Warwick writing

A Venetian Miscellany

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

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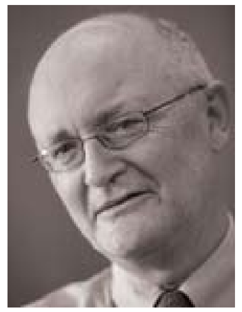
A Venetian Miscellany

A celebration of the many facets of Venice
by the University of Warwick

Warwick in Venice



Foreword

BY NIGEL THRIFT, VICE-CHANCELLOR

WARWICK HAS BEEN intimately connected with Venice for almost as long as it has existed as a university. It was in 1967 that Sir John Hale, Founding Professor of History, brought out the first Warwick students to spend the autumn term in Venice, living and studying in that remarkable city, taught by Warwick staff in the Palazzo Brandolini. Thus began the Venice Term. Later, historians were joined by art historians, undergraduates by postgraduates, in a programme now firmly embedded in the Warwick curriculum and taught in our permanent base in Venice, the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava.

Amongst UK universities, Warwick's Venice Term is unique. It allows our students to study *in situ* – to see the Renaissance come alive in the buildings and artworks of Venice and the Veneto, to experience day-to-day life in a different culture, using a different language. This has been a hugely important experience for, by now, several generations of Warwick students. None of this would have been possible without constant help and encouragement from Venice itself: from the city's public institutions; from academic colleagues at Venice's distinguished University, Ca'Foscari; from those who ensured that Venice's magnificent libraries were open to our students; from the many people who, over the years, have helped us find teaching accommodation and who have generously welcomed Warwick students into their homes and allowed us briefly to share their lives.

Palazzo Pesaro Papafava; photo by Tim Ball

'...a programme now firmly embedded in the Warwick curriculum and taught in our permanent base in Venice, the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava.'

In return, we hope that Warwick has been able to contribute something to Venice. We are proud to be associated with the splendid work being done by Venice in Peril, whose Co-President, Lady Frances Clarke, is an honorary graduate of the University and a member of our Venice Advisory Board. We are delighted to welcome Ca'Foscari students to our lectures at the Palazzo. We were honoured, in December 2010, to be awarded the Venice Prize for Cultural Communication. Above all, we have made an important contribution to the scholarship of the Renaissance – in art history, history, cultural studies, drama, literature. Warwick now has an international reputation for excellence in Renaissance Studies and its acknowledged leadership in this area is due, in no small measure, to our long association with Venice. Over the last five years, this position has been reinforced by our year-round occupation of the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, which is rapidly becoming a centre for international conferences and symposia that frequently, though by no means exclusively, address subjects connected with the Renaissance.

Students at work in the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava; photo by Tim Ball

This book of essays celebrates Warwick in Venice. We asked a whole range of Warwick people – academics, administrators, students past and present and distinguished friends – to write about Venice, whether as a reflection of their own academic interests, or in the form of personal musings upon the city itself. The result is this *Venetian Miscellany*. I hope you will enjoy reading it. ❋

‘the Paradise of cities’

(JOHN RUSKIN, DIARY ENTRY FOR 8 MAY 1841)

Photo by Tim Ball

COMMENT

'The city is not only a setting for the doomed love story of the two protagonists ... it also assumes the role of a character, and as the mood of Venice changes with the end of summer and the onset of winter, so D'Annunzio's extravagantly sensual descriptions mirror the stages of the break-up of the relationship.'

Susan Bassnett FRSL has just retired from Warwick where she was Professor of Comparative Literature and a former Pro-Vice-Chancellor. She began her academic career in Italy, moving via the United States to the University of Warwick. She is one of the leading figures and founding scholars in the discipline of Translation Studies. She is author of over 20 books, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a council member of the Academia Europaea. Her translation of D'Annunzio's 'The Flame' appeared in 1991.

A Very Venetian Affair

BY SUSAN BASSNETT FRSL

'It was still evening, the time he had described in one of his books as Titian's hour, because everything seemed to be gleaming with its own rich inner glow, like that painter's naked bodies, almost lighting up the sky rather than taking light from it. The octagonal temple of the Salute, designed by Baldassare Longhena from the Dream of Polifilus, rose up out of its own glassy reflection, with its dome, its scrolls, its statues, its columns, its balustrades, as rich and strange as one of Neptune's buildings with its tortuous sea-shapes, glistening with mother-of-pearl. Salt and damp had spread over it, and seemed to have left something fresh, silvery and jewel-like in the hollows of the stones that gave the vague impression of open oystershells lying in their pearly bed.'

This passage from the opening pages of Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel, *Il fuoco (Fire)* establishes Venice as the focal point for what will follow. The city is not only a setting for the doomed love story of the two protagonists, Stelio Effrena, a rising young writer and his mistress, the great actress La Foscarina, it also assumes the role of a character, and as the mood of Venice changes with the end of summer and the onset of winter, so D'Annunzio's extravagantly sensual descriptions mirror the stages of the break-up of the relationship.

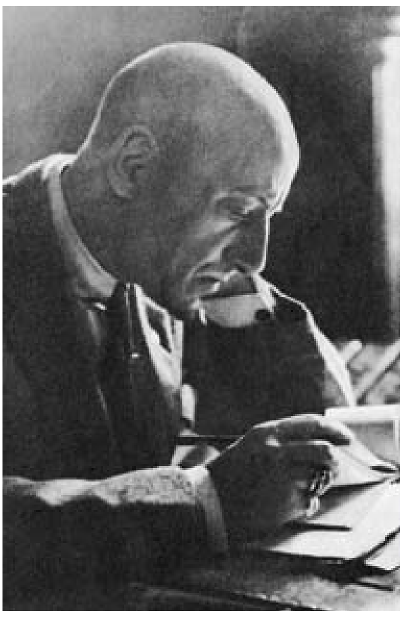
Il fuoco first appeared in 1900 and caused a scandal immediately, with one critic referring to it as 'the most swinish novel ever written'. D'Annunzio sent a copy to Sarah Bernhardt, who pointedly returned it unread. For the novel was based on the actual relationship between D'Annunzio and Eleonora Duse, one of the greatest actresses of her age, and was heavily autobiographical, despite D'Annunzio's public denials. The problem was not with the veracity of D'Annunzio's fictionalised account of his love affair with Duse, a relationship that had begun in Venice in 1894, but with the way in which the novel exposed intimate secrets that Duse had confided in him about her early life and her emotions. Moreover, D'Annunzio had contrived to translate the four year age

difference between himself and Duse (he was 31, she was 35) into a yawning gap, depicting Stelio as the personification of springtime and La Foscarina as an ageing autumnal figure, jealous and possessive, all too aware of her fading beauty. The golden light of Venice in September with which the novel opens turns into the clinging fogs of November; by the end, the lovers shiver as their gondola 'slid into the dampness of the dark canal, sailing under the bridge that overlooks the island of San Michele, brushing past the black gondola cabins putrefying beside the decaying walls.' The humiliating portrayal of an ageing actress struggling to hold on to her youthful lover outraged Duse's friends and supporters.

Gabriele D'Annunzio was an extraordinary character, even in an age of flamboyance and fin-de-siècle excess. Born into a middle-class family in Pescara in 1863, he established a reputation for himself very early as a poet, then moved on to novels and plays. He married well, but was serially unfaithful to his wife and many lovers, and his passion for self-dramatisation seems to have worked as an aphrodisiac, despite his physical shortcomings. Short, balding and far from handsome, he nevertheless was able to charm women of all classes of society into his bed, including the great Duse. Isadora Duncan remarked that listening to D'Annunzio's own brand of flattery must have been 'something like the experience of Eve when she heard the voice of the serpent in Paradise'.

Duse, on the contrary, guarded her private life closely, but seems to have been drawn to D'Annunzio not only by sexual attraction but by a shared passion for art. D'Annunzio wrote a play for her in 1895, *La città morta* (interestingly, the plot of this play is the same as the play Stelio Effrena is writing for La Foscarina) but then changed his mind and gave it to her great rival, Sarah Bernhardt instead. Despite this betrayal of trust, Duse performed in several other of his plays, regularly losing money because his dramatic output was not a success. Ironically, the one play he wrote that was a hit, *La figlia di Iorio*, starred another actress, Irma Grammatica, because Duse was ill on the opening night and he would not postpone it.

D'Annunzio's novels and plays shocked because of their combination of sex and violence. His female characters are raped, tortured, driven mad, killed, dismembered, or abandoned, and in *Il fuoco* Stelio fantasises about La Foscarina being possessed by other men. *Il fuoco* was more shocking because it was so obviously a *roman à clef*, and because it exposed so much about Duse's private life. She agreed to publication, however, on the grounds that her suffering was less important than the creation of a great work of Italian art, as she put it in a letter to her agent. Both she and D'Annunzio were passionate nationalists, an ideological stance that led D'Annunzio to embrace Mussolini's fascism, his flamboyant over-the-top rhetoric appealing to the mood of the time. For a time they planned to create an Italian national theatre, but the animosity of their break-up in 1904 ended that possibility, and in any case, D'Annunzio's


Gabriele D'Annunzio © Mary Evans Picture Library

Eleonora Duse © Mary Evans Picture Library

financial profligacy and unreliability could no longer be ignored. Duse, the child of travelling performers, had a strong sense of financial management and had brought up her daughter Enrichetta as a single parent, so although she had invested a lot in D'Annunzio's plays, she knew when to draw the line. She backed his six hour epic, *Francesca da Rimini* in 1901, but the problems between them led Adelaide Ristori, the grande dame of Italian theatre to remark that 'nobody would be surprised if it ended with a revolver'.

The Duse-D'Annunzio affair had begun in Venice, so using the city as the setting for the affair between Stelio Effrena and La Foscarina both reflected reality and served a particular purpose. For the city changes radically as the seasonal light changes, a phenomenon noted by many other writers and artists. As they move towards their final parting, the suspense of the situation is mirrored in the lagoon:

'They rested on a low wall, overlooking the water. The lagoon was so calm and still in the solstice that the shape of clouds and shores reflected in it seemed to take on an ideal quality, as though imitated by art.'

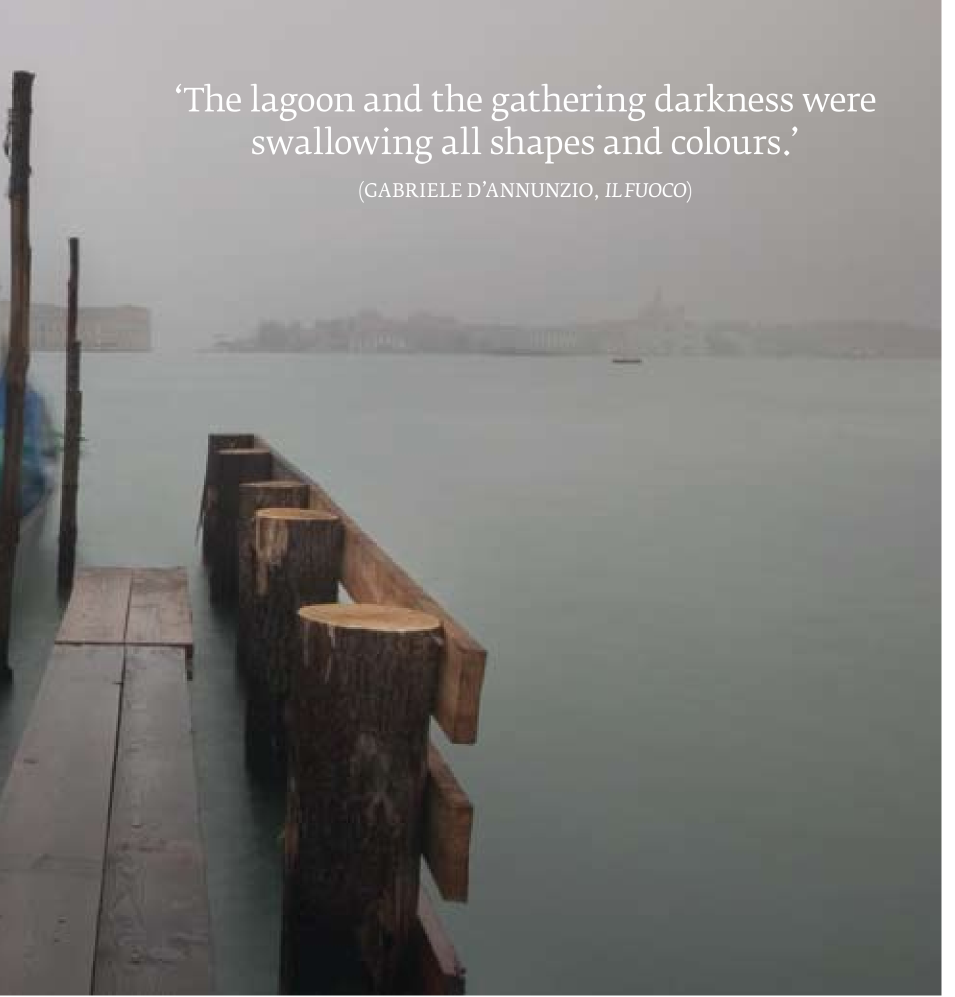
After their conversation, when La Foscarina realises that they can never build a life together, her sadness is depicted through another description of the lagoon:

'The lagoon and the gathering darkness were swallowing all shapes and colours. All that interrupted that monotony of greyness were the rows of posts, like a procession of monks on a path of ashes. In the distance, Venice was smoking like the remnants of a vast pillage.'

The language of *Il fuoco* is as excessive as the plot, but the descriptions of Venice are the best part of this often unreadable book because they are so beautifully wrought and so recognisable. D'Annunzio was, and remains a

Photo by Tim Ball

fine poet, though his prose and drama are dated and almost absurd in their hyperbole. And although he undoubtedly committed a cruel act of betrayal of the woman he claimed to be in love with at the time, the passages where La Foscarina talks about her early years as a child actress, most notably her appearance in the Arena at Verona playing Juliet, give us some insight into the otherwise very private life of the great Eleonora Duse. ❋


‘The lagoon and the gathering darkness were swallowing all shapes and colours.’

(GABRIELE D’ANNUNZIO, *IL FUOCO*)

COMMENT

The mendicant friars were some of the greatest travellers of the later Middle Ages. The purposes of their journeys ranged from the spiritual to the relatively mundane – such as acting as testamentary executors to fulfil the posthumous wishes of the deceased. This article explores the journeys in the Veneto of two fourteenth century friars, Pace da Lugo and Tomaso da Camerino, as the executors of the will of a Venetian nobleman accused of trying (and failing) to poison Pope John XXII.

Dr Louise Bourdua is Reader in the Department of History of Art and regularly teaches on the Venice Term. Her research has focused on the artistic patronage and iconography of mendicant orders in late medieval/early Renaissance Italy. She is currently exploring the production of art in Padua over the hundred years on either side of the Black Death. Louise's book 'The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy' (Cambridge, 2004) contains more information about Brother Pace da Lugo and his artistic commission.

Opposite: Death and the Mendicant Friar by Hans Holbein

Lunch on Expenses: Travelling Friars in the 14th Century Veneto

BY LOUISE BOURDUA

The mendicant friars, members of international religious orders dedicated to preaching, were some of the greatest travellers of the later Middle Ages. The purpose of their voyages was much more than merely devotional, disciplinary or evangelical. Student friars had to travel to provincial or general schools (the latter in university towns). Heads of convents and provinces were expected to attend both provincial chapter meetings and, occasionally, general chapter meetings which required travel across great distances in Europe. Such were the difficulties that Dominican friars, members of the order most dedicated to study, were subject to fines for non-attendance. There were also summons to appear before various courts, holidays to enjoy (Augustinian student friars in Oxford were allocated to summer convents when the university was closed), or bathing trips to take (for health).

Amongst all these activities, we do not often hear about the mundane travel associated with the duties of friars as testamentary executors, fulfilling the posthumous wishes of the deceased, including the restitution of any ill-gotten gains. A rare survival is an as yet unpublished single sheet

of paper from the 1340s, now in the state archives of Venice. This offers a glimpse of the travelling habits of two Franciscan friars, Pace da Lugo, famous as the supervisor of the sculpted façade portal of San Lorenzo in Vicenza (carved by Andriolo de' Santi between 1342 and 1345), and the lesser-known Tomaso da Camerino, who seems to have been an inquisitor.

The expense account of friar Pace da Lugo forms part of the documents relating to the execution of the will of Pietro 'Nan' (the 'dwarf') da Marano (died before 1 November 1341), a noble originally from Vicenza who made his fortune as a counsellor to Cangrande della Scala, was later made a citizen of Venice, and was famously accused of trying (and failing) to poison Pope John XXII. By the time he came to draw up his will Pietro had quite a bit on his conscience, and shortly before his death stipulated that ten thousand ducats previously invested in the Venetian Grain Exchange should be used posthumously to expiate his sins. As his executors, the friars Pace da Lugo and Tomaso da Camerino carried out his wishes in Vicenza, Verona and Tregnago (some 22 kms northeast of Verona). Rather unusually (as far as we know), they claimed travel and subsistence expenses from the Procurators of San Marco, the officials who administered the testamentary business of Venetian citizens and kept a tight hold on the purse strings.

As travellers, our two friars differed from merchants, who travelled to make a living, or indeed pilgrims, whose only reward was heavenly. Both friars took time off from their regular religious activities to restore the ill-gotten gains of a contrite sinner. Pace's journeys, additionally, involved the purchase and transport of building materials, and the wages of the workforce at work on the portal of San Lorenzo in Vicenza, a project intended by Pietro da Marano to earn him a place in Paradise (as well as on the tympanum of the church, kneeling before the Virgin Mary and Child – see above right).

The expense account offers a unique glimpse of the routes taken by friars who had to 'commute' between Verona and Venice, what modes of transport were available, where they spent the night, how much they spent on accommodation and food and drink, and what inconvenienced them. In total, the expense sheet details five voyages claimed between the middle of July 1341 and April 1342, undertaken to convince the Procurators to release Pietro da Marano's ducats from the Grain Exchange. The five journeys were only a small fraction of the overall total: it was to take Pace da Lugo nearly a decade to bring to completion all the projects stemming from Pietro da Marano's legacy.

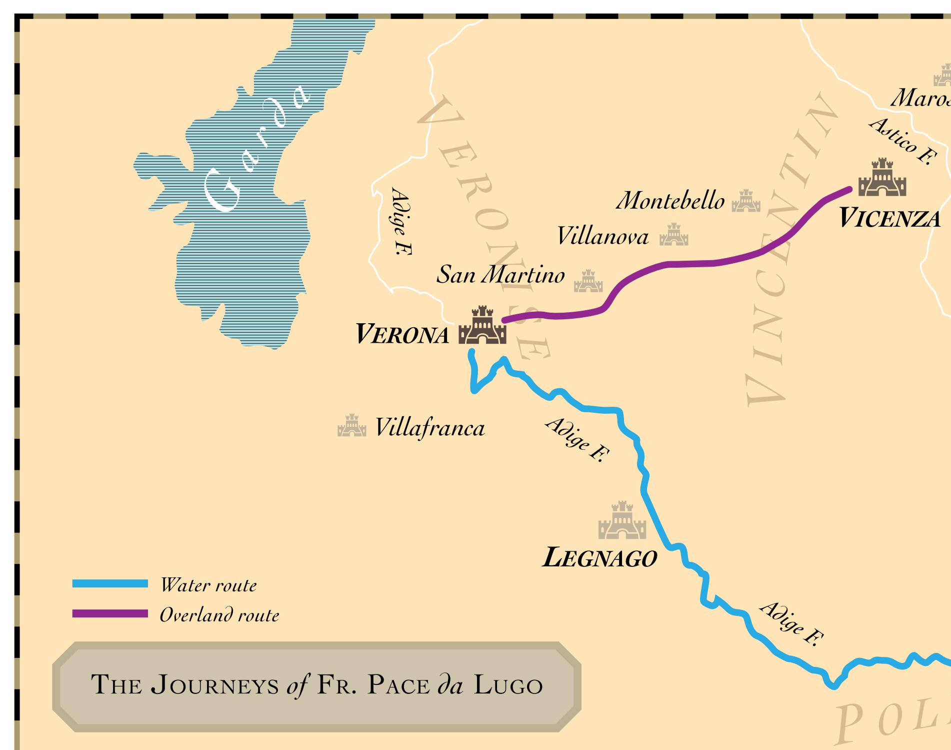
Unlike modern claim forms, the expense sheet does not detail everything (but does seem to have led to payment). There is no precise date for journeys or their duration: references are to 'around the middle of the month' (as in July 1341), or 'towards the end of the month' (November 1341). We learn that the friars were summoned to appear in Venice via letter. On the first voyage in mid-July 1341, in order to collect 2000 ducats, Pace apparently took one day to get to Venice by *navi* (ships) down the river Adige from Verona.

The portal of the church of San Lorenzo, Vicenza, showing Pietro da Marano kneeling before the Virgin and Child

The Adige which, unlike the Brenta and the Po, is not much travelled nowadays, takes a meandering route to the southeast, meeting the sea just south of Chioggia; the boat would then follow the coast up to Venice on the open sea. The speed of the journey suggests that Pace's boat was moving as fast as those on the Rhine or the Po, that is to say between 60 to 100 kms a day, downstream. There were two stops: in Legnago for lunch (approximately 55 kms from Verona, or 35 kms as the crow flies), then in Boara for some wine (some 45 kms further), before reaching Venice for supper and an overnight stay (approximately another 75 kms). It is not clear how many nights Pace spent in the city; however, what is striking is that he had to pay for his accommodation. We might have expected him to stay in the local Franciscan convent of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, but since he claimed his meal and accommodation together, this was surely a simple inn. The journey back was less straightforward, no doubt because it was upstream: Pace first took a *barchetta* (small boat) to Legnago, again stopping in Boara for lunch, then had supper and slept a night in Legnago. He next took a small craft to reach Verona but only after having had a midday meal in Legnago (Legnago was obviously the place for lunch). Unfortunately he did not record what he ate, but we do know that his lunches in Legnago cost more than in Boara. Eating and drinking on the Adige was obviously as exorbitant as on other European waterways. Pace's wine bill alone cost just under half of the weekly wine ration for eight manual workers engaged on the portal of San Lorenzo.

Land journeys were, of course, considerably slower than river travel. Other sources show that Pace occasionally travelled by cart, such as when he was ill and went off to recover in the countryside, some 15 miles from Vicenza. Tomaso, on the other hand, preferred a horse. Franciscans were forbidden to travel on any kind of mount except in cases of necessity and with the prior approval of superiors. But evidently the horse was not a problem for this inquisitor and it seems that at times Pace too may have travelled on horseback. On one trip, having set off from Vicenza en route to Verona, both friars stopped for lunch in Montebello (17 kms), supper and an overnight stay in Villanova (just above Soave, about another 17 kms), then a journey of around the same distance on the following day, before having lunch in San Martino and completing the final 7 kms into Verona. Thus it took nearly two days to travel some 58 kilometres. Incidentally, lunch in Montebello and San Martino cost about the same and both were cheaper than Legnago.

Not all aspects of travel were so enjoyable: the poor state of roads, the



roughness of the sea (which made even the poet Petrarch complain of nausea), and the unpredictability of the conditions brought about by frost, snow or heat, were all potentially fatal. There were also brigands and wild animals to contend with, so aside from carrying a large stick, the best solution for a friar, when large sums of money were to be carried around, was to have an escort. In general travellers might choose to be accompanied by a leather-clad bodyguard (a *burchiello*) or a group of "good men". Other sources show that Pace preferred an armed escort. Permission to travel had to be extracted from the local lord, but a safe-conduct did not always guarantee trouble-free journeys. The city-states of the Veneto were constantly at war with each other during much of the Middle Ages and men of the cloth were not immune to political strife. Indeed, Pace da Lugo's expense sheet begins with his unexplained arrest in Venice. Fortunately, such tribulation was not enough to deter him from carrying out his duties and he took to the sea and stopped for lunch as soon as he was released. ⁕

COMMENT

One signal feature of northern and central Italy in the period 1100 to 1600 was the revival of the city state. A second unusual characteristic of that part of Italy was the scale and sophistication of the economic undertakings of its principal cities which marked an early stage in the development of commercial capitalism. Of this interesting class Florence and Venice were exceptional members.

Dr Humfrey Butters FRHS is a Reader in Warwick's Department of History and co-ordinator of the Venice Programme for third year history students. His research interests lie in the political history of Florence during its last 50 years as a republic (1480-1530); the writings of Machiavelli, and public law and the state in Italy, 1100-1300. He was one of an international group of scholars working to produce a complete edition, with historical commentary, of the correspondence of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Opposite: The lions of Florence (left) and Venice (right)

Florence and Venice: A Tale of Two Cities

BY HUMFREY BUTTERS FRHS

In *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), the most brilliant account of its subject ever written, Jacob Burckhardt set out to explain why it was Italy, rather than any other part of Europe, that gave birth to the Renaissance. Not all the answers that he gave to that question have stood the test of time, but a concern with the singularity of Italy in the period 1100-1600, its peculiar and special characteristics, and not simply with its role in begetting the Renaissance, has been an abiding feature of historical study. One signal feature of northern and central Italy in that period was that it was home to a revival of the city state. This socio-political formation, distinguished from a simple city by the degree of political autonomy that it enjoyed and by its possession of territory beyond its walls, had played a crucial role in the ancient world. A second unusual characteristic of that part of Italy was the scale and sophistication of the economic undertakings of its principal cities which marked an early stage in the development of commercial capitalism. These cities, therefore, presented an extraordinary blend of contrasting and conflicting elements, well captured in the writings of Philip Jones.

From an economic point of view they marked a decisive break with the world of Greece and Rome, which had been dominated by landowners and regarded merchants, on the whole, as vulgar or venal; and yet from a socio-political point of view they constituted a revival of that world's most characteristic form.

Of this interesting class Florence and Venice were exceptional members. Economically Venice's rise to prominence occurred long before that of Florence, since as a cluster of islands on the north-east coast of Italy she was perfectly placed to assume the role she played from the eleventh century to the seventeenth, that of principal commercial intermediary between East and West. Florence enjoyed no such geographical advantage, so that it was not till the thirteenth century that her economy began to grow vigorously. By the end of that century, however, she had won a place in the first rank of European powers, in commerce, industry and international banking, indeed in the last of these she became preeminent. Venice never was a centre for international banking, and until the fifteenth century her only major industry was shipbuilding, although the Arsenal was by far the largest industrial complex in medieval Europe. In the course of the fifteenth century, however, she became, like Florence, a major silk producer, and by its end she was Europe's principal producer of printed books, powerfully assisted by German technology and German capital. In the following century she also became a major centre for the manufacture of woollen cloth.

The two cities were also distinguished by their political life. In the late Middle Ages both preserved their republican constitutions, at a time when most Italian city states had become subject to the rule of one man, the *Signore*. Florence finally ceased to be a republic after 1530, when the Medici family established a duchy that lasted till the eighteenth century; Venice, by contrast, remained a republic until 1797, when she was conquered by Napoleon. Unsurprisingly, she became a byword in Europe for political stability and the virtues of aristocratic republicanism, since political eligibility was confined to a closed and hereditary nobility, the members of the Great Council. The roles played in Venetian government by the Doge, the Senate and the Great Council made Venice appear to be the perfect model of a mixed constitution, a form favoured by Plato and Aristotle.

But economic success and political stability were not simply fruits of the peaceful production, exchange and sale of commodities by an elite of merchants. Firstly, because the upper class of Florence and Venice, even from the earliest days, was composed not simply of merchants but of *landowning merchants*, in whose portfolios earnings from land played a significant role. Secondly, because the governments of both cities were always prepared to deploy military force in the pursuit of their objectives. By the end of the fifteenth century both cities were masters of substantial Italian territorial states, which in the case of Florence comprised most of Tuscany.

Brunelleschi's cupola for Florence cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore; photo by Jebulon

The Church of the Rendentore by Palladio; photo by Norbert Nagel

Venice's military accomplishments were even more dramatic, since her territories included substantial possessions in the Eastern Mediterranean, the so-called 'Stato da Mar', acquired over several centuries largely at the expense of the Byzantine empire. In 1204, for example, the Venetians helped to conquer Constantinople. Although they lost their political position there in 1261, they retained their economic position there for centuries to come.

Culturally as well the two cities presented contrasts. In poetry and literary prose Venice produced no writers to rank with Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio (though Petrarch never *lived* in Florence); nor did she beget a political thinker to rival Machiavelli. This helps to explain why the Italian language is based on the Tuscan rather than the Venetian dialect. In architecture Venice was slower to adopt the classicising style that Brunelleschi and Alberti made fashionable in Florence; but in the sixteenth century Andrea Palladio created versions of it that subsequently won a European reputation. Each city produced influential painters of the highest quality, such as Michelangelo and Titian, masters of contrasting styles. Both made important but different contributions to the growth of classical studies: Florentine humanists (classical scholars) persuaded the European upper classes that gentlemen needed a classical education; printers based in Venice like Aldus Manutius helped to provide the necessary texts. Finally, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries both cities were at the forefront of musical innovation: Venice was particularly celebrated for its sacred music, while in Florence opera was born.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century Italy had largely lost its position as an economic and cultural powerhouse, thanks in part to the long-term consequences of Columbus's discovery of America and Vasco da Gama's discovery of the direct sea route to India. But educated north Europeans in the eighteenth century were perfectly aware of how much their world owed, economically and culturally, to Italians, and especially to Florentines and Venetians, of an earlier age. ❋

COMMENT

'It is the novel, above all the nineteenth and early twentieth century novel, that communicates a sense of place more powerfully than any other written medium. But why do writers choose one place in preference to another? In other novels by Wharton and James we find ourselves in London, New York, Boston, Rome, Paris. What leads to the choice of Venice? What are the particular associations of a location that contribute to the narrative as a whole? How is late-nineteenth century Venice – a city of decline and decay – deployed in their writing?'

Ann Hallamore Caesar is the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Student Experience. She is also a professor in the Department of Italian. Her research interests centre on the literary and cultural history of the novel in Italy. In particular, she is interested in the rise of a female reading public and the development of the domestic novel in Italy in the period immediately after unification. Professor Caesar is also exploring the emergence of an Italian novel of entertainment in eighteenth century Venice.

Opposite: American novelists Edith Wharton and Henry James
© Mary Evans Picture Library

Americans Writing Venice: Edith Wharton and Henry James

BY ANN HALLAMORE CAESAR

IN A FINE critical study dedicated to Venice in literature, Tony Tanner pointed out that whereas most great cities have their writers – Paris has Balzac, London – Dickens, Dublin – Joyce, and Trieste – Svevo – Venice does not. He attributes this to the fact that the rise of the modern novel came at the very time when Venice was in decline. However, the numbers of writers who have drawn inspiration from and written about Venice are many, from Proust and Thomas Mann through to modern crime writers such as Michael Dibdin and Donna Leon.

Here, I want to consider two American writers, Edith Wharton (1862-1937) and Henry James (1843-1916) – good friends, Europeanised Americans with a deep love of and knowledge of Italy, who both lived in Europe and featured Venice in their novels. James made his first visit to Venice in 1869 when he was under the influence of Ruskin. Edith Wharton, an intrepid traveller, lived permanently in France from 1907 until her death. Her non-fiction book, *Italian Backgrounds*, ends on a melancholy note in Venice with the mannequins

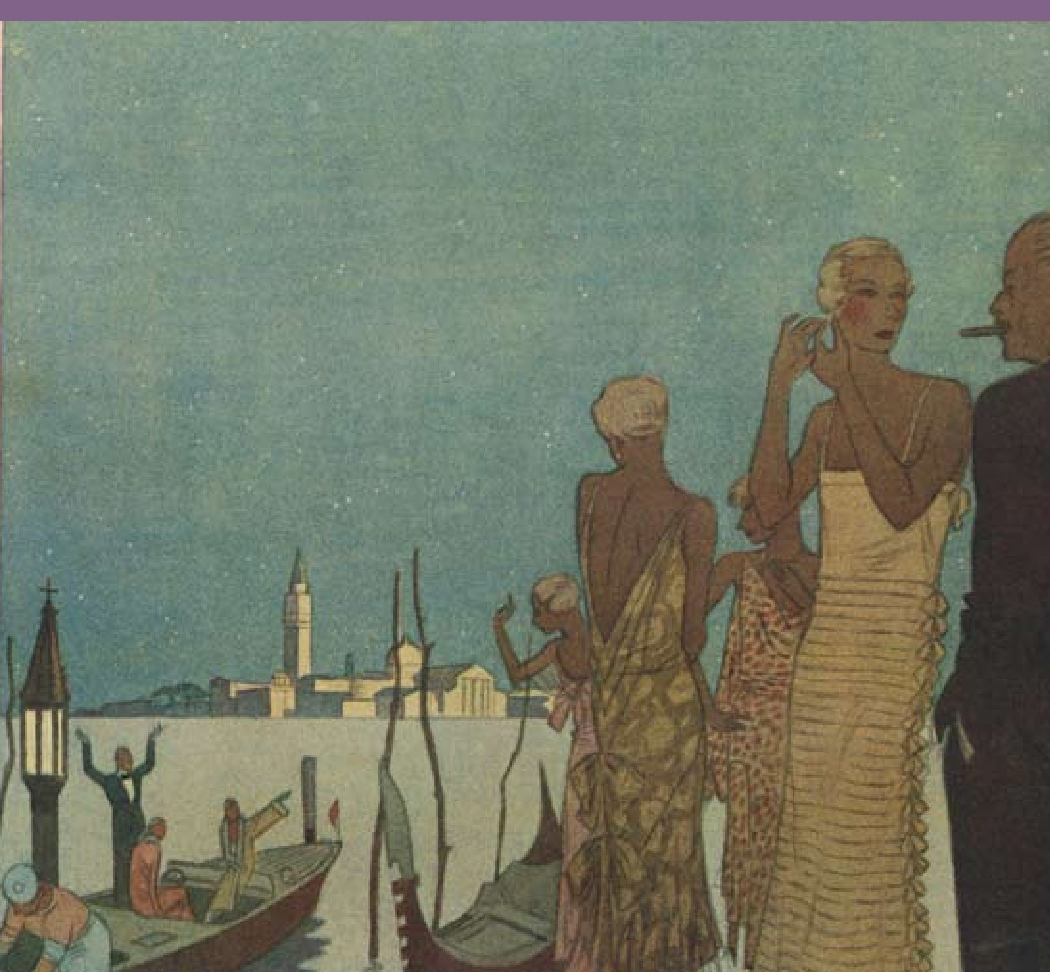
in a corner of the Museo Correr dressed in eighteenth century costume, snatched from the 'plots and pleasures' of eighteenth century Venice not 'by Death but by Napoleon'.

Yet it is the novel, above all the nineteenth and early twentieth century novel, that communicates a sense of place more powerfully than any other written medium. But why do writers choose one place in preference to another? In other novels by Wharton and James we find ourselves in London, New York, Boston, Rome, Paris. What leads to the choice of Venice? What are the particular associations of a location that contribute to the narrative as a whole? How is late-nineteenth century Venice – a city of decline and decay – deployed in their writing?

Edith Wharton's ways of using Venice are straightforward in comparison to Henry James. In her novels, she turns to Venice later in her career when it becomes a channel for a set of moral or ethical concerns. In *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922), two attractive young people, Susy Branch and Nick Lansing, hangers-on in the rich international set, agree to marry and live for a year off the offers of houses made by friends and their wedding presents. They move, reluctantly, to a palazzo in Venice. The building is oppressive in its dimensions, and it soon becomes clear, as Susy herself becomes increasingly compromised, that Venice represents corruption: the loan of the palazzo is in exchange for covering up her friend's adulterous affair. Susy, Nick and their set see Venice 'simply as affording excellent opportunities for bathing and adultery' rather than 'something unique and ineffable'. Venice is the Lido and Florian's; Wharton draws heavily on colour imagery, frequent references to water and to neglected gardens.

In *The Children* (1927), while the plot is very different, the underlying preoccupations are similar. The same drifting international set of high affluence and low employment, who drop into Venice for a couple of months each year, are now shown to be benefiting from the ease with which divorce is permitted in the USA. The parents are 'jazzing in Venice', staying in a hotel on the Grand Canal, and the focus remains firmly on the Lido. Venice is presented as the locus for artifice, money and transitoriness. The children in question have everything money can buy but because their parents have divorced and remarried so often, their lives are lived in a state of complete confusion and neglect.

Unlike Edith Wharton, Henry James actually lived in Venice. He first referred to the city in a letter to his brother, William, dated 25th September 1869 during his first visit made in his mid-twenties. And from what he said, it is surprising that he ever wrote about Venice again: 'Taine, I remember, somewhere speaks of "Venice and Oxford – the two most picturesque cities in Europe". I personally prefer Oxford.' Whereas he feels he can know Oxford from within, he will always look at Venice from without and is very conscious of his outsider status as an American: 'I feel more and more



Fashionable Venice in the 1920s – the setting for Edith Wharton's novel, 'The Children'
© Mary Evans Picture Library

my inexorable Yankeehood'. For James, Venice was to have a particularly powerful association with death after a very close friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson, killed herself by throwing herself from the window of a palazzo on to the stones below.

However, that sense of outsiderness, of the otherness of Venice, is altogether absent when James comes to adopt Venice as a location for his stories. Precise locations in the city can be identified. They often include private homes: in 1899, he describes visiting a palazzo in whose 'beautiful blighted rooms' he felt a novel could be made of their owners' 'great name and fallen fortunes … the absence of books, the presence of ennui'. Venice is no 'unreal city': James's topography is precise.

In *The Aspern Papers* (1888), James makes a clear connection between Venice, its acquisitive habits, and 'spoils'. The true events that the novella is based around took place in Florence, where Byron's mistress and Shelley's sister-in-law, Claire Clairmont, lived to old age in seclusion. An American obsessed with Shelley tried to get papers from her that he knew were in her possession; after she died, he tried with her fifty-year old great-niece who told him that if he married her, she would give him the papers. James moved the story to Venice ostensibly on grounds of delicacy, but at the same time he felt that Venice lent itself to such a tale. In *The Aspern Papers* an American writer who worships a long-deceased American poet, Jeffrey Aspern, learns that an early mistress of his is still living and has some of his private letters. Using lies and deceit, he becomes a lodger in her house and ingratiates himself with the old woman and her niece. The old woman dies and the niece offers marriage in exchange for the papers. The writer runs off in horror, then after wandering Venice, returns the next morning to accept her offer only to learn that she has destroyed the papers.

The scheming, blinkered, fanatical protagonist is also the narrator so all the reader is told and sees is filtered through him. There is no pleasure or delight in Venice. Indeed he hardly sees the city so intent is he on the obtaining the coveted papers. Venice holds no interest for him and when he flees the palazzo, the one 'sight' he dwells on 'as if he had an oracle on his lips' is the equestrian statue by Verocchio of the great mercenary Bartolomeo Colleoni astride his huge bronze horse – a reminder, of course, of terrafirma.

Most of the story takes place indoors or in the garden. The totally impoverished Miss Bordereau extracts a huge rent for a few empty rooms. The building is almost empty. The rooms are unadorned. This is part of Venice, but as far-flung and as un-Venetian as one can imagine. So: why Venice? The answer lies in the synergies between the fate of Venice and the fate of the Aspern papers for both are about plunder. The selling-off of so much when Venice fell to Napoleon created a city reduced to poverty and decay, where everything had a price, and where material and moral decadence accompany each other.

Henry James is a writer of interiors and what he emphasises about Venice is the contiguity between inner and outer. There is also the play of outer and inner – narrow winding calli where people crowd so that their voices sound as though they are coming from indoors – where one walks as though skirting furniture, where 'shoes never wear out'. 'The place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which Piazza San Marco is the most ornamented corner … As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro … strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.'

Henry James commented approvingly in his essay about Honoré de Balzac that where something happens in his fiction is as important as the event itself for there is always a correlation between person and place. In different ways and to different effect, for both Edith Wharton and Henry James Venice was not just another European city, a backdrop for a story. Instead its architecture, waterways and even the quality of light become the vehicle to raise questions about life and art, morality and desire, and, bearing in mind when they were writing, decay, deprivation and mortality. ❋

COMMENT

'Since the early 1970s VIP [Venice in Peril] has undertaken a programme to adopt projects on the 'waiting list' of the Superintendencies, whether these involved buildings, sculptures or paintings of high aesthetic value, or work considered worthy of scholarly or scientific investigation – all located in Venice and on the islands of the Lagoon.'

Lady Frances Clarke CBE is Co-President of Venice in Peril, which she founded with her late husband, Sir Ashley Clarke. She was awarded the CBE in 2000, in recognition of her work for Venetian culture. In 2010 she was named Ambassador for the culture of the Veneto region, and was made a member of the Istituto Veneto. In 2007 she was proclaimed Venetian of the Year by the Settemari Association. Lady Clarke has an honorary DLitt from the University of Warwick, and is a member of Warwick's Venice Advisory Board.

Opposite: The memorial to Sir Ashley Clarke in the Church of San Francesco della Vigna
© Venice in Peril

Venice in Peril

BY LADY FRANCES CLARKE CBE

THE EXISTENCE OF the Warwick in Venice Programme† goes back to the historic floods in Florence and Venice of 4 November 1966 which traumatised both cities, but in different ways and with diverse long-term effects. The dramatic TV documentaries by Franco Zeffirelli recording, live, the devastating flooding of Florence publicised the international appeal launched by the Italian Government through UNESCO, to which the British government responded by asking its former ambassador in Rome, Sir Ashley Clarke, to set up an Appeal. This was constituted on 5 November 1966 as the Italian Art and Archives Rescue Fund (IAARF). Its committee specifically included experts in paper conservation from the British Library, since a major victim of the Arno overflowing its banks was the State Archives. Not only the Italian army, but a voluntary international army of students, professors and citizens, including many Britons, rallied to the appeal for help, to such an effect that after two years the Florentine authorities were able to prove that thanks to their own efforts, and to American assistance in the form of CRIA (Committee to Rescue Italian Art), they had less need of IAARF's help.

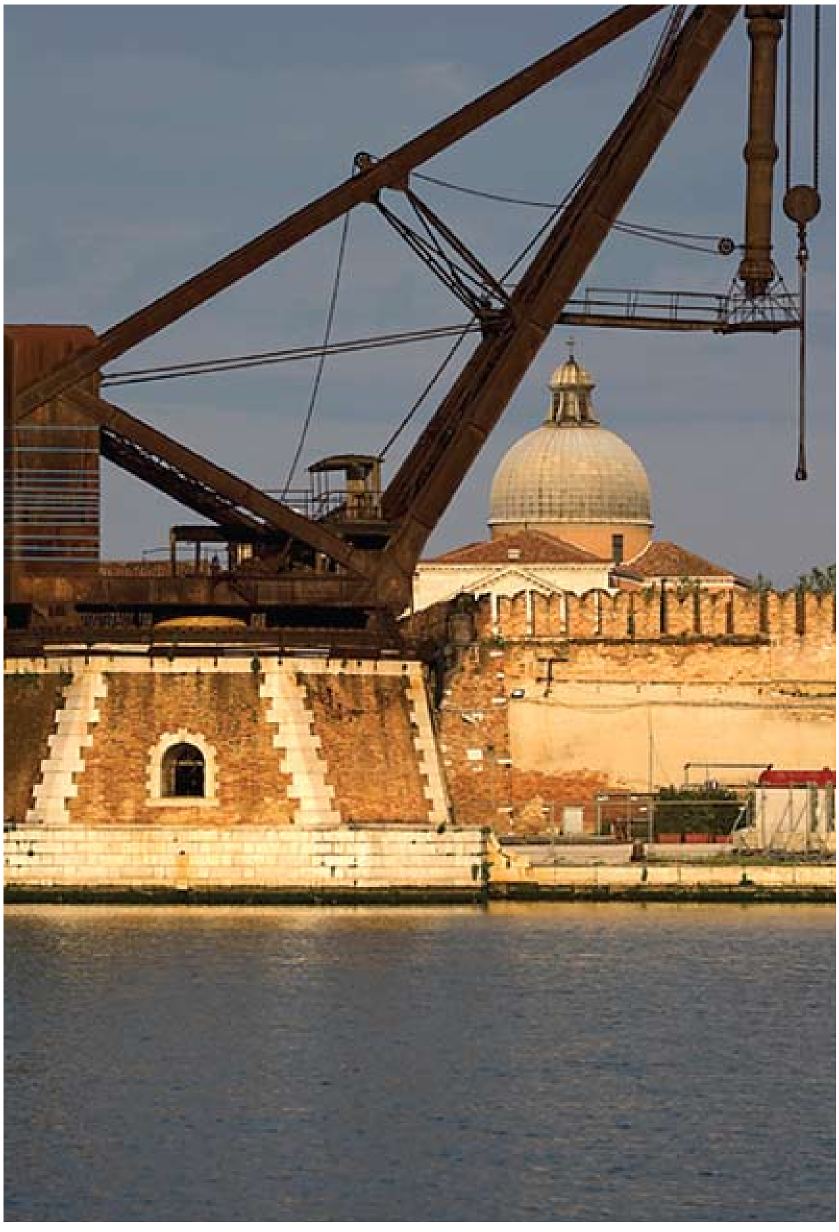
At this point the Venetian Superintendent for Works of Art, Dott. Francesco Valcanover, came to meet us in Florence, making a case for a similar initiative to be launched in Venice, where there was a perennial threat of flooding, partly due to what is now judged to be climate change. After consultation with the IAARF Committee, it was agreed to dissolve the Florentine operation, transferring the residue of funds to a new body of trustees, the Venice in Peril Fund, constituted in 1971. Venice in Peril (VIP) is a member of the Association of Private Committees for Safeguarding Venice operating in the framework of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Education in Europe, established in Venice in 1976.

The first major project undertaken by VIP, whose operations are always carried out with the local representatives of the Ministero dei Beni Culturali, was at the church of the Madonna dell'Orto. Situated on the northern periphery of Cannaregio, where its distinctive campanile dominates the Fondamente Nuove as the vaporetto approaches from the Lagoon, this church was greatly admired by Ruskin. In 1966, however, the area was little explored by visitors, despite this being Tintoretto's parish church, enriched by his great paintings in the chancel and the former organ doors, now mounted over the entrance to the sacristy. VIP'S commitment to the conservation of this church, always in collaboration with the Superintendents for Monuments and Works of Art, has concluded with the restoration of the fine Bazzani organ. The church is now part of the circuit of churches open throughout the day monitored by the Chorus Organisation, who have arranged a small museum on the ground floor of the bell tower recording the link with VIP.

From Cannaregio to Dorsoduro, where VIP took up the appeal from the Superintendency of Monuments to tackle the problem of flooding in the church of San Nicolò dei Mendicoli at what was originally the extreme western approach to the city from the Lagoon. Now the area is extended by the maritime port of San Basilio, with its regular ferries to Greece, and expanding facilities for the increasingly frequent cruise liners moving slowly along the Giudecca Canal.

The pink and white Verona marble floor of San Nicolò was taken up and damp-proofed, while the extensive wooden fixtures supporting the series of paintings all around the church, and the ceiling painting showing St Nicholas in glory, were all restored during the years 1972 to 1977. Again, an area of the city of great antiquity, but by that time seriously neglected, had been brought to the notice and appreciation of the discerning visitor, enlivened by the redevelopment of the former Cotonificio – cotton factory – into a vital area of college facilities for the Venice University of Architecture.

Since the early 1970s VIP has undertaken a programme to adopt projects on the 'waiting list' of the Superintendencies, whether these involved buildings, sculptures or paintings of high aesthetic value, or work considered worthy of scholarly or scientific investigation – all located in Venice and on



Armstrong Mitchell's crane for the Italian navy, built in 1866 © Venice in Peril

the islands of the Lagoon.

A major project was on Torcello, where other international committees joined VIP in collaboration with the Superintendency and the Curia Patriarcale to monitor and consolidate the vast expanse of the mosaics on the West Wall and in the apse of the Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta. On the cemetery island of San Michele in Isola, VIP, with a major donation from Mr Peter Boizot, undertook the difficult structural project of consolidating the cupola and floor of the Cappella Emiliani – a monumental chapel attached to the church whose foundations are constantly lapped by the waters as the vaporetti pass on their way to Murano, Burano and Torcello. Since the church itself has undergone a major restoration in 2010, financed by the Municipality, the Cappella Emiliani has been used for the veneration of cremations, since there is a crematorium on the island. There is also the Reparto Evangelico, a special area administered by the Anglican, Lutheran and Valdensian churches in Venice, containing the graves and monuments of numerous historical figures who either lived or, by chance, died in Venice, reflecting the many different nationalities who resided here. This burial ground, with its historic graves and venerable cypress trees, is currently the subject of a projected agreement between the Municipality and the different Protestant communities to provide for its conservation and maintenance on a permanent basis.

Monument to Antonio Canova in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari; photo by Matthew Clemente

Current VIP projects, subject to our financial possibilities, include monitoring the perplexing condition of the monument to Canova in the church of the Frari, suffering from a form of rising damp which has caused the surface of the marble figures draped over the brick pyramid to scale. Analyses by the Superintendency of Monuments, and by experts from Padua are awaited before a decision is made on necessary action.

But currently our main priority is the preservation of the unique hydraulic crane built for the Italian navy in 1886 by Armstrong Mitchell of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and still dominating the basin of the Arsenale, though no longer in use. From the numbers which were exported all over the world by Armstrong's, it is the only surviving example of that particular model. Its conservation, which requires a considerable financial commitment by VIP, would be a witness to the engineering technology of an era which recalls the historic achievements of the Arsenalotti of previous centuries.

VIP is hugely indebted to Professor John Hale, Founding Professor of History at Warwick, a trustee whose academic specialisation in Venetian history, consolidated by his practical as well as imaginative approach to confronting the problems of Venice, was invaluable. The Fund, as well as the University of Warwick, has benefited immeasurably from the commitment of his successor, the late Professor Michael Mallett, to continuing the Warwick programme in Venice. I hope this programme will expand, developing practical collaboration with the University of Ca' Foscari under the leadership of its dynamic Rector, Professor Carraro.

Since the days of the 1966 emergency, Venice has changed immeasurably, not least because of the exodus of the population to Mestre – which is, of course, two thirds of the Venice Municipality. The universities – both Ca' Foscari and the University of Architecture – are at the vital, even if sometimes controversial, stage of expansion, in which I hope Warwick will play a significant part. ❋

[†]Warwick's Founding Professor of History, Sir John Hale, originally intended his undergraduate Italian programme to take place in Florence. However, the floods, severely damaging libraries and archives, forced him to think again. In the aftermath of the floods, a campaign was launched in Venice to welcome foreign students to the city. In the light of this potential support, and with the offer of teaching space in the Palazzo Brandolini, Sir John changed his venue – and the rest, as they say, is history.

COMMENT

Visitors to Venice during the winter months are often bemused by the many unruly degree festivities which are held in the area around the university faculties, especially Calle Larga Foscari, Campiello dei Squellini, and Campo Santa Margherita. These festivities belong to a tradition dating back to the earliest universities. To an extent, today's graduates are descendants of the 'goliards', poor clerical students who first appeared at universities across Europe in the twelfth century.

Dr Jonathan Davies FRHS is a Senior Lecturer in the History Department and regularly teaches on the Venice Programme. His research centres on the history of the Italian states, especially Tuscany, between 1350 and 1600, focussing particularly on universities. Currently, he is concentrating on the study of violence in early modern Europe, again using students and professors as a focus.

Sixteenth century Italian students © Mary Evans Picture Library

'Goliardia' – Popular Graduation Festivities in Venice

BY JONATHAN DAVIES FRHS

Visitors to Venice during the winter months are often bemused by the many unruly degree festivities which are held in the area around the university faculties, especially Calle Larga Foscari, Campiello dei Squellini, and Campo Santa Margherita. Surrounded by family and friends, the graduate is usually dressed only in their underwear. They are forced to read the *manifesto di laurea* or *papiro*, a long and often obscene poem which describes their life, their behaviour, and their examination performance. As they read, the graduate must drink wine or other alcohol and submit to the pranks of their friends, who throw eggs, flour, oil, ketchup, talcum powder, or shaving foam. To 'help' the graduate drink, bottles of poor quality wine are sometimes tied to their hands. At the end of the festivities, the tipsy graduate runs through the streets to a bar where they are given more alcohol. As they run, the graduate endures further jests from their friends who sing an obscene song beginning 'Dottore, dottore…' At the end of the festivities, the graduate is cleaned up, using freezing water from a nearby fountain,

Two hats symbolising the Goliardia; photo by rinina25 and Twice 25

and the manifesti di laurea are pasted on walls across the city. Local residents are not always pleased by the festivities, which can leave the streets and squares dirty for days. But they are enjoyed by tourists as well as by the graduate's family and friends.

These festivities belong to a tradition dating back to the earliest universities. To an extent, today's graduates are descendants of the 'goliards', poor clerical students who first appeared at universities across Europe in the twelfth century. Often living unsupervised, far from home, these students indulged in the pleasures of youth. Love, drink, and games are the subjects of the numerous poems and songs written by the goliards, of which the most famous are the *Carmina Burana*, which form the text of Carl Orff's cantata. The poems also contain fierce criticism of the medieval church and the goliards would take passages from the Mass and adapt them for satirical purposes. Their behaviour was notorious and the University of Paris complained to the king of France that

'Priests and clerks… dance in the choir dressed as women… they sing wanton songs. They eat black pudding at the altar itself, while the celebrant is saying Mass. They play dice on the altar. They cense with stinking smoke from the soles of old shoes. They run and leap throughout the church, without a blush of their own shame. Finally they drive about the town and its theatres in shabby carriages and carts, and rouse the laughter of their fellows and the bystanders in infamous performances, with indecent gestures and with scurrilous and unchaste words.'

Unsurprisingly the church responded strongly to this challenge from within and in 1289 it ordered that 'no clerks shall be jongleurs, goliards or buffoons'.

Although the golden age of goliardia had ended, its spirit continued. It can be seen in the initiation rites which were a feature of student life in the universities of late medieval and early modern Europe, where the freshman was expected or required to provide for his colleagues, examiners, or the whole student nation. At Pavia a new student's failure on his arrival to give gifts to the officers of his nation led to a year-long *pupillagine*, which comprised the continual invasion of his room and occasionally threats to kill. At the beginning of the academic year students entering the residential college in Siena were required to pay for a dinner of pizza and wine for their elders. The eating and drinking were accompanied by jokes, pranks, and the reciting of obscene poetry. Students at Siena also participated in the tradition

of the *serra*. It was usual at the beginning of Carnival for masked students to walk through the streets of Siena collecting money to pay for their festivities. As they went, they cried 'serra! serra!' ('shut! shut!'). This referred to the ancient custom of shutting streets to a wedding procession until the father of the bride paid the 'shutters'. The *serra* of 1565 developed into a major riot between the students and the friars of the convent of Sant' Agostino. Two men were killed and many others were injured. Subsequent instances of the *serra* were not fatal but they were still unruly. For example, in 1584 the students dressed up as greengrocers and asked the ladies of Siena to sample their produce. The *serra* of 1590 included a cart on which the Mount of Virtue was represented. At the top of the Mount was a prominent and clearly phallic palm tree.

When goliardia was revived in the Italian states in the nineteenth century it was linked with the independence movement, the Risorgimento. Professors and students would meet in cafés including Florian in Venice. Orders of goliards were established which involved matriculation as well as the awarding of the *papiro*. These orders were suppressed by the Fascists but restored after World War Two. In April 1946 the Doge of Ca' Foscari convened a meeting in Venice of the heads of the goliardic orders at the main Italian universities. At Florian they signed a statement which defined the movement:

Caffè Florian; photo by Jeanne Boleyn

> *Goliardia is culture and intelligence.*
>
> *It is the love of freedom and the understanding of one's social responsibilities with respect to one's school today and one's profession tomorrow;*
>
> *it is the veneration of the spirit which produces a particular way of understanding life in the light of an absolute freedom to criticise men and institutions, without any prejudice;*
>
> *it is finally the veneration of the very ancient traditions which will carry throughout the world the name of our free universities.*

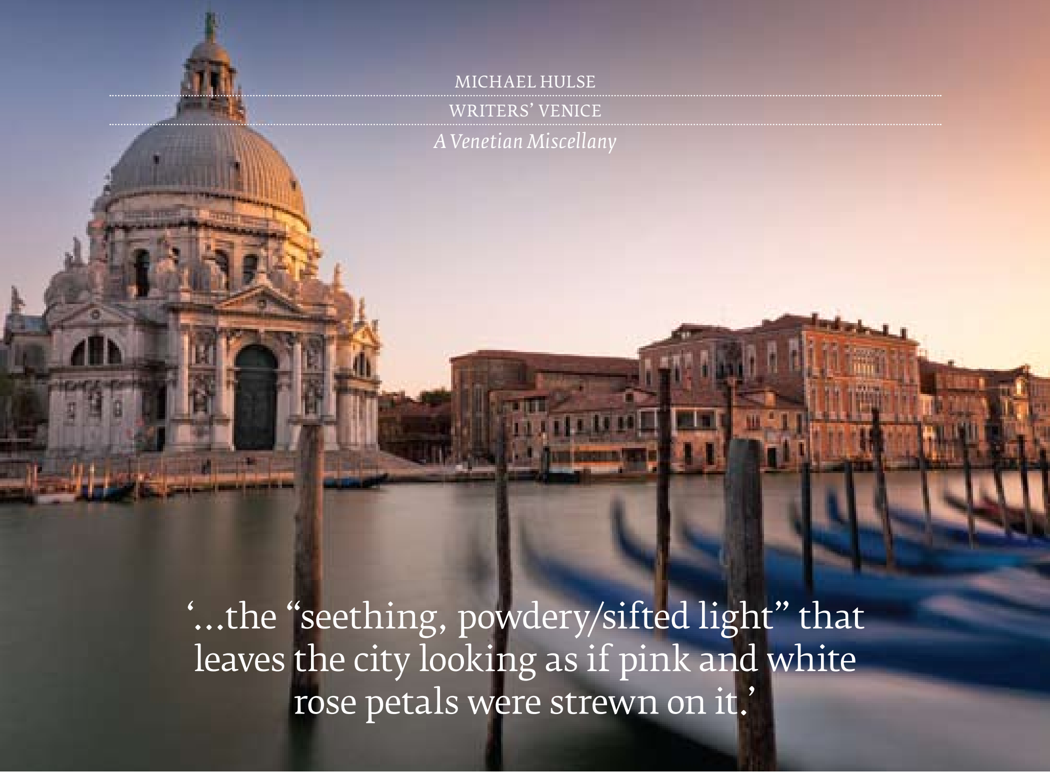
Today there are eighty-nine goliardic orders at Italian universities, including Venice's Serenissimus Goliardicus Ordo Phoenicis, the Most Serene Goliardic Order of the Phoenix. ❋

COMMENT

'*The Wings of the Dove*, *Death in Venice*, *Don't Look Now* and other modern treatments have perhaps conditioned us to expect the Venice of writers to be doom-laden. The imperilled state of the city has been familiar for a very long time indeed, and the use of Venice as an emblem of fragility, decay and death has surely become a cliché.'

*Michael Hulse is a poet and translator, and teaches in the Warwick Writing Programme. He has won many awards for his poetry including first prize in the National Poetry Competition. At Warwick, he co-founded the Hippocrates Prize for a poem on a medical subject (**www.hippocrates-poetry.org**), and this is a continuing area of research. Michael's most recent publications include 'The Secret History' (poems, Arc, 2009), 'The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge' (translation of Rilke's novel, Penguin Classics, 2009) and 'The Twentieth Century in Poetry', an anthology co-edited with Simon Rae (Random House / Ebury Press, 2011). For further information, see **www.contemporarywriters.com***

Above: photo by Sophie Kandaouroff
Opposite: Photo by Jon and Tina Reid; www.nomadicvision.com



Writers' Venice

BY MICHAEL HULSE

Goethe's father had brought back from his own journey to Italy a model of a gondola, which he occasionally allowed his son to play with. Venice was one of the Italian destinations that Goethe most longed throughout his early life to see, and when in his late thirties he finally arrived, by boat down the Brenta, his exultation sounded a high note: "It was written, then, on my page in the Book of Fate that at five in the afternoon of the twenty-eighth day of September in the year 1786, I should see Venice for the first time."

The Wings of the Dove, *Death in Venice*, *Don't Look Now* and other modern treatments have perhaps conditioned us to expect the Venice of writers to be doom-laden. The imperilled state of the city has been familiar for a very long time indeed, and the use of Venice as an emblem of fragility, decay and death has surely become a cliché. Goethe, always on the side of life, had other things in mind. He pursued his love affair with the architecture of Palladio; he observed the Doge at the annual festivity commemorating the Battle of

Lepanto; he went to the theatre, attended a trial (which he found to be theatre too), and looked at paintings and sculpture; and he "made arrangements to hear the famous singing of the boatmen, who chant verses by Tasso and Ariosto to their own melodies". This last has a particular poignancy, because when Byron was in Venice, not thirty years later, he found the custom no longer alive, as he tells us in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The testimony of these two visitors to the city makes their readers witnesses to the extinction of a beautiful tradition.

Byron's Venice is best savoured in *Beppo*, his squib-length dress-rehearsal for the epic *Don Juan*. The gondola's potential for grimness, worked by others for all it is worth, is made hilarious when he briskly describes it as "like a coffin clapt in a canoe" – and, of course, Byron delights to lay on innuendo, adding, "Where none can make out what you say or do." *Beppo* is a poem of carnival, and relishes the "fiddling, feasting, dancing, drinking, masquing, / And other things which may be had for asking." Byron celebrates the "dance, and song, and serenade, and ball" as well as the "mime, and mystery" of carnival, and rejoices to present the "sea-born city [...] in all her glory" as its capital.

Two centuries after Goethe, Byron's pleasure in the flesh – twisted into the macabre and monstrous – was the mainspring of *Pinocchio in Venice*, an unusual, ribald sprawl by American novelist Robert Coover. Venice here is a "shabby but bejeweled old tart of a city", and one characteristic description declares that "San Giorgio Maggiore, with its sagging cheeks, carbuncular dome, and stiff cone-capped campanile at its rear [...], sits gravely at anchor like an ordered thought within a confused sensuous dream". A marriage of thought and sensuous confusion is the hallmark of Coover's writing, and so is his "Burgessy

Murano glass-blower; photo by Mex3

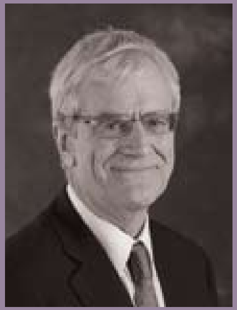
splatter of vocabulary" (as an admiring Salman Rushdie calls it). In one chapter envisioning a procession worthy of Bosch, a Conte, attended by a retinue with "genitals where their faces should be and their faces between their legs", exuberantly addresses Venice: "'My fulcrum! My feedbag! My fetish! My fenny fount and fungous funiculus! Floating fleshpot of my fancy! My foolscap, figzig, flophouse, and fantod! My foreskin! My fistulae!'" Goodness.

Coover's book leaves no Venetian stone unturned; one critic has seen in it "a prophetic version of the destiny of tourist-infested Venice". Contemporary writing located in Venice has to contend with the difficulty that every church, painting and piazza has prompted the spilling of ink, every alleyway has been worn smooth by numberless tourists. How to find a "new" angle? Bernard Malamud's Fidelman befriends a Murano glass-blower and learns his craft: "Give the bubble a mouth and it became beaker, ewer, vase, amphora or burial urn, anything the mouth foretold, or heart desired, or blower could blow." William Logan's *Macbeth in Venice*, a book of Venetian poems that rings unusual changes on themes we thought familiar, bases its title sequence on the curious circumstance that James I (or VI) sent an altered version of *Macbeth* to the Doge shortly after the frustration of the Gunpowder Plot.

A ship on the Giudecca; photo by Joan Sol

Two poets who have written about Venice have a special place in my affections. One friend, the late New Zealander Allen Curnow, suggested we meet in Venice when we had an edition of his poems to discuss; and, sitting with him and Jeny at their favourite pontoon restaurant on the Zattere, I learned to savour as they did the "Russian ships / dead-slowing up the Giudecca" as they came close to splintering our platform to matchwood. Another, the Australian Robert Gray, was my best man when Kathrin and I married in Venice in 2005. The poem he wrote for us as a wedding gift begins by seeing the Grand Canal on maps as a swan's neck, and later observes that Venice "has sung before it dies"; it notes excursions of schoolgirls on mobile phones, the gangrenous lower reaches of palazzi, the "seething, powdery, / sifted light" that leaves the city looking as if pink and white rose petals were strewn on it; and it declares, "Venice is a diet of pastries". I admit to being partial – but for the sharpness of its observation and the firmness of its thinking and language, Robert's 'The School of Venice' seems to me the outstanding literary response to the city of its generation. ❋

For a list of the works mentioned or discussed here, please see page 98.



COMMENT

Around 16.5 million tourists now visit Venice every year; enormous cruise ships – maritime skyscrapers – dominate the Giudecca canal; tacky mask shops abound. But you can still find the essence of the city if you stick to a few simple rules: avoid the peak of the tourist season; don't plan on just a fleeting visit; don't feel you have to storm around to see all those beautiful things that no-one can possibly afford to miss. Instead, pick them off slowly one after the other, and revisit them when necessary time and again. And on the way, you will find wonders that you have never heard of, and may not even rate a paragraph in the guidebooks.

Sir Richard Lambert is Chancellor of the University of Warwick. Formerly editor of the 'Financial Times', he became Chairman of the Confederation of British Industry – the CBI – in 2006. On his retirement from the CBI at the end of 2010, he and his wife spent three months living in Venice and – just as Warwick students do during the Venice Term – got to know the city from an entirely different perspective.

Opposite: Tourists in the Piazza San Marco; photo by Rudolph A Furtado

The Numbers Sound Terrible

BY SIR RICHARD LAMBERT

Back in the 1950s, a little more than one million tourists a year were coming to Venice: at the most recent count, the figure was 16.5 million and rising. On busy days – during Carnival, for instance, or at the height of the summer – the area around St Mark's can turn into a vast human traffic jam, and the place feels more like a football stadium than La Serenissima.

More and more homes are being given over to bed and breakfast, and every year more palaces on the Grand Canal are being converted into hotels – driving up the price of accommodation in the process. Because it's easier to find housing and decent jobs on the mainland, the number of permanent residents in the historic city has been shrinking at an alarming rate, down from a peak of over 170,000 in the 1950s to something like 60,000 or less today.

This inevitably has had an impact on the character of the place. Every time you visit, it seems, a favourite greengrocer has closed down and been turned into yet another tacky mask shop. And it gets harder and harder to find those wonderful fresh cakes that are worth crossing the Alps to savour.

"Go out of your way to find that lovely cake shop"; photo by Deror avi

There are not enough locals coming in to shop every day, and so the shop windows are more likely to be full of packaged goods and rather dry looking meringues than something that came out of the oven that morning.

Worst of all, perhaps, are the enormous cruise ships which appear out of the blue like the Battlestar Galactica, and – towering over the wonderful churches on the Giudecca – head slowly down towards the Lido. On their way, they disgorge tourists in large numbers, who don't seem to spend much money and can't be having a lot of fun on their brief sojourn in the city.

Even the most pacific of observers will long at some point for a Stinger heat seeking rocket launcher that would despatch the cruise ship in a puff of smoke once it's safely beyond San Giorgio Maggiore.

But despite all this, the city somehow or another retains the capacity that it has always had to charm and enchant. St Mark's Square may be disfigured by giant advertising hoardings, and the mask shops may have spread a little further from the centre than they did five years ago. But you don't have to go too far to discover that this remains the most beautiful city in the world. And after about 10pm, when the day trippers have gone home and the tourists have moved on, you still have very large parts of the place more or less to yourself.

The message for those who want to discover or revisit the magic of the place is simple. Avoid the peak of the tourist season, where things can get very jammed and sticky. And don't plan on just a fleeting visit.

If you are there just for a day or two and don't know your way around very well, the chances are that you will soon be lost along with almost everyone else. Two weeks are better than one, and a month is better still. If you are really very lucky, and can manage to stay for three months, you get just about the best of everything.

Then it doesn't matter if the church you've been longing to visit is unexpectedly closed: that happens in Venice, so try again tomorrow, or next week. Don't dream of doing anything in the morning before you've taken a stroll down the Zattere, and had a leisurely cappuccino in the Campo San Stefano. And yes, do go out of your way to find that lovely cake shop you've been told about: it takes a little finding, but it still exists.

Don't feel you have to storm around to see all those beautiful things that no-one can possibly afford to miss. Instead, pick them off slowly one after the other, and revisit them when necessary time and again. And on the way, you will find wonders that you have never heard of, and may not even rate a paragraph in the guidebooks.

The University of Warwick has had a footprint in Venice for more than forty years, and it's hard to imagine anywhere that better captures the spirit of the place than its full-time base, the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava. Down a not very impressive alley to a palace that dates back to the fifteenth century; into an entrance hall that looks like something out of a Visconti movie; up the stairs into the *piano nobile* and – bang – there's the stunning view out over the Canale della Misericordia as it heads on its way out to the lagoon.

History is all around you, and it's not just the mask shops that suddenly feel a very long way away: so too, of course, does Coventry. Those fortunate students who have this as their base for the autumn term get a perspective on Venice that is closed to most of its other visitors. As a place for scholarship, for discussion, or for just simply sitting around, it's quite simply in a league of its own. ❈

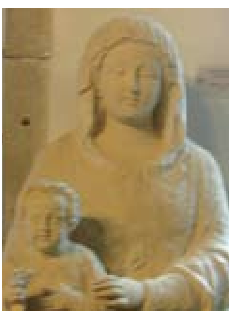
"A leisurely cappuccino in the Campo San Stefano"; photo by Tina L. Vierra

COMMENT

The statue of the Madonna dell'Orto was created by the stonemason Giovanni de Santi, son of the masterful Andriolo de Santi, for the prior of Santa Maria Formosa. When the prior refused to pay for the sculpture, finding it crude and unsightly, the frustrated Giovanni abandoned it to suffer the elements in the garden of his house in the parish of Santa Fosca. Giovanni's observant wife noticed strange noises coming from the statue at night, followed by shafts of bright light emanating from the Madonna's head. The work quickly became the subject of intense veneration.

Marie-Louise Lillywhite achieved first class honours in her BA in Art History at Warwick and was awarded a distinction in her MA in Venetian art history and architecture. She has remained at Warwick to work on her PhD, which investigates the effects of the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation on the visual culture of Venice during the late sixteenth century.

Opposite: The statue of Madonna dell'Orto; photo by Valendur



Working Miracles: the Statue of the Madonna dell'Orto

BY MARIE-LOUISE LILLYWHITE

One of the most beautiful of all of Venice's churches and situated close to Warwick's centre in Venice, the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, the church of Madonna dell'Orto is usually remembered for its impressive facade and large-scale works by Jacopo Tintoretto. Yet the statue of the Virgin present in the chapel of San Mauro holds the key to understanding not only the name of the building, 'Madonna of the Orchard', but also the nature of 'miracle-working' images in fourteenth century Venice.

I became interested in the church of Madonna dell'Orto whilst completing an essay for my MA in Venetian art history and architecture with Warwick University. During the autumn term which is spent living and attending classes in Venice, I decided to concentrate on the statue of the Virgin in Madonna dell'Orto which I found to be very neglected as a subject, despite its apparent importance as the object directly linked to the name of the church.

As any visitor to the church will know, Madonna dell'Orto is believed to be named after a miracle-working image of the Madonna which was found in a nearby orchard in the fourteenth century. Yet the statue was not, as legend would have it, found in an orchard, but was in fact created by the stonemason Giovanni de Santi, son of the masterful Andriolo de Santi, for the prior of Santa Maria Formosa. When the prior refused to pay for the sculpture, finding it crude and unsightly, the frustrated Giovanni abandoned it to suffer the elements in the garden of his house in the parish of Santa Fosca. Giovanni's observant wife noticed strange noises coming from the statue at night, followed by shafts of bright light emanating from the Madonna's head. The work quickly became the subject of intense veneration and the Bishop of Castello, fearful that a cult might develop, gave Giovanni an ultimatum on pain of excommunication. He could either move the statue inside his house, where it would be invisible to the public, or he could come to an agreement with a church which might be interested in purchasing the statue.

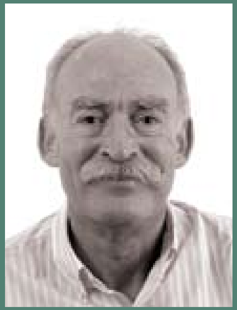
One can only imagine Giovanni's delight and surprise when he realised the lucrative financial returns which might be gained from the sale of his Madonna. He drove a hard bargain with the brothers of the Humiliati Order, who occupied the site of the present-day church, very close to Giovanni's own house. In exchange for his sculpture he demanded payment of one hundred and fifty ducats, a Mass said for his soul for every day in perpetuity after his death and to be buried at the foot of the altar, in front of the sculpture of his creation. Whilst the friars were happy to oblige him in the latter two requests, they did not have the resources to pay for the work and so appealed to the Confraternity, or Scuola, of Merchants, who had recently been approved by the Council of Ten and who occupied the building adjoining the church. Thus, the Scuola, of which Giovanni was a member, came to be inextricably linked to the fate of the sculpture of the Madonna dell'Orto and to the Humiliati presence in Venice.

Modern concerns over the 'beauty' or 'quality' of the statue would have been entirely irrelevant to both the Scuola and the Humiliati Order who would have been conscious of the benefits that owning a miracle-working image could bestow upon them. For the recently permitted Scuola it was a chance to demonstrate its wealth, prestige and piety. For the Brothers the donations which would be left in veneration provided a financial motive that would aid the as yet unfinished building work for both monastery and church. Thus, it was the Scuola who paid for the sculpture on 3 August 1377, noting in their records that 'the friars deserved to honour the church in every possible way and therefore decided to acquire the statue'. Therefore, the acquisition of the statue of de Santi provides an interesting example of how scuole and religious orders worked together for the mutual benefit of both parties.

Finally, both the church of the Humiliati and the Scuola were originally dedicated to Saint Christopher, yet in an opportunistic manner that is

The church of Madonna dell'Orto; photo by Nino Barbieri

typically Venetian (the replacement of St Theodore for St Mark as the titular saint of the city being the most salient example), the original dedication was forgotten over time and became known as the 'Madonna dell'Orto' in honour of the statue that still survives today. Certainly never venerated for her beauty, the crude chisel marks and roughly hewn stone of the heavy Madonna have little appeal, yet the story of this statue demonstrates that she was very important to Venetians. We know, for example, that she was often decorated with precious jewels and dressed in the finest damasks and silks. Whilst the worship of such 'cult images' is neither rational nor intellectual, they do reflect a very human desire for an emotional approach to the divine. Giovanni de Santi's stone Madonna demonstrates how such works could foster lively and genuine veneration within a community and the statue is an early example of the kind of miracle-working images that would become increasingly prevalent in the following centuries. ❈



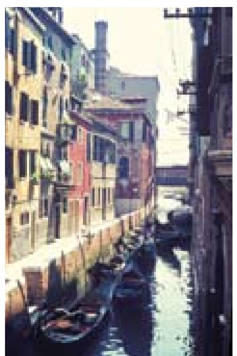
COMMENT

Paul Manser was one of the first Warwick students to experience what is still a unique feature of our undergraduate education – the Venice Term. 'At a time when regular and affordable international travel was still in its infancy, the luxury of three months abroad was almost unimaginable. The gift of this course was to transport us to live amongst the history, the art, the culture of Venice which we were studying: the idea was both inspired and inspirational.'

Paul Manser studied history at Warwick from 1969 to 1972. He has had a distinguished career in law and has continued to support the University: he has served on Warwick's Arts Faculty Board and is currently a member of the Venice Advisory Board. His wife, Lindy, is also a Warwick graduate, with a BA in French Studies (1969-72).

Opposite: Venice in 1970; photo by H Grobe

‘a narrow, terraced, crumbling, faded ochre domain’



We Felt the Spirit of the Renaissance

BY PAUL MANSER

I COMMENCED MY history studies at Warwick in 1969, having been seduced by its unique selling point, a term in Venice. At a time when regular and affordable international travel was still in its infancy, the luxury of three months abroad was almost unimaginable. The gift of this course was to transport us to live amongst the history, the art, the culture of Venice which we were studying: the idea was both inspired and inspirational. By day we studied at the Palazzo Brandolini overlooking the Grand Canal. By night we were dispersed to a network of families, flats and small hotels across the city and the Lido. I was based in Cannaregio, near Ca’ d’Oro, in a typically Venetian property: a narrow, terraced, crumbling, faded ochre domain – it was wonderful! The shared accommodation, in today’s politically correct climate, would leave a lot to be desired. Signora Dara, a resplendent, eccentric lady in her seventies, was our landlady and her prime enjoyment

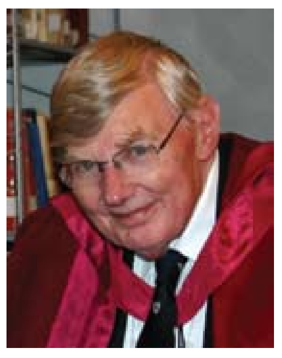
The Palazzo Brandolini: Warwick's first teaching base in Venice

in life was a daily game of bridge using a new, pristine pack of cards for each session. We were the lucky recipients of the daily discarded packs. The Venice term meant for the University a constant shortage of a wide range of resources – not only books and other academic necessities, but also suitable lodgings for 30 plus students each year. Notwithstanding, Warwick, like Signora Dara, always came up trumps.

One of the laudable purposes of living in Venice as a history student was to experience more than just the intellectual. On our walks every morning to the Palazzo Brandolini, we were surrounded by the ageing architecture, the art, the soul and faded grandeur of Venice. We felt the spirit of the Renaissance. Daily, we crossed the Accademia Bridge, traversed squares and sauntered down alleys. We saw their crumbling beauty at every level from the smallest gargoyle to lofty palazzi. We saw daily life in Venice in the raw from lines of washing to gleaming gondolas on the Grand Canal. We experienced the joys of early morning continental living, standing at a coffee bar and tasting authentic Italian espressos.

Our daily experiences included the open blue skies, the foggy nights, the acqua alta and vaporetti. We were also tourists. We took advantage of the cultural offerings by visiting numerous churches, museums and galleries, including the Accademia (where we saw masterpieces by Bellini,

Giorgione, Tintoretto and Titian) as well as the modern art collection of Peggy Guggenheim. When not walking, we were able to enjoy the only other form of transport in Venice – journeys on the vaporetti. We mingled with mothers and children, other residents and local businessmen, all at the same time in the noisy, crowded central area of the boat. We found the extensive routes and schedules confusing, but we appreciated the challenge of understanding a different, hitherto unknown, navigation system.



Professor Michael Mallett FRHS, receiving an honorary degree at a ceremony in Venice in 2007; Professor Mallett died in 2008.

We also studied. This was far easier than being in the UK. The Venice term was a very real education in the sense that what we read and heard about in lectures, we now saw, felt and experienced *in situ* and in reality. For three months, we were part of the fabric of Venice, and we learnt first-hand from our erudite professors Michael Mallett and Martin Lowry (both now sadly departed) of its fascinating history and its unique challenges for the future. We absorbed the atmosphere and were far better able to understand the social, political and artistic realities of the Italian Renaissance, as reflected in the actuality of Venice, than studying back home.

The worst acqua alta had only been five years before our visit so we were all very conscious of the constant threat to the fabric of Venice and the dangers of subsidence. For how many future generations could Venice, as we saw it, survive? All these thoughts were very much in my mind when I translated a pamphlet into Italian for the then newly formed Venice in Peril, an organisation with which Warwick has always been closely associated and has vigorously supported. This was but one means by which we were able to hone our language skills, understand Venice and appreciate its immense contribution to European civilisation to an extent not possible for the normally transient visitor.

The annual autumn term in Venice has now become very much integrated into the academic and social life of the city. The University has developed, over the years, close collaboration with other academic and cultural institutions in Venice as well as the public sector authorities. As a result, the University has contributed to, and become part of, the continuing evolution of Venice. We were then young and with limited lire but we were truly enriched by the experience. How lucky we were as one of the early cohorts of the new Venice programme. How privileged to be able to benefit from the foresight of the University and the devotion of the academic staff who have ensured its continuing success. ❈

COMMENT

'For the boatman as for the shopkeeper, the librarian and the civil servant, Venetian (often intermixed with Standard Italian) is still the principal medium of communication throughout the six historic districts (*sestieri*) of Venice and functions as a very powerful marker of identity in everyday life that distinguishes the natives (*venessiani*) from the non-Venetians (*foresti*, lit. woodlanders).'

Dr Cristina Marinetti is an Assistant Professor in Warwick's Centre for Applied Linguistics and in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies. She studied foreign languages at Ca' Foscari – the University of Venice – and also has a PhD in Translation Studies from the University of Warwick. Cristina's research interests include Italian and British theatre history, with a specialisation in Goldoni and the Commedia dell'Arte, and philosophical and cultural approaches to translation.

Opposite: The origins of 'un ombra' depicted in this painting by Canaletto of the Piazza San Marco; photo by Web Gallery of Art

'Andemo bever un'ombra': the Venetian Dialect

BY CRISTINA MARINETTI

When asked to translate Carlo Goldoni's *Le baruffe Chiozzotte* ('The Chioggian Brawls') for the English stage, Clifford Bax replied that Goldoni's thick Venetian dialect was untranslatable, 'for to use ordinary English would be to make wild peasants talk like gentlefolk, and to use any English dialect would be like mooring gondolas at Hull'. While beautifully crystallizing the inevitable compromise involved in representing and making accessible what is linguistically and culturally other, Bax's conundrum also highlights a fundamental aspect of Venetian life and culture that is seldom talked about outside Italy: the Venetian dialect.

Unlike Venetian painting, art and architecture, which have gained international currency because of their historical influence in Europe and beyond, the language of Venice seldom features in international discussions of the city's history and cultural heritage. And yet, at the start of the Third Millennium, Venetian remains the native language of most of the 63,000 or so inhabitants of the city, and one of the most prestigious of Italy's dialects.

While no longer the language of state and institutions, as was the case well into the nineteenth century, Venetian is very widely spoken in informal contexts, both within and outside the family. For the boatman as for the shopkeeper, the librarian and the civil servant, Venetian (often intermixed with Standard Italian) is still the principal medium of communication throughout the six historic districts (*sestieri*) of Venice and functions as a very powerful marker of identity in everyday life that distinguishes the natives (*venessiani*) from the non-Venetians (*foresti*, lit. woodlanders).

Although I am primarily an Italian speaker, now living and working mostly in English, I often find myself turning on my Venetianness with friends and family when I go back to Venice, partly to rekindle the warmth and humour of an idiom learnt at my grandparents' knees but also as a way of demonstrating my belonging, of marking myself out as a native. Like residents who pay one-sixth of the price of a tourist ticket for the vaporetto, Venetian speakers get the best tables at restaurants and events as well as better deals in shops and cafes – the so-called *'presso da Venessian'* ('Venetian price'), which waiters are trained to automatically apply to tables of Venetian speakers. In a city that has seen its butchers' and bakers' turned into mask shops and takeaway pizza outlets and its community centres converted into boutique hotels or exhibition venues for tourist consumption, the Venetian dialect gives the natives a way of claiming back part of the city by marking out spaces that are not accessible to mass tourism.

But even as a tourist it is impossible to escape the Venetian dialect, which is everywhere in the city, embedded in the very geography of a unique landscape that has remained virtually unchanged for hundreds of years. So walking around Venice, map in hand, our tourist will learn to navigate along *calli* ('streets') and *fondamente* ('embankments'), go through a *sotoportego* ('underpass'), across a *campieo* ('little square') and stop at a *bacaro* ('bar') for an *ombra de vin* ('glass of wine'). And perhaps, if she is curious enough to seek out connections between language, history and culture, she will puzzle at the sign *rio terà* and marvel at the fact that she's now walking on a stretch of land which was once a rio ('small canal') and was claimed back ('interred' – *terà*) during prosperous times when the city's population was increasing by the thousands.

The influence of Venetian dialect on Venetian geography is pervasive but also reciprocal. Venice's landscape and architecture have had a profound effect on language which is manifest in everyday conversation. The common expression *andemo bever un'ombra* ('let's go for a drink') comes from the tradition of breaking up the morning or afternoon work by drinking a glass of wine while sitting in the shade (*ombra*) of the *Campanile* in St. Mark's. Likewise, the standard Venetian reply to a request for directions is *un ponte e 'na cae* ('over the bridge and down the *calle*') which tells you more about the somewhat optimistic perception of distance of the natives and their confidence in navigating shortcuts than about how to reach your destination.

Un ponte e 'na cae (over the bridge and down the calle); photo by Dr Roberta Warman

The confidence and pride of the Venetian speaker is very unusual in contemporary Italy, where dialect speaking is disappearing in favour of the regional standard and, especially in the younger generations, is associated with low education and social status. Venice's unique identity as a world heritage site may have gone some way in fostering such confidence but its roots are most likely found in the glorious past of the Serenissima Republic. In the sixteenth century, at the height of the Republic's economic power and military might, Venetian was one of the most influential of the romance languages of Europe and was spoken right across the Eastern Mediterranean not only by merchants and traders but also by aristocrats and rulers, including famously the Ottoman Sultan. Some very distinguished linguists even suggest that had Venice prevailed against the European powers of the League of Cambrai between 1508 and 1515, Venetian and not literary Tuscan would have become the basis for contemporary Italian.

Although Venice lost and literary Tuscan won out as the model for written language, Venetian has remained an incredibly rich and influential language, especially in the spoken form. The most recent and comprehensive historical dictionary of Venetian, the result of decades of research in Venice and across the Mediterranean, offers a picture of sixteenth-century Venetian as a global language, transnational and hybridised, which by refusing the written codification of literary Tuscan remained flexible and open to the experiences and multiple voices of a cosmopolitan city of trade. And this is the language that we find in Venetian Renaissance comedy and later, in the eighteenth century, in Goldoni, where characters interact in multiple tongues, alternating the language of fishermen and aristocrats with stylised Tuscan, Spanish, mock-Turkish and Armenian. If Bax were writing now, instead of the early twentieth century, he may have to re-think the untranslatability of Venetian and see in the multi-layered and hybridised language of Goldoni a very striking parallel with the idioms of our cosmopolitan condition. ❋

COMMENT

'On the Sunday evening we'd arranged to sing Mass in Santo Stefano. Often these "arrangements" are a bit *ad hoc*: we have a pretty free hand what to perform, and we often don't meet the priest until just before the service. "What are you singing?" he asked Richard. "We've got a *Laudate Dominum* by Monteverdi, for bass and organ, and with the full choir we'll give you some Gabrieli, if that's all right..." "Excellent," said the priest, "and very appropriate – he's buried just over there." '

Richard Parker came to work as a librarian in Warwick in 1980 and was Head of the Arts Faculty liaison team and subject support specialist for the Departments of German, History and History of Art. He sings with ensemble 1685 – a group of about 20 singers based in Coventry who perform across the Midlands. Richard retired from Warwick in 2011.

visit ensemble 1685's website at: www.ensemble1685.org.uk

Opposite: Copy of a portrait of Claudio Monteverdi by Bernardo Strozzi, hanging in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice (1640); photo by Celeron

Making Music in Venice

BY RICHARD PARKER

As subject specialist until recently for history of art and history at Warwick Library, I've long had contacts with our teaching programme in Venice. So when plans for the fortieth anniversary alumni reunion were announced I immediately offered the services of the choir I sing with, *ensemble 1685*. Our first intention was to provide music for the honorary degree congregation which would take place during the reunion, but we were also ready and willing to offer musical accompaniment to the planned church visits. *ensemble 1685*, directed by Richard Jeffcoat, and named for the birth-year of both Bach and Handel, performs a wide range of music from early Renaissance to late Romantic, so Richard was sure to find something appropriate we could perform from our repertoire.

Richard had never visited Venice before, so he flew out for a preparatory visit. His flight was so badly delayed there was no public transport running, so he decided to walk from Marco Polo Airport into the city (it was a fine night). His compensation was his first ever view of the Piazza San Marco as the sun rose; he reckoned he'd walked every street in the city before it was decently late enough to call on us in our shared flat.

High point of *ensemble 1685*'s visit for me was an evening visit to San Marco. We began in a side chapel with a movement from the four-part unaccompanied mass by Monteverdi, then filed into the darkened Basilica to sing the eight-part motet *Jubilate Deo* by Giovanni Gabrieli – both composers

‘We sang it (Guerrero’s *Ave Virgo Sanctissima*) facing Titian’s *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Frari – as if singing to her.’

Titian’s Assumption of the Virgin in the Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari; photo by The Yorck Project

were once *maestro di cappella* there. One audience member later told me it was a most moving experience; one singer had never been in San Marco before, and was overwhelmed by the vista of golden domes receding into the gloom.

Another high point was a visit to the Frari, where we accompanied talks by Joanne Allen and Donal Cooper. First we sang the rich, sensuous *Ave virgo sanctissima* by Francisco Guerrero (1525-99). This was recognised in its day as one of the finest Marian motets, and we sang it facing Titian's extraordinary *Assumption of the Virgin* – as if singing to her. (One Warwick art history lecturer was apparently so moved on first sight of this huge altarpiece that he only regained the power of speech when sitting in the cafe opposite the Frari.) The talks were about liturgical space within the church, and we were able to illustrate this by singing from different points, each of which gave a different acoustic sense of the building: Monteverdi's six-part *Cantate Domino* between the choir stalls, then – a rare privilege – allowed into the sanctuary for Palestrina's beautiful *Sicut cervus* – the vocal lines flowing like the waterbrooks the hart longs for.

On the Saturday Warwick's degree ceremony took place in the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, when honorary degrees were awarded to Professor Michael Mallett and Lady Frances Clarke. There is no instrument of any kind in the Palazzo – so all the music would have to be unaccompanied. Before the ceremony we sang some (English) madrigals – not echt Venetian, but quite well-known and easily controllable as regards timings. Then *Jubilate Deo* again for the ceremony – its textures are sufficiently sonorous and imposing to work well as processional music. As the procession wound its stately way up the stairs and along the *piano nobile*, Richard was keeping a close eye on its progress over his shoulder – it would never do to leave the Vice-Chancellor to walk the last ten paces in silence… Thanks to an extravagant (and completely inauthentic) *rallentando* over the last two pages we (and the VC) just made it.

On the Sunday evening we'd arranged to sing mass in Santo Stefano. Often these "arrangements" are a bit *ad hoc*: we have a pretty free hand what to perform, and we often don't meet the priest until just before the service. "What are you singing?" he asked Richard. "We've got a *Laudate Dominum* by Monteverdi, for bass and organ, and with the full choir we'll give you some Gabrieli, if that's all right…" "Excellent," said the priest, "and very appropriate – he's buried just over there."

During the alumni programme we also found time to sing in Santa Maria dei Miracoli, the miraculous little marble church not far from San Zanipolo, built on such a small site that the canal had to be rerouted to make room for it; and in the Scuole of San Marco and San Rocco, and in San Francesco della Vigna in Castello; and for eucharist in St George's Anglican church, where we sang a graceful flowery mass by Haydn. Comments we received at the time and subsequently made clear just how much we had added to the enjoyment of everyone who attended the reunion. And what a great experience it was for us… ❋

COMMENT

'Like Italo Calvino's timeless invisible cities (all bearing the imprint of Venice), the city evokes its old, even archaic self, yet only through the lens of our contemporary sense of it. In Calvino's words, it is a city of memory, a city of desire, a city of signs and of trade, a hidden and a continuous city, a *città sottile* – thin, but also light and subtle – and a city of visions.'

Dr Loredana Polezzi is an Associate Professor in Warwick's Department of Italian Studies. She studied Modern Languages at Venice and Siena and has an MA in Italian Studies and a PhD in Translation Studies from Warwick. Her research focuses on the history of travel writing and the connection between geography and social mobility, as well as theories and practices of translation. Loredana is Director of Warwick's Venice Centre.

Opposite: 'Paco', the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava's neighbourhood cat; photo by Dr Roberta Warman

Sixteen Cats on One Tree

BY LOREDANA POLEZZI

It may seem like heresy to start a piece about Venice by mentioning one of its historical rivals, but there is a song about Genoa which always reminds me of my meeting with Venice. It was written by Paolo Conte (a Piedmontese) and it describes the marvel and shock of the first encounter with a city of water for someone who was raised away from the sea (Paolo Conte, *Genova per noi*, 1974). I met Venice when I was eighteen, as I arrived from Tuscany to study at Venice's Ca' Foscari University for a year. I had grown up in the countryside. My landscapes were made of hill towns and expansive valleys. My elective city was Florence, with its airiness and its uneasy relationship with the river that cuts through it. Venice meant standing and walking on water, feeling surrounded but also protected by it. And it meant, like Conte's Genoa, the strange encounter with a place so still and yet always moving, '*anche di notte*' – even at night.

Tiziano Scarpa likened Venice to a fish; image courtesy of NASA

My dominant images of Venice are always of arrivals. By train first of all. I did not live in Venice as a student, but lodged with family friends in Padua, travelling every day with the commuters, crossing the bridge over the lagoon, stepping out of Santa Lucia station, and walking into the city. Walking in Venice was a disconcerting experience for someone used to reasonably straight lines, to open vistas, to the geometric progression and the layering of ages which in Italian cities usually tells you that you are moving from the periphery to the centre of things. Venice had no fixed proportions, allowed no steady pace; it blocked your way with surprisingly beautiful objects at almost every turn. Its shape seemed much more organic, and slippery, like the fish Tiziano Scarpa, a contemporary Venetian writer, has likened it to. Navigating the city demanded the reading of maps or the unfaltering faith in a blind sense of direction – two things I had never had to rely on before. And even those tools often failed me, requiring further detours and the retracing of steps. (Years later, there was a strange pleasure in discovering that even Google Maps cannot cope with Venice's intricate patterns and small spaces: the blue dot that is meant to guide you gives up, and you need to ask someone, or just wander around, to find the next palazzo, the last art exhibition on the list, or the restaurant you just phoned to book your table for dinner.)

Walking the city at night compounded the effect. Every few weeks, after a trip home, I travelled on night trains, spent a couple of hours in Bologna station, and arrived in Venice at five in the morning. Italy's *anni di piombo*,

the years of terrorism and bombs, were not far away, and train stations were even less inviting than usual. So I walked the city, waiting for the first bar to open, and for a coffee taken in the company of firemen and old ladies suffering from insomnia and the need for a glass of grappa. I walked over humped bridges and under *sotoporteghi*, looking for the light of the next *campo*. Venice could be surprisingly empty, but also full of unexpected presences. There was one courtyard I kept coming across, with a walled garden on one side, a gate, and a tree.

'I walked… under sotoporteghi looking for the light of the next campo'; photo by Dr Roberta Warman

That courtyard was a gathering point for Venetian cats, and they all seemed to like that tree. I walked past and counted: once it was sixteen cats on one tree. They were not ragged, neglected strays, but placid dignitaries arranged on branches as if for a salon conversation. They were a perfect corner of Oriental Venice.

After that year, I did not return for almost two decades. When I got back to Venice, I approached it by sea, navigating the lagoon. I re-drew my map, adding a contour which the city itself had hidden from sight. And it did not take long to regain an old confidence in walking seemingly random routes. Venice appeared to have stayed still, yet shifted slightly. Like Italo Calvino's timeless invisible cities (all bearing the imprint of Venice), the city evokes its old, even archaic self, yet only through the lens of our contemporary sense of it. In Calvino's words, it is a city of memory, a city of desire, a city of signs and of trade, a hidden and a continuous city, a *città sottile* – thin, but also light and subtle – and a city of visions. When I went back, I looked for my own visionary image of Venice: the courtyard, the gate, and sixteen cats on a small tree. I found cats on the islands – on Torcello, Vignole, Sant' Erasmo – and a few in the city itself. They were always of the contented, regal kind. But I never saw so many in a single place again. A Venetian friend thought about it and mused: 'Yes, there used to be lots of cats around here…'. ❋

For the works mentioned here, please see page 98.

COMMENT

To the Elizabethans, Venice had both a grave and glamorous reputation. It was at once Venice the Wise; Venice the Just; Venice the Rich – and the *città galante* offering 'infinite superfluities of all pleasure and delights'. What did William Shakespeare, the country boy from Stratford-upon-Avon, know of this dazzling Renaissance capital of culture, commerce and sleaze?

Carol Rutter is Professor of Shakespeare and Performance Studies. She is a historian of the early modern playhouse, who also studies contemporary Shakespeare performance on both stage and screen. From 2006 to 2011 she was Director of the University's prestigious CAPITAL (Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning) Centre – a partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company which used theatre and performance skills and experience to enhance student learning, and now forms the core of Warwick's Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning.

'Two Venetian Ladies' by Vittore Carpaccio, (also known as 'The Courtesans'), in the Correr Museum, Venice

Shakespeare's Venice

BY CAROL RUTTER

For any Elizabethan likely-lad well-heeled enough to afford a European Grand Tour or well-connected enough to secure a passport to travel, Venice was a dream destination.

The city had both a grave and glamorous reputation. It was a republic, and so allowed any English student or observer of political systems an opportunity to study a government completely different from his own experience of monarchy – the absolute rule of a Tudor queen. It had earned the epithet 'Venice the Wise', and part of its political wisdom resided in its dedication to peace, signalled in La Serenissima's personification as a virgin. But it was also known as 'Venice the Just' for its reputation for the administration of severe but impartial laws (even to foreigners and lower classes) that were legislated by the Republic itself, not derived from civil (that is, Roman) law. And it was called 'Venice the Rich' for the spectacular wealth amassed there as a result of its geographic position, wealth on display in architecture and art as well as in the marketplaces and bazaars.

Nuremberg and Venetian Women by Dürer. The Venetian woman is wearing 'chopines' which is why she looks taller.

Venice was the commercial cross-point between east and west, and as the city recorder wrote, 'the most precious merchandise' of every 'city famous for merchandising in the Levant' passed through Venice. This economic power was a magnet for foreign traders, making Venice a visibly cosmopolitan city where, wrote a traveller, 'if you are curious to see men from all parts of the world, each dressed in his different mode, go to the Piazza di San Marco or to the Rialto.' There you would see Greeks, Spaniards, Florentines, Turks. And Englishmen: a head-count in the late 1580s put thirty English students living there; in 1593, there were so many 'English heretics' – that is, Protestants – living in Venice that the Pope issued a formal complaint to the (religiously tolerant) Doge.

Most sensationally, though, Venice had a reputation as the *città galante*. She was 'brave' (or brazen). She was the pleasure capital of Europe, offering (as one English visitor wrote) open-armed welcome 'to strangers' and 'infinite superfluities of all pleasure and delights'. One of its pleasurable delights was sex. It has been estimated that 10% of the city's population in 1600 traded openly as courtesans – *meretrici de luoghi publici* – from doors and windows; richly dressed in Venice lace and imported oriental silks; wearing high platform shoes called *chopines*; their hair bleached and frizzled; their faces painted white with lead-based cosmetics and lips redded with carmine; their breasts bare. Fascinatingly, and making it tough for the tourist to keep the two categories of women apart, this same high fashion was worn also by the city's 'respectable' women, its Desdemonas and Celias, who were kept, protected, constantly chaperoned, indoors by Venetian fathers and husbands who were notoriously jealous.

What was going on here? Well, the city's pragmatism was such that, putting marriage at the heart of its social and political institutions, and wanting its girls to be good but knowing its boys would be laddish, a code of civic morality based on mirroring had grown up. That is, the city was able to enforce the honour dynamic that disciplined sex lives in licit domestic culture by tolerating, even encouraging the illicit traffic with 'meretrici'. Thus, in Venice the sex trade paradoxically protected family values. The city's testosterone-fuelled adolescents, not yet old enough for marriage, were diverted from seducing wives and deflowering virgins onto professionals who could handle their energies. So: licit illicitness. Licensed licentiousness. What an eye-opener for the English student abroad!

Philip Sidney, the poet, courtier, and Elizabethan golden boy, visited Venice, aged 18, in 1572. The younger brother of his travelling companion would much later be installed there as ambassador from the Court of King James (1604). Sidney left no record of his encounter; Henry Wotton, scores of letters and despatches, including one shrewd observation about shared geopolitical interests, that the Republic was nearly as anti-Papal as was Protestant England: 'long neutrality of State', he wrote, had 'at length (as it seemeth) almost slipped into a neutrality of religion'. Fynes Moryson documented his journey to Venice in 1593; and Thomas Coryat, in his *Crudities* (1611). In 1599 Lewis Lewkenor published a translation of Gasparo Contarini's 1543 *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum*, with a supplement for the tourist, an early modern 'Rough Guide' to the city and its sights. John Florio's English/Italian dictionary, *A World of Words*, came out in 1598. That same year, a new edition appeared of Cesare Vecellio's *De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo* illustrated with sixty woodcuts of contemporary Venetian social types in their proper clothing – senators, lawyers, doctors, the fashionable wife and her look-alike, the courtesan – with, on the facing page, a social commentary on each type. So, for the tourist, a sort of 'Rough Guide' to potential in-the-flesh civic encounters.

Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639), King James's ambassador to Venice

Much, then, was known in England of Venice, from myth to eye-witness account to near-photographic representation. What did William Shakespeare, the country boy from Stratford-upon-Avon, know of this dazzling Renaissance capital of culture, commerce, and sleaze? Did he ever visit Venice? Probably not. Fynes Moryson estimated that £50-60 should cover a year's travels for a 'private gentleman'; Sidney, needing to make much more of a public splash, spent three times that much. Where would a working man come up with such a bankroll? Annual wages for dyers and mercers, shipwrights and glovers, remember, were fixed by Elizabethan statute at £5 per annum. A playwright was paid £6 per script.

Most probably, Shakespeare read all of the published accounts from Moryson to Coryat – and more: Giraldo Cinthio's Venetian tale of inter-racial marriage and a wife-murder which hadn't yet appeared in English. As a reader he was active and attentive, ranging widely across authors and topics, absorbing and processing his reading, and putting it into his writing. His two great plays set in the Republic, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello: The Moor of Venice*, are scattered with details giving superficial local colour: 'news'

The Rialto Bridge, completed in 1591; photo by Nino Barbieri

exchanged 'upon the Rialto'; a loan in 'ducats'; a clown called 'Gobbo' (after the hunchback 'Gobbo' in the Rialto market); an elopement conducted 'by a knave of common hire, a gondolier'.

More significantly, however, in each of these plays he got to the Venetian heart of the matter: thinking about ethnic and commercial tensions in the city that had invented the idea of the bank; thinking about family, patriarchy, wrongs done to fathers that have the effect of civic insult; thinking about wrongs done to outsiders and whether the 'alien' can get a fair trial. At the black core of Iago's marriage guidance counsel is some insider knowledge, 'what everybody knows' about Venetian women: 'I know

our country disposition well. / In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands'. At the anguished core of Shylock's interrogation – 'what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes?' – are questions about how real the myth of 'Venice the Just' is.

In *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare has the pedant Holofernes (perhaps a dig at his own pedantry) sigh, 'Venetia, Venetia: Chi non ti vede, non ti pretia': 'Who sees not Venice cannot esteem it'. John Florio supplies the next line of the proverb: 'Ma chi ti vede, ben gli costa': 'But he that sees it, pays well for it.' In *Merchant* and *Othello* Shakespeare lets us 'see' Venice, and counts the cost of what we see. ❋

COMMENT

'Beyond the pavilions in the cool gardens, and the wide spaces of the Arsenale, there are exhibitions in domestic, institutional and industrial buildings and open places throughout the whole city and region.'

Sarah Shalgosky is Curator of the University's Mead Gallery, situated in Warwick Arts Centre. Under Sarah's direction, the Mead shows a programme of contemporary and modern art which is of national significance, and is particularly known for its commissioning of new work.

Opposite: An exhibit at the Venice Biennale, 2009; photo by Dr Roberta Warman

The Venice Biennale

BY SARAH SHALGOSKY

I FIRST WENT to Venice in 1986 as the most junior member of the Arts Council of Great Britain delegation to the Biennale. Twenty-five years ago, the significance of the Biennale was immense. With no internet, no cheap flights and no global art scene, the only opportunities to survey international contemporary art were the Venice Biennale, the São Paulo Biennale and the quinquennial Documenta in Kassel.

São Paulo and Documenta are post-war innovations but the Venice Biennale had been founded in 1895, largely as a vehicle for the applied arts. Initially, it was very much like the Great Exhibitions that showcased national innovations in design and spread across Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, in the early years of the twentieth century the Venice Biennale developed a focus on fine art. Gradually, more and more countries started to participate and built their own pavilions in the tree-lined avenues of the Giardini on the easternmost tip of the south-facing waterfront.

My memories of that first trip are still very distinct. The British pavilion walls were painted a dull grey green and it was filled with the work of Frank Auerbach – vigorous paintings from which portraits emerge through extraordinarily tactile oil paint. The pavilions seem to have been built according to the political geography of the time. On the left of the British pavilion is the French pavilion which in 1986 was filled with the great striped paintings of Daniel Buren that anatomised and interrogated the space. The German pavilion, on the right of the British pavilion, remained closed during the preview week and the exhibition was only revealed on the day before the Biennale opened to the public. Sigmar Polke had painted the walls with pigments and minerals to create an enormous abstract painting that recalled the skies over Venice with flashes of silver, lilac, gold and turquoise.

In those days, it was possible to see the entire Biennale in two or three days. Beyond the pavilions in the Giardini there was the curated 'Aperto' ('Outside') exhibition. In 1980, the long rope yards in the Venice Arsenale had been taken over by the Biennale to introduce the work of younger artists from across the world to the festival. This was more exciting work – I remember seeing paintings by Lisa Milroy and John Murphy here for the first time and they were the first artists that I presented in the Mead Gallery in 1993. Above all, I remember the discussions. I suppose it was like being at a large, informal conference. Collected in one small city over a three day period are all the key international artists, critics and curators and everyone is keen to discuss the work.

Since 1986, dozens of other Biennials and Triennials have been established across the world. In Britain there is the Tate Triennial, the Folkstone Triennial and the Liverpool Biennial. Biennials are held in Sydney, Sharjah, Istanbul, Berlin, Kwangju, Havana, Glasgow, Moscow, Athens. New ones are constantly being developed to bring profile and development opportunities to cites. They have contributed to a global appetite for contemporary art. And Venice itself has got bigger too.

The Mead was part of this expansion when in 2001, my Assistant Curator, who was Welsh, felt that Wales required its own presence at the Biennale. She persuaded the *Art Newspaper* to give us the central pages of their Venice issue and we commissioned the artist Cerith Wyn Evans to create one of his text works for this spread. Written in Welsh, naturally, all the vertical strokes of the double dds, lls and ffs created a pattern across the page that resembled the typewriter drawings of Anni Albers.

Since 2003, Wales has had its own pavilion, as has Scotland and Northern Ireland and ... ArtSway – an artist studio complex from the village of Sway in the New Forest! The number of exhibiting nations, artists, projects and events is ever-expanding. Milton Keynes had a project last time. Beyond the pavilions in the cool gardens and the wide spaces of the Arsenale there are exhibitions in domestic, institutional and industrial buildings and open places throughout the whole city and region. It's impossible to see

Above and following page: Mike Nelson: I, IMPOSTOR (2011) Installation, British Pavilion; Venice Biennale 2011; photos by Cristiano Corte

9th International Venice Architecture Biennale Exhibition Design; photo by Christian Richters, courtesy of Asymptote Architecture

everything in three days, let alone a week. Now, before you go, you need to research diligently a list of priorities. When you're at the Biennale the prevailing greeting is, 'What have you seen? Can I afford to miss it?'

To a certain extent, there is not the same urgency for curators to go to the Venice Biennale today – we can learn about international art practice from the internet, by going to the major art fairs and by the explosion of contemporary art in galleries across the UK. But Venice is where nations showcase their best. Artists are given a major opportunity to create something extraordinary and reading about it isn't quite the same.

This year, Mike Nelson – who made the top floor of the Hayward Gallery in London look as if a wild animal had clawed its way out of an Edwardian suite of offices – has the British pavilion and it's almost beyond imagination what he might do with it*. However, I won't be going this year. Instead, my colleague, Liz Dooley, will be making her first trip to the Biennale. She is adept at research and she is fluent in Italian. She has successfully negotiated the almost impossible tasks of trying to find a hotel room at Biennale time in Venice and of getting accreditation to attend the preview days. Most useful of all, she regularly runs the journey between Coventry station and the University to come to work and is therefore supremely well equipped to see several hundred art exhibitions in three days! ❋

**Sarah wrote this in April 2011, before the opening of the 2011 Biennale.*

COMMENT

'Warwick's base in Venice – the envy of universities across the UK – has unquestionably inspired Warwick research in Renaissance Studies and stimulated its international scope. The long association of History and History of Art with Venice, and latterly the Renaissance Centre's association, have been to an extent responsible for Warwick's leading reputation among British universities as a hub of Renaissance Studies.'

Dr Margaret Shewring is a Reader in the School of Theatre, Performance and Cultural Policy Studies. She specialises in the theatre of the Renaissance and Restoration periods, Modernism in Europe and Shakespeare on the contemporary stage. Ronnie Mulryne is Emeritus Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies. His research focuses on Shakespeare and Renaissance drama, especially drama in performance. Both have had a long connection with Warwick's Centre for the Study of the Renaissance. In March 2010 they organised the conference on 'Waterborne Pageants and Festivities of the Renaissance' at the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava.

A Venetian Evening at the Palazzo: Musical Entertainment and Festival

BY MARGARET SHEWRING AND RONNIE MULRYNE

THOSE WHO WERE present will not readily forget the evening of 19 March 2010 at the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava. Guests in evening dress, and some in carnival masks, arrived by *motoscafo* – in itself an exciting and in many cases novel experience. From the candle-lit garden entrance they made their way to the Palazzo's main reception hall and there enjoyed an entertainment that exceeded all expectations for musical excellence, atmosphere and historical pertinence. The performers were members of a Renaissance Music Ensemble known as *Mascherata*, composed of Catherine Groom (recorders, voice, harp), Adrian Horsewood (voice, drum, reader) and Richard Mackenzie (lute). Together they presented a programme of song, reading and instrumental music such as Henri III might have heard during his celebrated and spectacular visit to Venice in 1574, beginning with a haunting drum-beat processional entrance that commanded attention and gave notice of delights to come.

Mascherata: Catherine Groom, Adrian Horsewood and Richard Mackenzie

Guests for the occasion included the Architect directly responsible for the new RSC auditorium in Stratford (shortlisted for the Stirling Prize), a leading Theatre Design Consultant, a former Chief Executive of Shakespeare's Globe, a Master Printer and Publisher, a leading Developer, a highly successful Financial Consultant, a Playwright and former Senior Officer of the Arts Council, family friends and relatives and a clutch of Oxbridge and other professors, senior academics and graduate students from Warwick and across Europe. For many the chief delight of the event was the Palazzo itself, so evocatively situated on the edge of a Venetian canal in the failing light. This will come as no surprise to Warwick colleagues who have taken advantage of the University's occupation of this historic building. Nor will they be surprised to learn that an invited contingent of guests went on to enjoy a superb Venetian banquet at a favoured nearby restaurant.

Mascherata's choice of music appropriate to the visit of Henri III, future king of France and lately king of Poland, proved a winning one. Henri didn't, so far as we know, visit the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava, but his activities fully embraced the carnival spirit. He spent most of his seven or eight days on the Venetian mainland at the Ca' Grande de' Foscari, now in the ownership of

The arrival of the Dogaressa Morosina Morosini Grimani in the Bucintoro for her coronation, 4 May 1597. Engraving and etching. Print by Giacomo Franco, 1597 © The Trustees of the British Museum

the University of Venice, watching the endless series of entertainments, day and night, on the Grand Canal. He attended unbelievably lavish banquets in the Doge's Palace, and each day heard Mass at one of the city's great churches. There were less formal moments too. A special performance was mounted for Henri of that peculiarly Venetian entertainment, the battle between the Nicoloti and the Castellani, in which competing factions try to toss each other from a bridge into the murky waters of a local canal. The famous Commedia dell' Arte company, the *Comici Gelosi*, put on 'a pleasing and charming tragicomedy' for the king. It was also rumoured that Henri, a handsome fellow, enjoyed other Venetian attractions among the local courtesans whenever he escaped from his official lodgings on Murano. And, of course, there were very grand water pageants involving the famous *Bucintoro*. As one contemporary writer put it: 'Just as one cannot find a more beautiful ship … there is no majesty equal to that of seeing it moving serenely, resplendent with so much gold and ornament'. Maybe, our concert audience may have mused, Shakespeare read this description when imagining the splendours of Venetian shipping in *The Merchant of Venice.*

All of these associations, and more, come to one's thoughts in Venice, 'a city,' according to a contemporary commentator on Henri's visit, 'that cannot be grasped in the mind of those who have not seen it'. They were especially in the mind, by contrast, of many listening to *Mascherata*, since this memorable evening formed part of a conference with the title 'Waterborne Pageants and Festivities of the Renaissance', mounted in the Palazzo under the auspices of a research group that has become, partly as a result of the conference, the Society for European Festivals Research. Currently based at Warwick, the Society has already brought together an international and multi-disciplinary group of scholars, including academics and museum and gallery curators, has launched a publications programme (with Ashgate Publishers), has hosted a conference and workshop (at Warwick and the Warburg Institute in London), is planning a conference in Bergamo, and has developed a close association with the art-and architecture-based European Science Foundation project PALATIUM. The Society is planning a major conference in association with PALATIUM for 2013, which we'd like to hold, if everything works out, at (where else?) the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava in Venice.

The background to all these past and planned events lies, of course, in published research, a good deal of it by Warwick colleagues, several of them based in Warwick's Centre for the Study of the Renaissance (a collaborative venture by English, French, Italian, History, History of Art and Theatre Studies) and in the AHRB/C-funded Centre for the Study of Renaissance Elites and Court Cultures. For a number of years the Renaissance Centre, under the EU Erasmus and Socrates schemes, was able to bring students to Warwick from the University of Venice, and to send our graduate students in return to Venice. Warwick's base in Venice – the envy of universities across

The battle between the Castellani and the Nicoloti at the Carmine Bridge, in the presence of Henri III. Etching by Luca Carlevaris, 1703 © The Trustees of the British Museum

the UK – has unquestionably inspired Warwick research and stimulated its international scope. The long association of History and History of Art with Venice, and latterly the Renaissance Centre's association, have been to an extent responsible for Warwick's leading reputation among British universities as a hub of Renaissance Studies. The University's presence in Venice at the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava is much more than a matter of symbolism. When you have the opportunity to mount and attend conferences, make academic contacts and enjoy music, in a place with so many associations and such stimulating facilities, you are privileged indeed among your academic colleagues. ❋

COMMENT

'Venice's inescapable casting as 'tourist ville-ain' points … also to the importance of recognising that, like it or not, the amorphous tourist presence uniquely *constitutes* the populace of the city. In that sense, to attempt to talk of a residents-versus-tourists dichotomy is misleading, since the latter represents a form of itinerant population upon which the former is hugely dependent … With those kinds of tension in mind, a group of 24 final year undergraduate students from Warwick's School of Theatre and Performance Studies recently undertook – under my direction – to spend a long weekend engaging with the city of Venice with the ultimate aim of producing a studio-based 'performative cartography' of their experience of the city back at the University.'

Dr Nicolas Whybrow is a Reader in Warwick's School of Theatre and Performance Studies. His research revolves round site-specific practices, particularly performance's relationship with the city. In 2009, Warwick's Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research awarded Nicolas an academic fellowship to carry out a research project with third year students from his department. This involved embarking on a field trip to Venice to create a psychogeographical mapping of the city. In 2010, he won a Warwick Award for Teaching Excellence, made on the recommendation of both staff and students.

Opposite: Tango in St. Mark's Square

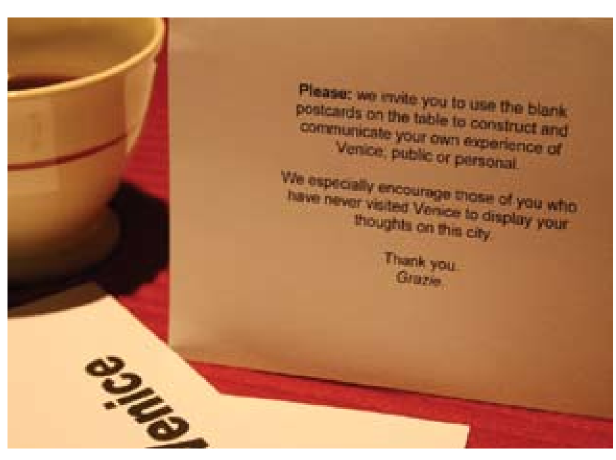
Performing Venice, Tourist Ville-ain

BY NICOLAS WHYBROW

IN THEIR CHAPTER in *The Hieroglyphics of Space*, 'Venice: Masking the Real', Curtis and Pajaczkowska succinctly sum up the central, troubling paradox that Venice is 'a city that provokes curiosity whilst at the same time threatening to permit only repetitions of experience'. Conscious of that, many 'enlightened tourists' go there with the stated intention of discovering an 'alternative Venice', which always already runs the risk of merely amounting to the next iteration of a cliché, one that arguably takes you away from the city. Henry James's late-nineteenth century verdict on the place already evokes an image of hackneyed decadence, the writer declaring in his travelogue, *Italian Hours*, that 'Venice scarcely exists any more as a city at all [...] only as a battered peep-show and bazaar [...] reduced to earning its living as a curiosity shop'. Moreover, having invoked those other well-worn Jamesian views on Venice, that there was simply 'nothing left to discover or describe', and that 'originality of attitude is impossible', the art historian and

travel writer Mary McCarthy famously went on – mid-twentieth century – to observe this to be the case even of that very view itself: 'nothing can be said here (including this statement) that has not been said before'. For her 'there is no use pretending that the tourist Venice is not the real Venice', which, she maintains, '*is* possible with other cities' [my emphasis]. Venice's inescapable casting as 'tourist ville-ain' points, then, not only to a form of long-standing, mediated inevitability in the visitor's experience of the city – a narrative of encounter so stereotyped that to reflect upon it as that is already, in itself, to be implicated by it – but also to the importance of recognising that, like it or not, the amorphous tourist presence uniquely *constitutes* the populace of the city. In that sense, to attempt to talk of a residents-versus-tourists dichotomy is misleading, since the latter represents a form of itinerant population upon which the former is hugely dependent. The way things are – and have been for a while – neither would nor could exist without the other.

With those kinds of tension in mind, a group of 24 final year undergraduate students from Warwick's School of Theatre and Performance Studies recently undertook – under my direction – to spend a long weekend engaging with the city of Venice with the ultimate aim of producing a studio-based 'performative cartography' of their experience of the city back at the University. The University's base in the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava effectively served as an 'incident room': an evidence-gathering, feedback and stock-taking point at the culmination of each day. For the majority of the time, though, the students worked independently in six teams of four on the streets (and canals) of the city, setting out to investigate the possibilities of using performance-based strategies to encounter and document an 'unknown' but highly determined urban situation. Each group had devised a particular set of questions and practical methods of exploration in advance of the visit, involving, amongst other features, making use of aural and visual recording technologies, mobile phones, couch surfing sites and, even, cross-gender identity disguises. In that regard the brief



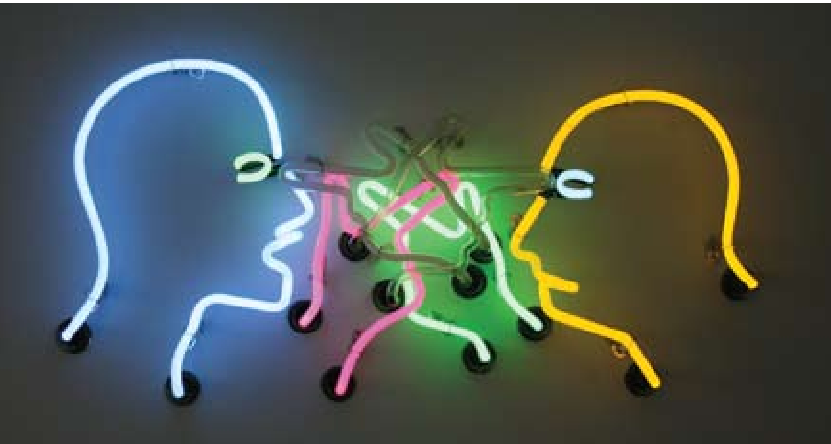
'Performing Venice' project installation detail

was straightforward: carry out the pre-planned exercises – modifying them *in situ* if necessary, in accordance with responses received – bring this data back to Warwick, evaluate how and to what extent pre-set questions had been 'answered', and, via means of performance, film, installation, exhibition, creative writing and lecture-demonstration *tell the story* of the 'Venice experience' as a component of a collectively-curated, performed environment.

Curtis and Pajaczkowska's observation served as one cue in framing the students' field-work: would it be possible to pursue their curiosities and desires without automatically becoming subject to pre-determined narratives of experience? The challenge the research groups set themselves, then, was premised in a sense on taking the city and its mythology 'for granted', even, as the venerable son of Venice and intrepid medieval explorer Marco Polo seems to propose in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, to 'ignore' the city's specificity as exotic, historic place entirely. Marco Polo suggests to the Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan: 'You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours'. To which his interlocutor replies: 'Or the question it asks you'.

The students' 'performed tactics' varied markedly from group to group, but one principle seemed to be held in common: in one form or another to seek out *conversations*. In *Cities: Re-imagining the Urban*, Amin and Thrift define the city as a 'force-field of passions', this particular emotion or 'affect' being culled from Spinoza, for whom the 'experience of other bodies can intensify our awareness of our own desires, joys and pains'. The authors identify *talk* as a key characteristic in the playing out of such 'urban intensities'. For them the city 'is a constant cacophony of talk'. But 'talk has to be seen in a particular way', namely 'as a toolkit of utterances which are there for doing things [...] Cities, then, hum with talk which is based on shared conversational contexts in which categories and identities are constantly articulated: local understandings which often very elegantly exploit the possibilities of ordinary talk'. Fittingly, Henry James (again) had already identified late-nineteenth century Venice as 'emphatically the city of conversation; people talk all over the place'.

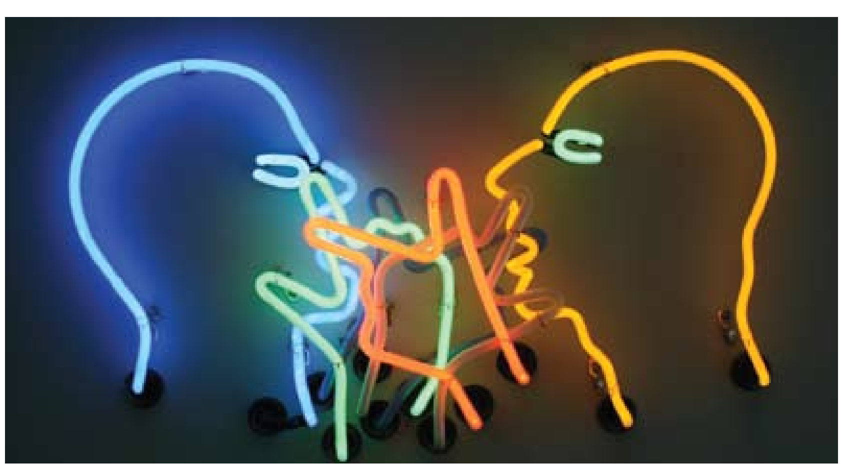
For the students the context of Venice lent itself to instigating playful, interactive encounters that they hoped might yield moments of potential insight. As visitors to the city their aim was actively to *make something happen*. In a sense what they were attempting to institute, therefore, was the touristic experience – their own as well as that of others – as 'relational performance': a form of tourism that can be said to be premised on 'going out of its way' to engineer subtle situations or *scenes*. Relational performance reaches out to the site in question – the city of Venice and its population, both resident and itinerant – but its motive is not to do the work of 'unmasking' it or exposing its specificity as site – or, indeed, of 'absorbing' its various sights – but to perform it into a form of 'temporary being'. In short,



Bruce Nauman, 'Heads and Hands' series, US Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2009; photo Nicolas Whybrow

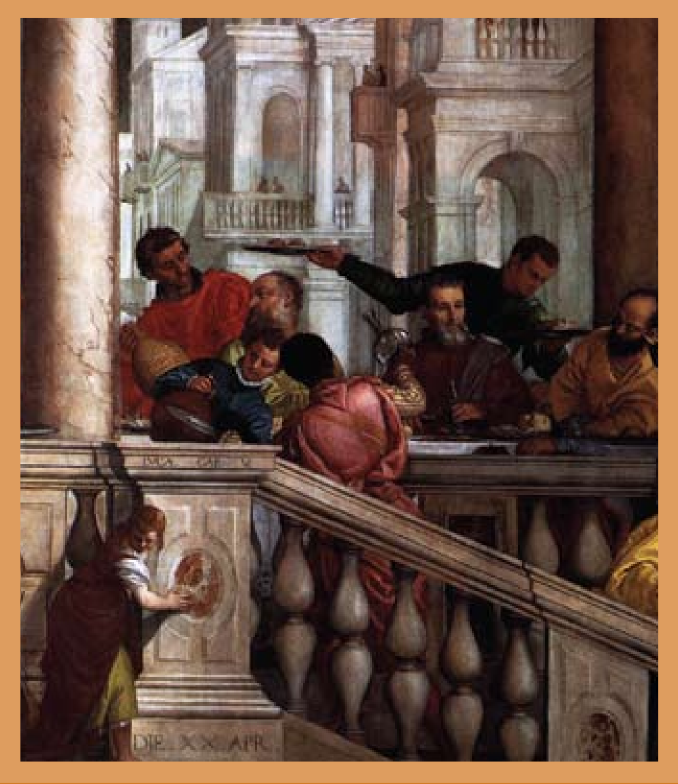
to provoke 'live moments' or 'playful interludes of exchange' that may not have immediate consequences, but that may at the very least constitute an experience that, in its out-of-the-ordinariness and desire to demand a form of engagement, makes some kind of 'memorable mark'. If that offers no more than a tantalising glimpse of what the students did, I refer the reader to my two publications listed on page 98. These provide an appraisal of the work in terms of the insights it offered as creative research. ❋

For the works mentioned here, please see page 98.

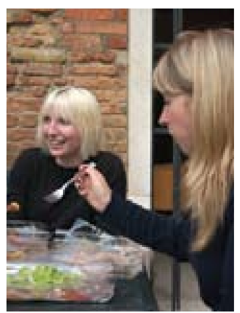


‘Venice is emphatically the city of conversation.’

(HENRY JAMES, *Italian Hours*)



Feast in the House of Levi by Paolo Veronese; photo by Web Gallery of Art



A Venetian Feast

Antipasti

Schie con polenta (tiny shrimps from the Lagoon with soft polenta)

Baccalà mantecato (creamy pâté made of dried cod)

Sarde in saor (sardines in a sweet/sour sauce)

Primi piatti

Spaghetti con le vongole (spaghetti with clams)

Bigoli in salsa (pasta from the Veneto region in a sauce of onions and anchovies)

Risotto di go (traditional risotto made with local fish)

Secondi

Frittura mista (a plate of mixed fried fish, such as shrimps, baby octopus, sole, squid, served with lemon)

Fegato alla veneziana (thinly sliced liver cooked with onions, served with sliced polenta)

Dolci

Tiramisù (cold dessert made with coffee, sponge cake and mascarpone cheese)

Essi Buranelli con fragolino (traditional 'S' shaped biscuits from Burano, dipped in a sweet local wine)

‘The carnival spirit
is rooted within the
urban population…
prohibitions are
violated, transgression
rules, the universe is
turned upside down’

(TIZIANO SCARPA, *Venice is a Fish*)

Photo by David Pin: www.ddpn.net

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