In ancient Greek drama, potentially offensive topics, such as murder or sex, were typically depicted offstage. According to a popular tradition, the term ‘obscenity’ would take its derivation from this practice. Niccolò Machiavelli, the Renaissance political genius and author of the infamous *The Prince* (1513), is said have been the first to put the obscenity of power onstage, to ‘enter into evil’. In other words, he was the first to reveal how power actually works against a thousand-year-old political tradition, which focused in large part on praising a ruler’s good virtues.

Celebrating the 500th anniversary of the writing of *The Prince*, this course will offer an overview of Machiavelli’s life and works in the context of early sixteenth-century Italy. We will discuss his representation of power by reading a number of his more significant works: *The Prince*, the *Discourses on Livy*, the play *Mandrake Root*, and the short biographical account *The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*. We will also compare his political thought to current issues in American and Italian politics. Finally, we will watch a film related to this topic: *The Profession of Arms* (2001) by the Italian filmmaker Ermanno Olmi.