

Alessandra Petrina. *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince*.

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It is well known that the first printed English translation of *The Prince* appeared in 1640. Less well known, perhaps, is that in the prior century that work enjoyed a robust circulation in Italian, French, Latin, and English versions, some printed, some in manuscript. Of the four distinct English translations in manuscript three are anonymous; the fourth, by William Fowler, is the first English translation in Scotland. It lies at the core of this volume, and it is accompanied by an

anonymous version known as MS 251 now in the Queen's College Library, Oxford. Along with Petrina's extensive, philologically grounded annotations and commentary, these two versions of *The Prince* offer a detailed reading of the Tudor Machiavel, as well as a much more precise look at how Machiavelli's works were diffused and received in sixteenth-century England and Scotland. Petrina has accomplished this by meticulously reconstructing the history of the circulation of *The Prince*, tracking all known editions and manuscripts as well as all references to lost manuscripts, partial drafts, and mysterious allusions. Leaving no stone unturned, she has examined editions, fragments, dedications, title pages, and marginalia, as well as wills, inventories, letters, bills of sale, and catalogs, producing, as a result, an example of intellectual history and philological scholarship at its best.

As for William Fowler himself, Petrina explores how he might have learned Italian, how he might have encountered Machiavelli's infamous text, and why he should have wanted to translate it, given its status as a book under papal ban. There are parts of her narrative that read almost like a novel: Fowler was a onetime spy who consorted with heretics, the book he translated was a prohibited book surreptitiously printed, clandestinely circulated, possibly smuggled, sometimes disguised, often plagiarized, and yet it enjoyed a *succès de scandale*. It became, for example, a cult text for Oxford University students in the 1580s and '90s.

As part of her commentary, Petrina analyzes the four English translations extant in eight manuscript versions and proposes, on the basis of her examination of inks, scribal hands, corrections, deletions, and underlinings, a *stemma codicum* to update genealogies put forward by earlier scholars. Focusing specifically on Fowler's translation, completed probably in 1590, she notes the challenges to a translator posed by Machiavelli's syntax, neologisms, and original uses of such terms as *stato* and *virtù*. One learns that Fowler fused different readings together, that he added explanatory glosses and synonyms as a way of amplifying and embellishing the original, especially when having to explain a complex term. Curious about this practice, this reviewer examined the translations to see how *virtù* and *stato* were rendered, and found that in Fowler's hands *virtù* becomes *wisdom, valor, courage, excellence, glory, resolution, valiance, worthiness, and discipline*. In one place, for example, Fowler translates *virtù d'animo* as "virtuously and valiantlye and with great and magnanime courage" (176). In MS 251, by contrast, *virtù* overwhelmingly is rendered as "vertewe." *Stato*, in turn, Fowler renders as *government, estate, country, empire, province, conquest, principality, nation, lordship, monarchy, prelacy, sovereignty, dominion, state*, and even *prince*. The expression *maiestà dello stato* becomes "maiestie of the prence" (172). In MS 251 *stato* usually becomes *kingdom, commonwealth, government, estate, or country*, a more limited range of synonyms.

I cite these examples to underscore a cardinal point that Petrina makes when she writes that Machiavelli's "limited vocabulary often means that words are used in diametrically opposite meanings, or adapted to the varying circumstances, sometimes within the same paragraph" (121). For his early English and Scottish translators this variable vocabulary presented both a challenge to find linguistic equivalents and an opportunity, as Petrina points out, to redefine the political

vocabulary of the English language (119). But there is in this an important caveat for all readers and students of *The Prince* when confronting its ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions, namely, not to ascribe a fixity to Machiavelli's terms and usages that he himself did not employ.

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