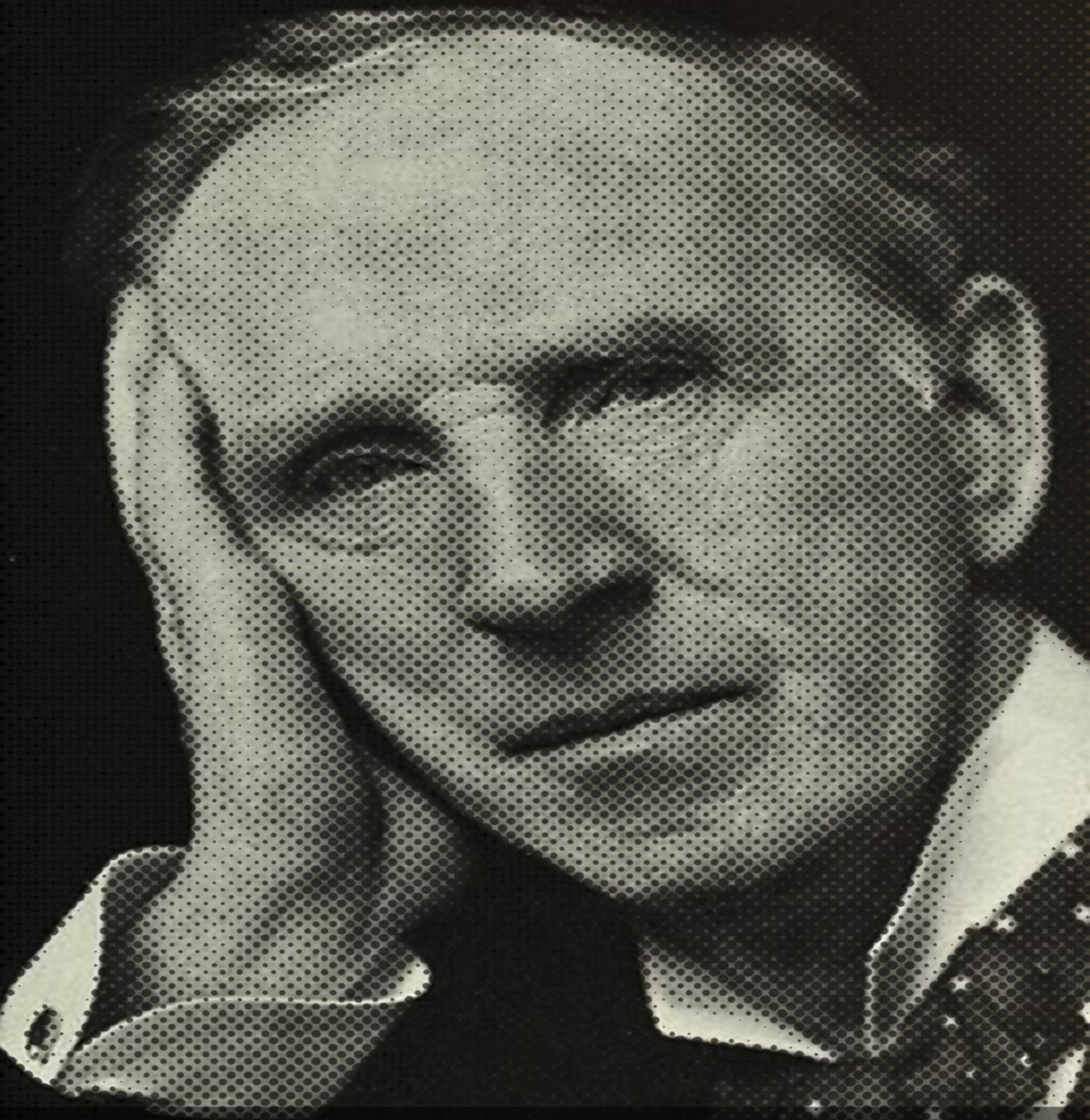


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Born in 1482, he was a little younger than Machiavelli and Michelangelo, and he died in 1540. He was descended from a tolerably long line of respectable burghers, of whom he has left us a full account, including half a dozen vignettes that show in graphic style what manner of folk they were. They kept shops where they sold silk and other wares; they owned ships and were their own skippers; they went to the Levant and Flanders and wherever else in the narrower and simpler trade of that day money was to be picked up; and they filled at one time or another all the various public posts of secondary rank in Florence. A sort of family likeness is to be traced among them. The men were strong, good-looking, warm in temper yet cautious in politics, weighty, of good character according to the standard of time and place, and with a sharp eye to the main chance. The Guicciardini were not great people, but they were steady, well-to-do, respectable people, and the historian was proud of his stock. Two things in the world, he told his descendants, he cared about—one, the perpetual exaltation of the city and its freedom; the other, 'the glory of our house, not only for my life, but for always.'

It has been energetically said of 'the sombre and sublime Italy' of the sixteenth century, that life was a mortal combat, the house a fortress, the garment a cuirass, hospitality an ambush, the embrace a garotte, the proffered cup poison, the proffered hand a dagger-thrust.^[2] This, however, was not all, and in truth this fierce melodrama