

John M. Najemy, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xvii + 282 pp. index. chron. bibl. \$95 (cl), \$29.99 (pbk). ISBN: 978-0-521-86125-0 (cl), 978-0-521-67846-9 (pbk).

Machiavelli alternately portrayed himself as a man of politics and a man of letters. Although he himself distinguished between these two personas — having become the latter only after circumstances prevented him from remaining the former — the political and intellectual culture of the Renaissance understood speech, writing, and rhetoric as indispensable aspects of political activity. Hence it is a fitting tribute to Machiavelli and his Florentine setting that this collection consists chiefly of essays by historians examining his early political activity and specialists in

Italian and comparative literature examining his literary milieu and literary themes in his major writings.

Najemy's introduction reflects on the reasons for Machiavelli's universality and why he has always managed to appear timely and relevant to readers spanning five centuries that witnessed several fundamental transformations in political assumptions and priorities. Najemy identifies four transcendent themes in Machiavelli's writings: the cultural and ideological work performed by history in creating and defining the present; the relationship between morality and politics; the relationship between agency and contingency (or between *virtù* and *fortuna*, in Machiavelli's lexicon); and the relationship between religion and the state. These themes are amply explored in essays by Najemy on social conflict in the *Discourses on Livy*, J. G. A. Pocock on Machiavelli and the Roman republican ideal, Anna Maria Cabrini on the *Florentine Histories*, Alison Brown on Machiavelli's philosophy and its debt to Lucretius, and two superb concluding essays by Victoria Kahn and Jérémie Barthes that examine the uses to which Machiavelli was put in the Western intellectual tradition from the Counter-Reformation to the present.

Machiavelli's political career and the Florentine context dominate the first half of the volume. James Atkinson opens with a concise and poignant biography that deftly integrates Machiavelli's correspondence with friends and family into the larger calamitous political and military conflicts plaguing the peninsula. Robert Black provides a detailed analysis of Machiavelli's years of active service in the Florentine chancery and their impact on his early writings and correspondence. Roslyn Pesman lucidly summarizes the chief institutional features of the republic headed by *Gonfaloniere a vita* Piero Soderini, Soderini's political priorities and alliance with Machiavelli, and their impact on Machiavelli's thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of republics. Humfrey Butters analyzes Machiavelli's connections to the Medici family, his friendships and enmities with key members of the Medicean ruling group, and Machiavelli's portrayal of the family in his political and historical thought. Mikael Hörnqvist examines Machiavelli's role in the Florentine militia project and tracks a change in Machiavelli's writing on military matters from an early radical emphasis on the ambitious individual's capacity for daring, cruelty, and deception to a more conservative stress in *The Art of War* on traditional glory, collective rather than individual action, and conventional means.

Literary themes dominate the second half. Wayne Rebhorn focuses on Machiavelli's recurring metaphor of the new prince as a mason and architect, arguing that Machiavelli's inspiration was more Virgil's Aeneas than Cesare Borgia. In one of the best essays in the volume, Virginia Cox pithily synthesizes classical and Renaissance rhetorical theory and then outlines a methodology for a rhetorical reading of *The Prince*, a text that famously opens with an apparent rejection of rhetoric. Albert Russell Ascoli and Angela Matilde Capodivacca discuss Machiavelli's poetry, poetic elements in his prose style, and his poetic milieu, particularly his debt to Dante. Likewise, on the subject of theatre, Ronald Martinez analyzes not only Machiavelli's plays, but also the formal theatrical dimension to his writing in general, from his diplomatic correspondence to his political and historical works. Barbara

Spackman considers Machiavelli's gendered vision of the tension between manly virtue and female fortune responsive to — however fleetingly — sexual violence.

There are no weak essays in the volume, but not all succeed as the kind of general introductions or reference works for which the Companion series was designed. Upper-level undergraduates in need of a useful point of departure can be profitably directed to some of the essays (Cox on rhetoric, Cabrini on the *Histories*, for example). But some essays (Rebhorn on *The Prince*, Pocock on Rome, for example) tend toward the kind of specialized commentary of benefit primarily for readers already well-versed in Machiavellian issues. While context and literature are amply explored, Machiavelli's relationship to classical and Renaissance political thought is less so: there is only indirect and brief commentary on topics such as Machiavelli's relationship with major contemporary political interlocutors such as Savonarola or Guicciardini, Machiavelli's relationship to humanism, or the impact of Venetian republicanism on his political thought.

But an edited volume on a figure as canonical and controversial as Machiavelli cannot possibly be all things to all people. Hence, the above reservations are a minor quibble with a splendid collection of essays that showcase the many ways in which politics and language merged seamlessly in Machiavelli's life and works.

MARK JURDJEVIC

Glendon College, York University