

FOREWORD

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the history of diplomacy witnessed a radical metamorphosis, which primarily entailed an evolution of the function of representatives of European powers. Diplomats became leading figures in the international political framework. The delicate and complex negotiations leading to the end of the War of the Spanish Succession augmented diplomats' awareness of their increasingly autonomous role as negotiators, while they became personally responsible for choices of strategic relevance. This new condition encouraged diplomats to initiate relations and to promote initiatives and forms of patronage that were properly literary.

Literary patronage is the common theme that characterizes the papers collected here. As a matter of fact they are not, nor intend to be, original contributions to the general study of diplomacy broadly intended as the 'set of practices' through which a sovereign state manages its foreign affairs; nor do they focus on topics such as collecting or intellectual patronage, although these are clearly related themes. The research presented here focuses instead on the ways in which eighteenth century foreign representatives actively contributed, in their more or less official roles, to promote the circulation of literary and dramatic texts – ancient and modern, in prose or in verse.

In the course of the century scientific, philosophic and political novelties found expression in works cast into literary form. Various as well as intimately intertwined, themes and topics received new significance through the nature of the literary medium chosen: epistolary exchanges, the periodical press, communication within reformed academic structures, transformation of 'canonical' forms and genres, such as pastoral poetry or epistolography in verse.

In this perspective, the activity performed by cultivated and influential diplomats in the old Italian states is testified by their intensive correspondence and above all by a series of initiatives they themselves (or their political associates) promoted and sometimes even supported financially – such as the translation and publication of ancient and modern literary works, the revival and dissemination of censored works through privileged channels, the commissioning and staging of dramatic texts.

The decision to deal with Anglo-Italian relationships, here intended as a first step towards a wider and more articulate research project, rests on a twofold consid-

eration. On the one hand, many of the scholars involved in this project had already directed their attention to authors, texts and cultural networks firmly anchored in the British sphere: Antonio Conti, Francesco Algarotti, Giuseppe Baretti, the reception of Addison's Cato and Gray's Elegy, the strong Jacobite presence in the Peninsula.

On the other hand, the presence of Italian envoys in London acquires a special significance, when one considers Britain's ever growing influence over European affairs and its newly acquired ability to control and orientate the delicate balance of power represented by the Hapsburg and the Bourbon sides. Some of the studies proposed here showcase literary and cultural achievements of primary importance that bear the hallmark of British intervention through its diplomatic representatives. The Republic of Venice is one such case, the home of Goldoni's 'theatrical reformation' and of Consul Smith's editorial ventures; the Grand Duchy of Toscana is another, in the twilight of the Medici rule and at the dawn of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty. Further eloquent examples come from the city of Rome, the most sought-after destination for antiquaries as well as the refuge of the exiled House of Stuart, and the Kingdom of Naples with its complex legacy of antiquarianism and juridical culture. Diplomatic networks also overlapped with masonic circles, thus effectively operating as communication channels for issues that British and Scottish culture had brought to the forefront of the European cultural debate: from classical republicanism to parliamentary monarchy, from the Newtonian revolution (with its strong Galilean roots) to the question of Ossianic primitivism.

The research project as a whole, together with the organisation of the workshop in Modena in May 2015 (of which this volume is the result), have been led by a scientific committee that includes Beatrice Alfonzetti, Carlo Caruso, Silvia Tatti and the authors of this Foreword. The Società Italiana di Studi del Secolo XVIII and the British School at Rome kindly granted their patronage to the initiative. In addition to that, the generous financial support awarded by the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Modena was crucial to secure the success of the entire enterprise.

The workshop in Modena benefited from the presence of Alberto Beniscelli, Amedeo Quondam, Gianvittorio Signorotto and Roberta Turchi, whose observations and comments have proved an invaluable contribution. A subsequent encounter at the British School at Rome in November 2015 offered the opportunity for additional thought-provoking exchanges with Christian Del Vento, Renzo Sabbatini and Dirk Vanden Berghe. We should like to thank all these colleagues and friends. We share with them a desire to develop further the lines of enquiry sketched out here.

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