlike Abigail, the baby is not a dramatic personality. Danby has remarked that in Shakespeare's plays "the ideas are such meanings as are also people".[20] The baby is,

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19 Roma Gill's Introduction in *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. R. Gill (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. xix. See: H. Levin, *The Overreacher : A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 90.

20 John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p. 19.

perhaps, unique in Shakespearian drama in being only an idea. It cannot speak, but can only be addressed. It cannot move about of its own volition, but is carried from place to place by other characters. One would like to know how it was represented on the stage. At first it appears as a bundle which the nurse wraps and fumbles in her arms, but later it may have emerged from its wrappings as a kind of black ikon or mammet, suggestive of the paraphanalia of the witch. Whether as bundle or sinister doll the baby is all symbol. It is the fruit of lust, an emblem of disorder, and the devilish contrary of the innocence and new hope embodied in that other Shakespearean baby which grows up to be restored as Perdita. In all this, of course, the child reflects the evil of the father, and Aaron's love for the baby comes from his recognition of his off-spring as himself. He sees in its colour, which "scorns to bear another hue" (IV.ii.100), an image of his own entrenchment in unalterable darkness, in its royal blood a mark of his own natural pre-eminence, and in its future as a warrior a reflection of the valour of "As true a dog as ever fought at head" (V.i.102), which he boasts of to Lucius. The child

> smiles upon the father,
> As who should say, "Old lad, I am thine own."
> (IV.ii.120-21).

And Aaron declares:

> this is my self;
> The vigour and the picture of my youth:
> This before all the world do I prefer.
> (IV.ii.107-09).

The dead fathers of loving Machiavellian sons have more than a little in common with Aaron's baby. They do not always appear on the stage, of course, although Hoffman keeps memory green by sharing his cell with his father's skeleton, still wearing "the iron/Crowne that burnt his braines out" (I.i.105-06). The skeleton, like the image of the father that remains in the mind of Alexander or Richard, becomes a symbol of what the Machiavel admires. Richard, for instance, praises York's martial prowess and reminds Edward of their father's ambition to become king:

> Nay, if thou be that princely eagle's bird,
> Show they descent by gazing 'gainst the sun:
> For chair and dukedom, throne and kingdom say,
> Either that is thine, or else thou wert not his.
> (*3 Hen VI*.II.i.91-94).

But prowess in battle and the ambition to rule are, of course, characteristic of Richard himself. Much later, in a scene in which he once again recalls his "noble father", Richard even applies the image of the eagle to himself:

> Our aerie buildeth in the cedar's top
> And dallies with the wind and scorns the sun.
> (*R.III*.I.iii.263-64).

The father who must be avenged, like the child that must be preserved, is seen, before all else, as part of the Machiavel's own being. Alexander, mourning Lorenzo, exclaims: "Ay me, my life is dead!" (*Alph*.I.ii.241). Richard identifies himself with York by stressing the shared Christian name, and Hoffman asks Lorrique whether he would not

> avenge his death whose better part
> Was thine, thou his, when he fell part of thee
> Fell with him each drop, being part thine owne
> And wouldst not be reveng'd?
> (I.i.67-70).

Apart from a capacity for love which turns out usually to be yet another expression of a massive, central egoism, the Machiavel, when his mask is off, is left with few apparent virtues and often with none at all.

Those admirable traits which sometimes seem to remain to him belong, in general, to one of two groups. The major Machiavels, especially those of royal or noble blood, can sometimes display a pride that takes on a certain grandeur. Often they are brave warriors, and they die, usually, with defiant resolution. The minor Machiavels, the tool-villains, and some of the more prominent figures of the tool-villain's class tend to be less decisive. They may waver in their courses, revealing doubts and scruples, and sometimes, in defeat, they may repent.

In *Orlando Furioso* Sacrepant's prowess as a warrior is acknowledged, and his invocation of chaos at death hovers between bathos and a dark splendour, reminiscent of Tamburlaine the Great. Sir David in *Edward I* fights bravely and accepts his end with dignity: "I go where my star leads me and die in my country's just cause and quarrel" (xxiv.8-9). Richard III, of course, has a long history of valour in battle and at Bosworth dies having enacted "more wonders than a man" (V.iv.2). Eleazar, whatever else he may be, is certainly no coward; he refuses to fight Philip when his enemy's sword is broken, and finally welcomes hell with undiminished élan. Mortimer and Suffolk both have creditable records as soldiers and both die with resolution and pride. Even Aaron and Barabas, though they have no history as

great warriors, face their singularly unpleasant ends with courage. Barabas in the cauldron exhorts himself to "strive/To end thy life with resolution" (*J.of M.V.*v.80-81), and Aaron, condemned to be half-buried and starved to death, declares:

> I am no baby, I, that with base prayers
> I should repent the evils I have done;
> (*T.A.V.*iii.185-86).

All this, undoubtedly, has an appeal. Yet such courage is, after all, like Satan's, of a perverted kind, consisting usually in supreme egoism, in determination to preserve the image of the alien, amoral self intact and free. Sometimes, too, the resolution and bravery of the Machiavel is deliberately undercut by his play in some more specific way. When Sir David, for instance, fights by his brother's side, a contrast is established between the vengeful reaction of the one and the chivalrous magnanimity of the other. Again, though Sir David is consistently loyal to the Welsh cause, he works as a spy and is a traitor to the noble Edward. This is brought out through yet another contrast, this time with Sir David's opponent in combat, the exemplary Mortimer. Mortimer is chivalric in his loyalties and cuts away the nobility of Sir David's final pronouncement with accusations of treachery.

The impressiveness of Barabas' final resolution is diminished in a quite different way. For one thing, nobody takes much notice; there are not even the customary exclamations of horror and dismay. More importantly, Barabas' attempt at self-assertion in the pot becomes an ironic, almost grimly comic

irrelevancy, because, despite his hatred of Christians and his desire to "have brought confusion on you all" (V.v.86), he has simply paved the way for Ferneze's victory and has left a Christian to spring on Calymath the news of his own mining of the garrison. Peripeteia of this order, whereby Barabas the Jew proves to have served the Christian cause more effectively than anyone, shrivels away the Machiavel more completely than any "extremity of heat" or "intolerable pangs" (V.v.88-89).

In *Richard III* different techniques again are employed to diminish the stature of the Machiavel and to place his courage. Richard is not allowed a dying speech, but simply vanishes on the battle-field, calling for a horse. Richmond dismisses him laconically with: "The bloody dog is dead" (V.v.2), and moves into a speech of his own that is resolute, yet pious and calm. The tone of this final address is crucial, because it is a fundamental part of the contrast between Richard's desperate courage and Richmond's "deliberate valour".[21] It extends and intensifies the difference between the two leaders that emerges from their parallel orations, and illuminates the distinction between a resolution that is furious, passionate and irrational and one that is rooted in faith, goodness and right reason.

Not all the plays bring out this kind of Miltonic contrast between true courage and the despairing fury of the Machiavel, who, for all his cunning, has never apprehended the higher forms of reason and who, in defeat, becomes as much beast as devil. In several plays, however, the distinction is clear enough, and in

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21 The reference to the quality which Milton contrasts with "rage" in *Paradise Lost* (I.553-54) seems apposite.

none is it clearer than in *Macbeth*. By this I do not mean to suggest, as some critics have done,[22] that either Macbeth or his wife ever quite succeed in becoming fully Machiavellian. They try with all their strength to do so, but much of their tragedy resides in the fact that, in the end, they fail. Eleazar invokes the forces of darkness to aid and to adorn him, to enter into triumphant complicity, but Lady Macbeth invokes these same forces to change, to "unsex" (I.v.41)[23] her, and because the change never quite takes place she is driven to madness. Similarly Macbeth, even at the point of the Macduff murders - indeed, especially at this point - never quite succeeds in becoming a true Machiavel. The murders contribute nothing to his political power, and afford him none of the sadistic pleasure, which is also a delight in power over others, that Iago or Aaron experience. The murders of Lady Macduff, her children and her servants are undertaken simply because Macbeth believes that if he acts with Machiavellian brutality he will, like the Machiavel, become free of conscience and "sleep inspite of thunder" (IV.i.86).

However full of horrors Macbeth may sup, this ambition is never quite achieved. Yet, by the end of the play, Macbeth is

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22 See for instance: Danby, pp. 162; 165.
Danby regards *Macbeth* as a play in which both public and private evil are seen in relation to a "benevolent metaphysical nature." He continues: "The machiavel, too, for the first time, is clearly related to this Nature. His generation is depicted in the degeneration of Macbeth."

23 All quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1962).

clearly much more of a Machiavellian than he is at the start. One measure of his progress lies in the difference between the true courage of the "worthy gentleman"(I.ii.24) and the desperate fury of the bear tied to its stake. In the first battle it is upon the rebel, Macdonwald, that "the multiplying villainies of nature" (I.ii.11) swarm. In the last battle it is Macbeth, in armour again after his "borrowed robes" (I.iii.109)[24], who is a rebel and unnatural. The settled prowess of "justice ... with valour arm'd" (I.ii.29) has given way to a fierce hacking and throwing, as Macbeth, no longer "curbing" the "lavish spirit" (I.ii.58) of Duncan's enemy abandons every check and curb in the struggle against his master's son. This struggle is very different from Bosworth field, because one recalls, as Macbeth himself does, what has gone before and what has been lost. But the recollection becomes more piercing when one recognises in Macbeth's perverted, ferocious courage a rage typical of the stage Machiavel in defeat.

Unlike Macbeth, Richard III and most of the greater Machiavels are either able to crush down conscience or are never troubled by it at all. It is usually the smaller, weaker figures who experience doubt and who turn sometimes to repentance. In *King Leir*, Skalliger, while justifying his villainy with "he that cannot flatter, cannot live" (ix.816), denounces Gonorill as "viperous" (ix.811), and predicts that the heavens will punish

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24 See: Alan S. Downer, "The 'Language of Props' in *Macbeth*" in *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, ed. Laurence Lerner (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 213-16. An extract from "The Life of Our Design," *The Hudson Review*, 2 (1949). Downer comments upon the way in which Macbeth's different costumes act as visual images of changing situations and states of feeling.

both the undutiful daughter and himself,

> a villayne, that to curry favour,
> Have given the daughter counsell 'gainst the father.
> (ix.813-14).

Mosby seems to waver several times. In scene i, when he first appears, he tries, apparently, to break with Alice; in scene viii he looks back wistfully to the "golden time" (viii.11) when he had no gold but slept secure at night, and in scene xii, after Shakebag and Black Will have failed yet again to murder Arden, he says suddenly: "These knaves will never do it; let us give it over" (xii.64). Narbazanes, in *Darius*, experiences similar qualms when he is plotting with Bessus against the king. He fears that the "staine of treason" will burden "all our race" (III.iii. 1025-26) and that "afflictions" (III.iii.1029) will disturb the enjoyment of stolen power. "The sacred title of a Soveraigne King" fills him with "terrour more than can be thought" (III.iii. 1031-32).

All this does not, of course, amount to very much. Although Skalliger vanishes from the play after confronting his scruples, there is no real indication that his disappearance is caused by a crisis of conscience. His final words suggest, rather, reluctant acceptance of the poor man's need to see conscience as a luxury well beyond his means. Mosby claims that his early coldness to Alice was assumed only to try her constancy, and since he goes on to describe how "yesternight" (i.227) he encountered a painter who will be able to help in the poisoning of Master Arden, one is inclined to believe him. Similarly, the glancing back to a time of innocence and security does not suggest any

genuine repentance. The recollection is prompted simply by the discomfort of uncertainty and fear, and is soon swept aside. Mosby's feet are planted firmly on the path to pleasure and there is no going back. Instead he turns with a certain relish to plans for making himself "sole ruler of mine own" (viii.36) by getting rid not only of Arden, but of Greene, Clarke, Michael and Alice as well. The suggestion in scene xii that the murdering of Arden should be given over is, again, the product of momentary discouragement which is quickly overcome. Alice at once presents her lover with a "new device" (xii.65) for disposing of "my husband Hornsby" (xii.73), and Mosby, exclaiming "Ah, fine devise!" (xii.74), rewards her with a kiss. The doubts of Narbazanes rest on no firmer moral foundation. They reveal a desire for fame and a fear of both "afflictions" and "Majestie". Bessus counsels his co-conspirator:

> To idle sounds and frivolous reports
> Give straight a pasport, for they last not long.
> (III.iii.1035-36).

And in one way Bessus is right; Narbazanes' qualms vanish as rapidly as Mosby's, and he soon returns to the business of plotting the overthrow of Darius.

If the doubts of a Skalliger or a Mosby or a Narbazanes do little to modify the villain's Machiavellian qualities, it may be that the more formal and comprehensive repentance of certain other characters produces a more genuine modification of evil. When Ateukin discovers that all his plans to win Ida for his master, King James, have come to nothing and that Ida has married

Lord Eustace, he launches into repeated admissions of shame and underscores the denunciation of ambition and flattery that runs through the play. Similarly, the Prior in *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* turns suddenly to repentance after his plot to poison King Richard has been foiled. Gardiner, on learning that Cromwell's reprieve has come from the king, exclaims:

> My conscience now telles me this deede was ill:
> Would Christ that Cromwell were alive again.
> (*Crom.*V.v.146-47).

And the messenger in *King Leir* drops his daggers when, already unnerved by Perillus' warnings of hell, he hears peals of thunder coming from the heavens. In all these instances fear of justice, earthly or divine, is obviously an important motive. It is tempting to conclude that if Machiavels of high standing or dramatic stature turn, in defeat, to raging lions, then the lesser Machiavels, who are at the same time often of humble origin, cringe, when cornered, like foxes. But this will not quite do.

If Gardiner's repentance or the messenger's is almost entirely a matter of cringing away from punishment, that of Ateukin or the Prior seems intended to reveal genuine remorse. Their confessions do not show simply a new facet of old evil, nor even a logical modulation of self- absorption into self-preservation. Ateukin and the Prior, like Fallerio or Lorrique, or, later, Bosola, actually cease to be Machiavels and become different character types. However, as M.C. Bradbook has remarked: "These reversals are . . . so frankly artificial that there is no point in dwelling on their lack of verisimilitude.

They are closely related to other conventions, such as the dissociation of character in disguise . . . The fixed type made such reversals of character the only possible form of character-development: each type was like a mask which could only be replaced by another mask and not modified in itself."[25] This means, of course, that Lorrique's sudden change of allegiance or the Prior's penitence does nothing at all to suggest that the Machiavel may harbour in himself seeds of goodness. Looking back, one finds no indication that either villain has been a good man misled or forced into evil. Despite the Prior's claim that he has been tempted by Sir Doncaster, the evil of the Machiavel remains intact and whole.

The suddenness with which this evil is discarded is sometimes emphasised by an abrupt change in the Machiavel's diction. Characteristically, Machiavels speak in blunt, often colloquial terms; sometimes they are given prose, and sometimes, as in the case of Lorenzo, their brutal, pithy speech is set in contrast to the formal, the patterned, the choric or the lyrical. With repentance, the Machiavel's own pronouncements may suddenly become, themselves, extremely formal and elaborately patterned, and, hence, suggestive of an abrupt acceptance of order and of conventional rather than individualistic values. These pronouncements may even take on a choric quality which heightens both the solemnity and unreality of recantation, and enforces

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25 M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 62.

the idea that the Machiavel has stepped suddenly into the new role of commentator upon his earlier evil. As such, he stands at a distance from both his former character and from any figure of consistent wickedness who may have been his associate. One of the sharpest contrasts between the repentant Prior and the incorrigible Sir Doncaster is, then, one of diction:

> Prior: Therefore I curse, with bitternesse of soule,
> The bower wherein I saw thy balefull eyes.
> My eares I curse, for harkning to thy tongue.
> I curse thy tongue for tempting of myne eares.
> Each part I curse, that wee call thyne or myne:
> Thine for enticing mine, mine following thine.
>
> Sir Doncaster: A holy prayer. What collect have we next?
> (V.665-72).

Ateukin's rapid sloughing off of his former role is not underscored by any contrast with the unrepentant, but simply by the adoption of a new diction which differs from his own earlier speech, especially that of the semi-comic scenes with the tool-villains. So in Act III Ateukin can berate Andrew with:

> Are you prating knave? I will teach you better nurture. Is this the care you have of my wardrop, of my accounts, and matters of trust? (*James IV*.III.ii.1248-50).

When repentant he exclaims:

> Ashamde to looke upon my Prince againe,
> Ashamde of my suggestions and advice,
> Ashamde of life, ashamde that I have erde:
> Ile hide my selfe, expecting for my shame.
> Thus God doth worke with those, that purchase fame
> By flattery, and make their Prince their game.
> (V.iii.1965-70).

All in all, it would appear that the Machiavel, the supreme egoist, is presented as entirely devoid of genuine virtue

unless he steps out of character or completely surrenders his former role. So long as he remains true to type his self-adulation may prompt him to scorn both Fortune and his fellow men, or to embrace an isolation occasionally enhanced by some peculiarity, or to act as commentator upon vices and weaknesses which, ironically, reflect those that he himself displays.

In any case, his egoism will prompt him to pursue power in one form or another, and even when he seems bent upon some other end, such as revenge, this egoism will ensure that the supreme purpose remains always the gratification of the individual, amoral will. Any love which the Machiavel displays will prove, ultimately, to be love of himself, and any apparent virtue will reside only in an endeavour to preserve the self.

And in all this the Machiavel will, as Machiavelli's most stalwart apologist admits, express a conviction which is "the very pith and gist of all Machiavelli's teachings." As I have shown in earlier chapters, there is not much in the way of maxims that can be extracted and quoted from *The Prince* or *The Discourses* to support such a statement. Just as Machiavelli takes a godless universe for granted, so he assumes without much ado that the actions of all men are guided by self-interest. His political theory rests upon the premise that all men are "wretched creatures", and his polemic is shaped by the assumption that the ruler or the aspirant whom he is addressing remains, for all his virtù, as self-absorbed as the rest of humankind.

Some Machiavels are, perhaps, more optimistic than their master, but Machiavelli is convinced that cunning and prowess will enable one to control Fortune for at least half the time. He is equally convinced that one's fellow men are simply factors to be manipulated, largely by means of an appeal to greed or to fear. Inevitably, such an attitude sets Machiavelli's prince wholly apart, and if he does not actually revel in his isolation, he accepts it as the inevitable accompaniment of that power which all men desire. Machiavelli's political figures are obviously incapable of affection or even of realising the nature of genuine concern for anyone but themselves. Consequently, the virtù of these figures stands as far from virtue as the rage of a Richard from the valour of a Richmond.

In one thing, however, the Elizabethan Machiavel can differ markedly from Machiavelli's political exemplars. A Fallerio can change his spots and step away from his former character to embrace the ethic sustained by the universe in which he moves; for the figures of *The Prince* there can be no change and no escape.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VILLAINS : THE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF THE MACHIAVEL

Destruction in the Mind

The Machiavel as a destroyer is not simply murderous. Sometimes his poisoning of a mind can appear more terrible than the destruction of a whole nunnery; and if no other villain can rival Iago's skill in practising upon a victim's "peace and quiet" (*Oth* II.i.305), some at least can undermine the reason or integrity of a mind as effectively as they can destroy a family or disrupt a state.

In many instances, of course, those whom the Machiavel appears to corrupt are not possessed of much integrity in the first place. Some of the characters who fall in with the Machiavel's schemes as tool-villains or accomplices already have a history of villainy. Fallerio's first murderer has, by his own admission, a peculiarly sinister past; Munday's Prior, despite his claims to have been corrupted by Sir Doncaster, turns out to have initiated an earlier plot to gain possession of his nephew's lands and, himself, to have hired Sir Doncaster to capture Robin; Lightborn is an experienced assassin who

> learn'd in Naples how to poison flowers;
> To strangle with a lawn thrust down the throat;
> To pierce the wind pipe with a needle's point...
> (*E.II*.V.iv.31-33).

Even where no previous crimes are revealed, the Machiavel's tool is often ripe for villainy. Lazaretto is not only poor, but has a "mischiefe"(*Jer* I.iii.6) in his breast, which Lorenzo offers to deliver. Iacomo in *The Jew of Malta* is so eager to obtain Barabas' wealth that he falls easily into the Jew's net. And Roderigo is so weak and so besotted that although he has no "great devotion" (*Oth* V.i.8) to the murder of Cassio, he swallows down Iago's "satisfying reasons" (V.i.9) without much demur: "'Tis but a man gone" (V.i.10).

Very few tool-villains make many bones about what is required of them. The bait, which is usually gold and advancement, is snapped up readily. Cade responds with zest to York's promptings to rebellion; Gardiner's perjurers meekly take their instructions, and Tyrrel, "Whose humble means match not his haughty spirit" (*R.III*.IV.ii.37) never bats an eye-lid at the thought of murdering the princes in the tower until after the deed is done.

Some tool-villains even erect unquestioning loyalty to a master into an imperative that overrides any scruple, so that Clarence's murderers try to justify themselves by claiming that they are carrying out the king's commands, and Pedringano in *The Spanish Tragedy* expresses contempt for those who are unwilling to stain their consciences for a liberal patron.

The plays in general do nothing to endorse this kind of perversion of morality. The arguments of Clarence's murders are countered by:

> Erroneous vassals! The great King of kings
> Hath in the table of his law commanded
> That thou shalt do no murder.
> (*R.III*.I.iv.198-200).

Pedringano's blind faith in Lorenzo, which persists until the rope is round his neck, makes him an object of mockery to an audience which is aware that Lorenzo has urged on the execution, and that the box supposed to contain Pedringano's promised pardon is in fact quite empty.

Quite often the error of the compliant accomplice is underscored, and responsibility for his succumbing to the Machiavel's temptation laid firmly at his own door by the use of parallel figures who exhibit contrasting reactions. Poverty like Lazaretto's, or desire like Roderigo's, or a lust for vengeance like Alexander's are admitted as powerful spurs, but, in general, there is insistence upon the possibility of resisting the influence of evil, if only at the eleventh hour. This is made plain in the contrast between such pairs as the first and second murderers in both *Richard III* and *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, or the Prior and Warman in *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon*. Warman, like the Prior, has committed some offense in the past and has been forgiven and relieved by Robin, but, unlike the Earl's uncle, Warman has no sense that Robin's kindness is accompanied by "bitter braids" (iii.151), and he steadfastly refuses to accept the suggestions of the two Machiavellian conspirators. The implications of the quarrels between the two pairs of murderers, or of the exchange with Warman, are similar in a limited way to

those of the scene in which Macbeth and Banquo encounter the weird sisters. Banquo's reluctance to trust "The instruments of Darkness" (I.iii.124) is set against Macbeth's eager questioning, and the point is made that moral choice, the decision to co-operate with evil or to reject it, remains a reality.[1]

In many plays the Machiavel's attempts to influence this decision in others are, in fact, passed over quite rapidly. Apart from the kind of debate that takes place before Clarence is finally stabbed, there is not much rehearsal or analysis of the "satisfying reasons" which the Machiavel gives his tool-villains, nor any very extended portrayal of mental conflict in those whom he goes about to corrupt. Usually, if the Machiavel's persuasion does not take effect at once it does not take effect at all. Monsieur has little difficulty in suborning Pero, but fails to gain any real hold over Bussy. Sejanus can corrupt Eudemus with ease, but his plan to draw Tiberius away from Rome so that he will sink entirely into a life of lust proves a disastrous failure. In *The Malcontent* Mendoza can make the Duchess his mistress and plot with her the murder of her husband, but in attempting to corrupt the disguised "Malevole" he merely paves the way for his own fall.

In the earlier plays, then, with the great exception of *Othello*, there is not much dwelling upon the direct, purposeful corruption of minds by baits, persuasion or innuendo. Of course, in some instances the Machiavel may lead a character into a course

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[1] W.H. Auden puts succinctly the point that is underscored by the contrasting of Banquo and Macbeth in "The Dyer's Hand : The First of Three Talks on Poetry," *The Listener*, 16 June 1955, 1064-65.

of action, represented as mistaken or evil, simply by telling lies. Muly Mahamet successfully misleads the young King of Portugal regarding his title to his uncle's throne, and so gains a powerful ally. Alphonsus convinces Alexander that his father's death was plotted by all the electors, together with the Empress and Richard of England, and by this means turns Alexander's vengeful rage against everyone who might prove a threat to his own power.

The more important and interesting instances of the Machiavel's corruption of a mind involve little direct temptation. Lies like those told by Hoffman to Mathias, or, later, by Edmund to his father, Gloucester, may lead to unjust, misguided action, but rarely corrupt the minds of the deceived. Almost always the breakdown of integrity or reason is caused by the experience of loss and suffering that follows upon the Machiavellian display of murderous force. Occasionally the same kind of effect is produced by a particular type of lie which leads a character to believe that those dear to him have already been murdered when, in fact, they are still alive.

The invocation of chaos, which, in the Machiavel, can mark the prospect of his own defeat or death, comes sometimes from a victim of his cruelty on the loss, real or imagined, of a beloved partner or child. The Duchess of Malfi, for instance, after she has been imprisoned through the machinations of Bosola and her brothers and has been led to believe that her husband and children are dead, vows that she could curse

> those three smyling seasons of the yeere
> Into a Russian winter: nay the world
> To its first Chaos.[2]
> (IV.i.117-19).

Thus the Machiavel appears to infect the victim with something of his own cynicism, his own readiness to see the sustaining order of the universe as meaning less than his own chaotic feeling.

Webster's play, which is later than those with which I am principally concerned, seems almost to endorse the Duchess' movement from a sense of the indifference of the universe to human agony, through to a conviction that any vision of beneficent order is delusive:

> Th' heaven ore my head, seemes made of molten brasse,
> The earth of flaming sulphure, yet I am not mad:
> (IV.ii.27-28).

In the earlier plays, however, the victim who invokes chaos, or who sees in the universe only the image of his own inner turmoil is usually shown as having lost his moral bearings, to have drawn closer to his Machiavellian tormentor, or, indeed, to have lost his reason and plunged into that madness which the Duchess of Malfi denies. Hieronimo's mind is thrown into disorder by the murder of his son, Horatio. Frustrated in his attempts to obtain justice on earth, in frenzy he tears his legal papers; he despairs of heavenly justice, seeing himself as inhabiting a world in which the might of his enemies bears him down like a wintry storm.

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2 All quotations from Webster's plays are from *The Complete Works of John Webster*, ed. F.L. Lucas, 4 vols. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927).

Finally, as we have seen, in taking the exaction of vengeance into his own hands, Hieronimo becomes as cunning, merciless and bloody as the Machiavel Lorenzo.

Similarly, Titus Andronicus is driven partly mad by the atrocities of Aaron and Tamora's sons, and sends arrows flying to heaven, loaded with appeals to gods who seem indifferent to his wrongs. Though less mad than his enemies imagine, he goes on to stab his own daughter and to devise a form of vengeance on Tamora, Chiron and Demetrius that outgoes anything which even they have perpetrated.

Again, in *Henry VI*, the performance of treacherous or cruel actions appears often to call forth still blacker treachery or still more monstrous cruelty. York breaks his word to Henry and rekindles the civil war, only to have his young son butchered and his brows crowned with paper by Henry's wife and supporters; in turn York's sons avenge their father's death by murdering Prince Edward before his mother's eyes. If no one could quite suggest that the inhumanity of Queen Margaret actually corrupts Richard of Gloucester, the way in which *Henry VI* and other plays bear witness to the corrosive effects of evil remains plain enough. The destructiveness of the Machiavel can drive good men into irrational, inhuman courses and can contribute to the finished Machiavellianism of those already set on the devil's way.

Sometimes the suffering inflicted by the Machiavel results not in moral decline or partial madness but in a total insanity,

which, even when it ends in suicide, is presented as wholly pitiable. These pathetic victims of Machiavellian evil are, like Ophelia, almost always women. Isabella in *The Spanish Tragedy* runs mad after the murder of her son and stabs herself. Lucibella loses her wits after Hoffman has tricked Mathias into stabbing her lover while he lies sleeping by her side. Later Cornelia, in *The White Devil*, falls into a distraction, sings snatches of song, and hands out rosemary and rue as she winds the corpse of her younger son, Marcello, killed by his brother, the Machiavel, Flamineo.

The Destruction of Human Bonds

Obviously the destruction of integrity or reason in individual minds is often closely associated with the severance of human bonds. The Machiavel, who is usually bound only to those cast in his own image, is always and inevitably responsible for the breaking of friendships, marriages, love-relationships and family ties. When he is concerned with his own followers, women or relatives he may sever himself from them or turn one against the other by direct repudiation, by the sowing of dissension, or by murder. King Leir speaks of his daughters, Gonorill and Ragan, as

> they, which first by nature's sacred law,
> Do owe to me the tribute of their lives ...
> (x.898-99).

Yet these daughters, "reject, contemne, despise, abhor" (x.904) their father. Richard of Gloucester sets one brother against another. Later, when his followers prove hesitant he sends them

to execution; there is a strong suggestion that he brings about the death of his wife, and like Selimus or Muly Mahamet he is undoubtedly responsible for the killing of several members of his family.

Relationships between characters with whom the Machiavel is less directly involved may also be destroyed by the cunning implantation of jealousy and mistrust. Barabas causes Mathias and Lodowick, who were once friends, to kill each other in a duel; Eleazar turns Mendoza against Philip, and Alphonsus stirs up strife amongst the electors. Iago, of course, destroys Othello's marriage to Desdemona, while Sacrepant convinces Orlando that Angelica is unfaithful to him. Unless he is himself a member of the family, the Machiavel rarely contrives to set parent against child, or brother against brother, but Eleazar succeeds in turning the Queen of Spain against her son, and Sacrepant convinces Angelica's father that she has betrayed Orlando and so arouses the King's anger against his daughter.

Although he is an accomplished deceiver, the Machiavel destroys more relationships by force than by guile. Usually he murders simply to eliminate some individual who stands in his path; there is no particular interest in depriving a parent of his child, or a wife of her husband. Yet often the dramatists lay particular stress on the way in which such politic murder, in fact, results in the shattering of relationships and especially in the bereavement of parents, lovers or children.

Munday's repentant Prior gives one of the most comprehensive statements of the disruption that may follow upon the death of the Machiavel's victim when he admits to depriving

> the king,
> The State, the Nobles, Commons and his men,
> Of a true Peere, firm Piller, liberall Lord.
> Fitzwater we have robd of a kinde sonne,
> And Marians love-joyes we have quite undoone...
> (V.727-31).

This kind of survey of a range of bonds is unusual; more commonly there is a focussing upon the severance of one or two peculiarly intimate ties, and the effects of the Machiavel's destructiveness are revealed in the grief, the bitter cursing or the distracted action of figures such as Darius' wife and mother or the Duchess of York and her orphaned grandchildren.

The presentation of bereaved parents is particularly common. The unnaturalness of the Machiavel's murderous acts is brought out by pointing up the youth of the victim and the age of the mourning survivor:

> Ah me! malitious fates have done me wrong,
> Who first come to the world, should first depart;
> And ah! why should the old o're-live the yong?
> (*Darius* V.ii.2117-19).

The inversion of right order is, in some plays, underscored by the apparently unnatural reaction of the parent to news of his child's death; in *Antonio's Revenge*, for instance, Pandulpho on hearing of the murder of his son, Feliche, bursts into bizarre peals of stoical laughter, although, later, he gives way to grief and asks why a singing boy's voice should not

> be hoarse and crack'd,
> When all the strings of nature's symphony
> Are crack'd and jar? Why should his voice keep tune,
> When there's no music in the breast of man?
> (IV.ii.91-94).

More frequently the unnaturalness of the victim's death is emphasised by a contrasting of recollections of birth and childhood with the present realities of deprivation, death and sterility. Kyd's Isabella, having prayed that the garden where her son died may be "Fruitlesse for ever", goes on:

> And as I curse this tree from further fruite,
> So shall my wombe be cursed for his sake;
> And with this weapon will I wound the brest,
> The haplesse brest, that gave Horatio suck.
> (S.T.IV.ii.34-37).

Whatever means are employed to bring out the unnaturalness of the death of the young and the survival of the old, the mourning parent affords opportunities for the evocation of a peculiar pathos. The support of old age is removed; since the parent is old, the child, unlike the lover, can never be replaced; all hopes for the future are blighted.

Lamenting spouses and lovers are presented much less frequently than parents, and where they do appear their grief is often overshadowed by that of other characters or by some woe of their own even more insupportable than the loss of the Machiavel's victim. Bel-Imperia's mourning for Horatio is eclipsed by that of Hieronimo and Isabella, and Darius' wife fades away to leave the final lamentations to his mother. Queen Margaret appears to grieve more for her young son than for her husband; Lavinia's loss

of Bassianus is almost forgotten in the horror of her own rape and mutilation, and Antonio, when he finally takes vengeance on Piero, reminds the Machiavel of the death of his father, but says nothing of the wrong done to his mistress.

At first this seems rather odd, yet there were, perhaps, good reasons for suppressing a kind of interest, often central in tragedy, which might distract from the revelation of the nature of the Machiavel's ambition as he cut his way forward, and from the evolving of the retribution which would finally come upon him. Again, *Othello* seems exceptional in compounding the tragedy of love with the Machiavellian tragedy of ambition, and begins to emerge as a play in which not one convention, but a whole range, are deliberately inverted.

If lovers and spouses are rarely allowed much opportunity for mourning in the Machiavellian plays, the grief of children is often used to balance that of parents. Sometimes the sort of patterning observable in King Henry VI's encounter with a son that has killed his father and a father that has killed his son recurs in less formal contrasts like that between Antonio and Pandulpho when the deaths of Andrugio and Feliche are discovered. Sons who go on to avenge their fathers are naturally allowed passages of lamentation to establish the motives which will propel them into subsequent action. Yet, of course, not all such avengers are represented as the victims of Machiavellian evil; Alexander's father, Lorenzo, is murdered by the Machiavel,

Alphonsus, and Antonio's by the villainous Piero, but in *Hoffman* there is little dwelling upon the Machiavellianism of the Duke of Luningberg; rather, from the start, the avenging son is presented as himself already Machiavellian.

While in some plays the lamentation of children is given special prominence, in others it is simply matched with the grief of a spouse, and the mourning of both wife and child only sustains and amplifies the grieving of a parent. In *Darius*, for instance, Sisigambis, having lost both Oxatres and Darius, is established as chief mourner, but in Act III she is joined in choric lamentation by Darius' wife and daughter. Similarly, in *Richard III*, the Duchess of York takes the centre of the stage and mourns the deaths of two sons, while on her one hand Queen Elizabeth laments the loss of her husband, and on the other the son and daughter of Clarence lament the loss of their father.

Very young children, especially those of the "pathetic" type, "precocious, lively and usually with martial ambitions",[3] make excellent victims, so that few survive to lament the Machiavel's destruction of their parents. Some, backed by loyal nobles, live on like the future Edward III, or the young son of Brachiano, to attempt the establishment of new order at the end of a play. Most, however, having displayed a combination of innocence, piety, wit and courage, are slaughtered. If their deaths do not always contribute as much to the moral patterning

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[3] Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions*, p. 59.

of a play as Mamillius' does to that of *The Winter's Tale*, usually, like Mamillius' death, these murders mark a crisis or turning point in the action. The killing of the princes in the tower signals the start of Richard's decline in real power and in "alacrity of spirit" (*R.III*.V.iii.73), and finally eradicates any sympathy that the audience may have accorded him. From the time of the murder, Richard's reluctance to trust his followers is reflected in the cessation of conspiratorial confidence in an audience which now, in turn, recoils from the "hellhound" (IV.iv.48), the "foul defacer of God's handiwork" (IV.iv.51).

The killing of the Macduff children has a rather similar effect, and if, at the end of *Macbeth*, there is some resurgence of feeling for the murderer, this sympathy is extended to a character who recognises the monstrous nature of his deeds and the futility of both having attempted to become fully Machiavellian or, now, denying that the attempt was deliberate and, in its repercussions, inescapable.

Murder

Murder, whether of young children or older victims, begins to emerge as the core of Machiavellian destructiveness, the source from which flow other forms of disruption. The killing of characters who stand in the path of the Machiavel may, it appears, produce chaos in the mind of an individual or destroy certain bonds between those who are cut down and those who survive to lament unnatural loss.

The Machiavel usually destroys his victims in one of three ways: he may kill them himself, he may employ a tool-villain, or he may contrive to send them to execution. Often he is indirectly responsible for yet more deaths: like Barabas he may have "now and then one hang himself for grief" (*J. of M.*II.iii.198), or, sometimes unintentionally, he may cause a character such as Fallerio's wife, Sostrata, to fall dead from a broken heart. More powerful Machiavels than Fallerio, rebels, usurpers and tyrants, may bring about open warfare in which, of course, unnumbered lives are lost.

Almost half the earlier Machiavels commit at least one murder directly and in full view of the audience. Sometimes this occurs early in the play and so serves to establish a villainy which will prove persistent and to reveal the goal at which the Machiavel is aiming. In *The Battle of Alcazar*, for instance, the Presenter's introductory comments on Muly Mahamet's character and ambitions are illustrated by two dumb shows; in the second of these Muly, assisted by two murderers, sets about clearing his path to the throne by murdering his two brothers and his uncle, Abdelmunem. When the action of the play proper begins in scene one, Muly has already usurped the throne, but in other plays the Machiavel's initial murder can serve as a trigger for subsequent action, creating a situation from which the complications of the plot may afterwards evolve. At the beginning of *Hoffman* Prince Otho falls into the avenger's hands and is killed with the burning crown. Hoffman is then able to assume the identity of his victim

and becomes involved in a train of events in which his disguise, its eventual penetration and the discovery of Otho's fate all play an important part.

Occasionally the Machiavel kills not at the start of a play but in some climax near the end. Mosby finally stabs Arden in scene xiv and *3 Henry VI* ends with a welcome to "lasting joy" (V.vii.46) rendered hollow by the asides of a Richard who, in the penultimate scene, has butchered the unfortunate Henry in the Tower.

A number of Machiavellian assassins, however, kill neither at the beginning nor at the end of a play. Sometimes, when the murder comes in the midst of the action, there is some lingering over the deed, some focussing upon quintessential blasphemy, hatred and venom as when Barabas stirs the poisoned pot of porridge, but usually the killing passes almost unremarked. Iago stabs Roderigo, committing murder in front of the audience for the first time, but, like Lodovico and Gratiano, the audience is quickly distracted by the commotion over Cassio's wound and the accusations levelled at Bianca. Similarly, the one murder that Aaron commits himself is dismissed in some eight or nine lines - the nurse is stabbed with

> "Wheak, Wheak!"
> So cries a pig prepared to the spit
> (T.A.IV.ii.146-47)

and Tamora's sons are hurried off to dispose of the body. If this kind of thing appears callous, then the callousness proceeds from the control of action and feeling, which, for the time being, the

Machiavel has assumed. In retrospect at least his nonchalant killing appears shocking in the manner of his stock indifference to the customary respect accorded to a corpse.

Whereas only about half the earlier Machiavels kill for themselves almost all of them employ tool-villains or work at times through accomplices and dupes. The distance between the Machiavel and the murder that his tool commits varies from play to play, but does not seem to depend very much upon the extent to which the actual killer is developed as a character. Some tool-villains are no more than the Machiavel's obedient hands, remaining in the background like the cup-bearer that Sejanus uses to poison Drusus, or speaking a line or two, like the murderers who in *2 Henry VI*, report the death of Gloucester to Suffolk. Sometimes, at the point of murder, they surrender such discrete personality as they may possess to become merely the instruments of a Selimus. Where the tool-villain is more fully developed he serves usually either to reflect or intensify the Machiavel's own evil or, in the manner of second murderers, to underscore his master's lack of conscience.

The distance between the perpetrator of murder and the crime itself is really determined by whether the briefing of the killers, the murder or the murderers' report are presented on stage, and by how such scenes are handled. Obviously the opportunities for the production of a range of effects are considerable. Wayne Booth has shown how, for instance, the reaction of the audience to

Macbeth is dependent upon the presentation of the three murders and, in part, upon what is seen of Macbeth's involvement with the murderers.[4] The imperviousness of the Machiavel to pity may be underpinned by contrasting scenes of instruction and report, so that a Richard is seen at first as at one with his instrument, Tyrrel, and, later, distanced from him by a refusal to surrender to the compassion drawn from even such hardened villains as the Dighton and Forrest whom Tyrrel describes. Again, the failure of a Lazaretto to carry out his master's instructions or the failure of a Machiavel like Hoffman, or Alphonsus, or Mendoza to recognise that his tool is to contrive his fall can become the source of manifold ironies as the inevitable limitations of evil are exposed.

While some tool-villains make dupes of their masters, the great majority are themselves duped. The lessons to be drawn from Chapter VII of *The Prince* and Cesare Borgia's treatment of his catspaw, Remiro de Orco, are taken to heart by a number of Machiavels who go about to destroy tools whose usefulness has been outlived. Thus Lorenzo employs Pedringano to kill Cerberine; Mortimer gives a secret indication that, after the murder of Edward II, Matrevis and Gurney must dispose of Lightborn; Mosby plans the murder of all his accomplices, and Eleazar arranges the shooting of the friars that he has employed to establish the illegitimacy of Philip. But the most popular method of getting rid of a tool-villain is to give him over to the executioner;

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[4] See: Wayne Booth, "Shakespeare's Tragic Villain" in *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, ed. Lerner, pp. 180-90. Originally published as "Macbeth as Tragic Hero" in *The Journal of General Education*, 6 (1951) and revised for the anthology.

either justice is deluded into seeing the tool as an independent agent, or, when the Machiavel is a tyrant, the law is perverted to serve Machiavellian ends. Amongst others, Lorenzo in *The Spanish Tragedy* and his namesake in *Jeronimo*, Barabas, Aaron, Piero, Sejanus and Gardiner surrender tool-villains or enemies to the stroke of a deluded justice, while tyrants such as Mortimer, Richard and the politic Council in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* pervert or ignore the law to encompass the execution of anyone who challenges their power.

Scenes in which the Machiavel's victim is tricked into taking the blame for more than he has done, and a judge or court into passing sentence are quite common. The Machiavel is sometimes on hand to express a simulated outrage and to revel in the ironies of the situation that he has created. Thus Barabas and Ithamore, having convinced Iacomo that he is responsible for a murder which they have themselves committed, hale the friar away to the magistrates.

> Barabas: No, for this example I'll remain a Jew.
> Heaven bless me! What, a friar a murderer?
> When shall you see a Jew commit the like?
>
> Ithamore: Why, a Turk could ha' done no more.
> (*J.of M.*IV.i.192-95).

But often the irony goes beyond any that the Machiavel can perceive, signalling as it does the end that he will himself meet and the evolution of a justice to which he remains blind. In *Antonio's Revenge*, Strotzo, in accordance with Piero's plan, lies to the "royal confluence" (IV.i.125) assembled to judge Mellida, and pretends that Antonio bribed him to poison his father and defame

his sweetheart. Strotzo, fully confident that Piero will save him from punishment, exclaims in a false passion:

> O, why permit you now such scum of filth
> As Strotzo is to live and taint the air
> With his infectious breath?
> (IV.i.186-88).

The tool-villain, to his surprise, is immediately strangled, but a further irony resides in the way in which Strotzo's words foreshadow those of the avengers when Piero, now so confident in his ability to "cleave through knots of craggy policies" (IV.i.195), is himself reviled as "Scum of the mud of hell" (V.iii.96) just before he is finally stabbed to death.

The Machiavel's temerity in perverting justice for private ends and the essentially blasphemous and anarchic nature of his proceeding may be brought out by means other than the manipulation of ironies. In *Sejanus* Silius and Sabinus provide a choric commentary upon a Rome where piety and civil liberty are almost unknown and where tyranny is fostered by

> whisperers grace, who have the time,
> The place, the power, to make all men offenders.
> (I.423-24).

In *Richard III* the scrivener makes plain the common man's awareness of the condition of a realm in which justice has become a mockery and the law not the protector but the scourge of good men, while in *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, young Guildford Dudley denounces the nobles who condemn him and his wife as more guilty than their prisoners, and goes on to suggest, in his choice of image, that the false judge offends against God as well as man:

> when the innocent creature stoopes his neck
> To an unjust doome; upon the Judge they checke.
> Lives are like soules, requird of their neglectors,
> Then ours of you, that should bee our protectors.[5]
> (V.ii.73-76).

The court scene in *Volpone* preceded by Mosca's stage-management ("Is the lie/Safely convai'd amongst us?" [IV.iv.3-4]) acts as a climax in the play's increasingly overt insistence upon the corrupt, anarchic and anti-social nature of Volpone and his parasite. Alan Dessen has commented that here, as in some of his characterisation, Jonson may be borrowing from the late morality play where the corruption of justice appears often "as the central symbol of the pernicious effect of Lucre upon society".[6] If Dessen is correct then the frequent emphases laid upon the perversion or delusion of justice in the Machiavellian plays may be underst od as involving the translation of an accepted symbolism to convey broader meanings and to reveal the Machiavel as the assassin not only of individuals but of the order and integrity of the state.

Where there is no recourse to the rope or the axe of the public executioner, the Machiavel or his tool can kill in a number of different ways. Specialists in murder, like Lightborn, take a pride in devising ingenious or hideously appropriate deaths for their victims; two or three Machiavels use guns, but despite the

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5 All quotations from *Sir Thomas Wyatt* are from *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Bowers, I.

6 Alan Dessen, "*Volpone* and the Late Morality Tradition", *MLQ*, 25 (1964), p. 394.

obvious delight taken in firing off ordnance on stage,[7] murder by shooting is rare. The most popular methods of killing are strangulation or hanging, stabbing and, of course, poison, and in many plays, particularly where the murder is committed in front of the audience, the means employed to dispatch the victim is related to recurrent visual or poetic images which sustain central meanings.

Selimus has most of his victims strangled; Horatio is hanged on the stage; Barabas and Ithamore strangle Barnadine, and both Gloucester and Woodstock are strangled by a pair of murderers. In a number of instances such as these there is some emphasis upon the perversion of the method of the public hangman to advance the ends of a private hatred or ambition that is destructive of public justice, and its anarchic antithesis. Iago, having wrought Othello to the point at which he confounds the whitest innocence with the blackest guilt, exhorts the Moor to carry out murder as an execution:

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7 The Viscount Dillon remarks that: "The detachable breech-pieces of the cannon of the day are meant by the 'chambers' which are so often referred to in stage directions." The "chambers" were used to "counterfeit the noise of heavy guns" in plays ranging from *The Battle of Alcazar* ("The trumpets sound, the chambers are discharged." III.iv.) to Middleton's and Rowley's *The World Tost at Tennis* ("Chambers shot off within". V.190). According to John Chamberlain "the burning of the Globe, or playhouse . . . fell out by a peal of chambers . . . the tampion or stopple of one of them lighting in the thatch that covered the house...."
See: The Viscount Dillon, "Armour and Weapons," and L.G. Carr Laughton, "The Navy: Ships and Sailors" in *Shakespeare's England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), I. pp. 140 and 160; John Chamberlain, Letter to Sir Ralph Winwood, 8 July 1613 in *The Chamberlain Letters*, ed. Elizabeth McClure Thomson (London: John Murray, 1966), p. 128.

Iago: Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed,
even the bed she hath contaminated.

Othello: Good, good, the justice of it pleases,
very good.
(IV.i.203-05).

The murder of Barnadine takes the form of a mock execution, with Barabas exhorting the friar to "Confess and be hang'd" (*J. of M.* IV.i.45-46), and both this killing and that of Horatio lead on to further hangings in which the Machiavel perverts justice to his own ends. Horatio and Pedringano are both hanged on the stage; in one sense, since Pedringano assisted in killing Horatio, one hanging answers the other, but in another sense the two hangings mark Lorenzo's inevitable progression from the exaction of private vengeance to the manipulation of public justice.

In *2 Henry VI* the king comes twice into his parliament to hear complaints of treason against Gloucester, but in the intervening scene the Queen, Beaufort, Suffolk and York convene a court of their own, consider the manipulation of the law, conclude that they are a law unto themselves and have their victim strangled by hired killers. The contrast between legal process and its ruthless, cynical travesty is underpinned by the perversion of a means of execution to a rope used to murder an innocent and sleeping man. Yet in this play the fact that Gloucester is strangled is used to sustain a further and still more significant contrast.

Death by strangulation, like death by poison, might sometimes be attributed to natural causes. At least, several

Machiavels entertain this hope. The murderers of Woodstock carefully smooth the corpse's hair and beard, close the eyes and set the neck right, then lay their victim on his bed "as if he there had died", confident that "it cannot be perceived otherwise" (*Wood* V.i.250-51). Similarly, Gloucester's murderers are asked by Suffolk if they have "laid fair the bed" (*2 Hen VI*,III.ii.11), since he and his accomplices intend to try to pass off the Duke's death as natural.[8] Warwick, however, is not deceived, and in his speech describing Gloucester's corpse the natural and unnatural are set one against the other; the murder is revealed as not only an offense against mundane law and justice, but as a violation of natural law and as a disruption of an order which extends beyond that of the state. Gloucester's face

> is black and full of blood,
> His eye-balls further out than when he liv'd...
> (III.ii.167-68),

> His well-proportion'd beard made rough and rugged,
> Like to the summer's corn by tempest lodg'd.
> (III.ii.174-75).

If the image of the man hanged or strangled invoked suggestions of the inversion of the proper justice of men and of the dislocation of natural order, the image of the blood shed in the act of stabbing afforded opportunities for yet more extensive

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8 This similarity between Woodstock and Shakespeare's Duke of Gloucester is part of a general resemblance between the two characters. In Rossiter's view the author of *Woodstock* drew upon *2 Henry VI*, and his "'Plain Thomas' ... is a clever and convincing improvement on the 'Good Duke Humphrey', who is himself a considerable improvement on the man we find in Halle or Holinshed." See: *Woodstock: A Moral History*, ed. A.P. Rossiter, p. 66.

metaphorical development and for the stimulation of awareness of a higher, more inexorable form of justice.

The Elizabethans were fond of blood on the stage; from the time of *Cambyses* at least, bladders of animals' blood or some red fluid such as vinegar were concealed in actors' clothing, so that, at death, a jet of gore might gush out.[9] The Machiavels punctured many such bladders. Richard of Gloucester, Iago, Mosby, Antonio, Hoffman, Aaron, the Guise, Sir Doncaster and Eleazar as well as a host of dupes and tools all stab at least one victim to death. Indeed, contrary to a belief created by the popular association of Machiavelli with poisons, the Machiavel uses the dagger very much more frequently than the phial.

While the blood spilt in such murders is not often associated with the Christian symbolism of sacrifice and redemption, it is usually accorded a traditionally miraculous power. In both the drama and in other forms of literature, such as political pamphlets or popular accounts of sensational crimes, blood is presented as an irradicable stain, searing the murderer's conscience or blazoning his guilt or crying out to God from the ground like the blood of Abel, shed by his brother Cain. Kyd's conclusion to his account of the murder of John Brewen is thoroughly conventional: "for bloud is an incessant crier in the eares of the Lord, and he

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9 In *Cambyses*, at the point of Lord Smirdis' killing by Murder and Cruelty, the stage direction reads: "A little bladder of vinegar pricked." See: *Dodsley's Old English Plays*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, IV, p. 217.

will not leave so vilde a thing unpunished".[10] *Arden of Faversham* translates the stock image and the familiar warning into dramatic terms when the blood of Master Arden cleaves to the ground and, despite Alice's attempts to scrape it away with her nails, remains as one of the evidences which reveal the murder to the Mayor and his party. Later, when Alice is led out to view her husband's corpse she sees the blood still flowing from the wounds as condemning her. It

> Speaks as it falls, and asks me why I did it.
> (*Arden* xvi.6).

"Blood", of course, can carry a number of meanings beyond the blood spilled by a murderer; in the language of some plays such meanings are exploited so that the spectacle of bloodshed becomes the centre of a network of imagery and reference. In some later plays such as *The Changeling* and *The White Devil* "blood" is used to mean sensual desire, so that lust and murder are linked in an echoing play upon words, but nowhere are the multiple meanings of "blood" employed more effectively than in *Antonio's Revenge*. The play begins with the entrance of the Machiavel, "unbrac'd, his arms bare, smear'd in blood, a poniard in one hand, bloody, and a torch in the other...". From this point on the appearance of dead and living figures bathed in blood acts as a series of foci, marking the curve of the plot. The body of Feliche, the son murdered by Piero is seen hanging in Mellida's window, "stabb'd thick with wounds" (I.ii); Julio, the murderer's

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10 Thomas Kyd, *The Murder of John Brewen* in *Works*, ed. Boas, p. 293.

son, is killed on stage, and Antonio, the righteous avenger, appears in Piero's guise, "his arms bloody, [in one hand] a torch and [in the other] a poniard" (III.ii). Finally, Piero appears in the last scene, as he does in the first, covered in blood, but at the end this blood is, of course, not that of a victim, but Piero's own.

The impact of these sights is enforced and extended by the constant recurrence of the word "blood" in the language of the play. Here the meaning may shift from blood spilled by a poniard to the blood that unites parent and child or to a lustiness and vigour which is sometimes associated with friendship or conviviality, but again and again these suggestions of innocence, amnity and social accord are rendered incongruous or ironic. Each is tainted or undercut by the association of blood with murder, just as, in Piero's world, the bonds between man and woman, parent and child or companion and companion are tainted or broken by bloodshed.

Thus the two young men who courted the same lady in "our May of blood" (I.i.23) have become victim and murderer, and Piero, smeared with blood, plans to renew his suit to Maria:

> By this warm reeking gore, I'll marry her.
> Looke I not now like an inamorate?
> Poison the father, butcher the son, and marry the mother; ha!
> (I.i.103-05).

In the mouth of Piero the innocence of childhood becomes transformed to:

> I have been nurs'd in blood, and still have suck'd
> The steam of reeking gore
> (II.i.19-20),

while in the veins of his young son "thy father's blood" (III.i. 179) is the object of hatred, and in Antonio's speech at the point of Julio's murder, modulates into the blood that is as incense to vengeance.

Children, associates or friends are addressed as "my poor wretched blood" (III.i.62) or as "lusty bloods" (V.ii.29); Mellida was to have been "link'd to the noble blood" (I.ii.228) of Andrugio's house; Maria is said to have consented to give Piero's "blood a son" (III.i.40). But the only "league of blood" (I.i.50) that endures is that between Pandulpho and his associates, united to revenge their blood-relations in the shedding of blood, and the final feast becomes one at which the wine seems to change to blood, the chief dish becomes the blood-stained corpse of a child and apparent amity gives way to a triumph of vengeance.

In the presentation of such blood-letting, the dramatists are usually at pains to distinguish between the methods of the Machiavel and the fair play of the duellist. Like the nurse killed by Aaron or Fallerio's nephew the victim may be weaker than his assassin, or he may be set upon in the dark, or when he is unarmed, unprepared or even asleep. Often the Machiavel and his tools or accomplices outnumber their victim, as in the case of Master Arden or Horatio. Sometimes the murder weapon is tipped with poison.

Although the Machiavel uses poison less frequently than one might imagine, the number of murders by poisoning is, none the less, impressive. Sejanus, Piero, the Guise, Selimus and Hoffman use poison at least once, and Barabas, Sir Doncaster and Alphonsus

are experienced poisoners. Even where no-one is actually killed by poison, the method is often canvassed or some attempt made. Sacrepant plans to poison Orlando and Eleazar gives his wife poison for the King. Alice and Mosby talk of a poisoned picture and crucifix, and offer Arden poisoned broth; Richard's flatterers in *Woodstock* mount an unsuccessful plot to poison the king's uncles, and Mendoza in *The Malcontent* attempts to murder Malevole with a box which he believes "being opened under the sleeper's nose, chokes all power of life, kils him suddenly" (V.iii.37-39).

Even where there is no actual attempt to use poison, the Machiavel is often related to poison in the imagery. The French King John, who is something of a Machiavel, hopes that the valiant English in *Edward III* may suck poison from "the Flewer de luce" (III.i.79),[11] and Winchester, risen to become Cardinal Beaufort, raves on his death-bed of the strong poison that he bought of an apothecary.

The association of the Machiavel with poisonous snakes or serpents is particularly common. In *Edward III* the Prince of Wales rebukes the French king with:

> Let creeping serpents, hid in hollow banckes,
> Sting with theyr tongues...
> (III.iii.99-100).

The undutiful sisters in *King Leir* are reviled as poisonous vipers; Aaron's woolly hair

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[11] All quotations from *Edward III* are from *Shakespeare's Apocrypha*, ed. Tucker Brooke.

> now uncurls
> Even as an adder when she doth unroll
> To do some fatal execution
> (II.iii.34-36),

and in *2 Henry VI*, the king shrinks from Suffolk as from "a serpent's sting" (III.ii.46), while York pictures himself as

> the starved snake,
> Who, cherish'd in your breasts, will sting your hearts.
> (III.i.343-44).

The effects of such images are interesting. Obviously the harping on poisonous reptiles suggests cunning as well as venom in the Machiavel in much the same way as the insistence on his being a fox as well as a lion. More importantly, the idea of cunning rubs off, as it were, on his ferocity or courage, so that his weapons seem cunningly poisoned even when they are not. Piero poisons one victim and stabs another, but the killings are merged, so that one *feels* that the poniard was a poisoned one. More obviously, Richard of Gloucester, who never uses poison except, possibly, on his wife, becomes through the imagery not simply a creature born with teeth, a wolf, a dog, a boar who swills warm blood like wash, but also a "poisonous bunch-back'd toad" (*R.III*.I.iii.245), a bottled spider "whose deadly web ensnareth thee about" (I.iii.242). Finally he is a creature whose ferocity is poisoned, one whose "venom tooth will rankle to the death" (I.iii.290).

Although the word "poison" does not carry a range of meanings in quite the way that "blood" does, it can still become the centre of a whole confluence of metaphors, and, in a context

in which the corrupted body stands as one in a series of corresponding planes, is readily transmuted to the destroyer of the mind's peace or of moral and social health or of the wholesome order of nature. In later plays, particularly *The White Devil*, poison is associated with an all-pervading disease and decay; it is everywhere in the infected world of Flamineo, and as, say, the stybium used as a cosmetic by the courtesan, not only conflates ideas of lust, murder, pox and moral decay, but also relates to the central theme of mask and face, of fair appearance and concealed leprous reality.

There is nothing quite like this in the earlier plays, although Tamora can offer to enchant the old Andronicus with sweet, dangerous words so that he will become "rotted with delicious feed" (*T.A.*IV.iv.93) and Iago pours his "pestilence" (II.iii.347) into the ear of Othello. Beyond this, the transmutation of the Machiavel's weapon into a spreading corruption that rots the body politic is already obvious in, say, Bussy's girding at Monsieur as one whose "political head" is

> the curs'd fount
> Of all the violence, rapine, cruelty,
> Tyranny, and atheism flowing through the realm:
> (*Bussy* III.ii.479-81).

The Destruction of Civil Order

The presentation of the Machiavel as the source of an evil which secretly corrodes his society from within is, again, apparent in *Othello*. Iago seems to damage the fabric of the state very little as compared with a Richard or even a Tresilian, yet his

disruption of right order is both an analogue of the Turkish assault upon Christian Venice and a contrast to that assault in subtlety and success. While the Turkish fleet is scattered by storm, the storm of Iago's making gathers force with extraordinary speed, so that as the barbarian without is defeated with never a shot fired, the barbarian within is unleashed to demonstrate the fragility of the foundations upon which the civilised world is raised.

If the destruction of civil order wrought by the Machiavel is not often, by implication, so far-reaching, it is usually more obvious and more obviously extensive. Many Machiavels are rebels, usurpers or tyrants; at the least they promote faction in high places or foster misrule by flattery.

The orthodox Elizabethan horror of rebellion has been repeatedly stressed;[12] its expression in the presentation of the rebel as guilty of "the whole puddle and sink of all sins against God and man"[13] is thoroughly familiar. In the drama, then, the merging of the rebel with the Machiavel, the enemy of God and the violator of human bonds, appears inevitable. Selimus, who follows Machiavelli in seeing the laws of God and man as mere "policie", devised to "keepe the quiet of societie" (ii.346-47),

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12 See, for example, Rossiter's comments in his edition of *Woodstock*, pp. 13-14, and E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944), pp. 64-70.

13 _____ "An Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion" (1573) rpt. in *Certayn Sermons or Homilies* (1640), p. 292. Quoted in Alfred Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1934), p. 48.

recognises no impediment to rebellion against his father, and Muly Mahamet, early established as "unbelieving" and murderous, falls readily into the role of the traitor who leads his "barbarous rebels" (*B.of A.*I.ii.127) against the rightful king.

Yet, despite Dr Tillyard's insistence upon the orthodoxy of "the theatrical world",[14] the identification of rebel and Machiavel is not always so complete. In plays where the king is tyrannical, or misled by flatterers, or himself a usurper the rebel is not always Machiavellian. Where the succession is disputed there is sometimes a weighing of just claim against empirical considerations of civil order, or a probing of the moral dilemma of ruler or subject who must reconcile the ideal with the expedient. Sometimes, then, when rebellion is in question, the Machiavellian ethic may be represented by a Tresilian or a Richard III while the rebels who oppose them are shown as champions of virtue and patriotism. At other times there may be no villains at all, but rather a Machiavellianism that is dispersed amongst a range of characters standing on opposing sides. In *Henry IV* the rebels Northumberland and Worcester are part Machiavel, but at the same time the King and his son, Prince John, employ Machiavellian tactics to retain a power that is from one angle illegitimate, and from another the realm's only protection against an anarchy prefigured in the quarrelling of Hotspur, Glendower, Worcester and Mortimer over the map of England.

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[14] Tillyard, *History Plays*, p. 65.

Rebellion in its most unequivocal and orthodox form comes naturally to the Machiavel who is, like Selimus or Muly Mahamet, more lion than fox. But most Machiavels, though their actions frequently result in open warfare, prefer to proceed by cunning, murder and a devious sowing of dissension. Eleazar, although he causes civil war in Spain, does not plunge directly into open rebellion, and Gonorill and Ragan attempt to consolidate their power by guile and assassination before launching into battle with Leir's champion, the King of Gallia.

Whatever means he may employ to achieve power the fully Machiavellian ruler is invariably presented as tyrannical. The Elizabethan stage tyrant owes something to Seneca and, as Mario Praz has shown, something to Cinthio who "developed the type of superhuman knave he found in Seneca with the help of elements derived from Machiavelli".[15] However, W.A. Armstrong is correct in asserting that "Seneca views his royal protagonists rather as superhuman villains consumed by passion than as defective guardians of the commonweal. He depicts their offences as an affront to the gods and as a negation of morality, but he does not associate them with social disruption as the Elizabethans do".[16] Armstrong continues his argument by pointing out how in *The Misfortunes of Arthur* Senecan passion is, in Mordred, transmuted to "the political ambition peculiar to the Elizabethan

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15 Praz, p. 112.

16 W.A. Armstrong, "Seneca, Machiavelli and the Elizabethan Tyrant", *Review of English Studies*, 24 (1948), p. 22.

tyrant", and how in other "tyrant-tragedies" such as Fulke Greville's *Alaham* the villain-hero is "condemned and slain as an offender against....the ethics of virtuous kingship provided by specula principum".[17]

From one point of view the stage tyrant must certainly be seen as the antithesis of the speculum principis, the Elizabethan model of ideal kingship. Sometimes this ideal is embodied in a character who stands in sharp contrast to the Machiavellian ruler, as Richmond does to Richard; more frequently the tyrant who destroys the moral health and political order of the state is simply presented as the contrary of the familiar image of the divinely anointed guide and guardian of his people.

Ideally the king stood as God's lieutenant within a divinely ordained hierarchy which it was his function to sustain. According to contemporary theory he was to do this by preserving within himself an order of princely virtue, governed by sovereign reason, and by maintaining within the body politic a corresponding "good order...by good laws stablished...by the which the whole body, as by reason, is governed and ruled, to the intent that this multitude of people and whole commonalty...may with due honour, reverence and love religiously worship God...Maker and Governor of all the world; every one also doing his duty to other with brotherly love, one loving one another as members and parts of

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17 Armstrong, 23-33.

one body".[18] Beyond this, as King James wrote to his son in 1599, "Ye have also to consider, that yee must not onely bee careful to keepe your subjects, from receiving anie wrong of others within, but also yee must be careful to keepe them from the wrong of any forraine Prince without".[19]

Although the Machiavel is a master of cunning and often, in his assessments, chillingly rational, his reason is essentially limited and isolated, and hence the implement rather than the governor of his own anarchic and destructive ambitions. Just as Starkey represents the realm of the ideal prince as reflecting the inner order of its ruler, so, when government is in the hands of a Machiavellian, the dramatist may show in the plight of the commonweal an image of the disordered condition of the tyrant. Nearly always the land is plunged into warfare. Like Macbeth, the usurping tyrant often pays the penalty of his crime in being driven to fight against the heirs or supporters of the monarch that he has deposed, or, like Henry IV, in being constantly plagued by the resentment and unrest of those who earlier helped him to power. Even when he is not a usurper, the tyrant may destroy the peace of the realm by fostering dissension amongst his enemies, as Alphonsus does, or by acting with such monstrous injustice that his subjects are eventually stung into taking up arms against him.

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18 Thomas Starkey, *A Dialogue between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset*, ed. Kathleen M. Burton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 59.

19 King James I, *The Political Works of James I*, ed. C.H. McIlwain, Harvard Political Classics (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1918), p. 28. Quoted in Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's "Histories"* (1947; rpt. London: Methuen, 1964), p. 267.

As well as destroying the good order of his realm by causing open war, the Machiavellian tyrant is destructive of that rule of good law which corresponds to the sovereignty of reason in the mind of the individual. Like Mordred or Selimus, or those evil counsellors Tresilian, Sejanus and Ateukin, the Machiavellian tyrant recognises no law beyond his own will. In consequence the "justice" that he administers becomes distorted to serve his own ambition, jealousy and fear, and the tyrant's impulse replaces the statute designed to sustain the law of reason and of God and to protect the commonweal. The absolutist doctrine of the Machiavellian ruler is often enunciated in soliloquy or in dialogue between king and counsellor; its pith is contained in such statements as Mordred's "My will must goe for right" (*M. of A.* II.ii.41) and "The Lawes doe licence as the Soveraigne lists" (II.ii.25).

In discussing the manner in which the Machiavel perverts justice to dispose of his tool-villains, rivals and enemies I have already said something of the dramatic representation of the destructive effects of the tyrant's abnegation of law. But perhaps one of the most revealing exposures of the consequences of substituting ungoverned will for the rule of law is seen in the semi-comic parody of tyrannic rule that occurs in *2 Henry VI*. Cade is at once the product and the tool of unscrupulous ambition in high places; he is also both rebel and embryonic tyrant, so that the horror and absurdity of his little day in power cut many ways. Cade pays lip-service to right theory in planning a realm

where men will agree like brothers, but while he promises liberty in the context of anarchic democracy, at the same time he gestures towards an Orwellian state in which some animals will be more equal than others; for Cade will be a king and his subjects will worship him as their lord. Already, when he condemns the clerk for literacy, Cade's will has usurped the function of law: "unless I find him guilty, he shall not die" (IV.ii.90); subsequently he declares "my mouth shall be the parliament of England" (IV.vii.13-14). Finally, in condemning Lord Say to death, Cade, like Mortimer, punishes concern for the commonweal as treachery, and, like Richard III, makes a mockery of legal process by sweeping aside any defense against a trumped-up charge. The image of the heads of Cade's victims, Say and Cromer, impaled on poles and made to kiss at every corner, stands as a hideously comic emblem of the death of reason and of the birth of new forms of tyrannic justice and tyrannic brotherhood.

The hall mark of the Machiavellian rebel, usurper or ty rant is indifference to the commonweal. Such indifference is commonly the tip of the ice-berg, implying on the one hand rejection of a whole order of which just and godly rule is a part, and on the other allegiance to an egocentric and inevitably anarchic and anti-social code. It is, then, the charge of indifference, of readiness to destroy the lives and liberties of subjects in the pursuit of personal ambition that is repeatedly levelled at the Machiavellian rebel or tyrant, and which ultimately defines him as what he is. Thus, when John of France

persists in denying what, in *Edward III* are presented as rightful claims, he declares:

> And ere I basely will resigne my Crowne,
> This Champion field shall be a poole of bloode,
> And all our prospect as a slaughter house.

The Black Prince replies:

> I, that approves thee, tyrant, what thou art:
> No father, king, or shepheard of they realme,
> But one, that teares her entrailes with thy handes,
> And, like a thirstie tyger, suckst her bloud.
> (III.iii.155-61).

Readiness to destroy the order of the commonweal finds, perhaps, its most extreme expression in the Machiavellian ruler who, rather than keeping his subjects "from the wrong of any forraine Prince without", invites or impels the foreigner to invade. So Muly brings in the Portuguese to help him in his struggle against his uncle, and Mortimer subdues Edward with the aid of foreign troops. Sometimes there is a shift of emphasis when invaders like the King of Gallia, or Richmond, or Malcolm fight on the side of right; but here the blame for creating an anarchy that can only be cured by foreign intervention is laid squarely at the door of the villain who has brought the state to a point at which it is incapable of healing itself from within.

At times the responsibility for the destruction of peace and the rule of good law is shown to lie less with the ruler than with turbulent, ambitious nobles like the Guise, or with malign and secret plotters like Aaron or, above all, with the Machiavellian favourite or adviser. Elizabethan denunciations of the flatterer

are legion,[20] partly because to condemn the evil influence upon a Richard II or an Edward allowed for some evasion of direct indictment of the hereditary monarch. Conversely, rebellion might be given at least some gloss of respectability when its stated aim was to free the king from the clutches of wicked parasites and to lead him back to right rule. Kent, for instance, countenances the rising against Edward II so long as he sees its purpose as the reclamation of his brother "For England's honour, peace and quietness" (IV.ii.58).

The Machiavellian flatterer is usually of low-birth, an upstart, whose preferment over wisdom, age and noble birth epitomises the denial of order and degree.[21] Once the court is dispossessed

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20 See for instance *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (1938; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960).
See especially: "The fall of Robert Tresilian...for misconstruying the lawes, and expounding them to serve the Princes affections"; "Howe the Lorde Mowbray promoted by Kyng Richarde the seconde was by him banished the Realme, and dyed miserably in exyle." Mowbray's narrative is intended "to admonysh all Counsaylers to beware of flattering princes", and shows how Mowbray having "laboured to destroye" flatterers, learned "among the rest to clawe" (45-47); "Howe kyng Richarde the seconde was for his evyll governaunce deposed from his seat and miserably murdered in prison." Richard concludes with a warning to princes to rule by right, for those who are governed by will rather than wisdom inevitably fall into the clutches of flattery and shame.

21 Rossiter sees the characters in *Woodstock* as divided into two groups, representing Right and Wrong. The king's uncles, who stand for Right, are, of course, nobly born and venerable, seasoned counsellors. On the other hand the favourites, whom Richard prefers before his uncles, are characterised by "beardless youth, political recklessness, luxury, contempt of tradition and respect, oppression of the people, with crooked law and scheming, treachery even among the upstarts. . ." (*Woodstock*, p. 26).

> Of finest wits and judgements...
> Whilst cloking craft with soothing climbs so high...
> (*James IV*,II.ii.1004-05),

the land is yielded up to oppression and moral decay. In *James IV*, a lawyer, a divine and a merchant lament the condition of the realm, while each accuses the other of failing to fulfil his proper function and of ruining the commonweal. In other plays, it is often in these three areas of law, religion and financial or commercial activity that the destructive effects of Machiavellian influence are most clearly displayed, with the upstart Machiavel being himself sometimes a churchman, like Winchester or Gardiner, sometimes a lawyer, like Tresilian, and sometimes - though at a greater distance from the throne - a dishonest, grasping merchant, like Rufford in *Edward IV*.

The evil effects of Machiavellianism in the church are demonstrated in *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, and rehearsed by Greene's Lawyer:

> looke on your maimes,
> Divisions, sects, your Simonies, and bribes,
> Your cloaking with the great, for feare to fall,
> You shall perceive you are the cause of all.
> Did each man know there were a storme at hand,
> Who would not cloath him well, to shun the wet?
> Did Prince and Peere, the Lawyer and the Priest,
> Know what were sinne, without a partiall glose,
> Wee need no long discovery then of crimes,
> For each would mend, advis'd by holy men.
> (*James IV*,V.iv.2087-96).

The suffering of the commons, the violation of ancient rights and liberties, and, finally, the disruption of civil order that proceed from Tresilian's screwing and winding of "the subtle law" (I.ii.47) are made plain in *Woodstock* where the farming out of

the realm, the issuing of blank charters and the institution of a kind of secret police lead on to civil war. The corrosive effects of an avarice castigated by Jonson, Dekker and Massinger are a common theme in the Machiavellian plays where abuses such as the sale of preferments by a Sejanus or an Ateukin not only breed injustice, but constitute yet another assault upon the proper ordering of society:

> Wee are corrupted by your many crownes:
> The Gentlemen, whose titles you have bought,
> Loose all their fathers toyle within a day,
> Whilst Hob your sonne, and Sib your nutbrowne childe,
> Are Gentlefolkes, and Gentles are beguilde.
> This makes so many Noble mindes to stray
> And take sinister courses in the state.
> (*James IV*,V.iv.2116-22).

Armstrong in his discussion of stage tyrants makes a sharp distinction between "tyrant-tragedy" and revenge tragedy in which "the political repercussions of misrule" are "of secondary interest...if present at all".[22] Yet is it perhaps worth pointing out that even in those plays in which the destructive influence of Machiavellian evil upon the commonweal is not a central concern, there is normally some reminder of the pervasive effects of private vice. If, under Claudius, "the commonweal does not groan and bleed"[23] as it does under Macbeth, there is still something "rotten in the state of Denmark" (*Ham*.I.iv.90);[24] Piero

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[22] Armstrong, p. 33.

[23] Armstrong, p. 33.

[24] All quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Edward Hubler, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, (New York: The New American Library, 1963).

may be brought down by private avengers, but their actions are endorsed by senators who have discovered their duke's wickedness and deemed him unfit for rule; the actions of Lorenzo and Hieronimo prevent the union of Spain and Portugal, and, like Hoffman, Kyd's Machiavel and corrupted victim leave the kingdom with no heir. Even where there is nothing like the dwelling upon the misfortunes of the realm left with no hereditary successor to its throne that one finds in *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, the plight of the realm that finds its ruling dynasty extinct would hardly go unperceived by the subjects of the aging Elizabeth.

Destruction in the Macrocosm

The destructive effects of Machiavellian evil upon an order beyond that of the microcosm or the body politic are frequently signalled in storms and prodigies and in verbal images of perversion and disorder in the world of nature. Since man, the state and the universe were seen as parts of one coherent design, and since destruction and decay in one area was inevitably reflected in others, I have already touched upon the stigmatisation of the Machiavel's activities as unnatural and upon their association with an all-embracing chaos. Yet something remains to be said.

In Elizabethan drama one sees again and again the figure whose own inner order is disturbed by the triumph of passion over reason; the distinctively human pattern is disrupted and the proper standing of man between beasts and angels abandoned. The

Machiavel, ever ambitious, strives, like Lucifer, to attain to a higher place in the hierarchy; in consequence he is seen as akin to the angel of darkness and is associated repeatedly with the powers of hell. At the same time, while the Machiavel may think of himself as rising in power or prestige, often, by his own efforts, he falls, ironically, to the level of a beast.[25] Webster's ambitious Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* is linked almost exclusively with the diabolical, while his brother, who is given to fits of uncontrollable rage, descends in his madness to pillage graveyards like the wolf. The earlier Machiavels, in whom all sins are concentrated, exhibit, typically, a combination of the diabolic and the bestial. Thus the linking of a Richard with hell and the devil is complemented by his association with poisonous or savage beasts. In the same way a great number of other Machiavels, while pre-eminently devilish, are likened not only to the serpents on which I have remarked, but also to toads or cocatrices, to lower forms of parasitic being such as ivy, cankers and ulcers, and to ferocious, pitiless creatures such as mad or "Spartan" dogs, wolves, boars, crocodiles and tigers.

Such imagery has the effect both of defining the Machiavel's own nature and condition, and of suggesting a more widespread disorder, of prefiguring a world in which the low strangles the high, the beast preys upon human kind, and, as

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25 Alvin Kernan makes a similar observation concerning the legacy hunters in his edition of *Volpone* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

Ulysses foresees in *Troilus and Cressida*, all moral order gives way before a power that is governed by will subservient to appetite until

> appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,
> Must make perforce an universal prey...
> (I.iii.121-23).

Such suggestions are made more explicit in the Machiavellian invocation of chaos; in such images of unnatural disturbance as that of the whirlwind, used to describe the Guise; or in passages such as that in which Antonio relates the terror of his hideous dreams on the night of Piero's murders to the horror he experiences on seeing that

> The verge of heaven
> Was ring'd with flames and all the upper vault
> Thick lac'd with flakes of fire; in midst wherof
> A blazing comet shot his threat'ning traine...
> (A.R.I.ii.116-19).

In his destructiveness, as in so much else, the Machiavel is at once Machiavelli's diligent disciple, following the master's advice to the letter, and a crucial element in the dramatists' exploration of the repercussions of Machiavellian tactics in a world where order and morality are accepted as realities.

I have suggested that the more destructive effects produced by the Machiavel upon the individual mind are to be seen in the suffering, madness and vengeful fury of those bound by ties of blood or affection to victims of murder. Neither Machiavelli nor the Machiavel is much concerned with the damage done to reason, integrity or human bonds by what he sees as expedient

assassination, although Machiavelli points out on more than one occasion that it is unwise to spare the relatives of one's victims since such people may prove dangerously resentful.[26]

Murder, as I have indicated, emerges as the core of Machiavellian destructiveness, and on this subject Machiavelli offers an abundance of advice which many villains follow with some care. In Chapter VII of *The Prince* the advisability of killing one's tool-villain is stressed; even though they do not always succeed in their purposes, Mortimer, Ragan, Mendoza, Eleazar, Lorenzo and others attempt, in this, to emulate the exemplary Cesare Borgia. Again, Machiavelli emphasises the wisdom of eliminating anyone likely to prove troublesome before any hostile action can occur; in particular, he insists upon the need to wipe out the ruling dynasty when one usurps a throne. In the discussion of the projected murder of the Duke of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*, Suffolk's advice is genuinely Machiavellian:

> No; let him die, in that he is a fox,
> By nature prov'd an enemy to the flock,
> Before his chaps be stain'd with crimson blood...
> for that is good deceit
> Which mates him first that first intends deceit.
> (III.i.257-59; 264-65).

Similarly, the usurpers Selimus, Muly Mahamet and Mortimer recognise the unwisdom of sparing at least their more obvious rivals.

Just as he offers counsel on the killing of individuals, so Machiavelli is prepared to advise on the dismantling of states,

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26 See, for instance: *The Prince*, IV and *The Discourses*, III.vi.

in order to secure the personal power of a ruler. Thereafter he accepts in the manner of a Mordred, a Selimus, a Tresilian or an Ateukin that the law is synonymous with the will of the law-giver and that, as Alphonsus' fourth maxim shows, it is better to be feared than loved. Shakespeare's Henry V may threaten Harfleur with pillage and slaughter and order the death of all French prisoners but there is no need to labour the fact that, in the end, his success depends not upon the circumspect tyranny that Machiavelli endorses but upon a kingly virtue in which policy and ruthlessness are subsumed. In the Machiavel the divorce of virtù and goodness, which Machiavelli finds unavoidable, leads on inevitably to chaos within a universal order which the Florentine does not recognise, and to retribution at the hands of a deity whose power he discounts.

CHAPTER SIX

THE VILLAINS : THE CUNNING OF THE MACHIAVEL

"Policy" and Reason

"Policy" in the sense of subtle, deceitful cunning based upon a coolly rational and materialistic assessment of men and situations is perhaps the most notorious of the characteristics shared by Machiavelli and the Machiavel. It is this aspect of Machiavellianism which is, above all, the sine qua non of the stage villain, which is parodied in figures such as Chapman's Gostanzo, and which impressed itself so widely upon the popular imagination that even the Host of the Garter in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* can enquire: "Am I politic? Am I subtle? Am I a Machiavel?" (III.i.95-96).[1]

There is here, however, an apparent anomaly. As I have shown a number of Machiavels pride themselves upon their politic cunning, but beyond this, they often denigrate passion and exalt reason. Quite frequently their rationality is contrasted with the rage or "ecstasy" of other characters. Alphonsus, for instance, in his opening soliloquy praises Lorenzo, his mentor, for

> a settled wisdom in itself,
> Which teacheth to be void of passion.
> (*Alph.E.of G.* I.i.43-44).

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1 Quotations from this play are from William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. H.J. Oliver, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1971).

In *1 Henry IV* the most Machiavellian of the rebellious faction, Worcester, is set against the furious Hotspur, and shows contempt for his nephew's passionate anger. Similarly, Lorenzo in *The Spanish Tragedy* exhorts the love-sick Balthazar to "Let reason holde you in your wonted joy" (II.i.2), and to "leave this extasie" (II.i.29), while Ateukin, confronted by the despairing king who would "die devoured in my love", remarks laconically: "Good Lord, how rage gainsayeth reasons power!" (*James IV*,II.ii.1046-47). All this, ironically, suggests in the Machiavel a curious semblance of orthodoxy and an apparent rejection of that domination of wit and will by passion which in the tragic hero leads on to sin and catastrophe. Yet while the Machiavel, master of policy, may appear eminently rational, his reason is not, of course, put to the kind of use envisaged by a Hooker; it is not directed to the perception of the perfect nor to the acquisition of self-knowledge within the context of a Christian concept of man. The reason of the Machiavel is essentially empirical, deriving its propositions not from the tenets of the moralist and the divine, but from the experience of the senses, and, as the ghost comments at the beginning of Fulke Greville's *Alaham*:

> Reason sworne in generall to Sense
> Makes honor, bondage; justice an offence.[2]
> (Prol. I).

Paradoxically, then, the Machiavel, however impassionate, still evinces the kind of inner disorder to which I have referred. He

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[2] Quotations from *Alaham* are from *The Works in Verse and Prose Complete of the Right Honourable Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Privately printed, 1870), III.

employs his understanding and his will in the service of his appetite, and appetite, "like the universal wolf" devours within him all compassion and all love but self-love.

In the plays, the Machiavellian confidence trick by which an Iago or an Ateukin seeks to convince the world that he has a monopoly of reason is often remarkably successful, at times confounding not only the dramatis personae, but also the dramatist. Later plays like *The Duchess of Malfi* reveal sometimes a sense that reason, having become a Machiavellian property, is no longer to be relied upon, and even in a play as early as *Leir* the old king suggests that reason as he has known it is no longer a sure guide; his daughters who owe him everything have rejected him, yet Perillus remains inexplicably loyal. And Perillus himself can only reply to Leir's argument with: "Where reason fayles, let teares confirme my love..." (x.900).

Politic Plots

The Machiavel, having often, like Alphonsus, vaunted the purity of his wit, customarily embarks upon the construction of politic plots. Very often, the purpose and nature of the Machiavel's plots are the key factors in the determination of a play's whole structure. Where the villain's aim is simple and he drives steadily towards it, removing one human obstacle after another, the structure tends to be episodic and linear like that of *Selimus*. Usually, however, the Machiavel is driven on to the defensive. Unlike Selimus, who takes no trouble to conceal his

murders, except in the case of the poisoning of Bajazet, the villains have to guard their backs while trying to advance or to retain power. As they plan, like Mendoza, to increase their influence, they are at the same time arranging the removal of tool-villains and suspicious companions. This overlapping of offensive with defensive machination in the central acts of a play can provide the requisite kind of complication, and act also as a form of plateau between success and failure, rise and fall. The shape of most Machiavellian plays is not so much that of a pyramid as that of an inverted arc or trapezium. Sometimes, however, the rise to the plateau is long and slow while the fall, which proceeds from an ultimate inability to outwit a Ferneze or to stifle a Hieronimo, appears sudden and swift.

Nearly all the Machiavel's plots involve deception. He may promise rewards which are chimerical, as John does to his allies in *Edward III*, or undertake, like Ateukin, to work miracles to gratify a patron. He may create dissension or lure a character into taking up arms by misrepresenting the circumstances. He may, like Sacrepant or Vandermast, Winchester or Aaron spread slanders which, as a matter of dramatic convention, are almost invariably believed.[3] Above all, the Machiavel commonly deludes his victims by playing a role or assuming a disguise.

Often there is a pretence of friendship and accord with characters who are, in fact, marked for destruction. Thus Winchester

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[3] See: Bradbrook, p. 54.

pretends to be reconciled with Gloucester, and Richard with Queen Elizabeth's kindred; York allies himself with Suffolk, Winchester and Somerset until they have served their purpose in snaring "the shepherd of the flock","the good Duke Humphrey" (*2 Hen VI*,II.ii. 72-73), and Louis in *King John* makes a pact with the English lords and then, on the same altar, vows to behead them when they have served their turn.

Just as a whole network of bloody actions and references to blood can be focussed in the actual shedding of blood upon the stage, so, sometimes, the multifarious deceptions and pretences of the Machiavel can be epitomised in the assumption of a full disguise. I have already made some reference to the way in which Macbeth's dressing in a nightgown to hide his guilt and his donning of "borrowed robes" reflect his movement away from truth. While the genuine Machiavel has no truth within himself to be denied, his allegiance to false appearances is at times underscored by the use of similar effects. Barabas goes in disguise to poison Ithamore, Bellamira and Pilia-Borza. As Richard moves towards the culmination of his schemes to win the crown, he appears in "rotten armor, marvellous ill-favored" (III.v), and, with Buckingham, engages in an elaborate charade designed to convince the Lord Mayor that the execution of Hastings was justified. Hoffman spends most of his play disguised as his victim, Otho, and achieves his most striking successes by assuming yet another disguise, or by inducing the dupe, Lodowick, to dress as a "Grecian", or by employing a tool-villain who passes himself off as a French doctor.

Often, in the Machiavellian plays, disguise is of a double kind and associated with masquing or the acting of a play within a play. In *Woodstock*, the apex of Tresilian's villainy is the formulation of the kidnapping plot, which involves Richard and his followers entering Woodstock's house disguised as "some country gentlemen" (IV.ii.85) dressed as masquers. *The Spanish Tragedy* presents what Kernan has called "one of the most intricate theatrical perspectives imaginable. The audience watches Revenge and Don Andrea watching the kings of Spain and Portugal watching Lorenzo, Balthazar, Bel-imperia and Hieronimo playing in the brief play, *Soliman and Perseda*.[4]

In revenge tragedy, particularly, plays or masques are sometimes used to turn the tables on the villain, and, as part of the denouement, stand as images in which all the deception of the preceding action is focussed in the moment before masks are stripped away and the truth revealed. At times, too, the adoption of particular roles involves both a doubling of pretence and a turning back to reality, as when Tamora and her two sons appear before the mad Titus, disguised appropriately as Revenge, Rapine and Murder. Yet while such disguising can lead in one sense to the enactment of justice and to the kind of revelation that concludes *The Malcontent* or *The Revenger's Tragedy*, it can also make plain the power of the vision of the Machiavel.

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[4] Alvin Kernan, "'Who would not admire this our chameleon?'" in J. Leeds Barroll, Alexander Leggett, Richard Hosley and Alvin Kernan, *The Revels History of Drama in English, III 1576-1613* (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 260.

The Machiavel is indifferent to human feeling and is concerned ultimately to manipulate action. His world is one of simplified design, patterned in accordance with his own materialism and his own appetite. He reduces those about him to types, ascribes to them roles and sets them moving in a scenario of his own devising. Thus the perspective which, as Kernan suggests, is supplied by *The Spanish Tragedy*'s "long view through theatres within theatres" is essentially that of the Machiavel, Lorenzo, or of a Hieronimo transformed to the likeness of his enemy. It is a perspective in which "the characters seem immensely distant, small and unreal" and in which "the uniqueness of their experiences is reduced to meaninglessness in order to get it down to a size and form that can be staged."[5] *Soliman and Perseda* comes to an end and Hieronimo, the puppet master, is himself reduced to a puppet in a dumb show. But if Hieronimo's attempt to shape events to a charade of his own conceiving ends in partial failure, his vision is not wholly dispelled. Revenge and the Ghost, who are indifferent to everything apart from the achievement of their own ends, remain to comment upon the final stages of the action.

Like Hieronimo, nearly every Machiavel finds that his scenario ends in a manner that he has not foreseen, and that the play in which he ultimately moves is directed by powers which supersede his own. But in the meantime, through force and guile, he often contrives to fashion events to his own design and to attain to the goals that he has set himself. Nearly all the major

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5 Kernan, p. 260.

Machiavels are successful in obtaining some measure of the power that they have coveted. Some, like Muly Mahamet, Richard or Selimus win thrones. Others, like Tresilian, Sejanus or Mortimer attain positions of influence. The avengers, Piero and Hoffman, destroy most of their designated victims. Even an Ateukin contrives for a time to make the world dance to his tune.

The Causes of the Machiavel's Fall

Usually the Machiavel wavers and his "policy" begins to fail him either in the final stages of his ascent or while he struggles to retain what he has won. Lorenzo removes the obstacle to his sister's marriage with Balthazar by killing Horatio, but the marriage never takes place and after the murder Lorenzo's efforts are devoted entirely to protecting his position. Fallerio is successful in arranging the death of his nephew but never inherits his brother's estates and in the later scenes of *Two Lamentable Tragedies* can do nothing but attempt to elude the stroke of justice. York and the Guise carry all before them for a time but are brought down before they can lay their hands upon a crown. Those who achieve a greater measure of success rarely remain long in power. Sacrepant and Richard, Alphonsus and Eleazar, Mortimer and Muly Mahamet are all deprived of life as well as influence, while other Machiavels such as Iago or Tresilian end as prisoners or, like Gonorill, Ragan and Ateukin, simply vanish. The only villains who survive unscathed and strong are doomed in prophecy, like Richard in *2 Edward IV*, or appear in plays which are

incomplete, like *Jeronimo*, or which have, or were intended to have, a second part showing the fall of the Machiavel. Monsieur dies in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* and Selimus is clearly marked for destruction in the promised sequel to his play.

In one sense the Machiavel's fall is brought about almost always by some miscalculation or false step, some defect in his "policy". Very often he underestimates an adversary. Sometimes he falls victim to an enemy more politic or more fortunate than himself, as Barabas does, or Suffolk, or Sejanus when he accepts Macro's explanation of the meeting of the senate. At other times he fails to recognise the strength of those who represent virtue and right order, so that Mortimer dismisses the young Edward as "yet a child" (*E.II.V.vi.17*); Eleazar triumphs too soon over Philip and the Cardinal, and Bessus and Narbazanes, having planned to offer Darius to Alexander in return for the conqueror's protection, discover too late that their treachery has earned them nothing but hatred and contempt.

In a rather similar way the Machiavel is often deceived concerning his tool-villains, either failing like Alphonsus to recognise the extent of an Alexander's cunning, or remaining blind to the fact that greed and fear may be overridden by the kind of remorse that suddenly afflicts second murderers. As well as erring in his assessment of character, the Machiavel can fail to cover his tracks with sufficient care or to guard against all the "unexpected harmes" (*S.T.III.iv.5*) of which Lorenzo speaks. Piero and Ateukin forget to destroy incriminating letters, and Mortimer is unable to silence Gurney.

All this constitutes, in effect, a series of practical comments upon the limitations of Machiavellian policy. The three parts of *Henry VI*, for instance, reveal a world where all order is discounted, loyalty sacrificed to ambition, truth and trust set by, and the law of God and man displaced by force and fraud. In such a world the commonweal "groans and bleeds" and no man, including the Machiavel, lives in safety. However politic a Winchester, a Suffolk or a York may be he is unable to survive for long in the milieu that he has created. Since he has cut away everything that might sustain him, apart from Fortune and his own strength and cunning, he becomes inevitably the victim of any rival who, for a moment, is a little more fortunate, or a little stronger or a little more politic than himself. Machiavelli, having held up the career of Cesare Borgia as an example to every aspirant to power, attributed his fall to the "extraordinary and inordinate malice of fortune" (P.VII). The Elizabethan dramatists made the point that when the Machiavel has reduced all commerce between men to force and fraud, neither the ferocity of the lion nor the cunning of the fox will protect him against the beasts who surround him on the day that Fortune turns away her face. And, as Machiavelli himself pointed out, no man can expect to command Fortune for more than half the time.

In most of the earlier plays, however powerful the Machiavels may become, virtue remains a reality, and the "policy" that neglects to take full account of virtue's power is revealed as defective. The belief shared by Machiavelli and Alphonsus or

Mordred that one can rule through fear is exposed as fallacious. Like Mortimer or Bessus and Narbazanes, a great number of villains are finally brought down by the forces of righteousness. They may suffer defeat in battle at the hands of virtuous champions, as Richard of Gloucester does, or they may, like Mortimer, be brought to justice by a character who has appeared to be governed by fear. Some, like Fallerio or Hoffman, find that conscience causes a tool-villain to betray them. The true Machiavel, unless he steps suddenly into another role, never gives way to any conscience of his own, but, at Bosworth, Richard's suppressed guilt turns to one of the forces marshalled against him, and, if Macbeth never becomes fully Machiavellian, his play makes plain the price exacted by the conscience when a man, who is not born a monster, attempts to deny his humanity. "Not all kill and forget, as Machiavelli had once implied. Some kill and remember. That is the ultimate Elizabethan critique of Machiavelli."[6] This comment of George Watson's is perhaps an over-simplification, but at least the plays make plain that the Machiavel, who, in his policy, forgets to take account of conscience and of goodness, will come at length to disaster.

Machiavelli does not, of course, condone the kind of blunder committed by Piero or by Mortimer. In the chapter on conspiracies in *The Discourses*, for instance, he speaks of the dangers which reside in confiding one's projects to others. Yet even Machiavelli admits that at times such risks are inevitable. From any point of view Lorenzo in *Jeronimo* or the murderers

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6 George Watson, "Machiavel and Machiavelli," *The Sewanee Review*, 84 (1976), p. 648.

of Master Arden are inept, but, in the case of more politic Machiavels, the dramatists sometimes make the point that it is impossible to fool all of the people all of the time. However determined he may be to trust none but himself, the Machiavel is forced at times to employ tools or to rely upon the loyalty of associates, and, however hard he may strive to stop all mouths, he cannot, in the nature of things, expect to take account of every circumstance nor to eliminate every kind of evidence which may one day betray him. Alphonsus makes the point very clearly:

> But, my Lorenzo, that's the hardest point;
> It is not for a prince to execute,
> Physicians and apothecaries must know,
> And servile fear or counsel-breaking bribes
> Will from a peasant in an hour extort
> Enough to overthrow a monarchy.
> (*Alph E.of G.*I.i.165-70).

Lorenzo counters this with the exhortation to "Be always jealous of him that knows your secrets" (I.i.173), to

> credit few,
> And when you grow into the least suspect,
> With silent cunning must you cut them off.
> (I.i.174-76).

But the plays make plain that the Machiavel cannot have his ear at every door; often suspicion arises too late. Moreover, ultimately there will be so many who suspect that to try to cut them all off will be to struggle with the Hydra. Macbeth may eliminate a Banquo, or Richard a Buckingham, but in the end their evil is made manifest to the nations over which they rule.

As I have shown, "the nature of things" in the world of Elizabethan drama is normally very different from "the nature of things" in the world of *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. Behind

the natural sequence of cause and effect by which the Machiavel may come to ruin, often the dramatists reveal the evolution of supernatural purpose. If in some plays the operation of divine retribution is discerned rather abruptly, in others the entire action proceeds on two levels and allows of the dual interpretation exemplified in the exchange of Warwick and the king in *2 Henry IV*. Warwick, the practical man of affairs is sure that

> There is a history in all men's lives
> Figuring the nature of the time deceas'd;
> The which observ'd, a man may prophesy,
> With a near aim, of the main chance of things
> As yet not come to life ...
> (III.i.80-84).

But King Henry, sleepless and troubled, sees in "this same times condition" the fulfilment of the prophecy of the murdered Richard and the breaking forth of a corruption that follows as an inevitable consequence upon the commission of "foul sin" (III.i. 65-79).

In many plays, then, any exposure of the practical defects of Machiavellian policy is sustained by an interpretation of events in terms of divine will, and, consequently, by the moral and religious judgements which such an interpretation implies. Occasionally the folly of discounting God's purposes is made so abundantly clear that the effect is almost comic. Providence intervenes in the manner of a white magician, like Bacon in *John of Bordeaux*, and the Machiavel is reduced to trembling impotence. The wicked messenger in *King Leir* drops his daggers as the thunder peals from heaven, and, in *Edward III*, the army

of King John falls into confusion in the face of English valour supported by the miraculous fulfilment of prophecy. More often Providence is seen working in and through something closer to Aristotle's "chain of probability (or necessity)"[7] and the Machiavel's failure to recognise the power of the supernatural is closely linked with his miscalculation of mundane forces. Richard III, before Bosworth, derides Richmond for his lack of military experience, and refuses to admit that he is confronted at last by an instrument of divine justice. Yet Richmond, blessed by the ghosts of Richard's victims, is the captain of the God to whom he prays and as he says: "God and our good cause fight upon our side" (*R.III*.V.iii.241). God will ward his soldiers against "One that hath ever been God's enemy" (V.iii.253). Richard is mistaken also in believing that he can force Stanley to fight on his side by threatening the death of Stanley's son. In a sense this is simply a military or strategic error, yet Stanley's detestation of Richard and his turning, as England's representative, to the godly Richmond are, like divine retribution, direct consequences of Richard's long career of crime. Stanley's desertion is one of the natural causes through which supernatural power bears down finally upon the Machiavellian tyrant.

In a similar way Muly Mahamet, in *The Battle of Alcazar*, is brought down by the nemesis who merges into "the god of kings",

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[7] Aristotle, *On the Art of Fiction*, trans. L.J. Potts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 28.

who inflicts "Vengeance on this accursed Moor for sin" (I.prol.40), and who gives success to the just. But, as Abdel Rayes suggests, divine power works through the valour of its agents.

> How can this battle but successful be,
> Where courage meeteth with a rightful cause?
> (I.i.132-33).

Nor is Muly Mahamet Seth, who finally defeats the treacherous usurper, simply a courageous warrior. After Muly Mahamet has almost won the day, his virtuous opponent, Abdelmelec, dies of grief, and Muly Mahamet Seth turns defeat to victory by engaging in subterfuge. He pretends that Abdelmelec is still alive and so rallies the army of the just by what, interestingly, is praised as "politic" advice (V.i.54).

Bawcutt in his article, "'Policy', Machiavellianism and the Earlier Tudor Drama", has pointed out that although "policy" carried "an increasingly pejorative meaning" throughout the sixteenth century, the word might also refer to a "praiseworthy skill", to prudence, sagacity and wise statecraft, and "both meanings existed side by side, sometimes within the same work."[8] With the advent of the Machiavel, the word came more and more to refer to "base and rotten" (*1.Hen IV*.I.iii.108) cunning, to the wiliness of a Barabas or to the sly and murderous dealings of a Suffolk. Yet that "policy" or "politic" might still be used to denote the admirable and wise strategy of a Muly Mahamet Seth.

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8 N.W. Bawcutt, "'Policy', Machiavellianism and the Earlier Tudor Drama", *English Literary Renaissance*, I (1971), p. 197.

reflects a number of interlocking convictions which certain of the earlier Machiavellian plays make clear. The policy of the Machiavel is shown to be evil not simply because it involves deception, but because it denotes a particular kind of rationality, such as I have described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Machiavellian policy is human cunning set against and above God, and, as such, stands opposed to legitimate practice, employed to confound the wicked and uphold the good. Such policy is inseparable, then, from atheism, from the egoism and amorality of the villain who is convinced that he can outwit a godless world of "wretched creatures", and from the destruction of order and of human lives in which such a being is prepared to engage in the pursuit of personal ambition. Taken out of the context of the whole Machiavellian credo, "policy" can, naturally enough, take on a quite different colour.

In the plays God may employ a politic instrument, like Alexander, to destroy another evil and politic Machiavel such as Alphonsus. He may use a Richard to cleanse England of sin, or allow the Machiavels to engage in an orgy of self-destruction, preying upon each other "like monsters of the deep" (*Lear*,IV. ii.49). In such cases, of course, "policy" remains an evil property, and its limitations are exposed in the ironic revelation of the manner in which a cunning pursuit of power is, at the same time, a blind subservience to the all-embracing purposes of a beneficent deity. But at other times, policy, in being drawn into a totally different moral context, changes its quality and

becomes, like white magic opposed to black, a weapon in the hands of the virtuous. Again, inevitably, irony is present, for the Machiavel, having seen all about him as fools and knaves, is proved to have underrated a virtue which, while remaining true to itself, turns the villain's own most potent weapon against his own politic breast. Thus Mendoza in *The Malcontent* who believes that "God made honest fools to maintain crafty knaves" finds himself outwitted by the policy of the righteous, and Malevole is able to conclude:

> Yet thus much let the great ones still conceive,
> When they observe not heaven's imposed conditions,
> They are no kings, but forfeit their commissions.
> (V.iv.142-44).

This kind of recognition of a heavenly power which ultimately champions the just and brings the Machiavel to ruin is thoroughly conventional. Sometimes expressions of confidence in divine retribution take the form of prophecy; Hieronimo looks forward to "the fall of Babylon/Wrought by the heavens in this confusion (IV.i.194-95), and in *Antonio's Revenge* the ghost of Andrugio gloats over the approaching death of Piero,

> Exclaiming, "Heaven's just; for I shall see
> The scourge of murder and impiety."
> (IV.i.24-25).

More often the folly of a cunning that neglects to take account of divine will is underscored by choric commentary which either accompanies the Machiavel's defeat or death, or, in the final lines of the play, brings home the moral in a pious couplet. When Sejanus is brought down, Regulus gives thanks to the gods. The fall of Bagot in *Thomas Lord Cromwell* is greeted with: "Thy workes

are infinite, great God heaven" (II.iii.78), and: "How just is God to right the innocent" (II.iii.64), while in *King Leir* the defeat of Gonorill and Ragan is seen as the act of a God who has consistently shielded Leir from his daughters "spight" (xxx.2560).

At times the Machiavels themselves suddenly discern the justice of the punishment that their politic wickedness has brought upon them. Fallerio, having murdered the child placed in his charge by his dying sister, recalls Armenia's final words:

> If you deale ill with this distressed childe:
> God will no doubt revenge the innocent,
> I have delt ill, and God hath tane revenge.
> (sig. K).

And when Ateukin sees that his hopes have come to nothing he exclaims: "Thus God doth worke with those that purchase fame/By flattery" (V.ii.1969-70). In *Darius* the chorus brings the play to an end by reflecting that there is "some higher pow'r" that can call all actions to account, "And them represse who to oppresse were prompt" (V.ii.2219-22), while Ferneze concludes *The Jew of Malta* by giving praise "Neither to Fate nor Fortune, but to Heaven" (V.v.125).

Most of these celebrations of heavenly power are, in the terms of the plays, convincing enough, yet there are, admittedly, times when they appear perfunctory, belated, or even incongruous. The effect of Regulus' exclamation is undercut by the reminder that Sejanus' fall has been brought about more by Macro than by the gods, and Macro, it is suggested, will go on to "become a greater prodigie in Rome" (V.752) than Sejanus. Again, in

The Jew of Malta, Ferneze's final piety appears only a fresh evidence of the hypocrisy of which Barabas accuses the Christians. Finally, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the settling of destinies by divine power, which Hieronimo seems to predict, turns out to be no more than a series of arbitrary judgements on the part of a vindictive ghost. Yet in all these plays, the audience is at least invited to measure the distance between a world dominated by force and fraud and one more pleasing to the heaven that is invoked.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, as I have already suggested, the audience sits above the action of *Soliman and Perseda*, above the kings who watch Hieronimo's play, and above Revenge and the ghost, who watch the kings. They are, then, distanced in an almost Brechtian manner from all that takes place, and, prompted by recollections of Christian belief, which occur throughout the play, are, perhaps, invited finally to pass judgement upon judgement. The summary despatch of friends to bliss and foes to torment is left entirely to Andrea, and, although the young Spaniard appears in ghostly form, his justice remains essentially the justice of man. It may well be that the audience, recalling "Vindicta mihi!", is driven to set against the operations of a just providence a vindictive and partial pursuit of human vengeance, which embraces both the blood-bath of Hieronimo and the pronouncements of a ghost who assumes, without demur, the role of the Great Judge.

The End of the Machiavel

The wicked folly and pride of the Machiavel in refusing to take cognizance of retributive power is brought out not only by explicit reference to the justice of heaven, but also by the particular circumstances in which the villain encounters his death or his defeat. Sometimes his fate constitutes a hideous warning, with some dwelling on the agonising manner of his death. Piero has his tongue torn out and, like York, is taunted with the death of his child before being struck down. Winchester dies raving in "black despair" (*2 Hen VI*.III.iii.23). Aaron is sentenced to be half-buried and starved to death, and Alexander, in *Alphonsus Emperor of Germany*, to be hanged "by the heels between two English mastiffs" (V.i.475). Sir Doncaster is to hang alive in chains, and Mortimer suffers the frightful death of a traitor. Sometimes the end of the Machiavel is more ignominious than agonising, so that emphasis is thrown on to the humbling of his fatal pride. Thus Sejanus, after being beheaded, is torn in pieces by the mob, and Suffolk is murdered by pirates after telling their leader:

> It is impossible that I should die
> By such a lowly vassal as thyself.
> (*2 Hen VI*. IV.i.109-10).

The death of Muly Mahamet, "th'ambitious enemy" (*B.of A*.V.i.228) is the most shameful imaginable and is turned to an object lesson of a peculiarly obvious kind. Muly flies from the final battle, is thrown from his horse, and drowns in a river "for lack of skill to swim" (V.i.242). After this his body is dragged from the water by a peasant and brought, "filed with mud" (V.i.245), to Muly

Mahamet Seth, who orders that it be skinned, and the skin

> stiffen'd out and stuff'd with straw,
> So to deter and fear the lookers-on
> From any such foul fact or bad attempt:
> (V.i.252-54).

In many cases the manner of the Machiavel's death corresponds to that of a victim or intended victim, so that the limitations of his policy are brought out by his being hoist in the end by his own petard. Barabas, of course, falls into the cauldron prepared for Calymath, and Hoffman is killed with the burning crown used to murder his first victim, Otho. Suffolk, having charged Gloucester with treason, and engaged in a travesty of justice in arranging his murder, is condemned as a traitor to England by the pirate captain and haled away to summary execution.

While Suffolk falls victim to a lawlessness which he has himself helped to breed, and while other Machiavels die at the hands of accomplices or avengers, most of the villains in the earlier plays are punished by the justice of the state. Their deaths bear witness not only to the inexorability of divine retribution, but also to the resilience of that law and order which they have attempted to delude or pervert, and to which their own anarchic ambition has stood opposed. Some, like Sir Doncaster or Mortimer or Sir David in *Edward I*, are doomed by a just monarch and sent to execution. Others, even though no death sentence is pronounced, are left, like Iago or Tresilian, to face the punishment exacted by the representatives of civil order. Even

when, like Ateukin or Bessus and Narbazanes, they manage to escape, the Machiavel's deeds are publicly condemned by a James or an Alexander, and orders are given that they be hunted down and brought to face the penalty for their crimes. When the villain is not executed or proscribed, but defeated in battle, the conqueror, as well as being the champion of righteousness and heaven, is also presented as the rightful monarch. His victory represents the triumph of a body politic which stands as part of an order that is divinely ordained, and which frames its laws in accordance with God's will. Consequently, the defeat of John of France by Edward III, or of Gonorill and Ragan by Leir and the King of Gallia, is, on one level, the routing of anarchic self-seeking by justice and good law, and the effect of the death of a Richard or a Muly Mahamet is, in one way, very similar to that of the villain who dies, justly condemned, upon the scaffold.

This movement away from anarchy or tyrranic rule and towards the re-establishment of the power of the just judge, who is also God's deputy, is enforced sometimes by direct reference to legal process. Few Machiavels are brought to justice in open court, as Volpone is, but the legality of the young Edward's condemnation of Mortimer is suggested by his going first into "the council-chamber.../To crave the aid and succour of his peers" (*E.II*.V.vi.20-21), while Richmond's pronouncement of wise and merciful judgement follows upon his ritualistic acceptance of the crown from the hands of Stanley. The re-establishment of just law implies also the re-ordering of relationships between

the members of the body politic, so that in many plays the movement towards lawful judgement involves both a progress away from "policy" in its pejorative sense and one towards virtuous governance which encompasses wise statecraft; it involves also a progress away from an individualism that sets a character apart from god and man, and one towards reconciliation within a godly and healthful society.

This type of development, discernible in a number of the earlier Machiavellian plays, is to be seen as one of a range of similar movements which are characteristic of the drama at large. In a comedy, such as *Twelfth Night*, certain characters work towards a maturity in love which enables them to marry and to take their places in a coherent community. In *Measure for Measure* both anarchic passion and withdrawal from the world are purged or overcome so that, finally, almost everyone is drawn into the life of a society governed by the wise and charitable precepts of a Christian ruler. Even in a tragedy like *Romeo and Juliet*, the division between the Montagues and the Capulets is finally healed, and "a glooming peace"[9](V.iii.306) comes to a Verona, unified in recognition of the lesson implicit in the lovers' sacrifice and in acceptance of the pronouncements of a just prince.

In the Machiavellian plays the Machiavel is always excluded from the reconciliation that follows upon his defeat. Even though,

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9 Quotations from this play are from William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. J.A. Bryant, Jr. The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: The New American Library, 1964).

like Munday's Prior or Fallerio, he may repent and, presumably, save his soul, nearly always he pays for his crimes with his life. When, like Mendoza or Gonorill and Ragan, he escapes death, there is no suggestion of his inclusion within the new order that has finally emerged. Even in the comedies, if a Gostanzo can discover the limitations of "policy" and join in a general reconciliation, a Volpone must be isolated and confined in a hospital for incurables. Later, in *The Tempest*, Sebastian may be forgiven and Caliban may learn to seek for grace, but, for the time being, even the sudden onset of remorse is not enough to bring the Elizabethan Machiavel within the confines of the paradigm of the ideal state.

Usually, of course, the earlier Machiavels are excluded not only from the societies of men, but also, after death, from the joys of heaven. In *Antonio's Revenge*, the avengers are confident that Piero's soul will descend to hell. Sir Doncaster is unmoved by the warning that:

> After this bodies bitter punishment,
> There is an ever-during endlesse woe,
> A quenchlesse fire, an unconsuming paine,
> Which desperate soules and bodies must indure.
> (*Death of Robert* v.656-59).

And Alphonsus, in an attempt to save his life, deliberately renounces

> the joys of Heaven,
> The sight of angels and his Saviour's blood,
> And gives his soul unto the devil's power.
> (*Alph,E.of G.* V.i.320-22).

I have already said something of the reaction of certain Machiavels to the doom that comes upon them. Invocations of chaos and the cursing of enemies are common, and an Eleazar or an Aaron looks forward to the isolation of supremacy in evil among the damned. What is perhaps remarkable is the large number of Machiavels who die unexpectedly or off stage, so that they are allowed no dying display, or who, like Iago, relapse before the audience into silence. Gonorill and Ragan, Bessus and Narbazanes, Muly Mahamet and Ateukin simply disappear from the stage, and, if they return, are seen again only as corpses. Lorenzo and Baltazar die playing the parts that Hieronimo has ascribed to them. Piero loses his tongue, Sejanus, once he realises that Macro is present in the senate, says almost nothing, and Iago vows that "From this time forth I never will speak word" (*Oth* V.ii.305). It is, perhaps, significant that the last group, those who become dumb, contains some of the most eloquent of all the Machiavels. Sejanus is a master of soaring, arrogant rhetoric, and Iago of the subtle, politic lie. Their reduction to impotence and speechlessness implies the "ultimate Elizabethan critique" of Machiavellianism, and of Machiavellian policy in particular. In the end, the master of deception, of blasphemous or "glozing" speech, is bereft of the god-given instrument, which he has abused and turned to his own egocentric and destructive purposes, and stands before his judges without explanation or defense.

The Elizabethan indictment of the Machiavel and his policy, is, all in all, a formidable one, encompassing criticism grounded

in both political practicalities and in moral and religious conviction. And, as always, the critique of the Machiavel is, in essence, an indictment of the master to whom the villains turn, and whose precepts they endeavour to follow in their practice. If the Machiavel is often Machiavelli's diligent disciple in his emulation of the lion, he is usually still more adept in playing the fox. Selimus likes "passing well" the counsel:

> If that I cannot speed with lyons force,
> To cloath my complots in a foxes skin.
> (xviii.1737-38).

The first of the maxims which Alphonsus has from his mentor, Lorenzo, recalls the notorious advice contained in the eighteenth chapter of *The Prince*: "A prince must be of the nature of the lion and the fox" (*Alph.E.of G.*I.i.101), and the Emperor, pondering this advice, concludes:

> And where the lion's hide is thin and scant,
> I'll firmly patch it with the fox's fell.
> (I.i.106-07).

I have already said sufficient to make it plain that where policy is concerned a great number of Machiavels observe the letter as well as the spirit of Machiavelli's advice. Almost all mask their designs with the politic display of piety and virtue recommended in *The Prince*; many, like Richard and Barabas see "no sin" (*J.of M.*II.iii.311) in breaking an oath when it is expedient to do so, and many more follow the counsel, given in the seventh chapter of *The Prince*, regarding the removal of tool-villains or the elimination of one rival by another.

The dramatists' demonstration of the limitations of the policy of the Machiavel and of Machiavelli is usually discounted as ill-judged or obscurantist, yet it is interesting to discover that in some things at least, the Elizabethan critique stands closer to modern commentary than might be supposed. Very few modern commentators on Machiavelli's work follow the Elizabethans in associating any flaws in Machiavelli's policy with a refusal to recognise the power of the divine. But despite the widespread admiration for Machiavelli's achievement, a large number of moderns point with the Elizabethans to certain failures in his assessment of human beings and, hence, to a variety of weaknesses in his political strategy. Aldo Scaglione has held that by searching for science in a field that does not admit of a "naturalistic approach", Machiavelli ends in some confusion.[10] Mazzeo admits: "his inductions are often drawn from rather limited areas and according to rules which were themselves formulated on relatively limited observation. He too often generalises a little too readily, and his method, particularly of historical analogy, is simply too risky." And Mazzeo goes on to point to particular errors in Machiavelli's conclusions, including "his excessive faith in the capacities of the single gifted individual to effect political change."[11] Butterfield points to a certain rigidity in Machiavelli's precepts, to which Guicciardini

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10 Aldo Scaglione, "Machiavelli the Scientist?", *Symposium* 10 (1956), 243-44.

11 Mazzeo, pp. 160-61.

objected: "Student of chance and change, of all the processes of time, he had yet an imperfect sense of their perpetual mobility."[12] J.R. Hale writes: "His knack of epigram, his confident tone, his taste for ingenuity, his optimism - these tendencies had produced from the beginning generalisations that were too rash, schemes that were too fine-drawn to be thoroughly practical."[13] Finally, Chabod, in discussing Machiavelli's obsession with citizen armies, comments: "In constructing his principate he completely discounts the people as a creative force, but he soon recalls them when he has need of their moral support."[14]

Certain parallels between these modern criticisms of Machiavelli's reasoning and the Elizabethan assessment of Machiavellian rationality, that is revealed in the handling of the Machiavel, are obvious at once. Most Machiavels in their cynical analyses of custom, or feeling, or the conduct of other individuals tend to over-simplify, and Iago's assessment of Desdemona and Othello, or Edmund's reduction of his father and his brother to factors in an equation are open to very much the kind of attack which Scaglione levels at Machiavelli's inappropriately "scientific" approach. The reasoning of a Mortimer is limited in the way that, in Mazzeo's view, Machiavelli's reasoning is limited, and, like Machiavelli, the Machiavellian tyrants of Elizabethan drama reveal an excessive faith in the prince's capacity to mould kingdoms and

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12 Butterfield, p. 24.

13 J. R. Hale, p. 20.

14 Chabod, pp. 101-02.

subjects as he wills. A number of Machiavels, from Hoffman to Sejanus, exhibit the kind of overconfidence in man's ability to control chance and change which Butterfield detects in Machiavelli. J.R. Hale's criticism of Machiavelli's generalisations as "too rash" and his description of the Machiavellian scheme as "too fine-drawn" are reflected again and again in the Elizabethan revelation of the Machiavel's mistakes. Many Machiavels are given to epigrammatic generalisations on men and affairs, which almost always prove "too rash". Lorenzo, confident in his own ability to shape events, is sure that:

> Where words prevaile not, violence prevailes;
> But golde doth more than either of them both.
> (*S.T.*II.i.108-09);

Tresillian that: "Wit makes us great, greatness keeps fools in awe" (*Wood* I.ii.70), and Mendoza that:

> my treachery is secure, nor can we fall;
> Mischief that prospers men do virtue call.
> (*Mal.*V.iii.72-73).

All are, in some sense, proved wrong, and the Machiavel's schemes, which often become over subtle and complicated, recoil, like those of Barabas, upon his own head.

The error which Chabod attributes to Machiavelli, that of discounting the people, and imagining that men will remain loyal to their masters when all religious and social bonds have been denied, is the very error which contributes to the fall of a Richard and which brings disaster upon a Volpone. The citizens of the commonweal, having been seen as nothing more than factors in the tyrant's political programme, in the final battle may revolt, like Macbeth's thanes,

> And none serve with him but constrained things,
> Whose hearts are absent too.
> (*Macbeth*,V.iv.13-14).

Similarly, a tool-villain whose allegiance the Machiavel has taken for granted may finally deny the bond with a master who has made a mockery of all bonds. He may desert to the side of righteousness, like Lorrique, or, like Mosca, simply beat the Machiavel at his own game by employing his master's methods and following his master's code.

The Elizabethan critique of Machiavellian cunning, which emerges from the dramatic treatment of the Machiavel, has, then, a great deal in common with various judicious modern assessments of Machiavelli's policy. If the Elizabethans proceed from this kind of "realistic" critique to one grounded in moral and religious conviction, this does not, of course, mean that they did not understand what they were judging. It means only that they accepted morality and religion as realities in a way that Machiavelli did not, and that they refused to judge his code in the light of premises which he took for granted, but which they saw as false. In condemning Machiavelli as godless and amoral the Elizabethans were, moreover, unconstrained by the conventional specialism of decorous modern scholarship.

It is true, as I have admitted, that the Machiavels of the Elizabethan stage are not at all points similar to Machiavelli's exemplary power-seekers, nor always representative of Machiavellian theory. Although the earlier Machiavels are all in some sense

interested in winning and exercising power, they are not, like the Cesare of *The Prince*, mere embodiments of an obsessive desire for political supremacy. They are capable of jealousy and personal hatred, of pique and a lust for vengeance. Sometimes their desire for power can take forms other than the simple ambition to win a crown, so that they may engage in a manipulation of the destinies of others from which no obvious political advantage can accrue. They are, unlike Machiavelli's figures, capable of humour and of self-congratulatory or sadistic delight.

Yet, as I have attempted to show, it is a profound mistake to imagine that the Machiavel is no more than his sensational trappings. In the plays the Machiavellian politicians are fleshed out, often by the stuff of legend, to become dramatic characters. Some, like Iago, are changed also to recognisable, if not comprehensible human beings, and this transformation of Machiavelli's characters, who are no more than figures in a political diagram, may appear at times unjust to the author of *The Prince*. But the most important differences between Machiavelli's Cesare and an Alphonsus or a Piero are not ones of dramatic or psychological elaboration. The crucial differences are the product of a process of definition and of assessment, of transporting the Machiavellian aspirant to power from beyond the Alps to stand almost always against the background of a god-centred world. In that world the emphasis upon the monstrous and diabolic nature of the Machiavel's evil can become at times an inevitable function of judgement. Machiavelli has little

to say of poison and it is, no doubt, unjust to present Alphonsus, the poisoner, as his diligent disciple, but it is not unjust to present Alphonsus, the ambitious and ruthless politician, as diabolic, if one happens to believe in hell and the devil.

Dr Tillyard fails to make this distinction. He writes that his "cool statement of Machiavelli's irrelevance to the age of Elizabeth does not mean that I am trying to prove that the educated man of Shakespeare's day did not know or heed him, or that the semi-educated did not distort his image in a very queer way. What I mean is that the age, while making much use of certain details of his writing, either ignored or refused to face what the man fundamentally stood for. It may even be that the whole fraudulent edifice of anti-Machiavellianism, based on a misunderstanding of his meaning and on a wrenching of his maxims from their contemporary context, was the unconscious means of punishing him for a fundamental heresy men hated too much to face and attack openly. Not till the age of Hobbes was the same heresy subjected to frontal attacks."[15]

This assessment could hardly be more misguided, and would be staggering if one had not encountered the same kind of thing so often before. The Machiavel does represent some distortion of Machiavelli, but, as I have indicated, the reasons for this distortion are not particularly queer. But behind the "queerness", invisible to Dr Tillyard, stands a definite type and that type is

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15 Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 22.

thoroughly and genuinely Machiavellian. In the atheism, the egocentric amorality, the destructiveness and the cunning which are his distinguishing characteristics, the Machiavel stands as an embodiment of the essence of Machiavellian theory. That theory, once its premises are granted, is, despite its flaws, remarkably consistent. The Machiavel has a similar consistency. Given his indifference to goodness and to God, then his elevation of his own ambition as the ultimate criterion, his destructiveness and his cynical policy appear all of a piece. Each quality or attitude evolves logically from the others and each is coloured or defined by those with which it is combined.

It has in the past been usual to see the Machiavel almost as the Elizabethan equivalent of the moustache-twirling villain of Victorian melodrama, as a type which, despite some interesting Shakespearean examples, may be easily dismissed as a compound of the Vice, of the polemics of Gentillet and of a superstitious, even fraudulent, garbling of respectable political theory. The Machiavels, on the contrary, are a group which merits the closest attention. That group is remarkably cohesive and no one of its members can be fully understood without some knowledge of the others. Together, the Machiavels bear witness to the Elizabethan understanding of the basis of Machiavellian theory. Beyond that they constitute a vision of the havoc which Machiavellianism might wreak within the Christian world.

The Machiavels represent in effect part of a very fierce "frontal attack" upon attitudes which were in the sixteenth century gaining ground in many areas, which were being spread abroad in many forms, and which were receiving impetus from developments as diverse as those in experimental science and those in the capitalist organisation of industry. Those who attacked Machiavelli, who used his name in polemical debate and who gave it to a particular type of stage villain showed an awareness of the magnitude of the threat to their civilisation. The shadow of the secular state and of the doctrine of the new men, which Dekker damned, was beginning to loom very large. The horror of the Machiavel springs in large measure from the knowledge that his progeny are everywhere. Unless this is understood it is hardly possible either to apprehend the peculiar quality of the Machiavel, or to grasp the significance of his actions.

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