In a much-acclaimed article published in *Il bargello*, Ardengo Soffici pompously proclaimed that “fascism is rural, hence it is an enemy of pan-industrialism as the mechanistic spirit that provokes brutalization, immorality, plutocratic corruption and people’s slavery.”¹ The same blending of populist drives and a deeply reactionary rationale can be found in one of the most intriguing figures of the Strapaese movement: Curzio Malaparte, who antifascist intellectual Piero Gobetti called “fascism’s best pen.” With Malaparte, not only do we encounter one of the most talented writers of this group but also we may appraise the canniness of the figure of the modern intellectual who strives to maintain his prominence under the regime. With varying levels of success, Malaparte was able to skillfully navigate the system, even from a frondist position, while continuing to elaborate on his philosophical and political theory.

The peculiar autonomy that Malaparte always cultivated can be misunderstood for an incongruous form of eclecticism. For instance, while he was strenuously contributing to the Strapaese movement, he simultaneously embarked on the opposite modernist cultural project promoted by Bontempelli. He acted as deputy director for the magazine *900 Cahiers d’Italie et d’Europe* (Italian and European Notebooks), one of the main organs of the hyper-city movement. On the one hand, he helped give literary substance to the cult of the duce. His most famous celebratory poem is *Cantata dell’Arcimussolini* (Song of the Archmussolini), where he flatteringly declaimed: “Traitors . . . Mussolini is diehard. The sun rises
the rooster crows, Oh Mussolini mount your horse!” On the other, he was often a source of annoyance to the regime, and this even cost him a temporary internal exile in 1933. Yet, we will see how this apparent botching of intransigent devotion and, at times, ironic rebelliousness is a salient characteristic of the same savage ontology that Malaparte interprets, albeit in a particularly idiosyncratic way.

**Palinode and Garibaldi’s Tradition**

Let us begin by briefly recalling the political framework that defined Malaparte’s thought and value structure. The first thing to be noticed is the elitist nuance typical of all his writings. Whether a merely cultural attitude or a political one, the distinctive trust in the superior quality of the leader is an unmistakable feature of Malaparte’s mentality. And this is true especially when discussing the destiny of the working class. The leadership of the commander coupled with an unshakeable will functions as a precondition for the building of a harmonious society. Without anticipating my argument, I shall indicate that the reason for this spontaneous form of elitism lies once again in the specific historical response to the problem of modernity. The leader—and we will see how the latter is not conceived of as a positive entity—is the superior, charismatic figure who resolves the ontological incongruence of the field through an individualist act. A peculiar reinterpretation of the reactionary solution to the crisis of modernity, Malaparte’s vitalism appears to be a type of misinterpretation of Henri Bergson’s notion of intuition, where the dialectical process entailed by the latter is liquidated through the act as a display of power.

In this sense, Malaparte’s fidelity to the necessity of an act of force that would inaugurate an antiparliamentary, antidemocratic State built on the unity of labor and capital perfectly translates the autonomist spirit of early *Strapaese* fascism. Mario Isnenghi traced this type of national or patriotic subversivism to the birth of Italy and to certain traits of Giuseppe Garibaldi’s personality and the republican tradition to which he belonged. As argued, the necessity to operate militarily outside the legal system to create a new one, as well as the sort of “hierarchical camaraderie” and “plebiscitary democracy” that directed the Red Shirts’ political life—all these blueprints of “relationships between movement and institutions” were available to early fascism for capture and redefinition in illiberal and oppressive terms. Yet here we should also consider a further characterization of Isnenghi’s definition of national subversivism. I am referring to Fabio Camilletti’s reinterpretation of the *grand gesture* that I find crucial for *Strapaese*’s ideology and that this chapter will investigate more in depth by considering it from the point of view of the (classic) idea of