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“What trust is in these times?” Thinking the Secular State with “the colour of religion”
in Shakespeare’s *2 Henry IV*

This article focuses on the idea, repeatedly reasserted in the second tetralogy, of the impossibility of refounding trust in the political order after the initial “sin” of the deposition of Richard II by Bolingbroke—trust being defined in Georg Simmel’s sense as the possibility of investing in a future that can be expected to be the continuation of the present. *2 Henry IV* shows a feudal society poised on the cusp of modernity, presenting a particularly acute moment of the aporia of trust in the political sphere. It posits both the necessity of faith to establish a stable form of order and the impossibility of guaranteeing the latter on solid grounds. Although it is not known whether Shakespeare had read Machiavelli, it has often been remarked that he includes some intriguing echoes of *The Prince*. What seems to have gone unnoticed is that Machiavelli’s treatise offers a particularly pertinent analysis of the problem of political trust, issuing a series of recommendations to quell the crisis of trust in “new” principalities. This article follows up this lead to analyse the manifestations of the crisis of trust and of its problematic resolution in *2 Henry IV* in the light of Machiavelli.

Cet article s'intéresse à l'idée, obstinément répétée dans la seconde tétralogie, de l'impossibilité de refonder la confiance dans l'ordre politique après le "péché" originel de la déposition de Richard II par Bolingbroke—la confiance étant définie dans le sens que lui donne Georg Simmel de possibilité d'investir dans un avenir dont on peut espérer qu'il sera une continuation du présent. 2 Henry IV met en scène une société féodale à l'aube de la modernité et présente un moment aigu de l'aporie de la confiance dans la sphère politique. La pièce pose à la fois la nécessité de la foi pour établir une forme stable d'ordre et l'impossibilité de garantir une telle foi sur des bases solides. Bien qu'il soit toujours impossible de savoir avec certitude si Shakespeare avait lu Machiavel, on a souvent noté que l'œuvre du dramaturge comporte de curieux échos au Prince. Mais ce qui semble être passé inaperçu, c'est que le traité de Machiavel offre précisément une analyse particulièrement pertinente du problème de la refondation de la foi politique, proposant une série de recommandations pour suturer la crise de la confiance dans les "nouvelles" principautés. Cet article propose d'analyser les manifestations de la crise de la confiance et sa résolution problématique dans 2 Henry IV à partir d'une relecture de ce passage de Machiavel.

In a study of the counter-strategies developed in modern democracies to fight untrustworthy leadership, French historian Pierre Rosanvallon argued that “any convergence between legitimacy and trust is purely temporary” (Jones x). Showing how citizens have adopted new mechanisms to hold their rulers accountable in an age of generalised suspicion, he reminds us of the importance of trust in politics, but more fundamentally of its necessarily ephemeral nature, as a coincidence between the general will and its momentary incarnation. It is precisely that problematic convergence that Shakespeare stages in his second tetralogy through the rise (and troubled reign) of Bolingbroke/Henry IV, in the context of a pre-modern England poised between feudalism and a more modern form of monarchy. The unanimous moment that sees both the English peers and the people cohere to bring Bolingbroke to power

and depose their legitimate king, Richard II (an episode narrated in 5.2 of *Richard II*), is short-lived. In *Henry IV, Part 2*, the Archbishop of York castigates the “fond Many” (1.3.91),¹ the “commonwealth” (87), who, after enthusiastically supporting Bolingbroke’s coup against Richard II, are now ready, like the “common dog,” “sick of their own choice” (87), to “disgorge / [their] glutton bosom of the royal Richard” and “eat [its] dead vomit up” (97, 99). And he concludes with a remark that almost seems to point to an anthropological fact: “What trust is in these times? (...) / Past and to come seems best; things present, worst” (100, 109). Trust has its temporality, tainted by a form of human inconstancy: in the present it is always shadowed by an irrational nostalgia for the past and a yearning for a better future. In this passage, which offers a glimpse of an early version of crowd psychology, the commonwealth only mirrors a similar division among the aristocracy. In fact, York is one of the seceding peers formerly supportive of Henry IV, who now sees him as unworthy and illegitimate. The peers also return to their vomit. As Hastings comments, “[w]e are Time’s subjects, and Time bids be gone” (110), rebellion is part of the *zeitgeist*. This article focuses on the idea, repeatedly asserted in the second tetralogy, of the impossibility of refounding trust—defined here, following Georg Simmel, as the possibility of projecting oneself in the belief that the future will be the continuation of the present in the political order—after the initial “sin” of the deposition of Richard by Bolingbroke, staged in 4.1 of *Richard II*, has shaken the faith that religion can found that trust. In the second tetralogy, it can be argued that Shakespeare stages an attempt to think about the monarchical state as a secular phenomenon, beyond the crisis of the ideology of the divine right of kings.²

If the deposition of Richard II can be seen as a way to breach the mistrust the wayward king inspired in his subjects, Bolingbroke’s attempt appears doomed: Henry IV fails to establish a permanent sense of faith in the stability of his regime, which, as he discovers, is vital for the political system to perpetuate itself. In the two tetralogies, Shakespeare explores the difficult shift from feudal society to a modern form of civil society in the context of secularisation. Jean Bodin was one of the first early modern theorists to theorise the European-wide transformation of feudal societies into *states* based on continuous sovereignty predicated on the published authority of the law.³ Shakespeare’s two tetralogies are about the difficult persistence of a continuous monarchy when it is based on the violent deposition of the legitimate ruler. *2 Henry IV* presents a particularly acute moment of the aporia of trust in the political sphere, an aporia which posits both the necessity of trust for a stable form of order to be permanent in the long run, and the impossibility of establishing trust on rational grounds. Whether Shakespeare had actually read Machiavelli (or his main source, Tacitus) is still a moot point, but there are striking similarities between Machiavelli’s treatment of this problem in *The Prince* and Shakespeare’s in the second tetralogy. *2 Henry IV*, in particular, includes intriguing echoes of Machiavelli’s analysis of the symptoms of residual mistrust, and of the solutions he advocates. As will be apparent, Henry IV’s strategy, which implies

¹ All references to Shakespeare are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*.

² For a study of Shakespeare’s engagement with the notion of secularity, see Hammill and Lupton, Cummings, Walsh and Jackson and Marotti.

³ For a useful overview of this phenomenon, see Pierson and Nelson.

exercising cruelty as an institutionalised form of state violence, seems to echo Machiavelli's controversial insistence on necessary cruelty as expounded in chapter 18 of *The Prince*.

It might seem unnecessary to bring Machiavelli back into the debate once more: John D. Cox, it might seem, settled the question for good back in 2002 when he argued that Shakespeare would have found nothing in Machiavelli that he could not have seen for himself in the spectacle offered by the Tudor monarchs (and in the Chronicles he was reading for that matter) (Cox 115). Not only was Machiavelli not translated into English, but it is often argued that there are no specific demonstrable echoes of *The Prince* in Shakespeare's work (Cox 112)⁴: if Shakespeare was at all aware of Machiavelli's writings,⁵ it is more probably through a different body of texts and ideas; his engagement with a diffuse form of "machievellism," Cox adds, did not necessarily mean a first-hand knowledge of Machiavelli's writings. One of the key texts to which Shakespeare might have had access is Gentillet's *Anti-Machiavel*, translated into English in 1602, which contributed to popularising a pulp version of Machiavelli the schemer throughout Europe.⁶ There is no question that Gentillet was influential in England, but the date of the English translation of *Anti-Machiavel* is too late for Shakespeare's histories—although the playwright could technically have had access to it in French or Latin. There is ground, however, for reexamining the case of a direct Machiavellian influence from the angle of trust. As the groundbreaking work of Alessandra Petrina has recently confirmed,⁷ Machiavelli was well-known in England in the late sixteenth century. His *Florentine Historie* was published in English in 1595; there were three English editions of *The Arte of Warre* published in quick succession in London (1562, 1574, 1588), and finally his decads on Livy appeared in Italian in London in 1584, published by John Wolfe. It is the same Wolfe who published that very year, in London, an Italian version of *Il Principe* itself (half a century after its first publication in 1532) (Roe 3-4). Finally, Shakespeare might also have been aware of the Latin edition of *The Prince* (1560) and of the three different sixteenth-century French translations, published between 1553 and 1571,⁸ if not of one of the English unpublished manuscript versions that were recently edited by Petrina.⁹ As is well-known, *The*

⁴ See also Roe 1: "Despite so much work on the topic, the relationship of Shakespeare to Machiavelli remains a matter of vagueness and perplexity." Meanwhile, several studies show the reality of Shakespeare's debt to Machiavelli, including Roe's. See also, among many others: Lily Campbell's influential *Shakespeare's Histories*, which argued for Shakespeare's direct knowledge of Machiavelli, Grady's—although Grady also asserts that it is now known "how Machiavellian ideas were transmitted to the dramatists"—, and more recently Camerlingo.

⁵ Shakespeare was certainly aware of Machiavelli as the stage villain: Marlowe has a character called Machevil in *The Jew of Malta* (first performed 1592) and Shakespeare himself mentions "murderous Machiavel" in *3 Henry VI* (3.2.193) (Shakespeare 2005, 109).

⁶ See Meyer and Bawcutt for a fairly recent revision.

⁷ Petrina edits two manuscript translations of *The Prince* and offers a thorough study of the reception of Machiavelli in England in early modern England. See also Kahn, and Arienzo and Petrina. More generally on the reception of Machiavelli in Europe, see Pocock and Bireley.

⁸ For an electronic edition of these translations, see the HyperMachiavel project, based at the École Normale Supérieure in Lyon.

⁹ The William Fowler manuscript was written some time before 1612 (which is when Fowler died); the second one is anonymous and is dated from the 1590s by Petrina (117).

Prince is explicitly concerned with how “principalities can be governed and maintained” (Machiavelli 1640, 2).¹⁰ *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, show Henry IV being confronted with rebellion as soon as he becomes king, and finally his bitter victory against his opponents.¹¹ Both Henry IV and his rebellious lords significantly describe their predicament as a problem of trust. In Act 5, Scene 1 of *1 Henry IV* Henry IV violently reproaches Worcester with rebellion, which the King compares to a comet coming out of its orb, and then defines as a breach of trust: “How no, my lord of Worcester? ’Tis not well / That you and I should meet upon such terms / As now we meet. You have deceived our *trust*” (5.1.9-11, my emphasis). And again in Act 5, Scene 5, after Worcester has been arrested and is on his way to his execution: “Ill-spirited Worcester, did not we send grace, / Pardon, and terms of love to all of you? / And woudst thou turn our offers contrary? / Misuse the tenor of thy kinsman’s *trust*?” (5.5.2-5, emphasis mine). But Worcester is unrepentant: “What I have done my safety urged me to,” he argues (5.5.11). The issues of legitimacy and rebellion are thus consistently posed in terms of the loss of mutual, *personal* trust between the king and his peers, before becoming a crisis of trust in the monarchy. Personal trust is thus seen as the basis of the institution of the monarchy in a regime that is highly personalised (and where Parliament itself is reduced to a handful of peers), but it is fear and mistrust that determine political action. As Worcester’s rational analysis of the political situation in 5.5. shows, the King will not, cannot, trust the peers, even if they repent and make their peace with him, because of their former betrayal. In return, they cannot accept his offer of a pardon at face value, because trust, once broken, cannot be made whole again—there is always a remainder. As Worcester notes,

(...) it cannot be,
 The King should keep his word in loving us.
 He will suspect us still and find a time
 To punish this offence in other faults.
 Supposition all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes,
 For treason is but trusted like the fox,
 Who, ne’er so tame, so cherish’d and lock’d up,
 Will have a wild trick of his ancestors. (*1 Henry IV*, 5.2.4-11)

The basic opposition that underlies the two parts of *Henry IV* is therefore between trust (which often translates into troth or faith, but also truth) and suspicion, for mistrust is mutual. Mistrust is even given a point of origin. In 5.1 of *1 Henry IV*, the same Worcester points at Bolingbroke’s original “violation of all faith and troth” in the founding moment of Richard II’s deposition:

(...) You swore to us

¹⁰ All references to *The Prince* are from this translation (the first one to be published, although too late for Shakespeare).

¹¹ This essay deliberately leaves aside the complex issue of the topicality of the Henriad and the connections between Bolingbroke and Essex, which have been dealt with elsewhere (Grady; Venet 1496-1498). In a more comprehensive treatment of the question of Machiavellism in the Henriad, we should naturally factor in the connections between Shakespeare’s plays and Hayward’s *First Part of the Life and raigne of King Henrie IIII* (Venet 1496-7).

And you did swear that oath at Doncaster,
 That you did nothing 'gainst *the state*,
 Nor claim no further than your new-fall'n right,
 The seat of Gaunt, dukedom of Lancaster.
 To this we swore our aid, but in short space
 It rained down fortune show'ring on your head,
 (...)

And from this swarm of fair advantages
 You took occasion to be quickly wooed
 To gripe the general sway into your hand,
 Forgot your oath to us at Doncaster
 (...)

Whereby we stand opposèd by such means
 As you yourself have forged against yourself,
 By unkind usage, dangerous countenance,
 And *violation of all faith and troth*
 Sworn to us in your younger enterprise (5.1.41-47, 55-58, 67-71, emphasis mine)

Instead of being content with simply retrieving his dukedom, Bolingbroke opportunistically pursued his advantage and went for the crown. But in doing so, he broke an implicit pact based on trust. As he later lies dying, he himself admits to having “an honour snatch'd with boist'rous hand” (2 *Henry IV*, 4.5.320). Intriguingly, Bolingbroke's fault is described by Worcester as a fault against “the state,” which implies some prior conception of the nation as a political entity. An *institutional* breach of trust if ever there was one, Henry's opportunistic accession to power is here defined as a form of political treason against a grander idea of the state. Earlier in the play (in 4.3), Hotspur had also accused Bolingbroke of abusing the “commonwealth,” and “the country,” by “tak[ing] on him to reform / Some certain edicts and some strait decrees / That lie too heavy on the commonwealth, / Cries out upon abuses, seems to weep / Over his country's wrongs” (4.3.80-83). By pretending to serve the people, Bolingbroke reformed the law to serve his private ambition—an act of tyranny in Hotspur's eyes.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli had described the “new” regimes as the most difficult ones to uphold, because of the difficulty to define a persistent form of legitimacy, in particular because of the part played by the new ruler's former accomplices or allies in helping him to power. According to him, the new prince's predicament is the following:

thou findest all those thine enemies, whom thou hast endammaged in the seizing of that Principality, and afterwards canst not keep them thy friends that have seated thee in it, for not being able to satisfie them according to their expectations, nor put in practise strong remedies against them, being obliged to them. (Machiavelli 1640, 5)

In Shakespeare's tetralogy, Bolingbroke has to deal with the two kinds of opposition, those who resent his rule (who might have supported Richard earlier), and his own former allies, who now resent a new status which they helped to procure for him. Such is the case of Worcester, again, in 1.3. of *1 Henry IV*, resenting “that same greatness too, which our own hands / Have help to make so portly” (1.3.12-13), or Hotspur in 4.3 of the same play: “My father and my uncle and myself / Did give him that same royalty he wears” (4.3.56-57).

There are other echoes of Machiavelli here. In chapter 17 of *The Prince*, entitled “Of Cruelty, and Clemency, and whether it is better to be belov’d, or feard [*sic*]” in the first published English translation in 1640 (Machiavelli 1640, 118), Machiavelli famously advocated prudence in rulers as a counterpart to his negative anthropology: because men are naturally fickle, false and covetous, it would be foolish to trust them, he claims, but it would also be unpolitic to show one’s fear and excessive mistrust. Therefore the Prince must dissemble; and for order to be maintained, misbehaviour must be punished most severely: the prospect of punishment should be used to terrify men into obedience (chapter 19). As Machiavelli famously argued, although it is naturally desireable to appear full of the virtues that men esteem, it is better for a prince to be feared than loved. Cruelty is necessary for the continuance of the state, especially for a new prince, whose power is more vulnerable: “a new prince cannot observe all those things for which men are held good; he being often forc’d, for the maintenance of his State, to do contrary to his faith, charity, humanity, and religion” (Machiavelli 1640, 139)—a statement, among many others, which caused scandal and led Rome to place all Machiavelli’s works on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* as early as 1557. This faculty of dissembling is precisely what allows Bolingbroke to seize the crown, as he is himself well aware in 3.2 of *1 Henry IV*. In this scene, he confesses to a reliance on dissimulation and deceit in his conquest of the crown, and describes how he manipulated public opinion, currying the people’s favour by assuming the persona of the sincere, trustworthy man in true Machiavellian fashion, however insincerely, pretending to be “all pitty, all faith, all integrity, all humanity, all religion,” as advocated by Machiavelli (Machiavelli 1640, 140):

Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
 Had still kept loyal to possession,
 And left me in reputeless banishment,
 A fellow of no mark nor likelihood.
 By being seldom seen, I could not stir
 But, like a comet, I was wondered at;
 That men would tell their children “This is he.”
 Others would say “Where, which is Bolingbroke?”
 And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
 And dressed myself in such humility
 That I did pluck allegiance from men’s hearts[.] (3.2.41-52)

Machiavelli described the strategic importance of currying the people’s favour to bolster one’s power, and he emphasised their credulity: “the vulgar is over-taken with the appearance and event of a thing: and for the most part of people, they are but the vulgar: the others that are but few, take place where the vulgar have no subsistence” (Machiavelli 1640, 141). As he woos the people’s favour as the perfect demagogue, the secretive Bolingbroke seems to have integrated Machiavelli’s advice.¹² In the same speech, Bolingbroke / Henry IV contrasts his political strategy—which implies making himself scarce and in demand, and carefully staging

¹² On Henry’s secretiveness as a sign of his Machiavellism, see Venet 1488.

his public appearances—with that of King Richard, who made himself too common. By showing his faults too apparent, Richard lost the people’s trust and his credit:

The skipping King, he ambled up and down
With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled, and soon burnt, carded his state,
Mingled his royalty with cap’ring fools,
Had his great name profanèd with their scorn[s.] (*1 Henry IV*, 3.1. 60-64)

This seems again reminiscent of Machiavelli, who had advised the prince “not to incur contempt or hatred” from his people,¹³ in particular by “shunning to bee hated or contemnd, and keeping himself in his peoples good opinion.”¹⁴

This necessary immorality of the Prince is nowhere better demonstrated than in 4.1 of *2 Henry IV*. As Henry IV reminds the rebellious lords in 5.5. of *1 Henry IV*, he had previously offered the rebels a general pardon, which Worcester and his fellow plotters turned down because of their distrust in the King. Worcester had then recognized the rationality of the King’s suspicion of them, implicitly acknowledging the logic of mistrust at the heart of their mutual relationships. In 4.1 of *2 Henry IV*, a similar offer of peace is made to the rebels on the King’s behalf by Westmorland and Prince John of Lancaster; but this time it is accepted by the rebels, with dramatic consequences, since the plotters are betrayed and arrested. This scene can be read as a direct application of Machiavelli’s advice to the prince. Shakespeare’s source, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, emphasises the suspicion of foul play:

[H]owsoeuer the matter was handled, true it is that the Archbishop, and the Earle Marshall were brought to Pomfret to the king, who in this meane while was aduanced thither wyth hys power, and from thence he went to Yorke, whyther the prisoners were also brought, The Archb (...) Yorke (...) Marshal and other put to death. and there beheaded the morrowe after Whitsunday in a place without the Citie, that is to understand, the Archbishop himfelfe, the Earle Marshal, sir John Lampley, and sir Robert Plompton. (Holinshed 1577, 1148)¹⁵

Building on these innuendoes, Shakespeare writes a long scene which culminates in the final betrayal, staged as a shocking, dramatic moment. Westmorland first comes as an envoy from the king’s substitute, his own son, John of Lancaster, who, as the general of the King’s army, is explicitly presented as his father’s spokesman. Hastings asks for reassurance on this point, which Westmorland confirms:

Hath the Prince John a full commission,

¹³ Machiavelli 1640, chap. 19, 145: “That Princes should take a care, not to incur contempt or hatred.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 147. Machiavelli had also, in the same chapter, contrasted the good and the bad Princes in terms which remind us of the opposition with Richard II and Henry Bolingbroke: “To be held various, light, effeminate, faint-harted, unresolve’d, these make him be contemnd and thought base, which a Prince should shun like rocks, and take a care that in all his actions there appeare magninimity, courage, gravity, and valour” (146).

¹⁵ See The Holinshed Project, http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1577_5322 (accessed 5 August 2018). The suspicion is made even more explicit in the second, 1587 edition of the *Chronicles* which introduces an additional passage clearly spelling out the idea of fraud. See *Holinshed* 1587, 530.

In very ample virtue of his father,
To hear and absolutely to determine
Of what conditions we shall stand upon? (4.1.160-3).

Acting as a go-between, Westmorland is then given a “schedule” (a petition) which “contains [the rebels’] general grivances” (166-68). Left alone, the rebels debate the odds of the King granting them their conditions and offering them peace. Echoing Worcester in *1 Henry IV*, Mowbray is worried; he is aware that prudence requires the King’s inflexibility:

There is a thing within my bosom tells me
That no conditions of our peace can stand.
(...) our valuation shall be such
That every slight and false-derived cause,
Yea, every idle, nice and wanton reason,
Shall to the King taste of this action (181-82, 187-90).

Henry will not, cannot trust them in the future, he argues: it goes against political rationality. The Archbishop is more optimistic: Henry is weary of war, he claims, and will

(...) wipe his tables clean,
and keep no tell-tale to his memory
That may repeat and history his loss
To new remembrance; for full well he knows
He cannot so precisely weed this land
As his misdoubts present occasion (...). (199-204).

The Archbishop’s political rationale also makes sense, although its logic is diametrically opposed to Mowbray’s: the King cannot realistically kill all the people he mistrusts, he claims—it would decimate his peers, and possibly cause collateral damage to his own friends, and, in the end, create more grievances. As a consequence, he argues, Henry IV must accept the peers’ conditions and issue an amnesty for past grievances.

A public amnesty was not unheard-of in recent history. Its most resonant contemporary echo came in 1598, in France, when the Edict of Nantes imposed forced oblivion for all political events between 1585 and 1598 as an attempt to reconcile Protestants and Catholics. Henri IV (of France) thus ordered “that the memory of all things that took place on both sides between the beginning of March 1585 and the advent of our realm (...) be extinguished and put to sleep, as of a thing that never happened.”¹⁶ In Shakespeare’s play, according to the Archbishop, Henry IV (of England) must stop the arm that is already “upreared” to smite his rebellious subjects. Henry describes the latter as “his land,” which, “like an offensive wife,” “holds his infant up” to stop her angry husband’s arm (208-12). Civil war is compared here by

¹⁶ “Premièrement, que la mémoire de toutes choses passées d’une part et d’autre, depuis le commencement du mois de mars 1585 jusqu’à notre avènement à la couronne et durant les autres troubles précédents et à leur occasion, demeurera éteinte et assoupie, comme de chose non advenue. Et ne sera loisible ni permis à nos procureurs généraux, ni autres personnes quelconques, publiques ni privées, en quelque temps, ni pour quelque occasion que ce soit, en faire mention, procès ou poursuite en aucunes cours ou juridictions que ce soit.” http://huguenotsweb.free.fr/histoire/edit_nantes.htm (accessed 5 August 2018).

the slightly too subtle Archbishop to a domestic strife between the king and his land, described as a mother holding a small child (their innocent offspring) used as an unwitting shield to avert the blows.¹⁷

While there is sense in this, as the cycle of attrition must be stopped somehow, the domestic analogy, which feminises the rebels and turns the king into an angry husband (and father), reveals a benign patriarchal conception of the state as a marriage between the king and his land, with his subjects as both his wife and children. This implies a view of the social body as obeying a horizontal form of covenant analogous to marriage, as a distant, secular echo of the idea of the church as married to Christ. Meanwhile, Prince John, speaking out as the king's surrogate, defends a more vertical conception of the state based on the divine right of kings: haranguing the rebels, John sternly reminds them of the absolute nature of kings' power. Their rebellion, he claims, is a sin against God and "his substitute" (254), the king. Substituting a domestic contractual model with a non-contractual theologico-political view of the monarchy, he severely admonishes the Archbishop: as the representative of the Church which should support the monarchy of divine right, the latter has abused his power as a man of God, "the imagined voice of God himself" (245). Prince John uses the image of the sycophant to describe the Archbishop's part in the rebellion, accusing him of acting as "a false favourite," abusing "his prince's name / In deeds dishonourable" (252-3). The Archbishop, he claims, has thus debased religion itself with base scheming. The question of the false favourite is a central issue in the political theory of the time. In his *Essays*, Bacon describes counsel as a vital institution of the monarchy, which is based on trust, but is constantly under the threat of being distorted by favouritism.¹⁸ Machiavelli himself specifies that a ruler should avoid flatterers at all costs and encourage his counsellors to speak out (chap. 23). A favourite is a distorted image of the good counsellor, a flatterer and a self-interested schemer who abuses the trust that the prince has invested in him, but he is also produced by misgovernment. In *Richard II* (3.1), Bolingbroke accuses Richard II of having favourites, "caterpillars" of the state (as they are later called by the gardener in 3.4). He sentences Richard's favourites to death in 3.1 before deposing the King. Henry V will later punish his false counsellor Scroope with the utmost severity in *Henry V* (2.2), as the one "that didst bear the key of all my counsels / That knew'st the very bottom of my soul" (2.2.93-94)—Scroope's betrayal for the King he sees as "another fall of man" (139).

The Archbishop's metaphor of the state as a contractual marriage is sanctioned in a most public way in *2 Henry IV*. Act 4, scene 1 seems to be a direct application of two controversial precepts of *The Prince*, which firstly describes how a prince ought to be cruel (chap. 18), rather than magnanimous—magnanimity should be reserved strategically for public displays—, and secondly how princes should use a surrogate for "affairs of reproach"

¹⁷ Venet describes Worcester as the conventional, scheming stage Machiavel, in contrast with the Machiavellian King Henry in the philosophical sense of the term, but she shows that Henry does not hesitate to use deviousness and secrecy for opportunistic reasons (Venet 1493-5).

¹⁸ According to Bacon, counsel should be based on a trust that goes both ways: the monarch should allow his counsellors to speak freely their minds without infringing on their prerogative: "The greatest trust between man and man is the trust of giving counsel" (Bacon 423). It is the duty of counsellors not to abuse their position by becoming favourites.

(chap. 19). Chapter 18 of *The Prince*, which became the focus of much subsequent criticism, is entitled, in the original Italian, “*In che modo i Principi debbino osservare la fede.*” “*Fede*” is rendered in the Latin translation as “*fides*,” in all French sixteenth-century translations as “*foi*” (Machiavelli 1560, 110); in the 1640 English translation, the title reads: “in what manner princes ought to keep their words” (Machiavelli 1640, 135). The Latin concept of “*fides*,” which can be translated by “faith,” is already a central concept to both the moral and political systems of Ancient Rome. As Robert A. Kaster argues:

Of [the most important civic virtues], surely the most important was *fides*, “trustworthiness” (“good faith,” “honesty,” “sincerity,” “loyalty,” “credibility”; also a thing offered to another, “promise,” “pledge,” “assurance”). The Romans believed that this quality was uniquely theirs (...). *Fides* made possible all stable human relations and all virtuous political dealings (a magistrate was obliged to act *e re publica fideque sua*, “out of (in accordance with) the public interest and his own *fides*”). (Kaster 151)

Fides is what knits the Roman society together in a series of reciprocal relationships of trust, within the family, the social group, and the commonwealth—and to a large extent this also applies to feudal societies. As the basis of the Roman order and one of the three theological virtues (with hope and charity), it implies fidelity to the word given, which is at stake in the scene under study. The word “*fede*” keeps much of this extended significance in modern Italian, as can be seen from John Florio’s *A Worlde of Wordes*, where it is translated as “faith, trust, truth, troth, religion, honestie, credit. Also a ring made with hand in hand: also a pasport, a testimonie, a warrant, an assurance.”¹⁹ The list of near-synonyms makes manifest the various occurrences of trust in *2 Henry IV*: when Henry IV finally condones the betrayal of his faith by his son (acting here as his surrogate), it is truth that is eventually under attack—an action which can be clearly seen as blasphemous in a Christian context.

In the speech that follows, Prince John, acting as an official representative of his father, solemnly gives his word that the lords’ petition will be granted, swearing on his soul: “My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redressed; / Upon my soul they shall” (4.1.285-6). Answering the Archbishop’s demand for reassurance with confidence (“I take your princely word for these redresses,” 292), the Prince is categorical: “I give it you and will maintain my word; / And thereupon I drink unto your grace” (294-95). Shakespeare takes his time to show the men’s relief, the mood of celebration settling in, as they relax into peace mode, before suddenly interrupting this moment of reunion with a shudder, when Westmorland, making sure that their armed men have been disbanded, brutally arrests the peers. Prince John, when confronted with his downright lie—“will you thus break your faith?” (337)—, bluntly answers:

I pawned thee none.
I promised you redress of these same grievances
Whereof you did complain; which by mine honour

¹⁹ Florio 128. It might be significant to note that the 1611 edition of *A Worlde of Wordes*, unlike the 1598 one, includes “*Tutte l’opere di Nicola Macchiauelli*” in Florio’s list of “Authors and Books that haue been read of purpose for the collecting of this Dictionarie.”

I will perform with a most Christian care.
But for you rebels, look to taste the due
Meet for rebellion (...). (338-42).

The Prince, master equivocator, even taunts the vanquished, mocking them for their naivety: “Most shallowly did you these arms commence, / Fondly brought here, and foolishly sent hence” (344-5). This again echoes Machiavelli who had recommended putting aside Christian principles to use cruelty when needed, even under the colour of religion (Machiavelli 1640, 140). Prince John actually claims he is being most Christian when most cruel (presumably by serving a greater good)—a cynical, even blasphemous statement, it could be argued, which he makes worse by claiming: “God, and not we, hath safely fought today” (347). Yet this seems a direct echo of chapter 18 of *The Prince*:

A Prince then being necessitated to know how to make use of that part belonging to a beast, ought to serve himself of the conditions of the Foxe and the Lion; (...) Hee had need then bee a Foxe, that hee may beware of the snares, and a Lion, that he may scarre the Wolves. (...) [A]nd therefore a wise Prince cannot, nor ought not keep his faith given, when the observance thereof turnes to disadvantage, and the occasions that made him promise are past. For if men were all good, this rule would not be allowable; but being they are full of mischief, and would not make it good to thee, neither art thou tyed to keep it with them: nor shall a Prince ever want lawfull occasions to give colour to this breach. (Machiavelli 1640, 136-7)

This very long scene (4.1) can thus be seen as the main focus of the play: it is written in such a way that the final moment when John (the Machiavellian lion-cum-fox) turns against the men with whom he has solemnly made his peace comes as a complete shock to the spectator. While this might have reminded the contemporary spectator or reader of recent events involving Queen Elizabeth herself, who was not the last person to use devious means to quell political opposition,²⁰ this moment implies a denial of aristocratic values such as chivalry and honour, not to mention the Christian values of honesty and forgiveness. It is obviously wrong ethically in all possible senses. And yet, because it is a rational and efficient action for the regime, it is subsequently condoned by Henry IV, perhaps in an echo of Machiavelli’s chapter 17: “it is impossible for a new Prince to avoyd the name of cruell, because all new states are full of danger” (Machiavelli 1640, 129). Or again in chapter 18: “wee see by experience in these our dayes, that those Princes have effected great matters, who have made small reckoning of keeping their words, and have known by their craft to turne and wind men about, and in the end have overcome those who have grounded upon the truth” (Machiavelli 1640, 135). Expediency, efficiency, cruelty: a rational handling of the rebellion necessitates and justifies the foul means used to reach the final end, i.e. peace, as Westmorland argues: “There is not now a rebel’s sword unsheathed, / But peace puts forth her olive everywhere” (4.3.86-87). Yet the way the news of the rebels’ demise is communicated to the King by

²⁰ McAlindon claims that the scene under study might be an echo of Henry VIII’s squashing of the Catholic Northern lords’ rebellion known as the “Pilgrimage of Grace,” as well as Elizabeth’s dealings with Northumberland’s rebellion in 1569, which are clearly two instances of ruthless Tudor politics that were both based on the betrayal of a kingly oath (McAlindon 2001, 33-39).

Westmorland shows an awareness of the deviousness involved, as well as prudence in the handling of sensitive state business. The shameful manner in which the rebels have been tricked is not made public to the court, but communicated privately to the King in a letter from the Prince which is delivered in person by Westmorland: “The manner how this action hath been borne / Here at more leisure may your highness read, / With every course in his particular” (4.2.88-90). For the second time in his reign, Henry is thus made to rely on the expedient aid of go-betweens, again as a perfect Machiavellian prince seizing his opportunity—perfect because on both occasions he can rely on an unshakable alibi, his genuine ignorance of the misdeeds:²¹ first Exton murders Richard for him at the end of *Richard II*, and here his own son betrays the peers’ trust. The news, however, symptomatically makes the King sick: “And wherefore should these good news make me sick? / Will Fortune never come with both hands full, / But whet her fair words still in foulest letters?” (4.3.102-04). The burden of the corruption of trust, which is also that of truth, and, more metaphysically, of truth, is eventually too heavy to bear. The play suggests that Henry ends up ailing under the burden of this guilt. Far from establishing or restoring the people’s trust in a positive conception of the covenant between king and people, therefore, this regime is closer to what the anonymous treatise *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* described as “a tyranny by practice,” in which the prince “subverts the commonwealth deliberately, (...) shamelessly perverts the laws (...), has not concern for faith which has been pledged, for agreements, for justice or piety,” in short, behaves as “an enemy to his subjects” (*Vindiciae* 154-5). Against such a tyrant it is lawful to rebel, the author argues, because he has subverted the “mutual and reciprocal obligation [the “tacit or explicit” “covenant” (*foedus*)] between prince and people” (*Vindiciae* 172, 158).

By failing to restore trust, Henry IV fails to secure his reign, which lays him open to further questioning. His heir Henry V will have more legitimacy by virtue of inheriting the crown; for, as Machiavelli states in the opening pages of *The Prince*, inherited principalities are easier to conserve (Machiavelli 1640, 2-3). This Henry IV seems aware of: “what in me was purchased, / Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort” (4.3.328-9). Before dying he offers his son a last, unmistakably Machiavellian piece of advice: “Be it in thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out, / May waste the memory of the former days” (2 *Henry IV*, 4.3.342-4). Again, we find here mentioned the need for forgetfulness: what is at stake is the mastery of the collective, national memory—perhaps an echo of chapter 21 of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli recommends gaining reputation through great enterprises (such as military campaigns, especially abroad) as a way of channelling the people’s energy into great causes:

There is nothing gains a Prince such a repute, as great exploits, and rare trialls of himselfe in Heroicke actions. We have now in our dayes *Ferdinand* King of *Arragon* the present King of Spain (...) Hee in the beginning of his reigne assailed *Granada*, and that exploit was the ground of his State. At first hee made that warre in security and without suspicion he should be any wayes hindred, and therein held the Barons of *Castiglias* minds busied, who thinking

²¹ “[I]t behooves him to have a mind so disposd [*sic*] as to turne and take the advantage of all winds and fortunes” (Machiavelli 1640, 139-40).

upon that warre, never minded any innovation; and in this while gained credit and authority with them, they not being aware of it (...) serving himselfe alwaies of the colour of religion; he gave himselfe to a kind of religious cruelty, chasing and dispoiling those Jewes out of the Kingdome (...). (Machiavelli 1640, 179-80)

This retrospectively sheds light on Henry IV's repeated intention to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a way of atoning for his sins (for instance in *Richard II*, 5.6.49-50)—a pilgrimage which could also be interpreted as a crusade.²² This is another way of “busy[ing] giddy minds with foreign quarrels,” as he advises his son to do in *2 Henry IV* (4.3.342), with the additional symbolic value that a crusade would also establish Henry's reputation as a Christian prince in Europe. Shakespeare seems again to echo *The Prince* when he describes how, after the English civil war, people “shall now in mutual well-beseeming ranks / March all one way,” “to chase these pagans in those holy fields” of Jerusalem (*1 Henry IV*, 1.1.14-15, 24).

Henry IV's explicitly spiritual quest is thus presented as tainted by strategic ulterior motives, which have to do with a Machiavellian concern for bolstering the state. In spite of having first been brought to power by the will of his people and peers, Henry fails to establish a stable state, locked as he is in a stalemate with his inconstant peers, short of a basis on which to establish the much-needed mutual trust. Even in *The Prince* the stability of the principality rests on a form of covenant between the prince and his people, and the idea of mutual reliability. The regime can only continue in existence if the prince can trust the people and rely on their permanent support; in return, they must be able to rely on him to work towards the good of the state of which he is become the trustee (Henley xxxiii). Only Henry V seems able to build a rapport with his subjects first by dedicating himself to war, as a true follower of Machiavelli—who described the importance of war as a way of “busy[ing] giddy minds,” and hence the basis of statecraft—then by using an elaborate strategy to stage himself as a Christian prince, thus recovering what was so fundamentally missing at the core of Henry IV's secularised stateship. In the speech on the eve of Azincourt, Henry offers a new model for a covenant between the king and his people, that of an egalitarian form of “fellowship” (*Henry V*, 4.3.39), also called a brotherhood, as they cohere to fight together for their country: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers, / For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, / This day shall gentle his condition” (4.3.60-63).²³ This horizontal (superficially more egalitarian) form of covenant is based on a nationalistic narrative which shapes the history of the realm through a of its memory.²⁴ Henry galvanises his soldiers with the prophetic prospect of posterity retrospectively envying them for playing a part in the glorious battle that lies ahead of them. But the cycle of mistrust can only be temporarily sutured in the Henriad: mistrust returns to haunt England, and will be

²² On the implications of Henry IV's “pilgrimage,” see in particular McAlindon 1995, Knowles 66-86. For the reality of medieval pilgrimage and crusade, see Webb 78-113, and on Henry IV, see Given-Wilson.

²³ For an interpretation of *Henry V* as staging “the triumph of reified political power over potentially subversive forces,” see Grady 180-200.

²⁴ On the question of forging a national memory in Shakespeare's second tetralogy, see in particular Baldo, Karrenmann 123-152, and Hiscock and Wilder, chapter 13.

visited on Henry V's weak son, Henry VI, in a vindication of Machiavelli, as evidence if need be that, in the absence of a rational contractual basis, a prince ought to "take the surest courses he can to maintain his life and State" (Machiavelli 1640, 141).

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