

# Machiavelli: *Letter to Vettori*, excerpts

**Niccolo Machiavelli:** *Letter to Francesco Vettori*: ‘Magnificent ambassador: “Never were divine favors late.” I say this because I appear to have lost, no, mislaid your favor, since you have gone a long time without writing me....

I stay in my villa, and since these last chance events<sup>1</sup> occurred, I have not spent, to add them all up, twenty days in Florence. Until now I have been catching thrushes with my own hands. I would get up before day, prepare traps, and go out with a bundle of cages on my back, so that I looked like Geta when he returned from the harbor with Amphitryon’s books; I caught at least two, at most six thrushes. And so passed all September; then this pastime, though annoying and strange, gave out, to my displeasure.

And what my life is like, I will tell you:

I get up in the morning with the sun and go to a wood of mine that I am having cut down, where I stay for two hours to look over the work of the past day, and to pass time with the woodcutters.... When I leave the wood, I go to a spring, and from there to an aviary.... I have a book under my arm, Dante or Petrarch, or one of the minor poets.... I read of their amorous passions and their loves; I remember my own and enjoy myself for a while in this thinking. Then I move on along the road to the inn; I speak with those passing by.... Comes the hour to dine... I eat with my company what food this poor villa and tiny patrimony allow Having eaten, I return to the inn.... With them I become a rascal... playing at cricca and tric-trac, from which arise a thousand quarrels and countless abuses with insulting words.... Thus involved with these vermin I scrape the mold off my brain and I satisfy the malignity of this fate of mine, as I am content to be trampled on this path so as to see if she will be ashamed of it.

When evening has come, I return to my house and go into my study. At the door I take off my clothes of the day, covered with mud and mire, and I put on my regal and courtly garments; and decently reclothed, I enter the an cient courts of ancient

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<sup>1</sup> His arrest, imprisonment, and torture on suspicion of conspiracy against them by the de Medici rulers of Florence who had recently seized power; followed by his subsequent release under instructions to stay in his villa.

men, where, received by them lovingly, I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity reply to me. And for the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I deliver myself entirely to them.

And because Dante says that to have understood without retaining does not make knowledge, I have noted what capital I have made from their conversation and have composed a little work *De Principatibus* [*On Principalities*], where I delve as deeply as I can into reflections on this subject, debating what a principality is, of what kinds they are, how they are acquired, how they are maintained, why they are lost. And if you have ever been pleased by any of my whimsies, this one should not displease you; and to a prince, and especially to a new prince, it should be welcome. So I am addressing it to his Magnificence, Giuliano [de Medici]....

I have discussed with Filippo this little work of mine, whether to give it to him or not; and if it is good to give it, whether it would be good for me to take it or send it to you.... The desire I have that these Medici lords begin to make use of me even if they should begin by making me roll a stone.... Through this thing, if it were read, one would see that I have neither slept through nor played away the fifteen years I have been at the study of the art of the state. And anyone should be glad to have the service of one who is full of experience.... One should not doubt my faith, because having always observed faith, I ought not now be learning to break it. Whoever has been faithful and good for forty-three years, as I have, ought not to be able to change his nature, and of my faith and goodness my poverty is witness.

I should like, then, for you to write me again on how this matter appears to you, and I commend myself to you.

Be prosperous.

10 December 1513

Niccolo Machiavelli, in Florence.

LINK: <<http://ianchadwick.com/machiavelli/miscellanea/letter-to-francesco-vettori/>>