

Puritan constable, at work defending his area from its ravages. Christopher Redmayne, the Dean of Oxford's son, newly qualified architect, and supporter of the restored monarchy, arrives after the fire and hopes to rebuild a better, more beautiful London. The pair meet when hunting thieves stealing building materials from the house Redmayne designed, and when Redmayne's employer is murdered they work together to catch the murderer.

It's a nicely convoluted plot, guessing whodunit or whydunnit is not easy, and the ending leaves the reader looking for the next in the series, if only to see how poor Jonathon Bale copes now he has to work for the King. One of the joys of Marston's novels is the light touch of humour and Bale and Redmayne reacting to each other can make a reader laugh out loud. Highly recommended.

*pdr lindsay-salmon*

### THE REPENTANT RAKE

Edward Marston, Allison & Busby, 2010, £7.99, pb, 410pp, 9780749008086

In a London still recovering from the Great Fire, Christopher Redmayne is busy pursuing his architect's career when his rakehell brother Henry seeks his help to deal with blackmail and a death threat. Before he knows it, Christopher finds himself working along with his reluctant friend, constable Jonathon Bale, on a murder case linked to Henry's plight. And just what ties the whole tangle to Christopher's latest clients, the choleric Sir Julius Cheever – late of Cromwell's Army – and his charming daughter? Marston tells a lively whodunit, brimming with damsels in distress, Puritans, Cavaliers, dissolute men about town, midnight ambushes, card games, danger, romance, and quite a few twists and turns. I had a few quibbles with the portrayal of Restoration social niceties (would an unmarried young lady go unchaperoned to an unrelated bachelor's lodgings? Would all these rakes be so unacquainted with the very notion of blackmail?), but if you are not after copious historical detail, this third offering in the Restoration Series provides an entertaining, well-paced, and engaging read.

*Chiara Prezzavento*

### THE LEAVES OF FATE

George Robert Minkoff, McPherson & Co., 2010, \$24.95, hb, 427pp, 9780929701820

Between 1610 and 1630, the Jamestown settlement in the English colonies began to take shape – the colonists left the safe confines of the walled-in town and established farms nearby, growing the popular cash crop, tobacco. Infringing on the lands held by the local Native Americans would cause many deaths between the white settlers and the local tribes. John Smith, banished from the community upon threat of death, is isolated in England writing his stories of his experiences settling Jamestown. Intermingled with these current events is his remembrance of his discussions with Jonas Profit, an alchemist

and a sailing mate of Sir Francis Drake. Drake's encounters with the Spanish and his attack on the Spanish mainland are also revealed.

This novel is the third installment of the fictional account of the Land of Whispers. The language the author employs to tell his tale mimics the speech of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At times, it was difficult to follow the story without rereading sentences, but because I have read the first two installments of this trilogy, I knew what to expect. Mr. Minkoff is a very talented writer whose use of English is similar to that of Shakespeare's sonnets – you must read and concentrate on the significance of his choice of words to fully comprehend the novel while you follow the plot of the story. If you are looking for a novel that is fast-paced and full of action, this book is not for you. If you value the tone and construction of the English language in sentences that are poetic in nature and add refinement to the ordinary novel, you will enjoy and savor this book. Highly recommended for readers with sophisticated literary tastes.

*Jeff Westerhoff*

### THE VENETIAN SECRET: 1620

Giulia Morosini, Morosini Press, 2010, £15.00, pb, 297pp, 9788799299003

This is the debut novel of Annemette Fogh, who has carried out research on primary documents, as well as drawing on more recent academic studies. The plot is intriguing and the characterisation vivid: like so many of the city's well-born girls, Marietta Morosini is forced to become a nun against her will, since, by tradition – and in order to pay the exorbitant dowries – only one daughter from each family can marry.

There is a wealth of detailed information about the lives of the nuns and the younger girls who board in the convent. Above all, the novel highlights the strong ties that bind the convent of San Zaccaria to the very heart of Venetian political affairs: the Doge himself is fêted there with choral music and food every Easter. Embellished with the finest art and architecture, the convent also conceals a dark secret, a wicked abuse of trust. Marietta's great-aunt, Rosalba, was one of the few nuns ever to escape from the convent, and Marietta is determined to discover her secret from a mysterious painting and then follow in her steps.

The story lays bare the connivance and corruption that festered at the roots of Venice's greatness and spins a ripping yarn about one young woman's determination to outwit the system and to pursue her dreams. Two further books are planned, and the series would also appeal to younger readers, although more careful proofreading will be needed to eliminate a series of annoying typographical errors. This is one for a dark winter's evening, or better still, a spring visit to Venice.

*Lucinda Byatt*

### KILLER OF CRYING DEER

William Orem, Kitsune, 2010, \$15.00, pb, 249pp, 9780981949550

In 1669, an abducted youth is shipwrecked

in the Florida Keys. Readers entering Henry's world will encounter an unrelentingly detailed envisioning of the moods and moments of tropical life. It is hard to imagine a more finely crafted lens into 17<sup>th</sup>- century Florida.

In his ordeal of survival and character growth, Henry becomes the central figure in both a visceral pirate plot, and a more cosmic, if arduous, period of education and romance among the Calusa tribe. Henry is an abducted aristocrat who interacts with indigenes, Spaniards, and other less tangible forces. Through his observant eyes, Orem creates a stunning tableau, and it is hard to imagine any lover of pirate adventure or crystalline prose who wouldn't appreciate this book. Chiseled though its style might be, the narrative is far too rich to be pigeonholed as an Indian-friendly *Treasure Island*. In its central sequence of short chapters, the novel is kaleidoscopic in its representations of indigenous life, and adept at articulating Henry's spiritual journey through them. Much of the interior narrative is devoted to Henry's romance with a girl called Speaking Owl, and Orem gives us much to admire in the sure-handed strokes with which he develops this amity.

Readers should be prepared for possible impressions of formlessness. Chapters begin to shift points of view freely, unpredictably, in an ever-growing series of related events. The vividness of the world he describes, however, and the continuously building significance of Henry's experiences easily carry the reader along. Just when we couldn't be any further out in this early Floridian dreamscape, the narrative reverts to the pirate plot with tremendous momentum and drama. This type of return of the very bad guys places the previous sequence in sharply contrasting perspective. This clash is the book's most impressive scene. When a book reinvents its genre like this, it is certain to reward close attention.

*Dwight Brooks*

### EXIT THE ACTRESS

Priya Parmar, Touchstone, 2011, \$16.00, pb, 448pp, 9781439171172

Nell Gwynn has been enjoying a revival in historical fiction of late, and it is no wonder. She's the quintessential heroine, her meteoric rise from impoverished orange seller to actress to one of Charles II's lovers enshrining her in our imagination as that plucky girl who achieved fame and fortune yet never lost her common sense. In Priya Parmar's exuberant *Exit the Actress*, Nell is brought to life through fictional diary entries, interspersed with letters between members of the royal family, scandalous broadsheets, and occasional recipes. Here, Nell narrowly sidesteps her sister's downfall into prostitution when she catches the attention of the proprietors of a popular theatre. Despite her unfashionably slim build and red-head coloring, Nell's vocal talent and comedic flair eventually steer her toward leading roles; it is during her time on stage that she captures the randy king's attention and becomes, according to the novel, his most beloved, if short-lived, mistress.