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Are You Game?

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"The fair play of the world": Games and Machiavellian Politics in Shakespeare's *King John*

Louise Fang

- ¹ *King John* has often been regarded by critics as one of William Shakespeare's most Machiavellian history plays (Roe 2002: 94-5; Loder 2016: 93). Although we cannot ascertain whether Shakespeare had read *The Prince* directly, or whether or not he was in fact "pro-Machiavellian" (Loder 2016: 90), the dramatist would have been familiar with Machiavelli's views and the discussions they had triggered throughout Europe (see Grady 2002: 20). The Florentine's book was first published in 1532 and was widely circulated in French and Latin versions, as well as in English manuscript form in England from the 1580s. In *King John*, the Machiavellian conception of politics is chiefly exemplified and brought to the fore by one character, Philip Falconbridge, nicknamed the Bastard as he acknowledges Richard Coeur de Lion as his father in act I scene 1. Throughout the play, he acts both as an ambitious character willing to serve the king of England at all costs, and as an insightful observer and commentator of the events staged. More generally, the echoes to Machiavelli also stem directly from the historical period represented on stage: as King John tries to secure an all too fragile crown, threatened by rival, and equally justified, claims to the throne, the plot illustrates how a form of legitimacy may be constructed or acquired in a way that would enable a ruler to remain in power, a concern that is also at the core of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In this paper, I would like to explore to what extent references to the games of the time mentioned by all characters of the play carry a view of politics which closely echoes that of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. There are many references to games in this particular history play, all of which are used as metaphorical tools to describe political decisions or alliances of the characters depicted: there are two references to chess (2.1.123; 2.1.221-4),¹ two references to bowling (2.1.562-87; 3.4.128), at least one reference to archery² (1.1.174) and one reference to card games (5.2.105-7). In addition to these references to specific games, the vocabulary of play keeps cropping up through the use of expressions such as "play fast and loose" (3.1.168), "fair play" (5.1.67; 5.2.118) or

"false play" and "foul play" (1.1.118; 4.2.93), for instance. All of these ludic references appear at pivotal moments in the play and often shed light on the numerous reversals of situations that occur. Firstly, we shall see the reasons why games feature so prominently in this play by closely analysing the metaphor of bowling and its meanings within the play before delving into the opportunistic and pragmatic outlook these ludic metaphors seem to propound. This paves the way for a reflection on the respective roles of human agency and providence which is also strongly linked to a Machiavellian conception of history.

Bowling in *King John*: The Rules of the Political Game

- 2 The most conspicuous allusion to a game in the play is most certainly found in the Bastard's soliloquy at the end of act II scene 1 in which he compares the world to a game of bowls through an extended metaphor. At that point, the king of France, Philip, has just agreed to a marriage between the Dauphin and Blanche of Castile to seal an alliance with his former enemy England, thereby reneging on the earlier promise he made to Lady Constance to fight for her son Arthur's claim to the English crown and securing the provinces that King John offers as part of Blanche's dowry:

Bastard: Mad world! mad kings! mad composition!
 John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole,
 Hath willingly departed with a part;
 And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,
 Whom zeal and charity brought to the field
 As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear
 With that same purpose-changer, that sly devil,
 That broker, that still breaks the pate of faith,
 That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,
 Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids, —
 Who having no external thing to lose
 But the word 'maid,' cheats the poor maid of that —
 That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling commodity;
 Commodity, the bias of the world,
 The world who of itself is peisèd well,
 Made to run even upon even ground,
 Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
 This sway of motion, this commodity,
 Makes it take head from all indifferency,
 From all direction, purpose, course, intent;
 And this same bias, this commodity,
 This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,
 Clapped on the outward eye of fickle France,
 Hath drawn him from his own determined aid,
 From a resolved and honourable war,
 To a most base and vile-concluded peace. (2.1.562-87)

- 3 By calling "commodity" the "bias of the world" (l. 575) the Bastard is likening self-interestedness to the weight that was inserted into the bowl, through what was called the "outward eye" (l. 585), in order for it to roll in a curve on an "even ground" (l. 577). The image therefore stresses that the whole world is directed by the motions of interest rather than by the noble intentions that had supposedly led France to fight King John and support Arthur's right to the crown in the first place. There is another reference to

bowling later in the play when cardinal Pandolf explains to the Dauphin of France why the situation may turn to his advantage:

Pandolf: Your mind is all as youthful as your blood.
Now hear me speak with a prophetic spirit,
For even the breath of what I mean to speak
Shall blow each dust, each straw, each little rub,
Out of the path which shall directly lead
Thy foot to England's throne. And therefore mark. (3.4.125-30)

- 4 The metaphor occurs elsewhere in Shakespeare's history plays — in *Richard III* for instance (1.3.70-3) and in *Coriolanus* as well (3.1.60-4) — to describe and illustrate historical and political events. Comparing the world to a game at bowls was perhaps naturally suggested by the spherical form of bowls themselves which also led Shakespeare to mention "this ball of earth" in the induction of *2 Henry IV* (ll. 3-5). Shakespeare was not alone in making this comparison. It is found in a number of emblems from the 16th and 17th centuries — "the world's the Jack" (Quarles 1635: sig. D^v) — as well as in Charles Cotton's chapter about the game in *The Compleate Gamester*: "To give you the Moral of it, it is the emblem of the World, or the world's ambition" (Cotton 1674: sig. E^v).³

- 5 Like all metaphors describing politics in terms of games and playing, this image implies an essentially relativist view of the world and denies any form of absolute truth according to Jacques Henriot. At the core of these ludic images lies the idea that games have rules that are autonomous and independent from the real world and from any superior moral or spiritual outlook:

Le propre du jeu — dans l'idée que l'on s'en fait — est de se donner des règles qui n'ont pas de valeur en soi: on doit les respecter seulement le temps que dure le jeu. Elles lui confèrent structure et signification, mais leur juridiction ne s'étend pas au-delà. Il n'en est pas de même pour les principes de moralité. [...] On peut y voir l'indice d'un détachement — au moins : d'un commencement de détachement à l'égard de la notion traditionnelle d'obligation, la substitution d'un mode de pensée à un autre, le refus d'un absolu des valeurs. Le jeu est le règne du relatif. (Henriot 1989: 66)

- 6 We might therefore argue that metaphors taken from games are particularly apt to convey a Machiavellian view of the world since the chief argument of *The Prince* is precisely the distinction between the rules that should be applied to the political realm, and those that dictate an appropriate moral conduct. Machiavelli repeats that a good Prince has to adopt an immoral conduct at times if he wishes to remain in power and expresses this idea more fully in chapter 15, entitled "What men and particularly rulers are praised and blamed for":

In the same way, [the ruler] mustn't be concerned about the bad reputation that comes with those negative qualities that are almost essential if he is to hold on to power. If you think about it, there'll always be something that looks morally right but would actually lead a ruler to disaster, and something else that looks wrong but will bring security and success. (Machiavelli 2009: 61)

- 7 This Machiavellian dimension inherent in ludic metaphors is more palpable and relevant in the extended bowling metaphor we find in *King John*. The defining trait of bowling is that the only movements that take place are firmly anchored to the ground, something that distinguishes it from other ball games as noted by scientist Francis Willughby (1635-1672) in his treatise on games: "The ball is either tossed up in the aire: Football, Stowball, Stoolle Ball; or trulled upon the ground, where it allwaies turnes

about its center, as in Boules, Pelmel, Biliards." (Willughby 2003: 206) This strict adherence to the ground from the very first moment the ball is released from the hand of the player was in fact part of the rules: "The boule should touch the ground as soon as it leaves the hand, for if it bee thrown forward it will not run so true" (206). Although this may appear as a mere detail, it entailed a significant consequence when it came to symbolic uses or readings of the game. Indeed, the absence of a movement upwards meant that it was not possible to establish any direct link to the divine, something which could occur with other pastimes such as tennis, as we can see from an emblem in Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britannia* (Peacham 1612: sig. R2^v, see Figure 1), or hawking which the later king Henry VI construes as mirroring a divine order in *2 Henry VI* (2.1.5-8).

Figure 1: Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britannia*, 1612

Emblem showing a tennis ball.

Source: <https://archive.org/details/minervabritannao00peac/page/113/mode/2up>

- 8 This opposition between terrestrial and celestial realms is taken up by Francis Quarles in his emblem about bowling in which he opposes the bowling ground which has been laid by "Sathan", and the higher goal of heaven: "I'll cease to game, till fairer Ground be given/Nor wish to winne untill the Marke be Heaven." (Quarles 1635: sig. D^v). Bowling was entirely comprised of movements of deviation, the players's bodies themselves "wreath, and screw/Such antic shapes as Proteus never knew" (Quarles 1635: sig D^r, see Figure 2). The game therefore symbolically hinted at the imperfection which characterises the sublunar world. The extended bowling metaphor we find in *King John* therefore emphasises conflicting individual interests and the instability of the world itself which swiftly rolls from one direction to the other in an unpredictable motion.

Figure 2: Francis Quarles, *Emblems*, 1696, book I, p. 40

The emblem illustrates John 8:44, 'Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father you will do.'

Source: <https://archive.org/details/emblems00quarl/page/40/mode/2up>

- 9 As such this image differs markedly from that of other games like chess which is used earlier in the same scene in a way that draws our attention to the structural similarities between the English and French camps which are both under the sway of a powerful queen: "Thy bastard shall be king / That thou mayst be a queen and check the world." (2.1.122-3). Chess was also much more closely linked to aristocratic ludic practices than bowling which was widely spread in England and particularly popular in London. According to Angela Schattner, there were at least 30 places dedicated to the practice of bowling in London in 1617, probably more as these only take into account those who had secured an official permission (Schattner: 203). Francis Willughby also said that bowling was a practice "more generally used than any other in England" (Cram 2003: 207). It was also much more controversial than other games as it often involved high bets and cheating as we can see from a description of bowling greens in Thomas Dekker's *The Belman of London* (Dekker 1608: sig. G^{r-v}). It had even been officially banned several times by royal statutes in 1533 and 1574. In using a metaphor taken from this very popular game so extensively, and at a key moment in the plot, Shakespeare turns away from the more idealised image of politics often contained in a game like chess whose symbolical value had been expounded in medieval treatises⁴ and draws our attention to some of the less honourable actions players could resort to in order to win the game.

"Well won is well shot": Games and Political Opportunism

- 10 Perhaps what is most astonishing the Bastard's extended use of the bowling metaphor is the conclusion it leads him to. Far from simply calling into question these relative and immoral rules, he embraces them and concludes his soliloquy by claiming: "Since kings break faith upon commodity, / Gain be my lord, for I will worship thee." (2.1.598-9) Unlike other uses of the ludic motifs, such as the one we may find in satires and caricatures of the 16th and 17th centuries which openly condemned the action of rulers and the vanity of the time (Figure 3), Shakespeare uses the bowling metaphor to account for the fierceless pragmatism displayed by one of the protagonists of his history play without explicitly voicing or representing any form of moral condemnation. In fact, other ludic metaphors in the play also seem to justify and pave the way for opportunistic action in the realm of politics.

Figure 3: *Le revers du Jeu des Suisses*, 15th century

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

What is sometimes considered as the first ever printed caricature, *Le Revers du Jeu des Suysses* (c. 1514-5), represented rulers at a gaming table playing cards.

Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb41499415g>

- 11 Very early on in the play, the Bastard seems to proclaim an opportunistic principle using a metaphor taken from archery when he alludes to his mother's infidelity with Richard Coeur de Lion, his biological father:
- Queen Eleanor: The very spirit of Plantagenet!
I am thy grandam, Richard; call me so.
Bastard: Madam, by chance but not by truth; what though?
Something about, a little from the right,
In at the window, or else o'er the hatch:

Who dares not stir by day must walk by night,
And have is have, however men do catch.
Near or far off, well won is well shot,
And I am I, howe'er I was begot. (1.1.167-175)

- 12 "Well won is well shot" (l. 174) is an allusion to archery which has strong sexual undertones in this specific context. It also expresses a ludic principle that the Bastard will apply throughout the play according to which victory must be obtained whatever the cost. This goes against the moral and aesthetic ideal of "fair play" which was gaining momentum in early modern Europe according to Georges Vigarello who analysed how several commentators of the time valued what was deemed right or beautiful in games and sports rather than the actual victory itself (Vigarello: 32-3). Laurent Thirouin also identified the moral imperatives behind the French ideal of the "beau joueur" in the 17th century who, to play in a way considered "fair", had to show no excessive interest in the gains or losses of the game itself (Thirouin 1999: 201-18). This, of course, is the opposite of cheating, or "foul play", which discards any aesthetic or moral consideration in order to ensure victory.

- 13 In the rest of the play, the Bastard repeatedly asserts the necessity to resort to "foul play" in order to ensure the victory of king of England over his enemies. When King John agrees to peace with cardinal Pandolf although French troops are already in England, the Bastard insists on sending an army despite the agreement that has just been reached:

Bastard: O inglorious league!
Shall we, upon the footing of our land,
Send fair-play orders, and make compromise,
Insinuation, parley, and base truce
To arms invasive? (5.1.65-9)

- 14 The "fair-play orders" he alludes to are equated with morally degrading decisions: "inglorious league" (l. 65) and "base truce" (l. 68). It hints at a discrepancy between the line of conduct that is to be wished in theory and what should actually be applied in practice. In that perspective, this cue also brings to mind several common sayings of the time that equated playing and cheating and stated that true "honest" players were seldom to be found at gaming tables: "Hee hardly can/ Be a good Bouler and an Honest man." (Quarles 1635: sig. D^v). John Florio also noted the following saying in his *Firste Fruites* according which only fools do not cheat at games: "Three sortes of men that are to be counted fooles, a faythful lover of maydens, a mercyful soldier, & a fayre gamester" (Florio 1578: sig. G1^v). The phrase "fair play" such as it used by the Bastard moments later, when he asks for an audience with the Dauphin just as he expects to attack him, is therefore particularly ironic: "According to the fair play of the world, / Let me have audience" (5.2.118-9). Just after this scene, the Bastard is bluffing, as it were, by considerably exaggerating the number of soldiers of the English troops in order to frighten his enemies. He is therefore presented to the audience through these ludic metaphors and expressions as a daring player who knows the different possible tricks that might give him an advantage over his opponents.

- 15 Naturally, Philip Falconbridge is not the only character to choose an immoral course of action in order to secure victory. The decisions of many other characters in the play are also described in terms of "foul play", to take up the phrase Salisbury uses when he is convinced that Prince Arthur has just been killed on King John's orders:

Salisbury: It is apparent foul play, and 'tis shame
That greatness should so grossly offer it.
So thrive it in your game; and so, farewell.(4.2.93)

- 16 Even though the death of Arthur is actually the result of an accident we later witness in act IV scene 3, the audience knows that it had indeed been ordered by King John in act III scene 3. However immoral the assassination is — even the Bastard is horrified when he discovers the body of young Arthur, exclaiming: "It is a damnèd and a bloody work" (4.3.57) — it is also portrayed as the only possible course of action for the King of England by cardinal Pandolf:

Pandolf: [...] John has seized Arthur, and it cannot be
That whiles warm life plays in that infant's veins
The misplaced John should entertain an hour,
One minute, nay, one quiet breath of rest.
A sceptre snatched with an unruly hand
Must be as boisterously maintained as gained;
[...] That John may stand, then Arthur needs to fall;
So be it, for it cannot be but so. (3.4.131-40)

- 17 We may note the insistence with which Pandolf explains that killing Arthur is absolutely necessary and unavoidable for King John at that point: "it cannot be but so" (1.140). Again, this consideration, even though it is voiced by a cardinal, is purely strategical and in no way moralising.
- 18 The same kind of "foul play" is perceptible in the French king's decisions during the play. When King Philip is at first unwilling to listen to cardinal Pandolf, the "meddling priest" (3.1.89), demand the king break his newly contracted peace with England, he asks himself whether such sudden changes of policy do not amount to cheating faith:

King Philip: [...] And shall these hands, so lately purged of blood,
So newly joined in love, so strong in both,
Unyoke this seizure and this kind regreet,
Play fast and loose with faith, so jest with heaven,
Make such unconstant children of ourselves,
As now again to snatch our palm from palm,
Unswear faith sworn, and on the marriage-bed
Of smiling peace to march a bloody host,
And make a riot on the gentle brow
Of true sincerity? (3.1.165-174)

- 19 Although "to play fast and loose" had already grown into a common phrase highlighting a form of inconstancy, it also referred to a specific "old cheating game" (OED) which was played in taverns; it is also mentioned in that sense in *Antony and Cleopatra*.⁵ Later in the same scene, despite his remorse, Philip finally agrees to do what Pandolf asks and reneges on his peace treaty with England, thereby showing that faith is in no way binding for political actors. Faith, as well as religion, are always instrumentalised in view of more pragmatic and strategic decisions. This is also what the Bastard suggests when he tells the Dauphin that King John has only used cardinal Pandolf, and through him, religion, "rather for sport than need" (5.2.175) and that he was not sincere in the peace he had concluded with him. Of course, this bears echoes to the religious dimension of the play which has often been considered as less pro-Protestant than the other play dealing with the same historical events, *The Troublesome Raign of King John* (Hamel 1989: 13-4). In light of this, we are led to see King John's successive rejection and acceptance of Pandolf's propositions as resulting from strategic considerations rather than spiritual convictions, a suggestion that directly

addressed some of the most debated issues of post-reformation England (Lake 2016: 184). By contrast, the only selfless deed inspired by a moral sentiment of pity in the play — Hubert's refusal to kill Prince Arthur in act IV scene 1 — is ultimately overturned by the prince's accidental death in act IV scene 3. Ironically, this selfless act leads Hubert to incur the recriminations and threats of the nobles even more brutally as they come upon the body of Arthur just before Hubert tells them the young prince was spared, allowing them to accuse him directly: "O, he is bold, and blushes not at death! — / Avaunt, thou hateful villain, get thee gone!" (4.3.76-7)

- 20 *King John* therefore illustrates the necessary "foul play" that occurs in the world of politics in order to reach a greater goal. This opportunism is all the more central as it stems from the Machiavellian idea that human agency plays a vital part in the unfolding of historical events.

"[T]he best cards for the game": Human Agency and Providence

- 21 Game metaphors also lead us to a question the respective roles of skill and chance in the outcome of a game. This was a central issue in early modern debates on games as the distinction between skill and chance was often called upon by moralists to determine which games were acceptable and which were not. For William Perkins (1558-1602), a theologian, games where the "industry of the mind & body hath the chiefest stroke, are very commendable, and not to be disliked"; contrariwise, "games that are of meere-hazard, by the consent of godly Divines, are unlawfull" (Perkins 1606: 590). Chess thus belonged to the former category; dice, and sometimes cards, were more often considered as belonging to the latter. These practices were all the more polemical as the luck that players had during their games was deemed by some, like John Northbrooke (1577: 107-8) or Thomas Wilcox, as "one of the principall testimonies of the power of God, because it is ruled and governed immediately by his hand and providence" (Wilcox 1581: sig. B7^v) and was therefore considered as misdirected when it was sought by players in leisurely pursuits or out of covetousness. This issue directly echoed questions concerning political action itself. As many writings promoted a providentialist view of history, including those, like Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, that served as a source for many of Shakespeare's history plays, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, on the other hand, claimed that there was also room for human agency and opportunistic action. He stresses this point in chapter 25 entitled "The role of luck in human affairs, and how to defend against it":

I realize that many people have believed and still do believe that the world is run by God and by fortune and that however shrewd men may be they can't do anything about it and have no way of protecting themselves. [...] All the same, and so as not to give up on our free will, I reckon it may be true that luck decides the half of what we do, but it leaves the other half, more or less to us. (Machiavelli 2009: 98)

- 22 Such a conception of history and politics considered at least partly controlled by human actions is perceptible in *King John*, especially in the way Shakespeare uses references to games in the play.
- 23 There are at least three occurrences in *King John* which can denote either a divine intervention or a disruptive form of contingency in political outcomes: the arrival of the cardinal, Pandolf, act III scene 1, has been construed by Kelly Hunter as a possible,

albeit ultimately ironical, answer to Constance's call for help to the heavens (Hunter 2004: 45-6); the prophecy of Peter of Pomfret at act IV scene 2; or the accidental death of Prince Arthur at act IV scene 3. However, it is unclear whether these events are truly providential and if they are, what meaning directs them given that they often lead to unexpected consequences, backfiring on those that had called upon a divine intervention. Furthermore, they are overshadowed by the depiction of the potency of human actions which is strongly highlighted by ludic metaphors. The extended bowling metaphor in the Bastard's soliloquy of act II scene 1, for instance, highlights the consequences of human actions which can shape and direct the world as a whole. The analogy drawn between the terrestrial globe and a bowl entails that the changes in the world are entirely directed and triggered by human actors engaged in a political game. Bowling was often considered as a game of skill whose issue was determined by the physical dexterity of the players, rather than exclusively by the intervention of luck or providence. Fortune played a part in the outcome, as is evident from the description we find in Quarles's emblem (Quarles 1635: sig. D^{r-v}), but it only partially determined the issue of the game. As such, bowling was part of what William Perkins and other authors of the time who attempted to classify games called "mixed games":

The third kind of plaies are mixt, which stand partly of hazard, and partly of witte,
& in which hazard beginnes the game, and skil gets the victorie: and that which is
defectiue by reason of hazard, is corrected by witte. (Perkins 1606: 591)

- 24 The allusion to card games at the end of the play also seems to suggest the strong interlocking relationship between fortune and human agency. In answer to cardinal Pandolf's demand that he immediately cease his invasion of England, the Dauphin Louis answers that, having the upper hand, he would be a fool to stop his attack at that moment:

Louis the Dauphin: [...] Have I not heard these islanders shout out
'Vive le Roi!' as I have banked their towns?
Have I not here the best cards for the game,
To win this easy match played for a crown?
And shall I now give o'er the yielded set?
No, no, on my soul, it never shall be said. (5.2.103-8)

- 25 The allusion to cards here, and to the money that was commonly played during these games through the double meaning of the word "crown" (l.106), portrays the king as a shrewd player who, like Machiavelli's prince, knows how to seize the opportunity of attacking a new enemy to increase and shore up his own power (Machiavelli 2009: 84. It was not uncommon to portray rulers as playing a card game and Shakespeare has done so in other plays (e.g. *Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.15.15-20). Cards were deemed to be the perfect example of a "mixed game" (Perkins 1606: 591). The metaphor as it appears in act V scene 2 of *King John* then fully exemplifies Machiavelli's distribution of luck and human agency.
- 26 And yet, the Dauphin's ambitions are quickly upset as we learn in the following scene that the reinforcements of the French army have been shipwrecked. Although this could clearly be construed as a divine intervention — an earlier version of the "Protestant Wind" that defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588 — another possible reading of this event could be that the Dauphin is not an unfortunate player thwarted by providence, but a mere card in the game played by the Pope, cardinal Pandolf, and the other rulers who are vying for power. This reading is suggested by the exclamation Louis claims to have heard on his arrival in England — "Vive le Roi!" — which was also a

phrase that could be found on actual playing cards of the time (Figure 4). Although there is no way of knowing exactly how widespread such objects were, had it been in the minds of Shakespeare's contemporaries it would have certainly induced a comparison between the Dauphin and the actual playing card, hereby suggesting that the Dauphin himself is in fact nothing more than an object in the hands of more cunning players.

Figure 4: Early 16th century playing card by F. Durand

The inscription on the bottom left reads "vive le Roy".

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O211485/playing-card-durand-f/>

- 27 Both the references to bowls and cards therefore suggest that human intentions are behind the unstable motions of the world. They show the importance of human actions on the course of history and how these actions may be, in turn, influenced by chance or providence. Such is not the case in all of Shakespeare's history plays. At the end of *Richard III*, for instance, the reference to dice underlines the protagonist's loss of power over the events that are unfolding. Referencing dice, one of the only games to rely exclusively on chance, is therefore highly significant here, as it clearly portrays the outcome of the Battle of Bosworth as being providential. As Richard III exclaims "I will stand the hazard of the die" (5.7.10), it is clear to the audience that Richard has already lost the game. By contrast, references to games in *King John* tend to play down any exclusively providential reading of the historical period represented on stage. This may also account for the Bastard's patriotic last cue at the end of the play. Although the idealism that pervades it may well be read ironically (Champion 1989: 151-2), it may equally be construed as a call to action and, more specifically, as a reminder of the importance of individual actions and interests in the political realm, especially when it comes to uniting the kingdom. This, as we know, is a rather pessimistic conclusion as it casts the shadow of the civil wars to come and of the disastrous consequences of never-ending contentions between aristocratic factions. As such, the ending of *King John* may also be reminiscent of the concluding remarks of chapter 25 of Machiavelli's *Prince*.
- 28 The numerous references to games such as chess, bowls, archery, and cards, in *King John* shed light on a deeply Machiavellian view of politics and history which pervades

the play. These references and their symbolism serve to highlight the autonomy of the political realm from morality and religion. Metaphors taken from games also account for characters who embrace this relative perspective and resort to "foul play" to maintain power despite the immorality or lack of consistency such choices may imply. Ludic metaphors also question the respective roles of human agency and providence in the play in a way which seems to emphasise the former over the latter, thereby taking Machiavelli's view that human actions are necessary and highly influential in the "fair play of the world" (5.2.118) whatever the ways of providence may be in the end. This question also pervades Shakespeare's later history plays, in which references to games of dice or cards constitute a similarly significant metaphorical subtext ultimately questioning whether rulers are cunning players in a subtle game of alliances and strategy... or merely pawns in the hands of higher inscrutable powers.

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NOTES

1. All references to this play and other plays by Shakespeare are taken from the second edition of *The Complete Works* edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor for Oxford University Press.
2. The language of archery, like that of chess and bowls, had given rise to many common phrases in everyday language, it is therefore possible to read other references to these practices in the play in addition to the most obvious ones which are mentioned here.
3. The image of bowling as a game illustrating the conflicting interests of individual parties was in fact also taken up in the 17th century by William Strode in a poem entitled "A Parallel betwixt bowling and preferment".
4. One of the earliest printed books in England was William Caxton's *The Game and Playe of Chess* in 1474, and again in 1483. It was an English translation of a treatise by Jacobus de Cessolis which described each pawn of the game and conveyed an idealised view of medieval society.
5. "Antony: This grave charm [...] / Like a right gipsy hath at fast and loose / Beguiled me to the very heart of loss." (4.13.25-29)

ABSTRACTS

This paper aims at analysing the different metaphors and references drawn from games in Shakespeare's *King John*. Far from being neutral, I argue that these images are underpinned by a deeply Machiavellian view of the world and politics. This is particularly perceptible in the extended bowling metaphor used by one of the play's protagonists, Philip Falconbridge, nicknamed the Bastard, in a soliloquy which leads him to adopt a pragmatic and opportunistic

course of action which he will apply throughout the play. This also leads him, and the other characters as well, to resort to acts that are characterised as “foul play” in order to secure victory. Ultimately, ludic references throughout the play give rise to a reflection on the respective roles of chance, or providence, and human agency in shaping history. Although some games, like dice, were often used to suggest a providentialist view of history, the ones we find in *King John* are “mixed games” in which luck and human agency constantly interact. In that perspective as well, the play seems to echo a Machiavellian outlook on history as expressed in the last chapters of *The Prince*.

Cet article vise à analyser les différentes métaphores et références tirées des jeux dans *King John* de Shakespeare. Loin d'être neutres, ces images ludiques sont sous-tendues par une vision profondément machiavélique du monde et de la politique. Cela est particulièrement perceptible dans la métaphore filée du jeu de boules telle qu'elle est employée par l'un des protagonistes de la pièce, Philip Falconbridge, surnommé le Bâtard, au cours d'un soliloque qu'il conclut en adoptant une ligne de conduite pragmatique et opportuniste qui le guidera tout au long de la pièce. Cela l'amène également, ainsi que les autres personnages de la pièce, à recourir à des actes qualifiés de « foul play » afin de s'assurer la victoire. En fin de compte, les références ludiques tout au long de la pièce donnent lieu à une réflexion sur les rôles respectifs du hasard, ou de la providence, et de l'action humaine dans le déroulement de l'histoire. Bien que certains jeux, comme les dés, aient souvent été utilisés pour suggérer une vision providentialiste de l'histoire, ceux que nous trouvons dans *King John* sont des « jeux mixtes » dans lesquels la chance et l'action humaine interagissent constamment. Dans cette perspective également, le jeu semble faire écho à une vision machiavélique de l'histoire que l'on trouve dans les derniers chapitres du *Prince*.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Shakespeare William, théâtre historique, jeux, théâtre élisabéthain, jeu de boules, Roi Jean (le), Machiavel

Keywords: Shakespeare William, history plays, games, early modern theatre, bowling, King John, Machiavelli

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