Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice (review)

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over time. Thus Stoics seek to foreclose the "Officer Krupke!" defense that attributes defects of character to a litany of causes outside our control. The normative wise man, of course, has no defects of character, but Garber makes an appealing case for his genuinely eupathic forms of emotion: a yearning for what is good, manifested in friendship or (even) erotic love.

No stone then, but a god? To the Stoics, goodness supervenes automatically once we achieve a rightness of fit between our judgments (which entail behavior) and reality. Reality is the cosmos: orderly and divine. Hence the real obstacle that stands between thoughtful modern people and ancient Stoicism is not its picture of affective life, but the model of an entirely rational universe on which this picture depends.

— Maud W. Gleason

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Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 400 pp.

Having worked on the history of Venetian opera for many years and about to publish a book entitled *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, Eleanor Selfridge-Field had to come to grips with the complex history of the calendar and timekeeping in Venice in the seventeenth century. That calendars and timekeeping changed considerably in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries throughout Europe has long been known, but the problems are particularly intense in Venice. Some of those issues continue into the nineteenth century. (When Rigoletto talks about midnight in Verdi's opera, which had its premiere in Venice in 1851, there are just six strokes of the clock: the "day" was figured as beginning with nightfall.) As we seek to understand contemporary reports, we need to understand precisely how the calendar was figured from moment to moment within the period Selfridge-Field is treating. The church calendar was one thing; the municipal calendar another; many figured their calendars on the basis of the presence or absence of the nobility in the city. And once we turn to theaters, how were seasons counted? What did "Carnival" actually mean? How did "masking" interact with theatrical practice? When were Lenten seasons permitted and how? Which theaters were permitted to be opened during what periods?

Selfridge-Field rightly insists that no one can speak responsibly about the chronology of Venetian opera without considering these matters. Unfortunately, her book is laced with typographical and grammatical errors that do not encourage readers to trust her statements. In chapter 9, on "Season and Genre from the

Middle Ages to Today," there are many outright errors in her treatment of the operas of Rossini and Verdi. These, too, do not encourage readers to have the confidence that her detailed treatment of chronological matters in the seventeenth century requires.
— Philip Gossett
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Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860–1960*
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 332 pp.

This learned and engaging study traces the roots of modernist "moral" aestheticism through German and English Romanticism back to Plato's vision of beauty carrying virtue and goodness in its train. Mao locates — sometimes controversially — the loftiest expression of moral aestheticism in Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde; follows it in Joyce and Dreiser; and unearths the seeds of its undoing in Rebecca West and Auden. I admired Mao's literary readings, but I was particularly fascinated by his argument that, far from fleeing its hegemony, aestheticism was informed by science. Seeing life as a continuing adjustment of malleable organisms to their world, aestheticist ideology anchored the substance of each human personality in minute and unconscious interactions with its environment. It was a short step from there to the thought that children would make a better and more virtuous go at life if they were exposed to art and beauty rather than squalor and ugliness. Most surprising, aestheticism — like naturalism — acknowledged the scientific picture's causal determinism. Pater, for instance, located freedom in the contemplation of the forces that have inevitably made us what we are: "Natural laws we shall never modify, embarrass us as they may; but there is still something in the nobler or less noble attitude with which we watch their fatal combinations." The conceptual problems here are complex, but the faith of this brilliant constellation of people in the redemptive power of beauty now appears deeper and more tragic. Mao suggests that shifting attention from environment to heredity in the late twentieth century may account for the parallel decline of moral aestheticism, but the depressing lessons of history are arguably more important. And although many today want to locate beauty in our genetic and evolutionary heritage, the hope that this move may realize Plato's dream seems to me as dim as Wilde's confidence that ugly wallpaper "must lead a boy brought up under its influence to a career of crime" seems misplaced.
— Alexander Nehamas
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