RIVISTA

2017-2018

Baroque Music in Venice
Sebastiano & Michelangelo
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Russell Page: Il Giardiniere Inglese
Navigating Italian Wines

The Magazine of
THE BRITISH ITALIAN SOCIETY

Dear readers

In this issue of *Rivista* we invite you to join us on a journey through Italy and take a leisurely stroll through the beautiful gardens created by Russell Page, the 20th century landscape gardener, marvel at the extraordinary buildings designed by the late Zaha Hadid and visit some of the best wine-producing regions in the country. No issue of *Rivista* would be complete without a mention of Venice and this time we celebrate the brilliance of the city through its baroque music, and in particular that of Monteverdi, as well as the invention of the comma by that great Venetian printer Manuzio, with special thanks to Gideon Todes for his accompanying cartoon. An uplifting episode from World War II is featured and concerns the story behind an image of the Madonna painted on a sack by an Italian prisoner of war in Somalia. Rome played a central role in the work of Michelangelo and Sebastiano del Piombo, the focus of a major exhibition at the National Gallery in 2017 which is reviewed at page 20. You will also find reviews of the new treatment given to Visconti's groundbreaking 1943 film *Ossessione* when it was brought to the Barbican stage during 2017, with Jude Law as the lead character, and of a recent book about Hemingway's links with Italy. As usual we also include summaries of all the talks given throughout the year.

Vanessa Hall-Smith

Linda Northern

Grateful thanks are due to our contributors and to all those who have assisted with the production of this year's *Rivista*. It's always a voyage of discovery for us, as ideas develop and materialise in written and visual form, and we hope for our readers too.

Linda Northern and Vanessa Hall-Smith

Cover photo: Joseph de Levis, *Bust of a Man*, Walker Art Gallery. The bronze head is fixed on shoulders and a pedestal carved from a single piece of mottled red Verona marble.

Photo: Charles Avery

The Editors wish to point out that the article in the last issue Grande Guerra: perchè gli inglesi ingnorano il contributo degli italiani, by Fabrizio Biscotti, first appeared in the publication Alpini Oltremanica in December 2015. Gli Editori vorrebbero sottolineare che l'articolo dell'ultimo numero Grande Guerra: perchè gli inglesi ingnorano il contributo degli italiani, di Fabrizio Biscotti, è apparso inizialmente nella pubblicazione Alpini Oltremanica in data Dicembre 2015.

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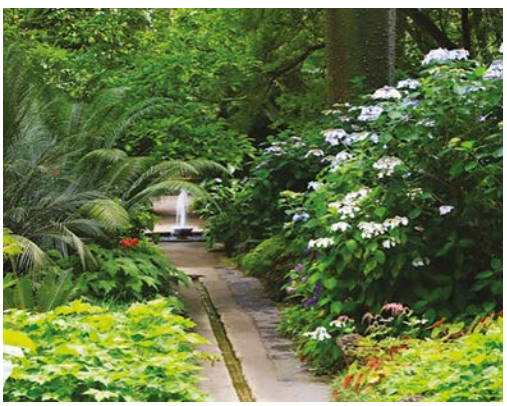


Baroque Music in Venice

by John Julius Norwich

One of the most astonishing – and occasionally, it must be said, the most irritating – aspects of the people of Venice down the ages had been their ability to turn their hand to virtually anything, and then to do it quite superbly well. As seamen, they were already in demand by the sixth century, after which their ships dominated the Mediterranean and beyond for the better part of a thousand years. As merchants, they were regularly trading with Russia, Central Asia, India, Siam and China at a date when such regions were, to the rest of Western Europe, little more than fable and legend. As imperialists, they administered their own trading colonies in Dalmatia, Greece, the Aegean, the Levant and the Black Sea, to say nothing of a later land empire that extended westward across north Italy almost as far as Milan. As political theorists, they developed an utterly individual system of government which, though technically an oligarchy, was in fact a good deal more democratic than any other in Europe – with the arguable exception of Switzerland – and which effortlessly maintained itself, with only the barest minimum of fine tuning, from the end of the thirteenth century till the end of the eighteenth and the death of their Republic. As international statesmen, they were the inventors of modern diplomacy. As industrialists, they initiated mass production half a millennium before Henry Ford.

Where the visual arts are concerned, Venice's record is, if anything, more dazzling still. First, and most peculiarly her own, comes that which stems directly from her Byzantine past: the art of mosaic. In all Italy, her only rival is Ravenna. In painting, the great names crowd in upon us, almost too many to be counted. As for architecture, the Venetian achievement is perhaps the most awe-inspiring of all, by reason of their extraordinary ability to transform every succeeding architectural style into something entirely and unmistakably their own.

And so, finally, we come to Venetian music. Here again Venice's record is enough to leave us gasping. Of all the arts, music knows the fewest frontiers; yet here too, as in every other field, Venice showed all her old, stubborn individuality. There was no reason why St Mark's should follow a different liturgy, requiring different music, from that of any other great church or cathedral in Christendom; but it did, and – as happened again and again in Venetian history – the Pope was obliged to accept the inevitable and give it his blessing. There is still less reason why Venetian music in the eighteenth century should have been the special preserve of female orphanages. The results, it must be admitted, did not invariably impress foreign visitors; at their best, however, as in the Ospedale della Pietà under Vivaldi or the Ospedale degli Incurabili under Baldassare Galuppi, those

Photo Vanessa Hall-Smith

girls could enchant all who heard them – and there is no doubt that they were immensely admired and respected in Venice.

But it is the baroque period – basically that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – that is the subject of this article. Already in the sixteenth, the Republic was in political and economic decline. As the new century opened, the situation went from bad to worse. Already in 1508, Venice found the Pope, the Holy Roman Empire and virtually the whole of western Christendom united against her. At sea, she continued her long, desperate struggle against the Turk. Yet, strangely enough, it was precisely at this time of political and commercial decline that artistic and cultural life in Venice began to flourish as never before. By 1500 the city had become the intellectual capital of Italy, in which more books had been produced than in Rome, Milan, Florence and Naples combined. Meanwhile Venetian painters were dazzling all Europe, Venetian sculptors were producing superb statuary, and Venetian architects were erecting some of the most exquisite and sumptuous churches and palaces that the world had ever seen.

The first great name in 16th-century Venetian music is Adrian Willaert, a Fleming who arrived in Venice in 1527 as *maestro di cappella* of St Mark's and remained in the city until his death in 1562. He introduced into Italy all the new forms of northern European music, pouring out masses and motets of a kind that no Venetian – indeed no Italian – had ever heard before. He it was who prepared the way for the two truly magnificent composers who were to follow him: Andrea Gabrieli and his nephew Giovanni, both of them Venetians through and through. Andrea, who was

born around 1515, spent much of his youth in Germany, where at the Bavarian court he was much influenced by the great Orlando di Lasso, better known as Lassus. When he returned to his native city, already well known for his prodigious output of motets and madrigals, he was almost immediately appointed organist at St Mark's, a position of immense authority and prestige. His ceremonial music for the Basilica set a new standard in the use of massed choirs and instruments. In 1585, the year before his death, he produced his ultimate *tour de force*: a *Gloria* in sixteen parts, sung by four separate choirs, which was performed at a special high mass in honour of a group of several visiting princes from – believe it or not – Japan.

Andrea's star pupil was his nephew Giovanni. Like his uncle, he too, spent some years in Germany, leaving Venice in 1574 at the age of about twenty – thus luckily escaping the terrible visitation of the plague which occurred in the following year. Again following the family tradition, he returned to Venice to become organist of St Mark's where, both as an instrumentalist and a composer, he soon showed himself an even greater musician than his uncle had ever been. No composer before him had managed so brilliantly to combine splendour and magnificence on the one hand with so much deep, heartfelt devotion on the other. Harmonically, too, he was far more adventurous than Andrea, and his improvisations – hugely important in his day, and how sad it is that we never hear any nowadays – seemed to his hearers to be divinely inspired.

The seventeenth century began for Venice with a major diplomatic triumph. She defied the Pope – and won. For long she had been famed for her religious toleration, welcoming Muslims and Jews – as long as they remained in their Ghetto – and, in more recent years, all the various Protestant sects spawned by the Reformation. But these enlightened policies were coming under increasingly heavy fire from Rome, and with the accession of the Borghese Pope Paul V in 1605 her relations with the Papacy reached breaking point. Finally, in May 1606, all Venice was placed under an interdict.

Until that time, even the threat of such a sentence had been the most dreaded weapon in the papal armoury, forbidding as it did all the sacraments of the Church – baptisms, marriages, the saying of the mass, extreme unction and the rest. Venice herself had suffered three previous interdicts – in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – each of which had cost her dear; this time, she simply ignored it. A decree signed by Doge Leonardo Donà dismissed the Papal Nuncio and instructed the clergy to continue as before with the cure of souls. Suddenly the Pope realised that his sentence had failed; worse, its failure had been revealed to the world. And so in April 1607, after little less than a year, the ban was lifted. It proved to be the last in the history of the Church.

On 10 July 1613 the *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's, Giulio Cesare Martinengo, died – to the general relief; for some years, the standard of music in the Basilica had been getting worse and worse. The Procurators sent out an appeal to all the major cities of North Italy and even to Rome for suggestions for his successor. One document, dated the 16th – less than a week after Martinengo's death – is addressed to the Venetian Resident in Milan. It reads:

> Since the death of our *maestro di cappella* at our church of San Marco various persons have been proposed, among them Signor Claudio Monteverdi…. We should be pleased to receive information as to his worth and ability.

The information must have been favourable, because Monteverdi was invited to come at once to Venice to show what he could do. He arrived two months later in mid-August, rehearsed throughout the morning of the 19th at S. Giorgio Maggiore and that same afternoon conducted his 1610 Vespers in St Mark's. He was hired on the spot, at a salary half as much again as that of his predecessor. He was also given an extra fifty ducats for expenses, with which he bought himself a new serge coat.

By this time he was forty-six. Born in Cremona in 1567, he had already published several books of madrigals and what were called *canzonette* – little songs – by the time he was fifteen, and a few years later joined the Cappella of the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo Gonzaga. The Duke seems to have liked him well enough, but never showed him much consideration – he often had to wait months for his salary. Still, he stayed on – largely, perhaps, because he had fallen in love with a lovely young singer, Claudia Cattaneo, a member of the Duke's *concerto delle donne*. It proved the happiest of marriages – but alas, all too short. Claudia died in 1607. Her husband was heartbroken, and never altogether recovered.

In 1601 he had been appointed *maestro di cappella* at Mantua, but although he was never really happy there he was conscious that in his own musical world exciting things were happening. In 1594 the two greatest musicians in Europe, Lassus and Palestrina, had died within two months of each other. The great age of polyphonic music was drawing to a close, and was to be succeeded by one which would give birth to what would become an essentially new art form – that of opera. And, because Italy was now swept up in the High Renaissance and humanism, artists were no longer necessarily seeking their inspiration from religion; instead, they were increasingly looking back to the world of antiquity, to ancient Greece and Rome. Musicologists will argue to the end of time what was the first opera to be composed; it was most probably *Dafne*, by the virtually unknown Jacopo Peri, which was performed during the carnival in Florence as early as 1597. There was another, *Euridice*, two years later; but both were lamentably under-orchestrated and almost unbelievably monotonous and neither, we can be quietly confident, is due for revival. But Monteverdi had been inspired, and was at work; and on 22 February 1607, in the ducal palace of Mantua, a thrilling toccata on the trumpet introduced the first great operatic work worthy of the name, *L'Orfeo*. This, at last, was the real thing: an orchestra of perhaps forty or more, with brass and woodwind as well as strings, with rousing choruses, soulful ariosos and madrigals and love music to die for.

His next opera, *Arianna*, is the story of Ariadne and Theseus, who abandons her on the island of Naxos. Alas,

all but Ariadne's famous lament, *lasciatemi morire* (let me die) is lost. In 1612 Duke Vincenzo of Mantua died; and his successor, barely six weeks after his accession, dismissed Monteverdi from his court, giving him just twenty-five *scudi* as a reward for twenty-one years of faithful service. He and his two sons returned, virtually penniless, to Cremona where, a few months later, he received the call to Venice. And in Venice everything changed. He was, first of all, treated like the distinguished artist he was, no longer as the menial he had been in Mantua. He was also making far more money than he had ever made before. After three years there he received a note from the Procurators of St Mark appointing him as *maestro di cappella* of St Mark for 10 years at a salary of 400 ducats a year "with the usual perquisites".

These perquisites included a large and commodious apartment adjoining the Basilica, furnished according to his wishes, and a generous allowance of free wine. No wonder he cheered up. "Wherever I go to make music," he wrote, "whether it be chamber music or ecclesiastical, the whole city longs to be there. My duties are extremely agreeable."

In 1631 Monteverdi took holy orders and was tonsured; the following year saw him appointed deacon. But the priesthood made little or no difference to his life, and it was only after his ordination that he looked again to opera. He reverted to Greek mythology with a work inspired by the last books of the *Odyssey, Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland). But his work was not yet done. One more opera remained to be written – and that opera was the most astonishing of all. *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (the Coronation of Poppaea) was first produced in Venice for the carnival of 1643. It is one of the first operas, if not *the* first, to desert mythology for history – for here is the story of the marriage of the Emperor Nero to the unscrupulous and power-hungry Poppaea. It is an unpleasant tale, as Nero callously gets rid of his wife Octavia to marry this most sinister adventuress. And, considering the circumstances, it is also a most unusual one: the baddies win. In the seventeenth century, this would surely have been something really shocking: how, people asked, could an ordained priest, now seventy-five years old, write such a worldly and licentious drama? And as for the astonishing love duet at the end: that superb musicologist H C Robbins Landon described it as almost obscene, and it somehow seems to be all the more so since the music itself is of such disarming simplicity and purity.

Monteverdi lived to see his last – and greatest – opera staged, but for very little longer. He died at the end of that year, 29 November 1643.

His influence continued for a while, with his star pupil, Francesco Cavalli, who was also to become *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's, though Cavalli too was to achieve fame through his secular works – above all his operas, of which he produced no fewer than forty-two – rather than his religious productions. Another composer of the time who simply must be mentioned is Barbara Strozzi, who became the most celebrated female composer of her age – perhaps of any age, since female composers have been remarkably few. With a single exception – one book of sacred songs – she wrote only secular music, much in the style of Cavalli – whose pupil she was – but somehow warmer and more lyrical. She died in 1677, and in the following year there was to be born a composer of a very different stamp. Antonio Vivaldi was also forgotten after his death and became popular only in the mid-twentieth century – a good deal too popular, in the opinion of many of us. Wherever one goes in Venice today, the threat of the Four Seasons looms darkly overhead.

But Vivaldi is essentially an eighteenth-century composer; and with him fashions quite spectacularly changed. Life became more frivolous as vast numbers of smart young gentlemen, often accompanied by their valets and tutors, began to arrive in Venice on the Grand Tour. It's unlikely that Mozart, Beethoven or Schubert ever heard a note of Monteverdi's music in their lives. Not until the beginning of the twentieth century did *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* return to the stage. Now Monteverdi is back in favour, and his three surviving operas in their various editions, together with those glorious Vespers of 1610, are performed everywhere. I remember a superb performance of the Vespers at St Mark's some fifteen or twenty years ago, directed by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, surely the greatest Monteverdi conductor alive; and in June 2017 I was lucky enough to hear him again, with his semi-staged version of all three of the operas, on three successive nights, at La Fenice in Venice. They are, he told me, much harder work than any other opera, because they have come down to us in shorthand. In Poppea, for example, no instruments whatever are specified. The instrumental pieces are written out for four or five parts, but Monteverdi doesn't tell us what instruments should play the individual lines. The vocal parts are fortunately complete, but because the full orchestra was never meant to play while anyone was singing, only the bass line – what is called the *basso continuo* – is written down; and once again there is no indication of which instruments are required, or when each should play. Another problem is that Monteverdi gives us no suggestions of dynamics or phrasing; all these decisions devolve ultimately on the conductor. In other words, the opera that we hear nowadays is inevitably a reconstruction; the Venetian audiences at the first performance may well have heard something completely different.

Claudio Monteverdi is buried in a little side-chapel in the church of the Frari in Venice. He has no imposing monument, merely a simple slab bearing his name. Most visitors to the great church miss it altogether; but on it there lies – whenever I have seen it – a single red rose.

John Julius Norwich is the author of numerous books, including A History of Venice and a three-volume history of the Byzantine Empire. He is a former chairman of the Venice in Peril Fund.

This article is an abridged version of a talk given to Cambridge Early Music to mark the 450th anniversary of the birth of Monteverdi

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La Faruk Madonna: 'Gratitude lives through time and frontiers'

by Mark Morpurgo

Some 30,000 Italian families owe their existence and happiness, in part at least, to an obscure British Second World War army officer. His story only started coming to light after his death, when some damaged paintings were gifted to a Glasgow museum. I first came across the outline of the story in a special exhibition in a corner of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. I was intrigued by the paintings and was surprised that so little was known about the people involved. How did a British officer end up with devotional art on maize sacks, painted by an Italian in an African prisoner of war camp?

The campaign in British Somaliland is treated as a bit of a sideshow by most war historians, but the area was of strategic importance because of its potential for easy access to the Red Sea. In August 1940 Italian forces invaded and, within a couple of weeks, had effective control of the country. The British evacuated from the capital, Berbera, and had little interference from the Italians, who were maybe hopeful that a peace agreement proposed by the Vatican would bear fruit. It didn't. Allied forces invaded in March 1941. The landing was essentially completed by two Sikh battalions, a fact rarely acknowledged. Then the Allies systematically captured Italian-led guerrilla forces.

From June most Italians in the area were herded into a prisoner of war transit holding camp. The British officer charged with their detention and safety was Captain Alfred Hawksworth.

> When he was seventeen he enlisted in the army, maybe to get away from a future in a factory - or from a sense of adventure

I managed to track down his grandson, Tim Vollum, to an island farm off the west coast of Scotland. Tim kindly collected his family together and invited me to stay.

From the attic came an old shoe box, and a cigar box. Inside were the poignant physical reminders of his grandfather's life. Amongst the regimental buttons and uniform insignia were a few faded photos and documents. An unusual metal cigarette lighter, apparently made by a prisoner of war for Alfred, added an extra personal touch to the small archive. There were also some heartfelt letters of appreciation and admiration from some of the Italian prisoners. Not much for a life, but it would turn out that this collection, together with further research, would tell an impressive and touching story that most of us would be pleased to have as an epitaph.

Captain Alfred Hawksworth

It is ironic that Alfred Hawksworth had greater recognition from the Italians than he had from his own side. Maybe, after the War, people were more interested in the daring-do kind of soldiering – the pilots, the prison camp escapees. There was little apparent glamour in outstanding organisation, logistical skills – and compassion. Or maybe class snobbery had something to do with it.

Alfred was born in 1906 in Sheffield, the son of a table knife cutter. He received only a basic elementary education. When he was seventeen he enlisted in the army, maybe to get away from a future in a factory – or from a sense of adventure. Private Hawksworth certainly travelled, serving in Germany, Nigeria, Kenya, Gold Coast and Somaliland. In 1941 he finally achieved the rank of Captain. The task of ensuring the safety and well-being of Italian prisoners must have been a substantial call on his administrative abilities. Our image of this sort of camp tends to be manipulated by war films showing audacious escape attempts, but for the Italians in the camp the safety inside was of paramount importance.

Margaret, Alfred's widow, wrote some notes I found in the family papers. 'The prisoners arrived with pathetic little bundles ... They were all anxious to get into the safety of the barbed wire fences, safe from the Somalis. Everyone's skill was used and the camp was built and was very successful. The prisoners were only allowed to wear shorts and sandals made of old tyres and have their heads shaved for cleanliness.' Nutrition and health were a major issue. With between 6,000 and 11,000 inmates in the camp at any one time, the risk of epidemic was ever present. Luckily there were a number of Italian doctors, and Alfred instigated the building of an infirmary. Although the buildings were primitive, it grew from 'one tent to 18 with a total of 118 beds.' When looking through the family papers, I found an Italian report on the camp's field hospital dated 1941 which stated: 'Great difficulties were encountered in the provision of medical stores, but these requirements were partly met by the British command passing on to the hospital all medical stores and equipment possessed by our men on arrival at the camp … What was achieved was due to the human interest

La Faruk Madonna triptych by Giuseppe Baldan © CSC CIC Glasgow Museums Collection

displayed by the Officer Commanding, Capt. Hawksworth and by Company Sergeant Major P V Navid. By hard work (they) made the function of the hospital possible, notwithstanding enormous difficulties. For the part played by these two men we are most grateful.'

Indeed it says a lot for their skills that only twelve prisoners died in the time the camp was operational.

Diplomacy rather than imposed discipline was clearly Alfred's approach. Indeed it was the only possible route forward. He had a South African engineer (Major Crowhurst) to supervise water supplies, the Company Sergeant Major, a few Nigerian and Somali guards, and that was it! Alfred encouraged sport (he had previously been a keen football coach in Nigeria), and set up the production of bricks, so the prisoners could build more solid buildings 'to protect themselves from the wind which blew every night, bringing with it the sand.' He also seized the opportunity of having a camp band (nicknamed Alfred's Band) and musical evenings, after he saw a 'bedraggled little group of men' coming into the camp.

But Alfred would have disappeared from history altogether had it not been for the building of a small chapel and some paintings. It became 'merely a small mud shed with open front and pitched roof. Inside was an altar of mud made to represent marble.' Three scenes were painted on maize sacks. These were similar to a traditional medieval triptych of Madonna and Child, surrounded by angels - but the background clearly shows the camp tents and huts.

Initially Alfred's family recorded the painter as 'the prisoner Baldi, reputed to have been an artist at the Vatican.' It turned out the artist was Giuseppe Baldan, and his connection with the Vatican wishful thinking! The artist's great niece, Nerella Zecchin, wrote that Baldan specialised in restoration work of bridges and monuments, and was a painter of religious subjects. 'He used to draw with pencils on table cloths and on the walls of the house.' The only other examples of his paintings known to have survived are on the walls and ceiling of the church in 'Liettoli Campolongo (near Venice), his place of origin.'

When the camp was finally disbanded, the 'Somali guards were really troublesome… smashing the church and slashing the paintings' with bayonets. Fortunately the damaged pictures were saved. At the end of the war, the Italian interpreter, Luigi De Giovanni, wrote to Hawksworth 'I ask you to keep for ever these painted canvasses....This will be the best testimonial which could be given by those administered by you, who appreciate in you the valiant soldier and gentleman.' Alfred tried to return the pictures in 1965, but Giovanni, on behalf of the prisoners, wrote, 'you must keep them forever as a gauge of gratitude and love by the 35,000 people who owe you, beyond their life, the dignity of human treatment.'

Alfred was modest about his war service, talking little to his family about the past. He worked at the Inland Revenue in Sheffield for the rest of his working life. But the documents and letters of gratitude he kept in his box of memories show a quiet pride in his time managing the La Faruk Camp.

The last word should go to the senior Italian officer (sadly I was unable to read his name on the letter he sent) who wrote: 'I honour you as a soldier who, in the difficult task given to him, performed it not only according to his sheer duty but also in the highest sense of humanity, especially in regard to the care and assistance provided for the sick and suffering prisoners, and the reverence towards those who lost their lives here. Gratitude lives through time and frontiers…'

Author's note

I have a faded photocopy of a wartime photo, the original of which has been lost, listing the names of the twelve prisoners who died in the camp. If anyone knows of family members of those who were in the camp, I would very much like to hear from them. My email is mrkmorp@gmail.com. Unless otherwise stated all the quotes in the article have been taken from the notes made by Alfred's widow.

Mark Morpurgo has written on financial services, traditional music, local and family history. He spends much of his time on research and travel. In 2016 he contributed a series of historical essays to his brother Michael's book "Such Stuff: A Story-maker's Inspiration"

Zaha Hadid's Italian Legacy

by Jacqueline Gargus

Dame Zaha Hadid, the late Anglo-Iraqi architect, is featured in a retrospective exhibition housed in one of her most important buildings and her first building in Italy, the MAXXI in Rome (MAXXI is a clever anagram for Museum of Art of the XXI Century). The exhibition, entitled *Zaha Hadid in Italy* (23 June 2017-14 January 2018) focuses on her Italian works, both in architecture and decorative arts, but also presents key transitional and experimental works in a variety of media, including sketches, videos, photographs, models, paintings, and studies in digitally driven parametric design.

The Italian architectural works of Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA) are daring both formally and structurally, and come as a shock and a breath of fresh air on an Italian architectural scene, which has long been more preoccupied with preservation and conservation than with fostering the new. These sinuous, sculptural works range from the modestly scaled Messner Mountain Museum at Plan de Corones (2006), which is vertiginously cantilevered on a mountain top; to the organic and sensuous Torre Generali for City Life in Milan (2017); and organically torqued transit hubs, like the intertwined ramps of the bridge-like Stazione dell'Alta Velocità at Afragola (2017), and the curved, shell-like form of the Terminal Marittimo in Salerno, inaugurated a month after Hadid's death in 2016. In her honour, posters were put up throughout Salerno, stating: "Goodbye Zaha Hadid, Genius and Modernity. Inspiration and Transformation. Light that takes shape. Salerno will proudly care for and cherish the Maritime Terminal".

Perhaps most important among Hadid's Italian works is the MAXXI itself, a Piranesian space comprised of interweaving, bent bars which at once remind one of highway interchanges and the twisted noodles on a plate of pasta. Selected from among 273 proposals at an international competition in 1999, the project suggests infrastructure and connective tissue rather than the singularity of an object building. While dissonant in the context of conventional block buildings and the military barracks formerly on the site, MAXXI strives to make a larger argument about context, aiming to knit together various forces that shape the region, rather than tamely mimicking characteristics of adjacent buildings. Hadid confirms this larger reading of the building's site strategy, stating: "MAXXI supersedes the notion of museum as 'object' or fixed entity, presenting instead 'a field of buildings' accessible to all, with no firm boundary between what is 'within' and what 'without'. Central to this new reality – its primary force – is a confluence of lines – walls that constantly intersect and separate to create indoor and outdoor spaces." *The Guardian* pronounced "the MAXXI to be Hadid's finest built work to date" and a "masterpiece fit to sit alongside Rome's ancient wonders".

MAXXI exterior courtesy Evan Chakroff

When ZHA builds in China, the timeline from schematic design to complete realization has been around two years. The MAXXI took rather longer and was not inaugurated until 2010. The intervening period marked a decisive shift in the design practice of ZHA and throughout the discipline of architecture. During this period, conventional hand drawing and physical model making were largely supplanted by digital design and fabrication. Rather than using digital technology simply to replicate hand drawing and its orthographic conventions, the new technology made it possible to study complex curvatures of surface and their junctures in three-dimensions. By the time the MAXXI was under construction, every detail could be unique with only a minimal increase in cost and construction time. A familiar critique of Hadid's early work had been that her visionary drawings were beautiful and formally suggestive but that they were impossible to build. In the new millennium, technology had finally caught up with her vision. Her dynamic, calligraphically sinuous projects could now be built almost as quickly and economically as conventional buildings.

The MAXXI is made with a reduced palette of materials, typical of Hadid's works: glass, steel and concrete. The most sensuously alluring of these materials is "self-compacting" concrete, a smooth, buttery surface, which begs to be touched. The engineering and execution of the concrete work is virtuoso, with some pours up to 50 metres long. As one of Hadid's first projects designed to feature fluid, curved concrete forms, the MAXXI benefited from experience ZHA gained when building the Phaeno Science Centre in Wolfsburg, and the BMW Plant in Leipzig, 2001-2005, both designed after MAXXI but completed earlier. Hadid claimed that the concrete shell of Pier Luigi Nervi's Palazzetto dello Sport (just around the corner from the MAXXI) in part inspired her sensibility for concrete.

In its present state, the MAXXI is only a fragment of the original project, which was to have included a total of five buildings, interwoven with each other, the old barracks and the lineaments of surrounding streets and sidewalks. The displaced, bent bars of the building align with two urban grids to create a rich warp and weft of layered, luminous

galleries, organized around a central, vortex-like atrium. There is no dominant path through the museum, rather visitors are encouraged to explore and forge their own experience across the soaring spaces, fluid ramps and bridges, which offer ever-changing views of the exhibitions, the building, the plaza, and other visitors. Hadid stated: "The walls of the MAXXI create major streams and minor streams. The major streams are the galleries, and the minor streams are the connections and the bridges".

Most visitors to Rome can be forgiven if they have not yet visited the MAXXI. Its site is a bit remote, just off the Via Flaminia, about a twenty-minute walk north of Piazza del Popolo. In a city rich with art and architectural treasures, one need not venture outside the historic centre to encounter great works; one merely need peek into a church, gaze at surrounding façades, or look into archaeological excavations, filled with majestic bleached marble and scrawny cats. Indeed, in an age when star architects have been aggressively recruited to transform the image of cities ranging from Bilbao to Shanghai to Dubai, and even London and New York, Rome has persisted in expressing more interest in curating its rich architectural heritage than in adding to it. Yet Rome's relationship with modern architecture is an uneasy one. While Florence seems almost content to serve as museum of Renaissance architecture, Rome struggles between its identity as the active, engaged capital of a progressive nation and its obligation to care for and preserve its invaluable cultural heritage. Moreover, building anything new in Rome is not easy. The *Ministero per i Beni Culturali* has set up daunting obstacles to new construction in Rome and there is a perpetual battle between archaeology and architecture every time a new Metro station is considered or even whenever decisions are made about repainting façades. Not since Mussolini's aggressive incursions into historic Rome has there been much willingness to transform or add to the fabric of the city, and Mussolini's interventions have long met with dispute. The then Mayor of Rome, Ignazio Marino, closed the southern part of Mussolini's Via dei Fori Imperiali in 2013 and threatened to demolish the entire road in order to reduce damage to the Forum, to reunite the severed halves of the Forum of Trajan and to unearth a myriad of important structures buried beneath it.

To understand the charged urbanistic and political tensions attached to the commissioning of new buildings in Rome, one need only look at the furore surrounding the Ara Pacis Augustae Museum. Built by the American architect Richard Meier to replace a Fascist-era pavilion, the Ara Pacis Museum was the first major architectural intervention in Rome's historic centre since Mussolini's time. When it opened in 2006, approbation and condemnation split along party lines. Centre-left Mayor Walter Veltroni declared it to be a "marvellous work," and a precursor to the coming modernisation of Rome. Veltroni stated: "This is a city where you can go from Bernini to Michelangelo to Julius Caesar to Meier… This is what we want to protect, Rome's double identity. There is no contradiction between the beauty of the past and the beauty of the present." By contrast, Silvio Berlusconi's Under Secretary of Culture,

MAXXI interior courtesy Evan Chakroff

Vittorio Sgarbi, pronounced Meier's museum to be a "monstrosity" and a "*pompa di benzina Texana*" (Texan petrol station). And right-wing Mayor Gianni Alemanno complained about the "internationalism" represented by the Ara Pacis Museum and pledged to tear it down.

Everything about the MAXXI underscores Italy's difficult relationship with modernity, especially during the last half of the twentieth century. The very fact that it is dedicated to art of the XXI century announces a renewed interest in the present that had been long absent, at least in the purview of urbanists and planners. Built outside the Aurelian walls, the MAXXI has not been met with the same kind of harsh criticism as the Ara Pacis Museum. Yet even in the periphery, building in a city rich with history, complex urban fabric and an exquisite array of monuments is never easy. Zaha Hadid's radical design illustrates a surprising yet effective strategy: daring to be bold, daring to upset convention, daring confidently to add another layer to Rome's architectural mélange and to leave the stamp of the twenty-first century next to the stamp of Rome's other great moments in history.

Compared to the MAXXI, Meier's Ara Pacis looks very timid indeed, more like a fragment of his extensive Getty Museum complex than an essay on the meeting of a 2000 year-old Roman altar with the contemporary city. Hadid's strategy is effective because Rome thrives on juxtaposition. The beauty of the city does not rely on preciousness, nor unity, nor singularity in style and scale, but on the raucous collision of difference. In the words of Giulio Carlo Argan: "the beauty of Rome exists in its being a messed-up city patched up a countless number of times ..." Hadid's MAXXI is such a patch. In spite of, or perhaps because of its idiosyncrasy, the building has helped to revitalize and redefine the Flaminio neighbourhood and bring new energy and texture to the city. Moreover, it has served to help redefine Rome as a centre for speculative, contemporary architecture and not just a repository for great monuments of the past. It is a triumph of design, a richly complex, frothy assemblage of curvilinear, biomorphic forms and luminous sky-lit spaces, a kind of contemporary interpretation of Baroque space in the city that invented the Baroque. Rest in peace, Zaha Hadid. You are greatly missed.

Jacqueline Gargus is Professor of Architecture at the Ohio State University, with a special interest in architectural history and theory.

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Manuzio's Marvellous Mark

by Alexandra Richardson

Henry James, that unrepentant wordophiliac, marshalled nineteen of them to propel his way through one 165-word sentence in his novel *The Golden Bowl*. In a fit of one-upmanship, Marcel Proust did him better with 110, as he negotiated a path through a 958-word thicket of prose in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.* (Perhaps it was less serpentine in French). One fan on the pro side of the fence famously quipped that this prime condiment of written language fell 'with the precision of knives in a circus act, outlining the victim'.

No blades, of course, have ever *really* been flung over that unassuming squiggle, the common comma, as far as history records. But heated vocal skirmishes, some of them legendary, are still recalled, unfaded by time. One of the most celebrated tussles goes back to the late 1920s, during the early editorship of Harold Ross at the *New Yorker* magazine, when he sparred with his staff writer James Thurber over this member of the punctuation family. Thurber dismissed the comma as a 'weedy growth…spreading… like dandelions'. Ross, on the other hand, consumed by a clarification complex, believed, in the interest of lucidity, that sentences should be squirming with them, like worms in a fisherman's bait box. On one occasion, Ross daggered his writer's description of Old Glory so that the American flag's colours read 'red, white, and blue' rather than 'red white and blue', as the writer fervently wished. Thurber thundered. Ross railed and, as salary paymaster, the latter won out.

> // Punctuation has always fuelled strong opinions. Many grammars devote meaty chapters to it, addressing present-day dos and don'ts.

Punctuation has always fuelled strong opinions. Many grammars devote meaty chapters to it, addressing present-day dos and don'ts. Often they set out the issues then slip out the back door, leaving it to the writer to choose his course. The National Comma Counters Society nursemaids its charges more assiduously, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner. Yet others have taken to attributing human traits to certain punctuation marks; for example one teacher of writing and journalism likened the dash to Kim Kardashian, 'misplaced, over-exposed, shamelessly self-promoting, always eager to elbow out her jealous sisters the comma, colon, and semi-colon'. Another wag, a far-flung New York Times columnist, took a handful of American politicians head-on: Jimmy Carter, he wrote, most resembled the question mark; Gerald Ford was the spitting image of a period and Daniel Moynihan was a shoo-in for the exclamation point. (No one seems to have looked like a comma). Aldus Manutius, who ushered in the modern comma 500 years ago, probably would have been stunned by all this fuss.

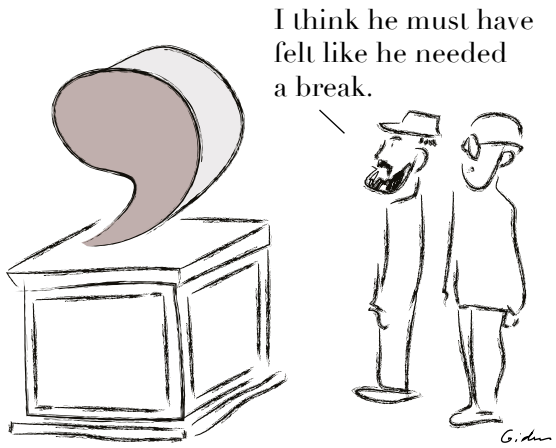
> // It was there, like half an A-frame house, to inform the reader that a new thought, a new aside, was approaching and had to be wedged in.

In the third century BC, Aristophanes devised a system of single dots, *distinctiones*, for separating verses. These dots told performers the amount of oxygen intake - breathing - they would need to complete each successive segment of recited text. The different lengths of breaks were signified by a dot at the bottom, middle or top of the line. For a short passage called a *komma*, which in Greek means something cut off, for example, *a media distinctione* dot was placed mid-level (·). It is thought that these variously-placed dots were the earliest concept of the comma, regulating the flow of spoken words. Improvement on that would take time.

Manutius, Aldo Manuzio to us today, was born south of Rome sometime between 1449 and 1451. Trained as a humanist scholar at La Sapienza in Rome and at the University of Ferrara, he went on to work as tutor to two princelings at Carpi, near Modena. By the mid-1460s, Gutenberg's new movable-type printing press had reached Rome and was causing quite a stir. Nonetheless, it was Venice that was the epicentre of printing in Renaissance Italy. In the summer of 1490, Manuzio, by then in his early forties, moved northeast to the lagoon city to seek his fortune making books – both writing and printing them – while still holding on to his day job instructing affluent young scholars. His print shop was called the Aldine Press and his first project was a Latin grammar, soon to be followed by a Greek one. And thereafter, virtually every known work of Aristotle. However, it all must have been troubling to Manuzio to work with the still imperfect tools of punctuation. Marks – or the absence of them – clearly vexed this printer, making an irritable man of him. It is known that he posted an impatient notice on his *bottega* door at Sant'Agostino:

> *Whoever you are, Aldus asks you again and again what it is you want from him. State your business briefly and then immediately go away.*

By that time, the comma had progressed a bit. From a dot, the comma came to look like today's diagonal slash. It was there, like half an A-frame house, to inform the reader that a new thought, a new aside, was approaching and had to be wedged in. It was called a *virgula suspensiva* and it would allay fears of ambiguity.



Manuzio had a worthy colleague in his shop. He was the Bologna-born Francesco Griffo who elsewhere had already begun to make a name for himself as an accomplished font designer and punch-cutter, engraving printing types. Encouraged by Manuzio to come up with some marks to lend greater clarity to texts, Griffo devised the comma in its curved form, a tail dangling below. For good measure, he invented the semi-colon as well. He also designed the cursive *italic* style. It was Manuzio, nonetheless, to be credited for popularising these innovations in the Aldine Press publications.

Like Mr Ross, some writers over time felt that 'more was more', as opposed to 'less is more'. Like seeking second and third helpings of dinner. Exuberant comma consumption came to be labelled the 'Oxford comma', or 'serial comma'. Regretfully, Aldo Manuzio no longer is around to weigh in on this debate. But his legacy is still very much with us.

On the 500th anniversary of his death two years ago, no fewer than six important exhibitions were mounted in the UK to mark his achievements while many others were held throughout Europe and the USA. The shelves of the British Library count over 185 books in their collection on the subject of this Venice-based printer. Whatever would we have done without him when writing the phrase 'Let's Eat Grandma'?

Alexandra Richardson is a former co-editor of Rivista and is currently working on a novel set in Antwerp. She gratefully wishes to thank the comma, used here 78 times.

Russell Page: Il Giardiniere Inglese

by Francois Gordon

Only a very few readers of *Rivista*, those who have a particular interest in garden design, will have heard of Russell Page (1906 – 1985) and the majority of those will only know him through his work for Sir William and Lady Walton at La Mortella, Ischia, in truth a garden which owes its fame as much to Lady Walton's brilliant planting as to Page's design. He himself liked to say he was 'the most famous garden designer you've never heard of'. Nonetheless, Page is generally considered by experts in the field of garden design to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, garden artists of the twentieth century and his book *The Education of a Gardener* is frequently cited by contemporary garden designers as a major influence. He created several wonderful gardens in Italy, including his masterpiece, Villa Silvio Pellico, above Turin. Most can be visited – you can even stay in the erstwhile gardeners' cottage at the Villa Silvio Pellico – and both the gardens and Page's work generally repay study a thousandfold.

So who was Russell Page? Born into a stolid Lincolnshire middle-class family, he studied at the Slade and then moved to Paris to live in the community around the syncretist and mystic Gurdjieff. Not many people today have heard of Gurdjieff but his status in pre-war society was very similar to that of Mahareshi Maresh Yogi in 1960s London. Page lived in Gurdjieff's chateau outside Paris for several years, before and after the war, which Page spent working for the Allied secret services, mostly in Cairo and Algiers. In 1947, he married Gurdjieff's daughter Lidia, but the marriage was of brief duration, and in1954 they were divorced. He then married Vera Milanova, the widow of French poet René Daumalis. They moved to London, and Page devoted himself full-time to garden design, although to the end of his life he maintained a strong interest in mysticism and Sufi philosophy. (He also retained the habit, ingrained in him by Gurdjieff, of reading two books at the same time, one in each hand.)

Page's garden style is not easily defined. He always claimed to be a gardener, not a landscape architect, and he was undoubtedly intimately familiar with a vast range of plant material. But what made him a great artist was his ability to visualise a landscape in three dimensions, and to work with earth, water, and trees to create landscapes whose beauty has a strong feeling of inevitability and permanence. It is often hard to believe that they are relatively recent creations which involved a good deal of activity by bulldozers and diggers. Seen in that light, Page could be considered

the heir to 'Capability' Brown, but the formality of others of his gardens evokes Le Nôtre, the genius who created Versailles for Louis XIV. He himself acknowledged as his principal influence Hidcote Manor in Gloucestershire, the brilliant Arts and Craft garden created between the wars by Lawrence Johnson, which prompts the thought that Page and Johnson shared, over and above a love of a particular garden style, a ferocious determination to protect the privacy of their personal lives, something in which they were both highly successful. Be that as it may, Page exploited the strong clear light of Italy and the spectacular views enjoyed by some of the sites on which he worked to create masterpieces which could only be Italian, with more than a whiff of the classical landscapes of Claude.

The corollary of Page's liking for a broad palette is that although he himself lived frugally, and frequently forgot to submit a note of his fees, his clients needed deep pockets. When, for example, in the early 1950s, Page created a large-scale water garden for Sig. and Sig.ra Agnelli at La Perosa, near Genoa, his enthusiasm for change on a heroic scale sometimes exasperated Sig.ra Agnelli. For example, he casually records in *Education of a Gardener* that 'the garden wall (at la Perosa) ... was far too close. A public road just beyond it led to the church, so we had to build a new road to reach the church from another side!'. Still, Sig.ra Agnelli recognised his genius and inevitably ended by agreeing to what he proposed. (This garden, based on eleven linked pools and ponds, is not generally open to the public).

In a sense, the Agnellis were typical members of Page's client-list, which reads like a *Who's Who* of European high society, including, for example, the Duke of Windsor, Count Rossi di Montalera, Lord Montagu, Lady Baillie, Lady Caroline Somerset, Baron Guy de Rothschild....

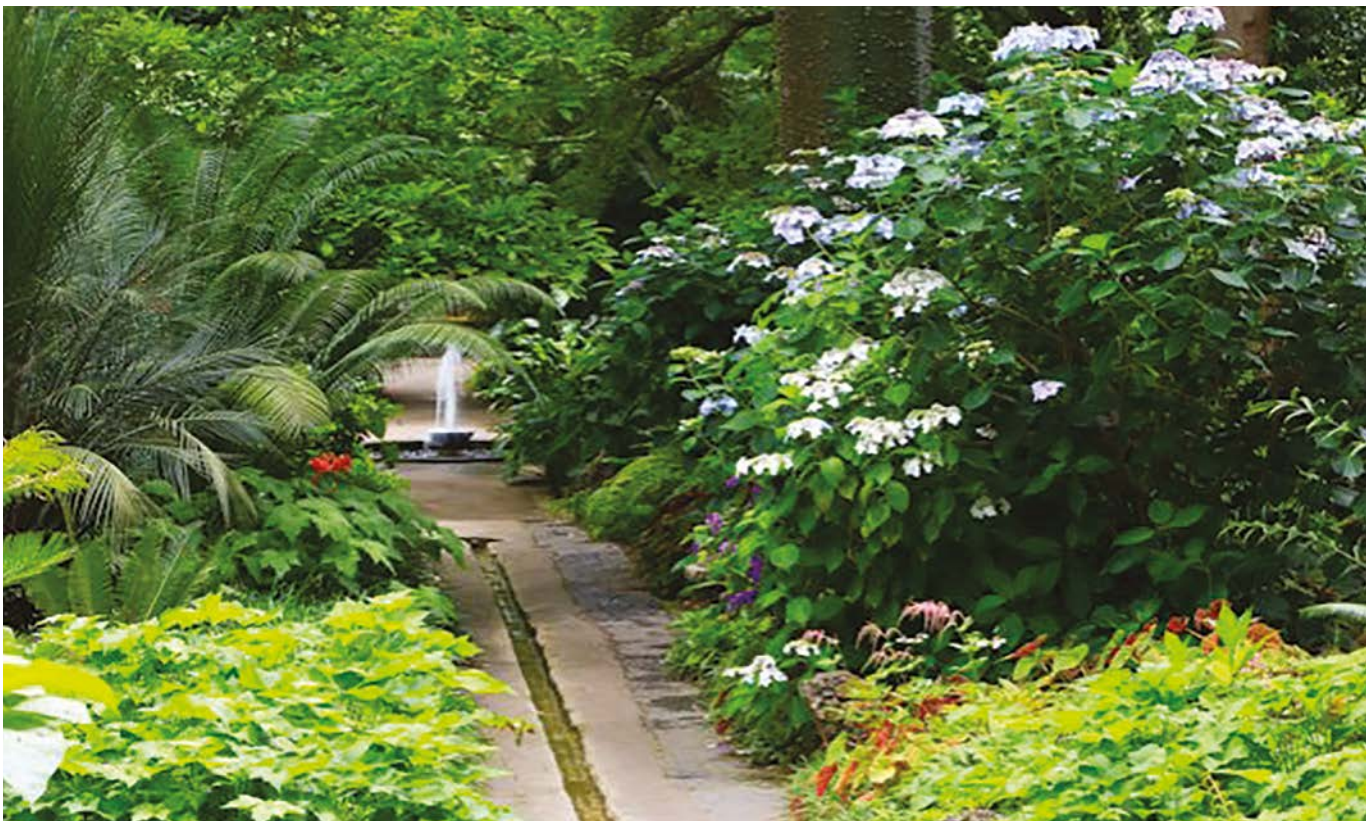
Page makes regular cameo appearances in the memoirs of the 'great and the good', often simply referred to as *L'Inglese*, or *Il Giardiniere Inglese*, consistently portrayed with affection and respect, but always a somewhat remote and enigmatic figure.

Physically, Page was impressive, six-foot-six (two metres) tall, with ash-white skin and pale blue-grey eyes with very clear whites. Rarely without a cigarette in his hand, a man of few but decisive words he could, at first meeting, be intimidating. But when in December 1969 Sig.ra Agnelli asked the newly-graduated Paolo Pejrone, now the premier living Italian garden designer, to come to talk to Page because 'he can't work in the garden because of the snow, and he's so bored !', within an hour, Pejrone had agreed to come to London as, in effect, Page's apprentice. Pejrone lived in Page's flat off Cadogan Square until late 1970, when Page told him the apprenticeship was over and it was time to start work on his own account.

There is no definitive list of Page's gardens, nor even a list of his gardens in Italy, but several of the latter are now accessible to the public, if only because many of the current generation of owners need to defray the cost of maintaining them. Perhaps the very finest of them all, in the opinion of this author, is the Villa Silvio Pellico, on the outskirts of Turin, a narrow, distinctly unpromising, site with a wonderful view over the Po Valley. The owner, Sig.ra Ajmone Marsan, commissioned Page to make a garden to be viewed from the house, and Page built a series of horizontal terraces on different levels which triumphantly overcome the difficulties inherent in a steep slope running across the main vista to create a wonderful formal garden incorporating a strong visual axis pointing over the valley to the distant Alps.

Other Page gardens in Italy open to the public are – in no particular order – the Valle Pinciole, east of Centona,

Page was tasked by the owner of Villa Silvio Pellico to make a garden which looked good from the house: this view from the ground-floor terrace shows how triumphantly he succeeded.



Page loved running water and, ten years after his original design, as soon as water was piped over to Ischia from the mainland, he added this rill to the garden at La Mortella.

a series of garden rooms on a steep hillside, clearly influenced by Hidcote but anchored in the local landscape by a lemon garden and the use of tufa for the paths linking the different parts. Il Giandorto, south-west of Magione, terraced along the contours of another hill, has beautiful views of Lake Trasimeno and roses, roses, roses everywhere, as well as many other plants, in lush profusion. La Mortella, Ischia, where Page advised on the siting of the house as well as the design of the garden, is a shrine to music, especially that of Sir William Walton, whose wife, Susanna, took Page at his word when he told her 'don't plant one (of any plant) – plant a hundred': the result is a garden like a Douanier Rousseau painting, full of bright colours and different textures. Or try San Liberato, near Bracciano, a series of garden rooms which have evolved into what is *de facto* a spectacular arboretum.

None of the above descriptions remotely does justice to these gardens, but they are all open to the public (in some cases only for limited periods of the year, or to groups or by appointment). Search out on the Net when you can visit and you will be richly rewarded. Before you go, read Page's *Education of a Gardener* and, ideally, *The Gardens of Russell Page* by Marina Schinz and Gabrielle Van Zuylen. Buona visita!

Francois Gordon is a retired British diplomat who first encountered the work of Russell Page in Geneva. His own garden in Kent is strongly influenced by Page's design philosophy, although the only feature of which he is confident that Page would whole-heartedly approve is that he made it over three decades with his own hands.

Navigating a path through Italian wine

by David Way

Twelve years ago I went on my very first wine tour to Italy. I had a choice between a classic trip to Tuscany and a rather more adventurous one that went south to Puglia, Basilicata and Campania. I had no idea then that these were radically different choices. Neither of the options had a concrete meaning for me. I was in the position of many wine lovers in the UK, knowing something about wine in general and about classic French regions but nothing about Italian wine. As it happened I ended up on the southern Italian trip and enjoyed every minute of it.

Since then I have visited Italian wine regions about 40 times, created a wine website, taught introductions to Italian wine, run tastings and become a Master of Wine student. I now write study materials with a special focus on Italy. It has been a rapid, thrilling and extraordinary journey, and one that continues.

But because my journey from wine lover to professional has been so rapid, I can still remember the sense of bewilderment at the complexities of Italian wine. If anyone promises to make Italian wine simple, do not believe them – just try the simple test in the panel below.

With 20 regions all with their own wine culture, varieties and specialisms, Italy has more unique local grape varieties than any other country in the world. And within regions there are massive differences. Trentino and Alto Adige may make up one region for administrative purposes but are two regions culturally and vinously. The same is true of Emilia-Romagna. And just as importantly, the *campanilismo* of Italian life in general means that everyone believes with total conviction that the wine of their village is the best. I vividly remember visiting a high quality winery which had been recommended by a reputable guide. At the end of the visit, the producers gave me the opened bottles that we were tasting as he had no further visitors in the next few days. I took them to the *agriturismo* where I was staying and shared them with my hosts. They tasted them courteously and impatiently. As soon as we had finished, they said, 'Now you must taste our wine!'… which of course for them was the best and the only point of reference. This sort of attitude is both a huge strength and a weakness. In my experience, only the most farsighted Italian producers think about how their wines appear to the outside world. And while Italians know about the wines of their own regions, many may know only the basics about the wines of other parts of the country.

1. **What do Chianti Classico, Brunello di Montalcino, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and Morellino di Scansano have in common?**

2. **What do these four names mean? See next page for answers**

Vineyard in Chianti Rufina
Photo David Way

How then should we navigate this extraordinarily rich and varied vinous offering?

Wine is not just a glassful of sensations or even a conveyor of mood-changing alcohol. It belongs to particular cultures, it has a history; at its best it has a profound sense of place. This means that the language of the country or region which produces the wine is part of the experience. I probably do not need to persuade Anglophone readers of *Rivista* that learning or maintaining your Italian is a worthwhile activity. But it has real benefits for wine enjoyment too: Italian wine tastes better in Italian. Interestingly quite a few of Italy's absolute classics have simple names which any English speaker can manage: Prosecco, Chianti, Soave, Brunello and Barolo. But as soon as you get beyond these you can be struggling. Perhaps the best example is the name of the DOCG (*Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita* – the label guaranteeing the quality and origin of a wine) for Prosecco. This is for the fizz that comes from the hills of the Prosecco area, not the inexpensive volume wine from the plain. They really should have named it simply Prosecco Superiore. But instead they called it Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG. That is 19 syllables; and the names of the two principal towns of the zone which they smuggled into the name (no doubt with great pride!) are a nightmare to pronounce correctly – unless you speak good Italian.

Wine styles have changed dramatically in the last 30-40 years. In general, we no longer need to drink poorly-made wine as standards of both viticulture and winemaking have risen dramatically. Wine has also become fruitier and

more accessible. The latter is largely due to the success of Australian, New Zealand, South African and American wines with their bold fruity whites and soft, approachable reds. This is a long way from Italian styles, however much they are fruitier and more accessible than they were a generation ago.

If you were brought up drinking Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc with its powerful, even aggressive, grassy-and-passion-fruit flavours you will need to work a bit to understand the muted palate of Soave, Verdicchio or Fiano, classic neutral Italian whites. The first two should have lovely, palate-cleansing acidity. The last will have a certain rounded voluptuousness – as it should for a wine from the south. But none of them are going to be obviously fruity. Let them speak to you quietly, drink them with food and they will come into their own.

A bigger shock awaits those who try some of the great Italian reds: learning to love high acidity and noticeable tannins. *Impegnativo* – challenging – is the best word for Brunello, Barolo, Taurasi and many more. The classic Italian red style is high in acidity and even higher in tannin, the grippiness which gives long lasting structure to the wine. This style makes classic Italian reds great with big meat dishes but it is initially forbidding and can come as a surprise for those whose usual tipple is a softly structured Australian Shiraz or an obviously ripe Chilean Merlot. Having taken small groups of English people on wine trips in Italy, one visitor memorably summarised tasting his first Brunello as 'great but undrinkable'! But this is just a matter of taste: some of these same people have become as familiar with the wines of the Langhe or of Tuscany as they were with Bordeaux or Burgundy – because they are now used to the style.

One of the joys of wine is the endless inventiveness of the winemaker in agrarian cultures and the distinctive styles they create. If your region happens to have grape varieties that are typically low in flavour and in those components which make for long-lived wines, what do you do? Equally, if you are growing in the African heat of the islands off Sicily in what style are you going to specialise? Surprisingly the answer may be the same: make wine from semi-dried grapes, the *passito* method. While this style is practised in other parts of the Mediterranean, Italy has specialised in it.

Traditionally the wines were sweet, for example, Recioto made with the Valpolicella blend, or Muscat from the island of Pantelleria. The grapes achieved very high sugar levels and therefore the wines have both good alcohol levels and residual sugar. The grapes were dried out and lost water by evaporation before they were turned into wine. The wines were sweet because winemakers did not have the know-how and the equipment to ferment out all the sugar. In fact the story is that the modern classic Amarone della Valpolicella, basically a dry wine, was an 'escaped Recioto'. It was intended to be sweet but all the sugar in it fermented out leaving a dry wine with very high alcohol (16% and above). And from this a new wine style was born: Amarone, rich, dry, alcoholic. Today, with very effective yeasts and temperature control you can ferment out all the sugar to create an entirely dry wine every time, if you want to. In this way the Veneto now has both a traditional, fully sweet red wine, Recioto, and a modern dry classic, Amarone. And these really are wines that you are not going to find anywhere else in the world.

Poggio alle Mure, Montalcino Photo David Way

There are many good reasons for drinking basic Prosecco – but there is life beyond Prosecco. The astonishing boom in sales tells us that an inexpensive, lively, sparkling wine with decent lemon and pear fruit and a slug of sugar has millions of fans. But there are much better Italian sparkling wines to be discovered. First there is the much more refined version of Prosecco with the added Conegliano/Valdobbiadene tag which we discussed above. Then there are two areas which have given Champagne a run for its money with their wines from the same Chardonnay/Pinot Noir blends. They are also made with the same method as Champagne – second fermentation in the bottle to produce the bubbles and many months of ageing in the same bottle. This produces wines of great complexity with toasty, nutty aromas above lemon, ripe apple and even white peach notes. The main difference is that the fruit is a little riper and less tart than Champagne, which many will prefer. The two areas that have specialised in these wines are Franciacorta, between Brescia and Milan, and Trentodoc, not surprisingly in Trentino. Don't expect these wines to be cheap – they are made with care and in the same laborious way as their French counterparts. But they can be exceptional. And then there are, of course, the speciality sparkling wines which many Italian regions make, for example, sparkling red Barbera and our old friend Lambrusco. They illustrate the point that there is always more to explore in Italian wine.

Navigating your way around Italian wine is an extraordinary and rewarding journey. With a smattering of Italian – or indeed very good Italian – and a glass in hand there is a journey of tasting experience to be embarked upon but never completed.

David Way works for the Wine and Spirit Education Trust and is the creator of the website www.winefriend.org

1. **The four wines listed are all Tuscan wine made predominantly from the Sangiovese variety - a word that does not appear in that form in any of the wine names.**
2. **Brunello di Montalcino and Morellino di Scansano both refer to the local name of Sangiovese - Brunello and Morellino – and then add where they are from. By contrast Chianti Classico is solely a geographically defined region with no reference to the dominant grape variety, Sangiovese. And finally, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano mentions the region of Montepulciano but not the grape variety Sangiovese which here is called Prugnolo Gentile. Not simple!**

Obsession at the Barbican

by Michael Ratcliffe

Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942) is a landmark movie sending a dark message from a dark place and time. One of the first neo-realist films that helped to define the image of Italy abroad after the Second World War, it was made largely by anti-Fascists, many of them underground communists, and set in the haunting, melancholy wetlands of the Po Valley near Ferrara. This poor, thinly populated landscape of long roads, huge skies and steep flood-dykes was also the setting of the young Antonioni's first film, the documentary *Gente di Po* (1943), and of Rossellini's revolutionary *Paisà* (1946). The poverty was extreme. To all three it must have felt like the antithesis of Mussolini's blowsy Rome, whose imperial ambitions had never reached it at all.

This land offers no refuge for Gino, the drifter who jumps off the back of a truck with nothing but his harmonica, strolls into a wayside garage, seduces Giovanna, the owner's wife, takes a job with the husband and, with her assistance, murders him. The acting is moving, but fairly basic; it would not have felt so at the time, but today we can see that the talkies had arrived only 14 years earlier.

Nobody removes much clothing, but *Ossessione* packs a terrific erotic charge. Giovanna peels Gino's bandages off him in lingering foreplay. His travelling companion, Lo Spagnolo, the streetwise, adoring Mercutio-figure with whom he shares a dockside bed as they plan to leave Europe from Ancona, strikes a match in the middle of the night to marvel at the beauty of the sleeping Gino's back. Visconti's genius lies in unexpected details. Lo Spagnolo – a young veteran of the Spanish Civil War – has a budgerigar named Robespierre. Giovanna returns to the scene of the crime immaculately dressed in a summer frock and black picture hat. In a local singing competition, a teenage boy croaks his way through Alfredo's declaration of love in *La Traviata* to the rigid figure of his granny at his side. Visconti's patrician irony hangs on the delta air.

How to bring all this to the stage? How to replace it with something else? Detail also informs the great theatre talent of the Belgian director, Ivo van Hove, whose recent productions of *Hedda Gabler* and *A View from the Bridge* were distinguished by their tense sexuality. So the first surprise about *Obsession*, his stage-adaptation of Visconti's film, brought to the Barbican Theatre in London in May 2017 by the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, was how unsexy it was. True, there was a fine Anglo-Dutch cast and a hot star, the excellent Jude Law, and a screaming orgasm early on which excited the English tabloid media for a few days. But whether it was Gino's or Giovanna's was unclear, since he didn't even loosen his pants. When Lo Spagnolo (here Johnny) tempted Gino to run away with him, he did so in a low, orange light, vamping the *habanera* from Bizet's *Carmen*. What still takes the breath away in a movie 75 years old, became today's cold, camp kitsch. We were not expected to care.

Van Hove has turned the Toneelgroep Amsterdam into one of today's greatest theatre companies, the equivalent of the RSC, Berlin Schaubühne and Giorgio Strehler's Piccolo Teatro in the 1970s. They are celebrated for their epic conflations of Shakespeare, performed by an ensemble of leading actors who can sustain both narrative line and inexhaustible detail for as long as six hours in a single show. He loves Visconti's work, and has already staged three of the more epic films: *Ludwig, Rocco and His Brothers* and *The Damned.*

But *Ossessione* is not an epic. It is an intimate trio, which doubles in size as the lovers are observed by a suspicious priest, a sharp detective and the embittered Spagnolo. Watching it on the large Barbican stage was like trying to hear a sextet on a football field. There was no outdoor landscape driving these provincial lives. We were barely in Italy at all. Instead, the stage was filled by a huge box, pierced by a wide window at the back and encased in outer screen walls on which were projected half-faces, close-up. Suspended centre-stage was an abstract, metal sculpture, part guts of an imagined engine, part image of hunk masculinity and brute male power. Would it burst into flames? Would it fall?

Everything was expressionistically enhanced. What was a rifle shot in the movie went off like a bomb on stage. Giovanna (here Hanna, played by Halina Reijn) whacked a great lump of raw meat to express her exasperation at the ridiculousness of men. The husband's murder was not opportunist and unseen, but delivered in a tangle of crude oil and black blood; Visconti's tragic, accidental death for Giovanna was transformed into a deliberate murder by Gino – and she released another pool of black blood. None of this enhancement made up for a fatal lack of tension between the principals. Van Hove and his designer Jan Versweyveld are proven masters of the awkward wide stage: their

Shakespeare is essentially horizontal and there is so much going on across that width that a second visit is always as thrilling as the first. Not here. The actors were swallowed by the space.

An amplified text compounded the overall sense of detachment. *Obsession* is the Toneelgroep's first-ever English-language production, and some of Simon Stephens's version of Jan Peter Gerrits's Dutch text caught the desolation of these lives well. At other times, he stranded himself in the language of TV soap. 'There was something stopping me being me', declares Gino facing a massive Romantic sea like Manfred on the Jungfrau. 'Now I *know* I love you. I do. I do'.

The use of music, crucial to both Van Hove and Visconti, was also revealing. Based on *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James M Cain, the story mixes the disciplines of *film noir* and *verismo* opera; it would have inspired Puccini or Leoncavallo. But Visconti's first love was Verdi, and the film pulses with the pathos of 'Di Provenza il mar', Germont's aria of paternal reproof from *La Traviata*. Giovanna describes herself to Gino as *una donna disgraziata* and asks him, 'D'you know what it's like when men buy you a meal?' She is Violetta's dirt-poor, working-class sister. Visconti uses the aria radically, taking it through provincial farce into a ruthless killing. Giovanna's husband wrestles it to the ground in a frenzy of sobbing and, to wild applause, takes first prize. After this, he becomes so drunk that the lovers get him to drive the car into the river, while, at the very last minute, leaping clear themselves.

In *Obsession*, 'Di Provenza il mar' was sung beautifully by the actor playing the husband (Gijs Scholten van Aschat), but the effect was sentimental rather than diabolically absurd. It drifted atmospherically in and out elsewhere, together with the orchestral prelude to Violetta's dying, and various hushed, requiem choirs. Rituals of cleansing in the workshop floated a surprising hint of redemption for Gino and Hanna, but this suggested religiosity rather than faith. The music decorated what remained an abstract drama. In a programme interview, Van Hove described *Ossessione/ Obsession* as being about the universal human need for, and the impossibility, of passion. This was, in the end, a show about the idea of passion, for very little passion was played out on stage. The pity of it was just not there.

Michael Ratcliffe is a retired arts journalist, editor and critic; he was literary editor and chief books reviewer of The Times and theatre critic of The Observer.

When the Master of Disegno met the Master of Colorito

by Antonia Whitley

The theme of the exhibition *Michelangelo & Sebastiano*, held at the National Gallery from March to June 2017, was an unusual choice. Curiously, it was really more of a subject for art historians than one for the general public focusing, as it did, on a Venetian artist – Sebastiano del Piombo (1485-1547) – a name not on everyone's lips in the UK. The Gallery negotiated this apparent disadvantage nimbly by placing Michelangelo's – a household name whose artistic supremacy is unquestioned – first in the title.

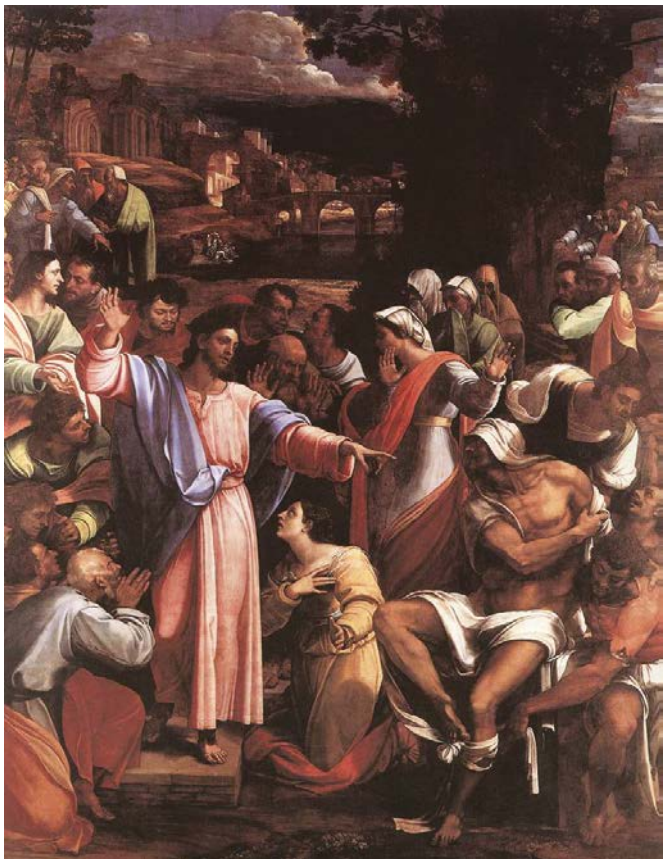
Then there were the parameters of the exhibition, which covered the years of their collaboration from their meeting in Rome in 1511 until 1536. These dates could seem insignificant when viewed through the prism of Michelangelo's long life (1475-1564) and the fact that their association was not mentioned in Condivi's biography of Michelangelo – a work seen by most art historians as derived directly from the artist himself.

In the case of Sebastiano's career, however, as the exhibition set out to demonstrate, his association with Michelangelo proved decisive, since the older artist provided designs and drawings to the younger for commissions he had been given to paint.

Rather than going for a blockbuster with this exhibition, the Gallery appears instead to have adopted the more didactic approach of seeking to educate the public on a lesser-known artist. But then here, as indeed at the core of many other exhibitions at the National Gallery, there was an obvious asset – a clutch of works already in their possession.

The Gallery owns two panel paintings by Michelangelo, out of a total of only four created by him. Both the *Entombment* (1500/1) and the *Manchester Madonna* (c.1497), painted long before the artists met, were nevertheless included as exemplars of Michelangelo's painting method. The Gallery also has a handful of works by Sebastiano, three of which were included. Noteworthy was the *Judith* or *Salome* (scholars are not agreed), painted in Venice in 1510; it is a fine example of the supremacy of Venetian artists of the school of Bellini and Giorgione as colourists. *The Raising of Lazarus* of 1519, one of the cornerstones of the exhibition, was shown in a monumental frame specially made for the occasion and based on and in part made of sixteenth century elements. Of particular note is the fact that this painting is catalogued as NG1, reflecting its early entry into the collection in 1824.

Three major collaborative projects were documented:



Sebastiano del Piombo, The Raising of Lazarus, National Gallery, London

- A Pietà painted for the cleric Giovanni Botonti for his chapel at San Francesco, Viterbo (1516), for which a sheet of drawings (1512) was made for the figure of the Virgin;
- A chapel in San Pietro in Montorio, Rome for the Florentine banker Pierfrancesco Borgherini, (1524), for which drawings of *The Flagellation* and of *Christ at the Column* (1516) survive; and
- *The Raising of Lazarus* (1519) for Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, for which two sinopia drawings for the figure of Lazarus (1516) have come down to us. Did Michelangelo also send drawings for the dominant figure of Christ? None have so far come to light.

Some scholars have viewed the commission for the Lazarus through the lens of a paranoid Michelangelo, constantly obsessed not with what Sebastiano was up to (his artistic status in these years was not one that would have warranted any loss of sleep), but with Raphael and his ascendency. The great rival for Michelangelo was Raphael, then the most fêted artist in Rome. Under both Julius II and his successor Leo X, Raphael had been granted the decoration of the papal apartments, the design of a series of tapestries for the Sistine Chapel and had been appointed successor to Bramante as papal architect from 1514. According to Vasari, Michelangelo's aim, in supplementing Sebastiano's talents as a superb colourist with figurative and compositional drawings, was to undermine Raphael's dominance in Rome.

The Lazarus commission was thus strategic for both Michelangelo and Sebastiano; but it was for the patron too. Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, (subsequently Pope Clement VII), wanted two images for the cathedral of Narbonne, of which he had been appointed archbishop. First, he gave Raphael that of *The Transfiguration*, then Sebastiano that of *The Raising of Lazarus*. He knew that Raphael would feel compelled, in such a competitive situation, to paint with his own hand rather than give it to his assistants, at a time when he had more commissions than he could physically handle.

Furthermore, Giulio knew that Sebastiano would turn to Michelangelo for help; thus both commissions were likely to be executed to the highest standard. Events took an unexpected turn at the conclusion of this commission, since Raphael died in April 1520, when *The Transfiguration* was not quite finished. His great loss at the age of only 37 conferred on his last work a magnitude that nothing could match.

And herein lies my only real criticism of this exhibition: there was one person missing from the presentation of this particular commission. It was necessary to include Raphael's role and his creation of the pendant painting, *The Transfiguration*. At the very least, there should have been a full-sized photograph of it on the same wall as *The Raising of Lazarus* rather than the small image no bigger than A4 in size that hung on a different wall. We needed to appreciate how contemporaries in Rome assessed these two paintings one against the other, for on Raphael's death, as Vasari tells us, they were juxtaposed for exactly that purpose in the Hall of the Consistory. My point is that, in depriving a commission of its wider context, it becomes much less interesting or, worse, it alters how it was perceived at the time it was created.

Raphael, The Transfiguration, Vatican Museums

Sebastiano del Piombo, Pietà, Museo Civico, Viterbo

We are given a glimpse of Sebastiano's attitude to Raphael, from the letters in the catalogue, but not of Michelangelo's. Sebastiano takes side-swipes at Raphael with some glee. It is probable that his dislike of him dated from his arrival in Rome in 1511 in the entourage of Agostino Chigi, the great Sienese patron of art and papal banker. Both artists were set to work on fresco decorations for Chigi's villa, now known as the Farnesina. While Sebastiano was already a gifted painter in oil, he was then less familiar with the technique of fresco painting and in consequence his *Polyphemus*, on the same wall in the villa as Raphael's masterful *Triumph of Galatea*, was seen to be somewhat lacking in comparison. So Giulio de' Medici was not the first patron to foster rivalry between these two artists.

Visual borrowings over different commissions were bouncing back and forth between the three artists in these years in Rome, a point insufficiently made in the exhibition. The influence was certainly not only one way.

A lesser criticism of the exhibition is that it is questionable that everything ascribed to Sebastiano is by him. Let me just mention the contentious portrait of Michelangelo (c.1518-20). Readers might like to refer to Charles Hope's article on it in the London Review of Books (Vol 39, No 8. 20 April 2017). Bendor Grosvenor also had interesting points to make in Art History News, *Is a Fake hanging at the National Gallery?* April 19 2017. The fact is that it is simply not on a par with Sebastiano's other wonderful portraits, including my personal favourite (not in the exhibition) of the *Man in Armour* (1512), now at Hartford, Connecticut.

What does the exhibition tell us that we did not already know? It reinforces the point made by the spectacular monographic exhibition at Palazzo di Venezia in Rome in 2008, that Sebastiano was an artist whose considerable talent has not been sufficiently recognized thus far.

Additionally, Piers Baker-Bates' enlightening essay in the catalogue underscores Sebastiano's perfecting of new techniques, such as using oils for wall paintings, as well as his increasing use of oil on stone/slate grounds – aspects of his *oeuvre* that had already been noted by his contemporaries. Worthy also of note was the full-size photographic facsimile of the Borgherini Chapel; it is hoped that future exhibitions will make use of such devices, where art works cannot be moved.

It is a given that Michelangelo was sublime, a point reinforced by all we saw here; but it is also clear that Sebastiano was not merely trailing in his shadow – in Dante's immortal words, 'he was following his own star.'

Dr Antonia Whitley has lectured on art history for over twenty years in the UK and Italy with a focus on the Italian Renaissance and the paintings of World War One. She also enjoys reviewing exhibitions on both.

Hemingway in Italy

Richard Owen (The Armchair Traveller at the bookHaus, 2017)

by Ian Grainger

This is not a book with pictures. The only photograph is that on the cover, showing Hemingway in a gondola: middle-aged, heavy-set and looking slightly like a cad. One suspects the book would sell much better if adorned by the famous photo of Hemingway as a young man, wounded in an Italian hospital bed during the Great War, but happy, confident and radiantly handsome. Nevertheless, the gondola shot captures something of the curious ambiguity of this strange man: behind all the swashbuckling masculinity of the bull-fighting big-game hunter, there is a hint of the unexpected timidity to which so many attested.

The book is not a biography as such. One gets what it says on the tin – an account of the writer's time in and connections with Italy. So, for the years 1927 to 1948, when Hemingway was not in Italy at all, there is nothing. But the years before and after (particularly those before) are covered in detail and the early Italian years were seminal for this impressionable youth from the American mid-west.

The book is beautifully written in a mixture of travelogue and memoir but eschews literary criticism. It provides a sweeping overview of the early events which made Hemingway's name (through *A Farewell to Arms*) and a close examination of his complicated emotional life and four marriages.

A constant theme is an air of uncertainty about what actually happened and what Hemingway wanted people to imagine had happened. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the episode at Fossalta di Pave in 1918 when he was wounded by the explosion of an Austrian mortar shell lobbed at him. 'The 227 wounds I got from the trench mortar didn't hurt a bit at the time' he wrote to America with characteristic bravura. Yet he was only a volunteer delivering cigarettes and chocolate to Italian troops and there lurks a suspicion that this adventurous youth may simply have gone nearer the front line than was wise for him (or indeed for the others killed and hurt in the explosion). The event was pivotal for Hemingway and he repeatedly returned to the spot where it happened. Further, the 'baptism' which he maintained he received from an Italian priest in the hospital afterwards (extreme unction perhaps?) laid his claim in later life to be a Roman Catholic, so as to be able to marry his second wife.

The 'make-believe' runs through other aspects of his Italian journeys, including the drink. Hard drinker he certainly was – the grand hotels gave him Valpolicella for breakfast and left flasks of it outside his room while he was writing. But Owen cites one academic analysis of the list of drinks said to be consumed in a single night by the lovers in *Across the River and into the Trees*. The understated conclusion of the academic concerned is that the list 'takes us a little beyond the bounds of literary realism'.

The book is much to be recommended as an easy account of Hemingway's many links with Italy. Lots of interesting locations appear, from aristocratic duck-shooting in the Veneto to the Italian Riviera to Taormina and the Castello Nelson in Sicily; and from Ezra Pound to the Duce (whom Hemingway met and did not rate). A very good read.

Ian Grainger is a former Vice Chairman of the British-Italian Society

Chairman's Review
September 2016 – July 2017

by Richard Northern

Our celebrations to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Society in 2016 concluded with a memorable Gala Dinner at the Inner Temple Hall in London in December. 150 guests enjoyed a reception with music, followed by dinner and an entertaining after-dinner speech by the guest of honour, John Julius Norwich. We are grateful to Kirker Holidays for supporting the event.

The speaker at our annual Leconfield Lecture in November was Dr Benjamin Walton of Cambridge University, who gave a fascinating talk about early performers who took Italian opera around the world. We organised eight other lectures as well as a pizza evening at Da Mario in Gloucester Road. Lectures covered a wide range of themes: medieval embroidery, Italian cinema, current affairs, First World War artists, Mediterranean fishing, the Querini Stampalia Foundation in Venice and the Villa Wolkonsky in Rome. We presented the 2015/16 Rooke Memorial Prizes at our October lecture on the Verona bronze founders, Joseph De Levis and Company. We were particularly grateful to Jill Morris, the British Ambassador to Italy, who spoke to us in February about relations between Italy and the United Kingdom following the referendum on membership of the European Union.

This year we launched a new website. We are confident that the site will raise the Society's public profile and extend our reach. It is designed to enable members and guests to keep up-to-date with our activities, and to book events and take out or renew membership easily. We are also able to include on the site news about some events or initiatives put on by partner organisations which might be of interest to members.

We are grateful to Dinah Murray who kindly presented to the Society a set of programmes of the annual Rossini Festival in Pesaro dating from its inception in 1980 and containing the librettos of all Rossini's operas, cast lists and programme notes. The programmes had formed part of the collection of her husband, David Murray, a talented pianist, lecturer in philosophy and music critic of the *Financial Times*, who passed away in 2016.

The Society made a number of grants during the year to support worthy artistic, academic and other projects in line with the its aims. These included:

- a donation of £300 towards *War and Peace*, a moving event featuring music and poetry, organised by the Tricolore Theatre Company at St Peter's Italian Church in Clerkenwell in November 2016;
- the award in October of two prizes, of £750 and £500 respectively, to the winners of the 2015/16 Rooke Memorial Prizes at post-graduate level (Marianna Griffini, London School of Economics) and undergraduate level (Lucia Crowther, University of Reading);
- a grant of £500 to the Italian School in London, partly in payment for their housing of the BIS Archives; and

Minister Vincenzo Celeste addressing 75th Anniversary Gala Dinner

Welcome to new members

Rosanna Addante
Kamlesh Bava
Sonia Beltramelli and Simon Alexander Boakes
Jonathan Black
David and Marilyn Clark
Anne-Marie Craven
Lucia Crowther
Elisabetta Dal Carlo
Glyn Davies
Jutta Davis
Gennaro Del Gaiso
Victoria Kate Evans
Simona Foglia and Laurent Sykes
Alan and Mary Gibbins
Sue Anne Gladhaug
Marianna Griffini
William Hew John Hancock
David and Angela Harvey
Hilary Ivory and Douglas Skinner
Cara Leek and Nicholas Nawka
Daniela Lo Monaco
Roberta Luzzi
Christine Melia
Antonella Meli
Gillian Murray
Sabina Nerpiti and Sanjiv Dogra
Anna Pesce
Magdalene Rogers
Barbara Rossi
Deborah Stinson
Patricia Thomas
Kevin Tomlinson Happs
Benjamin Walton
Helen Webb
Adrian Wootton

75th Anniversary Gala Dinner

- a donation of £250 towards the costs of publishing *The Italian Contribution to European Culture*, a collection of essays in honour of Professor Jane Everson.

Thanks are due to our Trustees and our Accountant, Silvia Pieretti-Malim, for their work in putting together and directing the Society's programme of cultural and social activities for members and its charitable work. We are particularly grateful once again to Elisabetta Murgia for her tireless and dedicated work throughout the year in her role as Secretary of the Society.

Sadly, Sir Tom Richardson, our President, announced at the AGM in June 2017 that he would be standing down later this year. We are very grateful for his active support and wise guidance over the past ten years – and, of course, for Lady Richardson's contribution over many years as a regular writer for, and former co-editor of, *Rivista*. The appointment of a new President will need to be formally confirmed at the next AGM in June 2018; but we hope to announce our choice of candidate well before then. Meanwhile we look forward to continuing to see Tom and Alex regularly, as active members and supporters of the Society, at our events.

As always, we are indebted to our Patron, Ambassador Terracciano, and his diplomatic colleagues at the Italian Embassy, and offer them our warmest thanks for their unstinting support during the year. We also thank Marco Delogu, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, not least for hosting the Leconfield Lecture and for his generous support in making a room available for regular Trustees' meetings.

Meanwhile we look forward to welcoming all *Rivista* readers to our new season of events in 2017-18.

In Memoriam

We record with sadness the death in May 2017 of Lord Bridges, Chairman of the British-Italian Society from December 1990 until July 1997.

After a distinguished career in the Diplomatic Service, during which he served in Rio de Janeiro, Athens, Moscow and Washington and as a Private Secretary to several Foreign Secretaries and to Prime Ministers Heath and Wilson, Tom Bridges was appointed Ambassador to Rome (1983-87). Italy was not where he had hoped or expected to end his career; but, to his credit, Tom quickly learned Italian and threw himself into the role. A man of integrity and devotion to public service, he took a serious and scholarly approach to his work. He attached importance not only to strengthening bilateral links between the British and Italian Governments and politicians, but also to building institutional links on a wider scale between professional, cultural and non-governmental organisations in the two countries. It was therefore no surprise that he agreed to become Chairman of the BIS in 1990 and devoted much time and energy to the role, presiding over the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 1991. He had a lifelong interest in the arts, especially music. After retirement from public service, he also played an active role in the House of Lords.

Summer 2017 also saw the passing, at the age of 97, of Denis Mack-Smith, perhaps the most eminent foreign historian of modern Italy. Fellow of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, then Senior Research Fellow, and later Emeritus Fellow, of All Souls College, Oxford, Denis taught and inspired a number of prominent British scholars of Italy. He was described by Simonetta Fiori in *La Repubblica* as 'the critical conscience of Italian history'. He was also a former Chairman of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy.

Richard Northern

Award of 2016 Rooke Memorial Prizes

The 2016 Rooke Memorial Prizes were awarded at the Society's meeting on 11 October 2016 at the Oxford & Cambridge Club.

Rooke Prize Presentation photo Linda Northern

Minister Vincenzo Celeste of the Italian Embassy presented the prize (£750) for the best entry in the postgraduate category to Marianna Griffini (London School of Economics) for her dissertation: *Colonial Hybridity in the Italian Community in Libya (1926-1970).*

The prize (£500) for best entry in the undergraduate category was awarded to Lucia Crowther (University of Reading) for her essay: *The Architectural Formalisation of Pilgrimage in the Portico of the Madonna di San Luca (Bologna).* The prize winners also received one year's complimentary membership to the Society. Unfortunately Lucia was unable to attend to receive her prize in person.

The judges commended the high quality of the entries, including those submitted by the two runners-up in each category.

Together with the Society for Italian Studies we will be launching the next round of competition for the prizes, which are funded by a generous bequest from the late BIS member, Rosemary Rooke, in the coming months. Further information about the Rooke Prize can be found on the BIS website.

VILLA MICHAELA
TUSCANY

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A Garden of Delight: The Popularity of English Medieval Embroidery in Italy

The talk by Dr Glyn Davies, Curator of Medieval Sculpture at the V&A, was given to celebrate the opening of the museum's exhibition, *Opus Anglicanum*, in October 2016.

Opus Anglicanum was the name by which products of English workshops operating principally in the 13th and 14th centuries were known. They were much in demand both in England and abroad, especially by popes and cardinals in Italy.

In 1246, the chronicler Matthew Paris wrote about how Pope Innocent IV, seeing the embroidered vestments of English prelates, enquired where they were from and on hearing the answer 'England,' sent orders via Cistercian Abbeys for gold embroideries to decorate his chasubles and copes as if they were obtainable for nothing. But the embroidery workshops took the opportunity to charge what they liked. This was the beginning of the fascination, lasting over 100 years, for such work. The ground fabrics on which the designs were embroidered consisted of linen, silk and wool. An Iranian mix of silk and cotton called Kanzi was also often used.

Dr Davies spoke of many of the pieces appearing in the exhibition, which included the following:

The Ascoli Piceno Cope, was given by Pope Nicolas IV to Ascoli Piceno Cathedral in 1288 with the instruction that it must never be sold, pawned or otherwise disposed of. It was probably originally commissioned by Pope Clement IV and was worked in silver-gilt thread and coloured silks on linen (the original was deemed too precious to be included in the exhibition but a photograph, minutely painted in water-colour in 1904, was included). This cope depicts scenes of the Virgin and Child enthroned, the Crucifixion, the Holy Face and twelve early popes venerated as saints. The iconography links it firmly to Rome but the style of the figures and ornament is very close to decorative schemes in contemporary English manuscript illumination.

The Vatican Cope (c.1280-1300) is embroidered in silver gilt, silver thread and coloured silks on a red silk twill. The figures, depicting scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin and also St Peter with the keys and a papal tiara, are set within three rows of golden frames in the form of eight-pointed stars, possibly derived from Islamic textiles. Similar forms can be found on the Westminster Abbey Retable. In 1291 Pope Nicolas IV wrote to Edward I to thank him for the gift of a cope and this may have been the cope to which he referred.

The Madrid Cope (1390s), embroidered with silver-gilt thread and coloured silks on two layers of linen, shows fifteen barbed quatrefoils arranged in three rows connected by winding knotted serpents. Scenes from Genesis, as well as the Annunciation and Crucifixion are depicted. Because the cope is very worn in places, it is possible to see the under-drawing of the design. The scenes of the Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve make this cope unique in *Opus Anglicanum* work. An inventory of 1397 compiled for the church of Santa Maria de los Sagrados Corporales at Daroca states that this cope was the gift of Pope Benedict XIII, when the cope was already 100 years old.

Glyn Davies

The Bologna Cope (1310-1320), embroidered in silver-gilt, silver thread and coloured silks on two layers of linen, with two bands of Gothic arcades depicts stories from both the infancy and the passion of Christ and the story of the Magi, as well as the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket. The inclusion of St Thomas clearly marks this as the work of an English workshop. It is believed that this cope was given to the Bolognese church of San Domenico by either Pope Benedict XI or Benedict XII.

The Toledo Cope (1348) embroidered with silver-gilt thread and coloured silks, is divided into three bands of Gothic arcades with scenes of the Annunciation, Nativity and Coronation of the Virgin. Other scenes are of the life of the Virgin and the apostles and saints. Many of these saints are specifically English and common in English religious iconography, but who may not have been well known abroad. Another feature, again specifically English, is the depiction of large birds between the architecture and the figures. The cope may have belonged to Cardinal Gil Alvarez Carrilo de Albornoz, Archbishop of Toledo or to Cardinal Pedro Gomez Barroso who left a cope of *Opus Anglicanum* to Toledo cathedral.

Dr Davies explained how the tastes of the Papal Court may well have influenced taste in England. John Grandison, Bishop of Exeter (1327-1369) was one of the greatest patrons of the arts in England at the time. He was immensely wealthy and oversaw the building of the nave and west front of the cathedral. His coats of arms appear on many examples of embroidered vestments, including orphreys (decorated bands worn over vestments) of *Opus Anglicanum*, and Dr Davies noted that subtle Italian influences, especially from Siena impacted on the designs. Papal goldsmiths from Siena were working in Avignon where Bishop Grandison was also based at the time.

This fascinating talk will surely have inspired those present to visit the exhibition and also perhaps to purchase the beautifully illustrated catalogue.

Diana Darlington

Joseph de Levis and Company: Renaissance bronze-founders in Verona

Dr Charles Avery, who presented this talk to the Society at its meeting in October 2016, has given sterling service to the Society over many years, both as a trustee until 2015 and as a speaker on art-historical topics linked to his flow of expert publications, most recently about the sculptor Francesco Bertos. This talk on the de Levis bronze-foundry dynasty was memorable, wittily delivered and illustrated by photos from Charles's just-published and sumptuous *Catalogue Raisonné*.

Charles has clearly had a lifelong interest in Joseph de Levis (1552-1611/14 – the date of his death is uncertain) since his early days as Deputy Keeper of Sculpture at the V&A in the 70s. He has sustained that interest while working for Christies, and subsequently as an independent writer, scholar and lecturer. He alluded in his talk to the research which he had done as a younger man in the Verona area, even climbing up dangerous-sounding bell-towers to inspect and then photograph a number of de Levis-produced church bells, which are often still in use. One bell dating from 1576 he had tracked down to a convent in Trento, though others have ended up in the Museo Castelvecchio in Verona itself. Charles also showed us images of smaller hand or table bells, with elaborate friezes of baroque ornamentation and often coats of arms. These bells were probably used to control meetings or to summon servants, and one is shown in Raphael's famous portrait of the Medici Pope Leo X, on a table in front of the pontiff.

Raphael, Portrait of Leo X, Uffizi Gallery,Florence

Dr Charles Avery
Photo Linda Northern

De Levis and his elder son and nephews – for this was a family business stretching over several generations – also produced elaborately-decorated firedogs (of which a pair of fine examples have been in the V&A since its early days as the Museum of Ornamental Art in Marlborough House), as well as candlesticks, inkstands decorated with graceful female figures, and a splendid bronze ewer, which was sold by the French Rothschilds to an American collector for $276,000 in 2001. Charles's book focuses in detail on 45 of these beautiful objects, though his talk necessarily concentrated on 20 of them, so we could get an idea of the complex decoration and imagery used, both religious and secular. He also explained the bronze-casting techniques used at the time in Italy, when the casting work was done principally in the winter months.

The Jewish context for this both artistic and artisanal activity was also explained to us. The de Levis were almost certainly of Jewish origin, but to practise their trade it is more than likely that they would have had to convert to Roman Catholicism. Joseph's work (and he was known as Joseph, not Giuseppe) was shown some years ago at a major exhibition entitled *Gardens and Ghettoes* in the Jewish Museum in New York, and his work features today in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, notably an ornamental bronze bucket, probably used for hand-washing, which has extensive decorations in Hebrew, and two mortars, which present a distinctively Jewish seven-branched menorah and again Hebrew lettering. Given the significant anniversary in 2016 of the founding of the Venice ghetto, it would be interesting to know more of the social context of the Jewish community, assimilated or otherwise, in Verona, which was of course part of Venetian territory at the time.

The BIS trustees decided last year to make a grant of £500 to cover the cost of the index to this very scholarly publication, a number of copies of which were bought by members after the talk.

Charles de Chassiron

The 2016 Leconfield lecture: The beginnings of Global Opera

In the 2016 Leconfield lecture, Dr Benjamin Walton of the University of Cambridge, gave us a glimpse of how opera was spread around the world in the early nineteenth century and, more specifically, by one particular touring opera troupe. Dr Walton took us on an entertaining and whirlwind tour alongside this small troupe of players, who took opera and especially that of Rossini, firstly to Latin America and then on to parts of the Far East, more particularly, Macau and Singapore.

Dr Walton commenced by demonstrating the global spread of opera by pointing to the new opera houses opened in recent years in places such as Muscat in Oman, Guangzhou in China and Astana in Kazakhstan and also to the worldwide trend of opera screenings in local cinemas. He pointed out that in 1916 opera was already global, with opera houses constructed from the Met in New York to Hanoi in what was then French Indo-China, and from Buenos Aires to Bombay (Mumbai). So what was premiered in Europe one year, was quickly premiered elsewhere very soon afterwards.

He then took us back to 1816 and into a different era. By the end of the Napoleonic wars times were changing and the disruption caused by these wars had also brought about change in the world of opera. Rio de Janeiro was cited as a prime example of such a change. The Portuguese royal family had decamped there in the face of Napoleon's advancing troops and, rather than sacrifice their entertainment as well as their Lisbon home, had built a theatre to host imported singers and imported operatic works, in order to continue to enjoy opera. Simultaneously, the Spanish were being pushed out of Latin America and independent republics had been established. They were all keen to enjoy non-Spanish entertainment. Italian opera, in their eyes, represented the best and most sophisticated of such entertainment and so the beginnings of an opera circuit in South America was born.

It is one thing to have an opera circuit, but quite another to have both the singers to perform opera and the operas for them to perform. Two factors came into play here. Firstly, by 1816 the twenty-four year old Italian opera composer, Rossini, had written at least sixteen operas, many of which had become well known very quickly, for example, *Tancredi*. Their performance was much in demand and Rossini's tunes were sung everywhere including in the Venetian law courts, much to the annoyance of the judges concerned! Secondly, the demand to hear Italian opera elsewhere in the world had prompted the establishment of a very small troupe of Italian singers: a soprano, contralto and two basses. This small group set off travelling around Latin America, despite no tenor and no orchestra, to various locations along the established South American trade routes and from there via the Pacific, and especially Macau, back to Europe. They not only travelled the world but, with them, Rossini's music travelled the world too.

Benjamin Walton
Photo Linda Northern

Dr Walton talked us through the various locations at which this tiny troupe played; the fact that they managed to find a tenor in one location and lose him at the next; the fact of finding a violinist where they lost their tenor. He also entertained us with the reviews that the troupe received in various places, ranging from the very negative to positively glowing. Thus we have one Brazilian critic virtually accusing one of the troupe of having no, or rather a very strange, voice; whilst their positive effect in Lima was so significant that an American travelling there shortly after they had left, found all the young ladies singing and playing Rossini and Puccini and many having learnt Italian.

If their effect on Latin America was often significant, the effect that this troupe and Rossini had on tiny Macau was equally startling. Indeed we were told that the impact of the troupe's opera season of 1833 was of sufficient importance to feature in a book on China written by a well-known Sinologist, John Francis Davis. Davis described the troupe's tour as 'a singular instance of the Opera performing a voyage around the world'. This was picked up and then relayed by various European journalists, including Charles Magnin, a well-known theatre critic of the era. Magnin decided that such was the effect of Rossini and the performance of his works on the Chinese that, 'to the honour of the Chinese, the music of the illustrious composer obtained as much success before this audience as among us'.

Having given us a comprehensive overview of the importance of Rossini to Italian opera, including his lauding by Stendhal, a huge fan of Italian opera, and of the impact of this small troupe who carried Rossini's music and other Italian opera *oeuvres* to South America and the Pacific, Dr Walton drew his conclusions. All of these pointed to the importance of the spread of opera regardless of (or maybe because of) the facts and myths behind such ventures, its globalisation and its importance in bridging cultures.

Sandra Fox

Sorrentino and Contemporary Italian Cinema

In February 2017 Adrian Wootton, Chief Executive of Film London and the British Film Commission, gave an exhilarating and informative talk about the renowned Italian film director and screenwriter, Paolo Sorrentino. Adrian knows Sorrentino well and is a great fan. He has regularly curated and presented his work in the UK and believes he is the greatest living Italian screenwriter and director. Adrian described how in the 1970s and 1980s there had been a dip in Italian cinema and few Italian films were shown at international film festivals. This was partly due to logistical problems (films were not available in advance) and partly because their themes were often light-hearted and aimed at the domestic market. Notable exceptions were the films made by Fellini, the Taviani Brothers and later Nanni Moretti. There was a sense of the doldrums at this time until Film Italia was set up to promote Italian contemporary cinema worldwide.

Paolo Sorrentino was born in Naples in 1970. His film career started in 1994 with his first feature-length film *One Man Up (L'Uomo in più*, 2001) for which he was awarded the Nastro d'Argento prize. He worked with Toni Servillo in this film, the beginning of a partnership which was set to endure. The film, though successful, did not, in Adrian's opinion, prepare us for what was to come.

His second film *The Consequences of Love (Le Conseguenze dell'amore*, 2004), a psychological thriller again starring Toni Servillo, was shown at film festivals and gained international recognition. It explored the mindset of a lonely businessman being used as a pawn by the Mafia. He falls in love with a waitress and relates to her his story of financial ruin, drug use and exploitation by the Mafia. Some of the film's themes, such as humour, secrets, shock, contrast, emotional aridity, the transformative power of love are developed in later films. Adrian commented that a sense of surprise marks Sorrentino out as a screenwriter and director – a sense of authenticity mixed with fantasy.

His next film *The Family Friend (L'amico di famiglia*, 2006), tells the story of a malicious septuagenarian loan-shark who develops a fixation with the beauty of one of his customers. This film was described pejoratively as Fellini-esque but Adrian believes Sorrentino is exceptional and is an artist with a bigger vision than the others.

One of Sorrentino's best-known films, *Il Divo*, released in 2008, was a dramatised biopic of Giulio Andreotti, the controversial Italian politician. A film about corruption and deception in politics, it was compared to Matteo Garrone's *Gomorrah* at the time. Toni Servillo plays the part of Giulio Andreotti brilliantly. Adrian believes that this film begins to fulfil Sorrentino's promise. It is a film opera which welds structure and style to content. Adrian pointed out that Sorrentino has described himself in the past as a failed musician but someone still passionate about music. Music plays a significant role in most of his films.

Adrian Wootton

The plot of Sorrentino's next film *This must be the Place* (2011) (his English-language feature debut) centres around a middle-aged wealthy rock star, played by Sean Penn, who becomes bored with his retirement and takes on the quest of finding the guard of the German camp where his father was imprisoned and who is now living in the USA. The film was filmed partly in Dublin and partly in the United States. Although disappointing to some, for Adrian it confirmed his potential and greatness as it showed that he could make films in English and direct English speaking actors.

His sixth film *The Great Beauty (La Grande Bellezza*, 2013) won numerous awards, including an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2014 and a BAFTA for the Best Film not in the English Language. A philosophical film, it is a journey into the heart of Rome, led by its main character Jep Gambardella (Toni Servillo again), an aging socialite, writer and journalist who walks through the streets of Rome, looking at the lives of its people, young and old, rich and poor, and reflecting on his own life and experiences. He is repulsed by the fawning on celebrity he experiences on his return to Italy. The film is renowned for its amazing shots of Rome, masterfully arranged by Sorrentino. It reflects the decadence of Rome and Italy, especially that of the upper class, and for this reason is often compared to Fellini's iconic *La Dolce Vita*. Adrian pointed out that Sorrentino needed to make *This must be the Place* before he could make *The Great Beauty.*

Finally, Sorrentino's most recent film *Youth* (2015) *(La Giovinezza)* is his second English-language film. It is set at a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps and stars Michael Caine. He wanted to do something quite different from his other films. It is a broader film and based on the true-life story of Francesco Rossi and Riccardo Muti. The film is structured musically. It is playful and, in Adrian's opinion, an extraordinary achievement.

In his first TV series *The Young Pope*, (2016) starring Jude Law and Diane Keaton, Sorrentino turns his attention to Catholicism. It was shown at the Venice Film Festival and critics at first regarded it as a film, when in fact it was the first episode of six. For Adrian, Sorrentino's move into television shows yet again how he keeps challenging himself. There is nobody else with this level of ambition. Sorrentino's next film will be in Italian and a new series of *The Young Pope* is planned.

Linda Northern

The Future of British-Italian Relations

Our ambassador in Rome, Jill Morris, volunteered to speak to the Society on a brief visit to London eight months into her post in February 2017. We hadn't had a talk on current affairs for quite a while, and the ambassador more than compensated in a lucid, wide-ranging presentation without notes. She began by describing the slow Italian parabola from the days after the Brexit referendum, when many hoped for a re-run, to the present 'we are where we are' and a shared determination to expand our bilateral cooperation wherever possible.

Jill Morris identified three major Italian concerns in the coming negotiations. First, the future of the 600,000 or so Italian citizens resident in Britain. Both Theresa May and Prime Minister Gentiloni wanted foreign residence issues addressed right at the start. Requiring reciprocity for UK residents of EU countries was entirely reasonable, and had our government wanted to make a bargaining chip of the issue, it wouldn't have flagged it up front in the negotiations.

Secondly, Italy feared a Brexit domino effect and would work for the unity of the 27. Theresa May had reassured Paolo Gentiloni that we wanted a strong EU. And thirdly, Italy wanted greater security and defence cooperation, including law enforcement, counter-terrorism and cybersecurity. It felt that the EU had been unhelpful over migration (180,000 immigrants to Italy last year alone) and more focused on the Greco-Turkish end of the Mediterranean. Jill Morris noted British help over Libya, and more generally in persuading source and transit countries to help clamp down on migration. Asked later about Italy's level of defence spending, she accepted that it was unlikely to reach 2% of GDP (it hasn't for ages), but thought that Italy's contribution to peacekeeping should be taken into account. (The current NATO debate, however, revolves around 'hard' security.)

The ambassador briefly described Italian domestic politics. Though a no vote in the 2016 Italian referendum had been forecast, the huge majorities for it among both southerners and young voters had come as a shock. Far from producing stronger governments, any new electoral law was likely to involve more proportional representation and more parties. Both the ruling Democrats and Beppe Grillo's Five Stars stood at around 30% in the polls, but though Matteo Renzi was still popular the PD was split, and Five Stars were handicapped by their poor governance of Rome. The centre-right was also split. Both Renzi and Five Stars wanted early elections, but the government, as G7 chair in 2017, was more cautious. Whatever the outcome there would be a coalition government.

Jill Morris

The economy remained sluggish and, even if statistically exaggerated, a 40% youth unemployment figure was frightening. Growth was the key. There was a real sense that German economic policy must change. The government and the European Commission were locked in talks on both bank refinancing and the Italian budget, where Italy believed that not enough allowance was being made for the cost of post-earthquake reconstruction. Meanwhile Five Stars had promised a referendum on euro (not EU) membership.

The ambassador said she believed Italy would be a concerned but helpful partner in the Brexit negotiations. In particular, it would support (unlike the Commission) parallel talks on divorce from the EU and on future relations, including trade.

The above hardly does justice to a dense analysis and of course events have moved on since February, not always for the better. I was, however, struck by Jill Morris' emphasis on the growing importance of bilateral relations, for long the Cinderella of our European diplomacy. No doubt this is partly dictated by Brexit requirements and the search for common ground with each of our 27 current partners; but the need will last once we're out, and it would be a welcome change from London's somewhat unbalanced focus over the years on Brussels, with consequent heavy reductions in our bilateral posts' staffing. I hope Jill will talk to us again while she is still in Rome.

Tom Richardson

Warrior and War Artist: Sydney Carline in the Skies over Italy

To further consolidate the Society's relationship with the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, where we held a successful Modigliani event in 2015, and to mark the gallery's reopening after months *in restauro*, we arranged for the curator of the opening exhibition *War in the Sunshine: The British in Italy 1917-1918* to guide about 40 members round it in March 2017. The exhibition focused on the war art produced when British forces were sent to Italy after the Caporetto disaster in late 1917. Dr Jonathan Black, Senior Research Fellow in Art History at Kingston University, drew on his great expertise about all aspects of 20th century war art to illustrate this and especially the generous loans from the Imperial War Museum.

Jonathan spoke first about the man whom his talk title described as 'warrior and war artist', Sydney Carline. Born in 1888 into an artistic family, he had shown precocious

talent for water-colours and drawing while at the Slade before the war. He was a contemporary of artists like Paul Nash, Duncan Grant and CRW Nevinson. After initial hesitation, he volunteered in 1916 for flying training with the fledgling Royal Flying Corps and served initially in France. He proved to be an adept pilot. But in February 1918 he was posted to Italy, to a squadron equipped with Sopwith Camel fighters, based near Vicenza. He was an operational pilot for five months, shooting down three Austrian planes and crashing twice after being hit by surprisingly effective Austro-Hungarian anti-aircraft fire.

Late in July 1918, he was appointed an official war artist to record the work of what were now RAF squadrons in Italy. For this he actually sketched from his pilot's cockpit while flying the Camel with his knees, though this process became less hair-raising when he started to fly as observer in a larger two-man Bristol fighter. He painted Italian civilians and refugees, as well as vivid scenes of aerial strafing of roads filled with Austrian troops, searchlights over cities, and impressions of the dramatic mountain landscapes. Jonathan explained the deep effect this experience had on Carline, shown by his post-war annual returns to Italy from 1920 until his death in 1929. His biggest works were oils (two shown in the exibition) depicting aerial combat in the fantastic setting of the Brenta Valley or high above the Piave. These vivid oils show his romantic obsession with flying in the cold, bright air of Italy – an early form of *aeropittura* – but his smaller works are eye-catching too, and even seem to have a touch of the Japanese print about them (he would have seen these in the British Museum pre-1914). No wonder Carline, who was a star of the big post-war show held at the Royal Academy of war artists' work and in 1922 was appointed head of the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford, was regarded as a great loss to British art when he died.

Jonathan then led us to the other gallery to present the photographs of Ernest Brooks and William Brunell, both born in 1878. The former had worked on the Western Front, but here we saw a body of work depicting Italian and British combat troops, and many Italian civilians, sometimes all together. Brunell's images mainly portrayed the Northern Italian landscape, but he also produced sympathetic scenes of Italian women working for the British army, washing uniforms, unloading supplies (especially of beer and rum), and road-mending. He depicted too ragged Austro-Hungarian soldiers happily surrendering to the British, rather than to the resented Italians. They both continued their photography after the war; Brunell took motoring subjects and Brooks was photographer for the Prince of Wales until he was sacked mysteriously in 1925.

Sydney Carline, The Destruction of an Austrian Machine in the Gorge of the Valley of the Brenta 1918 Courtesy Imperial War Museum

The show's successful balance between paintings, sketches and photos was mentioned by Jonathan Black, who modestly forbore to add that it had been his research and his selection skills which had disinterred these artists' works from the vast reserve collection at the Imperial War Museum. Carline's reputation can surely only benefit from this exposure, and I would put him up with Nash, Nevinson and Bomberg (who also painted aerial scenes) among the best war artists of WWI. The colourful intensity of his style is not offset by bitterness or sarcasm, as in Nash's case.

The displays were set off by three new installations by Keith Roberts, one a model of a Camel, the second a mocked-up field post-office (vital for troop morale), and the third a set of clapperless bells – perhaps, as Jonathan suggested, referencing the damaged *campanili* of Friuli and Venezia Giulia.

We concluded our evening in the light, bright spaces of the 'new' Estorick with wine and prosciutto, asking Jonathan our questions and savouring a close-up view of the works on display. This had been a very good way for the Society to mark the Italian/British alliance in WW1, and to strengthen our valued link with the Collection.

Charles de Chassiron

Fishing in the Mediterranean: Past and Future

The marine biologist, Daniela lo Monaco, began her absorbing and entertaining talk given in Italian, by telling us about the history of fishing in the Mediterranean. We were shown images of frescoes, graffiti, mosaics and artefacts found in and around Sicily which provided a wealth of information about the fishing methods used in ancient times and demonstrated how little has changed in the subsequent millennia.

Daniela referred us to a number of ancient texts including Ovid's *Halieutica* (Halieutica means 'about fishing') and his vivid description of pike, lamprey and mullet being caught in nets and on hooks and to another *Halieutica* by the Greco-Roman poet Oppiano. Aristotle and Pliny the Elder also wrote about fish in their works on natural history – another pointer to the importance of marine life throughout the history of the Mediterranean. Until the beginning of the 20th century the sea was considered to contain an inexhaustible supply of marine life but this view was to change after the Second World War.

We were given an ancient recipe for Garum, a fermented fish sauce used extensively in the cuisine of ancient Egypt,

Daniela Lo Monaco
Photo Linda Northern

Greece and Rome. The herbs and spices that were added to enrich the sauce varied from one area to the next and could include coriander, fennel and celery seeds, aniseed, saffron, pepper and oregano. The mixture would be left to ferment for at least seven days and could then be kept for a long time. Although often thought of as the ketchup of its day, it was probably more like soy sauce.

Fishing in the waters around Sicily is not for amateurs as Daniela discovered when accompanying a group of fishermen on one of their trips. The small boats have no GPS and the coordinates are handed down from father to son without being recorded on maps. The fishermen treat the sea with enormous respect and consider it part of their heritage though the greatest threat comes from man. Daniela emphasised the danger presented by overfishing, poaching and the use of poison by those without licences and the resulting imbalance to the marine environment. Sword fish, tuna and Mediterranean cod are particularly at risk and Daniela considered it was time for all of us to think of alternatives. Certain waters are protected where no fishing is permitted; however, these measures cannot prevent the risk of pollution to the marine environment arising from industrial activity, tourism and the disposal of waste. Fish farming, for example breeding tuna in circulating cages, can also damage the ecosystem and in Daniela's view consideration should be given to returning to the methods of the past.

Tuna merchant Madralisca Museum, Cefalu, Sicily

She described in some detail the use of nets, how they were designed to catch particular types of fish and the incredible skill of the fishermen in the way they swing them into the sea. She also spoke of those fish that managed to get through the nets, eat the fish and then swim away and likened them to today's diners who go to a restaurant, have their meal and leave. Other methods used by the fisherman included placing young men on high towers erected in the sea to enable them to spot swordfish, and the positioning of palm fronds on the surface of the water to provide shade so that the highly prized lampuga would swim underneath. Some catches could fetch high prices in particular the *gambero rosso di Mazara* which sells for as much as 500 euro a kilo.

The talk finished with a film about Sicily and its coastal waters reminding us of the beauty of the island and the importance of fishing throughout the centuries.

Vanessa Hall-Smith

A Venetian Evening with the Querini Stampalia Foundation

In the elegant period (and formerly royal) surroundings of the Princess Marie-Louise Room of the Oxford & Cambridge Club, the BIS combined forces appropriately with Venice in Peril to hear Barbara Rossi and Elisabetta Dal Carlo, two of the senior staff of the Querini Stampalia Foundation, give us an excellent overview of the historic building. They described the façade dating from 1513, and the various recent modern extensions and redesigning of the interior, as well as its intriguing contents, deriving from a distinguished nobleman's collection and library, as in the case of our own beloved Wallace Collection.

The speakers related how Count Giovanni Querini left all his property in the Sestiere of San Zaccaria to the City of Venice. The property comprised his patrician palazzo and its mostly eighteenth-century contents of fine furniture and entertaining pictures. In his will of 1868 he ordained, in an unusually public-spirited way, like a good Victorian in England, that the library with its 375,000 books be opened to ordinary Venetians keen on bettering their education at times when public libraries were closed. He also provided a warm, carpeted room for the use of scholars. It has now become the official public library for the city-centre and, respecting Count Querini's special provisions, its 150 seats with PC and Wi-fi sockets are open from 10 am until midnight during the week and until 7pm on Sundays. The reading-room has 30,000 books on the open shelves and some 300 international newspapers and periodicals. Its treasures include a print of Jacopo de Barbari's famous bird's-eye view of Venice of 1500 and *The Tailors' Book* of 1550.

Elisabetta Dal Carlo and Barbara Rossi
Photo Linda Northern

The palazzo's walls rise straight up from a small canal, occasioning grave problems of rising damp. Some readers will have been familiar with the boldly-modern restructuring in 1963 of the ground floor (distinguished by the then obligatory raw-looking shuttered concrete) by the distinguished architect Carlo Scarpa. Scarpa ingeniously introduced shallow channels to accommodate overflow water from the canal outside during periods of *acqua alta*, routing it securely through the ground floor of the building and making aesthetic use of its myriad reflections in mirrors. Another feature of Scarpa's design, though now perhaps rather dated, is a secret garden fashioned in concrete, emphasising the abstract use of space.

The Fondazione has recently undertaken the immense task of refurbishing the palazzo and, as the speakers explained, 'opening its space up to light and air', as well as adapting it appropriately for modern community use.

The contemporary Swiss architect, Mario Bozza, who had benefitted from study in the Querini in his earlier years, donated his efforts *gratis*. After a thirty-year programme, its showpieces are: a new entrance portal dedicated in 2013; an inviting 'Kids' space' embellished with swirling patterns in red, yellow and orange on its floor; and upstairs a light, bright auditorium, unusually laid out with a bank of seating sloping gently down from either side.

A wedding in 1790 had occasioned a facelift of the interior in the refined neoclassical taste. Smaller, better-lit and more intimate rooms in the French style were introduced, emphasising harmony and comfort. Querini entertained great Venetian artists here, including the famous Pietro Longhi, painter of tongue-in-cheek scenes of upper and middle-class daily life – sharing the fun with his audience – of which this is a signal collection, and the playwright Carlo Goldoni. Gaily-fashioned and decorated ceramics by Vezzi and Cozzi in the Rococo taste brighten the rooms, accompanied on the walls by some 400 pictures from the Italian, Venetian and Flemish schools, all illuminated by amazing chandeliers from Murano, notably in the *Portego*.

In the Dining Room there is a superb and elegant Louis XVI dining service in white and gilded soft-paste porcelain ordered in the 1790s by Alvise Querini, last Ambassador of *La Serenissima* to Paris: 244 items could accommodate the needs of 28 guests round the table! This is set off by several highly-populated *surtouts de table* in white biscuit porcelain by Louis-Simon Boizot, chief-modeller of Sèvres. But the star of the sculpture collection is Canova's original clay *bozzetto* for the life-size marble statue (now in Chatsworth House) of *Madame Mère* (mother of Napoleon) enthroned as a Roman empress.

Scenes characteristic of Venetian life and history abound. For example, a series by Gabriele Bella of 1779-92, depicting in great detail a wedding at the Salute church and another showing the annual celebrations on 2 February at Santa Maria Formosa of the historical event at Caorle, when the citizens recovered their women who had been carried off by pirates. But the undoubted masterpiece in painting is a *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* of 1455 – thought to be by Mantegna until 1915 – but then attributed to Giovanni Bellini. In 2018, it is to be compared side by side with another good version from Berlin's Gemäldegalerie in Venice, London and Berlin.

Jonathan Keates, Chairman of Venice in Peril, thanked the speakers and concluded the session by emphasising the need for continued commitment by all of us at a moment when times and finance are hard for the arts. He recalled the survival of the palace after the revolution in 1849, when the mob broke in and smashed to pieces some wonderful furniture that had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and 'defenestrated' the Bellini painting, which sploshed into the dank little canal below - happily to be rescued later by some more enlightened citizens!

Charles Avery

The Villa Wolkonsky: What's in a Name?

Following the 2017 AGM, on a sweltering evening in June, Sir John Shepherd gave us a fascinating lecture on the Villa Wolkonsky, the Residence of British Ambassadors to Italy for the last 70 years. John had been brought up partly in Rome, and had later lived in the Villa himself, as British Ambassador to Italy from 2000 to 2003. Based on his research in the Italian and German archives over the past three years, he was able to recount in some detail the history of this remarkable house and garden, which overlook San Giovanni in Laterano, and its successive owners and residents. He was also able to demolish some colourful myths along the way.

After describing the 1st Century Roman aqueduct, which runs through, and still dominates, the eleven acre site, John began his story with the purchase of what was then a rural vineyard by the Russian Princess Zenaide Wolkonsky in 1829. The highly-educated, French-speaking Princess had been a lady-in-waiting to the mother of Tsar Alexander and a close companion of the Tsar himself. She had married an aide-de-camp to the Tsar and accompanied the Court around Europe after the fall of Napoleon. Attracted by Catholicism, to which she later converted, the Princess settled in Rome, near St Peter's, in the 1820s and commissioned an architect to build a summer house (*casino*) in the former vineyard. We know that prominent artists and literary figures, including Gogol, visited the house and gardens. Indeed a number of evocative prints and drawings of the property survive. The *casino* was built beside the aqueduct, where the German Chancery later stood. The Princess' son, Alexander, expanded the *casino*, when he inherited it, so that it boasted eighteen rooms on four floors. Alexander in turn passed the property on to his adopted daughter, Nadeide. It was Nadeide and her Italo-Russian husband, who in 1892 constructed the first *villino*, which was to become the main house and current Villa. But the Russian Revolution in 1917 deprived the Wolkonsky family of its estates and income in Russia. As a result, Nadeide was forced to sell Villa Wolkonsky soon after.

John Shepherd
Photo Linda Northern

After three generations of Wolkonsky owners, the estate passed into German ownership in 1922. The German Foreign Ministry, whose Embassy building and Residence had been confiscated in the First World War, acquired

it as a replacement. The contents of the buildings had been sold; but the numerous antiquities on the site remained, and are still on display today. John described the ambitious plans of successive German Ambassadors (five in all) to expand and improve the Residence building (the *villino*), and even to build a grand Embassy on part of the grounds and neighbouring land. Only one of these plans came to fruition, a major extension, which doubled the size of the Residence, in 1939-40. The expenditure involved was so large that it had to be approved personally by Hitler. John was able to confirm that it was the non-swimmer Hitler who issued an order (possibly at the prompting of Ribbentrop, who hoped to serve in Rome after the war) insisting that a swimming pool be constructed in the grounds!

Villa Wolkonsky

After the German occupation of Italy in September 1943, most of the Embassy staff were withdrawn, and the German Military Governor moved into Villa Wolkonsky, using it as his HQ for a few months. This unfortunate association led the post-war Italian Government to confiscate the property again. Many myths have grown up about the alleged use of Villa Wolkonsky as a Gestapo interrogation centre and a place of torture or killing. John found no evidence to support these claims; but, for many post-War Romans, the Villa remained a symbol of a nasty occupation.

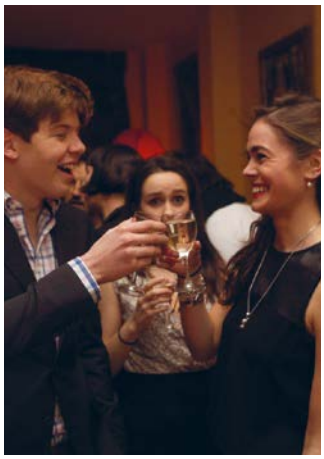
The final part of the talk dealt with the installation of the British (1947-51). Damage caused to the British Embassy and Residence at Porta Pia by a bomb planted by Zionist terrorists had left the British Ambassador homeless in 1946. Within a month the Ambassador moved himself and his Embassy temporarily into the vacant Villa Wolkonsky. An attempt by the German Government to have the property restored to them in 1951 immediately prompted the British Government to purchase the site (with a speed of bureaucratic decision-making rarely seen since).

This rich narrative left John little time to cover the history of the site since 1951. He said that he would have liked to talk about: the professional conservation of the aqueduct by the UK Ministry of Works in the 1950s; the repeated dithering in London over whether to sell the estate and move the Residence to Porta Pia or elsewhere; the opening of the new Embassy building designed by Basil Spence at Porta Pia in 1972; the later conversion of the old German Chancery/workshops at Villa Wolkonsky into good-quality accommodation for Embassy staff; and the recent restructuring of the garden and conservation and display of the site's antiquities in a converted greenhouse. Perhaps material for another talk?

This was a carefully-researched and well-illustrated talk, giving a vivid picture of the development and conservation of a historic estate in the heart of Rome. The narrative was set against a background of the turbulent events of 19th and 20th Century European history, and peopled by larger than life characters. It is no wonder that this combination of house, gardens, parkland and colourful history have been so cherished by all the Villa's various owners and occupants.

Richard Northern

JOHN HALL VENICE



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