

## Versione italiana

*The Book of Venice: A City in Short Fiction, Edited by Orsola Casagrande, Translated by Orsola Casagrande & Caterina Dell'Olivo*

It finally happens. Venice closes at 7:30 pm. The city is reduced to nothing more than a stage-set in Samantha Lenarda's futuristic opening story in *The Book of Venice*. She sets her tale in 2084 when tourists stay in "Easy Venice" and purchase day tickets to venture into the city to pelt a condemned man with rotten vegetables. The "final exodus" has occurred and other than a handful of merchants selling tourist tat, the Venetian civilization no longer exists. This is a provocative way to begin a collection of stories written by Venetian authors, deconstructing the idealization of Venice into 10 literary interpretations.

The personal essays from Cristiano Dorigo, Gianfranco Bettin, and Roberto Ferrucci give a contemporary context to Venice and her relationship to an unpredictable environment that is not necessarily conducive to the health and well being of residents. They write in compelling detail about the influences that have shaped their lives.

Elisabetta's Baldisserotto's singing protagonist Carmen is a woman who can be deprived of her "primary function" in life by a burst of rain. She is a laundress, she washes clothes incessantly, her expertise is legendary, and her grief apocalyptic when her work is disrupted by theft. Never has the prosaic act of laundry felt so much like poetry. We leave her at the end of the story, as she is searching for something precious that she's lost. A metaphor for Venice? Perhaps.

Ginevra Lamberti mischievously contends with a "granny in a candy pink dress," a conversational missionary friar, and an imaginary friend who paints mortgages in her delightful story titled, "Why I Begin At The End." Her clever observations offer a surreal layer to our appreciation of what it takes to survive in Venice.

We finally get to meet Inspector Nicola Aldani, the irascible Venetian in Michele Catozzi's Italian crime series, which began with the publication of *Acqua Morta* in 2015. In the short story, "A Farewell to Venice" Aldani fights the inevitable move of the police station from Venice to Marghera on the mainland. He is insolent, reckless, and gruff, in short everything you hope a Venetian homicide officer would be. It is not until a beleaguered Aldani sits down on his beloved *altana*—his "holy of holies"—that you understand the strength of his conviction.

It is a rare pleasure to be able to read Venetian authors in English. Their experiences of Venice give us an intimate view into a terrain that is both familiar and unrecognizable. The writing of Enrico Palandri was a revelation. His short story "Atmospheric Conditions" is a lyrical kaleidoscope of searching and desire. Whereas Marilia Mazzeo poignantly captures endings in

“The Casket” Palandri’s story is one of beginnings. The story is an adaptation from his novel, *Ages Apart*, and instigated my circuitous and successful search for all four of his novels published in English.

There is an elegant rhythm to the stories in *The Book of Venice*. They reflect the lives of Venetians, ones who have stayed and ones who have left. They comprise a seascape of emotions that never once take the astonishment of Venice for granted, even when eclipsed momentarily by the detritus of daily life.

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