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The origin of King Lear's power

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1. Introduction

“Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav’st thy golden one away” (1.4.155) summarizes the Fool within the well-known tragedy *King Lear* the moment which marks the beginning of the downfall of the character King Lear. The play, written by William Shakespeare and first performed in front of James I in 1606, is shaped around the elderly king, who loses everything when he decides to give up his responsibilities of the crown and transfer them on his daughters. It consists of a violent competition between several characters, who want to reach the position of absolute sovereignty, indicating that power, within this work of Shakespeare, is based on a realistic approach on politics. This essay will prove that even Lear’s authority, which has been portrayed often as a conservative one, holding power because of god’s will (Woodford 62), is based on a modern understanding of power. Furthermore, it will explore the process and the reasons for the king’s fall within the play. For this, the theories of one of the most famous and notorious political writers of the Renaissance: Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1572) will be applied. He, in fact, would have joined the Fools opinion that the King’s action, of giving away a great amount of his power (1.1) and, because of this, losing all, was imprudent and unreasonable.

In order to gain the readers consent of the belief just described, this work will first define the relevant Machiavellian concepts using *Il Principe* amongst other sources, to then move on and explain their conception in Shakespearean times. Secondly it will give a short overview of the opposing approach, which implies that the tragedy is an example of Christian providence. Finally it will attempt to refute this opinion and give sufficient evidence that king Lear’s style of politics is shaped by the pragmatic theories of Machiavelli, which will be demonstrated with a detailed analysis on how Lear handles his occupation of power.

2. The connection between Shakespeare and Machiavelli

Niccolò Machiavelli was a Florentine writer and undersecretary of state, who lived from 1469-1527 and is known to be one of the most influential theorists of power. His concept, which he describes in works like *I Discorsi* or *Il Principe*, is based on certain assumptions about the human nature (Anter 23). This establishes the possibility to draw a connection between the character traits of the old king Lear and the events that unsettle the political circumstances within the tragedy. Especially relevant for this is *Il Principe*, a booklet which Machiavelli himself claims to discuss the nature of authority, the various types of it, how to gain and defend sovereignty and what causes the loss of it

(Zorn XII). Nevertheless Machiavelli can only be understood if one can grasp the entirety of his works and therefore a small reflection on Wolfgang Kersting's resume about the political writer is appropriate and will be attempted here.

2. 1. Theories by Machiavelli relevant within King Lear

The strong belief of Niccolò Machiavelli was that all political events need to be observed in a realistic, objective way, rather than a normative one. He thought that only when a situation is judged pragmatically and unemotionally, it can lead to an act with a successful outcome. This includes taking the wickedness of the human nature into account, which is dictated by ambition. He exhorts every person holding power to be careful and not trust in an illusory idea of good men, as well as not force those normative standards on oneself, because one will ultimately be subdued (30). This work will suggest that when Lear gives away his crown, he makes himself deeply dependable on the good will of others, which is causing his later demise.

Machiavelli's cheerless opinion about the human nature, which he describes as an antisocial one, unwilling to accept the conditions of peaceful co-existence (34), also leads him to express a very positive verdict about animals (32). This is a surprising parallel found also within *King Lear* and will be picked up on in the further progressing of this text.

Il Principe includes the idea that fear is one way to keep a nation under control in order to tame the craving of the human race for importance, power and glory (35). Nevertheless Machiavelli mentions that a stable regime, defined by a strong judiciary and therefore infused with reason (preferable in the form of a democracy) is able to conquer the human pursuit for power (41).

Machiavelli believes that human beings are deeply influenced by their political environment. This leads him to the assumption that the destructive human ambition is especially dominant when the political surroundings allow for it (45) and implies the conclusion that a good regime produces good individuals, who are not immune to change into the opposite, once the political situation evokes it (46). In the eyes of Machiavelli, as soon as the stability of the political system is questionable, the human ambition takes over and chaos erupts, evoked by the fight for superiority (41). He depicts a repetitive circle in time, which consists of the idea that every settled regime will eventually turn into chaos, which will transform into an authoritarian regime, which then again, with the help of a skilful leader, morph into a settled regime again (66). *Il Principe* is directed at this special individual, who is able to become an authoritarian

leader and settle the political situation. It gives advice on how to gain and preserve power (68). Machiavelli calls this special individual the *uomo virtuoso*, a person with extraordinary political competence, who symbolizes the ideal of the perfect sovereign. This *uomo virtuoso* Machiavelli demands to incorporate the following qualities¹: He must be a realist, determined to achieve his goal and ready to fight for it ruthlessly. He must be pragmatic and willing to fulfil all necessities, which are needed to realise his vision of the political landscape (77). He must be unconscionable using his power, but still use it wisely and not become tyrannical. He should not be led by moral principles, but he should understand them and not provoke unnecessary furore by breaching against them (81). He should use ploys and lies wisely, but appear virtuous to the masses (94-95). He is supposed to be transformable like a chameleon and unite the human ration with the intuition of the animal (96-97), as well as he should recognize and use all fortunate possibilities opening up to him, but not depend on them (104). Religion he should utilize as an instrument to achieve obedience and to justify his actions, but never should he be bound to the principles of faith (148-149). All in all he must be a good and bad person at the same time and possess an extremely adaptive character (81).

These are particularly high requirements for the perfect ruler and Machiavelli blames the continuous collapse of any regime in history to the responsible politicians in charge and their inability to fulfil them (71). The collapse of a system is a theme explored within the tragedy “King Lear”, and an analysis on how and why Lear fails to be the ideal Machiavellian ruler will follow further on in this essay.

2. 2. The conception of Machiavelli in the life time of Shakespeare

When, after the death of Machiavelli, his scriptures got published in 1530, immediately the defamation of him and his work began and lead to their rising popularity. Rudolf Zorn writes, in his introduction to *Il Principe*, that Machiavelli was soon seen as an embodiment of an immoral and evil atheist (XIV). He states that the entire 16th, 17th and 18th century, Europe collectively condemned his work and that also Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, the most famous writers of the Elizabethan period, joined in harshly denouncing Machiavelli in their plays.

Can that be true when so many have recognized Machiavellian ideas, on what influences political processes, within Shakespeare’s plays?

¹ *Uomo* means man in Italian. For pragmatic reasons only the personal pronoun: “He”, will be used here. Of course especially “King Lear” shows that women can be skilful Machiavellian leaders too.

In his book *Shakespeare*, Gabriel Egan claims that apparently the educated Elizabethans did know and discuss the works of Machiavelli. He supports the opinion that especially within the Shakespearean history plays, which work through factual history of Great Britain's monarchy, a Machiavellian reading is appropriate because there we "see the chaos that ensues when no strong ruler has yet emerged, and see the madness and savagery that follows not from divine displeasure but from all-too-human lust for power". However he does admit it would be difficult to say, whether Elizabethan's would have seen it this way as well (59). Atheism, being an inevitable part of Machiavelli's concept, was not common at all in the late 16th century, but at least it was thinkable (Greenblatt, 19). Egan also writes that "official propaganda on the theory of politics held up absolutism as the only alternative to anarchy: God demands that subjects obey their monarch" (53).

While, when looking at the character of Edmund in *King Lear*, there is no doubt Shakespeare engaged with the Machiavellian ideas, it is still open for interpretation whether he approved of their verity. The existence of this character, the bastard son, who does not want to accept his position in society and who is determined to rise to power, no matter if that includes betraying his own family and who is portrayed as the villain of the tragedy, might imply a critical approach Shakespeare's towards Machiavelli. Nonetheless, on further observation, Edmund is not the perfect Machiavellian *uomo virtuoso*, as he fails to stabilize his power, which is one of the key skills the Machiavellian leader needs to possess (Kersting 99).

It is interesting how one play can be read in multiple ways, allowing several interpretations. The ambiguity of the tragedy might have been intended. Stephen Greenblatt claims that at least under James I, Shakespeare's dramas were "written for a theatre, subject to state censorship" (45). After the death of Elisabeth I, when most of Shakespeare's history plays were already written and performed, James became the King of England in 1603. Leonard Tennenhouse writes, (in an essay which examines Shakespeare's political plays), that when James rose to power, the artistic scene had to adapt to this new ruler. He writes: "(...) we find a whole set of literary genres fell out of favour with the accession of James I and a new set provided the appropriate means for setting oneself in proximity to political power", and adds that: "James's own practice of political authority was clearly archaic in comparison with Elisabeth" (110). To understand James's view on kingship, Donna Woodford quotes a speech he delivered to parliament on March 21, 1609, which expresses the strong faith of the divine right of

kings. She writes, that “(...) in comparing kings to gods (...), James emphasizes the power of god to give and take life, to judge and to be beyond judgement” (63).

This poses the thesis, that *King Lear*, in comparison to the history plays that incorporate a fairly modern approach on politics, possesses ambiguousness, in order to disguise the included Machiavellian concepts. It is as if Shakespeare adapted his style to the king the tragedy was going to be performed for, a king that was known to be more conservative than Elizabeth I.

However others have come to the conclusion that *King Lear* is an example of Providence, which will be commented on in the following chapter.

3. Providence

Providence, how Gabriel Egan writes, means the belief in the existence of a higher, godly force, which controls the events of the human world for the benefit of all. If bad things did occur to someone, it was believed he or she deserved them, because they were interpreted to be divine punishment. He writes: “Many critics have thought that Shakespeare believed in (...) this principle, that (...) wrong-doers finally get what they deserve”, (55). But is the character king Lear really basing his power on God’s will?

Donna Woodford argues that “the very wilful way in which he (Lear) makes mistakes, deciding to divide the kingdom without even consulting with his advisors (...) suggests that he is a king by divine right”. Could that not just be interpreted as a weakness of character? Also speaking for this view is the following text passage. Lear asks Kent (in disguise), why he wants to serve him (1.4.24-30) and Kent answers: “(...) you have that in your countenance which I would fain call master”. When Lear asks what that might be, Kent answers: “Authority”. Woodford believes this to prove the “innate authority” Lear possesses has been given by god (62). The political theology of the king’s double nature, one symbolizing god, was a common presumption at Shakespeare’s time and is described well by Charles R. Forker (KR, 17). He writes: “The king’s natural body incorporated his humanity and was thus subject to the frailties and mortality of the flesh, but his body politic embodied the state and so set him apart from all others, being ubiquitous and immortal” (17). R.A. Foakes comments on the concept the following way: “The King’s body politic included the body natural, but the body natural is the lesser, and with this the body politic is consolidated. So that (...) he has not a body natural distinct and divided by itself from the office (...)”, which would suggest he could split off his body politic and possibly transfer it on someone else, but “(...) a body natural and a body politic indivisible, and these 2 bodies are incorporated

in one person (law reports, 1.148)” (18). In connection to the fateful moment in *King Lear*, when Lear is trying to free himself off the crown’s duties, he is, looking at it with the concept of the two intertwined bodies, attempting the impossible (1.1). Firstly he does not only divide the country but himself at the same time, and secondly he is, against all odds, remaining the king (18)! This causes God’s punishment and evokes chaos, circling around the question of the rightful ruler. Foakes believes that Lear, staying king, is shown “not only by the way Kent, Cordelia, Albany and Edgar refer to him as a king throughout the later acts, but also in the way his enemies continue to think of him so” (19). Foakes also quotes J.F. Danby, who was convinced the play is based on a conflict between several characters. Lear, Cordelia and Edgar represent the just explained conservative view on kingship. Others, like Goneril, Regan and Edmund incorporate the Machiavellian ideas of individualism and egocentrism (82).

In general this interpretation is plausible too; however this essay will now illustrate the belief that King Lear’s power is not based on a belief in divine right, but on the Machiavellian concept. The erupting spiral of violence is a consequence of him failing to fulfil his office satisfyingly. Lear makes a mistake which causes his doom, rather than his fate to be a heavenly punishment.

4. King Lear, the insufficient Machiavellian king

First of all, when trying to integrate Lear’s rule into the Machiavellian classification of autarchies, one will realize that the tragedy does not give sufficient information on how Lear rose to be king. His old age which is mentioned several times (for example 1.1.38) and the natural manner Kent describes him to present his authority (1.4.27-28), seem to indicate that he has owned the position for a long time. If he inherited his crown, for Machiavelli it would explain the loyalty some subjects within the tragedy hold towards their king. He writes that those authorities, once they have lost their power, rise back to it more easily than others, because their subjects, through familiarization, accept their legitimacy naturally (Machiavelli 4). It explains Kent’s dedication towards his king and also the loyalty of the Fool, who both stick by Lear’s side in the storm, even though it is not the best option for them to do so when looking at the political situation (3.1). In comparison to the history plays, who deal with factual history of England’s monarchy, this tragedy is based on several sources like: Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande*, a poetic version of the story by John Higgins, a dramatic version by an anonymous writer, a common fairy-tale (known in several countries) and possibly even a law case, current at Shakespeare’s time (Weiss 49-58). It

gives one no relevant information about Lear's origin. There is no satisfying argument on if Lear reached the throne in a traditional way or he reached it by being the most powerful man in the country, indicating his Machiavellian approach. However by going through the tragedy from the start one will find several passages that prove exactly this.

Already act 1 scene 1, in which Kent and Gloucester hold a friendly conversation about the future of the country in order to prepare the audience for the following events, reveals something about Lear's view on politics. Especially interesting is Gloucester's comment, after Kent states that the King has found more liking for the Duke of Albany than the Duke of Cornwall. He claims: "It did always seem to us: but now, in the/ division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the/ dukes he values most, for qualities are so weighed that/ curiosity in neither can make chance of eithers moiety" (1.1.2-6). How is this to understand when only a few lines later the King appears and explains that he will "extend" the "largest bounty" on whichever daughter will declare her love to him in the most beautiful way (1.1.51-53)? Gloucester's statement leads to the assumption that Lear has prepared this important moment well and that he has thought through his decision. By dividing the country in three perfectly equal parts, Lear must have some idea of the Machiavellian definition of the human nature and its endless striving for power. From the start Lear wanted to avoid envy between the daughters and prevent the conflicts it might cause. Why does he fail so brutally?

Lear's vanity and his desire to be loved make him set up a contest and tell his daughters that the size of his gift will depend on their performance, when this is obviously not true. However it shows how important it is to receive love for Lear and that he is not cold- hearted when it comes to family matters. A successful Machiavellian ruler, as already described in the beginning of the essay, should never be led by his emotions and follow the objective necessities that his reason will propose (Kersting 91). Lear seems to know this by preparing his decision well, however not to the extent he should have. He grasps the essence of the human being and considers it to be a risk, but he does not really believe his own beloved daughters could turn against him.

Speaking for this is also, within the same scene, Lear's declaration of the terms and conditions of his transfer. He announces: "Ourself by monthly course, with reservation of an hundred knights/ By you to be sustained; shall our abode/ Make with you by due turn; only we shall retain/ The name, and all th'addition to a king: the sway, / Revenue, execution of the rest, Beloved sons, be yours; which to confirm /This coronet part with you". Lear is intending to keep a hundred knights and therefore keeping a big

amount of his military power! The threat this truly indicates is expressed in the reaction of his daughters Goneril and Regan, who, at all costs, are trying to diminish this quantity (for example in 1.4.238-243). Goneril even complains:” This man hath had good counsel- a hundred knights! / (...) Yes, that every dream (...), dislike / He may enguard his dotage with their powers/ And hold our lifes on mercy” (1.4.315-320). She remarks the firm conviction that her father does not want to let go of his final say in politics. On a further look there is even more in this passage supporting her opinion. Lear wants to keep his title and all “th’addition to a king” (1.1.137) which in the German *Reclam* version is translated with “des Königs Ehrenrecht”, is implying that he wants to keep the power of the judicative and stay the highest judge. In connection with his military force he would still be able to control all political processes. The only thing he apparently is willing to give up is: “the sway, the Revenue” and the “execution of the rest” (1.1.136-138). It sounds like a farce, as Lear is not willing to give up power at all.

One must bear in mind that he himself claims, it is because of his old age that he wants to step back from duty (1.1.37-39). This indicates a fairly modern notion on kingship, because it means one is just able to quit the office, like it was regular job. Goneril and Regan also address their father’s senility more than once (for example in 1.1.290-295). Therefore his age is the reason that he is willing to give away the enduring routines and responsibilities of kingship, however thoroughly he has planned to stay in the background and hold the power of veto. The fact he wants to keep his title can be seen as a tactic inspired by Machiavelli. It is not about really owning a certain skill or characteristic, but about pretending to do so in order to not lessen one’s power by gaining disrespect (Kersting 94-95). Goneril knows that too, as she advises a servant to treat Lear with negligence (1.2.13), who only, because of this, addresses Lear as: “My lady’s father” (1.4.77). This outrages the elderly king naturally, because he knows about the significance of his title in connection to his power.

It is also important that, in scene one, Lear only hands over a coronet and not a crown (1.1.139). R.A.Foakes writes: “Coronets (the word is a diminutive of ‘crown’) were circles worn by princes and dukes. It makes dramatic sense if Lear wears (...) a crown at the beginning of the play, and gives a coronet (...) to Cornwall and Albany”(14-15). Without doubt the symbolism expresses that Lear will remain the most powerful man in the country, only with less responsibility to weigh him down. Lear kept in mind the requirements of the *uomo virtuoso* and tried not to let go of control, however his plan does not bear fruit, because he underestimates the dimension of the human craving for power and is unable to look at his own daughters objectively.

A haze of love makes him unable to comprehend that once they have received a little share of power, they could turn against him, motivated by infinite ambition.

Shakespeare does not portray Lear as the perfect *uomo virtuoso*. Lear has flaws like a violent temper (shown in him banning Cordelia in 1.1.124-125) and his already described vanity. His power relies on a Machiavellian approach on politics but his already described senility has made him too weak to fulfil the role of the cold-hearted, pragmatic ruler. He gains the readers (or audiences) sympathy by appearing human and by making mistakes. The fact that Lear is hit by the catastrophic consequences of his blemish, shows that Shakespeare is not attacking the verity of the Machiavellian concept, but that he addresses the difficulty to follow Machiavelli's instructions.

Lear is unable to grasp what has happened in the beginning and still demands immediate response of anyone (for example when he shouts out: "Let me not stay a jot for dinner, go, get it ready" in 1.4.8). When he realizes that he is treated with disrespect he becomes displeased easily and verbally harasses a servant: "(...) you whoreson/ dog, you slave you cur" (1.4.78-79). This could either be blamed on his bad temper or other on him desperately trying to preserve his power in a Machiavellian way. For Machiavelli, every action should be pointed at increasing one's sway and if necessity demands so, violence should be used (Kersting 94). He believed that in order to tame the Goddess Fortuna, who symbolizes arbitrariness and luck, violence is an acceptable instrument. Lear's outburst is, at this point within the tragedy, extremely harsh not because he has realized the betrayal he suffers, but only an expression of a typical characteristic of his political style.

The continuous, repetitive explanations of the fool, like: "That lord that counselled thee to give away thy land, Come place him here by me; do thou for' him stand" (1.4.137-138), prove that Lear will not understand the dimension of his mistake for quite some time.

To say it in the spirit of Machiavelli; Lear's mistake has overthrown the country from a settled regime into the status of chaos. In this chaos, Lear, Goneril, Edmund and Regan all individually fight for their grasp of power. Like Machiavelli said, this chaos brings out the ambition, which before only unnoticed existed (Kersting 41). When Goneril tries to persuade Lear to give up fifty knights for her, he still has not accepted the true nature of two of his daughters. He takes on a hopeful journey to Regan with the purpose to federalize with her (1.4.287) and predictably fails, because for Regan, an alliance with her sister is the more useful Machiavellian solution. They are both trying to free themselves from his control, which works effectively until both his daughters

mirror their father in their Machiavellian approach on politics and also get defeated because of their mistake to love (in 5.3).

When Lear finally realizes he has misjudged his family he runs out into the woods and faces a horrible storm (3.2). The storm can be seen as a metaphor for Lear's inner turmoil and Lear uses it to express the intensity of his suffering. While ranting about his children he cries out: "Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters;/ I tax you not, you elements with unkindness. /I never gave you kingdom, called you children;" (3.2.15-17). He is expressing the Machiavellian wisdom that even the worst storm is less cruel, less brutal and less violent than the nature of men. In that moment Kent, his loyal servant, realizes that the king is too weak to process the betrayal of his family and states: "Man's nature cannot carry/ Th'affliction, nor the fear" (3.2.48-49), expressing that whether it is because of the storm, or of his daughters' betrayal, Lear is slowly gliding into madness. Ironically Lear's imperfect nature does not enable him to come to terms with the imperfection of human nature in general. The realism Shakespeare depicts is too harsh on his main character and makes him lose his mind ("my wits begin to turn" 3.2.68).

Before his downfall, Lear was a cold, rational king, who held softness in his heart for his family only, seen in his brutal communication with servants (as described before). Now he starts to become very emphatic towards anything. Towards the beggar Tom, who is Edgar in disguise (3.4.45) and towards the poor in general ("Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are, / (...), O, I have ta'en/ Too little care of this"). By now one can clearly see that Lear is not fit to fulfil the duty of a *uomo virtuoso* and that his weakness spreads out like a deadly disease, making him even more vulnerable.

It is not only the elements that Lear judges to be superior to his family. Also the advantages of being an animal are explored within *King Lear*. Edgar, in disguise, raises the topic of the different abilities various animals have: "hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in/ madness, lion in prey" (3.4.88). Interestingly, Shakespeare's use of three of those metaphors (lion, fox and wolf) reconnects to Machiavelli, who employs the latter in *Il Principe* in order to express the different attitudes a good ruler needs to possess (72). The character Lear lacks those abilities, as otherwise he would still be a successful authority. Inspired by Edgar's speech he accepts his insufficiency as a leader, as well as his inferiority to wildlife and cries out the desire to get rid of his clothes. "Thou/ ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep/ no wool, the cat no perfume (...)/ Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor,/ bare, forked animal as thou art" (3.4.102-105). Lear also tells Edgar: "thou art the thing itself" (3.4.104), describing his wish to be as innocent and intuitive just like the mad beggar or an animal

without human consciousness. Lear has understood that he is too flawed to function as the *uomo virtuoso*, however now, while his madness has made him softer and his experiences have made him bitter, he starts condemning those skills that he never had. He describes the two women that have betrayed him and whom he sees to be the more skilful rulers, obviously because they have conquered him, to be a mixture of animal and human. He calls out: “Down from the waist they are/ centaurs, though women all above. But to the girdle do/ the gods inherit, beneath is all the fiend’s; there’s hell, (...)” (4.6.121-123). It sounds like Lear is insulting his daughters, but, by taking account of Machiavelli’s system of theories, it can also be understood as a compliment. The centaur is in fact the same metaphor which Machiavelli uses to describe the perfect new Prince. At this point, it is almost possible to draw back a connection to the concept of the body politic. Like in the Christian propaganda, Machiavelli wants the monarch to be double natured, only he doesn’t distinguish between the human and the divine; he wants the monarch to unify the human ration with the intuition of the animal (Kersting 97).

The last relevant speech-act of Lear’s, in regards to politics, is an epitome of Machiavellian philosophy. As already explained before, it is important for Machiavelli to seem to be skilful, able, good and virtuous but not necessarily be like that (Kersting 94-95). Lear supports this claim by saying: “Plate sin with gold, / And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;”. He is reflecting on his experiences with the initial demands he made, while breaking up the country, and what happened to those ‘laws’ when the power had shifted. “None does offend, none, I say none. I’ll able ‘em;/ Take that of me, my friend, who have the power/ To seal th’accuser’s lips”. In Machiavelli’s eyes the power of the judicative lies in the hands of the powerful authority only and is not existent independently (Kröner XVII), which Lear has come to learn the hard way.

In the end Lear’s mistake to love will kill him, even if the loyalty of his subjects and his other daughter would have saved him from imprisonment (5.3). The pain he suffers, caused by the death of Cordelia, is too overbearing for his soft soul. Shakespeare, influenced by Machiavelli, cannot allow mercy on this character, as he has become so unfit to hold his power.

5. Conclusion

All in all, the just presented arguments make clear that King Lear, within the tragedy *King Lear*, is an authority that bases his power not on the divine right, but on a realistic approach on politics. His ruin is his emotionality, a flaw that would not be called one, if Lear was just a regular man. However Niccolò Machiavelli, in his text *Il Principe*, advises every politician who wants to be successful, to not interfuse politics with private matters like: emotions, morals and ethics. This causes Lear's doom. Whilst researching for this work, the extent of Machiavellian statements, found throughout the entire tragedy, has become very surprising. Edgar, Gloucester and the Fool are all characters one would not have expected it from, but who indeed express Machiavellian wisdom within the play. Further research could be applied on how the entire tragedy is shaped around the Machiavellian concept and why/how the individual character fail in achieving their goals, which would incorporate a further interpretation on the undefined ending of the play, when the question of authority is still unanswered. In that matter, especially the character of Cordelia presents a problem, because one is so at loss to explain her actions in a Machiavellian way. Therefore this topic needs further evaluation on her stressing the logic of the tragedy. However already this brief work has shown a few reasons why Shakespeare's play seems to possess an immortal timeliness: Its ambiguity allows modern readers to feel empathy, because they can understand it easily, without further insight knowledge of the common world-picture of its particular time. Shakespeare's approach on politics and humanity in general, in addition with his talent to portray realistic characters, give the contemporary reader an insight into the surprisingly modern mindset of an author, living and writing in the time during Elisabeth I and James I reign.

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