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Mentions légales

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The Folly of the Machiavel: Christopher Marlowe's Mortimer and the Guise

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The relationship of Christopher Marlowe's plays to the writings and reputation of Niccolò Machiavelli is one of the oldest of critical chestnuts. A great deal of ink has been spilt over the years trying to ascertain what Marlowe knew or thought about the Florentine thinker, without, it must be said, getting close to offering conclusive answers to either problem. There have also been several attempts to read his plays, especially *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*, in the light either of Machiavellian doctrine, or anti-Machiavellian polemic, again producing many suggestive but few determinate results. Another essay on the topic (which this one is) therefore runs the substantial risk of sowing indifferent seed in barren soil, especially as it consciously refrains, like many of its predecessors, from offering hard claims about Marlowe's knowledge of, let alone attraction to, Machiavelli. Rather, it seeks principally to broaden our sense of what Richard Hillman has termed (in reference to tragedy) "the circulation and co-presence of diverse discourses within a common cultural space" (*French Origins*, p. 2), in this case attitudes towards "Machiavellian" practices of political deceit or violence in late sixteenth-century France and England. To put it another way, this essay offers a new set of contexts with which to refresh an otherwise dog-eared, unproductive theme.

Specifically, it highlights the way folly can be used to link sixteenth-century accounts both of the supposed rise of a “Machiavellian” politics and of the diffusion of Machiavelli’s actual texts and ideas to Marlowe’s dramatic strategies in his plays *Edward II* (performed c. 1592) and *The Massacre at Paris* (probably early 1593). It pays particular attention to their “Machiavellian” protagonists Guise and Mortimer. Guise and Mortimer are “Machiavellian” not simply because they possess traits common to an emerging dramatic stereotype—the “murderous Machiavel” also expressed by Shakespeare’s Gloucester, later Richard III (*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.193)—but because of their plays’ shared ideological origin in the bitter confessional polemics of the 1580s and early 1590s written in or with reference chiefly to France, which reflected also (either explicitly or for English readers) the precarious geo-political position of England’s Protestant monarchy.¹ The reigns of Henri III of France (1574–89) and Edward II of England were explicitly linked in *Liqueur* polemics justifying opposition to the former, such as *Histoire tragique et memorable, de Pierre de Gaverston* (1588) or the deposition tract *De Justa Abdicatione Henrici Tertii* (1589), both now attributed to the radical Parisian cleric Jean Boucher. The common ideological context and indeed source materials of *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* are reflected in similarities of dramatic structure and strategy, apparent even in the latter’s problematically abrupt playtext. The crucial point as far as this essay is concerned is that their representation of political immorality is indebted to the French discourses of anti-Machiavellianism that figured heavily in religious polemic on both sides.² Marlowe’s atheistic, ambitious Guise is clearly derived, more or less directly, from Huguenot and/or royalist caricature of the Catholic leader as a pseudo-Machiavel, possessing, as Jacques Hurault alleged in 1588, a “domesticall ambition” to pursue his father’s “secret intente to vsurpe this crowne” (p. 9). Mortimer’s characterisation—which involves him at one point invoking contemporary Catholic resistance theory—is almost certainly intended to carry similar Guisian echoes (*Edward II*, I.ii.73, I.iv.54–55).³

A concentration on folly will, I hope, shed new light on the moral and theatrical paradigms used by Marlowe’s two plays to frame and direct audience

I See Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe*, pp. 72–111; cf. Knowles, esp. pp. 112–15; Kewes, “History Plays”; and Kewes, “Marlowe, History and Politics”, p. 503. The sources for *The Massacre at Paris* are discussed in Kocher, “François Hotman”; Kocher, “Contemporary Pamphlet Backgrounds”; Briggs (1983); and Potter (1996).

2 On this, the clearest introduction is now by Anglo, pp. 227–373 and 417–33. Cf. Beame.

3 Cf. Kewes, “History Plays”, p. 503. Marlowe’s works are cited throughout from Bowers, ed.

responses to Mortimer and the Guise, as well as to Machiavellian practices more generally. It will also offer a subtle recasting of these characters' relationship to the Vice figure of morality drama. Marlowe's indebtedness to previous theatrical tradition has been the subject of much distinguished scholarship, from the magisterial works of Bernard Spivack, Douglas Cole and David Bevington to more recent studies like Ruth Lunney's. Guise and Mortimer resemble the archetypal figure of the Vice in their relish for their own stratagems, their unrivalled, vaunting proximity to the audience, their come-uppances, and perhaps also their Catholicism. (The Vice of the Elizabethan morality play is often seen uttering papist imprecations; early in *Edward II* [I.iv.54-55], Mortimer threatens Edward with deposition if he refuses to obey the spokesman of the Holy See.) Unlike the Vice, they are not themselves foolish or ridiculous, unless their hubristic boasts of invincibility which precede their ruin can be considered such (*Edward II*, V.iv.48-72; *Massacre* xix.978-86). Nonetheless folly illuminates important aspects of their dramatic characterisation, and indeed of the plays' treatment of fraud, violence and ambitious usurpation more generally.

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Before examining Marlowe's plays more closely it is necessary to examine some of the historical narratives on which they depended. For certain writers of the late sixteenth century, the rise of "Machiavellian" political conduct—deceit and violence in the service of personal ends—was the result not simply of the spread of Machiavelli's own texts and ideas, but also of a fatal surrender to folly by those in charge of the body politic. This view was articulated with particular clarity in the dedicatory epistle to the Latin translation of Innocent Gentillet's *Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner. . . . Contre Nicolas Machiauel Florentin*, often known simply as the *Contre-Machiavel*. Gentillet's original French text appeared in 1576, the Latin version—whose author has yet to be identified—a year later, in Geneva. Both were widely read in England;⁴ Simon Patericke's English translation, published in 1602, was derived from the Latin version. Dedicated to two English gentlemen with strong Geneva connections, Francis Hastings and Edward Bacon, the translation's epistle advanced a brief account of sixteenth-century French history which purported to explain the Valois monarchy's (and especially Cath-

4 See Bawcutt, pp. 864-65.

erine de Medici's) complicity in the persecution of Protestants, which it linked directly to the circulation of Machiavelli's teaching. This historical narrative began with a phase of folly. The Protestant Reformation, the epistle claimed, represented an opportunity for thorough moral reform. France failed to take it, for reasons which were obvious enough, at least as far as the author was concerned. I cite Patericke's translation, noting some of the original Latin phrasing in square brackets:

Sathan (to occupie and busie mens minds with toyish playes and trifles, that they might give no attendance unto true wisdome) devised this policie, to raise up jeasters and fooles in Courts [*scurras & moriones aulicos*], which creeping in, by quipping and prettie conceits, first in words, and after by bookes, uttering their pleasant ieasts in the Courts and banquets of kings and princes, laboured to root up all the true principles of Religion and Policie. (Gentillet, *Discourse*, sig. ¶*iii*^r; cf. *Commentariorum . . . libri tres*, sigs. +*ii*^r)

Succeeding this era of godless courtly levity—represented, so the writer argued, by the “skoffing taunts” of Rabelais in France and Cornelius Agrippa in Germany—came a second of “lust and lightnesse [*libidinem ac mollitiem*]”, abetted and inspired by “new Poets, very eloquent for their own profit” (*Discourse*, sig. ¶*iii*^r; cf. *Commentariorum . . . libri tres*, sig. +*ii*^r). The consequence was a moral hollowing-out of the court and national culture, whereby lip-service was paid to ethics and legality but “all things onely for ostentation and outward show [*in ostentationem tantum & speciem composita*]”. The scene was thus set for the devastating third phase:

For than Sathan being a disguised person amongst the French, in the likenesse of a merry ieaster [*mimum quendam hilarem*], acted a Comaedic, but shortly ensued a wofull Tragoedic. When our countrie mens minds were sick, and corrupted with these pestilent diseases, and that discipline waxed stale; then came forth the books of *Machiavell*, a most pernicious writer, which began not in secret and stealing manner (as did those former vices) but by open meanes, and as it were a continuall assault, utterly destroyed, not this or that vertue, but even all vertues at once: Insomuch as it tooke Faith from the princes; authoritie and maiestie, from lawes; libertie from the people; and peace and concord from all persons, which are the onely remedies for present malladies. (*Discourse*, sig. ¶*iii*^r; cf. *Commentariorum . . . libri tres*, sigs. +*ii*^r-*iii*^r)

Besides its sense of writers and books as agents of moral decay, what is notable about this account is its employment of dramatic metaphor. The disastrous passage from Rabelaisian folly to Machiavellian villainy and atheism is described as if it were a morality play, jesters and fools setting up the entry of villainy and

atheism, “Comaedie” becoming “Tragoedie”, “the vices” of the French ruling class behaving as quasi-stage characters.

Thus the Latin translator of Gentillet, in a work which helped shape Protestant attitudes to Machiavelli across northern Europe, not least in England, as Bawcutt has shown. On these grounds alone his account is worth considering in relation to Marlowe’s *The Massacre at Paris*, which, as I argue below, echoes elements of the epistle’s moral patterning. It is significant that the idea of folly as a prerequisite for the flourishing of more sinister, “Machiavellian” vices can also be detected in contemporary narratives of the medieval reign of Edward II, to which Marlowe was indebted for his play. Raphael Holinshed’s account, for example, opened by informing the reader of the overall trajectory of the reign:

But now concerning the demeanour of this new king, whose disordered maners brought himselfe and manie others vnto destruction; we find that in the beginning of his gouernement, though he was of nature giuen to lightnesse, yet being restrained with the prudent aduertisements of certeine of his counsellors, to the end he might shew some likelihood of good prooffe, he counterfeited a kind of grauitie, vertue and modestie; but yet he could not throughlie be so bridled, but that forthwith *he began to plaie diuers wanton and light parts*, at the first indeed not outragiously, but by little and little, and that couertlie. For hauing reuoked againe into England his old mate the said Peers de Gaueston, he receiued him into most high fauour . . . through whose companie and societie he was suddenlie so corrupted, that he burst out into most heinous vices; for then vsing the said Peers as a procurer of his disordred dooings, he began to haue his nobles in no regard, to set nothing by their instructions, and to take small heed vnto the good gouernement of the commonwealth, so that within a while, he gaue himselfe to wantonnes, passing his time in voluptuous pleasure, and riotous excesse: and . . . furnished his court with *companies of iesters, ruffians, flattering parasites, musicians, and other vile and naughtie ribalds*, that the king might spend both daies and nights in iesting, plaieng, banketing, and in such other filthie and dishonorable exercises. (Holinshed, p. 318; emphasis added)

This account, which appeared also in condensed form in various editions of John Stowe’s *Chronicle*, is modelled closely on Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* (pub. 1534). As in the “Gentillet” account of sixteenth-century France, emphasis is placed on levity (“lightnesse”—“*leuitatem*” in Polydore), “iesting” and “plaieng” (“*iocando*”, “*ludendo*”) and wantonness as preparatory to “destruction”, as well as on a movement from covert villainy to open crime (Polydore Vergil, pp. 346–47). If in the former narrative “Sathan” is the “merry iester” leading France onwards to catastrophe, in Holinshed it is Edward himself who plays the fool, acting “*diuers wanton and light parts*”.

The inspiration for such consciously theatrical tropes derived, almost certainly, from the representation of folly in sixteenth-century morality drama. There was a long-standing tradition in English morality plays, in particular, of differentiating folly—a universal human predisposition—from the specific villainous practices which its presence enabled or abetted. In John Skelton’s *Magnificence* (1515–23), to take an early example, Folly and his brother Fancy—representations of universal human fallibilities—dupe the title character into the largesse that causes his downfall, but their deceitful trickery is distinguished from the destruction worked by Courtly Abusion, Counterfeit Countenance and Crafty Conveyance, each of whom figures a specific socio-satirical practice. Crafty Conveyance, left alone on stage by the two brothers, instructs the audience that his own sinister emergence is premised on Folly’s ubiquity:

It is wonder to see, the world about,
To see what folly is used in every place.
Folly hath a room, I say, in every rout;
To put where he list Folly hath free chase;
Folly and Fancy all where every man doth face and brace;
Folly footeth it properly, Fancy leadeth the dance,
And next come I after, Crafty Conveyance. (ll. 1328–34)

“Next come I after” invokes a pattern equally visible in the disastrous arrival of Machiavellian villainy after, and as a result of, Rabelaisian folly and lascivious wantonness in the 1577 epistle to the Gentillet translation. Yet in neither of the two prose accounts discussed above is such dramatic imagery metaphorical only. Both the French and English royal courts are portrayed as places of unbecoming levity precisely because that is where the performing arts, music as well as plays and jesting, especially flourish: and in both texts these are regarded as both cause and symptom of a collapse in moral standards. For the writer of the dedicatory epistle to the Latin translation of Gentillet, motivated no doubt by Calvinist dislike of theatrical representation, the idea that theatrical corruption can infect the political arena is a founding premise for his pejorative account of recent French history. His epistle opens by retelling from Plutarch the story of Solon, the Athenian statesman, castigating the playwright Thespis for the “feigned fables [*mendacia*]” in a much-applauded tragedy. Those who approve “this play [*ludum*]” will be doomed, Solon remarks, to discover such dishonesty sooner or later in their own affairs (*Discourse*, sig. ¶iii^r; cf. *Commentariorum . . . libri tres*, sig. +ii^r).

We can conclude, then, that when Christopher Marlowe turned to writing plays in the late 1580s, a relatively coherent tradition existed for representing historical irruptions of fraud and violence as outcomes of folly, notably the folly of courts and princes. This tradition offered a ready schema within which to place the ideas of Machiavelli, both morally and historically, while also coming pre-packaged, as it were, for the stage on account of its use of dramatic tropes. When we turn to Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* and *Edward II*, we find that they frame their representation of "Machiavellian" practices in very similar ways to the tradition just discussed, by making fraud and violence political vices contingent on regal folly. Indeed, they consciously exploit the ways folly was represented in Tudor morality drama to trigger certain responses in an audience equally familiar with this heritage.

One example from each play will be given here. Early in *Edward II*, the new king and Gaveston abuse the bishop of Coventry for his role in the favourite's exile during the previous reign. Their assault is both physical and verbal: they rip off his episcopal vestments and jeer at his wealth and haughtiness. Eventually, he is sent off to the Tower, his lands and see confiscated and assigned to Gaveston (I.i.175-207). The scene is based on an event in the play's chronicle sources. However, its dramatisation as an abusive personal confrontation recalls scenes from the Tudor morality tradition in which vice characters assault their victims or each other in a knockabout, but also excessive and vicious, way, inviting an audience's uneasily complicit laughter. An obvious if early example (not necessarily known to Marlowe, of course) is the beating and disrobing of Skelton's Magnificence (l. 1876 SD), probably representing another prelate, Thomas Wolsey. Marlowe gives his redeployment of the trope an intensely topical twist, appropriating only to reverse what Thomas Nashe referred to as the "launcing and worming" of Martin Marprelate in 1588-89 on the London stages, which also involved physical and verbal abuse ("A Counter-Cuff Given to Martin Junior", *Works*, I: 159). Indeed, the scene seems deliberately to stoke anti-prelatical feeling, doubtless latent in London audiences who had witnessed at first hand Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Aylmer's aggressive crackdown on non-conformism in the early 1590s.⁵ It does so unstably, however. On the one hand, Edward and Gaveston's marring of a prelate draws on the characteristic obsessions of Puritan anti-episcopacy—focusing on a bishop's popish vestments, identifying him with

5 See Collinson, pp. 403-67.

a “sea [i.e., see] of Rome” rhetorically identified with “the sea of Hell”, and questioning whether wealth is compatible with priestliness (*Edward II*, I.i.177–78, 191–92, 205). But they also resemble the caricatures of Puritanism by Anglican conservatives, not least in their pseudo-Anabaptistic demand for him to be “in the channell christen[ed] . . . anew”, and their greed for Coventry’s “goods” and “rents” (188, 193–94).⁶ Any laughter at Coventry’s humiliation—and for the scene to be effective there probably does need to be some (Gaveston and Edward appear to be inviting an audience to egg them on)—therefore has a sickly edge, informed not only by topical ambivalence but by the characteristic doubleness of foolish violence on the Tudor stage. This scene not only dramatically illuminates the descriptions of Edward’s levity in Marlowe’s source materials, but also creates an expectation that such behaviour will in due course give way to more insidious and destructive practices. In *Edward II*, the king’s abuse of Coventry directly provokes an alliance of the rebel barons with the Church; in the very long run (although not immediately), it sets in train the sequence of events that leads to Mortimer’s Machiavellian regency, discussed further below.

The presentation is somewhat different in *The Massacre at Paris*. For a start, the Machiavellianism of Guise, as well as the deceit and violence of the Catholic faction as a whole, is shown as trigger, not consequence, of the disasters befalling France. This reflects the polemical perspective of some of Marlowe’s Huguenot source materials (for example, François Hotman’s *De Furoribus Gallicis* [1573]), which blamed the “Guisians”, as well as Catholic perfidy in a more general sense, for the St Bartholomew’s Day massacres.⁷ It also reflects Marlowe’s decision to begin his play in 1572, rather than further back in time. Nonetheless, a pattern of folly anticipating more dangerous practices is invoked just over half-way through the play, during the scene of Henri III’s coronation. The precise mechanism is a piece of comic byplay involving one of the new king’s favourites, Mugeroun:

Mugeroun. Then may it please your Majestie to give me leave,
To punish those that doe prophane this holy feast.
He cuts off the Cutpurse eare, for cutting off the golde buttons of his cloake.
King. How meanst thou that?
Cutpurse. O Lord, mine eare.

6 For these elements of anti-Puritan polemic, found for example in the works of Richard Bancroft or Matthew Sutcliffe, see Lake in Lake and Questier, pp. 538–56.

7 Marlowe’s use of Hotman is convincingly argued in Kocher, “François Hotman”.

Mugeroun. Come sir, give me my buttons and heers your eare.
Guise. Sirra, take him away.
King. Hands of good fellow, I will be his baile
 For this offence: goe sirra, worke no more,
 Till this our Coronation day be past:
 And now,
 Our solemne rites of Coronation done,
 What now remaines, but for a while to feast,
 And spend some daies in barriers, tourny, tylte,
 And like disportes, such as doe fit the Court? (*Massacre*, xii.615-29)

This episode has no known historical source. However, in plays of the generation before Marlowe's, cutpurses are frequent occurrences: they are often identified at work in the theatre audience, and are then egged on by vice-characters. In Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (1560-70), for example, the Vice Ambidexter, apologising for having been temporarily off-stage, asks the audience whether "my Cosin Cutpurse" is with them "in the meantime", urging him, "to it Cosin and doo your office fine!" (ll. 603-4; cf. 998-1009). In George Wapull's *The Tide Tarieth No Man* (1576), Courage (the Vice) similarly instructs an imaginary figure in the audience, "Good cosen Cutpurse, if you be in place. / I beseeche you now, your businesse to plye / I warrant thee I, no man shall thee espye" (ll. 1049-51). "Farewell cosen cutpursse, and be ruled by me", says Revenge at the end of John Pickering's *Horestes* (1567; sig. Eiii^r). Such instances associate cutpurses with specific improvised periods of Vice-audience interaction; the conventionalised byplay associated with the villain in modern English pantomime is a useful parallel.⁸ Indeed, "cousin cutpurse" seems to have been an affectionate label for alleged audience members within the bantering idiolect of the Tudor Vice. It establishes a sardonic rapport (of the "you know who you are" type) while presenting himself as accomplice, or patron, of criminal practices at work in the audience and the wider world.

Thus the cutpurse scene in Marlowe's *Massacre* engages with existing traditions of performance (and audience expectations) to give Henri III's reign from the start a taint of ludic folly that is both amusing and unbecoming, degrading the ceremonial formality one expects of a royal court and especially a coronation. Henri's standing bail for the cutpurse, in fact, brings him close to enacting the same mock-patronage role taken by the Vice in relation to audience

8 For this, with special reference to Preston's *Ambidexter*, cf. Wiles, pp. 5-7.

cutpurses in previous plays. It is true that, according to the stage direction, the Cutpurse is stated to enter with the king's retinue at the start of the scene (*Massacre*, xii.587 SD). He may therefore seem a stage character to an audience. But not necessarily—he could equally sneak on from among the spectators. Certainly, to cut off Mugeroun's buttons, he would need to have started earlier than the second stage direction gives him time for; probably he is already at it while the high-status characters speak earlier in the scene, stirring up subversive audience hilarity. His come-uppance is certainly comic: "O Lord, mine eare" is a funny line (even or perhaps especially if screamed), and Mugeroun's return of the offending appendage ridiculous. That the severing is also uncomfortable—the play has, after all, already dramatised the sundering of Huguenot body parts—is no Marlovian innovation, but part of the queasiness intrinsic to the morality tradition's representation of vicious but amusing folly. The consequences of the episode are shown by their sequel: the Catholic faction immediately agree to use Henri III's levity as a cover for their own control of the state (*Massacre*, xii.631-56). In order to regain control, Henri III is compelled to trick Guise into being murdered, a stereotypically "Machiavellian" act (and furiously denounced as such in *Ligueur* propaganda, which it is clear Marlowe followed in dramatising the Guises' deaths), which leads to his own assassination shortly afterwards.⁹ In the play—or at least, the play as we have it now - these events are crammed into a few scenes; in reality, of course, Guise and Henri died at the end of the 1580s, nearly one and a half decades after Henri's coronation in 1575.

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It is clear, then, that both *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* exploit existing theatrical conventions, and expectations, to represent folly as a precondition for more

9 For this dependence, see Thomas and Tydeman, eds, pp. 258-59; cf. Briggs, pp. 263-67. In *Histoire tragique*, Edward II (as a stand-in for Henri III) is described as "ce perdu Machiauel" and Machiavelli is claimed to have taken his precepts from him (Boucher, p. 42). Another *Ligueur* tract, the *Histoire au vray du meutre et assassinat, etc.* (1589), describes Henri's supposed resolve to eliminate the Guises as a "proposition veritablement digne d'un Epicurien ou Machiaueliste" (p. 93). Most notably, Pierre Matthieu's fiercely pro-Catholic tragedy *La Guisiade* (written 1589) attributes to Henri an attitude all-too-welcoming to "Le Machiaveliste, et l'homme de fortune" (Matthieu, l. 379). See also the translation/edition by Hillman, who has elsewhere discussed the play as a "conditioning coordinate" for Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe*, pp. 86-97, p. 85).

sinister political vices and/or practices, such as ambition, deceit and murder. It is clear, too, that such a strategy tracks aspects of Machiavelli's reception in late sixteenth-century France and England. To be precise, Marlowe's dramatic choices, as they have been discussed up to this point, suggest an *anti*-Machiavellian understanding of the use of fraud and violence to acquire or maintain power. Readers of this essay might be pardoned for finding such a conclusion underwhelming, not least in its implied reading of Marlowe as a moral and political conformist. Marlowe's exposure to anti-Machiavellianism, indeed Gentillet, has long been alleged.¹⁰ It is worth wondering whether there might not be different ways to understand folly's relationship to the Machiavellian political arts in these plays.

One possible route can be identified within one of the surviving English manuscript translations of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. (Until Dacres' published translation of 1640, anyone wishing to read this text in English could only have done so via manuscript circulation or copying.) The translation in question is the one often described, after Napoleone Orsini's pioneering research in the 1930s, as "Translation A", a label which gives away how little has so far been discovered about its occasion, authorship and date.¹¹ Four complete copies of this translation, in different hands, have been identified in the British, Bodleian and Harvard (Houghton) Libraries, suggesting possibly wide circulation and possibly even some form of scribal publication; no other version exists in more than two. Another translation, entitled "Machiavel his Principles", recently identified during the electronic cataloguing of manuscripts in Lambeth Palace Library, uses Translation A's rendition (with minor variants) of the second half of Machiavelli's treatise, from chapters 16 to 26, although its version of the early chapters is unique. While it is likely that all copies of the translation belong to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries, only one (British Library, Harley MS 967) can be dated with any precision: as Orsini showed, it must have been composed, or copied, after 1583 ("Nuove ricerche", p. 101). This particular copy is also the only one to carry the copyist's initials, "J.[or F.] L.", although who this was remains uncertain (Orsini, *Studii*, pp. 19-33; Petrina, pp. 56-57).

Translation A is a periphrastic translation, systematically expanding Machiavelli's text and rendering it in English idiom. A compelling instance of this technique is its version of the opening of Machiavelli's sensational discussion

10 See, e.g., Orsini, "Policy", p. 132.

11 See Orsini, *Studii*, pp. 1-39; cf. Petrina, p. 51.

of how princes should keep their word (*Il Principe*, chap. 18), where Machiavelli goes on to recommend familiarity, when necessity requires, with the bestial arts of fraud and violence. The translation injects a discourse of folly into Machiavelli's text that cannot be found in any other published translation of the sixteenth century, whether the published Latin version of Sylvestre Tellio (pub. 1560) or the French ones of Gaspard d'Auvergne (1553), Guillaume Cappel (1553) and Isaac Gohory (1571). Nor does it correspond to any other manuscript translation so far identified:

There is noe man so besotted, that knoweth nott, or soe shameles that will nott confesse, how holie and honorable a thinge itt is for a prince to keepe his faith and promise unviolated and so Leade his Lief w[i]thout reprehention yett experience hath taught us, that those princes have bene most renowmend for their worthy facts that haue had least regard of their word or faith who circumventinge the simple sorte who but meane plaine sooth, haue surmounted them in dignitie. And made them poore fooles. (Lambeth Palace Library, Sion Abbey MS L40.2/E24, fol. 107^r)

The semantic choices here are worth highlighting. In *Il Principe*, Machiavelli says that “*ciascuno l'intende* [everyone knows]”¹² honest princes are praiseworthy. The translation says that you would have to be “besotted”—mentally confused—not to know it (other copies of Translation A say “sotted”). Machiavelli has princes who display “*astutia*”—“crafte, wilinesse, subtilty of wit”, as John Florio later defined it—running rings round and overcoming those who rely too much on “*lealtà*”, that is, “loyalty, truth, integrity, allegeance, vprightness, faithfulness” (Florio, pp. 45, 179). Many such princes, the Florentine blandly observes, have achieved “*gran cose* [great things]” (p. 31). The translation claims that in circumventing “the simple sorte who meane plaine sooth”, dishonest princes make them “poore fooles”, objects of ridicule for their stupidity. (In other versions of Translation A, the term “sottes” is used instead of “fooles”, but the meaning is the same.) Such adjustments explicate if not erase the terse, understated irony of Machiavelli's style, coarsening its smooth amorality by presenting it as contemptuous anti-moralism. There is an especially crowing edge to the sneer with which honest princes are described as “poore fooles”. For Machiavelli, *astutia* and its subsidiary arts are instrumental. They help preserve

12 Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, p. 31; for the Italian, I cite the 1584 edition published pseudonymously in London by John Wolfe. Regarding this passage, modern critical editions differ only over spelling and punctuation.

lo stato and achieve renown. But in Translation A, the secondary, perhaps even the principal aim, is to expose and humiliate those who abide by moral precepts, and award the privileged few who don't a sense of exclusive superiority.

This is an attitude captured also in Machevill's remark in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*: "Birds of the Aire will tell of murders past; / I am asham'd to heare such *fooleries*" (Prol. 17; italics added). But it also reflects a reading of Machiavelli through the Protestant anti-Machiavellian lens associated with Gentillet. (There are other aspects of the translation, which I shall not discuss here, which support this interpretation.) In Gentillet's *Discours . . . Contre Nicholas Machiavel*, Machiavelli is similarly coarsened as having characterised honest rulers as "*lourd-deaux* [dullards]" and "*idiots*", ripe for ridicule; the term for the latter in Patericke's 1602 translation is "idiot fooles and sots".¹³ There are significant implications here for how Machiavelli was read and understood in late Elizabethan England. For one thing, a hard distinction between a mediated and un-mediated Machiavelli (one who speaks in his own terms) becomes difficult to sustain at the point of reception, although it is worth pointing out that other translations, French, Latin, and English, offer more literal versions of this passage. More important for the present argument is the role played by folly in framing Machiavelli's advocacy of craftiness. For although it seems to echo the moral-historical idea, discussed above, that folly is a universal human failing which enables villainous practices to flourish, in fact it sees sottishness as the symptom and sign chiefly of those doomed to succumb to princely *astutia*, and thereby worthy of contempt, if not indeed deserving of their fate. Perhaps inadvertently, the translator's own anti-Machiavellianism has allowed a seductive if hyperbolically cynical "Machiavelli" (not to be confused with the original Italian thinker) to take shape within his idiomatic English prose.

Detecting a similar outlook in *Edward II* or *The Massacre at Paris* requires more than simply identifying similar sneers by his Machiavellian protagonists, Mortimer and Guise (although these do exist), as these can easily be recuperated and contained by standard moral perspectives. It requires, in fact, some further ratification within or by the play-world as a whole, a sense, that is, that cunning, dissimulation and violence *are* intrinsic to power, whatever moral judgments other characters or the audience may wish to make, and whatever the

13 Gentillet, *Discours*, pp. 388, 426 (III.xii, xviii); *Discourse*, p. 247, translating the Latin terms "*fatuos* [foolish] *et incautos* [unwary]" from the Latin version of 1577 (*Commentariorum . . . libri tres*, p. 443).

personal fates of the Machiavellian characters. *The Massacre at Paris*, at least in its present textual state, suggests little in the way of such dramaturgical ratification. To be sure, there are ample instances of fraud and violence in the play, while credulity, whether pious in the case of the massacred Huguenots or hubristic in those of Guise and (arguably) Henri III, tends to mark people out for imminent death. Yet as Hillman has most eloquently argued, the recurrent framing of the actions in terms of a providential justice acting in support of the reformed religion, notably in the language used repeatedly by Navarre and, when dying, Henri III, makes the play difficult to read as a jeering critique of ethical gullibility.¹⁴ Of course, Navarre's godliness fails to convince many of Marlowe's modern post-religious readers, the latest being John Guillory (p. 724n19); the juxtaposition with Marlowe's own (alleged) unorthodoxies of belief offers ready temptations. It is true that, historically speaking, rumours of Navarre's apostasy from Protestantism were already abroad at the time the play was likely performed, in early 1593 (his conversion finally occurred in July), and doubtless coalesced with the already well-established Catholic portrait of him as a violent, deceitful hypocrite, a "heretique notoire", "schismatique" and "pariure" who conducted a "vie cruelle & tyrannique, soit par effusion de sang des Catholiques", as one 1591 tract succinctly described him (*Les raisons*, pp. 3, 10, 11, 12). Yet the play makes no obvious reference to either his possible conversion or the *Ligueur* stereotype; the idea that the audience were *expected* to perceive the play's Navarre in light of them remains speculative.

The play-world of *Edward II*, contrastingly, can be argued to endorse some aspects of the "Machiavellian" contempt for fools, and celebration of *astutia*, glimpsed in the passage of Translation A. It does not do so systematically, however; there is a marked transition in the way political power is seen to operate before and after the crucial scenes dramatizing Edward's defeat, flight, and deposition (IV.v-V.i). In the early scenes of the play, politics is chiefly represented as a public struggle between the king and his opponents for control of the speech act, and power is implied to consist in an ability to command rhetorical assent, in full view of an audience. The latter's rapt attention, focused on each speaker as they try to seize *la parole*, thus buttresses (claimed) political with theatrical authority. This is, to use the terminology of Max Weber, a "charismatic" model of power, which Marlowe also employs in other plays—for example, *Tamburlaine*—and

14 See Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe*, pp. 75–82; contrast, however, Preedy, pp. 158–59.

which he probably derived from classical and Renaissance glorifications of the orator (Weber, II: 241-45). But unlike in *Tamburlaine*, in *Edward II* the model is from the start dysfunctional. The king and his nobility first enter quarrelling (I.i.74ff.), and Marlowe's verbal patterning is often one of stasis.

The dramatic representation of politics changes markedly when power in the state has shifted to usurping Mortimer. To begin with, as a passage in one of Mortimer's soliloquies indicates (V.iv.57-64), the *location* of power retreats from view, into the Council chamber, a venue not really mentioned until this point in the play and also, crucially, an off-stage space inaccessible to the audience. Power itself, meanwhile, is represented less by the declaratory speech acts characterising the first scenes in the play than by letters, seals, ambiguous written instructions: all the confusing, remote apparatus of the early modern bureaucratic state. (Although a letter of a very different kind, from Edward to Gaveston, commences the whole play, letters as such do not feature prominently, or as signs of political authority, until Mortimer's regency.) Both these dynamics assist an impression created throughout the post-deposition scenes that Mortimer controls affairs without always being personally present or identifiable. His power is diffused into an ubiquitous, menacing but often invisible *authority*, maintained, of course, as much through a climate of fear and intimidation as through the impersonal mechanisms of conciliar government.

This transformation of political conditions after Mortimer's usurpation is experienced by the audience in terms of an epistemological revision of their own role in relation to the action. Increasingly, they find themselves relying on Mortimer's reports, delivered in soliloquy, not only to understand the sinister motions at the heart of his cabinet councils, but for basic knowledge about what is really going on in the state—knowledge supplied to them by the one character whom they must least trust to deliver a version unskewed. This narrowing of knowledge is, then, also an awakening of and to their own political *subjectivity*, in the manifold senses of the term. To be sure, Mortimer's soliloquies are partly boastful performances, traceable to the Vice tradition of gloating interaction with the audience. But in *Edward II* such a perspective is given greater dramaturgical support. In a world where knowledge is assymmetrically distributed, politically *and* theatrically, and transmitted from an invisible centre by a corrupt yet glamorous tyrant, deception and dishonesty come to seem both essential and dynamic.

Two aspects of the “Machiavellian” play-world introduced with Mortimer’s supremacy are particularly worth noting. First is the language used at the moment of transition. “Faire *Isabelle*”, Mortimer remarks, awaiting news of Edward’s resignation of the crown, “now have we our desire, / The proud corrupters of the light-brainde king, / Have done their homage to the loftie galloves” (V.ii.1-3). The term “light-brainde” may seem a mere variation on the theme of Edwardian “lightness” prevalent in the play’s chronicle sources. Yet it points to a subtly different view of Edward, one increasingly ratified by Mortimer’s subsequent self-revelation to the audience as master manipulator. The deposed monarch is less frivolous, it would seem, than simply stupid, a kinsman perhaps of the “poore fooles” (to use the wording of the Sion Abbey version of Translation A) upon whom Machiavellian cunning proves its radical grasp of the truth of power.

Secondly, the reshaping of politics in the last scenes of the play survives the fall of Mortimer himself. It is true that, constitutionally speaking, his death restores monarchical authority and legitimacy. Edward III, the avenging monarch, is told, “know that you are a king” (V.vi.24), before commanding Mortimer’s arrest. The moment parallels Henri III’s reaffirmation of royal supremacy after Guise’s murder in *The Massacre at Paris*: “I nere was King of France untill this houre” (ix.1027). Yet when we ask where Edward III’s regenerated authority comes from, it is significant that he emerges, as the queen fearfully reports, from the space of Mortimer’s regency: “into the councell chamber he is gone, / to crave the aide and succour of his peeres” (V.vi.20-1). When he enters he is fittingly accompanied by anonymous “lords”, who replace the individuated, quarrelsome aristocrats who have dominated much of the play’s action: indeed Mortimer is arguably the last of their breed. At the end of the play “order and ceremony” may be restored (Bevington and Shapiro, p. 274), but the nature and source of power remain mediated and opaque; there is no straightforward return to the public-rhetorical style of politics characteristic of the early scenes. The perpetuation of a play-world with “Machiavellian” coordinates may be designed to suggest to audiences the realities of political knowledge and action in the late Tudor state.

Marlowe’s *Edward II* and *The Massacre of Paris*, then, use folly to dramatise “Machiavellian” political practice. However, the former’s treatment is, dramaturgically and politically, more complex and innovatory than the latter’s. Both plays are clearly indebted to a morality tradition, dramatic and non-dramatic,

in which a descent into folly greases the path for the temporary triumph of the Machiavel as a fashionably updated but nonetheless familiar figure of criminal vice. But in the final scenes of *Edward II* an alternative paradigm is suggested, whereby power's foundation in cunning is a truth conveyed by the dramaturgy, rather than simply the discourse of the Machiavel character, and survives as a fundamental element of the play-world even after his extinction. Crucially, in *Edward II* both paradigms give coherent readings of each other. They can be superimposed or flipped without difficulty. What one treats as the survival beyond the Machiavel of Machiavellian insight into the truths of power, to the other is the morality commonplace of vice remaining even after individual Vices are identified and punished. Whereas the "lightness", or predisposition to folly, of a ruler like Edward induces and invites the entry of villainous intrigue within a vice-multiplies-vice formula common in Tudor morality drama, it shades also into the quality of being "light-brainde", a ready-made doltishness for the Machiavellian agent to scoffingly prove his world-view on. The former reading, of course, understands folly as a latent human, that is universal, disposition, the latter as a property only of that substantial cross-section of mankind (or princes) who are easily duped. But "history", the setting of either play, is a solvent for any straightforward distinction between particular and general. Edward could be either type of fool, or indeed both. An audience can (or indeed could) choose which pattern to believe in. The fact that *Edward II* has such a double coherence takes us to the heart of Marlowe's dramatic art, and his precarious position in the history of theatre as complicit in and also in arms against its strategies of meaning-making.

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