
PAPERBOUNDS

VENICE: A Portable Reader. Edited by Toby Cole. Lawrence Hill, 1980. 242 pp. \$6.95 (cloth, \$12.95)

With its 28 miles of canals, Venice—which still holds the record for the world's longest-lived republic (727–1797)—has always captured travelers' imaginations. Abundant cause is found in this collection of 28 writings by historians, artists, novelists, and critics, including Edward Gibbon, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, and Bernard Berenson. Driven onto 118 tiny islands in an Adriatic lagoon by invading Lombards in the 6th century, mainland natives became Venetians in "fits and starts," notes historian James Morris. After evolving "an amphibious society peculiar to herself," Venice began brisk trade with the Orient; for more than 1,000 years, the city-republic stood alone, "one foot in Europe, the other paddling in the pearls of Asia." A sizeable fleet provided protection from both Eastern and Western rivals. But there was little defense at home against tyrannical doges, patricians who ruled with a ruthlessness that won praise from Niccolò Machiavelli. Today, pollution and floods, caused in part by over-dredged canals, corrode the city's buildings, unchecked. Once "somewhere between a freak and fairy tale—the worldliest of all cities"—Venice is an artifact whose history outshines its prospects.

THE JAMES FAMILY. By F. O. Matthiessen. Vintage reprint, 1980. 706 pp. \$7.95

Transcendentalist, master of rhetoric, Henry James, Sr. (1811–82) made "humanity seem more erect," Henry Thoreau observed. Concerned with the spiritual fate of the common man, the elder James—father of novelist Henry Jr., phi-

losopher William, and journalist Alice—led lively family debates on religion, philosophy, science, society, and literature. Henry Jr. (1854–1916) agreed with his father that no experience was wasted "so long as it stirred the mind to reflection." William (1842–1910), the eldest, deplored his father's "unsystematic" approach to facts. A Harvard physiologist "during the era . . . when both psychology and philosophy had close connections with biology," William faulted his brother's fiction for its "thinness," its tendency to "give a certain impression of the author clinging to his gentlemanliness though all else be lost." Critic Matthiessen (1902–50) lets these tireless observers of American and European life emerge largely through their own letters and essays. Although he ranks the Jameses among America's major thinkers, he shuns labeling any one of them as representative of a particular 19th-century American (or European) school of thought. Each was, as William said of brother Henry, "a native of the James family."

SEEING THROUGH CLOTHES. By Anne Hollander. Avon reprint, 1980. 504 pp. \$8.95

"Clothes make, not the man but the image of man." Art historian Hollander argues that, throughout Western history, people have gotten their notions about what is stylish, or "natural," from pictorial representations and not from one another. Early Christian, medieval, and Renaissance artists, for example, influenced by classical sculpture, depicted Jesus and his apostles in the tunics of ancient statesmen and sages. Classical clothing thus became "suitable dress for holy persons." Hollander concedes that some clothes were invented with a useful pur-



Costume Institute
of the Metropolitan
Museum of Art.

pose in mind, but often style won out. For example, lapels on military jackets were designed to keep the chest warm, but they "speedily atrophied into decorative flaps." Thanks to art, tight-laced waists, necks collared in millstone ruffs, and blue-jeaned legs have all seemed "comfortable, beautiful, and natural in their time."

AMOSKEAG: Life and Work in an American Factory-City. By Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Langenbach. Pantheon reprint, 1980. 394 pp. \$5.95

The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, which during the early 1900s was the world's largest textile plant, made the city of Manchester, N.H. At its peak, Amoskeag employed some 17,000 people, two-thirds of Manchester's workers. The company's absentee Boston owners modeled Manchester on the factory town of Lowell, Mass. In 1860, Manchester's labor-force was 27 percent foreign (mostly Irish), and by 1910, 35 percent of the workers were French Canadians. Hareven, a historian, and Langenbach, an architectural historian and photographer, spent four years researching the company's records and talking with more than 300 aging Amoskeag factory hands and managers. Some 35 interviews have

been assembled here, together with photos. The "self-contained world" of Amoskeag lasted for a century (1838-1936). Company welfare programs effectively discouraged unionization until after World War I. Even those most affected by Amoskeag's gradual decline (due to Southern competition, outdated machinery, management inefficiency, and—after unionization in the 1920s—high wages) look back on their days at the factory with great fondness. Ernest Anderson began working at Amoskeag in 1917 at age 14. "A lot of [the millyard] is torn down today," he says, "but . . . I can see those mills, how they flourished at one time, and I don't feel as old as I am—it's as if I was just walking through . . . ready to go to work again."

THE GOOD WORD AND OTHER WORDS. By Wilfrid Sheed. Penguin reprint, 1980. 300 pp. \$3.95

Novelist Sheed has chided literary critics who pounce on a book's "deep flaws" and show little patience with experimenters. His own appraisals are informed by an author's empathy with fellow craftsmen and a discerning eye. George Orwell, he reflects, "wrote best about the things he hated. When he tried to write lyrically, it came out stilted and anonymous." Others whose prose Sheed examines are Edmund Wilson ("forthright to the point of gullibility"), Walker Percy (he typifies "the old case against symbols: if you get them, they seem obvious and artificial, and if you don't, you miss the whole point"), Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald ("together, they make one hell of a writer"). Sheed skewers the literary ratings game: "When a reviewer says that Malamud is second only to Bellow, it means he isn't really thinking about either of them. When he's reading Malamud, he's thinking about Bellow, and when he's reading Bellow he's thinking about Roth."