

**Introduction: Speaking Truth to Power
from Medieval to Modern Italy**

“Non resta che perdere a chi ha perduto la libertà.”
(Once you have lost liberty, there remains nothing else to lose.)
Arcangela Tarabotti, *Inferno monacale* (translated as *Paternal Tyranny*)

Centuries before Lord Acton coined his famous phrase that “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” the humanist scholar Poggio Bracciolini argued in his *De infelicitate principum* (1440) that one of the four reasons for the general unhappiness of princes is precisely corruption — not as part of human nature, but as a particular vice of rulers (“Neque tantum hoc natura hominum, quantum ipsius evenit vitio principatus” 18).¹ Later in the century the humanist poet Matteo Maria Boiardo would open his *Orlando Innamorato* with the reflection that those in power have the tendency to crave what they cannot have, often putting their realms in danger in a vain attempt to secure something beyond their reach:

E sì como egli advien a' gran signori
Che pur quel voglion che non pòno avere,
E quanto son difficoltà maggiori
La disiata cosa ad otenerè,
Pongono il regno spesso in grandi erori,
Né posson quel che voglion possedere.

(1.1.5)

(And as it happens to great lords
who only want what they can't have,
the greater obstacles there are
to reaching what they would obtain
the more they jeopardize their realms,
and what they want, they cannot gain.)

The humanist chancellor of Florence Coluccio Salutati legitimized every

¹ According to Bracciolini princes are also unhappy because of their little interest in culture, their tendency to surround themselves with flatterers rather than men of real intellect, and their lack of virtue. See Loscalzo for a reading of this text as “una polemica di vasti contorni sul disinteresse del potere nei confronti della letteratura e sul rifiuto di ogni compromesso con la politica da parte dell'intellettuale” (388).

form of resistance, including tyrannicide, as a response against a ruler whose excessive ambitions had led him to disregard justice and the laws (*De tyranno*).² Indeed, the protagonists of Italian Renaissance humanism all underscored, albeit with different emphases, the immorality of power that some men exerted over others and, consequently, the need for an opposition capable of manifesting itself through words, ideas, and testimony.

Yet not all humanists belonged to what Eugenio Garin referred to as the movement's "età eroica in cui la riconquista dell'antico era stata una bella avventura, un'impresa eroica e solitaria da cavalieri erranti, senza maestri che non fossero i libri medesimi"(10). On the contrary, humanists dependent upon ruling elites, whether elective or hereditary regimes, often found themselves obliged to unconditionally support and celebrate their patrons through their writing. Lauro Martines describes these establishment intellectuals as propagandists of the state, rewarded with financial gain and social prestige for manufacturing consent among the populace rather than pursuing truth.³

The poet Lodovico Ariosto had so little faith in the integrity of his fellow writers serving patrons that in the *Orlando furioso* he has San Giovanni explain to the knight Astolfo that to arrive at the truth it would be necessary to convert every written statement into its exact opposite: "E se tu vuoi che 'l ver non ti sia ascoso, tutta al contrario l'istoria converti" ("But if you want to know what really happened, invert the story" 35.27). In *Il libro del cortegiano*, Ariosto's contemporary Baldassare Castiglione elaborately crafts three evenings of dialogue before broaching the subject of how a courtier might gain the prince's confidence sufficiently to tell him "la verità d'ogni cosa che ad esso convenga sapere, senza timor o pericolo di despiacergli" ("the truth about everything he needs to know without fear or risk of displeasing him" 4.5). Even so, the speaker Ottaviano Fregoso comments: "S'io avessi la grazia di qualche principe ch'io conosco e gli dicessi liberamente il parer mio, dubito che presto la perderei" ("If I had the favor of some of the princes I know, and if I were to tell them freely what I think, I fear I should soon lose that favor" 4.26).

After all, considerations of the political-institutional sphere of society have always shown how every political power structure is based not only on force, but also on ideological mechanisms designed to confer legitimacy upon the use and threat of such violence. The close tie between the power elite and intellectuals at their service has its justification in the necessity for all rulers to provide themselves with instruments to manipulate public opinion. Herein lies the difficulty — across a range of contexts — for individuals to freely voice

² Sozzi sees Salutati's treatise as a forerunner of Estienne de la Boétie's *De la servitude volontaire*, the quintessential Renaissance treatise on the population's right to refuse to obey an unjust sovereign (17).

³ His more cynical view of the humanists' affiliation with power can be found in the chapter "Humanism: A Program for Ruling Classes" (191-217).

their thoughts with regard to those in power, especially if their intention is correctional or contestatory.

It is understandable that openly censuring the political class should be deemed a virtually impossible undertaking when any critique could mean the loss not only of one's livelihood, but of one's very life as well. Massimo Rospocher, for example, documents how during the Renaissance perceived verbal or written affronts to the Venetian state by its residents, even statements pronounced outside the borders of its territory, could come under the juridical category of *crimen lesae maiestatis* and result in fines, imprisonment, banishment, or even more extreme physical punishments, such as the cutting out of the offender's tongue (354-55).⁴ As readers of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are shown through the example of the Thracian king Tereus cutting out his sister-in-law Philomela's tongue to prevent her from disclosing his violent rape, this particular form of punishment would additionally aim to prevent further verbal pronouncements by silencing the speaker forever.

Although the penalty is not so gruesome, today one still risks punishment for even verbal offenses to Italy's head of state through the so-called "legge contro il vilipendio." Alan Perry's essay in this volume dealing with Giovannino Guareschi's trial and imprisonment shows that this law, codified under Mussolini, could be applied in the post-war republic even when a citizen aimed not to gratuitously offend, but to arrive at the truth concerning the possibly illicit activities of a powerful political figure.

Given the difficulty and danger of critiquing those in power across time periods — as well as the advantages to be accrued from actively promoting and supporting their rule — we might not expect to find many willing to openly speak their mind. Nevertheless, history is full of examples, some famous but countless others little-known or still untold, of individuals who have voiced dissent or exposed the misdeeds of the powerful by means of speech, song, performance, art and writing, both directly and through fictional characters. One may recall that even deprived of her tongue a determined Philomela was able to narrate the tale of Tereus's vile act.

Perhaps an even more archetypal representation of the act of speaking truth to power involves another Ovidian character who, like Philomela, communicated through images: Ovid's Arachne used the art of weaving to disclose the abuses of the gods in a contest against Minerva, the goddess of needlework, wisdom, and warfare. In Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's sixteenth-century Italian verse translation of the *Metamorphoses*, the contest between the all-powerful goddess and the defiant female weaver is staged in the

⁴ Noting that Venice was not unique in this regard, Rospocher provides examples of punishments for dissident voices in other Italian states, not only hanging, beating, whipping, or chaining the perceived offender, but also piercing his (or her) tongue with a nail or impaling it with a poker (355).

epic form of the *ottava rima*. Whereas Minerva's depiction of Jove reinforces his unmovable position as king of the gods — "Giove nel mezzo imperioso siede, / Gli altri sedono bassi, egli eminente" ("Imperious Jove sits in the middle / The others are seated low, he (is) elevated" 84 *verso*) — Arachne (Aranne) strives to reveal his abuses against humankind and in particular against young females: "E con queste lascivie, e questi inganni / Nota i pensier di Giove empì, e tiranni" ("And through these lustful acts and deceptions / She denotes the impious and tyrannical thoughts of Giove" 85 *verso*).⁵ Despite the excellence of Arachne's tapestry, the angry goddess rips her artwork to shreds and then takes vengeance upon her body by striking her face and chest (see cover image). The translation makes clear that Minerva's violent reaction is not due to Arachne's immoderate pride in her art, but rather to her censorious depiction of the gods:

Quanto lodò la Dea d'Aranne l'arte,
Tanto dannò la sua profana Historia,
Che senza offender la celeste parte,
Ben acquistar potea la stessa gloria.
Tutto straccia quel panno à parte, à parte,
De celesti peccati empia memoria,
Per non mostrare à secoli novelli
Gli eccessi de gli zii, padre, e fratelli.

(86 *verso*)⁶

(As much as the goddess praised Arachne's art,
That much she condemned the profane history,
Since without offending the celestial lot,
She could have acquired the same glory.
She rips up that cloth piece by piece,
The impious record of celestial sins,
In order not to show to future generations
The excesses of her uncles, father, and brothers.)

Dell'Anguillara's translation first appeared in 1561, two years before the conclusion of the Council of Trent, whose decrees led to a period of censure in the Italian peninsula that made the previous centuries appear quite mild by comparison.⁷

Although the expression "speaking truth to power" is frequently linked to the American Quakers who used it in the title of their 1955 booklet on

⁵ Nor does Arachne keep silent about the abuses on the part of other gods, namely Pluto, Neptune, and Apollo.

⁶ In Ovid's original, moreover, gods and rulers are connected, for example, through the deification of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus (the ruler who later exiled him to Thrace on the Black Sea, where he died). The political implications of an original work by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara, his tragedy *Edippo*, are discussed in the present volume by Sandra Clerc.

⁷ For the history of censorship in Italy following the Council of Trent, see Frajese.

international conflict and approaches to peacemaking, the paradigm itself is timeless.⁸ Given that the question of speaking truth to power is not limited to either a specific historical period or particular form of government, the guest editors invited scholars to submit essays exploring instances in which literary characters and historical figures ranging from the medieval to the modern period articulated personal, political, economic, or religious freedoms or otherwise challenged the established power of the state. We welcomed attention to all levels of political power, from centralized to local, including the political power of the Church to the extent that it could take preventive or punitive action against individuals even outside the Papal States. While the papacy could — and often did — play a role in countering and limiting the power of contending sovereigns within territories of mutual influence,⁹ in many instances the Church was also intertwined with secular politics for a variety of reasons, including the fact that for centuries government representatives were involved in the offices and tribunals of the curia, which itself was often comprised of family members from the ranks of the ruling elite.

Before we move to an overview of the individual essays, it may be useful to further explain the theoretical position underpinning the guest editors' conception of the volume. Simply put, our goal has been to offer essays that shed new light or offer a fresh perspective on a range of individual and group efforts to stand up to power. Power, however, comes in different forms and the term has been used with different meanings. Many authors have grouped together under the same umbrella *political* power (which compels compliance through the use or threat of physical force), *cultural* power (activated through the spread of certain ideas), and *economic* power (which coincides with the possession and use of resources). Against this all-inclusive definition of power, we maintain that culture and wealth do not represent, in themselves, instruments of violence, and therefore can only be appropriately subsumed into the general category when they are in collusion with and backed by the power of the state. For this reason we have chosen to focus critical attention specifically on opposition to political power — for us, the distinctively aggressive form of power — because the state, regardless of the structure it assumes, is the only entity that claims a legal monopoly on the use of violence within a given territory and thereby compels compliance through physical aggression.

The conception of state power outlined above is shared by the Austrian School of economics and by libertarian philosophy. Although the Austrian School has roots dating back to the sixteenth-century School of Salamanca and

⁸ The booklet, whose full title is *Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence*, critiques the United States' aggressive military policy during the Cold War, contending that "military power in today's world is incompatible with freedom, incapable of providing security, and ineffective in dealing with evil" (online).

⁹ For historical examples, see Lottieri, *Credere nello Stato?*

even before, its core ideas were advanced by economists working in the nineteenth-century Austro-Hungarian Empire and further developed by twentieth-century Austrian economists. The commonly recognized founder of the Austrian School is Carl Menger (1840-1921), to whom are owed the theory of subjective value (based on the radical irreducibility of personal preference) and a groundbreaking reflection on the spontaneous origin and evolutionary development of human practices such as the use of money, language, and law. Menger, moreover, provided a crucial contribution to the elaboration of methodological individualism, a mode of reasoning that underscores the choices and actions of single individuals and thereby refuses to imagine collective entities (nations, classes, states, etc.) capable of acting subjectively and expressing a will.

In the course of the twentieth century both Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973) and Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992) drew on Menger's insights to develop a critical position toward state intervention and central planning in economic matters, starting from the centrality of individual human action and underlining the fact that, given the dispersed and limited nature of knowledge and expertise, no political authority could possibly substitute for the free play of social interaction. One of Mises's students, Murray Rothbard (1926-1995), further elaborated these theses in an original way by bringing libertarian philosophy — with its system of ethics based on the principle of non-aggression — to bear on the economic theories of the Austrian School.¹⁰ Rothbard, moreover, connected the subjectivity of individual preference, which is at the heart of the free market, and the objectivity of natural law, which prohibits the acceptance of power exerted over others by force or threat of violence. An important contribution in this latter area of thought comes to us from an Italian author, Bruno Leoni (1913-1967), whose writings articulate how rules that permit social life to operate are the product of social negotiation (the exchange of claims). This perspective gives rise to a focus on alternatives to legislation in the formation of laws, from Roman law (elaborated by jurisconsultants) to common law (which emerges from judgments ruled in the courts).

From the beginning and throughout its development, the Austrian School has confronted Marxism, criticizing the reductionism of a line of thought that ignores the fundamental character of political power, always a superstructure in the interactions among classes. One of the consequences of this perspective in Marx, as well as in those influenced by him in various ways, is the condemnation of “capitalist acts between consenting adults” (to use Robert

¹⁰ Rothbard's libertarianism draws largely from classical liberal philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who linked their conception of liberty to a strong defense of private property rights, and from the nineteenth-century individualist anarchists Lysander Spooner (1808-1887) and Benjamin Tucker (1854-1939).

Nozick's phrase), without an understanding of the authoritarian, oppressive, and definitive character of force monopolized by a small group. While the Austrian School shares with Marxism a conception of power as exploitative, it makes an essential distinction between power held and enforced by the state or other coercive institutions (bands of brigands, mafias, terroristic groups, etc.) and other uses of the term. In "Marxist and Austrian Class Analysis," Hans-Hermann Hoppe faults Marxism for "muddling things up" with its "fallacious model of the wage earner versus the capitalist" when in fact the real distinction is between those who acquire and increase their wealth by homesteading, producing, saving and contracting, and those who exploit the homesteaders, producers, savers, and contractors through non-productive and non-contractual acquisitions (84).¹¹

The focus on power elite analysis rather than class analysis invites researchers to recognize and investigate the form and effect of political power structures at work in any time period and at any point on the globe. Some of the proponents of this approach have occasionally delved into the interpretation of literature and other forms of cultural expression — for example, J. A. Nock's *Francis Rabelais the Man and his Work* (1929), Henry Hazlitt's *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1933), and Murray Rothbard's film reviews¹² — but it is only recently that scholars in the humanities have begun to ground their critical work directly in the Austrian School and libertarian philosophy. Paul Cantor's pioneering research in this interdisciplinary method has ranged from major English authors the likes of Shakespeare and Shelley to popular American television series such as *Gilligan's Island* and *South Park*. In the volume *Literature and the Economics of Liberty: Spontaneous Order in Culture* (2009), Cantor and his coeditor Stephen Cox present what they believe to be "the first collection of essays that accepts the idea that economics is relevant to the study of literature, but offers free market principles, rather than Marxist, as the means of relating the two fields" (x), with contributions on canonical European and American authors (including Cervantes, Jonson, Shelley, Whitman, H. G. Wells, and Cather) as well as the contemporary Nigerian novelist Ben Okri. Noting that "Marxist literary theory has only deepened what was originally an aristocratic contempt for and distrust of market principles and practices" (ix), the coeditors

¹¹ For further discussions of the economic principles of the Austrian School in relation to Marxism, see especially Osterfeld and Raico. Although Marxism has been largely discredited as economic theory and practice, Marxist criticism nevertheless remains widely known and used in academic literary criticism. See Dario Fernández-Morera's *American Academia and the Survival of Marxist Ideas* (1996) for an account of its origins and stronghold in academic literary and cultural studies.

¹² A selection of the latter, including pieces on *The Godfather* and *Cinema Paradiso*, have recently been collected in the section "Movie Reviews" in *The Rothbard Reader* (293-303). These and many other reviews can be found dispersed throughout *The Complete Libertarian Forum 1969-1984* under the rubric "Mr First Nighter."

argue that Austrian economics, “which focuses on the freedom of the individual actor and the subjectivity of values, is more suited to the study of literature and artistic creativity than a materialist, determinist, and collectivist doctrine such as Marxism” (12).

Austro-libertarian literary criticism has recently yielded new insights in a range of areas, from ancient Chinese moral philosophy (Long 2003) to American cowboy movies (McMaken 2012).¹³ Allen Mendenhall’s *Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism* (2014), which likewise argues from a theoretical standpoint for the privileging of methodological individualism over collectivism in the interpretation of texts, focuses on authors as diverse as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Shakespeare, Emerson, Mark Twain, and E. M. Forster. The current volume’s guest coeditors have also contributed to this interdisciplinary approach, albeit from different starting points. Carlo Lottieri is a political philosopher of libertarian orientation, who is interested in the historical and ideological roots of contemporary institutions.¹⁴ Jo Ann Cavallo is an Italianist who has looked increasingly to Austrian economics and libertarian philosophy in her interpretation of literary and historical texts.¹⁵

Readers need not be versed in Austro-libertarian theory, however, in order to appreciate the essays that follow. Indeed, although the contributions to this volume accord well with the Austro-libertarian framework briefly sketched above, most do not refer explicitly to this methodology. Some of the contributors have drawn from a range of contemporary theoreticians of power, such as Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Judith Butler.¹⁶ Others look to cultural anthropology, posthumanism, feminism, and Bakuninian anarchism. Still others eschew theory and base their arguments on a close analysis of the literary text in conjunction with careful attention to the historical context. The guest coeditors were gratified by the fact that a Call for Papers so expressly focused in a radical critique of political power drew the interest of scholars grounded in a variety of

¹³ More generally, see *Journal of Libertarian Studies* (1977-2008) and *Libertarian Papers* (2009-).

¹⁴ His endeavor to rethink “modernity” is most evident in *Denaro e comunità, Credere nello Stato?* and *Un’idea elvetica di libertà*.

¹⁵ This approach is used implicitly in *The Romance Epics of Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso: From Public Duty to Private Pleasure*, *The World beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto*, and “Purgatory 17: On Revenge,” and expressly in “On Political Power and Personal Liberty in *The Prince* and *The Discourses*” and “Marco Polo on the Mongol State: Taxation, Predation, and Monopolization.”

¹⁶ We might add that there are nonetheless some convergences between the first two of these critics and the Austrian School. Citing James Miller’s biography on Foucault, Cantor notes that Foucault’s opening lecture at the Collège de France for 1970 encouraged students to read precisely Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek (“The Poetics of Spontaneous Order” 11). David Gordon points out that Arendt “owned a large number of books by Mises, even more by Hayek, and two by Rothbard” (“Arendt and the Austrians”).

different traditions and methodologies.

Although a volume of this nature cannot aim to be comprehensive, the essays focus on distinct moments across a history of lived experience and fictional literature that stretches from Dante Alighieri to Elsa Morante. In some instances, contributors have revisited the writings of very well-known figures, while in other cases they have shed light on lesser-known writers as well as anonymous pronouncements such as the Pasquinades, private testimonials such as the personal letters of World War I soldiers, and choral voices such as the protest songs of female rice-workers, the *mondine*.

The volume opens with essays on the three Florentine crowns. Zane Mackin argues for the political relevance of Dante's varied and complex uses of preaching in the *Commedia* and elsewhere, exploring in particular the conditions that motivated Dante to assume the preacher's voice and his justifications of his right to preach despite ecclesiastical proclamations prohibiting laypersons from engaging in the practice ("Dante, the Rhetoric of Crisis, and Vigilante Preaching").

Steve Baker goes against the stereotypical portrait of Petrarch as a forlorn unrequited lover or a solitary figure writing letters to ancient figures of antiquity or to posterity in order to examine his involvement in the messy business of trying to improve the political reality of his day, in particular, his active support for the popular leader Cola di Rienzo in his insurrection against the aristocratic rulers of Rome ("Writing the Revolution: Petrarch and the Tribune of Cola di Rienzo").

Boccaccio's *Decameron*, dubbed a "merchant epic" by Vittore Branca for its vast fresco of human interactions in the marketplace, also includes its share of characters who speak truth to power. Madonna Filippa, for example, in a court trial in which she faces a death sentence for adultery, wittily defends herself by refuting the legitimacy of a law made without her consent, proclaiming self-ownership of her body and evoking free market principles (*Decameron* 6.7). She thereby not only successfully regains her freedom but also succeeds in overturning an unjust law. Karina Attar focuses on another *Decameron* wife who is accused by her husband of adultery — this time wrongly so, despite the literary connotations of her name, Ginevra — and who is eventually able to disclose the truth through her entrepreneurial ingenuity ("Speaking Truth to Powerful Friends and Foes: Genoese Merchants and the Mamluks in *Decameron* 2.9").

One of the fundamental commonalities in speaking out against the power elite regardless of time period and geographical location is the sheer difficulty of the enterprise. Coming through in various essays included in the volume, this theme is at the center of Alessandra Mantovani's discussion of Giovanni Garzoni's *Speculum veritatis*, a work that aims to balance discretion with honest advice ("*Speculum veritatis*: Giovanni Garzoni e la tradizione dell'*institutio principis* nella Bologna dei Bentivoglio").

Matteo Bosisio draws our attention to Antonio Cammelli, another fifteenth-century humanist, whose tragedy *Panfila* lays bare the dark side of courtly politics (“Fuggendo da lui fuggo la morte”: libertà, vendetta, polemica anti-cortigiana nella *Panfila* di Antonio Cammelli). Based on Boccaccio’s novella of Ghismonda speaking truth to her father, Prince Tancredi of Salerno (*Decameron* 4.1), *Panfila* further develops the themes of corruption, injustice, betrayal, and oppression through both the plot and inserted invectives that echo Cammelli’s own poetic output.

Jo Ann Cavallo maintains that the opening novella of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti’s *Porretane* not only harbors a thinly veiled critique of the military adventurism and rhetorical manipulation of those wielding political power, namely, the pope and the emperor, but also subtly pits the free movement inherent in a market economy against the coercive violence of the political state (“Contracts, Surveillance, and Censure of State Power in Arienti’s *Triunfo da Camarino* novella [*Le porretane* 1.1]”).

Laurie Shepard examines the development of Pietro Aretino’s vituperative writings over the course of two decades, exploring the Venetian context of his increasingly aggressive assertions of his right to act as the scourge of princes. She also situates his satirical works in relation to the genre of pasquinades, witty sayings and poems lampooning mostly prominent figures in the Roman Curia that since the early sixteenth century were customarily displayed on a certain statue in Rome (“*Petrus Aretinus acerrimus virtutum ac vitiorum demonstrator*”).

Linda L. Carroll places into historical context the literary and theatrical career of Angelo Beolco, usually referred to by the name of the peasant character Ruzante that he created and played on the stage, in order to help account for both his extraordinary outspokenness and the (temporary) patrician acceptance of his biting critiques (“Ruzante Speaks Truth to Venetian Power: Some Hows, Whys, Whens, and Wherefores”). Her essay includes close analyses that highlight his serious concern for the rights of peasants on the mainland and his various comedic strategies.

Diletta Gamberini takes into consideration Benvenuto Cellini’s literary works, in particular his autobiography and *Trattati dell’Oreficeria e della Scultura*. Her analysis demonstrates that even though Cellini is known for his boisterous outspoken character, he was compelled to revise and temper his words against Cosimo de’ Medici in a process of self-censorship in order for the latter work to see the light during his lifetime (“Benvenuto Cellini e il problema di sapere ‘pur troppo dire il fatto suo’ a Cosimo de’ Medici”). Her essay also devotes attention to contentious legal petitions that Cellini addressed to the Florentine magistrate — and thus indirectly to Cosimo — shortly before his death.

Noting that in the course of the sixteenth century the genre of tragedy became a privileged space in which to shine a critical spotlight on political

power, Sandra Clerc analyzes the figure of the ruler in four tragedies published between 1550 and 1565: Alessandro Spinelli's *Cleopatra*, Lodovico Dolce's *Ifigenia* and *Marianna*, and Giovan Andrea dell'Anguillara's *Edippo* ("Verità e potere, ubbidienza e menzogna nella tragedia italiana del Cinquecento [1550-1565]"). She finds that while all four tragedies present variations on the theme of speaking truth to a tyrant, it is generally the female protagonist, when present, who most openly challenges an unjust ruler.

Laura Benedetti focuses on Torquato Tasso's epistolary regarding his *Gerusalemme liberata* prior to its publication, chiefly his lengthy letter to Silvio Antoniano of the Roman Curia, highlighting his mode of reasoning and some of his rhetorical strategies (*Le ragioni della poesia: Torquato Tasso e Silvio Antoniano*). According to Benedetti, the poet strove to preserve as much personal and artistic liberty as possible in an increasingly restrictive cultural environment.

Francesco Sberlati analyzes the relation between political power and literary production in the Seicento, focusing especially on the genre of political oratory. He thereby lays bare the reality of court life in which the courtier who serves the ruling elite through encomiastic writing has little scope to speak his mind ("Il buon poeta è il più bugiardo": adulazione e falsità nella letteratura barocca").

Elissa Weaver's essay is dedicated to the Venetian writer and Benedictine nun Arcangela Tarabotti whose *La semplicità ingannata* (known in English as *Paternal Tyranny*) condemned the unfair treatment of women and especially the practice of forced monasticism, indicting fathers, the State, and the Church for their complicity in denying women the exercise of their free will ("With Truthful Tongue and Faithful Pen": Arcangela Tarabotti Against Paternal Tyranny").

It may also happen that one's protest against the abuses of the political elite, while suppressed or ignored in one's own milieu, will instead be positively received and even used as propaganda by rival or enemy nations. Nicola Rivero demonstrates how this occurred in the case of the polemical Catholic theologian Paolo Sarpi, whose criticisms of papal politics offered Protestant writers in England the means to support their arguments against the pope and the Church of Rome ("Paolo Sarpi: The Hunted Friar and his Popularity in England").

Marco Codebò's "Potere, dissimulazione e verità nei *Promessi sposi* (1840) e nella *Storia della colonna infame*" investigates the lack of truthfulness prevalent among characters at all levels of society in Manzoni's opus before focusing on two important exceptions in which a powerless individual in both *I promessi sposi* (1840) and *La storia della colonna infame* nevertheless finds the courage to speak truth to power.

Valentina Nocentini examines the massive propaganda campaign preceding and surrounding the 1911-1912 War in Libya, noting the complicity of the state apparatus, the banking cartels, and the military-industrial complex, as well as many Italian journalists and authors, before analyzing a short story by the little-

known writer Arturo Rossato whose puppeteer protagonist refuses to comply with the war machine via an unforgettable gesture (“L’Italia della guerra di Libia (1911-1912): un burattinaio contro il potere”).

Quinto Antonelli offers us a glimpse into the roughly four billion postcards and letters penned by Italian peasant soldiers during World War I, underscoring those that protested not only against the brutal conditions facing them, but also against the dubious premises under which they were sent to the front to kill or be killed (“Una rivolta morale: lettere e diari di soldati italiani dai fronti della Grande Guerra [1915-1918]”).

Diana Garvin’s “Singing Truth to Power: Melodic Resistance and Bodily Revolt in Italy’s Rice Fields” uses work songs and testimonials to investigate how the *mondine* challenged and rebelled against the Fascist propaganda that attempted to cast them as a symbol of productive womanhood as they worked in the rice paddies.

Alan Perry traces Giovannino Guareschi’s resistance to Nazi brutality as a prisoner of war, his opposition to the Communist party in the post-war period, and his accusation against the Christian Democrat Alcide De Gasperi in a consistent non-violent condemnation of the abuses of those who wielded power (“Giovannino’s ‘Libertà’: Guareschi’s Personal Freedom in Opposition to Power”).

In the volume’s final essay Maria Giménez Cavallo uses posthumanism, feminism, and anarchism as a lens to show how the characters in *La storia* give bodily form to Morante’s passionate denunciation of all institutionalized systems of control (“Elsa Morante’s *La storia*: A Posthumanist, Feminist, Anarchist Response to Power”).

We chose to arrange the twenty selected essays in chronological order not to impose a teleological vision, but to help contextualize occurrences in which writers dared to confront power structures across the centuries, allowing similarities and differences to emerge naturally across the peninsula’s shifting social, economic, and political configurations. As Clifford Geertz remarked when referring to the general concept of culture, “we need to look for systematic relationships among diverse phenomena, not for substantive identities among similar ones” (44). Readers will undoubtedly encounter both commonalities and differences in the manner of speech employed, the nature of the truth expounded, and the form of political power addressed and opposed among the many thought-provoking contributions contained in this volume.

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