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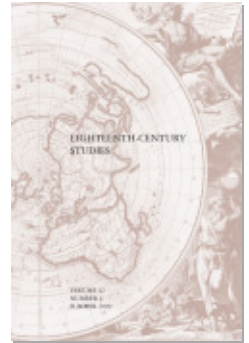
Venetian Reflections

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the malleability of these institutions and how complex the relationship between premodern and modern culture was.

Brophy has synthesized an enormous amount of primary and secondary research, and this book is not for the casual reader. He has made an important contribution to scholarly understanding of popular and elite culture, European politics in the first half of the nineteenth century, the tension between local and national identity, and the nature of modernity in the West. Although his book is beyond the strict chronological scope of eighteenth-century studies, it will be of great interest to anyone interested in the cultural changes engendered by the age of revolution.

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Venetian Reflections

Margaret Doody, *Tropic of Venice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Pp. x, 345. \$32.50.

Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Pp. 394. \$60.00.

With its dazzling facades and waterways, Venice has a way of reflecting visitors' own expectations for the city. After token disapproval, the eighteenth-century adventurer Ange Goudar happily proclaimed that Venetians indulged in vice of every sort without shame. John Ruskin read the fall as divine punishment, with the Venetians he observed—"knots of men of the lowest classes, unemployed and listless, [who] lie basking in the sun like lizards"—direct descendants of the eighteenth century's degenerate maskers (*The Stones of Venice*, 2:76). James Fenimore Cooper's dismissal of Venetian governance, which he called "a narrow, a vulgar, an exceedingly heartless oligarchy," was vintage Americana (*The Bravo*, 340). In *Tropic of Venice*, Margaret Doody proposes a critical reading of such tropes about the Venetian past, while including herself in the long tradition of travelers who have discovered in the city unmatched wealth, mystery, and wonder. The two registers of the book, which appears in the University of Pennsylvania Press series Personal Takes, enliven and humanize the subject, but they fit together uneasily at times.

Doody confesses to having been strongly shaped by the nineteenth century's tropes of Venice: as a place to suffer or die; a place of erotic mystery; a labyrinth, a mask, a play of color and light; as repulsive, ruined, or darkly menacing; as feminine, illusory, or liberating. "I am still trying to puzzle out why I love Venice so much," she writes, "an inquiry that has expanded to larger questions: 'What exactly is Venice? Why is Venice so important to us?'" (17). *Tropic of Venice* offers a meditation on the ways the city has come down to us through novels, plays, poetry, and film, interspersed with Doody's own impressions and experiences. The latter are by turns engaging and eccentric. We hear twice about the "devastatingly handsome" boatman Doody hired to take her around the islands; she states and restates her condemnation of the "stupidest thing done so far," the deepening of

the Grand Canal to accommodate cruise ships; and she spins a theory, based in part upon nose-structure and a taste for polenta, that ancient Carthaginians were the original settlers of Venice (272, 135). Given her reverence for the city, Doody's tone in describing its artists might strike some as uncharacteristically trivializing, despite the winks intended to excuse the indulgence. She twice refers to the "sassy little angels" in a Bellini altarpiece who remind her of Shirley Temple (199, 241). Bellini's Saint Catherine recalls Susan Sarandon. Giorgione was "a party animal," and Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* is, "like Madonna (the 1980s performer), . . . 'a material girl'" (210, 247). As accounts of Doody's own reactions, the observations cannot be faulted, but they tend to grate when read alongside her eloquent and occasionally stunning accounts of, for instance, the shimmering play of light on Venetian surfaces or Giandomenico Tiepolo's sketches of Pulcinella ("the unidentifiable and unplaceable self, caught up in an act and acting absurdly, in a world that is itself absurd but manifests an underlying menace") (236).

Tropic of Venice has much to offer the literate traveler seeking a serious and spirited guide. Doody's range is immense, and her writing is vibrant and musical. References tumble forth amiably (Henry James, Patricia Highsmith, Ian McEwan, John Profumo, Petrarch, Erica Jong . . .), as the city's well-known visitors share space with lesser figures. Doody's inclusion of excerpts from Michelangelo Mariani's soaring book *Le Meraviglie della città di Venezia* (1666) is a gift. Doody is a convincing anatomist of her own and others' responses. As an archaeology of the dominant tropes, however, the book is less successful, largely because Doody never wholly separates her own experiences from those she aims to penetrate. She presents Byron's highly influential condemnation that mixed pity with scorn without mentioning the Napoleonic propagandist Pierre Daru and his self-serving *Histoire de la République de Venise* (1819), which Byron used as a guide. Her description of Carlo Goldoni's plays as proto-democratic is accurate, but to argue from this that a democratic spirit was "never entirely absent from Venice itself" disregards the Republic's unyielding hierarchy and the widespread opposition to Goldoni's plays, most stridently voiced by the acid-penned Carlo Gozzi, which ultimately drove him into exile (78). Excessive credulity regarding Casanova's supposed critique of arbitrary power, spies, and secret tribunals is sustained only by omitting his own eager espionage for the State Inquisition.

Doody's view of Venice as a libertarian refuge is contradicted by its draconian laws against religious and sexual infractions. "Venice never burned a single individual for heresy," she writes (162). Perhaps. But in the late sixteenth century, Protestants were regularly executed under orders of the Venetian Holy Office, most typically by being heaved into the Adriatic with heavy stones lashed to their bodies. A form of torture that dislocated the victims' shoulders was common in eliciting confessions, a practice that belies the claim that the city "tolerated infidels and heretics within its borders" (162). Doody repeats the canard that the government discouraged homosexuality by urging harlots to stand topless at open windows; from this she concludes that the city was a home for sexual freedom. In fact, the Republic responded to acts of sodomy with mutilation, branding, whipping, and, on occasion, beheading and burning. As a mixed genre, *Tropic of Venice* calls to mind other excellent accounts of nineteenth-century myth-making (e.g., John Pemble, *Venice Rediscovered* [1995] and Margaret Plant, *Venice: Fragile City, 1797–1997* [2002]), as well as classics of the travelogue (e.g., Jan Morris, *Venice* [1960]). Doody's attractive prose and her book's many illustrations are genuine pleasures. Its errors of fact, signs of haste, and questionable conclusions leave these earlier works unrivaled for their care and insight.

Song and Season is the most recent installment in musicologist Eleanor Selfridge-Field's meticulous reconstruction of musical performances in early modern Venice (cf. *Venetian Instrumental Music from Gabrieli to Vivaldi* [1975], *Pallade Veneta: Writings on Music in Venetian Society, 1650–1760* [1985], *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660–1760* [2007]). The collective material in these books adds significantly to a field laden with myths and misconceptions. Together, they contain much detailed information unavailable elsewhere. They are a major contribution to musicology and bring important understanding to the cultural history of Venice more generally. *Song and Season* advances the thesis that battles over time in Venice were a part of larger struggles for cultural control. The assertion is undoubtedly true—Venetian authorities maintained a paternal grip on almost all aspects of public life from dress to speech in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—but the real wealth of this book is more in the evidence Selfridge-Field has unearthed than in her defense of the claim. The calendar year from January to December was only one among many seasonal designations. Other “virtual” seasons included the Venetian year (beginning March 1), the legislative year (beginning the Saturday before Advent), and the liturgical year (beginning November 30). Timekeeping was complicated and imprecise: the first hour of the day was calculated from sunset, and Venetians were dependent upon parish church-bells throughout the city for their work, worship, sleep, and leisure. The seemingly simple question “How does one date a Venetian opera?”—essential to Selfridge-Field's overall project—is in fact endlessly complex (15).

Untangling the welter of overlapping dates and conflicting records, Selfridge-Field maps the contours of musical and dramatic performances year-by-year in Venice's eight major theaters from the 1670s to the 1750s. She chronicles the rise of the city's unique “double-wedge” of theatrical seasons, in which performances peaked between mid-October and mid-November and again between late-December and Lent. She charts the genres and venues of new works against the social and political rhythms of Venetian life to gauge likely audiences and evolving tastes. She discusses specific regulations that fill out our understanding of Venetian dramatic experience. No performance could begin before sundown, for instance, and none could go longer than four hours; all libretti required prior approval from the Rectors of the University of Padua; permission for the opening of theaters each year came only by decree from the Council of Ten. A valuable section on sources offers extended commentary on books, foreign and domestic newspapers, diplomatic dispatches, and spies' reports treating musical life in the city. There are brief histories of all the major Venetian theaters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as helpful tables summarizing the branches of Venetian civic administration, divisions of the theatrical year according to feast-days, and a decade-by-decade accounting of the average number of dramatic works per theater. Together with *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, this book permits precise knowledge of premieres, repertoires, composers, librettists, and dramatic trends over time.

Of particular importance is Selfridge-Field's clear-eyed account of Venetian carnival, which, contrary to travelers' accounts in the eighteenth century and the reigning view among many scholars today, did not last six months of the year. The Council of Ten alone had the authority to declare the start of carnival, which varied from year to year but usually fell about a month before Lent. Selfridge-Field observes that masking in Venice extended outside the carnival season for events that were not always festive, and she rightly points to the misconceptions that persist from wrongly identifying masks with carnival license. “The image of Carnival has become further distorted in recent years by loose applications of Mikhail Bakhtin's

genres of the ‘carnavalesque,’” she writes. “Masking permitted many a folly, but most outrageous behavior was committed by visitors, since most attendees were from elsewhere. Venetians were by nature generally compliant with regulations” (106–7).

Penetrating the accretions of legend that still surround the Serene Republic will require the kind of painstaking archival work that Selfridge-Field has been engaged in across Europe for the last twenty years. Her conclusions are circumscribed, and she keeps herself scrupulously close to the sources. The results of such patient digging will be of lasting value to scholars.