FRIGHTFUL FANTASIES

Maurice Joly: The Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu: Humanitarian Despotism and the Conditions of Modern Tyranny. Translated, edited and with commentary by John S. Waggoner. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002, Pp. xv, 392, $29.95).

Books have their fates, but few can have had a stranger one than Maurice Joly’s work, part polemic against Louis Napoleon, part analysis of the nature of post-revolutionary, democratic politics and its easy descent into despotism. Through an underworld dialogue between Montesquieu, “the legislator of nations” (p.12) and Machiavelli, the “dark genius” (p. 29) of modern politics, Joly hoped to mask his criticism sufficiently to elude the censors of the Second Empire. The judgment against him, by the “Correctional Tribunal of the Seine, Sixth Chamber,” dated 28 April 1865 and printed after the title page in the work’s second edition, shows that in this hope he was sadly deceived: “The publication of the anonymous first edition of this book brought its author, Mr. Maurice Joly, a sentence of fifteen months in prison and a fine of 200 francs, for inciting hatred and contempt for the imperial government.” (Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu ou la politique de Machiavel au XIX siècle, par un contemporain [Maurice Joly], Briard, 1868, p. i.) Certainly of greater disappointment would have been the fate already alluded to. In a highly complex series of transformations and plagiarisms, Joly’s critical analysis of Louis Napoleon’s plebiscitory European despotism was taken over by the Russian secret police and, along with a strange brew of other texts, formed a good part of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, where Machiavelli’s demonic words are uttered by the Jewish Elders, expressing their plans for world domination (pp. 355 ff). In this guise Joly’s admonitory and prophetic words have become the justification of Tsarist pogroms, Nazi genocide, and now, in a dark inheritance from these failed regimes of the past century, contemporary Arab Jew-hatred, as the Protocols form the basis of a popular series on Egyptian television and are referred to in Article 32 of the Hamas covenant. Indeed, the first English translation of the work was in an appendix to a work exposing the Protocols and the Swiss judgment against them in 1935. A new translation and commentary which focuses on the historical and political concerns of the work, as well as its own prophetic insights into the relation between modernity and despotism is certainly welcome.
The Dialogue consists of four parts and twenty-five individual dialogues. The first part (Dialogues 1-6) introduces the interlocutors in what seems like more of a pagan underworld than a Christian Hell and allows them to remind each other of their fundamental beliefs. According to Joly's Machiavelli, (=NM) "the evil instinct is more powerful than the good...all men seek to dominate" (p. 10; cf. Discorsi [=D] I, 3), while Joly's Montesquieu (=CM) posits a justice based on morality as "the basis of the very existence of society" (p. 14; cf. De l'Esprit des lois [EL] I, 2, 3) and believes that "the tendency to perfection and progress is a foreordained social law" (p. 30). NM resists CM's argument that "everything has changed," and asserts that he underestimates the "infinite baseness of the people" (p. 25). He promises to show how, even in an industrialized nation, "where public right is firmly based on liberty," in full view of a free press, a new despotism can be established (p. 36).

Part Two, Dialogues 8-17, depicts the politics of the modern prince or despot, who makes use of the plebiscite, rooted in popular sovereignty, to attain power (p. 44) and overwhelm the structures of government (p. 50) so prized by CM (p. 15), and consolidate his singular rule (p. 59). Two complete dialogues are devoted to the regulation (XI) and, more spectacularly, use and manipulation of the press (XII), which embraces not merely journals that adopt the official line but also those in which "the official or quasi-official slant on things is totally absent, but only on the surface" (pp. 68f.), aristocratic, republican, revolutionary and even anarchist organs. This plan draws the ultimate accolade, "truly machiavellian," (p. 71) from CM. Dialogue XIII, on conspiracies, is at the book's center (cf. D III, 6). Laws limiting association and permitting non-judicial deportations (deporter sans jugement unfortunately rendered as "injudicious deportation," ) (p. 77) are to be used against potential conspirators. Dialogues XIV through XVII complete the picture of the seizure of power: all ranks of society will be infiltrated by the Vishnu-armed, Hydra headed police (p. 100).

The Third Part deals with state finances, and tries to solve the problem raised by Montesquieu in EL XIII, 10: absolute monarchs or despots cannot afford to levy high taxes on their subjects (pp. 103-104). Through a policy that sets rich against poor, and basing himself "on the proletariat, the bulk of which possess nothing," NM will use representative democracy to raise taxes and maintain his power (p. 105; here, la nation is inconsistently translated as "nation" and "people").

The Fourth Part concludes the Dialogue with a summary account of the glories of the new regime both for ruler and ruled. Rather than despotism à la Montesquieu whose inhabitants are slaves ruled by fear (EL III, 8,9), it will be a land of peace and prosperity. There will be peace at home by waging war abroad, (p. 127) and prosperity by encouraging grand building projects to create work for the masses (p. 129), a "reign of pleasure" (p. 137). In this way NM fulfills his promise to "make good emerge from evil. I shall exploit materialism for the sake of harmony and civilization" (p. 137). In the twenty-fourth Dialogue NM glories in his "power of dissimulation" (p.138; cf. Principe (=P) XVIII). There is a striking anticipation of Orwellian newspeak on p. 139. The turn to la fortune in the twenty-fourth chapter is perhaps an allusion to the invocation of fortuna in the twenty-fifth chapter of Il Principe. However, three different words are translated by Waggoner as "fortune" on p. 141. The concluding dialogue is the apotheosis of the new leader. Having consolidated his power, he can afford to relax, which will "disarm partisan hatred" (p. 146). NM anticipates a cult of personality, ending in the worship of the leader as a kind of god. The
incredulous CM hopes that the “frightful fantasy is finished,” but NM, before being swept away by an infernal whirlwind, gets him to understand that this is no fantasy, but the current regime in his homeland. The work ends with a *cri de coeur* from CM (p.149).

Although in five parts, the Commentary, which occupies over half of the volume, divides rather neatly into two: the first half, Parts I and II, is a textual commentary while the second half consists of essays on (1) the role of Saint-Simonian elements in the socio-political programs of NM, (2) Joly's portrait of Machiavelli, and (3) “the Dialogue and History,” an account of its relation to Louis Napoleon and to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The commentary of one hundred pages (Part I-II) is more discursive and summary than analytic, critical, or scholarly, and it for the most part repeats the arguments made by the interlocutors. Relatively few of the abundant allusions to the works of Machiavelli or Montesquieu are identified.

Waggoner's major claim to a new understanding of Joly would seem to be his emphasis upon the positive Saint-Simonian elements in NM's presentation of Louis Napoleon's regime, expressed in the first portion of the second half of the Commentary (Part III). Waggoner views the religious rhetoric of NM in the final dialogues as the reflection of a serious rather than cynical attempt to found a "civic religion" and usher in a new "organic" order, subsequent to the old Christianity of the Middle Ages and the skepticism of the Enlightenment (pp. 282-84). Yet there is nothing to show that NM, any more than the historical Machiavelli, expected this rule to be any more pious than that of Pope Alexander VI. Furthermore, that such religion has any connection to Saint-Simonian "organicism" needs to be shown. This view recurs in Part IV ("The Drama of the Dialogue" whose real subject is "Joly and the Portrait of Machiavelli"). Although Machiavelli is its main subject, several pages (pp. 306-309) are spent on Montesquieu, and Waggoner notes, correctly, that "the real Montesquieu, sober but hopeful, is lost from view in the *Dialogue in Hell*" (p. 309). He is the mere foil to Machiavelli-Louis Napoleon, a powerless advocate of anodyne political structures that cannot help but be overtaken by a demonic and morally indifferent force. Part V's account of Louis Napoleon is concerned with the vagaries of modern historiography. The conflict between a "humanitarian" and "fascist" Napoleon II gives rise to the subtitle of this book, which, it should be noted, differs from that of Joly: "Or: the Politics of Machiavelli in the Nineteenth Century, by a Contemporary." The Commentary's last chapter on the *Protocols* gives a concise history of the forging of this text.

The references at the foot of the page of the Dialogue are taken over from the French edition (though twice—pp. 13 and 104—the references to books and chapters of the *Spirit of the Laws* are transposed), as are its errors (the reference on p. 133 should read "X 16," not "X 15," and on p. 147 should read "XIX 3," not "XIX 2"). The French edition (1868) clarifies references to de Maistre and Benjamin Constant, but these, along with other interventions by an unnamed editor are not taken over. Along with a plethora of English language misprints, there is an unfortunate misprint in the Latin quotation on p. 14. The translation does not include the very useful and extensive analytic table of contents which occupies ten of the 252 pages of the French edition.

Joly's work is a brilliant account of modern despotism, and of the vulnerability of republicanism to a Machiavellianism aware of the manipulability of popular mechanisms. The power latent in the *Protocols* is the power of this Machiavellianism, whose abuse by Tsar, Führer and now
Imam is not fortuitous, but a consequence of the demonic brilliance of the Florentine segretario, his epigones and even his critics. Although Hannah Arendt spoke of the “cheap Machiavellianism” of the Protocols and noted that “in their crackpot manner they touch on every important political issue of the time,” (The Origins of Totalitarianism [1958] p. 358), she did not recognize its source in Joly’s profound understanding of Machiavelli, and thus both the Florentine’s and the Parisian’s real, if unintended role in this contributor to the “origins of totalitarianism.”

We have focused almost exclusively on Machiavelli in a discussion of a dialogue between two great thinkers. As Waggoner notes, the title page of the Dialogue reflects this imbalance by casting the Florentine’s name in bold type twice the size of the Frenchman’s. The prospects for representative government would seem much better if the true depth of Montesquieu’s political understanding was reflected in the Dialogue itself. But this was clearly not part of the author’s polemical intent. A task lying before contemporary readers of this text is precisely the formulation of a response to the dialogue’s Machiavellianism that includes a greater measure of the “spirit” of the Spirit of the Laws than is to be found there. We would live in a more comforting world if we could limit our praise of John S. Waggoner’s translation of this important work to the historical significance of Maurice Joly’s Machiavellian warning about modern tyranny and its contribution to our understanding of an almost forgotten regime. However, the refractions of his brilliant image are barely hidden behind current headlines. Joly’s updating of Machiavellianism deserves to be read as a prophetic and unwittingly influential document. Having detailed the despotism of its own century and inadvertently contributed to that of the century to come, perhaps it can help our century to learn to formulate an adequate response to the all-too enduring voice of tyranny.

—Robert Rethy

À REBOURS

Aurelian Craiutu: Liberalism Under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003. Pp. xvii, 337. $26.95)

This outstanding and innovative work of scholarship aims to recapture the French political thought that corresponds to the “French notion of civilization.” In Craiutu’s view, the French have “successfully combined the taming of nature and material progress with respect for culture, refinement of manners, and humanism” (p. 1). French civilization basically combines the best in modern or liberal and classical life. But strangely enough, in political thought “French liberalism” has seemed virtually an oxymoron. That was true in much of the nineteenth century, when French thinkers characteristically embraced antibourgeois and highly literary perfectionism of various kinds, and in much of twentieth-century France, which was dominated intellectually by Sartre’s stylized and narcissistic Stalinism. French radical thought, we might say, has been in rebellion against what is good about both modern and classical life; the French political mind was somehow infused, as Alexis