

instance, Odysseus's joke on Polyphemus in the ninth book of Homer's epic—as a means of unpacking various changes in the representation of identity and action in the early modern theater. Wilson provides what should be history's most extensive reading of the anonymous play *Nobody and Somebody* before turning to Desdemona's famous answer to Emilia's pressing question: "O, who hath done this deed?"

If there is a weakness in this book it has to do with difficulties that are built into the topic. The law is notoriously obscure when it comes to words: in its attempt at precision the law often, as Jonson said of Spenser, writes "no language." Thus it can be challenging to read continuously about matters of, for instance, "assumpsit," "deodand," and "nonfeasance." But to Wilson's credit, he takes great pains to clarify what are essentially issues of tremendous complexity, all the time asking us to see that it is precisely this complexity that drew playwrights to legal thinking and expression in the first place.

This is a provocative book, one that may well repay repeated consultation. For its insight into questions of agency and action alone, it deserves serious consideration from those within and without the field of early modern studies. Its focus on the drama will prove particularly helpful to those interested in issues of performance and politics in the theaters of other places and times.

Gigliola Pagano de Divitiis. *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xv + 202 pp. \$59.95. Review by JAMES PATERSON, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY.

The title of Pagano de Divitiis's *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy* is frankly a misnomer. It promises a study of the English mercantile community in Italy, perhaps something along the lines of M.C. Engels's *Merchants, Interlopers, Seamen and Corsairs* (1997) or Daniel Goffman's *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642-1660* (1998). But while Engels studies the Flemish mercantile

communities of Livorno and Genoa and Goffman documents the careers of English Levant Company representatives in Turkey like Sir Thomas Bendysh and Henry Hyde, Pagano de Divitiis relegates individual English merchants almost entirely to her footnotes and says very little about English mercantile communities in Livorno or anywhere else in Italy.

Deciding what *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy* actually is is a rather more complicated matter, however. Perhaps the most accurate way to describe the book would be to state that it is simply a compendium of information about seventeenth-century Anglo-Italian trade. Viewed as such, it can be regarded as a reasonably important addition to the existing stock of literature on the early modern Italian economy available in English. It contains a wealth of data about most every conceivable aspect of Anglo-Italian trade and will certainly provide the resource of first resort for economic historians interested in the subject for years to come.

That said, the book seems to want to be something more—something which, it must be said, it manages with far less success. In her Preface, Pagano de Divitiis presents the book to her readers as an attempt “to clarify the ways in which England came to replace the cities of northern Italy as the guiding force in the organisation of Mediterranean trade over the course of the seventeenth century, and the reasons why it was able to take on this role” (xiii). *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, therefore, is offered to the reader as a work of problem-centred historiography, a study in the process by which the English wrested the long-distance trade between the Mediterranean and northern Europe from Italian hands. In this regard, *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy* belongs to a well-established historiographical tradition that seeks to establish the reasons for Italy’s economic decline after the Renaissance, a problematic complicated by growing appreciation of the fact that Italy’s decline was of a relative nature only.

The problem the book sets out to address is, in fact, only directly addressed in its first chapter, “Times and places.” Here Pagano de Divitiis discusses the English penetration of the Mediterranean

trade after 1573. She presents an interesting, nuanced account of the process by which Italian mercantile activity declined and English traders achieved superiority by the middle of the seventeenth century. This turnaround, which provides the basis for Fernand Braudel's famous assertion that the seventeenth century saw the "Northern Invasion" of the Mediterranean, is examined in a dual perspective. Recognizing the relative nature of Italian economic decline, Pagano de Divitiis discusses both factors illustrating Italy's weaknesses and England's new strengths.

The problem with Pagano de Divitiis's approach is that her historiographical problematic rapidly fades from view with the second chapter, "The ships." In certain respects, this chapter deepens the picture created in the first by narrowing the focus to reasons why the Italian shipbuilding industry went into decline in the late sixteenth century and why English (and Dutch) ships possessed important advantages over Italian-built ships. A point Pagano de Divitiis makes well is that from the 1660s onwards English ships regularly enjoyed the benefits of protective convoys. No one would disagree that such protection was "a significant step towards the establishment of English commercial hegemony in the Mediterranean" (63). However, with "The ships" Pagano de Divitiis begins to lose sight of her problem in favor of simply amassing information about Anglo-Italian trade. With the last three chapters - "Routes and ports," "Imported goods," and "Exported goods"-the problematic virtually disappears, and we find ourselves confronted by data that are intrinsically interesting, perhaps, and certainly useful to future researchers, but which shed very little light on the problem that the book purports to address.

In this respect, *English Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Italy* is a casualty of the thematic organization of its chapters. By this means, Pagano de Divitiis certainly builds up a comprehensive overview of seventeenth-century Anglo-Italian trade. But by compartmentalizing her information in chapters that do not seem to reflect the development of an argument, she will leave many of her readers feeling extremely dissatisfied. Perhaps the chief fault of her method of organizing her information is that many facts which seem in-

dispensable to the problem examined in the first chapter are doled out in a seemingly arbitrary and casual manner in succeeding chapters.

Most perturbing to this reviewer was the fact that certainly the most pertinent fact in the entire book is withheld until page 132, when it is only mentioned incidentally. The problem the book seeks to examine, it should be stated again, is that the English increasingly monopolized the Mediterranean trade to northern Europe. Since the expression "northern Europe" refers in most parts of this study simply to English ports, the problem is how the English managed, during the course of the seventeenth century, to monopolize the flow of Ottoman and Italian goods to England. Yet not until page 132 does Pagano de Divitiis tell us that in 1615 King James I enacted a decree that allowed only English ships to import goods from the Mediterranean. Here, strikingly, Pagano de Divitiis is talking about why Dutch (not Italian) ships were unable to import goods to English ports. But if Italian merchants, from 1615 onwards, were also barred from carrying Mediterranean products to England, as this reference to the decree implies, then almost everything else Pagano de Divitiis has to tell us about England's displacement of Italians from the Anglo-Mediterranean trade is redundant. At least three chapters in this book dispense facts that seem to shed light on the changing dynamics of Anglo-Italian trade—such as that even in the fourteenth century, at the height of Italian domination of the Mediterranean trade to England, the English already controlled the transportation of Italian wine—in contexts where their significance is not examined in a way that relates them clearly to the problem.

There is space for only two more criticisms. First of all, Pagano de Divitiis has a habit of broaching problems and dismissing them with glib and unsatisfying answers. When she considers the problem of why the Italians relied so heavily on imports of English herring when they should have been able to provision themselves adequately with fish from the Mediterranean, for instance, her answer is to the effect that, because the Reformation diminished the English need for fish, the English offloaded the surplus to Italians

whose dietary habits were still regulated by the church calendar. This implies that the English only ate fish because compelled to do so by the Catholic church and that the Italians were content to buy up the English surplus. This argument presents at least two problems that ought to have been resolved. First, since neither the Dutch nor the Scandinavian peoples lost their appetite for herrings after the Reformation, why did the English? Second, was there a compelling price rationale for Italian consumption of English fish? Were the English able to supply herrings to the Italians so cheaply that it was simply not worth the Italians taking the trouble to provision themselves? Finally, as Geoffrey Clark, a previous reviewer of this book, has observed, “the text is occasionally vague and its arguments telegraphic.” Although the translation seems correct and proper throughout, it still possesses that elusive and insubstantial quality that too often mars Italian academic prose.

Jonathan Brown and John Elliott, eds. *The Sale of the Century: Artistic Relations between Spain and Great Britain, 1604–1655*. Madrid: Yale University Press and Museo Nacional del Prado, 2002. 315 pp. \$65 hardback. Review by ELIZABETH R. WRIGHT, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA.

Art historian Jonathan Brown and historian John Elliott have joined forces to provide an indispensable guide to the political and artistic relationship between Spain and England in the first half of the seventeenth century. Though specifically focused on the Commonwealth Sale of 1649–1654 that dispersed Charles I’s magnificent art collection, this catalogue of a 2002 exhibit gives a thorough account of Spanish–English relations between the Peace Treaty of 1604 and the sale that transferred numerous paintings by Titian, Veronese, Raphael, and other masters from England to Spain. Along with introductory essays, a chart of ambassadors, and annotated catalogue entries, the editors have included untranslated transcriptions of the Spanish documents that chart the sale. As with their