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Ginzburg, Carlo. *Nondimanco: Machiavelli, Pascal*

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**Ginzburg, Carlo.**

*Nondimanco: Machiavelli, Pascal.*

Milan: Adelphi, 2018. Pp. 242 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-88-459-3314-1 (paperback) €18.

“Nonetheless”: any reader familiar with Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Prince* knows this adverb to be a mark of his style and his method of reasoning. From the sea of possibilities, the prince has to pick the exception necessary for his purpose. *Nondimanco* (to wit, “nonetheless”) thus provides the title for Carlo Ginzburg’s new book, a collection of nine of his published and unpublished essays on Machiavelli plus an appendix devoted to *Il Gattopardo* (“The Leopard”), the mid-twentieth-century novel by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Ginzburg reads Machiavelli’s masterpiece “between the lines” so as to unveil the hidden meanings and the structure of its prose.

One of Ginzburg’s premises is the inapplicability of the “dichotomy Middle Ages/Renaissance” to Machiavelli’s oeuvre (88). A close analysis of the books Machiavelli could access in his father’s library reveals that there were many typically medieval works. Ginzburg dwells, in particular, on commentaries and translations of Aristotle that provided Machiavelli with not only the nucleus of theories that he later developed, but also the language to express them. An example of this productive reading of Aristotle in Latin is offered by the distinction between *simpliciter* (that is, “absolutely, generally speaking”) and *secundum quid* (“in a specific historical context or circumstance”), a distinction that constitutes one of the foundations of the theoretical framework used by Machiavelli to formulate his views on the prince’s agency and his analysis of political states in general—not the perfect one, such as the ideal republic delineated by Plato (*simpliciter*), but those that existed in human history and concrete circumstances (*secundum quid*).

Ginzburg notes a similar tension in the discussions that took place at the time of Galileo Galilei’s trial in the first half of the seventeenth century. The same personalities that defended or censored Machiavelli’s works for their apparent impiety—German humanist Kaspar Schoppe (a name that appears often in the book) and Dominican theologian Niccolò Riccardi, respectively—resorted to the ideas of “absolutely” or “in a particular context”/“hypothetically.” Galileo’s theories were thus evaluated on a delicate scale that measured reality and hypothesis. Whereas in the end the Inquisition refused the “hypothetical”

approach and forced the scientist to abjure, Galileo remained aware that nature, unlike politics, does not have exceptions—there is no “nonetheless” in nature (141)—and therefore cannot be studied through the lens of art.

“The art of the state” is in fact the term that Machiavelli applies to politics. Such usage is all but irrelevant because it implies a further consequence in the evaluation of the prince. In order to explain it, Ginzburg recalls Aristotle once again, but in this case he points out that Machiavelli subverts Aristotelian categories. Transferring political agency to the field of arts—a field that by definition excludes ethical judgment—entails depriving it of any moral connotations. Moreover, because Machiavelli puts politics in the field of “making” (*facere*) and not in that of “behaving” (*agere*), he ties the prince’s decisions to the idea of “producing” objects more than “acting” in a certain way.

Among Machiavelli’s several readers, Ginzburg points to French philosopher Blaise Pascal. As indicated in the preface, the comma that separates his name from Machiavelli’s in the book’s subtitle reveals a relation of both conjunction and disjunction (11). Ginzburg locates the link between the two authors in their respective attitude towards or against casuistry, and in their evaluation of exceptions or, in a religious context, miracles. Ginzburg dwells in particular on Pascal’s eighteen *Provinciales* (“Provincial Letters,” 1656–57), where the original attack against casuistry—and in particular the Jesuits who employed it—was to bring into question the very legitimacy of religions in the age of Enlightenment. While proving such a reading of Pascal’s work, Ginzburg sketches a precise and consistent web of connections between authors, treatises, private letters, and religious orders. What emerges is not only the correct attribution of works to authors, but also how works themselves travelled over centuries and how they were read and used (or misused)—sometimes very differently from the original intentions of their authors.

By exploring the massive bibliography and by deepening observations that previous scholars merely hinted at (as in the case of an enlightening essay by Charles S. Singleton), Ginzburg disentangles the knots of Machiavelli’s thought and offers an impressively original reading of his political theory. At the same time, without underestimating the accuracy of textual philology, Ginzburg underlines the key role of reception history so as to understand some obscure aspects in Machiavelli’s work. Such an operation might appear extremely complicated, if not hazardous, for an impartial approach to texts. *Nonetheless*, for a personality of the likes of Machiavelli, examining his original

ideas through the filter of their subsequent readers proves to be both instructive and beneficial.

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**Higginbotham, Jennifer, and Mark Albert Johnston, eds.**

***Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture.***

London: Palgrave, 2018. Pp. x, 281 + 3 ill. ISBN 978-3-319-72768-4 (hardcover) \$109.

In a very informative introduction, the editors set out their purposefully anachronistic intentions to look at ways queer children represented in Renaissance drama and culture subvert the expected heteronormative happy endings of comedy and romance. They look for ways in which these characters may have appeared queer then and might today, allowing for a fluid backward and forward reading of history. Also, the lateral sideways movement which Stockton has detailed as the growth pattern of the queer child yields exciting new readings (7). The editors defend the range and variety of the ten chapters in “queering queerness” (6) through teasing out myriad cultural and gender anomalies. They avoid any reductive synthesizing of the chapters, observing instead that queerness had not yet acquired erotic connotations and that homonormativity prevailed in male-male friendships; furthermore, erotic relations between powerful men and women with children were not necessarily seen as abusive. Higginbotham and Johnston insist that boys, at least, were assumed to have erotic agency and that early modern pedophilia cannot be equated with modern queer homoeroticism defined as mutually consensual adult sex. Ultimately, boys, performing as pederastic subordinates, were used to validate contemporary patriarchal power systems. Next, they suggest that the two overlapping early modern sexual models encourage “a radical unknowing” (17) in relation to conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality. Galenic influences of the “one-sex model” (17), where females might potentially become men, favoured notions of “gender fluidity, mutability and change” (19) facilitating reading the child as queer. Humoral discourses also helped to explain categories such as tomboy, roaring girl, asexual, and gender queer. The chapters