

ments of the loose sheet containing the prohemium to book 4 of *Troilus*.

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Machiavelli's Intentions

To the Editor:

While I am in sympathy with the intentionalism of Stephen Fallon's reading of *The Prince* ("Hunting the Fox: Equivocation and Authorial Duplicité in *The Prince*," 107 [1992]: 1181–95), I do not understand why a person bent on revenge would produce as equivocal a work as Machiavelli's complex book. Why would Machiavelli offer his Medici torturers a "demonstration that they will fail" (1188) when he wants them to believe (wrongly) they can succeed? And what sort of revenge alerts its targets to dangers in their situation, as, according to Fallon, Machiavelli does by pitching "three strikes" to the Medici: "they are new princes; they rule a former republic; and they have come to power aided by fortune and foreign arms" (1187). Fallon's thesis would require Machiavelli to want to avoid obviously stupid suggestions, and perhaps that necessity explains why Fallon does not mention Machiavelli's most disastrous advice—advocating citizen armies just when huge professional armies became dominant in Europe. Machiavelli was pretty certainly being naively idealistic here and was surely not being cunning. Similarly, Fallon sees cunning in Machiavelli's claim that it would not be difficult "to unify Italy and drive off the barbarians" (1191). But it is more likely that Machiavelli was both cheering up the troops and letting wish outrun reality. The combination in *The Prince* of shrewdness and of innocence born of idealism seems relatively unproblematic to me, though I admit that it is hermeneutically boring.

Although charity is a good principle at the outset of interpretation, it seems sensible to believe that in the end any work that is not trivially correct is bound to be flawed in one way or another. Machiavelli's rhetorical stance seems close to that of some cultural critics today, who wish to emphasize the potency of dominant ideologies in order to awaken people to social dangers but who, in the process, are likely, as many commentators have pointed out, to make resistance seem well-nigh impossible. Cultural critics are not servants of the status quo even when their diag-

noses might be perversely construed as discouraging resistance, and few in the *opposition* camp would interpret their analyses in that way. It would be both wrong and unjust for future readers to infer from the menacing portrait of power structures drawn by today's cultural critics an intention to support the status quo. Similarly, Machiavelli wants to rouse resistance to fortune and so paints her as (almost) invincible, but it is dubious that anyone reading *The Prince* would, until recently, have taken this picture literally and absolutely. Of course, Machiavelli's portrait of *fortuna* "can be read"—the blank check of current interpretation—in that way, an approach that opens the door both to Fallon's complex intentional reading and to workaday deconstruction. The basic strategy of deconstruction is systematic misreading of unintended implications; the method is clever and inexhaustible, though at times wearying. To transpose this sort of reading to an intentionalist register is an improvement, for we can then appeal to what people are likely to do given certain purposes. It seems to me that a person like Machiavelli, bent on revenge and promotion, would have been ill-advised to write the sort of book Fallon constructs—that is, one made for professors, not the Medici.

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Reply:

I am glad that Roger Seamon is in sympathy with the intentionalism of my article; I had expected that this aspect of the piece would elicit the most spirited protest. While he objects to my interpretation, I welcome his distinction between my "complex intentional reading" and "workaday deconstruction."

We might not disagree as much as Seamon thinks. It is my argument, implicitly throughout and explicitly at the end, that the strategy of *The Prince* is overly ingenious. Seamon finds it implausible that Machiavelli would offer to the Medici demonstrations of inevitable failure along with promises of success, but I stress in the article the audacity of Machiavelli's multiple strategy and of his confidence in the readiness of people to believe what they want to believe, a confidence given foundation in *The Prince* and dramatic form in *The Mandrake*. This is not the place to repeat those arguments in detail, but I will refer again to a telling passage from *The Prince*: "men are so simple-minded and so dominated by their present