

## ***The Rediscovery of Machiavelli in Napoleon's Germany. Heinrich von Kleist and his Contemporaries***

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### ABSTRACT

Successive defeats by Napoleon's armies, and the occupation of Prussia by the French after the battle of Jena, inspired a new interest in Machiavelli among German thinkers. Hegel, in his unpublished essay on the German constitution, compared the fragmented state of Germany to that of Machiavelli's Italy. Fichte, in his essay on Machiavelli, drew a comparison with the French invasion of Italy in 1494, and argued that Germany needed to be unified under a powerful ruler, as Machiavelli had recommended for Italy. He and F.L. Jahn were inspired by Machiavelli's concept of the democratic nation composed of patriotic citizens who were always ready to fight for it. Finally, Kleist, who probably absorbed Machiavellian ideas indirectly via Rousseau, celebrated the unscrupulous Machiavellian liberator in *Die Herrmannschlacht*, gave a more critical portrayal of Machiavellian statecraft in *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, and, in the latter play, developed the idea of the military republic united by patriotism.

### KEYWORDS

Hegel, Fichte, Jahn, Kleist, Napoleon

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, a renaissance of interest in Machiavelli occurred in Germany. His works, especially *The Prince*, seemed startlingly relevant to the fragmented and enfeebled condition of the German-speaking lands. Hegel and Fichte noted the striking parallel between Machiavelli's Italy and present-day Germany: both were divided into petty states which were unable to co-operate even against the overwhelming threat from France. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, the German nationalist who founded the 'Burschenschaft' movement, also invoked Machiavelli. Above all, the later dramas of Heinrich von Kleist, an ardent German patriot, seem to be pervaded by Machiavellian thought, although Kleist nowhere mentions Machiavelli. After a brief account of how Hegel, Fichte and Jahn sought inspiration in Machiavelli, the greater part of this essay will focus on Kleist and his two political dramas *Die Herrmannsschlacht* and *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*.

The Holy Roman Empire, lacking effective leadership and even a common purpose, was helpless against the aggressive and expansionist policy pursued by revolutionary France. The attempt by combined Prussian and Austrian forces to invade France and restore the King to power was repelled at the battle of Valmy in September 1792. Thereafter France went on the offensive, occupying many weak states of western Germany and subjecting them to brutal exactions. By the Treaty of Basel in April 1795, Prussia acknowledged the legitimacy of the French revolutionary government and accepted its occupation of the Rhineland. Austria, continuing the war after Prussia's withdrawal, suffered a defeat at the battle of Hohenlinden in December 1800 and signed the peace treaty of Lunéville in February 1801. Under pressure from Napoleon, the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved on 6 August 1806; the Emperor Francis II, became instead Emperor of Austria under the (confusing) regnal name Francis I.

Until the dissolution of the Empire, discussions went on about how it might be saved.<sup>1</sup> No such hope, however, was expressed by the young philosopher Hegel, who between 1799 and 1802 worked on an essay on the German constitution. He abandoned the essay (without giving it a title), and it was published only after his death. His starting-point is that a political entity must be a state, in which power is concentrated at a single centre. Cardinal Richelieu made France into a centralized state by taming the power of the nobility and defeating the aspirations of the Huguenots to form a state within the state. Germany is very far from such unity. Not only is it fragmented into a large number of political units, but these, despite their various dissensions, are exposed to the influence either of Prussia or of Austria. Germany's condition is even worse than that of Machiavelli's Italy. There the small independent states were swallowed up by larger ones, but this process did not lead to the unification of Italy and left it exposed as a battleground for foreign powers. In this situation Machiavelli alone was far-sighted enough to see that Italy could only be saved by being unified, and that this unification could only be accomplished by a man who was prepared to use the necessary force. Hegel admits that 'the name of Machiavelli carries with it the seal of disapproval in public opinion, and Machiavellian principles have been made synonymous with detestable ones'.

Hegel therefore undertakes a defence of Machiavelli against 'moralizing', such as that of Frederick the Great in his *Antimachiavel*. Frederick, as Hegel points out, uttered 'moral cries' against Machiavelli but undermined them by his own actions, notably in seizing Silesia from its helpless rightful owner,

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<sup>1</sup> See Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ii. 600-13.

Maria Theresa, and claiming that treaties between states are not binding when they do not serve a state's interests.<sup>2</sup> Machiavelli was a patriot; he wrote 'with genuine sincerity', and 'had neither baseness of heart nor frivolity of mind'. He saw that only the most drastic means could save Italy. 'A situation in which poison and assassination are common weapons demands remedies of no gentle kind. When life is on the brink of decay it can be reorganized only by a procedure involving the maximum of force'. Violence is justified as a means of opposing anarchy: 'Those who assail the state directly, and not indirectly as other criminals do, are the greatest criminals, and the state has no higher duty than to maintain itself and crush the power of those criminals in the surest way it can'. Forcible measures to maintain the state are not blameworthy, but can be seen as just punishment. And Machiavelli's conception of the unification of Italy, by whatever means are necessary, is 'an extremely great and true conception produced by a genuinely political head endowed with an intellect of the highest and noblest kind'. Germany needs a conqueror who will impose his will by force, but he will also have to institute some form of organization that gives the people a voice in government. Like Theseus, the legendary hero whose life Plutarch had written, this great man will be both a conqueror and a lawgiver.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel's prescription for saving Germany anticipates the conception of *Realpolitik* which was formulated in the 1850s by August Ludwig von Rochau.<sup>4</sup> The great exponent of *Realpolitik*, in the general view, was Bismarck, and his ruthless deployment of war in order to unify Germany was associated with the precepts of Machiavelli. Thus Nietzsche speaks of 'Bismarck's Machiavellianism with a good conscience, his so-called "*Realpolitik*".<sup>5</sup> In Hegel's day, however, no German Theseus came forward. His conception of the Machiavellian conqueror seems formed in the image of Germany's great antagonist Napoleon, who was pre-eminent both as conqueror and legislator.

After Napoleon had defeated the combined Austrian and Russian forces at Austerlitz on 2 December 1805, he formed the German states under his

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick says this in the original version of the foreword (1742) to the *Histoire de mon temps*; see *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, ed. J.D.E. Preuss (Berlin: Decker, 1846), vol.2, pp. xvi, xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Hegel are from the twelfth chapter of *The German Constitution in Hegel's Political Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox with an introduction by Z.A. Pelczynski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 220-1.

<sup>4</sup> See [August Ludwig von Rochau], *Grundsätze der Realpolitik, angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Stuttgart: Göpel, 1859).

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 305.

sway into the Confederation of the Rhine and encouraged the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Prussia was not nearly so formidable an antagonist as she had been under Frederick the Great. 'As quickly became clear, the army suffered from the same weaknesses as the government: half-hearted and insufficient reforms, poor leadership, an incoherent command structure, and a surfeit of special privileges.'<sup>6</sup> Hence on 14 October 1806 Napoleon's forces defeated the Prussian army in the battles of Jena and Auerstedt. Prussia collapsed as a military power. Napoleon entered Berlin as a conqueror on 27 October 1806; the Prussian King and Queen fled to Königsberg, far away on the Baltic, while Prussia remained under French occupation. By the treaty of Tilsit, agreed between Napoleon and Tsar Alexander of Russia in July 1807, Prussia lost all its territory west of the Elbe and most of its Polish lands. It was reduced to only four provinces, its army was limited to 42,000 men, and its population was heavily taxed for the benefit of their French occupiers. Patriots placed their hopes in Austrian resistance, but Napoleon decisively defeated Austria at the battle of Wagram on 6 July 1809 and concluded the Peace of Schönbrunn on 14 October 1809.

The collapse of Prussia gave a huge stimulus to German nationalism. One of its main spokesmen was the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, not only in his famous or notorious *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (*Addresses to the German Nation*, 1808), but also in an essay giving a positive revaluation of Machiavelli. A heady patriotic discourse, emphasizing self-sacrifice for the fatherland, had already emerged during the Seven Years' War, focused on Prussia. Fichte and his contemporaries transferred the focus to Germany as a whole. Their nationalism was partly founded on the arguments put forward by Herder in the previous decades for valuing the distinctive, local, and particular character of individual cultures, for which he constantly uses the word 'national'. Although some older accounts portray him as anticipating Fichte's nationalism, Herder is one of the greatest exponents of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism.<sup>7</sup> Fichte, however, discarded cosmopolitanism and imputed superior qualities to the German people ('Volk'). His views were broadly shared by such spokesmen as Ernst Moritz Arndt (author of the poem 'Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?' (1813), calling for the unification of Germany) and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. As we shall soon see, they were also shared by Kleist.

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<sup>6</sup> James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 295.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960). Herder's nationalism is sharply distinguished from Fichte's by Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 17. For a differentiated account of Herder's outlook, see Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976).

Fichte's nationalism is based on language. According to him, the Germans still have a language which is original ('ursprünglich') and retains its natural vigour ('Kraft'), whereas the French speak a derivative language based on Latin. By implication, French culture too is merely shallow and derivative. Words derived from French or Latin should have no place in the German language. This applies especially to those words associated with the ideals of the French Revolution: what Fichte calls the notorious words 'Humanität, Popularität, Liberalität'.<sup>8</sup> To the German these words can only be an empty noise, because they are not related to any other German words. He cannot have any deep, inward understanding of them. But neither can a Frenchman, because French is not a deep, original language anyway. They can be nothing more than slogans. They impose on some foolish people, but they mean nothing. If such meaning as they have were expressed in German, it would be 'Menschenfreundlichkeit, Leutseligkeit, Edelmut' (which sound quite different, and not at all revolutionary).

Since only the Germans are profound, only they can properly be a 'Volk'. A 'Volk' is eternal; it is a continuity extending before the birth and after the death of the individual; this sense of belonging to a larger whole is the foundation of patriotism, of devotion to 'Volk und Vaterland', which can inspire one to die for one's country. As an example, Fichte returns to the ancient Germans: 'In diesem Glauben setzten unsre ältesten gemeinsamen Vorfahren, das Stammvolk der neuen Bildung, die von den Römern Germanier genannten Deutschen, sich der herandringenden Weltherrschaft der Römer mutig entgegen.'<sup>9</sup> 'In this belief our oldest common forefathers, the ancestral people of the new culture, called Teutons by the Romans, bravely opposed the encroaching world dominion of the Romans.'<sup>10</sup> They wanted the freedom to remain Germans without adopting Roman ways. And at this point Fichte's audience must have felt acutely conscious that their country was occupied by a foreign nation claiming cultural superiority and apparently striving for world dominion.

The ancient Germans' resistance to the Romans was one model for contemporary resistance to French occupation. Another model was provided by Machiavelli. In June 1807 Fichte published in the journal *Vesta*, based in Königsberg, an essay entitled 'Ueber Machiavell, als Schriftsteller, und Stellen aus seinen Schriften'. The extracts from Machiavelli that follow the

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<sup>8</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Philosophische Bibliothek 204 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1978), p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Fichte, *Reden*, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, tr. Gregory Moore, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 108.

essay begin with the last chapter of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli calls for a new leader to liberate Italy from the barbarians who have been ravaging it since 1494. They also include an extract from chapter 14, on the duty of a prince to concentrate on warfare.

Fichte finds Machiavelli not only a timely writer, but also a congenial one. The great quality he emphasizes is Machiavelli's realism. Machiavelli is rooted in real life ('ruht ganz auf dem wirklichen Leben').<sup>11</sup> He is an honest and truthful writer, whose moral character inspires love and respect. He is concerned to see and describe matters as they are and to follow his arguments through to their conclusions. He does not advocate wickedness. Far from praising Cesare Borgia's cruelty, he commends Borgia only for establishing order quickly in an unruly province. Even the paganism that Fichte imputes to him is to his credit, since it is based on a rejection of the monkish, other-worldly Christianity of his time; it resembles the outlook of modern pagans who find inspiration in classical literature (presumably an allusion to Goethe).

Machiavelli does not get everything right. Fichte disapproves of his nostalgia for small independent republics, because such petty states merely retard the progress of humanity. Fortunately, Machiavelli seems eventually to have realized that Italy needed to be united under a single strong leader, such as he demands at the end of *The Prince*. Fichte quotes his testimony that 'no country has ever been united and happy unless the whole of it has been under the jurisdiction of one republic or one prince'.<sup>12</sup>

However, Machiavelli has many lessons for the present day. He shows admirable realism in saying that in setting up a state 'it must needs be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers'.<sup>13</sup> For the state is not a voluntary association but a compulsory one ('eine Zwangsanstalt') which restrains people's natural condition of mutual enmity, the war of all against all, by compelling them to preserve at least the appearance of peace.<sup>14</sup> The prince is entitled to maintain law and order by force, as when he suppresses a rebellion, though Fichte thinks that nowadays, in contrast to Machiavelli's time, uprisings against one's ruler are a rare event.

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<sup>11</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell, als Schriftsteller, und Stellen aus seinen Schriften', in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky, vol. 9: Werke 1806-1807, ed. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), pp. 223-75 (p. 224).

<sup>12</sup> *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, tr. by Leslie J. Walker, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), p. 245; quoted by Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 229.

<sup>13</sup> *Discourses*, pp. 216-17; Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 239.

Fichte's main concern in the Machiavelli essay is with foreign policy. Here, constant suspicion is essential, because nations really are in a condition of perpetual enmity. Thanks to a drive implanted by God, every nation seeks to increase its influence and enlarge its territory at the expense of others; a state that ceases to expand is liable to be attacked and to diminish. 'Whoever does not grow will shrink when others grow.'<sup>15</sup> A private individual may be content with what he has, but a state must always seek to enlarge its possessions, for fear of having them reduced. So you must always assume that other nations are trying to benefit at your expense, and you must be prepared to respond to their aggression. Perpetual enmity, however, does not mean perpetual war, for readiness for war is the best guarantee of peace. To maintain this readiness, Fichte recommends that in peacetime young Europeans should be sent to fight with barbarians, of whom there are some in Europe and many more in other continents.<sup>16</sup>

In dealing with other nations, there is no room for morality. A ruler should observe morality in his private life; in dealing with his subjects, he should strictly observe the law; but towards other nations the only law is that of the stronger: 'in his relation to other states there is neither law nor right, except the right of the stronger, and this relation is placed in the prince's hands, and in his responsibility, by the divine laws of fate and the order of the universe ['Weltregierung'], raising him above the commands of individual morality to a higher moral order whose material content is expressed in the words: *Salus et decus populi suprema lex esto* (Let the safety and glory of the people be the supreme law)'.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, Fichte continues, too many people are now misled by liberal doctrines, which, as a veiled allusion shows, he especially associates with Kant. 'In the second half of the past century, this briefly fashionable philosophy had already grown flat, sickly, and impoverished, offering as its highest good a certain humanity, and liberality, and popularity,<sup>18</sup> pleading with people to be good and to leave well alone, constantly recommending the golden mean, i.e. the fusion of all antitheses into a dull chaos, the enemy of all seriousness, all consistency, all enthusiasm, of any great idea and decision, and of any phenomenon that stood out a little above the long and broad surface, but especially enamoured of perpetual peace.'<sup>19</sup> Kant's advocacy of

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<sup>15</sup> Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 242.

<sup>16</sup> Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', pp. 244-5.

<sup>18</sup> 'eine gewisse Humanität, und Liberalität, und Popularität', Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 245. In using foreign words, he intends further to discredit this philosophy by portraying it as un-German.

<sup>19</sup> Fichte, 'Ueber Machiavell', p. 245.

peace in *Zum ewigen Frieden (On Perpetual Peace, 1795)* is thus decisively rejected. Fichte offers instead a vision of a warlike state, ruled by a strong leader but based on law and on popular participation; its young men will engage in military exercises and fight against colonized peoples (who will presumably be in constant rebellion, otherwise fighting would soon cease to be necessary); its people will not seek prosperity and comfort, but military glory, and the natural urge of nations to enlarge their territory ensures that war will break out from time to time. This vision strikingly resembles the expansionist republic, based on Rome, that Machiavelli envisaged in the *Discourses*. It uneasily combines an appeal to hard-headed realism with what now looks like boyish romanticism about warfare. Over the next century and a half it would find many supporters.

Machiavelli is also a pervasive presence in the patriotic treatise, *Deutsches Volkstum* (1810), by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852). Jahn, often known to later generations as 'Turnvater Jahn', is famous for organizing resistance to the French invaders of Germany, founding gymnastic associations, and reviving the medieval word *Turnen* for gymnastics.<sup>20</sup> Jahn has been the subject of much myth-making, whether positive, as a herald of the Wilhelmine Empire and/or the Third Reich, or negative, as a crude, ill-educated person (he was expelled from two universities for brawling). Jahn participated with little success in the war against Napoleon as a member of the Lützowsche Freikorps, which was sidelined. The sports and gymnastics that Jahn encouraged were no eccentricity, but in keeping with the mood of the times, as well as being a practical realization of proposals put forward in *Deutsches Volkstum*. Jahn also helped to found a patriotic secret society, the Deutscher Bund, which called for the reformation of student life and led to the foundation of 'Burschenschaften' or patriotic student societies from 1815 onwards. He underwent arrest, trial and imprisonment for his part in the nationalist Wartburg festival. The rest of his life was spent in internal exile.

*Deutsches Volkstum* describes what a united Germany should be like, though Jahn is well aware that unification is a distant and perhaps a utopian prospect. The unified German state should have a capital city, Teutona, which should be located somewhere on the Elbe, as near as possible to the centre of the present German-speaking territories. Writing against the background of French occupation, Jahn, like Fichte, deplors the borrowing of words from French. The German language should be purified of all such alien elements; foreign languages should not be taught; and schools should introduce pupils to German authors before directing them to distant classical

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<sup>20</sup> For my understanding of Jahn I am very much indebted to Hanna Weibye, 'Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and German nationalism 1800-1819', Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 2014.



ones, so that Goethe should have priority over Horace, Schiller over Sophocles. A national system of education is needed. Boys should learn not only academic subjects but also handicrafts; girls should learn not only domestic tasks such as sewing, but also household management and home economics. Physical exercises – running, climbing, swimming, rowing – should be prominent in the education of both sexes; women should learn the less strenuous exercises, such as skating, and also learn to shoot with a pistol. The citizens of united Germany should all wear a distinctive national costume; being forbidden to wear the national dress will be part of the punishment of criminals. This ideal state suffers from the same drawbacks as other utopias: since no allowance is made for change and development, it would inevitably stagnate; and its intense nationalism would exclude fruitful influences from other cultures.

Jahn's imagined Germany is strikingly democratic. Serfdom will be abolished, leaving a nation of peasant proprietors who will be motivated to defend their own property along with their fatherland. Nobles will receive no privileges beyond what their individual talents entitle them to. All male citizens (assisted if necessary by their pistol-shooting wives) will be ready to defend the fatherland, though a small standing army will be maintained in case of surprise attacks by other nations. The citizen army, or 'Landwehr', is the fullest expression of patriotism: 'Nur im vaterländischen Schutzkrieg, in der Landwehr allein kann der Mensch, mit Ehre und Pflicht einstimmig, streiten, siegen und fallen.'<sup>21</sup> 'Only in a defensive patriotic war, only in the citizen army, can man, in accordance with honour and duty, fight, prevail, and fall.'

It is in his conception of a democratic state, in which all male citizens are ready to fight a defensive war, that Jahn's reception of Machiavelli's republican ideal is most obvious. He has of course other sources of inspiration. The leaders of the American revolution, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are mentioned approvingly, suggesting that Jahn saw in their defeat of British forces a possible model for a German uprising against the French. Another model, praised for his 'hohen Volkssinn', was Wilhelm Friedrich von Meyern, author of the patriotic (but unreadable) novel *Dya-na-Sore* (1787-91).<sup>22</sup> Meyern too celebrates war as the supreme expression of patriotism. One of the numerous hermits who counsel the main characters praises war as 'the source of the noblest actions, the place where man's soul

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<sup>21</sup> *Deutsches Volkstum* (1810), in *Friedrich Ludwig Jahns Werke*, ed. Carl Euler, 3 vols. (Hof: G.A. Grau & Cie, 1884), pp. 143-377 (p. 295).

<sup>22</sup> See Jahn, *Deutsches Volkstum*, p. 346.

shows itself in its most sublime strength'.<sup>23</sup> Machiavelli appears several times in Jahn's text as a source of wisdom on diverse topics. Not only is he ranked, as a political thinker, alongside Aristotle and Montesquieu, and described as 'der gründliche Kenner von Staatskrankheiten und Volksseuchen' ('the expert on political diseases and popular plagues'); his praise of the Germans' as yet unspoiled national character is quoted approvingly, as is his view that boys should be named after heroes in order to encourage them in heroic sentiments.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, within Prussia, some more realistic people recognized the need for internal renewal. The Prussian Reform Movement was led by the politicians Prince Karl August von Hardenberg and Freiherr Karl von Stein from 1807 onwards. They wanted to reduce class privileges, to replace the influence of the king's irresponsible cronies with ministerial government, to abolish serfdom, to transform the population from subjects into citizens, and to promote national identity and solidarity. They were not wholly successful in practice: thus the provincial governments (*Stände*) they introduced did little more than provide a forum for the enemies of reform, while agricultural workers, freed from serfdom, were exposed to market forces. They particularly wanted to reform the army, to get rid of the elderly and incompetent officers who had been responsible for Prussia's defeat, and to create a clear command structure in which officers would be promoted according to their talent, not their family connections. Following the example of the French revolutionary armies, they wanted to bring forth 'the nation in arms, a citizen army led by the most talented professionals society could produce'.<sup>25</sup> The King, however, feared the *Volk* and opposed the idea of a *Volksarmee*.

Kleist now enters the scene. Although as a young man he had rebelled against Prussian military discipline, he now assumed a patriotic stance. When the Prussian royal family fled to Königsberg, Kleist was already there, holding down a bureaucratic post. In February 1807 he left for Berlin, but he and two other Prussian officers were arrested by the French on suspicion of espionage and transported to prison in France. In April, thanks to appeals by relatives to the French governor of Berlin, Kleist and his two fellow-officers were transferred from a prison, Fort Joux, to an internment camp at Châlons-

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<sup>23</sup> W.Fr. Meyern, *Dya-Na-Sore, oder die Wanderer. Eine Geschichte aus dem Sam-skritt* übersetzt (Frankfurt a.M.: Zweitausendeins, 1979), p. 111.

<sup>24</sup> Jahn, *Deutsches Volkstum*, pp. 170, 309, 338. Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* are mentioned on p. 289.

<sup>25</sup> Sheehan, *German History*, p. 309.

sur-Marne. After France signed the Treaty of Tilsit with Russia on 9 July, Kleist was released, and was back in Berlin by 14 August 1807.

These experiences added vitriol to the furious polemics that Kleist wrote against the French, calling for a national uprising to expel them. He particularly criticized the weak and indecisive leadership offered by King Friedrich Wilhelm III. Kleist was strongly encouraged by the battle of Aspern in May 1809, in which Austrian troops under Archduke Karl defeated Napoleon's army outside Vienna, and himself visited the battlefield on 22 May. His many patriotic essays had little resonance, since none of them was published; his often bloodthirsty poems perhaps had more effect. He spent the last two years of his life in Berlin, trying to promote an uprising against the French; he also sympathized with the aims of the Prussian Reform Movement.

Kleist never, to my knowledge, mentions Machiavelli, yet it is a commonplace of Kleist criticism that several of his main characters are unscrupulous Machiavellians.<sup>26</sup> It is less often noticed that in portraying a militarized nation, he recalls Machiavelli's conception of an armed citizenry.<sup>27</sup> Here, however, his reception of Machiavelli was probably indirect, via Rousseau, who wrote of Machiavelli in *The Social Contract*: 'He professed to teach kings; but it was the people he really taught. His *Prince* is the book of Republicans.'<sup>28</sup> Rousseau, especially in his first Discourse (1750), idealized simple, cohesive societies, such as ancient Sparta and modern Switzerland, which were held together by the citizens' shared commitment to self-defence. In any case, given Machiavelli's reputation, one did not need to have read him in order to know that Machiavellianism was shorthand for a pragmatic conduct of politics with no moral scruples, often described as statecraft or 'Staatskunst'. The article 'Machiavelisme' in the *Encyclopédie*, written by Diderot, defined it as: 'espece [sic] de politique détestable qu'on peut rendre en deux mots, par l'art de tyranniser, dont Machiavel le florentin a répandu

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g. William C. Reeve, *In Pursuit of Power: Heinrich von Kleist's Machiavellian Protagonists* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Gerhard Schulz, *Kleist: Eine Biographie* (Munich: Beck, 2007), p. 415; Ingo Breuer (ed.), *Kleist-Handbuch* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2009), pp. 242, 262; Peter Philipp Riedl, 'Texturen des Terrors: Politische Gewalt im Werk Heinrich von Kleists', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 78 (2009), 32-46 (p. 40).

<sup>27</sup> For this argument, see Ritchie Robertson, 'Women warriors and the origin of the state: Werner's *Wanda* and Kleist's *Penthesilea*', in Sarah Colvin and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (eds.), *Women and Death: Warlike Women in the German Literary and Cultural Imagination since 1500* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 61-85.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, tr. G.D.H. Cole, revised by J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall, Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1973), p. 242.

les principes dans ses ouvrages' ('a detestable kind of politics which can be summed up as the art of tyranny, and whose principles were spread by Machiavelli the Florentine in his works').<sup>29</sup>

Of Kleist's two late political dramas, *Die Hermannsschlacht* (*Hermann's Battle*) is an open and unqualified affirmation of Machiavellian statecraft; *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* is much more nuanced and complex, and will be discussed at more length. Kleist wrote *Die Hermannsschlacht* in the summer of 1808, inspired by Austrian resistance to Napoleon. Ostensibly it is about the ancient Germans' resistance to the Roman invaders of their territory. The title denotes the defeat inflicted on three Roman legions under Varus in the Teutoburg Forest in the year 9 CE by the Germanic chieftain Arminius, who, pretending to be an ally of the Romans, led their troops into a swamp. The main source for our knowledge of these events is Book I of Tacitus' *Annals*. Books I to VI of the *Annals* exist in a single manuscript which was discovered in 1508 in the monastic library at Corvey in Westphalia and published at Rome in 1515. German readers were pleased to find that Tacitus called Arminius the 'liberator Germaniae'. Very soon the idea emerged that 'Arminius' must really have been called Hermann or Herrmann. Hermann, adopted as a national hero, is commemorated in the Hermannsdenkmal outside Detmold, near the presumed site of the battle, erected between 1841 and 1875. The heroic figure points a sword threateningly in the direction of France, which by the nineteenth century had come to be considered the hereditary enemy of Germany.<sup>30</sup>

Kleist perceived an analogy between the Roman occupation of Germany and the French occupation of Prussia and other German territories. Soon after the battle of Jena he wrote to his sister Ulrike, referring to Napoleon: 'Es wäre schrecklich, wenn dieser Wütherich sein Reich gründete. Nur ein sehr kleiner Theil der Menschen begreift, was für ein Verderben es ist, unter seine Herrschafft zu kommen. Wir sind die unterjochten Völker der Römer.'<sup>31</sup> 'It would be terrible if this monster established his empire. Only a few people understand how pernicious it is to come under his sway. We are the subjugated nations of the Romans.' The play is so full of allusions to contemporary politics that it may be seen as an extension of Kleist's political pamphleteering. The eminent Kleist scholar Richard Samuel argued that Herrmann is in part a portrait of the Prussian statesman Stein, who, together

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<sup>29</sup> Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (Neuchâtel: Faulche, 1765), ix. 793.

<sup>30</sup> See Rainer Wiegels and Winfried Woesler (eds.), *Arminius und die Varusschlacht: Geschichte – Mythos – Literatur* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Letter of 24 October 1806, in Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Ilse-Maria Barth and others, 4 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1989), iv. 364.

with the military leaders Gneisenau and Scharnhorst, decided in 1808 that concessions to Napoleon were futile and that they needed to prepare an insurrection. They had a revolutionary vision of national awakening: all Germans, without necessarily forming a single political entity, should be governed by the same laws. They sought drastic measures. Gneisenau wanted a scorched-earth policy, such as Herrmann advocates in Kleist's play. Stein went further, putting forward a plan which Samuel describes as 'wahrhaft machiavellistisch': he offered the French a German auxiliary corps, intending to turn it against the French, and privately justified this deception to the more scrupulous Gneisenau, by asking why only Napoleon should be allowed to lie.<sup>32</sup>

For Kleist's Herrmann, in order to unite Germany, and to defeat and expel the Romans, any means whatever are justified. It is clear that the Romans are thoroughly unscrupulous: Varus is offering support both to Herrmann and to his rival Marbod, intending to divide them and conquer both. The other German chiefs recognize the cunning statecraft ('Staatskunst') with which Herrmann has held the Romans at bay till now, but they are puzzled by his claim that he intends to submit to the Romans as a first step towards defeating them, and they reject the scorched-earth policy which he proposes to them. Their towns and farms, they point out, are exactly what they want to defend: 'Oh,' replies Herrmann off-handedly, 'I thought it was your freedom' - 'Nun denn, ich glaubte, Eure Freiheit wär's'.<sup>33</sup> Herrmann does invite the Romans into his territory, but secretly welcomes the pillage and destruction that they practise. When they burn down three towns, he spreads rumours that it was seven. When they cut down a sacred oak, he puts it about that they also compelled the locals to worship Zeus. He sends out his agents disguised as Romans to rouse the population by further atrocities. And when a young German woman is gang-raped by Romans, and killed by her despairing father, Herrmann orders her body to be cut into fifteen pieces and a piece sent to each German tribe, in order to maximize hostility and resistance to the invaders. These measures succeed, combined with a secret alliance with Marbod. Varus's legions, unfamiliar with the swampy and forested terrain, are led into a trap and annihilated. Herrmann is proclaimed king of the Germans, and at the very end of the play he promises to lead his followers to destroy Rome:

Ihr aber kommt, ihr wackern Söhne Teuts,  
Und laßt, im Hain der stillen Eichen,

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Samuel, 'Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht* und der Freiherr vom Stein', in Walter Müller-Seidel (ed.), *Heinrich von Kleist: Aufsätze und Essays* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), pp. 412-58 (p. 437).

<sup>33</sup> Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ii. 462.

Wodan für das Geschenk des Siegs uns danken!  
Uns bleibt der Rhein noch schleunig zu ereilen,  
Damit vorerst der Römer keiner  
Von der Germania heiligem Grund entschlüpfe:  
Und dann - nach Rom selbst mutig aufzubrechen!  
Wir oder unsre Enkel, meine Brüder!  
Denn eh doch, seh ich ein, erschwingt der Kreis der Welt  
Vor dieser Mordbrut keine Ruhe,  
Als bis das Raubnest ganz zerstört,  
Und nichts, als eine schwarze Fahne,  
Von seinem öden Trümmerhaufen weht!<sup>34</sup>

But come, ye stalwart sons of Teut,  
And let us, in our grove of silent oaks,  
Thank Wodan for the gift of victory!  
We have to hasten swiftly to the Rhine,  
Ensuring first that not a single Roman  
Escapes Germania's sacred soil;  
And then set out courageously for Rome!  
And if not we, my brothers, then our grandsons!  
For I see clearly that this murderous brood  
Will never leave the great round world at rest  
Until their robbers' den has been destroyed,  
And only one black banner  
Waves from the desolation of its ruins!

Here Kleist envisages not just a defensive war, such as Jahn advocated, but an out-and-out war of conquest. We might remember that for Machiavelli the greatness of the Roman Republic was founded on its expansionist policy. This is a troubling feature of his *Discourses*. While one can no doubt draw from Machiavelli, as Quentin Skinner does, a conception of civic virtue and active social involvement that can be opposed to political theories based on individual self-interest, one also has to recognize that a Machiavellian republic promotes its own well-being at the expense of all other states and ultimately aims to conquer the world.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ii. 554. The translation that follows is mine.

<sup>35</sup> Contrast Quentin Skinner, 'Machiavelli on *virtù* and the maintenance of liberty', in his *Visions of Politics*, vol. ii: Renaissance Virtues (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 160-85, with Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

By the time he wrote *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* in 1810, Kleist's patriotic frenzy had somewhat abated. The defeat of the Austrians by the French at Wagram in July 1809 had sobered him. The play is cooler, more judicious, more balanced and more complex in its presentation of a community united by patriotism. The community is of course imaginary, corresponding neither to seventeenth-century Brandenburg nor to early nineteenth-century Prussia. It represents rather what Kleist the propagandist thought an ideal Prussia should be like. He shared the views of his friend Adam Müller who argued in *Elemente der Staatskunst (Elements of Statecraft, 1809)* that a reformed Prussian state should strike a balance between impersonal law and patriotic emotion.<sup>36</sup> His ideal also derives in part from Rousseau. I would suggest that the seventeenth-century Brandenburg shown in the play is still a virtuous and cohesive society, based on warfare, such as Rousseau idealized in the First Discourse.

I want now to argue that the Elector in *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* – based on Friedrich Wilhelm (1620-88), the Great Elector – is also a Machiavellian, though a more complex and less successful one than Herrmann. To all appearances the Elector seems the opposite of a pragmatist. He undertakes to administer justice in a rigorous and impersonal manner. At the battle of Fehrbellin in 1675, the Prince of Homburg was ordered to remain with his cavalry in reserve and to attack only when the Swedish enemy was already in flight, in order to turn their retreat into a rout. Carried away by patriotic enthusiasm, he charges prematurely, so that the victory is less than complete. This is not history, but a patriotic legend that grew up in the eighteenth century in order to glorify the Elector for his merciful treatment of the Prince. Kleist also departs from history in representing the Prince as an impetuous young man, whereas in fact he was forty-two, married for the second time, and had a wooden leg (still on display in the palace at Bad Homburg). In the play, the Elector, not yet knowing who led the charge prematurely, declares that the culprit, whoever he may be, must be executed for disobeying orders. On learning that it is the Prince, his relative, he stands by his principles. This inflexibility provokes a mutiny

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<sup>36</sup> See Klaus Peter, 'Für ein anderes Preußen. Romantik und Politik in Kleists *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*', *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1992, pp. 95-125. Studies of this play are legion. For surveys of research, see Fritz Hackert, 'Kleists *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* in der Nachkriegs-Interpretation', *LiLi* 3 (1973), 53-80; Bernd Hamacher, "'Darf ichs mir deuten, wie es mir gefällt?" 25 Jahre *Homburg*-Forschung zwischen Rehistorisierung und Dekonstruktion (1973-1998)', *Heilbronner Kleist-Blätter*, 6 (1999), 9-67. I must acknowledge a particular debt to John M. Ellis, *Kleist's 'Prinz Friedrich von Homburg': A Critical Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), which first helped me to understand this play.

among his officers, one of whom, Colonel Kottwitz, rebukes him for his 'kurzsicht'ge Staatskunst', his short-sighted and over-abstract conduct of affairs.<sup>37</sup> The play invites us to see the Elector as cold and mechanistic in his execution of justice – rather as he insists on sticking to his preconceived battle plan irrespective of changing circumstances on the battlefield.

However, the Elector is not just an over-theoretical practitioner of statecraft; he is also a Machiavellian in the sense of being amoral and unscrupulous. Another relative, the strange, Mephistophelean character Hohenzollern, suggests to the Prince that the Elector may have political reasons for wanting him out of the way. An ambassador has arrived from the Swedes with an offer of peace, to be sealed by a dynastic marriage of a Swedish prince to the Princess Natalie. Natalie is said to object to the match because she has set her heart on somebody else, and the Elector has reason to believe that that person is the Prince. Is Hohenzollern right in his suspicions? The play does not allow us to be absolutely sure. But when Natalie goes to the Elector to plead for the Prince's life, she begs him not to insist on a marriage which will require the death of the Prince as a sacrifice, and the Elector does not disclaim such intentions. Finally the Elector resolves the difficulty with apparent statesmanlike wisdom. He hands responsibility over to the Prince. If the Prince really thinks the sentence passed on him is unjust, he will be set free. The Prince concludes that the sentence is just and announces his intention to die as a sacrifice to the laws of war. Thus, if the Elector is really a Machiavellian who wants rid of the Prince, he is close to achieving his purpose without incurring blame, because the Prince himself proclaims publicly that he deserves and wants to die.

However, if the Elector is a Machiavellian, he also has another, emotional side which is not under his control and interferes with his responsibilities. In the opening scene, where we see the Prince sleepwalking, the Elector is so intrigued that he draws Natalie into the action to see what the Prince will do. At the battle the Elector unwisely rides on a conspicuous white horse, and his life is only saved because an officer asks to ride the white horse instead and is killed by mistake for the Elector. In Act V, the mischievous Hohenzollern presents evidence that the Prince's culpable action was in fact the fault of the Elector, since if the Elector had not encouraged the dreams of love and victory that the Prince revealed when sleep-walking, the Prince would not have been distracted when the battle plan was being announced and would not have disobeyed orders. The Elector ridicules this argument, but nevertheless seems affected by it, as well he might. For Hohenzollern reveals the Elector as a type of figure that occurs elsewhere in Kleist, the guilty

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<sup>37</sup> Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ii. 632.



judge. He is another, more dignified version of Judge Adam in *Der zerbrochene Krug*, who judges the case of the broken jug and tries to conceal the fact that he himself broke the jug when scrambling out of a young woman's bedroom window. In the background we can see the pattern of a Shakespeare play that is considered a stimulus for Kleist's drama, namely *Measure for Measure*, which shows us both the corrupt judge Angelo and the 'old fantastical duke of dark corners' who governs Vienna in an eccentric fashion. I have not yet seen it pointed out that the impish Hohenzollern resembles the mischievous character Lucio who talks about the Duke's weaknesses and may not always be wrong.<sup>38</sup>

The Prince is led to his execution, then suddenly the blindfold is removed and he finds himself being praised as a hero. He faints, and people fear that the joy has been too much for him. The Elector has spared his life, but by means of a truly sadistic trick. Anthony Stephens calls it a 'cruel charade'.<sup>39</sup> One could go further. To prepare oneself for death, then be released at the last moment, must be a shattering experience. A similar trick is employed in Schiller's story 'Spiel des Schicksals', based on the historical commandant of Stuttgart, Rieger, who was gratuitously made to suffer all the terror of imminent death ('alle Qualen der Todesangst') before being released.<sup>40</sup> A few decades after Kleist's death, such an experience was imposed on Dostoevsky and the other young Russians accused of conspiracy. On 21 December 1849 fifteen of them were taken to Semenovskiy Square in St Petersburg, made to mount a scaffold, and unexpectedly confronted with a firing squad. After a minute the firing squad lowered their rifles, and the conspirators were instead sentenced to imprisonment in Siberia. The experience of that minute, however, sent one of Dostoevsky's companions permanently insane, and changed Dostoevsky's own life by laying the foundation for his religious faith.<sup>41</sup> Kleist's Elector is playing a dangerous and sadistic psychological game. He may be dangerous as a rational Machiavellian, but he is more dangerous as an irrational and powerful man unaware of his own impulses.

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<sup>38</sup> *Measure for Measure*, IV, iii, 152, in William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1951), p. 107. See Meta Corssen, *Kleist und Shakespeare* (Weimar: Duncker, 1930).

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Stephens, *Heinrich von Kleist: The Dramas and Stories* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 183.

<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert, 5 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1958), v. 42. On the historical events, see Peter-André Alt, *Schiller: Leben – Werk – Zeit*, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 2000), i. 478.

<sup>41</sup> See Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 49-66.

However, the complex figure of the Elector is framed within a portrayal of political life that is indebted to the republican tradition. The Cambridge School of historians of political thought, led by Quentin Skinner, have tried to identify a tradition of republicanism running from the early Italian city-republics via Machiavelli, the Dutch Republic and the English Civil War to the American and French Revolutions. Montesquieu in *L'esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of the Laws*, 1748) makes a famous distinction among monarchies which are governed by honour, republics which are governed by virtue, and despotisms which are governed by fear.<sup>42</sup> Kleist's Brandenburg of course is not technically a republic – unlike the Dutch or Venetian Republics – but a monarchy. However, some people thought a free state did not have to be a republic, but could be under a monarch, provided his powers were restricted. Thus Skinner quotes Machiavelli as saying in the *Discourses* that a community can be self-governing under the rule either of a republic or of a prince.<sup>43</sup>

Using Montesquieu's distinction, it can be seen that Kleist's Brandenburg, though technically a monarchy, is pervaded by the spirit of a republic. Characters are motivated by virtue rather than honour. The Prince goes astray in part by pursuing personal fame (or honour) as though he were living under a monarchy as described by Montesquieu. In the course of the play he comes closer to the ideal of republican and patriotic virtue. The Elector has a corresponding fault: he is in some danger of becoming a despot. He insists that he is not a tyrant, contrasting himself with the Dey of Tunis – a stock example of the Oriental despot. The Prince, when angry with him, compares him to a whole series of despots: the Dey of Algiers, the Babylonian king Sardanapalus, and all the tyrannical Roman emperors.

To argue that republicanism predominates in the play, we do not have to prove that Kleist had read deeply in the literature of republicanism. The republican tradition may in any case be much less continuous than its exponents imply. Republicanism is often transmitted not through treatises but by themes and topoi with strongly republican associations. Andrew Hadfield has shown the presence of such republican topoi in Shakespeare, especially in *Hamlet*.<sup>44</sup> Two of these topoi will be discussed in relation to *Prinz*

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<sup>42</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. and tr. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller and Harold S. Stone, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 21-30.

<sup>43</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

*Friedrich von Homburg* – the figure of Lucius Junius Brutus and the need for a citizen army.

First, ‘Brutus’: When arrested and obliged to surrender his sword, the Prince is initially unconcerned, saying: ‘Mein Vetter Friedrich will den Brutus spielen’ (My cousin Friedrich wants to play Brutus).<sup>45</sup> The allusion is to Lucius Junius Brutus, who according to Livy overthrew the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, and became its first consul. His sons joined in a conspiracy to restore the monarchy, and Brutus condemned them to death on the grounds that justice was impersonal. This was a standard example and a limiting case of republican virtue. Kleist was probably inspired by Jacques-Louis David’s painting of Brutus condemning his sons. The painting was completed in 1789 and displayed in the Louvre where Kleist must have seen it. Machiavelli refers repeatedly to ‘killing the sons of Brutus’ as shorthand for the ruthlessness that must be exercised by the founder of a democracy.<sup>46</sup> Montesquieu is more reserved, considering Brutus’s punishment of his sons excessive.<sup>47</sup> Kleist is closer to Montesquieu. He implies that the Elector’s imitation of Brutus is unduly severe, and further, by the Prince’s word ‘spielen’, that it is a piece of showmanship in which the Elector represents himself as constrained by impersonal virtue while possibly pursuing other schemes behind the scenes.

Second, it was a commonplace of republican thought that (as we have seen Jahn maintain) an army should consist of citizens determined to fight for their country. Republicanism opposed the existence of a standing army under the sole command of the monarch which could support his absolute power and put down any opposition. In Kleist’s *Brandenburg*, there are a number of regiments whose commanders, including Natalie, act with considerable freedom. At her wish, Kottwitz removes the troops of her regiment away from the place where the Elector has ordered them and leads them to Fehrbellin in order to protest against the sentence on the Prince. The Elector is unconcerned precisely because, despite his Machiavellian inclinations, he is not a tyrant and knows they are not seeking to overthrow him. They are more like a loyal opposition. They embody the republican principle whereby, in the words of the Scottish republican Adam Ferguson, ‘even the safety of the person, and the tenure of property, [...] depend, for their preservation, on the vigour and jealousy of a free people’.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ii. 597.

<sup>46</sup> *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, i. 465-7.

<sup>47</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, p. 180.

<sup>48</sup> Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 1767, ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p. 167.

My case therefore is that Kleist includes in *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* a positive but also critical engagement with the Machiavellian ideal of republican virtue. Virtue can be taken to excess, as it was by Lucius Junius Brutus, but in the form of patriotism and determination to see justice done, even at the cost of insurrection, it is essential to the cohesive, free, united polity, permitting outspoken and informal discussion even with the monarch, that forms Kleist's ideal state.