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MACHIAVELLI IN THE LIBERAL COSMOS

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MACHIAVELLI demands assignation to contexts: to his own, which we must recover if we are to understand him, and to our own, in which we must read him if we are to interpret him. In the language of Wilamowitz, recently quoted by Hugh Lloyd-Jones,² we must give our blood to the ghosts if they are to speak to us, but then empty them of it if they are not to speak with our own voices. You put your heart's blood in, you take your heart's blood out. It is not easy, but has to be tried. Two recent interpreters of Machiavelli have trouble with history, as we all must; but the troubles they have are interesting in proportion as their enterprises are intelligently designed. Mark Hulliung's³ troubles are of his own making; he wants to take Machiavelli out of history and make him a contemporary—he appears to regard history as the creation of a false liberal consensus—but the contemporary he rigorously defines emerges as an oddly archaic figure. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's⁴ problems are far more interesting, because they are not rooted in misunderstanding, but in the nature of her enterprise. She attempts to interpret Machiavelli's thought as containing flaws and ambivalences that may be attributed to inadequacies in his perception of gender; his understanding of humanity is incomplete and his understanding of masculinity insecure, because women are excluded from his perception of life and return to it in distorted and menacing shapes. One wants this enterprise to succeed, because there is obviously a great deal of truth in the proposition; but the difficulties are formidable and have not yet been overcome.

To begin with, the terms in which we explain gender relations are hard to make culturally or historically specific. The analyses of the probable development of infantile sexuality, which Pitkin presents along Freudian and Kleinian lines, are interesting and plausible, but...
would clearly apply about as well to Athens or Boston as to Florence; there are difficulties, consequently, in linking them to the history-specific knowledge that we have of any one of these cultures. The historian is plagued by missing links in the journey from the breast to the polis; this does not mean that the question is *mal posé*, only that we are having major difficulty in giving answers. A radical response is that the two are not linked: that women have been so thoroughly excluded from the public structures created by men, in which the acts and reflections constituting history as we know it have been performed, that they have inhabited a different historical *durée* that must be recovered by different historiographical techniques. But this does not abolish the problems that arise as soon as it is claimed that the male world can be understood, and its history written, by attention to the absence or the distorted presence of women.

This claim is evidently true, and true of Machiavelli; yet to say that it is true does not of itself tell us how to make its truth historically arguable. It is one thing to say that what is present is distorted by what is absent; it is another to show, in any real detail, how this has been happening. And the counter-factual tends to be based on a value judgment: What might have happened but did not will almost certainly turn out to be what we could wish had happened. How else can we imagine it? Pitkin can tell us that Machiavelli’s perceptions are flawed by the exclusion of women, but not what they would have been like if they had not been flawed in this way. She has far too good an apprehension of history to try to tell us, but she cannot escape leaving us faced with this unanswerable question: answerable, that is, in terms of our perceptions and what they ought to be like, but never in terms of what a sixteenth-century Florentine’s perceptions were not but might have been. Machiavelli, then, becomes a tool for telling us how we do and how we might think. There remains the possibility that the tool may turn in our hand and ask us questions about the question we are using it to ask and answer. When tools are texts, this sometimes happens.

Pitkin aims to prove two contentions: first, that Machiavelli’s perception of political manhood is so deeply flawed that it is self-destructive; second, that this is connected with his inability to perceive women as anything but a force alien and menacing to political life—the force typified as the female figure of Fortune, whom the political man of virtù must beat and subdue, because she likes it if he does but will unman and destroy him if he doesn’t. I shall argue that the two perceptions are severally to be found in Machiavelli, but that the association between them (which I am disposed to accept) ought to be more strongly made
out than it is by Pitkin. In the first place, that Machiavelli presents the political man as a being radically flawed by nature is beyond doubt; one has only to consider the implications of identifying him with the centaur. If man is by nature a political animal, and the political animal is half man and half beast, it inexorably follows that man is by nature only half a man, which is contradiction sufficient. Whether Machiavelli is saying this because he is deeply unsure of his own manliness is, however, another question; and where that uncertainty comes from, if it exists, is another. Up to now the accepted reading has been that Machiavelli wrote in this way not because of something he failed to perceive about women, but because of something he did perceive about politics; and whether politics are (if they are) as Machiavelli perceived them in consequence of women being excluded from them by men (as they have been) is the question at the bottom of the barrel.

But Pitkin does not make much use of the centaur image, preferring to rely on another of Machiavelli’s beast analogies: the proposition that the prince (or political man) needs to be both lion and fox (they appear, heraldically supporting what seems to be a Tudor rose, on the jacket of Hulliung’s book). She is insistent that Machiavelli never succeeds, or believes that he has succeeded, in bringing lion and fox together, and that consequently none of his images of political man really work or convince him. Something is trapping Machiavelli, she tells us—and what can it be but an incomplete and obsessive vision of sexuality?—so that, much as he admires the fox for running to and fro, smelling out the traps before the lion can fall into them, the fox is himself trapped; Machiavelli is trapped in his own foxiness. To make her case, she presents the fox as cunning because he lacks the lion’s strength and is therefore dependent on a being less intelligent than he is; the fox is a jackal. There is evidence for this presence in Machiavelli’s vision, no doubt; there is Ligurio the con man and go-between in Mandragola, content to supply the ideas by which the richer but stupider Callimaco will get the girl. Machiavelli openly identifies himself with Ligurio. But here we have to do with the figure of the parasite, an ancient figure in Greco-Roman comedy (he has been known to beat the lion to it and get the girl himself). That Ligurio-Machiavelli is a parasite is not enough to make the fox a parasite every time he appears, or to render the lion-fox composite forever unrealizable, as Pitkin seems to be contending. The fox-figure in European literature and mythology is bigger and more complex than this. Certainly, if Machiavelli fails to see this and can never present the fox as more than a jackal, it will go far to prove Pitkin’s point; but does he so fail?
In one perspective, the lion stands for virtù, the power to dominate contingencies, the fox for prudenza, the power to manipulate them. Machiavelli incessantly argued for the primacy of virtù over prudenza against his friend Guicciardini. I am tempted to contend that Guicciardini was the foxier of the two because he had more standing and clout in politics than Machiavelli, not because he had less. But there is a relationship between prudenza and comparative lack of power. Machiavelli emphasized the virtù of the armed democratic city, Guicciardini the prudenza of the diplomatically savvy few in a città disarmata. However, to oppose the two in an either-or choice was only a game unless it was really impossible to combine them; and in Machiavelli’s central (and very unpleasing) sexual image they are combined. The prince who is both lion and fox is to attain a sexual ascendancy over Fortune, and the assumption has to be that men enjoy being seduced by superior cunning as much as they enjoy being dominated by superior force. It appears (regrettably) quite as easy to make this assumption as to have doubts of it, and to say that it is a fantasy is not to say that Machiavelli admitted that it was one.

If we extrapolate from Machiavelli’s erotica to his politica, the lion and the fox will prove to stand for something rather important. The city is not self-sufficient; it exists in a geography and history of contingencies and givens, factual and moral, some of which antedate its being and others of which will arise in a future it cannot determine. Fortune stands for this contingent world, especially if we perceive it without God. The city seeks a total determination of its environment, and therefore has to choose between creating that environment and manipulating it; the problem of time—of temporization, about and against which Machiavelli had so much to say—arises because there is no moment of creation in political history, no absolute freedom for the city or its founder to create a new world, but only a series of moments (may I add of Machiavellian moments?) at which some givens can be changed and some cannot, some can be preserved and some cannot. The prince (or the city) is not a god; consequently, he cannot be all lion, neither can lion and fox be combined to form a new kind of creature. The prince must be both lion and fox, but cannot be both at the same time; he must live in a time series, changing from one to the other. The problem of time, stated like this, appears to be independent of the problem of gender. How do the two interact?

Pitkin asks why Machiavelli allows himself to become engrossed with the deeply ambivalent figure of the Founder (Lycurgus, Romulus) who exists at the beginning of a city’s life in time, unconstrained by givens or
contingencies; why he says of the Founder, first, that he will commit terrible acts—fratricide if he is Romulus, filicide if he is Brutus—and, second, that as there is no moment without antecedents, it is impossible that he should exist at all. Why imagine so dreadful a demiurge, unless forced to it by some inner trauma? The question is good, but can be asked of others besides Machiavelli. Whatever became, one wishes to ask, of the pious Aeneas, who founded Rome in the pieties he brought with him from Troy and erected a city with a better civil religion than most Greek foundations? Why was Augustine as determined as Machiavelli to ignore this dutiful man and think only of the terrible and ambivalent Romulus? And to name Aeneas is to remember Dido, the only woman Founder we hear of in the mythography, who seems to have been doing quite well until the Trojans came and entrapped her in romantic subordination, but whose city survived her to become Rome's great commercial and military rival, the Venice of antiquity. Neither Augustine nor Machiavelli makes anything of Dido; nor does Pitkin. Virgil seems to fail as a creator of political archetypes. But if it should be the point that for a woman there are always antecedents, contingencies, and pieties, Dido and Aeneas are on the same side; they respect the moralities inherent in the given, and their politics are Burkean, not Promethean or Machiavellian. Would Pitkin have us accept this great paradigm of Augustan conservatism?

Lion and fox are now becoming ways of coping with historicity: two ways of acting in time. The woman figure of Fortune is being made to stand for time and its contingencies, never for its pieties, which only males appreciate, and the problem of gender politics in Machiavelli is to see why this happens and what it means. Pitkin makes much, and I would like to make more, of a Machiavellian fragment in which both women and beasts perform exceedingly significant roles. This is the Asino, an unfinished poem in which Machiavelli set himself the ambitious program of burlesquing, simultaneously, the Circe episode in the Odyssey, the Golden Ass of Apuleius, and the Divine Comedy of Dante, whom he admired deeply and several times tried to send up. Not surprisingly, he abandoned the enterprise after a few cantos.

As the poem opens, a narrator Machiavelli, lost in a wood like Dante, is accosted by a young woman who is herding the beasts into which Circe has transformed men. We gather that he is to take on an ass's shape like Lucius and undergo a metamorphic journey among the beasts, not unlike Dante's journey among the damned, learning how each was transformed by his dominant appetite, until he himself is ready to renew his humanity. But at this point in what is usually an ascetic, the narrator
and his guide go to bed together. (What happens sounds more like premature ejaculation than orgasm, but there is a literary joke in charge here, so we let it pass.) Pitkin rather oddly says that the herdsman "seduces" the hero, and she certainly takes the initiative; but the episode is one of mutual pleasure and friendship, unfortunately rare in erotic literature: the lovers talk together of many things, like friends. However, they do not seem to have talked about politics, because no sooner has she left in the morning for her day's work as a herder than Machiavelli jumps out of bed and begins thinking about politics in sixteenth-century Italy. After this interruption—it seems the right word—the poem is never really resumed. There is a long conversation with a figure other authors called Gryllus, who prefers to be a pig rather than a man, and nothing more. The hero never completes his underground journey or recovers a lost humanity. We never meet Circe or complete our knowledge of her significance. It is as if the politics had destroyed the poem.

Machiavelli has introduced sexuality in a way calculated to challenge his models. Intercourse bestializes Lucius and turns him into the Ass; Beatrice sends Virgil as her agent and is beyond sex herself. The hero of the Asino makes love in a way that seems to presage his renewed humanity; but then comes the violent turn from love to politics. It is inescapable that Machiavelli is saying that the two don't mix; immediately after about the only happy sexual encounter in all his writings, he announces that politics is a man's affair, from which erotics is only a distraction. There seems, however, to be a further implication: that there is probably no erotic Beatrice and certainly no political one. Das ewige Weibliche may lead to the psychopompic journey, in which the self is lost and transformed; intercourse with a real woman in all probability doesn't. As for politics, it is not transformative at all (Donato Giannotti, who says this noncynically, may have learned it from Machiavelli); its business is not the death and renewal of the self, but the association of (masculine) selves to reinforce and better one another. Perhaps the city is the perfection of the political animal, but a political animal who embarks on a solitary journey toward self-renewal is wasting his time. Machiavelli has started the wrong poem and must break it off.

We can now situate him at a point where he could have constructed a concrete and humane erotics and politics simultaneously, and say that the violent caesura he interposes between the two proves that there was some reason why he couldn't. This is Pitkin's central argument, although we have yet to discover the reason and can never imagine the
counter-factual. What a two-gender politics would have looked like in Machiavelli’s historical universe is really unthinkable (the Abbey of Theleme is not a polis). But there is a buried politics, which may tell us something about Machiavelli’s problems, in an aspect of the Asino we have not yet considered.

Although we do not meet Circe, she provides the fragment with its central myth: Men are transformed into beasts by their appetites, and to be human is to master them. The question not asked or answered in the Asino is how this is to be done by political association; the poem was the wrong way of asking it. But in the Odyssey itself, a prepolitical epic, Circe is overcome by Odysseus. Her magic has the effect of making him more manly and godlike than before, after which sexual intercourse between them is no threat to either, and he resumes a voyage that is not a search for the self. In the Asino we do not meet Odysseus, and there seems no way for the Machiavelli narrator to assume his role; the poem is a rejection of another kind of journey. But there are ways of exploiting his encounter with Circe that can tell us a great deal.

When Pitkin tells us that the fox figure in Machiavelli is necessarily that of a jackal, we want to disagree with her (or with him, if we accept her reading). The Fox in literature and mythology is a far more powerful figure. He is the Trickster, the Shapechanger, the Hero with a Thousand Faces, the Man of Many Wiles. Sometimes—as Pitkin points out, quoting one Dr. Anton Ehrenzweig—he appears as one of a pair of male personalities (Thor and Loki, Siegfried and Hagen, Esau and Jacob, Othello and Iago, Callimaco and Ligurio) in whom we see the Lion and Fox as two incomplete halves of a personality that has failed to be both at once; so that Pitkin can assume the Fox to stand for the necessary incompleteness of masculinity self-isolated from femininity. But it is doubtful whether Dr. Ehrenzweig was justified in completing his list of Treacherous Twins with the names of Achilles and Odysseus; far from being incomplete without the other, each is complete enough to have furnished Europe with one of its fundamental epics. One is tragic and the other comic, but these are not modes of incompleteness; they are different kinds of completeness. In the great Riace bronzes now at Reggio di Calabria it is possible to feel you have met Achilles face to face, and very alarming he is: The heroic body and the heroically unreflective intelligence rush upon you, preferring glory to length of days. But there is no statue of Odysseus that I know of, because he is too many-minded to be caught in the bronze; Dante, Tennyson, and Kazantzakis tried to lead him to some final and self-transcending death, but somewhere he is still travelling on, preferring to know many things
rather than one big thing. He is many-minded, polytropic, because he has seen many cities and known their ways.

This Fox is important, even if unmentioned, in the Machiavellian mythography, for the simple reason that Circe is Fortune. She turns men into beasts—that is, into creatures who are less than political animals—by isolating single and dominant appetites till each replaces the whole man. In philosophy reason, in theology the love of God, become that which in each man controls the appetites and keeps him human; in politics the city associates men so that each checks the bestial element in all the others. But Machiavelli's insistent theme is that in politics the city must act, and that its actions are performed by individual men. In a letter to Piero Soderini (the Florentine Jimmy Carter) he gives an explanation of the power of Fortune over men, which Pitkin mentions but does not exploit fully. It is that each actor's personality is the work of his imagination (fantasia) and nature, but that the external circumstances he encounters are the work of Fortune; and as the circumstantial, the contingent, and the political contain more variable elements than are contained in the psyche, Fortune is always able to vary the demands of contingency upon individuals in ways that the personality cannot adapt itself to meet in time.

Now—allowing for the element of time, which is not prominent in the Odyssey—this is closely akin to what Circe does. She finds personalities dominated by a single drive, in which she then freezes and entraps the personality; Fortune, who is more a political than a moral force, merely faces them with practical demands that they cannot meet and sentences them to political failure. But Circe fails with Odysseus—his human personality is reinforced by her magic, which should destroy it—not because he is single-minded and selfless, but because he is many-minded and polytropic; he is too adaptable for her. How she would have fared with Achilles we do not know. If he is less than Odysseus she changes him into a lion; but probably his love of glory is as irreversibly human as the many-mindedness of Odysseus. All it can do is kill him and (until he finds himself dead) he doesn't mind.

But the Odyssean solution too is ruled out of the Asina by politics. Cities, as Pitkin shows, are made up of Founders and Citizens. The Founders exist before Fortune and need only be a special kind of lion, but once they have passed on they are replaced by Citizens, who are individuals and neither heroes nor archetypes. No individual can be both lion and fox; the usurping Prince must try to be, but although he comes as close to it as Cesare Borgia, yet he will fail. But citizens are many, and among them they have many minds (as Aristotle pointed
out). Some of them will be more lionlike, others more foxlike, and it is
the strength of the polis that it can combine and recombine these
qualities, using its collective judgment to appoint magistrates and
commanders who have the qualities that the state of contingency calls
for. Scipio the lion can be replaced by Fabius the fox when a fox is
needed and, should a wrong choice of general lead to disaster at Cannae,
still the republic need not despair. There is nothing servile or parasitical
about being a fox in the right relation with Fortune: “Massena is an old
fox,” wrote Wellington of his opponent, “and as cautious as I am; he
risks nothing.” The republic can be both lion and fox because it is an
association and not an individual; it can be polytropic because it consists
of many minds.

I am therefore not quite convinced by Pitkin’s attempt to argue that
the Machiavellian idea of the republic falls apart because the archetypes
of political manliness on which it is built are contradictory to one
another. It is true that Machiavelli shows the personality as constantly
under almost intolerable stress imposed by historic contingency; but his
remedy for this is the republic, which is adaptable because it contains
many individuals with diverse personalities, and the individual is invited
to associate with those unlike himself. A republic ought not to be
resolved (or dissolved) into archetypes confronted with one another; it is
composed of individuals, not of archetypes. In this perspective it is an
anticipation of liberal society, in which the association can work even if
the individuals composing it are imperfect and incompletely har-
monized. On the other hand, the republic can have no basis but the
virtue of its citizens, and it has always been the liberal criticism of the
Republic that this basis is narrow, unstable, and, in the end, too harsh an
imposition on the individual, so that virtue is destroyed by the demands
of too restrictive a conception of it. Here we approach Pitkin’s gender-
based critique; it is because Machiavelli's conception of humanity is
exclusively masculine that it is harsh, insecure, and unworkable. To
deny the full humanity of women is to wreck the humanity of men. No
one will wish to deny this proposition; the question is whether Pitkin has
produced an adequate account of how it works in the case of
Machiavelli.

The two chapters that she devotes to a psychological explanation of
how the male infant can come to see the female as an exterior and
threatening force seem to me to make a wrong choice of strategy.
Protection and sustenance are incomprehensibly given and taken away,
the argument runs, and so there arises the image of the unpredictable
kindness and cruelty of fortune. But this is to make Fortune over-
whelmingly a maternal figure, which is not how she appears in the literature; she does not even particularly resemble the Wicked Stepmother. An explanation so much dominated by the infant’s experience of the mother or nursing surrogate surely points, as Pitkin’s language suggests, toward quite another figure of menacing femininity: the dark, engulfing Earth Mother who gives death where she gives birth, the womb as the grave. Fortune is not like her at all. The Mother stands for the menacing power of nature and the earth, whereas Machiavelli explicitly makes Fortune stand for the terror of a history radically separated from nature; Gryllus the Pig has gone back to the earth to get away from her. All this may be psychoanalytically explained, but we need to recognize the diversity of the images; and historically speaking, we need an explanation of the widespread Renaissance fear of a mutability identified with femininity. All the imagery of wheels and moons and irregular patterns of recurrence loudly declares that we are dealing with male fear of the menstrual cycle, which one would suppose to be postinfantile in origin, although very likely linked with elements in infantile experience. Pitkin does not seem to me to have conducted the right psychoanalytic inquiry or fully recognized the problem as Machiavelli presents it, which is that the mutability of history (which is female) can be overcome only by many-mindedness in the republic (which is male).

One central problem, however, remains. Does the proposition that Fortune is a woman and that women must be dominated (not seduced or married or worshipped) help to explain Machiavelli’s all but unequivocal pronouncement that the republic must commit itself to dominating, conquering, and absorbing its neighbors, and must go on until it dominates the whole world? He opposes the “republic for expansion” to the “republic for preservation,” says that the former must dominate its neighbors and the latter isolate itself from them, ignores after mentioning the possibility that in ancient Tuscany or modern Germany a plurality of republics may have existed peaceably together, and declares that although the expansive republic will end by destroying itself, glory is preferable to length of days. Why should the republic, which we have seen aim at being both lion and fox, both Achilles and Odysseus, make so exclusively Achilian a commitment? Both Pitkin and Hullüng consider this question.

Pitkin’s answer is gender-based: It is Machiavelli’s masculinity, insecure because he cannot recognize women in the full humanity of association, that traps him into conceding, and then glorifying, the presupposition that political, or rather interpolitical, relations must in
the last resort be relations of domination. The difficulty about her thesis is, of course—and as she well knows—that it can only be tested by supposing a counter-factual: Would our politics be, or would we imagine them as being, any less “Machiavellian” if they were not based on a distorted view of gender? It could easily be a cheap shot to bring up the names of Jiang Qing, Indira Gandhi, and Margaret Thatcher in order to suggest that women in politics are not very different from men, and there would be plenty of comebacks; but it could remind us that Machiavelli has always been understood to say that politics in human life is an independent variable (like Fortune), and that if this is so women in a gender-sane society might still find themselves “Machiavellian” political actors. Pitkin may mean no more than that a sane view of gender might help both men and women to act more agreeably, and this is plausible. But we call “liberal” the assertion that politics is immersed in a context of many interdependent variables, some factual and others moral; and if Pitkin is repudiating that Machiavellian “autonomy of politics” as a masculine error based on a distorted view of gender, her assertion is of the liberal order. None the worse for that; but it does take us into a world of metapolitics, in which we must make statements that are sometimes difficult to test. This is why I could wish her linkages from psychoanalysis to history to politics were rather more specifically worked out.

A mythographic way of approaching the problem of the Achillean republic is to say that although the epic heroes are prepolitical creatures, there is no theoretical difficulty about making Achilles into a citizen; you have only to teach him military and civic discipline—as Machiavelli says, this will call for some unimaginably stern measures—and his glory will become the glory of the republic. Odysseus will be harder to catch; he is polytropic because he has seen many cities and knows their ways, and will not readily accept the discipline of any one of them. He may spend ten years trying to get home to Ithaca, but he knows he won’t stay there. His many-mindedness looks beyond glory, and there is something about it incompatible with civic virtue. He will not regard any polis to which he may belong as the origin and cause of all good, and it is the Machiavellian paradox that this assertion is the origin and cause of all “Machiavellism” in politics. If the good is limited to a single city, there is no moral control over its relations with other cities; it must always be at war, always menaced by Fortune, always in need of the lion and fox, and always constrained to choose the lion’s role when the play is cast. Odysseus left town some time ago, walking inland and carrying an oar. He has always preferred the cosmopolitan and comic, Achilles the
patriotic and tragic. Machiavelli continues to infuriate us by his inveterate preference for black comedy.

I am not quite persuaded, in the last analysis, that Machiavelli opts for republic seeking conquest, glory, and death because of the inadequacies of his understanding of masculinity; it is plausible that it should have been so, but Pitkin does not quite convince me that I have seen the thing happening. And for over two hundred years there has been available another and more materialist explanation of why Machiavelli made this choice, which Pitkin does not consider but which might have been integrated with hers. Before attempting to do so, however, I have to consider the curious fact that this explanation is not mentioned by Mark Hullung: curious because, as we shall see, Hullung knows all about it. Citizen Machiavelli is an extraordinarily one-eyed book, devoted to the proposition that the choice of conquest, glory, and death is all there is to be said about Machiavelli and that there has been a series of conspiracies to conceal it. Hullung places it at the center of every reading of every text, bringing all Machiavelli's theses back to the point at which the pursuit of these goals appears as the sole purpose of the enterprise; this, he seems to say, is all Machiavelli ever cared about, and all that need be considered in interpreting him.

Even Machiavelli's erotics are made the effect of his pursuit of conquest; Mandragola is deduced from the Discorsi in a way almost the reverse of Pitkin's treatment and lumped in, both with Machiavelli's letters to Vettori about whoring—what would we be reading and writing if he had been compulsively addicted to the chasing and sodomizing of boys as were many Florentines of his generation?—and with his relationship with the actress Barbera, which Hullung seems to regard as one more proof of his insatiable sexuality. We, in fact, know little about her, except that she was much with Machiavelli in his later years and that her company is said to have played Mandragola, but perhaps she was as gay (meaning joyous) and intelligent as the herdswoman of the Asino. Some play, novel, or dialogue might be devoted to imagining Machiavelli with a woman to whom he could talk.

But Hullung writes of politics, and seeks only to show that Machiavelli valued citizenship for the sake of conquest, the free plebeian republic because it could dominate and destroy its neighbors. This has been noticed before, but as Hullung isolates it and makes it the absolute presupposition of everything Machiavelli ever wrote, he is in a position to declare that it has never been noticed enough, and that those who have noticed it share with those who have not a disposition to deny its importance. A succession of premodern theorists—Guicciardini, Gian-
notti, Harrington—attempted to play down the option for conquest and integrate Machiavelli’s insights into a vision of politics less extreme. A succession of modern historians—Meinecke, Chabod, the two Gilberts, I believe I may add myself—have attempted to show Machiavelli’s thought fitting into ongoing patterns of European discourse to which the option for conquest was sometimes central and sometimes not. All these fall under Hulliung’s censure, and he condemns both historians and history as concealing the truth that Machiavelli is our contemporary, and that he is most our contemporary when he exercises the option for conquest. History to Hulluqing is a kind of liberal conspiracy, and by the last sentence of his text he is reduced to equating the writing of history with the construction of a “great tradition”—a remark it will be lenient to let pass.

Who is this contemporary Machiavelli, whose immediacy to us history can only obfuscate? He appears to be the author of the proposition that republics of armed citizens are to be admired because they can conquer other republics of armed citizens by the power of armed citizenry; and this is really not very like anything going on in the contemporary world, even in Central Africa or Southeast Asia. Machiavelli was innocent of ideology, and might have understood modern mercenaries but never terrorists. The latter do not use swords to conquer, but bombs in parked cars to delegitimize through a subtle exploitation of political sado-masochism, after which they do not conquer but seize centers of administration and degenerate rapidly into apparatusiks. Machiavelli was not a modern and could not have comprehended them at all. And if there is some way of extrapolating propositions from his writings and then translating them into an idiom that renders them relevant to concerns of ours, this goes as far toward proving that Machiavelli is not a contemporary as toward proving that he is. Wilamowitz was right; you must give the ghosts blood and then drain it from them before they can speak to us as they did to Machiavelli. History is infuriating but inescapable, and Hulliung is wasting his time and ours if he thinks he can dismiss it as a smokescreen thrown up by the heirs of the Enlightenment. (Does he say this? He does.)

That Hulliung should be presenting this essentially archaic Machiavelli as our inseparable contemporary is all the more extraordinary because his earlier book, Montesquieu and the Old Regime, was largely an account of how Montesquieu killed, ate, and digested Machiavelli and left him behind in the excretions of history. He did this by developing a perception that took shape rapidly among Dutch, English,
and Italian intellectuals following the wars against Louis XIV: that an ancient world based on conquest could be said to have been rendered obsolete by a modern world based on commerce. Because the ancient world had lacked a properly organized world market, its inhabitants had been forced into seizing the lands of others by conquest and appropriating their labor as slaves. The warrior-citizen-farmer had joined the legions rather than stay at home and increase his farm’s marketable yield by industry, and on his return had as often not found himself in debt, which he must work off as a tenant laborer on someone else’s latifundium; the individual had found no outlet for his energies but the harsh politics of the city, and no outlet for his intellectual powers but the harsh metaphysics and rhetoric of the academies. Machiavelli, said Hume, was a great genius, but he understood nothing except the little furious republics of antiquity, and the little republics of Renaissance Italy that had tried to imitate them. Here was the Enlightenment’s explanation of why Machiavelli, like the Romans before him, had taken the option for conquest and made the Achillean commitment.

The moderns, it began to be said, could opt instead for a commercial world in which patterns and relations of exchange ran across the borders of kingdoms and republics. Conquest was now unnecessary, as production and commerce brought nations greater wealth and power than the crude appropriations of ancient virtù. The citizen of the new cosmopolis, founded on transaction rather than on association, had the opportunity to become as many-minded as Odysseus; he could see many cities and learn their ways, and on his return to Ithaca need not lead out the citizens to seize their neighbors’ lands, preferring glory to length of days. Gibbon saw two reasons why modern Europe would stand up better to a barbarian invasion than ancient Rome. One was that, instead of a military empire unified by a single carapace, it was a republic of independent states who traded with one another, became diversified from one another, and learned from one another; the second was that the world commerce of which it was the heartland was reaching out to control the lands of the barbarians and annex them to civilization. Odysseus with his oar on his shoulder had arrived among the people who asked him what it was, and had begun to rule them.

As the many-mindedness of the market sought to replace the single loyalties and the virtù of the hero, citizen, or patriot, something happened of peculiar importance to the themes of these two books. We should be hard put to show that the actual condition of women improved, but for nearly the first time what were supposed to be
feminine values were recognized as having universal merit by male theorists. It was claimed for the new world commerce that it softened, refined, and polished the manners and led to a more general intercourse among nations. Hume—who must have been reading the *Symposium*—was moved to declare that modern conversation was superior to ancient because women were admitted to it; Montesquieu to the apothegm that "il n'y a qu'une sexe, et nous sommes tous femmes dans l'esprit." The patterns of male dominance were, of course, reasserted in every way you can think of, but something had begun to happen.

It did not last, of course; Rousseau wrote *Emile*, and Mary Wollstonecraft realized that she would have to begin all over again. It was hard to accept that the abandonment of a primitive warrior virtù entailed the abandonment of virtù altogether; the single-minded political animal resisted absorption by the many-minded commercial animal. The commercial utopia, in which the ethos of exchange led to a recognition of feminization and intercourse, was a short-lived product of the rentier-controlled economies of the ancien régime. With the American, French, and Industrial Revolutions, the ethos of production became once more hard, imperious, and masculine; the landscapes of the world were overrun by conquistadors on steam engines, followed at a short interval by conquistadors on revolutionary processes; and women found themselves back at being angels in the house—a considerable improvement, perhaps, on their precommercial image, but a form which they found it hard to escape.

There is, then, a history of how perceptions of gender have been combined with perceptions of political economy, which has never been properly written but which it has been in principle possible to write for over two hundred years. (Nearly every theorist of the Scottish Enlightenment who wrote an account of the four stages of human society included a chapter on the condition of women at each stage; this is quite as remarkable as a dog walking on its hind legs.) The first great paradigm into which this history was organized, in the generation of Montesquieu, was capable of offering an explanation of why Machiavelli and the ancients had made the Achillean choice and feared the power of Fortune, and it was feeling its way toward an explanation of why women should be differently perceived by men—not, indeed, of how women might perceive things—at different stages of human development. To remind ourselves of this we have to restate the thesis of Huliuang's second book in light of his first; but some modernized form of the Enlightenment paradigm might usefully be applied to the far more
important problems raised by Pitkin. A problem to which this enquiry would lead would clearly be the extent to which psychoanalytic explanations can, and should, be historicized.

NOTES

4. I owe this syllogism to Gordon J. Schochet, who stated it in a conversation as long ago as 1969.
6. He appears as his changeable self in black-figure vases, the animated art of antiquity.
7. Perhaps it was to another Soderini.

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