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“I'm all for cheating. This is war.”
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Net, ma eckt ja jeden Tag an irgendeinem Betrug an, ob's a Gastwirt is, oder in am Kaffeehaus, oder am Meer, oder im Gebirge. Im Grunde is alles a Betrug und a Selbstbetrug, aber – eigentlich großartig. Ohne den Betrug würde ja alles zusammenfallen und wär nix mehr.

Thomas Bernhard, *Eine Herausforderung*

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1. Acknowledgements

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Praise Timo, the greatest landlord of all. Long may he reign.

2. Introduction

Machiavelli's cardinal achievement is his uncovering of an insoluble dilemma, the planting of a permanent question mark in the path of posterity. It stems from his *de facto* recognition that ends equally ultimate, equally sacred, may contradict each other, that entire systems of value may come into collision without possibility of rational arbitration, and that not merely in exceptional circumstances, as a result of abnormality or accident or error—the clash of Antigone and Creon or in the story of Tristan—but (this was surely new) as part of the normal human situation. (Berlin 1971)

This evaluation of Machiavelli might seem counter-intuitive when we think of his usual connotations. Describing someone as 'Machiavellian' is generally less compliment than negative verdict. After all, the namesake of the word himself is widely regarded as an advocate of ruthless and immoral politics, condoning lies and brutality as perfectly reasonable means to rise above enemies.

At the same time, this nexus of manipulation and political ascension proves fascinating today as well. Najemy lists countless examples of books dedicated to Machiavelli's application in business, (office) politics and management (2010, 6). As often the case, the controversy surrounding his name allows for powerful attraction, and so does his renowned pragmatism. Machiavelli's most famous work, the *Prince*, a short, yet dense book for new rulers, is often summarized under the simple law that the ends justify the means. A closer look at his teachings complicates things, however. Despite Machiavelli's works having been studied for centuries, their interpretation eludes any definite consensus. While the aforementioned pragmatism surely is a constituent factor, it presents itself as more nuanced and embedded in a vast political universe that, despite this term, seemingly allows for no unified theory.

The connection between Machiavelli and *Game of Thrones* is not a new observation. The saga's creator George R. R. Martin himself has commented on the historical inspirations for his writing, which, in addition to English and Scottish history, include the struggles between the Italian city-states of the Renaissance. In an interview with the BBC, he specifically describes a number of his characters as Machiavellian, talking about Petyr Baelish in detail. The reason for the influence of history is Martin's desire to portray ruling over any extended territory as a complex and difficult endeavor (universalnews8). It is fitting to think of Machiavelli's influence in this context. In a more general sense, *Game of Thrones* features

political machinations and ethical dilemmas similar to those included in his writings. Nevertheless, there have only been few detailed analyses of this connection. For example, several articles in the collection *Game of Thrones and Philosophy* mention Machiavelli, with Schulzke and Hahn treating his theories more thoroughly (Jacoby 2012). Schulzke examines the main characters using selective examples of their behavior, while Hahn focuses on Ned Stark's downfall specifically. There are numerous online (newspaper) articles and blogs inspecting *Game of Thrones* from a Machiavellian angle, for example Della Quercia (2014), Ede (2013), Bland (2014) and Liedl (2013). In another medium, users of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* forums debate the Machiavellian competence of characters, as in two threads by user dmo862000 (2013).

Still, there is no wider chronological analysis of the current four seasons of the series. At the same time, Machiavelli's most substantial opus, the *Discourses on Livy*, is often absent from discussion. All of these factors add to providing the gap this thesis means to explore. Its main aims are to provide a basic, yet differentiated view of Machiavelli's life and writings, as well as to use the gained knowledge as a telescope, panning across the world of *Game of Thrones*. Ideally, this will result in illuminating Machiavelli's theories, as well as in illustrating fundamental governing principles of Martin's cosmos. Another question always subtly resonates in our engaging with these topics: what happens when we project value systems, be it personal ones or perhaps those of Machiavelli, onto historical and fictional worlds? Whatever answers may be, by considering these worlds and systems we certainly gain insight into our very own.

3. Machiavellian Politics

The following section introduces Machiavelli's life and works in stretto, as his writing is chiefly informed by his first-hand experiences in Florentine politics. The most important works, including *The Prince*, *The Discourses on Livy*, *The History of Florence* and *The Art of War*, were written only after the end of his political career, which provided them with a strong empirical foundation. For this reason, it is necessary to provide historical context, touching upon Machiavelli's biography and the Florence of his time. Apart from the aforementioned works, he produced a variety of smaller political and historical treatises, as well as (humorous) poems and drama, the most famous example being his play *Mandragola*. This chapter remains a brief overview, as the mere attempt to summarize Machiavelli scholarship and its manifold positions would require a thesis of its own. To provide continuity, I have chosen to quote the primary texts by Machiavelli with his name and the year of their respective translation used. Original spelling and capitalization of those quotes are retained.

Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli was born in Florence on May 3rd, 1469. Originating from an established but only modestly wealthy family, he received a thorough education, which included learning Latin and reading classical literature (Femia 2). His upbringing was informed by a general climate of being conscious of history and aspiring to past ideals, a central view of humanism. Najemy stresses that “[t]o assimilate and emulate the ancient Romans, who had inhabited the same cities and walked the same streets as did Renaissance Italians, became the essence of education and culture” (2010, 9). This is reflected in the books Machiavelli's father possessed, including the main works of Cicero, and *Ab urbe condita*, Livy's history of Rome. The latter would later become the basis for Machiavelli's ambitious treatise titled *Discourses on Livy*. In it, he mentions the profound impact of childhood influences on a person's life, which again stresses the importance of his classical education (Atkinson 15). Having acquired Latin at an early age, he was able to read Roman writers' original texts and Greek writers in translation, including important figures such as Tacitus, Sallust, Ovid, Virgil and Plautus, as well as Aristotle, Plato and Thucydides. In contrast to his boyhood, sources on Machiavelli's young adult life are scarce until the start of his first political office in 1498 (16).

As opposed to being a hereditary principality, the Florentine Republic rested on two socio-political factions, trying to exert control over one another:

From at least the early thirteenth century Florence's history was dominated by a competition, more intense and longer-lasting than similar confrontations elsewhere in Italy, between two distinct but overlapping political cultures and classes: an elite of powerful, wealthy families of international bankers, traders, and landowners organized as agnatic lineages; and a larger community of economically more modest local merchants, artisans, and professional groups organized in guilds and called the *popolo*. (Najemy 2006, 5)

Control of government alternated between the two classes, their power fluctuating during the different phases of the republic. For example, the beginning of the 14th century saw a dominance of the upper class families until the crisis of the 1340s (132). War expenses and a decelerating economy led to a revolt by the *popolo*, who then installed a new government. The class-internal feuds between noble families might have been regulated under a moral code, keeping them within bounds as not to jeopardize large-scale stability (17). "The entire process, from murder to punishment to peacemaking" was ritualized (19) and became part of the elite's sovereign culture. At the same time, these rivalries served as a way for the elite to transgress the popular laws, which condemned violent behavior (20). As a result, such conflicts were integrated into the nature of the republic, instead of plunging it into chaos. In 1390, a war between Florence and Milan began. It would be divided into shorter phases of conflict and times of peace, but ultimately last until the 1440s (189). During this time, Florence was conquering new territories after having already acquired part of the papal states. Other Tuscan cities such as Siena formed alliances with Milan in order to escape the Florentine expansion (189). Facing a prolonged military campaign, the government of Florence passed laws to counteract interior dissent. In addition, it made "attempts to manipulate public opinion with processions, public masses, bonfires, and dramatic announcements, all intended to sustain a sense of urgency and preserve support for the regime's war policy" (190). Ironically, the first major triumph over Milan in 1402 and the acquisition of Pisa became ideologically charged, making Florence's victory a symbol for republican values surpassing "monarchical tyranny" (200).

According to Kennedy, these struggles of the Florentine Republic represent a dilemma that permeates Machiavelli's writings: "[H]ow is republican liberty maintained in a context of

necessary territorial expansion?” (5). For if the republic plans to expand aggressively, it will be unable to manage its class dynamics, which has a destabilizing effect. Instead of complete unity within the state, Machiavelli acknowledges the necessity of continuous interior power struggles for the overall stability of the republic (6). However, if it focuses inwardly and ignores expanding, it will become vulnerable to rival states that seek to add to their dominion by conquest. Ultimately, there is no solution to this dilemma. Even if a state manages to balance these two extremes for prolonged periods of time, it will eventually crumble (7).

From 1434 on, Florence had been in the hands of the Medici family, a clan of bankers. Rather than overturning the republican constitution of the city, they experimented with swaying the traditional electoral processes into their favor (for an extensive treatise on their machinations, see Rubinstein 1997). There are few references to the Medici in Machiavelli's correspondence during his years of active political service (Butters 64). Only much later, they would have a direct effect on him by ending his career. However, as the city was influenced by the decades of Medici reign, Machiavelli would deal with the structures they had established.

The family rose to power under Cosimo de Medici during the wartime of the early 15th century. Similarly to the earlier crises, military expenses and citizen protests threatened the stability of Florence. Cosimo's immense wealth was one of the factors that enabled him to use this opportunity in order to gain influence (Najemy 255). With his funding, the Florentine military campaigns were able to continue, as paying mercenaries often forced the city to take loans from private citizens (265). Additional important factors for Cosimo's success were his good relationship with the papal court and the establishment of a well-structured party, allied with other noble families, but firmly led by the Medici (268). Their growing influence did not go unnoticed, as the family was accused of various crimes in 1433, leading to a vote on the banishment of Cosimo. He was forced to leave Florence, only to return in the following year and to now banish his opponents at the start of what would become three more decades of his rule (274). His son, Piero the Gouty (a condition he shares with Doran Martell), succeeded and reigned for five years. In turn, Piero's son Lorenzo ascended into power in 1469 and subsequently became one of the most famous patrons of the arts in history (341). In contrast to his grandfather, who had cultivated a style of covert leadership, Lorenzo fashioned himself as a true aristocratic prince. In the 1470s, the Medici banks' wealth declined. At the same time, disputes with the papacy grew and finally culminated in an assassination attempt on

Lorenzo in 1478, leaving him wounded, but alive (356). The following hunt for the conspirators marked one of Florence's darkest days, resulting in the execution of over 80 citizens. Lorenzo's survival strengthened his image, which was useful in the immediately following war declared by Pope Sixtus IV. It lasted two years and severely threatened the position of Florence, until the Ottoman invasion allowed for a hasty diplomatic end of the conflict (361). In order to secure his control further once again, Lorenzo installed a central government council, called the Seventy. They were elected for five years, effectively controlling all areas of administration, and governed with negligible resistance during Lorenzo's final stretch (362). After his death in 1492, his son Piero succeeded and only reigned for two years.

In the following epoch, Florence underwent political changes in quick succession. French troops under Charles VIII had taken the city in 1494, which marked the temporary end of the Medici dominance (Femia 2). The next four years saw Florence under the rule of Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican priest with the desire to reform and with contempt for a “hedonistic Church” (Atkinson 16). In order to further his vision of a new republican government, he urged the founding of a Great Council as a tool of democracy, extending the small council of the Seventy. At the same time, he welcomed the French king as an upholder of religious morality. Savonarola of course also created enemies, including Pope Alexander VI, who opposed his strict moral views and condemnation of the Florentine practices before his reign (17). Ultimately, he was overthrown and executed in 1498.

Savonarola is among the first-hand political examples in Machiavelli's writings, who was supposedly critical of the Friar in private, but presents an unemotional written account of his rule. Chapter VI of *The Prince* is occupied with the difficulties faced by newly established princes who seek to secure their influence while changing existing structures. Savonarola is described as not having been qualified enough to retain the people's support while pushing for a new republican order and passing new laws (2003, 21). Had he been successful in his endeavors of change, his future reign would have been unquestioned. Machiavelli justifies this claim by stating that creating a new form of government is highly difficult, but safeguarding it afterwards is easy, given military power and that its opponents have been taken care of. In this way, the people will come to accept the new authority as natural.

Machiavelli attended two sermons by Savonarola, criticizing, but also ascribing to him a certain adaptability and skill as an orator (Atkinson 17). This went as far as the Friar convincing the Florentines “that he spoke with God” (Machiavelli 1883, 63). Machiavelli refrains from judging whether this was true or not, for the reason that “of so great a man we must speak with reverence; but this I do say, that very many believed him without having witnessed anything extraordinary to warrant their belief; his life, his doctrines, the matter whereof he treated, being sufficient to enlist their faith” (65). Interestingly, Machiavelli picks up on Savonarola's alleged prophetic abilities again in chapter LVI of the *Discourses*, titled “That when great Calamities are about to befall a City or Country, Signs are seen to presage, and Seers arise who foretell them” (186). Continuing on the same page, he collects historical examples of such signs, including his immediate past: “And not to travel too far afield for evidence of this, every one knows that long before the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France, his coming was foretold by the friar Girolamo Savonarola”. Predicting the invasion of a foreign king, however wishful or far-fetched, could easily be dismissed as based on knowledge of the real world, rather than being able to communicate with God. Still, Machiavelli remains neutral on the subject. Concluding the chapter, he stresses the need to have these matters examined by someone with knowledge of the supernatural, which he does not possess. However, he claims that there is no denying of the existence of such potentially metaphysical phenomena (187).

After Savonarola, the administration under the Great Council continued, having around 3500 members at this point. Membership was hereditary and for life. The council formed the ultimate authority in matters of governance, and candidates for temporary posts were chosen from its personal (Pesman 49). Despite including members of both the elite and the *popolo*, there was no institution providing separate influence for the former. This led to tensions, as the higher class families were not granted a council analogous to the Seventy under the Medici (49). In order to remedy this, an unexpected motion passed: the *gonfaloniere*, “Standardbearer of Justice [and] titular head of state” (50), should now be elected for life. In 1502, Piero Soderini was chosen to hold this office for the very first time. He originated from an influential elite family, yet was of no clear political allegiance. Nevertheless, he had an unambiguous agenda, which Pesman summarizes as

financial and judicial reform; a system of taxation acceptable to the Great Council and capable of generating sufficient revenue; and the recapture of Pisa. In foreign policy, Soderini believed that Florence's security was best protected by unswerving loyalty to France. (51)

Soderini and Machiavelli had an amicable relationship "based on mutual respect, common political interests, and shared views on the realities of the political world" (5).

Savonarola's removal had opened up further positions in the Florentine government. However, Machiavelli's subsequent election into the office of second chancellor seems surprising, since he had no prior experience in politics (it was his second attempt, after having lost the previous election in 1498). As a possible explanation, Black suggests the traditional political neutrality of the post (31). This was desirable to the city, as chancery officials generally held their positions for longer periods of time than magistrates. By installing neutral candidates, there was less danger of them using their longevity to further specific party interests (32). The fact that Machiavelli had no political affiliation could be the reason for his success in the elections. However, since there are so few records of the previous part of his life, he might have held smaller offices without surviving documentation before (Gilbert 17). Machiavelli was devoted to Florence, writing, "I love my native city more than my own soul" (43).

The duties of the second chancellor were largely related to foreign affairs. They included communication with Florentine subjects of all kinds outside of the city, and relaying decisions made by the Florentine magistracy and the Ten of War, a military council elected during wartimes (Black 32). Additionally, Machiavelli was sent on diplomatic missions within Italy initially, but soon including negotiations with important officials of foreign states. These missions did not allow for much writing, but he nevertheless managed to produce smaller works mainly focused on foreign politics, including titles such as "Report on German affairs" or "Portrait of French affairs" (40). Several of his first assignments concerned the recruitment of and negotiation with leaders of mercenary armies. One such leader from France attacked Pisa on order of Florence in 1500, which proved to be an unsuccessful endeavor (33). As a result, Machiavelli was sent to appease the French king in the same year. 1505 saw another failed attack on Pisa, again at the hands of unreliable

mercenaries. Influenced by these experiences, Machiavelli became even more disapproving of employing soldiers from outside Florence. Already before 1505, he had begun constructing plans for the founding of a local Florentine militia. Soderini and his clerical brother supported these plans, leading to the official establishment of the militia by law (35). Additionally, the council of the Nine was founded. It served as the administration of the militia during times of peace, with Machiavelli being its chancellor. He oversaw the initial formation and administration of the new force himself, and his concern with military affairs would later become evident in his writings as well. In chapter XIV of the *Prince*, he states that “a prince [...] must have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline. The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler” (47). It is quite striking to find all the various facets of rulership as presented in the *Prince* reduced to this one basic truth. However, the necessity of military faculties is undeniable when considering Machiavelli's contemporaries and predecessors. According to him, the superior success rate of locally rooted armies is documented by historical experience, as they are bound to fight well for their place of origin. In the *Discourses*, he elaborates in detail on how the loyalty of soldiers should belong to their state as opposed to their leader (Najemy 2006, 412). In the latter case, there is the danger of troops becoming completely devoted to their commander's personal agenda, and thus turning into a threat to the republic.

The importance of the topic of military resulted in the *Art of War*, a treatise in form of a humanist dialogue, written by Machiavelli around 1519 and 1520. It is occupied with the question of the position of military structures within a state, as well as historical approaches concerning warfare and the establishment of forces (Hörnqvist 121). Consisting of seven parts, the book includes accounts of Roman practices and advice on all phases of combat, from the initial assembly of troops to tactics and siege (122). Interestingly, the *Art of War* shifts the focus from individual achievements and importance as established in the *Prince* and the *Discourses* onto abstract entities, such as institutions or actions. In one instance, for example, Machiavelli “commends the military captains of the early republic for having acquired glory, not by a calculated use of force and fraud, but by acting as ‘valiant and good men’” (123). Certainly, he did not abandon his personal causes, as he debates his very own militia in the *Art of War* at one point, reaffirming its necessity. Hörnqvist argues that the more conventional political views presented in the text might be an attempt by Machiavelli to

mitigate the controversy sparked by his other writings, but does not deny them certain subversive undertones (123). Butters echoes this sentiment, stating that the focus on Roman methods and the rather harmless political tone were “not likely to offend [the] readers” (71).

Lynch offers an essay appended to his translation of the *Art of War*, which he intends as a defense of Machiavelli's military advice. The advice put forth in the book has widely been criticized, citing, for example, Machiavelli's insufficient expertise concerning the changes in warfare at the time (180). The nature of Italian state-of-the-art tactics and troops underwent substantial reforms during the crossing from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Originally, the norm was a well-calibrated force consisting of both heavy and light cavalry and infantry (181, 2003a). These could be aided by a variety of ballistic weapons, but in general, heavy riders were key to dispersing an enemy army. With the emergence of Swiss anti-cavalry infantry, the focus began to shift. All of a sudden, this well-trained, pike-carrying infantry was not only able to withstand the mounted collision, but even aggressively challenge it (181). At the same time, gunpowder weapons became more widely available. However, their spread did not instantly revolutionize warfare, as it would take centuries for them to become efficiently established (183).

These two factors posed significant problems to the Italian military leaders of the 16th century. They were left with cavalry that could no longer decide battles to the extent it used to, while having to develop ways to integrate the new technology into their forces.

In the final chapter of the *Prince*, Machiavelli bewails Italy's lost status of military dominance, and calls upon its rulers to free their country (2003, 84). In true rock-paper-scissors fashion, he demonstrates how their enemies of Swiss and Spanish origin might be overcome: Since the Spanish infantry is weak against French cavalry, and the Swiss infantry is weak against the Spanish, it is possible to imagine an army that perfectly counters both. Machiavelli's respect for the infantry of Italy's enemies is reflected in the militia he himself promoted. Inspired by the Swiss and recurring to the armies of ancient Rome, he argued for foot soldiers to be the basis of a powerful force (Hörnqvist 122). Still, he understood the need of an effective combination of units, and pushed for flexibility, rather than monolithic rigidity in an army. This included, for example, sacrificing well-protected flanks in exchange for greater mobility (2003a, 183).

For long after Machiavelli's time, the dilemmas of army composition remained topical, especially considering the new gunpowder weapons. Soldiers using early handheld firearms, called arquebuses, proved to be of great effect when protected and combined with other army units (2003a, 182). However, finding the right combinations necessitated experimenting in battles. As the years passed, this resulted in an absurd, yet understandable equilibrium:

The dominance of the pike could only be countered by the combination of cavalry and some type of shot. Since this combination of cavalry and shot could only be countered by its own kind, pike squares needed cavalry and shot on their own side; yet given that shot and cavalry without their own pikemen were vulnerable to enemy pike, they needed their own pikemen. In a word, each element needed the others to carry out its function successfully (183)

During his time as second chancellor, Machiavelli had several formative encounters with Cesare Borgia on diplomatic missions. At that time, Borgia was constructing a state of his own from papal territories granted to him by his father, Pope Alexander VI. Machiavelli was sent to the duke for the first time in 1502, a meeting requested by Borgia after his men had revolted in Arezzo, a town subject to Florence (Black 33). They met again in late 1502, this time in the context of difficult negotiations. Reporting to the Ten, Machiavelli wrote about the skillfully evasive Borgia, who “would seem to want a treaty between you and him to be drawn up quickly, nevertheless, in spite of the fact that I pressed him closely in order to get some particulars out of him, I was always outflanked and never could get out of him more than I have written”(Atkinson 19).

Borgia is perhaps the best example to illustrate one of Machiavelli's central concerns, the struggle of human agency and virtue against fortune. Descriptions of the duke's rise and fall form key passages of the *Prince*. Chapter VII discusses “New principalities acquired with the help of fortune and foreign arms”, stating that princes who came into power in such ways have great difficulty maintaining their rule, unless they are extremely talented and quickly learn to adapt to their new situation. Machiavelli adduces Borgia as such a talent, capable of planning for eventualities and being brutal when necessary. In one such instance, after having conquered the Romagna with French military help and a multitude of diplomatic sleights, Borgia installed the exceedingly cruel Remirro de Orco in order to unify the territory (25).

After the plan had succeeded, the duke founded a civil government in order to limit his subordinate ruler's power. As a final step, he had de Orco cut in two and his body displayed in public, which shocked the population and diverted its accumulated hatred.

Despite considerable victories and great ability, Borgia's fall became imminent after the death of his father in 1503. The succeeding pope was sympathetic towards him, but died after only two months in office (Black 34). Borgia had significant influence on the papal elections, but committed the mistake of supporting Julius II, who had been exiled by Alexander before and planned to take revenge. This led to the duke's imprisonment and loss of his properties. While also citing his failures, Machiavelli claims that Borgia was on the path to becoming an independent and long-lasting ruler, furthering the recruitment of his own troops and gradually distancing himself from the French and papal support (2003, 27). However, fortune struck him with sickness at first, and then with the loss of his father before having gained a fully sovereign state. Nevertheless, Borgia embodied the most fundamental attributes praised in the *Prince*, earning him the following passage: "I know no better precepts to give a new prince than ones derived from Cesare's actions" (23).

In 1509, Machiavelli witnessed the conquest of Pisa, which marked a high point of his career. At the time, Julius II and the Holy League became the main threat to Florence. The pope's aim was to terminate French influence in Italy, which had just been increased by the loss of Venetian territories (Black 36). Machiavelli was sent to the French king Louis XII in 1510, who, in turn, had the aim of disposing of the pope. Florence's amicable relations with France trapped the city between both parties, as Louis expected it to aid him in his struggle with Julius. After a wave of armed conflict between France and the Holy League, the pope sent Spanish troops to conquer Florence as punishment in 1512 (37). This resulted in the end of Soderini's reign and the reestablishment of the Medici family, who removed Machiavelli from office. He reflects on the end of this era in the *Discourses*, referring to

the fall of Piero Soderini, which had no other cause than there not being in our republic any law under which powerful and ambitious citizens can be impeached. [...] [H]ad there been proper methods for obtaining redress, either the people would have impeached Piero if he was guilty, and thus have given vent to their displeasure without calling in the Spanish army; or if he was innocent, would not have ventured, through fear of being accused themselves, to have taken proceedings against him. (1883, 48)

The *gonfaloniere* is described as skillful “in securing the affections of the people” (172), favoring “patience and gentleness” (380), but having failed to adapt his style of leadership when circumstances made doing so a necessity. Thus, he lost favor with parts of the population, which ultimately added to his fall, signified by the Spanish takeover. Pesman stresses that the overall account of Soderini's reign in the *Discourses* emphasizes negative aspects, as its end also marked the fall of Machiavelli's beloved republic (61). Still true to his position, Machiavelli sent a note to the Medici party during the last days of his office, warning them against the very groups around the name Salviati who undermined Soderini (Butters 66). It was in the interest of the Salviati followers to maintain the popular government of the Great Council and adapt the constitution to the new ruling family. However, the Medici acted radically and overturned the council by force, installing an “emergency magistracy” (66). After Machiavelli's dismissal in November, he remained a free citizen for several months until his name was found in a document linked to an anti-Medici conspiracy. He was unjustly captured and tortured in February 1513, staying in prison until March, when he was released during the general amnesty due to the ascension of the Medici pope Leo X (67). After being freed, Machiavelli returned to his wife and children on his farm outside of Florence and began writing the *Prince* in the following summer (2003, xi). During this period, he would try to gain the favor of the Medici in order to return to political service, which explains the dedication of the *Prince* to the young Lorenzo, as well as the hortatio in its final chapter, urging the Medici to expel the foreign barbarians and restore Italy to its former glory. Machiavelli's initial attempts to enter the rulers' grace remained without success. He dedicated his time in factual exile to extended correspondence and discussion with friends, as well as occupying himself with reading classics and working on his own writings (xi). The creation of the *Discourses* began in 1515, and by 1516 the *Prince* was already circulating (xi). It seems adequate to end this section with a comparison of Machiavelli's two most widely received works, which will also be the main references for the analytical part of this thesis.

Without doubt, no other work of his has been as far reaching and divisive as the *Prince*. A short book of 26 chapters, its style consists of the introduction of a topic and its subsequent dissection with strict either/or constructions. The *Prince* gives practical advice to the new ruler of a principality, in order to secure position:

Machiavelli's masterpiece [the *Prince*] was thus conceived as a contribution to a familiar and well-worked genre, that of humanist advice-books for princes on the proper ends of government and how best to attain them. If we turn to Machiavelli's specific suggestions, moreover, we find that these too are at first sight almost equally familiar. The prince's basic aim, we learn in a phrase that echoes throughout *Il Principe*, must be *mantenere lo stato*, to maintain his power and existing frame of government. (Skinner 2003, 143).

Much of the lasting controversy resulting from the *Prince* originated from its seeming disregard for Christian morality. In the establishment of a leader's key quality, *virtù*, Machiavelli defines it as different from the common idea of virtue, which generally is associated with concepts like honor, piety and sincerity. *Virtù*, however, is the allegedly superior ability to simulate the qualities made necessary by the situation. In other words, a prince needs to be able to seem pious or trustworthy when it is the dictate of the moment, without really possessing these characteristics. To go even further, having virtues is an obstacle to a prince, as they act like chains, not wings. From a contemporary point of view, it seems natural to condemn these and the more gruesome parts of the *Prince* as morally deficient. This changes, however, when considering the surroundings of the work. Machiavelli lived in a city that saw violent overthrows of the government at regular intervals, alternating between bloodshed and large-scale administrative reforms. Longing for stability in a situation this volatile is quite understandable, even if reaching it might require radical measures.

A key inspiration for the *Prince* came from counter-intuitive, yet successful political steps taken by Julius II. The most striking one is retold in chapter XXV of the book, relating the pope's bold move to personally lead a campaign against Bologna, stunning both his enemies and reluctant allies (2003, 81). On another occasion, the pope seemingly recklessly entered a rebel city with an inferior armed force. Still, he reconquered the city, defying odds and common knowledge (Brown 158). These actions posed a severe problem to Machiavelli and his views on politics and human nature. Assuming that the latter cannot be changed in its individual appearances, he concluded that political achievement largely depends on whether the times favor a prince's inborn character. Sometimes preparation was the key to victory, yet other times imprudent actions proved to be just as effective. It follows that even for the most skilled prince there is no guarantee for success or longevity, because extreme blows by

fortune can never be overcome (158).

However, Machiavelli paradoxically ascribes the ability to alter their character to the wise in an exchange with a Florentine astrologer (159). By accepting the powerlessness with regards to the processes of the universe, it is possible for an individual of *virtù* to change. At the end of chapter XXV of the *Prince*, Machiavelli attests that “as fortune is changeable, whereas men are obstinate in their ways, men prosper so long as fortune and policy are in accord, and when there is a clash they fail” (2003, 81). This fundamental complex of agency and fortune is closely connected to the aforementioned account on Cesare Borgia, among others.

Many of the issues central to the *Prince* occur in the *Discourses* as well. However, the focus of the latter is on the topic of republics, while the former is occupied with principalities. Machiavelli explicitly excludes republics at the beginning of the *Prince*, writing that he “discussed them at length on another occasion” (2003, 7). To be more precise, Strauss argues that, instead of assigning the topic of republicanism to the *Discourses* and the topic of principalities to the *Prince*, it would be more appropriate to distinguish them in the following way:

Machiavelli treats in the *Prince* all subjects from the point of view of the prince whereas in the *Discourses* he treats numerous subjects from both the princely and the republican point of view. One is therefore inclined to suggest that in the *Discourses* Machiavelli presents the whole of his political teaching whereas in the *Prince* he presents only a part of it or perhaps discusses only a special case; one is inclined to suggest that the *Prince* is subordinate to the *Discourses*. (17)

He adds that the nature of the relation between the two works is still uncertain. There can be no debate, however, about the more comprehensive nature of the *Discourses* purely based on length, as the work consists of three books and 142 chapters in total. Beginning with the founding and nature of the Roman Republic, it discusses virtually all matters of government. These include the interior organization and different kinds of governments (including princes), warfare, religion, and again the influence of fortune and individual faculties, all aided by a multitude of historical examples and references to Roman matters. Within the book, many of Machiavelli's views from his political career are mirrored, for example the necessity of class dynamics and his advice to the Medici after Soderini (Book I, chapters IV and VII).

Both the *Prince* and the *Discourses* result in questions about Machiavelli's ideal form of government and proposed morality. All too often, analyses of his writings entail ethical judgment of the individual. Strauss, for example, begins his *Thoughts on Machiavelli* with the assertion that the simple view of deeming him “a teacher of evil” (9) is, while insufficient, still superior to what Femia calls a “sanitized version of Machiavelli”, which means a popular way of presenting him as a shining example of Florentine humanism, fighting for the republic and its people (vii). However, both historians agree that, while a complete understanding of person and work is out of reach, a nuanced reflection is necessary. Even though Machiavelli certainly proposed actions that are reprehensible to a great number of ethical systems, it seems imprecise to draw inferences from these propositions about his personal standards of morality (of course, they may have been reprehensible from many points of view after all). Rather, his writings appear as a realistic assessment of a political climate that had little regard for ethical concerns. To conclude, a complete unraveling of Machiavelli's views on government and its human associates seems impossible, which guarantees the continuation of academic debates in these matters for states to come.

In his final years, Machiavelli's devotion to his partially new identity as both a writer and still a student of history proves touching, as exemplified in a famous passage from a letter to his friend Francesco Vittori in 1513:

On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day's clothing, covered with mud and dust, and put on garments regal and courtly; and re clothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me. (Gilbert 142)

The following period saw him write the *Art of War* in the time around 1520 (published in 1521) among other works, as well as his commission by the Medici in the same year to write a history of Florence (2003, xii). He presented the latter to the Medici pope Clement VII in 1525. Two years later, Rome was conquered by German and Spanish troops, and in the course of the conflict, the Medici were once again removed from Florence in May of 1527. Machiavelli died a month later, his life ending in parallel with yet another radical incision in the history of his native city. His major works, the *Prince*, *Discourses*, and *History of Florence*, were published posthumously in 1531 and 1532 (xii).

4. Game of Thrones

Game of Thrones is an American TV series produced by HBO Television, with Daniel Bob Weiss and David Benioff as showrunners. The series is based on the novels from the *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga by the American author George R. R. Martin. Seasons One to Four are the primary text for this thesis (forty episodes in total), the former having premiered on April 17th, 2011. Season Five is scheduled to be released in April 2015. For its distribution, HBO will for the first time directly offer a program to the viewers via an online service, which was announced to launch alongside Season Five (Ocampo 2014, Miller 2014). *Game of Thrones* was the most widely pirated TV show of 2014, and it should be interesting to see in how far the option of legal streaming will influence this trend (Collinson 2014, Williams 2014). Martin, known for taking considerable time in his work, is currently in the process of writing book six of the intended seven. However, as the show already started using story elements of the fifth book in Season Four, complications may arise. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, the involved parties voice their concerns in no uncertain terms: “Asked if it’s conceivable the show could overtake its source material, Benioff says, ‘Yup.’ When I mention to Martin that Benioff and Weiss are catching up, he says, ‘They are. Yes. It’s alarming.’” (Windolf). As a safety device, Martin has already shared his intended ending of the books with the two showrunners, but only in rough outlines, as many details and fates of characters are still undecided.

Since the series deviates from the novels to a certain extent, it is necessary to mention that the chapters below adhere to the story as presented on television. For the sake of my conscience I will state the obvious: the following passages contain major spoilers for the first four seasons of *Game of Thrones*.

History and structure

Because some roads you shouldn't go down.
Because maps used to say, "There be dragons here."
Now they don't.
But that don't mean the dragons aren't there.

Lorne Malvo - *Fargo*

The events of *Game of Thrones* take place on the two largest continents of the “known world”, Westeros and Essos. Reminiscent of medieval Europe, Westeros features kings and queens, castles and knights, while Essos seems influenced by Arabic and Eastern themes. They are separated by the Narrow Sea, which is only narrow when compared to the massive oceans to the north and south. Crossing the Narrow Sea in order to begin a large-scale invasion is considered a daring and unlikely endeavor.

The precise extent of historical influences on specific cities and dominions is subject to debate. In the case of Valyria, for example, users of asoiaf.westeros.org largely agree on its resemblance to the Roman Empire. However, there are counterarguments and other proposed influences, such as ancient Egypt, Mycenae or even Atlantis (I.Know.Nothing 2011). In an interview with *Le Mouv*, George R. R. Martin himself comments on his historical inspirations, stating that he “[likes] the freedom of being able to draw on history and use it as a building block, but to rearrange it, to change it and to produce something that's unpredictable” (Hughes 2014). He adds that his personal concern with strictly historical fiction is already knowing the outcomes of battles and the ultimate fates of characters, which is not interesting to him. In order to counteract this and still embrace his love for history, he chooses to mix various historical entities in his writings, which leaves a considerable portion of the connection between *Game of Thrones* and actual history open for interpretation.

In the Machiavellian sense, Westeros is a principality (Najemy 2010, 108). It is ruled by local noble families, who are, at least theoretically, bound to answer to the king's commands. A common name of the realm is The Seven Kingdoms, a term predating the conquest by Aegon Targaryen. Before his arrival, there were seven independent kingdoms on Westeros, which he unified under the Iron Throne. The Targaryen family originated from Valyria on Essos, but after the destruction of the city relocated to the island of Dragonstone. Aegon landed in Westeros close to 300 years before the events of Season One, and his subsequent conquest

was also historical in the sense that it marks year zero of the Westerosi calendar (although, of course, nobody could really oppose the Targaryen's act of using the establishment of their dynasty as year zero). Much of the success of Aegon's campaign is owed to his three dragons, as he only commanded a small army. After becoming the first king of Westeros except for Dorne and everything north of the Wall, he installed noble families to rule over the constituent regions of the realm. These local authorities have sworn their allegiance to the king, yet are allowed to govern autonomously to a certain degree within their territories. Additionally, there is a Warden for each cardinal direction, who acts as the direct military commander of the region. Titles and lands are passed on hereditarily, the line of succession being oldest to youngest son and oldest to youngest daughter.

In comparison, most of Essos had been part of the Valyrian Empire for thousands of years. Despite having had access to dragons and magic, the empire ultimately perished in an apocalyptic event known as the Doom (of Valyria). It occurred approximately 100 years before Aegon's conquest, with only House Targaryen surviving. After the Doom, all of the Valyrians' achievements were lost, including their dragons. The only remaining ones were the three used by Aegon, and after their death, dragons were thought to be extinct.

At the beginning of *Game of Thrones*, Essos consists of numerous city-states, most of which were once under the rule of Valyria. Nine of its former colonies are now called the Free Cities, located towards the west of Essos. This again invites associations with the historical Italian city-states as distant successors of the Roman Empire. Other Essonian cities have retained their independence throughout their history, the most important examples being Braavos and Qarth. The former is home to the Faceless Men, an association of virtuoso assassins, and the seat of the Iron Bank, said to be the richest institution in the known world. The latter calls itself the greatest city that ever was or will be, and lies behind the Red Waste, which protects it from the Dothraki. These are a mounted people of feared warriors, comparable to the Mongolian horde or the Huns, and originate from the central grasslands of the continent. Dothraki are portrayed as forever eager to conquer and plunder, holding physical strength as their highest value. They are also known for fearing the sea and never having set foot on ships.

The Westerosi feudal system appears humane in comparison to the widespread slavery in

Essos. This also influences military structure. The rulers of the realm depend on the loyalty of their subject lords, who, in turn, have to rely on their bannermen. The Essonian cities largely deploy slave armies or various companies of paid mercenaries. It is difficult to absolutely compare the potential military power between the two continents. The series does not specify the strength of the sellsword companies that roam Essos, except for the Second Sons, who consist of 2000 riders. In Season Three, the Unsullied are established as the perfect foot soldiers, skilled, obedient and without concern for morale. Nevertheless, they are limited to a few thousand in number, which puts them at a disadvantage in terms of reach and prolonged campaigns that aim to conquer vast expanses of land. Holding an entire continent with just a small force of however highly skilled soldiers is simply not possible (reading players of Risk may have repeatedly been traumatized by this fact).

In contrast, the Westerosi lords may be plotting against each other and trying to further their positions, but should have less difficulty in mobilizing a sizable force in case of a common enemy invading. King Robert Baratheon questions this, claiming that assembling a superior force is not enough to overcome “one army [...] united behind one leader with one purpose” (S1E5). His concerns reference a potential invasion by the Dothraki, who very convincingly embody the idea of the Scourge of God. In her comparison of the two continents, Ramesh argues that even the unlikely alliance of Dothraki and an army of Unsullied could not control Westeros as a whole (2014). She lists a better strategic understanding and a more pervasive military culture as main reasons for the superiority of Westeros. Also, the great houses under the Iron Throne are more unified in structure than any political entity on Essos. The only access to reliable data would be the analysis of battles between the forces of the two territories, which have yet to occur. In any case, the concerns with potential conquest are very much one-sided, as throughout the entire series no one in Westeros expresses any desire to attack Essos. Most of their power struggles remain internal to their respective land mass.

Another important factor in terms of military is the portrayal of the cities' localities in *Game of Thrones*. As mentioned before, Westeros is depicted in a medieval European style. The main cities of the realm feature fortresses as the seat of the ruling family and extensive castle walls, protecting the immediate citizens. Outside of the cities, farms and smaller towns stretch across the country. They are the main suppliers of produce, and cutting off these

supplies is the basis for a successful siege. Many of the Essonian cities have the advantage of an established trade network by sea, which could be a necessary result of their barren surroundings. This makes them more independent of their direct environment, more resilient against attacks by land, and allows them to stay behind strong fortifications without worrying about starvation as much as their Westerosi counterparts. Still, the Dothraki horde is feared by all.

Regarding cultural development, the Essonian cities appear superior to those in Westeros. Striking differences include the aforementioned access to dragons and cultivation of magic, as well as being the origin of the most influential religions of the known world (notable exceptions are the Old Gods of the North and the Drowned God of the Iron Islands). Essonian products like Valyrian steel are revered and admired in Westeros. Ramesh lists the cultural differences between the continents in detail, including the advanced trade and artisanship on Essos, as well as its greater variety of languages and poetry (2013). She also mentions the extreme seasons on Westeros and its unifying, yet static feudal system as potential limiting factors for development.

There is a strong mystical component to the portrayal of Essos, which is reinforced in various ways. The focus of *Game of Thrones* clearly lies on Westeros, with Daenerys' plot as the sole exception until Season Five. As a result, there is less emphasis on Essos in terms of absolute on-screen time. Viewers are not familiarized visually in the same way as they are with Westeros. When characters outside of Essos reference experiences connected to the continent, their reports remain verbal only. These accounts are not supported by accompanying images, as *Game of Thrones* does not utilize flashbacks (Season Five is going to break with this tradition, introducing the first flashback of the series (Upadhyaya 2014)). Due to the wide spread of the internet, the series is globally accessible and can be consumed by a culturally diverse audience. European history is the main part of George R. R. Martin's inspiration for Westeros, which makes viewers from 'Western' countries likely to recognize the medieval flair as something familiar to them. This is different for viewers from outside this cultural context, but as the center of the series, it is Westeros that provides the largest number of characters, and, as a result, the largest number of opportunities for identification. However, for many of these characters, Essos serves as the great Other, which could have an alienating

effect on parts of the audience. Also for this reason, it would be interesting to analyze viewer's reactions to the depictions of different cultures within the series. Without doubt, *Game of Thrones* constitutes a worthwhile basis for investigations from a post-colonial point of view.

To provide an example of a continuously built-up mystical aura, a brief look at Braavos seems adequate. The city is not shown at all until Season Four, and even then, there is only a brief bird's-eye shot of it, including the colossus and the harbor, as well as the inside of the Iron Bank afterwards. Whenever the bank is mentioned, it is described as a fearsome and virtually omnipotent institution. Tywin Lannister notes that “we all live in its shadow and almost none of us know it. You can't run from them, you can't cheat them, you can't sway them with excuses” (S4E5). Its power resides in the ability to turn wars at will by simply funding one side. So far, the series has not specified if the Faceless Men embark on missions for the bank. Access to this order would enable the bank to dispose of single enemies even more pointedly. Two of the few Braavosi characters appearing are noteworthy as well. Arya's alleged dancing master Syrio Forel hails from the city, and so does Jaquen H'ghar, a Faceless Man. Both of them have largely unknown backgrounds and display close to super-human skill in their respective profession (in the case of Jaquen even fully super-human at one point). Syrio held a seemingly prestigious office as a warrior and stresses the different quality of the Braavosi technique of sword fighting. His pronounced accent and emotionally invested style of teaching add to his foreign air. Quite the opposite, Jaquen appears reserved and unemotional, while cultivating a unique way of evading the use of personal pronouns. Again, use of language marks him as a foreigner, as does his devotion to the Essonian cult of the Red God. After having disposed of a respectable number of Lannister guards, Jaquen hands Arya a coin from Braavos as a tool for finding him again, stressing that its value is not that of regular currency. In addition, he teaches her the High Valyrian phrase “valar morghulis”, which is later revealed to mean “all men must die”. All of these factors mesh to present Braavos as a mysterious, incredibly powerful entity. Working with the unknown and presenting more and more brief glimpses of it is a very basic, yet highly effective technique for building tension and capturing the viewers' curiosity.

The political situation in Westeros at the beginning of Season One is a direct result of Robert's Rebellion. This event marked the end of the Targaryen dynasty and its last king

Aerys II., commonly referred to as the Mad King. Prince Rhaegar, Aerys' oldest son and brother to Viserys and Daenerys, abducted Lyanna Stark, who was the younger sister of Ned and Brandon Stark, as well as the intended wife of Robert Baratheon. The situation was additionally charged as Rhaegar had already been married to Princess Elia Martell of Dorne, resulting in two children. When Brandon rode to King's Landing to have the Targaryens explain themselves, he was imprisoned, which led to his father Rickard being summoned to court. Both were then executed on order of the Mad King, who planned to eliminate the remaining Starks for treason as well. Because of this cruel act, the houses Arryn, Stark and Baratheon rose in rebellion against the throne. Several of the following battles were a result of interior quarrels of the rebel alliance, as not all lower houses immediately followed their cause. The decisive battle against the royal army occurred at the Trident, which saw the death of Rhaegar at the hands of Robert. After scattering the royalists, the next major aim of the alliance was to take King's Landing.

Tywin Lannister was originally loyal to the crown, having been a highly competent Hand of the King, as well as his closest friend for twenty years. However, Aerys' madness and jealousy grew more intense and led to their eventual rift. Tywin resigned as Hand and resumed his position as Lord of Casterly Rock. During the rebellion, he ignored the king's call for support and instead waited for a decisive battle before declaring his allegiance. When it became clear that the rebellion would be successful, he marched the Lannisters' army to King's Landing, claiming to have come as an ally. Aerys ignored Lord Varys' warnings and instead heeded Grand Maester Pycelle's advice to open the gates. Tywin ordered his army to take the city, resulting in what is now referred to as the Sack of King's Landing, and in the death of Elia Martell and her children. Aerys' final order to his Hand was to set the city ablaze with wildfire, incinerating every person and thing in it. Before the order could be carried out, both the Hand and Aerys were killed by Kingsguard member Jaime Lannister, who became known as the Kingslayer. Tywin used the opportunity to marry his daughter Cersei to the new king Robert, as Lyanna had been found dead by Ned near Dorne. The series begins seventeen years after Robert's ascension to the throne.

The sheer number of characters and storylines in *Game of Thrones* makes it impossible to cover all of them, and I apologize in the likely case someone's favorite character is not addressed to a satisfactory extent. Despite Jon Snow being a person of great *virtù*, I have chosen not to cover the rather isolated plots revolving around the Night's Watch, as the rest of Westeros already offers an incredibly high level of Machiavellian scheming, providing a stunning amount of material for analysis.

4.1. Season One

A strange game. The only winning move is not to play.

WarGames

The story begins with the death of Jon Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie, who had been Hand of the King for all of Robert's reign. Arryn was known to be a man of peace and prudence, well-liked by the populace. Initially, a strong fever is given as the reason for his passing. King Robert's choice for the new Hand is his old friend and brother in arms Eddard Stark, whom he trusts completely. Ned became Warden of the North and Lord of Winterfell after his father's death, having last seen Robert nine years ago. In order to give Ned no chance to decline, the king rides northward personally.

Chapter XXII of the *Prince* is concerned with the assembly of the ruler's staff. The infallible way to finding a suitable minister is to look for someone who is ultimately selfless and thinks only of the prince and the government (2003, 75). In turn, the prince must bestow honor and riches upon this minister, fulfilling his needs and nurturing interdependence. Ned certainly fulfills the first requirement, and Robert is ready to honor this by immediately staging a tournament for the new Hand. However, Ned's selflessness goes so far as to him being unable to accept any extravagant tributes, because he only thinks about the arising costs for an already indebted crown.

In the same chapter, Machiavelli outlines three kinds of intelligence a leader must possess: "one kind understands things for itself, the second appreciates what others can understand, the third understands neither for itself nor through others. The first kind is excellent, the second good, and the third kind useless" (74). It is difficult to determine whether Robert was ever in possession of the first kind of intelligence, as years of alcohol abuse surely have taken a toll on his mental capabilities. However, he at least possesses the second kind, being able to see Ned's loyalty and talent for leadership. At the same time, Ned's code of honor would hinder him a great deal in the cutthroat environment of King's Landing, which Robert did not anticipate. He could have picked any of the Lannisters or one of his two brothers for the position of Hand, but does not for reasons of distrust. His disdain for the Lannisters is quite obvious, so is the strained relationship between the Baratheon brothers. Choosing Ned was to choose trust and rigid morality over potentially disloyal expertise. While the right decision in an abstract sense, it would later prove to be catastrophic.

At his first Small Council meeting, Ned becomes acquainted with his subordinate ministers. Each discrete part of the realm's government is represented by one member of the council. They are Lord Varys, Master of Whisperers, Lord Baelish “Littlefinger”, Master of Coin, Lord Renly Baratheon, Master of Law, the absent Lord Stannis Baratheon, Master of Ships, Ser Barristan Selmy, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, and Grand Maester Pycelle. King and Hand count as members as well, so does a potential king or queen regent. Robert rarely joins meetings, as he prefers spending his time on various distractions. He began his reign as an established and skillful warrior, who presented his *virtù* on the battlefield. Governing a kingdom proved to be an unsuitable occupation for him, which led to reliance on others to rule in his stead. Robert's reckless spending and regular disregard for advice has driven the realm to financial ruin, which Ned is shocked to find out. This leads to a debate, during which Varys, conscious of class dynamics, explains the necessity of events like the planned tournament for unimpeded governing, as the elite has a chance to add to its glory, while the common people are distracted from their daily hardships.

Exiled across the Narrow Sea, Viserys and Daenerys Targaryen reside in Pentos, one of the Free Cities on Essos. They are the surviving children of Aerys II, making them the last of their name (except for Maester Aemon of the Night's Watch, who renounced all of his birth rights when entering the order). Viserys is heir to the 300-year-old dynasty, a fact he is very much conscious of. He finds himself in this situation as a result of his father's failure to keep the throne. Descending from a well-established royal house, Aerys was in an advantageous position at the beginning of his reign. Machiavelli stresses the positives of a prince who came into power by succession, claiming that “if he does not provoke hatred by extraordinary vices, it stands to reason that his subjects should naturally be well disposed towards him” (2003, 8). However, Aerys' aggravating insanity made him cruel and erratic, which incited hatred. This was the fundamental reason for the erupting rebellion and subsequent end of three centuries of Targaryen dominance.

Viserys' plan for retaking Westeros is to wed his sister to the Dothraki Khal Drogo in exchange for his vast army. Considering the limited options Viserys has, he is forced to rely on the support of others for coming into power. While entering dependence is already problematic enough, he also displays an exceptional lack of *virtù*. Arrogance and a sense of entitlement are his greatest vices, rendering him unable to adjust to new circumstances and be

diplomatic when necessary. This becomes obvious on numerous occasions: During the Dothraki march to their sacred city he becomes furious when Daenerys orders everyone, including him, to stop. His ceaseless references to the Targaryen lineage and the monstrous usurper Robert seem ironic. As Ser Jorah comments, Aegon Targaryen had no right to rule Westeros, he conquered it because he could. Going back in time far enough, every dynasty was once founded by usurpers. In another instance, Viserys is upset by Dothraki gifts given to him by Daenerys. He takes them as an insult and assaults her. Drawing a sword in the sacred city of the Dothraki proves to be his last misstep, resulting in his death by molten gold.

Daenerys, in contrast, starts from a position of absolutely no power, being treated as mere property. By adapting to the Dothraki customs, learning their language and following their rituals, she slowly rises to become their accepted queen, called a Khaleesi. This is aided by her frequent questions about the customs and people of Essos, posed to Jorah or her immediate servants. Despite initially adverse fortune, she steadily improves her position by means of *virtù*.

The beginning friendship of the exiled knight and the new Khaleesi springs from their shared place of origin and Jorah's support of the Targaryen claim. Despite him still being a spy for the Small Council, honest trust begins developing between them. Before Viserys' death, Jorah and Daenerys had already agreed that they would rather not have him ascend the Iron Throne. Jorah had quickly lost his faith in the labile prince and began supporting Daenerys. In the second book of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli warns against any of these relations, writing “[o]f the Danger of trusting banished Men” (1883, 326). In his view, it is foolish to trust any exile, because when finding a better way to return home than the one they originally promised themselves to, they are ready to break their word without second thought. Regarding Jorah, a lone and thus flexible knight, this means that he would freely change his loyalty between the crown and the Targaryens, depending on which pact would grant him the better chances of returning to Westeros. Eventually, his emotional investment makes him cease to report back to King's Landing, declaring his allegiance unambiguously. It would take until Season Four for this decision to haunt him.

Back in King's Landing, news of Daenerys' wedding causes discomfort, resulting in Robert's attendance at the Small Council when there is word of her pregnancy. Having already voiced

his concerns to Ned on the King's Road, he now is determined to have the Targaryens assassinated. The *Discourses* echo this sentiment in a chapter dedicated to usurpers, stressing that “every prince may be warned that he can never live securely in his principedom so long as those from whom he has taken it survive” (1883, 344). Additionally, it would be ideal to kill all of them at once, which was impossible due to the escape of Aerys' last children. This is put forth in one of the most striking passages of the *Prince*:

So it should be noted that when he seizes a state the new ruler must determine all the injuries that he will need to inflict. He must inflict them once for all, and not have to renew them every day. [...] Whoever acts otherwise, either through timidity or misjudgement, is always forced to have the knife ready [...] Violence must be inflicted once for all; people will then forget what it tastes like and so be less resentful. [...] For, when adversity brings the need for it, there is no time to inflict harm. (2003, 32)

Interestingly, Machiavelli included this advice in the chapter on principalities won by crime, rather than in the ones about acquiring power by personal and foreign arms or fortune. While Robert's military prowess certainly is a shining example of *virtù*, overthrowing the established king and the excessive bloodshed during the process could very well be filed under wickedness. Still, his case does not fit neatly into these categories. Regardless, he understands the necessity of dealing with the last of the old dynasty, even if this is fueled more by fiery hatred for the Targaryens than abstract reason.

The following scene provides a glimpse into the rationales of the council members. Ned is the only one to oppose the King's plan, citing the viciousness of killing children, whichever family they may belong to. This exact clash of views occurred after the Sack of King's Landing, when Ned confronted Robert about the murder of Elia and her children, leading to a temporary rift. The other ministers agree with Robert's proposal. True to his diplomatic, yet radical pragmatism, Varys attests that “[i]t is a terrible thing we must consider, a vile thing. Yet we who presume to rule must sometimes do vile things for the good of the realm”(S1E5). Pycelle puts utilitarian thought into numbers, stating that taking a single life could save tens of thousands who would die during a Dothraki invasion, and Renly adds that the Targaryens should have been killed years ago. Littlefinger, ever the brothel-owning businessman, likens the proposed action to sleeping with an unattractive woman (a related, yet rather unspeakable anecdote about an encounter between Machiavelli and a prostitute is documented in his letter

to Luigi Guicciardini from 09.12.1509). Ned attempts to reason with the council, stating that news delivered by a traitor such as Jorah cannot be the basis for planning an assassination. Littlefinger points out that Ned ignored the difference between being a slaver, which was the original reason for Jorah's banishment, and being a traitor. This shows a key weakness of Ned's reliance on honor, namely its sweeping, undifferentiated nature. Instead of focusing on the individual circumstances that led to someone's actions, he judges them purely based on their accordance with his moral views. In the case of Jorah, he by chance correctly deduces that the exile's accounts are not to be trusted in general (although they are still trustworthy at this point in time, which is unthinkable to Ned). By cultivating personal, Kantian-like imperatives, Ned puts himself at a disadvantage when sparring with the ruthless players in King's Landing, who represent the adaptability of *virtù*. The meeting ends with him resigning as Hand, and Robert growing furious and berating him.

When the king came to Winterfell in the very first episode, Ned's young son Bran was thrown from a tower after witnessing Cersei and Jaime Lannister in flagrante delicto. After a later assassination attempt on Bran, Catelyn Stark rode for King's Landing to inform Ned and identify the assassin's dagger. She had found golden hair on the top of the tower in Winterfell, which, aided by Littlefinger's lie about the dagger belonging to Tyrion, made it seem obvious that the Lannisters were the sole perpetrators behind the attempts on her son's life. The resulting tensions culminated in Cat's seizing of Tyrion on her way home, as well as Ned's fateful fight with Jaime following the aforementioned council meeting. After Robert calmed down, he reinstated the wounded Ned as Hand, who continued to investigate the circumstances of Jon Arryn's death. In doing so, he finds the bastards of the king, which then leads him to the discovery of all of Robert's children having been fathered by Jaime.

Throughout his time in the capital, Ned is being used for schemes of arguably the two highest-level players of the game, Lords Varys and Baelish, who aid him in his inquiries regarding Arryn. Referring back to Machiavelli's advice on a prince's personal staff, they share a dedication to causes other than the king's well-being, which guarantees the ruin of either the prince or the respective advisor. Despite several personal parallels, the two Lords' aims are opposite. Both have risen from disadvantageous positions, Littlefinger coming from a poor noble house, Varys from Essonian rock bottom. They operate alone, without family or

friends, and while Baelish's desire is invested in the unreachable Catelyn, the eunuch Varys has none at all. However, while the latter claims to serve the realm, whatever that may mean from his individual point of view, the former professes wanting everything for himself. Regarding each other as equals, they often find themselves in verbal sparring matches and closely surveilling the other's actions. Varys' insistence on his neutral role in service of all of Westeros is doubtful, as he is in contact with a high official from Pentos, who arranged for the marriage of Daenerys to Khal Drogo. It seems as if Varys is interested in destabilizing the Seven Kingdoms in order to allow the Targaryens to return with a Dothraki army. However, it remains unclear whether his ultimate goal is the reestablishment of the dynasty, or any other potential outcome of the intercontinental struggles. Littlefinger is responsible for the death of Arryn, as well as the following dispute between Starks and Lannisters. Since Arryn was about to discover the incestuous relationship of Cersei and Jaime, his death could easily be pinned to them panicking and liquidating him. Basically, Littlefinger covertly orchestrated the events leading up to the War of Five Kings in order to create instability, which would then allow him to climb the ranks and deliver his infamous speech on how "chaos is a ladder" (S3E6).

Devoting a chapter of the *Discourses* to conspiracies, Machiavelli distinguishes between two types: plots against a prince and plots against a country. The schemes devised by Varys and Littlefinger are of far-reaching impact and seem to primarily concern the country, while implicitly opposing the king as well. The chapter continues with advising the prince to put friends in all close and powerful positions:

I affirm it to be shown by history that all such plots have been contrived by men of great station, or by those who have been on terms of close intimacy with the prince, since no others, not being downright madmen, would ever think of conspiring. For men of humble rank, and such as are not the intimates of their prince, are neither fed by the hopes nor possessed of the opportunities essential for such attempts. (1883, 351)

Robert's disinterest in active government made his reign vulnerable to conspiracies. When he came into power, he kept Varys and Pycelle on the council for their expertise, even though they had served Aerys before. Despite installing a friend in the position of the Hand, the other ministers had ample opportunities to foster their influences and plots, while occasionally having to bear the king's whims. Adding the various interests of the high houses of the realm produces the potential for a great number of schemes.

Conspiracies against a prince are riskier than those against a country (367). Machiavelli claims that the desire for the latter only arises in an at least partially corrupted commonwealth. Planning it is relatively unproblematic, as the conspiring individual can hide any long-range plan within the many processes of administration, but the execution can prove difficult. This is largely connected to the ultimate necessity of an army, which only few have access to.

Using Littlefinger as an example, this becomes quite obvious. He neither possesses an army, nor is he a capable fighter himself. As a result, his *virtù* does not rest on military competence, but on the skillful manipulation of others, often making them fight among themselves. In a scene ending with Baelish's revealing of truly wanting everything, he explains his modus operandi: "You know what I learnt losing that duel? I learnt that I'll never win. Not that way. That's their game, their rules. I'm not going to fight them: I'm going to fuck them. That's what I know, that's what I am, and only by admitting what we are can we get what we want" (S1E4). Machiavelli agrees by writing that

there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second. So a prince must understand how to make nice use of the beast and the man. [...] [H]e must learn from the fox and the lion; because the lion is defenceless against traps and a fox is defenceless against wolves. Therefore one must be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves. Those who simply act like lions are stupid. (2003, 56).

As stated above, Littlefinger represents only the aspect of the fox, letting others do the fighting. Machiavelli's advice is mirrored beautifully by Tywin Lannister's very first words of the series, addressing his son Jaime concerning Ned: "Attacking him was stupid" (S1E7).

Briefly returning to the vast potential for conspiracies in Westeros, it is necessary to discuss the two basic kinds of governing principalities according to Machiavelli. One is ruled by a prince and personally chosen administrators, the other by a prince and nobles with historically established influence (2003, 15). Turkey and France serve as Machiavelli's examples, the first being ruled by one leader and his servants, while the second has a king and a long-standing nobility. It follows that a principality akin to Turkey is difficult to conquer, as it is unified, but easy to hold after the new prince has appointed trusted ministers.

In the case of France, conquering is easier, since the new prince can form alliances with nobles who will exchange their support for future benefits. However, the very same nobles and their personal agendas make holding onto the reign taxing (16). Following this example, the Seven Kingdoms share their structure with France. Robert succeeded in overthrowing Aerys with the help of other noble houses who shared his goals. As the new king, he now witnesses the elaborate power struggles between those families, or simple backstabbing, as he calls it.

As the story continues, Ned offers Cersei a chance to leave the city, because he planned on telling Robert about the Lannisters' incestuous relationship. As a response, Cersei ensures that Robert is drunk during his hunt, leading to him being fatally wounded. Before his death, he dictates his last will to Ned, making him Protector of the Realm until Joffrey, Robert's oldest non-son, come of age. During this brief interregnum, Ned is initially approached by Renly, who offers him an alliance to take down the Lannisters, making Renly king. In an earlier scene, him and his lover, Loras Tyrell, discuss the potential reign. Loras argues that Renly would make an excellent king, being loved by the people and still capable of doing necessary evil. The Tyrells are an extremely wealthy and powerful house, which would provide a strong foundation for the new king. While originally concerned about his older brother Stannis being the true heir, Renly echoes Loras' sentiments when talking to Ned. The line of succession should be secondary to installing a worthy, balanced king. Stannis is said to be an extraordinary military leader, but lacking in personality. By likening him to Robert, the skilled warrior, yet problematic king, Renly tries to secure Ned's support, who refuses based on Stannis' right to the throne. Judging the situation correctly, Renly immediately leaves King's Landing to prepare for war.

Lord Baelish is the next in line to court Ned. He proposes making peace with the Lannisters and supporting Joffrey's claim despite his bastard status. Littlefinger is well aware of the fact that Ned would never agree to this, which is bound to further chaos. At the same time, the suggestion shrouds his true intentions. Much later, he would offer the explanation that “[a] man with no motive is a man no one suspects. Always keep your foes confused. If they don't know who you are or what you want, they can't know what you plan to do next” (S4E4). They agree on buying the city watch as a means for Ned to overthrow the new king. During

the showdown in the throne room, it is revealed that Littlefinger betrayed Ned, and that the watch had already been bought by the Lannisters. In chapter XVIII of the *Prince*, Machiavelli observed that “contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have know how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles” (56). As a result of this, Robert is succeeded by Joffrey, with Cersei acting as queen regent until he reaches the age of sixteen, and with the absent Tywin as the new Hand.

Furthermore, Ned is declared a traitor and imprisoned, Ser Barristan is released as Lord Commander of the Kingsguard to make room for the absent Jaime Lannister, and Tywin begins a military campaign to free Tyrion. After his ascension, Joffrey orders Robb, Ned's oldest son, to King's Landing, expecting him to reaffirm the loyalty of house Stark. This situation is reminiscent of Brandon and Rickard Stark's fate under Aerys, and Robb is determined to not let history repeat itself. He calls the Starks' banners and marches to destroy the Lannisters. By deceiving their scouts, he captures Jaime after decimating his troops, while Tywin's army attacks a small northern bait force. This was achieved by the Robb's unconventional decision to let an enemy scout return to Tywin alive, but only after convincing him of having counted a larger force than there was in reality. Because of the traditional measure of killing as many scouts as possible, Robb had to use his authority as commander to overrule the more experienced lords and their advice. Quoting Titus Livius directly, Machiavelli confirms the delicacy of having several people in charge of military command than only one: “The three tribunes with consular authority gave proof how hurtful it is in war to have many leaders; for each forming a different opinion, and each abiding by his own, they threw opportunities in the way of their enemies” (1883, 400). By insisting on his decision, Robb created a valuable opening for his numerically inferior army to divide and conquer.

Cersei and her son share a key trait, the indifference towards other people's opinions about them. While this benefits them greatly when severity is adequate, it also makes them hated quickly. Joffrey acts cruelly without second thought, as he feels invincible in his new role as king. Cersei is conscious of the need to avoid hatred at least on the level of nobility, but does not care for the populace. During the war, she orders the gates to be closed on refugees, as they are flooding the city. In contrast, when advising Joffrey to offer a favor to his future wife

Sansa Stark, she notes that “the occasional kindness will spare you all sorts of trouble down the road” (S1E3).

As a player of the game, Cersei embraces the aspect of the fox, which she shares with her female peers (exceptions are Brienne, Arya and Shae, for example, who also exhibit lionlike capabilities). This means that she is forced to eliminate her enemies indirectly. She cultivates a network of informants, aiding the ultimate goal of protecting herself and her children.

While quite bitter already, this key trait of hers intensifies over the course of the series. She learned to despise Robert, who never loved her in the way she initially loved him, ultimately chiefly contributing to his death. While using her as a tool for joining the Lannisters with the crown, Tywin focused on his sons, who do not share his concern for the family's legacy. This results in Cersei repeatedly trying to gain Tywin's appreciation, remaining without success.

When Jaime leaves the city in Season One and subsequently becomes a prisoner, she feels abandoned, while Joffrey's viciousness is becoming uncontrollable. These factors add to her callousness, which is likely to arouse both fear and hatred in those surrounding her, as Tyrion warns: “You might find it difficult to rule over millions who want you dead” (S2E2).

The question whether it is preferable to be feared or loved is a central point of discussion in the *Prince*. Machiavelli advises that a prince should desire an image of compassion rather than of cruelty (2003, 53). However, it is important to not mismanage either of the two.

Executing a small number of enemies is perfectly reasonable, as long as it serves to keep peace and unity within the state. In the same vein, generosity must be handled carefully.

Having a reputation for it leads to generous acts being taken for granted, and, as a consequence, disappearing from the public consciousness. The prince would then be forced to invest more and more in order to gain favor from his reputation, resulting in his downfall by poverty. For this reason, Machiavelli praises being a miser as “one of those vices that sustain [the] rule” (52).

Ideally, the prince succeeds in being both loved and feared. However, as this is a rare case, a decision between the two must favor fear. Offering a pessimistic view of human nature, Machiavelli argues that it is inclined to inflict injury upon a loved ruler, rather than on a feared one, as the thought of certain punishment is an effective deterrent. He adds that “[t]he prince must none the less make himself feared in such a way that, if he is not loved, at least he escapes being hated” (54). A main factor in avoiding hatred is to refrain from robbing

subjects of their property and honor. The prince's personality plays an important role as well, because “he will be despised if he has a reputation for being fickle, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly, irresolute; a prince should avoid this like the plague and strive to demonstrate in his actions grandeur, courage, sobriety, strength” (59).

Joffrey unites several of the aforementioned negative traits within him, and being a teenage boy with a violent temper, his coronation only amplifies them. He promises Sansa to be merciful to Ned if the latter officially acknowledges him as the true king, only to change his mind and have Ned executed against all advice (Jaime's quip about Hands of the King from his very first scene has held true in this case, “their days are too long, their lives are too short” (S1E1)). Afterwards, he forces her to look at her father's head on a spike. Just before, he had a bard's tongue ripped out for singing a satirical song about Robert. Naturally, hatred follows from continuously atrocious behavior like this, putting Joffrey at risk for conspiracies or revolts.

One of the rare times he acts in accordance with Machiavelli's teachings is his suggestion of a royal army to Cersei. This is a valid idea in theory, as the king of Westeros always depends on at least a few of the noble houses to back his military campaigns. Much like Machiavelli's claim that a local militia would be loyal to its place of origin, a royal army would directly heed the king's commands, as opposed to whoever their local leader might be. In addition, Joffrey suggests to use this royal army to crush any defiant families and to then install loyal administrators from his own family. Essentially, he wishes to transform the political system of Westeros from the French into the Turkish mode of organization mentioned above. Cersei, however, dismantles Joffrey's proposition based on the factual problems of the realm. The king cannot become fully independent from the local families, and if the soldiers of the royal army are recruited from their territories, then the army's loyalty becomes doubtful.

As a last example in Season One, Ned's youngest daughter Arya is an exceptional holder of individual *virtù*. An early fascination with archery and sword fighting led to her taking lessons from the fencing dancing master Syrio, beginning soon after her arrival in the capital. Ned is reluctant initially, but then allows her to follow these interests, which are the opposite of what is expected from a young aristocratic lady. Despite being a child, she already exhibits both the traits of lion and fox. Her early occupation with fighting will certainly be of value

once she grows older, while her intelligence already allows her to see traps and adapt to radically different environments. After escaping from the Lannister guards who were trounced by Syrio, she is put on a convoy to the Wall, playing the role of an orphan boy. Before, she successfully defended herself against two bullies, utilizing her sword skills.

The season ends with Daenerys being reborn in flames, causing her dragon eggs, a wedding gift, to hatch. The preceding death of Khal Drogo had led to her loss of virtually all influence, but relying on *virtù* she was able to persevere until fortune would change its course and smile upon her.

4.2. Season Two

Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

The Who - *Won't Get Fooled Again*

The War of Five Kings is in full swing, as Renly, Stannis and Robb vie for Joffrey's throne, while Balon Greyjoy, Lord of the Iron Islands, declares the independence of his territory. Ironically, the personal qualities that led to Ned's demise in King's Landing were the basis for Robb's smoothly assembled retaliation campaign. Of course, the northern lords have sworn their fealty and must obey, but wanting to avenge their beloved liege lord seems to provide incentive beyond simple duty. However, the longer war drags on, the more difficult it becomes for Robb to motivate the troops to keep fighting for the original cause. After his initial military success, he encounters the first serious complications. In order to cross the Twins, Robb makes promises to Walder Frey, a notoriously prideful and whimsical man, and for his projected attack on the capital, he sends Theon Greyjoy to secure the untrustworthy Balon's fleet. Additionally, he orders Catelyn to negotiate with Renly, who currently commands the largest army. Though seemingly a necessity in Robb's case, the reliance on soldiers commanded by anyone but the prince is to be avoided. Chapter XIII of the *Prince* deals with auxiliary troops, including the following warning: "Auxiliaries are fatal; they constitute a united army, wholly obedient to the orders of someone else" (2003, 45). In case a battle is won with them, the prince is in their power, and in when the battle is lost with them, the whole campaign becomes endangered.

In the case of fickle rulers like Balon Greyjoy, such concerns are reasonable. With the level-headed Renly, an alliance seems less risky, as he calls himself and the Starks natural allies. The *Prince* includes a warning against entering an alliance with a more powerful prince, unless it is of absolute necessity (73). Considering how Renly has both a strong claim to the Iron Throne and the most massive force by far, doing so seems essential. He also offers Cat very good terms, including a more independent North, provided he keep his word. By accommodating the Starks' aims, Renly uses the opportunity to successfully align them with his aspirations.

Apart from entering these dependencies, Robb proves himself as a capable, natural leader and agent of *virtù*. He outsmarts the Lannisters in a series of battles, keeps his subjects in line, is

an active fighter himself, and understands the limits of his followers' loyalty (this results in keeping the captive Jaime Lannister with the army, as opposed to hiding him in a castle and then have his father buy him from the local ruler).

The remaining Baratheon brothers form a striking contrast. Renly is a likeable, rational leader, who mitigates his lack of military experience by assembling a large army and relying on Loras Tyrell's support. Stannis, first in line of succession, is serious, precise and not exactly a beacon of charisma. However, his expertise in warfare inspires the trust of his soldiers, and he is supported by Melisandre, a mysterious Red Priestess from Essos. Converting to her God, the Lord of Light, Stannis renounces the old faith of the Seven, essentially trading poly- for monotheism.

For someone planning to introduce unpopular changes to a government, religion is a useful tool, as Machiavelli discusses in the *Discourses* in striking similarity to the heir's situation:

We see, too, that while Romulus in order to create a senate, and to establish his other ordinances civil and military, needed no support from Divine authority, this was very necessary to Numa, who feigned to have intercourse with a Nymph by whose advice he was guided in counselling the people. And this, because desiring to introduce in Rome new and untried institutions, he feared that his own authority might not effect his end. Nor, indeed, has any attempt ever been made to introduce unusual laws among a people, without resorting to Divine authority, since without such sanction they never would have been accepted. (1883, 63).

It is unclear whether Stannis originally truly believes in his new God. He certainly seems dedicated to him as a rational means to ascend to the throne initially, despite clear evidence of Melisandre's supernatural powers. For example, she gives birth to a shadow assassin, eliminating Renly and making his Baratheon troops side with Stannis, who then is able to sail for an attack on King's Landing directly.

By ritually burning many followers of the old faith of the Seven, Stannis adheres to the fundamental necessity of establishing a new religion, that is the radical elimination of the old. Machiavelli shared this view, “because when a new sect, that is to say a new religion, comes up, its first endeavour, in order to give itself reputation, is to efface the old” (1883, 226). Not only is religion useful for pushing forward governmental reforms, but also for inspiring an army. In order to be victorious, it is vital to instill the “conviction that it is certain to

prevail”(451). By at least outwardly converting to and embracing a new faith, Stannis accomplishes making his forces feel unique in the sense that they are fighting for the one true God, as well as the one true king. Adding to the claim of divine support, soldiers need to be well-armed, disciplined, and from the same place of origin as well (an initial aspect of Robb's success).

Much of Machiavelli's view on religion and the nature of the universe is indebted to Lucretius, whom he never explicitly mentions. However, Machiavelli transcribed *De rerum natura* in his youth, studying and annotating it (Atkinson 16). The concept of atomism and the question to what extent the world is subject to change deeply impacted him, as evidenced by the prefaces to the books of the *Discourses* (Brown 163). In them, he stresses the unchanging character of the world, as it indifferently witnesses the back and forth of good and evil. However, since “human affairs are always in motion” (163), there is change in the cosmos after all. This is connected to Lucretius' concept of vibrating atoms, which are the basis of free will. A chapter of the *Discourses* is dedicated to eternity and the question why, if the world truly happens to be eternal, there is no memory beyond the 5000 years of recorded history (1883, 226). As one reason for this, Machiavelli adduces the sequence of different religions, citing, for example “the methods which Christianity has followed in dealing with the religion of the Gentiles, for we find that it has abolished all the rites and ordinances of that worship, and obliterated every trace of the ancient belief” (226). The only reason for remaining records was the general use of Latin, making shared language one of the key factors for keeping a memory of preceding beliefs.

Instead of Lucretius' aspiration to liberate humanity from the yolk of religion entirely, Machiavelli regarded it as fundamental for people's adherence to law: if there is no fear of religion in a state, then it can only survive if there is fear of the prince (Brown 166). While there are instances of Machiavelli both praising and condemning Christianity, there is no dispute about the fact that he regarded it as a tool of government, as exemplified by the nine different popes that held office during his lifetime. Summing up, Brown concludes that

[t]here is little evidence that Machiavelli believed in Christian revelation or even in the special authority accorded to religious states and holy men. His writings provide instead a remarkably consistent account of a world in which religion played a supporting but subordinate role in the essential art of politics (167).

Meanwhile, Tywin Lannister is regrouping his forces, and condemning the recklessness of Joffrey and Cersei's inability to control him. Later, Joffrey's royal escort through the capital would be attacked by the people, confronting him with the result of becoming hated. Having been the highly successful patriarch of the Lannisters for decades, Tywin is one of the most experienced players of the game. His ultimate aim is to further the influence and longevity of his family. While also a great strategist, he displays cruelty, unwavering decisiveness, and hybris with regards to others' opinions. Initially, he controls his children using tough love (with a strong focus on tough) and evokes fear by being merciless. Being loved certainly is not one of his concerns, which means he should carefully tend to his fearful image without inspiring hatred. However, it seems as if his arrogance does not allow him to be too conscious of this important distinction, as he is hated by many from Dorne to Winterfell. This is the result of a vindictive side that overrules his usual cold rationality at times, as, for example, on the many occasions he has punished Tyrion for being the reason of his mother's death during birth.

He certainly understands the necessity of henchmen, though, as exemplified by Ser Gregor Clegane, the Mountain. On Tywin's order, he laid waste to the Riverlands and killed Elia and her children during the Sack of King's Landing. While still being widely despised, Tywin at least partially follows Machiavelli's advice "[t]hat princes should delegate to others the enactment of unpopular measures and keep in their own hands the means of winning favours" (2003, 61).

Still required as military commander, Tywin sends his now liberated son Tyrion, who is highly intelligent, yet prone to certain vices, to rule as new Hand of the King instead. Tyrion is well aware of the potential danger of an established staff. Once in power, he immediately disposes of the commander of the city watch, installing his companion Bronn, who, despite or because of being a sellsword, can be trusted in his open pragmatism. Regarding his ministers, Tyrion devises a scheme to test their allegiances, establishing him as an equal player while also removing Pycelle, who is in Cersei's service.

In contrast to his brother Jaime, one of the realm's most distinguished sword fighters, Tyrion has no military faculties. However, being well-read and knowledgeable about history, he has a mind for understanding strategy. This proves invaluable when Stannis' fleet attacks in the culminating battle of Season Two, as Tyrion devises a trap for him in time. When sailing into

the bay without meeting enemy ships, Ser Davos, Stannis' second in command, becomes suspicious, because “on finding an Enemy make what seems a grave blunder, we should suspect some fraud to lurk behind” (Machiavelli 1883, 489). At that moment, Blackwater Bay erupts in wildfire, destroying the fleet. The *Discourses* side with Tyrion, stating that “[a]lthough in all other affairs it be hateful to use fraud, in the operations of war it is praiseworthy and glorious” (474). Machiavelli reserves this judgment only in the case of declared enemies, as breaking a given word detracts from glory. This provides an interesting contrast to the self-evident advice given in the *Prince*, which states that breaking promises is a legitimate tool.

Tyrion surprises himself in the resulting battle on the shore, leading the charge as Joffrey flees without entering the battle, which damages his reputation further. Stannis still has the superior force and seems to be winning, until a massive army led by Tywin and Loras arrives, ensuring victory for the defenders. Littlefinger emerges as a victor as well, being instated as new lord of Harrenhal. Originally sent to Renly to negotiate, he used the opportunity after his death to forge an alliance between the houses Lannister and Tyrell, as Loras is dedicated to avenge his lover by destroying Stannis. Littlefinger positioned himself perfectly, being now celebrated as instrumental for the survival of the capital. Looking back, he actually triggered the conflict long ago, which certainly is one of the reasons George R. R. Martin calls him the most Machiavellian character in *Game of Thrones* (universalnews8).

Before this battle, Arya Stark found herself captured by Lannister soldiers and put into Tywin's service. The following exchanges demonstrate their sharp wits, as Arya strives to maintain the identity of an orphan. Her skills as a fox allow her to stay unexposed, her bravery in an earlier episode allows her to now use the service of the Faceless Man Jaquen, who ultimately helps her escape the fortress of Harrenhal (although it could be argued that Jaquen is an agent of fortune instead of a reward for Arya's courage).

Fortresses are a topic of importance to Machiavelli. Discussing the various circumstances that can make them necessary or un-, he arrives at the following principle: “The prince who is more afraid of his own people than of foreign interference should build fortresses; but the prince who fears foreign interference more than his own people should forget about them. [...] So the best fortress that exists is to avoid being hated by the people” (2003, 70). For if the people are against the prince, no fortress can withstand them forever. Eventually, outside

forces will aid them or vice versa. Harren the Black built the most massive fortification of Westeros in order to withstand regular armies, but was overwhelmed by Aegon's dragons. It is difficult to reconcile mythical forces like these with the categories Machiavelli defines. In a way, dragons can be regarded as auxiliaries, as they are a factual army of one with a mind of its own. This makes them a potential risk. However, if they are trained well, they become fiercely loyal weapons of mass destruction. Equally ambiguous is the use of magic, as Melisandre, for example, both inspires and alienates followers.

On Essos, Daenerys has led the remaining of her Dothraki subjects to the independent and wealthy city of Qarth. She is allowed to enter on a pledge by Xaro Xhoan Daxos, who is a member of the Thirteen, the governing council of the city. Xaro is regarded as the wealthiest citizen, having worked his way up from the lowest of origins. He seeks to marry Daenerys, offering her everything behind the impenetrable vault door in his palace. Later on, the vault is revealed to be empty, and he a charlatan. In cases like this, Machiavelli teaches suspicion:

I hold it as most certain that men seldom if ever rise to great place from small beginnings without using fraud or force, unless, indeed, they be given, or take by inheritance the place to which some other has already come. Force, however, will never suffice by itself to effect this end, while fraud often will.
(1883, 251)

Xaro admits to having used unethical means to get to his position, but his projected image suggests that he stopped doing so. However, he conspires with the warlocks of the city in order to become king of Qarth, killing the rest of the Thirteen and making him rather untrustworthy.

During her stay in Qarth, Daenerys struggles with the very concept of trust. She suffered growing up in exile, being used by her brother, losing her influence with the Dothraki, and now finding her servants killed and her dragons stolen. Her conclusion is to be selective about those surrounding her, and to avoid outside influences as much as possible, an insight she would consistently heed. In doing so, she represents one of the key lessons of the *Prince*, a focus on independence and perpetual vigilance.

4.3. Season Three

Wedded at twenty to a woman about whom he'd known just one salient thing, this father-to-be had almost immediately found marriage's conjugal routines tedious and stifling; and the sense of monotony and sexual obligation (as opposed to sexual achievement) had caused in him a feeling that he felt must be almost like death.

David Foster Wallace – *The Pale King*

The alliance between Lannisters and Tyrells results in new players arriving in King's Landing. Most importantly, they are Olenna, matriarch of house Tyrell, and her granddaughter Margaery, who was Renly's wife for the sake of appearance. At the same time, Tywin assumes his position as Hand of the King, releasing the wounded Tyrion from his post, only to make him Master of Coin later. There is no mention of who actually rules at Casterly Rock, as neither Tywin nor his children are ever there.

Margaery is now betrothed to Joffrey, furthering the connection between their houses. Unlike her husband-to-be, she places great importance on being loved by the populace. At one point, she enters an orphanage and makes sure the children are cared for. At the same time, she also attends to Joffrey's personality, showing interest in his new crossbow and hunting. Ironically, she tells him that “sometimes severity is the price we pay for greatness” (S3E4), which certainly is not her style of playing the game. Quite the opposite, she heeds Machiavelli's guideline that

a man who is made prince by the favour of the people must work to retain their friendship; and this is easy for him, because the people ask only not to be oppressed. But a man who has become prince against the will of the people and by the favour of the nobles should, before anything else, try to win the people over; this too is easy if he takes them under his protection. (2003, 34)

This was echoed by Jorah earlier: “The common people pray for rain, health and a summer that never ends. They don't care what games the high lords play” (S1E4).

In any case, by flattering and skillfully adapting to Joffrey, Margaery gains increasing influence on him, while cementing her position as new queen. Machiavelli warns against flatterers, as they will try to turn the prince towards their individual goals, all of them giving contradicting advice (2003, 76). By demonstrating his vicious reactions to criticism, Joffrey

has created an atmosphere that makes most of his subordinates afraid of confronting him. Flattery is a consequence of this, and, being practiced by the ministers (except for Tywin and Tyrion), alienates the young king further from actual government. Margaery, however, has a more privileged position than ordinary sycophants. She establishes herself as wanting nothing but to be a loyal queen, humbling herself to Joffrey. The weight put on a royal marriage aids her position as well. For these reasons, she is able to manipulate him more and more as the series progresses.

Margaery learned a great deal from Olenna, who firmly controls the Tyrells. Like Tywin, she is eager to defend her family's best interests, but practices the necessary ruthlessness more discreetly. The Tyrells are not quite as rich as the Lannisters, but able to produce great amounts of supply for their respectable army. Olenna advised against Loras' original siding with Renly, and would have preferred to stay neutral in the War of Five Kings. After entering the war, she is now determined to use the opportunity for making the Tyrells part of royalty. Thus the royal wedding is prepared without opposition, while another potential marriage causes scheming. As Robb Stark is expected to lose the war eventually, his sister Sansa is bound to become heir to the North. Littlefinger has already begun cultivating a relation of trust with her, which alarms Varys, who seeks out Olenna. They agree on the necessity of marrying Loras to Sansa in order to keep her away from Baelish. At the same time, Tywin decides on foiling this plan by marrying Sansa to Tyrion, while Loras should marry Cersei. The Lannister children are equally discontent. In order to finalize the arrangement, Tywin meets with Olenna. Forcing her to consent, he threatens to appoint Loras to be a member of the Kingsguard, which would make him ineligible for marriage, as well as for inheriting any lands and titles. Interestingly, the Mad King had done the same to Tywin, appointing Jaime Lannister a member of the Kingsguard (although this was planned by Cersei, resulting in more tension between her father and the king). During their negotiation, Tywin attests that he does not care about the opinions others have of him, ascribing the same to Olenna. She disagrees, as controlling one's image is important for political survival. This contrast again illustrates Tywin's arrogance, rendering him likely to being hated. The issue of Sansa's wedding is decided without her having any influence, and without alerting the public. The latter is a necessary step in order to keep the peace, as Machiavelli mentions the potential danger surrounding disputes about marriages:

I say, then, that neither absolute princes nor the rulers of free States should underrate the importance of matter, but take heed to the disorders which it may breed and provide against them while remedies can still be used without discredit to themselves or to their governments (1883, 430).

In the meantime, Robb Stark's campaign is slowing down as he attends the funeral of his grandfather. Additionally, he is forced to deal with his bannerman Lord Karstark, who killed two captured Lannister boys as revenge for his sons. Robb abides by the law, which states that traitors be punished by death. Everyone advises him to imprison Lord Karstark in order to coerce his soldiers to stay. However, Robb beheads him, which results in the loss of half of the army, as the Karstarks march home. In this case, he is hindered by his code of honor in the same way Ned was. By following the law, he doomed his military endeavor, forcing him to enter new dependencies. At the same time, he broke his oath to marry one of Walder Frey's daughters in order to be with Talisa instead. Robb's new strategy of attacking Casterly Rock then requires Frey's army, so he arranges for negotiations. After agreeing on new terms and substitute marriages, the infamous Red Wedding takes place at the Twins. It results in the death of Robb, Talisa and Catelyn, as well as the dispersing of the remaining Stark forces. Tywin orchestrated the carnage, using Frey's wounded pride and offering serious compensation to draw him to his side, as well as Roose Bolton, one of Robb's chief advisors. When the news arrives at the Small Council, Tyrion criticizes Tywin for having the Starks killed at a wedding. He replies that he did so in order to end the war, and that there is no reason why killing a few people at dinner should be worse than killing tens of thousands on the field.

George R. R. Martin explains that the Red Wedding is based on events from Scottish history, including one called the Black Dinner (Hibberd 2013). Apparently, Machiavelli witnessed a similar betrayal by Cesare Borgia:

Machiavelli watched, fascinated, while the notorious monster lured some of his mutinous subordinates to a peace conference, invited them to a banquet to celebrate their renewed friendship and (when they arrived unarmed and unescorted) had them seized and murdered. (Femia 3)

Regarding the disagreement between the Lannisters, Machiavelli sides with Tywin. A short chapter of the *Discourses* is titled “That our Country is to be defended by Honour or by

Dishonour; and in either way is well defended” (1883, 476). In it, he stresses the necessity of doing anything in order to maintain the freedom of a country: “no consideration of what is just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or shameful, must intervene. [...] [T]hat course alone must be taken which preserves the existence of the country and maintains its liberty” (476). Following this pragmatic point of view, the Red Wedding was an incredibly successful move.

The captive Jaime Lannister, Tywin's oldest son, experiences severe changes of fortune in Season Three. Having been Robb's prisoner for a while, he managed to escape by killing his own cousin in order to create diversion (this would be subtly referenced in Season Four, when Tyrion lists all possible kinds of -cides, claiming that every type of familiar killing has a term of its own. Jaime then quietly adds that killing a cousin does not). Despite showing his unbroken spirit, he is captured again and only escapes death at the hands of Robb's subjects when Cat sets him free. She orders Brienne of Tarth, an extremely loyal and outstanding warrior, to escort a bound Jaime to King's Landing in exchange for the Stark girls. Initially, this appears to be good fortune for Jaime, as he now has a realistic chance of returning home. However, their journey is paved with obstacles. Encountering them, Brienne relies on her exceptional fighting skills, while adhering to her strong sense of honor and justice. At one point, they find three dead women hanging from a tree, murdered by Stark soldiers. Wanting to give them a proper burial, Brienne stops and begins cutting them down. As the soldiers return, she at first tries to defuse the situation, but when one of them identifies Jaime, she kills all of the Stark men.

Less of a fox than Jaime, Brienne embodies steadfast virtue similar to Ned Stark. Her impressive combat skills enable her to reinforce her dedication to honor, which only allows her to act within a limited frame.

In contrast, Jaime is well aware of the occasional unethical need to kill in order to make one's life easier, and constantly uses his biting wit to try to upset Brienne. When they meet an old farmer on their clandestine way through a forest, Jaime correctly advises her to eliminate the man, as he may inform the local lord about their move. Brienne refuses based on her knightly honor of protecting the innocent, continuing their march. After they have taken the risk of crossing a bridge in plain sight, the Machiavellian lion in Jaime seizes the opportunity to

snatch Brienne's second sword and cut the rope connecting them. However, she quickly disarms him in the following fight, only to have them both be captured by soldiers of house Bolton who were notified by the farmer. Being prisoner again, Jaime tries utilizing his rich family background and eloquence to get in a better position, but ultimately has his right hand cut off, destroying his resilience.

When Jaime was still chained in the Starks' camp, he told Cat that he really did not fear death. In true existentialist fashion, his indifference regarding life's end manifests itself in the all-embracing desire to preserve his personal idea of meaningful being. This includes the status as one of the greatest fighters in Westeros, a key part of his identity. Having this part taken away stuns him for considerable time.

The loss of his hand is a direct consequence of misguided *virtù*. Used to commanding respect simply through his name, Jaime's arrogance made him judge the situation wrongly. Instead of acting like a benign prisoner, he assumed part of the authority he is used to. As a result, he was punished for failing to adapt. The situation was further complicated by his sympathy towards Brienne, and the subsequent desire to save her from being raped or killed. He succeeded in this respect, but paid a life-changing price.

Being Tywin's favorite son and first in the Lannister line of succession, Jaime could have risen to great influence. However, he showcases his disinterest in politics and official power on several occasions, as he opposes Tywin's order to become Lord of Casterly Rock in Season Four and dismisses all references to becoming Hand of the King. Having been made part of the Kingsguard by Aerys was certainly a better fit than the destiny his father had designed for him. When Cersei became queen, being Kingsguard also meant that Jaime could be closer to her and their resulting children. Regarding the larger contexts of *Game of Thrones*, he certainly is not an active player except when fighting. The two constituent parts of what he considers a life worth living are his family and the capability of exercising his skills in combat, and his personal *virtù* is invested in safeguarding them.

Daenerys currently resides in Astapor, a city of slavers and the training ground for the Unsullied. They are elite soldiers who are put through inhuman training from boyhood on. As such, they are obedient without fail and very expensive. Interestingly, their tactics and

equipment are reminiscent of Lynch's description of the Swiss army during Machiavelli's time (2003a, 181). Jorah and Daenerys' new advisor Ser Barristan debate whether she should acquire Unsullied. Barristan argues against them, because they are mercenaries without emotionally invested loyalty. He actually prefers hiring sellswords from other cities, as they have more human qualities. Jorah counters by seeing the inhuman characteristics of the Unsullied as an advantage. They are so obedient that they do not harm innocents unless explicitly ordered to do so. Daenerys ultimately agrees with Jorah, having allowed both knights to fully state their opinions before. She values the expertise of her advisors, but follows her own conclusions, implementing the view concerning counsel put forth in the *Prince*:

[H]e should also question them thoroughly and listen to what they say; then he should make up his own mind, by himself. And his attitude towards his councils [...] should be such that they will recognize that the more freely they speak out the more acceptable they will be. [...] [H]e should put the policy agreed upon into effect straight away, and he should adhere to it rigidly. Anyone who does not do this [...] is held in low esteem. (2003, 76)

She continues in this way when Jorah and Barristan are shocked about her decision to trade a dragon for the Unsullied. Warning them to never question her decisions again, she successfully executes her plan to acquire the army and take the city without losing the dragon.

Referring back to Machiavelli's concerns about mercenaries and auxiliaries, the Unsullied do not belong to either category. While not Daenerys' native army, they have no roots or place of origin they could be loyal to. In a sense, they are the antithesis to Machiavelli's ideal of an army devoted to a republic, as their cause simply is an imprint of their leader's.

Closely connected to this topic is another dispute regarding soldiers. In Season One, Littlefinger tells Ned that “gold wins wars, not soldiers” (S1E6). Tyrion offers the contrary opinion, stating that armies above all else are what gives someone power (S3E10). However, he admits that Robb Stark's army could not save him against Tywin's plan. Machiavelli treats the question about the importance of gold in the *Discourses*, and rather passionately deems those who prefer gold followers of a wrong and uncouth opinion (1883, 238). Any advantage a prince might have, be it favor from the people, wealth or strategic capacity, will only be actualized when there is an army. It is the one fundamental necessity, and having gold can

lead to a false sense of confidence. In closing, Machiavelli “[maintains], therefore, that it is not gold, as is vulgarly supposed, that is the sinews of war, but good soldiers; or while gold by itself will not gain you good soldiers, good soldiers may readily get you gold” (240).

Applying this aphorism to Westeros, it seems to follow that all rich people have an army, but not all who have an army are rich.

4.4. Season Four

We are living in the era of premeditation and perfect crimes. Our criminals are no longer those helpless children who pleaded love as their excuse. On the contrary, they are adults, and they have a perfect alibi: philosophy, which can be used for anything, even for transforming murderers into judges.

Albert Camus – *The Rebel*

King's Landing is busy with the final preparations for the royal wedding. Before, Sansa had already married Tyrion, causing both of them grief. They are slowly united in their shared hatred for Joffrey, though, who continues to demean the couple. This leads to visible conflict between Tyrion and the king during the wedding, where the former is ordered to be the latter's new cupbearer. As a result, Tyrion is immediately accused of being the perpetrator when Joffrey meets his rather timely demise through poison (Aside: writing this last sentence felt right, and why would it not. Judging Joffrey is a perfect example of projecting our moral views onto other entities, both fictional and real. However, while he certainly behaved in the most horrible of ways, it is easy to forget that he was not born a monster, but a possibly troubled human who grew up under problematic circumstances. The way he is depicted throughout the series makes the audience wish for his death, which in itself seems like a rather vicious thing to desire). Sansa is immediately taken out of the city, while Tyrion is arrested and put on trial for regicide. After elaborate schemes by Tywin and an unsuccessful trial by combat, he is sentenced to death. However, Jaime and Varys extricate Tyrion from prison, hiding him in a crate to be shipped to Essos. On his way out of the castle in the final scenes of the season, Tyrion takes revenge by killing Tywin and Shae, his former lover. Varys, now alarmed, decides to enter the ship and go into exile as well.

All of these events were the result of yet another large-scale plot by Littlefinger, this time aided by Olenna Tyrell. After learning about Joffrey's unstable personality, she could no longer support Margaery marrying him. For this reason, she devised a plan to eliminate the king by means of rare and quick poison. Littlefinger's involvement granted him an opportunity to abduct Sansa, a plan foiled earlier by her marriage to Tyrion. In order to make her eligible for another husband, her first one has to die. To guarantee this, Littlefinger had

organized for a rather offensive type of entertainment at the royal wedding, amplifying the tension between Joffrey and Tyrion. Again, Littlefinger succeeded without implicating himself or using force, showcasing a kind of *virtù* accentuating his individual strengths. The only unexpected result was Tyrion's escape, which still might not stop Baelish from marrying Sansa.

As for Olenna, she opened up an option for Margaery to seduce Tommen, the clement new king. By her becoming the eventual new queen, the Tyrells would still enter royal lineage and fortify their influence.

Invoking Littlefinger's earlier assertion that he truly wants everything, there still is no telling of what this could ultimately be. As an extreme, Varys attests that his rival would burn down the whole of Westeros if he could become “king of the ashes” (S3E4).

There are several ways to evaluate Lord Baelish's Machiavellian effectiveness. As a singular person, he perfectly embodies the fox, yet certainly is not loved, and is feared only by the few who have an idea of his inner abyss. If Varys' statement is true, then Littlefinger's endgame does not necessarily include a stable government or even anything to be governed. In this way, he would not just oppose Machiavelli's key intent of *mantenere lo stato*, but transcend it. After all, a black desert requires no rulers.

What he is still missing, though, is the aspect of the lion. Being neither strong nor a gifted fighter, Littlefinger could one day easily meet his demise by force. The duel he lost as a boy against Ned's older brother left him scarred and surely taught him to evade direct confrontation, but, like most of the major puppeteers of King's Landing, he would be helpless in a direct fight.

Liedl offers another point of criticism regarding Littlefinger:

So, when others claim that Littlefinger perfectly parallels Machiavelli, I have to differ. So far, Petyr Baelish has not experienced the real reversals of fortune that Machiavelli knew so well in his life prior to writing *The Prince*. The rest of Baelish's history in Westeros has yet to be written, of course: quite literally with Martin still completing the final two books in his series. Perhaps he will find that chaos is not so enjoyable when it turns against him in the future. Fans will have to wait and see. (2013)

While it is true that Littlefinger has not had to overcome “real reversals of fortune” yet, this does not detract from his competence. It seems more realistic to attest his ‘luck’ to exactly the kind of Machiavellian skills Liedl seeks to deny him. While no one is safe against outrageous fortune, those who came into a powerful position via *virtù* are more likely to survive unforeseen changes, provided they continue adapting (2003, 79). Littlefinger's fate, however, truly has yet to be decided.

Since Tyrion is a fan favorite, it would seem insufficient not to have a look at his Machiavellian competence until exile. Having enjoyed playing the game in the powerful position of Hand in Season Two, he found himself in the less influential seat of Master of Coin from Season Three on. He discovers that Littlefinger borrowed massive amounts of gold from the Iron Bank, which Tywin already knows. Since his new title still makes Tyrion part of the Small Council, he has the opportunity to offer insight and debate governmental plans, but no realistic chance to regain his lost power. Consequently, the series shifts focus onto his personal relationships, which grow more problematic. He has fallen in love with the prostitute Shae, but is forced by his father to marry Sansa. Both his and the Red Wedding effectively destroy his love life, resulting in widespread tension. Sansa and Shae despise him, and so does his family at court. The lifelong ridicule Tyrion suffered for his short stature has resulted in his detached and ironic image, while inside he longs to be truly loved by someone. Despite the readiness for doing what is necessary, he retains his fundamental trait of kindness, as exemplified by his soft spot for “cripples, bastards and broken things” (S1E4). When his originally honest relationship with Shae dissolves, he finds himself in limbo, becoming increasingly passive. In this position, his individual *virtù* of intelligence and knowledge has little bearing. As a result, the influence of fortune grows. Initially averse, it makes him end up in a cell. Despite an outburst provoked by Shae during the regular trial, he finds the wits to insist on a trial by combat. More fortunate now, Tyrion is represented by the competent warrior Oberyn, who then perishes in the emotionally irresponsible fight that ensues. Facing certain death, fortune sends Jaime to free Tyrion from prison. Now on the way to Essos, he narrowly escaped his doom with the unforeseen aid of others. It is more than likely that Season Five will provide new opportunities for his true talents to shine.

The new king Tommen, Joffrey's younger brother, is portrayed as a meek and obedient child. Due to his age, he is very much dependent on outside counsel. In an extensive scene centered around Joffrey's laid out body, Tywin offers Tommen a lesson in sound governing. Essentially, that lesson establishes the apodictic need of listening to advisors, i.e. Tywin. In doing so, he sets himself up as the effective ruler, becoming to the king what Machiavelli warns against:

For this is an infallible rule: a prince who is not himself wise cannot be well advised, unless he happens to put himself in the hands of one individual who looks after all his affairs and is an extremely shrewd man. In this case, he may well be given good advice, but he would not last long because the man who governs for him would soon deprive him of his state. (2003, 77)

While a sensible, this rule does not take effect in the case of Tommen, as the king outlives Tywin for a change. Ultimately, it was not being hated by the public that became Tywin's undoing, but being hated by his own children.

Having freed the slaves of Astapor, Daenerys continued on her path of liberation at the end of Season Three. At that time, she conquered Yunkai by giving its slave soldiers an opportunity to surrender, which she initially was unsure about, as “people learn to love their chains” (S3E10). She also gained the support of the Second Sons, a force of mercenaries. When the gates of Yunkai opened, Daenerys was greeted by the former slaves, who called her their mother. The people truly became her fortress, as she walked through a massive crowd of devoted subjects. Invigorated by her success, she now plans to liberate Meereen, the last of the three great cities of Slaver's Bay. The reason for her subsequent victory is twofold: she is preceded by her reputation as Breaker of Chains, which then enables her to have weapons smuggled into the city, arming the slaves and allowing them to overthrow their masters. By winning the favor of the people and, in turn, making them an army, she implemented an important principle described by Machiavelli in the following way:

Now, no new prince has ever at any time disarmed his subjects; rather, when he has found them unarmed he has always given them arms. This is because by arming your subjects you arm yourself; those who were suspect become loyal, and those who were loyal not only remain so but are changed from being merely your subjects to being your partisans. Then, as it is impossible to arm everybody, when you have given this privilege to some you can deal more severely with the others. (2003, 68)

This is exactly what occurred when the slaves of Meereen began executing the elite. While being a useful guide in terms of conquest, Daenerys is now in need of ideas for government. As soon as she begins holding audiences for her new subjects, several dilemmas arise. The most existential one comes from an old teacher, who used to educate the children of his master for all of his life. Being free puts him in danger, because younger and stronger ex-slaves deny him his share of food, while he has also lost his identity and sense of purpose. He begs Daenerys to let him be a slave again, because he is too old to adapt to the new system of freedom. Shocked but understanding, she allows former slaves to sign one-year contracts with masters, a law surely to be abused, as Jorah points out. She also learns that her elimination of slavers has caused innocent people to die, adding further shades of morality to her campaign. On a larger scale, both Astapor and Yunkai have been reverting to their old systems. The absence of Daenerys and her forces has given the masters and an individual delinquent the opportunity to claim the cities. This is an expected problem for a conqueror in certain cases:

But when states are acquired in a province differing in language, in customs, and in institutions, then difficulties arise; and to hold them one must be very fortunate and very assiduous. One of the best, most effective expedients would be for the conqueror to live there in person. [...] Being on the spot, one can detect trouble at the start and deal with it immediately; if one is absent, it is discerned only when it has grown serious, and it is then too late. (2003, 10).

The next best way of dealing with the situation, according to Machiavelli, would have been to raze those cities completely. This is not an option, as Daenerys is dedicated to end slavery without simply annihilating all living beings of Slaver's Bay. Since she can only reside in one city at a time, she orders the Second Sons to reconquer Yunkai, offering the masters a choice between accepting the new order and death. At the same time, she removes the mercenaries' potentially disloyal commander from her vicinity.

Additionally, her dragons are becoming problematic. They begin disobeying as they grow more powerful, making them a highly dangerous risk factor. When Drogon, the largest of them, kills a shepherd's daughter and disappears, Daenerys decides to chain her remaining two dragons in the catacombs. As her title Mother of Dragons suggests, this is emotionally difficult and also concludes her storyline in Season Four.

Generally speaking, Daenerys exhibits several Machiavellian characteristics, including pronounced *virtù* and behavior parallel to his teachings. Her decision to learn how to govern in Slaver's Bay is definitely wise. She states that her inability to do so would make it completely irrational to sail for Westeros in hopes of conquering and holding it (S4E5). By remaining on Essos, she dedicates herself to ensuring the stability of her territory. At the same time, she is decisive and deals with advice appropriately. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how her future style of government will deal with the poles of fear and love. Her military faculties certainly inspire fear, yet it seems as if her natural tendency is wanting to be loved. This may have been amplified by the sudden adoration of those she freed. Whether they might make the use of fear necessary at one point is unclear. So far, Daenerys certainly has balanced the two emotions to great effect, making her a capable and dangerous leader.

On Dragonstone, Stannis had fallen into a crisis of faith after his defeat at Blackwater Bay. He spent much of the time since brooding, dealing with his personal relationships and originally questioning Melisandre's worth. When she presents him with a vision in the flames, his faith is restored. After Davos delivers unsettling news from the Wall, him and Stannis sail for Braavos in order to acquire the necessary funds for a new army. The bankers at first decline, but Davos convinces them that Stannis is their best bet to recover all of the money they have already invested into the Iron Throne. After converting the money into soldiers, the march for the North begins. There is no explanation to who those new soldiers are. Judging from their equipment and uniformity, they seem to be Westerosi. As sellsword companies are not widespread there, it would make sense to assume that Stannis exchanged gold for the loyalty of the Stormland lords who originally fought for him at Blackwater Bay. Considering the (supernatural) threat beyond the Wall, this new army has a shared cause in the survival of everything on the continent. By leading his forces north rather than focusing on his immediate claim to the throne, Stannis demonstrates his dedication to the realm and its stability. Along with this, his military leadership and sense of justice surely result in fear and respect. His personality may not inspire love, but perhaps his future deeds will.

Season Four ends with a focus on Arya Stark, and so will this chapter. After her escape from Harrenhal, she traveled through the Riverlands and the Vale with varying companions. During this time, she had become even more acquainted with death surrounding her.

Accompanied by the Hound, she witnessed the extension of the Red Wedding around the Twins, saw innocents dying as a result of the war, and murdered several people herself. One of those was a Lannister soldier who had killed a friend of Arya's before her stay in Harrenhal. Fatally piercing his throat gives her great satisfaction and adds to her determination to eliminate all those on her personal list of evildoers. The driving force that propels her is not the gaining of political power, but taking revenge for her family and friends. From this follows that her *virtù* is very much directed towards her personal survival and improvement, while the question of comprehensive territorial stability does not seem to be her concern at all. Originally exhibiting the aspect of the fox, she has steadily embraced the lion over time. Even in Season Four, Arya can still be seen practicing the steps Syrio had taught her so long ago. Shortly thereafter, she criticizes the Hound for allowing a sense of pride to hinder his effectiveness as a killer. In her final scene, she gets the opportunity to use Jaquen's coin and, instead of heading north, sail for Braavos. Dedicated to acquiring the skills of a Faceless assassin, she may not participate in the future political *Game of Thrones*, but is bound to become a threat to anyone in her way of *virtù*.

5. Conclusion

Despite the many different scholarly interpretations of Machiavelli as a person and writer, a number of assertions are possible. He was neither a corrupt preacher of cruelty, nor a shining saint of humanism, but either conclusion can be encountered within casual and at times even academic discussions. By engaging with Machiavelli's works, the complexity of his teachings soon becomes obvious, dispelling extreme views. While it is certainly legitimate to probe these texts with regards to their proposed ethics, they are a product and mirror of their time, and so is their writer. Reading, for example, the *Prince* without context is likely going to result in moral condemnation of the book. However, adding the framework of the *Discourses*, evaluating Machiavelli's relationship with the Florentine Republic, or simply imagining witnessing Cesare Borgia massacre his way to new heights will change this perception.

Apparently, the person of Machiavelli did not exhibit the traits that are associated with his name. Despite himself being victimized by and involved in the machinations of Florentine politics, he seems to have drawn many of his conclusions about what is best for a state from observation and historical study, rather than from being particularly deceitful himself.

The initial theoretical portion of this thesis was intended to partially rehabilitate Machiavelli and present his works in the context of his life and surroundings. Doing so allowed for an analysis of major characters and events in *Game of Thrones*. George R. R. Martin's being inspired by the Italian Renaissance was no secret, but has become striking in the process. The struggles between the noble houses of Westeros and the elite clans of Florence very much feel like branches on the same family tree. Nevertheless, the wide-ranging applicability of Machiavelli's teachings to this fictional realm is based on the universality he desires in his writings.

They concern fundamentals of the state, like class-struggles and warfare, and his discourse of power is strongly focused on the stability of large governmental structures. These factors appear equally constituent in *Game of Thrones*. However, the idea of power takes on many forms for different characters, and often only in connection with the abstract categories they dedicate themselves to, for example, Tywin and legacy, Ned and honor, Arya and revenge, Varys and the realm, or Daenerys and justice. While navigating their complex world, they are

confronted with often delicate decisions, which they approach with these ideas as guidelines. In the process of doing so, they exhibit their individual Machiavellian competence, relating to the binaries he so often favored: the fox and the lion, human fate and agency, which he calls fortune and *virtù*, and being loved and hated.

What makes Machiavelli's writings timeless is their occupation with questions of humanity that are just so. Acknowledging this does not necessitate agreeing with his works, but the willingness to respect their far-reaching relevance. In doing so, this thesis answers several, but hopefully raises even more questions.

Taken from the *Discourses* (107), perhaps this is the great lesson Machiavelli teaches us: that we, as humans, “seldom know how to be wholly good or wholly bad”.

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Abstract

The name Machiavelli is often associated with concepts such as ruthlessness, deceit and immorality. At the same time, there is a century-old discourse resulting in vastly different interpretations of Machiavelli's works. On close inspection, an extensive political theory reveals itself. It is based on Machiavelli's experiences in Renaissance Italy, as well as his occupation with the history of the country. Additionally, this theory embraces a character of practical instruction, which includes ethical difficulties that are often thematized.

Game of Thrones presents a world that is significantly influenced by European history. Moreover, it includes structures and characters that allow for an association with the concepts Machiavelli describes. This results in the question whether these are suitable means for understanding the processes of this fictional world.

The theoretical part of this thesis is dedicated to Machiavelli's life and works in order to produce a differentiated picture of the person. Focusing on his political career, this is supposed to result in a fundamental overview, correcting popular simplifications. In the following chapters, key events of the series are analyzed chronologically, in order to examine them and the Machiavellian competence of characters based on the introduced theory.

Zusammenfassung

Der Name Machiavelli wird oft mit Konzepten wie Rücksichtslosigkeit, Täuschung und Unmoralität in Verbindung gebracht. Gleichzeitig existiert seit Jahrhunderten ein weitreichender Diskurs, der Machiavellis Werke auf die unterschiedlichsten Arten interpretiert. Was sich bei einer näheren Betrachtung offenbart, ist eine umfassende politische Theorie, basierend auf Machiavellis Erfahrungen im Italien der Renaissance und seiner intensiven Beschäftigung mit der Geschichte des Landes. Zusätzlich wohnt dieser Theorie ein stark praxisbetonter Charakter inne, dessen ethische Problematik immer wieder betont wird.

Game of Thrones präsentiert eine Welt, die stark von europäischer Geschichte geprägt ist. Zudem finden sich in ihr Figuren und Strukturen, die eine Assoziation mit den von Machiavelli beschriebenen Konzepten ermöglichen. Daraus ergibt sich die Frage, ob diese ein geeignetes Mittel für das Verständnis der Prozesse in jener fiktiven Welt sind.

Der theoretische Teil dieser Arbeit widmet sich Machiavellis Leben und Werk, um eine differenzierte Beleuchtung seiner Person vorzunehmen. Mit einem Fokus auf seine politische Laufbahn soll hiermit ein grundlegender Überblick geschaffen werden, der populäre Reduktionen korrigiert. In den weiterführenden Kapiteln werden Schlüsselereignisse der Serie chronologisch analysiert, um diese und auch die machiavellistische Kompetenz von Charakteren mithilfe der vorher eingeführten Theorie zu untersuchen.

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