

Indeed, the plan of the garden, its sculpture and its inscriptions were not simply a backdrop for the poetry readings and play-acting of Arcadians dressed in shepherd costumes. It was rather a space that enacted the pastoral in its pathetic reminiscence of the distant past, in its production of mood and relaxation in the service of *otium*, and in its lack of resolution or logical narrative conclusion as an experiential space. The Bosco Parrasio was the very quintessence of pastoralism in the service of *buon gusto*, operating at the heart of Arcadian poetics.

Minor's book is not a comprehensive historical account of the period, nor does it claim to answer in absolute or definitive terms why the baroque style was eclipsed by a new aesthetic in the eighteenth century. This is one of the great strengths of Minor's study, for the question of style is multifaceted, and cannot be answered in simple terms. He offers instead sharp historical analysis and insight into the political and social climate that contributed to and helped to create a critical shift in aesthetic taste. Another strength of Minor's study is his illuminating reading of works of art, architecture and literature, which draw upon a dazzling array of theoretical approaches. His use of semiotics and reception theory, to highlight just two examples, provide the reader with model approaches for future art-historical interpretation. But perhaps the greatest contribution of Minor's book is his ability to explicate the cultural discourse and institutional powers that produced works of art and facilitated their appreciation in a period so critical to the development of the Enlightenment, and yet so often neglected by scholars.

Alexander Cowan. *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xvi + 209 pp. + 8 illus. \$99.95. Review by R. BURR LITCHFIELD, BROWN UNIVERSITY.

This book will be of interest to historians of Venice and to those interested in the definition of nobility in Early Modern Europe generally. It focuses on proofs of nobility for the 600 non-patrician brides of Venetian nobles in the period 1589-1699. The book is well researched and well written.

The Venetian ruling elite was closed in 1297 to all but about 1500 males in 150 families, which actually enlarged the elite for a period. These were able to sit in the Senate, the *Maggior consiglio*, and the chief magistracies. Subsequently some 120 families were admitted to the nobility in exchange for large fees paid to the Republic, mostly in the period of the War of Candia in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. But through the extinction of families barely enough males were left in the eighteenth century to fill the offices they were privileged to hold. The system ended with Napoleon's suppression of the Republic in 1797. The elite defined itself as "noble" and became increasingly concerned with its purity of blood. In 1422, standing required the nobility of both parents and grandparents, in 1506 the Golden Books appeared, and in 1589 *prove di nobiltà* for non-patrician brides. The proofs were assessed by the *Avogaria di Comune*, a kind of supreme court of patrician lawyers appointed by the Council of Ten. The proofs had to be accepted by the *Avogadori* for any offspring of the marriage to be eligible to hold office.

The *prove di nobiltà* are a vast archive providing the rich detail set forth in this study. The "out" marriages were about seven percent of all patrician marriages in the years 1580-99, the only period for which comparative figures are provided. The proofs could be somewhat subjective, both as presented by the supplicants and as assessed by the *Avogadori*. Cowan eschews general legal categories, such as patricians, *cittadini*, and *popolani* in Venetian society—indeed definitions of nobility were quite varied in Italy of this period—in favor of how the matter was practically perceived. There was a basic threshold distinguishing between the exercise of *arte meccaniche* (menials, servants, laborers, prostitutes) and *vita civile*. The *Avogadori* considered such criteria as honor and modesty of behavior, dress styles, ownership of a gondola or carriage, the quality of houses, and the type of guests who frequented them. In 1607 Laura Castello's father had been a member of the Venetian College of Surgeons; her mother was a patrician. But when it was discovered that both her father and grandfather had exercised as "barber surgeons" doubt was cast on her petition.

Rejection of a petition (about 1 in 10 cases) was not, to be sure, a prohibition of marriage, only of proof of standing and of any sons holding office, and the procedure of the *Avogadori* could be

lengthy. A widow, Giustina Coleti, was investigated in 1616, but she was discovered to have married her intended patrician husband before resolution of her case, and it was thrown out. What was a Venetian patrician to do if he could not find a bride who could pass muster? Many probably remained bachelors. An interesting chapter addresses the question of concubinage and illegitimate daughters. Concubines seem to have been common in Venice, even for husbands who had both their legitimate and their illegitimate children living in their households. Illegitimate daughters could pass muster under certain conditions. Secret marriages also abounded.

Despite this wealth of information some drawbacks in this study arise from the fact that there is little or no information about the husbands, and from the fact that there is little comparison between the “out” and the “in” marriages of Venetian nobles. Some aspects of “out” marriage may have been typical of Venetian marriage customs generally, but others may not have been. The author asserts that “marriages between men of high status and lower status women all over Medieval and Early Modern Europe centered on the benefits of large dowries.” But with only the few examples for and against provided here this question is left unresolved for Venice, although the Avogadori di Comune apparently recorded the dowries of all patrician marriages, which might have been investigated. Also, not much social mobility is evident from this study. Not only were the “out” marriages only a small percentage of the total, they also came from a limited social and geographical range. In fact, 60 percent of the women investigated by the Avogadori had fathers who were patricians or nobles of the Republic (some were illegitimate daughters), or Venetian *cittadini*, and 58 per cent came from Venice. The author’s main conclusion is that Venetian noblemen chose outside brides among groups they already socialized easily with: “they publically recognized that gentility was not something over which they had a monopoly, but a system of behavior which was shared with many others” (175).