



# Lucia: A Venetian Life in the Age of Napoleon

*Andrea di Robilant*

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## **Lucia: A Venetian Life in the Age of Napoleon** Andrea di Robilant

From the acclaimed author of *A Venetian Affair* comes the vivid and dramatic story of the fall of Venice and the rise of a new age during the tumultuous Napoleonic period, as seen through the eyes of his great-great-great-grandmother.

In 1787, Lucia, the beautiful sixteen-year-old daughter of a prominent Venetian statesman, is married off to Alvise Mocenigo, scion of one of the most powerful Venetian families. But their life as a golden couple will be suddenly transformed when Venice falls to Bonaparte. As the larger events unfolding around Lucia mingle with her most personal concerns, we witness—through her letters to her sister and other primary sources—her painful series of miscarriages and the pressure on her to produce an heir; her impassioned affair with an Austrian officer and its stunning results; the glamour and strain of her career as a hostess in Hapsburg Vienna and lady-in-waiting at the court of Napoleon's stepson, Prince Eugène de Beauharnais, as well as her intimate relationship with the Empress Joséphine; and her amazing firsthand account of the defeat of Napoleon in Paris in 1814. In her later years, Lucia, regal and still beautiful and a bit battle-hardened herself, was Byron's landlord during the poet's stay in Venice. In a fitting finale to this sweeping drama, Lucia stands as a relic of a lost golden age: she created, in part, the aura that gave rise to the Romantic view of Italy and its culture that we still nourish today.

With the brave and articulate Lucia at the center of his re-creation of this remarkable historical period, Andrea di Robilant has once again reached across the centuries, and deep into his own past, to bring history to rich and vivid life on the page.

## **Lucia: A Venetian Life in the Age of Napoleon Details**

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# From Reader Review Lucia: A Venetian Life in the Age of Napoleon for online ebook

## Krista says

The tumultuous events of early 19th-century continental Europe, as seen through the eyes of a Venetian noblewoman. Fascinating.

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## Eb Daniels says

Having developed his flair for historical writing somewhat from his debut *A Venetian Affair*, Andrea di Robilant, the journalist-turned-popular-historian, has produced in *Lucia* an eminently readable and enjoyable little jaunt into a deeply personal history. What this work lacks in in-depth research it more than makes up for in its narrative force and scope.

As in *A Venetian Affair*, di Robilant has stumbled upon another cache of letters from one of his ancestors. The richness of this epistolary horde, and the fact that di Robilant's ancestors so regularly cavorted with luminaries like Casanova, the Empress Josephine, and Lord Byron, has raised some eyebrows, but one finds nothing suspicious in this turn of events - drawing from his journalistic roots di Robilant has a knack for focusing on the "newsworthy" and has clearly drawn the most exciting episodes from a collection of letters which, in their whole, would certainly be far more quotidian. The result is an engaging read that follows the history of the Fall of the Venetian Republic, the rise and fall of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the decline of Venice into a tourist trap, all from the fascinating perspective of a Venetian noblewoman.

Which is not to say that di Robilant's journalistic roots are not also a hindrance at times. He excessively chops sentences and phrases out of context and inserts them into editorializing formats, and he rarely lets the letters stand on their own. This decision is a fitting enough stylistic choice, as di Robilant makes it clear that this is a biography framed around letters, but it would have been nice to have included a few unedited examples of Lucia's letters in full. And while di Robilant provides a nice enough jaunt through the history of this period, he relies overmuch on generalizations and provides, in many instances, only allusions to many of the historical events in which Lucia participated.

I would recommend *Lucia: A Venetian Life in the Age of Napoleon* to anyone interested in a light yet entrancing account of Italian affairs during this period. Fans of historical fiction or romances will also find it a very pleasant transition into popular history, while more experienced historians will enjoy its highly personal perspective. I would especially recommend this work to anyone who will be traveling to Venice soon - Lucia's life provides a sort of built-in itinerary for the historically-minded tourist.

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## Kelly says

For research- thanks, Dini!

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## **Jen says**

This is what happens when you have a three day business trip and you are an insomniac--you get a lot of reading done.

This book is a beautifully written book about a extremely boring person.

Di Robilant is the great great grand daughter of Lucia Moncenigo, so she found the trove of her letters (mostly to her sister) and decided to create a book about her. Lucia moved in the first circles of Venitian, Austrian, and Bonaparte nobility. This should make an interesting book--but Lucia is not interesting. Every movement of her life is detailed with a multitude of quotations, and seldom is anything beyond superficial.

The problem may be an almost fanatical reliance on her letters without few (if any) outside references to Lucia. Di Robilant gets mired in the mundane details of Lucia's life, and since Lucia didn't write letters about her more scandalous adventures (love affair, illegitimate child, etc), Di Robilant has to rely on conjecture.

Instead, you come away with a woman who watches a turbulent world from the sidelines, with very little interest about what is happening. I also get to read all about her illnesses and her almost oppressive whining.

She was even Lord Byron's landlord. SHE SHOULD BE INTERESTING.

But it's not.

I shut this book with a clear idea of who Lucia was--and pretty sure I would have never wanted to spend more than 5 minutes with her.

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## **Rachel Aranda says**

Oh my gosh how I enjoyed this book! This is definitely a 4.5 rating for me so I might change the rating between 4 or 5 stars. I had never heard of Lucia and her family before this book. In truth what really interested me to pick this book up was wanting to learn about what it was like in Italy when the French Revolution then Napoleon rose to power. Never really gave much thought to how this period of time affected non-French citizens. Not only did I get a glimpse into what I wanted to know but I learned about an admirable person. So very glad I chose to randomly stroll through the library.

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## **Paul says**

After becoming reacquainted with an almost complete statue of Napoleon in what used to be his families house in Venice, and coming across Lucia while researching the life of her father Andrea (see A Venetian Affair) Di Robilant was intrigued enough to delve further into his great-great-great-great-grandmother's life, and by doing so uncovered an indomitable spirit who lived a long and fascinating life.

Engaged to Alvise Moceginio when she was just fifteen, even in her first letter to her future husband, Lucia showed poise and thoughtfulness that she would have throughout the rest of her life. Di Robilant's functional text embellishes little, preferring instead to let Lucia tell much of it, using the mine of letters and diaries at

his disposal, including near daily letters to her beloved sister Paolina, with whom she nurtured a life long affection and intimacy, particularly as her ceaseless striving for her husbands love often fell short.

Lucia and Alvisé hopped from one side to the other as Napoleon rose and fell, first putting herself forward in Vienna, working ceaselessly to integrate herself into the upper echelons of society, and then later finding some freedom and independence in Paris, where she stayed while accompanying her illegitimate son in his studies, and spending time with the empress Josephine. Despite a highly cosmopolitan life, Lucia was first and foremost a Venetian, and despite witnessing the end of the stagnating republic, always harboured dreams of it being re-established, returning to it in her old age.

Her spirit was tempered by three early miscarriages when under pressure to provide a heir to the Mocenigo family, and by her husbands almost constant absence. Yet Lucia did not sit and pine for Alvisé, instead managing his estates, trying various agricultural based business ideas and educating herself in Paris, still never giving up that she could still have the perfect family life. Alvisé constantly sought to be on the right side during a tumultuous period for Europe, and was often ostracised for his allegiance at one time or another. He regularly saw other women, and late on Lucia discovers an illegitimate child of his own, but she outlived her husband, and during her later years rented out part of her home to Byron, an arrangement that did not end amicably for either of them.

Lucia died just before her ninety-fourth birthday, an incredible age at the time. Di Robilant's diligent research is plainly rendered, but provides an insight into Europe at the time, through the eyes of one of Venice's last grand dames.

([blog review here](#))

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## **Erin says**

Gripping! The book is based on the letters between Lucia Memmo and her younger sister Paolina. For periods of their lives, they corresponded on a daily basis, giving you excellent insight into the everyday life of an aristocratic Venetian woman in this time period. It is ironic that by submitting to her husband's wishes, Lucia takes on tasks that a modern woman would find intimidating. When her husband is in exile, Lucia has to raise as much money as she can by selling off their possessions. She is in charge of moving their household several times, and not just down the block, but over the Alps. Lucia becomes the overseer of their many properties while her husband is on diplomatic duty - in charge of bringing in harvests, selling grain, etc. Of course, she does all this while enduring multiple miscarriages and pregnancies. I ended up truly admiring Lucia.

I can't wait to read Di Robilant's first book, *A Venetian Affair*. By the way, both books are about his ancestors who came from Venice.

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## **Marga Vr says**

Lucia was the daughter of a prominent Venetian statesman and lived through the glory and decline of Venice, she became the bosom friend of Empress Josephine, the landlady of Byron in Venice, and stands as a relic of the lost golden age

Di Robilant is the author of *A VENETIAN AFFAIR*

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## Frances says

I have really enjoyed both of di Robilant's books about his ancestors in Venice. Both Lucia and The Venetian Affair are based on packets of letters he found. Di Robilant brilliantly brings 17th and 18th century Venice to life.

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## Lucia says

a unique story about the life of an early 19th century woman, written by her great great great great grandson, who used hundreds of letters from her entire life as the basis for this non fiction work. Lucia's life takes her from Venice to Vienna to Paris and all over Italy in this turbulent historical time of Napoleon and the forming and re-forming of empires and nations. Lucia encounters and befriends many historical people from Lord Byron to the Empress Josephine. Thoroughly enjoyable and educational.

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## Jane Routley says

This is my favourite kind of history. The story of an ordinary (albeit in this case aristocratic person) brushing up against great events. In 1787 Lucia 16 year old daughter of a Venetian Statesman married Alvise Mocenigo, scion of another powerful Venetian family. Using an extensive cache of her letters, Di Robilant, one of her descendants, describes her life and throws light on the lives of women of her time. Family structures, sexual mores and household finances are all described in the most fascinating and sometimes surprising way. At one stage Lucia breeds pigs to get pin money because other than what she is given by her husband she has no money of her own and is sometimes short. This in the middle of great familial wealth and at the same time as she is her husband's political helpmate, asset and informer. She is also the wife of a man of affairs at a time when the Venetian republic is brought to an end by Napoleon and Italy loses its independence. She spends time at the court of Austria, is later a lady in waiting at the French court at Milan and later again is in Paris when Napoleon is overthrown. She is great friends with the Empress Josephine with whom she spends evenings playing "Boston". Di Robilant has a wonderful writing style and illuminates Lucia's fascinating life wonderfully, sometimes quoting from her directly and sometimes extrapolating from her letters. It's a fascinating read about a piece of history I knew almost nothing about.

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## Louise says

Some people embroider their family trees on samplers, others create mementos and books for the family. Fortunately Di Robilant went further than this, making his great-great-great-great grandmother a research subject and having Knopf publish it for the general market. This ancestor was witness to and active in a critical time in the life of Venice and through her story we get an idea as to how the nobility coped during the Napoleonic years.

We are introduced to Lucia when she is 15 and her father is involved in extended and stressful marriage

negotiations. At this time the Venetian elite are leading la dolce vita. Soon, Venetians and their republic will be jolted into new and uncharted territory.

Through the Mommo and Mocenigo families we see how the nobility adapted. Many fled. Others chose to work with the French, the Austrians, the French again and again the Austrians. Marriage and family scenes are just as striking as those of the famous events.

Lucia is resilient. From an entranced young bride, she becomes realistic about her marriage that will only end when death due them part. There is infidelity, child birth and death, long separations, primitive medicine, fine entertaining, perilous travel and fiscal constraint.

Lucia learns to set up and manage households and farmsteads and to "wait" on a Princess who is half her age. Despite the many problems of her son and his education, she is a successful parent. She gets herself recognized in the Austrian court, educates herself in Paris, becomes a friend of Napoleon's Josephine, manages the family assets and has famous tenants in Venice. This woman is amazing for any age, but for her time, totally impressive.

There are two problems with the book, neither serious enough to take away stars. There are two maps but others are needed, one showing the various estates and others showing the travel routes to Vienna and Paris. The other problem may not be addressable. Lucia, while running what seems to be a large farmstead, refurbishes the main house. Then she raises, for sale, a small number of animals (are there not a lot of other animals on this farm?). Similarly, as a lady in waiting she raised two head of cattle. The economics/practicality of this husbandry doesn't compute for me.

What is wonderful about this book is that it makes history alive. It shows how larger events effect people's lives. The writer draws portraits of people whom we tend to care about and of the turmoil of Europe at the time.

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### **BAM The Bibliomaniac says**

Really 3.5 stars not quite a 4

What a sweet, fresh-faced ingenue of the napoleonic era. Always positive, always loving, Lucia fails to be a product of war or what really sounds like an unsatisfying marriage. Seeking joy in society, she makes friends easily, which is good because her husband can't seem to settle.

Lucia seems what's best for her son til her death. Also the daily corresponded she keeps up with her younger sister bolsters her outlook. She fails to ever play the victim to the end.

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### **Laura says**

I read this book because I absolutely loved Andrea di Robilant's first book, *A Venetian Affair*, which, like Lucia, was also a non-fiction book based on the letters left behind by one of his ancestors. I agree with some other reviewers who said that the life of Lucia was not as compelling as the torrid, secret, forbidden love affair depicted in the first book. That said, di Robilant is a top-notch writer and I thought this was an excellent book. Di Robilant combines personal and global history effortlessly, and I came away from the book with insights into how world events can change life trajectories. Di Robilant also deftly brought out the

complexities of human relationships: he takes contradictory situations -- people are awful to each other and yet love each other deeply -- and helps us understand how that can be so.

I think I also loved the book because I was recently in Vienna and so I learned about many of the emperors and empresses that are mentioned in this book. In general, any European history buff should love to see what life was like during the age of Napoleon. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Raully says**

A beautiful depiction of the author's ancestor, surprisingly intimate narrative through the fall of the Republic, the turmoil of Napoleonic Italy, the courts of both the Habsburgs and the Bonapartes, ending with her elderly role as Lord Byron's exasperated landlord.

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