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BETWEEN FLORENCE AND GLAMIS: ON MACBETH'S MACHIAVELLIAN PHASE

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Abstract
The influence of Machiavelli on Early Modern British drama is quite obvious. The character named after him haunts the stage in different forms. Despite the official ban enacted by ecclesiastical and secular authorities and the attacks of the moralist and intellectual of the time, his precepts were extremely popular. Shakespeare represented him in his plays. Richard III, Henry IV and Claudius show many traits related to Machiavellism. *Macbeth* is also influenced by the Florentine political theorist. However, the role of the Machiavellian imagination in the play does not extend to the entire action of the play. The Machiavellian phase of Macbeth's life seems to be an exploration of the epistemological claims of that theory that exhausts its potentialities and uncovers its limits. Macbeth renounces Machiavellism after he fails to kill Fleance. Along with Machiavelli's percepts, the hero villain discards his wife who no longer plays any significant role in his plans. He leaves her burdened with more than her own guilt to continue on his path of destructive search for the ultimate power of knowing and controlling the future. This article seeks to analyze the Machiavellian phase of Macbeth's life and discover the reasons why he renounces Machiavellianism. It argues that Machiavelli's theory fails to rationalize the world of Macbeth/*Macbeth* to provide the hero-villain with a reliable framework of knowledge and action.

Parole chiave
Macbeth, Machiavelli, Epistemology, Power, psychology, Lady Macbeth

Contatti

The nature and significance of the actions of the main character of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606)[1] have spilled much ink. They are subject to an ongoing controversy. Critics never agreed on how to interpret them. For example, there is still very little agreement among critics as to whether fate or will should be given precedence as «Shakespeare's play suggests both possibilities» (Harper 203). Despite the different interpretations of the events and actions of the play, it may be argued that most critics agree about their political nature. Indeed, the actions of Macbeth revolve around the political themes of kingship, legitimacy, usurpation, advancement, and tyrannical (mis)rule. In many respects, the play is an exploration of these themes. This is why it tends to be interpreted in the light of the political theories of the time.

As one of the most controversial theories of the early modern period, Machiavellism comes to the fore in some critical accounts of the play. For instance, Harold Bloom shows the centrality of «the Machiavellian imagination» (2) in *Macbeth*. According to Bloom, the play abounds with references to this theory.

[1] According to Nick Moschovakis, «the date 1606 is conventionally assigned to *Macbeth*». (5)

Machiavellian imagination certainly plays an important role in shaping the events of the play at least until Macbeth realizes its limitations. Machiavellianism offers the hero-villain an initial sense of security that will soon be shattered as his machinations fail to destroy Banquo's line. This affects his relationship with his wife as Lady Macbeth ceases to play any significant role in the hero-villain's life after her way of thinking fails him.

This article seeks to analyze the Machiavellian phase of the hero-villain's life and to show the reasons why Macbeth adopts then relinquishes Machiavellism. It argues that the play is in some respects a critique of the Machiavellian political theory that exhaustively explores its potentialities to ultimately show its epistemological as well as its practical limitations. Shakespeare may not be the first Early Modern British playwright to refer to Machiavelli[2] in his works. However, it is possible to argue that he is one of the few that could lay bare the fundamental philosophical presumptions of the Machiavellian way of thinking. Rather than being purely moralistic, Shakespeare's critique of Machiavellism tackles the very philosophical premises of this political theory. He challenges the epistemological as well as the practical claims of the theory of Machiavelli.

According to Andrew Moore, «the study of Shakespeare's biography is built on […] speculations». For example, critics often «talk about theatrical performances that happened in or near Stratford without any certain evidence that a young Shakespeare attended any of them». Similarly, we lack any adequately irrefutable evidence that Shakespeare may have read Machiavelli (or any other writer to whom he possibly alludes in his works). Hence, «the difficulty of speaking about influence in the traditional sense». (Moore 3)

Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that Shakespeare was no stranger to the world of Machiavellian practices. His father «was an active member of Stratford's municipal government for approximately twenty years» (Moore ix) It is, therefore, very likely «that from the time he was a very young boy, discussions about politics and power, about good government and taxation, about civic responsibility and ambition circulated around Shakespeare's home.» (Moore x) His «cognitive unconscious» (Lakoff 43) was certainly affected by his surroundings. This is why it is safe to assume that a person like Shakespeare would be more than willing to read Machiavelli.

In the Renaissance, Machiavelli was associated with every kind of evil. His precepts were considered immoral and sacrilegious. He was even described as «the devil incarnate». (Scott 154) He was officially denounced by the ecclesiastic authorities in Rome and elsewhere. Under Pope Paul IV, the inquisition index of heretic books and authors of 1557 lists works of the Florentine theorist as heretic. Official ban on his works was in force in many catholic and reformation territories across Europe. In addition, many Renaissance moralists like the French Innocent Gentillet and the English John Case tried to refute Machiavelli's precepts.[3]

However, this hardly curbed his influence. On the contrary, his works spread throughout Europe without any effective opposition. According to Sydney Anglo, «Machiavelli's toxic qualities, wickedness and fury remain matters of debate, but there is no gainsaying the rapid circulation of his writings». (17) «A European country that could consider itself free of the taint of Machiavellian doctrine was entitled to congratulations on its good fortune». (Petrina 83) His works even entered the courts of European Sovereigns who championed orthodox religious beliefs. According to Anglo, Charles V of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire possessed a copy of *The Art of War* despite his declared dislike of letters. In addition, many French translations of the works of the Florentine writer were commissioned by influential courtiers in France. His works soon crossed the Canal and started to circulate in the British Isles as some of these French translations reached England. For example, in 1553, «there was a French translation [of *The Prince*] dedicated to the Earl of Arran», (Scott, 150) which may be seen as reflecting the interest of the English upper classes in the works of Machiavelli.

Despite the official ban, many in England were ready to read Machiavelli even in his original language. «In 1584, Italian editions of *The Discourses* and *The Prince* were printed by John Wolfe». (Scott 150) Many English readers of Machiavelli at the time seemed to have firsthand knowledge of his works. According to Anglo, as early as 1549, an anonymous English author quotes the third chapter of *The Prince* with an accuracy

[2] The character named after the Florentine political theorist probably made his first appearance in *The Jew of Malta* by Christopher Marlowe (which, according to Chambers, was a huge success in the Elizabethan and the Jacobean periods).

[3] See Sydney Anglo's *Machiavelli – the First Century: Studies in Enthusiasm, Hostility and Irrelevance* and Alessandra Petrina's *A Florentine Prince in Queen Elizabeth's Court* for a more detailed survey of the contemporaneous responses to the works of Machiavelli.

that is far from coincidental. Anglo sites Billious Bale as another salient example of the English readership of Machiavelli. According to her, Bale's references to Machiavelli also betray firsthand knowledge of the latter's works. Accordingly, finding and reading the works of Machiavelli in Renaissance England was not the ordeal many critics and literary historians believe it to be. It is, therefore, safe to maintain that Shakespeare lacked neither the motive nor the means to acquire and read the works of the Florentine political theorist.

Yet, even if we assume that Shakespeare had never read Machiavelli and that the source(s) of the Bard's knowledge of Machiavellianism is (are) uncertain, we can in no way establish that this knowledge was as second hand and as distorted as we are usually made to believe, because the Bard's works skin deep into the epistemological foundations of Machiavellian thinking. In *Macbeth*, in particular, Machiavellism is represented as world view rather than a set of morally questionable political beliefs and practices. We believe that the Machiavellian phase of Macbeth's life should, therefore, be read in the light of the broader philosophical issues raised in the play.

The characters of Shakespeare are known for their dynamic nature. His tragic heroes are not static like their classical precursors. Macbeth is representative of this dynamic nature. His transformations are both radical and spectacular. This is why critics tend to divide his life/story into different phases. As a result, there have been a few insightful attempts to map the life of the notorious Shakespearian King of Scotland. A classical but very interesting example of this is «Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth» by D. F. Rauber. The article of Rauber draws the bloody borders that separate the phases of Macbeth's life. According to Rauber, it is possible to divide «Macbeth's life symbolically and psychologically into three divisions of youth, middle age and old age […] the same pattern is repeated in victims but in reverse order». (61) The Machiavellian phase of the tyrant's life coincides with his middle age phase. It occupies the space between his decision to murder the old king of Scotland and his visit to the weird sisters after his failure to kill Fleance. As he leaves the youth phase, Macbeth murders King Duncan, the oldest character in the play and the fatherly figure whose assassination fulfils Macbeth's «Oedipal desire to slay the father». (Bloom 2). The act of regicide (and symbolic patricide) releases him from all the ethical considerations that the old king represents. Nevertheless, this does not prevent him from using the murder of the old king to legitimize his succession to the throne by blaming the murder on the king's two sons to disinherit them. He, thus, divests the past from any emotional or moral significance. Accordingly, along with Duncan, Macbeth kills his former self, the loyal soldier and the defender of the crown and unleashes darkness on the world.

By the end of Act one, Macbeth becomes a villain who is ready to commit any crime to obtain and secure power. The transformation is both painful and spectacular. The audience witness the struggles in the tyrant's soul unfold on the stage, throughout the first act. Macbeth's soliloquies and asides betray a growing obsession with speculative imagination. Speaking about the failure of his attempt to murder Fleance, Macbeth says:

> Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,
> Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
> As broad and general as the casing air.
> But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
> To saucy doubts and fears.
> (3. 4. 22-6)

His vivid imagination torments him and prevents him from achieving the «form of completeness» (Greenblatt Tyrant 104) he craves. Throughout the play, Macbeth spends a long time running scenarios in his head and speaking about what would happen if he takes one decision or another. This is probably why Greenblatt describes him as someone «who is afraid of everything». (Greenblatt Tyrant 100)

According to Harold Bloom, «Macbeth has few attributes beyond imagination to recommend him, and that imagination is anything but benign». (1) Macbeth's imagination plagues him with uncertainties. In many respects, it is a Hamlet-like speculative imagination that cripples the will. As he keeps imagining different scenarios that may take place if he makes any move towards the crown, Macbeth cannot act. This is why he always needs external help to suppress his imagination and act. In the Machiavellian phase, Lady Macbeth provides the needed assistance.

Because his imagination is one of the most vivid in Shakespeare, Macbeth longs for a sense of narrative and imaginative security. He may not «wholeheartedly want to be a king», (Greenblatt Tyrant 96) but he wants to achieve «the be all end all here» (1.7. 5) by killing Duncan and usurping the crown. His hesitation springs from his realization that this act may not bring about the end of his story. His wife comes to whet his resolve by assuring him that his success and failure depend on his actions alone:

> We fail?
> But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep –
> Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
> Soundly invite him – his two chamberlains
> Will I with wine and wassail so convince
> That memory, the warder of the brain,
> Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
> A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep
> Their drenchèd natures lie as in a death,
> What cannot you and I perform upon
> The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
> His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
> Of our great quell?
> (1. 7. 60-71)

She uses reason and logic to quell his fears and reassure him. This suppresses his imagination and gives him a sense of control. He gives in to her instigations and decides to kill Duncan. Macbeth even adopts his wife's logic and reasoning when he asks her to give birth only to male children:

> Bring forth men-children only,
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males.
> (1. 7. 72-5)

This reveals that Macbeth seeks the ultimate security of knowing and controlling the future. He wants to have total control over his story. His obsession with narrative perfection gradually transforms him from a stoic believer in the mysterious power of fate to the nearest thing to a mad prophet.

At the beginning of the first act, Macbeth does not seem to be worried about the extinction of his line as his virility is taken for granted. He also does not feel unhinged by the prophecy about Banquo's children. Moreover, the very identity of the three sisters does not seem to bother him. Unlike his comrade in arms (Banquo) who asks: «can the devil speak true?» (1. 3. 105), Macbeth assures his wife that he «learned by the perfectest report they have in them more than mortal knowledge». (1. 5. 2-3)

However, as he progresses through the story, he becomes frustrated. The witches only share glimpses of their knowledge and their equivocation makes them defy monosemic interpretations. As a matter of course, the protagonist knows that, sooner or later, he has to make a decisive choice relying solely on his own interpretation of the prophesy. This scares him as he feels that the horns of the dilemmas of good and evil can no longer co-exist. His final aside in Act One Scene three betrays this awareness:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is,

But what is not.
(1. 3. 129-41)

This quotation shows that the incompleteness of his knowledge leaves him with a frustrating uncertainty. He is thrown in a world of possibilities. His imagination is stirred in different directions. He is both thrilled and terrified. Although he initially dismisses his concerns saying: «Come what come may / Time and hour run through the toughest day» (1. 3. 145-6), he soon realizes that they cannot be ignored any longer. It is imperative that he chooses a course of (in)action, because the prophesy of the Witches has lured him out of his initial status.[4] The first encounter with the heralds of fate alters the main character of the play irreversibly. Macbeth's loyalty to Duncan is deeply shaken by the words of the weird sisters. His eagerness to know the details of his ascension to the throne shows little regard for the king and his legitimate heirs.

He is by no means the only one that has little or no respect for the status and authority of the old king and his sons. It is true that Macbeth describes Duncan as a beloved monarch who

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking-off.
(1.7. 17-21)

Nevertheless, this seemingly has deterred no one from plotting against him. The first thane of Cawdor betrays him and fails then the second thane of Cawdor whom the old king unwisely has made too powerful through the possession of two thanedoms kills him and usurps his throne. The weakness and vulnerability of the King and his dynasty has stirred internal unrest and encouraged foreign invasions. From the very beginning of the play, it is clear that the reign of Duncan has reached the end of its tether. He is too old and his two sons are by no means a force to be reckoned with.[5] Surrounded by enemies and traitors, Duncan makes his situation even more precarious by bestowing dangerous favors on his ambitious and talented nobles in the hope of deterring them from rebellion. His trust in the faith and loyalty of his vassals will prove fatal.

The fresh tidings brought to him by Ross fuels the ambition of the new thane of Cawdor. With two fiefs in his possession and with the assurance of the witches, Macbeth knows that he can grab the throne without opposition. Conscious of his strength and prospect, Macbeth starts to question the legitimacy of Malcolm's succession to the throne. His relationship with King Duncan and his dynasty, which he set out to defend from rebellions and foreign invasions at – or before – the beginning of the play, is now based on pure political calculations. Macbeth is no longer the king's champion. He is now a Machiavellian politician waiting for the right opportunity to grab the throne. In an aside, the ambitious thane says:

The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires:
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
(1. 4. 331-6)

He sees Malcolm only as an obstacle. He envies him and wants to remove him from his path to the throne. The thane of Cawdor hardly refers to the dynastic ties between the king and his son and legitimate heir. He is rather concerned because the latter receives a fief (a source of wealth and military power). In *Macbeth*, Malcolm's ties with his father carry no weight. Being militarily and economically the most powerful noble and

[4] Although they spring from his longing for narrative completeness, the transformations of Macbeth are usually prompted, accelerated and facilitated by other characters.

[5] The weakness of Malcolm is theatricalized by Polly Findlay in her Royal Shakespeare and Company performance of Macbeth in 2018. Findlay presents him as a weak-willed drunkard who struggles to catch the ring offered to him by Duncan as token of his investiture with the title of Prince of Cumberland.

kinsman of the deceased king,[6] Macbeth seizes the throne and disinherits Duncan's two sons with a hardly believable story. In the private conversations of the courtiers, it is a subject of sarcasm:

> It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain
> To kill their gracious father? Damnèd fact!
> How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight
> In pious rage the two delinquents tear
> That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep?
> Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too,
> For 't would have angered any heart alive
> To hear the men deny 't. So that, I say,
> He has borne all things well. And I do think
> That had he Duncan's sons under his key –
> As, an 't please heaven, he shall not – they should find
> What 'twere to kill a father. So, should Fleance.
> (3. 6. 10-21)

This quotation shows that the courtiers do not believe the official story, but they do not dare to challenge it openly because they are afraid of Macbeth. Fear rather than loyalty inspires obedience in Macbeth's Scotland.[7]

By the end of Act one, Lady Macbeth deals the final blow to the loyal soldier and unleashes the ambitious tyrant on the world after she convinces her husband to betray his unsuspecting guest. In her very first soliloquy, she borrows the style of the weird sisters declaring: «Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised». (I. 5. 13-15) These words echo the prophesy of the witches both in style and content, but, unlike them, lady Macbeth is not an imperfect speaker. She delineates the course of action she wants her husband to take. She tries to «pour [her] spirit into [his] ears» (1.5. 24) to convince him that the path of treachery and murder is the only way to the throne. The influence of Machiavelli is clear in her:

> thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ld'st have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, «Thus thou must do», if thou have it,
> (1. 5. 5-13)

Her Machiavellian imagination paints the situation of Macbeth in such a manner that regicide seems a political necessity. Machiavellism regards calculated violence (esp. covert violence) as indispensable in the political realm. For Machiavelli, this justifies the morally questionable actions of certain states and individuals under certain circumstances.

While most contemporaneous writers failed to refute Machiavelli's precepts, many contemporary critics and political theorists defend them. They believe that the Florentine political theorist was misunderstood by the moralists of his age. It is now a cliché that «the author of 'the prince' never urged evil for evil's sake». (Scott and Zaretsky A31) According to many critics, Machiavelli sees evil as a mean to an end. It is only used when necessary and «for one clear reason, [which is] to survive». (Greenblatt Renaissance 14) This is clear in *The Prince* where the Italian political theorist writes:

> [I]t should be noted that in taking hold of a state, he who seizes it should review all the offenses necessary for him to commit, and do them all at a stroke, so as not to have to renew them every day and, by not renewing them, to secure men and gain them to himself with benefits. (Machiavelli 38)

[6] Only when he gains foreign supports and the service of powerful nobles such as Macduff could Malcolm reclaim his inheritance.

[7] The tyranny of Macbeth is based on the forceful silencing of any competing narratives in favor of the official story (which in most cases is difficult to believe).

For Machiavelli, therefore, evil is not a policy. It is rather a set of necessary measures resorted to in order to obtain or secure power. His theory of realpolitik represents evil as a necessity imposed by the political situation. Hence, the repetition of the word «necessity» about forty times in (Mansfield's English translation of) *The Prince*.

In his article «Creating Necessity: Well Used Violence in the Thought of Machiavelli», Dustan E. Howes writes:

> A few thinkers, namely radical pacifists, have argued that violence is never necessary or justified. Some politicians and ideological movements, fascists most prominently in contemporary politics, have argued violence is good in its own right and therefore needs no justification. However, most contemporary politicians and modern political theorists forward the idea that violence is necessary. (183-4)

With the notion of political necessity in place, any claim that the Italian political theorist advocates an unscrupulous rather than an a-scrupulous (immoral rather than amoral) political theory will readily be dismissed as outdated and uncontemporary (probably even unacademic). Efficiency has shadowed most of the other criteria in the political arena. Political actions are now valued by their effectiveness. Therefore, it seems that Machiavelli can only be judged by his own standards. This makes him immune to ethical criticism.

Shakespeare, however, does not seem to have fallen in the trap Machiavelli set for his detractors whether they are contemporaneous (with him) or contemporary. In *Macbeth*, the Bard offers an insightful critique of the idea that evil is a political necessity. By destabilizing the notion of political necessity, Shakespeare renders Machiavellianism vulnerable to moral as well as pragmatic criticism.

Considering *Richard III* will help us better understand how Shakespeare undermines this notion. Like Macbeth, Richard is an aspiring relative of a reigning monarch. Although he does not seem to take the prophesy about the initial letters of his title as seriously as Macbeth does with the Witches' prophesy, his acts make it come true. Richard is decidedly a Machiavel who would stop at nothing to achieve his ambitions. In his famous soliloquy, the notoriously ambitious Duke of Gloucester declares:

> since I cannot prove a lover,
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
> (I.1. 28-31)

This is the conclusion that Richard draws from assessing his situation and weighing the different options he has. He claims that he chooses the path of villainy because he cannot «prove a lover». (I.1. 28) Villainy, therefore, is imposed on him by his disability. According to him, he has no other alternative to make a name for himself in the time of peace than to rely on fraud and deceit. As he has no place in the existing world order, he needs to destroy it and create a world in which he can triumph on his own terms.

Ironically, one scene later, he boasts that he could seduce an unlikely woman in a very unlikely situation:

> Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
> Was ever woman in this humor won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
> What, I that killed her husband and his father,
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
> The bleeding witness of my hatred by,
> Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
> And I no friends to back my suit at all
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks?
> And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
> (1. 2. 234-45)

This soliloquy contradicts Richard's initial assertion that he cannot be a lover. He seduces Anne at the funeral of her former father in law. Richard killed Anne's first husband, Prince Edward of Lancaster, who was younger and undoubtedly more handsome than him. He also killed her father in law Henry VI.[8] Moreover, he was an enemy of her father Richard Neville, the kingmaker. Nevertheless, all this does not prevent Richard from winning Anne. The multilayered morbid and subversive irony of the scene reveals that Richard relishes in destroying the possibilities of a different plot. Were Richard to choose to prove a lover, he would be extraordinarily successful – despite his physical deformity. Yet, Richard does not wish to be a part of the existing order. He wants to destroy it (and any other possible Richard along with it). Therefore, in the case of *Richard III*, villainy is a choice not a necessity. It is his ambition not his situation that guides him.

Like Richard, the thane of Cawdor is driven solely by «vaulting ambition». (1. 7. 27) His choice of conspiracy is hardly a political necessity. Indeed, in *Macbeth*, every political situation can be dealt with in different manners. For example, the protagonist could rebel and kill the old king of Scotland more honorably on the battlefield like the historical Macbeth who killed Duncan in 1042 AD. He could also wait for the decrepit and weak king to die and seize the throne from his weaker sons. The prophesy of the witches as well as the political situation described in the play presents its hero-villain with a myriad of possibilities. From a purely political perspective, therefore, conspiracy is a «false necessity». We borrowed this term from the political philosopher Roberto Mangabeira Unger who uses it to refer to the process whereby certain social and political notions, discourses, institutions and practices are surrounded with «a fog of naturalness and authority». (x1vi) According to Unger, «we act with almost everything in our practical and discursive setting taken for granted». (x1vi) We act as if we have no choice but to follow the common path. Lady Macbeth's strategy is to convince her husband that betraying his unsuspecting guest is a political necessity, which she makes clear in her: «Thus thou must do» (1. 5. 13)

The ideology of the «form itself» (Jameson 129) in *Macbeth* is frustrating for the tragic hero. The plurality and polyvocality of drama does not offer him the narrative security he seeks. In seeking to impose an oneiric world-view on the polysemous and polyvocal world of the play, Macbeth tries to suppress his own imagination. His narrativist obsession with linearity and control reveals that the hero-villain is anti-theatrical. He feels threatened by the inherent plurality and multivocal nature of drama. He tries to control the stage, but the genre does not allow any character to have absolute control over the play. He continuously seeks means to reduce drama's world of endless possibilities to a single predictable storyline.

By the end of the first act, the protagonist adopts Lady Macbeth's Machiavellism as an attempt to tame the world of possibilities in which he lives (and which lives within him). Its rationalization of the political world seems to promise answers to his epistemological and ontological dilemmas. As a rationalized/rationalizing political theory that reduces the political world to predictable dynamics, Machiavellism claims to give the prince power over the future. Macbeth seeks this kind of power. He needs to understand the movement of the world to feel secure. For a while, Machiavellianism (or its Shakespearian variation) seems to satisfy his epistemological longings. Therefore, the dominance of Lady Macbeth at the beginning of the play can be understood in the light of this initial satisfaction. She replaces the weird sisters. Her presence and dominance on the stage suppresses the supernatural. She is the voice of reason, logic and science Her husband accepts her interpretation of the world and acts according to it. She controls him both epistemologically and politically. He relies on her to interact with the world. She is his mind and his mouth. For example, she explains his condition both to him and to his guests in the banquet scene.

Macbeth does not challenge her authority over him until the Ghost of Banquo appears to haunt him This shakes his confidence in her way of thinking irreversibly. As he starts to take measures to preserve his power from potential threats, his trust in the Machiavellian imagination of his wife wanes. Her rationalization of the world no longer provides him with the sense of security he craves. Therefore, the death of Banquo ushers the end of Macbeth's Machiavellian phase. The epistemological power he seeks is beyond mortal knowledge. The Machiavellism of his wife cannot satisfy his needs any longer. He realizes that she does not hold the answer to (all) his questions about the future. As a result, she soon ceases to play any significant role in his life. He no longer heeds or needs her counsel. Eventually, he leaves her and returns to the witches.

[8] In the final act of Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 3*, Gloucester murders King Henry VI.

Viewing the long critical tradition that has established the reputation of Lady Macbeth as a powerfully subversive female figure, it would seem unwise to push her to the shadows as a mere phase of her husband's psychological and political life. However, curiously enough the relationship between the couple seems more intimate than any relation between two distinct persons can ever be. A curious fact that cannot escape many readers of Shakespeare is that unlike many other queens and royal consorts in the plays of the Bard, Lady Macbeth is seldom referred to with her first name (even by her husband in their private written or verbal exchanges). This omission is far from accidental. It emphasizes the exceptional intimacy that characterizes the relationship between the two. Another indicator of this exceptionally intimate relationship between her and her husband is her:

> Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes
> of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
> (5. 1. 32-3)

Lady Macbeth has not literally spilled the blood of King Duncan. Her hands are cleaner than Macbeth's. Moreover, her fainting and faltering spirit in the final act of the play is reminiscent of Macbeth's in his early soliloquies. During the Machiavellian phase of her husband's life, Lady Macbeth «pour[s her] spirits» (1. 5. 16) in him and haunts him until she no longer can satisfy his epistemological and ontological needs. It is, therefore, natural that it takes a ghost to break Lady Macbeth's hegemony. The exorcism leaves her devastated. It seems that when he discards her Machiavellian imagination, Macbeth leaves his wife with a heavier burden than her own guilt. She becomes the haunted party. Macbeth gives her his guilt-ridden and faltering spirit of the first act. When she fails him, Macbeth leaves her behind along with any other burden that would hinder his progress towards his ultimate goal.

The hero-villain cannot rely on logical and scientific explanations anymore. Calculated political violence cannot secure the protagonist's power over his political future. His attempt to challenge the foretold by plotting to kill Fleance can be read as an attempt to test the Machiavellian calculations of his wife against the prophesy of the weird sisters. Pitting it against the «supernatural soliciting» (1. 3. 29) of the prophesy about Banquo's line, Macbeth exhaustively stretches the epistemological and practical potentialities of Machiavellian imagination. This may explain why he does not tell Lady Macbeth about his plot to murder Banquo and Fleance. Her way of thinking reaches its limits and fails to give him the kind of knowledge and power he seeks.

The throne is not Macbeth's ultimate objective. Indeed, his frustration with the limitations of his knowledge shows that the power he craves is not essentially political. He seeks the ultimate epistemological power of knowing the future in ample details. He even wants to control it by limiting its potentiality. His attempts to eliminate Fleance and Macduff are intended to destroy any alternative future that may threaten his control over his story. Macbeth is not content with the role of the protagonist, he wants to be the storyteller as well. This is clear in the soliloquy that follows the death of his wife:

> She should have died hereafter.
> There would have been a time for such a word.
> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.
> (5. 5. 17-28)

This soliloquy is rich in literary metaphors. Indeed, the death of lady Macbeth is described as another word in the recorded time. Her life is an «hour upon the stage» or a tale. In the final act of the play, the hero-villain seems to have indulged in the role of the storyteller or prophet. For him, everything should be predictable and accounted for. Nothing should surprise him because he knows (or assumes to know) the plans of fate (with which he assumes to have become one). This is the ultimate state of narrative perfection he seeks.

At the end of his Machiavellian phase, Macbeth discovers that Machiavellian politics is not the answer to his longings. But his renunciation of Machiavellism as an epistemological framework of knowledge and action deprives him of the moral immunity it offers. Macbeth's actions are no longer justifiable. As a political theory that seeks to rationalize the past and the present to predict and control the future, Machiavellism tries to limit our understanding of our political situations. As such, it can justify the otherwise unjustified violence and tyranny. Through *Macbeth*, Shakespeare challenges the naturalization of evil (of many forms of political violence) that Machiavelli tacitly advocates. While he does not follow the minute details of the chronicles, Shakespeare recreates the political world of Macbeth's time and shows the different possibilities of political action. In the play, the Bard shows that the path of tyranny and bloodshed is not imposed on the Scottish king. It is true that the political situation of Scotland is volatile. The country was also under constant threat from its powerful neighbors. In the play, the Kings of Norway and England take turns in invading the fragile realm. However, the kings and nobles of Scotland enjoyed great maneuverability that allowed the kingdom to survive despite its weakness and the strength of its neighbors. In the play, the possibilities of political action are far from being limited. Every political situation can be handled in different manners. Therefore, the crimes of Macbeth are not inevitable as his wife (through her Machiavellian reasoning) would have him (and us) believe.

As a critique of Machiavellism, the play challenges the concept of political necessity which is a trap that has made Machiavellism immune to ethical criticism. However, Shakespeare is not yet another moralist that rejects Machiavelli's teachings from a purely ethical ground. *Macbeth* skins deep into the epistemological and philosophical foundations of his theory. It sheds light on its limitations and implications. The play undermines the epistemological as well as the practical validity of the Machiavellian imagination. Machiavellism cannot explain the political world. With the notion of political necessity removed and with its epistemological value challenged, the philosophical foundations of Machiavellian political theory become vulnerable to criticism. Shakespeare also explores it and exhausts its imaginative possibilities to show its practical limitations. The play, therefore, can be read as a critique of the fundamental premises of Machiavellism. It challenges the rationalization and naturalization of evil this theory tacitly advocates.

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