

VENICE AS NO-PLACE: LIMINALITY AND THE
MODERNIST INTERPRETATION OF THE
MYTH OF VENICE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*Venice is quite the Venice of one's dreams, but it remains strangely the Venice of dreams,
more than of any appreciable reality.*

-H. James

Venice is a dream city, a fairy place that has for centuries lured the traveler, the tourist, and, especially, the artist, out to her infamous lagoon. She has been memorialized, mythologized, celebrated, scolded, examined, blamed, and longed for in literary works by writers from Shakespeare and Jonson to her patriot, D'Annunzio. Emerson wanted to love her. Byron could not stop. Radcliffe used her image without ever having known the pleasure in person, while Ruskin methodically studied every inch of her stony face. What it is that Venice does to inspire authors has been the focus of a type of geographical criticism for nearly as long as they have been writing about her. The notion of the myth of Venice has been widely discussed, and she is prepackaged in countless travel guides as the enchanted and enchanting city on water. Guides traditionally warn of her costliness, though perhaps only in response to the comparatively high expense of her pasta vongole and not the cost she has historically had on one's morality, to say nothing of mortality. For the novelists and poets who have been lured to her watery walkways and spent nights experiencing the luminous spectacle of the city and appreciating its dreamlike images of ornate marbled and frescoed palaces, bell towers, and domes reflected endlessly in the broken surfaces of her multitudinous canals, Venice became the city they felt compelled to capture. Henry James, a lifelong admirer of the city, summarizes in *Italian Hours*, "It is a fact that almost everyone interesting, appealing, melancholy, memorable, odd, seems at one time or another, after many days and much life, to have

gravitated to Venice by happy instinct," and wistfully continues, "the deposed, the defeated, the disenchanted, the wounded, or even only the bored, have seemed to find there something that no other place can give" (115). For each who was transformed by her mystery and transfixed by her illusion, the resulting prose and verse following their departure invokes those qualities of Venice both beguiling to each visitor and characteristic of her personal literary history, until artists at the turn of the century changed forever how Venice exists in fiction.

The city has established a specific literary reputation, unique to its own history. Initial installments grandly incorporated the original myth of Venice, and then successive interpretations reworked that myth to reflect the changing attitudes and conceptions of the city, first as powerhouse, then as playground, and, ultimately, as death mask of a once-great queen. By the time the Western world was reeling from the effects of urbanization, contemplating the inevitable changes attendant on the Industrial Revolution, and anticipating the Great War, artists drew from the concept of Venice as "other world" long represented in fiction to create from it a new reading of the city reflective of the inward obsession of the modern consciousness at the turn of the century. In *Venice, Fragile City: 1797-1997*, a careful examination of the city's wide-ranging cultural history, Margaret Plant declares, "If it is possible for Freudian metaphors of dream, desire, repression and illusion to take on the imprint of topography, then Venice achieved that in the early years of the twentieth century" (285). Beginning with Henry James's 1888 version of the city, Venice—the great appropriated city—evolved in literature from a physical setting associated with sex and scandal, corruption and decline, to a symbolic cerebral space, representing the repressed consciousness of the modernist protagonist.

The Myth of Venice

Historians refer to the perception of Venice designed and controlled by her first magistrate, the Maggior Consiglio, as the famed Myth of Venice. David McPherson, in his book *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Myth of Venice*, explains how the myth initially developed and was then embraced and perpetuated by the authors who were first to record her reputation in their fiction. The Venetian aristocracy spent considerable time and money constructing an image and a historical identity that would set Venice apart from other Italian cities. According to McPherson, the self-proclaimed La Serenissima—the Most Serene Republic—was known around the world as Venezia the Rich, the Wise, and the Just (2). Because she controlled the coveted silk and spice trade routes with the East, Venice was lauded as the "safeguard to the West, the pathway to the gorgeous East" and envied for the incredible wealth these routes supplied (Plant, 41). That she sustained the most successful and longest lived modern republic solidified her reputation for political wisdom. The city was respected for its history of strategic peace and admired for engaging in war only to protect the city's liberties, and never out of a desire to rule other lands. The impartiality and severity of Venetian citizenry laws fostered a belief in the city as the paragon of civic justice. David Rosand, investigating the artistic symbolism of the Venice Myth, declares, from "out of the facts and fictions of its history, the Republic of Venice wove the fabric of propaganda that represents the essence of the myth itself: an ideally formed state, miraculously uniting in its exemplary structure the best of all governmental types—that is, monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy—and, most significantly, institutionalizing this harmonic structure in a constitution that was to inspire other nations for centuries" (4). A strong claim was made that Venice was the successor of the Roman Empire as Venice was unique in Italy for being a city founded after the Roman Republic's great fall. Like Constantinople before her and Paris after, Venice, too, bore the appellation "New Rome." Venetian architecture purposely

emulated that of republican Rome, and the Great Rituals of State, such as the annual Doge's procession and Marriage with the Sea, acted as a public expression of the unique beauty, geography, and longevity of her republican government (Crouzet-Pavan, 12).

At the outset, the Myth of Venice was designed to assert the immortality, power and stability of the lagoon republic. However, as the painters of the Italian Renaissance flocked to the city to work with its peculiar light and reflections, images of Venice were heavily traded across the continent and, in turn, eventually secured for the city a reputation as a mandatory stop on the routes of the burgeoning groups of Grand Tourists. It was advertised in oil as the city of unique architecture, but word of mouth promoted the more licentious pursuits of gambling and sex. Eager to encourage the inflow of foreign income, Venice found itself fervently catering to the younger, mostly male, visitors, and the traditional interpretation of the myth soon encompassed the idea of Venezia Città-galante—the dream state of opulence and sexual promiscuity and the new pleasure capital of Europe. The city was now seen not only as a place free from foreign domination but one in which one might indulge in liberties of all kinds. The government-regulated business of legal courtesans led to an increased tolerance of sexual capriciousness, and the half-year long Carnivale celebrations established a reputation for unmatched moral decadence. This atmosphere prior to the invasion and subsequent conquering of Venice by Napoleon has been described as "a caricature of life lived in sensual gratification, cancelling all responsibility, all intellectuality, all seriousness of mien" (Plant, 11). Then, as the city passed into French, and then Austrian hands, the great Myth of Venice saw, as its final addition, the morose concept of the death of the Republic, including a sense of pervasive sadness and mystery, and an ongoing macabre fascination with death itself. Perhaps aligning oneself with Rome is a dangerous tempting of fate, but the lasting reputation of Venice today is

that of a faded, fallen Queen, reduced to mere ruins by hosting too many parties, harboring too many secrets, and eventually being done in by her own beauty and impossible hubris.

Venetian Literary History

*Venice—perhaps the word itself should be in quotes—is the creation of art,
and the canals might be imagined to be black with literary ink.*

-M. Bell

The evolution of the myth of Venice was recorded by the poets and novelists who found themselves among the glittering waterways, and their impressions of the city and their interpretation of its reputation further imbue the myth with deep cultural significance. In her research on Dickens and the myth of Venice, Alice Gatti turns to French semiologist Roland Barthes and his 1957 work *Mythologies* to help understand the term “myth” and the myth of Venice in the context of literature. Barthes explains that myth is a message deliverable through art, but what really defines a myth is not the object of the message, but the way in which artists use it. Barthes argues that man uses myth in two different ways: first, by accepting and considering its historical, political, and cultural features, and second, by enriching its meaning with new and fanciful elements (Gatti). The myth of Venice, then, can be thought of as a literary work constructed by the artists who fictionalize the city. Rosand, in *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*, stresses the importance, in particular, of English writers in propagating the myth of Venice as a unique state possessing an exemplary political constitution, thereby ensuring the city a literary immortality in the English-speaking world. The city's earliest literary treatment in English began with the important works of the Elizabethan writers, especially Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. They present a Venice of great cultural importance, a "powerful capital of an immense commercial empire, and the western gateway to the East" (Gatti). Additionally, the city is presented as a glorious Republic whose government was respected for

ensuring social balance by enforcing strict, but just, laws. The English continually associated Venice with wealth, power, and prosperity, but it is in works such as Otway's Restoration drama *Venice Preserved* that the original conception of the literary myth of Venice was born.

When Venice lost to Portugal her stranglehold on trading routes with India at the turn of the seventeenth century, this view of "Venice the Great" was radically changed. Venice was no longer considered an international power, and the exaggerated image of the Elizabethan's perfect city was challenged when Venice found herself suffering the same economic depression that was plaguing all of Italy. While still admired for her beauty, Venice was understood throughout Europe to be a city in decline. When Goethe arrived for the first time in 1786, he expressed the typical pity of the foreigner for what Venice had recently become, writing "all that surrounds us is full of nobility, it's a great work and respectable of a human concord force, a magnificent monument not by a sovereign but by a nation, even if the trade strength of Serenissima declines, nevertheless its grandiose structure and its character won't cease for a moment to appear to the observer worthy of reverence" (qtd. in Armstrong, 161). He filled his diaries with observations of the famed palaces, expressing his popular view of the city as an architectural marvel, but avoided recording the more lurid pursuit of gambling and the sexual enticements written about with delight and candor by his brief travel companion, Rousseau, until a return visit four years later, when he openly discusses the more erotic attractions of the city. As Venice's economic future grew darker, so too did her general reputation, and Goethe, like the rest of the admiring world, observes the obvious turn toward decay but ultimately decides to continue to attend the party.

Napoleon's successful conquest of the Venetian territory resulted eventually in the Republic being consigned to Austria with the signing of the treaty of Campoformio in 1797. Gatti

again explains, in her dissertation on Charles Dickens and Venice, how this political act radically changed the initial myth. She describes how the French general, in order to justify his political action against Venice, diffused libelous propaganda against the old government and ordered the prisons of State to be opened to the public. She argues, "from this moment on, Venice [was] considered the capital of violence and evil, [whose] legal system never acted through impartiality, but used murder and corruption as means of justice. As a consequence, a negative image of the city spread through English literature." This negative political coloring was embraced by Gothic novelists Ann Radcliffe and Monk Lewis, who helped perpetuate this new sinister image of the city by using the twisting canals and darkened calle as the setting of their Gothic novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Bravo of Venice* (1805), respectively. Combined with Goethe's nostalgia and Casanova's seductive and wildly popular autobiographical record of his escapades in the city, the haunting use of Venice-specific scenery by Gothic novelists consumed the minds of the reading public and manipulated further the conception of Venice in English literature. Writers reacting to fall of the Republic and the collapse of the city's government and economy constructed an image of the city inextricably connected with the notion of crumbling. The silent waterways and darkened palazzos became a paramount focus, resulting ultimately in the city being presented as a glorified stage set—driving a further wedge between the historical, actual city and the concept of the city as it exists in fiction.

The Romantics inherited the complex image of a once glittering Queen city struggling to stay afloat and extracted from it the now common notion of Venice as both a city dying and a city of death. Lord Byron portrayed the Serenissima as a dream place, writing in *Childe Harold*, "She to me was a fairy city of the heart/Rising like water columns from the sea/Of joy and sojourn and of wealth the mart/And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art/Had stamp'd

her image in me" (153). He also, however, aligns any magic the city might still possess with an overwhelming sense of doom, describing the ruined palaces, the music no longer playing in the piazza, and the inherent beauty of Venice in her "dying Glory"(148). His invocation of the city's symbol, the gondola, as a representation of death, and Shelley's insistence on writing about the city as it had existed in the decadent past, rather than as it appeared during his visit, pushed the evolution of the literary myth of Venice toward a powerful conception of Venice as terminally sick and nostalgically mourned. As in Wordsworth's lamenting dirge, "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic," the power of a dreamlike nostalgia to re-imagine a Venice of the glorious past created a city that still stands as the epitome of romantic death. The writings of Lord Byron and his contemporaries, along with paintings by Canaletto, J.M.W. Turner, and others, shaped this romanticized image of Venice popular in the early nineteenth century. Cooper's first novel, *The Bravo*, published in 1831, depicts a Venice controlled by a ruthless oligarchy, operating behind the mask of a serene republic but really functioning as a center of intrigue and corruption, and takes as its inspiration those dangerous canal side liaisons first written about by Radcliffe (Lehan, 169). Charles Dickens's tour of Italy led to the composition of *Pictures from Italy*, his traditional travelogue celebrating the Serenissima as the Queen of the oceans and the "dreamy city" par excellence, drawing on the earliest manifestations of the literary myth but aligning himself with Wordsworth in using the city as a mirror image of the possible decadence Victorian England could also experience (79).

In 1851, Ruskin introduced an interpretation of Venice as an extended metaphor in his landmark tome *The Stones of Venice*. He rejects the strictly romantic, Byronic view of the city and instead presents Venice as a city with two sides: its former state and its current state, "one ideal and ancient, the other modern and ruinous" (238). Ruskin's concept of a fallen empire—one eventually done in by the "gathering vanity and festering guilt" (119)—was presented as a

warning to the English to temper what he observes as a sliding and questionable direction in societal morality, the same concern originally presented by Wordsworth and Dickens. He strips away the nostalgic longing of the Romantics and presents a city with its greatness forever lost to history, existing only in memory, one whose relevance, importance, and glory are long dead, but one which is worthy of continued admiration. Ruskin's thorough studies of Venice's Byzantine and Gothic architecture, and of venerable Venetian painters like Tintoretto, serve as his only interaction with the dead, even fossilized place. Nonetheless, his historical-aesthetic narrative placed "the idea of a Venetian fall more powerfully than ever in the treasure hoard of the cultural imagination" (Bell, 2). In *Stones of Venice*, he develops the notion of Venice as a city suspended between apocalypse and utopia, explaining how many of its palaces are in desecrated ruin or forever defaced but arguing there is still much magic in her appearance. His calculated study of Venetian art and architecture is analogous to a docent's lecture during a museum tour. This near-worship of the city's past creates a notion still pervasive in today's interpretation of Venice—that while the lifeblood has long been drained, the rush remains to get there before even the geographical space is lost entirely.

Perhaps it was the death of German composer Richard Wagner in 1883, the result of a heart attack while staying in his sixteenth-century palazzo on the Grand Canal, which cemented the relationship between Venice and the inevitable death of the artist. He finished the second act of his opera, *Tristan and Isolde*, while staying in the city and helped infuse the literary myth of dead Venice with the concept of actually dying in Venice, since there is no city more intimately associated with the tragic expiration of beauty. The Modernists inherited the long and complex literary evolution of the myth of the city, only to ultimately create an interpretation of Venice beyond anything grounded in historical fact. The city as setting for the Modernists is much more than simple backdrop. It had been ages since the city was a breathing,

living place for writers, and the lengthy romantic eulogizing could not continue in the face of rapidly encroaching industrialization across Europe. Decline, deterioration, and even death in Venice were perceived as inherent to the city's beauty and its splendor—a theme the Modernists were eager to pick up and apply as an extended trope for the current mental state of humankind.

The Modernist Concern for Place

The attack of progress from the 1870s onward provided a new way of interpreting publicly occupied space. The social transition from a producer-capitalist culture (where the focus was on work, thrift, and self-denial) to a new culture of abundance (with a focus on leisure, spending, and self-fulfillment) left writers struggling to find meaning in the home, in nature, and especially in the newly burgeoning cities (Kalaidjian, 21). By 1900, abundance was in vogue as a result of steam powered industrialization, and urbanization and the rise of mass media overwhelmed the public with immediate and rapid change. Leonard Lutwack, in his study of place and modernism, explains, “The twentieth century evidences a new interest in a place as an important issue in general as a result of widespread public recognition that earth as a place, or the total environment is being radically changed and perhaps rendered uninhabitable by more and more pervasive and powerful technologies” (2). From the Romantics into the opening years of the twentieth century, such change was considered threatening to social and personal well-being. Society was growing complex, destabilized, dislocated, and less unified, thereby leading to a transition in literature from a “sense of place inherited from Renaissance exploration and romantic identification [into a] twentieth century sense of place-loss and a sense of placelessness (Lutwack, 11). In opposition to the Victorians, who utilized and focused on social

space, and unlike the Naturalists and Transcendentalists, who found meaning in natural space, Modernists turned inward to chronicle the events of an internal space.

In his contribution to modern theories of human-place relations, Wesley Kort acknowledges how the “language of place and space is given prominence in modern fiction not only for reasons internal to the narratives but also because of the larger cultural context (18). The mass migration of the population from agricultural environs into the industrialized cities resulted in a feeling of rootlessness, one which prompted Jung’s later concern for the damaged psyche of one who has lost touch with the “dark, maternal, earthy ground of his being” (qtd. in Lutwack, 214). The socio-spatial aspects of modernist fiction reflect the unrelenting anxiety and alienation of city life and the growing discomfort of existing in a crowd. “The crowd became a metonym for the city in modernist discourse. The crowd easily became the mob, and the mob was indistinguishable from the masses,” Richard Lehan explains in his critical book *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*. “What gets lost in mass society is the individual; alienation is inevitable; the individual feels alone even in the crowd. (72). Acute isolation promotes the inward turn of the modernist protagonist, often taking the form of the sensitive artist, and preserving a space for individuality, creativity, and aesthetic value in an increasingly homogeneous and bourgeois world becomes paramount (Armstrong, 4). As a result, the deeper the inner reality intuited by narrators—Joyce’s *Dedalus* or Fitzgerald’s *Carraway* for instance—the more opaque their settings become. Thus, the indistinct geographical and architectural spaces in modernist fiction serve as metaphors naturally reflective of the narrator’s own internal space. Lehan further reveals: “before Modernism replaced Romanticism, it had to go through the decadent/aesthetic and symbolist experiences: the first created a reality so sour that it turned the aesthetic vision inward to escape reality; the second moved to a private, autistic state of mind, shutting out the urban, commercial, and industrial world that had become hostile.

Under such pressure the city as a physical place gave way to the city as a state of mind." (76). Ultimately for Modernists, the actuality of any real space was less important than the private mind space of a protagonist.

Venice as a No Place for Modernists

I do not say Venice by chance

-Proust

Discussing the Venice of the Modernists in traditional terms of setting and backdrop is to condemn the part the city plays to an inherently passive role. According to Kort, place in the novel traditionally determines what is possible and what can or cannot be expected. It sets limits and boundaries to the action, and creates a mental picture for the reader (15). Venice, as an anomalous place, balances quixotically between natural and man-made, between historic record and poetic fiction, and has a long and fabled record of encouraging limitlessness and eschewing traditional boundaries. Remaining curiously insulated from any governing nation, while ever serving as the crown jewel of Italy, Venice does not conform to a standard mental picture so much as it fosters a state of mind. It is a city of endless paradox, where "death is feared or pursued, cherished and enacted in the decay of splendor, in the excess and corruption of beauty...in the ambivalence of sensual, mental elation and a lugubrious atmosphere of doom" (Perosa, 281). It is the city which most easily lent itself to the modernists as a space far beyond simple backdrop. The inherited literary myth (what Millicent Bell charmingly terms "the handing on of its weightless stones from writer to writer" [124]), combined with the unusual nature of Venice's physical existence—a stone city remarkably afloat in the Adriatic—provided modernist authors a literal liminal space.

As Modernism was partially an aesthetic movement, and Venice a city of splendid surfaces, the belief that art (in a city famously and tirelessly painted) could transcend the disorder and chaos of the modern seems most fertile, even in a city with few gardens, in a place protected from the automobiles and bellowing factories of industrialized society. Because careful admiration of these surfaces was a critical part of visiting the city, especially post-Ruskin, the Modernists made use of the stage set of the city's famous facades to allow room for their protagonists to connect to their innermost realities. "Up to the palaces and gothic windows, up to the basilica, all the looking up in Venice creates a separation from reality," Bell explains (132). The true structure, or foundation of Venice is concealed, and thus the visitor is required to wander the city either staring up along its seemingly two-dimensional facades, or down into the reflective canals. The physical uniqueness of the city makes it easier for the modernist protagonist to slip from the more traditional, mythologized world of Venice, into a newly realized inner world. Once distanced from the cacophony of modernization and exposed to the seeming weightlessness of the floating city, the characteristic silence of the canals, and the magic of the moonlight reflecting in the water, one experiences a disorientation which concludes with an inner recognition impossible in the noise and distraction of the newly modern world.

Just as World War I isolated present experience from the usual and universal flow of time, Venice mimics a similar isolation in geographical space. The impossibility of its geographical existence allowed writers working in the turbulent atmosphere of fin de siècle Europe up through the heavy melancholy of the postwar Western world to juxtapose the chaos of the modern world with an unreal utopia. Venice never exists in modern fiction as a real city and is rarely associated with any type of nationalism. "Venice is not really ever written from the inside," Tony Tanner explains, "but is variously appropriated from without." (5) While Dickens

wrote London or Joyce Dublin, the protagonists who are transformed by Venice are never Venetians by birth, have not moved there permanently, and do not belong to the city in any natural way. That is, of course, because to be "natural" in Venice is impossible. The literary myth of Venice was so readily appropriated as a landscape of consciousness for Modernists because it was born from the long appropriated concept of the city as a dream state—the very notion of its stone self floating effortlessly in water mimics the experience of a dream.

In specific opposition to the Victorians and Transcendentalists, Modernists looked to Venice to give their internal space a beautiful, if moribund, face. As a setting that can act as an in between place, Venice exists between the natural and man-made, between the historical and mythological, and served for modernists as a mirror to reflect the newly pervasive sense of mental dislocation. The unique nature of Venice as an artistic, historical, and cultural object created a space for the Modernists that is at once simulated, constructed, staged, and imbued with mythological importance. For Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, Venice is a place wrapped up in notions of the romanticized past. For Marcel Proust's protagonist in *Remembrance of Things Past*, Venice is a personal memory, and in the novel, his long journey of discovery finds reassembly in the city of mosaics. Though each of these authors had physically visited the city, spent time in a gondola, and socialized in St Mark's, their protagonists exist in a Venice purely of the imagination. "Both Proust and Pound use the same word—incrustation—to define the inner nature of Venice" (Perosa, 283), and so the tendency of modernist authors to remove their protagonists, incrustated themselves by the blight of modern innovation, from the urban wasteland to the dream state or utopia of Venice to allow them personal reflection is progressively apt.

The blithe sexual liaisons of Cassanova and Byron as the epitome of the Venetian experience seemed passé to Modernist authors Henry James, Thomas Mann, and Ernest Hemingway, whose world was a decidedly altered place. Venice for them was not a sexual place—a place where sexual acts are committed and all manner of desires fulfilled—but rather a city that arouses desire but is not accommodating. Though James describes the city as the “Venice of one’s dreams” (qtd. in Tanner, 157), his unnamed narrator in *The Aspern Papers* is eventually undone by a sexual proposition Thomas Mann's Gustave Aschenbach submits to the constant invitation of sensual surrender in the city, only to face his eventual demise, and Hemingway's retired Colonel Cantwell from *Across the River and into the Trees* participates in an unconsummated love affair with Venice for thirty years before planning his death there. These characters all travel across the water—a symbolic, mythic journey of purgation—into a Venice largely of their own invention in order to recapture youth, beauty, meaning, God. Each of the narrators attempts to reassemble the past and tangentially experience a type of Modernist quest to uncover meaning in a chaotic, new world. The protagonists are all visitors, fittingly not rooted in either the actual place or in their own cerebral spaces. The hostility of the environment, similar to that experienced by the traditional questing hero, becomes an important thread among the three texts: James still sees Venice as hostile to the protagonist but not to Juliana, a foreigner in her own right. Mann presents a Venice that is extremely hostile to the repressed German but hostile because it is real, not a fake place dominated and controlled by a totalitarian society. Hemingway ultimately paints Venice as the only refuge from a too real, traumatically war-ravaged land. The no-place Venice of these Modernist authors is hostile because it does not actually exist and, more important, because their protagonists are fearful of their own internal dialogues. Namelessness, religion, nostalgia, historical discontinuity, and the impossibility of love are all evoked by and reflected in fragments in the facades and waterways

of Venice, which serves not as an actual, visitable city but, rather, as a reflection of the inner crisis of each character.

CHAPTER II

THE STAGE, THE MIND SPACE AND THE NO-PLACE:

THE USES OF VENICE IN "THE ASPERN PAPERS"

In 1887 Henry James was working and living in London as a writer but traveling regularly among the European cities popularized by the routes of the Grand Tourists. As recorded in his earliest impressions of London, called in a later essay a "murky modern Babylon," he did not find it the same city that inspired Dickensian melodrama (Essays, 1). While Dickens believed the place possessed an unfailing ability to turn out a moral lesson from even the most squalid narrow backstreet, James experienced a sprawling, suffocating, cosmopolitan metropolis, beleaguered by change on every level. The general overcrowding, as well as the unemployment and housing crises, had reached a catastrophic level, and residents of London, the most populous and most urbanized city on earth, were irrefutably affected by the heightened anxieties resulting from the onslaught of change in communication, transportation, and consumerism. In an article describing the Jubilee summer of 1887, social historian Bob Biderman writes, "Large sections of Old London were being methodically knocked down and replaced by imposing establishments of commerce. Avenues were widened to compensate for public crowding around the world's number one seaport and London found itself with hardly a square foot of brick wall bereft of advertising slogans which, in contemporary serial fashion, repeated their phrases over and over again, ad nauseam." The alienation, despite the overcrowding, and the pervasive unrest in the face of change, left James searching for a scene to provide relief from the visual and mental noise, both for himself and for his fiction.

A lifelong lover of the whole country of Italy, James was particularly fond of Venice and spent a great deal of his traveling time there. He confessed to his brother in 1881, “The simplest thing to tell of Venice is that I adore it—have fallen deeply and desperately in love with it” (qtd. in Norwich, 198). Venice represented for James a place free from the soot and grime of modern industry and protected from the clamoring machines of modern transportation. Far from the constant shuffle and push of industrial London, in Venice, all life moves at the proverbial pace of the oar and a high society lifestyle can be enjoyed in the bustling but peaceful piazzas, delightfully muted by the silence of the canals. Providing a further removal from the madness of modern progress, the dilapidation and borderline ruin of the city’s buildings symbolized for James the romantic past. Against a background of Venetian life when the gondola was still the main means of transport, Venice provided for James the opportunity to write about contemporary life by looking backward to an age quickly disappearing. In the preface to “The Aspern Papers” he writes, “I delight in a palpable imaginable *visitable* past (31),” and the unique city of Venice with its slower pace and drastically different appearance from that of “hideous, vicious, cruel and above all overwhelming” (Essays, 7) London, provided him the space and relative silence to lose himself in that past he admired.

It is clear, as John Julius Norwich recognizes, just how far removed James’s version of Venice is from modern reality. He discovers that nowhere in James’s copious writings on the city, travelogue as well as fiction, is there any mention of the momentous political events of the late 1860’s (Norwich, 194). To exclude consciously such events evidences James’s inability, or unwillingness, to understand or experience Venice as a modern city. He fails to register any current political unrest because he only interprets the place, and what it represents, as already dead, and a dead city cannot experience unrest, political or otherwise. James writes in his “Grand Canal” essay of 1892, “Venetian life, in the old large sense, has long come to an end, and

the essential present character of the most melancholy of cities resides simply in its being the most beautiful of tombs. Nowhere has the past been laid to rest with such tenderness, such a sadness of resignation and remembrance. Nowhere else is the present so alien, so discontinuous, so like a crowd in a cemetery without garlands for the graves" (*Italian Hours*, 33). Because it exists for him only as a fossilized setting of life now extinct, James not only fails to write of Venice as alive, but secondarily describes the city as one might describe a cherished memory, or even a dream. Venice is not real, not of "any appreciable reality" (qtd. Tanner, 157). In addition to the abundant travel writing James published on the city, Venice also served him repeatedly in his fiction, and it is in his fiction, from his earliest short stories such as "Traveling Companions" through his later, larger novels—most notably *The Wings of the Dove*— that James uses the dead world, or, dream world setting of Venice to draw out the modern consciousness of his transatlantic characters by writing the city as a stage, thus making a space outside the crush of modernization to allow an opportunity for the protagonist to recognize individual, deeply internal thoughts.

Providing the space and silence to hear one's internal dialogue is at the very core of the modernist literary movement. As James was traveling and writing, the Victorian era in literature was coming to a close, and his work reflects a new consideration for psychological and moral realism. James often employs a limited, third-person narrator and uses the mostly effaced voice to present a reflection of the protagonist's own struggle with modern morality. In addition to habitually exploring the world as it is mediated by one consciousness, James also juxtaposes Old World Europe and New World America. His transatlantic theme was most popularly explored in his early novels *Roderick Hudson* (1875), *The American* (1877), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and as Christof Wegelin, in *The Image of Europe in Henry James*, explains, James, above all, "was so profoundly concerned with the American character and the moral qualities it represented for

him, that other national characters came to serve in the end primarily as a means of defining the uniqueness of the American” (148). Similarly, in those novels set in Venice, it is James’s strategic employment of the city as a fictional setting that serves as a further, and at times, clearer mirror of his character’s mental space to better reflect a protagonist’s consciousness.

In 1887, after spending the late winter and spring with an American expatriate couple in Venice, Henry James suffered an attack of jaundice and fled to Florence to lodge with his beloved cousin, Constance Fenimore Woolson. Here, with his deepening interest in the transatlantic interaction and newly drunk with what he termed the “magic potion” of Venice, (Italian Hours, 55) James delighted in the latest society gossip concerning a Captain Silsbee, an avid fan of the Romantic poet Shelley, and his infiltration of the home of the elderly Ms. Clairmont, one of Byron’s most famous lovers and the mother of his daughter, Allegra, in order to collect any remaining personal papers of Byron’s or Shelley’s still in Ms. Clairmont’s possession. James, at once realizing the potential for an interesting short story, re-imagined the action in Venice, choosing for the dilapidated Bordereau homestead the late-sixteenth-century Palazzo Soranzo-Capello of Constance Fletcher on the Rio Manin (Norwich, 205). James explains in his preface how the setting might only be Venice, writing:

Juliana, as I saw her, was thinkable only in Byronic and more or less immediately post-Byronic Italy; but there were conditions in which she was ideally arrangeable, as happened, especially in respect to the later time and long undetected survival; there being absolutely no refinement of the mouldy rococo, in human or whatever other form, that you may not disembark at the dislocated water-steps of almost any decayed monument of Venetian greatness in auspicious quest of. (Aspern Papers, 33)

James's term "arrangeable" indicates that he imagined the city as a stage and himself as a master director with an intriguing bit of gossip for a loose script. Millicent Bell suspects James shifted the story from Florence to Venice "to bring the Italian phase of England's great romantic poets—particularly Byron's Venetian interlude—into association with Venice's multiple connotations of romance and degradation," (135) and since James was a devoted student of Ruskin and no doubt influenced by Ruskin's idea that Venice was the precursor of modern England, it might be surmised that in his retelling of the tale in his short *nouvelle* "The Aspern Papers," James does prove himself a master manipulator of the stage by assembling modern England, the American character, and his personal dream world of the past.

As interesting as a rumored plot to pilfer any surviving Byron/Shelley papers might have been to James, it is his break from the historical imagining of Venice as setting that begins a literal transmutation of the myth of Venice for the modernist authors who followed. Venice as a traditional setting provided a believable space for authors to explore uncensored love, lust, and deception. James, writing on the forefront of the modernist movement, began the earliest experimentation with an inward narrative, and thus sought out a suitable stage where modern life and reality will not interfere with his more important focus. In "Henry James's American Byron," Jeremy Tambling remarks, "the text ["The Aspern Papers"] requires a specifically Venetian setting. American openness and ability to express everything can only be achieved in an atmosphere of secrecy, impossible to map." (48) What Tambling refers to as American openness might be further defined as a prototype for the modernist effort to represent interiority in a specifically Venetian setting that provides the necessary latitude for a writer to explore a mental space. There is an irony in demanding a city like Venice, a place where writers have relied on the colorful traditional myth of Venice and all the attending implications to imbue a story with a certain layer of significance, operate instead as a paradoxically blank canvas onto

which a protagonist might transpose his mental landscape. But James does more than incorporate parts of the traditional myth of the city—specifically invoking the popular city-as-deceptive strain of the myth used brilliantly by Cooper in *The Bravo* fifty years prior—but further relies on Venice, the city removed from the modernization of the rest of the world, still undeniably beautiful but more important, entirely dead, as a stage, on which to use his characters' internal experiences to resurrect its lifeless stone.

James makes extended use of the traditional symbols of Venice in "The Aspern Papers," but his most successful connection is using the city of Venice as a symbol itself—a symbol of a great stage where a modern drama might reveal some truth about a representative protagonist, a symbol of the interior mind space of his modern character, and/or a nostalgic symbol of a time and world prior to the corruption of modernization. For instance, while James makes heavy use of specifically Venetian scenery—the glittery domes of San Marco, the gliding gondolas and smooth waters of the interior canals—there are no believable Italians in "The Aspern Papers." While there are a few stock Venetian characters, the gondolier, the maid, and the doctor, they are employed only as additional representations of the city. James uses the building facades and piazza tables just as he does his mute Venetian cast, as theater props meant only to give the story color. Venice is not a pulsating, living place but just a backdrop for his narrator and the American women he intends to deceive. James describes Venice in another travel essay from his collection *The Italian Hours* using a city-as-museum metaphor: "where the little wicket that admits you in perpetually turning and creaking" (14). Again, it is no surprise James (as an astute student of Ruskin) treats the city as the world's finest collection of painting and architecture. Steve Salmoni, in an article interpreting the act of seeing Italy in James's travel literature, explains, "James's Venetian travel writings implicate themselves into the larger narrative of the visual as metaphor for consciousness or thought" (279). It is natural that his earliest impressions

of physical Venice would then be useful in his fiction. He strives to imbue the symbols of the city with a greater, timelier meaning. Salmoni fleshes out a fascinating interpretation of James's museum metaphor, defining Venice as a place of "pure interior(ity), windowless and self-contained, like a gallery of pictures in which the framed paintings assume the place of outward-looking windows, conducting the gaze of the viewers back upon themselves within the closed room" (283). James's perception of the self-reflective nature of the city resurfaces when he intends his protagonist also engage in some type of meaningful self-reflection, though, in "The Aspern Papers" the double vision of Venice is paramount, as his narrator is both observer and the observed.

One of the most significant symbols in "The Aspern Papers" is the Bordereau palazzo, a symbol of Juliana's physical self, as well as her interior mind space, especially as the symbolism applies to her locked secretary and her aged steamer trunks (her symbolic heart/memory) inside. Juliana represents the woman of an older, decaying world—a world that has been under constant attack by the move toward the modern, a world that is slipping into the annals of history. She has withdrawn into the obscurity of the palazzo outside the city center, and inside her dilapidated palazzo she reconstructs her disappearing world with the ancient trunks, sparse and outdated furniture, and her middle-aged niece. Her life inside is staged and simulated to recreate the past. The images of the elderly, lonely Juliana clutching her love letters in the shadowy corners of a decrepit palazzo are powerful images connecting her to the myth of Venice as an aged and slowly sinking queen of the sea. Mrs. Prest comments to the narrator that Juliana lives in the *quartier perdu*, emphasizing that the area, like Juliana, was once fashionable but has since been replaced by something more modern. The gothic element embodied in the palazzo's physical description and the Bordereau women's rumored reputation as witches are critical to James's invocation of Venice as a city mediated by the singular consciousness of the

protagonist. The palace is suffering extreme dilapidation and is endlessly compared with the state of Juliana's physical health, its façade crumbling away like so many of the buildings along the canals. Extending the Gothic element favored by Poe, James reflects the deteriorating mental health of the visitor in the physical state of Juliana and her palazzo. This incorporation of Gothic person-place symbolism provides the reader a clearer picture of the narrator as a man guided by images in books, and creates from that the understanding of modern man in search of a past he has only read about, further identifying the city of Venice not as a real place, but as a city alive only in pages of fiction.

The narrator's description of the palazzo's "gloomy grandeur" uses the physical setting of Venice as a trope, but while Juliana's home is a hyperbolic reflection of her physical infirmity, the examination of the two- or three-centuries old palazzo, which possesses, "an air not so much of decay as of quiet discouragement," further explores the general foreignness of its inhabitants (49). The narrator observes how the palazzo is, "so little in the tone of Venice," creating a separation between the symbolic place and the fictional city (49). Additionally, the Bordereau name implies some "sort of remoter French affiliation," and the interior space is described as; "more Dutch than Italian, more Amsterdam than Venice" (45). James weaves the stranger in a strange land thread not only by having his American narrator travel abroad in search of the papers, but also by emphasizing Juliana's deracination, her not belonging to this, or any, place. She willingly imprisons herself in the dark rooms of the palace and in the deepest recesses of her own mind, to be consumed with her own memories of what life was previously: "that was what the old woman represented—esoteric knowledge" (74). Indeed, the selective enlightening of Juliana further serves James's use of Venice as a neutral place rather than a modern city. Confusing Juliana's nationality and tastes creates of her symbolic palazzo a neutral space, and must be a conscious move given that the author's other works are devoted to the

themes of transatlanticism and nationality. When the narrator asks Tina during their first exchange if she and her aunt are Americans, she replies, “I don’t know. We used to be. We don’t seem to be anything now.” (57) This response effectively creates another symbolic tie between the women and the city, since all resist formal classification, and clarifies James’s use of Venice as a city beyond the modern world, operating as an internal space for Juliana, who has resigned from modernity and chosen instead to take up permanent residence inside her memory.

The garden, then, is the symbolic opposite of the crumbling palazzo and therefore represents Tina and her opposition to Juliana’s chosen life. Flowering plants and trees have long been employed as symbols of life, but their presence in Venice, a city of cold stone and precious little greenery, gives the palazzo garden specific importance. The garden is both a representation of Tina’s internal space, hidden, or long ignored yet still able to bloom with a little attention, as well as the narrator’s tool of deception. He concludes he “must work the garden—I must work the garden” once he learns of the younger Bordereau’s insatiable appetite for fresh flowers (54). His plan from the outset was to “make love to the niece” and, one can infer that “working the garden,” attending to the garden metaphorically and literally, also means cultivating Tina. Since the garden is her symbolic self, left ignored and overgrown beside the much larger, darker palazzo of her aunt, the implication is that she has wasted away without attention yet is still capable of transformative regeneration. Tina, unlike Venice, is not dead, and just the narrator’s presence alone is reported as having a revitalizing effect on her. The garden, the stage set where Tina and the narrator share their most intimate talks, and where he even briefly re-imagines Shakespeare’s balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* (a stage within a stage), is used by James as another location inside the larger dream world city where Tina finally finds the space and possibility to identify her own desires for love and youth beyond the suffocating presence and sun-blotting shadow of her aunt.

The symbolic location of the narrator's interior space must be the grand Piazza San Marco, overflowing with strangers of various nationalities (similar to the narrator, an American living in England, traveling as a stranger to Italy) and buzzing with constant music and conversation, the signs of civilization. The symbolic San Marco is a "visitable" palimpsest not of Venice's long and fascinating reign but of Western cultural history. To make the passeggiata—to promenade in Piazza San Marco—was obligatory for the Grand Tourist, and aside from either collecting the papers or physically touching the decrepit Juliana, this social act is the closest James's narrator can come to sharing the Venetian stage with his idol, Aspern. Furthermore, strolling along the canals beside the piazza, the narrator admits he is "more than ever struck with that queer air of sociability, of cousinship and family life, which makes up half the expression of Venice" (140). The most curious element of the city for him is not the historic buildings or enchanting waterways, because he has seen those images reproduced in scores of books, but rather the feeling of belonging on the piazza stage, interacting with fellow actors, as opposed to watching the action from afar as a man more familiar with the alienation experienced as a member of the crowded London masses. Salmoni theorizes, "James is merely one of the numberless crowds of viewers each engaging in their own private, partial visions of the city, transforming it into a collection of fragmentary images that may be endlessly reconstituted and combined to produce multiple 'Venices'" (280). And so, for the narrator, this particular space in Venice reflects his own desired mental space:

without streets and vehicles, the uproar of wheels, the brutality of horses, and with its little winding ways where people crowd together, where voices sound as in the corridors of a house, where human step circulates as if it skirted the angles of furniture and shoes never wear out, the place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which the Palazzo San Marco is the most ornamented corner, and palaces

and churches, for the rest, play the part of the great divans of repose, tables of entertainment, expanses of decoration. (Aspern Papers, 140)

The description of Venice here suggests it is something arranged, decorated, like a theatre stage, just as the narrator desires to arrange the Bordereau palazzo so he might be privy to the memories stored there (inside Juliana's mind), and also as the narrator might wish to arrange his own life so that it mirrors, or reflects, Aspern's. In "Traveling Companions," an earlier short story set in Venice, James also writes about the Piazza San Marco. He says of the multi-domed Basilica, "there proceeds a dense rich atmosphere of splendor and sanctity which transports the half-stupefied traveler to the age of a simpler and more awful faith" (21). Aspern, as a modern god, haunts the narrator's Venice as he haunts Juliana's memory, and James's Venetian stage presents a similarly overwhelming atmosphere in which each of his characters experiences the full weight of his or her mental desires.

The no-place symbols in "The Aspern Papers" are more principally representative of the nostalgic longing that permeates the short story and add to the overall sense of Venice as a place which does not exist outside each character's mind space. Aspern, of course, is the god figure, a symbol of creation, deep emotion, and a capacity for feeling, as well as a representation of another time. The narrator repeatedly refers to Aspern as his god and explains how "he hangs high in the heaven of our literature" and is "part of the light by which we walk" (46). Aspern for James is, like Venice, a fictional construct. The poet-god is something assembled from what the modern narrator most desires. The narrator, as Aspern's devotee, praises him as "one of the most brilliant minds of his day...one of the most genial men and one of the handsomest" (47). First, James assembles a neutral, though beautiful, stage to give the narrator the freedom of unobstructed space to follow his internal instinct, away from the noise and

mechanical complexity of the modern world. Second, James supplies his narrator with a representative god whom he can use to light said stage: "I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth" (73). He is not the spiritual figure of a slowly eroding Christian faith, but a constructed god, an artist, made immortal by his own pen, and representative of the world modernity is destroying. Aspern served as the poet of the New World, but no longer are there places to be discovered, and the modern narrator is reduced to writing literary biography instead of creating original poetry. It could be both coincidence and classic narcissism that inspired James to elevate the status of his personal profession to that of a god worthy of worship. In James's Aspern figure there is a clear acknowledgement of the modernist's concern with and anxiety regarding a loss of faith. Before later writers gave up the idea of god altogether, James constructed this hero God, once a living being and thus more readily identifiable than the Christian spirit God, and yet still unreachable. The holy name Aspern is so often spoken throughout the story that the repetition recalls an almost ritualistic incantation, but the narrator, a modern man, remains nameless throughout.

The narrator's namelessness is a strategy that keeps the reader ever aware of the narrator's status as a stranger, in the Bordereau home, in the symbolic mind space of Venice, and in the larger, modern world. As a man bombarded with modernity, he is a stranger most to himself. On first arriving in the city, he speaks familiarly with only one other person, Mrs. Prest, a self-effacing expatriate in her own right. Prest never addresses him by a Christian name but does call him monomaniacal and foolish. The namelessness of the narrator throughout clarifies James's desire to create a sense of anonymity and presents a sinister, distant quality even as the literary critic becomes more intimate with the ladies of the palazzo. The insistent namelessness further serves the Venice as a stage metaphor. The narrator presents the housemaid with his calling card, carefully engraved with his chosen *nom de guerre*, both calling attention to his

premeditation for deception and showing how far, even at the outset, he is willing to go to procure his tangible link to the past. Calculated motivation aside, the narrator has what is in fact a stage name, or a character role he has mentally practiced. Ilona Treitel's research concerning art and the act of interpretation in James's fiction has focused on what she terms the "play acting" of the narrator in "The Aspern Papers." She argues he is "continuously acting, improvis[ing] his lines and gestures as he goes along" (87). However, even when his true name is at last revealed to Tina in the garden, it is omitted for the curious reader. This is because it matters so little. The narrator skillfully plays a role to access the palazzo, but even in his real, literal world, his name has no meaning for him: Trietel recognizes the narrator's namelessness, and thus, infers he is lacking identity, just as Venice is presented as lacking depth or any measure of discernible reality (86). She surmises, "The narrator's quest for his origin, and thus a determinable self, stands in contrast to his constant play-acting and hiding behind masks" (Treitel, 86). The narrator's mask, whether symbolized by his fictional calling card or by the various roles—lodger, gardener, potential suitor—he adopts, is the lesser of the two major symbolic masks James uses to represent the internalized space of Venice.

The tradition of mask-wearing recurs in literature set in Venice because it remains a powerful symbol of the roles one is free to adopt while staying there. At the end of the eighteenth century, Venice during carnival season was described by author Philip Monnier as "an enchanted city, a wonderful, mad city of masks and serenades, of amusements and pretense" (qtd. in Plant, 11). Juliana Bordereau's, "horrible green shade which served almost as a mask," works as a symbol of her own play acting a role of secrecy, similar to the secret nature of the city, rather than as a mask of Venetian revelry. The narrator struggles to understand why Juliana has not bothered to take greater care to hide herself away from prying journalists but quickly realizes her choice might have been better thought out than he had initially presumed:

“She had boldly settled down in a city of exhibition...the one apparent secret of her safety had been that Venice contained so many much greater curiosities,” and so the carnival atmosphere again makes Venice a stage, able to accommodate her need for total self-effacement and his for open deceit (48). James employs the symbolic mask/veil in the vein of the closely related Dionysus myth and redirects the concept of masked participant in Carnivale as “the mysterious stranger, and the man in the crowd,” where the crowd is synecdochal of modernity (Lehan, 20). The “mystifying bandage” over Juliana’s eyes frustrates the stranger in her house because it maintains distance (91). Behind it, she, and her Aspern, remain strangers to the narrator, just as he remains a stranger to her, hiding behind his invented name. The dual anonymity results in neither character having a discernable identity beyond a shared devotion to Aspern and the past. Juliana lives behind her shade, inside her own memories of her youth, and the narrator lives upstairs in her palazzo under false terms and pretenses. Venice as a traditional setting permits and encourages the duplicity of both. “The mask,” historian Margaret Plant explains, “was a powerful agent of deception and escape for resident and visitor” (24). Juliana is not residing; she never engages with the city at all. And the narrator is not visiting; he is there on a specific mission. Venice allows for the hiding in plain sight both characters require.

The veil the elderly Mrs. Bordereau wears to hide her eyes performs a double duty as protector of her actual vision and as preserver of her vision of a world no longer viewable. When the veil is removed, during the first of James’s dual climaxes, Juliana’s eyes are revealed to the snooping narrator, catching him, and he says they are extraordinary and make him horribly ashamed (125). Symbolically, Juliana’s eyes sans mask have a meaning of their own; her eyes have been protected and therefore act as an uncorrupted gaze from the past. Their judgment of the narrator’s actions is far more impactful than Mrs. Prest’s modern reaction. Tina is also affected by the power of Juliana’s representative gaze and admits even after the aunt’s death

how she “can see them—they stare at me in the dark!” (134). The lasting impression of the judgmental gaze proves that Juliana’s earlier admission that “the world goes fast and one generation forgets another,” does not, in fact, work the other way round (109). The powerful nostalgia of living in Venice is further displayed in Juliana’s tightly gripping her letters and her small portrait of the poet, all relics of the past modernity has forgotten. Her life is suspended in time, and the “personal, delicate, intimate” tokens provide for her both meaning and identity beneath the mask she wears to play her character (51). In frustration, the narrator says to Juliana, “I look at you but I don’t see you” because she is not there, in the present, in the palazzo which reflects her physical age (112). She is, behind her mask, in her mind space, in the no-place Venice which ignores her age and permits an eternally suspended existence in which Juliana is happiest, most beautiful, and in love and loved in return by a poet-god.

Tina, too, is nostalgic for her youth, crying to the narrator, “pleasure, pleasure—there’s no pleasure in this house!” (71). Her desperation is all too clear without a mask to hide behind. Tina is caught in limbo between two conflicting worlds: her aunt’s romanticized past and the world the narrator’s obsessive nostalgia has driven him to construct from a past he never knew; neither are worlds she belongs to or desires. She suffocates from the extinction of a generation that she has been tethered to rather than born into, living both with her aunt and as her aunt for as long as they have been in no-place Venice. While she remembers once enjoying the splendor of a city unlike any other in the world, she has for long been trapped physically inside the dank palazzo, waiting for the inevitable death of her guardian, Juliana. Initially, the narrator finds himself unable to distinguish between speeches she makes on her own and those the older aunt imposes on her, revealing Tina’s assigned role; under the only mask she has been permitted, essentially a mask of middle-aged haplessness, she is taking cues and learning her lines from Juliana (67). When, at Juliana’s encouraging, the narrator takes Tina out in his

gondola, she is reawakened by Venetian life outside the cold corridors of the palazzo. She wastes no time visiting other corners of the city but instead requests they go straight to the Piazza San Marco, where she is “more than pleased, she was transported; the whole thing was an immense liberation” (96). From the instant she steps out into the grand piazza, swept up with the gay crowds and surrounded by the charming, pink marble of the Palazzo Ducale, she is reminded of lunches on the Lido and evenings spent with company in various Italian cities. Tina’s facial expression, the “flush of a wounded surprise,” delineates the space between her long standing role as ignored niece and the life and world she occupied before being written into her aunt’s drama (98). The change of scene reveals to Tina an incredible playground stage set with color and music, and it is symbolic of her realizing her own desired space. Her own limited mobility in Venice is mirrored in Juliana’s confinement to a wheelchair, and by strolling the streets and shops in San Marco, she is reminded of the life she has been made to sacrifice. Remembering her life on the Lido and within the city creates a symbolic double vision of Venice. The Piazza San Marco stirs a nostalgic longing she has for her past life, and the memory of the Lido beaches, replete with modern hotels and scores of vacationing aristocrats, reveals the forward-looking desire she has to return to the modern world.

James’s arranging of Venice, and his treatment of Venice as a stage, creates a space for the narrator to serve as both actor and audience. His interaction with the Bordereau women is certainly a theatrical performance, like the Venetian life he sees being played out on the stage of the city. The mute background actors in his own scenes, and the various costumes, character names, and backstories are all important for creating distance between his real, mental self and the self he presents for the world stage. Once Tina proposes, in effect breaking the fourth wall, he breaks character and quits the scene. He has somehow blurred the line between fiction and reality so thoroughly that he is caught accidentally living his own play. Emotionally, he has only

committed to worshipping Aspern, and so to create separation, he flees in an effort to reprise his role as observer. He has crossed into a double occupancy of Venice, being recast by Tina from a skilled actor on its stage to a participant in its historical love story, but he never desires the intimacy he experiences in the “queer sociability” of the city (140). James admits in *Italian Hours* his best hours in Venice were spent looking at pictures of the greats. Carpaccio, Bellini, Tintoretto, and Veronese were all masters for him, just as Aspern for the narrator is a mighty god. The genius of these masters has expired, and nothing replaces or competes with it in modern time. And so James presents the internal phenomenon of consciousness just as the Impressionists presented a modern image of the fleeting reflections of light on the canals. The light, like James’s language, obscures as it clarifies: “The moment-to-moment panorama of the Venetian scene passes from light to shadow; the most magnificent objects are as often enveloped in darkness as they are bathed in light, and this light, paradoxically, can at other times become so intense that it obscures by dissolving the boundaries between discrete things” (Salmoni, 280). The separation between drama and reality is blurred, just as the characters’ external and internal experiences are revealed at once in a Venice as a stage setting of consciousness. Recalling the famous opening stanza of Byron’s *Childe Harold*, the notion of the double vision of Venice, of a palace and a prison on each hand, is not just fitting but revealing of the mind space James and his narrator occupy in Venice.

The geographic and object symbolism in “The Aspern Papers” aids James in staging his drama, and the incorporation of backdrops such as the Bordereau palazzo, its garden, and the bustling Piazza of San Marco represent with symbolic clarity the mental state of his characters. Beyond the staging, there are a variety of masks, of props, play-acting, and behind the scenes glimpses of actors struggling to memorize lines or working through improvisational exercises in order to anticipate a fellow player’s next move. James’s delighting in the play-within-a-play

effect is just one of his several allusions to Shakespeare in the short story. James plays on Shakespearean drama, with a nod to *The Merchant of Venice*, via the narrator's obsessive talk of "spoils and stratagems," and he has his narrator comparing Aspern's poems to Shakespeare's sonnets, calling the Bard, "scarcely more divine," (155). As Eliot did in *The Waste Land*, James quotes *Twelfth Night's* "dying fall" before playing out the Romeo and Juliet scene in the garden (46). But, for all the play-acting, the narrator knows too well he is not a poet and Tina not a poet's mistress, and so James uses his stage of Venice to reenact the beautiful past but produces nothing for the desperate present, and thus the present is spent not on a stage but locked in a mental space, burdened with memory, which becomes, ultimately, a no place at all.

After the masks have been removed and the actor's roles confessed, Venice ceases to act as a stage and, at last, is permitted to reveal its true nature. The no-place Venice allows its visitors to remove any national affiliation and provides the beautiful spaces, abundant silence and reflection, and historical freedom to allow one to relax into one's own mind. The dreamy, otherworld quality of James's description of Venice—"see how it glows with the advancing summer; how the sky and the sea and the rosy air and the marble of the palaces all glimmer and melt together (152)—makes the city appear like a painting and never like an inhabitable, modern reality. The methodically arranged stage is for all three of James's characters in "The Aspern Papers" the closest they come to experiencing a total, if fleeting, utopia. James wrote shortly after his first visit to the city, "the mere use of one's eyes in Venice is happiness enough" (*Italian Hours*, 60), but later, for his characters without nationality, without direction, and disabled by a move toward the modern, their collective happiness is finding a place that overlooks aging and the passing of chronological time, that permits the worship of a god who is first a poet but also eternal, a place which fosters, encourages, and protects reciprocal, romantic love. That no-place, mental state, dream world Venice is not one that permanently can be

staged. It is only through its unique atmosphere and literary legacy that the myth of Venice can provide the symbolic place and adequate space to constitute a world of its own.

CHAPTER III

DREAM STATE AND STATE OF DECAY: DOUBLE VISION IN

THOMAS MANN'S "DEATH IN VENICE"

The cultural anxiety resulting from the first major onslaught of the Industrial Revolution was amplified in the two decades separating the publication of James's "The Aspern Papers" and Thomas Mann's 1912 publishing of "Death in Venice," his own Venetian novella. The advancements in travel and communications, as well as the vast developments in science reached far beyond cosmopolitan London and set the modern, Western world on edge. Modernist movements in literature and art reflected the desire to decipher the impact of this seemingly endless change and to distinguish between true advancements and contributions to the degeneration of humankind. The fin de siècle pessimism about the moral sickness of civilization carried into the first decade of the twentieth century, and rumors of an impending war hung heavily across the continent. What Professor of German Literature Inta Miske Ezerailis calls the emblem of the male principle—Aschenbach's clenched fist in the beginning chapter of "Death in Venice"—might further stand as the emblem for the whole of Germany at the turn of the century (47). Clenched-fist tension and self-discipline were hallmarks of the static, hierarchical, and undemocratic structure of Wilhelminian society on the eve of World War I. Roderick Stackelberg explains how fin de siècle Germans embraced Idealism and the quest for moral perfection, and determines, "authentic German culture embraced the inner freedom

that liberated the individual from selfishness and material temptation” (Stackelberg, 30), thus concluding that Germans attempted to create order from the chaos of modernity by turning away from capitalism and consumerism and, instead, deriving purpose from hard work and determination.

The interpretation of the state of mind of the modern German was undergoing tremendous and lasting change as well. The impact of Nietzsche’s philosophical inquiry into the Apollonian/Dionysian continuum provided a new lens for a Western literary world struggling to defend the pursuit of the arts in the face of the stricter forces of the industrial mentality. Nietzsche proposed the embracing of the more Dionysian element in an effort to counterbalance the ruling Apollonian, rational, scientific force directing Europe. Freud’s description of the subjective states of the mind was a startling new model, positing an unconscious mind, full of primal impulses, counterbalanced with self-imposed restrictions, and a “self” constantly engaged in acts of denial and repression. Carl Jung extended the idea of repression, specifically the collective unconscious of humankind, and emphasized an understanding of the psyche through exploring the worlds of dreams, art, mythology, and religion. Writers looking to explore these philosophical principles imbued the setting of their fiction with a more distinct, more purposeful element of place to expose the contrasts between the varying states of the controlling mind. The light and dark motif in Joseph Conrad’s 1902 novel, *Heart of Darkness*, for example, is woven into an obscurely defined jungle setting in which readers may explore the natural duality of man, while Conrad also provides mythical allusions to connect ancient Greece and a not yet conquered African continent in a manner meant to shed light on modern man’s remaining primordial qualities. In general, the concept of “self” became increasingly problematic in modern culture, and place began to take on a new and important role to help the author define the humanistic qualities of a protagonist. As Leonard Lutwack

explains, “In the relationship between place and person, the person cannot come off second best, for what counts is the subjective flow set in motion by the place, the amount and intensity of inwardness that external stimuli can arouse” (14). For Conrad, the stimuli were dense jungle and oppressive silence. For German novelist Thomas Mann, the stimulus was a place that is the antithesis of modern, industrial Germany.

To Northern Europe, and most especially to the Germans, the fallen queen city of Venice signified “the erotic, the exotic, and the forbidden” (Koelb, 97). As a city that had long enjoyed a reputation as host to a perpetual Mediterranean party and acted as a safe haven for a myriad revelers, secret keepers, and mask-wearers of all kinds, Venice, thanks to symbolic associations, became “the dream-land of the German soul” (Shookman, 203). The palace facades were presented by the Impressionists in dreamy blues and dusky pinks, like aspects of a place one might only imagine. The image of the floating gondola, rowed effortlessly to the sound of the oar’s splash, stood in stark contrast to the pollution of industrial machines and the daily grind that was an essential part of the German work ethic. The tendency of non-Italian writers to fictionally link Venice with moral corruption connected the dreamy-symbolic landscape with danger. That danger-dream dualism created a particular type of warning for the German reader, suggesting the mortal threat of permitting indulgence in one’s innermost fantasies (Ritter, 90)—fantasies that could only be explored in a place as lawless as Venice. Freud’s talking cures, while revolutionary, were problematic for the German citizen who had been conditioned to believe in repression as a tool to aid production in the modern world, and as, “in both life and literature visits to the Mediterranean have often brought about a sexual awakening” (Robertson, 96), visiting Venice promised a total moral, professional, and sexual undoing of self. Add to the increased heat and humidity of the Southern clime the myth of licentiousness stereotypically associated with Venice, as well as the disorienting, maze-like calle and all manner of masks to

hide behind, and the resulting labyrinth of Venice seemed uniquely designed to inspire a complete release of repressed desires.

It is the city Mann refers to as "someplace incomparable, someplace as out of the ordinary as a fairy tale," (13) and the place he chooses as a setting for exploring his preferred theme, the link between art and death. Mann was creatively influenced by Wagner and his use of the musical leitmotif—he spent hours during his own Venetian sojourn, the same which inspired the novella, drafting an essay on the composer—and by another composer, Gustave Mahler, who became the face for his *Künstlerroman* as Mann's version of a mature and successful artist, Gustave von Aschenbach. As one of the "foundational modernists, an artist concerned about the experience of modernity" (Gillespie, 93), Mann, writing on the threshold of the First World War, constructs in his protagonist a modern German stereotype, a man capable through his struggle with his fictional id and ego to offer a commentary on the overly-structured, emotionless, modern world. Aschenbach is symbolic of the state of Northern Europe and embodies the German mentality; he is credited with publishing a prose epic about Frederick the Great, and sees himself as an important part of a larger German cultural heritage. In his treatment of Munich, Mann implies the end of Bismark's Germany, one like the collapse of the no less exhausted Victorian empire, and describes a modern world in a state of chaos and disintegration (Ritter, 89). Mann illustrates via Aschenbach a concept of the modern man, as one with a "life of self-control and a life lived in despite" (47). Aschenbach's leaving Munich is in effect the man of German modernity giving up the endless fight to create a respectable life worthy of his lineage, as well as abandoning the quest for moral perfection embraced by German Idealists. The matter of Aschenbach's personal space, in which he must operate inside a larger social space, is of utmost importance to Mann. Wesley Kort determines, "the personal, by being mysterious and hidden, is a threat to society, especially a society that tends toward

totality and control" (170). Traveling from Munich to Venice opens up a larger space for Aschenbach's personal, hidden self, and his Southern holiday directly positions the "puritanical, disciplined north" against the "sensual, passionate, instinctual charm of the south" (Stackelberg, 34). This binary encourages Aschenbach's repressed personality to relax in an atmosphere renowned for its lawlessness and privileges the personal space of the individual man over the social space, the opposite of what is dictated in Germany.

Whereas James's Venice is the meeting point for Old World Europe and New World America, Mann's Venice is the meeting point of a dignified, orderly West and a primordial, Indian East, a city in which one can examine the tension between modern and ancient. Mann transports Aschenbach "to the land of Elysium at the far ends of the earth...where the days run out in blissful leisure, trouble-free, struggle-free, dedicated only to the sun and its revels" (35), yet presents the specific paradox of a city like Venice through a series of dreamlike settings, mythological archetypes, and symbolic representations of its inherent duality. The city is a utopia, a splendid illusion, but also dangerously decadent and destructive. The labyrinthine streets are at once charmingly adventurous and horribly disorienting. The abundant waters of the city—the fountains, the canals, the lagoon, the sea—are liberating but also threaten total dissolution; they keep encroaching modernity at bay but also act as the medium in which the fatal cholera thrives. Mann remarks, "Ambiguous is really the simplest term one can use to define Venice...but it suits her in all its possible meanings, notwithstanding the fatuity and corruption which dominate her, this musical enchantment is still alive—at least, at moments" (qtd. in Giobbi, 58). For Mann, the musical moments he experienced were composed exclusively by Wagner, and the ambiguity he detected a result of the natural duplicity of the city with a long literary tradition and a strong German stereotype.

“Death in Venice” makes pointed use of Nietzsche’s Apollonian-Dionysian polarity, “expanding it beyond the fatal passion of an old man for a young boy into a symbolic tale about—among other things—the relation between art and life, the artist and society, the aristocratic past and the bourgeois present, the North and South, Platonic idealism and bodily eroticism, the conscious and the unconscious...civilization and its discontents” (Traschen, 177). The double vision Mann creates, by presenting the city as an Utopist paradise and then with the subtle play of lighting lifting the veil to reveal a decaying, dangerous place, further symbolizes the dueling desires of the modern consciousness. Venice, like Aschenbach, is dying from within, and the novella is an allegory of the decay of an old world, and an old man, that have lost direction in the face of modernism (Lehan, 150). Mann embraces the Nietzschean dichotomy by exploring setting and character using binary oppositions. Venice is a city with two faces, and as Gustave Aschenbach, the symbolic man of German modernity, uncovers first the magical and then the decadent views of the city, so too is he revealed as possessing two faces, the Apollonian and Dionysian, the Ego and the Id, the modern and the mythical, both sides exposed specifically by the double vision of the dream state and state of decay of the ambiguous city of Venice.

Mann’s initial presentation of Aschenbach is as a mentally overwrought modern man surely sinking beneath the burden of maintaining his professional reputation. Aschenbach’s history is detailed explicitly to achieve two distinct ends: to present him as a pillar of moral and social standards, but also to present him as teetering on the very brink of mental collapse. He is described as behaving decisively, reliably and as writing with a terseness of style. His writing is formulaic, just like his life, and therefore appropriate for use by the educational authorities in their textbooks for the grooming of the next generation. His regimen of discipline and endurance has left no space for “sloth, the carefree, laissez-faire attitude of youth,” emblematic

of his oncoming desire to travel southward and recapture, perhaps, this very thing (8). Aschenbach's physical description, "clean shaven with cheeks lean and hollow...and eyes looking tired but piercingly through rimless glasses," is characteristic of over-wrought, modern nervousness and is similar to the face of twentieth-century weariness worn later by Eliot's Prufrock (12). This first face of Aschenbach, still imprisoned in the modern world of Munich, is emblematic of his dire need of an escape—from his work, his history, and from himself.

The novella opens with the first version of Aschenbach at the North Cemetery tram stop, at the end of his regular walk through Munich, and in his first symbolic death space. The trams have stopped running, and the surrounding area is entirely deserted. The description of place is representative of the protagonist's mental landscape; the graveyard serves as a symbolic burial of the wholly rational, first version of Aschenbach and is the beginning of his inner realization, partly through fear and partly desire, to seek out a new, meaningful life outside the suffocation he experiences in his industrial homeland. Until he gives in at last to the "urge to get away from his work, from the daily scene of an inflexible, cold, and passionate service," Aschenbach has allowed the modern mentality to convince him his work was academically important and personally rewarding (6). Outside the church, Aschenbach is tempted initially to flee the demands of scholarly composition and escape to some place more suitable for encouraging an emotional connection to his writing. That Aschenbach finds himself easily transitioning from religious reverence outside the church (he silently contemplates the golden scripture above the mortuary doors) to being entirely distracted by a red-headed stranger's "physical or spiritual influence" (4) evokes the modernist religious trope; traditional Christian worship is replaced with a search for a new god, or a return to older ones, as in the cases of Pound and D.H. Lawrence, for instance. Thunderclouds hover ominously overhead, a clear metaphor of the modern as looming, cold, and unfeeling. His world is dead from the inside

out, and his desire to flee to a “primitive wilderness,” another modernist trope reflective of “primitivism,” is a desire through metaphor to travel back in time to some place meaningful and inspiring, and to discover a more meaningful self (5). The struggle against his inborn German character traits, “self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and subordination of self to a normative authority,” can only be eschewed by “overcoming one’s natural inclination to surrender to the enjoyment of life” (Stackelberg, 36). Aschenbach, at this stage, needs not to escape to someplace, but first must only run away and seek some as yet unknown personal meaning in the South, to give space to his other self. The other world the cemetery images collectively conjure resembles a place vastly different from the one he currently feels imprisoned in; though the dream-world is frightening, expressing the “terrors of the earth” through a landscape like “a tropical swamp under a vaporous sky, moist, luxuriant, and monstrous,” (5) Aschenbach’s first indulgence of repressed desire simply involves no longer controlling his passionate wanderlust for travel.

Aschenbach’s decision to vacation in the charming South, though “not quite all the way to the tigers,” is his second step toward his construction of his second self, and, his first exploration of another state of mind (5). Following his brief encounter with the stranger in the cemetery, he experiences “a sudden, strange expansion of his inner space, a rambling unrest, a youthful thirst for faraway places, a feeling so intense, so new—or rather long unused and forgotten” (5). The struggling writer, as Aschenbach’s first self, is a man past his fiftieth birthday longing for some way to reclaim his youth, but a second image, a man beyond this crippling modern neurosis, finds some emergent space in the words of an artist: “He remembered the melancholy, enthusiastic poet of long ago who had furnished his dreams with the domes and bell towers rising from these waters” (16). Like James’s narrator, Aschenbach is lured to the city by a famous poet. Recalling verses by August Graf von Platen depicting the awe, joy and sadness

of a former time, Aschenbach's dominant first self is initially silenced by poetic permission to travel away from the solidity of the mountains and to elect as a haven a seaside resort, "a setting of oceanic formlessness bounded by land" (Rotkin, 501). Leaving Munich, and symbolically escaping the oppressive Northern ideology prevalent at the time, Aschenbach takes a night train to Trieste, the first leg of his Jungian night sea journey, and the escape is imbued with a sense of danger and a covert action against the German state. He continues by boat to Pola, continuing his escape into a second self, but is quickly dissatisfied by the exclusively Australian clientele. Pola is not quite as exotic as he desired, cannot provide enough atmosphere to silence his essential German self, and does not fulfill his desire to foster an "intimate relation with the sea" (13). This yearning to move away from the symbolically landlocked and instead move toward the significantly more abstract openness of the sea is Aschenbach's attempt to loosen the stranglehold oppressive German modernity has on his entire life. The ticket seller at Pola, resembling an "old time ringmaster," (13) serves Mann in establishing his scene as a variation of a circus, not the formal stage set of James, but a far more uncontrolled show reflective of the protagonist's innermost, chaotic mental state.

Aschenbach secures passage on an "aged vessel, long past his prime, sooty, and gloomy, sailing under the Italian flag" (13) and continues his prolonged journey into his second self. The ship is a thinly veiled metaphor for his own body, worn down, overworked, and headed for death in Italy. Mann, moving from a physical description to a mental metaphor, sees Aschenbach interacting with his symbolic Id when he observes the group of young passengers, "full of excitement and Asti," carousing with an older imposter wearing bright yellow and outdoing the others in his "screeching gaiety" (14). The stranger is another invocation of the archetype first encountered in the Munich church portico, but this one, with his dyed mustache and goatee and his hands bedecked with signet rings, is a man grotesque in his desire for youth.

By the time they reach Venice, the old fop is “wretchedly drunk” and attempting to maintain “his woeful bravado” (16). When they finally disembark and part company, the “ghastly old imposter” coos and bleats and drools, calling to Aschenbach, “our compliments to your beloved, your dearly beloved, your lovely beloved...” before his upper dentures come unstuck and he is left just mumbling “obstructed sounds” (17). It is a grotesque image and presents the first personification of danger in the double vision of Venice. The man, whose presence encourages an extension of the circus setting by acting as a disfigured sideshow attraction, reveals the moment things start to take a turn away from the ordinary to Aschenbach, “as if a dreamy estrangement, a bizarre distortion of the world were setting in and would spread if he did not put a stop to it by shading his eyes a bit and taking another look around him” (15). Lutwack explains, “It is natural for people to expect great things from new places, to exaggerate both the good and bad qualities of places they have not yet experienced,” and thus Aschenbach presses on, interpreting the encounter as something unfamiliar but not personally harmful (143). Despite the sudden blurriness of his surroundings, he is unwilling to return to Northern oppression and, though reduced to squinting, forges ahead into the unknown.

Aschenbach falls asleep onboard, thereby giving his second self permission to surface in a dream state. A misty rain falls as the boat passes over the sleep-inducing, rocking waves of the Adriatic. The rain is a veil, further blurring the definitive line which separates reality from imagination. “The mist obscuring Aschenbach’s first sight of Venice is a barrier between his conscious and unconscious,” and it masks the darker reality of what is to come (Thorton, 150). Waiting in the lagoon for the boat to continue into the Grand Canal, Aschenbach feels giddy, realizing, “The world were displaying a slight but uncontrollable tendency to distort, to take on a bizarre and sneering aspect” (16). That Aschenbach detects the illusion, and especially, its potential danger, yet continues towards its source, indicates that he is permitting the breaking

through of his second, repressed self. He no longer feels exhausted by the traveling, but invigorated by the unknown. Disembarking at Riva d. Schiavoni, that “most astounding of landing places, that dazzling group of fantastic buildings,” (16) just around the corner from the Palazzo Ducale and the splendor of the greatest Piazza in the city, Aschenbach moves mentally from a loosely experienced dream state to standing face to face with the Venetian illusion. His trepidatious first self is silenced by the “airy splendor of the palace and the Bridge of Sighs; the pillars on the water’s edge bearing the lion and the saint; the showy projecting flank of the fairy tale cathedral; the view toward the gate and the great clock” (17). Approaching the city from the sea, crossing the threshold separating reality and fantasy, Aschenbach is presented with his literal dream state, and using specific Venetian symbols and locations, Mann dissolves the distance between modern and mythological, between physical and mental, and ultimately between euphoric and insane.

The uniquely Venetian experience of traveling by coffin-black gondola elicits tremendous anxiety but is quickly calmed by Aschenbach’s newly surfacing second self. He talks to no one, at once both intimidated and desperate for the experience:

Who would not need to fight off a fleeting shiver, a secret aversion and anxiety, at the prospect of boarding a Venetian gondola for the first time? The strange conveyance, surviving unchanged since legendary times and painted the particular sort of black ordinarily reserved for coffins, makes one think of silent, criminal adventures in a darkness full of splashing sounds; makes one think even more of death itself, of biers and gloomy funerals, and of that final silent journey. (17)

The night sea journey is exposed in full motif as Aschenbach submits to a voyage somewhere beyond this world, beyond consciousness, by stepping down into the bobbing gondola and

symbolically relinquishing his power and control. Bell declares, "Not for nothing has the gondola, painted black since the sixteenth-century, been compared again and again to a coffin bearing the pleasure seeker to his end along the serpentine canals" (144). And so it is used representatively in the novel as a combined hearse and coffin, engaged in the funeral rites for the death of the protagonist's modern self. The insulating silence of the waters makes Venice far quieter and more conducive to eternal sleep than the bustling city of Munich, and Aschenbach's earlier stressed self is soothed by his occupying "one of the softest, most luxurious, most sleep-inducing seats in the world" (17). Sleep for Aschenbach's overworked brain is associated with relaxation, and once he is lulled by the water and gently rocked by the motion of the gondola, the sleep he embraces is one designed for more than relaxing the brain; it is about releasing repressed desires. The "mild breath of the sirocco," (17) the wind of African origin, soothes him with its warmth and helps him relax. He has escaped oppressive Germany and begins, with his first unstable step down into the gondola, immersing himself fully in his unconscious.

Like those crossing the Styx, Aschenbach is escorted, with or without giving consent, to the proverbial other side of reality. Mann's "Charon" is both "clearly not of Italian stock" and another appearance of the archetype first encountered in the Munich cemetery (18). In fact, Aschenbach, quickly tiring of the fight to have his gondola turned around, agrees that he has enjoyed the ride and remarks, "even if you send me to the house of Aides," the Greek spelling of Hades, "with a stroke of your oar from behind, you will have rowed me well" (19). According to Greek tradition, once Charon has shuttled one across, only an act of the gods could bring him back, and as the Christian God has been undone by modernity, the reader holds little faith that the protagonist will survive and return safely. Aschenbach's inability to put up much resistance is a result of his being affected by the magic of this peculiar city: "Venice increases the fascination, its deceptiveness increases Achenbach's susceptibility" (Traschen, 173). Instead of

getting angry at the wayward gondolier, a specific symbol of the city, he instead decides to “let matters take their course... [as] it was also the most pleasant thing to do” (19), emphasizing the power of the first vision of seductive Venice and the immediate effect it has on revealing the second face of Aschenbach. Isadore Traschen clarifies the significance of this experience in her article, “The Uses of Myth in ‘Death in Venice,’” explaining the gondola alludes to a typical trial of heroes facing the underworld, but where as the mythical hero wills it, “Aschenbach surrenders to it; he allows Charon to impose his will on him, and accepts Hades as his destiny; that is, he surrenders to the forces of his unconscious” (172). Being suspended on the water creates a new dimension, a watery place fit for a rebirth, and a place where the anxieties of the modern world wash away on the foamy waves. “A magic circle of indolence seemed to surround the place where he sat” (19) and, as one does in Venice, Aschenbach finds it progressively easier to abandon himself to a life lived at the pace of the oar once he is transformed by the symbolic birth of his second self on the water.

The beach scene at the Hotel des Bains reveals the newly expressed second version of Aschenbach, and represents the first relaxed and pleasurable vision of Venice. It is a view of, “a carefree society engaged in purely sensual enjoyment on the edge of the watery element” (25). People “played games, lounged lazily, visited and chatted,” activities neither enjoyed nor engaged back in Munich (25). “The bold and easy freedom of the place” is analogous to his new mental state, and he decides, after spending his first full day at the Lido beach, to stay. From his cabana, “he let his eyes roam the ocean’s distances, let his gaze slip out of focus, grow hazy, blur in the uniform mistiness of empty space” (26). This repeated mention of blurriness and visual clouding mirrors his own liminal mental state, and as he spends more time relaxing in Venice, he eventually experiences clarity in the form of his personally dreamt utopia. Utopias present the possibility of moving beyond the more familiar experiences of anxiety, fragmentation, and

alienation, and once he has successfully traversed both the geographical and mental landscapes causing his anxiety, he is rewarded with “an image of ‘other’ possibilities, a form of social life not as it ever was or ever will be, but only as it might have been or ought to be” (Ruppert, 4). Rejoicing in the discovery of this other place, Aschenbach finds “in strange places the unconsciousness is freed” (Traschen, 169). Venice as a geographic reality no longer exists; it is an unreal place, unreachable in a controlled mental state. The utopia Aschenbach’s second-self inhabits is what Ruppert calls a no place, not actually existing in space and time, and not reachable by any actual roads (x). The Hotel de Bains is a physical location of Aschenbach’s mental utopia. The other guests do not share his space, and the people he selects to populate his mental landscape are both specific to his desires and symbolic of his transformation.

In this utopist mental state, aligned with the first of Venice’s two faces, Aschenbach is no longer a rational modern man, controlled by the social dicta of industrial Germany. Therefore, he feels permitted to acknowledge with love and adoration for a young boy, something which in his home country would lead to him being labeled a pedophile. When Aschenbach first notices Tadzio in the Hotel des Bains dining room, he notes “with astonishment that the boy was perfectly beautiful” (21). He describes young Tadzio from the onset as a poet might— “his face, pale and gracefully reserved...his honey-colored curls...straight nose and a lovely mouth—” and compares the boy to a Greek sculpture (22). As Venice takes on a double meaning in the novella, so too does the young Tadzio present a doubled importance for Aschenbach, first as an object worthy of inspiring a level of physical desire previously unknown but also as the embodiment of Aschenbach’s own desired child self. When he observes the Polish family organizing themselves for dinner the first night at the hotel, he confesses there was nothing peculiar about the way the children stood to greet their mother or the way they followed her into the dining room, but still he is affected deeply, observing the “sense of

discipline, responsibility, and self-respect" (22). As Aschenbach is watching this boy, constructing him as a version of his younger self, the unnaturalness of the discipline stirs a sense of desire in the old man to protect the beautiful Tadzio from ever becoming the tired, exhausted man he was in Germany. On the beach, he keeps "watch over the resting boy...busy as he might be with his own affairs, he maintained his vigilant care for the noble human figure...a paternal kindness, an emotional attachment filled and moved his heart" (28). Tadzio's natural beauty is starkly contrasted to Aschenbach's "gray hair and his severe, tired face," (29) aligning Aschenbach's interest in the child with a deep desire to recapture his own forgotten youth and driving him continually toward the pursuit of his second self.

Watching Tadzio swim the first morning, Aschenbach is obsessed with, "the sight of this lively adolescent figure, seductive and chaste, lovely as a tender young god, emerging from the depths of the sky and the sea with dripping locks and escaping the clutches of the elements" (28). The dramatic and lavish description of this boy is expressed by Aschenbach's emotionally connected poet version of himself, one only just now able to express passion with words. "An older man and a younger, one ugly and one handsome, wisdom at the side of charm" (38), in the vein of traditional Greek love between two men, Aschenbach's transition has made it possible to imagine himself participating in Plato's dialogue between Phaedrus and Socrates, in which Socrates argues that madness is necessary to enter the gates of poetry. In an internal conversation with himself, Aschenbach playfully calls the boy "little Phaeacian" (24) and declares he has the very face of Eros (25). Aschenbach is Zeus, made a god by his success as a writer and as a noble intellectual, and imagining himself as such, he wishes to take the form of the eagle, as Zeus did to capture and carry the lovely Trojan shepherd, Ganymede, back to Olympus, just as he desires to capture and carry away young Tadzio. Any reality or realistic place is abandoned for a mythological landscape that the beaches in Venice shape. Ruppert discusses

the relevance of myth in his theory on the utopist state, explaining how utopian literature can have a therapeutic effect similar to the function of myth as literary utopias have the capacity to “mediate or resolve, on the level of imagination, real cultural and social contradictions,” (16). In his deepest utopist state, Aschenbach calls up mythological references of all sorts, which Charlotte Rotkin understands as Mann’s technique of “meshing classical myth with modern psychology” in order to provide a refuge for Aschenbach and an acceptable escape from unfamiliar and overpowering feelings (500). The supporting structure of mythology provides Aschenbach with the necessary framework to mediate his new consciousness and additionally provides Mann with an “alternative timeless paradigm,” which he employs as a mirror for the European present (Gillespie, 103). Free on the beach to indulge his most personal fantasies, Aschenbach “listened with his eyes closed to this mythic song reverberating within him” (28).

Released from his repressive first self, and happily distracted by the dream face of Venice, Aschenbach lets go entirely, and slips into the unreal landscape of mythology. In between water and land, and now in between past and present, real and imagined, real place and mental space, Aschenbach settles back into the Hotel and experiences a total poetic dislocation of reality. The sun is no longer at a noon-position in the sky overhead, but is Helios “the god with fiery cheeks,” and the Adriatic Sea is transformed into the Pontos, or Black Sea of Greece (34), a construction of his own private, mythical landscape from the Venetian geography. The days are now festive with “loosely ordered leisure, bejeweled with countless, thickly strewn possibilities of happy accidents” (34). Aschenbach recognizes this as a “strangely fertile intercourse between a mind and a body!” and feels “exhausted, even unhinged, as if his conscience were indicting him after a debauch” (39). His dawn is Eos, the Greek goddess of dawn, arising, and the first light is transformed into “that first sweet blush of red” (41). Dawn is equated with “a strewing of roses...there on the edge of the world, where all shone and

blossomed in unspeakable purity” (41). The references to morning and the golden spears of the sun are another Jungian connection, representative of the rebirth that has followed Aschenbach’s cleansing in the waters of the city. The simple experience of being alive is poetically heightened and mythically transformed. He sees a “magical world, sacred and animated by the spirit of Pan” and finds his heart has “dreamed tender fables” (41). Pan is associated with fertility and sexuality, and while his adoration of Tadzio has inspired a full revision of his world, Aschenbach’s love is unreal, and is as double faced as the city which fosters it.

Social interactions are entirely imagined, as witnessed by Aschenbach’s interpreting Tadzio’s walking past him, toward his family’s cabana, as a sign of requited love. Returning from the steamer landing one evening, Tadzio smiles at Gustave: “he smiled eloquently, intimately, charmingly, and without disguise, with lips that began to open only as he smiled. It was the smile of Narcissus leaning over the mirroring water” (43). This inspires Aschenbach, who has flown in an excess of emotion to find refuge in the park, to whisper “the eternal formula of longing...‘I love you!’” (44), thus revealing how completely he has given free rein to the desires of his second self. When Aschenbach stops “in front of the lovely one’s door, leaned his brow against the hinge in complete intoxication, unable for a protracted period to drag himself away, heedless of the danger of being caught in such an outrageous position” (47), the fear that comes from the total conversion of the rational first self into the wild, uncontrolled second self is realized. The height of the mythological reimagining takes the form of a terrifying dream Aschenbach suffers, which Lillian Feder says is “a regression to the primitive roots of a civilization and the unconscious sources of art” (219). Its music and roaring mob beckon Aschenbach to excess with drums and obscene gestures and phallic symbols, whereafter, “the afflicted dreamer awoke unnerved, shattered, a powerless victim of the demon” (57). In the

subconscious dream state, the mythology replacing reality for Aschenbach's second self becomes openly harmful and reveals to Aschenbach its full danger. The moral downward spiral that follows is reflected in the unveiling of the sinister second face of the city which permitted his transition.

The fearful mythological state is part of the trope of Venice as a double vision: "Pleasure and death—these twins walk all the streets of Venice" (Seyppel, 10). The double face of Venice reveals itself in the odiously oppressive air in the little streets in the city proper, "so thick that the smells surging out of the dwellings, shops, restaurants, a suffocating vapor of oil, perfume, and more, all hung about and failed to disperse" (29). Removed from the pleasant beaches of the Lido, Aschenbach finds himself sweating uncomfortably as he recognizes the terrible second face of the city. His eyes cease to function, he feels feverish, and the blood pounds in his head; these are the physical manifestations of the protagonist's damaged mental state, as revealed in the darker face of Venice. The beggars molest him in the poorer quarter, and the "evil emanations" (29) from the canals hinder his breathing. Behind the glittering palazzo façades and the beautiful light and colors on the Lido beach, is the interior, second face of Venice, and the city in its truest form, not as regal queen afloat on water, but as a dark circus stage: "The marble steps of a church descended into the waters; a beggar crouching there and asserting his misery held out a hat and showed the whites of his eyes as if he were blind; a dealer in antiques stood before his cave like shop and with fawning gestures invited the passerby to stop, hoping for a chance to swindle him" (47). The show is intensely menacing and overwhelmingly obscene. Making his way back to the safety of his hotel room, Aschenbach abhors the stagnant-smelling lagoon (29) and its "noxious...fever-inducing vapors" (30), and is aghast at the "mournful palace facades...reflected in the garbage-strewn water" (30). He is made physically sick by the wind coming off the canal and compares it to an attack of harpies, a suggestion of both the danger of

the fully mythological world, and the embodiment of the real sickness that represents the darkest face of a mortal Venice.

The darkest face of the double vision of Venice is ultimately revealed as actual disease; Venice is not the Congo, but the heart of darkness comes to it in the form of cholera (Shookman, 161). Exhibiting the Northern, rational mindset, at the first hint of disease, the Germans are the first to disappear from the Lido: "it seemed that the German language ceased to be heard around him; lately his ear could only detect foreign sounds in the dining room and on the beach" (44). The altered Aschenbach, however, when confronted with physical sickness and the double face of Venice, does not leave the city because he is somewhere far away, still lost in his myth, inside a personal utopia and therefore oblivious to the epidemic. When he realizes Venetian authorities are attempting to keep the rumors of sickness under wraps, he comments to himself, "passion, like crime, does not sit well with the sure order and even course of everyday life; it welcomes every loosening of the social fabric, every confusion and affliction visited upon the world, for passion sees in such disorder a vague hope of finding an advantage for itself" (45). Social order is, in fact, coming undone both around him, in the form of the plague rumors, and also within him, as he allows himself to follow the boy closely on the beach and then stalks him through the city. During week four of his stay on the Lido, reality comes seeping back in on the wings of the rumors of disease. Aschenbach smells a "peculiar aroma in the air" at San Marco, "one that he now felt had been lurking at the edge of his consciousness," a "medicinally sweet smell that put in mind thoughts of misery and wounds and ominous cleanliness" (44). His love for Tadzio, like a sweet medicine, acts as a foreign salve to heal the wounds the strains of the modern world have left on his psyche. Aschenbach is too far removed via the initial magic of Venice to react with alarm; he instead stands around "sniffing and musing" but remains inactive (44). The cabanas on the beach at the hotel are emptying, and the

lack of people in the dining room should make him aware of the impending danger, but, instead, the prospect of Venice laid waste by cholera, with law and order collapsing, opens up dim, unformulated, but exciting possibilities” (Robertson, 104). As the city officials scurry, trying to keep the truth of the cholera from leaking out to the tourists, Aschenbach defies logic, as his second self is made stronger by the panic and actual threat of lawlessness, and the “heinous secret belonging to the city fused and became one with his own innermost secret, which he was likewise intent on keeping” (45). This revelation of the darker side to the dream world of Venice reveals, in tandem, the darker side of its most recent convert.

The total state of decay which both Aschenbach and the city of Venice find as double visions of themselves is only made apparent when the conditions of both are revealed together. Aschenbach’s total overtaking by his second, Dionysian self is a direct result of “his solitary life, the foreign locale, and his late but deep transport of ecstasy” (47). He journeys to the darkest recesses of the self, to the unconscious, and find himself driven by the mania only Venice can inspire (Traschen, 167). His initial inspiration to travel East did not take him all the way to the tigers; he did not need to go that far, since, in Venice, among the “condensed grandeur of the oriental temple” and surrounded by the billowing clouds of incense, “sweet, heavy, ceremonial fragrance” (45), the East has found him amidst the Byzantine architecture of Venice. Like a tiger himself, he transforms into a prowler, lying in wait for Tadzio and pursuing him like prey from the shadows inside and around San Marco. The children—Aschenbach’s quarry—leave the vestibule of San Marco accompanied by their governess, passing beneath the famous clock tower on top of which two giant bronze Moors ring each hour, symbolic of their travel back through time and into the darkest, purest parts of the city, the Merceria: “Aschenbach had penetrated deep into the maze in the heart of the diseased city...he had lost his sense of direction, for the little streets, canals, bridges, and piazzas in the labyrinth all looked alike” (59).

Following unconsciously, in a state of mania, Aschenbach, too, travels back in time, much farther back, into the darkest, most primordial parts of himself, skewing the balance between the Apollonian and Dionysian indefinitely. He tracks them over bridges and into dirty cul-de-sacs. The atmosphere of interior Venice is terrifying and so is Aschenbach's mental state. He is "intoxicated in head and heart, and his steps followed the instructions of the demon whose pleasure it is to crush under foot human reason and dignity" (46). The chase continues via gondola, with the pursuing gondolier acting in full collusion with Aschenbach's demons. That his boatman "seemed entirely familiar with such assignments" (46) is a comment on the nature of the Venetians as criminal by design, something encoded in the Northern European stereotype of the city.

As in Ruskin's work, the stereotype of the danger inherent in Venice comes out of the destruction of the Serene Republic as a result of what most Northern Europeans believed was too much excess. In the end, Aschenbach makes every effort to please his lover, Tadzio, adding the youthful touches of a red tie and a symbolic broad-brimmed hat to his dress, and using perfume and jewelry to gain attention. He visits the barber, whom Traschen recognizes as a parody of the magician or shaman performing the fertility rites of death and rebirth (173). There, he has his hair dyed and curled into soft waves, his brows arched, and requests the application of shadow on his lids, "delicate carmine rouge" on his lips, and a face cream for the wrinkles (59). Dressed in the costume of "a young man in full bloom," Aschenbach returns to the deserted, enchanted piazza where he originally decided to flee the city. This is a remarkable setting of scene— the sweaty, exasperated Aschenbach, with a face full of sticky make-up and comically dyed hair, collapsed on the well, head rested on the stone rim:

He sat there, the master, the artist...the author whose greatness had been officially recognized and whose name bore the title of nobility, the author whose style children were encouraged to emulate—sat there with his eyes shut, though from time to time a mocking an embarrassed look would slip sidelong out from underneath his lids, only to conceal itself again swiftly and his slack, cosmetically enhanced lips formed occasional words that emerged out of the strange dream-logic engendered in his half-dozing brain.

(60)

He babbles on in conversation to his Phaedrus-Tadzio about the challenge of men who act as false heroes, hiding behind a mask of honor and fame though within they are all women, driven by love and desire. Like Venice, the city that inspires his transformation and brings about his ultimate destruction, he is trying desperately, comically, to hide his crumbling visage with makeup and jewels, uncertain still as to when he lost the dream.

Feeling unwell, struggling with certain attacks of dizziness that are partly physical and accompanied by a powerful anxiety and indecision, Aschenbach makes his way back to the Hotel de Bains and watches as his beloved boy, Tadzio, wanders idly into the sea, in the wind, on the “edge of misty boundlessness” (62). “Tadzio in the end, vertical and finite, moving into the sea, horizontal and endless, operates as an inversion of the Birth of Venus” (Gillespie, 103), and additionally takes on the persona of Hermes, the leader of souls to the underworld, “pointing outwards, hovering before him in an immensity full of promise” (63). Mann has Aschenbach die in his beach chair on the Lido, staring out into the threshold that permitted his rebirth and that carried him to the death of both of his inner, conflicting selves. Many critics have analyzed the death of the protagonist and its various representations. Trachten connects Aschenbach’s collapse with the breakdown of the European will (178), while Gillespie sees the end as

representing a reversal of the Renaissance (103). Reinforcing my argument about the double visions of both Venice and of Aschenbach, Ritter makes the claim that: "This man, the symbol of heroic European achievement menaced from within could die only in this specific place, for it too symbolizes magnificent yet decaying European culture (88). The death scene on the beach features all three important, pivotal elements incorporated in the theme of duality in the novella. Aschenbach has unwittingly damaged both of his selves, the rational Apollonian being silenced by the magic of the dream state of Venice, and the impulsive Dionysian side being driven to the brink of insanity, then dies as a result of ingesting, without caution, overripe and choleric strawberries. Tadzio on the beach is both an eternal love object and a harbinger of death. Venice, as seen from the modern beaches of the Lido, is the vacationer's paradise but, looking across the lagoon, one is reminded quickly of the ancient tradition that links the city's calle with decay.

Venice for James is a stage where a player might arrange the symbols to reflect his own narcissistic ends. Venice for Mann is far more sinister; it represents not merely nostalgic longing about a total disengagement with presently reality, feasible only in a place where the city's geographic liminality inspires a natural separation of reality and illusion. Gillespie breaks "Death in Venice" down simplistically as such: "Chapters one and two are essentially land-bound in setting and motifs, reaching back into the protagonist's past. The next two chapters are water-girt, moving into the immensity of the sea, associated with timelessness and formlessness of the unconsciousness. The last paragraph of chapter five is a neutral physical description of Aschenbach's collapse and capsule report of the world's reaction" (102-3). The modern symbol of the camera on the tripod, "at the edge of the water, apparently abandoned, its black cloth snapping in the freshening wind" suggests that regardless of which face is exposed, the ideal or the tragic, the Apollonian or Dionysian, the ego or the id, the challenges associated with the

move toward the modern are ceaseless, and while certainly exploring the problem of balancing these binaries, Mann refuses to define which poles are the more detrimental. While the novella remains a “sustained and very powerful mediation upon the proper relations of art and beauty, Eros and death” (White, 53), it never clarifies whether repression or gratification is to blame for tragedy. Taking in the singular view of the city from his first seat in the gondola, Aschenbach quips, “That was Venice, that coquettish, dubious beauty of a city, half fairy tale and half tourist trap” (47), and so it remains. Though Mann contemplates the timeless ideas of life, art, and pleasure by exposing each concept to the double vision intrinsic to his sensitive protagonist and the unique city of La Serenissima, the realities of human morality, mortality, and a world changed by modernity remain for him beyond binary classification.

CHAPTER IV

MEMORY, LIMINALITY AND HEMINGWAY'S VENICE

In an early, premonitory reaction to encroaching modernity, influential French writer Émile Zola stated that he feared, “we are sick, that is for certain, made sick by progress” (qtd. in Nicholls, 46). The growing anxiety born from the growth of industry and capitalist progress was replaced after the World Wars by a general postwar melancholy. The lost generation of the interim years suffered from a heavy sense of meaninglessness and loss of direction. Leaving the battlefields, men and women experienced trouble returning home, finding it far more difficult to settle back into a world changed by war. The struggle to locate some genuine meaning manifested itself in the inability to settle, or stay, anyplace. The constant moving around, searching to replace home and quiet an internal unrest, resulted in a tangible sense of placelessness, and Hemingway explores this theme in his fiction in a number of changing settings. But whereas Jake Barnes moves from taxi to restaurant to hotel room and Frederic Henry creeps across countries, always looking for love, for purpose, and for reprieve from a mental war, another soldier protagonist, Colonel Cantwell, in Hemingway's only book set in Venice, knows exactly where he is going and what he is looking for there; it is the same thing scores of literary protagonists had unintentionally found there before him.

The Colonel's decision to return to Venice appears, like Aschenbach's, to be an unconscious desire for escape. However, Aschenbach's death seems predetermined by fate;

he does not know during his traveling that freedom in Venice means death. Colonel Cantwell, conversely, like James's narrator, returns to Venice with purpose, leaving his army base in Trieste and symbolically the whole of the modern world of warfare, planning to meet his death in the city that taught him about life. The novel opens with the protagonist called only "shooter," the stark anonymity of an unnamed person, a cold gun, and ice in the earliest morning darkness recalling the deceptive anonymity of James's narrator, but Hemingway's hero is not the Prufrockian figure characterized by timidity, moral confusion, and spiritual paralysis common in literature in the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, the Colonel does not seek out a space in Venice to hide (like Juliana Bordereau), nor to escape (like Aschenbach) but returns because he is ready to make peace with his collective past and move consciously into the afterlife. Colonel Cantwell does not suffer from the same indecision and degradation as Aschenbach, and he endures none of the moral and social dilemmas of James's narrator. Furthermore, Cantwell has no god to seek out in Venice. His poets have been silenced by the atrocities of war, and there is no magic in mythology to sustain him. Instead, he keeps company in the liminal city with a lover he calls daughter and a fictitious order of others maimed mentally and physically by the war, purging his memory of battle stories and indulging in food and drink until his inevitable end.

Published in 1950, *Across the River and into the Trees* is consumed with the loss of innocence as was Hemingway's world at the time. Negative reaction was almost unanimous, as many reviewers criticized the novel as disappointing and tired. And it was tired, but purposefully so, as its defining story arc was the journey through painful, exhausting memories—not active life—in order to bring the Colonel at last to rest. Margaret Plant believes traveling to Venice frequently provokes recollection, both of the city's own past and the past of its visitors (313). The journey forward toward death, then, could have no setting better suited for a journey

backward through life by way of careful memory. Venetian scholar Sergio Perosa proposes: “the best of Hemingway came not from direct, but remembered experience,” and Hemingway certainly had some memories (qtd. in Byrne, 160). His fiction is often a recreation of his direct experiences of war, and of war and love, and the memory of those experiences.

Unable ever to dissociate love and war, Hemingway had defended and, consequently, fallen in love with Venice and the Veneto region during the Great War. While protagonists in his earlier novels travel endlessly around Michigan, Paris, and Spain, always moving and searching, actively attempting to assemble a meaningful life, Hemingway did not return in person or in fiction to Fossalta di Piave, the site of his first, traumatic battle wound, until 1948, thirty years later. The autobiographical element in this later novel is powerful, and the Colonel differs from James’s fictional character created from society gossip, and Mann’s much older protagonist who, though the author included many of the events from his Venice vacation, does not resemble a fictionalized Mann. Hemingway and his protagonist are both fifty years old, enamored with a young Venetian, and, as Michael Reynolds points out in his biography, *Hemingway: The Final Years*, both the author and his character were taking Seconal to sleep, and both were taking “mannitol hexanitrate—Ernest to control his high blood pressure, the Colonel to keep his heart pumping” (202). Reynolds further explains when Hemingway was writing *Across the River*, he was “intensely aware that his erratic blood pressure could, at any moment, blow a hole through a major artery, Hemingway was existential to the bone, breakfasting with death as a tablemate,” (206) leading to the assumption that Colonel Cantwell’s journey of remembrance is one not likely far from the author’s own, and that the city of Venice possessed a special meaning for both.

Hemingway was certain that *Across the River and into the Trees* was the best book he had ever written; “certainly it was his most complex, with little action and much retrospection” (Reynolds, 212). Cantwell loves Venice and has returned to complete a personal cycle, to engage his memory without the distractions of the modern world. The novel’s circular structure, bookended by the duck hunt, contains his wide range of recollections despite the major time shifts caused by the frequent lapses into remembered time. Additionally, while Hemingway adheres to his typical narrative style and short, pared down sentences and brief descriptions, a city like Venice inspires finer descriptions. His images of Venice, the Venetian people, and food and drink are as beautifully detailed as a painting. Hemingway’s extensive reading about Venice also helped him to paint a picturesque city with finely layered meaning: “Colonel Cantwell was afoot on his three-day rendezvous with love and death on the stones and bridges of Venice. Behind him stood a troop of forebears: Dante’s burning lovers; Byron’s gaudy life; Henry James’s *Aspern Papers*; D’Annunzio’s inflamed young poet and aging actress; Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*. Ernest knew them all, read and remembered them all, using them wherever needed” (Reynolds, 201). He drew on them, on giants of art and literature, as well as on the history of Venice, and incorporated all of this into Cantwell’s recollections of his personal experience as a soldier in a modern world.

Venice is the Colonel’s past—his first experience with war, his first wound, first taste of a bitter reality, first overseas tour, and his first unvarnished view of life beyond his boyhood home. He returns to revisit each of those firsts and to pair them with the collective wisdom of life lived in the trenches, in the ranks, and as a modern man. “It looks quite differently now,” he remarks when first approaching the city after an extended absence, but so does the whole world after war (21). The Colonel sees differently now without the veil of both innocence and immortality. To a man facing his end stoically and on his own terms, “like the new machinery of

the industrial age, divested of all superfluity and dedicated to the execution of a crisply defined assignment,” Hemingway’s Venice provides a paradoxical, purposeful placelessness (Roston, 133). The city that exists for him in the novel is a space outside of reality, beyond the battlefield, and outside of chronological time. It is the fictional Colonel’s beginning and will be his end. Venice as a setting in Hemingway’s novel reflects the war trauma experienced by members of the lost generation; it is a liminal space possessing its own temporal dislocation and anamnesis, floating between life and death, past and present, memory and reality, just as it floats between stone and sea.

Until he reaches the interior of the city, the Colonel, devoid of emotion or attachment, factually reports his visual surroundings, recognizing the surrounding Italian countryside as real geography. Lutwack theorizes the disease of placelessness for modernist writers could be eased by constant motion (219), and in the opening of the novel Hemingway presents another hero, moving, reporting what he observes with clear emotional distance. The settings his characters observe, in contrast to the tradition of the nineteenth-century novel, are presented in Hemingway’s individualistic style, what Murray Roston calls the “accurate, objective depiction of reality in a spare, unsentimental prose, the precise conjuring up of a scene through an unemotional focusing upon detail” (123). The geography of the streets of Paris or the river banks in Spain and Michigan is specific, realistic, and reported journalistically. As Colonel Cantwell travels down from his base in Trieste, the geography of the Veneto is reported in the same fashion: frozen lagoon, snow covered mountains in the distance, and the marshes at the mouth of the Tagliamento. The flat country from Montafalcone to Latisana, along an old road between Trieste and Venice, is so familiar the Colonel tells his soldier-subordinate driver, Jackson, that they have no need for a map, that he will announce the turns. From the backseat, Cantwell describes, as one might in a news article, the squared tower of the church at Torcello and the

high campanile of Burano behind it (33). But the reporting dissolves into impassioned reactions to the landscape once he spies the uniquely liminal geography of Venice: "His heart was happy because of the brown nets and the wicker fish traps and the clean, beautiful lines of the boats. It's not that they are picturesque. The hell with picturesque. They are just damned beautiful" (40). When he orders Jackson to pull over at a specific spot, it is his first moment of clear observation, and as Venice, his city of emotional, memorable firsts crystallizes, "it was all wonderful to him, moved him as an eighteen-year-old. (37). He recognizes it as his town, and though he does not possess the words to describe it lyrically like a poet, he certainly recognizes his muse.

Jackson's order to follow his verbal directions instead of consulting a map could further serve as Hemingway's direct instruction to the reader. There will be no guided sight-seeing; the Colonel knows the city far too intimately to be following the calle with his nose in a Baedeker. Plant clarifies: "Like most writing about Venice in the twentieth century, *Across the River and into the Trees* is a visitor's novel, although not a tourist's novel. It is the tale of death after visiting Venice, of death occasioned not by Venice, but by war injuries from allied service in the area" (313). Hemingway contrasts the driver, Jackson's, limited experience with art, as expressed in his preliminary theory on the Italian obsession with Madonna and her bambini, and his limited understanding of the Italian language to distinguish the Colonel from the tourist. Cantwell knows these fields, and this city, intimately and internally, and thus a paper map could not reflect the non-geography of this Venice, his mental city. His inventing a game of navigating the many bridges from the "Gritti to the Rialto by Fondamente Nuova without mistake" (173) is symbolic of the challenge this old soldier faces in knowing the way around his own mind. That he can successfully find his way in the real streets of a city which has rightfully earned a reputation for being more than disorienting presents him as a man who has spent important

time learning something about the city, and about himself: "It was a game you play...but it had the advantage of you moving while you do it and that you look at the houses, the minor vistas, the shops and the trattorias and at the old palaces of the city of Venice while you are walking. If you loved the city of Venice, it was an excellent game" (173). Spending time wandering through Venice is a game as much as life is a game, something to be learned, something to win or lose, and something that eventually ends. Playing represents a stark contrast to the soldier's "serious" duty, and reveals the Colonel is not returning for any official, road mapping duty, but has come back to his no-place Venice to walk each of the winding roads of his memory.

Unlike Aschenbach, Cantwell makes his way into the fairest city in a Buick, by what Mann calls Venice's proverbial backdoor. The big car, which has "too much of everything except engine" (37) is deposited at the Fiat garage—its oil and rubber stained cement a terrible image of modernity, but a reminder that the ugliness of the modern is held back from the city proper. The "mechanical elephant cemeteries" and the ugly Breda works are images of the modern world that the Colonel does not register in his memory. He merely reports their presence before descending into a motor boat, "reconditioned and reconverted to start this new life on the canals of this city," clearly a representation of himself, though he will not begin, but end his life along the canals. Plant's suggestion that the canal water "constantly moves but goes nowhere" (266) mirrors the disease of placelessness that drives all of Hemingway's protagonists, but as the modern is left at the parking garage and in the factories at Mestre, there is no distraction from the Colonel's mental struggle. As Cantwell is driven to Venice, "he perceives countering images of life and death, some recurring from the past, some appearing in the present, and they are simultaneous in the colonel's consciousness" (Williams, 161). Leaving the modern, blighted, and meaningless parked at the Piazza Roma, Cantwell uses his time in the in between space of

Venice to give room to his youthful memories and to reconsider each of the moves he has played in his larger game of life.

For all of his life with the military, his hand in the game has been ordered, directed by superior officers, and reportedly, gruesomely mismanaged. The incompetence of a military command causing great suffering is a recurrent theme for Hemingway, but this novel has the distinction of being “a war novel without any war” (Reynolds, 211). Since Colonel Cantwell’s memories are the subject of the novel, and Venice is where the Colonel’s, as well as Hemingway’s, war started, returning to the city is effectively revisiting all of the battles of WWI and WWII, interactions that are described in vivid detail and in ways that dovetail. War, Cantwell explains, is the only hell he has known, but separated from the ranks and the stupidity of military hierarchies, Venice offers both a reprieve and a place to collect and reconsider his military experiences since the life of an active duty service member involves constant, often unexplained moving, and the adrenaline from battle does not leave much time for personal reflection. Colonel Cantwell is a man with much to reflect upon. He reports killing “one hundred and twenty-two sures. Not counting possibles” (117). The images he recalls from his first experience with combat are horrifying; he remembers there had been great killing, an intense heat, and orders to throw the dead down into the canals (28). The war is recalled in nearly each reference to the water, and dredging up his memories of his experience thirty years earlier, he is forced to deal again with the dead in the canal, where he remembers they stayed, “a long time, floating and bloating face up and face down” (28).

Cantwell attempts to explain away his experience: “you get the orders, and you have to carry them out. It is the mistakes that are no good to sleep with. But they can certainly crawl into a sack sometimes. They can crawl in and stay in there with you” (176). And Venice is the city

in which to face these memories rather than fight in his sleep with them. Lying safely in his hotel bed at the Gritti:

He looked up at the light on the ceiling and he was completely desperate at the remembrance of his loss of his battalions, and of individual people. He could never hope to have such a regiment, ever. He had not built it. He had inherited it. But, for a time, it has been his great joy. Now every second man in it was dead and the others nearly all were wounded. In the belly, the head, the feet or the hands, the neck, the back, the lucky buttocks, the unfortunate chest and the other places. Tree burst wounds hit men where they would never be wounded in open country. And all the wounded were wounded for life. (222)

The canal, viewed from his hotel window, is as grey as steel, recalling guns and the industrial progress he has fought for, and he finds peace inside the city: “Christ, I love it, he said, and I’m so happy I helped defend it when I was a punk kid, and with an insufficient command of the language and I never even saw her until that clear day in the winter...and saw her rising from the sea” (49). He is happy to have returned to the first place he defended, and interprets Venice as a place worthy of fighting for. He has a shared Venetian love for Gabrielle D’Annunzio, whom he admires for the way he stormed the country with his talent and his rhetoric. D’Annunzio, the writer and national hero—“certified and true if you must have heroes,” (54) is the Colonel’s Venetian ideal self. He understands why the Venetians loved D’Annunzio for both his talent as a writer, and “because he was bad, and he was brave,” and the Colonel loves him as well for his eye patch (proof of battle wounds) and for his words, “Morire non e basta” (53). Cantwell calls Jackson a jerk for having never heard of him. Venice, the unnatural city, like D’Annunzio her patriot, is worthy of the fictitious Order which the Colonel has created, one that has specific

qualities for entry, demanding that one must have persevered in the face of gross human atrocity.

It is a selective aristocracy, Colonel Cantwell's Order, and recalls the recurrent theme in Hemingway's fiction of honoring those who have been damaged in war. The Order members acknowledge a certain, unspoken moral criteria, perhaps most clearly determined by Hemingway in the understood fraternity of Jake Barnes et al from *The Sun Also Rises*. "The creation of the Order is one more example of the colonel's quest for form, whether it be philosophic or aesthetic, and it has at its center his and the author's view of the permanent wound as the human condition" (Williams, 163). The Order in Venice is a form within the formless. Cantwell's first experience with the military was fighting for and in Venice, and his Order formed "a good true hatred of all those that profited by war" (61), with Venetians who share the experience of tragedy and love of the city. Unlike the "Sad, self-righteous, over-fed and under-trained" current soldiers, as represented by his driver, Jackson, the head waiter cum Gran Maestro proves himself worthy of inclusion. They both share a number of important secrets, these "two old inhabitants of the Veneto, both men, and brothers in their membership of the human race, the only club that either one paid dues to, and brothers, too, in their love of an old country, much fought over, and always triumphant in defeat, which they had both defended in their youth" (58). Their shared love for Venice and the suffering as soldiers culminates in the purely fictitious organization, El Ordine Militar, Nobile y Espirituoso de los Caballeros de Brusadelli, founded in a series of conversations between the Gritti's maitre d'hôtel and the Colonel, and which boasts three additional members: the hotel's anarchist bartender, the cook, and the young waiter. The Order's members act according to an accepted code of behavior, lying by telling one another they each look healthy and well, and also by sharing common enemies—like the post-war rich from Milan who visit the bar—as well as common

allies, codes, and oaths. The city of Venice not only gives the Order's members a common thing to value and honor to spur them to join forces, but it also ultimately serves as the meeting place, the in between space where they are free to conduct battles of their own design in the safety of a hotel bar where they can select enemies the group feels are least deserving of sharing their personal Venice.

The location where the Colonel suffered his physical first war wound is just outside the no-place city of Venice, in a real town forty miles to the north. He was hit three times that winter, but calls them "gift wounds" (39), a phrase which, though often interpreted as referring to the gift of learning his own mortality, could also represent the gift of suffering outside the beautiful city of Venice so that it was left untainted by injury for him. On his way into the city, he stops at the dyke where he suffered the lesser of his war injuries (the other being mental trauma that stubbornly resists healing) to remember the incident, but also to keep the recollection there, to avoid dragging that particular memory into the city he loves and the place he feels is outside reality, where something like real injury could happen. He has Jackson drive him to the exact place he had been badly wounded thirty years before, by the river, and first buries a 10,000 lire note, then urinates on the spot, completing the monument. "It's a wonderful monument," he declares. "It has everything. Fertility, money, blood, and iron. Sounds like a nation" (27). The colonel performs this deeply personal ritual in a real place, with real symbols representative of a real war. Having been a teenager when he joined the military, he was quite confident of his personal immortality, but there at Fossalta, he was wounded, "properly and for good" and, as a result, lost his feeling of immortality. As an old man returned, he recognizes it was a lot to lose (39). So he is jaded first by an initial battle wound, and then grows more cynical as he continues to serve in a military for which he has little respect, all the while protecting his image of Venice as a place outside of the modern world and modern war,

incapable of wounding him. He uses the construction of his war monument to release any residual reality of experience before entering Venice, entering the liminal mental space where he may relax his wounded psyche and which may provide him the safe separation he needs to die honorably.

In order to preserve the distinction between a terrible reality and the beautiful memory space of Venice, the Colonel reenacts his military battles in the lagoon waters of Venice, in an effort to clear them from his consciousness but not relive actual fighting in the city he respects: “I’d hate to fight in this town where I love the people” (175). Instead, he heads out into the calm of the lagoon and shoots ducks symbolically as a way of expiating his guilt for the lives he has been instructed to take on the battlefield. No longer controlled by military superiors, he approaches the hunt with such specificity that it seems ritualistic. He makes several announcements concerning the clarity of the winter sky and the appropriateness of the season for this particular hunting. This is geographically and seasonally symbolic, since the Colonel fought in Italy as a youth in summer, and now hunts again in the winter of his life. He loads his hunting rifle and drinks from a sacramental flask he has prepared. The Colonel has very little patience for the boat man—yet another incarnation of the surly Charon figure in Venice—or for interruptions of his ritual, but as a herald of death, the boatman must remind Cantwell that this is, indeed, his “last shoot” (16).

The extensive preparation and careful attention to detail is representative of the Colonel’s long history living within a meticulously regimented military but also his attempt at giving the liminal space in the Venetian lagoon some firm order. The flock of ducks overhead is an image of true freedom, beyond any structure imposed by man, transcending the earth-bound condition of mortality. The lagoon waters also act as an agent of freedom, initially by washing

away Cantwell's real world titles. His confused attempts to identify himself while in the waters, "boy, or man, or Colonel, or busted General," emphasize his inability to define himself in this in between stage of his life, in this in between city of his memory (176). Then, his experience in the waters of the lagoon, and symbolically shooting the duck and drake, (representative of himself and Renata), and his meeting with the Charon figure presents the lagoon waters as a purgative agent, allowing the purification of the memories of the mindless slaughter of war via a ritual of duck hunting. Just as Cantwell has returned to Venice specifically to complete his cycle of life, his shooting down his symbolic self out of the sky over the lagoon is him enacting his own sacrifice. Williams claims the hunt is the "final metaphor of his quest for form and beauty," (158). Colonel Cantwell's approach to the hunt as a ritual and Hemingway's specific use of the duck hunting scenes to open and close the novel, emphasize that Venice serves an in between space for the completion of the Colonel's cyclic quest.

Fighting as a teenager in Italy was really the Colonel's first experience not just with war, the military, and physical wounds but with adult life beyond his childhood home. The home Venice represents for Cantwell is the only type of home he has known during his transient life within the military. Like Hemingway, the expatriate, "the modern writer, having no homeland, is perpetually on tour. Mobility not dwelling, process not place, determine his point of view" (Roston, 120). The Colonel's view is determined by the metaphor of Venice as a labyrinth. Cantwell does not need a home to return to for closure but rather a space capable of collecting and revealing the road, or labyrinth, of his past. He explains to Jackson that Venice is a tougher town than Cheyenne, Casper, or Cooke City, Montana, tougher than Memphis and Chicago, something the young American soldier disputes. Cantwell ends the argument by asserting, "Maybe we move in different circles. Or maybe we have a differing definition of the word." (41). Jackson's definition of "tough" is still determined by American concepts and is still developing to

compensate for the things he is experiencing in the larger world. The Colonel has lived a long, tough life fighting outside his birth country. Venice is not his birth city but the place he has come to recognize as where his life started. The Colonel knows “This country meant very much to him, more than he could, or would ever tell anyone,” (39) though he makes a long list of references to stereotypical Americana: Rawlins, Wyoming and Nebraska, the Indians in Oklahoma, stupid Texas girls, and the shining buildings of New York. He sees all of these places reflected in his adopted Venice, and the complex character of the city symbolizes the combined experiences that have shaped and changed Cantwell as a man. He recognizes Venice as a “strange, tricky town,” another self reference perhaps, and believes returning there to die is the only alternative to his greater wish—“I wish I might walk around this town all my life” (76). The longing is a part of the remembering and a major part of coming to terms with life’s reality. Being in Venice suspends that necessity for a few precious days. He walks all he can in his final days, participating in his own bridge game, and enjoying his love for the Italian contessa, Renata, as well as his love for all the parts of the city of Venice.

Together, Colonel Cantwell and his nineteen-year-old lover take in “the old magic of the city and its beauty,” the colonel’s first love (51). Venice is as much his mistress as Renata, who does not appear until sixty pages into the story. Ben Stolfus points out that Cantwell’s love for Renata occupies 214 pages of the 308-page novel, but his love for Venice fills each paragraph (22). Cantwell takes his greatest pleasure walking the water-worn, old stones of the city and associates each with the more positive, even naïve, beliefs of his much younger self: “It’s a good town to walk in. I guess the best, probably. I never walked in it that it wasn’t fun.” (49). But he also recognizes the city’s unique ability to distort time and direction, recalling he had “been lost in this place...and I was never lost in my life” (152). Anyone who has traveled in Venice will easily relate experiencing this same disorientation, but the Colonel speaks of being lost only in the

past tense. He has managed, after long and at times traumatic years, to map out the labyrinth of his mind just as he eventually mapped out the city. "We all love Venice. Perhaps you do the best of all," Alvarito tells him in the end (277). And so he does. Even though he is returning to encounter painful memories, Cantwell's impressions of Venice, in light and color, "set an aesthetic backdrop for the story, a sensitivity to a place worthy of Pater," a backdrop inspired by a deep affection for a place of faded beauty (Reynolds, 212). But he does need a physical, warm blooded lover to listen as he recounts his memories, and she should embody as much of the Venetian brilliance as possible.

Renata is symbolically compared to the city in the portrait in which the Colonel sees her as a Venus, rising like the city, from the sea. Also, Renata and Cantwell together are metaphorically described when Cantwell's observes the two monuments out in the lagoon, "chained together, but not touching" (50). Both characters are capable of being related to specifically Venetian symbols because they share an intense love for the city, but they are left not touching because while the symbols, and Renata, exist in present time, Venice as a whole is split between the Colonel's present experience and his powerful memories and illusions of the city from his first visit. Hemingway changed the name of the colonel's love interest (called Nicole in earlier manuscripts) to Renata, which in Italian means "reborn," and makes her the same age Cantwell was when he first fought for Italy against the Austrians, thereby creating a connection between the Colonel's love for her as a Venetian woman and the memories the Colonel's has of his first experience in Venice as a teenager. Lying with Renata, he tells his war stories, and she listens like a rapt girl in love—the Desdemona to his Othello. In going through his battles and tragedies, he was "not lecturing, he was confessing," not instructing the girl, and thereby his own younger self, on how to fight, but working through each of the memories to clear his conscience (204). She begs him to please "tell me true until you are purged of it; if that can be,"

aiding the old colonel in his efforts to reach a peaceful end (207). And so the Colonel and his girl complete the purgation by returning to the canal waters, despite his declaring how “only tourists and lovers take gondolas” (152). As this is his final journey, he must enjoy all the symbolic rites of the city, including the traditional ride in the canal in a gondola with a lover: “They got down into the gondola and there was the same magic, as always, of the light hull, and the sudden displacement you made, and then the trimming in the dark privacy” (140). The time spent with Renata in the gondola is, of course, another memory, one the Colonel is calling up as he sits crouched during his duck hunt, and he remembers Renata asking, “Do you still love me in the cold, hard Venice light of the morning? It is really cold and hard isn’t it?” (186). And it is. Life is cold and hard for the Colonel, but sunk down, warm, and drunk inside the magic gondola—like he has sunk down deep inside his memory—life is suspended, and together they occupy the liminal space only realized in Venice.

Because Cantwell loves Venice and Renata, “they have simultaneous and overlapping beauty,” (Stolzhus, 24) the various objects Hemingway uses to reveal Venice’s role in the Colonel’s necessary remembering often refer to Renata’s role as well. The portrait is perhaps the best indicator that Renata is associated with his youth and represents the crystallization of the memory he is taking with him into the afterlife. When he looks at her sleeping and then at her portrait, there is an extension of the conflict between reality and fantasy he experiences just by being present in the city: “it doesn’t really look like her, but how he likes to see her” (137). Similarly, Venice, which doesn’t look like it did when he was nineteen, is still a city of his memory, forever beautiful. “It was a beautiful portrait; neither cold, nor snobbish, nor stylized, not modern,” like Venice, he decides, “it was simply a splendid portrait painted, as they sometimes are, in our time” (137). The specific mention of time and speaking but failing to receive a reply from the inanimate Renata, reaffirms that the portrait is a thing of the past,

while the detested bathroom mirror in the hotel, in which he studies his reflection and declares himself a “beat-up, old looking bastard” (157) is his present reality. The blurred line between past and present, between real and representation is evoked throughout the novel. Of course, the emeralds Renata gives him are a hardened symbol of the eternal, and the weight of them gives the Colonel deep pleasure. Critics have suggested the emeralds represent everything from a familial link, to the verifiable past, to a jeweled miniature of the stones of the glorious St. Mark’s, to the cold squares of gravestones. They are, indeed, reminiscent of the three stones given to D’Annunzio by his muse, Eleonora Duse, whose Venetian palazzo Hemingway mentions in the opening chapter (Williams, 158), but even if they represent a symbolic union with the past, or human continuity and romantic love, they ultimately are left behind, in the hotel safe, with instructions to return them with love to the girl. This act of returning is a symbolic closing of all the recollections from the Colonel’s life, as well as an ending of the love he shared with Renata. If the emeralds represent eternity, they must be left in no-place Venice, where time has stood still for centuries.

For Cantwell, being present in Venice constitutes a viable link with the past, and the city, more than the emeralds in his pocket, is the real jewel. *Across the River*, certainly more than any of Hemingway’s other fiction, is filled with more allusions and arcane references than anyone expected from him, but as with the other various settings of his stories, Venice must be revealed for the meaning it has for the protagonist. In *The Role of Place in Literature*, Lutwack surmises that timeless places of the past, like Hemingway’s Venice, “intersect the present world and produce a visionary experience” (57). The city’s personal past for Cantwell, his first experience with war, and with adulthood, is coupled with Venice’s historical and literary past to intersect in the Colonel’s present, the waking from his dream state of recollection, to culminate in his death. Venice is the Colonel’s first, continued, and final education in civilization, a civilization preferred

to the mass murder he witnesses as a soldier, and one he has spent his life idolizing: “he continued to look and it was all as wonderful to him and it moved him as it had when he was eighteen years old and had seen it first, understanding nothing of it and only knowing that it was beautiful” (37). Traveling within Italy, (he mentions a familiarity with Veneto, Vicenza, Bergamo, Verona, Brescia, Treviso, Mantova, and Padova), he has gathered from extensive cultural experience the ability to define his personal concept of the term “civilization”. His degree of education is witnessed in his easily switching with Renata from speaking Italian, to English and French with Renata. He references the words of Lord Byron, the great poet of Venice, and acknowledges the work of Robert Browning (52). He also refers to the greats, alluding to Dante when drawing parallels between Renata and Beatrice, as well as invoking Shakespeare’s Venetian couple Othello and Desdemona. He talks fluidly about the history of Venice, especially to Jackson on the drive in, mentioning the Byzantine architecture of Torcello (36) and detailing the ingenuity of the Torcello boys who smuggled back the body of the city’s patron saint. The long list of art and literary references displays the level of knowledge he has acquired during his life and his preference for Venice as the ideal. The beauty he finds in the work of Titian and Tintoretto is the same unmatched beauty he sees in the city itself. The damage from the war in the real world is blotted out by his study of the ancient canvases of Piero della Francesca and Mantegna, the triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch, Brughel’s landscapes, and the technically unmatched frescoes of Giotto and Michelangelo. His appreciation is like reverence and is not wasted on the modern but reserved for the meaningful. Venice is a city imbued with artistic significance, acting as a liminal space joining the ancient greats and the modern generation.

Cantwell declares the canal side market to be the closest thing to a good museum (178) and spends the length of the novel taking part in an extensive ritual consumption of food and drink in order to physically engage with his litany of memories. Venice is revealed as his

sustenance, and the chapter-length experience at the market is beautifully detailed and passionate. The “charcuterie with the Parmesan cheeses and the hams from San Daniele, and the sausages alla cacciatora, and the bottle of good Scotch whiskey and real Gordon’s gin” (77) is one of the few symbols of present living, and the old soldier uses the market as a life giving source: “The Colonel liked to study the spread and high piled cheeses and the great sausages. Inhaling the smell of roasted coffee and looking at the amount of fat on each carcass in the butcher section, as though he were enjoying the Dutch painters” (178). The description of the fish market, with its slippery stone floor, its baskets and rope-handled boxes, links the Colonel’s present with the oldest traditions of Venetian merchants. His observations of the “heavy gray-green lobsters with their magenta overtones” and the “fine prawns,” the “shucked carcasses of the gray and opalescent shrimp” that “float easily on an ebb tide on the Grand Canal” (179) are beautifully rendered and deeply registered. His consumption of the razor-edge clams is described in ritualistic terms, as the Colonel slices the shell open and slurps out the meat, as though he is taking communion with the queen of the seas.

His worship of food, however, is not a personal act. He and Renata devote themselves to food and drink while enjoying the city and one another. Their shared bread breaking is catalogued carefully—lobster, very rare steak, cauliflower braised with butter, artichoke with vinaigrette—but it is the alcohol, the endless, limitless, highly-valued drink list that creates a mood of decadent experience and danger. In the gondola, Cantwell gives wine to Renata, encouraging her to drink: “This is good for you, Daughter. It is good for all the ills all of us have and good for all sadness and indecision” (145). The colonel orders dry martinis, Campari with gin and soda, Capri bianco secco, Chambertin and Roederer, and Pomer-Jouet. The Valpolicella waiting by his bed in the hotel appears more like prescribed medicine or ritualistic necessity than mere aperitif. The only time he mentions physical permanence and safety is when he pulls

open the door of Harry's Bar, a favorite Venetian haunt of both Cantwell and Hemingway. There, where he had "made it again, and he was at home" (77), the Colonel enters more of a mental state than a bar, where he feels relaxed in his surroundings, enjoys not military rations but ritualistic feasting, and is given the space to sink into his memory in defense against a painful present. Venice provides the space, the people who understand his needs, and the food and drink to create of his journey's end the ritualistic sacrament to allow him to face death with a clear conscience.

The mental stupor created from constant eating and drinking, combined with the ingestion of the cocktail of prescriptive drugs, including mannitol hexanitrate nitroglycerin and Seconal, further blurs the already blurred reality Venice presents. Both Colonel Cantwell's physical state, weakened by age and self-medication, and his mental state, nearly consumed by memory, are exacerbated by the quiet canal waters and the endless opportunities for wandering the labyrinthine streets. He recalls suffering ten concussions over the course of his service, and so his crossing back and forth continuously between past and present is the result of both a physical condition and the residual traumas of shell shock. Returning to the city from Trieste, the Colonel remarks how "everything is much smaller when you're older" (21), as the road, ditches, and farm yards encourage the first flood of memories. His whole world, in fact, is so small as to fit inside Venice entirely, something enacted via metaphor by his own placement in the sunken oak hogshead that they used in the Veneto for hunting blinds. As the unnamed shooter, he returns to Venice to shed his military memories and the real world trauma he has endured. Peter Byrne concludes: "The experience of Paris between the wars, of Spain and its Civil War, of Key West, of the Liberation of France in 1944, Cuba, the American West, and Africa was all brought back to Venice as to an altar for consecration" (157). After deciding, "The shooting's over," and that his time passed in the liminal state has been sufficient, Cantwell

signals the boatman with two shots toward the empty sky and considers his last regrets: the ducks did not have enough feathers, he forgot the sausages for the hunting dog, and he had failed to leave a note for Renata. He does, however, take pride in recognizing he has reached his end, acknowledging his beat up body is of no use to the Army, that he did find some way to say goodbye to his girl, and that, in the end, he had shot carefully and well, and was satisfied: "I always love the shoot...and I always love Venice" (277). Colonel Cantwell resigns life entirely on his own terms, making the final decision to move out of the no-place of Venice and into the next place of death.

The opportunity for viewing death as affirmation and transcendence is offered in a specific place, along the waters of the lagoon and in a city that resists modernization, classification, and is suffering a death of its own. The concentration on a single place, Lutwack says, makes possible a "great range and intensity of reflection" (15). The Colonel's military travels have taken him far beyond his home town and forced him to experience a life too traumatic to take into his death. Returning to Venice to expunge each of the memories from the various stops on the long road he has traveled since first departing, he leaves his list of memories collected from all over within a single liminal space. The night before his final shoot, Cantwell experiences a combat dream, for him, a common occurrence. But reflecting on these dreams, he says they are never bad, and most always about places: "We live by accidents of terrain, you know. And terrain is what remains in the dreaming part of your mind" (117). His dreaming mind was the safe place he escaped to when the reality of war was too terrible to confront. In his death, his final battle, he escapes to Venice as a geographical symbol of his dreaming mind and uses the city's liminality and inherent sense of placelessness in order to evoke a no-place capable of serving honorably as his final resting place.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Venise, c'est là où je ne suis pas

-Sartre

Influential novels of the Modernist movement often employ far larger, more industrialized cities such as London and Dublin in an attempt to represent the crisis of anxiety and alienation by presenting their protagonists in the places where they suffer. But in choosing Venice instead of other, modernized places, the author creates a symbolic geography, layered with meaningful historical and literary pasts, but sufficiently distanced from modernity to allow crucial self-reflection. Lutwack explains how Modernist writers rely on setting to reveal a protagonist's escape into nostalgia, the common distortion of place through fantasy and hallucinations, or the rejection of place altogether (184). James, Mann, and Hemingway each utilize Venice in a way that supports Lutwack's theory. James uses Venice as a representation of a nostalgic mind space which Juliana Bordereau chooses instead of facing a far less fulfilling reality. Mann uses the watery setting to allow his protagonist to easily slip out of his oppressive reality and deep inside the fantasies of his innermost consciousness. And lastly, Hemingway sees Venice as the dead city of the past and sends his Colonel there to reject his present, traumatic life altogether.

Henry James, like his nameless narrator, never quite seemed able to get at the real, inner Venice. The author, though long in love with the city, laments in personal letters how he

perpetually feels like a tourist among the canals. While he easily portrays the elite American businessman or the moneyed English aristocrat in his fiction, he seems not to know what it is, exactly, that makes something Venetian. James possessed an incredible desire to “get” Venice for himself, and read Ruskin and studied the city’s art and the architecture, but, revealingly, he never wrote a rounded Venetian character, just as he never wrote Venice the actual city but rather presents Venice the stage. Similarly, the narrator in “The Aspern Papers,” despite grand effort and determination, can never figure a way to circumnavigate successfully Juliana and access what it is he really desires. The narrator and Juliana, and even the poet Aspern, are Americans. James is certainly familiar with the American inability to honestly voice concerns or desires but unable to uncover what it is that makes Venice so desirable, he is limited to a concept of Venice as a grand and opalescent stage set, like the famous one at La Fenice, on which he can artistically arrange an interaction that reveals something about the state of modernity.

The narrator’s namelessness further reflects the no place theme of James’s location, and that his name is revealed in the story to be a disguise and yet still is not disclosed to the reader is an extension of the inability of James, despite many long stays in canal side palazzi, to ever feel satisfied that he knew Venice. The city and the narrator are never fully unmasked. Likewise, the papers the narrator hopes to pilfer are not even confirmed to be in Juliana’s possession until the very end, when Tina has burned them, and of course, it is too late. They are never made real. The narrator believes in their rumored existence based on little more than literary gossip. Juliana never reveals them nor acknowledges their existence. Tina claims to have set them alight but produces no ashes, no remnants, to prove they ever were. The idea of the Aspern papers, as used by James, is the clearest symbol of Venice in the story. The rumors from the city’s history consist largely of hearsay, gossip, and warnings handed down since the rise and

fall of the Republic. And though he could visit and stand on the same stones, James seemed never convinced he really knew the truth of the city. Venice, in fact, is the craftiest of his characters, and by serving as a no-place, charges his fiction with challenges to the notions of what has real substance and what is merely disguise.

Thomas Mann's protagonist, Aschenbach, most simplistically trades one mask for another, exchanging the one he has been assigned for one he adopts. Seeing Venice, even if failing to recognize it, in the Byzantine architecture and gilded lettering of the mortuary chapel is his selecting another face, a different character to present to the modern world. Thereby Mann indicates every place is meaningless on the surface, and only by escaping into a no-place can anyone be free to fully embody the mask of his choosing. First described wearing the face of an exhausted German writer, Aschenbach, in the end, is reinvented with makeup and hair dye. Aschenbach is like Venice, weary and worn, but willingly concealed by the faked gilding of a facade. Venice has failed to earn an assigned purpose for the modern Western world and thus continues hanging onto a once vibrant history, beautifully decorated but poorly kept, eliciting a sad kind of appreciation for what once was but with no present or future meaning beneath all the gold inlay. In both cases, the masks conceal reality, and Mann's Venice is filled with the unreal: the rumored cholera sickness, the distorted sounds of communication in the international hotel lobby, and even the perceived love conveyed by Tadzio's looks and smiles. The no-place position of Venice can deceive those looking for nothing more than a harmless holiday, but once revealed to a sensitive modern mentality, the eternal no-place is the most disorienting place of all.

The first incarnation of the Death archetype in Mann's text is also met at the cemetery. Again, whether or not Aschenbach recognizes him as such, he willingly follows the herald of

death to the city which possesses a liminality of space which blurs the standard separation between modern life and the afterlife. The herald appears again and again: on the boat from Pola, steering the gondola to the Lido, even as the teeth-baring, guitar-playing singer, entertaining the guests at the hotel. On each leg of the journey, the archetype is there, ushering Aschenbach through the in between space of Venice. The constant lurking of the red-haired stranger indicates the nature of a city like Venice, a geographical place encompassing both the weighted stone of the real world and the floating waters of another world, as a space that cannot be easily navigated without an assigned guide. While Aschenbach gets lost and mentally defeated chasing Tadzio through the dark streets in the city center, he is steadily losing his way from the moment he arrives in Venice. The Charon figure is meant to see him through the liminal space of the city until he arrives at his fated end. Venice, like the guide, does not exist to serve any function beyond fostering the transition of its visitors.

Writing after the initial modern anxiety had subsided and after the postwar melancholy had started to lift, Ernest Hemingway knew exactly what reality looks like; the graphic images of casualties of war had created an image in his memory he was unable to shake. His protagonist comes to Venice searching for a no-place, rather than being surprised by discovering it, like the characters of James and Mann. Colonel Cantwell depends on Venice and the non-reality and non-modernity of the place to provide an acceptable space for creating an alternate reality that serves to soothe his soldier's psyche. His fictitious Order serves his need for human connection and meaningful fraternization but allows him to keep a requisite personal distance by relying on invented titles and the unspoken agreement to jointly ignore reality. Participating in the mock battle of the duck hunt gives Cantwell a non-threatening place to experience his own murder/suicide and thereby begin the mental healing required to peacefully die. The Colonel requires the portrait of Renata because it is a safer representation of the lover he should have,

not requiring the same commitment, vulnerability, or the same emotional connection. Venice makes possible the space for reflection the Colonel desires. When he returns to Venice as a no-place, it can exist as any place he needs. Unfortunately, as much as he declares his love for the city, it remains unreal, and all of the incessant eating and drinking cannot sustain him; none of the various wines or dinners provides life-giving nutrients, and the constant imbibing of medicine and alcohol cannot sustain his life, but rather only augment the impression of existing in an alternate reality, making the journey to the end more comfortable.

Margaret Plant, describing a view of post-Byronic Venice, comments, “for so long depicted as an enthroned queen, both Virgin and Venus, Venice now appeared lying sleeping with the sea lapping menacingly at her feet and her useless sceptre leaning against a column; beside her was a lethargic lion of St Mark” (94). Venice, as a no-place for Modernists, evolves from the traditional literary myth focused on the power of the Republic, the city’s reputation for licentiousness, and the tragic fall of the Queen of the Seas, and into the ambiguous, liminal, disorienting landscape of an island, capable of symbolically representing the mental state of modern man. In recognizing the importance of exploring the changing and challenged consciousness in modern times, Modernist authors transpose the anxiety and post traumatic stress experienced by their protagonists onto a city that has ceased to exist as an active place. The coldness of the stones, the silence of the canals, and the floating impossibility of the geography make Venice the no-place capable of reflecting the new uncertainty in the Western world. The coldness reflects the waning human connection following the mass transition to the urban and the emergence of the industrial. The pervasive silence indicates the isolation and alienation that result from the move toward the modern, and the strange floating nature of the city Apollinaire famously called amphibious, best reveals the unsettling mental state many were left struggling through, attempting somewhere to recreate normality: “It is not knowing the

place that counts, but knowing oneself or finding the truth about oneself in a place” (Lutwack, 15). Venice is the liminal space which encourages in its multitudinous reflective surfaces that self-reflection required during periods of historical upheaval. Representing the transition from Victorianism to Post-Modernity that challenged authors to find ways to use place and setting in fiction, Venice as a no-place provided the space to expand the concept of inner awareness of character and the powerful employment of character-place symbolism.

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VITA

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This thesis examines the traditional concept of a literary myth of Venice and argues how a significant change in the modernist understanding of place effectively re-imagines the city of Venice in a variety of non-geographical ways. Tracing this re-imagining by modernist authors, I focus first on the Henry James novella, "The Aspern Papers," addressing the specific Venetian symbolism James employs to reveal his interpretation of the city's stage-like setting and how James, as a forerunner to the modernism movement, used the stage to mimic each character's consciousness. Then, in using Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," I explore the evolution of the use of Venice by modernist authors by considering Mann's incorporation of the illusionary and decadent reputation of the city to heighten the modernist trope of double vision. Lastly, in a treatment of Ernst Hemingway's final novel, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, I conclude the theory of an evolving use of Venice as setting in modernist fiction by examining Hemingway's concept of liminality and memory, and address how he relies on the city's unique history to serve as a reflection of the mental state of the Western world following the end of World War II.

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