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Machiavelli, Nicolò. Edward Dacres, translator. *Nicholas Machiavel's Prince; also, The life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*. London: Printed by R. Bishop, for Wil. Hils and are to be sold by Daniel Pakeman, 1640. 6 ¼ inches (160 mm), [12], 305, [7] pp.

The vest-pocket compass (as befits a book of maxims) is not the least of the attractions of *The Prince*; it is a quality shared with such other classics as Gracian's *Manual* and the *Fioretti* of St. Francis. (Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book* was an obvious attempt to turn communism in this fruitful direction, veering away from the verbosity and longeurs of such fellow-spirits as Karl Marx and Fidel Castro.) First published in 1532, five years after Machiavelli's death, *The Prince* made an immediate impact, becoming almost instantly the great political treatise of the Renaissance, although its influence is difficult to calculate. As a revolutionary tract, it elicited a prompt and strong reaction from the Machiavellian Jesuits, who were instrumental in placing the book on the very first *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, in 1559. Polemical in style, the intent of *The Prince* was to incite rulers to guide their public lives by principles of far-sighted, relativistic, amoral self-interest rather than traditional Christian precepts.

Although Machiavelli is similar in outlook to his contemporaries Guicciardini and Castiglione, the intensity of his pragmatic zeal set him apart from these other political philosophers. A psychological basis for Machiavelli's principled enthusiasm may be found in the days he spent on the strappato at the behest of the Republic of Florence (an institution which he dearly loved), and in the exile imposed upon him by the Medici, which he spent among peasants on his farm not far from Florence. Perhaps his time in exile, and his shifts of fortune, brought him closer to the realm of the supernatural. While his realist contemporaries shared his opinions about a great many matters, they expressed themselves in a less provocative form and differed with Machiavelli over the question of supernatural influences and practical extremes. Machiavelli felt that Fortuna exerts profound influence upon the course of events, favoring the young and bold. In the words

of his English translator (**Spread 111**), “Fortune is a Mistresse; and it is necessary, to keep her in obedience, to ruffle and force her.” Machiavelli’s principled defense of extremes in practical matters, as opposed to Aristotle’s middle way, is one of the hardest things to swallow about his philosophy. For example, Machiavelli encourages the prince to be stingy rather than generous, and feared rather than loved; no suitable middle ground is available, because it is impossible to benefit from both reputations simultaneously. He discouraged doing things by halves: come to an accord with the preceding regime, he suggested, or kill them all.

Since government involves compromise, Machiavelli’s ideas were often opposed by the more statesmanlike politicians. By angering both church and state, Machiavelli inevitably earned an infamy that has lasted to the present day. His English translator, Edward Dacres, was well aware of the satanic reputation of *The Prince*. Esteeming Machiavelli, but unable to swallow him whole, Dacres arranged to have his title page (**Spread 3**) allude to the addition of “some Animadversions noting and taxing his errors.” Dacres defends his choice of text in the Epistle to the Reader (**Spread 6**): “Surely this book will infect no man: out of the wicked treasure of a mans own wicked heart, he draws his malice and mischief. From the same flower the Bee sucks hony, from whence the Spider hath his poyson ... Hony soit qui mal y pense.” In our age of ubiquitous paperback translations of *The Prince*, perhaps the chief interest of this first edition in English lies in Dacres’s running commentary. At **Spread 37–38** he voices disapproval of Machiavelli’s advocacy of cruelty and dissimulation. He finds a “second blemish” at **Spread 68** in Machiavelli’s “ambidexterity” of Virtue and Vice: Dacres insists that “Politicks presuppose Ethiques.” Further reservations appear at **Spreads 78–80**, where he opposes verse 5 of *Psalms 15* to Machiavelli, and in an eloquent passage at **Spreads 111–12**, in which Dacres insists that where the Italian sees only Fortuna, an honest man will detect “the finger of God.” “The lot is cast into the lap,” he admits, “but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

The almost medieval political idealism of the commentary contrasts starkly with Machiavelli’s Renaissance realism, reflecting the uneasiness that Dacres’s English contemporaries felt with the ever-changing relations of church and state, soon to culminate in the execution of King Charles I. It was a purely *public* uneasiness, to be

sure, for many a contemporary defender of “Christian Values” had no objection to a *righteous* Machiavellianism.

The Prince fills **Spreads 6–117**. It is followed by two minor tracts illustrating similar themes: *The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca* (1520) on **Spreads 118–48** and *A Relation of the Course taken by Duke Valentine in the Murder of Vitellozzo Vitelli and others* (1502) on **Spreads 148–56**.