

## *Machiavelli and Piccolomini: a textual analysis*

My aim today is to demonstrate how to conduct a comparison between two different texts. Starting from the lexical level, I will try to find the common structures which lead to a common content: the words are spotlights, indicators that guide us towards the inner process of the making of a text. To achieve this result, I will utilize the textual analysis according to a logical and philological approach. First, we should put the texts in parallel, in dialogue, in dialectical confrontation. Dialectic means simply to talk through, and the text is talking to us through the words.

But the main questions are:

- are there any specific circumstances able to generate the words or there are peculiar words, a specific language to be used only in certain circumstances?
- And is this language an indicator?
- Is there certain precise moment in history, certain critical transitional moments, that request a certain vocabulary or this is the only available vocabulary?
- Therefore, which is the most appropriate language to use to communicate?

This was a problem that Machiavelli had faced several times and the issue was sparked in the form of an essay *Discourse on the problem of language*. The question of the language runs through all our culture. In the *Essay on the language* Machiavelli approaches with great sensitivity the debate that was animating his contemporaries, thus demonstrating to be a true man of his time, linked not only to the political, but to the cultural context as well. The language issue was strongly felt during the XV and XVI centuries: at the time, the vernacular was still considered a minor form of expression, not a literary way of writing. The mainstream of communication was Latin. Machiavelli's choice is the Tuscan language, the language of Dante, because this is considered by Machiavelli an instrument fit for the contemporary content. The Prince has in fact the chapter's titles in Latin and the text in Italian, to give importance and

prestige to the text but also for the practical reason of communication. Considering the limited time, I will show you just a few lines from each work, living to your curiosity the verifying of my thesis.

But what do we mean by “philology”? This statement could be considered as the guideline of all the philological activity:

Ἐν ἄρχῃ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸ θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

(In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God).

I'm referring here at the Greek meaning of the term *logos* by interpreting the opening words of John's Gospel, beyond their religious sense. Logos (in Greek: λόγος, from λέγω: "I say") is derived from the Greek λέγειν (*léghein*) which means *to choose, recount, enumerate*. The corresponding Latin terms (*ratio, oratio*) are referring with the meaning of *calculation, speech*, to the original sense of the word. So, it has a deep mathematical meaning. Subsequently, the word *logos* in the Greek language has assumed multiple meanings: "estimate, appreciation, respect, bonding, proportion, measure, reason for being, cause, explanation, sentence, statement, definition, argument, reasoning, reason. It became a technical term in philosophy, beginning with Heraclitus (ca. 535–475 BC), who used the term for a principle of order and knowledge. The Gospel of John identifies the Logos, through which all things are made, as divine (*theos*), and further identifies Jesus as the incarnate *Logos*. Some scholars believe that John used the term "logos" in a double sense: both to make it understandable to Jewish circles, family, the concept of divine wisdom, and to stay connected with the circles of Hellenistic philosophy, where "logos " was a philosophical long time rooted concept. Then, the logos, the word is the beginning of everything (even of Creation) and it is the ultimate purpose of the philological research. To play even further with words, the *logos* is the **logo** of philology.

**The first text** I would like to analyze is a **report**, conceived as a letter, written in Latin in 1458. The author was a cardinal, a diplomat at the service of pope Martin V, destined to become pope himself the following year with the name of Pius II. Enea Silvio Piccolomini was encharged of a mission in Prague to observe and report the situation of heresies. The script, preserved in time as *Historia Bohemica*

, conveys a profusion of information about the central power of the Roman Church. Despite of the title "History", the historical aspect is just instrumental to the analysis of contemporary politics. I'm choosing it because it has several affinities of content and language with Machiavelli, that reveal a thought and common source. The beginning is a dedicatory letter, as it was a literary tradition then, to a sovereign, Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Naples. The Kingdom of Naples was experiencing similar troubles and the portrait of Bohemia becomes for Piccolomini a contemporary example of modernity, and most of all, a useful one. Why did Piccolomini choose Bohemia? Because he knew that in order to achieve the art of ruling the knowledge of the experiences of other countries is absolutely undeniable. In fact, Bohemia appears to contain in its recent history the entire spectrum of the events, as Machiavelli would say of the accidents.

*Among the Bohemians there are **admirable events in our troubled era**, occurred in time of war or in time of peace, **well worth of consideration**. (...) It seemed to me not a waste of time to write the matter of the Czechs, **which partly we have witnessed personally, and partly we have heard**, (...). For there are many things which it is **very useful to know**, in general, **in the (Czech History)**, and even if there are facts worthy in the memory of the old times, **I think however that the new events are even more certain, and then more marvelous. In my opinion there is in our age not a single Kingdom, in which emerge so many changes, so many wars, so many massacres, so many miracles, how Bohemia, shows us.***

What Piccolomini finds in Prague in 1458, Machiavelli will discover 50 years later in his homeland. The first point is the observation of the facts. Machiavelli expresses in this regard:

*It remains now to be seen what the methods and rules for a prince are as regards his subjects and friends. And as I know that many have written of this, I fear that my writing about it may be deemed presumptuous, differing as I do, especially in this matter, from the opinions of others. But my intention being to write **something of use** to those who understand it, it appears to me **more proper to go to the real truth** of the matter than to its imagination ; and many have imagined republics and principalities which **have never been seen** or known to exist **in reality; for how we live is so far removed from how we***

*ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation.* (*The Prince*, XV)

Obviously, behind both writers is concealed the prototype of the medieval exemplum, the story-pattern, but the difference here, the one that puts us in the perspective of Humanism and Renaissance, is the fact that the inspirational plot is not historical or biblical, but contemporary and by consequence true and therefore useful.

**The second aspect** I'd like to show is the choice of the main characters. We have here two inspiring figures. The first one is the hero of Piccolomini. His focus is on Georg Podebrady, who was the Governor of Bohemia in 1457. At the time Ladislaus, the son of the Emperor Albert II, heir of the crown of Bohemia and Hungary, still too young, was put under the protection of King Frederick III of Germany, who became the ruler of Bohemia and Hungary. But the local nobility was very unsatisfied and would not recognize a German sovereign. They originated an independence movement led by two important figures: the Hungarian John Hunyadj and the Bohemian George Podebrady, who belonged to the Hussite heresy. Podebrady was able to take advantage of the weakness of the crown and proposed himself as a new reference for his Country. Although he belonged to heresy, he was able to create strong alliances that led him to steal Bohemia is the influence of the Papacy from that of the German Empire. Appointed Governor of the Kingdom, after a series of complex events and bloody fights and intrigue that I will not enumerate here, after the death of Ladislaus, which took place under mysterious circumstances at the age of 22 years, George Podebrady became King of Bohemia by election. Here the words describing his seizure of power:

*(The opponents) turned to George Podebrady and choose him as **their leader; he had given in several occasions before the proof to be skilled in military matters, to be capable of great endurance and brave deeds.** In the heat of riots, he took up arms: **you must dare to be man of courage, because the fate itself opens the path to victory.** George himself, who **by its nature was overly ambitious**, ordered to some of his followers to enter in the city, in order to get the maximum support of the population. After this search, many citizens joined the conspiracy and he decided to invade with his troops on the opposing*

*side. (...) While they opened the gates, scream and cry were heard all over the place, as it always happens in the capture of a city. (...) Those who resisted were slaughtered.*

The *Historia Bohemica* ends with the image of the coronation of George Podebrady, restorer of the Christian faith, despite his heresy. What matters here is the ultimate compromise: to retain the power at any cost, even if this means the change of direction in the Regency. The tradition must be set aside if the price is the State, even seeking an alliance with a king Utraquist, crowned by law. And now the last words of the book:

*George Podebrady, a man rich of military knowlege and extremely bright, wise, and capable of right judgment, was proclaimed King. What a wonderful change and how powerful is the influx of the stars! ... The ancient philosophers would have said **it was a game played by fortune**; we instead are convinced it was due **by the intervention of the divine Providence**. There were a few false allegations about the fact that the election could have been conducted with violence: yes, they say, and what was obtained with the fear cannot be maintained with the law. **I am strongly convinced that (the ruling power) a kingdom must be (conquered) acquired with the force of arms, not with laws.** (LXXII)*

You may sense here a preview of what for Machiavelli is the virtue and for Piccolomini is still the divine grace; in a more pessimistic vision of reality, the dynamics of life do not belong to man, even not a little percentage.

Machiavelli acts following the same criteria. Staring from the title, we acknowledge immediately which is Machiavelli's center: **The Prince**, the head of State. To be truly effective, Machiavelli looks in his time and finds a living model, Cesare Borgia, the duke Valentino, son of the Pope Alessandro VI Borgia. Cesare's career was founded upon his father's ability to create alliances, through the favorable situation which was outlining in Northern Italy. He carved a State taking advantage of the local rulers, who, in the view of the citizens, were mean and petty. When Cesare took power, he was viewed by the citizens as a great improvement. His strength came from the support of the papal armies. He was

appointed Commander with many Italian and Swiss mercenaries. Consequently, he captured several territories and returned triumphant to Rome. His life is a lively example:

*Therefore, he who considers it necessary to secure himself in his new principality, to win friends, to overcome either by force or fraud, to make himself **beloved and feared** by the people, to be **followed and revered by the soldiers**, to **exterminate those who have power or reason to hurt him**, to **change the old order of things for new**, to be **severe and gracious, magnanimous and liberal**, to destroy a disloyal soldiery and to create new, to maintain friendship with kings and princes in such a way that they must help him with zeal and offend with caution, cannot find **a more lively example** than the actions of this man.*

*(...) there were in the duke such **boldness and ability**, and he knew so well how men are to be won or lost, and so firm were the foundations which in so short a time he had laid, that if he had not had those armies on his back, or if he had been in good health, he would have overcome all difficulties.*

So Cesare Borgia is an example to those rulers who obtained their power thanks to good fortune and virtue. The Duke Valentino, despite not being able to keep what fate had given to him, in fact, exercised all the power at its disposal to deal with the events, and is therefore worthy of praise and respect in the eyes of the author. The failure of Valentino is due then, according to Machiavelli, to the adverse fortune.

*Cesare Borgia, called by the people Duke Valentino, acquired his state during the ascendancy of his father, and on its decline he lost it, notwithstanding that he had taken every measure and done all that ought to be done by a wise and able man to fix firmly his roots in the states which the arms and fortunes of others had bestowed on him. Because, as is stated above, he who has not first laid his foundations may be able with great ability to lay them afterwards, but they will be laid with trouble to the architect and danger to the building. If, therefore, all the steps taken by the duke be considered, it will be seen that he laid solid foundations for his future power, and I do not consider it superfluous to discuss them, because I do not know what better precepts to give a new prince than the example of his actions.*

(...) *if his dispositions were of no avail, that was not his fault, but the extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune.[...] When all the actions of the duke are recalled, I do not know how to blame him, but rather it appears to be, as I have said, that **I ought to offer him for imitation** to all those who, by the fortune or the arms of others, are raised to government. **Because he, having a lofty spirit and far-reaching aims, could not have regulated his conduct otherwise.***

Now let's put in comparison the words of the two portraits. The terminology is quite close. George Podebrady and Cesare Borgia share many common points: they are both brave and resolute and above all, they both know how to take advantage of the situation. Fortune or fate provides opportunities that only the brave knows how to capture and save in time. Their stories are exemplary, in the meaning I was explaining before and their narrators are united in the vocabulary they use. Given the same premises, we reach the same conclusions. A mathematical equation, a calculation, a *logos*, to use the initial phrase. 50 years have passed between the two operas.

Where is situated the difference? The difference is not formal, but substantial and lead us to a key point: the variable "fortune" that cannot be identified anymore with the Providence, but it becomes only a sidereal force, the same of the ancient philosophers indeed, as Piccolomini reminds us, that scrambles our lives for no reason. In his defence, however, the Prince of Machiavelli can oppose the confidence in succeeding, something that still the King of Piccolomini could not:

*Uncertain are all the men's plans about the future, concealed by God with a blind darkness. God only keeps the government of the entire Universe. No one single mortal man can act at his will without His approval. All things are governed wisely by Him, even if we consider iniquitous (unfair). We have the **free will** guiding us to the government of our soul (...) ...But ruling cities, conquering Reigns, even the empire of the world, all this is truly minimal: only God disposes the great actions.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Incertae vanae cogitationes hominum, futurum quicquid caeca caligine Deus occulit, ipse sibi gubernacula retinet universi. Nihil sine suo nutu mortales agitant, sapienter ab eo justaque cuncta reguntur, saepe in conspectus eius aequissima sunt, quae nobis videntur iniqua. ... **Ad regimen animae nostrae liberum nacti sumus arbitrium** .... De regimine civitatum, de mutatione Regnorum, de orbis imperio, minimum est quod nomine possunt: magna magnus disponit Deus. (caput LXIX)

The particularism experienced by Piccolomini, through the observation of the Councils and the factions within the Church is the same that Machiavelli is witnessing in the struggles in Italy and all over Europe. The perspicacity, the acumen of Piccolomini consists in identifying the Bohemian Nation as the possible welding between particularistic behaviours. What was lacking at the time was the need of an universal vision: his world seemed to have abandoned the universalism, created from the ancient Rome, in order to embrace the use of weapons. Piccolomini clearly states this pessimistic perception with his last words: "*in my opinion it is much better to conquer a State with weapons, not with rules.* While accepting the judgment of the divine providence, the future pope cannot refrain himself to consider the astral conjuncture, the bad situation of the stars: *Mira mutatio rerum et novus syderum influxus.* God has nothing to do with it; we are solidly anchored to a concrete vision, able to see the dangers and challenges of the future.

Although he was an immensely capable general and statesman, Cesare would have trouble maintaining his domain without continued Papal patronage. Niccolò Machiavelli identifies Cesare's dependence on the good will of the Papacy, under the control of his father, to be the principal weakness of his rule. Machiavelli argued that, had Cesare been able to win the favor of the new Pope, he would have been a remarkably successful ruler. The news of his father's death (1503) arrived when Cesare was planning the conquest of Tuscany. The vision proposed by Machiavelli is the first example of secular power after the binomial Empire- Church that dominated politics throughout the Middle Ages and laid the foundations of modern philosophical and political thinking.

The meaning of Machiavelli, his empirical approach to the political pondering is the product of a skilled mind, deeply involved in the context of his time, but is also the result of a historical process that sees the beginnings of the formation of the idea of State in Europe. For Machiavelli, the true variation is the emancipation from the eschatological vision of history. The religion is not anymore, the key to the universal understanding. These are the foundation of our modern political thought: the idea of Europe, the foreign policy as a figment of domestic politics. Certain ideas are the product of their age and the authors are only their voice. The circumstances generate ideas. Similar times give birth to similar figures: in the *Historia* we find a strong and brave man, a precursor of Cesare Borgia. Georg Podebrady was the



first European non-Catholic sovereign, eventually emancipated from the power of the Church of Rome. Aware of its political strength, it was also the first king to conceive an embryo of Union of European States, a 'community' of Nations, as a real alternative to the Church. His main ability appears the capability of recognizing the profitable situations, in other words the moment of **fortune**:

*And in examining their life and deeds it will be seen that **they owed nothing to fortune but the opportunity** which gave them matter to be shaped into the form that they thought fit ;and **without that opportunity their powers would have been wasted**, and without their powers the opportunity would have come in vain.... These opportunities, therefore, gave these men their chance, and their own great qualities enabled them to profit by them, so as to ennoble their country and augment its fortunes. (cap. VI)*

With Machiavelli we are now reaching the end of '400 and beyond: the end of a century and the end of a world. The rejection of religion or rather the gods' power as it affects and interferes in human affairs leads to the search for an alternative, a different path of interpretation of reality and this has its fundamentals in the knowledge of the ancients. The discovery of the classics, the search for the text, the philology, all leads to the evolution of thinking. However, everything was already in the embryonic perception which Piccolomini derived from his experience, free from all the etiological superstructures: *Nobis persuasum est armis acquiri regna, not legibus*. The cornerstone is all in that *nobis*, which shows the assertion of the man's individuality and his freedom of thought, as the greatest achievement of our Humanism and our Renaissance. The greatest legacy of the Renaissance and of Machiavelli is to have given the capacity of **free will**, of the freedom of mind and action, despite the forces of nature. Nature, not God anymore: the subsequent ages will declare this achievement an illusion, but still we consider this one of the most precious gift for the whole humanity.