
Katherine Crawford Luber’s book on Albrecht Dürer has two subjects. The first, as the title suggests, has to do with Dürer’s relationship to Venice and the Renaissance in northern Italy; the second concerns Dürer’s painting as a neglected but essential facet of his art. Indeed, art historical literature has dedicated little attention to Dürer’s painting. The artist’s phenomenally successful prints and his contributions to art theory have commanded the interest of most scholars, leaving few pages for a consideration of his painted oeuvre. But as Luber demonstrates, Dürer’s paintings, particularly those executed during and shortly after his trip to Venice in 1505-1507, are perhaps the clearest indications of his pictorial debt to the Italian Renaissance. It is here that Luber’s two subjects connect. Dürer’s *Feast of the Rose Garlands*, now in Prague, is perhaps the *summa* of the artist’s engagement with Italian painting, as Panofsky once maintained. The composition and the pose and placement of the angels owes much to the art of Giovanni Bellini, whom Dürer greatly admired and with whom he entered into a sort of artistic competition. But as Luber shows, the technique of the painting, Dürer’s specific manner of underdrawing and shading, reveals his greatest debt to the Venetian masters. The landscape background, for instance, is composed with a new type of atmospheric perspective, a delicate muting of the planes and surfaces—quite opposed to the linear manner of depiction that Dürer employed in the *Glimm Lamentation* of only eight years earlier. It was this technique that Dürer would continue to use in several key works, both in painting and engraving. Luber examines Dürer’s new-found manner of depicting volume in several drawings of the time, comparing the artist’s preliminary sketches with the underdrawing on several paintings. The reputation of Dürer as the great master of drawing or *disegno* owes much to the testimony of Erasmus and Vasari. Yet, their interest in the German artist was not well-rounded; Luber shows that there is much to learn from Dürer’s paintings.

It is one of the strengths of Luber’s book that the author has examined the evidence available through x-radiography and infrared reflectography, techniques that have light to shed on fully one third of Dürer’s painted output. This comparative material allows the author to relate the artist’s procedure to that of Venetian painters. Dürer’s use of coloured paper as a support for his drawings is perhaps the most obvious borrowing from his north Italian contemporaries. But his approach to atmosphere, to volume, and to the perception of colour show added contacts. Luber examines Dürer’s short treatise on colour and usefully reprints it with a translation in an appendix.

Luber also confronts the issue of Dürer’s alleged early trip to Venice around 1495, ten or eleven years before he is actually documented in the Lagoon city. This first trip has been accepted as gospel by most commentators on the artist, though the idea of such a journey dates from only the early twentieth-century. Luber suggests that German art historians, in awe of the Italian Renaissance and following the model of Goethe’s two trips to the southern peninsula, brought forth the the-
ory of Dürrer’s similarly paired excursions. But, as Luber shows, there is little evidence to support such a proposition. Scholars have pointed to four paintings that purport to demonstrate Dürrer’s early acquaintance with Venetian art. Yet the attribution or dating of all four pictures has recently been doubted, making these works an unstable bedrock on which to build the theory of such a trip. Furthermore, knowledge of Italian prints, which would have traveled more easily to Nuremberg, would explain other features of Dürrer’s supposed contact. Luber’s examination of the techniques of painting and drawing as they relate to Italian practice offers firmer evidence of Dürrer’s exposure to Venetian painting a decade later. As the author summarizes, there will never be conclusive evidence that Dürrer did not visit Italy in the 1490s, but there is no good reason to credit this assertion.

A final chapter considers Dürrer’s various portraits of Maximilian I. Dürrer first painted the emperor in his Madonna of the Rose Garlands in 1506. Yet Luber is most concerned with the relation between life study and Dürrer’s later portraits: the paintings in Vienna and Nuremberg, the drawing in the British Museum, and the closely related woodcut. The author contributes many insights to our understanding of this later series of images and their interrelationships, but the subject stands rather outside her predominant interests. It is a final essay that considers the artist’s drawing technique and its role as preparatory to presentation paintings, but the references to Venice and the Renaissance are not paramount.

Luber’s study is a valuable contribution to the literature on this prototypical Renaissance artist and to the central question of his debt to Italian developments. The book avoids discussion of Dürrer’s theoretical interests, his immersion in mathematics, and his elevated sense of self as an artist—so removed from the craft tradition of early modern Nuremberg. Rather than providing an overview of Dürrer’s relations with Venice and the south, Luber’s investigations are narrowly focussed and consequently offer important insights into these specific questions.

**Ethan Matt Kavaler**

*University of Toronto*


A beautiful, intelligent, and virtuous Florentine widow spends her life raising an honourable, obedient and naïve young daughter. She offers her daughter as a wife to a charming man of good social standing and on the wedding night the young virgin—adept at following instruction—so pleases her new husband in the bedroom that he questions her honour.

Sixteen years of age and feminine, an angelic young priest visits the country with some friends. He meets a friar who, taking him for a woman, falls in love. All but the friar are amused when, while seducing his beloved, the cleric discovers that the young lady is in fact a boy.

Forced by shame to leave his native Florence after being dishonoured by