

Review Paper

Brand Machiavelli

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Received: May 9, 2021

Accepted: May 19, 2021

Online Published: May 28, 2021

doi:10.22158/csm.v4n2p36

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/csm.v4n2p36>

Abstract

In this paper I analyze the reputation of Niccolò Machiavelli against the criteria of celebrity found in the Cultural Studies literature. Applied to Machiavelli these criteria include the detachment of his name from any substance of his works, life, or thought; trading on the recognition of his name; the appetite for biographies of him; and the integration of his very name into the common parlance in the adjective “Machiavellian” and the noun “Machiavellianism” which are widely used as self-explanatory in the media, press, and You Tube videos, music, and social media. The evidence adduced for these conclusions is mainly in books—print and digital—but incorporates film, plays, music, and commerce. In short, Machiavelli has accumulated sufficient media capital to be internalized into the popular culture and so rendered an immortal celebrity, i.e., that is Brand Machiavelli.

Keywords

Machiavelli, celebrity, Machiavellian, Machiavellianism, media studies, cultural studies

1. Introduction

Celebrity Studies have taken as exemplars ephemeral rap musicians, eclipsed athletes, obscure royals, cartoon figures, fictional characters, and airheads galore. Crowded though it be the celebrity hall of fame has not, until now, included Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). Time to put that right! That status, properly understood, helps explain the flow of biographies of this obscure bureaucrat. How in the world did this paper pusher become the celebrated Machiavelli? To find out read on.

Machiavelli's name has been occasionally cited in sociologists' stern and somber analysis of celebrity but only as a confidant to the prince. Both John Corner and Chris Rojek refer to the following passage from his most famous, if seldom read, book, *The Prince*, that a ruler should carefully cultivate the public image (Note 1).

Thus, it is not necessary for a prince to have all the above-mentioned qualities in fact, but it is indeed necessary to appear to have them...By appearing to have them, they are useful, as it is to appear merciful, faithful, humane, honest, and religious...Everyone sees what you appear to be, few touch what you really are...For the vulgar are taken in by appearance and the outcome of a thing (Note 2).

While the obvious way to secure that image is to live up to it, Machiavelli recognized that it is not always possible to do that in the frangible world, and that is where image management is needed.

Death, by the way, is no hindrance to celebrity. It may even smooth the path to fame for some, like Machiavelli, when his name recognition outlives his opponents, detractors, and enemies. Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500-1558) was the first to leave a written condemnation of Machiavelli, but who has heard of him today outside the confines of a narrow scholarly circle? (Note 3) Do musicians take his name? Do novelists put "Pole" into their titles? Will restaurants sport the name "Pole's"? Do journalists label the shenanigans of others Polean? No, no, no, and no. Yet all of these uses apply to Machiavelli.

2. What Does Celebrity Mean?

The Latin *celebritus* means to be "much spoken of" that is, celebrated. Of course, those first and foremost much spoken of in Latin were saints and not sinners, like Machiavelli. Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Teresa of Avila, and their haloed ilk—worshippers celebrated their birthdays, and gave the same names to children, thus bonding the living to the dead. Death does not end fame. Though not all celebrities are on the cover of *People* magazine or the homepage of *Gossip!*

One of the most famous celebrities in death is Elvis; not even his last name is necessary for instant recognition in much of the world, but for the record, it is Presley to whom I refer. The marketing of Elvis remains big business, and a visitor to Graceland has an opportunity to have a picture taken before a green screen with Elvis. Well, a holographic Elvis that is. Every year, apart from those blighted by a pandemic or worse, impersonators gather in look-alike competitions hither and yon to out-King each other. Death has not stopped Elvis from working.

Edmund Burke was right when he said that a community unites the dead, the living, and those as yet unborn (Note 4). As with saints, many a youngster has entered life with his names: Elvis, Aron, or Presley. Burke had saints more in mind than Elvis's ilk, but times change.

A celebrity is "famous for being famous" (Note 5). Whereas an athlete, a politician, a composer become well known for their accomplishments. Their celebrity was a consequence of their endeavors in sports, in legislation, and in music. Their celebrity is achieved from the bottom up. If that celebrity is cashed-in at the end of the career, it has transcended the achieved to the ascribed.

Yet there are others whose fame is wholly ascribed, resting on nothing but itself, coming from the top down like the houses in Jonathan Swift's Laputa. The example the exponents of cultural studies never

tire of citing is someone named Paris Hilton who has made herself famous without any evident achievement except that. Becoming famous by the alchemy of hardened air takes wit, will, and stamina to be sure, but this status is ascribed by all those editors, photographers, and consumers who say it is so.

In the words of a perspicacious student of celebrity, Robert van Krieken, a celebrity is “a person whose name has attention-getting, interest-riveting and profit-generating value” (Note 6). The name alone is perceived to have the capacity to generate financial income, van Krieken continues. Yes, this fits Machiavelli.

3. Machiavelli Celebrity!

Against van Krieken’s criteria I shall compile empirical evidence which includes (1) the titles of books that take his name detached from any substance, (2) the fictional works in which he appears seemingly for no other reason than name-recognition, and (3) the extensive, and repetitive, biographical literature on him, and, finally, (4) the extensive use of his name in variety of popular (as distinct from scholarly) contexts. By and large, omitted from these four exhibits are his books themselves, his place in the study of Renaissance history, political science, and the origins and development of Italian as a literary language. These latter provinces belong to specialists for whom knowing of him is a professional requirement.

3.1 Books, Books, and more Books

There are many books that take his name in the title, but where there seems little *prima facie* or any other reason for the use of his name. Examples include the following.

Table 1. Titles alone

Troy Bruner and Philip Eager	<i>Modern Machiavelli: 13 Laws of Power, Persuasion and Integrity</i> (2017)
John Drennan	<i>Paddy Machiavelli: How to Get Ahead in Irish Politics</i> (2014)
B. S. Thejendra	<i>The Cosmic Machiavelli</i> (2012)
Jules J. Berman	<i>Machiavelli’s Laboratory: A Satire</i> (2010).
Mark Crick	<i>Machiavelli’s Lawn: The Great Writers’ Garden Companion</i> (2011)
Nicholas Antongiavanni	<i>The Suit: A Machiavellian Approach to Men’s Style</i> (2006)
David Apostolico	<i>Machiavellian Poker Strategy: How to Play Like a Prince and Rule the Poker Table</i> (2005)
Nick Casonova	<i>The Machiavellian’s Guide to Womanizing</i> (1995).
Simon Ramo	<i>Tennis by Machiavelli</i> (1984)

Reader, this is but a sampler of the titles to be found. Given that Machiavelli is not discussed and not quoted in these books beyond an epigram or two, the conclusion must be that the authors and also the publishers thought there was attention-getting and profit-generating value in his name, choosing to use it, rather than, say, Plato or Thomas Hobbes.

Nor are all the titles coupled to Machiavelli as frivolous as those on Table One appear to be. Consider the entries of Table 2 below.

Table 2. Some Serious Books

Neil Morton	<i>Deception: An Essential Guide to Understanding how Machiavellian People can hide the Truth and Use Their Knowledge of Human Behavior to Manipulate Negotiate and Persuade</i> (2020)
Mark Powell and Johnathan Gifford	<i>Machiavellian Intelligence: How to Survive and Rise in the Modern Corporation</i> (2017)
Ronald Collins and David Skover	<i>The Judge: 26 Machiavellian Lessons</i> (2017)
Melissa Aho and Erika Bennett	<i>The Machiavellian Librarian: Winning allies, combating budget cuts, and influencing stakeholders</i> (2014)
Richard Samuels	<i>Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan</i> (2003)
Ian Demack	<i>The Modern Machiavelli: The Seven Principles of Power in Business</i> (2002)
Beryl Radin	<i>Beyond Machiavelli: Policy Analysis Comes of Age</i> (2000)
Rinus van Schendelen	<i>Machiavelli in Brussels: The Art of Lobbying the EU</i> (2002)
Bernard W. Wishy	<i>Good-Bye Machiavelli: Government and American Life</i> (1995)

What other explanation could there be than the authors and the publishers hope that affixing Machiavelli's name will increase attention, rivet interest, and generate a profit.

Then there are the novels that take his name, apparently for the same reasons.

Table 3. Novel Titles

Bella de Corte	<i>Machiavellian</i> (2020)
John Greaves	<i>The Fist of Machiavelli</i> (2011)
Penelope Rosa	<i>Introduction to Machiavelli: A Novel</i> (2011)
Lawrence Uhlin	<i>Machiavelli's Desert</i> (2010)
Allan Folsom	<i>The Machiavelli Covenant</i> (2006)
Laramanda Williams	<i>Machiavelli: Pastor or Pimp?</i> (2006)
Steve Perry	<i>The Machiavellian Interface</i> (1986)

In these novels it is left to the reader to guess why Niccolò's name appears on the cover. By the way, several of these titles are independently published, and that exculpates a professional publisher from the decision to attribute some responsibility to Machiavelli, on the other hand it does mean the authors were so committed to the titles as to invest their money in them.

There are other novels in which Machiavelli appears as a character. In a few he has a leading role but in most he is a supporting player.

Table 4. Novels in which Machiavelli Has a Major Role

Michael Ennis	<i>The Malice of Fortune</i> (2012)
Maryann Philip	<i>A Borgia Daughter Dies</i> (2003)
Derek Wilson	<i>The Swarm of Heaven</i> (2001)
Somerset Maugham	<i>Then and Now</i> (1946)

All of these are easy enough to read, but perhaps the one that best captures the personality of Machiavelli is Maugham's *Then and Now*, whose Machiavelli is whip smart, but he discovers to his chagrin that he is not always the smartest guy in the room.

Table 5. Novels in which Machiavelli Is a Supporting Role

Salman Rushdie	<i>The Enchantress of Florence</i> (2009)
Michael Scott	<i>The Magician</i> (2009)
George Herman	<i>The Florentine Mourners</i> (1996)
George Eliot	<i>Romala</i> (1863)

Three of these are period pieces set in Florence of Machiavelli's days and he passes in the background, but Scott's is a fantasy novel with a contemporary setting which features, albeit in a small role, an eternal and charming Machiavelli in league with the Devil.

In Table 6 below there are novels that feature Machiavelli in such detail as to be biographies.

Table 6. Biographies in Fiction

Anthony Wildman	<i>The Diplomat of Florence: A Novel of Machiavelli and the Borgias</i> (2020)
Maurizio Marmostein	<i>The Making of a Prince: A Novel based on the Life of Niccolò Machiavelli</i> (2018)
Sarah Dunant	<i>In the Name of the Family: A Novel of Machiavelli & the Borgias</i> (2017)
Joseph Markulin	<i>Machiavelli: A Renaissance Life</i> (2013)
Jean Dumont	<i>Machiavelli—a Novel</i> (2013)

That Machiavelli barely knew one Borgia has been enough for some to link his name to theirs through the centuries. By the way, there is a mystery in Table 6 and it is that last entry, Dumont, *Machiavelli*. I acquired a Kindle copy of that title in 2015 and dutifully read it. Oh hum. But recently when seeking to confirm publishing details, I discovered this e-book seems to have nearly disappeared from the digital ether, apart from an entry on the *Good Reads* web site, nor are there traces of its author. If there is knowledge available will a kind reader send it on that I may be enlightened.

The feats of biographical erudition compiled below are all the more impressive when one realizes just how little is known about his life. Leaving aside the fact that nothing is known about him before the age of twenty-nine, the sheer volume of biographies indicates the appetite for Machiavelli.

Table 7. Biographies

Alexander Lee	<i>Machiavelli: His Life and Times</i> (2020)
Patrick Boucheron	<i>Machiavelli</i> (2017)
Eric Benner	<i>Be Like a Fox: Machiavelli and His World</i> (2017)
Christopher Celenza	<i>Machiavelli: A Portrait</i> (2015)
Corrado Vivanti	<i>Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography</i> (2013)
Philip Bobbitt	<i>The Garments of Court and Palace: Machiavelli and the World He Made</i> (2013)
Robert Black	<i>Machiavelli</i> (2013)
Miles Unger	<i>Machiavelli: A Biography</i> (2011)
Paul Oppenheimer	<i>Machiavelli: A Life beyond Ideology</i> (2011)
Paul Strathen	<i>The Artist, the Philosopher, and the Warrior</i> (2010)
Niccolò Capponi	<i>An Unlikely Prince: The Life and Times of Machiavelli</i> (2010)
Ross King	<i>Machiavelli: Philosopher of Power</i> (2007)
Michael White	<i>Machiavelli: A Man Misunderstood</i> (2004)
Maurizio Viroli	<i>Niccolò Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli</i> (1998)
Sebastian de Grazia	<i>Machiavelli in Hell</i> (1989)
Giuseppe Prezzolini	<i>Machiavelli</i> (1967)
Roberto Ridolfi	<i>The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli</i> (1963)
J. R. Hale	<i>Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy</i> (1961)
Valeriu Marcu	<i>Accent on Power: The Life and Times of Machiavelli</i> (1939)
Pasquale Villari	<i>The Life and Times of Niccolo Machiavelli</i> (1909)

One curiosity in the 8,000 or so total pages of these biographers is how few cross-references there are by any biographer to those who have gone before.

3.2 Film, Video, and Music

As a bookman, I have concentrated on those, but there is more to media than books. Film and music are domains where Machiavelli can also be found. In these now digital empires once again his name is largely detached from anything he said, did, or wrote, floating freely as if in a dream, or nightmare.

Inevitably in the imagination of film school graduates Machiavelli's name conjures Mafia. Note the evidence the cinematic works enumerated in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Mafia Films with Machiavelli in the Title

Taner Tumkayo.	<i>Machiavelli & Company</i> (2011), 24 minutes
Julio Ponce Palmieri	<i>Machiavelli's The Prince</i> (2010), 30 minutes
Billie Redieck	<i>Machiavellian Boys</i> (2004), 19 minutes
Ephraim Horowitz	<i>Machiavelli Rises</i> (2000), 90 minutes

The director is named in the left column above.

Do not be misled by the use of the title *The Prince* in the second title above, for in the film it is applied to the protagonist who holds onto his criminal empire. There are many other films, some of which offer expositions or applications of Machiavelli, and which themselves indicate he remains much spoken of. One can also find a host of videos on You Tube and films on the IMDb by searching for "Machiavelli". Turning now to the world of music, according to the Internet Movie Data Base there is a Belgian Eurorock band call Machiavel which has been making noise since 1976 (Note 7). Many tracks from this group can be found on Amazon. Likewise, American rapper Tupac Amaru Shakur styled himself Makaveli (Note 8).

On the Internet Archives one finds Vincent Bergeron's "Machiavélisme Magnifique" (Note 9). There is no discernable connection to the Niccolò Machiavelli. While roaming Amazon I found—in no particular order—"Machiavelli" from the Scene is Now on Songbirds Lie (2004), the lyrics of which do refer to Machiavelli. Then there is *Lore, Glassed Wing Angel* (2006) with a track called "Machiavelli" for no apparent reason. Then came Franky the Fly with "Machiavelli" on "Lord of the Flies" (2008). And Mo Doughy, "Machiavelli vs Lao Tse" (2009). Ditto Zekwe Ramo's "Machiavelique" (2009); Peep Templ, "Thank you, Machiavelli" (2012); and Bart Classen, "Machiavelli" (2013). Nor should Australia's own "Machiavelli and the Four Seasons (1995) from TISM, which stands for "This is serious, Mum" be overlooked.

3.3 Commercial Uses

Businesses have appropriated his name, from hotels, to restaurants, to products, and more. A few examples make the point. Medici Leather in Florence offers an attaché case called Machiavelli in black, ocher, or red. There once was a Eurasian chocolatier in Manila called Machiavelli chocolatier with an

amusing web site, but alas, it seems to have voided the ether. As has an elaborate Russian web site once called Machiavelli Luxury Boutique that offered yachts, limousines, and their accouterments for purchase online.

Then there are the restaurants: Machiavelli, New York City USA; Ser Nicolo Machiavelli in Ghent, Belgium; Machiavelli Restaurant in Montreal, Quebec; Machiavelli's Italian Restaurant, Southington, Connecticut; Machiavelli Ristorante, Seattle, Washington; Machiavelli Kitchen & Dining Room, Covent Garden, London; and Machiavelli Restaurant in Sydney, New South Wales.

Transitory as restaurants always are, and more so in the years of the pandemic, some of these may be long gone even now. Suffice it to say that Machiavelli left behind no cookbooks, recipes, or menus, and no doubt made do on a poor fodder most of us today would not touch. He was no trencherman, at least not according to the above listed biographical sources. The films, the music, the food all demonstrate the disconnection between the man and the use of his name. Surely one hallmark of celebrity is when the name alone sells.

His name in these businesses just means Italian, though if that is the only purpose, one might ask why the name Benito Mussolini is not used, too. He after all is another well-known Italian who was famed for his appetites.

3.4 *The Language Itself*

And so to the final exhibit in this overwhelming parade of evidence of Machiavelli's celebrity and that is that his name has entered the language where it is used by people who have never, and will never, turn a page in any of his books, and yet take his name, like the Lord's, freely. I refer to the adjective *Machiavellian* which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and there can be no higher authority than this, or so they say all over Oxford, which chronicles its use since the Sixteenth Century in the following fashion below set forth in its own truncated nomenclature:

- 1572 *Treat. Treasons against Q. Elizabeth* Pref. sig. a5 I cal a Machiauellian State & Regiment: where Religion is put behind in the second & last place.
- 1579 J. Stubbs *Discouerie Gaping Gulf* sig. Cvij Thys absurd manner of reasoning is very Macciauelian logick.
- 1592 *Greenes Groats-worth of Witte* To Gentl. Acquaint. sig. F Is it pestilent Machiuiilian pollicy that thou hast studied?
- 1613 G. Chapman *Reuenge Bussy D'Ambois* iv. sig. H2 These are your Macheuilian Villaines.
- 1631 W. Gouge *Gods Three Arrowes* i. xix. 26 What got that Machivillian politician Achitophell.
- c1650 J. Row & J. Row *Hist. Kirk Scotl.* (1842) 162 *Divide et regna* is an old Matchiavilian maxime and trick.

- a1652 A. Wilson *Hist. Great Brit.* (1653) 185 The true way of Treaties is with Christian, not Machiavelian policy.
- 1722 W. Bond in J. Hartcliffe *Treat. Virtues* (ed. 2) Ded. 5 The refined Matchiavillian thinkers have..altered the very nature of ethicks.
- 1790 E. Burke *Refl. Revol. in France* 120 Where men follow their natural impulses, they would not bear the odious maxims of a Machiavelian policy. View more context for this quotation
- 1847 W. M. Thackeray *Vanity Fair* (1848) xxiii. 194 So this Machiavellian captain of infantry cast about him for some..stratagem.
- 1878 E. Jenkins *Haverholme* 63 Conducting his party with Machiavellian subtlety.
- 1928 T. S. Eliot *For Lancelot Andrewes* 65 No one was ever less “Machiavellian” than Machiavelli.
- 1951 R. Crossman *Diary* 5 Dec. in M. Foot *Aneurin Bevan* (1973) II. ix. 373 Bevanism and the Bevanites seem much more important..and Machiavellian to the rest of the Labour Party..than they do to us.
- 1971 K. Gottschalk in B. de Ferranti *Living with Computer* v. 45 Its Machiavellian overtones suggest a ruthless and pragmatic manipulation of men, money and materials to achieve ends concealed from the world at large.
- 1985 H. Carpenter *Secret Gardens* ii. i. 111 The Machiavellian behaviour of the weasel, who plays every kind of trick on the other animals.

(T. S. Eliot above in 1928, by the way, was right but that is for another time.)

These terms are readily used in the media and few, if any readers on encountering them, would consult a dictionary to find their meaning, so generally known are they now. A search of the *New York Times* archives from 1980 to date on the term “*Machiavellian*” produced 11,857 hits on 21 February 2021. Cardinal Pole does get a single hit. Not one.

4. Conclusion

I conclude from reviewing this evidence that Machiavelli has “accumulated media capital” through his recurrent and compounded representation in media from You Tube videos, to feature films, television series, books, and in the very language itself (Note 10). In van Krieken’s words “once the public face of the celebrity has been elevated and internalized in the popular culture, it indeed possesses an immortal quality that permits it to be recycled”. The example he cites is Elvis. Humbly, I suggest that Machiavelli is a like example. Not even Elvis has become an adjective and noun as Machiavelli has. Brand Machiavelli exists.

It may be objected that much of Machiavelli's reputation is dark, so dark that in social psychology a condition that includes a Machiavelli index is called the Dark Triad (Note 11). Does he not recommend unethical, immoral, and unacceptable conduct? Though with T.S. Eliot among others, I am less sure that he does these things, let us simply leave them aside on the assumption that infame may entwine with fame. Notoriety fuels fame, as the bad boys and girls of rock music and sports have long known.

Acknowledgements

My thanks for the advice and suggestions of Katie Blake, Damian Grace, and Lukasz Swiatek along with the anonymous referees.

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Notes

Note 1. Corner, Mediated Persona and Political Culture: Dimensions of Structure and Process, 388 and Rojek, “Niccolo Machiavelli, Cultural Intermediaries and the Category of Achieved Celebrity”, 456.

Note 2. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 71. A similar remark can be found by Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, 59.

Note 3. Pole, *Apologia to Charles V*, 275 where he wrote Machiavelli was “an enemy of the human race”, “the hand of Satan”, “unworthy of being born”, and “stink of Satan’s every wickedness”, Whew! The man did not pull his punches. Pole was soliciting a pension from the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in demonstrating his zealous defense of the one true faith, ferreting out its enemies in the pages of books he had not read, a tradition that defenders of the faith continue to this day.

Note 4. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 359.

Note 5. Daniel Boorstin, *The Image*, 5.

Note 6. van Krieken, *Celebrity Society* 15ff. See also Cashmore, *Kardashian Kulture*, throughout.

Note 7. <http://www.machiavel.be/discography/Discography.html>

Note 8. See Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me*. This hardcover book from a major publisher is a biography of the musician, who had a short life.

Note 9. Try it for yourself at <http://www.archive.org/details/artdudesarrois2005>

Note 10. Driessens, “Celebrity Capital: Redefining Celebrity using Field Theory”, 555. See also Barrie Gunter, *Celebrity Capital: Assessing the Value of Fame* (London Bloomsbury, 2014) throughout.

Note 11. Delroy Paulhus and Kevin Williams, *The Dark Triad of Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathology*, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(2002), 6, pp. 556-563.