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Nota di contenuto	Conscience in Luther and Henry VIII -- Shakespearean consciences : Hamlet in Wittenberg -- More Shakespearean consciences : looking back at Henry VIII's conscience -- Supporting conscience in Donne's sermons -- The toleration crisis of 1644 -- Contesting conscience in Eikon Basilike and Eikonoklastes -- Revising conscience in Paradise lost.
Sommario/riassunto	"'Bold Conscience' chronicles the shifting conception of conscience in early modern England, as it evolved from a faculty of restraint--what the author labels "cowardly conscience"--to one of bold and forthright self-assertion. Caught at the vortex of public and private concerns, the concept of the conscience played an important role in post-Reformation England, from clerical leaders on down to laymen, not least because of its central place in determining loyalties during the

English Civil War and the consequent regicide of King Charles I. Yet within this mix of perspectives, the most sinuous, complex, and ultimately lasting perspectives on bold conscience emerge from deliberately literary, rhetorically artistic voices--Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton. Joshua Held argues that literary texts by these authors, in re-casting the idea of conscience as a private, interior, shameful state to one of boldness fit for the public realm, parallel a historical development in which the conscience becomes a platform both for royal power and for common dissent in post-Reformation England. With the 1649 regicide of King Charles I as a fulcrum that unites both literary and historical timelines, Held tracks the increasing power of the conscience from William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Henry VIII to John Donne's court sermons, and finally to Milton's Areopagitica and Charles's defense of his kingship, Eikon Basilike. In a direct attack on Eikon Basilike, Milton destroys the prerogative of the royal conscience in Eikonoklastes, and later in Paradise Lost proposes an alternative basis for inner confidence, rooting it not in divine right but in the 'paradise within,' a metonym for conscience. Applying a fine-grain literary analysis to literary England from about 1601 to 1667, this study looks backward as well to the theological foundations of the concept in Luther of the 1520s and forward to its transformation by Locke into the term 'consciousness' in 1689. Ultimately, Held's study shows how the idea of a conscience in early modern England, long central to the private self and linked to the will, memory, and mind-emerges as a nexus between the private self and the realm of public action, a bulwark against absolute sovereignty, and its attenuation as a means of more limited, personal certainty. Whether in Milton's struggle against King Charles or Hamlet's against King Claudius, the conscience born of the Reformation becomes less a state of inner critique and more a form of outward expression fit for the communal life and commitments demanded by the early modern era"--
