half-glimpsed snippets of Matthew Arnold. All in all, it is a fine volume, and one that should readily turn readers to Grafton's other works.

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Monica Chojnacka. *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Pp. xxii, 188.

Working Women in Early Modern Venice is an excellent read, which offers a multifaceted picture of Venetian women in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries. The book certainly fulfils the expectations evoked by its title by focusing in particular on women of lower status — the *popolane*. Chojnacka traces their existence as married women, spinsters, and widows, and their experiences of living at home with their families, with female and male friends and acquaintances, in charitable institutions, or alone. She explores these women's domestic and public worlds, analysing household structures, marriage patterns, kinship ties, work and property relations, notions of community and civic space, migrations and movements, as well as the women's ethnic origins. Drawing on a multiplicity of different sources — parish registers, notarial and financial records, government tax indexes, and Inquisition documents — she adopts an approach at once quantitative and qualitative, which results in a comprehensive study of how *popolane*, as well as their male counterparts, interacted with the city and moved in and out of Venice, its Adriatic territories, and the Mediterranean. Chojnacka employs a clear and accessible style, which makes this a valuable book for a general as well as an academic audience.

One of the book's greatest merits is its assumption that women not of elite status enjoyed a degree of social power — economic resources, residential autonomy, and physical mobility — which gave them “the ability to make independent decisions as well as influence the actions of the other people” (p.xvi). Chojnacka examines the disadvantaged position of women in early modern Venice, underlining the crucial place of gender, status, and ethnic origins in shaping women's relationship with society, and stressing the power of the church, the state, and the family in directing their lives. At the same time, she successfully shows women's capacity to defy social norms, acting and moving around in accordance with their own resources and preferences. In doing this she challenges the idea of women as completely subordinated to the authority of men, whether fathers, husbands, guardians, confessors, state officials, or city governors. Instead, she provides a more complex narrative, according to which women were able to negotiate their lives with a certain degree of autonomy and work around social rigidities and material constraints.

Particularly relevant to this purpose is Chojnacka's analysis of household structures and of gender and property relations. She discusses the variety of living patterns available to women in early modern Venice, showing that they lived with

husbands, fathers, employers, and companions. Furthermore, she portrays Venetian women as possessors, earners, financial actors, and managers of wealth, if often rather modest wealth. Thus we learn about widows, single women, and wives who wrote wills, negotiated leases, challenged debts, or appealed to public institutions and courts in order to defend their property rights. They acted alone or jointly with their husbands or siblings. In reinforcing the centrality of the dowry as a substantial part of these women's material possessions, Chojnacka also identifies different forms of property, distributed across class and marital status. Here she points to the crucial distinction between two ways of defining female wealth: the absolute value of money and land, bringing effective income to its possessors, and the non income-producing value of material objects — domestic goods like wardrobe chests, small items of furniture, clothes, and linen — which could be bequeathed as legacies to other women within the family and beyond it. Women's wealth — and above all that of the *popolane* — primarily consisted of such non income-producing goods. Chojnacka also considers an additional and equally important aspect of women's relations with material culture, describing the variety of jobs performed by Venetian women: selling food, fruits, spices, and other goods on the streets; working as domestic servants, second-hand clothes dealers, linen makers, or even sail-makers and boat-women. These activities provided women with economic support when other sources of wealth, such as inherited goods, were lacking. As the author argues, such forms of wealth endowed these women with power within their household, as well as within the community of their immediate acquaintances.

By assessing household configurations, women's property and possessions, and women's work, Chojnacka also addresses their presence in the public space of the street and the neighbourhood. She rejects the idea that female existence was mainly confined to the domestic and private domains and suggests, on the contrary, that it was deeply woven into the local community. *Popolane* had many direct contacts with their neighbours, and the neighbourhood served to bridge the gap between the household and the city, representing the most obvious space in which women bonded and extended their relations, as well as exerted their influence through friendship, personal ties, economic relations, emotional support and mutual help. She is therefore able to point to the porous boundaries of the domestic space and the range of connections between the domestic and the public spheres. Chojnacka also concentrates on the relevance of both native and immigrant women in local community life. She sketches the identity of the female immigrant population of Venice and its geographical span, showing that in spite of cultural clashes and discrimination, women from different countries and ethnic origins managed to integrate into Venetian society. They brought their diversity of customs and religious beliefs to the world of the indigenous population, thereby enlarging the latter's networks, as well as their symbolic horizons. Finally, Chojnacka offers stimulating comments on women's participation in several civic bodies, including those charitable institutions which hosted poor girls, women from difficult family backgrounds, and redeemed prostitutes. Those women who found shelter in such

charitable institutions, or who were involved in the administration of these places, became socially engaged through their link with all-female communities, which expanded well beyond the circumscribed domestic sphere of the household.

If there is a weak side of Chojnacha's book, it is probably the lack of a genuinely comparative perspective. She does not allow the reader fully to appreciate the peculiarities of the Venetian cases in comparison with other Italian contexts, like the much-studied cases of Florence or Rome, or other European realities; and she provides only short and scattered comments bearing on this question. Nevertheless, her study is a much-needed and well-balanced assessment of the private and public lives of women of lower status, and it offers an excellent understanding of the gender and class dimensions of early modern Venice.

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Leo Steinberg. *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper*. New York: Zone Books, 2001.

The format of this book — an extended essay on one work of art — is itself a battle cry, and a part of its argument. According to Steinberg, Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* is a densely interwoven work whose full resonance of meaning requires slow unfolding, even if the "total harmonic effect" of the work is felt all at once by its viewer. Steinberg's implicit argument throughout is that Leonardo's interpretation of the *Last Supper* is a work of biblical exegesis in its own right, which is to say that it, too, demands careful examination and interpretation by a well-versed exegete. The model of transmission and commentary here is not very far from that of the Talmud, which Steinberg studied as a young man.

The difference is that here one of the "texts" is visual. If the world of biblical texts bristles with exegetical debate, in the world of biblical pictures Steinberg often finds himself all alone. Throughout his career Steinberg has been at pains to show that to read works of Renaissance art — such as the frescoes of the Sistine ceiling and Leonardo's *Last Supper*, not to mention any number of smaller devotional works — as well-behaved history paintings in the academic manner of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to flatten them and to tame them, to fail to see their persistent confounding of temporal logic, to deny their invitations to polysemic thinking, to refuse the open structures by which they are connected to their physical environments and invite their viewers' participation.

The first order of business, therefore, is to break the spell of the academic discourse that has dominated painting and sculpture since the seventeenth century. In the case of the *Last Supper*, one must contend with no less an authority than Goethe, who in 1817 offered the classic reading of the painting as a drama occasioned by Christ's announcement that one of the apostles will betray him. In the Enlightenment reading the painting respects the dramatic unity of time by emphasizing the momentary response of the apostles. It engages the universal