

"LE PLUS GENTIL ESPRIT QUI SOIT APPARU AU MONDE DEPUIS LES DERNIERS SIECLES". THE POPULARITY OF MACHIAVELLI IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE.¹

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All historians are, I imagine, familiar with the conventional intellectual topography of Machiavelli's reception in sixteenth-century Europe. The map is painted in lurid colours. The initial publication of Machiavelli's oeuvre provokes an outburst of fear, indignation, and hatred. By the end of the 1550s clerical opposition erupts into the papal condemnation of all Machiavelli's works. His identification with atheism and political amorality is exacerbated by the Huguenot, Gentillet; and, by the end of the sixteenth century, Machiavellism is an evil swamp over which brood the tomes of the Jesuits - a dreary mountain range extending far into the seventeenth century.

This topography has been endorsed by many intellectual travellers - most famously by Friedrich Meinecke who wrote that, "Machiavelli's theory was a sword which was plunged into the flank of the body politic of Western humanity causing it to shriek and rear up". Even the judicious Quentin Skinner, has declared that "the majority of Machiavelli's early readers were so shocked by his outlook that they simply denounced him as an invention of the devil, or even as Old Nick, the devil himself". Worst of all, Sydney Anglo, with whose judgements I often

¹ This article is, with minor adjustments, the text of my Klaus Mayer Memorial Lecture delivered at the British Library on 17 November 2000. It is a brief summary of a more substantial study which is itself part of a much larger project covering the reception of Machiavelli in western Europe up to the early seventeenth century.

concur, once wrote that "the majority of Machiavelli's early critics were agreed that hell had assuredly become his permanent address in the hereafter".²

Yet this familiar map of ideas is as unsophisticated as much other early cartography. Mere foothills are delineated as mountains; other (and loftier) peaks are omitted; rivers of influence run in the wrong direction; and (to abandon my cartographic metaphor before it becomes wholly unsustainable) great areas of uncharted space are glossed with the legend, "Here be monsters".

Many of these mistakes may be corrected by applying a little common sense. If Machiavelli were so universally hated, why are the sources for informed hostility so few and (with rare exceptions) so feeble; and, conversely, why were his books so frequently reprinted?³ In the century following his death, there were at least 158 editions, issues or versions of his four major works, of which well over half appeared after the first published papal Index of Prohibited Books of 1559. And why were these works so enthusiastically translated (especially in France) - with 30 French issues of Il Principe, 35 of the Discorsi, 5 of the Arte della guerra, and 5 of the Storie fiorentine - of which barely a handful were issued before the papal ban? These are astonishing statistics for any sixteenth-century author and they do not take into account manuscript sources and adaptations.

² Friedrich Meinecke, trans. D.Scott, Machiavellism. The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History, 1957, p.49; Quentin Skinner, Machiavelli, Oxford, 1981, p.88; S. Anglo, Machiavelli: a Dissection, London, 1969, p.273.

³ In this article, my information on editions, printings, and variant versions is drawn from Sergio Bertelli and Piero Innocenti, Bibliografia Machiavelliana, Verona, 1979, and from Adolph Gerber, Niccolò Machiavelli. Die Handschriften. Ausgaben und Übersetzungen seiner Werke im 16. Und 17. Jahrhundert, Gotha, Munich, 1912, 1913.

This paper touches upon three aspects of the Machiavelli problem with reference to Renaissance France.⁴ The first concerns scraps of information which, though suggesting serious interest in Machiavelli, cannot be forced into a pattern or narrative. My second and far more important concern is with Machiavelli's French translators and the implications of their work. And finally I shall come to Gentillet whose Contre-Machiavel tells us quite a lot about Machiavelli's popularity in Renaissance France - a paradox which, I like to think, would have pleased Klaus Mayer himself.

All historians are at the mercy of their sources: but historians of ideas are especially vulnerable since so much of their evidence comprises unclassifiable bits and pieces of information. Especially unsatisfactory are references indicating ownership of a text; for possession of a book, while suggesting some degree of interest, implies neither knowledge nor opinion.⁵ We are, for example, unable to penetrate behind the fact that a French version of the first book of the Discorsi - in the royal binding of François I^{er} - was presented by the translator not to the King but to Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France. We know nothing about the Machiavellian knowledge of François's son, Henri II, beyond the fact that he purchased a translation of the Arte della guerra. Nor can we say more about other contemporary Frenchmen who possessed similar books. Jean Grolier, Treasurer of France, had copies of three Machiavelli

⁴ There is a considerable literature on the reception of Machiavelli in France. Some studies of specific authors are helpful but, of works which attempt a more general approach, only Giuliano Procacci, Studi sulla fortuna del Machiavelli, Rome, 1965, and Rodolfo de Mattei, Dal premachiavellismo all'antimachiavellismo, Florence, 1969, emancipate themselves from conventionality.

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⁵ For examples of ownership of Machiavelli's works, see A.H. Schutz, Vernacular Books in Parisian Private Libraries of the Sixteenth Century according to the Notarial Inventories, Chapel Hill, 1955.

texts bound for him: but whether or not he ever peeked between the sumptuous covers remains a mystery.⁶

There were others who did know Machiavelli's works, or are said to have known them, but in circumstances which remain wholly obscure. One of the earliest bibliographical reference to Machiavelli occurs in 1548 when Conrad Gesner, under De re militari, noted the seven books by Niccolò Machiavelli the Florentine, "per Ianum Morellium Parisium Latine traducti elegantissime".⁷ This is potentially of immense interest, for Jean Morel had been secretary to Erasmus and was later the centre of a Parisian literary salon which included many of the most important scholars and poets of the time.⁸ But we can push the matter no further.

Then we learn from a letter written in July 1547, that one, Baccio del Bene, was possessed of the keenest wit and was a student both of Machiavelli and Lucretius.⁹ Now Del Bene was a notable Italian emigré in France; was the son-in-law of Biaggio Buonaccorsi (a colleague and close friend of Machiavelli himself); had connections with Jacopo Corbinelli who certainly did study Machiavelli; and eventually became a significant figure in the Palace Academy of Henri III. Yet there is nothing we can do with the information. D'Avila, it is true, tells us that, every

⁶ Léopold Delisle, Chantilly. Le Cabinet des livres. Imprimés antérieurs au milieu du XVI^e siècle, Paris, 1905, nos.1145, 1147, 1148; Ernest Quentin-Bauchart, La Bibliothèque de Fontainebleau et les livres des derniers Valois à la Bibliothèque Nationale (1515-1589), Paris, 1891, no.190. See also Grolier's Il Principe and Storie fiorentine in the British Library, C.27.d.2 and C.27.d.3.

⁷ Conrad Gesner, Pandectarum sive Partitionum universalium . . . libri xxi, Zurich, 1548, fol.324. Gesner had earlier referred to Machiavelli's work "de re militari" in the Bibliotheca Universalis, Zurich, 1545, p.520.

⁸ On Morel, see Premier volume de la Bibliothèque de Sieur de la Croix-du-Maine, Paris, 1584, p.250-1; I.D.McFarlane, Buchanan, London, 1981, especially p.180-2.

⁹ See Lucien Romier, Les origines politiques des guerres de religion, Paris, 1913, p.164. n.4.

day after dinner, Henri III would withdraw in the company of del Bene and Corbinelli to read Polybius, Tacitus, and especially Machiavelli's Discorsi and Il Principe, to draw out rules for his political designs.¹⁰ But D'Avila was writing long after the death of all three men. We do not know whether del Bene and Corbinelli ever seriously discussed Machiavelli, with or without Henri III; and, if they did, whether such discussion ever made the slightest impact upon intellectual history.

We can multiply examples of this sort, just as we can accumulate instances of Machiavellian reading in a host of writers great and small - Du Moulin, La Perrière, De Fourquevaux, Du Choul, Symeoni, Nestor, Estienne, Bodin, Montaigne, Le Roy, Belleforest, Vigenère, and so on. They are all very interesting, but remain resolutely discrete and disparate and no more evidence of “popularity” than random ill-informed condemnations of “Machiavel” are evidence of his “unpopularity”.

We are on more solid ground, though, when we turn to the process whereby Machiavelli's opinions (and opinions about his opinions) were disseminated in France. This dissemination was achieved not by commentators or theorists, but rather by the numerous editions of his own writings in French translations. The translators were, in fact, by far Machiavelli's most diligent students for, whatever their failings and limitations, they were obliged to study his every word, weigh his every phrase, and seek to understand his every nuance of meaning. They were, in short, obliged to read what he wrote.¹¹

In 1546, Jean Charrier, Secretary to the President of the Parlement of Paris, offered his French rendering of Machiavelli's Arte della guerra, together with that of Onosander's account of the

¹⁰ On del Bene's connection with the Palace Academy, see Frances Yates, The French Academies, London, 1947, p.33, 108, 214. On his reading with Corbinelli and Henri III, see Procacci, op.cit., p.174-5.

¹¹ The pioneering study by Willis H.Bowen, “Sixteenth century French translations of Machiavelli”, Italica, XXVII (1950), p.313-20, is still of value.

duties of a general, to Henri the Dauphin: and the gift was, presumably, received since we know that Henri possessed the copy which is still preserved in the Réserve of the Bibliothèque Nationale.¹² In his dedication, Charrier laments that modern armies do not conform to ancient models but have become disordered and rebellious; and he is, therefore, offering these “unguens et cataplasmes pour guerir les vieilles ulceres et maladies de noz armees gastees de si longue main”.¹³

Charrier explains the style and structure of his translation, begging forgiveness for having divided Machiavelli's book into chapters "contre l'ordre de ses dialogues": but he has done this because division helps memory and understanding, and also facilitates pleasure. Wise men have, accordingly, developed a method of breaking up a text into subjects - applying this to the books of Aristotle, Vitruvius, and Pliny who wrote in a "style continu et sans division" - and Charrier has preferred to consider the comfort of his reader rather than timidly follow his author. Nor has he followed his source word for word. There are differences between his own and the original language, and he believes that in translation it is more important to represent faithfully the intention of writers "que de s'amuser au langaige nu des paroles".

One curious feature of Charrier's introduction was an evident embarrassment at his lack of knowledge concerning Machiavelli. He acknowledges that it is customary to provide a biography of the author at the beginning of a work, but he has decided against this partly because it isn't long since Machiavelli died and his writings are very recent, and partly because those who wish to know more about him could find plenty of people to satisfy their curiosity.

¹² L'art de la guerre composé par Nicolas Machiavelli, Citoyen et Secretaire de Florence. L'estat aussi et charge d'un lieutenant General d'armee, par Onosander ancien philosophe Platonique . . . Le tout traduit en vulgaire françois par Jehan Charrier natif d'Apt en Provence, Paris, Jean Barbé, 1546. On Henri's copy, see Quentin-Bauchart, op.cit., no.190, p.117-8.

¹³ Charrier, sig.a.iv.

Unfortunately, we do not have this option with regard to Charrier about whom we know almost nothing.

Nor do we move from darkness into light when we turn to the three earliest translators of Il Principe of whom only the first, Jacques de Vintimille is somebody of moderately wide repute - and his version of Il Principe (dedicated to the Constable of France, Anne de Montmorency) has remained in manuscript, an unpublished but eloquent testimony to Machiavelli's magnetic powers.¹⁴ Far better known are the labours of Guillaume Cappel and Gaspard d'Auvergne, who published independent translations of Il Principe in 1553. Cappel, born in 1530, was a member of a distinguished literary and professional family and eventually became a doctor. His Le Prince, which was published at Paris by the King's Printer, was dedicated to Jean Bertrand, Lord Privy Seal, and accompanied with poems by members of the Pléiade with whom Cappel was evidently on more than nodding terms. His translation is very literal and sinewy: yet, apart from one shameless plagiarism, it was not reprinted until the twentieth century.¹⁵

His Préface is valuable as a mid-century interpretation of Machiavelli, and is strikingly at variance with the "shocked horror" reception theory. We owe, says Cappel, a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who, in their books - "comme boutiques de sagesse" - treated that knowledge which brings us nearer to God. There are, naturally, diverse human aims but, just as the more worthy the goal the more worthy the man who pursues it, so "la politique" is the very summit of philosophy. It is "la fin des fins" for, without political science, all other forms of knowledge count for nothing. When the republic is well governed by magistrates the whole state

¹⁴ Chantilly, Musée Condée MS No.693: Le Prince de Nicolas Machiavel, citoyen et secrétaire de Florence, traduit en françois, MDXLVI, par Jacques de Vintemille. On Vintemille, see Ludovic de Vauzelles, Vie de Jacques, comte de Vintimille, Orléans, 1865.

¹⁵ Le Prince de Nicolas Machiavelle secretaire et citoien de Florence. Traduit d'Italien en François par Guillaume Cappel, Paris, C. Estienne, 1553. Cappel's translation was reissued, with a brief and uninformative preface by Raymond Aron, by Livre de Poche, Paris, 1962. The plagiarist was Gohory: see below, n.20.

flourishes, and the handling of affairs conforms to "cette grande providence divine" in the theatre of the universe.

This is a lofty view of political philosophy. "La politique" is God-given. And at this unlikely point - enter Machiavelli! In Cappel's view, most authors, have written more for show than for practical utility, indulging in wishful thinking rather than describing a republic. Neither their eloquence nor all human learning can persuade a prince to consent to his own ruin which would surely come about if anyone followed their advice amidst so many who did not - a fundamental Machiavellism from the fifteenth chapter of Il Principe. Machiavelli, says Cappel, is quite different. He has a healthy, unbiased judgement; a sound method; a style appropriate to his subject; a knowledge of history; and the assurance which derives from experience. He reprimands faults with severity; resolves difficulties with wisdom; and seeks out the causes of change. In short, the thoroughness of Machiavelli's work has left nothing for his successors either to add to or subtract from, and those who hold opinions contrary to his own simply do not hold good opinions. For the rest, Cappel concludes, Machiavelli has dealt so well with every part of politics that it is the general opinion that of all books this one is the best.

A similar assessment of Il Principe was advanced by its other French translator in 1553. Gaspard D'Auvergne, a lawyer in the duchy of Châtellerauld, remains a thoroughly obscure figure: though he, like Cappel, was able to elicit a eulogistic liminary verse from Marc Antoine de Muret. He offered his translation to James Hamilton, second Earl of Arran, who had been chosen Regent and Governor of Scotland in December 1542 after the death of James V.¹⁶ D'Auvergne considers "this little work" to be marvellously appropriate to so great a man of affairs for the original author deals with nothing other than how a prince may acquire and maintain "le sien":

¹⁶ Le Prince de Niccolas Macchiavelli secretaire et citoyen de Florence traduit d'Italien en Francois, Poitiers, E. De Marnef, 1553. See Gerber, op.cit., III, p.30-33.

n'ayant voulu suivre en cela la tradition de ceux qui ont écrit par devant lui sur semblable argument: lesquels ne figuré en leurs écrits je ne scay quelle perfection de prince non imitable à tous les humains pour la fragile condition de ceste nature.

Machiavelli, in D'Auvergne's view, considered it "fort inepte monstrer un chemin par ou lon ne va point, pour laisser celui qui est battu de tout le monde". There are, he admits, difficulties in facing up to harsh realities; but, without the express favour of God, no prince can maintain himself "s'il ne veut jamais lascher la bride à la severité des règles de conscience". It is the law of the world, naturally vicious, that one cannot prosper for long, even in sovereign dignity, "sans se scavoir aider au besoing du vice, pour l'occasion cessée retourner incontinent à la vertu".

Saintly folk, D'Auvergne argues, have often tried to divorce themselves from the sinful commerce of worldly affairs: but such withdrawal would be pernicious if adopted by everyone. Necessity constrains us to live one with another in a politic society, "approuvée des saintes lettres", and we must not be astonished if the manner employed by princes to command men is often not understood by their subjects, and "semble quelquefois exorbitante des loix communes et ordinaires". Yes indeed! Monarchs may sometimes go beyond the limits of virtue in order to put right the corrupt world which is subject to them. And in doing this their power is still approved by God: a paradox which, says D'Auvergne, is analysed and discussed by Machiavelli whose manner of proceeding has not hitherto been used by any similar writer.

This special pleading is truly remarkable for, in order to exculpate Machiavelli's dubious political morality, D'Auvergne presses into service a commonplace of Christian political thought. Kings must be obeyed because, as God's lieutenants, their behaviour is simply beyond the comprehension of common wits.

Thus St Paul the Apostle is called upon to testify as a character witness for Niccolò Machiavelli. And it is important to remember two things about this strange apology for the

Florentine's topsy-turvy ethic. First, it was included in all subsequent editions of D'Auvergne's translation which, despite its pleonastic flabbiness and inferiority to Cappel's version, enjoyed some twenty printings up to the mid-seventeenth century. Secondly, as a result of this popularity, it must have reached a far wider audience in France than any of the writings against Machiavelli.

Vying in popularity with D'Auvergne's Le Prince was the translation of Machiavelli's Discorsi by Jacques Gohory. Indeed for much of their history the two texts were issued together in a composite volume. Gohory was born about 1520 and died in March 1576, having shown proficiency as a translator, editor, poet, lawyer, doctor, alchemist, musician, magician, and historian. He wrote on magic, divination, and viticulture; and produced the earliest known treatise devoted entirely to tobacco. He knew just about everybody who was anybody in the medical, academic, artistic, and literary world; and, according to his own testimony, he was the central figure of an informal academy which used to meet to conduct alchemical experiments, perform music, and play bowls and nine-pins.¹⁷

On 12 April 1544, the printing of Gohory's translation of the first book of Machiavelli's Discorsi was completed. This was Gohory's earliest published work, though he was simultaneously preparing a translation of the opening book of Livy's first Decade. In September 1548 Estienne Groulleau reprinted the first book of Gohory's Discours, together with the two remaining books. In 1559 there were three reissues of the complete translation; and, from then on, there was a long series of further issues which continued until well into the seventeenth century.¹⁸

¹⁷ On Gohory see E.T. Hamy, "Un Précurseur de Guy de la Brosse. Jacques Gohory et le Lucium Philosophal de Saint-Marceau-lès Paris (1571-1576)", Nouvelles Archives du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, 4e Série, I (Paris, 1899); Enea Balmas, "Jacques Gohory traduttore del Machiavelli (con documenti inediti)", Studi Machiavelliani (Verona, 1972).

¹⁸ For the complicated bibliography of Gohory's translations, see Gerber, op.cit., III, p.20-27, 34-36, 39-47.

These various editions were accompanied by laudatory verses by divers hands; by a number of liminary letters by Gohory himself in which he explained his method and purpose, and provided his estimate of Machiavelli's worth; and finally, preceding Le Prince of 1571, there came Gohory's Vie de Nicolas Machiavel. And, taken as a corpus, this material must be regarded as the most deeply-considered critical comment on Machiavelli up to the time of the St Bartholomew massacre.

Apart from Gohory's own observations, the most interesting preliminary - and one which accompanies every edition of the Discours - is the verse by Nicolas Herberay des Essars, suggesting that Machiavelli's Discorsi provided valuable insights into the work of Livy, and that Gohory's current translation of the Roman historian was itself eagerly anticipated. That translation was never completed although, when twenty-five years later Gohory did publish a Latin edition of all the extant books of Livy's Roman History, he mentions that he had, in his youth, translated Machiavelli's commentaries on Livy showing that the Italian was no mere interpreter of words, like grammarians, but rather a practical teacher who revealed the true fruit of history, providing patterns to be adapted for daily use, "just as Livy advises in the preface of the work".¹⁹

However valuable the exemplars contained in Livy, skilled exegesis was needed to reveal their practical application; and Gohory was deeply impressed by the way in which Machiavelli interpreted the Roman historian for the benefit of modern readers. In his letter "au lecteur" which precedes Le premier livre des discours in 1544, Gohory praises "ce marchand Florentin" who brings good wares for everyone; and he is sure that he will be well-received by the French. Machiavelli has written on many matters such as the history of Florence, the prince, and the art of war: but here in the Discorsi, Rome is his preoccupation - "sa magesté, son Empire, sa Police excellente en temps de paix, sa vertu et prouesse nonpareille en guerre". Moreover, when

¹⁹ "Animadversiones Iacobi Gohorii Paris. in T. Livii", fol.34: in Titi Livii Patavini Historiae Romanae ab urbe condita, libri xlv, Paris, 1573.

appropriate, Machiavelli speaks also of other kingdoms and republics so that "ces devis sont un vray miroir de l'histoire universelle, qui peut grandement servir à l'instruction de toutes manieres de gens". Gohory adds that, should this first attempt of his be given a warm welcome, then two other books (that is the rest of the Discorsi) would follow. Four years later they did; and he provided another preface this time claiming that Machiavelli should be no less prized by his contemporaries than Tacitus, Sallust, and even Livy himself, for, without him we could derive little benefit from these writers. As far as Gohory was concerned Machiavelli had become the essential interpreter of the greatest Roman historian.

The Premier livre des discours of 1544 is preceded by a letter - addressed to Gabriel le Veneur, Bishop of Evreux - which, strictly speaking, belongs only to this edition although it accompanies all but one of the subsequent issues of the complete translation. Gohory is sure that the Bishop will treasure his translation, not so much for its language which is "simple et commun", as for the profound secrets of its doctrine. Moreover, the work is most appropriate to the Bishop's dignity since, in this first book Machiavelli, "traicte amplement de la religion, et s'il parle des armes, si maintient-il que beaucoup plus doibt Rome au divin Numa qu'au belliqueux Romulus" - a testimonial which would have tickled the author.

In 1571, when Gohory revised and reissued his translation, he also supplied a new dedication.²⁰ And it is here that he praises Machiavelli as "le plus gentil esprit qui soit apparu au monde depuis les derniers siecles". He recommends Il Principe as a book not only worthy to be read but also to be known entirely by heart. And as for the Storie fiorentine? Well, his relative, Miles Perrot, Maître des Comptes - in his time one of the most learned men in the kingdom - kept this text closer to hand than his Livy or Tacitus and "me dit qu'il estimoit plus de proffit en

²⁰ Les discours de Nic. Macchiavel secretaire et citoyen de Florence, sur la premiere decade de Tite Live, dez l'edification de la ville. Traduitz d'Italien en François et de nouveau reveuz et augmentez par Jacques Gohory Parisien, Paris, Robert le Mangnier, 1571. The new dedicatee was Francesco Affaitati, Baron of Ghistelles, a member of a powerful Cremonese commercial family.

sa lecture estant accommodee à l'humeur de nostre temps que en celle des grandz historiens antiques tant eslognee de noz meures façons et present usage " .

It was also in 1571 that Gohory published what he claimed as his own translation of Il Principe prefaced by a Vie de Nicolas Machiavel - both works dedicated to Giovanfrancesco Caraffa. Having already poured scorn on the previous French translations in his dedicatory letter to Affaitati preceding the Discours, he does not, therefore, acknowledge that his Le Prince follows that of Cappel almost verbatim, with only the most trifling textual variants. Gohory assures Caraffa that he does not intend to praise "nostre Machiavel" other than to declare that he better described for us the secrets of the Microcosm in all its diverse humours, passions, and "fantaisies" than Pliny had managed in his "histoire naturelle de tout le grand monde". Man by his reason is able to frustrate celestial influences and exert his free will; and there is no author in any language who better tells us how this may be achieved than Machiavelli whose works are founded entirely upon human wisdom.²¹ This massive praise is continued in the Vie de Machiavel, where Gohory explains that Machiavelli was not interested in worldly riches but preferred the goods and ornaments of the spirit, "sacrez et incorruptible". And, whereas D'Auvergne had merely called upon St. Paul to speak up for Machiavelli, Gohory here cites "l'exemple de l'evangelique Marie qui eleut le meilleur party de vie qui jamais ne luy peut estre tollu".

Gohory reveals a comprehensive familiarity with Machiavelli's works all of which he considers superior to even the greatest ancient authorities because the Florentine's "bons enseignemens" are more conformable and appropriate to contemporary needs. Yet the little biography ends with a lament. This author, so excellent in spirit and doctrine that his equal has not been seen on earth for centuries, provides a fine example of the ingratitude of many princes who consume their wealth in "pompes, bobans, et delices" without honouring or rewarding the

²¹ Le Prince de Nicolas Machiavel secretaire et citoyen de Florence . . . Traduit d'Italien en François avec la vie de l'auteur mesme, par Iaq. Gohory Parisien, Paris, Robert le Mangnier, 1571.

virtue of the elegant pens of which they make use, perhaps even after the death of the authors, as a toy and pastime when other recreations fail them.²²

This may well be genuine indignation at the misfortunes endured by Machiavelli in his lifetime: but it sounds, also, a personal note since we know that, for some reason, Gohory felt ill-used by the ungrateful princes of his own time. He also feared impending plagiarism: though this did not prevent his sneering at Cappel while appropriating Cappel's work as his own. None the less, whatever misgivings we may have about his integrity, there is little doubt about the seriousness with which he regarded the business of translation. Indeed, nothing less could be expected of one who was so well acquainted with the literary circles of his day and, therefore, with the prevailing attitude towards translation as a means of enriching French language, knowledge, and culture.²³

An odd feature of Gohory's work is that he deliberately adopted two different modes of translation when dealing with Machiavelli: in the first book of the Discorsi he has, he admits, sometimes been quite free; whereas in the other two books he is "un peu plus serf et supersticieux". He has done this, he says, in order to demonstrate that he can manage both types. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this strange decision had several serious consequences.²⁴ The French language, he concedes, is not well regulated. Some writers wish to bring old words back into use. Others seek to enrich their tongue by stealing from vernaculars such as Italian and Spanish. But, like Plato, Gohory believes that we should not waste our time in vain fastidiousness concerning words. Rather we should direct our spirits with fine discourses drawn

²² Le Prince (1571), sig.a.vii^{r-v}.

²³ Gohory's various translations - Livy, Machiavelli, and Amadis de Gaule - include remarks on the problems posed by the French language which was so "povre et sterile".

²⁴ Le second livre des Discours, Paris, 1548, sigs.a.ii-iii: "Préface du Traducteur aux lecteurs".

from the very foundations of those sciences which are beneficial to life, and should model ourselves on Machiavelli who had employed very simple language, enriched by rare and profound matter.

Gohory's energy is beyond dispute. But how - after all the praise, promises and puffs - does he actually discharge his obligations as a translator? His admission, that the second and third books of his Discours are more literal and precise than his first, is disingenuous. Book I is not merely free "en quelques endroitz". It is often wildly irresponsible; and, whereas the later books generally convey Machiavelli's meaning effectively and with reasonable economy, in this first book, words, phrases, sentences, and even entire paragraphs from Machiavelli's text are compressed or omitted, altered or inflated.

Where, for example, in Discorsi, I.3 the original text cites the saying that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and laws make them good ("le leggi gli fanno buoni"), Gohory writes that it is good laws which make men worthy ("les bonnes loix rendent les gens de bien") - a distinction not only lacking in Machiavelli but also quite uncharacteristic of him.²⁵ Again, in the following chapter, Machiavelli makes a fundamental statement on the importance of military virtù which, he says, promotes good order and good fortune: "dove è buona milizia, conviene che sia buono ordine, e rade volte anco occorre che non vi sia buona fortuna". Gohory, however, renders this: "le faict des armes ne se peut conduire sans bon ordre et police: et la police communément est celle qui amene la bonne fortune". This gives primacy to good order and "police" rather than to arms - which is precisely what Machiavelli did not mean.²⁶

Also worth noting is Gohory's treatment of the crucial chapter on the importance of religion and how Italy has been ruined by the Papacy. He blots his copy-book immediately by altering

²⁵ Guido Mazzoni and Mario Casella, Tutte le opere storiche e letterarie di Niccolò Machiavelli, Florence, 1929, p.63a; Les Discours, Paris, Le Mangnier, 1571, fol.10. All subsequent references to Gohory's Discours are to this edition.

²⁶ Mazzoni and Casella, p.63b; Discours, ed.cit., fol.11.

the title of the chapter which had unequivocally placed responsibility for Italy's degradation upon the Church of Rome. Machiavelli writes: "Di quanta importanza sia tenere conto della religione, e come la Italia, per esserne mancata mediante la chiesa romana, è rovinata". Gohory, however, renders this as "Que c'est que ne tenir compte de la religion et ne l'entretenir en son point. Et comme l'Italie en est perdue" - which completely emasculates the original text. Furthermore, Machiavelli rejects any notion that the Papacy has been beneficial to Italy, for two reasons which he deems irrefutable ("non hanno repugnanzia"): first, that through the evil examples of the court of Rome, Italy has lost all devotion to religion; and second, that the Church had kept Italy divided. Gohory, in his version, weakens the whole of this passage by reducing Machiavelli's precise and very bitter attack on the Roman curia and its priests into a mild and generalized rebuke that they have failed to keep to the tenets of the primitive Church: "ceux qui en telles dignitez se sont oubliez et non gardé comme ils devoient les statutz, canons et saincts decrets de la primitive Eglise".²⁷

I have dwelt on Gohory and the other French translators partly because they are crucial to our understanding of Machiavelli's reception in France but also because they effectively destroy the idea that he was universally hated. I have already alluded to the number of editions enjoyed by these translations. But it is worth thinking a little more about the implications of this. Gohory's translation of the Discorsi was to remain the vehicle through which most Frenchmen, from 1544 until late in the seventeenth century, came to know that text. Charrier's Art de la guerre occupied a similar position of authority throughout the same period, although it was much less frequently reprinted. And D'Auvergne's Le Prince, from its first publication in 1553, remained the standard French version for more than a century, and was generally reprinted along with Gohory and sometimes also with Charrier.

²⁷ Mazzoni and Casella, p.78a-79b; Discours, ed.cit., fols.31^v-33^v.

The translators kept Machiavelli's ideas in circulation long after the cessation of Italian editions. Indeed, for most French readers the translators were Machiavelli: which is precisely where most studies of Machiavelli's influence in France have tended to go astray. Moreover, the translators' enthusiastic assessments of Machiavelli's worth - couched (as we have seen) in extraordinarily extravagant terms - were constantly reprinted along with their versions of the original texts, and circulated far more widely than the hostile criticisms which have so coloured the work of generations of historians. And so I come to my paradox.

On 30 May 1571 (just over a year prior to the Saint Bartholomew massacres) a royal privilege had been accorded to Robert le Mangnier for the publication in Paris of a revised version of Gohory's Discours together with his reworking of Cappel's translation of Il Principe and the flattering Vie de Machiavel. The market must have seemed lucrative for, at about the same time, Marnef and Cavellat reissued D'Auvergne's Le Prince together with a pirated version of Gohory's Discours.²⁸ It is unlikely that these publications had anything to do with the subsequent atrocities: but the increased availability of Machiavelli's writings in France, together with the Italianate nature of a French court dominated by the Florentine Catherine de' Medici, suggested to at least one Huguenot that there was a disgusting connection between theory and practice. The Huguenot was Innocent Gentillet.²⁹ And Gentillet had good reason to be angry. The massacre, of course, appalled him; but in some ways even worse was the exultation with which it had been greeted. The French King and the Pope had caused medals to be struck to record their triumph for posterity and there had been a flood of literature ranging from bloodthirsty little pamphlets to full-length treatises all justifying the murders and gloating over their barbarities.

Gentillet thought (mistakenly though not unreasonably) that he had found the source both for massacres and justifications in the current availability of Machiavelli's works and, like many critics, he saw only what he was looking for, did not understand everything that he read, and exaggerated much that he did understand. Critics of Gentillet have, in their turn, treated him similarly and concentrated on the many occasions where he seems to get Machiavelli wrong. But it is worthwhile to start at the other end of Gentillet's achievement: to see the extent to which he did read his chosen texts; and to see how far he got them right.

²⁸ See Gerber, op.cit., III, p.39-40.

²⁹ The first edition of Gentillet's work - Discours sur les moyen de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Principauté . . . Contre Nicolas Machiavel Florentin - was published anonymously in 1576, without place (but probably Geneva) or printer's identity. For the bibliographical history of Gentillet's text, see the edition by A. D'Andrea and Pamela Stewart, Florence, 1974, p.xvii-lxxix.

For Gentillet was an attentive reader. The trouble was that he had never read Machiavelli. In fact, he is the first in a long line of critics to have based his study solely on translations from the Italian: and this is a procedure with certain drawbacks. Quite apart from changes of tone and emphasis, translators' mistakes or idiosyncracies go unrecognized; and Gentillet, like many others, is thereby betrayed into errors of judgement. This is not to argue that, had he read his sources in Italian, he would have interpreted Machiavelli in a fundamentally different fashion. But to be dependent on translators is to walk on crutches which may sometimes, of their own volition, march in directions not intended by the original author. Gentillet's crutches frequently carried him up wrong alleys; and some of his notorious misinterpretations were really not his fault at all.

Furthermore, whatever modern critics may say to the contrary, Gentillet's method is, for a sixteenth-century polemicist, very orderly and fair.³⁰ Each of his chapters has, as its title, a maxim allegedly derived from Machiavelli. This is immediately followed by an expansion of the maxim where Gentillet sets out - in what he takes to be Machiavelli's own words - both the implications of each maxim and the evidence upon which it is based. Then comes the refutation, culminating in some moralistic counter-maxim. The whole procedure is reminiscent of Gohory's analysis of Machiavelli's own method in the Discorsi where, said Gohory, he first expounds, "en peu de parolles la singularité de l'histoire Romaine selon que Tite Live l'a descripte, puis sur icelle il debat les profondes matieres vivement d'une part et d'autre, pour enfin se resoudre en quelque haut paradoxe politique".³¹

³⁰ For modern readers Machiavelli has become a hero and Gentillet a villain - "le polémiste qui n'a d'innocent que son prénom", as Charles Benoist put it in Le machiavélisme, Paris, 1936, p.22. Even scholarly authors are unsympathetic towards a writer who had every reason to be bitter.

³¹ Gohory, Le premier livre des discours, Paris, 1544, sigs.a.iv^v-v - address "au lecteur".

Nor is Gentillet's debt to his adversary confined to questions of method. In total, his expansions of the hateful maxims comprise approximately 10,500 words. He also provides marginal references so that, although these are sometimes incorrectly given or omitted, it is possible in almost every case to identify the passages cited or paraphrased; and it soon becomes evident that he relied entirely on D'Auvergne's Prince and Gohory's Discours. And I should note, in parenthesis, that, for his enlarged edition of 1585, Gentillet added material from Charrier's L'Art de la guerre and Brinon's Histoire Florentine.³²

For Gentillet, these translations were the authentic voice of Niccolò Machiavelli; and the fact that they were not resulted in many misconceptions - some merely matters of detail, others more serious. But, with (I think) only one exception, all his verbal perversions are based upon the errors or stylistic vagaries of his French sources.³³

Two typical examples must suffice.³⁴ The first is where Gentillet attacks Machiavelli's attitude toward pagan religions. These ancient faiths, based upon oracles and auguries, had (according to Machiavelli) kept people devout until it became evident that the rites were being manipulated. Men then lost faith and were inclined to disturb every good institution. In Gohory's version this passage is heavily adorned so that, once the deception has been discovered, not only are the oracles abandoned, but people come to believe neither in God nor the Devil; they make no further conscience of anything; and are ready to break, burst, and spoil everything,

³² Histoire de Florence de Nicolas Machiavel. Nouvellement traduite d'italien en françois par le seigneur Yves de Brinon, Paris, Jean Borel, 1577.

³³ This single instance occurs in Contre-Machiavel, I.3 which is based on Discorsi, II.31, where Machiavelli deals with the dangers which arise from those who put their trust in sbanditi - that is "exiles". This was correctly rendered by Gohory as "bannis": but Gentillet deliberately mistranslates the maxim as Le prince ne se doit fier aux estrangers - a sentiment with which any rabid Italophobe would readily concur.

³⁴ Although I may here add that the error already noted above, n.26, is followed by Gentillet, III.xxxi.

like unchained slaves. None of this froth is in Machiavelli: but it all finds its way into Gentillet who therefrom deduces the maxim, Quand on delaisa la religion payenne, le monde devint tout corrompu, et vint à ne croire plus ny Dieu ny diable. And he elaborates this in words which can only derive from Gohory - "Et devindrent les hommes meschans à outrance, prests et volontaires à tout rompre, briser et gaster, comme esclaves deschainez, sans plus faire conscience de rien".³⁵

Nor did Machiavelli use the highly-coloured word "seditions" to qualify the opposition between the Roman Plebs and the Senate, which, as he claimed in the Discorsi (I.iv) made that republic free and powerful. Machiavelli took issue with those who maintained that Rome was so disorderly that, without good fortune and military virtù, its condition would have been inferior to that of other republics. On the contrary, he argued, those who blame the tumults between the Nobles and the Plebs are blaming the primary cause for Rome's retention of liberty. Gentillet joins battle with this idea, setting forth, as a Machiavellian maxim, that Seditions et dissensions civiles sont utiles, et ne sont à blasmer. Modern criticism has claimed that the word seditions distorts Machiavelli's meaning and leads Gentillet into a refutation of something Machiavelli neither said nor meant.³⁶ Gentillet, both in his maxim and in its exposition, completely alters the original argument: asserting that Machiavelli believed seditions and dissensions to be "bonnes et utiles" and the cause of Rome's greatness; and ignoring Machiavelli's point that the beneficial tensions were specifically those between nobles and Plebs. The malformation of the idea is patent. But it does not arise from Gentillet's bad faith. The source is Gohory's Discours where

³⁵ Gentillet (1576), p.212-13, II.v, based on Gohory, Discours (1571), fols.31^v-32.

³⁶ Pamela Stewart, Innocent Gentillet e la sua polemica antimachiavellica, Florence, 1969, p.58, notes that the expression, "seditions", adopted by Gentillet is "troppo generica e troppo forte".

there is a marginal gloss - Seditions cause de bien à Rome - sufficient to enrage the Huguenot determined to expose the rotten, Machiavellian roots of dissension in contemporary France.³⁷

Now it may seem strange to end a discussion on "The popularity of Machiavelli in sixteenth-century France" with observations on his most bitter antagonist. But there are good reasons for this. Gentillet's chosen method of debate meant that he was himself publishing large chunks of Machiavelli in French and (even allowing for sixteenth-century taste) it is not unlikely that any reader, comparing their vigorous naughtiness with the laborious moralizing of the refutations, would be tempted to delve deeper into the writings of the exciting "puant athéiste". And that this is not merely an unhistorical gloss of my own is evident if we cast a last look at the publishing history of these works. The Contre-Machiavel first appeared in 1576 and was followed by five further editions or variant issues between 1577 and 1579. This may seem impressive until we note that, in the same period, there were seven issues of Le Prince, three of the Discours, and two of the Histoire florentine. In 1585 there was a single issue of an enlarged edition of the Contre-Machiavel: but in 1586 there were three issues of Le Prince and three of the Discours, with a considerable further Machiavellian flurry of twelve issues around the turn of the century. The Contre-Machiavel appeared again in a single issue in 1609: but within six years there were another seventeen versions of the French translations of Machiavelli.

The truth of the matter is this: publishers, and especially pirates, do not issue books unless they think they can sell them; and they certainly do not reissue books unless the titles have already proved popular. Conventional notions about Renaissance attitudes towards Machiavelli are simply silly and derive from the work of nineteenth-century scholars convinced that Machiavelli was a culture-hero who had been hard-done-by, misunderstood, misrepresented, and villified. Renaissance attitudes were very different - especially in France. When, in 1614, the printer Charles Chappellain, under the royal privilege, issued a composite edition of L'Art de la

³⁷ Gohory, Discours, ed.cit., fol.10^v; Gentillet (1576), p.554, III.xxxi.

guerre and Le Prince, he addressed the work to Maximilian de Béthune, the illustrious Duc de Sully.³⁸ At the end of his Epistre, he noted that in former times it had been customary to suspend the arms of great captains on the walls of temples, together with eulogies containing the name of whoever it was who was making the offering - "De mesme ce livre s'esleve au sommet du Temple de vostre gloire avec l'inscription du nom de son auteur, qui est Machiavelle". The summit of the temple of a famous dedicatee's glory is an odd place to suspend the name of a notorious political monster.

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³⁸ See Gerber, op.cit., p.42-43; Bertelli and Innocenti, op.cit., p.89-90.