English Perceptions and Representations of Venetian Chromatic Variations

Anne Geoffroy

▶ To cite this version:

Anne Geoffroy. English Perceptions and Representations of Venetian Chromatic Variations. E-rea - Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone, 2015, 12.2, 10.4000/erea.4509 . hal-04345217

HAL Id: hal-04345217

https://hal.uvsq.fr/hal-04345217v1

Submitted on 14 Dec 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

E-rea
Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone

12.2 | 2015
1. La syntaxe du discours direct en anglais / 2. "The Dyer's Hand": Colours in Early Modern England

English Perceptions and Representations of Venetian Chromatic Variations

Anne GEOFFROY

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/erea/4509
DOI: 10.4000/erea.4509
ISBN: ISSN 1638-1718
ISSN: 1638-1718

Publisher
Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur le Monde Anglophone

Brought to you by Université de Versailles St-Quentin-en-Yvelines

Electronic reference
Anne GEOFFROY, "English Perceptions and Representations of Venetian Chromatic Variations", *E-rea* [Online], 12.2 | 2015, Online since 15 June 2015, connection on 14 December 2023. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/erea/4509 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.4509

This text was automatically generated on August 9, 2023.

The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

English Perceptions and Representations of Venetian Chromatic Variations

Anne GEOFFROY

Dans *Adieu au langage*, à un moment, il y a une boîte de couleurs, de l'aquarelle. Faut-il en déduire que, pour vous, peindre, c'est un des derniers langages qui existent?
J'avais fait cela en espérant que quelqu'un, pour lui-même, penserait qu'il y a là quelqu'un qui a un encrier et de l'encre — le noir, l'impression —, et puis, de l'autre, il y a une boîte de couleurs. Penserait que, d'un côté, il y a le texte, et de l'autre, l'image. Ici, si on était tous les deux, je prendrais plutôt une boîte de couleurs, et puis, vous, je vous laisserais l'encrier. Les gens me demandent ce que ça veut dire. Moi, je filme un état de fait.[1]
(Godard, 18-19)

1 In the third and last part of his *Gentleman's Exercise* published in 1612,[2] the poet and writer Henry Peacham devised a dialogue between Cosmopolites, a young scholar in heraldry, and Endaemon, a teacher. The book purports to deal with blazons, together "with a more Philosophicall and particular examination of the causes of colours and their participation, with the light according to the opinions as well of Ancient as late writers" (139). The craze for coats of arms was not something new during James's reign, and one of the most popular heraldic works of the 16th century was Gerard Legh's *Accedens of Armorie* (1562) — to whom Peacham seems highly indebted for the colloquy form. In Legh's manual, colour is the second headword in the list of entries, just like in *The Gentleman's Exercise.* Peacham's advice does not, however, strictly limit itself to

questions of colours in heraldry. On the contrary, writing about colours leads him to summon the broader field of optics as can be seen in the following extract:

> This colour blew doth participate lesse of the light then the white colour, for striking it selfe vpon this colour it is rarified and dispersed, as on the contrarie it is thickned and more condensate in red, as by a most pleasant and delightfull experiment wee may perceiue in a three square cristal prisme, wherin you shal perceiue the blew to be outmost next to that the red, the reason is, that the extreme parts of a perspicuous bodie shine and yeelde a more faint light then the middle as appeareth by *Opticke*, and the light is receiued by fewer beames in the outmost edges then into the midst, so that yee perceiue first while in the middest then red and blew in the extremes seene (Peacham 150).

2 It seems from this passage that by 1612, the experiment with the "three square crystal prism" was not only reserved for natural philosophers but may also have been widespread among the general public, and Peacham insists on the pleasure the reader could derive from it. Indeed, his work was published at a time when many experiments were being carried out, shifting the focus away from the medieval debate between "apparent" and "real" colours to explore the notion of light alone.[3] Peacham's comments are a case in point since we can infer from his explanations that colour was thought of as a property of light. In other words, "brightness" and "saturation" were recurring keywords in early modern debates on colour, and his demonstration typically relies on ancient theories while drawing on natural phenomena.

3 At the beginning of James's reign, after the Gunpowder plot trial, Thomas Harriot had been working on optics in 1605-1606, more precisely on the dispersion of light into colour, and he had been using a triangular prism (Gage 1993, 54). At the same period, the sketch of "An Apparatour"[4] which was added to Sir Thomas Overbury's collection of characters emphasized the sinful and sinister quality of this occupation by foregrounding a dark symbolic landscape of nooks and crannies. The "apparatour" is clearly associated to the devilish raven[5] and interestingly draws on the science of optics and colours: "[...] he studied opticks, but can discover no colour but blacke, for the pure white of chastity dazzleth his eyes" (Overbury, "An apparatour", sig. G.). A few years later, in 1629, the hermetic philosopher Robert Fludd was the first to imagine a colour circle in which red was the intermediate between black and white, thus slightly changing the Aristotelian linear scale, but still sticking to the notion that black and white were two hues situated at the extremes of the system (Gage 1993, 9 and 171). It was not until Newton actually turned the prism into a complex optical instrument, almost sixty years later, that the chromatic spectrum we know today was made apparent.[6]

4 Now, Peacham's *Gentleman's Exercise* provides a relevant starting point for this essay which intends to examine the way Venetian colours were imagined or actually perceived and represented in early modern England. Of course, the study of colours then cut across a multitude of disciplines, but here, Venice's cultural and material influence on British minds will necessarily be seen through a restricted selection of topics, mainly science, language and art.

1. Decolourizing, or the Venetian *cristallo*

5 As a matter of fact, the use of the triangular prism as an optical instrument seems to date back to the middle of the 16th century.[7] John Gage refers to what he thinks is

probably one of the first occurrences of the phrase *vitrum triangulare* in an a text by the Venetian Filippo Mocenigo, appointed in 1560 as Archbishop of Nicosia (Gage 130, note 50), a place he left just before the Turks conquered the island of Cyprus in 1570 (Mocenicus 307). In Venice, Mocenigo, who belonged to a rich and renowned patrician family,[8] was mostly known as a philosopher and had many friends at the university of Padua (Bonara 215). His work on optics led him to establish a system articulated around three fundamental chromatic shades: *flavus* (yellow), *hyacinthinus* (blue) and *ruber* (red), with the colour red being closer to black than blue (Gage 1999, 129, note 46; Mocenicus 305). Despite its atypical nature, this theory was nonetheless taken up by the Italian physician Guido Antonio Scarmiglioni who dedicated his *De Coloribus* (1601) to the Emperor Rudolf II.

6 As Gage puts it, it is probably no coincidence that the earliest known reference to experiments with the triangular prism was found in a Venetian source, given the quality of glass the Venetians were already able to produce. Glassmakers had their own guild, which dated back to 1301, and had to follow strict regulations to keep trade secrets in Murano. In the 15th century, glassblowers were able to achieve the transparency of rock crystal, thus giving birth to the renowned *cristallo*. So there must have been a close link between the city's cutting-edge technology and contemporary science. Ironically, it was the Venetians' ability to decolourize glass which led to the later discovery of the prism. In that respect, the cultural gap which separates early 16th-century England from the next century could not be made more tangible than through such examples as Thomas More's *Confutation To Tyndale Answer*, which referred to the "mervailes that appear in crystal stones, and such superticious conjurations" (sig. cxcvi) as opposed to the true miracle of the Church and, one century later, as Thomas Harriot, complaining about the poor quality of the prism he was using (quoted in Gage 1999, 130, note 48).[9]

7 Interestingly, one of the first English attempts to account for the purity of the Venetian *cristallo* was by Fynes Moryson, a graduate from Oxford, who arrived in Venice in the spring of 1594:

> The windowe are for the most part very large, the greater rooms lying almost altogether open to receive air, but the lodging chambers have glasse windowes, whereof the Venetian brag, glasse being rare in *Italy*, where the windowes are for the most part covered with linen or paper. And howsoever glasse be common with us this side of the Alpes, yet it is certaine that the glasse makers of *Venice,* dwelling in the Iland *Murano*, have a more noble matter &thereof make much better glasse than we can. (Book II, chap. 1, 89)

8 Although Moryson did not mention the raw materials used by Murano glass blowers — *i.e.* a mixture of soda plant-ash from the Levant (*alume catino*) and silica (Janssens, 6.2.4.1) — he actually insisted on the excellence of this "more noble matter" (Moryson 89). This reference is inserted within a description of the design of Venetian palaces and of the extensive use of glass as part and parcel of the city's architecture, allowing a quick glimpse at the city's affluence and degree of sophistication.

9 It was also in 1594 that Jacopo Verzelini, the first Venetian glassmaker to establish a successful business in London, was to lose the monopoly he had secured as early as 1572 in Crutched Friers, near the Tower of London, succeeding Jean Carré from Antwerp (Powell 27).[10] By 1574, the glasshouse was granted a license by Elizabeth I for the production of Venetian-style glass for 21 years, and at the end of the 16th century,

there was not only a growing number of imports of both Venetian and "façon de Venise" glasswares, but also a thriving glass industry in England (Willmot 271).

10 In his *Crudities* published only one year before Peacham's *Exercise*,[11] Thomas Coryate reported that he went to Murano and blew a glass himself. However, the recipe he gave his reader about the composition of the *cristallo* remains extremely vague and questionable:

> I passed in a gondola to pleasant Murano distant about a mile from the citie, where they make their delicate Venice glasses, so famous over all Christendome for the incomparable fineness thereof, and in one of their working houses made a glass myself. Most of their principall matter whereof they make their glasses is a kind of earth which is brought thither by Sea from Drepanum a goodly haven towne of Sicilie, where Aenas buried his aged father Anchises (Coryate 248).

11 The traveller's idiosyncratic rhetoric of blending facts and myth resurfaces here, shifting the focus from the far-fetched geographical origin of the matter (Drepanum, now Trapani) to the mythical legend taken from the *Aeneid* (Book III). While the reference to Antiquity is meant to endow his account with heroic gloss, it actually testifies to what extent the traveller is ready to colour his text for literary appeal. Furthermore, it may seem odd that neither Moryson nor Coryate offer graphic details about the artistic styles of the various artifacts produced in the Murano furnaces given their extraordinary output and influence. The English traveller thus appears to be no more interested in the technological side of the craft than in its aesthetics. The fact that these early modern writers do not portray themselves as consumers is also noteworthy. They give no clue, for instance, about the glass fashion at the time they were visiting the city, and no mention is made either of the various items to be found (beads, mirrors, vessels...) and the rich glassware palette. Last but not least, while these precious artifacts could be enameled, painted, tinted or colored (or even mistaken for precious stones), the specific technique known as *millefiori* is not even mentioned.[12] Ironically, Coryate was much more intent on drawing the reader's attention to the natural colour of the oysters of Murano, which were "as green as leeke"(249)!

12 A few years later, while James Howell was in Venice in 1618 as assistant to Sir Robert Mansell (who had been owning the glass monopoly in London since 1615), he was fascinated by the perfection of crystal-glass, which he related to the quality of the air in the Venetian lagoon. In a letter to his brother dated 1621, he extols the exquisite lustre of the crystal-glass, resulting from a mixture of science and art:

> [...] it being a rare kind of knowledge and Chymistry, to transmute Dust and Sand (for they are the only main ingredients) to such a diaphanous pellucid dainty Body as you see a Crystall glass is [...]. (Howell, Letter XXIV, "To my Brother", June 1st, 1621)

13 Howell's letter shows an acute awareness of the virtuosity of Venetian glass blowers and reveals his taste for aesthetically refined objects. During Charles I's reign, the circulation of collectible items rose significantly under the guidance of the Earl of Arundel. Venetian glass was then imported together with paintings, as the following note testifies:

> That the English ambassador be permitted as a favour to export 10 cases of chrystal glass and nine of pictures, which he is sending to England for the service of his Majesty and the Earl of Arundel, free of duty, which would amount to about 40 ducats (Horatio R. F. Brown vol. 23 [1632-1636], n°510: 14th July 1635).

14 Not only does the note shed light on the privileged relationship between Venice and the Caroline court, but it also confirms to what extent British taste and British understanding of colour or colourlessness had improved since the beginning of the century. Venetian colours were now closely associated with the collecting mentality.[13]

2. Dyeing in Venice and social data

15 As Michel Pastoureau has shown, "[l]'étoffe et le vêtement sont les premiers supports de la couleur" (Pastoureau 2010, 240). The oldest regulations of the dyeing craft that we have today date back from a Venetian statute issued in 1243. However, the Venetian dyers had probably formed a fraternity (*confraternita*) as early as the end of the 12th century (Pastoureau 2008, 234, note 24). Just as with the glass industry, there was a strict oversight of the dyeing industry. The *Tintori*'s guild, which had moved to the Servites Church, could pride itself on having no less than ninety names of dyers in 1609,[14] testifying to this flourishing branch of the textile industry (Brunello 205). Venice was also the place where the best dyeing manuals were printed. In England, the dyers' guild was similarly founded in the 12th century and it received a Royal Charter in 1471.

16 Pastoureau also reminds us that the first function of colour is to classify. No wonder, therefore, that the traveller Thomas Coryate articulated the ranks of the Venetian *clarissimoes* to the colours they wore when he set out to portray the social texture of the city. In this specific case, what is made manifest is that colours entail meaning for the English traveller. The first passage in the *Crudities* incorporating a social analysis of colours occurs when he depicts *Piazza san Marco* and "its famous concourse and meeting of so many distinct and sundry nations twice a day. [...] For you shall not see as much as one Venetian there of the Patrician ranke without his blacke gowne and tippet" (175). Perhaps not coincidentally, in his *First Fruits* (1578), John Florio inserted a proverb emphasizing the superiority of black, and which may well have been a common saying in Venice: "Over God there is no Lord, / Over black there is no colour, / Over salt there is no savour" (33).

17 Yet, Shakespeare did not take up the *cliché* in his Venetian plays. Likewise, in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, the colour black does not suggest reverence. Although Jonson alludes to the austere character of Venetian fashion when Sir Politik instructs Peregrine on how he should dress,[15] the colour black is on the contrary associated with a devilish bestiary of birds of prey, feeding on carrion (*i.e.* Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino, the Italian names for "vulture", "raven" and "crow"), which comes as no surprise given the play's affinity with the beast fable. Just as it has been common for directors to have Corvino black-robed on stage, it may also have been the case when the King's Men performed at the Globe in 1605.

18 Reverting to the *Crudities*, one finds another enlightening passage when the narrative entails a lot of data dealing with the Venetian social hierarchy, described though the prism of colours:

> Most of their gownes are made of black cloth, nad over their shoulder they have a flappe made of the same cloth, and edged with black taffeta [...] There are others also that wear other gownes according to their distinct offices and degrees; as they that are of the Council of tenne (which are as it were the maine body of the whole estate) doe most commonly wear blacke chamlet gownes, with marveilous long

> sleeves that reach almost downe to the ground. Again they that weare red chamlet gownes with long sleeves, are those that are called *Savi*, whereof some have authority onely by land, as beeing the principal overseers of the Podesta'es and Praetors in their land cities, and some by sea. There are others also that weare blew cloth gownes with blew flappes over their shoulders, edged with Taffeta. Upon every festival day the Senators, and greatest Gentllemen that accompany the Duke to the Church, or at any other place, doe weare crimson damask gownes [...]. (Coryate 259)

19 Because crimson cloth was dyed from kermes (the most expensive pigment for red which was extracted from insects), this shade was connected to princely luxury and submitted to high standards of production. The fact that Coryate does not provide any commentary on the Kermes dye not only reveals his lack of interest in the technique of this specific trade, but it also testifies that for early modern British travellers, the lustre of Venice was first and foremost political. Incidentally, in 1581, the English merchant Lawrence Aldersey, then on his way to Jerusalem, also noted the red colour worn by the most influential members of the Venetian Republic: "Of the Seigniory there be about three hundreth, and about fourtie of the priuie Counsell of *Venice,* who vsually are arayed in gownes of crimsen Satten, or crimsen Damaske, when they sit in Counsell" (Aldersey 151). As for Fynes Moryson, having reached Turkey in 1596, he explained that "Venetians bring into Turkey wollen cloths, which they call broad, being dyed scarlet, violet and all colours, and they are so strong and well-made that they will last very long, so that the Turks prefer them before our English cloths" (Moryson Part I, Book 3, quoted in Parker 143).

20 By the end of the 16th century, gaudy colours were thus fully integrated to the discourse on Venice sartorial splendour. Moreover, the description of the ghetto also gives Coryate another opportunity to make national distinctions thanks to colours: "The Turkes wear white, the Jewes yellow" (231). Likewise, women fall into two categories, *i.e.* wives and maids, according to the colour of their veils: black, white or yellowish (Coryate 261). Moreover, while the traveller keenly encapsulates all the subtleties of the city's social structure and the chromatic nuances inherent to status, he takes advantage of his account to adopt a derogatory stance towards English sartorial habits, condemning both English design and colours. If the Venetian black is perceived as "a colour of gravity and decency" (260), Coryate takes up the topical issue of the extravagance of British fashion (viewed as "phantasticall" by Italians) and expands on his contemporaries' lack of taste on a hyperbolic mode: "For whereas they have but one colour, we use many more then are in the Rain-bow, all the most light, garish, and unseemly colours that are in the world" (*ibid.*).

21 Obviously, on the English stage, both metaphors of rainbow and chameleon were conjured up to denounce hypocrisy, falseness and ability to 'make legs' when necessary, one of the most famous lines being pronounced by Richard of Gloucester (later to become Richard III) in *3 Henry VI*. As Richard tells the audience about his Protean-like character and his mastery of colours, he slyly observes: "I can add colours to the chameleon" (3.2.191), thereby building his self-portrait of the archetypal villain by foregrounding his own skill in outdoing the exotic animal. In George Chapman's city comedy, *Monsieur d'Olive* (1606), the eponymous character (who epitomizes the Jacobean foppish gallant) descants on the chromatic scale of humours, boasting of a precise knowledge of the variations in the physiological code of gallant behaviour:

> As your cameleon varies all colours of the Rainbow, both white and red, so must your true courtier be able to varie his countenance through all humours — state,

> strangeness, scorn, mirth, melancholy, flattery, and so forth; some colors likewise his face may change upon occasion, black or blue it may, tawny it may, but red and white at no hand [...] (3.2.24-30, Act III, sig. E3).

22 Chapman's character draws on both the Aristotelian linear scale and the galenic theory of humours to work out his doctrine of decorum, allowing courtiers to wear only the darkest colours — black symbolizing the melancholic character, while red and white respectively referred to the sanguine and the phlegmatic temperaments. If colours, be they sartorial or humoural, are thus often representative of double-dealing in English post-Reformation culture, another issue concerns the multiple frauds that occurred in the dying industry.

23 While regulations were extremely strict, the authorities had to adapt to a changing market using less expensive pigments from overseas. Given the numerous trials linked to colour frauds in early modern Europe, there grew a common distrust of dyers who managed to swindle customers by adding cheaper pigments and adulterating colours. Sometimes, it was even revealed that the dyers were not dyers by trade.[16] As black stood for purity in the Venetian dress code, it became crucial for the city to produce the finest hues of black, despite the great difficulty of obtaining a true black. In his 1578 *First Fruites*, Florio probably drew on the Italian/Venetian context when he devised a vivid situation starting with the proverb "*In panno bon colore* / In cloth good colour" and leading to a dialogue registering a citizen's suspicion towards the reliability of dyers. This dialogue eventually turns out to hold up a mirror to 'masters and servant' relations:

> -Yea, but seldome tymes is that found, the other day I bought me a cloake of blacke cloth, and the colour is alredy stayned, certis Dyers are very false now adayes.
> -Sir, I wyl tel you, blame not the Dyers, for they doo as they are commaunded by the Drapers.
> (Florio 36)

24 Masters are here perceived as people who "promise much but don't do much" (*ibid.*). In the medieval period, only dyers specialized in blue were allowed to dye in black, and different techniques were used to stabilize the pigment derived from nutgall. In the passage quoted above, Florio not only reflects on the discontent of customers regarding black clothes, but he also draws on this example to introduce more general views on service relationships in a nascent capitalist society. The correlation between the falsity of dyers and the falsity of masters is indeed instrumental in representing the way service was perceived and allowing the servant to voice his frustration. Such a correlation thus undoubtedly mirrors the English experience of ancillary functions and foregrounds Iago's denunciation of "the curse of service" (1.1.35) in *Othello*.

3. Venetian *colorito*: the linguistic heritage

> All that glisters is [not] gold
> (William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 2.7.65)

25 Owing to its Byzantine heritage, Venice is first and foremost viewed as a golden city. While the first image which comes to mind is undoubtedly the golden mosaics of St Mark Cathedral, the colour gold may also be traced into the social, economical and religious fabric of the city: one thinks here of the ring of gold which is cast into the Sea by the Doge on Ascension Day, of the coin of pure gold known as the ducat dating back to 1284, or of the winged golden lion of St Mark, to quote just a few examples.[17]

26 Now, while the perception of Venetian colours in the early modern English imagination undoubtedly benefits from bringing the study of material culture into the frame, it also gains from a close study of what colours then associated with the mere name of Venice could conjure up. The existence of a Venetian colour palette in the 16th century is indeed made palpable through several collocations in the English language. Thus, focusing on the lexical enrichment entailed in colour terminology enables us to assess the impact of Venice on British culture.

27 Strikingly enough, "Venice gold" stands out as the most common collocation in the texts of the period. Venice gold thread was already a fashionable item at the end of the 14th century at the court of King Richard II (Sylvester 68). It "consisted of finely beaten foil cut into strips and wound spirally round a silk core" (Campbell 133), a tricky operation carried out by the members of the *Tira e Batti oro* trade. Even though it did not compare with genuine Constantinople gold thread, it sold well in the north of the Italian peninsula (Stuard 211).

28 In Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the vignette dealing with Gremio's description of the furniture in his city-house contains a well-known reference to this typical golden thread, and as such, it certainly allows a glimpse at the fashion prevailing for interior decoration in England: "Valence of Venice gold in needlework" (2.1.366). Whether Valence refers to the city in Spain or Valence near Lyons in France, the piece of fabric was made of very thin silk, conveying the idea of luxury, as the whole catalogue of items does. The reference to the Venetian luxury industry is probably one of the earliest occurrences in the Shakespearian canon.

29 Yet, such an industry was already well known before Shakespeare's time. The *OED* provides us with five English references to Venice gold. One of them dates back to 1535 and is taken from the inventory of Katherine of Aragon's wardrobe: "fringid with grene silk and Venysse golde" (Nichols 26). Another dates from 1558: "Aperns of white gowlde snarsnetedged with veniys gowlde fringe" (Feuillerat 40). But Elizabeth Salter notes that there were already many references to Venice gold in the *Accounts of the Revels* at the beginning of Henry VIII's reign, and she notably cites the festivities organized to celebrate the meeting of the French king at Calais in 1521 (Salter 69-70). Now, in *A Dialogue of Sir Thomas More*, better known as *A Dialogue against Heresies* (1529), we do actually find one of the earliest fictional mentions of the Venice gold thread: "Then was there yet a monk standing at the altar that hallowed certain threads of venice gold" (Second Book, Chapter X, sig. lxi). In his polemic against pilgrimages, worshipping images and miracles, Sir Thomas More associates the craft of knitting "venice gold" with false miracles and gullible pilgrims. Although the Protestant Coryate does not explicitly refer to this prized Italian item in his detailed description of the Venetian courtesan's gown and petticoat, the "deep gold fringe " and "rich gold fringe" expected to lure the visitors intricately intertwine with the caveat the traveller is putting to his reader (Coryate 266).

30 Unsurprisingly, while the ubiquitous presence of gold in Venetian clothes can be observed in the works of the Venetian painters, it is probably worth mentioning here that Giovanni Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura, scoltura, et architettura*, published in 1584 and translated into English by the Oxford physician Richard Haydocke in 1598, provided a definition of the Venetian school of painting as mainly colorist. Lomazzo actually focused on a single pigment to characterize their style: "burnt orpiment is the color of gold and it is the alchemy of the Venetian painters" (Lomazzo chapter 3, 99,

sig. Iiij). The yellow mineral (*auripigmentum*) — an arsenic compound imported to Venice from Turkey — was highly prized by alchemists and could be turned to tawny orange and ochre when mixed with realgar. Since the end of the 15th century, it had been possible to purchase pigments at colour sellers' shops (*vendecolori*). The trade derived from the guild of apothecaries and was unique in Venice at the time. Recent scientific analysis has highlighted the way Italian painters added numerous layers of pigments, thus creating complex glazing hues. Among the numerous examples of burnt orpiment in Renaissance Venetian painting, Veronese's banquet scene *Marriage at Cana*, commissioned by the monks of San Giorgio Maggiore and completed in 1563 for the refectory of the Palladian building, is a case in point, since Coryate mentions this painting in his account. While Veronese's depiction of Jesus's first miracle gives way to a rich description of Venetian aristocratic lifestyle, the painting greatly relies on colour contrasts. Among the hundred and fifty characters who attend the wedding, several key figures wear golden clothes, not least the character on the right hand side of the painting, who pours wine from a jug and is made to witness Jesus's miracle, or the Ottoman character on the left, who may have been Suleyman. Given the outstanding mastery of Veronese's technique and his brilliant use of colours, today's readers experience both frustration and bafflement at Coryate's lack of aesthetic response to Venetian *colore*. Oddly enough, if the painting is still praised today for its magnitude, the traveller's comment only deals with the sheer size of the canvas: "[...] their hall or refectory, where there is a passing faire picture of an exceeding breadth and length, containing the history of Christs sitting at the table at the marriage at Cana in Galilie" (245), leaving out personal response to the pictorial technique.

31 As a matter of fact, Coryate's limited appreciation of painting is counterbalanced by his admiration for the colourful pavements in mosaic in Saint Mark, "[...] made of sundry little pieces of Thasian, Ophiticall, and Laconicall marble in checker worke, and other most exquisite conveyances, and those of many severall colours" (207), or for the astounding shades of marble.[18] Fynes Moryson strikingly focuses on the same details: "The Marble pillars set in Caues vnder the Church, beare vp the pauement, which is made of peeces of the best marble, carued and wrought with little stones of checker worke very curiously, especially vnder the middle globe of the roofe, and neere the great doore" (7). So, on the whole, these accounts have more to do with materials such as porphyrie, brass, brick, alabaster than with pigments, and their significant loopholes illustrate long-standing prejudices against the lavish colours associated with the Catholic faith.

32 Interestingly, other associations between Venice and colour in the English language date from the early modern period. As early as 1538, Sir Thomas Elyot wrote an entry devoted to the word "venetus" in his *Dictionary*: "Venetus, ta, tum: of Venyce. Also the colour of light blue or blunkat" (V ante E). The reference to Venice is unfortunately lost in Randle Cotgrave's translation of "couleur perse": "skie colour; azur colour, a Blunket or light blue".[19] However, one of Cotgrave's entries does offer another intriguing example of a then familiar association: "Venise: Ceruse, white lead (wherewith some women paint)".[20] Venice ceruse, which was considered the best one, was made by mixing vinegar with lead and it was used as a cosmetics to whiten the face and chest, as can be seen in the numerous portraits of Elisabeth I. In spite of its toxicity, the deadly pigment, which ate away at the wearer's skin, was highly fashionable in England at the time. It could also be used as a pigment for painters. In *The Act of Drawing with the Pen, and Limning in Water Colours* (1606), Peacham devotes a whole section to "Venice ceruse"

as part of his chapter on the various hues of white (55), and he advises British gentlemen to “take blew bice and Venice ceruse for a skie colour” (“of Mingling Colours for all Manners of Garments and Drapery”, 98).

33 No wonder if in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, dominated by hues of black and white, one also notices a blue scape motif at the beginning of the second act. This corresponds to the in-between moment when the scene has already been displaced to Cyprus and when “brave Othello” is expected to arrive. The “tableau” represents an “indistinct” alchemical mingling of sea and sky, blurring the boundaries between “the main and the aerial blue” (2.1.38), conveying an uncanny impression of pause or delay as well as a sense of rupture after the tempest and before the onset of the Moor’s personal tragedy. Not unlike Titian, Shakespeare contributes to landscape painting, revisiting in his own way the mythical association of Venice with the sea.

Conclusion: ‘eyes wide shut’

34 All in all, while Peacham’s works have provided a frame to this paper, his own knowledge of colours does not give an accurate picture of the prevailing attitudes to colours in early modern England. On the whole, colour was associated to fabrics and rhetoric, as Coryate makes plain at the very beginning of his section on Venice: “Though the incomparable and most decantated majestie of this citie doth deserve a farre more elegant and curious pencil to paint her in her colours than mine” (159). No less significantly, Lewis Lewkenor also portrays himself as an “unskillful painter” in his dedicatory epistle to the Lady Anne, Countess of Warwick, prefacing his translation of Gasparo Contarini’s *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599, 2), published a year before the first quarto of *The Merchant of Venice*. Although Lewkenor’s travails in the Italian language initiated a new phase in the British representation of Venice, reduplicating Contarini’s portrait of an idealized city, one of the four prefatory sonnets which follow Lewkenor’s epistle — the one written by John Astley (whose own father had been to Padua in 1554) — strikes an ambivalent note emphasizing vice and deliberately spoiling the image of the Virgin city. The ambivalence is taken one step further with the final couplet and its punning rhyme on “dye”, testifying both to the poet’s reluctance to pay tribute to Venetian glory and, more generally, to a typically English defiance to colour at the time:

> Now I prognosticate thy ruinous case,
> When thou shalt from thy Adriatique Seas,
> View this Ocean Isle thy painted face,
> In these pure colours coyest eyes to please,
> Then gazing in thy shadowes peereles eye,
> Enamou’d like Narcissus thou shalt dye.
> (Contarini 4)

35 These ambiguous lines, poised as they are between fascination and rejection, also tend to show that, even though there was an obvious prejudice against hues and tinctures in Post-Reformation England, along with a widespread belief that colour, symbolically associated to flesh, was essentially a means to hide (“*celare*”), Vasari’s prejudice against colour was not yet totally ingrained into the English discourse on art, as would be the case with Sir Joshua Reynolds (*Discourses on Art*, IV) in the next century. This, however, is a different story.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aldersey, Laurence. *The First Voyage or Journey, made by Master Laurence Aldersey, Marchant of London, to the Cities of Ierusalem, and Tripolis, &c. In the yeere 1581. Penned and set downe by himself, in Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Nauigations*, London, 1599-1600, STC (2nd ed.) 12625. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Beecher, Donald (ed). *Characters, together with Poems, News, Edicts, and Paradoxes based on the eleventh edition of A Wife Now the Widow of Sir Thomas Overbury*, Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2003. Print.

Bonara, Elena. "Heresy of a Venetian Prelate, Filippo Mocenigo" in *Heresy, Culture, and Religion in Early Modern Italy: Contexts and Contestations*, eds. Ronald K. Delph, Michelle Fontaine and John Jeffries Martin, Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2006: 211-29. Print.

Brown, Horatio R. F. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscript Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice*, 38 vols, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, [and] Longman, [and] His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1864-1940. Print.

Brunello, Franco. *The Art of Dyeing in the History of Mankind*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1973. Print.

Campbell, Marian. "Gold, Silver and Precious Stones" in John Blair and Nigel Ramsay, eds, *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, London: A&C Black, 1991: 107-66. Print.

Chapman, George. *Monsieur d'Olive, A comedie, as it vvas sundrie times acted by her Maiesties children at the Blacke-Friers*, London: Printed by T[homas] C[reede] for William Holmes, 1606, STC (2nd ed.) 4983. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Contarini, Gasparo. *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, trans. Sir Lewis Lewkenor, London, 1599. Trans. Of De Magistrabus et republica Venetorum, 1543, STC (2nd ed.) 5642. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Coryate, Thomas. *Coryats Crudities, Hastily Gobled up in Five Monthes Travells (1611)*, 2 vols, Glasgow: MacLehose, 1905. Print.

Cotgrave, Randle. *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, London: Adam Islip, 1611. URL: http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/. Web. 5 March 2015.

Elyot, Thomas. *The dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot knyght, Londini*: In aedibus Thomae Bertheleti typis impress. Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum solum, 1538, STC (2nd ed.) 7659. Early English Books Online. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Feuillerat, Albert, ed. *Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth*, Louvain: Uystpruyst, 1908. Print.

Florio, John. *Florio, his First Fruits*, London: Imprinted at the three Cranes in the Vintree, by Thomas Dawson, for Thomas Woodcocke, 1578, STC (2nd ed.) 11096. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Fludd, Robert. *Medicina Catholica*, 2 vols, Frankfurt: C. Rötelli, 1629-1631. Print.

Gage, John. *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, Boston: Bulfinch, 1993. Print.

Gage, John. *Colour and Meaning: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1999. Print.

Godard, Jean-Luc. "Le cinéma, c'est un oubli de la réalité", *Le Monde*, 10 juin 2014, an interview by Philippe Dagen and Franck Nouchi: 18-19. Print.

Hills, Paul, *Venetian Colour. Marble Mosaic, Painting and Glass 1250-1550*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. Print.

Howell, James. *Epistolae Ho-Elianae. Familiar Letters, Domestic and Forren*, 2nd ed., London, 1650. Print.

Janssens, Koen H. A. *Modern Methods for Analysing Archaeological and Historical Glass*, Chichester: Wiley, 2013. Print.

Jonson, Ben. *Volpone*, ed. Philip Brockbank, London: New Mermaids, 1998. Print.

Kuehni, Rolf G., and Andreas Schwarz. *Color Ordered: A Survey of Color Systems from Antiquity to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

Lomazzo, Giovanni. *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura, scoltura, et architettura / A tracte containing the artes of curious paintinge caruinge buildinge written first in Italian by Io: Paul Lomatius painter of Milan and Englished by R. H. student in physik*, Printed at Oxford: By Joseph Barnes for Richard Haydock, 1598, STC (2nd ed.) 16698. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Matthew, Louisa C. "'Vendecolori a Venezia': The Reconstruction of a Profession", *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 144, No. 1196 (Nov., 2002): 680-86. Print.

McConnell, Anita. "Verzelini, Jacob (1522-1607)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, January 2008. URL: http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52157. Web. 5 March 2015.

Mccray, Patrick W. *Glassmaking in Renaissance Venice: The Fragile Craft*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. Print.

Mocenicus, Philippus. *Universales Institutiones ad hominum perfectionem*, Venice: Manutius, 1581. Print.

More, Thomas. *A Dialogue of Sir Thomas More*, London: By J. Rastell, 1529, STC (2nd ed.) 18084. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

More, Thomas. *The Confutation of Tyndales Answer Made By Sir Thomas More*, London, Wyllyam Rastell, 1532, STC (2nd ed.) 18079. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. 12 March 2015.

Moryson, Fynes. *An Itinerary containing His Ten Yeeres Travel (1617)*, 4 vols, Glasgow: MacLehose, 1907. Print.

J. G. Nichols, J.G., ed. "Inventory of the Wardrobe, &c. of Katherine of Arragon" in *Camden Miscellany*, 1st series, vol. 3, part 3, Printed for the Camden Society: London, 1855: 1-41. Print.

Overall, W.H. and H.C., eds. *Analytical Index to the Series or Records Known as the Remembrancia: 1579-1664*, London, 1878. URL: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=59925. Web. 5 March 2015.

Overbury, Sir Thomas. *Sir Thomas Ouerburie his wife written by himselfe and other learned gentlemen*, London, 1616, STC (2nd ed.) 18909. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web 12 March 2015.

Parker, Kenneth, ed. *Early Modern Tales of Orient: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.

Pastoureau, Michel. *Les couleurs de nos souvenirs*, Paris: Seuil, 2010. Print.

Pastoureau, Michel. *Noir. Histoire d'une couleur*, Paris: Seuil, 2008. Print.

Peacham, Henry, *The Gentleman's Exercise*, 1612, STC (2nd ed.) 19508. Early English Books Online. URL: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home. Web. 12 March 2015.

Powell, Harry J. *Glass Making in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923. Print.

Reynolds, Joshua. *Discourses on Art*, 2nd edition, ed. Robert R. Wark, New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, (1959), 1975. Print.

Salter, Elizabeth. *Six Renaissance Men and Women: Innovation, Biography and Cultural Creativity in Tudor England, c. 1450-1560*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. Print.

Schaffer, Simon. "Glass Works: Newton's Prisms and the Uses of Experiment" in *The Uses of Experiment: Studies in the Natural Sciences*, eds. David Gooding, Trevor Pinch and Simon Schaffer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989: 67-104. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *3 Henry VI*, trans. Line Cottegnies, in *Histoires*, tome 3, eds. Jean-Michel Déprats and Gisèle Venet, Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade, 2008. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, 1998. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Jay L. Halio, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of The Shrew*, ed. Ann Thompson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, 2003. Print.

Stuard, Susan M. *Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Print.

Sylvester, Louise. "Mining for Gold: Investigating a Semantic Classification in the Lexis of Cloth and Clothing" in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol. 8, eds. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012: 62-82. Print.

NOTES

1. "In *Goodbye to Language*, at one point, there is a colour box, watercolours. Should we infer that painting for you is one of the last existing languages?" / "I did this, hoping that someone, deep down, would think that there is someone there with an inkwell and some ink — black, printing —, and that on the other hand, there is a colour box. Would think that, on the one hand, there is the text, and on the other, the image. Here, if there were the two of us, I would rather willingly go for a colour box, and leave the inkwell to you. People ask me what it means. As far as I'm concerned, I shoot facts." My translation.

2. Henry Peacham's book was originally entitled *Graphice, or the most auncient and excellent Art of Drawing with the Pen and Limning in Water Colours* (London, 1606) and it was dedicated to Sir Robert Cotton. For the subsequent editions of 1607, 1612, and 1634, Peacham's work was re-entitled *The Gentleman's Exercise.*

3. During the 13th century, the medieval Oxford Franciscan scholars Robert Grosseteste (*De iride*, *De colore*), Roger Bacon and John Pecham all contributed to the reflexion on light and colour. The

famous quote "color est lux incorporata perspicuo" by Grosseteste shows that colour was perceived as an attribute of light (Kuehni and Schwarz 30).

4. An apparatour was "a summoner, usually to the ecclesiastical courts, a beadle or serjeant" (Beecher 234).

5. See Pastoureau 2008, 46 and 68.

6. See Simon Schaffer's now classic sociological "Glass Works" study in which he articulated the developments of Newton optics to the experimental apparatus available at the time.

7. See Gage 1999, 125: "It does not seem to be before the middle of the 16th century, and in Italy, that triangular prisms came to be part of the instruments of optical experiment."

8. See Gentile Bellini's portrait of *Doge Giovanni Mocenigo*, *c.* 1478, Tempera on panel, Correr Museum, Venice. This portrait can be viewed online: http://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/bellini/gentile/mocenigo.html (Date accessed: 7 February 2015).

9. Gage gives the following reference: British Library Add.MS6789, f148.

10. In 1549, eight Venetian glass blowers came to London and their premises were probably located in Aldgate, in the House of the Crutched Friars. See also McConnell 2008.

11. Coryate included four pieces of burlesque verse by Peacham in the preface to his *Crudities*.

12. See Hills 117: "They [the Venetians] reinvented the Roman technique of *millefiori* glass, in which cross-sections of multicoloured canes are embedded like a 'thousand flowers' into a gather of clear glass or occasionally an opaque blue".

13. See the 2014 Project Cristallo at the Louvre, and more particularly Suzanne Higgott (Wallace Collection), "Venetian and façon de Venise enameled, gilded and *millefiori* glass made *c.* 1500-1550 and excavated from reliably dated contexts in Great Britain". Website: http://www.glassinvenice.it/seminars/2014-seminar-on-glass (Date accessed: 12 March 2015).

14. This was recorded on their registry.

15. "First, for your garb, it must be grave and serious; / very reserved and locked" (4.1.10-12).

16. See Overall II, 118: "Letter from the Lord Mayor to the Master of the Horse (the Earl of Worcester, K.G.) concerning James Hoseman, a servant of his Lordship, who had resided in the City for twenty-four years, and carried on the trade of a dyer of black silk; and stating that, upon a complaint being made of the fraudulent way in which black silk had been lately dyed in the City, an inquiry had been instituted, and all persons not being Dyers by trade had been ordered to cease such occupation; it then appeared that Hoseman was a Silk-weaver.15th February, 1606".

17. Contemporary artists have continued to draw on this tradition: see Lucia Fontana's use of the gold pigment to encapsulate Venice into an abstract monochrome (*Concetto Spaziale Venezia era tutta d'oro*, 1961, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid) or, more recently, Heinz Mack's gold pillars at the Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore for the 2014 Venice Biennale, which features nine identical monolithic structures being wrapped in a mosaic of golden *tesserae*. As far as the Italian language itself is concerned, the word *oro* is associated to the palace on the Canal Grande, to the famous enamel Ca d'Oro, or to the Pala d'Oro, the altarpiece ordered from Constantinople in the 12th century. It is also linked to the hierarchy of the Venetian social fabric, structured in the *Libro d'oro* (a 14th-century register defining patrician identity).

18. See Coryate 185: "The front of it [the Logetto] looking towards the Dukes Palace is garnished with eight curious pillars *versicoloris marmoris*, that is of marble that hath sundry colours."

19. Cotgrave n.p. See the Website: http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/ (Date accessed: 5 March 2015).

20. *Ibid.*

ABSTRACTS

While Newton was the first to split white light using a triangular prism in 1671, thus putting an end to the linear system of the Aristotelian chromatic scale, previous experiments using the prism as an optical instrument had been made a hundred years before by the Venetian Filipo Mocenigo, Archbishop of Nicosia. These attempts at understanding colours need to be linked to the uniqueness of the Venetian environment and to the quality of light in the lagoon where refraction is a daily phenomenon. Although Venetian colours have traditionally been associated to painting, they also belong to the texture of the city itself as exemplified in marbles and mosaics. As early as the 15th century, the city boasted a flourishing industry of colour relying on trades such as, among others, dyers, glassmakers, tailors, or pigment sellers (*i.e. vendecolori)*.
This paper explores the material, cultural and linguistic influence of Venice on early modern England, focusing more precisely on glass, dyes and pigments. The perception and representation of the Venetian palette will be analysed through various sources, so as to shed light on the way colours informed the imaginative construct of the city while revealing the British travellers' ability or inability to be responsive to Venice's ubiquitous polychromy.

Si Newton fut le premier à décomposer la lumière blanche à l'aide d'un prisme en 1671, mettant ainsi un terme au système linéaire de l'échelle chromatique aristotélicienne, le Vénitien Filipo Mocenigo, évêque de Nicosie, réalisa des expériences un siècle plus tôt en se servant du prisme comme d'un instrument optique. Cette tentative visant à comprendre la nature des couleurs doit être appréhendée au regard du caractère exceptionnel de l'environnement vénitien et de la qualité de la lumière dans la lagune où la réfraction est un phénomène quotidien. Bien que les couleurs vénitiennes soient traditionnellement associées à la peinture, elles constituent la texture même de la ville, symbolisée par ses marbres et ses mosaïques. Dès le début du XVe siècle, la ville put se targuer de posséder une industrie de la couleur florissante qui reposait sur de nombreux métiers (teinturiers, verriers, couturiers, ou vendeurs de pigments appelés *vendecolori*).
Cet article explore l'influence matérielle, culturelle et linguistique de Venise dans l'Angleterre de la première modernité en s'attachant plus spécifiquement au verre, aux teintures et aux pigments. La réception et la représentation de la palette vénitienne seront analysées au prisme de sources variées qui permettront de révéler la façon dont la couleur participe à la construction imaginaire de la ville, et dans quelle mesure les voyageurs britanniques parviennent ou non à rendre compte de l'omniprésence de la polychromie vénitienne.

INDEX

Keywords: colours, Venice, England, 16th century, 17th century, reception, representation, prism, dyes, pigments, gold
Mots-clés: couleurs, Venise, Angleterre, XVIe siècle, XVIIe siècle, réception, représentation, prisme, teintures, pigments, or

AUTHOR

ANNE GEOFFROY

University of Versailles-St Quentin, ESR
anne.geoffroy9@gmail.com

Anne Geoffroy defended a thesis on the English representations of Venice in the early modern period (1549-1642) at the University of Versailles-St Quentin. Her fields of interest include early modern travel writing, translations and Anglo-Italian relationships. She is currently teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the University of Versailles-St Quentin.