

Da Ponte's Struggle against Oblivion

*The poet's memoirs drawn up according to Giampaolo Zagonel's
Bibliografia and complemented by an extended commentary*

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“...Perchè morte fura

Prima i migliori, e lascia star i rei?”

(Petrarca, *In vita di Madonna Laura*, rime CCXLVIII, 5–6)

1999 saw the publication of *Lorenzo Da Ponte (Ceneda 1749–New York 1838). Bibliografia*, edited by Giampaolo Zagonel. Hailing, like his subject, from Vittorio Veneto (formerly Ceneda), Zagonel presented an extensively annotated list of all of the published works by Da Ponte, as well as of secondary scholarly literature concerning Da Ponte and his work. Such a bibliography had not previously been available, and I am grateful for Zagonel's work on which my own contribution to the present volume has been based. Exploration of the material in the *Bibliografia* exclusively concerned with Lorenzo Da Ponte's memoirs and related scholarship is warranted for the following reasons:

1. Memoirs are invariably important sources for research, although wide-spread opinions on this point frequently differ. Events and dates recorded in memoirs may not be historically correct but they can be checked against those for which there is historical evidence before a final conclusion is drawn. Moreover, memoirs reflect the social life and values of an epoch or a territory; they may also make for entertaining reading, especially if their authors are the likes of Lorenzo Da Ponte who easily stands his ground among great Italians of the eighteenth century such as Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793), Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806), and Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803).
2. Autobiographical works are especially important in the construction of a list of works that may go beyond existing publications because memoirists often mention or even quote works from memory which have been lost or were never formally published.
3. The way in which a memoir comes about and is structured may reveal the personality and status of the author. A case in point are the *Memoirs* of Giacomo Casanova de Seingalt (1725–1798) which are worth noting in view of his friendship and correspondence with Lorenzo Da Ponte, particularly since Da Ponte's Venetian adventures seem to have been directly inspired by Casanova.
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