

# Machiavelli in Melbourne

Jaynie Anderson

On 18 February 2013 Professor Jaynie Anderson spoke at the opening of the exhibition *500 years on: Machiavelli's The prince and political thought in Renaissance Italy*. This exhibition drew upon the Leo Raab Political Thought Collection, which is part of Special Collections in the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne. The following article is based on Professor Anderson's address.



We are here to welcome guests from Italy, from the United States and from interstate, as well as to thank our local colleagues who have organised this very special exhibition in the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne. The purpose of this reception, which opens the conference *The power of luxury: Art and culture at the Italian courts in Machiavelli's lifetime*, for which we have had more than 200 registrations, is to introduce our distinguished guests to our University Library, which is full of treasures. It is a library for which those of us who teach here have enormous affection. We have a surprising number of Renaissance and Italian collections, an old master print collection of over 8,000 works—the equal of a national gallery—and many incunables and rare books.

The exhibition that we have here is the result of an enlightened act

of philanthropy that celebrates the critical reception of Machiavelli at the University of Melbourne in the 1950s and '60s. It is a collection of books assembled largely by Felix Raab (1930–1962), a young Australian student who, after completing his BA (Hons)<sup>1</sup> in history at Melbourne went to Oxford to write a DPhil on Machiavelli and secular political thought in England during the 17th century. His supervisor was Hugh Trevor-Roper, an extraordinary historian: tall, imposing, effortlessly superior, and given to outrageous behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Trevor-Roper was a witty correspondent, and his letters to the American art historian Bernard Berenson have been memorably published.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporaries remember Raab describing, for instance, the time that he arrived at a supervision and sat down opposite Trevor-Roper: the latter pushed Raab's latest piece of work across the table and said 'You know this won't do'; Raab responded by pushing it back and declaring 'Yes, it bloody well will!'<sup>4</sup> Raab's failure to be frightened by Trevor-Roper worked in his favour.

After Raab handed in his doctorate for examination, he went on a walking holiday in Italy, across the mountains of Reggio Calabria, and died while climbing Monte

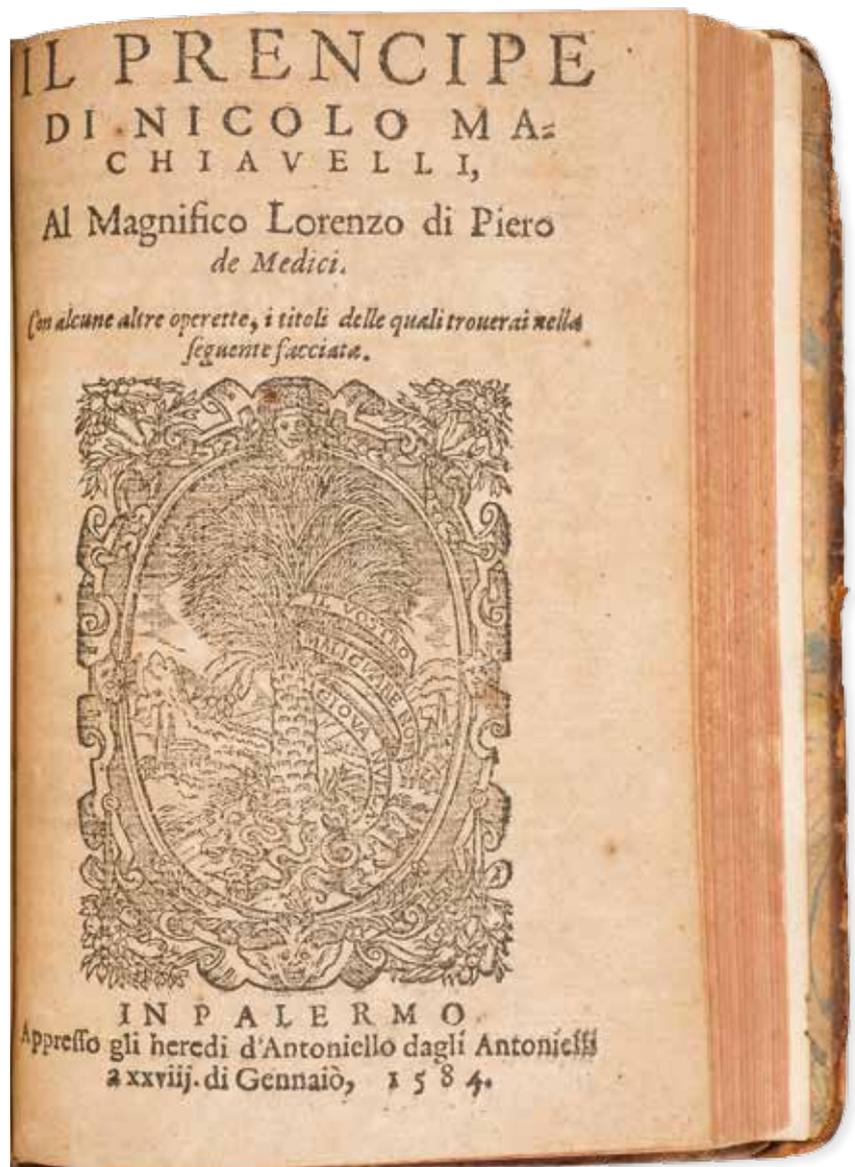
Pollino. He was therefore unable to defend his excellent thesis in the usual *viva voce* examination, but was awarded the degree posthumously and his work was published in 1964 as *The English face of Machiavelli: A changing interpretation, 1500–1700*, with a moving preface by Trevor-Roper that testifies to an 'affectionate' relationship. (Raab's book was reprinted as a classic in 2010.) Trevor-Roper recalled that Raab was:

a memorable figure as well as a memorable personality. Whenever he appeared at my door—a heavy, square frame, slightly stooping, black-bearded, with a genial glint in his large, bulging eyes—my spirits would rise. There was enthusiasm and humanity in him, as well as quick intelligence and great industry. Always he would come with work in his hand and ideas in his head. The work had been carefully planned and punctually executed. But his efficiency was never mechanical, it was always accompanied and enlivened by the ideas which had inspired it, or had emerged from it, and which still hovered around it, demanding discussion. Nor was there anything dry or pedantic about those ideas: the past to Raab was always living, always modern

... at well-calculated intervals he would quietly disappear, generally with a rucksack and a bundle of books, to Ireland, to Spain and above all to Italy ... From remote mountain villages I would receive long, gay letters describing present experiences, future plans, new ideas; and the sight of that ungainly handwriting could be as stimulating on an envelope as the sight of that ungainly figure at my door.<sup>5</sup>

On enquiry to the custodians of the Trevor-Roper archive of Christ Church College, Oxford, a fascinating piece of correspondence was found: the last letter Trevor-Roper wrote to Raab, which was returned to him from Raab's address (*Poste restante*, Calabria Post Office) after Raab's death:

My dear Raab  
Thank you very much for your letter. Those kind words gave me the greatest pleasure, though really I don't think I deserve them: I have done nothing, and am conscious of having done nothing, except of having had a very good research student! And I am sure that the examiners will think so too, and that you can have a complete holiday in



Calabria without thought of that future. Don't hurry back: the Board *can't* appoint the examiners till the Thursday of the second week of term, and so you can't conceivably be needed for any purpose connected with your thesis for at least ten days after that: the examiners have to receive the request from the Board, accept it, then receive the thesis, then read it, before they can need to communicate with you. So spend as long as you like in Calabria, and enjoy it.

I am very glad to hear the good news about your parents' finances and the relief it gives to you. I hope it may enable you to return to Europe. Anyway we can discuss that, and Greece too, when you are back.

The subject you suggest—the century of dying religion—is a fascinating but enormous subject. I think you would find it changing in your hands as you worked on it; but you have a strong, clarifying mind and could, I think, tackle a subject whose vastity and formlessness would overwhelm others. I quite agree that there are infinite varieties of secularism. There was also a 'third force', which was perhaps more important than straight

'secularism': I mean, a kind—or rather many kinds—of religious solvents of religion. Socinianism<sup>6</sup> is the most obvious form, but there are others. I think that there are differences from country to country. In Protestant countries, where there was relative freedom for sects, I think that secularism came in often in this way, but in Catholic countries, where sectarianism was crushed out—this seems to me one of the great social consequences of the Counter-Reformation—pure secularism seems to me to make a much more frontal attack. In England, religion is undermined by Socinians, Quakers, mystics; in France it is challenged by *libertins*.

Do you know Gottfried Arnold's *Urparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzergeschichte*?<sup>7</sup> (I quote from memory, writing in bed, with only one eye in use, which may account for calligraphic uncertainties and linear lapses). It was published towards the end of the 17th century, and had a great influence on, among others, Goethe (see *Dichtung u. Wahrheit*): and that alone—in my eyes—is a great recommendation.

Do you realise how fortunate you are to read German? It is becoming—to judge from most of

my pupils—an extinct language in England. And yet what wonderful books were written in it in the *Goethezeit*! Do you know Voigt's *die Wiederbelebung des klassischen Altertums*?<sup>8</sup> It is a marvellous book, never translated. And—though of course much later—Gregorovius' *Wanderjahre in Italien*?<sup>9</sup> But I may be prejudiced in favor of Gregorovius: I taught myself German as an undergraduate, reading his *Geschichte der Stadt Rom in Mittelalter*.<sup>10</sup>

I knew Norman Douglas quite well: at his best he is a marvellous writer. He hated DH Lawrence—precisely because of his meanness—see his (rare) pamphlet on DH Lawrence and Magnus.<sup>11</sup>

Yours sincerely  
Hugh Trevor-Roper<sup>12</sup>

Raab was born in Vienna in 1930 and emigrated to Australia at the age of nine, after Hitler's annexation of Austria. As an undergraduate at the University of Melbourne Raab experimented with science and architecture, but then discovered Max Crawford, an inspiring Renaissance historian. Raab's field of doctoral inquiry—the political philosophy of Machiavelli

and its influence on Stuart and Tudor England—had been opened up by Mario Praz in his ‘Machiavelli and the Elizabethans’, in *The flaming heart* (1958), and Napoleone Orsini’s articles ‘Elizabethan manuscript traditions of Machiavelli’s *Prince*’ in the first volume of the *Warburg Journal* of 1937.

The writings of Machiavelli, especially *The prince* and the *Discourses*, were initially banned in England, and only appeared in Dacre’s English translation as late as 1640. Raab’s contribution was to show the strong influence of Machiavelli’s writings in Tudor and Stuart England, especially on English theatre. Even though Machiavelli was repudiated by Henry VIII, Raab proved that his works were widely read at the time. Among the books in the Baillieu Library is the 1584/5 edition of *Il prencipe* (bound together with the *Discourses*) that was printed in London by the famous publisher John Wolfe under the false imprint of the heirs of ‘Antoniello dagli Antonielli’ at Palermo. Under this imprint, due to the ingenuity of Wolfe, Machiavelli’s influence permeated England. This book (illustrated on page 13) is a key work in Raab’s thesis.

The books now held in the Baillieu Library were bequeathed

to the University of Melbourne by Leo Raab in memory of his son. The collection was established both to commemorate a robust student and teacher and to inspire others to follow the example of his rigorous scholarship. Some volumes are Felix Raab’s working material, which he used as a scholar as he formulated his pioneering ideas, while others have been bought by the University Library in his memory.

Professor Jaynie Anderson is the Herald chair of fine arts at the University of Melbourne and foundation director of the Australian Institute of Art History.

**The Leo Raab Political Thought Collection** is fully catalogued online. Items can be requested for use in the Cultural Collections Reading Room on the third floor of the Baillieu Library. See [www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/special/collections/rarebooks/raab.html](http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/special/collections/rarebooks/raab.html) for details.

- 1 Raab’s 1957 honours thesis, ‘Towards understanding Harrington: A thesis on some aspects of the nature and origins of Harrington’s historical method’, is held in Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.
- 2 Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914–2003) was Regius professor of modern history at the University of Oxford. His best-known book is *The last days of Hitler* (1947).
- 3 Hugh Trevor-Roper, Bernard Berenson and R.P.T. Davenport-Hines, *Letters from Oxford: Hugh Trevor-Roper to Bernard Berenson*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006.

- 4 Hugh Trevor-Roper, ‘Introduction’, in Felix Raab, *The English face of Machiavelli: A changing interpretation, 1500–1700*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, p. viii.
- 5 Trevor-Roper, ‘Introduction’.
- 6 The Socinians were a 16th-century Christian group, originating in Italy with the thought of Laelius Socinus and his nephew, theologian Faustus Socinus.
- 7 Gottfried Arnold, *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie: Vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, Frankfurt am Main, 1727.
- 8 Georg Voigt, *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums: oder, das erste Jahrhundert des Humanismus*, Berlin, 1859.
- 9 Ferdinand Gregorovius published five volumes of his *Wanderjahre* in many editions.
- 10 *Geschichte der Stadt Rom in Mittelalter* is now available in Italian and English translation.
- 11 Norman Douglas, *D.H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus: A plea for better manners*, Florence: printed privately, 1924.
- 12 The letter is quoted with the permission of the Literary Estate of Lord Dacre of Glanton, Christ Church College, Oxford (SOC. Dacre 1/3/11). I am grateful to his literary executor, Professor Blair Worden, and archivist Judith Curthoys for having sent me this letter and for their help. Since this speech was given, the letter has been published in Richard Davenport-Hines and Adam Sisman (eds), *One hundred letters from Hugh Trevor-Roper*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 110–12.