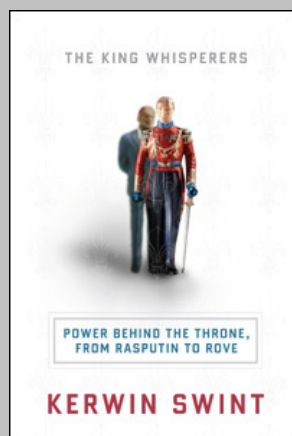


Book Club Discussion Guide



The King Whisperers: Power behind the Throne, From Rasputin to Rove

by **Kerwin Swint**

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About this book

Some stories are so terrible, so fantastic, so unreal that you just know they had to have happened.

Take Agrippina the Younger, the devoted mother would stop at nothing to secure her son's emperorship or Rome—incest, murder, cunning, whatever it took. Or Kautilya, the BC-era warlord who knew his most powerful weapon was a beautiful woman and a lovesick enemy. How about the monster Heinrich Himmler whose desire to build a race-based society of supermen led to the twentieth century's most horrifying event, the Holocaust?

These figures were all wise, ambitious, determined. They knew what they wanted and, in most cases, they knew how to get it. Power was their motivation.

These are not the great villains of history; they are not the mighty rulers of nations. They are the King Whisperers, a special breed of politician that thrives behind-the-scenes. They are the power behind the throne, not that which is seated upon it.

Too often their stories have been discussed as they relate to those of the rulers they served; some have been overlooked almost entirely. *The King Whisperers: Power behind the throne from Rasputin to Rove* by Dr. Kerwin Swint introduces the reader to 47 figures ranging from biblical times to the modern day.

They are sorted into ten archetypal groups: Machiavellians, Empire Builders, Kingmakers, Spies, Silver-Tongued Devils, Generals, Rebels, the Truly Evil, Fixers, and Schemers. Each category is defined for the reader before delving into its explanations of the four to seven highlighted individuals.

The King Whisperers offers an in-depth look at these great manipulators, sometimes exploring multiple figures that shaped a single era or movement, sometimes juxtaposing enemies and

highlighting their similar strategies. Swint explores his content in such a manner that it caters to both the historical expert and the ignoramus. He draws intriguing parallels across archetypal groups and poses questions which the reader may choose to ignore or to contemplate at length (this is especially true of the chapter on “the truly evil” King Whisperers).

The author’s careful attention to detail and fluid writing style make this book an intriguing and informative read. Its well-paced discussion and organized structure allows for the reader to pick it up at will or to read it straight-through in a single sitting.

The King Whisperers by Kerwin Swint tells the stories of some of the greatest power players and schemers in world history, from the ancient world to modern day.

Although they ruled from the shadows, history has not forgotten.

Interview with the author

Q: What inspired you to begin researching and writing *The King Whisperers*?

A: I've always been interested in political advisors, the behind-the-scenes people we sometimes think of as evil geniuses - American political consultants for example. I thought there was a need to tell the stories of some of the greatest.

Q: If you had to give a Webster definition of “King Whisperer,” what would it be?

A: Someone who either is, or aspires to be, the power behind the throne.

Q: Are you the first to coin the term “King Whisperer?” What made you choose to classify the figures this way? Were there any other possible terms that you considered using before landing on “King Whisperer?”

A: I can't say I'm the first to ever use the term, but I'm not aware of it being used in this way before. My wife's favorite TV program is *The Dog Whisperer*, and I thought “well that works in politics too.” Another title I considered was “Princes and Pawns.”

Q: You chose to chronicle figures from ten distinct archetypes. What made you choose ten? Are there other categories that could be included?

A: I tried to think of categories of leaders and styles that would fit certain individuals from history and politics. Some figures in the book could fit into more than one category, but I'm happy with the way it turned out. And 10 is a nice, round number.

Q: Do you have a favorite figure that is explored in the book? What makes him or her stand out the most to you?

A: I've long been a student of Machiavelli, he would be bemused to know his impact on western political culture. I also enjoyed writing about Francis Walsingham, Warwick the King Maker, and Dick Cheney.

Q: Did you have any difficulty in choosing a single category for each figure? Can some King Whisperers accurately fit into more than one category?

A: Yes, there were some that were difficult to put in just one category - Zhou Enlai for example, or Oliver Cromwell.

Q: Do you believe that a certain category of King Whisperers has proven to be more successful than the others? How can we measure success when it comes to indirect political power?

A: Success is often measured in relative terms, but most of the figures in the book achieved much of what they set out to do. The Fixers from Chapter 9 were very successful, while some of the Schemers from Chapter 10 ultimately fell short.

Q: Were there figures that you wished to include in the book but had to leave out due to space or other constraints?

A: Yes, I could write two or three volumes.

Q: How much time did it take you to plan, research, and write this book?

A: About a year.

Q: What's next? Might you write a follow-up book that explores the King Whisperer further, or do you begin working on a whole new topic?

A: I'm trying to decide now what to write about next. I might focus on an untold story from history, or cover something more current and topical in today's political climate. And part of me wants to leap into historical fiction.

Discussion questions

1. Are there any characteristics or personality traits that are common in a majority of the King Whisperers introduced within the book?
2. How has religion been a powerful influence to King Whisperers? Has it been mostly a positive force or a negative one?
3. What makes the female King Whisperers stand out? How come most of the female figures listed are from the ancient world? Can you think of any modern day women that serve in this role?

4. Some historical periods fostered multiple King Whisperers often on opposing sides of an issue—consider the spread of communism in the early twentieth century, the final days of Rome, World War II, the Crusades, the Renaissance, even modern day US politics—did you notice any patterns emerge? Did certain situations lead to the rise of a specific King Whisperer archetype? Are there any patterns among time periods or nationalities?
5. Can some of the figures profiled fit into more than one of the ten King Whisperer archetypes? What, for example, makes Zhou Enlai a rebel instead of a Machiavellian? Why is Big Jim Farley classified as a Kingmaker rather than a Fixer?
6. What brought some of the figures from the ranks of schemers and empire builders to the ranks of the truly evil? Swint raises many intriguing questions in his description of this archetype. Does evil exist? Or does the idea of evil depend on whose side one is on? Is the concept of evil subjective and unequivocal, or is it cast in black and white? Were the truly evil figures profiled in *The King Whisperers* mentally ill or just seriously misguided?
7. The King Whisperers “through a combination of political instinct, personal ambition, and opportunity have successfully driven political players and systems in a direction that advanced their own interests.” Why were these players unable to achieve the ultimate power—was it for these same reasons?
8. Some of the King Whisperers became rulers themselves (Joseph Stalin, for instance). What made these men and women stand apart from the others? Why are they still categorized as King Whisperers?
9. Was there a particular figure or archetype that stood out from the rest. What made this person or these persons different from their peers?
10. Do you believe that the profiled figures would have had more success if they had utilized strategies detailed in the other King Whisperer archetypes? For example: If Trotsky had slipped into the role of Kingmaker or General, could he have beaten out Stalin for the coveted position as Lenin’s right-hand man?
11. How do King Whisperers differ from the kings they serve? Can rulers get by without at least one person serving in this role?
12. The book ends with an especially poignant quote from H.L. Mencken: “The urge to save humanity is almost always only a false face for the urge to rule it.” Based on the examples presented in *The King Whisperers*, does this statement prove to be true?

A guide to the King Whisperer archetypes

- **Machiavellians** are the ‘political realists’ of history—those who counsel or practice hard-nosed power politics, along with threats, intimidation, and deception, in order to

bring stability and prosperity to their society. They also believed the success and security of the state come first; ethics second.

- **Empire Builders** have played decisive roles in building and supporting powerful institutions of which they were a part. These institutions may take various forms—government, business, and commercial, or social and religious.
- **Kingmakers** are powerful figures who arise through political or military systems but do not seek the top leadership positions for themselves, either because they are unable or unwilling to do so.
- **Spies** are some of the most clever and sometimes devious political masterminds. They are generally not from the ranks of the elites, and therefore are not rivals for the throne or candidates for supreme leader. Normally behind-the-scenes players, their understanding of the flow of information and how to attain it and use it are keys to their success.
- **Silver-Tongued Devils** are known for the ‘gift of gab’ or a charismatic presence that enabled them to succeed in politics and public life, whether it was due to great oratorical skill, the ability to sweet-talk friends and foes, or a display of diplomatic doublespeak.
- **Generals** have been in a position to exploit their power for personal or political gain. As Machiavelli said, a prince must always be knowledgeable about military affairs and strategy.
- **Rebels** led movements of rebellion and either toppled or replaced existing regimes; there were motivated by ideology, religion, economics and other factors.
- **The Truly Evil**, also dubbed the genocidal lunatics, were monsters, and sometimes thought to be mentally ill. Although the concept of a pure villainy may be difficult to define, it is easy to understand. These individuals stood apart from their whispering brethren.
- **Fixers** are brought in by leaders to perform specific functions; this is a uniquely American concept and most often includes political consultants and campaign managers.
- **Schemers** are the “wannabes” of history. They desperately seek to be in a position of power. Not many of them ever reach the “happily ever after” stage of politics. In fact, more often than not, they meet a premature, sometimes violent, end to their schemes.