

Marco Cavarzere. *La prassi della censura nell'Italia del seicento: Tra repressione e mediazione.*

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The opening, in 1998, of the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which includes the historical records of the Holy Office and the Index, makes way for the elaboration of a rich historiography in which the book by Cavarzere brilliantly fits. Cavarzere succeeds in rearranging the ecclesiastical censorship machine in the “long Italian seventeenth century” (242) in an articulated framework, thanks to impressive research on mostly unpublished material. He reveals the complex picture of an authoritarian power from “omnivorous appetites” (47) that sought to control minds through intellectual production, and that knew how to preserve itself through “repression and mediation,” the two sources of its balance.

The study's opening clarifies the structure and operation of the three Roman institutions responsible for censorship: the Holy Office, the Index, and Master of the Sacred Palace. Cavarzere illustrates the overlap and clash between the jurisdictions of these Roman Church bodies, with the increasing preeminence of the Inquisition, the competition or connivance with peripheral ecclesiastical censorship (local inquisitorial courts and religious orders), and the secular censorship of the various Italian states.

Particular attention is devoted to describing the shift that happened in the seventeenth century: with reformed heresy no longer at the center of attention, it was the Italian book market that was watched in order that it did not deviate from the dictates of the Council of Trent and the precepts of the new religious sensibility. With the Index of 1664, an alphabetical catalog included primarily Catholic authors, and the Church's efforts focused on an “internal police” (61). Even though the anti-Protestant fight was no longer a priority, proscription lists included reformed lawyers and political theorists; the apparatus censors also tried in every way to hinder the spread of new political concepts, which refuted the temporal sovereignty of papal power and claimed jurisdiction of kings over their kingdoms without ecclesiastical legitimacy.

In the censors' networks free scientific speculation and theological debates within the Catholic world also got through until the extinction of Jansenism in the second half of the seventeenth century. In addition, the spectrum of Roman censorship quickly adapted to the new wealth of media acting in the seventeenth century, not merely in order to prohibit books, but all kinds of printed material deemed dangerous: loose sheets, proclamations, images, copper figures and medals, theatrical booklets, and musical works. Manuscripts, however, escaped control because of the instability and anarchy of their circulation (38–39).

But who were the censors? The most original section of the book is the second one, detailing the censors, the criteria underlying their appointments, their origin, and their often contradictory network of relationships. Through some case studies Cavarzere investigates the “multiple identities” and “dangerous liaisons” of censors

in the seventeenth century, as he enters their daily work, tracing the map of their “different loyalties” toward the Church, the elites of their hometowns, and men of letters or science (135).

The reconstruction of the individual vicissitudes of the Master of the Sacred Palace, Raimondo Capizucchi, and the consulters of the Congregation of the Index — Lodovico Sergardi (author, under a pseudonym, of satirical poems against Gianvincenzo Gravina) and Francesco Bianchini, astronomer from Verona and Member of the Royal Society — makes it possible for Cavarzere to convincingly use the concept of brokerage. The Italian censors of the seventeenth century were “amphibious creatures” (xvi), mediators between Roman magistracies and the République des Lettres, to which often belonged the same judges or reviewers and consultants of the judges. A blend and an “exchange of roles” based on “perfect knowledge of the rules of the game” (124), which only strengthened the capillary action of censorship, making it more effective.

The last part of the book deals with the reactions by society toward censorship and the survival strategies implemented by the authors who suffered censorship. Here Cavarzere confronts “the problem of decadence” (223), or the otherwise marginalization of Italy by leading European intellectual currents of the day. Careful consideration on negotiations between authors and censors on self-expurgation and especially on self-censorship (perhaps the worst kind of censorship) shows the pervasiveness of a repressive system that had learned to rely on “persuasion and fear” (217). All of this led to the triumph of the conformism and the “courtier model” (244). The exceptions were more apparent than real: Cavarzere tackles intelligently the figures that go under the name of libertines and shows how their antagonism to Rome, in fact, moved along within the same lines that censorship had forged and exploited.

Indeed, rare were any radical objections questioning the fundamental assumption that held the entire censorious apparatus that knowledge should not be extended to all but had possession and privilege for a chosen few. We would have to wait until the eighteenth century to witness the “regime of double truth, one for the happy few and the other for the mass, of which each understanding should be foreclosed” (xvii).

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