Document generated on 06/11/2025 10 a.m.

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Jurdjevic, Mark, Natasha Piano, and John P. McCormick, eds. Florentine Political Writings from Petrarch to Machiavelli

Jonathan Locke Hart

Volume 44, Number 1, Winter 2021

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081171ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37082

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)
2293-7374 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Hart, J. (2021). Review of [Jurdjevic, Mark, Natasha Piano, and John P. McCormick, eds. Florentine Political Writings from Petrarch to Machiavelli]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, *44*(1), 263–266. https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37082

© All Rights Reserved Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2021

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

Renaissance painting as well as in literature. The discussion in this chapter is framed by the motif of the death of "a bridal couple," and begins with an analysis of a painting that stylizes this motif, on display in the Cleveland Museum of Art. The art-literature comparative method continues through much of this chapter, and the notion is to focus on both the material objects—the pictorial representation of time as the mortal reaper—and the philosophy and language of gender and desire that provide the verbal background for cognitive consonances and disharmonies within *carpe diem* poetry. In the second half of the book, in fact, the comparative analysis of the visual and the textual enhances the discussion of ideas of sex, the female body, death, and desire in ways that no other, earlier discussion of the invitation poem ever ventured.

Intellectual daring and critical freshness make each of the five chapters and the compact "Afterword" (beginning with brief remarks on Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and moving on to sum up the argument) an original critical piece. The book expands significantly how we should think about the genre of the invitation to love (and seduction) poem, and our sense of how deep and diverse are the imaginative making and signifying powers of a form that gave energy to Renaissance love writing—and that has become, for many readers, the essence of Renaissance love poetry.

GORAN STANIVUKOVIC
Saint Mary's University, Halifax
https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37081

Jurdjevic, Mark, Natasha Piano, and John P. McCormick, eds.
Florentine Political Writings from Petrarch to Machiavelli.
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. Pp. x, 322. ISBN 978-0-8122-2432-0 (paperback) US$34.95.

The editors, Mark Jurdjevic, Natasha Piano, and John P. McCormick, have produced an excellent collection that brings together Florentine political writings from the Renaissance of importance to Florence and beyond. The epigraph from Leonardi Bruni sets out the Florentine love of freedom and hatred of tyranny: "I think something has been true and is true in this city more than in any other; the men of Florence especially enjoy perfect freedom

and are the greatest enemies of tyrants." Jurdjevic sets out the aim: "This volume provides a selection of political texts—largely but not exclusively Florentine—that illustrates the language, conceptual vocabulary, and issues at stake in Florentine political culture at key moments in its development" (1). A helpful frame, the Introduction provides insights and contexts for the texts. Jurdjevic says, "Machiavelli and Guicciardini, who became good friends, shared a number of political convictions and intellectual affinities" (18). He continues: "They both desired to see Florence ruled by a republican government, although Guicciardini, always the more cautious and prudent of the two, expressed that sentiment privately whereas Machiavelli expressed it openly. Their ideal governments were both variations on the ancient mixed constitution, though with admittedly substantial institutional differences" (18). Jurdjevic compares Machiavelli and Guicciardini, the one an outsider from an ostracized, middle-class family, the other an insider from an ancient and distinguished house (17–20). This collection attempts to give readers in English a fuller understanding of these two key thinkers but also of Florence, political thought, and the Renaissance, and makes a distinct contribution: "Whereas the main goal of many Renaissance readers is to present the multifaceted intellectual preoccupations of humanist writing, this volume focuses exclusively on formally political texts" (20). Jurdjevic maintains that the collection increases the scope of humanist political writing by consciously linking it with the sixteenth-century "realist" turn of Machiavelli and Guicciardini (21). Exploring continuity and change over two hundred years, the book shows that ideas on the politics of Renaissance Florence were and are significant.

The editors divide the volume into three parts. Part 1, "On Monarchy and Tyranny," includes selections from Petrarch, Coluccio Salutati, and Bartolus of Sassoferrato; part 2, "On Civic Republicanism," contains selected works from Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, Alamanno Rinuccini, and Girolamo Savonarola; part 3, "On Florence: Between Republic and Principate," offers texts of Paolo Vettori, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Francesco Guicciardini.

The letter of Francesco Petrarca to Francesco da Carrara, the ruler of Padua, discusses the nature and duties of the ideal prince, an instance of the mirror-for-princes genre, or *speculum principis*, giving advice on princely rule. Salutati and Sassoferrato examine monarchical government through an examination of tyranny. Bruni and Bracciolini analyze the republican constitutions of Florence and Venice in relation to aristocracy. Rinuccini

explores classical ideas, including Platonic withdrawal and contemplation, as a protest against the Medici subversion of republican Florence. The French king Charles VIII invaded Italy and destabilized it. Other texts consider the implications of this invasion and the subsequent instability (2). Savonarola advocates for republicanism contra the Medici, whom he associates with tyranny. Vettori addresses the Medici on their return to Florence in 1512 and argues for a princely regime based on force. As some of the selections from Machiavelli and Guicciardini first appear in English translation here, they represent another contribution. Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy* and Guicciardini's *History of Italy* are well-known; these selections focus on the specifics of Florentine politics and the constitution.

These Florentine and Tuscan writings are brilliant and continue to be significant in Italy and beyond. Here is a sample of the insights. In *How a Ruler Ought to Govern His State* (1373), Petrarch observes: "The first quality is that a lord should be friendly, never terrifying, to the good citizens, even though it is inevitable that he be terrifying to evil citizens if he is to be a friend to justice" (30). Petrarch expatiates on love and fear, drawing on Cicero and other classical sources while noting the good qualities of Julius Caesar: "It is indeed a splendid kind of revenge to pardon past wrongs; to forget them altogether is more splendid still" (31). Salutati's *On the Tyrant* (1400) talks about the Greek word "tyros," which "is the same as 'brave,'" and notes that "the most ancient Greeks and the primitive Italians called their kings 'tyrants'" (59), saying that "tyrant" was soon applied to him who abused his power. Salutati sums up the difference between tyrants and kings:

> We conclude, therefore, that a tyrant is either one who usurps a government, having no legal title for his rule, or one who governs *superbe* or rules unjustly or does not observe law or equity; just as, on the other hand, he is a lawful prince upon whom the right to govern is conferred, who administers justice and maintains the laws. (61)

Bartolus of Sassoferrato pursues this topic in *On Tyranny* (ca. 1355) and considers the Greek τύρος, the Latin *fortis* or *angustia*, and how "the worst of kings who exercised a cruel and wicked rule over their peoples, that is oppression (*angustia*), because they oppress (*angustiant*) their subjects" (85).

Exploring civic republicanism in *Panegyric to the City of Florence* (ca. 1402), *Oration for the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi* (1428), and *On the Florentine Constitution* (1439), Bruni uses, in the first text, the topos of inexpressibility: "this city is of such admirable excellence that no one can match his eloquence with it" (106). In a similar context, Bracciolini's *In Praise of the Venetian Government* (1459) employs anaphora to emphasize the conditional "If" leading to the "then" of Venice: "If ever there has been a republic that deserved praise and celebration […] that republic is surely Venice, a city whose repute eclipses all others that have ever been, or are or may be in future" (146). Rinuccini writes about freedom in *Liberty* (1479), saying "Man's first concern is to seek inner peace and liberty and tranquility" (173). Savonarola's *Treatise on the Constitution and Government of the City of Florence* (1498) observes: "No animal, indeed, is more dangerous than man without law" (181).

The final works deal with Florence as Republic or Principate. Vettori, in *Memorandum to Cardinal de' Medici About the Affairs of Florence* (1512), remarks on the citizens: owing to "their ambition, it is hard to satisfy them, and because of their cautious self-seeking, they will give unsound advice" (207). Machiavelli's *Memorandum to the Newly Restored Medici* (1512), *Discursus on Florentine Matters After the Death of Lorenzo de' Medici the Younger* (1520–21), *Minutes of a Provision for the Reform of the Florentine Government* (1522), *Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio on the Reform of the State of Florence* (1522), and *Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca* (1520) all tell us about human nature and politics: for instance, "In short, to establish a principate in a city where a republic would be more appropriate requires efforts arduous, inhumane, and unworthy of anyone wishing to be deemed merciful and good" (217). The following works by Guicciardini, *On the Method of Electing Offices in the Great Council* (1512), *On the Mode of Reordering the Popular Government* (1512), *The Government of Florence After the Medici Restoration* (1513), and *On the Mode of Securing the State of the House of Medici* (1516), all further our understanding of Florence and government, with, for example, advice in this last text: "You must demonstrate yourself as grateful and human to the majority and live among them amicably" (294). The Introduction and selections in this volume increase our understanding of Florence and politics.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART
Shandong University
https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37082