

**Europa e Italia.
Studi in onore di Giorgio Chittolini**

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***Impertinent meddlers in state building:
an anti-war movement
in seventeenth-century Italy***

by Edward Muir

During the desperate waning years of the Thirty Years War, a curious anonymous book appeared with no place of publication and a false date. The title page of *L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino* prints 1643 as the date of publication, but the conceit of the book is that the soul of the deceased Ferrante Pallavicino, who was executed in 1644, returns to earth one evening to converse with his old friend, Henrico. All of this subterfuge, which had the soul of Pallavicino return to earth the year before he died, obscured the book's true origins and protected the true author¹. Toward the end of *L'Anima*, embedded in a long discursive passage, is a remarkable claim for a book published in the midst of the Counter Reformation: the Christian religion is a thing of fear, «indeed even the fear of a madman». The only palliative for the madness of religion is to recognize that «men have the ability to establish laws over God» («gli Huomini abbiano facoltà di componere Leggi sopra Dio»)². That is indeed a radical claim. If humans can impose laws on God, then what is God? Does he have any moral authority, let alone power over human events? Would there be any reason for there to be a God, except as the deists assert, as the Prime Mover of the Universe? And why would the total rejection of divine law be proposed in the 1640s? I want to suggest that disgust with the prolonged wars of the seventeenth century, especially with the role of the papacy in those wars, corroded not just acceptance of the authority of the Church but undermined the very conception of war as a necessary evil, a necessary manifestation of the then new fangled idea of *ragione di stato*. During the seventeenth century anti-war arguments and religious skepticism went hand in glove.

¹ [Giovanni Francesco Loredan ?], *L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino*, Villafranca [Amsterdam or Geneva ?] 1643.

² *Ibidem*, p. 81. In a previous work, *L'Adamo*, Venice 1650, Loredan seems to raise the question that the death of the soul is implied by Adam's Fall, that the mortality of the body is matched by the mortality of the soul. To him the death of the soul was the direct consequence of the Fall. *L'Adamo* has usually attracted scholars' attention because of its overt misogyny, which Arcangela Tarabotti attacked, but I am suggesting in light of my reading of *L'Anima* that Loredan rejects the immortality of the soul, albeit very indirectly, in both texts.

One of the bits of trivia I memorized long ago for my PhD exams in European history was the fact that there were during the entire seventeenth century only four years of peace. The most famous of all these wars is the Thirty Years War, which was mostly fought in Germany but was in one respect merely the final phase of the Eighty Years War between Spain and the Protestant powers in the Netherlands. These were but a prelude to later conflicts including the maritime Anglo-Dutch wars that turned New Amsterdam into New York and the continental wars of Louis XIV. In these conflicts religious intolerance cohabited uneasily with *ragione dello stato*, the first a century-old legacy of the Reformation and its wars of religion, the second a product of the new ideology of absolutism. In contrast, the Italian wars of the period – the War of Mantuan Succession (1628-1631) and the Wars of Castro (1641-1644 and 1649) – were primarily dynastic and territorial struggles, not ideological confrontations. As a result in Italy it became much harder than in northern Europe to imagine that God was on your side.

In contrast to the early sixteenth century when the great European wars were mostly fought in Italy and the Italian states were struggling for their very survival, by the seventeenth Italy was a side-show in European conflicts, the Italian states themselves minor players in their own affairs. Virtually the entire peninsula submitted to Spanish hegemony. There were Spanish viceroys in Milan and Naples. The only large states surviving with their independence intact were Savoy and the Republic of Venice. In the balance were a few small states, such as Mantua.

In 1627 the male line of the Gonzaga dynasty, which ruled the Duchy of Mantua and the Marquisate of Montferrat, died out after the last three Gonzaga dukes, all brothers, failed in the conjugal bed. The issue of Mantuan succession opened the way for a confrontation between France and Spain over the control of northern Italy because of the strategic positions of the Gonzaga territories. Spain needed to protect Milan, but Savoy wanted the fortress of Casale in Montferrat to defend the upper Po. Consisting of an intermittent Spanish siege of Casale and the brutal imperial sack of Mantua, the War of Mantuan Succession soon petered out because Spain, France, and the Empire were all heavily committed elsewhere and because a soldier-killing plague, described by Manzoni in *I promessi sposi*, struck Milan and Mantua. A sideline to the war, however, was the proposed Venetian Enterprise, the plan seriously considered in Spain to attack Venice after Mantuan succession was settled. Nothing came of the Venetian Enterprise, but the secret plan came out, souring Venice's relations with Spain³.

Fast on the heels of the War of Mantuan Succession was the notorious aggression of the Barberini Pope Urban VIII (the very pope who had silenced Galileo) and the Pamphili Pope Innocent X against Odoardo Farnese, Duke of Parma and Piacenza, aggression that provoked the Wars of

³ J.H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline*, New Haven 1986, p. 55-61, 337-346, 375-406.

Castro. An otherwise minor episode, the Wars of Castro stimulated anti-war sentiments more than any other violent conflict in seventeenth-century Italy. A good measure of those sentiments might be Girolamo Brusoni's *Delle historie memorabili, contiene le Guerre d'Italia de' nostri tempi* (Venice, 1656). In his dedication Brusoni notes the book is not a celebration of martial valor but a condemnation of the horrors of war: «per temperare all'Italia con sì fausta memoria la funesta ricordanza di tanti mali, quanti per gli ultimi venti anni addietro il cieco furor della Guerra ne' nostri popoli ha derivato»⁴. Odoardo Farnese held the feudal enclave of Castro adjacent to the Papal States, and after he quarreled with the pope's nephews during a visit to Rome in 1639, Urban VIII prohibited the sale in Rome of grain from Castro, depriving Odoardo of a significant source of income and preventing him from repaying his Roman creditors. Speaking of the nephews, Brusoni reported that,

A causa di sue pretensioni, o malgradite, o sprezzate da loro; né minore era il desiderio, che nudrivano i Barberini di mortificare il medesimo Principe, e per lo disprezzo, che aveva egli mostrato di loro... Onde giunto quel tempo, che aveva la Provvidenza Divina destinato a correzione della superbia de' Grandi; e a castigo della licenza, e del lusso de' Popoli, permise, che questi segreti odii, e disgusti svaporassero in pubblico incendio di turbolenze, e di guerre⁵.

In the ensuing war, Venice, Modena, and Tuscany backed Parma while Rome's requests for Spanish aid went unanswered. One of the horrors of the little war was the sack of Codigoro on the lower Po, which was contested between Venice and the papal armies. «Solita brutalità della guerra, quasi che sia una spezie di Religione il non conoscere Religione, alcuna negli eccessi della licenza militari; e che non si possano pagare alla divinità i beneficii, che ne ricevono dello spirito, e della vita fuorche a pezzo di bestemmie, e di sacrilegii»⁶. The final result of the war was a humiliating defeat for the pope and his nephews who had infuriated the Roman populace by pillaging antique monuments («Quod non fecerunt Barbari, fecerunt Barbarini») and by littering the city with the Barberini bee emblem. A pasquinade from the period depicted a weeping Catholic emperor, defeated by the Swedish Protestant King Gustavus Adolphus and asking the Church for assistance. The pasquinade had the Church reply, «Non ho niente per darti mio difensore, perché le mosche [i.e. the Barberini bees] mi succhiano fino le viscere»⁷.

Pope Urban died a few months after the peace, but war over Castro resumed in 1649 when Odoardo's son, Duke Ranuccio II, reneged on his father's promise to repay the Roman creditors and to accept Pope Innocent X's appointed bishop of Castro. When the bishop was murdered on the road

⁴ Girolamo Brusoni, *Delle historie memorabili, contiene le Guerre d'Italia de' nostri tempi*, Venezia 1656, n.p., dedication.

⁵ Brusoni, *Delle historie memorabili*, p. 248.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 265.

⁷ Gregorio Leti, *Nipotismo di Roma*, Amsterdam 1667 [?], p. 224-227.

to Castro the pope retaliated by sending troops to Castro who completely destroyed the town. It has never been rebuilt.

The Wars of Castro provoked an anti-war movement among writers in Venice. This anti-war movement had two strains. The first consisted of dyspeptic arguments about the princely rights of the Duke of Parma over his feudal enclave of Castro. The seventeenth-century debate about the status of Castro, however, has the ephemeral character of journalism. The second strain contributed to a deeper anti-war argument. Some writers challenged the very foundations for contemporary wars, especially the claim that the venal ambitions of the papacy enjoyed divine sanction. The specific target of this argument was easy to criticize but dangerous to rouse, the Barberini family of Pope Urban VIII. By unmasking the pope's violation of the rights of legitimate princes, the anti-war writers crystallized the persistent anti-clerical traditions of Italian culture into an ideology that divorced *ragione di stato* from God's grace. For an influential stratum of Italian intellectuals the papacy as an institution, not just individual popes, was part of the problem rather than the solution, and these anti-clerics, several of whom were themselves clerics, argued their case without any overt inclination toward Protestantism. They relied on the pre-Tridentine, fifteenth-century Catholic theories of conciliarism rather than on the more contemporary heresies. It is hard to give these seventeenth-century Italian intellectuals a label. They were certainly not liberals in the English sense. Some scholars have considered them proto-Enlightenment thinkers, but they were certainly indebted to Renaissance humanism. Their enemies called them libertines. "Skeptics" might be the best term because their prevailing characteristic was doubt. They did not articulate an alternative society so much as unmask the dark side of their own.

These thinkers were not especially original, which, in fact, accounts for some of their popular appeal. They built upon the traditions of Italian skepticism that included writers such as Aretino, Ochino, Poggio, Ficino, Poliziano, Pomponazzi, Cremonini, Galileo, and, of course, Machiavelli⁸. As the inclusion of Machiavelli on this list indicates, Italian skepticism was not especially pacifist. Italian pacifism had other roots: in the Spiritual Franciscans and the letters of St. Catherine of Siena. The anti-war writers of the seventeenth century, however, thought in a different direction. Borrowing from the essay form of Montaigne, these writers addressed what was rapidly becoming a European republic of letters in which the lingua franca was no longer Latin and not yet French but Italian. The proto-journalism of the Venetian printing industry made it possible to spread in cheap print and good Tuscan a flood of words that promoted doubt in established institutions and authorities⁹. In that, I submit, lies the significance of the seventeenth-century anti-war

⁸ N. Davidson, *Unbelief and Atheism in Italy, 1500-1700*, in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. by M. Hunter and D. Wootton, Oxford 1992, p. 56.

⁹ B. Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism: Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture*, Baltimore 1999.

movement. Neither original nor philosophically sophisticated, these writers were brilliant propagandists and cultural critics, people who undermined authority through satire, novels, and histories.

The city of Venice and its satellite university town of Padua remained a relatively free-thinking island in Catholic, Spanish-dominated Italy. Due to the intermingling of ideas from religious skeptics, Jewish philosophers, and various heterodox foreigners, who constituted what was perhaps the most diverse population in western Europe, Venice was unusually cosmopolitan¹⁰. Padua was the only university in Italy where Protestants and Jews could actually study along side Catholics despite the Council of Trent's prohibition of non-Catholics taking degrees¹¹. The largest nation of students at Padua were the Germans, many of whom were Protestants who voiced an alternative to the Catholic propaganda that prevailed in Spanish Italy during the Thirty Years War.

Venice had the largest publishing industry in Italy and one of the largest in Europe. Venice and Rome signed an agreement in 1596 to enforce the Index of Prohibited Books among Venetian publishers, but if only for commercial reasons the Republic was a reluctant censor, and prohibited books – dangerous stuff like Machiavelli, Luther, and vernacular Bibles – could usually be bought from under the counters of Venetian booksellers. In its official culture the Republic of Venice was certainly orthodox, but Venetian officials were jealous of their prerogatives over the local church, which brought them into direct political conflict with the Counter Reformation papacy¹². Especially after the epic confrontation between Venice and Rome when Pope Paul V placed the Republic under Interdict (1606-1607), Venetian officials tolerated and sometimes even encouraged rabid anti-papal and anti-Spanish polemics.

The most important intellectual in seventeenth-century Venice was the Servite friar Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623), known throughout Europe for his *History of the Council of Trent* (published pseudonymously in England in 1619). After the imposition of the papal Interdict against Venice in 1606, Sarpi defended in print not just the republican liberty of Venice but the rights of secular princes everywhere against the universalizing claims of the Counter-Reformation papacy. Sarpi's pamphlets led some to compare his attacks on the papacy to those of Luther and to imagine a new Reformation was in the works. His attacks on the papacy hit home. Two hired assassins stabbed the friar while he was crossing a bridge just outside his convent. The thugs fled to the Papal State and later received a pension from the Spanish

¹⁰ M. Infelise, *Books and Politics in Arcangela Tarabotti's Venice*, in *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice*, ed. by E.B. Weaver, Ravenna 2006, p. 57.

¹¹ P.F. Grendler, *The University of Padua 1405-1600: A Success Story*, in *History of Higher Education*, 10 (1990), p. 7-17, 36-37.

¹² P.F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605*, Princeton 1977. On local Venetian religion and piety, see E. Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, Princeton 1981.

viceroy in Naples, which revealed the hand of those who had hired them. Sarpi survived the attack and produced a series of books that lambasted clerical wealth, the papacy, and Spanish Habsburg ambitions in Italy. Sarpi's survival not just from other potential assassins but from persecution by the Roman Inquisition depended entirely on his Venetian patrons. One of the signs of Venice's continued resistance to the Counter Reformation, even after the conclusion of the Interdict, was the refusal to allow members of the Society of Jesus to return to Venetian territories.

Sarpi never published his most radical ideas, which were too far from orthodoxy even for his Venetian patrons, but relegated them to his private notebooks, his *Pensieri*. Based on his analysis of the *Pensieri*, David Wootton has argued that Sarpi not only held the Counter-Reformation papacy in contempt but rejected Christianity itself. Despite his public pronouncements in which he contrasted papal behavior with true Christianity, the rhetorical ploy of most anti-clerics, Sarpi was in private thoroughly irreligious. Sarpi was willing to contemplate the creation of a purely secular society, a state composed of moral atheists. For Sarpi religion and politics must be kept entirely separate, and the responsibilities of a citizen or subject need not have anything to do with Christian morality, which he saw as corrosive of true morality. Wootton concludes, «Sarpi's true originality, however, lies not in his rejection of Christianity, nor even in his willingness to conceive of a natural order without God. It lies in his conviction that a society of moral atheists need be no worse than a society of Christians. It was this conviction which made it possible, for the first time, for an unbeliever to pursue different social and political objectives from those pursued by believers»¹³. Sarpi's revolutionary conviction was the necessary first step for an ethically grounded anti-war movement that did not borrow from Christian traditions of pacifism¹⁴. As I hope to show, some of Sarpi's followers made an additional step by asserting not just that a society of moral atheists need be no worse than a society of Christians but that it might be better, and the evidence for such a claim was the culpability of Christian society and especially the papacy for the endemic wars of the seventeenth century.

In Venice the institutions for preserving and extending Sarpi's ideas were the aristocratic academies, most importantly in the Accademia degli Incogniti. For nearly thirty years from its founding in 1630, an international group of aristocrats and clerics gathered in Venice under the auspices of the Incogniti where they engaged in conversations about all possible topics. The freedom and very survival of the Incogniti depended on their founder and patron, Giovanni Francesco Loredan (1607-1661), a member of one of Venice's most prominent patrician families and a successful politician who could guarantee the security of the other Incogniti. Even so, the Incogniti did

¹³ D. Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment*, Cambridge 1983, p. 133-134.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 120-124.

their best to remain unknown by hiding behind pseudonyms, anonymous publications, false places of publication, and elaborate metaphorical language¹⁵. The absence of the Jesuits for a half century after the 1606-1607 Interdict, an anti-papal political culture theorized by Sarpi, and the Accademia degli Incogniti made possible in Venice the formation of the most prominent community of skeptics before the Enlightenment.

Some of the books of the Incogniti, especially those by Ferrante Pallavicino, criticized any form of religion and the hypocrisy of the war mongers. More than any other figure Pallavicino represented the extremes to which anti-papal and anti-war rhetoric could reach during the seventeenth century. Born in Piacenza in 1615, which made him a subject of the embattled Duke of Parma, Pallavicino took vows as a Lateran canon at age sixteen before he had the chance to taste, as one of his admirer's put it, the carnal delights of the world, but he did not waste much time in making up for that mistake¹⁶. On a pretense he obtained leave from his monastic superior and fled to Venice where he took up with a series of prostitutes and began his career as a writer. Without money of his own he survived from the income from his extremely popular books and by working as Loredan's private secretary. His *novelle*, histories, and essays were in such demand in the late 1630s that they were sold at a high mark-up and were translated into English and French. In Italy an eager public awaited each of his new books to see what outrageous things Pallavicino would write about the Barberini pope and his nephews or the Jesuits. He came to be known as the «scourge of the Barberini»¹⁷. By his own account Pallavicino was a satirist, not a theologian or a philosopher, but satirists since Erasmus have probably altered public opinions more quickly and more broadly than the serious thinkers¹⁸.

In Pallavicino's *Il divorzio celeste*, the first volume of an anticipated trilogy dedicated «al Scropoloso Cristiano», Jesus asks God the Father for permission to divorce his bride, the Roman Church, because of her intolerable adulteries. After sending St. Paul down to earth to investigate, God gives Jesus his permission for the divorce. The Roman Church was not redeemable. The centerpiece of the case against the Roman Church was the Barberini role in the first War of Castro. In one passage St. Paul, disguised in the habit of a monk, interviews the Duke of Parma who excoriates Urban

¹⁵ Girolamo Brusoni [Iacopo Gaddi], *Le Glorie degli Incogniti o vero gli huomini illustri dell'Accademia de' signori Incogniti di Venetia*, Venezia 1647. On the Unknowns see E. Muir, *Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2007, and M. Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredan, Venezia (1630-1661)*, Firenze 1998.

¹⁶ [Loredan], *L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino*, p. 92.

¹⁷ R. Urbinati, *Ferrante Pallavicino: il Flagello dei Barberini*, Roma 2004. For bibliography of works by and about Pallavicino, L. Coci, *Bibliografia di Ferrante Pallavicino*, in «Studi seicenteschi», 24 (1983), p. 221-306.

¹⁸ [Ferrante Pallavicino], *La retorica delle puttane composta conforme li precetti di Cipriano. Dedicata alla università delle cortegiane più celebri*, Cambrai 1642. See Muir, *Culture Wars*, p. 90-94.

VIII: «Gran crudeltà di Pastore, che scorticando le pecorelle vive, non vuole almento, che sia loro lecito l'affetto naturale del risentimento, e del dolore»¹⁹. Urban pretends to be the venerated successor of Peter, but unlike Peter Urban closed his ears to the words of Christ who told Peter to put his sword back in its scabbard. Christ instituted a reign of peace. Urban instituted a reign of war. Paul went on to Venice where he discovered a treatise on the Republic of Venice, which declared that among all cities the Venetians were the freest of superstitious credulity. After reading this treatise, St. Paul inquired of a Venetian patrician how it could be that a secular state could exercise authority over the Church as did Venice by regulating benefices. The Venetian reminded the saint that Christ declared that His kingdom is not of this world, which he left to the management of the secular princes and republics such as Venice's.

When St. Paul arrived in Rome his hitherto secret identity was revealed. Pope Urban sent a courtier to invite the saint to the Barberini palace, but Paul demurred. Through a messenger Urban replied that if Paul would not honor him with a visit, then he could at least do the pope a favor. Urban wanted St. Paul to revise the Scriptures because it is not fitting that Paul in his Epistles should contradict the preferences of St. Peter's successor. In particular he wanted dropped from the Bible, «omnis anima potestatibus sublimioribus subdita fit» («Let every Soul be subject to the hither powers») and «diacones habeat non turpe lucrum facientes» («let them have deacons not given to base lucre»), especially the latter because Urban wanted to enrich the cardinal nephews. Paul managed to escape Rome before Urban could force him to make the scriptural modifications. In his rush to leave, however, Paul left his sword behind, which Urban took for himself saying «Horsù già che la penna di Paulo ricusa di servirmi, mi servirà la sua Spada... Questa questa vi sforzerà, o Principi ad inchinarvi a' miei piedi qualunque io mi sia. Questa, questa conserverà Castro, sogiogherà Parma, e mostrerà non esser necessarii altri pretesti di ragione dove può trionfar il filo d'una taliente Spada»²⁰. Paul wanted to go back to get his sword but thought it too dangerous and thus wrote an open letter to the Italian princes hoping that they would wrest the sword back from the pope's hands. Pallavicino's biographer attributed his subsequent problems to *Il divortio celeste*, which was his most impious and blasphemous attack on the Roman Church²¹.

The *Baccinata* becomes even more explicit in its direct assault on the Barberini papacy. It opens with an allusion to the three bees on the Barberini heraldic emblem. Bees, Pallavicino writes, naturally hide in cadavers or in cattle droppings, and the Barberini bees have been sent from their filthy hive into the field of combat, swarming and stinging as they went. During the War of

¹⁹ [Ferrante Pallavicino], *Divortio celeste, cagionato dalle dissolutezze della Sposa Romana, et consacrato alla semplicità de' Scropolosi Christiani*, Ingolstatt 1643, p. 31.

²⁰ Pallavicino, *Divortio celeste*, p. 119, 122-123.

²¹ Girolamo Brusoni, *Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino*, Venezia 1655, p. 19-23.

Castro the Barberini changed Christ's promise, *beati mites* («blessed are the meek»), to *beati milites* («blessed are the warriors»)²². Pallavicino imagined a solution to the Barberini tyranny. Like their illustrious ancestor, Emperor Charles V, the Habsburgs should sack Rome and imprison the pope. «When all the Christian princes have been excommunicated for helping Parma, it will be necessary to call a Council to determine the sentence against his Holiness... The Church represented in the totality of the Councils is the true bride of Christ, who granted government to the popes, who are, moreover, the inferiors and subjects to her [*i.e.* the Councils] as to a mistress»²³. Once Urban is deposed, Pallavicino concludes, «accrescerà il riso commune promosso in lui dalle coglionerie de' Barberini»²⁴. Pallavicino's solution is a practical appeal to the conciliar tradition within the Church. However, there are echoes of Sarpi in the formulation because by repudiating the papal tyranny of the Council of Trent a new council would manifest the absolutism of the secular states. Pallavicino managed to slip in a deeply subversive idea: the Church should be subject to control by princes who would become the guardians of morality, a formulation not far from Sarpi's notion of a society of moral atheists.

The third of Pallavicino's anti-Barberini, anti-Spanish books combined satire with serious theological speculation. *Il corriere svaligiato* presents itself disingenuously as a joke, which readers should not take as truth. The only motive for the book, he writes, is to illustrate virtue²⁵. Pallavicino's device in the *novella* was to have four courtiers read and comment on letters that their prince had ordered stolen from a postal courier. Some of the letters are straightforward satire. A Milanese man requests the favor of being made the hangman of Rome where he knows there is lots of work. A prostitute seeks a position in Rome to practice her profession where she knows the demand is high. She would prefer to "work under" those who wear the purple habit or the papal nephews, and if necessary she can masquerade as a man since some customers prefer that²⁶. Other letters are serious political commentaries. In a letter supposedly from the Viceroy of Milan is a discussion about tricking the princes of Italy. The King of Spain mortified the Duke of Parma, enervated the Marquis of Mantua, put his foot in the neck of the princes of Savoy, struck a deal with the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, holds his claws over Genoa and Lucca, and has a plan to manipulate the Republic of Venice to serve his interests. Not only has the pope become a partisan in these Italian fights, but the Spanish have put him in chains to serve their interests²⁷.

²² G. Demaria, *La Guerra di Castro e la spedizione de' presidii (1639-1649)*, in «Miscellanea di storia italiana», 4 (1898), p. 191-256.

²³ [Ferrante Pallavicino], *Baccinata ovvero Battarella per le Api Barberine. In occasione della mossa delle armi di N. S. Papa Urbano ottavo contro Parma*, Geneva [?] 1644, p. 69-70.

²⁴ Pallavicino, *Baccinata*, p. 81.

²⁵ Ginifaccio Spironicini [Ferrante Pallavicino], *Il corriere svaligiato*, Villafranca [Amsterdam?] 1644, p. 7.

²⁶ [Pallavicino], *Il corriere svaligiato*, p. 52.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

In his *Dialogo molto curioso*, Pallavicino has his interlocutors ask the question whether the current wars were just or unjust. The two soldiers of the dialogue debate the issue. Antonio Barbarini da Piacenza argues that the secular princes have fought the war with moderation, but the pope has been unjust. His opponent, Geminiano Propapali (the “pro-papalist”) da Modena, suggests this view is heresy. Antonio answers that when a temporal prince goes to war without justice he only violates Justice but when a pope does his violates the laws of Christ. In an elaborate analysis of contemporary events, Antonio insists that Urban is, in fact, the anti-Christ who has ignored Christ’s dictum, «He who lives by the sword dies by the sword»²⁸. The book ends with another of Pallavicino’s pasquinades titled, *Il grosso & idioto Pasquino per accomodarsi all’umor di Papa Urbano VIII*. Summarizing the case against Urban and his nephews and calling for the Duke of Parma to avenge his wrongs, the poem works out an elaborate pun on Castro/castration:

[265]

Tu se’ in error, se pur conosci il vero
A questa volta tu non sei buon Mastro,
Che per haver, buon huom, il picciol Castro,
Potresti ignudo far restar San Pietro.

Deh quanto per te meglio era Maffeo,
Castro lasciar à quel di chi era stato,
E pria d’ haverne quel Duca spogliato,
Castrar Francesco Antonio, & Don Tadeo²⁹ [*i.e.* the Barberini cardinal-nephews].

Pallavicino’s highly personalized satires of high church officials and the Spanish were his undoing. In an act of bravado Pallavicino dedicated the *Baccinata* to one of his most ardent enemies, Monsignor Francesco Vitelli, the papal *nuntio* in Venice. In his dedication he punned on Vitelli’s name, pointing out that it meant “calf” (*vitello*), which demonstrates his bovine, animal-like nature³⁰. When *Il corriere svaligiato* appeared, Vitelli demanded that Venetian authorities arrest Pallavicino. After six months in Venetian prisons Giovanni Francesco Loredan engineered his friend’s release, but Pallavicino now lived a precarious existence in Venice. He kept busy writing scurrilous books, but in the end his own ambition, like Galileo’s before him, lured the satirist from the safety of the republic. A secret agent for the papacy promised Pallavicino that Cardinal Richelieu would hire him as official historian. Pallavicino followed his betrayer right to the gates of papal Avignon where he was imprisoned, tried for *lèse majesté* against the pope, convicted and executed by decapitation at age twenty eight. His capital crime

²⁸ Ferrante Pallavicino, *Dialogo molto curioso e degno, tra due gentiluomini Acanzi, cioè soldati volontari dell’ Altezze Serenissime di Modona e Parma sopra la guerra, che detti principi fanno contra il Papa. In cui, con ogni verità, toccansi le cose di detta guerra. Su la fine leggesi anco un breve discorso fatto da Pasquino a Papa Urbano VIII*, in Ferrante Pallavicino, *Opere scelte*, Villafranca [Amsterdam?] 1673, p. 249-252.

²⁹ Pallavicino, *Dialogo molto curioso*, p. 265-266.

³⁰ [Pallavicino], *Baccinata*, p. 3.

was not heresy but his refusal to acknowledge the pope's universal sovereign power, the very claim that had enraged Pallavicino and his Venetian friends the most.

Pallavicino's death made him even more of a martyr in the cause of skepticism than his older contemporary Galileo, but the death made his colleagues among the Incogniti more cautious than had Galileo's silencing³¹. Loredan himself acknowledged that Pallavicino had been imprudent to satirize the Barberini and recommended to his colleagues that they should devote themselves to praising living princes and save their satire for dead ones³². However, soon after Pallavicino's death someone, probably Loredan himself, staged an elaborate campaign to advance the martyr's case against the Church. *L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino*, the book mentioned at the beginning of this paper, was the most virulent attack on the Church to come from the circle of the Incogniti.

The soul of Pallavicino and his old friend Henrico feed off each another's skepticism, progressively making ever more radical attacks on Christianity, as might happen in a real conversation between two like-minded friends. There are clues that the author was Loredan himself, who had once used the Anglicized pseudonym, Henrico Gible. They talk about how the scandals of the Curia have encouraged infidels and heretics to see the Christian religion as superstition. Echoing Luther's complaint from a century before, they accuse Pope Urban VIII of selling indulgences for personal profit: indulgences are more like poison than medicine because they do not take away sin but lead sinners to increase their guilt. In short, they conclude, the Protestants have good reasons to reject the papacy³³. The abuses of Rome have become so bad that Pallavicino's soul reports that not a single pope has been saved since Sixtus V, the reform-minded pope who loathed the Jesuits, limited the size of the college of Cardinals, but died in 1590 more than a half century before. That placed the intervening eight popes in Hell³⁴.

Pallavicino and Henrico move on to discuss the Last Judgment. Pallavicino argues that to condemn many souls to eternal punishment would be to contradict God's mercy. They both agree that all souls in possession of reason should be saved. If only a few are saved then the Incarnation of the Word would be useless and without infinite value. Infinite mercy would not leave room for anyone to be damned unless he or she lost humanity through the loss of reason. They argue that men do not sin with the intention of offending God but to satisfy their appetites. They are not made any less guilty by punishment, which is incompatible with the infinite mercy of God³⁵. It is at this place in the text that the author states that the Christian religion is a

³¹ Muir, *Culture Wars*, p. 111-148.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 98-99.

³³ Loredan, *L'Anima*, p. 52-53.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

thing of fear, «indeed even the fear of a madman», and concludes with the radical claim that «men have the ability to establish laws over God» («quasi che gli Huomini abbiano facoltà di componere Leggi sopra Dio»)³⁶.

Pallavicino's soul, speaking from the beyond in the conceit of the book, has taken the Christian promise of divine salvation and turned it on its head. The whole scheme, not just of Church imposed penalties but of the divine judgment itself, contradicts the Christian claims of God's infinite mercy. As a result the author, whoever he was, has voiced in print what Paolo Sarpi only dared express in the privacy of his notebooks. Morality, especially morality in war, does not require religion. Morality does not even require God. Human laws can guarantee society. Unbelief has become a higher ethical position than belief itself.

Recognizing the evil of war is easy. What is more difficult is to unravel the elaborate political and theological attempts to make war a *necessary* evil. That unraveling process involves an analysis of the immediate conditions of *ragione di stato* to create an argument that criticizes the folly of some wars but accepts the necessity of others. But the process also involves a re-evaluation of the ethical foundations of the state, the very process that took place in seventeenth-century Italy by writers such as Paolo Sarpi, Ferrante Pallavicino, Girolamo Brusoni, and Giovan Francesco Loredan. An anti-war movement is not the same as pacificism, which rejects the principle that the state has the exclusive right to employ force to defend its vital interests. An anti-war movement is, and in the seventeenth century was, more subtle because it necessarily involves a deconstruction of the ethical foundations of a specific state's actions in a specific situation. It can be a political exercise but at its core is an ethical enterprise, and as the seventeenth-century Italian skeptics recognized the most precious gift the ethical person can give to society is to doubt.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 81.