

“Selling stories and many other things in and through the city”: Peddling Print in Renaissance Florence and Venice

Rosa M. Salzberg
University of Warwick

Mobile and marginal, street sellers tend to disappear from the historical record, yet they played a very important part in the dissemination of cheap print from the earliest days of Italian publishing. They operated in the most central spaces of Italian cities such as Venice and Florence, selling cheap printed pamphlets, fliers, and images alongside other small consumer goods. They helped to make print accessible to a wide audience, often engaging in oral hawking or performance that could reach beyond the confines of the fully literate minority. However, these sellers occupied an ambiguous position in Italian cities, more often welcomed by customers and audiences than by guilds and government authorities. The increasing restrictions on print peddlers introduced in the era of the Counter-Reformation reflect the efforts of civic and religious authorities to grapple with the contemporary challenges of a burgeoning print market.

IN FEBRUARY 1560, several *cartolai* (stationers) petitioned the Duke of Florence, Cosimo I de' Medici, for an exemption from a recent prohibition against selling in the street on religious holidays. All three petitioners—Tommaso di Antonio del Grasso, Santi di Giuliano Ceserini, and Bartolomeo di Luca—emphasized their poverty and responsibility to provide for large families. They explained that they had been accustomed, “according to long tradition” (*secondo l'antica consuetudine*) to sell various kinds of cheap printed texts and images on feast days in the Via Calimala, near the Mercato Vecchio in central Florence, and elsewhere around the city. The prohibition was a great threat to them as without the income from holiday street trading they could not support their families. They argued additionally that these kinds of goods, “if they are not laid out in wide open spaces so they can be seen, . . . will never sell”; moreover, that “it is customary to sell these kinds of things in all cities on such days.”¹

It often happens that a “long tradition” such as this one only becomes apparent to historians when it is prohibited. Much of the time such ubiquitous activities went unrecorded and unremarked.² And yet, precisely for the same reasons that they have left little trace on the historical record, street sellers and peddlers of

¹Archivio di Stato, Florence, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova, busta 193, fol. 8r (hereafter ASF, SMN, followed by busta and folio numbers). For the individual petition of Bartolomeo di Luca and his brother Gaspare, see fol. 12r. All three petitioners seem to have been given permission to sell on this occasion. For the prohibition, see Lorenzo Cantini, *Legislazione toscana, raccolta e illustrata* (Florence: Fantosini, 1802), 3:226–34 (23 December 1557).

²However, for other references to the long tradition of selling in the streets in these places see, for example, ASF, SMN, 193.5r, 195.186r.

print were important cultural figures in early modern Europe.³ Because they did not fit into clear professional categories, could be highly mobile, had close connections with oral culture, and sold products that were cheap and ephemeral, the actual presence and activity of these figures is difficult to recover. For these same reasons, they were also in a unique position to reach a large and diverse public with products that appealed to them and which many could afford.⁴ Without the cost of maintaining permanent shops, peddlers could charge lower prices for a variety of small goods, bringing them within reach of a wider public. Moreover, the particular means by which they disseminated cheap print—selling, showing, crying, or performing it—and the central public spaces in which this occurred also were essential to ensuring a broad dissemination of the new printed products of the press. Peddlers brought print out into the streets, and thus into the daily experience of ordinary people. However, the mobile and interstitial quality of these figures, moving in between different spaces in the city (and between cities), between the social margins and the commercial centers, intertwining print and orality and selling a range of goods, made them a troubling presence. As fluid as print itself, they continually transgressed the boundaries imposed by civic and religious authorities seeking to maintain the city as an orderly and magnificent space, and in so doing exposed many of the anxieties and tensions riven through the urban community in the later Renaissance period.

Focusing on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the work of Laurence Fontaine and others has shown how networks of peddlers of print and many other goods spread across Europe, often emanating from mountain regions such as the Alps. However, the roots of this phenomenon remain unclear, particularly

³The role of peddlers as cultural mediators was suggested by Susan Noakes in “The Development of the Book Market in Late Quattrocento Italy: Printers’ Failures and the Role of the Middleman,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11, no. 1 (1981): 23–55, but there has been little research into this question for sixteenth-century Italy. On the elusive but important figure of the peddler elsewhere in Europe, see Margaret Spufford, “The Pedlar, the Historian and the Folklorist: Seventeenth-Century Communications,” *Folklore* 105 (1994): 14; Jeroen Salman, “Between Reality and Representation. The Image of the Pedlar in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic,” in *New Perspectives in Book History: Contributions from the Low Countries*, ed. M. van Delft, F. de Glas, and Jeroen Salman (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2006), 189–90.

⁴The printed products of peddlers could be very cheap indeed. Evidence from the early sixteenth century records the sale of pamphlets in Italian cities for prices as low as one quattrino, or one-third of a soldo, at a time when the estimated daily salary of a shipbuilder starting work in the Venetian Arsenal was six soldi, or eighteen quattrini. See Robert C. Davis, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 29. For examples of pamphlet prices, see Marin Sanudo, *I diarii (1496–1533)*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin et al. (Venice: Visentini, 1879–1903), vol. 9, col. 335; vol. 11, col. 615; and Klaus Wagner and Manuel Carrera, *Catalogo dei libri a stampa in lingua italiana della Biblioteca Colombina di Siviglia / Catalogo de los impresos en lengua italiana de la Biblioteca Colombina de Sevilla* (Ferrara: Panini, 1991).

for Italy, despite the economic vibrancy and cultural importance of the peninsula.⁵ Hawkers and peddlers were common on the streets of Italian Renaissance cities, and new forms of itinerant selling that might combine performance and/or public healing were emerging in this period, but there has been little consideration of how this quotidian economic activity contributed to the spread of cheap print.⁶

This article considers peddlers of print in Venice and Florence from the late fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century. The Venetian Republic, after the press arrived there in the late 1460s, became the largest printing center in Italy, and in all Europe, until at least the middle of the sixteenth century. For the first half century or so, the Venetians were rather *laissez-faire*, allowing the trade that brought great wealth and prestige to the city to expand largely without restriction. Increasingly threatened by the spread of heterodox religion, the authorities clamped down in the latter part of the century, incorporating the members of the printing industry into a guild and imposing ever tighter restrictions on how print was produced and circulated.⁷ Meanwhile, the Florentine Republic transformed into the Medicean principate in the sixteenth century, and the Medici dukes exerted themselves to establish their authority and dominion over both the physical space of the city and the territory, and their cultural, political, and economic structures.⁸ Although the printing industry in Florence was much smaller than that of Venice, an echo of the thriving literary culture of the Republican era, which had expressed itself in both oral and handwritten media,

⁵Laurence Fontaine surveys very briefly the period up to 1700 in *History of Pedlars in Europe*, trans. Vicki Whittaker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), chap. 1. See also Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and Their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hambledon, 1984); Roger Chartier and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, eds., *Colportage et lecture populaire: Imprimés de large circulation en Europe XVIe–XIXe* (Paris: Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine; Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1996); Jeroen Salman, "Peddling in the Past: Dutch Itinerant Bookselling in a European Perspective," *Publishing History* 53 (2003): 5–21; and Salman, "Between Reality and Representation."

⁶Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400–1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 34–60, is one of the few works to consider itinerant sellers within the wider Italian economy of the period; David Gentilcore's *Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chap. 10, chronicles the rise of charlatanism including consideration of how charlatans publicized their products and performances with print.

⁷On the Venetian industry, although not on the street trade, a key work remains Horatio F. Brown, *The Venetian Printing Press* (London: Nimmo, 1891); see also Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540–1605* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977). For some attempts early in the century to control the spread of political pamphlets, see Massimo Rospocher, "Versi pericolosi? Controllo delle opinioni e ricerca del consenso nelle guerre d'Italia," in *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. Diego Ramada Curto et al. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2009), 1:394–402.

⁸For an overview of these processes, see R. Burr Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital, 1530–1630* (New York: ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008).

lived on in the particularly active production of cheap printed works of the kind likely to be sold (and performed) in the streets.⁹

In what follows, a variety of archival sources are examined to illustrate the range of sellers operating in the streets of the two cities, what they sold, where they sold it, and what motivated them to take up this economic activity. As well as illuminating a facet of Renaissance print culture that too often has been left in the dark, this survey sheds light on the role that peddling played in the “makeshift economy” of the poor, trying to survive in a period of escalating economic turbulence.¹⁰ Next will be an examination of the question of how the Venetian and Florentine authorities developed—sporadically and ambivalently—some kind of policy of regulation over the print peddlers in the course of the sixteenth century. The comparison of the two cities can show how states with different political structures and economic systems dealt with the questions of urban poverty, itinerancy, informal economic trading, civic order, and freedom of the press, all of which were raised by the activity of the print peddlers. Following this story from the beginning of printing to the end of the sixteenth century, a period of great flux and change and of the establishment and expansion of the press, allows observation of how various civic and religious bodies grappled with the problems and promise of the new medium. At the same time, the sixteenth century brought a range of increasingly pressing political, religious, and demographic challenges—war, plague, and famine that pushed more people onto the roads in search of work, and the fight against the spread of reformist religious ideas—that directly influenced how both print and peddlers were regulated.

A FLEXIBLE TYPOLOGY

The kinds of small books, pamphlets, and fliers that were the main stock of peddlers now survive only in small quantities, in inverse proportion to the abundant quantities originally produced. It is the larger, heavier books, often in Latin rather than the vernacular, that endure and tend to crowd the space of cultural and intellectual history.¹¹ Likewise, the large print trading networks, the prestigious printers and publishers, and the more established bookshops and literary academies left the most abundant traces of themselves and have been the subject

⁹See Paolo Trovato, “Il libro in Toscana nell’età di Lorenzo: Schede ed ipotesi,” in *La Toscana al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico: Politica, economia, cultura* (Pisa: Pacini, 1996), 525–63; Gustavo Bertoli, “Librai, cartolai e ambulanti immatricolati nell’Arte dei medici e speziali di Firenze dal 1490 al 1600,” pts. 1 and 2, *La bibliofilia* 94, nos. 2 and 3 (1992): 125–64, 227–62; and Bertoli, “Nuovi documenti sull’attività di John Wolf a Firenze (1576–1577), con alcune considerazioni sul fenomeno delle stampe popolari,” *Archivio storico italiano* 153, no. 3 (1995): 577–89.

¹⁰The famous articulation of the “economy of makeshifts” is from Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974); on peddling as a recourse for the poor, see 83–84, 120–21.

¹¹Neil Harris, “Marin Sanudo, Forerunner of Melzi,” *La bibliofilia* 95 (1993): pt. 1, 19–29. See also Ugo Rozzo, *La strage ignorata: I fogli volanti a stampa nell’Italia dei secoli XV e XVI* (Udine: Forum, 2008).

of the majority of research.¹² These eminent people and weighty books monopolize the attention—it is easier to find them, count and catalogue them, to admire them. Yet it is crucial to search for the more elusive traces of the ephemeral, to leave space for them alongside the more permanent and weighty. The printing industry and the wider cultural scene of early modern Italy were composed of both the more fixed and the more ephemeral elements in continuous contact and interaction with each other. To trace the peddlers (and the cheap print they sold) requires the historian to be as flexible and mobile as the peddlers, ranging across the disciplines and drawing on methods of social and urban history, social anthropology, studies of print culture, the history of the book, and of material culture. Inspiration comes from the growing body of research on the complex culture of everyday commerce and itinerant selling in early modern Europe that has highlighted the continued importance of street selling and peddling more generally throughout the period.¹³

Peddling was used for the dissemination of print from the earliest days of Italian publishing. Thanks to the survival of the logbook of the Ripoli convent press in Florence, it is known that by the late 1470s charlatans and other traveling performers and peddlers were commissioning reams of cheap print to take out and sell on the streets.¹⁴ Although some scholars argue for the limited relevance of the Ripoli model outside of Florence, others suggest that this kind of investment in printing “from the lowest corner of the piazza” and dissemination of print in the streets were common to other cities, even if the documents to prove it are difficult to find.¹⁵ The survival of numerous pamphlets commissioned by itinerant publishers and performers in Venice and other Italian cities confirms that this practice was not unique to Florence and lasted throughout the sixteenth century.¹⁶ That street selling of print occurred in Venice from the earliest days of

¹²The most recent survey of bookselling in Renaissance Italy devoted only a few pages to the street trade; see Angela Nuovo, *Il commercio librario nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, new ed. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 103–7. Important works on more prominent and enduring figures include Martin Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979); Lowry, *Nicholas Jenson and the Rise of Venetian Publishing in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); William A. Pettas, *The Giants of Florence: Merchant Publishers of the Sixteenth Century* (San Francisco: Rosenthal, 1980); Angela Nuovo and Christian Coppens, *I Giolito e la stampa nell'Italia del XVI secolo* (Geneva: Droz, 2005).

¹³As well as the works cited in n5 above, see also Bruno Blondé et al., eds, *Buyers and Sellers: Retail Circuits and Practices in Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

¹⁴Melissa Conway, *The Diario of the Printing Press of San Jacopo di Ripoli, 1476–1484: Commentary and Transcription* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1999).

¹⁵Martin Lowry, “La produzione del libro,” in *Produzione e commercio della carta e del libro, secc. XIII–XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Prato: Le Monnier, 1992), 385. Noakes, “Development of the Book Market,” also stressed the significance of the Ripoli case for the wider history of early Italian print dissemination. In contrast, Nuovo, *Il commercio librario*, 106–7, suggested the uniqueness of the Florentine case.

¹⁶Rosa M. Salzberg, “The Lyre, the Pen and the Press: Performers and Cheap Print in Cinquecento Venice,” in “The Books of Venice,” ed. Craig Kallendorf and Lisa Pon, special issue

the industry is certain. In 1519, for example, a Council of Ten decree ruled that no printed works, “neither large nor small, neither sonnets, nor verse, nor stanzas,” could be sold in Venetian shops, “nor on the piazzas, nor on the Rialto Bridge, nor elsewhere in this city.”¹⁷

While the medium of print might have been new, much of the content of the cheap printed products that began to flood onto the market was familiar to audiences from the corpus of medieval oral and literate vernacular culture. The pamphlets and broadsheets commissioned by hawkers from the Ripoli press included *cantari* or songs in the *ottava rima* form such as those that had featured in the repertoire of popular street performers from the thirteenth century on, for example the *Sala di Malagigi*.¹⁸ Religious orations and prophecies were other familiar texts that quickly turned up in cheap printed forms.¹⁹ The adaptation of existing forms of street performance to include the dissemination of print, and the hawking or oral recitation of the printed works, gave a certain continuity to the infiltration of the new medium into urban culture, and allowed even members of the audience who could not read or afford to buy the printed text into the circle of print consumers.²⁰

Although sources for the street trade in print never will be as abundant as those for fixed shops (and even these are not particularly abundant), there is a variety of evidence that allows the construction of a fragmentary, but valuable, picture. What one finds suggests that, as Fontaine argues, it is necessary to use a “flexible typology” when categorizing peddlers and street traders, since they came in many forms, and one might move from one category to another and back again or occupy two at once in the course of a career.²¹ If, for the purposes

of *Miscellanea Marciana* (2008): 251–76; Salzberg, “In the Mouths of Charlatans: Street Performers and the Dissemination of Pamphlets in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Studies* 24, no 5 (2010): 638–53.

¹⁷Archivio di Stato, Venice (hereafter ASV), Consiglio dei Dieci, Minuti dei proclami, filza 2, fasc. 33 (3 July 1519). I thank Claire Judde de Larivière for alerting me to this reference. On the sites of print selling in Venice, see Salzberg, “Per le piazze et sopra il ponte’: Reconstructing the Geography of Print in Sixteenth-Century Venice,” in *Geographies of the Book*, ed. Charles Withers and Miles Ogborn (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 111–30.

¹⁸Conway, *Diario of the Printing Press*, 261.

¹⁹Edoardo Barbieri, “Per il ‘Vangelo di S. Giovanni’ e qualche altra edizione di S. Jacopo a Ripoli,” *Italia medioevale a umanistica* 43 (2002): 383–400.

²⁰On the “acculturation” of people to print by means of oral dissemination, see Roger Chartier, “Publishing Strategies and What the People Read, 1530–1660,” in his *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 152–59. For some indication of the kinds of cheap print available in the streets of Renaissance Florence and Venice, see Arnaldo Segarizzi, ed., *Bibliografia delle stampe popolari italiane della R. Biblioteca nazionale di S. Marco di Venezia* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d’Arti Grafiche, 1913); Carlo Angelieri, *Bibliografia delle stampe popolari a carattere profano dei secoli XVI e XVII conservate nella Biblioteca nazionale di Firenze* (Florence: Sansoni, 1953); and my articles cited above, n16.

²¹Fontaine, *History of Pedlars*, 73. Cf. also Salman, “Peddling in the Past,” 10–11; and Harald Deceulaer, “Dealing with Diversity: Peddlers in the Southern Netherlands in the Eighteenth Century,” in Blondé, *Buyers and Sellers*, 171–98.

of this study, one borrows Jeroen Salmen's simple definition of print peddlers as "all traders in printed matter who did not have a regular shop," one encounters a spectrum of sellers that ranged from nearly destitute hawkers, barely removed from begging, to more fixed and respectable stallholders; from apprentices and printing workers who supplemented their income by print peddling to itinerant charlatans and ballad singers who sold print and other goods as part of their performances in the streets and squares.²² Seeking to survey the full array of people who might have been found peddling print in the streets, one would include here the more or less successful shopkeepers who continued to sell in the streets and around the countryside (or sent out people to do so for them).

An important source for this variegated community of outdoor and ambulant sellers active in Italian cities in the sixteenth century is the records of the Florentine *Arte dei medici e speziali*. This was one of the largest Florentine guilds, and it enrolled among its members not only doctors and apothecaries but anyone who sold, in any location, a great array of dry goods including spices, perfumes, medicines, soap, and a host of accessories and adornments from pouches to hats to pater nosters to combs. This also extended to paper and books; hence the guild enrolled printers and booksellers.²³ In 1375, the guild statutes had forbidden masters selling outside their shops (*botteghe*), probably to avoid the movement of stolen goods and other fraudulent behavior.²⁴ This rule evidently was not in force in the sixteenth century, as Bertoli's publication of the guild's matriculation records of printers and sellers of books or printed goods between 1490 and 1600 rendered the names of 252 individuals of which fifty-eight clearly were peddlers—such as Fidele di Bartolomeo de' Sacchi of Piacenza, who was described in the guild registers as "selling stories and many other things in and through the city of Florence."²⁵

This is only a partial view of the dissemination of print in the city in this period. It is likely that cheap print was not yet profitable enough to be a unique specialization of many ambulant sellers. More frequently it was pack-filler for peddlers of other goods, or a useful form of advertising and extra revenue for traveling charlatans and performers who sold printed editions related to their repertoires.²⁶ Aside from designated print peddlers, the Florentine guild also registered large numbers of itinerant performers and other ambulant peddlers of goods described generally as "pertinent to the guild," and it is possible to

²²Salman, "Between Reality and Representation," 192.

²³Raffaele Ciasca, *Arte dei medici e speziali nella storia e nel commercio fiorentino dal secolo XII al XV* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1927), 366–37.

²⁴Raffaele Ciasca, ed., *Statuti dell'Arte dei medici e speziali* (Florence: Camera di Commercio e Industria di Firenze, 1922), 289. On the reasons for this prohibition, see Ciasca, *Arte dei medici*, 251.

²⁵The 1562 matriculation of de' Sacchi is in ASF, *Arte dei medici e speziali*, reg. 12, fol. 179v; published in Bertoli, "Librai, cartolai e ambulanti," pt. 2, 239. Bertoli excluded the handful of print sellers who are listed in the separate registers for the *contado* (the countryside around Florence), and hence were not operating in Florence.

²⁶On cheap print as pack-filler, see Fontaine, *History of Peddlars*, 61.

conclude from other sources that under this blanket description there might hide items of print. To give but one example, “Benedictus di Venetia di Claris [who] sings on a bench and sells things pertinent to this Arte,” who matriculated on 3 June 1549, was most probably the Benedetto Clario *il cieco* (the blind man) who published several short works in Venice around this time and thus was likely to have been selling print in Florence as well.²⁷ In total, the guild registered at least 631 individuals between 1490 and 1600 to sell goods pertaining to the guild in the streets of the city. Another sixty-three registered to sell only through the state, not in the city.²⁸

These peddlers were a very disparate and motley crew, which is evidenced by there being no clear word for print peddler or street seller in this period. The terms *rivendigolo* or *rivenditore* (retailer or reseller) sometimes were used to describe peddlers in both Venice and Florence, often peddlers of secondhand goods.²⁹ However, the Florentine guild records most frequently describe peddlers simply by their activity and location rather than with a distinct professional moniker, such as sellers of goods “in and through the city” or “through the Florentine countryside.” This lack of a precise professional definition, this “unfixability” within the schema of urban trades, was one of the problematic aspects of peddling.

Ambulant sellers including vendors of print appear in these guild records only in small numbers until the 1540s; thereafter they continue to rise strongly through the century, peaking in the 1560s to 1580s before declining slightly in the 1590s. Even if street selling of various goods had been a common feature of medieval cities including Florence, a series of serious demographic pressures in the sixteenth century—the displacement of people by the Italian wars, devastating bouts of dearth and plague—are indeed thought to have spurred more people onto the roads, traveling longer distances, and turning to peddling to earn a living.³⁰ It is also probable that the perception of growing numbers of these sellers

²⁷ASF, Arte dei medici e speziali, reg. 12, fol. 38r.

²⁸Included in these figures are all those identified as selling outdoors or through the city or state, and all those whose profession (for example, *cantimbanco* or ballad singer) meant that they performed and sold in the streets. No doubt there were other mobile and outdoor sellers not included in this total since their activity was not specifically described by the guild scribe. The matriculation records for the period immediately preceding 1490 are lost.

²⁹Patricia Allerston, “The Market in Second-Hand Clothes and Furnishings in Venice, c. 1500–c. 1650” (PhD diss., European University Institute, Florence, 1996), 179–80; Carole Collier Frick, “The Florentine *Rigattieri*: Second Hand Clothes Dealers and the Circulation of Goods in the Renaissance,” in *Old Clothes, New Looks: Second Hand Fashion*, ed. Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 16. *Trecca*, *treccola*, or *treccone* were also used for female and male street sellers of food; see Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 34. Italian terms such as *merciaiuolo* or *girovago* that later became common for peddlers do not appear frequently in the sixteenth-century sources; see Fontaine, *History of Peddlars*, 2.

³⁰On reference to mobile sellers in Florentine guild statutes in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Alfredo Doren, *Le arti fiorentine*, trans. G. B. Klein (Florence: Le Monnier, 1940), 202–3. On the new conditions of the sixteenth century, see Giovanni Pizzorusso, “I movimenti migratori

caused this guild to become more aggressive in forcing them to enroll and pay their fees, and also more precise about noting different types of ambulant activity so that they now can be identified in the records. In this same period, there was a growing tide of literature expressing fear and suspicion of itinerant peoples such as peddlers, beggars, and vagabonds.³¹

The same conditions likely made peddling a more pressing issue in other Italian cities in the course of the sixteenth century, and the numbers of such temporary or permanent migrants that thronged to bigger cities like Venice, Rome, and Naples would have been far greater than those recorded as working in the Tuscan capital or countryside. The different guild structure of Venice is one of the factors that make peddlers of print more difficult to trace there. Although Venice had a far greater number of guilds than Florence, it lacked the kind of large catch-all corporations—like the *Arte dei medici e speciali*—that might enlist the disparate body of peddlers. The fragmented nature of the Venetian guild system meant that jurisdiction over particular forms of commerce was unclear and subject to continuous negotiation.³² In Venice, peddlers appear to have operated mostly on the illegal fringes, the “dark side of the urban economy that lay outside the official guild structures,” described by James Shaw.³³ Later in the sixteenth century, however, the masters of the Venetian print trade, newly gathered into a guild, made efforts to pursue unlicensed street sellers, as will be discussed further below.

Even though peddlers cannot always be found registered in the guild lists, other surviving records from both Venice and Florence show that sending or taking print out onto the streets remained a very regular part of the spectrum of print distribution throughout the sixteenth century. Some printers and booksellers supplemented their incomes in this way as they built up more established and successful print businesses. Giorgio Marescotti, for example, a migrant from France to Florence in the 1550s, sought permission to sell various kinds of pictures, “display[ing] them in public after the feast day masses,” a few years after

in Italia in antico regime,” in *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana*, vol. 2, *Partenze*, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 7–12; and Alberto Monticone, “Per una corografia della povertà: Territorio, mobilità ed assistenza,” in *Poveri in cammino: Mobilità e assistenza tra Umbria e Roma in età moderna*, ed. Alberto Monticone (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1993), 3–15.

³¹Piero Camporesi, ed., *Il libro dei vagabondi: Lo “Speculum Cerretanorum” di Teseo Pini, “Il Vagabondo” di Raffaele Frianoro e altri testi di “furfanteria”* (Turin: Einaudi, 1973; Milan: Garzanti, 2003).

³²James E. Shaw, *The Justice of Venice: Authorities and Liberties in the Urban Economy, 1550–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2006), 27, 109–37.

³³Shaw, *Justice of Venice*, 2. As Laurence Fontaine notes, in general peddlers operated in a “legal twilight” that makes them difficult to trace; Fontaine, “The Organisation and Evolutions of Traders’ and Pedlars’ Networks in Europe,” in *Spinning the Commercial Web: International Trade, Merchants, and Commercial Cities, c. 1640–1939*, ed. Magrit Schutte Beerbühl and Jörg Vögele (Frankfurt a/M: Lang, 2004), 122.

he had opened his own *bottega*.³⁴ Established printers and booksellers also frequently employed peddlers and criers to sell their works for them around the city. This is indicated by a 1568 edict of the Venetian blasphemy magistrates complaining that, despite earlier prohibitions, many printers and booksellers in the city were publishing “books, stories, . . . songs, letters, and prognostications without the required licenses and freely selling them or having them sold by boys (*puti*) and others on the Rialto Bridge and in other places.”³⁵ In spite of the edict, the practice continued. In 1575 the lame street vendor Battista Furlano, who posted himself at the gate of the ducal palace in Piazza San Marco, was picked up for selling orations in the form of small printed fliers that promised to save buyers from the plague that was ravaging the city at that time. The printer Pietro de’ Farri admitted that he had given the sheets to Battista and to another street vendor, Iseppo Mantelli, who operated on the Rialto Bridge. Battista then had passed some on to another vendor called Paolo Lauto so that he might sell them for one bezzo, or half a soldo, each.³⁶

Peddling was irrepressible because endemic poverty was a persistent (and indeed a growing) problem in Italian cities in the early modern period. Peddling of small cheap printed items or setting up an improvised bookstall were activities that tended to escalate in hard times, as a fallback.³⁷ Most of those shopkeepers who petitioned for the right to sell in the streets on *feste* seem to have been in a fairly wretched position. Those who petitioned the Florentine duke may have exaggerated their poverty and desperation to win his sympathy, but the guild officials often confirmed their claims, and referred to them as “poor wretches” (*poveri meschini*).³⁸ Such was the case with Tomaso del Grasso, the above-mentioned *cartolaio* who ten years after his first petition again sought the right to sell print in the streets on *feste* after a new prohibition. At this point, Tomaso was described as “poorer than ever and nearly blind,” making it ever more difficult for him to support his family “in these scarce times.” The guild affirmed that he was “not just poor but wretched, old, and burdened with family.”³⁹ Similarly, in Venice, the numerous sellers who applied for licenses to sell on *feste* were

³⁴ASF, SMN, 193.415r (May 1562). For Marescotti’s matriculation as a *libraio* or bookseller in the Via del Garbo, see ASF, Arte dei medici e speciali, reg. 12, fol. 116r (7 April 1558). Marescotti sustained a career over several decades, albeit never reaching a level of great economic comfort; see Cesare Tidoli, “Stampa e corte nella Firenze del tardo Cinquecento: Giorgio Marescotti,” *Nuova rivista storica* 74, nos. 5–6 (1990): 605–44.

³⁵ASV, Esecutori contro la bestemmia, busta 56, vol. 2, fol. 38v (2 March 1568).

³⁶ASV, Sant’uffizio, busta 39, fasc. 7. Copies of the orations are preserved with the trial records. On pamphlet prices, see n4 above.

³⁷Salman, “Watching the Peddler’s Movements,” 139. On itinerant selling as one of the many temporary recourses of the poor, alongside, for example, begging or seeking admission to hospitals, see Daniela Lombardi, *Povert  maschile, povert  femminile: L’Ospedale dei mendicanti nella Firenze dei Medici* (Bologna: Mulino, 1988), 108.

³⁸See, for example, ASF, SMN, 195.20r (15 February 1569).

³⁹ASF, SMN 195.145r (September 1569). On this occasion, Tomaso’s petition was refused.

referred to as *poveri*. Allowing them to operate in a restricted way obviously was considered an act of charity towards the least fortunate members of the guild, akin to providing dowries for the daughters of poor masters.⁴⁰ As in Florence, the Venice-based petitioners presented themselves as close to destitute, “not just poor but extremely poor,” as one Andrea Ravanello described himself.⁴¹

As well as taking goods out into the street on the instruction of their masters, some apprentices or print shop workers on their own initiative peddled print in order to supplement their often meager wages. In 1568, fifteen-year-old Piero di Giuliano Morosi explained to Duke Cosimo how his father had died, leaving Piero as the eldest son to support his four siblings, including two girls. “Not having a way to survive and support himself and his little siblings . . . in order to be able to help and continue living he began to buy some stories and little books,” selling them “like many others” on feast days in the Via Calimala, because on working days he was employed in a *bottega*.⁴² There is no record of whether the duke was charitable in this instance, but Morosi did manage to survive this difficult period and to establish a relatively successful career as a printer and bookseller with his own shop.⁴³

Peddling print also was an activity that workers might turn to later in life, when they had no other form of support and had never managed to establish their own shops. It is particularly notable that many of the street vendors in this position were more or less recent migrants to the city, suggesting they had less capacity to call on local networks of support at difficult times. In 1559 in Florence, Vincenzo di Pierantonio explained in his petition to the duke how he had come to the city from Siena twenty years earlier to work as a *cartolaio*, but

being very poor and burdened with children, he never has been able to put enough together to start his own shop, and always has been, as he is now, an apprentice, and since he could not live on his salary that his bosses gave him of five lire a week, always he was accustomed to go on holidays to sell in the piazzas and through the streets, in order to save something.⁴⁴

⁴⁰On these *poveri* see, for example, ASV, Arte dei librai e stampatori, busta 163, reg. 2, fol. 8r (5 November 1598) (hereafter ASV, ALS, followed by busta, register, and folio nos.). The statutes of the Florentine Arte dei medici include a resolution to help members of the guild who fell into poverty, and the guild consuls could be lax in forcing poorer matriculants to pay their entrance fees. Ciasca, *Statuti dell'Arte*, 144 (statute of 1349); and Katherine Park, *Doctors and Medicine in Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 25.

⁴¹ASV, ALS, 163.2.7v (1 October 1598).

⁴²ASE, SMN 195.24r (February 1569). See also the petition of the orphan Bartolomeo di Luca cited in n1 above.

⁴³Tim Carter, “Music-Selling in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence: The Bookshop of Piero di Giuliano Morosi,” *Music & Letters* 70, no. 4 (1989): 483–504.

⁴⁴ASE, SMN 193.13r (March 1560). Vincenzo was permitted to sell.

In 1567, the Venetian Inquisitors called in a poorly dressed old bookseller called Giacomo da Trino, who operated a stall at Rialto. Giacomo said that he was “a poor man and that he had taken up the job of finding books and buying them in various shops in order to earn a little money.” Although he had been found selling prohibited works, the Inquisitors, considerate of Giacomo’s “old age” and “good reputation in matters of religion,” let him be released. Similarly, in 1574, an old bookseller called Bartolomeo da Sabbio, who sold mostly secondhand books from a chest at Rialto, was questioned about having sold prohibited vernacular works such as the *Rime* of Francesco Berni and the *Facezie* of Poggio Bracciolini. Previously, he had worked as an apprentice in several printing shops, yet Bartolomeo claimed not to be able to read the Index of Prohibited Books (although he owned a copy) nor to be capable of writing down the works he sold. Bartolomeo was prohibited from buying and selling books in the future, although the Holy Office later took pity on his family, his “poverty and inability to exercise another trade” and gave him license to continue to buy and sell as long as he frequently consulted the Index of prohibitions.⁴⁵

The snapshots of peddling activity received from matriculation records, prohibitions and petitions, and run-ins with the guild or civic authorities give little information about the degree of mobility of print peddlers operating in Italian cities in this period. Although some print sellers held stalls that were semipermanent fixtures of the urban landscape, others moved about the city and beyond, and their mobility is even more difficult to capture than their presence in the city.⁴⁶ The peddling of print into the countryside probably became more common as the sixteenth century progressed, as witnessed by the appearance in the Arte dei medici matriculation records from the 1560s on of a few print peddlers specifically described as selling through the city and its hinterland or through the entire Tuscan state. Nevertheless, scholars have suggested that large-scale organized networks of print peddlers reaching into rural areas developed only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as in the example of the Remondini publishing firm from Bassano who employed peddlers mostly from the Tesino area to disseminate their cheap printed products across Europe.⁴⁷ There is little evidence thus far to contradict this; for example, there is no sign in the Florentine Arte dei

⁴⁵ASV, Sant’uffizio, busta 22, fasc. 25, fol. 1r (22 May 1567) and fols. 3v–4r; busta 37, fasc. 3, fol. 3r–v (October–November 1574).

⁴⁶A list of booksellers operating in Venice including a significant number of stallholders is preserved in ASV, Sant’uffizio, busta 156, unnumbered sheet dated 13 September 1567, and is transcribed in Paolo Veneziani’s introduction to *Il libro italiano del Cinquecento: Produzione e commercio* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989), 21–23. Included are “Ser Iacomo da Trini quondam Alberto sartor libraro vende sotto il portego de Rialto” and “Batista furlan quondam Tomaso Zanier a il banco in Piazza di San Marco.”

⁴⁷See Fontaine, *History of Pedlars*, chap. 3; and on the peddlers from Tesino, see Elda Fietta Ielen, *Con la cassella in spalla: Gli ambulanti di Tesino* (Turin: Priuli & Verlucca, 1985); and Mario Infelise, *I Remondini di Bassano: Stampa e industria nel Veneto del Settecento*, 2nd ed. (Bassano del Grappa: Ghedina & Tassotti, 1990), esp. 114–18.

medici e speciali registers of print peddlers hailing consistently from a particular region. In contrast, there already were clusters of peddlers of other goods, particularly of haberdashery and cloth, who matriculated in Florence while on seasonal selling trips from mountain regions such as the Casentino near Arezzo.⁴⁸ Print peddling in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy gives the appearance of a rather ad hoc activity, often still just a commercial sideline for small-time vendors of other goods and taking place principally in urban centers where literacy rates were higher.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it was an increasingly visible presence as the century progressed, suggesting a progression towards the more organized networks that developed later and penetrated farther into the countryside.

A high-profile, and highly mobile, subcategory of part-time print peddlers active in the centers of both Florence and Venice in the sixteenth century was that of performers such as charlatans (*ciarlatani*, *ciurmadori*) or ballad singers (*cantimbanchi*). Ballad singers in particular had been a fixture of the piazzas of Italian cities throughout the medieval period. Characteristically adapting themselves to a new situation, these protean figures turned to selling print very soon after the introduction of the press in Italy, in addition to their performances, which might range from miraculous (and entertaining) cures to ballad singing accompanied by a stringed instrument to comedic dialogues to acrobatics. The pamphlets they peddled usually recorded some aspect of their performances in the public spaces of the city, sometimes beginning with a call to the audience to gather around the performer, and closing with a plea to give him a coin and take away a pamphlet if the show had been pleasing. Medical charlatans who peddled drugs and remedies communicated and advertised their recipes or “secrets” via printed fliers that they sold or gave away from the stage.⁵⁰

Their moving into print reflects an increasing commercialization of the profession of traveling performer in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which saw them become ever more associated with the mercenary and fraudulent practices of the marketplace.⁵¹ Traveling performers walked a fine line between performance and peddling, as in the case of Giorgio di Filippo Manichatti from Pesaro, who matriculated in the Florentine Arte dei medici in May 1581 as a mountebank whose activities included pulling teeth, administering remedies,

⁴⁸See, for example, ASF, Arte dei medici e speciali, reg. 22, fols. 301v–3r: four *merciai* (haberdashers) and *reticellai* (hairnet sellers) from the Casentino who registered within two days of each other in February 1584.

⁴⁹On the “hothouse effect” of the city on literacy rates, see R. A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500–1800*, 2nd ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2002), 150–51.

⁵⁰Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism*, chap. 10. The dissemination of cheap print by such performers is explored more fully in Salzberg, “In the Mouths of Charlatans.”

⁵¹The intertwining of performance and peddling was an essential feature of medical charlatantry from its beginnings in the fifteenth century, as demonstrated by Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism*.

and selling stories, unguents, salves, and musk soaps.⁵² Similarly, a 1543 restriction on mountebanks' performances in Venice's Piazza San Marco specifically listed their activities as including singing, giving out drugs and stories, and pulling teeth (*cantar, dar via ballotte, historie, o . . . cavar denti*).⁵³ When sixteenth-century writers wanted to evoke the crass commercialism of their age, when it seemed that everything was up for sale, repeatedly they used the figure of the charlatan or mountebank, who represented, in the words of Katherine Park, a "lightning conductor for more general anxieties about an increasingly monetarized economy and market society, trading in unfamiliar goods from distant places."⁵⁴

At least 179 of these performers enrolled in the Florentine *Arte dei medici e speciali* between 1490 and 1600, almost all of them after the 1540s and in escalating numbers as time went on.⁵⁵ Again, the relative abundance of the Florentine evidence does not mean that this was solely a Florentine phenomenon. These figures frequently were peripatetic and occasionally the sources allow one to follow them as they moved around the peninsula. For example, in 1551 the records of the Venetian health magistrates show that the charlatan Latino de' Grassi was kicked out of Venice for exaggerating the benefits of his electuary against venoms, which he sold publicly along with two printed recipes. The Florentine records demonstrate he simply turned up several months later in Florence.⁵⁶ Many traveling charlatans claimed—truly or falsely—in their petitions to work in Florence that they had already been licensed by the authorities in other cities of Italy.⁵⁷

As well as moving texts and ideas around the Italian peninsula, these figures were significant because they communicated them by means of oral performance, whether by the advertisement of titles and texts by hawking or via more elaborate recitations of poems, songs, or dialogues that were then sold in print. Although certainly not a simple and direct "voice of the people," they were important cultural mediators, also peddling high cultural literary works in a cheap printed form that made the works accessible to broader audiences. While generally they took care to flatter the local authorities who permitted their presence in the center of the urban landscape, occasionally these performers voiced opinions on topics such as wealth and poverty that went against the dominant views promoted by church and state authorities.⁵⁸ For this reason they were treated with suspicion,

⁵²ASF, *Arte dei medici e speciali*, reg. 14, fol. 174r.

⁵³ASV, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, busta 729, fol. 26r.

⁵⁴Katherine Park, "Country Medicine in the City Marketplace: Snakehandlers as Itinerant Healers," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 117.

⁵⁵Of these, eleven were specifically listed as selling some kind of print, although undoubtedly many more did.

⁵⁶ASV, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, busta 729, fols. 216r–17r (22 April 1551). For Grassi's registration in Florence as a "medicus chyirurgus," see ASF, *Arte dei medici e speciali*, reg. 12, fol. 61r.

⁵⁷See, for example, ASF, SMN, 196.177r, 294r; 198.20r, 113r–v, 142r–v.

⁵⁸Giorgio Caravale, "Censura e pauperismo tra Cinque e Seicento: Controriforma e cultura dei 'senza lettere,'" *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 38, no. 1 (2002): 39–77.

and increasingly subjected to procedures of licensing or matriculation in local guilds so that their activity and movements could be monitored.⁵⁹

In this survey of various kinds of print peddlers operating in the streets of Venice and Florence in this period, finally it should be noted that women are notably absent in the evidence currently available. Women peddlers, particularly of food, were common throughout this period, although Judith C. Brown speculated that there was a growing discomfort with this kind of female work that required “mobility and public exposure,” and a wish to restrict women ever more to the home.⁶⁰ A considerable number of women matriculated in the Florentine *Arte dei medici e speziali*, but all of them were identified as widows or daughters of registered masters with shops. As in Venice, there seem to have been no women matriculated to work in printing or bookselling, although in both cities wives, daughters, and widows undoubtedly were closely involved in the life of the shop and sometimes took very active roles in the business.⁶¹ As a very public activity, selling print probably was not considered a respectable profession for women. Perhaps, too, it required at least a moderate literacy and familiarity with literature that women were less likely to have.⁶² Nevertheless, with historians’ growing awareness of the sheer size of the informal economy that lay outside the official guild structures of early modern cities, a sector into which much women’s work would have fallen,⁶³ the possibility must remain open that there were female print peddlers on the streets of Florence and Venice. The range of

⁵⁹On the licensing of charlatans, see Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism*, chap. 4. A database of charlatans based on license records has been made available online by Gentilcore at the UK data archive (<http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>).

⁶⁰Judith C. Brown, “A Woman’s Place Was in the Home: Women’s Work in Renaissance Tuscany,” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 215–16. On the particularly troubling nature of female peddlers to early modern authorities, see also Merry Wiesner Wood, “Paltry Peddlers or Essential Merchants? Women in the Distributive Trades in Early Modern Nuremberg,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12, no. 1 (1981): 3–13; Dean T. Ferguson, “The Body, the Corporate Idiom, and the Police of the Unincorporated Worker in Early Modern Lyons,” *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (2000): 561; and Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 34–35. Notably, the prohibition against street trading, cited in n24 above, referred to both men and women.

⁶¹Deborah Parker, “Women in the Book Trade in Italy, 1475–1620,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1996): 509–41.

⁶²In contrast, for two cases of male *merciai* (haberdashers) petitioning on behalf of their wives for permission to sell in the streets on *feste*, see ASF, SMN, 193.598r, 601r. Paul F. Grendler estimated rates of full literacy in sixteenth-century Venice as approximately 33 percent of boys and 12 to 13 percent of girls. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 46–47. However, for the argument that there was a high level of “functional semiliteracy” in Italian cities in this period, see Armando Petrucci, “Scrittura, alfabetismo ed educazione grafica nella Roma del primo Cinquecento: Da un libretto di conti di Maddalena Pizzicarola in Trastevere,” *Scrittura e civiltà* 2 (1978): 184.

⁶³See, in particular, James R. Farr, “On the Shop Floor: Guilds, Artisans, and the European Market Economy, 1350–1750,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 1 (1997): 24–54.

peddlers surveyed here must be assumed to have included many more figures never recorded in the guild registers, petitions, and trials that survive, and now lost to scholars' searching.

REGULATING THE STREET

As print peddlers active in Florence and Venice in the sixteenth century slipped in and between various categories of selling and other public activities, it is not surprising that a range of civic and religious bodies at one time or another were concerned with their regulation. As well as being a component of the retail economy, peddling activity might be regulated as part of policy on public order and sanitation, or on poverty and crime.⁶⁴ Regulation of the street trade was influenced by a number of (often competing) concerns and the interests of different groups; the attitude of the authorities in both Venice and Florence towards the traders was ambivalent and the policy on this issue inconsistent as a result. Nevertheless, across the century there was a proliferation of strategies developed to monitor and restrict the street trade, even if the degree to which these strategies succeeded is questionable.

A principal problem was that itinerant sellers fit uneasily into a system of economic transactions primarily still "rooted in the personal," in which price and terms of sale were influenced by face-to-face negotiation, trust, and long-term credit.⁶⁵ Peddlers often were foreigners; frequently they lacked a fixed place in the city let alone in its regulatory economic structures. Hence they were more prone to suspicions of dodgy dealing and criminality.⁶⁶ Peddlers themselves had an interest in countering this reputation. Some appear to have done so by returning regularly to the same places, selling on credit, and building up commercial relationships with customers over time, as certainly was the case by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶⁷ Enrolling in a guild was another form of authorization suggesting that these foreign figures with no fixed place in local society were, to some degree, regulated and monitored.⁶⁸

⁶⁴For example, on restrictions on fruit and vegetable sellers at Rialto in the pursuit of orderliness, see Donatella Calabi and Paolo Morachiello, *Rialto: Le fabbriche e il ponte (1514–1591)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 118; on street selling of eggs for the same reason, ASF, SMN, 194.127r; and on secondhand peddling and the movement of goods because of plague, see Allerston, "Market in Second-Hand Clothes," 279.

⁶⁵Evelyn Welch, "Making Money: Pricing and Payments in Renaissance Italy," in *The Material Renaissance*, ed. Michelle O'Malley and Evelyn Welch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 80.

⁶⁶For suspicions that peddlers were vending stolen goods because of the low prices they offered, see ASF, SMN, 192.319r; 193.48r; 195.20r, 145r.

⁶⁷Fontaine, *History of Pedlars*, 91–92. See Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 37–40, on the Vignarchi clan of cloth peddlers in late sixteenth-century Tuscany, who extended credit to their customers over long periods.

⁶⁸Nevertheless, it is unclear from the Arte dei medici records how often peddlers were forced to join the guild when found trading illegally, and how often they presented themselves willingly. Matriculations such as that of a *stovigliaio* (crockery seller), "found at the fair of San Simone" in

The desire to monitor, license, count, and control mobile individuals such as peddlers by one means or another was a growing tendency of early modern states that can be discerned in both Florence and Venice.⁶⁹ The cultural climate of post-Tridentine Italy in particular engendered ever greater control not only over written texts, but over words spoken or performed, over the indecorous use of public urban spaces, and over the movement of people who might spread disease, immorality, or religious heterodoxy. Moreover, often these issues were linked in the minds of legislators, as in the example of the Venetian magistracy of the Esecutori contro la bestemmia, which was given jurisdiction over the dissemination of print as well as over other disturbances to public order and morality such as blasphemy, gambling, and the unlicensed entry of foreigners into the city.⁷⁰ Peddlers, with their itinerancy and position on the fringes of society, their sale of spectacle and novelty, were problematic on a number of fronts. Their activity was not consonant with the view of those who ruled Renaissance cities and desired them to be grand, wealthy, and well-ordered spaces, who increasingly advocated ejecting the poor and vagrant from the city or enclosing them in hospitals or shelters.⁷¹ Peddlers were problematic above all because they upset the notion of the ordered city, crossing boundaries of both space and time that authorities were making increasing efforts to police. Their mobility made plain how tenuous were the divisions of the urban environment into the spaces (and times) for politics, religious practice, entertainment, and commercial activity.

This is evident in the attempts to prevent peddlers from trading on feast days. These holidays, when artisans and retailers were prohibited from opening or working in their shops, were a favored time for outdoor selling because there were many people in the streets.⁷² The Via dei Servi in Florence, for example, was described by many contemporaries as “like a fair” on such days, so crowded was it with ambulant vendors and swarms of visitors to the city going in pilgrimage to the church of the Santissima Annunziata.⁷³ Although the city was meant to be a space of religious observance and devotion in these moments, such occasions also were a good opportunity for commercial activity, particularly to sell

October 1586, suggest matriculations were sometimes coerced; see ASF, Arte dei medici e speciali, reg. 13, fol. 22v. Many matriculants also never paid the full amount of their entrance fees; see Park, *Doctors and Medicine*, 25–26.

⁶⁹Cf. Ferguson, “The Body, the Corporate Idiom.”

⁷⁰Elizabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 80. On the Esecutori, see Renzo Derosas, “Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel ’500–’600: Gli Esecutori contro la bestemmia,” in *Stato, società e giustizia nella Repubblica veneta (sec. XV–XVIII)*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi (Rome: Jouvence, 1980), 431–528.

⁷¹Brian Pullan, “Poveri, mendicanti, e vagabondi (secoli XIV–XVII),” in *Storia d’Italia: Annali I: Dal feudalismo al capitalismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 981–1047.

⁷²On the attitudes of church and state authorities to working, trading, and displaying goods on the many movable and immovable feast days of the Italian calendar, see Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 111–15.

⁷³See, for example, ASF, SMN, 193.461r, 465r.

religious-themed works such as stories about the lives of saints (*leggende*) and images of holy figures. Some evidently transgressed the supposedly holy nature of these days still more by selling works deemed entirely inappropriate on such occasions in the religious climate of post-Tridentine Italy. In Venice, for example, a 1565 ruling of the magistrates in charge of small-time commerce, the Giustizia Vecchia, instructed that on feast days under the portico of the Rialto market square known as the Drapparia it was permitted only to sell “images of saints, books of the epistles, the evangelists, and legends of the saints, offices, bibles, and similar devout works,” and not “dirty books, plays, and [works] of any other sort that be profane.” Down the commercial thoroughfare of the Merceria that ran from the Rialto Bridge towards Piazza San Marco, and under the portico at San Marco, there might be sold only images of saints and other “honest and devout” subjects, and not of “dishonest and shameful things.”⁷⁴

Particularly from the 1540s, as the propagandistic power of the press became increasingly apparent, both lay and religious authorities were concerned by the dissemination of politically sensitive or heterodox religious print.⁷⁵ Some peddlers of filo-Protestant or anti-Catholic print undoubtedly were active by the middle decades of the century, sometimes coming from Switzerland or Germany down into Italy.⁷⁶ The Venetian authorities in particular did not neglect to regulate peddling as they attempted to control the spread of print in the city, although peddlers were particularly hard to control as they could more easily flee the surveillance of the magistrates and their minions than established sellers with shops. The Venetians issued more and more decrees that specifically prohibited selling unlicensed print on the streets, bridges, and squares, as in the law of February 1543, issued by the Council of Ten, which stated that no one could print or sell any work without first obtaining a license, and specifically extended it to all those “who sell such books and works, prognostications, stories, songs, letters, and other similar things on the bridge of the Rialto, and in other places of this city.”⁷⁷ In 1568, a similar edict was issued, and subsequent investigations led to the fining of several peddlers, including a performer called Stefano Mantovano, who was selling some unidentifiable stories about vagabonds (*alcune istorie cioè quella di vagabondi*) from his bench or *banco*.⁷⁸ Undoubtedly many more such figures peddling print in the streets slipped through the fingers of the

⁷⁴Law copied into the *Matricola dell'Arte dei stampatori e librari di Venezia*, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice, MS. Cicogna 3044/ Mariiegola no. 119, fol. 42r.

⁷⁵Berta Maracchi Biagiarelli, “Il privilegio di stampatore ducale nella Firenze medicea,” *Archivio storico italiano* 123, no. 3 (1965): 304–70; Grendler, *Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*.

⁷⁶See Rozzo, *La strage ignorata*, 149–52.

⁷⁷ASV, Consiglio dei dieci, Parte comuni, filza 32, fasc. 234.

⁷⁸ASV, Esecutori contro la bestemmia, busta 56, vol. 2, fol. 40v (2 August 1568). See also the fining of “Benetto francese who sells stories around the place,” found peddling some “immoral pictures,” fol. 41v (9 September 1568). The 1568 decree is cited in n35 above.

authorities, packing up their stages or stalls or running off with their baskets before the authorities could catch them at work.

The increasing efforts of religious and civic authorities to ensure the orderly use of space in the city and the dissemination of only licensed print were tempered somewhat by occasional clemency towards poor sellers who broke the rules. As both Florence and Venice struggled with economic decline and terrible bouts of famine and plague in the later sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, it was recognized that street peddling of print at least was preferable to begging or crime, which both cities were working particularly hard to control at this time.⁷⁹ It may be that with a much smaller printing industry the Florentines in particular could afford to worry less about the dissemination of illicit print. The Florentine duke from 1537 to 1574, Cosimo I, who did not always comply with the papacy's Counter-Reformation initiatives,⁸⁰ repeatedly demonstrated more concern that the poor without other means to support themselves should be allowed to continue peddling than that prohibitions against feast day trading or free print distribution be enforced. In 1547, for instance, Cosimo overrode some fines handed out by the *Arte dei medici e speziali* to street vendors selling print illicitly on *feste*.⁸¹ Even the guild officials sometimes acknowledged that this activity was a preferable alternative to others to which a desperate man might turn. In 1560, for instance, they urged the duke to absolve some sellers of print caught in the streets on *feste*, since "it is better that they be occupied on such days in selling in public rather than turning to a life of crime causing great damage and setting a worse example."⁸² In Venice, government bodies similarly showed clemency to the peddlers on occasion, undoubtedly for the same reasons. The *Provveditori di Comun* who oversaw the guilds were not prepared completely to enforce a ban introduced by the guild of printers and booksellers on the participation in the trade by unlicensed outsiders. They added an exemption for "those who sell stories (*istorie*) around the city."⁸³ Presumably, such vendors were considered to be of too little importance and too poor to be forced to fulfill the necessary requirements and pay the enrollment fee in the guild.

The relationship between more settled shopkeepers (generally guildsmen) and their mobile counterparts was a similarly conflicted one, although again there is evident a tendency for guildsmen increasingly to band together against peddlers in the course of the sixteenth century. In Florence, the *Arte dei medici e speziali* was relatively permissive of street sellers, seeming to prefer to accept

⁷⁹Daniela Lombardi, "Poveri a Firenze: Programmi e realizzazioni della politica assistenziale dei Medici tra Cinque e Seicento," in *Timore e carità: I poveri nell'Italia moderna*, ed. Giorgio Politi, Mario Rosa, and Franco Della Peruta (Cremona: Biblioteca Statale e Libreria Civica di Cremona, 1982), 165–84; Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

⁸⁰Biagiarelli, "Il privilegio di stampatore," 312.

⁸¹ASF, SMN, 192.562 (December 1547).

⁸²ASF, SMN, 193.6r.

⁸³ASV, ALS, 163.1.75v (15 March 1588).

them into the corporate body where they could be taxed and controlled than to exclude them altogether. Certainly, anyone not born in the city or district of Florence had to pay a double matriculation fee and was not allowed to hold positions of power within the guild, but this was common to other cities. However, there were periodic complaints by shopkeeper members of the Arte against street sellers, and attempts to circumscribe their activity. In 1547, for instance, some shopkeepers complained about a pair of traveling vendors of haberdashery (*merce*), Arrigo da Milano and Guglielmo Tedesco, who set up a bench in the streets near the established shops. The merchandise of these “who go wandering about” (*vanno vagabundi*) could not possibly be as good as that of the shopkeepers, it was claimed, and yet the street activity detracted from their trade. The foreigners were prohibited from selling within sixty braccia of the shops.⁸⁴

A much larger body than that of the printing trade in Florence, the Venetian master printers and booksellers, were more eager to be accorded the prestige and regard deserved by one of the city’s leading industries. Once the guild of printers and booksellers became active in the latter half of the sixteenth century, it made various attempts to prevent the intrusion of unlicensed outsiders into the trade. In this is what Dean T. Ferguson has described as “the logic of the corporate idiom,” in which “corporations required a disorderly ‘outside’ to define themselves as social bodies.” Unincorporated workers such as peddlers provided the obvious scapegoats, the outsiders against whom the insiders could fortify themselves.⁸⁵ So, in 1572, one of the Venetian guild’s first recorded actions was to restrict participation in the trade to matriculated practitioners who demonstrated years of training and experience in the city. Foreigners had to pay twice the matriculation fee of natives, while the children or heirs of masters were exempted from any payment.⁸⁶ Street sellers were not banned per se, but they were more likely to be welcomed if they demonstrated experience in the industry and preferably a fixed location of sale, such as the stallholder Nicolò Furlan who was admitted to the guild in April 1578.⁸⁷ In contrast, the guild leaders rejected the charlatan Domenico di Francesco of Florence in the same year. The charlatan pleaded that the guild should leave him in peace as he only sold a small amount of printed merchandise, but he was ordered to hand in his works within three days, or expect further action.⁸⁸ In 1586, the guild again sought to ban all those nonmembers of the Arte who “print, and sell, or have books printed, or sold, from printing shops, workshops, stores, and stalls, in large or small quantities.” These unlicensed outsiders “usurp the bread from our hands, since it is primarily

⁸⁴ASF, SMN, 192.591r–92r.

⁸⁵Ferguson, “The Body, the Corporate Idiom,” 548.

⁸⁶*Matricola dell’Arte dei stampatori*, fols. 18v–19r (27 April 1572).

⁸⁷ASV, ALS, 163.1.5r–v (20 April 1578).

⁸⁸ASV, ALS, 163.1.10r (4 June 1578). See also the examination of Gabriel di Anzoli maestro da scuola, who was told to desist from selling books “con banchetti nella Piazza di San Marco” and refused entry to the Arte; ASV, ALS 2.28v (27 September 1601).

we who bear the burdens [taxes] of our trade.”⁸⁹ Likewise, printers, booksellers, and stationers who sold print in other Italian cities made strong moves to prevent the entry of itinerant sellers into the local trade. In Bologna in 1507, printers and stationers attempted to prevent anyone from selling print from shops or stalls in the piazzas who had not been a resident of the city for twenty years.⁹⁰ Similar efforts were made in Milan in 1589, and in Rome in the seventeenth century.⁹¹

An important factor prompting printers and booksellers to define and protect themselves as a corporate body in the latter half of the sixteenth century was the escalating censorship regulations that threatened their freedom and profit. The Venetian guild was decreed in January 1549, when the Council of Ten expressed concern that, while all the other trades in the city were organized into corporations, the printers and booksellers were not, and “every one [of them] operates in their own way, with extreme disorder and confusion.” The Ten wanted to know precisely who was involved in the production and dissemination of print so it could ensure that no “scandalous and heretical” works circulated.⁹² The printers and booksellers also had incentive to gather together and cooperate as they sought to protest the new prohibitions on what could be printed and sold that were introduced with increasing frequency in the second half of the century.⁹³ At the same, the Venetian printers and booksellers also strengthened their condemnation of nonregistered practitioners of their trade, including street peddlers, insisting that the works that incurred the disapproval of the Inquisition or the blasphemy magistrates were “nearly always . . . printed and sold by people outside of our guild, and not matriculated, who do not know or understand our profession.”⁹⁴ The pressure on the Venetian printing trade may have been greater than that on the Florentines because Venice had more commercial and cultural ties to the Protestant north and thus was seen as more at risk of “infection” with heterodox ideas. Nevertheless, censorship laws also prompted the Florentine booksellers to band more closely together against unlicensed outsiders, as when they complained about a restriction on their buying and selling

⁸⁹ASV, ALS, 163.1.74r.

⁹⁰Giorgio Cencetti, “Alcuni documenti sul commercio libraio bolognese al principio del secolo XVI,” *L'Archiginnasio* 30, no. 14 (1935): 355–62.

⁹¹Kevin M. Stevens, “Printers, Publishers and Booksellers in Counter-Reformation Milan: A Documentary Study” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1992), 44–45; Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, “Banchi, botteghe, muriccioli: Luoghi e figure del commercio del libro a Roma nel Settecento,” in *Editoria e istituzioni a Roma tra Settecento e Ottocento: Saggi e documenti* (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1994), 8–10. In Ferrara in the 1470s traveling printers of cheap material were allowed to stop and sell only for three days; see Angela Nuovo, *Il commercio librario a Ferrara tra XV e XVI secolo: La bottega di Domenico Sivieri* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1998), 15–16.

⁹²ASV, Consiglio dei Dieci, Parti comuni, filza 47, fasc. 66 (18 January 1549).

⁹³See Grendler, *Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*, 118–19; Michele Jacoviello, “Proteste di editori e librai veneziani contro l’introduzione della censura sulla stampa a Venezia (1543–1555),” *Archivio storico italiano* 151, no. 1 (1993): 34–35.

⁹⁴ASV, ALS, 163.1.74r (4 September 1586).

of secondhand books saying that this would leave the way open for “second-hand dealers, resellers, scrap metal dealers (*rigattieri, rivenditori, ferravecchi*), or people who have no knowledge” of the trade but who were involved in selling print without impediment.⁹⁵

Despite such complaints, shop-based printers and booksellers continued to employ street sellers to get their wares out to a wide public even as they demonized them. Defining the peddlers as “others” or “outsiders” was a useful way not only to boost the status of the corporate body but also to deflect attention from one’s own misdeeds, since there is ample evidence that, in Venice for example, some of the city’s most prominent printers and booksellers were involved in the clandestine trade.⁹⁶ Yet, ultimately, there were simply too many poor members even within the guild to eradicate street peddling altogether. In 1598, the Venetian guild attempted to control the peddling of print on feast days by issuing four licenses per *fiesta* to poor masters to sell in the streets, but it received many more petitions asking for permission.⁹⁷ In the seventeenth century, the Venetian printing industry by now in clear decline, there were repeated guild regulations against masters sending their apprentices out to sell in the streets, or going out themselves, so evidently the practice was rife.⁹⁸ An “eminently adaptable system,” peddling continued to play a role in the circulation of print, and the following centuries saw the rise of large-scale print peddling networks reaching out into remote areas.⁹⁹ Directed by wealthy entrepreneur figures like the Remondini, these peddlers more easily were monitored and controlled than the ad hoc hawking of the earlier period and thus, one might assume, a more acceptable presence on the streets and roads of Italian cities.

CONCLUSION

In the course of the sixteenth century print peddlers had become a greater issue of concern and anxiety, caught in the crossfire of competing and sometimes conflicting interests about the distribution of print and the orderly organization of city space, the urban economy, and the social body. An important reason for this increasing attention was that the activity of print peddlers entailed the movement of ideas and trends, of news and information, of diversion or dissent. The medium of print, especially in its smallest and cheapest forms was, like the peddlers, mobile and fluid; it flowed across and threatened to erode whatever barriers

⁹⁵A 1570 supplication of the booksellers against a recent raft of printing legislation, transcribed in Biagiarelli, “Il privilegio di stampatore,” 345–46.

⁹⁶Grendler, *Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*, esp. 105–15.

⁹⁷ASV, ALS, 163.2.

⁹⁸Ivo Mattozzi, “Mondo del libro’ e decadenza a Venezia (1570–1730),” *Quaderni storici* 72, no. 3 (1989): 754–55.

⁹⁹Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 2, *The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Sian Reynold (London: Collins, 1986), 79. On later peddling networks, see the works cited in n47 above.

existed between learned and unlearned spheres, or between religious doctrine and heresy.¹⁰⁰ The peddling, hawking, and performing of print alongside the sale of other small consumer goods brought the new products of the press into the quotidian experience of all city dwellers. By these means printed pamphlets, fliers, and images became an ever more ubiquitous presence, opening up markets that would be more fully exploited by the organization of large-scale print peddling networks from the seventeenth century.¹⁰¹

Print peddling and the efforts to control it in the first century or so after the invention of the press cannot be separated from some of the crucial issues of conflict and concern of the early modern period—the escalation of urbanization, the strengthening of centralized states, the controversies over religion, and the communications revolution spurred by the spread of the press—as well as the perennial problems of poverty and uncontrolled migration. Marginal as they were, peddlers of print might be seen as walking examples of all of these trends, in the heart of the city. While religious and civic authorities and guildsmen succeeded in extending a measure of control over the street trade in print, their attempts underline how the spaces of early modern cities—but so too the less tangible realms of print culture, performance, and public life—were shaped by not only the dictates of authorities but by the actions and movements of even the “lowest” of individuals.¹⁰² ♣

¹⁰⁰Carlo Ginzburg and Marco Ferrari, “The Dovecote Has Opened Its Eyes,” in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 11–19.

¹⁰¹Cf. Margaret Spufford on early modern English peddlers: “It is precisely because these people were so important in the distribution of goods like shirts and underclothes that were, or became, essential that the news, jokes, songs, ideas, and few books they carried had so much chance of spreading so widely. It was because they were primarily salesmen of linen and haberdashery, that their ‘cultural’ goods had such a good chance of reaching the widest possible audience: they became cultural intermediaries because they had a vital economic function.” Spufford, “The Pedlar, the Historian and the Folklorist,” 15–16.

¹⁰²Cf. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).