

Tancredi's cruelty). Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* teaches that the role of the courtier is to lead the prince into the path of *virtù*, and refers to the virtues that both men and women in court should possess. Finally, the metamorphoses of the rude peasant Scopone (Prickly Pear) into the obedient Salcione (Willow), and of his young master into a good and respectable lord (Buonsignori) show that the *virtù* of good governance is to know one's place and its duties.

Other studies in this volume contain vivid descriptions of sexual adventures (and torments), and confirm the view that laughing did matter in the Renaissance. The stories abound in hermeneutic suggestions. The 'devil', for instance, has multiple significations. 'Putting the Devil back in hell' was a euphemism for narrating the sexual intercourse between the hermit Rustico and the pagan Alibech in Boccaccio's tale. Suor Mansueta metamorphosed from bride of Christ to mistress of the devil, and reached the ultimate negative limit of sexual play as a consequence. In Machiavelli's *Belfagor* the devil runs back to hell, desperate to escape his wife. Facing other devils, Captain Fear and Abbot Ruis suffer at the hands of sexually voracious and power-hungry women. These stories reflect 'stereotypical misogynistic visions' of aggressive, evil, lustful and manipulative women who test the limits of male sexual performance and identity (p. 219). The classic case of moral preaching and hypocrisy is depicted in the tale of Giuliano Brancacci, an avowed enemy of sodomites who turned out to be a man seeking sex 'with young boys in the illicit heart of Florence' (p. 219).

Ruggiero provides challenging accounts of public ethics and private morality by analysing a selection of literary and archival material. Armed with humour and determination, he deciphers the subtle codes of Renaissance narratives, and comments on the various ways in which identity and sexuality were constructed, understood and politicised. However, the overall project needed a firmer direction in terms of systematising the research findings into a theory of Renaissance social culture. I enjoyed the 'journey' into the rich landscape of early modern Italy and expected to see in a concluding chapter all the strands of information, interpretation and critique integrated into a more comprehensive conceptual framework which would contextualise Ruggiero's analysis, and enable the reader to see the connections between particular cases and broader theorising. That said, *Machiavelli in Love* deals successfully with some

rather 'hot stuff' in intellectual history, and commands scholarly attention.

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Literature and International Relations: Stories in the Art of Diplomacy by Paul Sheeran. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. 238pp., £55.00, ISBN 978 0 7546 4613 6

Republic of Readers? The Literary Turn in Political Thought and Analysis by Simon Stow. New York: SUNY Press, 2007. 185pp., £45.00, ISBN 978 0 7914 7089 3

A discussion between the authors of these two books would assuredly end in a dispute: Paul Sheeran closes *Literature and International Relations* with the strong claim that 'Literature in International Relations is as valid as fact – stories invariably shape the science' (p. 189). By contrast, Simon Stow's *Republic of Readers?* refutes Sheeran's underlying thesis, as the book elaborates on the problem of why 'Literature cannot ... serve as empirical evidence for claims about the *unwritten* world', meaning our empirical reality, 'because the standards of justification demanded by literary analysis are lower than those required for analysis of the *written* world' (p. 149), i.e. the world created by fiction. In other words, Sheeran's book is an example of what Stow calls the literary turn in political thought, designating the growing interest of political science in fiction and literary criticism as points of reference. Due to their diametrically opposed attitudes towards this literary turn, the books presented by the authors differ completely in structure, approach and target audience.

Sheeran develops his main claim by taking the reader on a journey through the vast landscape of topics either abandoned, disregarded or not yet sufficiently explored by scholars in international relations: casting a beam on issues as disparate as utopias and the practice of diplomats, Sheeran provides us with an overview of 'hot topics' in IR, and he simultaneously introduces us to literary works dealing with these particular issues. The literary corpus is equally vast and diverse, ranging from what have become the usual suspects in the field such as Shakespeare or H. G. Wells, to Chinese writers less known in Western countries. Sheeran on the one hand demonstrates how these different works of fiction

illustrate pressing problems with more vigour than any scientific treatise could, and how they let readers take different viewpoints. On the other hand, he highlights the prophetic nature of literature, in that some writers have forecast controversies now at the top of the political agenda.

Considering that Sheeran's arguments span less than 200 pages for this ambitious endeavour, one cannot be surprised by the fast pace and succinct style used. While readers for whom Sheeran's book represents their first encounter with the 'politics and literature' movement might have appreciated at least one detailed political analysis of an exemplary novel, Stow's criticism would probably touch Sheeran's methodological approach. Instead of arguing the usefulness of literature for political science, he scrutinises how the philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty as well as the literary critic Terry Eagleton and philosopher Judith Butler answer the same question in their works. Of these, the first two have put forward arguments which are particularly challenging for political scientists, since both Nussbaum and Rorty regard literature as conducive to liberal democracy. In their eyes, reading will invite citizens to adopt other viewpoints and, eventually, have more empathy and solidarity. Hence, they both ascribe to literature more than an illustrative character or the potential to bear political ideas, as has often been done in political science. Instead, they place great importance on literature as a means to establish an ideal polity.

Or so it appears after a first reading. Stow on the other hand meticulously analyses the main claims of the authors and thereby provides us with a valuable companion to their works. Dissecting Rorty's claims, Stow concludes that literature remains in the philosopher's vision only 'a tool of the theorist-intellectual rather than a direct source of moral insight for the citizenry' (p. 74). Although this result also contradicts Rorty's initial assumptions to a certain extent, Stow criticises tensions in Nussbaum's argumentation even more harshly. For instance, Stow accuses Nussbaum of applying a 'supply side' theory of the novel, meaning 'a theory that suggests that the impact a text has on a reader derives from the *text itself* and not the reader, and that furthermore texts have a definite and ultimately discernible meaning' (p. 51). In this context, Stow condemns the interpretations forwarded by Nussbaum as patronising and 'illiberal'.

Although at times unnecessarily aggressive in its tone, Stow's criticism of the four scholars is hard to refute and

allows one to hope for a response by those who are attacked. As suggested in the initial quote from Stow's book, one of the main problems he uncovers in the works associated with the literary turn in political thought constitutes the commingling of the written and the unwritten world. In particular, he stresses that literature is not to be taken as evidence in itself: it can 'lead us to consider alternative possibilities, but it is not ... itself evidence for the existence of these possibilities' (p. 150). Stow's caveat is to be kept in mind if one sets out to explore the literary turn in political thought as it is mandated by scholars like Sheeran – it should, however, not hinder us from embarking upon this intellectual journey at all, as it has already proved enriching to political science.

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Britain and Ireland

Instruction to Deliver: Tony Blair, Public Services and the Challenge of Achieving Targets by **Michael Barber**. London: Politico's, 2007. 418pp., £19.99, ISBN 978 1 84275 210 4

This is an extremely valuable addition to the literature on the Blair era, for it provides a detailed 'insider' account of the approach to public sector reform during New Labour's second (2001–5) term. Barber was uniquely qualified to write this book, for prior to being appointed as head of the Downing Street Delivery Unit, he had been a teacher, and thus served at the chalk-face himself. As such, although this book is partly a personal memoir of Barber's own career, he emphasises that his primary concern is not so much to examine the 'why' of public sector reform as to provide a first-hand account of 'how' such reform was pursued.

In so doing, Barber clearly conveys the unequivocal and unshakeable faith which New Labour had in its particular approach to public sector modernisation,