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MACHIAVELLI AND THE FOUNDATION OF A CULTURE OF RECOGNITION

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Abstract

This paper approaches Machiavelli's works with respect to his correspondence and to his relationships with friends and women. In doing so, Machiavelli is presented in a perspective that can stimulate a critical reflection about some crucial concepts of psychoanalysis and psychiatry such as autonomy of the Ego, desire, recognition, astonishment. Cultural psychology could be understood as a discipline focused on how philosophical theories and religious doctrines shape the mind of a group of subjects and are understood by them. In this sense, to trace the development of Machiavelli's thought can be relevant to cultural psychology in so far as it enables us to assess how the author's ideas have shaped or can shape the mind of the subjects in the Western world as well as how they were and are received by them.

Key words: Machiavelli's letters and works, Machiavelli's relationships with women, desire, autonomy of the Ego, recognition, astonishment

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On the 2nd of December 1497, Machiavelli wrote a letter to an ecclesiastical authority, asking him to reconsider a decision which had deprived his family of some property. There is a connection between this letter and *The Prince*: in the letter we see Machiavelli grappling with the problem of the acquisition and preservation of a private property, which in the treatise will become the State.

Furthermore, the letter highlights the function carried out in the acquisition of property by the act of recognising. However, in the letter recognition is the tribute that he who acquires possession of property owes to God and to his intermediaries. In *The Prince*, instead, recognition has a reciprocal quality for two reasons: because a «possession»² appears there, the State, founded by the «entirely new prince», which cannot be considered the gift of another; and because the treatise itself is conceived as a gift made unique by its novelty and accompanied by an «extreme desire» that it be recognised for this quality.

We must then establish what caused this change, what problems it created and how Machiavelli attempted to resolve them.

His desire for the novelty of his treatise to be recognised stands out at the centre of his best known letter, that one dated 10th December 1513.

The background to the letter is the period of Machiavelli's life following the failure, in August 1512, of the Florentine Republic when he was removed from his official positions, accused of having participated in a conspiracy against the new government and thrown in prison, where he was threatened with a death sentence. He was freed thanks to the intervention of Giuliano de' Medici and Paolo Vettori, then confined to his father's country house from which he wrote that letter.

His ascent from this abyss passed through several stages. While still in prison, Machiavelli had written two poems addressed to Giuliano. A poetic vein was born in him in the darkness of the prison. In this vein he had entrusted the possibility of preserving his most precious «possession», life itself. It had constituted the first

² Quotations from Machiavelli are based on the edition of his works edited by Vivanti C.: Machiavelli, *Opere*, Einaudi-Gallimard, Torino 1997-2005, 3 vol. The translation into English is mine.

moment of his ascent. It was also the first step towards a modification of the 1497 classification of the sources of acquisition and preservation and of what, once acquired, needed to be preserved: that is to say that these sources were not to be identified exclusively with God and his intermediaries, but also in oneself.

The second composition ends with an affirmation, «I am I», which means the moment in which Machiavelli finds himself beyond the crisis: if he had to recognise his debt to someone for having maintained possession of his life and for having acquired a prospect for life in the future, that someone was himself and his poetical vein which had arisen facing death.

Machiavelli's correspondence with Vettori allows us to glimpse other moments of his ascent from the depths of his crisis.

The letter of the 10th December conveys an image of solitude which implies a state of expectation. In a letter, again to Vettori, he speaks of a love experienced «while in the country». The letter is from August 1514. However, in Chapter II of the autobiographical poem *The Ass*, that love and leaving prison are placed in a close sequence, as if to hint at a reciprocal relationship.

We thus have two poems, an image of solitude which implies a state of expectation and an openness to love into which all this is translated. But this is not all: he had also written a «caprice», a «tract».

The tract, *The Prince*, cannot be understood apart from what happened between February and December 1513. When, in the dedicatory letter accompanying his gift of the book to Lorenzo de' Medici, Machiavelli maintains that in it he has gathered his own «lengthy experience with things modern and a continuous lesson from those ancient», we can infer that, among the experiences «of things modern» that found their way into the tract, he placed not only legations and analyses of political events, but also what he had lived through in those months.

All the moments of his crisis and of its resolution are re-echoed in *The Prince*. Above all, the essential global content of the experience of overcoming the crisis, the discovery of a possible autonomy of the "I", is objectified and universalised in the creation of the image of a new type of prince - the «entirely new prince» - who finds in the lack of certainty of one who is fatherless the conditions required for being and for asking to be recognised.

In this last aspect of the crisis there is both a continuity and a discontinuity with the past. The treatise's classification of the form of principality resumes that of the «possessions» in the letter of 1497; but this classification is now disrupted and the source of every investiture is now posed not outside, but inside the subject. A new form of subjectivity appears which was absent in the 1497 letter: that one of the «entirely new prince», indebted to fortune only for the negative moment of occasion and for the rest in debt only with his own virtue.

Seen in this context, the book is the conclusion of a process of healing following the despair of February 1513; and the announcement that Machiavelli gives to his friend on the 10th of December is the announcement of that conclusion.

This turning to someone to involve him in what had been accomplished, is full of expectations that will have consequences.

At the end of the dedicatory letter to the tract, the expression «this extreme desire of mine» appears: in this way Machiavelli defines his expectation that the book be recognised for its significance in rendering universal and participative an initially personal experience. On the basis of the discovery of the «I am I», therefore, the desire for recognition arises.

It is here, however, that the idea appears of recognition as the object of desire of an I which, in realising its own autonomy, establishes a dependence on another human subject. We encounter the paradox according to which, in order to be confirmed, the affirmation «I am I» needs to be reflected and represented in the recognition of another. What follows in the correspondence with Vettori is the development of this paradox.

In some sense, the book too is a poem written from prison. The prison is now the place of his confinement, the Albergaccio, the house of his father. The recovery obtained is not sufficient, and actually creates an existential suffering that yet awaits and desires resolution.

In what does this suffering consist? What acquisitions does it prospects? What forms does the search of its resolution assume?

The final part of the letter of 10th December advances several requests. Machiavelli would like his friend to help him present the book to those in power at the moment to obtain a position that would free him from the fear of poverty and from the inactivity

of confinement giving him, at least, the possibility of «starting to roll a stone». However, he also asks for the recognition of an identity, of the fact that «the fifteen years in which I have studied the art of statecraft have been spent neither sleeping nor playing».

Although these things are strongly desired, not even they are “extreme desires”. Machiavelli would also like the book to be recognised for its being based on the discovery of personal autonomy, for its making that autonomy available for a politics of the common good. He expresses this desire in the dedicatory letter. In it the book becomes a «gift» from which he expects recognition of the fact that he had thought, written and proposed new things never thought before. This recognition would pave the way for his individual solitary experience to be rejoined with the part of that experience which seemed to him valid for all men.

Locked inside the prison that was his father’s house, he now felt that it was no longer only the possession of his lifespan to be threatened by oblivion and death, but also what he had discovered in the early months of 1513 and concretised in his great «caprice». This constituted an individual and universal good, upon which depended both his future and that of a «university of men» which was his city and the human world. Just as the “I” under prison conditions had to be recognised by Giuliano in order to exist, in the same way its translation into a political project had to be recognised in order to exist.

The desire for recognition thus comes to the fore in two forms: as a request for the recognition not only of an identity, but also of one’s own autonomous inner reality and its extension as a political project.

No recognition came from either Giuliano or Lorenzo in this higher sense. Machiavelli did not even receive the minor public recognition he had expected from his friend Vettori. He had not expressed merely the wish that Vettori should help the book to become recognised by the powerful men of the time, but also that Vettori himself should recognise it. Vettori answered neither request. He made little effort to help and the appreciation he expressed for the book was formal. This was so because he had not understood. He had not been in prison, had not said «I am I», had not experienced the content of self-discovery in the solitude of the days in confinement, had neither felt the openness to love. The paradox according to which the discovery of self-autonomy

becomes real only through recognition by another thus became the problem that such recognition could only come from one who in turn had discovered the same autonomy. We can follow Machiavelli's grappling with this problem in the correspondence with Vettori after 10 December 1513.

Immediately after he left prison, the relationship with Vettori had been the only one that he had with the world. Vettori was a «*compare*», a friend; but, following the writing of the book, he was no longer only that. On the one hand, to the extent that Machiavelli sought from him a recognition that gave existence both to what he now was and to the book, Vettori was also one father called upon to recognise the son. On the other hand, he was also the object of an attempt aimed at making him understand and like the book which placed him in the condition of a pupil asking obliquely for help.

A tacit dynamic develops: the «not vile» father asks he who has laid himself open to him as a son in order to be recognised, to teach him to love; the son would like to lead the father to love because only if he manages to love can he truly recognise him, read the book and commit himself consciously to having it recognised by others.

There is not, therefore, only friendship between the two, but also conflict. The correspondence between them took place between February, 1513, and April, 1527, but within this period we can distinguish two parts: the first between February, 1513, and January, 1515, and the second between January, 1515, and 1527.

The first part can itself be subdivided into two parts. The first continues until 10 December 1513, while the second extends until April of the following year and ends with a brief epilogue.

Various topics arise in the first period: above all, analyses of the political situation of the time, the «*castellucci*». But two new themes appear immediately after the letter of December 10. The first consists in references to the book: Vettori had not replied to Machiavelli's request to tell him whether he had liked it; however, he returns to that request in continuous asides which make the problem of the reply an essential preoccupation. The second theme consists in discussions of women. Vettori's references to the book are thus accompanied by these discussions. Is there some meaning in this?

Vettori is the one to lead the discussion to the topic of women. He does this on 24th December 1513, through the story of an episode which had occurred during his stay in Rome as Florentine ambassador. The story includes a request like the one Machiavelli had made to him: Machiavelli had asked him if he liked the book and Vettori now asks Machiavelli to help him face what had happened to him. He liked women, but this fact created problems for him, it provoked «perturbations».

Later on he would have the opportunity to discover that these “perturbations” come not from others, but from himself. At the moment, however, there are only two bothersome fellows: a homosexual and a ladies’ man. The homosexual is also a hypocrite and a moralist. Vettori was accustomed to receiving women at home, and this man admonishes him pedantically. The ladies’ man does not accept that Vettori’s house should be open to another homosexual, a certain ser Sano, which, he warns, exposes Vettori to unpleasant gossip. Poor Vettori is confused: one person criticises him because he sees women, another because he allows a homosexual to visit him. What should he do?

It is at this point that he asks Machiavelli for advice. What is remarkable, however, is that he establishes a tacit but unequivocal connection with the advice that Machiavelli had asked for concerning the book: in what is an apparent *non sequitur*, he immediately afterward make a reference to it on the 24th December 1513.

In his reply of 5th January 1514, Machiavelli seems to enjoy replying to the request and does not miss the opportunity to tease his friend. However, he is also serious. He puts the wisdom he had demonstrated in commenting on the political topics of the day at the service of solving this small, comic, private problem: Vettori should not for the moment react against the admonishments and pretend to comply, inviting neither women nor homosexuals to his home for a while. Soon he would see what would happen.

He is more serious also because he follows this tactical suggestion with an exhortation to Vettori to detach himself from cultural models imposed upon him and to turn towards the discovery of «I am I». It is certain that Vettori failed to understand where this invitation came from and where it was directed. He was however surprised and «astonished» by the fact that what Machiavelli had foreseen happened. His reply of the

18th opens in fact with praise of his friend: he had followed his advice and after a short time the homosexual had slyly asked for the house to be re-opened to men and the ladies' man that it be re-opened to women.

However, something else unexpected then happened: the friend fell in love. He notes how it had not been the first time that a certain Costanza had been to the house; she came regularly, but only now does he really see her and fall in love with her. Evidently something had moved him. Was it only, as he suggests, that she had pressed herself upon him? Was it a rivalry with the ladies' man who courted her? Or was it that he had read the book? Was it that the book, to the writing of which had contributed separation, solitude and an openness to love, had moved Vettori the reader, even without his realising that he liked it, to find that part of the «experience of things modern» from which it had been created?

We cannot know. But it is indicative, that, right after the words in which he declares his love, without stopping and in another apparent change of topic, Vettori speaks again of the book: «I have seen the chapters of your work, and I like them immeasurably. But since I do not have the entire work, I do not want to make a definitive judgment».

These are ambiguous words. He liked the book, but perhaps only because he hadn't read all of it; he might change his mind. They are, however, revealing words as well. They say that he had fallen in love and had seen Costanza for the first time while reading the book. Perhaps in this case it is legitimate to believe that a space had opened up for him, that old and paralyzing horizons had disappeared and he had intuited the existence of lands unknown to him, experienced in an instance of that wonder spoken about at the beginning of Chapter VI of the tract. He had, moreover, found no other way of making this wonder somewhat long-lasting than to fall in love with a woman that he had seen «with his eyes» in that moment.

So he had fallen in love, but this created problems. Following Machiavelli's advice he had left the prison of the admonishments and constraining rules of the two acquaintances. Now, however, he found himself in yet another prison, enchained to a woman. In replying to his letter, Machiavelli maintains a light, facetious tone, but he is also clear, decisive and passionate. He tells him to loosen the brake, to close his eyes

on what is keeping him from abandoning himself to the experience of what he likes and of the wonder that has possessed him. He had intuited that his friend had a chance to discover that he too was able to say «I am I», to feel himself to be a prince «entirely new»; perhaps then he would like the book.

If he nourished such a hope, he was immediately disappointed. Vettori's prison was neither inactivity, nor the admonishments and constraints of the bothersome acquaintances, nor the woman that tied him down. It was he himself and his way of thinking, his culture, that locked him inside a prison from which it was more difficult to escape than from the others, and as long as he remained there it would be impossible for him to understand.

The «*compare*» begins to reason. He liked the girl very much. Yes, Machiavelli was right to tell him to let himself go, but he did not realise that there were problems: his wife, his daughters, his age, his property, not to mention the fear of possible future betrayals. He decides therefore to eradicate her completely from his soul. Initially he is unable to comply with this decision, but immediately thereafter he conforms to it. The moment of imagination, wonder and astonishment is therefore quenched, although the love affair continues for a while under the form of ambivalence and conflict. Machiavelli returns in part to comment on political events and the advice he gives Vettori concerning Costanza becomes tired, though unchanging in direction. On the 3rd of August 1514, however, moved perhaps by a letter in which Vettori summarily relates to him of the failure of his attempts to present the book to Giuliano, he unexpectedly returns to the topic and tells him of the love affair that he himself had while staying in the country.

In the letter of the 3rd of August we can see one last, extreme attempt at pushing the friend towards that dimension of astonishment and wonder in which resided the only possibility of his understanding the book. This last effort was carried out by directly proposing Machiavelli himself as an example, telling Vettori that what he was unable to experience had indeed been experienced by someone.

It was not enough to make his friend like the tract and enable him to carry forward that initial, unconscious recognition of the new that had allowed him to see a woman already seen as new, that had made him fall in love which was at the same time a

consequence, a transposition and a negation of the encounter with the book. Immediately after the telling of the tale, the situation cooled and the correspondence tailed off. There are just a few more exchanges in which other things are discussed, followed by a «long silence». Perhaps it had been too much: Vettori was not ready to put a discourse on women together with a discourse on the State.

After the «long silence», in the four letters written between 3 December 1514, and 16 January 1515, the interweaving of discourses about the book and about women continues. Vettori excuses himself for not having been of help to his friend and informs him that the relationship with Costanza is over—he has finally «freed» himself. He re-proposes a conception of fortune in opposition to the one in the book, commiserating with himself and accusing himself. Finally, on 16 January, in what seems to be a direct response to Machiavelli's last attempt, he expresses all of his hatred towards the person who presents to him as possible what he has found to be impossible. The humanist becomes a naturalist: what Machiavelli had experienced in the summer of 1514, the light and internal certainty that had accompanied him through the woods and the dark, was nothing but «lust (*foia*)». Likewise, his own current melancholic encounters with other women are nothing but lust, are not wreckage from a shipwreck, suggestions of nostalgia. The human mind includes the fact, as beautiful as it is surprising, that great visions and great realisations are translated into love. Love is ruined by opposition to them, opposition to love obscures them.

Machiavelli replies yet again on 31 January 1515 to what he calls the «letter of lust». The reply is a summary, a commentary and an epilogue. There is nothing left to do but speak of other things, return to the «castellucci», ask other questions.

It would however be reductive to hold Vettori wholly responsible for the disappointment of Machiavelli's desire of recognition. It is Machiavelli himself to suggest so. In the proem to the *Discourses* he would write that he had been blind to have asked for that desire to be satisfied by one who was a prince undeservedly, and he would put this blindness down to «ambition».

In order to understand what he means with the term «ambition», we must remember that through the book he asked for the recognition of his own merits and for the restitution, along with economic well-being, of the prestige he had enjoyed prior to

1513. The accent here is on egotism: the fact that the tract had been written partially with an eye towards personal advantage made it to some extent subject to the goal of self-affirmation, thus denying the possibility of others' participation in the discovery that «I am I».

As has been seen, Machiavelli had defined his own desire for recognition as «extreme», an adjective which has a significance related to time: it speaks of the impossibility of postponement, of urgency, of impatience. This is what the word «ambition» speaks of. This aspect of urgency and impatience, which Machiavelli criticised as a limitation of his desire for the book to be recognised, is present in the book as well. In Chapter XXVI, he declares his trust in the immediate apparition of the «entirely new prince» implying the expectation of a miraculous solution, of the intervention of a father or god whose absence or exclusion instead defined the «entirely new prince» as such, due to «virtue only and not fortune».

We can thus discern in Machiavelli's «extreme desire» for the tract (and, through it, for himself) to be recognised a remnant of the mentality present in the 1947 letter. This was a tie to the past, a contradiction. If, therefore, his intention of opening Vettori's mind to the understanding of the book ended in disappointment, it was also because that tie contradicted it.

However, the disappointment encountered in his relationship with his friend was not useless. Perhaps also thanks to it Machiavelli was able to notice the contradiction and was then moved to transform his desire. This transformation goes through two sequential stages which correspond to relationships with two different audiences: that of the comedies, inclined to amusement, and with the politically committed one of the *Orti oricellari*.

The basic theme which the three comedies have in common is once again recognition. The protagonist of *Andria*, written in 1517, shortly after the disappointment stemming from his relationship with Vettori, is the young woman Glicerio from the Greek island of Andros. She has been separated from her parents. She is therefore a fatherless daughter, and this situation blocks her marriage to a youth who she loves.

Andria concludes with a rite of recognition. «Glicerio has found her father», the final scene announces. The real parent arrives at the end when all the protagonist's hopes

seem faint, to give her the gift of recognising her as a subject possessed of rights on the basis of ascertained paternity. He arrives guided by fate, by providence, by God.

There is a relationship of analogy and opposition, between *The Prince* and *Andria*. In both works the protagonist is a fatherless character, male in the first and female in the second. Both conclude with a case of recognition; in the first this recognition is presented as immediately possible; in the second it is has happened. In the first, it comes from a collectivity of citizens; in the second it comes from a natural father and from God.

More than the relation of analogy and opposition between the contents of the two works, what interests us is the identical relationship between them and the author's experience. He hopes for recognition for both of them, but receives the applause for the comedies that he had received from neither Lorenzo nor Vettori for the book.

The audience applauds the comedy at the moment of the performance of the rite because the expectation of recognition in which it participates through the protagonist's experiences is satisfied simply and directly, thanks to the intervention of a natural father guided by providence. However, the audience smiles while it applauds. It smiles because it is told and it knows that that recognition is a fable and so, while it enjoys it, it relegates it to unreality and separates itself from its own enjoyment. With and before the audience, the author separates himself as well. He too, in presenting the direct recognition which he had hoped to have for the book and had not obtained, as having happened at the level of a fable, relegates it to the world of things imagined and distant from actual reality. He puts that sort of recognition aside. The writing of comedy has therefore a cathartic function. In the smile induced in the audience by its fairy-tale ending, we can see the reflection of the smile that has freed the author from the disappointment experienced when he asked Vettori to like the book and recognise it. In this way he separates himself from his residual dependence from the conception of acquisition as seen in the letter of 1497.

The desire for recognition does not die out with the applause and the smiles that welcome the comedy. It is proposed again in Machiavelli's relationship with the politically committed audience of the *Orti oricellari*. To notice its presence in this

relationship, we must turn to the works written in part during his visits to the *Orti*: the “Discourses” and “The Art of War”.

In the proem to the “Discourses” Machiavelli speaks to two friends, Cosimo Rucellai and Zanobi Buondelmonti, criticising the manner in which, at the time of the dedicatory letter for “The Prince”, he had experienced the «extreme desire» to be recognised. He acknowledges that, at that time, he had expected satisfaction from «those who are princes» because he was «blinded» by that «ambition» that was present in within him.

This concise, strong self-criticism is the condition for a second stage in the elaboration of the theme of recognition. As we know, the first stage had consisted in substituting the conception according to which recognition has as its object a gratuitous gift made by God to a human subject, with the conception that it is this subject who offers a gift and expects recognition for it. The second stage consists in lowering that expectation. This reduction is carried out in the first part of the proem. Now Machiavelli’s desire for his gift to be recognised is altered in three respects.

First, he gives a different evaluation of what he would like to be recognised for. He considers the “Discourses”, as he did “The Prince” in the above-mentioned letter, to be a gift as well («I am sending you a present»). Whereas, however, in the letter he had exalted the gift that it accompanied, in the proem he notes the limitations of the current gift both with respect to the «quality of the thing sent», that is, the contents, and with respect to the real situation of the donor. While in the letter he had underlined the importance of his own experience to the point of fearing he would be for that reason considered presumptuous, in the proem he highlights his inadequacies. Furthermore, while in the letter he had exalted his own uniqueness, in the proem he insists that he was forced into writing as a result of his relationship with those who frequented the *Orti*.

Second, the subject from whom Machiavelli awaits satisfaction is now different. No longer is it «those who are princes» but «those who would deserve to be». We no longer see someone who, from within the strength of his own self-recognition, turns to an even stronger individual because that individual would have the power to free his self-recognition from its solipsistic chrysalis. There is, instead, a collective subject, the

Orti friends, which lacks the same power to bestow recognition attributed by the letter to the recipient of the tract.

Third, the desire for recognition has changed because the expected satisfaction has changed. Rucellai and Buondelmonti are not the father that Machiavelli had sought in the intended recipient of the letter when he was still partly «blinded», nor is Vettori: they cannot bestow a type of recognition which they themselves have not received, but only another type, characterised by incompleteness whose sense is clarified in the other work which developed in the context of the *Orti*, “The Art of War”.

This opens with a funeral oration in honour of Cosimo Rucellai. He did not receive the sort of recognition which would have saved him from the fate of «being born to die young inside his own houses». For him, the recognition that should have separated birth from death, opening up the time of life for him, taking him out of the prison of his father’s house and rendering fruitful his «being young», had been missing in a way that death had rendered definitive and removed from any providential negation. He would have only another type, that «of his praiseworthy qualities», which Machiavelli now offered him.

Death therefore enters into the story of Cosimo Rucellai with a different meaning from what it had had for Machiavelli when he was in prison. There, it was a threat of extreme bad luck which became an occasion for a self-recognition through which death itself was annulled. Here it constitutes a metaphor for the realisation of that threat, for the impossibility of obtaining a form of recognition which would represent birth.

Having begun speaking of a death, “The Art of War” concludes with the prospect of redemption from death. This word, which at the beginning of the work represents the definitive defeat of desire, returns in fact with a completely different meaning in the conclusions drawn by Fabrizio Colonna, another man who would have deserved recognition not given him.

The word “death” is not only in the expression «dead things», but also at the beginning, implicit, in that «now, being old». Its meaning is once again close to what it had had for Machiavelli at the time of his imprisonment. Here in fact is the metaphor

of a possibility of life not experienced but not over, of things planned and unrealised, but not forgotten or inexistent; it does not indicate therefore the quenching of the desire for recognition. It presents it anew, consigning it to other subjects and defining the conditions for its satisfaction; it restrains the request for current satisfaction within the idea of future satisfaction.

This transformation is tied to the appearance of time. «Now, being old», Fabrizio Colonna and through him Machiavelli, no longer think it possible to have «any occasion» for full, current recognition of their ideas, but «you, being young and qualified, can». Old, young; one present, one future: amongst them and beyond them, time is seen not only as a lengthening of the duration of the desire for recognition, but also as what within which the tendency to lose that desire in the blind request for immediate satisfaction is contained. This containment is possible because the time that appears between the above-mentioned present and future is not thought of as empty, but as the time of history. Before, out of prison conditions came the self-affirmation «I am I»; now, from the evocation of death as the non-recognition of that “I”, an idea of history is born.

This idea, summarised in the final words of “The Art of War” by the expression «resuscitate the dead things», is more or less as follows. At the beginning of every coming together of human beings to form a community, there is a certain measure of the same type of «goodness (*bontà*)». Since the human world starts with separation from the animal world, when those who are mere «inhabitants» living in the physical world «dispersed [and for that reason] like beasts», «gather together» to create an initial embryonic community, this goodness is also at the beginning of that world.

The «goodness» at the beginning of the human world and of every community can be identified thanks to the fact that it is still present in the societies of the Germans and the Tuscans. It corresponds to what the former defend by «slaughtering» those who threaten it and to what the latter preserve of the Etruscans from whom they are descended. It is the consideration of all the members of a community as equal, «civil equality».

The «gathering together» that is the beginning of the human world is in turn made possible by an act of recognition whose reciprocity is the basis for that value and with

which the «goodness» at the origin of that world and of every community is to be identified.

The «goodness» inherent in this initial reciprocal «recognition of one another» as equals is consolidated and developed through the process of successive hegemonic forms of community government which follow one another. This «goodness», however, due to the fragility inherent in its very nature of belonging to an initial phase and because this process includes periods in which it is negated, is continually at risk of becoming a «dead thing». It risks being relegated to oblivion causing the ruin of the community which fails to resist such oblivion and the ruin of that very human world of which it constitutes the beginning.

This risk is a real one. The world is not eternal. Having arisen from the conjunction of «chance» and the «multiplication of generations», there is no God, no destiny, no law of an infinite cyclical succession of worlds to guarantee its existence. Being human is therefore not only one and the same thing as «gathering together» thanks to the «goodness» of the reciprocal act of «recognising one another», but it is also the same thing as «striving insistently (*insudare*)» for the development of the «goodness» of that initial act, resisting its passage into oblivion. It is the same thing as the continual commitment to «recognising one another» in the sense not only of recognising one another, but recognising one another again, remembering, augmenting the initial reciprocal recognition.

Machiavelli's idea of history in the period of the *Orti* also includes an indication as to the conditions for the renewal and rebirth of initial recognition, of its resuscitation. Once again, the closing words of "The Art of War" signal this. The discreet mention they make of art as the instrument of the re-establishment of the State seems in fact to connect resuscitation and renewed recognition to artistic creativity.

I wish now to highlight the transformation which has occurred, following the disappointment experienced in his relationship with Vettori, in Machiavelli's desire to be recognised, thanks to the placement of such a desire within the idea of history that I have described.

The closing words of "The Art of War" recall those of "The Prince" not only because

of their common reference to art: like them, they present a political project aimed at saving Florence and Italy from decline and they support this project subordinating it to a return to an ancient ideal that was present at the origins of Florence and Italy. They also contain fragments of religious language. However, “to resuscitate” in “The Art of War” is distant from “to redeem” in “The Prince”. The background of religious eschatology, which at the time of “The Prince” had suggested an end of history in the immediate realisation of the reciprocal recognition between a human community and a «redeemer», has given way to an idea of history which excludes such a realisation as immediate, but which is unthinkable without imagining it as possible. The recognition that Machiavelli saw as not having been bestowed on Cosimo Rucellai, Fabrizio Colonna, Castruccio Castracani and himself, and which at that moment in his life did not exist and could not exist except at the cost of denying its very possibility, was possible in the future, «at the right time». It was possible because it had been the beginning of the human world, establishing its existence, defining the idea of it and orienting the course of its history. To be born beyond «one’s father’s houses» and to be alive in history now meant containing one’s own desire to be recognised within that idea and relating it to the course of that history.

Machiavelli’s consideration of recognition has therefore come a great distance from that of the 1497 letter. The contradiction in *The Prince* has been resolved. Blindness and ambition have been set aside and the disappointment of the relationship with Vettori has been overcome. He has now gone beyond the conviction that everything men possess comes to them «as a recompense from God». God, who in 1497 was the object and source of every recognition, no longer has a place in the search for it. This is now a question concerning human beings exclusively, defining their origins, orienting history and indefinitely extending the time required for its solution. This is the gift which Machiavelli offered for the recognition of the youths who formed his audience at the time of the *Orti*.

However, they welcomed his discourse on the recognition of one another as equals as if it meant that he had said it did not mean. They understood equality as parity of material wealth and as immediately achievable. They were overcome by ambition which led some of them to fall first into armed combat and then into a religiosity of a Lutheran and Calvinist type.

A few years remained. In them, the new form of desire faces its first trials in a struggle to be recognised which immediately encounters its first defeat in the relationship with Guicciardini.

Machiavelli had obtained one funny form of recognition of his abilities. In May of 1521 he had been sent to the Grey Friars' monastery in Carpi, entrusted with a mission composed of two tasks: to obtain the separation of the Order's Tuscan province into two branches; and to have a highly regarded preacher sent to Florence for Lent.

This is the famous mission to the «Republic of the Sabots» which is spoken of in the first part of the correspondence with Guicciardini. Its account keeps exclusively to the events regarding the second less important task, because Guicciardini had reduced Machiavelli's mission to it alone. This reduction signals a state of conflict which for the moment is confined to the level of irony and joking. Since the Governor had been ironical about his craving for recognition, he is ironical about the prestige of the Governor's position: «Magnificent vir, major observandissime. I was shitting when your messenger arrived». This situation of conflict returns four years later in terms which are not humorous. In 1525 the Pope had shown interest in Machiavelli's old plan of instituting a local militia. The project was supposed to be started off in the territories of which Guicciardini was governor, and so he was required to give an opinion. It was negative and the project was abandoned: perhaps Guicciardini was right, but his opposition had a meaning which went beyond disagreement over it.

This meaning is already anticipated in one letter pertaining to the first part of their correspondence, when the Republic of the Sabots is still the topic of discussion. At that time Guicciardini had written: «When I read your titles as ambassador of the republic and of friars (...), I am reminded of Lysander, to whom, after so many victories and trophies, was given the task of distributing meat to those very same soldiers whom he had so gloriously commanded; and I say: You see that, with only the faces of the men and the extrinsic colours changed, all the very same things return; and we do not see any incident that has not been seen in the times. But changing the names and forms of things means that only the prudent recognizes them» (18 May 1521).

Already prior to 1525, Guicciardini's opposition concerns the philosophy of history underpinning Machiavelli's discovery of the autonomy of the "I" at the time of non-recognition. He speaks of repetition and uses the verb "recognise" in a sense which devastates Machiavelli's sense of the word: history serves to recognise the non-existence of that which Machiavelli believed history lead to the recognition of.

However, Guicciardini's opposition to Machiavelli's idea of history did also address the emotional experience which was the more concealed source of his theoretical propositions.

Not only in the correspondence with Vettori, but in this one too, the discourses on politics intersect with discourses on women. In 1525, after the failure of his friend's «last» project, Guicciardini, sarcastically passes on to him the greetings of a courtesan, Mariscotta, declaring that the fact that she «spoke of you very flatteringly (...) warms my hearth because I desire everything that makes you happy» (29 July 1525).

On 3 August 1525, Machiavelli relates to his friend the outcome of the reconnaissance of an estate called the Finocchieta, which Guicciardini had asked him to carry out in view of a possible purchase. Machiavelli's judgement is negative and hard and Guicciardini's reaction to it is heavy and surprising.

On 7 August 1525, he sends Machiavelli a piece of writing entitled «Madonna Possession of Finocchieto desires for Machiavelli health and purged judgement». In it he returns to the criticism implicit in his passing on Marescotta's praises. However, he no longer provokes Machiavelli about this occasional relationship with her, but about the one with a certain Barbera which then kept alive that disposition to love which had arisen in the distant year of 1513.

«Madonna Possession of Finocchieto» is hurt by the indignities that Machiavelli has written about her. She attributes them to an «error» and wishes that he «purges» his judgement. This error, which has caused him to consider her rigidity and harshness as negative from the fact that Machiavelli spends time with a woman who is completely different from her, with Barbera «who strives (...) to please everyone and seeks rather to seem than to be. Therefore your eyes (...) are not satisfied so much by what is as by what seems to be; and, as long as there is a bit of vague beauty in it, they do not take the effects into account».

The criticism aimed at Machiavelli's relationship with Barbera, goes beyond this. His disposition to love was not necessarily directed towards a definite woman; as we have seen in the Vettori episode, it was directed towards her only to the extent that she represented something else, but also as if she could exist as an object of love only on the condition that something else existed. Therefore, through the reduction to harlotry of the «vague beauty» which Machiavelli searched for in women and in particular at that time in Barbera, Guicciardini attacks precisely that «bit of vague beauty (*poco di vaghezza*)» without which history would be, as he maintained, nothing else but repetition.

This criticism thus touches Machiavelli's values, his vision of the world, the vision of history which now sustain him. Machiavelli is blind, does not see, pays attention to superficial aspects and not to the substance of things. Through the exaltation of the value of her never having had «any objective but to live with one person», through the praise of her own rigidity and harshness, Madonna Possession aims not only at the destruction of desire and of Machiavelli's disposition to love, but also of the self-assuredness that sustained those things. She concludes in fact with a warning that implies an accusation that he is a visionary: «Learn another time not to trust yourself and your resolution».

In the end Guicciardini plays the same role that Vettori had played in relation to Machiavelli when he had reduced the latter's disposition to love to «lust». He does so however with greater coldness, elegance, awareness and incisiveness; he accompanies his envy for one who searches for the possible in relationships with women which orient his relationship with the community and with history, with a discourse against a philosophy of history which does not only speak of mere repetition, as his does, but of a time which contains «a bit of beauty», a possibility.

There was nothing left to say. And perhaps this is just what is said in the strange letter that Machiavelli sends to the «President of Romagna» ten days later: in it he replies to Guicciardini's invitation to «purge» his judgement sending him the gift of 25 purgative pills.

Two months later, on 21 October 1525, Machiavelli signs a letter describing himself as «historical, comical, tragic»; three adjectives, the most remarkable of which is the

last since it cannot be thought that Machiavelli refers to his literary activity. He could describe himself as «tragic» because of the things that he lamented as «lost», because of the misunderstanding of his desire to be recognised on the part of Vettori, the members of the *Orti* and Guicciardini. However, we can also consider him as such because of other misunderstandings which came afterwards.

These misunderstandings are summarized in the myth of “Machiavellism”. They began immediately after Machiavelli’s death and are still alive now. However, the word “misunderstanding” is not adequate to represent the tragedy that they continue to play because it does not include the sense of catharsis present in the word «tragic». In contrast with comedy, which can exhaust itself in the moment of laughter, tragedy continues offstage, in the audience. It tends to turn its immediate outcome into a catharsis produced in them. In this case, the audience is the Western culture of today and the catharsis can consist in a twofold effect. On one side it can consist in offering to the author of the tragedy the belated gift of that recognition for which he had an «extreme desire». On the other side, it can consist in providing that culture of the foundation of a psychology and of an ethics of reconnaissance so needed in the present time.

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