

## Painted Veil

A Baroque Mystery

BEVERLE GRAVES MYERS

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Castrato soprano Tito Amato has two big problems: The first is an upstart young castrato visiting the Teatro San Marco and stealing all of Tito's acclaim; the second is the murder of Luca Cavalieri, chief scene painter at the opera and now floating corpse. Tito, who previously solved a murder in Myers' *Interrupted Aria*, is pressured into playing amateur detective again by the opera company's maestro, who hopes that by quickly clearing up the murder, the local government that subsidizes the opera company won't notice how far overbudget the company has gone.

Tito has no shortage of suspects, including a seemingly too-sweet soprano, an aloof stage manager, and the deceased's Jewish lover. Soon a mysterious masked individual becomes involved in the crime, and it is up to Tito to uncover the face behind the mask. With new best chum Augustus "Gussie" Rumbolt playing an English Watson to Tito's Venetian Holmes, the two set off to find the killer while the entire city of Venice threatens to erupt in anti-Semitic mob violence.

*Painted Veil* effectively evokes 1734 Venice, replete with glorious masquerade balls and grand opera. It accurately depicts the world of Venetian opera and the importance of the castrati to that world. As a castrato, Tito finds himself always an outsider, even in a place where he has achieved great fame, and in this dichotomy Myers has created a character who is warm but aloof, bold but pensive. Like many amateur detectives, Tito is both initially reluctant to be involved and yet impossible to throw off the track once he's got the scent of the chase in his nose.

Gussie is perhaps even more likable than Tito, and his romance with Tito's sister is one of the sweet sidelines of the book. Tito's own romantic desires provide one of the book's heartaches, though too often we are not offered enough of a glimpse into the mind and heart of the opera singer to satisfy. The mystery itself is enjoyable, if a tad predictable.

The setting is perhaps the main character here, but unlike the opulent Venice the book depicts, the story itself seems oddly more circumspect than indulgent, a bit hesitant to fully embrace the city dedicated to masquerade and pleasure that it promises to inhabit. This reflects Tito's character as well, though as a reader I would prefer to indulge vicariously, even if Tito does not. Still, the book makes for fun reading, an enjoyable mystery with an authentic air to its arias. Poisoned Pen Press enjoys a strong reputation, especially with historical mystery lovers, and this book will certainly do nothing to discredit that. ■

REVIEWER: **Michael G. Cornelius** is Chair of the English Department at Wilson College in Chambersburg, PA. His scholarly work has appeared in journals such as *SCOTIA: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Scottish Studies*, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching*, *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, and *The Delta Epsilon Sigma Journal*.