

## Will Daddario

*Baroque, Venice, Theatre, Philosophy*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.  
pp. 261 + x. Hb, \$119.99.

Daddario notes in the introduction that “*Baroque, Venice, Theatre, Philosophy* assembles various theatre and performative practices from sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Venice in order to rethink the baroque as a pattern of social practices aimed at cultivating modes of subjectivity, understood here as subject positions that coincide with recognizable identity categories,” with two of those identity categories being “Catholic” and “Jesuit” (5). Daddario posits two entities, the actor/playwright Ruzzante (Angelo Beolco, 1502–42) and the Jesuits, that “harnessed theatrical expression to coerce allegiance for and/or act out against dominant ideologies” (7). While the volume features six chapters, an introduction and scholarly apparatus, only two of the chapters concern the role of the Jesuits in Venice during the baroque period: chapters four (“Jesuit Pastoral Theatre: The Case of Father Pietro Leon da Valcamonica”) and six (“The Enscenement of Self and the Jesuit *Teatro del Mondo*”).

Daddario, himself Jesuit-educated, advocates for understanding “the dramaturgy” of the Spiritual Exercises, which he sees as inherently theatrical and constructed in order to make the practitioner play a series of roles—a theory with which I happen to agree (6).

Chapter four explores the public execution of Father Pietro Leon da Valcamonica on November 10, 1561 as “a large scale social performance staged with incredibly high stakes” (79). Valcamonica was the chaplain at a house for prostitutes seeking to leave the sex worker trade. He regularly molested his charges. Upon discovery, he was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. His execution in the Piazza San Marco was “staged,” with the windows and balconies around the piazza “fundamentally like [...] box seats” from which the elite of Venice might watch the execution while the groundlings stood below the scaffold in the piazza itself (86). Daddario argues the state needed to stage the execution as a display of its ability to stop and suppress internal threats to the citizens of the city through acts of justice. The Jesuits, on the other hand, already firmly ensconced in the city for over two decades, with numerous supporters among the elites and a stellar record of pastoral care of the disenfranchised of the city, led by the Jesuit Benedetto Palmio, sought to reframe the execution so as not to cast aspersions either on their work or the priesthood.

Here Daddario makes a compelling argument for how the Jesuits structured the “performance” of the execution, by having Valcamonica publicly proclaim his guilt, blessing the executioner, and offering his life as atonement not just for his sins, but for the sins of all of Venice. This act, argues the author,

transformed the execution into a pastoral sacrifice. “From Palmio’s point of view, Valcamonica had failed to keep an eye on all and each of his sheep and this required the wayward shepherd to atone for his faults by sacrificing himself for the whole of the flock” (90). Further evidence that both state and the Society preferred a public execution is the fact that death was not a mandated punishment for his crimes, and that other priests had been exiled, publicly beaten or had amputations for greater crimes than his. By executing him, however, not only did the state stage its power to protect and punish, the order staged the idea/ideal of the pastoral shepherd. It was necessary for Valcamonica “to sacrifice his life spectacularly” in a public forum (93). The author concludes Palmio became the dramaturg of this spectacle, reframing it as an allegorical event about the lengths a priest would go for the salvation of his flock.

In chapter six, Daddario offers a close reading of the allegedly anti-theatrical criticism of the Jesuit Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli, whose art criticism “hides an intricate performance score and a conceptual entrance into the world of Jesuit conversion” (161). While Ottonelli’s writings seem to place him firmly in the anti-theatricalist camp, Daddario argues that his work, while condemning immoral secular theater in Italy is actually “a defense of a very specific type of acting”—the *teatro del mondo* (theatre of the world) (171). Since the medieval period, Christian dramaturgy has conceived of the world itself as a kind of theater, with God as playwright, the world a stage, and all people performing the roles in which they have been cast (see Pedro Calderón’s *El gran teatro del mundo*, c.1634, for one of the best examples of this construction). Daddario is interested in how the Jesuits “actualize” this concept, finding in the Spiritual Exercises an acting textbook, so to speak, teaching how to perform in the world. Ottonelli “outlines a psychological performance philosophy predicated on the belief that one must not only live according to the Word of God but also fashion a daily performance of self that demonstrates the extent to which the individual has internalized the knowledge that he or she is performing for God’s eyes and God’s eyes alone” (180).

Together, the two chapters form a continuum of how sixteenth-century Venetian Jesuits employed and manipulated theatrical concepts to frame an understanding of the role of the self and the priest in God’s world. *Baroque, Venice, Theatre, Philosophy* itself is a sophisticated and original conceptualization that links performance and philosophy into the actual lived experiences of Jesuits and laypeople in Renaissance Venice. Daddario announces in the opening paragraph of the volume that his study is “reveling in the excesses of baroque thinking” (1), and indeed his analysis is ornate and extravagant in all senses of those terms. The innovation in this volume is an expansion of how we can and should consider the relationship between the Jesuits and

performance beyond studies of Jesuit performance practices in the form of theater, ballet and opera, into the realm of exploring how Jesuits conceived the world and even ultimate reality in performative terms. For Ottonelli, Palmio, and Daddario, all the world is indeed a stage and the Jesuits understood that better than most what the play is and how to perform it. A worthy addition to the Jesuit theater bookshelf.

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