PATRICIA FORTINI BROWN, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio.* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1988. 310 pp, 34 colour plates, 145 b & w plates, 5 text figs.

One of the most important and characteristic contributions of Venetian quattrocento painting to Italian Renaissance art was the creation of a tradition of narrative painting not exactly paralleled in the other main artistic centres. For most people today, this tradition is probably best summed up by the two cycles that now occupy Rooms XX and XXI of the Accademia gallery in Venice: eight canvases comprising the *Miracles of the True Cross* cycle, painted by Gentile Bellini and others from c. 1493 onwards; and Carpaccio's eight scenes from the Life of St Ursula, also dating from the 1490s. Central to the tradition is the typically Venetian sense of the decorative value of colour, so that in their cumulative effect the paintings resemble not so much the frescoes of central Italian large-scale narrative painting, as tapestries, or even mosaics. No less essential is the painstakingly documentary approach to the pictorial content, with the crowds of figures in contemporary costume shown acting out elaborate civic rituals against townscapes that accurately record (or vividly evoke) those of late fifteenth-century Venice. The two cycles in the Accademia are among the finest and the earliest of their kind to survive; but it is easily forgotten that they were preceded by a number of other narrative cycles, now lost, from which they would have derived many of their essential features. Among the losses particularly to be regretted are the *Scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin* painted for the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista by Jacopo Bellini around the middle of the century; the *Scenes from the Old and New Testament* painted for the Scuola di San Marco by Jacopo and Gentile Bellini and a number of other prominent Venetian painters in the 1460s and 70s; and most important of all, the two successive history cycles in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Doge's Palace. The first of these, begun by Guariento in the late fourteenth century, and continued by Gentile da Fabriano, Pisanello and others in the early fifteenth, would have laid the foundations for the Venetian narrative tradition; while the second, begun by Gentile Bellini in 1474 to replace its rapidly decaying predecessor, constituted the authoritative model for all Venetian cycles executed in the subsequent half-century. The quattrocento tradition, with its emphasis on documentary realism, was eventually to be supplanted by the new heroic style of the early sixteenth century, a development that would have been dramatically symbolised in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio itself by the placing of Titian's vortex-like *Battle of Spoleto* opposite the scenes of stately ceremonial by the Bellini brothers, Alvise Vivarini and Carpaccio. Yet important elements of the older tradition were retained by Titian in other works, such as the Accademia *Presentation of the Virgin,* and by later painters such as Paolo Veronese. Similarly, the topographical exactitude and genre-like details of the *Miracles of the Cross* cycle have often been seen as prophetic of Canaletto and Pietro Longhi.

Considering the importance and coherence of the quattrocento narrative tradition, it is surprising that it has not hitherto been the subject of any sustained scholarly discussion. True, there exist numerous monographs on one of its most attractive and prolific exponents, Carpaccio; and the previous lack of any monograph on Gentile

Bellini has recently been made good by the informative book by Jürg Meyer zur Capellen (*Gentile Bellini*, Wiesbaden, 1985). But these monographs naturally focus on the individual artistic personality and individual contributions to the tradition, rather than on the tradition as a whole; and they naturally also leave out of account lesser but no less typical exponents such as Lazzaro Bastiani, Giovanni Mansueti and Vittore Belliniano. Perhaps art historians have been discouraged by the difficulties of tracing a tradition that survives in so fragmentary a form. Perhaps, too, we have only recently begun to think more seriously about some of the main genres of Italian Renaissance art, and about the various criteria — of function and placing, as well as of form and content — according to which they may be defined.

It is the merit of this excellent new book by Patricia Fortini Brown that our appreciation and understanding of a number of familiar and less familiar works by Gentile Bellini, Carpaccio and their contemporaries is greatly enlarged by her consideration of them in terms of their genre. She does not underplay the importance of purely artistic traditions, and is well aware of the various ways in which her painters drew on Tuscan and Netherlandish, as well as local Gothic and Byzantine sources. But her chief concern is to show how the Venetian narrative tradition was also deeply responsive to a whole range of external circumstances, and closely reflective of an equally broad spectrum of cultural attitudes rooted in the particular time and place. Her central thesis — which carries complete conviction — is that the apparently naive realism of what she dubs 'the eyewitness style' is, on the contrary, far from indiscriminately factual, and portrays rather a world carefully reconstructed to conform with the political and religious ideology of late fifteenth-century Venice. Her interdisciplinary method correspondingly involves a discussion of such topics as political events, social institutions, corporate piety, official historiography, concepts of honour, and even the descriptive techniques of contemporary travelogues, all with the purpose of shedding new light on the narrative paintings. Conversely, by making intelligent use of the recent research by others into extra-artistic aspects of Venetian history, Brown provides readings of the narrative paintings as cultural documents, and even as reactions to contemporary events, in a way that should prove highly stimulating to political and social historians in the future.

The book is divided into three parts, respectively entitled 'Circumstances', 'The Visual Culture' and 'The Painted Histories'. In accordance with the author's contextual rather than chronological method, the eleven main chapters are mostly concerned with topics, or angles of approach, rather than with particular cycles — although sometimes a cycle might provide the focus of a general discussion of one of its more striking characteristics. After an introductory chapter, Chapter 2 ('The Situation') discusses the political and social order of the Venetian Republic, and the way in which the ethos of the *Scuole* (lay devotional confraternities), for which most of the narrative cycles were painted, was identified with that of the State itself. This chapter also discusses the changing external circumstances within the period 1470—1530, and suggestively relates important commissions to outward events. For example, the decision in 1474 to replace the decaying cycle in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio is convincingly linked to the need

to counter recent setbacks in the eastern Mediterranean with triumphalist visual propaganda.

Chapter 3 ('The Tradition') traces the history of the Venetian tradition of narrative painting from the mosaics of San Marco to 1474, providing as full an account as possible of the various lost decorations of the earlier fifteenth century. Although the works themselves are lost, the correlation of documents, sources, drawings and other probable visual records is often surprisingly informative. The lost Scuola di San Marco cycle of the 1460s—70s, for example, is particularly well documented, and lends valuable insight into the mechanics of patronage. And the author is surely right to emphasise the generally neglected importance of Jacopo Bellini in the history of Venetian narrative painting, and to take more careful account, here and in Chapter 7, of the Books of Drawings when considering the character of his lost works. In her account of the early fifteenth-century campaign in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, Brown might have considered the possiblility that an important role was played by Michelino da Besozzo (as already proposed by T. Pignatti in *Il Palazzo Ducale di Venezia,* Turin, 1972, p. 105; see now also K. Christiansen, 'Venetian painting of the early quattrocento', *Apollo,* no. 301, 1987, pp. 166—77); and she might also have been less cautious about accepting Vasari's information that Antonio Veneziano returned from Florence to work in the Sala. It is normally assumed that any visit by Antonio would have taken place in the 1370s or 80s; but the long-lived artist was still active at the time of the campaign begun in 1409, and in fact there is a gap in the records of his presence in Florence during the years 1413—19 (see J. Czarnecki, *Antonio Veneziano: a Florentine painter of the late Trecento,* Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1978, p. 8).

Chapter 4 ('Artists and Occasions') discusses the principal cycles between 1474 and c. 1525 from the point of view of the commission, taking account of the patrons, the settings and the required subject-matter. The discussion is richly informative, and provides a vivid account of the circumstances under which the decorations were planned and put into effect. The author points out (as does also G. Agosti, 'Sui teleri perduti del Maggior Consiglio nel Palazzo Ducale di Venezia', *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte,* no. 30, 1986, pp. 61—87, an article that appeared while Brown's book was in press) that the Sala del Maggior Consiglio served not only as a council chamber of the Venetian government, but also as a setting for the reception of foreign dignitaries such as the Emperor Frederick III, who visited the city in 1469. The emperor's host on that occasion was Doge Cristoforo Moro; and I wonder whether it was he, perhaps on that very occasion, who conceived the idea of having the decaying frescoes replaced with resplendent new canvases painted in the up-to-date style of the Renaissance. Moro certainly played a leading role in importing exponents of the new style in sculpture into Venice, and he may well have experienced some embarassment at having to entertain his distinguished visitor in the presence of frescoes that were no longer visually impressive or even properly legible. Be this as it may, Brown's observation that Doge Moro was almost certainly responsible for commissioning a narrative cycle, probably from Gentile Bellini, in the nearby Sala delle do nape (destroyed as early as 1483) usefully adds to our knowledge of both patron and painter.

Chapters 5 and 6, which open Part II, are concerned with local traditions of historiography, and the parallels they offer with the narrative techniques of the painters. Some of this material was used by the author in an illuminating article published in *Art History* (vol. 7, 1984, pp. 263—94), and will already be familiar to students of Venetian Renaissance painting. Chapter 7 ('Antecedents') turns to visual sources, and assesses the indebtedness of the 'eyewitness painters' to a wide range of artistic predecessors, from Altichiero to Gentile da Fabriano, Masaccio, Jacopo Bellini, Mantegna and Jan van Eyck. Chapter 8 ('Eyewitnesses') relates the 'eyewitness style' to methods of reporting employed by merchants and travellers.

In the final Part, the author returns to discuss in more detail the artists' responses to some of the commissions previously outlined in chapter 4. Chapter 9 ('The Sacred in the Profane') is concerned with the *Miracles of the True Cross* cycle, and with the conviction it expresses that Venice was a city singled out by God for special favour and protection. Chapter 10 ('History as Ceremonial') draws parallels between the important role played by processions and ceremonies in Venetian civic life and their frequent portrayal in the narrative cycles. Chapter 11 ('From *Istoria* to *Fantasia*') turns away from the local Venetian environment to consider the way in which Carpaccio, in particular, created settings that were far off in time and place. Finally, in chapter 12 ('Visible Witnesses') the author discusses one of the most typical features of Venetian narrative cycles: the inclusion of portraits, and its expressive significance. There is a sub-section on artists' self-portraits in the narrative paintings, in which the author makes an excellent case for identifying a self-portrait by Carpaccio in his *Disputation of St. Stephen* (Milan, Brera).

The text is followed by a catalogue of all recorded Venetian narrative cycles before 1534. As well as providing a valuable source of reference to the various works discussed in the text, the catalogue is more accurate and more comprehensive than that in any previous work, including the Electa volume of 1981 (*Le Scuole di Venezia,* ed. T. Pignatti, Milan, 1981 — which, however, covers a much wider chronological span). Since not a single cycle in the catalogue remains in its original architectural setting, the author's various reconstruction diagrams of the original arrangement of the canvases are of particular value and interest. In some cases, such as Carpaccio's Santo Stefano and Albanesi cycles, the author admits that the arrangement must remain conjectural for want of sufficient evidence; but in other cases, such as the *Miracles of the True Cross* cycle for the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista, the published reconstruction will provide a new basis for the study and appreciation of the canvases. But I have one qualification to make about the proposed arrangement: from the description of the room by Francesco Sansovino (1581) one should surely conclude — as did John Bernasconi in an unpublished reconstruction of 1972 — that the order of the canvases on the north wall from right to left should read Bastiani-Gentile-Mansueti, instead of Mansueti-Gentile-Bastiani, as proposed by Brown (p. 282). I wonder, too, whether she should not have given more thought to the possibility that some of the lost works in the Doge's Palace consisted of several scenes on a single canvas with a fictive dividing column, as in Carpaccio's *Departure of St Ursula* and *Martyrdom and Burial of St Ursula.*

Otherwise, the thirteen scenes on the north wall would have had to have been accomodated in fields that would have been uncharacteristically tall and narrow.

The contextual method adopted by Brown is subject to at least two potential dangers. One is that a reader not already familiar with the works and their chronology may lose his bearings, since different aspects of the same work may be discussed in a number of widely separated places. The other is that the parallels drawn between the paintings and the various other aspects of contemporary culture may seem undemonstrable and far-fetched. Brown successfully counters both dangers. A chronological arrangement of the material would in any case be awkward, given the fact that the book is concerned with cycles of paintings, the execution of which sometimes extended over several decades; further, an idea of the appearance of earlier lost works must often be inferred from the study of later, surviving ones. In short, the very nature the material presents difficult problems of organisation, and the author deserves full credit for the skill and clarity with which she handles it. Similarly, her investigation of the broader cultural resonances of her narrative cycles is marked by imagination tempered by admirable good sense. The result is a model of art-historical research and a major contribution to our understanding of Venetian Renaissance art.

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CHRISTIAN HORNIG. *Giorgiones Spätwerk.* München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1987, pp. 263 + 258 b & w. illus. DM 240,—. ISBN 3-7705-2335-0.

The title of Christian Hornig's monograph, 'Giorgiones Spätwerk', suggests a study of an artist in old age, such as Michelangelo or Rembrandt, who developed a radically different risk taking style in his last years; but Giorgione's life spans only some 33 years (1477/8—1510), and his late style encompasses a very short period from the time of his frescoes on the German customs house in Venice of 1508 until his death shortly before 25 October 1510. Despite Hornig's title his monograph attempts a reconstruction of Giorgione's entire œuvre as a preamble and justification for a series of polemical attributions to the late Giorgione. For the most part they are all problematical paintings which are usually though not exclusively given to other artists known to have collaborated with Giorgione, such as the *Concert Champêtre* in the Louvre (usually given to Titian), the newly cleaned *Judgement of Solomon* at Kingston Lacy, Dorset (almost always attributed to Sebastiano del Piombo), *Christ and the Adulteress* in the Glasgow City Art Gallery (usually attributed to Titian), the turning portrait of a youth in a fur coat in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (usually attributed to Palma Vecchio), and the much restored *Storm at Sea* in the Biblioteca della Scuola di San Marco, Venice (usually attributed to Palma with later interventions by Paris Bordone and other restorers). Of a less polemical nature is his attribution to Giorgione of the late self-portrait as David in the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig, which Professor Pignatti unwisely declined to give autograph status to in his catalogue of Giorgione's works (Pignatti, *Giorgione* 1969). In his lengthy entry on the painting, Hornig fails to mention the excellent account of the portrait by Dr Sabine Jacob in her recent exhibition