

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

2-2015

The Labyrinths of Venice: Environment and Identity in Anna Pavignano's Novel "Venezia, un sogno" and Other Works in Literature and Film

Viviana Torrero

Graduate Center, City University of New York

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/631

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

The Labyrinths of Venice: Environment and Identity in Anna Pavignano's Novel *Venezia, un sogno* and Other Works in Literature and Film

by

Viviana Torrero

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Dr. Giancarlo Lombardi

12/16/2014

Chair of Examining Committee

Dr. Giancarlo Lombardi

12/16/2014

Executive Officer

Dr. Monica Calabritto

Dr. Peter Carravetta
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

The Labyrinths of Venice: Environment and Identity in Anna Pavignano's Novel *Venezia, un sogno* and Other Works in Literature and Film

by

Viviana Torrero

Dissertation Advisor: Professor Giancarlo Lombardi

This dissertation consists of the translation of Anna Pavignano's novel *Venezia, un sogno* and of an essay presenting a comment and critical analysis of the work.

The essay itself is divided into the following sections:

--An introduction to my translation of *Venezia, un sogno* and a reflection on my choice of Venice as a setting and background for my dissertation work.

--An introduction to the author and a description of her previous works.

--A discussion on the theory of translation and its challenges.

--A comparison between *Venezia, un sogno* and other literary and cinematic works set in Venice with a focus on the way the city of Venice lends itself to affecting, or in some cases, even transforming the identity of the main characters of related novels and films.

--An exploration of the cinematographic aspects of Anna Pavignano's novel and my challenges in translating its unusual colloquial style while maintaining fidelity to the original.

--An afterthought and comment on the book's general reception and the significance of its focus on environmental issues.

Venezia, un sogno, Anna Pavignano's third novel, was written after she had worked mostly as a screenwriter for Massimo Troisi's films and was nominated for an Oscar for "Il postino".

The essay discusses the concept of identity in individuals removed from their hometown either by choice (as in the case of Pavignano's main character Thomas) or by necessity (as in the case of individuals forced by financial, social, or military reasons). The city of Venice plays a major role in affecting this identity. The essay calls especial attention to the significance of environmental and social issues.

An essential component to the development of part of the dissertation is the repeated reference to films and other works of literature connected to the novel. The themes of love, betrayal, and death are present in all these works and are used as points of comparison between *Venezia, un sogno* and other literary references. These include works that are represented as both novels and films such as Ian McEwan's novel and Paul Schrader's film *The Comfort of Strangers*, Daphne du Maurier's novel and Nicholas Roeg's film *Don't Look Now*, Camillo Boito's novella and Luchino Visconti's film "Senso", as well as Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel *Il fuoco*. Particular attention is given to Thomas Mann's novella "Death in Venice" and Luchino Visconti's film of the same title, as well as Giuseppe Berto's novel and Enrico Maria Salerno's film *Anonimo veneziano*. The latter two play a major role in my essay.

Finally, two further elements of this section of my dissertation concentrate firstly on the authors' use of a colloquial style, including the regular use of idiomatic expressions and dialect which made the translation more challenging, and secondly, on the book's potential for being reproduced as a film.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of several people in my life.

To my advisor, mentor, and friend Professor Giancarlo Lombardi, I would like to express my deepest gratitude. Thank you for your consistent patience, dedication, and wonderful care. You encouraged me in every step of the way and inspired me with your knowledge about film and literature and with your valuable insight. Working with you has been an unforgettable learning and growing experience.

Thank you to Professor Monica Calabritto and to Professor Peter Carravetta, for being a part of the committee, for your enlightening comments, and for supporting me in the last, perhaps most challenging, but wonderfully exciting, months of this process.

To my friend and mentor Professor Giuseppe Di Scipio: you were there when I first started my studies at Hunter College and you inspired my love for literature, for Dante, as well as my passion for teaching. I know that somewhere, somehow, you are sharing this beautiful moment with me.

To my close friends in NYC and in Torino, for your precious friendship, and for putting up with me throughout the “writing years”, and making sure that I never give up.

To my mother: for being an admirable example with your endless strength and determination. Thank you for believing in me and for being such a fierce supporter throughout the many years of my studies. From you I learned that through persistence any goal can be achieved. Thank you also to my sister and to my immediate family for your encouragement and care.

To my husband: for the many years of unconditional support, love and devotion. For always being there for me and for inspiring me to begin something I did not believe I would ever complete. Thank you for working with me and for helping me get through this day after day. I would not be where I am now without you.

To the mountains, lakes, and rivers of Val d’Aosta and Switzerland: to those magnificent valleys, delightful flowers, trees, and gardens, for adding such unforgettable beauty to this project. And to Venice, for providing a most enchanting setting, as well as the inspiration for Anna Pavignano’s novel *Venezia, un sogno* and for my dissertation.

Finally, to “my beautiful hills of Torino”, which after many years I’ve had the immense joy of rediscovering. You have been my inspiration since my childhood years and to you I owe my passion for nature and for the arts. I will be forever grateful to you for sharing this project with me and for transforming what began as a frustrating never-ending struggle, into a fun, inspiring, exciting, and unforgettable adventure. To you, I dedicate this dissertation. Thank you for bringing such joy to my work and to my life, still.

Table of Contents

Abstract - iv

Acknowledgements - vi

Introduction - 2

The Author and Her Works - 9

Theories of Translation - 15

Venezia, un sogno: a Story of both Conversion to Commitment and the Concept of the “Other”

18

Comparison and Contrast with other Works Set in Venice. Identity: the Evolution of Characters in the Contrasting Aspects of Venice - 34

The Cinematographic Aspect of the Novel as a Challenge for its Translation - 56

An Afterthought About the Book’s General Reception and its Significance - 63

Translation of Anna Pavignano’s Novel *Venezia, un sogno* - 65

Bibliography - 243

Filmography - 247

O VENICE! Venice! when thy marble walls
Are level with the waters, there shall be
A cry of nations o'er thy sunken halls,
A loud lament along the sweeping sea!
If I, a northern wanderer, weep for thee,
What should thy sons do?—anything but weep?

--Lord Byron. "Ode on Venice"

A trompe l'oeil painting is a painting that is so lifelike it doesn't look like a painting at all. It looks like real life, but of course it is not. It is reality once removed. What, then, is a trompe l'oeil painting when it is reflected in a mirror? Reality twice removed? Sunlight on a canal is reflected up through a window onto the ceiling, then from the ceiling to the vase, and from the vase onto a glass, or a silver bowl. Which is the real sunlight? Which is the real reflection? What is true? What is not true? The answer is not simple, because the truth cannot change. I can change. You can change. That is the Venice effect. (Berendt, 2)

I. Introduction

The relationship between Italians and Venice is a most peculiar one. Some find the city artificial and others find it too melancholic, while still others talk about it with spirited pride, and many find it extremely beautiful and charming, but Venice is still a city where many Italians would never want to live. It is the source of all such mixed emotions, which are often contradictory.

As a child and as a teenager, I used to think of Venice as a fairy-tale city, an unreal city, an island, apart from the rest of the world, where life was slow and nothing of consequence had happened for centuries. To me, it was a city for tourists, who were ready to spend ten dollars for a soda in exchange for the simple thrill of sitting at one of the piazza cafés to admire the architectural spectacle of San Marco's façade. And the perception of that façade was constantly changing—with the light of day, with the clouds of pigeons swirling before it, and with the multiple shapes and colors of the visitors who walked by it.

These visitors stopped before the church to photograph their companions in front of this ornate Byzantine structure of stone. It seemed a city of superficial appearances, a city with no more substance than the image on a movie screen. Following thousands of others like them, these visitors wandered for hours through the city, fascinated with window-shopping in front of hundreds of tiny, almost identical boutiques selling glittery pieces of almost identical jewelry and tacky souvenirs. Much of the setting of the book, which I chose for my translation, *Venezia un sogno*, is in a similar souvenir shop which sells the souvenirs that the protagonists call "ricordini".

A souvenir, of course, is also a memory, and this was mine until years later, when I returned and was struck by how the place—or my perception of the place—had greatly

changed. As I tried to edge my way through a bustling crowd of tourists in the Stazione Santa Lucia, I felt overwhelmed and annoyed. Their noisy excitement drowned out any other authentic sentiment I might have experienced. At that time, I had not been living in Italy for years, and although my absence had triggered a rising fascination with my country and its culture, during this return visit I felt as though I were caught up in the dynamics of a land I did not know.

Finally, as I exited from the station, the crowd of tourists—or, I should say, other tourists, for I was one of them—dispersed, and my annoyance subsided. There had been a storm that day; the storm had cleansed the city, and the refreshing scent of post-storm air enticed me to experience a whole new perspective of Venice. It was late in the afternoon, and the light was soft. A warmer, more intimate light was visible through the windows in the façades of the houses, and I was suddenly aware of the buildings within which a city and the life of its own residents continued to evolve. For the first time, the city appeared to have a human dimension. On this visit, however, it was not the parade of historical events that intrigued me, but the ambience in which the smaller dramas of individual lives and the lives of families continued to take place. Suddenly, I felt a rush of excitement. What I was looking at was no longer the shallow cheerfulness of first time visitors in this gloomy city of fairy tales. Before me was a city I knew would become a part of my intellectual and emotional life over the years to come. A world of water and stone, which would very quickly take root in me and impact the very nature of my identity, essentially becoming a newly revisited home, seen from a different perspective from my youthful impressions, or as Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*, my new “corner of the world ... my first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (4). I also knew it would be through the “souvenirs” that others have reproduced—especially as in my case because of my interest in literature and film—that I would enhance my own knowledge of this rediscovered

treasure; those same souvenirs that are a central theme in *Venezia un sogno*. For me this is also a way of demonstrating that the complex interactions of individuals with a city can alter the identity of those individuals as independent actors, as participants in a family or in other small social groups. And it is with this in mind that the translation of Anna Pavignano's novel *Venezia, un sogno* becomes a vehicle to revive the same sentiments I experienced during that enlightening visit.

In that "fairy-tale" city most visitors, as John Berendt observes in *The City of Falling Angels*, are just passing through. However, for many others as well as for me several years earlier, and for Thomas, the main character of *Venezia, un sogno* those many islands, with their canals, winding passages, squares, and bridges, are the environment within which the lives of the city residents take place behind the façades that the visitors walk by. This city of souvenirs, and of anything symbolic of memories such as "ricordini", as Thomas calls them, is of course, one of those memories. Those memories, which according to him "prevent us from living the present" (9). However, those memories also connect us to our past, as witnesses to this phenomenon of Venice. They tell us where we come from and who we are; they are our identity, and indeed our home. They are a reminder of our humanity and what connects us with the rest of the world. Memories are the horizon, the inner and outer world, and what trigger different levels of emotions. They are also the connection with beauty and joy or pain. And it's that pain at times that may cause those memories to be forgotten—purposely forgotten—and repressed even though it's through that pain that one often comes back to life. Often a sound, a scent, a musical note, a word, a taste, an object can suddenly bring us back in time. In a split second, we relive

moments and episodes as if no time had gone by. We go through what Proust calls “involuntary memory” in his *A la recherche du temps perdu*¹ (Bradbury, 138).

What makes the world strange and turns the familiar room into unfamiliar, cracks open our sense of habit and what we conventionally call reality. It dissolves and recreates the room around us, turns it into all the rooms we ever slept in and all the sensations we have had in them. It links together the physical sensations of our bodies with other past sensations of the same kind, and is a sort of synaesthesia, a coming together of every one of the senses. (Ibid)

Memory for Proust is “an organ of being, not a remembered thing but an active process of consciousness in motion” (Ibid). By means of the involuntary memory, one becomes that child or that teenager, and in a split second we experience as that child and that teenager so long ago did. And those memories conjure up images of a home we thought impossible, and yet that “corner of the world”, that “universe”, as Bachelard suggests, which for years had disappeared from our memory and had been substituted with new memories, suddenly invades our hearts again, as if they had never left us. As if they had been our reality forever. And finally we know we’re home for good. Thomas knew from the moment he set foot in Venice that that miracle of water and stone would become his present, his past, and his future home, and that it would remain so for the rest of his life.

Bachelard continues by writing:

I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.” Thought and experience are not the only things that sanction human values. The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths. Daydreaming even has a privilege of auto valorization. It derives direct pleasure

¹ *Remembrance of Things Past* in the English translation by C. K. Scott-Moncrieff. Bradbury Malcolm, *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*. Penguin Books, USA, 1990

from its own being. Therefore, the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as day dreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time. (6)

The dream that is Venice allows one to dream while being in a dream (Venice). However, Venice remains in one's mind even after leaving the city. Even several years later, the memory of it continues through daydreams. That reverie is triggered through a variety of experiences, whether connected or not with the Venice once visited. It is relived precisely by means of that involuntary memory. Samuel Beckett says that "involuntary memory is an unruly magician which will not be importuned. (Bradbury, 138).

In several works of literature and films that take place in Venice, main characters most often change or are changed during their visit in the city, while, again as John Berendt observes, they are passing through. "The best-known novels and movies set in Venice tended to be about people who were just passing through ... The main characters of all these stories, and many more besides, were neither Venetians nor resident expatriates. They were transients." (46).

Indeed, all characters in films and literature are just passing through. They are a part of an illusion, which continues for an hour or two or three, and then ends. The viewer of a film as well as the reader of a work of literature can be seen also as a *visitor*, someone who has come to watch or to read. I observe, in the works I have read and in the movies I have seen that were filmed in the city, the variety of each central character's response to, and consequent interaction with that distinctly "other" reality that is Venice. A short stay in the city is often enough to change, sometimes profoundly, who these characters are. The beautiful yet claustrophobic labyrinths of Venice, have often been as much the setting for life-changing experiences for characters in movies and in books as they continue to be with today's visitors. The influence on fictional characters caused by the changing scene of the city is portrayed, for example, in *Death*

in Venice. Aschenbach, the main character—a writer in the novella and a composer in the film, arrives in Venice sure of his principles and confident of his ability as a serious artist. His integrity is very soon threatened by the seductive power of the androgynous beauty of Tadzio, an adolescent visitor of Venice. In just a short time all of Aschenbach's certainties vanish and he becomes captive of the city's decadence, and eventually as the title suggests, a lethal victim of it. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, Colin and Mary, a couple going through a crisis in their marriage, at first find Venice as a means to reestablish their identity as a couple. The city is their new hope, their dream for a restored relationship. However, their curiosity and attraction towards a seductive and eccentric couple will make them fall into the couple's perverse net and subsequently, lead one of them to his death. Tadzio on the one hand and the eccentric couple on the other represent the menacing and alluring side of the multi-faceted city.

I also observed, in the novel that I translated, not only how an engagement with Venice altered the persona of fictional characters, but also how it altered their perception of identity, and, finally, how it impacted their awareness of possibilities and risk in their engagement with the world outside of Venice—especially as it involves the environmental concerns.

The creativity we witness in cinema as well as in literature is an elusive art form, bringing to mind Picasso's statement, that: "Art, is a lie that reveals the truth." In fact we notice that several artists have attempted to convey the seductive power, the thrills of discovery as well as the disillusionments of this place unique in all the world, and have done so in every medium, in every genre, and in every language. Among those artists are writers such as D'Annunzio in *Il fuoco*, Camillo Boito in "Senso", Giuseppe Bertolucci in *Anonimo veneziano*, and Thomas Mann in "Death in Venice". In addition to the literary pieces, we find filmmakers such as Visconti (*Death in Venice*), Nicholas Roeg (*Don't Look Now*), David Lean (*Summertime*), Paul Mazursky

(*Blume in Love*), Enrico Maria Salerno (*Anonimo veneziano*), and Paul Schrader (*The Comfort of Strangers*).

II. The Author and her Works

Anna Pavignano is a writer and screenwriter. She was born in Turin and has been living in Rome for several years where she teaches writing for cinema. Her screenwriting works include Alessandro D'Alatri's *Sul mare* (2010) and *Casomai* (2002), Michael Radford's *Il postino* (1994), Massimo Troisi's *Pensavo fosse amore invece era un calesse* (1992), *Le vie del signore sono finite* (1987), *Scusate il ritardo* (1983) and *Ricomincio da tre* (1981). In 1995, for her significant contribution to the movie *Il postino*, directed by Michael Radford, she won an academy award for Best Adapted Screenplay, and in 1996 she was nominated for an Oscar for best non-original screenplay for the same movie. Her career as a writer includes the novels: *Da domani mi alzo tardi* (2007), *In bilico sul mare* (2009), *Venezia, un sogno* (2012) and *Tutto quello che vorrei* (2013).

In *Da domani mi alzo tardi*, the author describes aspects previously unknown to the public, of the late actor and director Massimo Troisi, with whom Pavignano was connected sentimentally and professionally for several years. The book is a biography but also a work of fiction in which Pavignano brings Troisi back to life and places him in a countryside setting where he is on retreat from fame and from everything and everyone else associated with his past. In the story, Troisi finally decides to move back to Rome and after he has experienced a period of difficulty in settling back to "normal" life, Pavignano and Gaetano, characters themselves in the book and close friends of Troisi, convince him to begin a new project. During this time she will help him reconstruct his past and reminisce with him about the good and bad moments of his life, of their relationship, their work together, and their love. The author beautifully describes episodes of Troisi's life and uses photographs from their past to restore his identity.

Ricordo tutto di te, momento per momento ...te la racconto io, se vuoi, la tua vita. Sicuramente ti piacerà, vedrai." (52)

In the first pages of the book, she says:

Non so se nulla si crea, ma sicuramente nulla si distrugge: quello che ho vissuto con lui si è trasformato in patrimonio genetico. Lo capisco adesso: la persona che ho davanti mi appartiene e mi apparterrà anche se un giorno dovessi dimenticarmi della sua esistenza. (29-30)

Pavignano chooses the title *Da domani mi alzo tardi* based on Troisi's candor and shyness, the typical personality traits that made him the charming individual his audience loved so much.

These facets of his character are seen in the following words and clearly evoke the title of the book:

Ho pensato che voglio cambiare, non voglio più essere pigro come sono sempre stato. Ho deciso che da domani cambio, da domani mi alzo... tardi!". E quando Pavignano, ridendo, gli fa notare: "Che cosa cambia? Ti sei sempre alzato tardi!", la sua risposta è candida come sempre: "Mi sono sempre alzato tardissimo! All'una e mezza, alle due! Da domani mi alzo alle undici, giuro!". (Intervista di Marzio Di Mezza, 22 aprile, 2010)

In the novel, Pavignano represents Troisi's memory, his joy and his sorrow, his "other" self. With her words she gives her audience a chance to participate in Troisi's life. By reading her book her readers are taken into a world previously unknown to the public. It allows the readers to "feel" the spirit of and to become a part of the actor and director's life. Troisi comes back to life, specifically through his dialect, his uncertain way of speaking and his irony, which characterized him. The novel reflects above all the love story between the author and Troisi.

Con quel libro ho voluto aprire e chiudere un periodo... avevo bisogno di ripercorrere un pezzo di vita importante e la scrittura... mi è sembrata lo strumento più consono per fare questo.

Quello che ho voluto fare con 'Da domani mi alzo tardi' è stato ricostruire un periodo inventando cose vere... sembra strano, ma è stata proprio questa modalità, il racconto di un incontro tra me e Massimo ai giorni nostri, l'arcano per mettere su carta ricordi che mi avevano intensamente modificato la vita.

Avevo iniziato a studiare psicologia, poi la scrittura, una delle tante possibilità che la vita mi ha offerto, mi ha permesso di realizzare un mio percorso... è una cosa complicata mettere insieme passione e lavoro... in alcuni casi rischia di diventare un'ossessione... nel caso della scrittura pensare solo a quella... mentre è fondamentale l'esperienza di vivere... incontrare persone... visitare nuovi luoghi... lo svago è un arricchimento.

(“Passeggiando con Anna Pavignano”. Intervista di Andrea Bettini, 11 aprile, 2012)

The themes that keep coming back in Pavignano’s cinematic and narrative works are love and identity. In every novel, and movie it is through love that her characters reconstruct their identity, whether it is through the relationship between teenagers (*In bilico sul mare*), or between the author and Massimo Troisi (*Da domani mi alzo tardi*), or between a grandfather and his adopted African grandchild (*Venezia un sogno*). In the latter novel, it may be love between a man and his wife, or of that same man and his past love, or even more, the relationship between an ordinary man and a special city: Venice. It is through the different kinds of love that the characters evolve; it is through love that the characters’ identities are given shape. Concern for the environment is another issue close to Anna Pavignano’s heart. Water plays a major role in *In bilico sul mare*, and it is as significant as love in *Venezia un sogno*: “The world around him in that misty dawn had made the young Thomas aware that the sea, in Venice, was a habit, normality. People live that way, on water every day. He liked that.” [10].

In both novels, the main characters live in places surrounded by water. As often happens to people who grow up near the water, they cannot conceive of living anywhere else; they are addicted to it. Water incorporates the good and the bad, summer and winter. It separates and it brings together, it protects from outside threats, but it threatens when “angry”. In *In bilico sul mare*, it brings together and divides the lives of two young lovers while at the same time it accompanies them in their love story and is a constant impartial witness to their troubles. In *Venezia, un sogno*, water is the charm and beauty of a city, but one that slowly threatens its very life. Water is the ever-changing constant of the characters’ world: something that lives within them.

In the novel *In bilico sul mare*, the main character, Salvatore, lives on a small island

(perhaps Ventotene?) where life is sunny and beautiful during the summer, but dark and depressing in the winter. His world embraces those two extremes that affect who he is. In both of these opposing worlds, his home is the water which surrounds him. It is the calm, serene, lovely sea, which attracts outsiders and makes the island lively and exciting. Alternately, it is the threatening, stormy element that scares away visitors, brings destruction and death, and accentuates the isolation of those living there. The author calls these worlds winter and summer lives and compares them to the “two sides of a mattress” (13).

This novel is not only the troubled love story between two young people from different social backgrounds, who learn about worlds completely foreign to them. It is also the story of profound but difficult friendships, tragic deaths on job sites (*morti bianche*), of illegal work (*lavoro nero*), of illegal immigration, and of that “obscure illness” called depression. It is the account of deaths, which often no one knows about and are not reported in the news but which are every day events. The expression “morte bianca” in Italian refers to the absence of any individual who might be responsible for the accident.

Spesso fanno un lavoro nero, la morte pero` la chiamano bianca. Secondo me e` sbagliato perche` bianca e` una sposa tutta felice, e` la neve che ti lascia incantato, e` la prima pagina del quaderno di scuola che era bella perche` tutta da scrivere. Si deve trovare un altro colore. (5)

Through Salvatore, the author describes a world unknown to many. With this novel she opens the eyes of her audience to those tragedies, which strike workers daily.

The author’s style in both *In bilico sul mare* and *Venezia un sogno* is highly colloquial, similar to what the characters would speak in their hometowns. She uses mostly dialogue, and her sentences are short and simple. The slang and dialect she employs makes her characters come to life. At times her language is harsh and strong, but it captures the spirit of her characters. The use of non-traditional punctuation and sentence structure reflects her background as a writer for

the cinema, and especially reflects her experience with Massimo Troisi, who often chose to use Neapolitan dialect in his films.

In *In bilico sul mare*, the story is narrated in first person by the young protagonist Salvatore. As mentioned above, the language Pavignano uses is simple and flowing and is an excellent example of the author's capacity to "become" the character she created. Thanks to this language and to the conversational format, the reader is able to identify with the teenager's carefree, yet at times deeply anguished state of mind, and to be fully immersed in the ambiance of the island of Ventotene.

Il mare e` azzurro, il mattone e` rosso. Le onde fanno schiuma, la calce bolle.

L'estate c'e` il sole e fa caldo.

L'inverno c'e` il sole uguale, ma fa piu` freddo.

La mia isola e` uno sputo di terra nera in mezzo al mare e meno male che le case sono rosa e gialle, che quando torno, e magari sono stato tanto tempo fuori per lavorare, a vederle da lontano fanno allegria [7]

In the following words, Pavignano relates her main thinking and motivation for writing the book *In bilico sul mare*.

"Il tutto parte da una riflessione... da un pensiero magari per un po' di tempo messo da parte, ma che poi non solo ritorna, ma sento la necessita` di approfondirne il senso...". Fa una breve pausa e poi riprende: "Dopo *Da Domani mi alzo tardi* ho scritto *In bilico sul mare*, libro che poi ho pure sceneggiato per il film di Alessandro D'Alatri... bene in quel caso il pensiero scatenante era legato alle morti bianche, una delle tante ingiustizie della societ` ignorate... dovevano ancora accadere casi purtroppo eclatanti come quelli della Thyssen... a me interessava raccontare la storia che c'era dietro ad una di queste persone... spesso fa notizia il numero dei morti, ma ci si dimentica che dietro ad ognuno di loro ci sono delle storie... ci sono delle vite vissute... io racconto le storie interiori... il sentimento e` la spinta vitale... perseguendolo pi` o meno coscientemente".

("Passeggiando con Anna Pavignano". Intervista di Andrea Bettini, 11 aprile, 2012)

In the above comments one can see the author's line of thinking that is also evident in *Venezia una sogno*. Both novels of denunciation focus on issues often set aside by most people. In one instance, the deaths of undocumented immigrants fail to elicit the compassion that might

impel the population to take action on a continuing basis to eliminate this problem. The lack of fellow feeling toward those who are at the bottom of the social structure reinforces their virtual invisibility. They become an expendable part of the environment. In *Venezia, un sogno*, the lack of fellow feeling—of compassion—expands to incorporate not only humans but the entire animal kingdom, the water and the air that suffer from depletion and pollution. Not just the people but also the entire environment upon which they depend for survival are put at risk. Pavignano urges humankind to assume responsibility for its collective action and to act accordingly.

III. Theories of Translation

Many of the films I mentioned above were transposed to the screen from books. Moreover, many of the books I mention in this essay were themselves translated from one language to another. The literary and cultural critic Walter Benjamin tells us in “The Task of the Translator” that, “no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. (“A Translator’s Long Journey, Page by Page” by Andrew Blast. The New York Times 05/25/2004).

If the translator then should not strive for likeness to the original, can his translation still be effective? In what ways can a translator reproduce what the author so particularly expressed in his work? Does the reader receive the same experience and can the reader absorb the same information when reading in translation as when he or she is reading in the original? Is the Italian expression “traduttore, traditore” (translator, traitor) a fair criticism? The New York born literary translator Gregory Rabassa is clear in his response: “my thesis is that translation is impossible. People expect reproduction, but you can’t turn a baby chick into a duckling. The best you can do is get close to it.” (ibid)—close to the original, that is.

In “The Art of Translation”, translation is described as an art. A translator is supposed to be the original author’s most intimate and exact reader. He/she should learn as much as possible about the author’s life and experience what the author experienced. It is through a close understanding of the author’s background, as well as of his/her language that the translator can come closer to expressing the same feeling. Additionally, it is through the attempt to fully immerse oneself in the same context—the same ambience—that the author is describing, that the translator enhances his or her comprehension of that world’s setting and meaning.

A translation must be a faithful representation of the author’s intent. To do this a

translator must be creative but also imitative. He is on the one hand in fact a creator but must also follow the writer's vision of reality. The language of translation may at times interpret the *reality* of its original, but it must try to imagine the situation and describe it even if similar words may not be available.

When discussing his reading and translation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Rabassa says:

I'm reading the Spanish, but mostly I'm reading it in English, and it comes out that way. When I talk about it, I say the English is hiding behind his Spanish. That's what a good translation is: you have to think if Garcia Marquez had been born speaking English, that's how a translation should sound. (Ibid)

In certain instances it is necessary to borrow words from other languages when the language one is translating from does not contain that word. If the word is not available in any other language, it is then necessary to describe the situation or the word and come as close as possible to the original. In "The Journal of Literary Translation: Translation Atti", the English writer Anthony Burgess when translating T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* into Indonesian, described his difficulty in finding an Indonesian word for "cruel". At the time of his translation, the word "cruel" did not exist in Indonesian, and he had to turn to an Arabic word instead. The other issue was the fact that the word "cruel" was being used to describe the month of April, and its "cruel" weather. How can one translate the "cruelty" of a month and especially, how does one do it in a country when the seasons do not differ from one another and when there is no cold or hot weather? And how does one translate words like "snow" or "ice" if snow and ice don't exist in the country? (34). These are just a few of the issues, which a translator faces and needs to resolve. Translation opens up the world to people. It is a way for people to learn new cultures, new ways of thinking, new languages, and new horizons. Without translation, we would be confined to our own language, to what we already know, and there would be no "horizon".

The Australian writer Shirley Hazzard writes that “Italy entered her life through translation” (33). She writes that she began to study the Italian language so that she could read Giacomo Leopardi “in his own voice” (34). It was by learning another language and by visiting a new culture that she became the writer she is today.

The American poet and literary translator Richard Wilbur describes translation as “an act of love” (13), where a translator must in fact be a writer or have the abilities of a writer. August Strindberg, playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist goes even further saying that: “All translation is an act of destruction, unless undertaken by a poet with song in his heart and music in his ear.” (ibid). Upon reading the above, one may conclude that art and love are what make a translation successful in the end.

IV. *Venezia, un sogno*: a story of both Conversion to Commitment and the Concept of the “Other”

The novel *Venezia un sogno* is the story of Thomas, a native of Benicia, California, who leaves his hometown in his early twenties and later on discovers both himself—and a new home—in Venice. It is the transformation of a man who breaks through his indifference to the plight of others and his environment and learns to cope with the challenges in his life. The story follows the progress of the main protagonist, from being a carefree world traveler to an affable barman at Harry’s Bar in Venice, where he establishes the first real roots to his growth. It is in this context that he begins to collect as souvenirs different pieces of a silver place setting as they connect with significant events and people in his developing lifestyle. Moreover, when he becomes an actual resident in Giudecca, he confronts the stages of a daily life and his relationships with loved ones. The first of these relationships is his brother Ernest back in California, who is the only connection with his past; then his wife Ivonne, who will eventually die prematurely of an incurable disease; years later, his son Felix and his wife Margherita will threaten to separate him from the city he loves; finally, his newly adopted African grandchild Abdul, with whom he establishes a warm and enlightening relationship. Intermittently, among all of these people in his life come his several lovers, with Marina being the most significant one. Strengthened by his success in meeting these challenges, he ultimately becomes a fierce advocate for the salvation of Venice.

The novel was inspired by the documentary film “An Inconvenient Truth”, in which Al Gore discusses the current climate crisis and attempts to educate the public on the threats of global warming today and in the next fifty years. Directed by Davis Guggenheim, the documentary was released in 2006. In a similar manner, Anna Pavignano attempts to sensitize her audience to the issue of environmental concern by telling the story through the eyes of an

ordinary guy from California, Thomas, who evolves thanks to his relationships with those close to him. Most of all, it is the story of a man and the city that becomes his soon after he sets foot in it.

Thomas and Venice are both protagonists of the story. Thomas' personal environment in Venice is threatened by the changing depths of the water. This threat awakens in him an awareness of the dangers both to his own lifestyle as to those of the people dear to him. In this he finds a new sensibility and humanity. Initially, he is apathetic to the environmental issues of the world. He is also self-centered and prejudiced against what he doesn't know (and anything else that he finds different). He is constantly looking ahead and on the move, incapable of giving to those whom he encounters. As mentioned earlier, he believes, that memories prevent one from achieving his goal, from "living the present ... 'I want to live moment by moment. Without a past and without a future.' He left (California), certain that life would be found only on the road. Backpacking, hitchhiking and on the road." (2).

The rising level of the water in the city and its constantly suffocating fogginess provide the parallel image to the rising emotional strain of the protagonist. At the beginning of each chapter, the reader's attention is reminded of the increasing level of the *acqua alta*, the high water, which is a premonition of the impending threat to the city. As Venice slowly sinks, its streets and bridges are submerged, and its homes flooded, we note that Thomas's awareness of his surroundings changes. Before this, Pavignano describes the relationship between Thomas and his wife Ivonne, a relationship which is idyllic at first, but which becomes strained after the birth of their son Felix, who becomes the cause of jealousy and resentment. The relationship between the husband and the wife is never the same, and that with his son Felix becomes one of contrast and of envy. In his heart, Thomas feels that he has lost his wife's love and therefore becomes

unable to communicate with him. Several years later, his state of mind will be challenged by his son Felix's desire to sell the family house, leave the island (Giudecca), and move to solid ground. In a phone conversation with his brother Ernest in California, Thomas says: "Felix says that we have to leave for his son's future. That this is a city without hope." (98). Unexpectedly, Thomas feels his world collapsing. The thought of being torn away from his roots—roots once lost and now found again—becomes, as he wishes to reveal to Ernest in California, his personal 9/11. "He felt it in his heart to say that leaving Venice, leaving the house, its memories, and everything he had, would have been his personal 9/11. He thought, however, that to Ernest it would have sounded like a heresy." (97). Though it may seem out of proportion to Thomas' situation, this reference to 9/11 conjures up the tragic image of that fatal day that took on poignant meaning especially to those whose lives were directly affected by the losses they suffered. So in Thomas' case the threat to his lifestyle and newfound security seems to him a comparable tragedy. Suddenly the fleeting "acquaintances" of just moments before become little bits and pieces of his deeper self. They are his family. They are pieces of the puzzle, which he had never before been able to complete. They become his life. "I know everyone here" (89) he tells his son. And that "everyone" that surrounded him involved his daily life: his morning walks on the wet *calli*, the chats with the shop owner, with the bartender, with the baker, "the childhood joy of looking out the window and feeling that he was the master of what he saw." (103). That "everyone", comprised his newly established roots. Each of these phases in the story sees a quality change in Thomas' character.

In the end, Thomas is transformed into a man who feels a need to get involved and who knows that something needs to be done to save his city and to save himself. He learns compassion and love. He learns that memories will no longer prevent him from living the present,

as he was a firm believer of in the past, but that they make us who we are and enrich our present: “memories are our future” (169); “in order to forget, one must first remember” (87). And Thomas in the end *remembers*. He remembers and finally acknowledges his mistakes: his betrayals, his responsibility in his difficult relationship with Felix, his inability to communicate with him, his silence caused by his own resentment and jealousy from the day Felix was born: the day when Felix “stole” Ivonne’s love away from him. He remembers and realizes when faced with the possibility of losing what he loves the most. He remembers and understands, when faced with the possibility of the collapse of what has been his world for decades, a world he was not aware of until now. It is the realization of a man who never came to grips with his surroundings until those surroundings were about to be submerged by water. A “personal 9/11” (97): the end of what he’s familiar with. “‘In the course of my life’, he asked himself, ‘was I successful in having people love me enough to worry about my absence?’ A chilly shiver ran down his spine, the expectation of a negative response or a wind draft.” (143)

Together with the threat of losing his home Thomas comes to the realization that he had never really established warm relationships with anyone. Now that he risks losing everything, he begins to find a new meaning in life.

Anna Pavignano uses an episode as tragic as 9/11 to describe the protagonist’s conversion of his state of apathy. This is however not an end, but a new beginning. Precisely on the day of 9/11 Thomas, while in Venice and still unaware of the tragedy, chooses to begin his silverware collection. He chooses to start remembering again. After decades of turning his back to the past, he finally realizes that it’s time for him to look back. The endless search for the silver fork, which would complete his collection of six pieces of silverware, represents just this: the return and acceptance of his past, with its mistakes and its joys.

He had left America when he was just over twenty, he had toured Europe and lived in Italy, but he had never been to New York. He had never seen the Twin Towers, and he would have never been able to see them again.

But still he could have answered the question: “What were you doing when you received the news?”

Nobody ever asked him. But if they had, he would have answered: “I accepted to remember my past”. (53)

The protagonist “dies” only to be reborn into someone new, more compassionate and more aware. The sinking of Venice could lead to a new Venice, as reflected in the new awareness of its citizens. It is, therefore, a realization that there is new life even when the end seems so close, and eventually equilibrium is restored.

The author’s reference to the tragedy of 9/11 is perhaps the suggestion of a man-made catastrophe being necessary for individuals to be brought back to their senses, by realizing that it is only through awareness, through compassion, and through the acceptance of what they’re not familiar with, that the world can be saved. In this might be the hint that by learning to accept those different from us and by looking beyond our surroundings, we might be able to find ultimate peace. Thomas not only reconnects with his son and understands that the world outside needs him (as it needs all individuals), but he also learns to accept and to love cultures different from his. To a certain extent, he overcomes that kind of fear of getting involved in situations outside his comfort zone. We sometimes fear what we don’t know. We avoid and fear what has no resemblance to us. Thomas experiences a cultural awareness when he realizes that Abdul, despite his African origins and his age, can have a positive impact on his life. He undergoes a conversion from opposition to acceptance of ethnic differences.

With her novel, Pavignano indirectly invites her readers (and the general public?) to be gentle with, and aware of, the world around them, because by doing so, everyone’s own little world will benefit from it. During this process of becoming aware, as Thomas learns and

evolves, his son Felix learns and evolves as well. He learns to understand his father and to forgive him. In the end, his decision to stay in Venice and not to sell the house is actually a tribute to his father. It is his way to continue the relationship of father and son, of son and grandson, of grandfather and grandson, without breaking the generational chain. “Margherita (Thomas’ sister-in-law) is not a bad person. I’m the bad guy. Even with my son, it is I who’s the bad guy. They decided not to leave Venice in order to meet me half way: perhaps they care about me.” (171). In fact, Margherita as well has Thomas’ wellbeing at heart. She continuously calls him dad, something Thomas instinctively rejects in the same way he had rejected his son and grandson.

To Felix’s great surprise, Abdul quickly wins over the curiosity and affection of the grandfather. With his gentleness and perception, the child, who just shortly before, had been perceived as a small alien by Thomas, is soon able to capture Thomas’ heart. When Felix becomes aware of this strong bond, he experiences for a moment the same kind of jealousy towards his son that Thomas had experienced towards him many years before when he was born.

Enviously, Felix watched the child grab the box with familiarity and command, leaving fingerprints on the shiny wood and on the silver.

At that moment he ceased to be an adult and a parent. He went back to being the child of long ago: jealous, extremely jealous of the newcomer who, in such a short time, had been able to gain a favored treatment, which had not been granted to him, ever. (158)

Perhaps in that moment, through his jealousy, Felix is able to comprehend his father for the very first time in his life.

Thanks to Thomas, Abdul learns to understand and to be a part of a world so remote to him at first. Through his relationship with his grandfather, he becomes more familiar with his surroundings and more comfortable with a world he finds frightening and puzzling, but also amusing and intriguing. A world where water from a faucet—and not carried in a bucket for

miles—is the norm and where light appears and disappears at the simple turn of a switch. Abdul learns from Thomas, but Thomas learns from Abdul. He learns that something as basic as water and light, which he always took for granted, could make a child, who had spent the first few years of his life in a world where water and light were not taken for granted, laugh with joy for hours at a time. And he felt ashamed.

He felt ashamed for himself. For his family.

For the showers, the fountains, the rain which had been pouring for the past three days. Even for the *high water*, though salty and filled with debris. He felt ashamed for Venice, for Italy, for Europe, for America.

He felt ashamed to live in a world where one could afford the luxury of filling up swimming pools and of splashing around in them...

He felt ashamed of having before him a child who switched on and off the light in order to make sure that it was still there, and who thoroughly enjoyed seeing it come back again.

Something wasn't right, it didn't add up. (84-85)

For Thomas, shame is related to the conscious realization of his own shortcomings and lack of proportion in his values and understanding of cultural differences between him and the child.

In Abdul, Thomas finds both an ally and a friend in his project to save Venice. “Thomas realized, almost incredulous, that this child, despite his poor knowledge of the language, was able to listen to him and to understand him, a lot more than anyone else.” (105)

Abdul, like Thomas, is a “foreigner” and is perceived as a threat in the beginning. As sometimes happens in countries preoccupied with nationalism, citizens may go to war to protect their sense of identity from “others”. Similarly, people who live in cultures different from their culture of origin may fear the same identity loss. They may refuse to become a part of that new culture and prefer to isolate themselves and live as permanent foreigners. Alternatively, they may attempt to impose their own beliefs and traditions on those who were there before them and

conflict results. In other instances, generations of people, who, of necessity, emigrate to other countries and choose to change their names and forget their roots for the sake of fitting in. In order to survive in their “new homeland”, they may refuse to speak their native language, forsake their traditions, their cuisine, and, in some cases, even their religion. They take on a completely new identity by way of assimilation.

In her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva writes that:

a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group (1).

Often in wars, men and women from the same community turn against each other for the sake of an ideal, a religious belief, or simply because they happen to be born in an “other”, part of the same community. They become strangers to each other and as such can ignite cultural or ideological clashes. All that is often necessary to avoid such clashes is a certain amount of tolerance and compromise or, as Kristeva suggests, acceptance and understanding of our innermost self, which makes it possible to coexist in a single local community as other people while maintaining one’s particular identity.

“Strangely, the foreigner lives within us”, Kristeva writes,

he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns ‘we’ into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible, the foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities. (ibid).

Kristeva is not the only author to write about the foreigner, seen as the “outsider”. The newcomer who moves into an established community and changes it for better or for worse, has been written about in a variety of literary genre over the years. For example, Manzoni in the *Promessi Sposi* (1827) describes the episode where the main protagonist Renzo is “the foreigner”

in Milano and as such, is received with fear and hostility by its inhabitants during a period of plague. He is accused of being the propagator of the pestilence for being “different”: an outsider. That is still the case today, and by reason of some form of xenophobia foreigners are often used as scapegoats and blamed for crimes they never committed.

In Elsa Morante’s *La storia* (1974), moreover, the outsider is a German soldier who brings death and terror and who imposes his will on the inhabitants of a country—not his own—bringing terror and death as a consequence. The German symbolizes the “unknown”, someone to be feared and to defend oneself from.

The foreigner may not always be seen as a negative element in a certain setting, however, as can be seen in Baudelaire’s poem *L’Etranger* (1869). In the poem he writes about the stranger (the “enigmatic man”) and his indifference to loved ones, to his country and to material possessions (“gold”). When asked what he loves the most, the stranger’s reply is: “I love the clouds, ... the passing clouds ... over there/up there ... over there/up there... the marvelous clouds”.

- Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta soeur ou ton frère?
 - Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni soeur, ni frère.
 - Tes amis?
 - Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu.
 - Ta patrie?
 - J'ignore sous quelle latitude elle est située.
 - La beauté?
 - Je l'aimerais volontiers, déesse et immortelle.
 - L'or?
 - Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu.
 - Eh! qu'aimes-tu donc, extraordinaire étranger?
 -J'aime les nuages... les nuages qui passent... là-bas... là-bas... les
 - merveilleux nuages!² (Charles Baudelaire; *Le Spleen de Paris*)

²—Tell me, enigmatic man, whom do you love best? Your father, your mother, your sister or your brother?—I have neither father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother.—Your friends?—You are using a word whose meaning is to this day still unknown to me.—Your homeland?—The latitude under which it's located is unknown to me.—Beauty?—I would gladly love it,

The clouds, which are constantly in motion (always traveling), are intangible and inaccessible, as travelers often like to be; as Thomas used to be when he left Benicia. The clouds are free, as the traveler is free from all ties, free to be with himself and to discover himself. He is who he wants to be. If there is no real home and no real physical and material attachment, the only truth the speaker in the poem can count on is what he can see: the clouds, and how beautiful they are. Thomas finds his clouds: his freedom and his beauty, in a dream, the dream of the city of Venice.

In Camus' *L'Etranger* (1942), the main character Maursault, is a "stranger", an "outsider" in his own society. In his indifference to life and to relationships, he is seen as different and therefore prejudged and misunderstood. His seemingly meaningless actions arouse questions by the audience whose conception of life is that of certain rules and behaviors, and when those rules and behaviors are not followed, that "foreign" individual is perceived as "wrong" and "strange": a stranger.

The foreigner, or the "other", in some cases is not necessarily someone from a different culture, but just someone who is different. It's that difference that makes him/her an *other*. Thomas spends his early years in Venice living an apparently meaningless but self-gratifying life. For this reason and because of his difficulty in communicating with close ones, his relationships at first seem to suffer. However, unlike Camus' protagonist, whose acceptance of (the) society's indifference towards him and all of humankind becomes his final resolution, Thomas eventually finds meaning among the people in his neighborhood through his "conversion" to advocating environmental awareness.

goddess and immortal.—Gold?—I hate it as much as you hate God.

—Well, What do you love then, extraordinary stranger?—I love the clouds ... the passing clouds... over there/up there ... over there/up there ... the marvelous/magnificent clouds! (My translation)

In all his works, Pirandello describes everyday citizens as “strangers” even to themselves: “Di cio’ che posso essere io per me, non solo non potete saper nulla voi, ma nulla neppur io stesso.” (*Uno, nessuno e centomila*, 1926), as they undergo the difficulty of communication with the rest of society and suffer from a general “male di vivere”: a sense of alienation that leads them to drastic resolutions.

Che colpa abbiamo, io e voi, se le parole, per se` sono vuote? Vuote, caro mio. E voi le riempite del senso vostro, nel dirmele; e io nell’accorgliete, inevitabilmente, le riempio del senso mio. Abbiamo creduto d’intenderci, non ci siamo intesi affatto. (ibid)

Pirandello’s characters are not losers, however. In his novels and plays, the characters end up realizing that they can’t live as strangers any more, and they search for a solution. His concept that individuals are what others make them to be is expressed in his work *Uno, nessuno e centomila*. We are one, no one, a hundred thousand based on the situation we are faced with, the person we are involved with, or the environment we live in. We end up giving in to what society believes we should be and what is expected of us. In the end we are no one even to our own selves. Pirandello’s stranger is always a foreigner even in his/her own home. He/she is bound to be lost unless he/she fights back. In his play *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* (1921), even the characters of the play are looking for identity and they cannot find it in the actors who play them. As earnestly as the actors try to play the part of those characters, they will never be able to assimilate fully the experiences that their characters had lived through.

In *Enrico IV* (1922), the author turns to insanity as a sane way of living. The person who is insane, in his insanity, is more “sane” than he/she who is considered to be sane by society. Whose reality is more truthful: that of the person who is considered a madman by society, or that of the person who is considered sane? Who is more real in the end: he who wears the every day mask in order to adapt to the demands of everyone around him, or the “madman” who

spontaneously drops the mask and allows himself to be who he really is? Is Thomas a madman for chaining himself to a grate in order to make people aware, or is he someone who chooses to drop the mask and finally fight for a cause? Which of these realities is more acceptable and less frightening to society? In this conflict between reality and illusion, one is reminded of the “Bauta”, the expressionless mask of the Venetian Carnival.

In Pirandello’s work the struggle for identity is a major theme, but it is in the every day life of each individual as well. Who one is, who one is perceived as, who one chooses to be, whether it be one, one hundred thousand, or even nobody, in the end, is not based on where a person was born, or whether that person is a foreigner or not in his own country, it’s a feeling that comes from within and which cannot be taught or learned (as in *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore*).

Do we see ourselves in our true and genuine reality, as we are, or rather as we would like to be? –Whoever understands the game can no longer fool himself, but if you cannot fool yourself, you can no longer derive any enjoyment or pleasure from life. –So it goes. My art is full of bitter compassion for all those who fool themselves. But this compassion cannot help but be succeeded by ferocious derision of a destiny that condemns man to deception. This, succinctly, is the reason for the bitterness of my art, and also my life. (Luigi Pirandello in Bradbury, 208)

In the end, who is the “different” individual being compared to? Different from whom? The majority? The more powerful? The forceful society? In the end, in order to fit in and to be accepted, certain individuals choose to follow rules dictated by others. In his final awakening, Thomas goes against those rules and stages his dramatic act. In his act he attempts to bring that same awareness to that more “forceful society”, which for too long has been indifferent to the issues of the world. In *Venezia un sogno*, the “different” one prevails.

Manzoni’s “different” is someone who is foreign to a town; in Baudelaire, it’s someone who has no family, no homeland, no material possessions and who finds beauty to be the only

reality worth loving; in Camus, it's an individual who lives life in total passivity and indifference and who observes life passing by him; in Pirandello, it's a man who can be one, one hundred thousand, or no one, depending on the surroundings; in Morante, it's the occupying enemy during World War II; in Pavignano, it's a man who is a stranger in his native country, then a citizen of the world, and in the end, a committed member of a community in a town of water and stone.

Although Thomas is in a somewhat different league than the "strangers" of the aforementioned literary pieces, he still admirably assumes the role of an outsider who adopts his new environment as an extension of himself and brings fresh insight to a cause many locals had already abandoned. His energy albeit inspired by desperation introduces a stimulus to a small but vibrant group of activists.

It is through his relationship with Abdul that he learns to recognize his own "difference", and he learns it after living in a country, not his from birth, but where he knows he belongs.

Because here in Venice I have everything. I'm not Italian as you are: I'm Venetian. If you went to live anywhere else, you would still be Italian. I am nothing anymore: I was born in America, but all my memories are in Venice. Outside of Venice I'm nobody anymore. (148)

He no longer belongs to his native California, but the Venetians treat him as a foreigner and Americans in Venice laugh at his "pretentiousness" when he addresses them as outsiders. In time he becomes a proper Venetian and reminds his adopted fellow citizens that in order to save their city (and indirectly the Planet) they must first begin by saving themselves as citizens of Venice; their homes, their memories. He, the "foreigner" reminds the locals that if they don't love and take care of their own land, that same land will disappear, or it will be turned into an "amusement park ... locked up at night with gates all around it like Disneyland ... with gondoliers instead of Mickey Mouse and Goofy" (148). Ultimately, it's the foreigner who opens

the eyes of the locals, that same foreigner whose eyes were opened by another, much younger, and initially frightened and disoriented child from Africa.

As a point of reflection in relation to the theme of the foreigner or “other”, it is appropriate to see the choice of the names Felix and Abdul as a further registration of this concept. The name “Felix” stems from the Latin (*felix, felicitas*), and it means “happy” or “lucky”, which seems, ironically, to be in opposition to the character’s personality throughout the story, especially when seen in relation to his father, Thomas. In the eyes of Thomas, on the other hand, Felix is “lucky” because he has diverted Ivonne’s love for the father to himself and is able to hold on to it till her death. It’s possible that the author chooses the English “Felix” over the Italian “Felice” to further emphasize his father’s “foreignness”. The name Abdul is the first component of compound names and literally means “slave of the” or “servant of the”. It is the transliteration of the Arabic word “abd” meaning “servant” and the prefix “al/el, meaning “the”. Furthermore, an Arabic name in Italy implies a foreignness that is related to the large and continuing immigration to that country from Northern Africa.

In the end in *Venezia, un sogno*, the feeling is one of general peace and acceptance where priorities find their places again and harmony is restored. The threatening level of *acqua alta*, which was a major theme throughout the novel, recedes to zero, and Thomas’ relationships find closure. The silver fork from Harry’s Bar with the winged lion engraved on the handle, which, as mentioned before, Thomas spends almost a lifetime looking for, becomes secondary when Marina offers Thomas a similar fork, found among “forgotten” stuff in her home. That fork symbolizes his past: his days as an employee at Harry’s Bar and the day of his big verbal betrayal of his wife Ivonne; the lie and the false oath at the restaurant. This was a past he wanted to put behind him, and which haunted him till the end. It was the fear that perhaps that false oath

had doomed him, and as a consequence, his wife Ivonne's life as well. The awareness of such a responsibility did not leave him until Ivonne's illness, and after her death he was also free. Free to remember his past and to move on, and to attempt to save the misty, water framed city he loved so much.

The love affair between Thomas and Venice persists through the life and death of loved ones, through the coming and going of acquaintances and through the increasing and decreasing level of the water. The cycle of life continues. In this novel of awareness and of memories found again, we are reminded of the dream that the Earth is very much alive and that it needs us. It is through everyone's love affair with this Planet that the Planet will not only endure but will prevail through the help of the conscientious activists that Thomas would inspire.

As the story nears its dramatic conclusion, one could consider Pavignano's reasoning for leading her readers to the need for saving not only Venice, but also the environment in general. The author herself acknowledges the difficulty of such a challenge as suggested in the following quotation.

E' un libro complesso... non tanto per la lettura, ma per come è nato... la suggestione iniziale che può apparire banale è comunque che esiste un luogo dove la gente vive sull'acqua... la normalità all'interno di questa eccezionalità... accanto a questo c'è stato un altro stimolo arrivato dopo la visione del docufilm di Al Gore 'Una scomoda verità'... il riscaldamento globale, un tema così importante che riguarda tutti, ma dove si preferisce far finta che il problema non esista... o comunque demandare ad altri... bene questi due elementi mi hanno fatto venire voglia di raccontare una storia di una presa di consapevolezza... dove Venezia diventa il simbolo di una precarietà ben più grande e il protagonista, un giovane americano che s'innamora della città... avrà una reazione individuale che poi per una serie di circostanze lo porteranno addirittura a diventare un eroe per caso...". ("Passeggiando con Anna Pavignano". Intervista di Andrea Bettini, 11 aprile, 2012).

When reflecting upon the many elements at work in the novel, we must give credit to the writer's art in weaving together different strands into a believable fabric. For example, the adventures of an American loner on a pleasure hunt in Paradise who encounters, as do the

Venetians themselves, the environmental and political threats to Venice's continuing physical and spiritual integrity as a city.

V. Comparison and Contrast with other Works Set in Venice.

Identity: the Evolution of Characters in the Contrasting Aspects of Venice.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, because of its contradictions, its mysterious labyrinthine streets, its enigmatic beauty, which opens itself to the public, yet hides from it, Venice masquerades itself with multiple identities. The First Venice: that of beauty, harmony and tourist attractions. The Second Venice: the residential, yet also dark, mysterious and, as sometimes observed in literature and film, often deadly city, which seduces and disorients its residents and visitors. But just as it happens in most large cities, the two identities of Venice are not immediately revealed. Only after a substantial visit or sojourn can one come to capture those fascinating aspects. The works I'll compare to the novel I translated may be seen as an example of such discoveries.

Identity is the central theme that permeates the novel *Venezia un sogno*, but a theme which governs not only this one Venice-set novel. I will consider how this concept of identity is strongly present in six other literary works, five of which were later transformed into films: *Death in Venice* (Thomas Mann, 1912 and Luchino Visconti, 1971), "Senso" (Camillo Boito, 1882 and Luchino Visconti, 1954), *Anonimo veneziano* (Enrico Maria Salerno, 1970 and Giuseppe Bertolucci, 1971), *The Comfort of Strangers* (Ian McEwan, 1981 and Paul Schrader, 1991), *Don't Look Now* (Daphne du Maurier, 1971 and Nicolas Roeg, 1973), and the novel *Il fuoco* (Gabriele D'Annunzio, 1900), and I will finally comment on how the city of Venice becomes as much of a character as the main characters in the works just listed.

The word "Identity" derives from the Latin "Identitas", and in turn from the Latin "Idem", meaning "the same". One's identity, then, is one's degree of "sameness" with the ways by which one presents oneself in the world. It is also the degree to which an individual conceives that relation to be harmonious or discordant. Finally, it is the way in which society chooses to

describe one in relation to its norms, which, most often, have been determined without that person's awareness.

“Identification” is both the action by which one—and one's society--establishes identity, and the action by which an individual establishes his/her “sameness” with another or with aspects of the world.

The very concept of someone's identity is challenged by the unique and often mysterious nature of the city of Venice. A person's sense of who he/she is, is redefined by that place: who one is as an individual, as a member of a family, of a social group, of a city, and of the world. The city becomes a character in the life of the resident or visitor; it also becomes such in the work of many filmmakers.

How have the several film directors and writers employed Venice as a setting for—and an agent of—their characters' interior change? How is reflection on water used to convey a feeling of both the doubling and the deconstruction of personality? How does the interplay of water, stone, and light define—in whichever medium—one's perception of both physical and psychological reality? How do spectacle, costume, and disguise function in the establishment of real and false identity in a city in which they are part of the ritual life of the place—and not only at Carnival? The filmmakers and writers who have engaged Venice have addressed this double, identity of Venice itself. In their works, Venice is often, among the causes of all mixed and frequently contradictory, emotions. Behind their works, one finds also the crucial, interior influences of artists of previous generations like Nietzsche, Wagner, D'Annunzio, Mahler and several others.

In the novel that I translated, the interaction of the main character with others in the city of Venice alters or reaffirms his identity in a variety of ways according to the changing situations

and characters interacting with it. Many visitors to Venice arrive at the realization that--in this place of mists, water, and multiple reflections-- they find themselves very far away from their long-established expectations of a city. Adrian Stokes, in his *Stones of Rimini*, tells us that, in Venice,

The water never palls against the stone: the radiant causeway swarms. Water and builded stone vivify the one the other; they are at peace. The certainty of man-placed stones contracts the ocean's awfulness. In the port, it is as if the seas had been sifted and winnowed: upon the tall mole we can admit and gaze at their depth. Nothing is kinder to the ephemeral movements, the ephemeral reflections, refractions and shadows of water than the even-lighted masonry; no material less stalwart would provide such vivid opportunities to the water's reflective tricks [Stokes 21].

He writes elsewhere that the Mediterranean and its cities—and, I would say, especially Venice—convey such a deep emotion, that when, according to Stokes, even a visitor from a completely different culture (like Thomas in *Venezia un sogno*) first encounters the Mediterranean, he senses that he is coming home. “Mare Nostrum” indeed. That sense of coming home may be equated with a coming to rest in a place of serenity—the finding of oneself in a single place—and, although it may be the peace of the comfort of one’s home, that rest most often, in the works examined, takes on its ultimate form, that of death (the “other” Venice). In Pavignano’s *Venezia un sogno*, Ivonne’s death by drowning, after wandering the foggy streets of Venice, is the essential catalyst to Thomas’ transformation. It is what leads him to assume his new role and what confirms his commitment. It is the imminent death by sinking of the city of Venice that slowly awakens him. In *Anonimo Veneziano*, the protagonist awaits his death from a fatal disease but finds peace in his revived relationship with his estranged wife. The parallel between the dying protagonist and the dying Venice is an obvious reminder in this case.

In *The Comfort of Strangers*, the protagonist permits his fascination with a bizarre couple to lead to his own murder. In *Don’t Look Now*, the protagonist follows a hooded figure that reminds him of his dead child until that figure, in fact a serial killer, turns on him and stabs him to death. In each of these

instances, the culmination occurs after the main character's extensive wanderings through the Venetian streets and alleys, wanderings that could disorient the mind beyond the mere confusion of one's sense of direction.

In Thomas Mann's novella, *Death in Venice*, and in Visconti's film of the same title, the composer/writer Aschenbach, whose preconceptions about the relation of art to life, which are so clear when he is in Munich, and which are central, he believes, to his identity as an artist and as a man, alter when he enters a city which in many ways is a work of art (the First Venice). This city, which is filled with works of art, and in which he encounters a figure of perfect beauty in Tadzio, who, to him, is as unique and perfect as a musical composition by Beethoven. This composition, which is also a work of art, will eventually lead him to his death in the Second Venice.

Aschenbach's conception of himself as a deeply serious artist is threatened by his attraction to this disorienting androgynous figure. Through several strategies of altering his appearance, he attempts to put on the identity of a seductive younger man with black hair and a powdered white face. The struggle between the values of his life before Venice and the attractions of the life he seeks later on in Venice begin to tear him apart. On the one hand he may, perhaps unconsciously, feel that he has been freed by Venice to create a new identity. On the other hand, the fact that he is seduced by the city, by Tadzio, and ultimately by his own weakness is unsettling to his sense of integrity. Thomas is seduced by a sinking city, but it is precisely his concern for this dying city, which frees him in the end.

In a flashback, in the film, Aschenbach argues with Alfried that the artist creates beauty out of his imagination, while Alfried contends that beauty appears spontaneously, without the artist's participation. The presence of Tadzio on the Lido undoubtedly confirms Alfried's argument. Aschenbach attempts to legitimize his infatuation by placing it in the context of Ancient Greek practice, especially that of the great philosophers. Anthony Heilbut, in his book, *Thomas Mann: Eros and*

Literature, writes, “That image leads [for Aschenbach] to a vision of its cultural sources, Athens, and the replay of a Socratic dialogue in which ugly wise men court handsome youths” [Heilbut 255].

When the ship carrying Aschenbach glides across the Lagoon in the opening sequences of the film, the main protagonist is apparently at ease in his deck chair. This condition of comfort very soon becomes questionable, for everything in Venice is in constant flux and the standard rules do not apply. What never changes is the ability of the city to change one.

Visconti employs the mists of the lagoon and the gray overcast that obscures the sun. Together, these phenomena throw into question even the identity of landscape, of what is apparent and what is real. The clouds suggest an imminent turn for the worse, as a sort of symbol of both the protagonist’s psychological world and, with the onset of cholera, that of the society around him. Aschenbach and his trunk are transferred to a gondola rather than the *vaporetto* he had requested, and he in turn is transferred to the hands of an anonymous Venetian rower who ignores his protests. This obvious allusion is to Charon and his boat that transports one across water to the Underworld. He asks the rower the cost of his passage and is told “The signore will pay”. Aschenbach says to himself, “I do not understand”, and it becomes clear, as the story continues, that the price that the city will require from him is his life. The city changes those around him from healthy to mortally ill as the cholera advances, and the strain that both the city and the alluring beauty of the boy Tadzio, release in Aschenbach, worsens until his heart fails. That confusion between what is apparent and what is real is rendered especially painful for Aschenbach as he considers his failing health and his physical appearance in the new light of Tadzio’s beauty. It is in conformity with his lifelong principle of “creating beauty out of his artist’s imagination”, that he attempts to render himself again youthful with the application of make-up and hair dye. Aschenbach's pathetic attempt to render himself apparently young to appeal to Tadzio involves the taking on of an aspect of Carnival. He takes on also the artificially white “skin” that resembles that of

not only a mask but even the Istrian stone out of which the city has been built. And the stone of Venice is apparently eternal. Adrian Stokes writes, "Without a visit to Venice you may hardly envisage stone as so capable to hold firm the flux of feelings. In the southern light of this city, we may admire the evidence of Italian living concretized and objectified in stone" (Stokes 16-17). What Stokes gives us, without irony, is the opposite effect of what Aschenbach achieves.

Visconti was aware that Mann had based his protagonist on the composer Mahler, although Mann's protagonist, Aschenbach, is a writer. As Monica Stirling discusses in her book, *A Screen of Time: A Study of Luchino Visconti*, the director changes the film's protagonist into a musician, in order to make the product of Aschenbach's creative activity accessible to the audience in a way that that of a writer is not.

Visconti's transformation of [Aschenbach] from a German writer into a composer [was made] for two simple reasons...[First], a composer can be heard composing, and a conductor can be seen conducting, with dramatic effect. Second, Mann had the composer and conductor Gustav Mahler in mind when writing *Death in Venice*. Mann's entire work is, moreover, filled with echoes of music, thoughts of music, references to music; he himself said, ten years before *Death in Venice*, that he had "learned to use music to mold his style and form" (Stirling 207).

The director selects costumes, eyeglasses, hairstyle, and make-up to emphasize Aschenbach's initial resemblance to Mahler. Visconti's own preoccupation with Mahler has been evident since his selection of the name "Franz Mahler" for the male protagonist of *Senso* in 1954. The name of the Austrian lieutenant in Camillo Boito's novella, "Senso", on which the film is based, is "Remigio Ruz".

Visconti's deep interest in Mann is reflected in his selection of the name Aschenbach for one of the characters in his film, *La caduta degli Dei*, or *Gotterdammerung* (English title: *The Damned*). Although the German title is more gentle, even in English translation (*The Twilight of the Gods*, as in Wagner's opera), the Italian title—*The Fall of the Gods*--is harsher and more clearly final. Death is without a doubt the culmination, and even among the central themes of Visconti's film about a powerful, pro-Nazi family in the 1930s and early 1940s. That family, based probably on the steel-producing Krupps, falls

from a very high position economically, politically, and socially—just as Aschenbach falls from a very high position artistically. The two stories are, therefore, to an extent complementary. Moreover, as the composer Mahler was influenced by his acquaintance with Wagner, Mann was deeply influenced by the example of Mahler himself. He writes in a letter: “The conception of my story was influenced, in the spring of 1911, by the death of Gustav Mahler, whom I had previously known in Munich, and whose personality, full of such intense ardor, had impressed me beyond measure” [Stirling 208].

In Ian McEwan’s novel and Paul Schrader’s film, “The Comfort of Strangers”, Venice seduces a visiting British couple, Colin and Mary, with its beauty. The “apparent” harmony of the couple is accentuated by the “apparent” harmony of the city surrounding them. While attempting to find a particular restaurant after dark, the couple enters the labyrinth of small streets and alleys of the city, beyond the great works of art, the Canal Grande, the hotels, and major tourist sites. This realm of dark, winding, spiraling streets is a Second Venice. It is no longer the Venice of tourists, of harmony and beauty, which they had first encountered. Suddenly the two become lost and disoriented and their apprehension rises.

The man who “rescues” them (Robert) and who leads them to a restaurant in which, they later learn, he is a partner, and who then invites them to his home in a palazzo, turns out to be a citizen of the Second Venice. Just like the First Venice, Robert’s apparently innocent friendliness provides a screen of credibility behind which he and his wife Caroline indulge in an array of perverse behaviors as dark and complicated as the labyrinths of the Second Venice.

And yet, Colin and Mary are drawn to the couple, whose eccentric actions will eventually lead them to a tragic ending. The Second Venice, which had been hinted to them when they were lost in the winding streets, upstages the first Venice and affirms its primacy as an influence on character change. The Second identity of Robert and Caroline, affirms its primacy as well and culminates in their drugging

of Mary and murder of Colin.

In Daphne du Maurier's story and Nicholas Roeg's film, "Don't Look Now", the second Venice again gains primacy, and again with fatal consequences, although this time with a supernatural twist. An apparently harmonious couple from England is in Venice on vacation. However, John and Laura have recently lost their daughter—to meningitis in the book, but by drowning in the film—and, beneath the apparent normality of their lives, they are attempting to come to terms with this devastating tragedy.

They encounter two sisters, one of whom is blind and claims, to Laura, that she has been in communication with the dead daughter. The woman even transfers to John, who is skeptical of her powers, a mysterious vision in which he foresees his wife Laura and the sisters on what turns out to be his own funeral boat. Once again, the identity of Venice as the appealing and "romantic" place is revealed as a sinister player.

That sinister role again is suggested in the complex of passageways that give Venice a potentially threatening identity behind the scenes of the main tourist attractions. Both John and Laura have ignored police posters warning that there is a murderer in the city, and John has ignored the clairvoyant sister's warning that he must leave the city immediately to avoid great danger. It is here, in the darkened alleyways of the Second Venice, that John catches sight of a small figure in a red cape and hood, similar to the cape and hood that his dead daughter had worn. She appears to be attempting to escape from some menace. John—and the reader—is deluded to believe that the small figure may be his daughter who might not be dead after all. He chases her through the dark alleys until she is cornered and turns on him. He then sees that it is not his daughter but a dwarf, who raises her knife and stabs him to death. The Second Venice wins again.

In Anna Pavignano's novel, it is in the darkened alleyways of the Second Venice, that Ivonne

wanders in the fog and falls to her death in a canal (the cinematographic aspect of the novel is certainly noticeable in this particular episode).

She had gone out with no shoes on and a light pink cotton jacket, while Venice had sunk in a heavy fog, made of a hazy and cutting humidity which didn't spare one's clothes, it attacked the skin with light frozen pins attempting to penetrate one's flesh.

Where was she trying to go?

They found her in a canal.

The fog had probably prevented her from seeing, and she had fallen. Probably. (116-117)

Ivonne had been diagnosed with an incurable rare fatal disease. The disease slowly took away her capacity to remember and she feared that soon she would turn into a "vegetable". In one of her rare moments of lucidity, she had asked Thomas to help her end it all before she would lose herself completely:

-"Help me die when you see that I am no longer me" she implored him.

-"I don't know if I can do it" he replied with a sigh.

Ivonne knew then that she could count only on herself. -"I hope to realize it on my own when I won't be worth anything anymore" she concluded.

Thomas didn't want any investigations. He was tormented by the freezing cold, which she had certainly felt once she fell into the canal, the feeling of being filled with water, not only in her head, but also in her mouth, in her stomach, in her lungs. He was tormented by the length of time it took her to die. In that moment, he was certain Ivonne's mind had gone back to being lucid. She had asked herself why she was doing it, she had had to force herself to remember the good reasons which had brought her to make that last, fundamental, decision. (117-118)

Ivonne's agonizing sickness reflects the slow death throes of Venice. Her moments of lucidity reflect the lucid moments of the city at low water. The slow amidst the fog of the city mirrors the slow decline of Venice. Ivonne's gradual memory loss was in its tragedy, Thomas' path towards freedom. With her disease, came the realization that his wife could no longer remember his past betrayals and the torment caused by them. The disease had freed her from the pain, and had released Thomas from the guilt he had felt towards her for years. The guilt for the false oath about a past lover, a lie which had haunted him and which had led him to the irrational

belief that it might be the cause of Ivonne's disease; an unconscious punishment.

In *Death in Venice* and in *The Comfort of Strangers*, and in *Don't Look Now*, the well-known attractions of the First Venice lead characters beyond boundaries into situations that challenge and threaten their long-presumed identities and integrity. In all three cases, the unexpected psychological and seductive power of a Second Venice takes over the First one and leads the characters into an illusive, self-destructive path of no return. In Pavignano's novel, Ivonne's self-destruction is what leads Thomas to a new awareness and ultimate conversion.

In Camillo Boito's book and Luchino Visconti's film, "Senso", the protagonist, Livia, the Countess Serpieri, surrenders to an infatuation equivalent in intensity to that of Aschenbach's with Tadzio. However, her infatuation has larger, political implications, for it is with an officer of the occupying Austrian army. This encounter between a foreigner and a resident, who becomes native by adoption, is emphasized in Pavignano's novel in the relationship between a child newly adopted from Africa and a resident adopted as a citizen by the Venetians.

Livia's consequent involvement with the lieutenant becomes a betrayal of her identity both as a married woman and as a supporter of the cause of Italian independence embraced by her cousin and his comrades. It is also a betrayal of her identity as a citizen of Venice. The opening scene of the film—which does not occur in the novella—occurs in one of the principal symbols of the First Venice, the theater of La Fenice, where Livia is introduced to Franz. The performance of *Il Trovatore*, with the Austrian occupying army in attendance, is then interrupted by protesting Italian nationalists, including Livia's cousin, who want the Austrians' departure from Venice.

It is in then in the narrow streets of the city, that Livia's cousin and his comrades plot the next phase of their uprising. But it is in those same streets, where Livia and Franz walk endlessly, that betrayal occurs. This same setting is home for contradictory events. The forces of occupation and the

forces that oppose it both inhabit the same neighborhood. If the identity of the first Venice is one of order, the identity of the second Venice is that of disorder where anything can happen—including murder.

When Livia further betrays the cause of her country by hiding Franz and giving him financial support, she compromises her integrity and identity all together. The loss of her identity is complete when, after coming to the realization that Franz had used her for his own purposes only, she ends up betraying Franz as well and causing him to be executed by his own army. Again, the influence of the Second Venice as a backdrop takes over.

In *Death in Venice*, Thomas Mann equates entering Venice through its train station with “entering a palace through a back door” (24). Indeed, the view of the city one has while walking out of the train station is certainly not that of Piazza San Marco and the works of art of the city. However, the walk from there to Piazza San Marco takes one through much of the Second Venice where it is actually possible to catch glimpses of the domestic life of the city. It is precisely this domestic life, as it is for Thomas in *Venezia un sogno*, that has been—and becomes again—the context for the interactions of the protagonists of Giuseppe Berto’s novel and Enrico Maria Salerno’s film, *Anonimo Veneziano*.

In *Anonimo Veneziano* the Santa Lucia train station is the place of encounter between the protagonist, Enrico, and his estranged wife, Valeria, who is arriving from Milano (from Ferrara in the film):

Nella stazione, il rapido delle dodici da Milano arrivo` a fermarsi con innaturale dolcezza sul finire del binario numero quattro, senza un rumore proprio, finche` non si senti` il soffiare dell’aria compressa che apriva le porte automatiche. Scesero viaggiatori frettolosi, con poco o nessun bagaglio: non era stagione di turisti. (28)

Enrico asks to meet his wife for a reason he initially chooses not to reveal. Again it is a matter of life and death, and especially as it turns out, his own impending death. After the arrival of Valeria, the two walk through the *calli* of the city, and their stops involve many of the places where they had met,

dined, lived, and made love in the past. Each of these places seems to be rather ordinary; however, each has special relevance to their relationship. The city's atmosphere alternates between the spectacular sun-dazzled canals and the grim fog-shrouded *calli*, but it is also deeply melancholic as it perfectly reflects the emotional struggle the two are undergoing. The main protagonist is dying, but the city he loves is dying with him.

-“Hai tanta paura del passato?

-“Non si tratta del passato. E' che non posso piu' tollerare l'odore di questa citta'. Muore, torna ad essere fango. -Ma e' proprio questo che la fa bella: muore.” (93).

At the end of the story, Enrico and Valeria separate in the full knowledge that this will be their last moment together. As Valeria is leaving, Enrico is directing a performance of the piece, *Concerto in Re Minore per oboe, archi e basso continuo* by Alessandro (or Benedetto) Marcello (the title is *Anonimo Veneziano* in the film). The culmination of both film and literary work occurs as that performance is about to begin, when the two part.

Al suo cenno gli archi cominciano, dapprima appena percettibili, poi piu' sicuri nei lenti accordi d'attesa. E lui attacca, la nota ferma, seguita con necessita' e precisione dalle altre, nell'antico concerto che dice la rassegnata disperazione per la morte di un uomo e forse d'una citta', e forse anche di tutto cio' che e' gia' vissuto abbastanza (132-133).

The streets, the restaurants, the *calli*, the apartments the two have visited or lived in are part of the Venice of the normal citizen. They do not visit the grand salons of the Hotel des Bains, and the theatre where Enrico directs his students' performance is not “Senso”'s La Fenice. In *Anonimo Veneziano*, the second Venice is the natural home of the every-day life of each Venetian and of each of the visitors. The places that Enrico and Valeria visit together during Valeria's brief stay in the city are places they have known and loved. Theirs is not an alien or threatening Venice, such as that of Aschenbach during a cholera epidemic. It is not a Venice threatened by a serial killer, as it is in Daphne du Maurier's story and Nicolas Roeg's film, *Don't Look Now*. And it is not a Venice in which a perverse couple attracts a pair of tourists to a palatial house where one is drugged and the other

murdered, as in Ian McEwan's novel and Paul Schrader's film, *The Comfort of Strangers*. The Venice of Enrico and Valeria is a place of memories, of private joys and private sorrows. It is and has been a gentle and charming context for the passionate exchanges of their lives. When they walk through the streets, Enrico is greeted by those who know him either as neighbor or as musical conductor. His is a Venice that has appreciated his art and accommodated his way of life. Aside from the tourist sites, it is for him, just as it is for Thomas, a place of reassurance.

On the other hand, it is also a place, which, just like the main protagonist, is slowly moving towards its end. The first description of the city in the novel is certainly not a bright, joyous one. It is a perfect way of leading the reader/viewer towards the protagonist's impending tragedy:

Sfumata in un residuo di nebbia che non ce la faceva ne` a dissiparsi, ne` a diventare pioggia, un po' disfatta da un torpido scirocco piu` atmosfera che vento, assopita, in un passato di grandezza e splendore e sicuramente anche d'immodestia confinante col peccato, la citta` era piena di attuti rumori, di odori stagnanti nel culmine d'una marea pigra. Sole e luna le segnavano un ritmo diverso, e come sospinta da un doppio scorrere di tempo essa incessantemente moriva nei marmi e nei mattoni, nei pavimenti avvallati, in travi a architravi e archi sconnessi, in voli di troppi colombi, nell'inquietudine di miriadi di ratti che si andavano moltiplicando in attesa. Della gente, ognuno portava dentro di se' una particella di quella finalita` irrimediabile. (27)

When Valeria learns of his disease and his impending death, she asks if he would not prefer to move to Milano (again, Ferrara in the film), where he could be near her and their son, who now are living with her new companion. His response is to confirm his intention to remain in Venice: Why, especially under such circumstances, would he want to leave what he considers the most beautiful place in the world? His identity has blended with that of the city and his choice to die there is evidence of the depth of that identification and devotion.

As we resume the various themes and development of the stories as connected with Venice, one persistent idea is the repetition of death as a consequence of the protagonist's interaction with the city as a setting. Death like other elements also becomes a catalyst for change just as it is seen in *Venezia, un sogno* after Ivonne's "suicide".

Thomas immediately signed to close the file, which talked about accidental death, and kept for himself the other hypothesis.

“Suicide”. The word defined itself in his mind, associated with a light image, something which rose from the water as mist does and went up, towards the damp sky of the morning (118).

In yet another creative interpretation of Venice as a setting (the first Venice in this case), one could consider D’Annunzio’s ultimate “superman” novel *Il fuoco*, where an old and dying Richard Wagner is the model of perfection to imitate and whose art, the main protagonist, Stelio Effrena³, believes only he can pursue. The protagonist (D’Annunzio’s alter-ego) is a writer who will stop at nothing to enhance and illustrate his creativity. His ambition knows no boundaries and he is driven by his obsession to bring back art and beauty to the people. Of course Venice is the perfect setting for this task, but a Venice in opposition to that of the increasing *acqua alta* in Pavignano’s novel. D’Annunzio’s Venice (“Venezia la bella”, defined by the author in 1879, nine years before his very first encounter with it) is as regal and exceptional as the protagonists in his other novels. It is certainly not that of Pavignano’s common people, threatened by the environment and oppressed by humidity and fog. In the regal Venice, Stelio’s intense relationship with the female protagonist Foscarina, whose character is based on Eleonora Duse with whom D’Annunzio had a passionate and tormented love affair, is the source of inspiration and a necessary instrument for this work. Stelio’s “fire”—hence the title—is what drives him even at the cost of harming those he loves.

-Stelio, non vi trema il cuore, per la prima volta?- chiese la Foscarina con un sorriso tenue, toccando la mano dell’amico taciturno che le sedeva al fianco. -Vi veggo un poco pallido e pensieroso. Ecco una bella sera di trionfo per un grande poeta! Uno sguardo la aduno’ negli occhi esperti tutta la bellezza diffusa per l’ultimo crepuscolo di settembre divinamente, così che in quell’animato cielo bruno le ghirlande di luce che creava il remo nell’acqua da presso cinsero gli angeli ardui che splendevano da lungi su i campanili di San Marco e di San Giorgio Maggiore. (3)

³ Effrena from the Latin “ex frenis” means without restraint

In this novel, D'Annunzio goes a step further in introducing a female character who is as influential as the city of Venice, in bringing about a change in the main character Stelio. Stelio uses the woman in his life for his so-called “higher” purposes. Ultimately however, it's the female protagonist who prevails by choosing a life without her lover. Foscarina goes from being a weak and defeated figure to a strong and prevailing one. Stelio loves her noble spirit and her loyalty to him, but he has a self-seeking goal to attain: his art. When in the end Foscarina establishes her emotional freedom from him, Stelio's strength dissipates. He becomes the frail one, the character with no substance whose “fire” is extinguished and whose emotional bareness is exposed. Foscarina, is the character gifted with depth. In her suffering, she shows credibility and strength.

A similar effect can be seen In *Venezia, un sogno*, where Thomas' relationship with his wife Ivonne and with his lover Marina, reflects that of Stelio. Thomas is by no means the “man driven by fire for the sake of art”—though one could say that his fire ignites at the end of the story in his plan to save Venice the paradigm of art—but his relationship with women is a superficial and self-centered one, and he displays the same emotional sterility as D'Annunzio's Stelio. In *Venezia, un sogno*, the two female characters show stability and emotional depth. They remain loyal to Thomas to the very end. Ultimately, Thomas assumes the proper role of leader of the family: husband, father and grandfather. It's the city of art that eventually drives him, but it's the relationships with his loved ones, which truly help him to reach a satisfactory closure.

From the human perspective, D'Annunzio's “superman” ends up defeated. He is no longer infinite, as his success cannot be achieved in life. Pavignano's character, however, is a common man who has extended himself beyond his own limitations. His achievement is a visible gift, albeit tormented, to the people and the city.

As we treat male or female protagonists in the two novels, we can see how all the elements of

dialogue, setting, and tone together help resolve the conflict. We must consider then that Pavignano's novel is an organic whole, each element contributing to that larger, aesthetic unity. This unity of the book is echoed in the final pages, where the common people of Venice join with Thomas in proclaiming the social unity of their determination to save their city from the environmental challenges that threaten its continued existence.

Venice is, then, a place of dual identities. The luxurious hotels of the Lido and its extensive beach, the grand churches, impressive squares, historic buildings, and especially Piazza San Marco with its basilica, are landmarks of the first Venice, the Venice of postcards and of tourist guides. Their magnificence is legendary and apparently welcoming and innocuous. The artist who looks closely however, may perceive ironic contradictions behind these illusive surfaces. At the same time, the Venice beyond the tourist sites, with its dark, labyrinthine streets and small squares, has been invested by many writers with an identity of disorienting if not sinister disorder. The obvious beauty and clarity of the monumental Medieval and Renaissance city, the first Venice, is something that is, if only apparently, more easily comprehensible and reassuring than the less obvious, disorienting urban puzzle of the every-day Medieval city, the second Venice. Moreover, both the fact of each of these two Venices, and a given character's experience of them, determine the extent to which a character's identity is altered in and by this unique place. Ultimately, of course, these changes are a function of that singular governing intelligence, the author's imagination.

In the novel that I translated, *Venezia, un sogno*, the First and Second Venices are portrayed through the evolving self-discovery of the main character Thomas. The city of water and stones immediately becomes his world and his home. The residents know him as the "American" and call him "California". Yet, he fits in and soon becomes one of them, *a Venetian*, as he calls himself when confronted by two American tourists at Harry's Bar where he works: "-

‘I’m as happy as a clam with the *high water*, you tourists are the ones who believe that we Venetians are all at your service.’ -‘We Venetians you said?’ And the American woman laughed. Thomas looked at her furiously.” (11)

He learns the dialect, he finds a job, he learns the way of the city and, as the years go by, he learns about the threats that the city is undergoing and becomes an advocate for those issues. He considers himself a Venetian and just like Enrico in *Anonimo Veneziano*, his wish is to live and die in the city he loves the most. When asked by his brother Ernest to move back to California, his response is that he does not believe that he could any longer live without being surrounded by water, but with streets, rather than with canals and bridges. Water had become his every day reality and it’s this very emphasis on water that leads us to consider Pavignano’s purpose in the story. What is in fact unique about the author is that not only does she follow the line of thinking of other authors using Venice as a setting, but she also introduces her own theme, that of the environment which for obvious reasons is not treated in the other works. As the story nears its dramatic resolution we can note an increasing crescendo of ideas building up to her special purpose to leave the reader with a significant message about Venice as a cause to be defended.

The beginning of this emphasis comes to life during a phone conversation with Ernest on 9/11. Thomas is being accused by his brother of not being able to understand the pain all Americans were going through on and after that day. He told Thomas that he was living too far away, in a dream world (one is reminded of Venice, the dream indeed):

-“You’re far away, you can’t possibly understand”.

-“What do you mean I can’t understand? I understand that it’s a tragedy...”

Words melted in his mouth.

-“It’s like when our mother died: you thought you could comfort me by telling me that she was better where she was now. You live in another world.

In Venice, life is a game: the water, the boats, the palaces, the people on holiday. It's an amusement park, there is no real life there".

-“There is real life, however; it's you foreigners who don't see it”.

-“Hey ... have you noticed? You said *you foreigners*. There's nothing to do about it, you are a Venetian now. You have water in your head!”

Thomas remained in a daze thinking about Ernest's last sentence: “You have water in your head”. (53-54)

Again it's the theme of water, the “good” water that makes the city the charming beauty it is, and the threatening, deadly water that slowly destroys it day after day, that becomes Thomas' “obsession” and the reason for his dramatic change. He speaks up for the city's survival and goes to extreme measures to open all other residents' eyes to this matter. The ending is perhaps extreme and theatrical but it reflects the extent to which the author is concerned about the issue. The world seems to have forgotten—or is perhaps ignorant—about the environmental issues. Venice is just one of the examples of this oblivion and “ignorance”. The daily news tells us about the impact of dramatic climate changes, smog in the air, animals dying, and polluted waters. A threat, consequently, is posed for humans who live in this kind of environment. Thomas realizes that in order to save a planet, it is necessary to start with one person, with one neighborhood, with one city. His wife Ivonne and his lover Marina sensitize him to this reality, a reality which he had chosen to ignore or which he believed nothing could be done to change. It was an issue, which was someone else's problem and as such needed to be solved by others. No longer is this the case for Thomas whose Venetian enculturation at this point is complete and identifies him as fully committed to his “duty” to his adopted environment.

He had never shown interest, not even as a young man, in politics, society, or the environment. He had looked with indifference at those in Venice who hung old bed sheets from their balconies as protest banners displaying hand-painted complaints against the wakes caused by motorboats on the Canal Grande. “Look there” he thought, “They are right. However, nothing ever changes”.

Only for a short time, he behaved as if he were the one responsible for solving the world's problems.

The commitment phase to environmental activism belonged to a couple of years before.

Often Ivonne used to bring home leaflets about toxic wastes poured into the *laguna* by the chemical industries, leaflets which told stories about people who worked there and who got sick while working there.

“And you just need to look out the window” she told him. “You can see the smoke, you can see the fire coming from the chimneys! They are poisoning us”. (31)

Marina’s husband had died from handling vinyl chloride for a long time: “in other words, plastic.” (32). Pavignano’s mention of that plastic as the cause of Marina’s husband’s death in the novel, is another example of her concern for the environment. Thomas met Marina at one of the demonstrations for the environment, which he had attended with his wife Ivonne. He kept going back to these demonstration not so much for his interest in protecting the environment, but to meet her, Marina, the woman who would soon after become the “other” love of his life and play a most significant role in his future. Marina described those tormented times when she was taking care of her husband, the physical and psychological pain he was enduring, the medications, the tests, the hope, and then his death.

But that stuff that he breathed in, that he took in his hands, it went everywhere inside of him. Do you know that I can no longer look at a bucket, a laundry basin? Anything made of plastic. A record, CDs, those made today. I feel that that they all have the stigma of death, the one with the skull and the crossbones; can you picture it? The same one they put on poison (37)

Another episode which is representative of Pavignano’s commitment, is described towards the end of the novel when Thomas accidentally takes a look at a newspaper page used to wrap up some nails he had bought to help him stage his final “Save Venice” act. He reads about the death of a whale and suddenly what had never been a thought in the past turns into an alarming concern, something which needs to be dealt with as soon as possible. He starts thinking about bears, about glaciers melting, about water, about how everything was connected, about Venice.

In her “conversation” about the environment, Pavignano also hints at the phenomenon of abandoned homes in the city. Homes submerged in water, uninhabitable and therefore left to rot by their owners; homes like Thomas’, where the water-saturated lower part of the house is no longer salvageable and for that reason, his son is set on selling it. How many other homes are there like that in the city? How many people are compelled to leave their houses and shops, and ultimately, the place they were born in and had spent a lifetime in? How many people are affected by the slow sinking of this city of water and stone? And how many people are actually aware that it’s happening and that they are doing something to prevent this loss? In the battle against the environmental damage being done to other cities by contemporary industrial malpractices, one could argue at the same time that the many small actions concerned environmentalists may assume, will salvage nothing without political backing and citizen awareness. This seems to be the case in Venice as in the rest of the world. A larger vision continues to be lacking and a one-man battle may not be sufficient when deterioration is already underway. Such indifference was Thomas’ attitude in the first part of the novel and it continues to be the attitude of a substantial portion of today’s society. After Thomas’ conversion, his consequent sacrifice through a symbolic gesture for the benefit of those close to him, his son Felix, the hardware store owner, even Marina, and perhaps also the reader, is initially absurd and useless if not even humorous. Perhaps, the theatrical excess in the ending presented by the author may in some way intend to defuse the dramatic situation, implying that in the end, one way or another, even without anything substantial being done, and without the involvement of the government, a resolution might still be attained. However, this assumption is in total contrast with the rest of the novel and with the message of the book, hence difficult to accept. Instead, one might consider a dream and the need to follow a dream, as the title suggests. It’s the dream

of a city that survives, and a planet that is saved. It's the aspiration of a man who lives his dream (Venice) and who gets involved to make that dream come true. It's the hope for a world where people are aware of life around them enough to make it their priority and finally to take care of it. It's the dream of a city, which is a beautiful fantasy world for some (the tourists) but a challenging reality for others (the Venetians). It's an image, an illusion, a daydream—and in a daydream everything is possible, even a Californian man chained to a kitchen window security grate trying to save his small world. "Memories make what we are. Dreams make what we'll be." Thomas, the pragmatic foreigner and the aggressive idealist, remembers and dreams. "I am nothing anymore: I was born in America, but all my memories are in Venice. Outside of Venice I'm nobody anymore." (148)

The present and the future; idealism mixed with action, and Thomas finally takes action that attracts the attention of young activists who just might make a difference.

The themes of betrayal, death, love, cultural interaction and differences, are clearly seen in the six works cited in this chapter as well as in Anna Pavignano's novel. These different themes, as well as the city of Venice which is common to all six, connect the cited works with her novel. In *Death in Venice* it's the theme of love and death; in the *Comfort of Strangers* it's death and betrayal; in "Senso", the themes of love, death and betrayal; in *Don't Look Now*, once again it's death; in *Anonimo Veneziano*, love, death and betrayal; and finally in *Il fuoco*, it's passion and betrayal within an artistic framework appropriately set in Venice.

The multiple facets of the city leave their mark on the main character's personality, play a major role in his personal transformation and are a basis for change in storyline and character.

The First Venice of the *ricordini* store, of the shop owners, of the baker and hardware store, of Harry's Bar and of Thomas' past and present relationships, is in sharp contrast with the

dying Second Venice of the *acqua alta*, of the nauseating stench coming from the canals, of the foggy winters and the often humid summers. The city is suffering, but despite this suffering, it has maintained its dignified beauty. In *Venezia, un sogno* the two Venices are in a relative harmony with each other. Even in Venice's agony, equilibrium finds its way and Venice, the "dream", ultimately endures.

"Friday, 8:30 AM: no *acqua alta*" (171).

VI. The Cinematographic Aspect of the Novel as a Challenge for its Translation.

A principal challenge in the translation of this text is the style in which it is written. This might lead the reader to think of the book's potential as a film. Moreover, *Venezia un Sogno* incorporates extensive use of dialogue, a bit of Venetian dialect and a large number of colloquial words, phrases, and sentences. In keeping with the image of the common man, the author employs grammar and punctuation, which are to some extent unconventional as well. She also incorporates short bursts of language reminiscent of the dialogue in a film script. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, this may be partly due to the author's past work in cinema and to her work and relationship with the late Massimo Troisi, who also used his own Neapolitan dialect.

The colloquial approach then is also an indication of the author's intention to identify her style with the common people of the towns in her novels, as well as with the slang of the younger generation. The detailed descriptions of weather, architecture, and nature, with particular attention to the many colors they incorporate, offer a scenic backdrop and again suggest the cinematic effect of the story or even its possible application as stage directions. The emphasis on the visual, combined with the colloquial style and irregular form of the language of the text, made it necessary to adopt an unorthodox style of English in translation, and to maintain that same effect using, similarly, short, abrupt statements wherever possible. The fact that many of these statements are not complete sentences in the original provided an additional challenge to the translator who wants to be true to the spirit of the original text. Moreover, the lack of precise equivalents in English for many of these words and phrases made it necessary to improvise in order to achieve an adequate meaning if not an exact translation. The English must also come as close as possible to the emotional dimension of the original, making the task even more complex. With regard to punctuation, the question often was whether or not to follow the exact style of the

author at the risk of bypassing the traditional English form. By choosing to deviate from her style how far would the translator be from the accuracy of the text? How true to the author's work would I still be? I chose then to compromise and to follow the author's style as closely as possible without deviating excessively from the original meaning and tone.

Regarding the chronology of the plot, moreover, it's interesting how the author contrives through intermittent flashbacks, to narrate the life of the protagonist. The novel begins with Thomas in his early twenties and ends with him as an older father and grandfather. Pavignano takes the reader through the life of Thomas by describing different episodes of his life. The actual plot develops over a three-day time span, but, in those three days, a whole life passes in review, with the joys and sorrows of a family and of the people involved with them.

The flashbacks bring us back to the novel's potential as a film. When asked about it in an interview in May 2012, the author replied that the novel was written without any thought of its being adapted into a film. She explained that writing a story only for it to be read gives her a kind of freedom, which she would not have if she had to write while visualizing a film adaptation as well. She also stated that it's not easy to write a film script based on a novel when the author of the novel is the same person as the screenwriter. In fact she implied that she would have to reinvent herself when writing the screenplay considering the many elements that need to be kept in mind in either a novel or a film situation. One must keep in mind that the reading public and the viewing audience will be different. The perception is different: in the first case the reader is dealing with mostly imagination and interpretation, while in the latter, the visual dimension is present and the viewer deals mostly with his/her feelings about that dimension.

In novels, however, the reader has a closer relationship with the characters of the story. The character's feelings and thoughts are described, and the reader learns about them through the

narrator's point of view. In a way, the reader is guided through the experience and through the process of "getting to know" his/her protagonists. In a movie, this doesn't happen (unless a voice-over adds to the effect of dramatic pictures) and the viewer is left to imagine what the character is thinking and feeling. In a sense, the film is more straightforward as it gives the audience instant gratification with the added features of colorful images, interpretative voices, and a creative sound track while the novel often requires interpretation, or even, in many cases a "translation" of ideas. When reading *Venezia un sogno*, we can imagine the *acqua alta* and can picture it if we have experienced it by visiting the city or watching it on TV. However, the level of the water, whether it's threatening or not, can be described only by the narrator, and the reader can only interpret it. In a movie, we would be shown graphic images of the level of the *acqua alta* and see for ourselves how threatening or non-threatening it is. In a sense, the reader has more freedom to make what he or she wants of the story and its characters. He/she has the option of interpreting it as he fancies. When we read a novel, our imagination plays a greater role, which is not always the case in film where we are participants in the director's imagination.

Bela Balazs has shown us how seriously we tend to underestimate the power of the human face to convey subjective emotions and to suggest thoughts. But the film, being a presentational medium (except for its use of dialogue), cannot have direct access to the power of discursive forms. Where the novel discourses, the film must picture. From this we ought not to conclude like J.P. Mayer that 'our eye is weaker than our mind' because it does not 'hold slight impressions as our mind does.' For sense impressions, like word symbols, may be appropriated into the common fund of memory. Perpetual knowledge is not necessarily different in strength; it is necessarily different in kind... The rendition of mental states—memory, dream, imagination—cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language. If the film has difficulty presenting streams of consciousness, it has even more difficulty presenting states of mind which are defined precisely by the absence in them of the visible world. (Bluestone, 47).

For example, Thomas' emotional state easily lends itself to the director's imagination.

His suffering when he loses his wife, his ambivalence when he betrays her, his complex relationship with his son and with his grandchild, and his love for Venice offer dramatic close-up

possibilities. In the novel, the reader is “told” what the protagonist feels and what he thinks in every chapter. Depending on how much the reader identifies with the character, he/she will make those feelings more or less intense. The author indeed shows us through the protagonist’s changes in mood and actions that his feelings can be represented on the screen. While reading the novel, one could imagine the visual effect of Thomas meditating on the harmony of images in front of him. The author’s descriptions of color in the setting—a dark grey sky versus a clear blue one or fog versus sunshine—emphasize the changes of the character’s state of mind reflecting the mood of the story. In this case, the imagination of the reader plays an important role in visualizing the story as a film.

A particular component to consider is the length of the novel itself as a consideration for a film. A good director will both create the necessary cuts in a scene to accommodate the timeframe of a book, and make the right choices to attain the necessary connections to the story line.

While concentrating on the novel and its cinematographic aspects, adaption of film into a novel and fidelity to the original come to mind. In an interview about his screenplay *The American*, the screenwriter Michael Hastings said that: "Film is visual brevity.... If the novel is a poem, the film is a telegram." Hastings described his difficulty in adapting Henry James’ work, the changes he had to make in the film and the several choices he had to deal with. Often, it happens, that screenwriters and film directors will change much of the plot in order to make the story acceptable for the screen. Therefore, how important is the notion of “fidelity” when adapting a book to a movie? Robert Stam in his book *Literature through Film. Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* writes:

The traditional language of criticism of filmic adaptation of novels, as I have argued elsewhere, has often been extremely judgmental, proliferating in terms that imply

that film has performed a disservice to literature. Terms such as “infidelity”, “betrayal”, “deformation”, “violation”, “vulgarization”, “bastardization”, and “desecration” proliferate, with each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. Despite the variety of the accusations, their drift seems always to be the same—the book was better.

The notion of “fidelity” does, admittedly, contain its grain of truth. When we say an adaptation has been “unfaithful” to the original, the very violence of the term gives expression to the intense disappointment we feel when a firm adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source (3).

Stam then argues that one should distinguish between the good adaptations and the mediocre ones. And that one should not make “fidelity” the main methodological principle, but consider that a movie will be inevitably different from the book. “Is strict fidelity even possible?” (ibid). The question brings us back to the similar issue about translation and about the “faithfulness” of translation. It brings us back to *Venezia, un sogno* and to my work of translation. How faithful to the novel is my translation? As specified earlier, choosing the correct word or expression in order to set the correct mood and not go out of context, will certainly always be a challenge for any translator. In the end, is strict fidelity in both adaptation and translation even necessary? Ultimately, if one is able to capture the same emotional tone in the film when adapting from the novel, and in the other language, when translating it, one will have succeeded in the task. Eventually, the one person in the end, who would be able to answer the question of fidelity in either translation or adaptation (if there should be a film to adapt to) and to have the last word on the matter, will be none other than the author.

Despite the opposing viewpoints about film interpretations of books, some argument could be made on behalf of this novel’s possibilities as a film. For example, a clever film director will make a routine shot of a scene like “high water” both artful and full of portent, and several of Pavignano’s descriptions do lend themselves to such a creative vision. The author describes the dislocating blend of charm and grunge of Venice using detailed descriptions. Thus, the

changing setting of the story therefore appeals to an even wider audience of viewers as well as readers ready for a message. The importance of a translation and of a film then is that they need to respect the author's philosophy and the audience's interest in the final product, be it the translation or the adaptation to a film.

At this point, we might observe that some films are created only for the box office while others can be effective pulpits giving both author and film director a chance to spread the word more effectively. To a certain extent *Venezia un sogno* might adapt comfortably to this role.

Upon reflecting on the general challenges and difficulties of rendering an effective translation of Pavignano's book, I must conclude that the experience has been a most fascinating adventure not only in learning more about Venice but also by showing its human aspect through my efforts as a translator.

As I stated at the beginning of my essay, it is among the purposes of my translation and analysis of *Venezia, un sogno* to demonstrate that the complexity of a city, and especially of a unique city like Venice, is so great and so subtle that it can be rendered comprehensible through exceptional works of the imagination. One enters an exceptional city with a particular sense of oneself and, over time in that place, that sense of self—that identity—is altered by the experiences and interactions with the people, buildings, streets, squares, waterways, climate, light, and rooms of that city. The architect Louis Kahn once wrote: "The city is an agreement among rooms" ("The Room, the Street and Human Agreement"). In Venice, that agreement may indeed be present, but it often also is obscured. Film-makers, other visual artists, writers, and composers, are able to celebrate both that agreement and that mystery. They may not always resolve a city's contradictions, or the contradictions inherent in the characters they depict, but

these artists know that enlightenment may reside in the celebration of contradiction, and this is an opportunity that few cities provide as abundantly as does Venice.

‘Everyone in Venice is acting’, Count Girolamo Marcello told me. ‘Everyone plays a role, and the role changes. The key to understanding Venetians is rhythm—the rhythm of the lagoon, the rhythm of the water, the tides, the waves ... the rhythm in Venice is like breathing,’ he said. ‘High water, high pressure: tense. Low water, low pressure: relaxed. Venetians are not at all attuned to the rhythm of the wheel. That is for other places, places with motorvehicles. Ours is the rhythm of the Adriatic. The rhythm of the sea. In Venice the rhythm flows along with the tide, and the tide changes every six hours’ (Berendt 1-2)

VII. An Afterthought About the Book's General Reception and its Significance.

According to a variety of literary critics (amongst them are: "La Stampa", "Panorama" and "Il Salvagente") Pavignano's book was generally well received by a public interested in more than just the "dream" of Venice. The book in fact encourages a proactive response to the fulfillment of that dream. Maurizio Cucchi in "La Stampa" writes:

Anna Pavignano racconta con mano leggera, con una fitta rete di dialoghi, dove si avverte la lunga esperienza di sceneggiatrice. Tanto che la vicenda di Thomas sembra già pronta per un film. Ma uno dei pregi originali di questo libro è soprattutto nella capacità che dimostra l'autrice di scompaginare felicemente o di sovrapporre i vari tempi della vicenda, che ha un arco di tempo piuttosto ampio, in quanto ci presenta un Thomas poco più che ventenne e ce lo riporta in scena con i capelli bianchi, ormai burbero e molto testardo. Il tutto, peraltro, senza seguire linearmente il filo cronologico della sua vita, ma con sbalzi avanti e indietro che creano tensione poetica, senza alcuna forzatura. (21 agosto 2012)

The mix of romantic and dramatic issues captured the attention of her readers. In an interview by Marco Spagnoli on Globalist, in January 23, 2013, for example, the author stated that her purpose was precisely this: to send a message to her readers while adding a romantic twist to the story. She suggested that it would be a "lighter" way of dealing with a weighty issue. Upon a close reading through the task of translation and after further reflection on its purpose, I believe that she succeeded in her task. I agree with the words from "Il Salvagente": "bellissimi i dialoghi, veri i sentimenti in una Venezia antituristica dove, appena finito il libro, viene voglia di andare". (20 aprile, 2012)

In this novel of "denunciation", different matters such as the environment, relationships, intrigue, and the "outsider" in our midst, are introduced and discussed, and several questions are raised about these elements. "Il Salvagente" describes it: "un romanzo che parte minimalista e sfocia in un finale sorprendente".

The city of Venice takes on a different form: it is described in its human aspects, as a

living and finite entity rather than in its renowned glory as one would expect.

After reading the story, we are reminded of the precious gift that the city is to the world, and that as such it cannot be left to a disastrous end. As Erica Jong writes in her article *A City of Love and Death: Venice*, “it is quite possible to believe that Venice can take you and never give you back”. Venice is just that, and it was that for me decades ago the first time I got off the train at Stazione Santa Lucia, when a few steps later, after I left the station behind me, a magnificent world of water and stone opened up before me.

Anna Pavignano’s message is clear in her book: the planet needs all of us to wake up and to preserve it. Ultimately, every individual can and should make a difference in Venice’s endurance.

In “Il Panorama.it”, Ilaria Molinari writes:

Ho scoperto con piacere *Venezia, un sogno* appena pubblicato. Thomas, un americano trapiantato a Venezia, guarda l’acqua alta crescere sotto la pioggia nella laguna e ripercorre la sua vita in questa città che ama alla follia e dove tutto è passato. Dolori, gioie, cambiamenti. E da cui non vuole allontanarsi. Tantomeno quando suo figlio gli propone di vendere la loro casa alla Giudecca per andare a vivere sulla terraferma. Thomas glielo impedirà. Come si impedisce a chiunque di interrompere un amore che sa di eterno. E che niente potrà mai cancellare. (14 aprile, 2012)

Venice, a Dream: Anna Pavignano

Yesterday

“Really, you’re leaving? You no longer wish to be an actor?” Ernest asked his brother.

“Do you know how many blonds with blue eyes there are, lined up?” Thomas answered him the night he decided to leave.

“But you look just like Robert Redford!”

“Looking just like Robert Redford is not enough. I’m getting old and I have never seen Europe”.

Thomas was convinced then, that one could be considered old around twenty five. Ernest, who was a few years younger, had nothing to object on the subject. “But won’t you tell mom and dad?”

“You tell them”.

“Are you coming back?”

“I don’t know”.

From the drawer of the desk, Ernest took out a photograph of when they were little, and were playing with their dog.

“I don’t want it”.

“Keep it as a souvenir”

“Memories prevent one from living the present”. Thomas seemed eager to pronounce those words. “I want to live moment by moment. With no past and no future.”

He left, certain that life would be found only on the road—backpack, hitchhike and go.

He had traveled across all of America from west to east, had then crossed the ocean, until he reached Europe.

In Belgium he lived for two months with a girl from Lisbon who had a stand of hand knitted clothing. Then, in Paris, he spent another six months with a fire-eater. Thomas felt she was the right one because each time she unbuttoned her jeans and he could feel the rising warm aroma of sex mixed with that of fuel, she had left on him, he felt a pang of love in his stomach. But at the end of the sixth month the desire to leave took a hold of him again.

The real life was outside. Locked in a house, he and his juggler would have begun to tell each other of their first encounter and to remember the first time they had made love. Instead of actually doing it.

He left at night, without saying anything.

He arrived in Venice in the early morning.

Groggy from sleep, he found himself on the *vaporetto* in the midst of workers returning to Porto Marghera from the night shift, of housewives going to the market, of young students. Waves tugged the shirt of a girl with rhinestones and high heels who looked as though she had not slept the night before. After an abrupt turn, three oranges rolled out of a shopping bag, children raced to pick them up.

The world around him in that misty dawn had made the young Thomas aware that the sea, in Venice, was a habit, normality. People live that way, on water every day. He liked that.

He didn't care to climb up the bell tower of San Marco or to enter the basilica. He was intrigued by the two brown statues of the clock tower that would move at the strike of the hour.

He waited with his nose up in the air. After waiting for twenty-five minutes the old more made him happy first, immediately followed by the younger one. Nothing more than a stiff rotation on themselves wielding the long hammer to strike the bell. What did he expect? A dance? An acrobatic number? Or that they would actually come down from the tower and say to him: “why don’t you try to give it a strike as well?”

He felt disappointed. He wasn’t a tourist. And not even a traveler. He was one who moved from place to place. Because the world is big and it has to be traveled over, stepped on, breathed in. The world is everything, something that must not be wasted by standing still in one corner.

With his mouth full and a sandwich in his hand, sitting on the store step with a closed shutter, he had not noticed the girl next to him. He had perceived her presence and had caught sight of a foot in a low-heeled shoe tapping nervously.

“I need to raise the shutter” Ivonne had said with kindness. “Could you please move?”

Thomas didn’t understand Italian. Later on he would claim that he had no memory of that first moment other than of her musical voice.

He almost didn’t turn around. Ivonne took the keys from her purse and inserted them in the lock. Only then did Thomas realize that he needed to move from there. The girl opened the shutter and turned on the lights, he remained in a daze behind the window.

Crystal goblets as heavy as lead. Masks with long skinny noses edged with lace. Shiny gondolas in fake gold and flashing lights, which whirled around on a pedestal at the *plin plin* of a music box. Horrors.

The girl invited him in with a smile and he, after a few steps, stopped to check himself out in a huge mirror, framed by light blue and pink glass flowers.

The sales clerk arrived looking suspicious, but after a while he relaxed. The girl must have told him that they had nothing to worry about.

Thomas paid no attention to their conversations: for the first time in months he could see himself fully. The fire-eater thought she was heavy and wanted no mirrors in the house.

He had lost weight, even his legs seemed to have grown longer. His faded jeans, his shapeless shirt, his unshaven beard, full of hairless spots: he had never let his beard grow because it wasn't the beard of a man yet, despite his twenty three years of age. His wild hair framed his face giving him an expression of fatigue. His look had lost the innocence of childhood he had before leaving. His irises, although still a heavy blue, were softened, and felt like wool. They reminded Thomas of the knitted dresses of his Belgian friend.

Reflected in the mirror of Murano glass, he felt he was getting old. He was pushing twenty-five, and he felt it necessary to add present to the present, life to life. But it was impossible to prevent the mind from rendering fragments of the past.

The world itself, he thought, is organized to make this happen. The girl from the store, whose name he still wasn't aware of, lived in it selling memories.

"Very beautiful" he said to her, putting together the few native words he knew.

Thomas had never fallen in love.

"The store? Yes ... it's cute" she replied while appearing next to the mirror, smiling.

She was wearing a dress of many colors; her eyes and hair were dark. Compared to her he felt that he had come out of a bath of bleach, washed out, pale. On his face was an expression of passiveness.

"Do you understand 'carino'? *My shop: carino. Beautiful!*"

“No, no. You very *bello!*” he said turning towards her reflected image.

Ivonne began to laugh.

“Oh *bella* then. You say *bella!* Thank you!”

“Store blah!” She shut her eyes, pulled her tongue out and made the gesture of pushing away from her something she didn’t like.

Ivonne was surprised that a foreigner would not appreciate her junk. She picked up a glass bubble and set off a snowstorm on a gondolier in short sleeves.

“Don’t you like my ‘ricordini?’”

“I don’t like ‘ricordino!’”

However, he liked the girl very much.

For a while, *Dontlaic ricordino* was the nickname that the attractive American was known by. She liked to use that name when bragging with her friends about having a foreigner interested in her. She felt that calling him Thomas was too much.

One calls only friends and lovers by name.

Dontlaic ricordino was more than enough for that shabby, yet so charming young man who found himself each morning in front of the store and hung around her all day long.

“Show him to us at least from behind the window!” Her friends would say.

“It’s useless, he will be going back to America very soon”.

Since Thomas never went back and they kept talking about him, the girls, to make it short, began to call him *Ricordino*. And Ivonne played along with it.

“Last night I went out with *Ricordino*”.

“Last night I made love with *Ricordino*”.

“I’m falling in love with *Ricordino*”.

One day Ivonne came by with news which left everyone with their mouths open.

“I’m getting married”.

“With *Ricordino*?” her friends asked all together.

“No, with Thomas”.

And the nickname was forgotten.

It had always been foreseen that when their only child was to take a husband, Ivonne’s parents would move to the mainland and leave the house at the Giudecca to her.

“I’m full of aches and pains”, the mother complained. “All this humidity makes my bones suffer.”

And there was also the family business.

The store was attractive, spacious, and with large windows. The position right behind Piazza San Marco, was excellent and always packed with people. Her father and her mother, who had inherited it from the grandparents, had retired just a little while before, and the daughter alone couldn’t manage and had found it necessary to hire someone to help.

When Ivonne showed up with her foreign boyfriend, and said that she wanted to marry him, the first thing her dad thought was that they could fire the shop sales clerk.

They received Thomas in the kitchen, on the lower floor of the small building they lived in, in the Fondamenta della Crosa.

“It’s what we call the streets along the canals”, Ivonne explained to her boyfriend.

“I know”, he answered playfully offended. “I’m not that new to Venice!”

Once he was downstairs, Thomas' attention was attracted by a very wide window, which overlooked the canal. As he was looking outside the window frame, one could see nothing else but water. It was like being on a boat.

Her father offered him a glass of wine and looked him over attentively from top to bottom. He wanted to make sure that his daughter had not picked up a weakling who was able to handle only Coca Cola. Thomas drank it all in one gulp and immediately after asked for another *ombra*⁴. This scored him several points.

Her mother called the girl aside. "His hair is certainly beautiful, so long and blonde. But does he keep it clean?"

It took them a while to feel close to him.

Ernest was the only one who went to Benicia's for the ceremony. He asked permission to take a few Polaroid photographs to show their parents.

"You know, the fact is that they didn't come to the wedding therefore photographs for them are not a memory. In a sense they are the present!"

The argument was considered valid and Ernest returned with a nice bundle of portraits, which amazed family and friends. The pictures with the newlyweds riding a gondola and the pigeons in Piazza San Marco were the most popular ones.

Ivonne's father's hopes of firing the sales assistant after the wedding soon vanished: Thomas had no intention of ending up selling *ricordini*.

He was going to find himself a job as a waiter.

⁴ "a second round" in Venetian dialect

He aimed high and showed up at Harry's Bar.

The manager observed him strictly:

"Are you American?"

"*California.*"

"How's your Italian?"

He had already learned Italian in a few months. He liked to do things properly and had studied it using an old grammar book, which belonged to Ivonne. The result was a language with all the subjunctives and the conditionals in the right place, which mixed the English pronunciation with a light Venetian cadence.

"I speak Italian very well".

The manager looked at him attentively again, twisting his chin with his hand.

"If you cut off that hair of yours I'll give it a thought.

Thomas went to the first barbershop.

"Have you seen it? There's a white hair here. It doesn't show much, but ...".

The barber paused to observe the center of Thomas' skull with great attention.

He was not surprised. "It's normal, I'm getting older!"

The other guy laughed. "May I give you a piece of advice? Don't pull it out. You'll get seven more for every white hair you pull out!"

"Pull it out! Make it disappear. Immediately!"

After having pulled it out with a firm pluck, the barber stuck it under his nose.

Thomas turned to the other side. "I want everything off. Even the beard".

“Are you certain? It will take me a split second to cut everything off, but what if you then regret it?”

“Everything. Everything!”

He walked out of the store looking like someone else.

He bought a new shirt and threw his worn jeans in the trash. He then went back to the manager.

“Very good, California!” And he hired him.

Soon after it would have been his twenty-fifth birthday.

Today

Time: 20:00

High Water level: 1.30 M

In place of that one extracted white hair, seven more grew. And from each one of those seven, seven more. And so on. Thomas became completely white. Perhaps elderly.

Perhaps, for if he was certain that at the age of twenty five one begins to age, he wasn't sure at all of when one stops, of when in other words, one can consider oneself an individual where every trace of youth has been lost. He didn't feel old, even though several things had changed. Venice itself, in thirty years, had sunk twenty-six centimeters; however, it glowed just as much as the day he fell in love with it.

The sea was swollen by a high tide, which had been flooding the city for days. Leaning over the windowsill, Thomas measured the water level with his look, which lapped the walls of the house in the Giudecca. He wasn't annoyed by the high water. On the contrary, he liked everything about the temporary, floating land. A land, which was rotting below and enchanting above, one which had become his out of love. This land was his more than if he had owned it by being born in it. In Venice, he felt at home. Not even once in the many years had he asked himself: "what am I doing here?"

He had been happy with Ivonne for a long time.

She joined him every free moment she had. She would leave her assistant in the store, and walk the *calli* behind the square with a sort of happy anticipation in her chest, a joyful and

painful one at the same time. She would cross San Marco dribbling through the tourists, scattering the voracious swarm of pigeons, which, as she walked by, would take flight annoyed. During the *acqua alta*, she would walk across the footbridges weaving in and out of people, so quickly that she would barely brush against the wooden platforms with the tip of her feet. The rush she felt to see her man was a wind that drove her all the way, but whose force was not enough. Too forceful were her enthusiasm, her need for him. People crowding the footbridge prevented Ivonne from *flying* the way she wished to, impatience would assail her and she would jump in the water even without wearing her boots. She would arrive panting, breathless, only to find, each time, that Thomas was there waiting for her. Love and only love triggered in her this sense of uncertainty. He did nothing but wait for her, feeling the excitement when she appeared.

Almost every day for five years this game of anticipation and desire, of hesitation and of certainty, repeated itself.

He never went to the store to see her. He didn't like it; he was still adverse to "memories".

He did it only once and only because she had asked him explicitly. He entered the store hesitantly looking as if he couldn't wait to be elsewhere. He stopped in front of the mirror in the entrance, not wishing to look at himself.

She welcomed him cheerfully.

"You could visit me more often. Are you worried that I might lock you inside and force you to work here?"

She embraced him and laughed while dragging him inside.

"I'm concerned that you might turn me into a souvenir".

"I like the idea!"

They stopped in front of the crystal showcase: rearing horses, multicolored fish, swans, elephants. The unicorn.

“Nice pig”, Ivonne said while feeling the fat belly he had developed lately. “Pink transparent crystal. Here, I’ll transform you into a piglet and I’ll place you here in the window, with a note saying: ‘not for sale.’”

“You also have gained weight lately, but I don’t rub it in”, he joked.

“Well, I can afford it, I’m pregnant.”

After ten years of service at Harry’s Bar, he lost his job.

That day as well the sea was shimmering and dense like jelly. It was raining, the wind was blowing, the level of the water was high, the tourists, tired of jumping from one footbridge to another, took refuge in bars.

Those for whom cash was not a concern, went to Harry’s.

Everything began with a couple from the USA who believed that their Bellini had not been properly blended.

“The peach and the Prosecco are not one, you can taste the pieces.”

It was not the first time that he happened to meet clients who were troublemakers and moreover incompetent, since “his Bellini” was perfect. It was sufficient to pretend to please them, which was part of the game. On several other occasions, Thomas had overlooked their pickiness, but not that time.

He was tired of the way things were going for him. He would struggle all day and often during the evening as well. Moreover, Ivonne had become impossible. She kept reproaching him because he worked too much and he never took care of their child.

Felix was born five years before; the magical moment had ceased.

“How often have you put your son to bed? Seven? Eight? Fifteen? Has anyone ever told you that a child needs his father in order to grow up?”

Ivonne was right. He was bored with Felix. But perhaps, more than boredom, it was his fear of not knowing how to deal with him, of what to say to a five year old.

His son’s favorite game was “Cowboys and Indians”. His maternal grandmother had taught him that during vacation.

Immediately after their daughter’s wedding, Ivonne’s parents had moved to Asolo, his family’s town of origin. They said that the air was healthy over there, that they could have their child stay with them anytime, that they were crazy about him.

“Dad, shall we pretend that I am the cowboy who kills the bad Indian?”

“And who’s the bad Indian?”

“You.”

Instead of dying after being “shot” by his son, Thomas would begin to complain, saying that the bad ones were not the Indians, but the white men, who had ravaged their lands and raped their women. Felix would get upset and accused him of never wanting to be the mean one because mean ones always lose and he wanted to always win.

“He who deserves to win, wins”, the father would tell him.
They would argue until Ivonne would intervene.

“Thomas, he is only a child! You really don’t get it.”

She would shake her head and take the child away.

“The pieces? You call pieces the precious fragments that make the difference between a Bellini with real white peach and one with an extremely vulgar fruit juice?”

With time, Thomas’ language had become refined: using terms like “precious fragments” seemed a beautiful way of speaking. Wasted, on the boors in front of him.

“I have had Bellini a thousand times and it was always blended”, the woman had said, with her mouth smeared with blood colored lipstick, which highlighted the wrinkles around her lips.

“I have worked here for ten years”, I have always made my Bellini this way, and no one has ever had anything to say. I’m as happy as a clam with the high water, you tourists are the ones who believe that we Venetians are all at your service.

“We Venetians you said?”

And the American woman laughed.

Thomas looked at her furiously.

“Why?”

“One can hear a mile away that you’re not even Italian!”

And her partner added:

“Italian or not Italian, what difference does it make? If the lady says that she can taste the pieces, she can taste them!”

“You’re supposed to taste them!” He yelled.

The American was wearing a reddish toupee, which stuck to his skull with a sticky gauze. Thomas noticed that it had come unglued on one side.

Meanwhile, in the bar an intriguing silence had risen above the murmuring of the customers, the manager approached the table and gave him a look of reproach.

“*Fuck*” hissed the fellow pushing the glass away from him. The woman repeated the same gesture. Even her nails were an ox blood color, Thomas noticed.

“You see, sir” the manager started, “the barman and I are very sorry ... “

That would have been the right opportunity to remain silent and to let the manager resolve the matter for him.

On the contrary.

Some time before, while walking on the Riva degli Schiavoni, Thomas had stopped to snoop around attracted by a crowd of people. He never did that. However that time, he had smelled something which had caught his attention. A smell of fuel. He had simply needed to slow down his pace to notice that right there, in the midst of it all, was the fire-eater, looking a bit older, her skin darker from years of spitting out a mouthful of flames, her legs heavier and wrapped by black tights which replaced the high-cut shorts of a while before.

But he still liked her and they ended up in bed again.

It went on for three months. Thomas came up with the excuse that he had to work extra hours at parties for Americans in the palaces on Canal Grande. He told his wife that his manager had assigned him jobs around Veneto, to instruct novice waiters. In the end he had invented such trivial excuses that he was embarrassed with himself. Excuses like problems with the *vaporetto*, house keys left at work, things like that. In short, day after day the lies were improvised and careless, dictated only by the urgency to satisfy his passion.

He would spend his days behind the bar counter. He could still look at clients' faces and was still able to mix his cocktails, but everything was somehow transparent. Hidden behind the veil of daily events, the scene remained dominated by her body, by the recollection of gestures, words, sighs.

In those three months he had lived in a state of hedonistic oblivion, filled with the idea that each day, a woman full of desire for him, was there waiting. He had remained captured, more, way more than when he had lived with her in Paris, at a younger age.

Now however, the fire-eater was threatening to tell Ivonne everything had Thomas refused to give her a child. She swore that she would have kept the child on her own, that she wanted nothing from him, not even his last name. But his seed she expected.

Following that request, Thomas had gone from an erotic daze to a state of enraged obeisance, he didn't feel the same desire when making love to her, but he couldn't separate from her.

"We're not at all sorry" he had replied leaning in a threatening way towards his customer.

"In fact, I can't wait for you to get that smelly ass up from the chair so that I may wipe it clean before other customers arrive."

The fellow was about to stand up, but Thomas nailed him down:

"Give back the teaspoon you stole, it's silver!" he yelled furiously.

"And where exactly do you expect me to have hidden it?" the other one cried out, speaking for the first time in English.

"Under your toupee". A sharp blow and the hairpiece flew.

You could hear quite distinctly, the tinkling sound of the teaspoon that fell to the ground.

The manager bent over to pick up the toupee and returned it to the customer along with several apologies.

“The teaspoon fell from his forehead. Did you see that, sir?”

Thomas said in an excited tone.

“No, I did not see.”

“You heard, however.”

Thomas looked around searching for a solidarity, which did not come. The other customers had gone back to sipping their drinks and to chatting softly.

He would have ended up selling “ricordini”.

He found himself sunken in the nightmare of a life spent on a golden gondola turning on a brown plastic pedestal, at the sound of ‘*O sole mio*. He felt the weight of the crystal dolphin in its natural dimension falling on his head, just like an anvil; the crystal dolphin that a couple of years before had been the main attraction of Ivonne’s window store.

He seriously considered the possibility of apologizing to the customer, but his exasperation prevailed.

And, above all his pride prevailed.

No one had the guts to pick up the teaspoon.

“Since I’m the only one who sees it, I will keep it as a memory.”

Thomas bent down, picked it up and put it in his pocket. He then walked out of Harry’s Bar with his head held high.

Forever.

Dontlaic Ricordino

The following day he went out wearing the same rumpled clothes, which he had thrown on a chair the night before. Ivonne would have certainly been suspicious: it had never happened that Thomas would go to work two days in a row wearing the same shirt, or the same wrinkled trousers. But Ivonne was sleeping. For a while now, she had stopped waiting up for him at night or waking up with him in the morning to have coffee together.

Ivonne was sleeping, because during the night she had gotten up several times to take care of the feverish Felix. When their son was sick, it never, ever happened that Thomas would get up even once to give him a glass of water, or to console him from nightmares due to the fever.

She stopped asking him.

He wandered around for hours and hours.

A burst of sun shone through, the sea was withdrawing, the city was drying little by little.

Unemployed, poor father, husband in crisis, lover in trouble, he wandered the still flooded *calli* and noticed the souvenirs left over by the sea, lost objects mixed by the currents which had traveled in the ocean depths to be then spat up on a dock or beach.

The brush of a broom, the muzzle of a dog, an empty bottle.

He had the sudden desire to go back to being who he was before, one who, came and went without saying anything, without a single hello or goodbye. He felt like going to the station and getting on just any train. He had left ten years before to see Europe but had stopped almost immediately.

He dreamed of going to Germany or Greece. He even considered the idea of going back to America.

He had only gone back to California once, a few months before Felix was born. He knew right away that it was no longer his home. He had only felt at home with his brother, the only one with whom he felt like talking. After all, Ernest never asked him anything.

“I could no longer live in a place with automobiles and paved roads. I can’t be OK without water under my feet and the stench rising from the canals.”

“Stench? Are you sure?”

“Sometimes it’s there, absolutely.”

“I don’t remember it.”

“As soon as I arrived in Venice I said to myself: this is my place. You know when you find the piece of a puzzle, which fits in perfectly? Well, I fit in there, as soon as I got off the train at the train station.”

“Have you made any friends?”

“Very few. Acquaintances, mostly. People who say to me, as I walk by: ‘Hello, California’.” He had then felt some sort of deep emotion rise within him. “They love me”, he had added.

To run away, like the most cowardly of men. Taking advantage of the moment when the shock of being fired had messed up the puzzle.

Then, however, he had realized that a huge part of the mosaic had remained intact: he remained one who could live only in Venice, on water.

“Perhaps I’m the reincarnation of a fish”.

He wrinkled his nose in a sort of grimace, a mockery to himself. He told himself that not even the Indians in reservations would have believed such nonsense, but he felt joy even in having formulated that crazy thought, for even if his life was falling apart, he knew with certainty how to make it go forward.

His home was there and there is where he wished to stay.

He ran to see Ivonne at the store. He found her while she was cleaning the dolphin with *Vetril* and stroking it with a piece of cloth.

“What are you doing here?”

The huge mirror, the one from ten years before which had remained unsold for years, had ended up in an Englishman’s living room. At its place now was another, just as imposing but equally unmarketable; the only difference was that the flowers on the frame were no longer pink and light blue, but white and red.

Thomas looked at himself: the blond skinny young man, who didn’t speak a word of Italian, was no longer there. Instead, he saw a man who looked serious, imposing, who looked a little older than thirty-five. He turned towards Ivonne faking cheerfulness.

“Dontlaic ricordino!”

She looked at him suspiciously.

“Why are you acting cute? You have been minding your own business for three months; it’s been three months since you cuddled your son and ... it’s been three months since we made love.”

“Not because of me”, he replied after turning his back to the mirror. He didn’t want to look at himself while he was lying.

“Do you still love me?” she asked.

A group of Japanese people awarmed the store. They bought rhinestone necklaces and glass spheres filled up with water with the San Marco bell tower covered in snow. The women were immediately attracted by the Burano lace shawl, they admired themselves in front of the mirror, asked the price, and ended up placing it back on the counter. It took them a half hour to pass it around to each other, about the same time it took Thomas to find an answer to Ivonne’s question, while he sat on the red velvet jump seat of a Doge sedan chair. A sign, hanging from a chain, said in four different languages: “sitting prohibited”.

When even the last tourist had left, and without looking straight at her, Thomas said in a serious tone:

“I love you, but I’m unfaithful to you.”

Ivonne instinctively stretched her hand on the counter, took the shawl and wrapped it around her shoulders. Inside however, she was ice cold and she threw on her shoulders a laced cloth as well. She then ran towards the shutters and brusquely slammed them shut.

They were alone in the dusty quietness of the store filled with objects. He was still, one foot in and one foot outside the Doge sedan chair. She, curled up behind the counter almost wishing to disappear, as she was, covered in lace like a bride.

The light that came in from the window, filtered by the crystalline mass of the dolphin’s body, was dim and bluish.

Ivonne felt that she was also made of glass.

Thomas was like a statue.

They were certain to be alive only because he breathed deeply out of anxiety and she sniffed in order not to cry.

“I want to know everything” Ivonne said, and she bit her lips spitefully.

He did not reply immediately, so Ivonne with her mouth wide open sliced the air with a cry, which made the necklaces and music boxes jingle and vibrate.

“I want ... “

She had to breathe after every word.

“... to know ...”

She felt more and more choked up, her throat hurt, and she could barely breathe.

“... everything”

With a last effort she said:

“Immediately!”

Thomas placed his other foot as well in the sedan chair and looking ahead of him, as if he were in a confessional, he began.

“I met her three months ago, but I knew her from before ...”

To Say My Love

“Ivonne, why do you want to suffer pointlessly?”

“Pointlessly! The truth is pointless?”

“I don’t care about her.”

“That’s impossible. You saw her for three months. It’s impossible that she means nothing to you. I want the truth.”

“I told you the truth.”

“You did? And all the lies you told me?”

“Those have nothing to do with the truth.”

“No?”

“Facts are not the truth.”

“And what is the truth?”

“Something one has inside.”

“Facts have the truth inside. You need to tell me how you looked at her, how you touched her. I must understand if you loved her.”

“The actions are always the same. It’s what you don’t see, of the actions, which counts. And you cannot describe that.”

“Don’t pretend to be a philosopher and spit it out. What did you do with her?”

“Ivonne, please, don’t cry.”

“I like to cry, it gives me satisfaction. If it gives you a knot in the stomach, I don’t care. You should have thought about it earlier.”

“...”

“So?”

“What do you want to know?”

“Everything, I told you.”

“...”

“How did you do it?”

“...”

“What you felt, what you said to her, what she said to you”

“...”

“How was she?”

“How was she how?”

“How was she ... naked?”

“Why do you care?”

“I want to know, I need to know.”

“For what?”

“If I can imagine the scene, perhaps I can resign myself.”

“I didn’t love her.”

“But you liked her.”

“Yes, I liked her.”

“Did you like having sex with her? What did you feel?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? You had sex with her just for a spirit of charity?”

“I felt what one feels when one has sex.”

“However I don’t know, you need to explain it to me.”

“What, you don’t know?”

“No, I do not know. I never had sex without love. I don’t know what one feels.”

“...”

“And afterwards? What did you do afterwards?”

“...”

“You must have done something afterwards, you must have said something. What did you say to one another?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? You were so full of passion that you had no time to speak?”

“...”

“And afterwards? After having had sex, what did you say to one another?”

“I’d run out.”

“But then you’d go back. The desire would come back the day after. Isn’t this love then?”

“I don’t know ... actually, no. It’s not love.”

“And you didn’t think about me?”

“Yes.”

“It didn’t occur to you that you would have destroyed me?”

“I never thought that you would have found out.

“But how can you be so naïve?”

“You would have never known if I had not told you.”

“Then why did you tell me?”

“I believed that honesty might do us some good.”

“What is the difference between honesty and truth?”

“There is a difference.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. Right now I don’t know.”

“And what would be the purpose of your honesty?”

“For us to love each other again.”

“So you don’t love me anymore.”

“I never stopped loving you.”

“Neither have I. If you love me then be honest all the way.”

“What else do you still want to know?”

“What do you mean ‘still’? You haven’t told me anything yet.”

“Then ask me questions.”

“What did you like about her? I mean physically.”

“Why does it mean so much to you? The physical aspect is not the only thing.”

“Oh, so you liked her mind as well?”

“...”

“Did she have a mind?”

“I never asked her if she had a mind, OK?”

“Did you like her ass?”

“Come on Ivonne, what are you asking me?”

“Answer me.”

“Her ass ... her ass was square. Yes. She had a flat ass, square.”

“Her breasts? How were her breasts?”

“They sagged a little.”

“Then what was so attractive about her? Did fire come out of her when you were having sex?”

“Ivonne!”

“Well, if she ate fire. It had to come out from somewhere”

“Physically there was really nothing special about her.

“But as soon as you saw her, you got aroused”

“...”

“So?”

“...”

“I see, that’s exactly it: as soon as you saw her, you got aroused”

“She tasted of gasoline. This I liked.”

“And I spend my life putting perfume on!”

“Love ...”

“Go on.”

“I’m done!”

“No, go on.”

“I liked that she travels around the world. And that she’s alone. At least, I thought she was alone. She never spoke about her past, as if she didn’t have one.”

“And what did she say?”

“She talked about the places she had seen. But she never became attached to anything. Only once, when she told me about a dog she took along with her for a few months, she became teary-eyed.”

“So you see, you did talk?”

“We talked, just not to be silent. If we had sex without talking, you’re not happy, if we talked you’re not happy!”

“Of course not. I don’t like anything of what you did with her! But I want to know it anyway. So: the dog?”

“Nothing. It was a normal dog, but she loved it anyway. When it ran away, she felt lonely.”

“How touching! And you consoled her, right? I know that you hugged her when she got teary-eyed: the tenderness makes me almost angrier than the love.”

“It wasn’t love. Sometimes, when ... when we did it ... I didn’t look at her. I felt uncomfortable seeing her face so close.”

“Was she that ugly?”

“She wasn’t ugly, it’s that she seemed a stranger to me. Therefore I closed my eyes.”

“How did you have sex?”

“In what sense?”

“Was she on top or bottom?”

“What do you want me to tell you, Ivonne?”

“Did you come, with her?”

“Yes, or else what sense would it have made?”

“Did she?”

“Yes. I believe she did too.”

“Why, you never asked her?”

“No, you could see it ...”

“But if you said that you didn’t even look at her!

“Sometimes I looked at her.”

“And what was she like?”

“Disheveled”

“And it bothered you?”

“No. I liked it.”

“...”

“Don’t cry: you wanted to know the truth. Sometimes, it’s the details that hurt the most.”

“So I’m too self-composed? I’m cold. Do I seem cold to you?”

“You’re someone else. You’re my wife. I love you.”

Ivonne didn’t ask Thomas the most obvious question: she didn’t ask him the name of his lover; she remained always, between them, “the fire-eater.”

And Thomas did not tell her that that woman wanted a child from him: the truth cannot be told all the way. If Ivonne had known that even the thought of a child had been conceived, the desire for a human being fathered by Thomas and not brought to life by her, she would have been shattered. Or she would have become a fury thirsting for revenge. She wouldn’t have been able to consider that, sometimes, children are produced even just because they’re “necessary”. And for the fire-eater, a child would have been necessary so that she could feel like something more, than just a simple fire-eater.

Thomas had understood this. A son, for example, would have asked her for her name. Even the dog had abandoned her.

A son would have stayed there, sitting on a step enchanted, to admire his mother with her mouth full of fire like a friendly dragon. And at night, in bed, he would have cuddled up against her body and would have looked at her closely without feeling she was a stranger. The smell of

gasoline would have been for him what for others is the smell of milk or baby powder: the scent of mom. And when she would have left him to dedicate her time to the lover of the moment, the child would have quietly waited for her, certain that in the morning he would have found a loving mother next to him. Self-composed again.

But the truth that Thomas could not tell did not concern the child only.

There were kisses, embraces, and words.

He who betrays knows what those words signify. He knows that one can attribute even a thousand meanings to the word “love”, meanings which have nothing to do with love.

Tenderness, frivolousness, play, excitement.

For the person who is being betrayed, however, love means love.

And Thomas had said: “My love”, to the fire-eater.

It Seemed to be Over

The truth that Ivonne was able to find out, though incomplete, made her cry for an infinite length of time.

Waves of tears. Every once in a while the cry diminished, as if she could no longer find the strength, then it came back with a lament.

A thought came upon her like a stab.

“Did you wear a condom?”

“Oh come on, Ivonne. What does that have to do with anything?”

Together with rage some of her dialectal expressions came out.

“Do you know or don’t you know, you idiot, that there’s AIDS out there? And that it doesn’t hit only gay people and drug addicts anymore? And who knows how many people that whore goes to bed with! You have a son at home, do you remember that?”

Thomas tried to hug her, but she wouldn’t let him touch her.

Suddenly she stopped crying.

“How disgusting” she said, finally.

She removed the lace cloth, and the shawl. She took an embroidered handkerchief from the exhibiting shelf and she blew her nose. She threw it away as if it were made of paper.

She raised the shutter.

Everything seemed over, but it wasn’t.

She checked herself out in the mirror while tightening her lips. She thought that those dark wrinkles, the paleness, the bags under the eyes had been caused by him. He had painted grief on

her face, and if that was the outside mark, who knows what kind of catastrophe she must have had inside.

She could not forgive him for it.

She kept sniffing as if crying, but she decided to vent her pain with punches and slaps.

It didn't matter that he was stronger.

As she was hitting him, Thomas managed to embrace her and felt that she was ice-cold.

Slowly her body regained warmth. She softened up.

They kissed.

He cried as well.

“You haven't fallen in love with her, have you?” Ivonne asked.

“I can love only you in life. Even after life. Only you.”

“They kissed again mixing tears and saliva.

“How disgusting ...” she said again, but with a different tone than before.

She was about to clean herself with her hand, as children do.

Thomas looked for the handkerchief in his trousers' pocket, and pulled out a muddle of stuff from which the teaspoon, which had been there from the night before, fell out.

She looked at the ground, so did he.

She looked at him.

Thomas half smiled and surrendered.

“They fired me”.

They went back home together. Felix welcomed them in his pajamas, ready for his goodnight kiss.

Having to pretend in front of the child, that nothing had happened, helped them to start over and to speak to each other in their every day tone.

“If it hadn’t come out on its own would you have told me anyway?”

“Told you what?”

“That you had lost your job.”

“I would have told you afterwards.

“After what?”

“After finding another job.”

“You’ll find one.”

While Ivonne accompanied her son to bed, Thomas observed at length the silver teaspoon with the coat of arms in the form of a winged lion engraved on the handle. He seemed to see the fingerprints of those who had served it, used it, washed it, and put it away. He seemed to see reflected on it ten years of his own life.

Then he tossed the teaspoon in the drawer where they placed things they didn’t know what to do with.

In the midst of frayed electrical wires, rusty scissors, crushed ping pong balls, Easter egg surprises, nibbled pencils, unpaired earrings when one might then perhaps find the other, unsent postcards, keys of changed locks, Felix’s pacifier hidden there so that he wouldn’t find it anymore, tip-less compasses and that hell of a small screwdriver, that’s where it ended up, the silver teaspoon would have become tarnished and forgotten.

Things You Don't Need Anymore

Time: 21:00

High Water level: M 1.30

The water was there, always the same. High. Higher than usual. Longer lasting and persistent. Stable. As if, from one day to the next, the news could have announced, with little surprise that : “As of today high water in Venice is a normal condition”.

They would have talked about it as something curious, and even the reporter would have smiled while reading it.

At first someone would have been alarmed, or would have reacted. Then, not knowing whom to get angry with, it would have been accepted as a matter of fact. One would have gotten used to it.

Thomas sometimes tried to close the window and go to bed, but inside he felt a restlessness, which tormented him.

He would lie down, turn off the light and get up again to look outside.

The Venetians had told him about when, years and years before – he was not yet in Italy – because of the high water they had been left without electricity, without gas, the homes flooded and the soaked mattresses thrown in the streets. On the sea surface, floated diesel oil, which had leaked from the torn pipes. The flashlights were much in demand and the *calli*, at night, looked like a cemetery of lost souls.

But what kept Thomas awake was not the fear that such an apocalypse could happen again.

That evening his days off began, his Saturday and Sunday as barman, which often occurred at the end of the week, now happened in the middle. On Wednesday and Thursday this time.

Instead of sleeping, he checked the tide as if he could rush it and force it to go away by measuring it with his eyes minute after minute.

He scanned the horizon from the window like a captain from the deck of the ship.

While waiting, alone, for the sea to calm down, the captain remembered.

He remembered that when he was young he didn't want to remember.

And that at a certain point something happened that changed him.

Maybe age as well, yes. Becoming aware that the time he had left, was now less than the time which had gone by had induced Thomas to make a one hundred and ninety degrees turn on himself: he placed the future behind and the past ahead of him. To be able to look at it. To think about it over and over again.

He liked to live again that sort of second life that was hidden in his memory. He just had to forget about the desire to go back, to appease the anxiety to make up for the errors. All he needed to do was understand that memories don't prevent one from living the present, but rather they fill it when it's empty, and enrich it when it's full.

One evening, for their wedding anniversary, he and Ivonne had reserved a table at Harry's. Many years had passed now since Thomas had stopped working there. After being fired for a month he found a job at the Excelsior hotel. At the bar downstairs, the one next to the entrance hall. A constant coming and going of people.

Thomas was now no more than a customer at Harry's and for their anniversary they had decided to treat themselves to dinner regardless of expenses.

All the silverware with the lion coat of arms, the same printed on the spoon lost in the oblivion of the drawer of useless things, passed on their table and through her fingers.

“Felix wants to go to the Actors Studio after his High School diploma” she said while waiting for their first course.

“Let’s not talk about children, at least tonight.”

“Children? I remind you that we have only one.”

“He already told me about the Actors Studio. But he’s not fit for it” Thomas asserted, convinced that Felix had no talent.

“How do you know?”

“I wanted to go there as well. But we need to explain to our son that it’s not enough to be some kind of Brad Pitt to become an actor in America. I was also told as a young man that I looked like Robert Redford ... and here I am”.

“Felix is not *some kind of Brad Pitt*” she answered, scraping her fork on the table cloth. While talking she engraved parallel lines on the cloth, then she crossed them with other transversal lines going in all directions until she formed an intricate design.

“He lacks the actor’s soul” Thomas concluded.

“Maybe someone was able to give him Brad Pitt’s blue eyes and blond hair but he did not work enough on his soul.”

Ivonne had stopped drawing lines with her fork and was now rhythmically hitting the table with the point of her knife as if she wanted to stab it.

She looked like a young girl that evening.

But there was something vague about in her features, a condition strangely similar to that of an adolescent. But Ivonne's beauty had not actually flourished; it was about to leave her.

Every time she put on an expression you could see the risk of a wrinkle too deep, of a sign too sharp, but the harmony was still there.

Old age for her was only an averted hypothesis which added fullness, maturity, and consciousness to any emotion one could read on her face.

Thomas did not want to ruin everything with an unpleasant discussion between them. He knew their son was their battlefield. He decided to turn away from the subject.

"I will ask Ernest to inquire about the Actors Studio. Ok?" He said compliantly.

"But don't create illusions for the boy. That's a difficult, ruthless world. I just want to protect him from the pain of failure. And don't forget you need help in the shop."

"I can do very well on my own" she said. Then she picked up her fish knife and tapped it on the glass. "Waiter!" she called.

Thomas looked at her with amused disappointment: " You don't do that ..."

Pasta with clams. She picked them up one by one with her hands and sucked the pulp, laughing.

Thomas liked to look at her, he found her very sensual.

"You embarrassed me" he complained joking. "First you play a concert on your glass, then you eat with your hands: we're not in a tavern!"

The atmosphere was cheerful once again.

“I enjoy it more like this. And did you look more elegant with the fire-eater? I imagine how vulgar she must have been!”

“Her again? It was fifteen years ago!”

“Thirteen” emphasized Ivonne. “ With certain things time does not matter”.

“But I asked you to forgive me a billion times”.

“Ask me again”. Her eyes were sharp and inquisitive, but she wanted to laugh.

“You never loved her even for a moment?”

“No, no, no! I never loved her, never”.

“You don’t go to bed with a woman for three months without loving her at least a little”.

Thomas threw himself back on his chair pointing two fingers of his right hand to his head, as if he wanted to shoot himself.

“I’m sick of this!” he exclaimed simulating a desperate expression.

Ivonne pricked him lightly with her fork on the back of his left hand.

“You haven’t seen her anymore?” she asked suavely.

“For God’s sake, no!”

“And you never had any other?”

“No. I swear.”

“Swear it on my head”.

“Oh come on Ivonne!

”Swear it on my head, Thomas! I won’t ask you to swear it on Felix’s head only because I don’t trust you enough! But you must swear on my head that you didn’t have other women after her”.

Under the right border of his plate, Thomas crossed the two knives; then he did the same with the two forks “I swear!” he solemnly said. “No other!”

Marina

The affair with Marina was still fresh in his mind. To the point that, while he was swearing to Ivonne that he had not betrayed her again, he was afraid that she could read it in his eyes.

But if that had happened, it was not all Thomas' fault.

He had never shown interest, not even as a young man, in politics, society, or the environment. He had looked with indifference at those in Venice who hung old bed sheets from their balconies as protest banners displaying hand-painted complaints against the wakes caused by motorboats on the Canal Grande. "Look there" he thought, "They are right. However, nothing ever changes".

Only for a short time, he behaved as if he were the one responsible for solving the world's problems.

The commitment phase to environmental activism belonged to a couple of years before.

Often Ivonne used to bring home leaflets about toxic wastes poured into the *laguna* by the chemical industries, leaflets which told about people who were working there and who got sick while working there.

"And you just need to look out the window" she told him. "You can see the smoke, you can see the fire coming from the chimneys! They are poisoning us".

One day she took him by the hand to a pontoon bridge where many people were protesting, shouting out slogans and raising fists, and she put a megaphone before his mouth.

"What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Speak into it, I purposely bought it for you."

"But I don't know how to yell."

“This is the reason I bought you the megaphone. Even if you speak softly, this will make your voice sound louder. Protest like everybody else does. Say that we’re fed up, that they’re killing us.”

And Thomas protested. But not against the poison of the petrochemical companies. Against her.

“Why do you boss me around as if I were an idiot?”

“I’m not bossing you around, I’m explaining things to you, because you’re distracted and you don’t show an interest in things.”

“You, show an interest! Anyway, what sense would it make? Should I begin to protest against the same people who are giving me a job? Who do you think my customers are at the Excelsior?”

“I get involved, but I don’t have time. The store won’t carry on without me. You see that I am “locked up” in there from morning to evening. However, you’re free when you don’t work, considering that I cannot count on you to take care of our son.”

“Felix can take care of himself. At his age I hitchhiked around California.”

“The world is not measured after you.”

A quick kiss and she left him there, with a megaphone in his hand, amongst people he didn’t know.

And Thomas took his revenge.

This time she was not a fire-eater, but a widow. Her husband had died of cancer two years before from handling vinyl chloride for a long time. In other words, plastic. Her name was Marina.

When Ivonne left him alone on the pontoon bridge, he looked around feeling lost.

Out in the front there she was: strong, angry, her fist up in the air. The others followed her; they repeated what she said first. Thomas stood there with his megaphone down, watching her while she yelled.

At a certain point he approached her and gave her the megaphone.

“Perhaps this might help you.”

“Finally someone who does something useful” she replied almost snatching it from his hand. Then she smiled.

Thomas waited, keeping aside, for the demonstration to end. When Marina looked around for him, he raised one finger shyly, as if to say: “I’m here.”

“Thank you, it was useful. Are you coming back tomorrow?”

And he went back. The day after and the one after again.

He felt that he had fallen in love a little, and the widow seemed to reciprocate as well. They always held hands; they passed each other the megaphone from one mouth to the other, they exchanged the taste that remained caught in it.

Marina didn’t feel that she wanted to make love, even though they had become quite close.

“Look, Thomas” she said to him, “if my husband were still alive, I would go to bed with you in a heartbeat, because as soon as I see you I feel that I get terribly aroused.” She was a simple impulsive woman, and he liked her shamelessness. “But not this way” she continued. “This way I feel that I’m doing something wrong to him: while I’m here trying to demand some justice for him, I start fooling around with you.”

If they had made love, it most likely would have ended just like with the fire-eater, that soon after he would have gotten sick of her.

Instead he became attached to her and he couldn't wait to go to the demonstrations to see her. Even Marina waited for him.

He made love to Ivonne in the dark while thinking about Marina, but Ivonne didn't notice. On the contrary, she was surprised that after a day at work, after the meetings on the petrochemical companies or the demonstration on the pontoon bridge, her husband still had all that desire to satisfy with her. And she was glad that she had been able to convince him to get involved in social issues.

Then Marina decided to go away. Her mother was paralyzed in bed and needed to be taken care of.

"I'm going back to Bassano" she said to him. It is fate that I always need to roll up my sleeves for others: first my husband, now my mother."

He felt his throat tightening up.

"And what about the fight for justice?" The words sounded empty in his mouth.

"I don't have the energy to fight any longer. Each time I feel as if my wounds opened up again. "And then, have you heard? There will finally be a trial. It will be up to the judges to bring justice" Marina had said.

"Venice and Bassano are not that far away; we can find ways to see each other ..."

She replied that it made no sense: to start over somewhere else meant closing with her past. With all of her past: Venice, her husband's sickness, the petrochemical company.

"Why do you want to throw me away as well?"

Thomas asked her to make love at least once, before she moved to Bassano.

They booked a room in a *pensione* behind Piazza San Marco, not that far from the *ricordini* shop. They went there after a demonstration, the last one before the opening of the trial.

When the owner saw that Thomas was still holding the megaphone in his hand, she became concerned: “Make sure not to make noise. People sleep in the afternoon.”

As they walked up the stairs they laughed together partners in crime.

“Do we look like two people who have come here to hold a rally?”

Thomas imagined that they would have immediately undressed.

He couldn't wait to see her the way she was, to take off her sweater, her skirt, to unbutton her blouse.

“I know, I dress like a lay nun” she said.

“Yet, that clothing with no-frills, of absolute normality, did not degrade her body, on the contrary. Normality was Marina's strength.

Her complexion was fair, her breasts full, her abdomen rounded. The welcoming body of a mother. But she didn't have any children. She and her husband were happy that way, she had told him.

“And then, giving birth to an individual in this awful world ...

It doesn't seem right.”

Thomas had even thought about one thing to say if she felt uncomfortable. He would whisper: “One time only is not a betrayal.” Then he would cover her with kisses and caresses. The passion, which had been held in for too long, would have finally exploded.

They held each other naked for a long time. She appeared very calm and relaxed but he wanted to say to her anyway: “One time only is not a betrayal.”

Marina thought that Thomas was saying it to himself.

Are you thinking about your wife?”

In fact the thought of Ivonne had “frozen” him: by now it had become normal to betray her every night, in their own bed, savoring the thought of Marina, every night before going to sleep, and every morning when they woke up. However this way, in a real situation, it was very different.

The kisses, the caresses, became empty gestures, unnatural.

Passion could not explode.

He was ashamed; he felt the need to justify himself: “It had never happened to me.”

“It doesn’t matter” and she giggled, not to mock him, but only to make light of the moment.

But Thomas didn’t laugh. For him it was a question of pride.

He threw himself upon Marina forcing himself to think that it wasn’t she. He ran his fingers through her hair and threw her head back: just as he used to do with the fire-eater.

His juggler friend would sink her teeth into his flesh. And when he got upset because of the bite marks on him, she would become furious over the idea of having to control herself. She hated that complicity which he extorted from her with the threat of leaving her had she done anything that could arouse suspicions in Ivonne.

“Do I have to be like a dead person in bed with you for your wife to feel at peace?”

“Well, there’s a little difference between a dead person and a tiger!”

They fought while they made love; they wriggled away from each other and then grabbed a hold of each other again. But, just like in martial arts, they never struck too hard.

When Marina felt Thomas going inside of her, she thought immediately, that she had never experienced that same emotion which was now capturing her stomach, with the man she had shared her existence with. And then she knew that she had loved a man who was not for her: in every day life they had always gotten along, but in bed she felt violated each time. So much that when he got so sick that he couldn't make it anymore, though it was ugly to think it, she felt relieved. She also knew that with Thomas it would have been different, completely different.

And that by now it was too late to start over.

And she felt like crying.

He stopped, he felt that he had to look at the woman in front of him: yes, it was indeed she, it was now Marina. The woman he had thought about every night was at that moment right there underneath him, as if she were suspended, breathlessly, waiting for what would have happened next and then again.

He licked the tears on her face, he went into her mouth with his fingers, he touched her tongue, her palate, the inside of her cheeks. Then he kissed her for a long time. Teeth striking against teeth, his lips hurt him.

“Don't go, Marina. I will leave my family, if you want.”

“No, I've already decided, it's right this way, I'm leaving.”

“So I don't count at all?”

“I'm not someone who breaks up families.”

“Come on, let's go away, just you and me. I will take you to America.”

“Wouldn’t it scare you to start all over?”

“Nothing scares me anymore, now that I have you.

“And the story about the fish?”

“The fish?”

“That you are the reincarnation of a fish, that you can live only in Venice ...”

“It’s nonsense. And anyway, even fish fall in love and one does everything for love. You know the story of how the world began, don’t you?”

“I never studied much.”

“In the beginning there were only fish. There were no other animals: insects, perhaps. One fish jumped out of the water, it developed lungs and everything began from there. Why do you think the fish came out?”

“Because he was curious?”

“Because he had fallen in love. With a butterfly, for example.”

“Thomas, don’t act romantic! You know, I’m not that kind of person. It makes me laugh!”

“I cannot believe that we’re here now and that tomorrow everything will be over.”

“...”

“That I will think of the two of us this way, close, and I won’t know any longer if it really happened. Because if you don’t get used to things, you remember them as if they were a dream.

“...”

“Aren’t you sorry to leave me?”

“...”

“Marina!”

“...”

“Come on! Before you wanted to laugh and now you cry?”

“I never had guts in life. My husband as well, I married him just like that, because I didn’t want to wait. I didn’t have the guts to have a child.”

“You said that you didn’t want any children.”

“I didn’t want them because I was afraid.”

“You still could.”

“I don’t have the guts to steal a man from another woman.”

“You are not stealing me. I am making my own decisions.”

“But you have a son.”

“He’s already old enough.”

“How old?”

“Fourteen, fifteen.”

“You don’t even know! He needs a father, he needs *you*.”

“I’ll write to him.”

“I no longer want to stay in Venice, everything feels dead! You have no idea what my husband’s death was like.”

“I can imagine.”

“You can’t know if you didn’t live through it. Watching someone so close die. Young and in full health. You kill yourself in order to hold on to him, and he sinks deeper into his illness. He suffers through tests, injections, x-rays, because he deludes himself into thinking that he will make it. But that stuff he breathed in, that he took in his hands, it went everywhere inside of him. Do you know that I can no longer look at a bucket, a laundry basin? Anything made of plastic. A

record, CDs, those made today. I feel that that they all have the stigma of death, the one with the skull and the crossbones; can you picture it? The same one they put on poison.”

“Marina, let’s go away together. Pain can be forgotten.”

“I don’t have the courage to. Even in a new place ... what kind of life could we have in America?”

“I don’t know. I only have love to offer you now.”

“At our age love is not sufficient. In fact, having these conversations, this way, in bed, with our rear end to the four winds, seems to me indecent for two people who are over forty.”

“But what’s wrong with having one’s rear end exposed? Here: I’m going to the window with everything exposed! Look: a forty-five year old cock! Who cares, Marina! I want to be happy!”

“Close that window, don’t act stupid!”

“I want to be happy.”

“Why have you become serious now?”

“I want to be happy.”

“You will never be with me. I can no longer be happy. What I went through made me age before my time.”

“One can put sorrow aside and let it come out only once in a while.”

“No, Thomas, sorrow drains you.”

“What are you doing, are you getting dressed?”

“I’m going.”

“Come here.”

“It’s late.”

“Nobody’s waiting for you.”

“Not for me, but someone’s waiting for you.”

“Come here, let’s do it again.”

“No.”

“I want to do it again. A lot. More than before.”

“I’m cold.”

“I want to look at you.”

“What is there to look at?”

“You are very beautiful.”

“I don’t believe so, but I like it if you say it to me.”

“You’re very beautiful.”

“Earlier it was ... it had never happened to me that way. And then ...”

“And then?”

“And then it had never happened to me to be talking while making love.

“Why are you laughing?”

“It seems so strange to me to be learning new things at my age. I should have met you earlier.

I should have ...”

“Move a little slower.”

“...”

“You should have what?”

“I should have waited for you.”

“I’m here.”

“I should have waited for you.”

“It’s useless to wait. When you arrived I wasn’t waiting for anyone. I had everything. I thought I already had it all with my wife ...”

“I love you, Thomas.”

“...”

“It’s you who doesn’t have the courage, now.”

“Courage for what?”

“To tell me ‘I love you’.”

“I can’t.”

“You said that nothing frightens you.”

“It’s true.”

“Then say it to me.”

“...”

“Then I will say again to you: I love you.”

“Don’t move. Stop.”

“Tell me you love me.”

“If I say it to you I’ll come.”

“Say it to me...”

When she was already on the bus for Bassano she could still hear in her head all the words they had said to each other; she kept seeing, as if reflected in the window, the gesture of him opening her mouth to find something inside that no one else had ever taken from her.

Thomas remained in a daze; the image of her with her face wet from saliva and tears was stuck in his head.

Marina had left, but she had not left his thoughts; she had moved to a corner, always more curled up in herself, as if she were the small dried up fetus of another possible life, which however had died inside of him.

Little by little the feeling for Ivonne began to flow again, daily, in the depth of Thomas' heart.

Having lost and then rediscovered it gave him enthusiasm.

The megaphone was put away among the things, which were no longer of use.

The Collection

Time: 21:30

High Water level: M 1.40

It was easy to be tempted by the desire to redeem the past.

After years spent being determined to refuse memories, he focused only towards the present and the future; he was now trying to put together fragments from the past, in order to give peace to his mature days.

He looked out of the window obsessively, hoping the sea would give back to him the missing piece that, he had chosen in his mind as symbol of the reconstruction of his self. This piece which, once found, would allow him to move forward and to look towards the future.

Thomas was not old yet.

That night he couldn't do anything else but wait for the water to withdraw. This wait, certainly not a wasted moment, prevented him from doing anything else.

From the neighbor's houses came the sounds of late dinners and of chattering around the table; the altered voices of arguments; the tantrums of children; the loud phone calls of those calling foreign countries standing by the window and thinking they should speak loud: China, Sri Lanka, Romania; the monotonous whining of a prayer: three days before in a nearby home an old man had died, but the funeral could not be celebrated before the end of the *high water*. The

hearse couldn't pass under the bridges. With the dead man inside the coffin, the relatives continued to recite the rosary.

Thomas had the curiosity to look at himself in the mirror: he didn't look fifty, he was a good looking man, healthy, blue eyes, and hair, though white, just as thick as when he was young. Robert Redford was still blond despite being older than he was.

His life however, Thomas' life not Robert's, was not going anywhere.

He was missing something.

He was missing a fork.

Thomas was waiting for it, hoping to find it one day, amongst the objects transported by the water and left randomly on the bank of the canal.

A silver fork with a winged lion on its handle from the old set of cutlery that he knew so well.

His original collection.

One evening sometime before coming back from the Excelsior, he saw something shining on the sidewalk still wet from the last *high water*.

He remembered the souvenirs from the sea: mementos that reminded one of nothing.

He moved away the object with his foot and heard a metallic ting against the stone. He kneeled: it was a fish knife, edgy and flat, slightly serrated and with the unmistakable coat of arms: the winged lion.

A piece of silverware from Harry's Bar.

He picked up the knife, he held it against himself almost with a hug; then he hid it under his jacket as if he were stealing it, so intense was his surprise, so heavy the memory that in spite of himself it had hit him: his years working at Harry's, the happiest time of his life.

After that, the firing, the anniversary dinner.

And the false oath to Ivonne.

He started to walk. Step after step, a whirl of thoughts, images, events. A clear yesterday projected on to today, on to now.

At home he had turned on the TV with an automatic gesture and saw smoke and dust on the screen.

On every channel the same images.

New York.

He had left America when he was just over twenty, he had toured Europe and lived in Italy, but he had never been to New York. He had never seen the Twin Towers, and he would have never been able to see them again.

But still he could have answered the question: “What were you doing when you received the news?”

Nobody ever asked him. But if they had, he would have answered: “I accepted to remember my past”.

He felt the need to call his brother.

Ernest was crying.

“Come on “ said Thomas.

“You’re far away, you can’t possibly understand”.

“What do you mean I can’t understand? I understand that it’s a tragedy...”

Words melted in his mouth.

“It’s like when our mother died: you thought you could comfort me by telling me that she was better where she was now. You live in another world.

In Venice, life is a game: the water, the boats, the palaces, the people on holiday. It's an amusement park, there is no real life there".

"There is real life, however; it's you foreigners who don't see it".

"Hey ... have you noticed? You said *you foreigners*. There's nothing to do about it, you are a Venetian now. You have water in your head!"

Thomas remained in a daze thinking about Ernest's last sentence: "You have water in your head".

He had never told him about how Ivonne had started not to be well.

It was at that point that he convinced himself, that in order to tell certain stories, there is a way that goes beyond words.

He hung up the phone and directed himself instinctively to the closet at the bottom of the stairs. The drawer was so full that he couldn't open it anymore. For some time in order to fit something in there one had to go through a gap so narrow that only small, thin objects could go through. Ivonne used to say: "Sooner or later we'll have to tidy up in there", but she as well didn't want to face the difficult issue of dealing with the things nobody knew where to put and seemed to find their place only in that drawer.

Thomas unhinged it; then he searched, moved things, and dug out nervously. Finally the spoon reappeared, now burnished and spotted with a grayish green stain. He ran to wash it, but only the superficial dirt came off. He went to buy a product to polish it.

In the streets people started talking about what had happened in America. Many asked him for news. As if, only because he was an American, he should have had further information.

“I know nothing” he answered everybody.

He went back home to polish the spoon. When he saw it shining with the typical indefinable color of silver, marked by its life of an object passed from hand to hand but still intact, perfect in the slender line of the handle, in the engraving, in the round form of its concave part, he thought it deserved a worthier treatment. Just like the knife he had found shortly before, still shiny and still; solitary in the midst of the smoked glass of the table where he had placed it, a lake with dark waters.

He went out again and bought a wooden case with white satin inside, where he could store the fish knife and the teaspoon. While he was there, he chose a wide case with four other places.

He was becoming a collector.

He had just invented his personal collection of *“Harry’s Bar’s cutlery from the time I worked there...”*

Searching the Venetian junk dealers, he easily found at a low price, the traditional knife and the small fork, the one for fish.

His collection grew richer with extreme ease: all he was missing was a fork, the set would have been complete.

But the other fork was not to be found, the same as the one with which, on the evening of the dinner at Harry’s, Ivonne had drawn little roads on the table cloth, and which he had used himself, together with the rest of the silverware, to exorcise his false oath.

Neither at the junk dealers, nor at the collectors' stores, nor at Harry's, where a very kind young waiter, told him that a year before, for New Year's, they had replaced all the linens, the plate settings and the silverware.

"Then the barge which took everything away, tipped over in the canal. Only a few things were saved", the boy explained.

Thomas understood that the search for the missing fork would not be easy, but he accepted the challenge with destiny. And with the sea.

He decided that the right place to expose his collection of five pieces of silverware would have been the shelf in the living room. But every time he walked by it, he felt a sense of pain in seeing the fork's space still empty. He imagined it settled comfortably in its white satin bed, shining. In the meantime, he went searching for it in every second hand shop.

"It's unmistakable, it's silver. A winged lion is engraved on the handle and its prongs are very long ..."

"The prongs?"

"The tips" Thomas replied with fake nonchalance. He knew quite well that his interlocutors had no idea what the points of forks were really called, and still after several years, he took pride in speaking Italian better than the natives. He walked far and wide through all the local street markets of fake antiques in the city; he rummaged through Chinese junk; he consulted former retired colleagues. Nothing.

If in Venice nobody owned even a sample of that collection, it meant that it had been the sea to grab the forks after the barge had tipped over. And the only thing to do was to wait for it to return it to him.

When seeing the polished wooden case appear from one day to another on the shelf, Felix asked him distractedly what it was.

“Silverware” Thomas replied.

“ I see.”

“They’re not to be used.”

“I see”, the son repeated.

“And remember, when you come home with your girlfriends, the forks are not to be touched.”

Felix did not take it personally. In fact, he laughed over it off.

“We have other things to do, dad, me and those you call my girlfriends!” Felix had now become a handsome twenty year old, blonde with blue eyes, and not yet with a girlfriend. The girls lined up for him.

While observing the box better he commented: “it’s unsettling.”

Thomas looked at him with a questioning look.

“It resembles a miniature coffin.” But immediately, he realized what his words meant, also because he read his own grief in his father’s look.

Ivonne.

Her death, six months before.

The day of the funeral.

The flowers, all white.

The blue motorboat and the brown of the coffin, which clashed. The engine which hammered away.

Silence would have been necessary to accompany her.

Silence and fog. Fog to soften the metallic pounding of carts, which had transported her inside the cemetery. Fog to blunt the squeaking of the pulleys and of the ropes lowering her down, in the black hole of the earth.

Instead, there was a cruel and cold sun, on that day.

It's Not the Same Thing

Time: 22:00

High Water level: M 1.40

Starting back in the year two thousand one when he had had begun his collection, early in the morning, at the withdrawal of each sea storm, Thomas walked the dock like a hungry falcon.

He walked and searched through orange peels, drowned mice, and supermarket bags. His back bent, his eye pointed like that of a predator, he walked the city methodically hitting a new area each time.

He walked and searched.

Even if he knew that silverware does not float.

“But water is strong and it shows it. It sweeps away automobiles, it cracks roads, flattens houses as if they were sand castles. It kills. Imagine if it can’t carry a simple fork.

Fallen on the ground from a restaurant table, which had changed the second hand silverware set, thrown away by mistake in the garbage, recovered from the bottom of the canal where the barge had turned over, sooner or later it would have ended up stuck somewhere, perhaps between the boards of the *vaporetti* stops. Hanging there rocking, back and forth. In the livid light of dawn, more than once seeing something on water’s surface Thomas had hoped; however, disappointment had always followed the enthusiasm: in his hands he had found the spoon of just any silverware set from just any home or ordinary restaurant.

In that unending and solitary evening, which preceded his days off, Thomas let his glance glide over the surface of the water: San Marco, San Giorgio, everything else.

“How nice. How nice” he thought. “I will never get tired of looking out of my window.”

“I know that sooner or later you will bring it back to me: he said to the sea.

The previous morning he went to the baker who wore high boots up to his groin.

The young sales assistant was putting bread in paper bags. This made him cheerful.

“It has been like this for three days! Have you seen what level the water has reached?”

The girl pointed at the back of her shop, a stock room one could reach with some kind of slide and which had been transformed into a tub. It reminded one of those old public washhouses where women went to do their laundry.

“I need to sit on the counter if I don’t want to spend all day with my feet soaking in the water! However I, Mr. California, do not wish to suffer from rheumatism at the age of twenty!”

Thomas peeked in between the girl’s legs while she leaned over to get bread from the shelves.

“There is no way out, here” she said, but she seemed to be speaking more out of something she had heard rather than from a real concern. Or perhaps, it was Thomas who could not believe that someone that young could really be concerned over anything.

“If no one does anything to stop the water, we will all end up like drowned mice” the sales woman insisted as she handed him a sweet treat with a cherry, which she knew was among his favorites.

“No way? What mice!” Thomas replied.

“Yes yes, drowned like mice! My grandfather says it as well: in the past one knew how to deal with the wind; it lasted as long as it needed to last. Now one no longer knows which way it turns! If I find a job elsewhere, Mr. California, I’m getting out of Venice!”

‘What are you saying? Think about finding yourself a boyfriend, think about dancing. You’re young, what are you worrying about? You’ll see that it will get resolved in the end.

Thomas was one of those types who trusted that there are other people placed there just to solve all problems, people who think about others and for others. He trusted that the those in charge were great fathers who watched quietly over the unsuspecting child, but that when the time comes they roll up their sleeves and do their job.

This thought gave him peace of mind, even now that the *high water* had reached exceptional levels. Even now that people around him were beginning to feel alarmed. Everyone hoped that the sirocco would change its course; that the sea would go back to its normal place; at each look, at each hello, without having to say anything Venetians hoped for this.

What he cared mostly about was that the *high water* did its job: pick up, carry, mix up, objects and then withdraw. And after having withdrawn, that it would finally leave behind the fork he needed to complete his collection.

It started to rain again. Thomas closed the window again.

He didn’t have time to reach his bed before the siren for the *high water* called him back.

He looked out the window to hear the nasal and intermittent sound: the first note was down, the second was up and higher up. All along, Thomas sang together with the siren, as if he wanted to make fun of it. He sang: “*La! La!* If the tide was so so. He sang: “*La! La! Laaa!*” if it was really high. This time a fourth: “*Laaa!*”, more acute and prolonged, it should have made him stop wanting to sing.

The water level which the siren was warning people of was, this time, exceptional. Beyond any measure.

And what if there had been a fifth sound? And then a sixth?

No, it was not foreseeable. The siren only had strength for four signals. But the papers were saying that this time the tide was exceeding the habitual level.

This time it was as high as the market stands.

No, it was even higher.

As high as the bar tables in Piazza San Marco.

No, even more.

As high as the trash bins.

No, no! It had exceeded the trash bins and it had spread its contents everywhere.

It was as high as a tall dog.

As high as a short man.

Much, much higher than the new child who had been living, for the past few days, under the same roof as Thomas and Felix. The same roof as Margherita as well, the woman whom Felix had married immediately after the death of his mother.

Margherita was just about the first one who showed up. At least this is what Thomas thought of his son's girlfriend.

But one needed to understand him, Felix: his mother was sick, she went in and out of hospitals before he hadn't even turned twenty. And he had set aside all his artistic aspirations in order to take over the *ricordini* shop.

"If it were for you" Ivonne said to Thomas once, without any reproach, "you would set the shop on fire, wouldn't you?"

“No, Ivonne. The shop would not be set on fire, since it’s always so full of water! Yet perhaps, one could spread gasoline ... “

Ivonne replied with a dull smile, a tired one. “You always had a passion for gasoline” she whispered, far away from the old jealousies for the fire-eater.

Ivonne had raised Felix while on the job.

“Your job is guaranteed with the shop. If you get a better offer, you’ll think about it, right?”

And she had led him step by step in the world of lace and bobbin of quality craftsmanship and of more commercial objects for those tourists who do not wish to go back home empty handed.

Together, mother and son went to visit the old women of Burano and Torcello. She knew everyone and introduced her boy to everyone, with pride.

She liked the amazement of people in seeing him so tall, so blond, so well mannered. So similar to her, in his features, and manners.

“Yet, He got the colors from my husband” she pointed out all the time.

Felix felt a subtle embarrassment in feeling so admired: he was just as everybody, his mother especially, had hoped he would be. But he guessed that one could also be different; that one could rebel to one’s parents and find his own way. That there were those who left home and never came back. After all his father had done it when he was younger.

But he couldn’t. At least, not now that his mother was sick.

She had been the first one to push him to follow his own vocation, but now she was trying to accompany him gently to the moment when she would not longer be there. And he could not disappoint her. He loved her too much. And this was the only aspect, besides the color of his eyes and hair, which he had in common with Thomas.

Felix had become a quiet man, one who had settled down: he had married a sensible woman, he had set up home in the family home and he lived with his father.

The shop was doing well. Of course, one could sense the competition with the Chinese, but Thomas was doing fine, and each year he brought home a good sales profit.

In short, he had passed all the tests a man who wished to adopt a child had to undergo.

You have nothing to do with it

“It’s not the same thing, Felix!”

“Why, dad?”

“Because an adopted son has someone else’s blood.”

“It’s not blood the that makes one a father or a son.”

“Also.”

“And in fact you and I have the same blood.”

“... and we are father and son, in fact!”

“Come on, let’s drop it, dad.”

“What?”

“Let’s drop it.”

“I don’t agree.”

“On what?”

“On adopting a child.”

“What bothers you about it?” The fact that the child is adopted, or simply that he’s a child?”

“It’s already a concern that he’s a child, the adoption then worsens it!”

“But Margherita and I want a child. What are we supposed to do according to you, considering that we’re having trouble conceiving?”

“I wouldn’t know ...”

“Exactly, dad, the decision is mine and Margherita’s. You have nothing to do with it.”

“Of course, I never have anything to do with anything.”

“Not with regards to this issue.”

“I’m always the last one to know, you never consider anyone else.”

“But the son is ours! **We** are the parents!”

“But I have to live in this house as well!”

“My wife and I need to consult you over the decision to have a child? It’s absurd!”

“And where would you get him?”

“We don’t ‘get’ him. It will be an international adoption. They will probably give us an African child.”

“African?”

“African”

“You had to get an African child?”

“If the child had been Brazilian, you would have said: ‘he has to be Brazilian?’ And if he had been Rumanian, you would have said: ‘he has to be Rumanian?’ Dad, there are not only Californians and Venetians in the world!”

“Is he little?”

“He’s not an infant, for sure.”

“Well. At least he will let us sleep at night.”

“If this is what worries you, yes.”

“It isn’t *this* that worries me.”

“What, then?”

“I’m worried that he will not look like us, that he will always be a stranger, that it will be obvious that he is not our child.”

“*Our* child?”

“Yours, OK!”

“Dad, you and I look exactly alike. And we have always been strangers.”

“This is a different issue, which I don’t wish to discuss now.”

“But we will need to discuss it sooner or later.”

“What’s important is blood, heritage, genetics!”

“Perhaps the color of the skin as well, right?”

“Of course. An African child will feel different in our family.”

“Yes, if someone will make him *feel* different.”

“I will not make him feel different, but he will be for everyone else.”

“There’s still too much racism around here.”

“However, you Americans have elected a black President.”

“What does that have to do with anything? A president does not live in your home!”

“You’re a racist!”

“I’m not a racist!”

“ ... ”

“And anyway, even the President is married with someone of his own race, and therefore their daughters are just like them. A blonde girl with blue eyes would feel different even in the family of the President of the United States of America!”

“And this is not a racist way of thinking?”

“No, it’s pure realism!”

“Dad, if you didn’t piss me off, you would make me laugh.”

“So laugh then!”

“Anyway, it’s a matter of weeks before the child will be assigned to us. An African child.”

Felix and Margherita, during the days when the *high water* was engulfing homes and drowning bridges, had returned from Africa just a while before with a child who barely spoke English, but who moreover, did not speak. A child whom Thomas saw as a stranger and to whom he would have to teach as soon as possible that the grandfather's box with the silverware was *off limits*.

Felix

Time: 22:05

High Water level: M 1.40

The newcomer will understand the ban? Will he abide by my rules? Or will he avoid the supervision of those who take care of him in order to steal the precious metal tools, in the form of silverware which he will later use to dig, hammer, or play like a drum?

Thomas was asking himself this while waiting for his fork and while singing *la la la* to the notes of the siren.

“Dad, could you be a bit quieter, please?” Felix asked.

“Abdul can’t sleep.”

“He’s not an infant, is he?”

Thomas recalled the argument with his son of a few months before. He felt uncomfortable for having said things, which now surprised him.

In fact he really had not said anything against blacks or Africans. He did not care too much for children, this was for sure.

The child could have been ... five years old? or perhaps seven? Skinny and tiny, his eyes maybe too big and a bit protuberant, which conferred to him an adult expression and, above all, a certain look in his eyes, one similar to indifference.

The fact is that Thomas felt judged by that look, and he didn’t like that at all. Felix had explained to him that the child had grown less than expected because of a chronic lack of protein. He had also mentioned his age but Thomas could not get it into his head.

“Do you know that when we got him he was dehydrated? There was a drought in his country. You should have seen ... a multitude of dead animals, dried out in the fields, the ground cracked ... “ Felix had told him with a concerned tone.

“But now you’re with us and very quickly you’ll become a handsome young man!”

Margherita said holding her son to her breast like a real mom.

No, a real mother would not have smothered that poor baby simply for the joy of feeling like the woman she wasn’t, Thomas thought. He was certain that if they couldn’t have children, the responsibility had to be Margherita’s.

The new child had been in the house only for a few days and already his parents seemed to love him very much.

How was that possible? When Felix was born, he didn’t feel any love for him. He was certain of this and had no difficulty in admitting it, at least to himself.

When Ivonne, at the store, had revealed that she was pregnant, after the first moment of disorientation Thomas said: “He is the child of great love and therefore he will be an exceptional person.”

Then, during the pregnancy, he did what every father who wants to participate in the birth of his child and be close to the woman he loves, does: he caressed her abdomen, he spoke to the child by gluing his mouth to Ivonne’s belly-button.

“Child, it’s your father!” he said with a big voice.

“Come on, you will scare him like that!” she laughed.

Thomas could not wait to see his son.

He wanted him to have some qualities of hers, above all the dark hair and the skin a bit amber.

But for the rest he wanted him to look exactly like him. His dream was that the child would have something of his family because after all, after years and years of distance, he was beginning to appreciate his father and his mother.

“And then I would like him to have something of Ernest’s. My brother is strong, you know? He never asks you anything, but when you speak, he always listens to you.”

Ivonne nodded in agreement in order to make him happy.

They agreed on the name: it had to be a name that was normal enough both for Italy and for America. That way, when he grew up, he could choose where to live.

After these conversations, they would hug, they would kiss, they would make love.

And they counted the days, which separated them from the birth.

When Felix was born, however, Thomas immediately saw him as an intruder.

In his mind he had thought of a child full of unique qualities and he found in front of him a small purple thing, which moved in jerks, with a shaking chin, and a powerful voice.

Felix screamed all night long.

If Ivonne had shown a bit of dismay towards the child as well, if perhaps she had said: “You know Thomas, I’m disappointed, I believed that our baby would come out differently ... Thomas, please help me love him”, then he would have consoled her and together they would have learned to love the little one.

Instead, his wife had immediately fallen madly in love with Felix, from the very first moment: the passion with which she held him tight: the enchanted look which only a few days before she had dedicated to Thomas and that now was lost only on the baby; the little hands, the little feet, the poop, the pee, his willy—how long was Felix’s willy!—day after day always more dedicated,

more excited.

Felix had even dared to steal the color of Thomas' eyes: yes, the same blue of his father's. That blue which, as he was getting older, was always softer and duller, while the little one had periwinkle blue iris, glistening ones and so bright!

When he looked at Ivonne, so calm, innocent, wise, those deep and empathetic eyes gave her back all the thoughts he had instilled in him during the nine months she held him inside of her.

They slept together, they ate together, they breathed together.

There was no more space for Thomas.

Thomas began to love his son later on.

However, at a certain point he asked himself: had he ever really begun to love Felix for real, or had jealousy always prevented him from loving that son who had, from one day to the other, taken away the woman he loved?

Abdul was a tiny alien. When he saw him the first time, he had no desire to either pick him up, or talk to him, other than to tell him that grandpa's silverware was not to be touched.

The little one stayed in his room all day, scared. Everything was too big for him, too complex and articulate. In his village every hut had only one room. A little at a time, he would have had to get used to a house with stairs, landings, and doors.

Better like that.

This way even the grandfather would have had time to get used to his grandson.

Thomas finally decided to stick his nose out of the room. The evening never ended, the time to go to sleep never came.

The first thing he saw, immersed in the dark, on the first floor landing, was the open door of the new child's bedroom, the dim glare of the small yellow light next to the bed.

Felix held him in his arms. He cuddled him so that he would fall asleep, but he ended up keeping him awake with his love.

Thomas was about to walk past but the scene stopped him in his tracks.

The eyes of each stared wide open into the eyes of the other.

The blue of one and the black iris of the other studied and admired each other. It was terribly clear: father and son were just born to something new, born to a world which excluded Thomas. Once again. For the umpteenth time.

Even Margherita had nothing to do with that quiet getting to know each other. Blood had nothing to do with it, and it wasn't about being father, mother, or grandfather.

It was a way. A way which Felix had learned from Ivonne, and he was keeping the strict exclusive right to it.

As Margherita was going up the stairs, Thomas slipped away from the landing. He went to greet his silverware. He straightened the case which he felt was not perfectly centered on the shelf.

He heard husband and wife muttering and ending their exchange of ideas with a disturbing: "let's ask him".

He couldn't avoid pricking up his ears.

Those days the *ricordini* shop had been entrusted to the sales assistant. The parents had taken a break from work in order to stay with the child.

After three days of rain, and the resulting flooding of the city, they realized that it was

necessary to check on the conditions of the shop. Over the phone, the sales assistant said:

“everything is OK”, but with the tone of someone who was literally up to his neck in water.

“Dad, can you stay with Abdul tomorrow?” Margherita asked Thomas while going down the stairs for the umpteenth time. “May I refuse?” was his response.

“No.”

“Well then yes, I will gladly stay with him!” he answered her with slight sarcasm.

She felt obligated to add: “He doesn’t speak much but he understands everything.

Perhaps you can help him as well, with his English.”

Who Will Console me

Time: 8:00 AM

High Water level: M. 1.35

One is obliged to love one's children, but not one's grandchildren.

He felt reassured knowing he had excellent reasons which would exonerate him from feeling love for the newcomer: after all, it wasn't his own blood. He hadn't chosen him, he hadn't wanted him. Therefore, he didn't need to acknowledge him. Ever.

Very soon, however, Abdul would wake up, and Thomas would have to be quick in finding ways to spend time with him.

Wandering around the house awaiting the child's awakening, Thomas' gaze fell upon the silverware collection. Aided by the light of the day, he realized that the silverware had gotten darker sooner than expected. Perhaps it depended on the excessively humid air of those days.

Rubbing on them a cleaning agent, letting them dry, applying a soft cloth to make them shine again was an operation, which took him a good hour.

In order to avoid the agony of waiting, he decided to wake up the child. He found him already up and fully dressed. Thomas hadn't noticed anything.

Tic tac, tic tac.

Abdul was turning on and off the lamp of his little bedroom.

That morning's sun, of a pale yellow, entered the room with a light similar to that of an electric light. This is why the child kept turning on the switch. Then he would move to the center of the room and look up high in order to check if the bulb was switched on. If it was switched off he repeated the operation, checked again, and squealed with joy if he found it lit. Then he would

go back to the switch, press on it a few times and start again convinced that it was he who was magically affecting the lamp.

“Stop it! You will burn it out!” Thomas yelled at him in Italian.

Abdul did not understand, but the tone was enough to scare him away. He looked at his grandfather while holding his breath and fluttering his eyelids.

Even this didn't help provoke any feeling of love in Thomas. “Good thing that he doesn't know how to speak: he will not be able to tell anyone that I scolded him.”

After this feeling, he felt uncomfortable.

“Are you hungry?” he asked him in English while forcing a smile.

The child shook his head.

“You say, no thank you.” His tone came out quite harsh.

The child ran to seek refuge in his bed.

Thomas went to the window and opened it.

“Come, I'll show you something” he said, as if he wanted to concede to him.

On the leaden gray of the canal water, flowed a multi-colored vortex of leaves: red, yellow, brown, green dancing swirls. A little farther away you could see the jail and just behind it you could get a glimpse of a park hidden by a wall, which ended up at the sea. You could catch sight of exotic plants, statues, a patio with several small white columns. That inaccessible place was called Eden. For a long time, Thomas had believed that the name was given to signify a mysterious and incredible place like heaven. He then discovered that Eden was simply the last name of the man—an Englishman—who one day had bought that land and had planted trees and the rarest type of grass.

The child got out of bed and approached the window. He moved slowly and cautiously, in

absolute silence, as if he were crossing a minefield.

When Thomas picked him up, he had the same feeling that you have when you pick up an object you expect to be heavy and find out it really isn't. Abdul was extremely light and the excessive force used to pick him up made him fly up in the air. The child laughed mistaking the awkward gesture for a game.

He then had him sit on the window sill, and while holding him tight, he looked outside at the park, choosing what to show the child.

Abdul pointed with his finger to a window with bars.

"That's the jail" Thomas said. "The place where you put bad people" he added in English.

The child seemed to understand.

On the window sill tiny red insects ran crazily. Absent-mindedly Abdul began to crush them, checking his fingertip once in a while to see if he could find any spots.

"My father" ... prison" he said, smelling his finger to find out if the little smear of insects had any smell.

Thomas remained speechless, but the child didn't seem shaken. He continued his slaughter of little red spiders.

"Let's close the window; it's cold" Thomas said embarrassed.

He did not wish to go into further depth with the conversation; he was afraid of getting involved with matters he then wouldn't know how to handle. What if the child had started to cry at the memory of his father? Of his real father, by the way, his own blood. He would have been forced to feel pity, and maybe to console him.

No, he had to find something else to do.

He remembered that when he had just arrived in Italy, he used to have fun planting small

flags on a map to point out all the places in the world where he had been: those days it was important for him to point out that those little flags were proof and not memories.

During the years following his marriage, the map had remained hanging on a wall for a long time. The tiny canvas pennants had slowly been covered with dust and the pins used as flagpoles had become rusty.

One day, when Felix was still a child, after having gone by the map without ever noticing it, he became struck by it. He looked at it for quite a while, sensing for the first time, what it represented. Something vast and different from the reality which his young mind knew, a sudden widening of his childhood world towards an unknown and fascinating dimension, made of explorations and long journeys by sea. He removed the little flags from the cities and countries where the father had pinned them and placed them all in the middle of the ocean.

When Thomas became aware of it, he was infuriated and violently ripped the map from the wall.

“You ruined everything!” He yelled at his son. “Why do you do these stupid things?”

“I was pretending that they were boats ...” Felix stammered mortified, on the verge of tears.

In that instant, Ivonne stepped-in. She took her son by the hand without saying a word, and took him to his room. Then she went back to her husband. She was furious.

“He didn’t do anything wrong!”

“What do you mean, nothing? My flags ...”

“But how old are you?? Your flags! You can put your flags back together.”

“No, certain things are done only once.”

“Why?”

“Because otherwise it becomes something nostalgic. No longer just a token but a memory. “

“Still this memory business?”

“A token is not a memory; anyway he should not be touching my stuff.”

“Do you know that I’m really sick and tired?”

“You’re sick and tired of me? You’re always and only tired of me? You’re never tired of him?”

“Why should I be tired of my son?”

“Because you should. Sometimes you should.”

“Go to hell. Thomas.”

“So then I’m never right and he always is?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“He’s always right. Felix is a good boy. You’re an aggressive and an absent father.”

“It’s not true.”

“It’s true.”

“If you didn’t protect him so much I would be nicer to him.”

“If I didn’t protect him so much, you would destroy him with your resentment.”

“You would destroy him ... who am I, a monster? Look at all my flags, they’re scattered all over the floor.”

“You have the brain of a child and the meanness of an adult!”

“It’s the other way around: children are mean, even if they look like angels.”

“You don’t love him.”

“I love him the way one loves a son.”

“And how does one love a son? Is there a rule?”

“Yes.”

“And what is it?”

“One loves one’s children, one does not venerate them. Children are children, they’re not husbands. Children are wrong, sometimes.”

“On the other hand fathers, especially fathers, are always right ...”

“Fathers yes. And also mothers, when they don’t lose their reason because of their children.”

“He only took away flags from a map.”

“The flags have nothing to do with it right now. Actually yes, they do have something to do with it. But he did worse!”

“You’re always ready to accuse him of everything.”

“You’re always ready to forgive him for everything.”

“It’s not true.”

“He always comes before me.”

“...”

“One time, one time only tell me that I’m right. Put me first. Do one thing, only one unfair thing to him. One time, only one time I would like to be able to console my son because his mother was unfair to him. But instead never! A perfect mother! But what about me, who consoles me in the end?”

Ivonne fixed the map with adhesive tape but didn’t hang it back up on the wall, she folded it and put it away in a drawer. She picked up the flags from the floor one by one and placed them in a box.

She then quietly hugged Thomas for a long time.

Where Do You Come From?

Time: 9:30 AM

High Water level: M 1.50

The flags were still there and so was the map.

They were in the living room, on the bookshelf, in the lower part.

Thomas thought that it might be interesting for both of them to retrieve them together.

When he took his hand, the new child followed him in a docile way.

Thomas observed with pleasure that Abdul, below the crystal shelf, was too small to reach the top and that it wasn't necessary to explain to him that he shouldn't touch the silverware box.

He took the map from the bookshelf and opened it up on the floor: it had a musty smell and had green and gray roses of mold, which turned to dust at one's touch. Quickly he wiped the handkerchief over the Unites States and showed the child California, San Francisco, Benicia.

"This is where I come from."

The act of pointing out something on the map, didn't seem to mean anything to Abdul.

The map itself seemed to mean nothing.

With his finger, Thomas traced all of America; he crossed the ocean; he stumbled over the patch of dried up scotch tape with which Ivonne had recomposed the Tropic of Cancer and had arrived at Venice.

"This is where we are right now."

Abdul hinted a kind of condescending yes and scratched his head.

"Where do you come from?"

"*Where do you come from?*" Where do you come from?"

Thomas spoke in English and then translated into Italian: teaching the language to the child could give a meaning to their being together.

“Uganda.”

“Ah, Uganda!”

Abdul looked around the room. His grandfather, totally absorbed in subtropical Africa, took a while to find him. “Here it is! Come take a look.”

Abdul obeyed. He directed an indifferent look at Thomas’ finger as he pointed at a particular spot on the map.

“It’s not the hand, but the map you need to look at!” Thomas said with a slight irritation in his voice.

“When the wise man points at the moon, the fool looks at the finger!” he thought.

“Do you know Chinese proverbs?”

The child smiled without understanding.

“Let’s drop it. Here, this is where your country is.”

Abdul didn’t know what to look at. It was obvious that he wasn’t acquainted with the map; he had never seen it. Perhaps he didn’t even have an idea of what the globe was, or of the world. He was little, he had never gone to school.

“Are there schools in Uganda?” Thomas felt disoriented in front of that being he knew nothing about.

What kind of life had he lived? What had he seen? What had he played with? Had he played? What story was locked in the awareness of his look? Was it only an optical illusion due to the contrast between the dark skin and the white of his eyes, or did the child look down at him from the height of his own natural wisdom?

He had lived in a world, which Thomas didn't know about and this caused a certain apprehension in his heart.

He had not mistaken, he was an alien.

He couldn't wait to get rid of him.

"Now, go to your room to play."

He signaled with his hand and the grandson, obediently, slipped away.

Revelation

Time: 10:30 AM

High Water level: M 1.55

The Chinese people of the pizzeria downstairs, looking out from the flood gate which should have contained the flooding, were expelling water with a pump. They were all quite young and they spoke among each other in an excited way. They were enjoying themselves. The owner, an older man, smiled as if though he had no intention to, but reflected on his lips the shadow of everyone else's laughter.

A tourist with her legs inside two black plastic garbage bags, held in her hands a wet bundle of clothes which she had taken off, and she moved forward shamelessly with her underwear blatantly showing and her rear end bouncing.

The phone rang. Thomas ran to pick it up shuffling with slow and quick steps.

It was Felix who wanted to know how things were going.

"Everything is OK" Thomas answered.

"Where is he now?"

"In his room."

"What is he doing?"

"I don't know."

Margherita, who was next to Felix said:

"Tell him to go check."

Before Felix could report, Thomas was already headed off towards the bedroom.

“He’s probably playing ...” he said with slight condescension.

“Can you get him on the phone please?”

But Abdul was not in his bedroom.

“What do I get him on the phone for, he doesn’t speak and he doesn’t understand when you speak to him in person, imagine over the phone!” Thomas lowered the volume of his voice as if it were a sort of accomplice pretending not to want to be heard from his grandson who was immersed in his play.

“There he is, yes, he’s playing with his stuffed animals” he lied with as much of a calm voice as he could have. Better not bother him. *Ciao ciao.*”

And he ended the call.

He went through the whole house in his mind.

Abdul was not on the first floor. He would have felt his presence.

He went down the stairs and ran to the living room to check the shelf with the beloved silverware. It was in its place.

On the lower floor, he noticed that a window was open. What if Abdul had looked out possibly intrigued by the *high water* and had fallen into the canal? He could have flown down like a little bird, not yet trained by his mother.

While watching the motionless water below him, his thought went back to a pain he kept inside like an incurable disease, a pain which does not kill but which one is forced to live with forever. A pain he did not wish to remember.

It was impossible that the child had fallen out.

He closed the window and went to the kitchen: the child was there.

Abdul seemed to be doing nothing.

He had taken a chair, had placed it in front of the sink and had climbed onto it.

Since he didn't notice Thomas' presence, the grandfather stayed there quietly to peek at him.

The child was looking at the sink.

After a few seconds, he moved.

He reached out towards the faucet and opened it. When he saw the sudden and powerful gush he began to laugh.

A fascinated and surprised laugh, that of all the children in the world when they're having a good time.

He then turned off the faucet. He turned it on again. He laughed again with a trilly laugh. He was content.

He brought his little hands to his cheeks, covered his mouth with his hand, almost with shyness. He touched the gush timidly, letting the water splash all around. He looked at his wet fingertip, then put it in his mouth for a long time, as if he had immersed it in honey.

This went on for a long time. A time, which to Thomas seemed suspended in the quietness of his house, of Giudecca, of Venice and of the sea, which threatened it, attacked it, permeated it.

A child looking at the water and a man looking at a child.

Thomas felt something growing inside of him, something which had to be indulged. His own silence was not only respectful, it was also cherished.

He realized that Abdul was playing the same game that he had played in the morning with the

switch: he switched on and switched off, he turned the faucet on and he turned it off to make sure that both water and light, which he had never had, were there each time.

And to have the confirmation each time for him was a joy, extremely pure amusement. A revelation. It was like opening the magic box and watching the puppet pop up.

That scene reminded him of a documentary he had seen on TV while awaiting the beginning of the *David Letterman Show*.

A few missionaries had brought a generator to an African village. At night, the generator was supposed to keep a light bulb turned on, in front of a hut used as an emergency room for the villages of the area.

At night, the children's entertainment was to sit below the light bulb and to stare at it. They would chat among each other, they would laugh, but they remained seated without moving.

At that time, Thomas had not given importance to the scene, but now while watching Abdul, he felt ashamed.

He felt ashamed for himself. For his family.

For the showers, the fountains, the rain which had been pouring for the past three days. Even for the *high water*, though salty and filled with debris. He felt ashamed for Venice, for Italy, for Europe, for America.

He felt ashamed to live in a world where one could afford the luxury of filling up swimming pools and of splashing around in them. Of decorating monuments with angelic penises spurting night and day. Of going to the bathroom and flushing it away with a quantity of water which would have been enough to quench the thirst of ten Abduls. Of washing slightly dirty dishes, or clothes worn for only one hour. Of washing cars when they're not shiny enough. Rinsing one's

teeth while leaving the faucet turned on.

He felt ashamed of having before him a child who switched on and off the light in order to make sure that it was still there, and who thoroughly enjoyed seeing it come back again.

Something wasn't right, it didn't add up.

Thomas felt the desire to get to know that child who came from a place where there was no sea, and who had been led by chance to Venice, where there was way too much sea and where the sea was frightening.

When he would begin to leave the house in the Giudecca, Abdul would believe that the world, outside his village, was all like this: built on water.

The siren began its chant again.

The child looked around scared and found his grandfather's eyes staring at him. He quickly ran to snuggle up next to him on the couch.

Thomas thought that he should have said something to him.

He remembered that in the movies when the hero is dealing with a scared puppy, even if it's not true that everything is OK and a building is about to collapse, and there are hundreds of dead bodies around, and a huge wave is about to turn the world into an aquarium, he says:

"Everything's OK!"

"Everything is OK" he said to Abdul. The child snuggled up even more next to Thomas.

"Everything is OK" the hero says in the movies. Afterwards however, he takes the child in his arms and keeps him with him forever. Thomas reached out with his hand in a smothering embrace. The child confused it with a real hug and took advantage of the moment to insert his

hand inside the cuff of his grandfather's sweater: it was still cold and humid. Abdul moved his fingers around and gently pulled the hair on Thomas' arm.

When the siren ceased, Thomas felt his own heavy breathing overlapping the soft panting of Abdul's.

"What were you doing before, next to the sink?" he asked him.

"Game."

"And what is the name of this game?"

He didn't get an answer.

You can't anymore

Time: 20:00

High Water level: M 1.60

Felix and Margherita returned home exasperated. Just like the Chinese below, they too had spent the whole day pumping out water from their shop.

“The water gates in front of the door can't hold anymore. The pressure is so strong that water seeps in everywhere. Even the window is flooded” Margherita said.

Thomas thought with joy of the miniature gondoliers who could finally row; of the Murano fish which could be free from their glass coffins and swim in a real sea; of the carnival masks which would float with their long noses pointing upwards, just like shark fins on the prow.

“Light came and went all day long”: “and it was terribly cold!”; “We can no longer go on like this!”

Thomas listened patiently to their complaints.

“You could have told me that his father was in jail.”

He whispered it to Felix and Margherita while Abdul was distracted. “Who told you?” she asked alarmed.

“Abdul.”

“So that means that he speaks English?”

“Just a little. But he made himself understood.”

“Dad, you shouldn't have asked him things about his past.”

The tone was one of cautious reprimand.

“I didn’t ask anything” Thomas replied categorically.

“First of all it is necessary to help him forget.”

Years before, Thomas would have agreed with Margherita. Not anymore.

“In order to remember, you first need to forget” he declared, proud of his own awareness.

“Father in jail, mother unknown. His brothers walking around with a rifle. Do you believe that there is anything that is worth remembering?”

Thomas didn’t dare reply to Felix’s words. Abdul had come too close.

“And how is my child doing?”

The mother spoke with a sharp voice while holding the little one close to herself. He quietly let himself go to the embrace.

“Your child is doing OK. I taught him a few words in English and in Italian.”

“I wonder how many times that bad grandpa of yours has scolded you” stepped-in Felix while he was warming up the minestrone.

The tone sounded playful, but Thomas wasn’t too sure about it.

You stay with your son if the grandfather is bad!” he reacted.

“Come on, dad” Margherita said. “It’s a joke, right? Where did you leave your sense of humor?”

“I’m not your dad” hissed Thomas.

At the dinner table, it was immediately clear that a new chapter was about to begin. Something unsaid permeated the spiraling column of steam coming from the dishes: a bubble of unexpressed words bounced from the son to the daughter-in-law and vice versa.

Finally Felix burst out:

“That’s it, dad! We’ll sell everything, the house, and the store, and we’ll move to a normal city.”

“In what sense *normal*?” Thomas, who preferred not to have heard, asked.

“Just what I said. We’ll sell here and we can go live who knows where ... in Milan ... in Turin ... in Padua!”

“It’s a joke, right? Just like that of the evil grandfather?”

Husband and wife remained quiet.

Who knows how long they had been thinking about it; they had certainly agreed on how to tell the ‘old man’.” Thomas thought he could hear them whisper, at night in bed or in the shop when there were no clients: “We’ll tell him at dinner, when we’re all together.”

They must have made their final decision during the day, when they were exasperated after the flooding.

“It’s not a joke” Thomas replied on his own. “And what do we do with the shop?” he asked.

“We’ll sell it and we’ll open one in another place.”

“*Ricordini*” in the shape of Sant’ Antonio instead of gondolas?”

No one said anything.

“Or do you prefer the Mole Antonelliana covered in snow?”

“In Vicenza, for example, you can buy a palace with the money you get from selling this house to an Englishman or to an American relative of yours” Felix added.

“A relative of mine? But none of my relatives has any intention of moving to Italy!”

“I was just saying, dad. A relative of yours in the sense of an American like you! In the sense that foreigners are buying Venice if you haven’t noticed it! Because Venice has become nothing but a holiday city, a week and goodbye! Have I been clear?”

Thomas did not want to give Felix the satisfaction of a consent and he replied, pig-headedly:

“No, you know because a relative of mine is also a relative of yours.”

“Alright, alright. I got the example wrong but the concept doesn’t change.”

Everyone was silent, now.

Abdul drank bubbly water, one glass after another. He drank and then, with his mouth wide open, scratched his palate because the gas made it itch.

“I know everyone here” Thomas began to say.

“You have never been a social guy, you don’t associate with anyone ... who is this ‘everyone’?”

Thomas changed the subject.

“Don’t you hear what’s happening around you? Flooding everywhere else, not just here!”

“Sure, it’s true. But in other places it’s a coincidence, a natural disaster! Here, being with one’s rear end soaked is normality!”

“This is exactly the beauty of Venice” Thomas said. Then, when he saw skeptical looks around him, he quickly concluded: “anyway, this house will never be sold!”

The leftovers from the minestrone soup at the bottom of the tureen, didn’t emit steam anymore.

In the sudden silence at the dining table, Abdul burped and then burst out laughing. No one thought of saying to him: “ you don’t do that.”

“After all these days of *high water*, we will smell mold for at least three months in here ...” started Margherita again in a dull tone.

“Felix found a wife like his mother. But with him, Ivonne, was the personification of sweetness; Margherita is only a corner cushion, a shock absorber of low blows”. This is what

Thomas thought.

“Please consider the advantages of moving” she added affectionately placing her hand on Thomas’ hand. Little by little, he retracted his hand. Margherita noticed only when she felt the texture of the tablecloth under her fingers.

“Even in anticipation of old age: a nice dry house ...”

“No way” Thomas said abruptly, obviously addressing only his son. “This house was your mother’s house and it’s not for sale” he added.

Felix didn’t want to go there, but his father left him no alternative.

“Dad, I need to remind you that this was *my* mother’s house and that it is now *my* house!” he said raising his voice due to the tension.

Thomas could not reply and the son felt uncomfortable. He wasn’t used to winning, with his father. In a calm voice he said:

“You know, it’s also for Abdul’s future. Venice offers fewer and fewer prospects.”

“Did you grow up without any prospects? It’s you who did not take advantage of them and closed yourself in the *ricordini* shop.”

Thomas was a wizard in diverting conversations, but Felix had learned not to be fooled by him.

“Dad, let’s not touch upon this subject” he said becoming irritated. “You know very well why I ‘closed myself in the shop’, although now I am glad to have made this choice.”

He paused.

“If I hadn’t taken it, the shop would now be in the hands of a Chinese! In your opinion, would mom have been happy?”

Thomas could not answer-back.

“Anyway, we were not talking about me” Felix continued, “but about my son’s future.”

“Your son doesn’t even leave the house, he doesn’t speak, he doesn’t go to school! This poor thing doesn’t even have a present and you’re already concerned about his future?”

Meanwhile, Abdul stared fascinated at the chandelier. The facets of the crystal were radiating red, blue, and green rays. He was playing with light, and Thomas knew it by now.

It was just as Felix said: the house was his.

After Ivonne’s death, the ownership of the house had gone in equal parts to Thomas and to her son. But soon after, in order to obtain a quicker credit for the shop from the bank, Thomas had given his half to Felix.

“This is still my house” he thought, glancing all around him to mark every corner, every object, like an animal who defines his own territory.

However, he could not help imagine himself a wanderer, with his only luggage consisting of his white satin wooden box and the silverware inside.

And without the fork.

While his wife was giving the child a bath, Felix smoked in front of the TV. Sitting next to him and after a time of silence, Thomas said:

“All this phenomenon of always more high water is because of an issue called general warming.”

Felix looked at him with a thread of amused commiseration: “*Global*. You say global warming, not *general*.”

“Central ... global ... it’s the same. I’m American, I can get a word wrong, can’t I?” Thomas protested.

“Dad, you are American only when it suits you!” Felix answered back.

Thomas pretended not to hear him and continued.

“Nowadays, we have conventions people make deals to get things back together!” And he began to rattle off information he had heard on TV: “As long as we work at it everything will go back to normal ... in the sense that ... how can I say?”

He stuttered, he couldn't recall, he was unable to explain himself.

In reality, he had never cared about any issues of the world. Except when he fell in love with Marina. However now, Marina and the demonstrations in Porto Marghera seemed so far away to him. Events lived by someone else.

“Do you realize, Felix? High water is an issue, which will certainly be resolved in the next few years.”

“Are you sure? Where have you been? What are we really doing for the world, dad?”

“Well, the governments are preparing for ... in other words, something can be done for this climate anomaly ...”

Thomas struggled. Felix listened to him tapping nervously on the chair arm.

“Dad, there is no anomaly! The climate changes because it has to change, and what we doesn't help anything!” Afterwards, seeing that his dad had nothing more to say, he took heart and attacked: “what should I do to save myself from the flooding? Extinguish the cigarette so that it doesn't cause smoke? Here, look I'm putting it out.” And he stubbed out his cigarette butt in the ashtray. “Or should I turn off the radiator even if I'm cold? Or give up wearing deodorant and then smell like a sweat hog because of a hypothetic hole in the ozone up there?” He pointed to the ceiling, but he meant the sky. Then he got up, he turned off the TV and started walking back and forth in the room. “It's this city which is an anomaly! I say, how could anyone think of building houses on water with all the land available?”

Thomas was silent.

“And what if there were beautiful roads, instead of canals? Imagine a beautiful field, here below! And then of course, the monuments, the churches, everything could stay where they are now. Why can't Venice be like Florence or like Rome? Are you disgusted with Florence or Rome?”

Thomas reacted with one of his most annoying faces.

It's useless for you to act superior, dad, I'm right! Venice is sinking. Fifty years from now the sea will completely flood it! Fine! Every man for himself!”

Next to the table in the living room was an old rocking horse. An old family toy. The muzzle crushed and the mane askew, it belonged to some grandparent, and then went to Ivonne, and finally to Felix. It had by now become an antique, which had survived the incursions of the children of the house—it had been ridden by many, among the children, cousins, and grandchildren—and the humidity of the space under the stairs. It couldn't rock because it had a broken base. Felix was trying to fix it for Abdul. It had been there for some time, one of those jobs one begins and never finds the time to finish.

“We'd better hurry up and fix it or else the child will be too old to ride on it.”

Felix said while getting the tools and passing his finger through the coarseness of the wood.

“You broke it when you were little, do you remember?” whispered Thomas.

“No.”

“You always broke everything!”

Thomas began to work with the file.

“Hold it still” he said to his son, while placing the broken wooden base

in his hand.

“I used to hear you argue with mom.”

The file flipped up on the table cover.

“Your mother and I always argued because of you.”

“She wasn’t the one to start fights, she simply defended me when you got mad at me.”

The two bases of the rocking horse, well polished, now fit in perfectly.

“Oh, I get it: now you’re seeking revenge by selling the house and by taking me to Padua?”

“No, dad. As a child, I used to suffer in this house, but now I don’t care anymore, I don’t need revenge. I want to go away for my own sake and for my family, not for you.”

“Anyway, when it comes to the house, I’d say that it would be best if we took some more time, no?”

“Dad, I have already asked a real estate agency to sell it.

I’m certain that later on you will thank me.”

The Sea One Day or Another

Time: 24:00

High Water level: M 1.50

The sirocco wind continued with the heavy breath of a drunken man filtering from the drafts and carrying with it stale odors.

The sky and the sea were a vague black womb tormented by distant lightning and thunder.

Looking out the window of his room, Thomas noticed that the level of the water had gone down a little; this however, could have been an impression due to his eyes being used to flooded Fondamenta and boardwalks. He had perhaps lost his reference point.

At the same time, his mind had lost every certainty about what had happened that evening: would they really have to leave Giudecca, or had it all been just a bad dream?

His sight ran in the dark till he couldn't see any longer, he spun around following the Earth's profile and traveled around half a globe. In Benicia, California, it was afternoon and the boats moored in the dock, reflected the beautiful but already warming winter sun with their brass.

He felt the need to call Ernest.

Had it been for him, he would have gotten the phone and dialed the brother's number, but Felix had taught him to call abroad with the computer. It was cheaper and you could also see each another.

Ernest answered almost right away, but the image on the screen appeared unclear and unstable.

The dialogue was clear, however.

“I’m here!” Thomas said a moment before Ernest’s image appeared. They seemed to be just a meter away from each other; so close that they could actually hug.

In the darkness of the room, the brother appeared radiant, optimistic, still young. Only a bit heavier.

Ernest greeted him with that typically American enthusiasm, which Thomas by now had lost a long time ago. A joy at all costs, which was not apparent, but also not substantial. It expressed the desire to be positive and happy, to see the glass always half full. In the end, there is not that much difference between a glass half full and a glass half empty: half the glass is a part of the whole thing anyway. This Thomas had learned in Venice.

They hadn’t exchanged even a phone call since the summer before, when Ernest had visited for a few days with his wife and two kids.

They were happy together, and as usual, spoke as little as possible. However, since the night when his brother, before leaving, had refused to take with him the photograph of when they were little, Ernest felt a certain discomfort in dealing with any issue tied to the past.

They spoke about politics, about Italy, and about America. They reminisced about the time when they had spoken on the phone after the Twin Tower attack: it’s when Ernest felt that the brother was really far away. It was easy to say for Thomas, that it wasn’t true, that he had felt a part of it, that he was close. Ernest insisted that if one was not there, he could not understand what people felt during those days. Therefore, reassured that they loved each other, but that they had far away and completely different lives, there had been no other reason to call each other.

After the first greetings, the hellos, the how’s your family, and how are things at work, Thomas couldn’t find the words to describe the imminent tragedy which was about to hit him.

He was almost sorry that he had called.

He felt it in his heart to say that leaving Venice, his house, his memories, and everything he owned, would have been his personal September Eleventh. But he thought that to Ernest it would have sounded like a heresy.

The brother announced: I need to show you something.” Immediately he grabbed his cell phone and crossed the living room.

On Thomas’ screen he saw the crooked profiles of the couch, of the dog sleeping on the floor, of the stairs going up to the first floor.

Then, a door.

On the screen he saw the brother’s pudgy hand reaching for the door knob: a shaky panoramic of bathroom majolica, a towel hanging on a hanger, a blurry faucet.

And then the images stopped on the close-up of a bidet. Shiny, perfect in the order of the shelves with the towels a lilac color, matching the soap in the form of a corolla.

“Look” Ernest said to him triumphantly. “We’ve got it!”

His joy lacked any kind of irony.

“After visiting you we can’t do without it!”

Thomas smiled.

In Italy, Thomas, had not only learned that everything is relative; he had also learned to take for granted that every home had that kind of faucet for personal hygiene. However, a wealthy Californian, cultivated and Internet savvy like his brother could still feel pride in being one of the few people, in his country, to own a bathroom with a bidet.

He forced himself to congratulate him, but immediately began to talk about the wind and the rain. Never as in that moment did the weather conditions, the subject one usually chooses when

talking without saying anything, become something authentic and profoundly moving.

“Here, things are not going well, it rains all the time” he said. “My son wants us to move to another place.”

“Where?”

“Vicenza, Padua, Turin. I don’t know.”

“And the house in Venice? Will you sell it?”

“Yes.”

“What a pity!”

“Felix doesn’t want to stay here anymore, he wants us to leave. The child arrived, do you know?”

“Really? How is he?”

“Skinny. In the beginning, he was afraid of me. But I didn’t like him either. You know, children touch everything, they break everything, they never stand still. But he’s different. He’s OK. Felix says that we need to leave for the child’s future. That this, is a city without hope.

Ernest’s image got blurry and then clear in the fraction of a second, as if it were percolating in a waterfall of small, colorful rectangles to then reform a little later in a slightly different position.

“But, is it your son who decides or is it you?” he asked him.

“No, it’s he. Then, if this is my fate, and it really ends up that the sea will engulf the houses, before that happens, I’ll return to Benicia!”

Ernest’s kids, who had just returned from school, came out from the corner of the screen laughing and in a festive mood.

“That’s great, uncle, you’re coming back to Benicia! Do you know that we too have a bidet?”

The youngest placed a hand on the eye of the video camera. Ernest pushed them aside.

“Thomas, I’d be happy if you came back. You can come and stay with us. However, if this may console you, I don’t believe that you have a way out!”

With a quick movement, Ernest pointed the computer towards the glass wall of the house. Thomas saw the sea of the bay and the sun setting on California. He glanced at his own window, almost incredulous that it was pitch dark in Venice.

“Do you see the sea? It all seems beautiful, peaceful, doesn’t it? But do you realize that someday it will swallow us all here too? The scientists said it: California is certainly not the right place to save one’s ass.”

The close-up of Ernest’s big red-cheeked face came back. He was saying serious things with cheerfulness. And Thomas felt that his brother’s words evaporated as soon as they were pronounced.

Ernest put his computer on his knees and hugged the screen. “Come on, don’t worry” he said.

“Do you remember, Ernest, the time when you cried and said that you felt hurt and I didn’t get it?”

“Indeed, the world was collapsing and you didn’t get it.”

“Even you now, don’t understand. Because you’re far away. Because the water has not flooded your home yet.”

“Well, Thomas, if you decide to come and drown in California, please know that your big brother is waiting for you with open arms.” And he laughed as if to end the conversation.

Thomas closed the connection and meditated in silence. He observed the uncertain contours of his own image reflected on the screen.

Forgotten Things

Time: 0:30

High Water level: M 1.60

He didn't feel sleepy, but he went to bed anyway. He slept in a fitful state, dreaming catastrophes and collapses.

And the sirens. The real ones, the fish-women. They came out of the water and crawled gracelessly on the *fondamenta* below his house: walruses, more than beautiful enchantresses. Suddenly, with powerful leaps, they clambered up to the top of the bell tower. And from up there, tied with iron chains, they emitted piercing shrieks.

Thomas was agitated: "We need to pull them down! Out of water they will die!" But nobody was listening to him. The feeling of not being listened to, surrounded by indifference, sent him into despair. He wanted to scream, but his mouth was clamped shut.

A deaf whimpering inside of him woke him up. His cheeks were wet with sweat and tears. He got up and entered the staircase, which led down to the old kitchen.

Originally, the house in the Giudecca, was on three levels. Upstairs, were the bedrooms; on the first floor, the living room and the dining hall. There, you could also find the main entrance door. You could access it from the *calle* by climbing up a steep stair, whose ramp rested on the façade of the residence. On the inside, from the living room, you could descend into the large kitchen whose window looked out directly onto the canal. At the end of the 90s an exceptional flood, in the middle of the night, had inundated it. Furniture, chairs, flatware, were floating in a slimy liquid. Only the table had remained where it used to be thanks to the marble countertop, a

stone with pink veins, which shined like coral. Everything else was floating around the room.

When in the morning, still sleepy, Ivonne opened the door to the kitchen, she contemplated in dismay the sea which had entered her home. She blamed herself for not having cleared the table. For a while now in the evening, she had been hit by a deep fatigue, which left her enough energy only to drag herself to bed. She saw that yellowish and round drops, which little by little formed smaller and smaller drops, poured out of the bottle of oil.

If the oil in the water disappears, it means that the evil eye doesn't exist. But if it floats, some malevolent person has cursed you.

"In what way would they have hurt you, with their thoughts?"

"Yes!"

"You can't do anything with your thoughts!"

Ivonne remained convinced of the opposite, and Thomas really tried to tell her that it was all nonsense: "In America even the Indians in reservations no longer believe in certain superstitions. He often made that connection: he didn't know exactly what the Indians in reservations believed or didn't believe in. He didn't know their culture, except for what he had learned from old Westerns. But he was convinced that the comparison worked: if even the Indians, who had defended their rituals so much, their spirits, and their shaman, had been able to detach themselves from that magic thought, no one else in the world should have relapsed into certain superstitions.

"I'm not an Indian from the reservations and I believe in what I want" Ivonne had replied.

The oil had not dissolved therefore the misfortune would have happened: the lower floor of the building had to be abandoned.

They chose the least expensive solution: the door which gave access to the upper floors was

bricked up.

With time, an intrusive sea established itself permanently in the old kitchen. The walls and the floor became slimy with moldy algae, the tides came and went as they wished. The staircase remained a blind alley, the last steps in the lower part and the landing across the kitchen became a sort of storage for objects no one had the guts to renounce, but which in that place, would have been so damaged as not to leave space for any regret of getting rid of them, in the future.

Thomas went down the stairs, which led to the lowest floor of the house. One could clearly distinguish the outline of the bricked-up door. The bricks, which kept it shut, had been daubed and painted the same color as the wall, but the door re-surfaced like a ghost dripping with humidity, always covered by a veil of tiny drops, a sort of constant cold sweat.

Among a pile of magazines with undulated covers, a discarded TV, the old megaphone of the Porto Marghera demonstrations, Thomas sat listening to the lapping of the water coming from the other side of the wall.

He often did that: he would sit there and think.

On the other side of the wall, a life which was no longer there. That evening, it seemed to him that it would take very little to find himself on the other side, twenty years ago, or thirty.

He even liked the smell of that place.

Now he liked it.

When he was a child, that same smell scared him. When he played in the garden with his brother and they played pretending to be at war, shooting at each other, he who got shot had to fall face first on the ground and remain still. While he lay down waiting for Ernest to come and turn him over with a kick, announcing to an imaginary superior: "Captain, the enemy is defeated!"

Thomas breathed that odor from the earth, a smell he thought was the same one that the dead sense in their graves. In that case, he would feel a shiver, get up and interrupt the game. His brother would get mad, begin to yell, expect to kill him again, and Thomas would have to lie down again and pretend to be dead. It was then that he began to harbor that annoyance with little kids, which not even paternity had been able to chase away.

He moved the scraped and lopsided stool, and pulled it close to the wall. With his head leaning against the bricks like a pilgrim at the Wailing Wall, he tried to put order in the events of the day.

It seemed impossible that it was really happening: they wanted to take him away from Venice.

“I know everyone here”, he had said to Felix, and his son had asked him: “Who is this everyone?”

He couldn't respond.

They didn't exist.

“Everyone” was the childhood joy of looking out the window and feeling that he was the master of what he saw.

The walks in the wet, in the early morning, searching for his fork.

It was the baker's salesgirl who threw her youth at his face; the newsvendor, who handed him the daily newspaper which he had ready for him; the bartender who served him a taste of white wine before dinner.

They didn't talk to each other, what brought them together, was habit.

They had participated, reciprocally, in the course of life; one would get engaged, the other become a widower, babies were born, old people died, and they were still there, the same actions

repeated for years.

That “everyone” which surrounded him were roots.

Frail and erratic like those of a water plant, and when you try to plant them in the ground, the plant dies.

He heard a rustling at the top of the staircase. Then a very soft breathing. He distinguished two wide-open eyes, which were trying to catch the little light.

Abdul.

Thomas hinted for him to come closer. The child began to walk down the stairs cautiously, as if he were about to cross a forbidden border.

“You can’t sleep?”

He shook his head.

“Neither can I.”

Abdul went downstairs and stood in front of him.

“Do you know what I’m doing?”

The child did not reply. He continued to stare at him with his deep eyes.

“I’m looking at a wall. You can understand me. You look at faucets, light bulbs. I look at a wall, because I see beyond the wall.”

Perhaps the child did not understand, but continued to listen in a serious manner.

“One time we could walk into the kitchen from here. We could eat, we could also do nothing, but we were OK. Your father was little and he played.”

It had been a while since Thomas could tell someone his story from the beginning. Someone, who didn’t know anything.

He told him about how he had arrived in Italy, his first encounter with Ivonne, his job at Harry's, the story of the American customer who had been the cause for his being fired.

“He wanted to steal a teaspoon. Not because he needed it: he wanted to keep it as a souvenir! It was a silver teaspoon with a winged lion on top.”

“Does he fly?” the child asked.

Thomas realized, almost incredulous, that this child, despite his poor knowledge of the language, was able to listen to him and to understand him, a lot more than anyone else.

“No, the lion doesn't fly. He's still, but his wings are straight.”

He also told him about a woman who was not grandma Ivonne, the woman they had shown him in a photograph. A woman who had loved him and whom he had loved as well, but who had left one day. And he was still thinking about her, because he knew that he had thrown away a chance for happiness.

And he also added that life really goes that way: it makes you throw away things, and only when it's too late do you realize that they were really important.

“After she left, I even tried to call her.

I don't know, maybe I had the wrong number, but I didn't reach her. And then, one time, I even met her again ... “

Thomas went on talking, because he knew that the child would not understand just about everything. Otherwise, he would have had the discretion to talk about happiness to a person who perhaps had never felt it.

With gestures Abdul asked permission to touch the old things he saw around him.

Thomas nodded.

The child moved a box, then a newspaper. When he discovered the megaphone, he placed it on his head as if it were a hat.

He had a way of moving which Thomas liked. His actions were marked by an instinctive wisdom, which came from far away: gestures precise and delicate at the same time.

Abdul, what are you doing? There's another way of using that. Tomorrow, I'll show you. He spoke gently, without reprimanding him.

The child gently put down the megaphone.

“Look at your hands, they're all dirty!”

Abdul opened his hands widely, then cleaned them on his pajamas soiling them with dust and mold.

“If your mother saw you!”

They both laughed.

The little one started rummaging among the forgotten stuff of the storage room. The grandfather, leaning against the wall, was lost in his thoughts.

He thought of everything and nothing. Of how to convince his son not to sell the house. Of the new child and of that new feeling which he was developing for him.

Happy This Way

Time: 2:00

High Water level: M 1.60

Ivonne had fainted for the first time right there, in the old kitchen, the evening of the dinner at Harry's on the occasion of their anniversary.

When they had returned home, they went downstairs, they made another toast, then they got up from the table to go to sleep. While getting up, she stumbled.

"We drank too much, huh?" Thomas said to her laughing.

Ivonne frowned, as if to keep her gaze focused.

"I have a weird feeling. I feel my brain going here and there as if I had water inside my head" and she attempted to laugh trying not to give importance to the fact.

Then she fell. She didn't hint at getting better and Thomas decided to take her to the hospital. Felix and he went on the water ambulance, his down jacket over the pajamas and sneakers, with no socks.

The son was a scared young man, who for the first time was experiencing the fear of losing someone he loved. Felix fought his way through nurses while instinctively climbing over even his father, as if he took for granted that the place next to his mother was reserved for him. He held her hand and caressed her head being careful not to touch the oxygen mask.

On the way, Ivonne opened her eyes but couldn't say anything.

The son caught her look without giving her a chance to see anything else around and looked at his sick mother the way she had looked at him when he was little: eyes staring into eyes, pupils joined by an invisible thread coming from the soul. A look, which made of the two of

them an exclusive unity.

Ivonne whispered something and Felix immediately replied: “Yes”, with a smile and with a gesture of approval.

When Thomas later on, asked Felix what he and his mother had said to each another, the son said that he didn’t even remember that they had spoken.

During the whole trip the father remained aside, ignored.

In his mind, was the thought of the false statement he had made that same night at Harry’s.

“Swear on my head” she had said.

Thomas had sworn and the remorse weighed on his conscience causing him an unbearable anguish. But his memory had continued to wander on its own anyway.

He and Marina.

The frenzy, awaiting a demonstration where they would be close. The desire to smell her armpits every time she waved her fist and yelled out to shout slogans of protest. Her tense profile, the eyes which emanated rage for the unfairness of the death of that man she perhaps no longer loved anymore; whom she had perhaps never loved; but who remained her partner, as she stayed by his side until his death, with his liver destroyed by something as trivial as plastic.

And then the hotel. That one and only time.

If Ivonne had known of the thought, which had gushed from his heart: “ I have never been this happy.”

Perhaps it wasn’t even true; perhaps it was only the rapture of a moment. Along with happiness, he had felt the strength to take on the world. Too bad that there no longer was a world to take on, it had gone to pieces the day she decided to leave forever.

Better Not to Know

The water ambulance was going towards the hospital, Thomas continued to think about Marina. "My life will be hell without you" he had said to her at the train station.

"Hell is forever. Love sooner or later passes on, even though it makes you suffer."

And she gave him a kiss. The last one.

"Don't look for me in Bassano, we will feel even worse, both of us."

The energy, which Thomas felt and which he would have wanted to dedicate to happiness, from that day was transformed into sorrow.

If Ivonne had known, if she had understood Thomas' suffering after that one and only time in the hotel with Marina, she would have been desperately jealous.

And if truth had seeped through anyway? If it had gone from thought to thought, from head to head, from soul to soul, and had transformed that unknown sorrow into illness?

The water ambulance ploughed the waters of the canal, it slammed against the waves as if they were asphalt. Thomas repeated to himself that not even the Indians on reservations believed that false oaths could hurt someone.

Ivonne remained in the hospital for a long time.

Thomas explained that the last thing she had said before blacking out was that she felt water in her head.

She didn't remember anything; she woke up in the ambulance without knowing why she was there.

When the doctors asked her: "Be clearer ma'am. What do you mean 'water in the head?'" she

replied with a lost look, and Thomas became annoyed with them: “what is there to explain? She said it before she fainted: ‘I feel as if I had water in my head’!”

They didn’t pay any attention to him, but rather, they thought that he was the delusional one. Even more: they implied that he had pushed her during an argument. But she denied it with conviction.

The tests revealed nothing particular. They asked her if she drank alcoholic beverages. If there had been other similar cases in her family. And if she had recently gone to England or Ireland, because there seemed to be a new disease, discovered a few years before, which one got from eating meat.

The responses were all negative. They sent her back home.

She didn’t laugh much, she didn’t sleep well. Her doctor said that it could have been menopause. Ivonne didn’t take it well: “Oh, go to hell, doctor! I’m not coming to see you anymore! When a woman is more than forty years old, everything is explained as menopause. A callus hurts! It’s probably menopause! I feel like shit? It’s probably menopause! I want to kill myself every morning when I open my eyes! It’s probably menopause!”

The doctor was left with his mouth open, and so was Thomas: he had never seen her so aggressive. But despite it all, this made him smile.

After taking him aside, the doctor said to him: “look, there is nothing to laugh about. Rather, have her seen by a neurologist or a psychiatrist.”

The post office was the determining moment.

Ivonne had to make a shipment for the store. That day Thomas was free and accompanied her.

Instead of taking the Vaporetto, they took a long walk: it was a beautiful sunny day.

She had filled out the form and gave it to the employee, who immediately returned it to her saying kindly: “the date is missing.”

Ivonne looked at the piece of paper with a sense of non-involvement, dubiously studying the blank dotted line.

“Why don’t you add the date?” she replied in a challenging tone. “Don’t you know how to do it?”

Luckily, the girl at the window was a patient person. She just commented in a low voice: “she could at least have said please!”

Ivonne walked out of the post office with her head down.

She walked a few steps in silence, sighing repeatedly.

“Thomas, do you know why I didn’t add the date?”

“No.”

“Because I can’t remember it! What day is it today, Thomas? I’m losing my memory, day after day it’s always worse.”

She was desperate.

“Yesterday, for example, I went to buy bread and couldn’t find my way back home!”

“Ivonne, what can it be? It happens to me as well not to remember what day it is.”

“Thomas, I can’t even recall what year we’re in!”

“Come on, it’s impossible. Try!”

“Nineteen seventy?” She dared.

“Come on, Ivonne! We didn’t even know each other! Think about it, this year we celebrated an important New Year. Do you remember? They had fireworks in San Marco Square and we

went to see them.”

“Yes, I recall that we celebrated ...”

“Right, good! And what did we read everywhere? On the posters and they wrote it even with the fireworks: two ...”

“Two!”

“Two thousand, Ivonne! We’re in the year two thousand! A millennium has ended and a new one has begun!”

“Thomas ... I can’t remember it!”

A wrinkle formed in the middle of her forehead. She put on a guilty expression which did not leave her face.

It was a new illness, no one knew anything about it. Ivonne seemed healthy, she was still young, but she was condemned to sink more and more into a painful loss of herself. This is what the doctors said. Her mind would have slowly faded away, what was impressed in it, was destined to disappear, only to leave in her head some sort of tabula rasa from which incomprehensible doodles would have casually emerged. In a few words, she would become a woman with no sense of reality.

The worse thing was that she would be aware of it.

And she was aware.

After every action, she would make a countercheck: had she shut the door exactly the way doors are shut? Had she worn the right shoe and the left shoe on the right and left foot? Were the buttons of the coat aligned with the respective buttonholes?

Then she began to walk around the house with a notebook in her hand where she jotted down

everything: what day it was, what she had eaten, whether the neighbor had come by, whether the sun was out or if it had rained.

At a certain point, she confessed with embarrassment that she found it hard to write: at times she confused the letters, other times her hand did not respond. “But I’m still pretty good at reading” she said to him. She begged him to write for her what she dictated. When he came back from work, Ivonne put paper and pen in his hand:

“Write that today I went grocery shopping and that later I went ... do you know that I went by myself? Truly, I don’t know how, I caught myself doing it without having decided it before, and I walked in.”

“Walked in where?”

“Come on! In that place where you can look at ... where you look at things while sitting down: help me! You’re doing it on purpose not to help me!”

Lately, she had gotten more and more often upset with Thomas.

Then she seemed to remember:

“I went to the TV!”

If it had been an old lady, the whole family would have laughed hearing the story of the grandmother who had confused the movies with the TV. But Ivonne wasn’t ninety years old, and she was still beautiful.

When she fluttered her eyelids, lost in her own forgetfulness, she had the look of a scared young girl, chased, besieged. A siege, which came from inside of her.

“Ivonne, it’s not the TV, it’s the movies.”

“Good, so then write that I went to the movies.”

And Thomas wrote, swallowing in silence the sorrow which Ivonne’s condition was causing

him.

She kept her notebook under the table and in the evening, while she was having dinner with her son, she read it in secret. She didn't want to show Felix how sick she was, and in order to keep up a conversation, she would repeat parrot-like, quickly for fear of forgetting what she had read.

“Today, I don't know what to have you write down, Thomas. I don't know what happened.”

“Nothing, nothing happened ... there was *high water* and for this reason you could not go out.”

“OK then, let's write down that there was *high water*.”

“But why? It's not something so strange to have to write it down.”

“Just so that I don't forget it.”

“OK. So then I'll write that today there was *high water*, is that OK?”

Thomas scratched down on the notebook words, which were always less various, words, which helped to keep Ivonne's mind attached to the real world, to prevent her from losing herself in emptiness.

But always more often the day's chronicle was reduced to: “Today there's *high water*.”

After some time, all one needed to do was to give Ivonne the notebook, with the exact same page. She would read: “today there's *high water*” and believing that it was a new phrase, she'd be happy.

One evening, over that same sentence, she got mad with Thomas: “I can't read anything: I can't understand what's written here! Your writing is like chicken scratches.”

The Shape of Sorrow

In the humidity of the storage closet at the bottom of the staircase, Thomas could not get himself to go back upstairs. In the old kitchen, the water came and went, it rose and fell; the seaweed swung up and down gently caressing the wall.

The son and the daughter in law were sleeping, the grandson was playing not too far from him, and this was enough to alleviate Thomas' loneliness.

The awareness of having to leave Venice, was like an icepick stuck in his brain, one which caused a slow and continuous bleeding, difficult to stop. And it gave him such an intense pain that he could visualize its shape: it was a concave pain, an empty hurt in the shape of a stomach, of a heart, of an abdomen. As if his guts all melted into a unique painful and contracted cavity, and as if the re-surfacing in the memory of past facts rendered that pain more pungent.

But Thomas didn't care, he wanted to remember.

It was after all his life, good or bad, happy or sad. In his memory, it kept itself a bit more alive, to the point that, even after thinking of the most dramatic moments, he would have given anything to be able to go back.

One morning, Ivonne had left the house avoiding the supervision of Thomas, Felix and of the girl who was there to take care of her.

She had gone out with no shoes on and a light pink cotton jacket, while Venice had sunk in a heavy fog, made of a hazy and cutting humidity, which didn't spare one's clothes, it attacked the skin with light frozen pins attempting to penetrate one's flesh.

They all went out to search for her. They mobilized the neighbors and the neighborhood

storeowners. No one had noticed her.

The police would not have mobilized before forty eight hours had passed, this was the procedure.

That night, Felix smoked his first twenty cigarettes and never quit after that. Thomas desperately thought about Ivonne walking around the *calli* enveloped by the fog and calling him. Or perhaps she wasn't. Perhaps she wasn't calling him. It was from Felix that she expected help in the worst moments.

Where was she trying to go?

They found her in a canal.

The fog had probably prevented her from seeing, and she had fallen. Probably.

One time—they had just diagnosed her illness—she said to him that she didn't want to be reduced to a vegetable. She asked him the favor of killing her when this would occur.

"It will happen, let's not be blindfolded" she added in a grave way.

He behaved like an idiot: "Come on, Ivonne, how could I kill you? You can't do that! They would immediately send me to jail." He had tried to lighten the tone of the conversation in order not to worry her, and such an awkward phrase had come out of his mouth, that he was immediately ashamed of it.

"Thomas, you have to swear to me ..." she said to him in a serious tone.

He still tried to joke about it: "Ivonne, enough with the promises! You're not coming up with the story of the fire-eater again?"

"The fire-eater?" And she looked at him as if she heard it mentioned for the first time.

“Yes, the fire-eater, don’t you reca...”

In front of her distracted look he interrupted himself.

Ivonne had forgotten. She forgot snatches of the past here and there. The fire-eater had fallen through one of those gaps, the woman who had been her torment for years.

“Help me die when you see that I am no longer myself” she implored him.

“I don’t know if I can do it” he replied with a sigh.

Ivonne knew then that she could count only on herself. “I hope to realize it on my own when I won’t be worth anything anymore” she concluded.

Thomas didn’t want any investigations. He was tormented by the freezing cold, which she had certainly felt once she fell into the canal, the feeling of being filled with water, not only in her head, but also in her mouth, in her stomach, in her lungs. He was tormented by the length of time it took her to die. In that moment, he was certain, Ivonne’s mind had gone back to being lucid. She had asked herself why she was doing it, she had had to force herself to remember the good reasons which had brought her to make that last, fundamental, decision.

He immediately signed to close the file, which talked about accidental death, and kept for himself the other hypothesis.

“Suicide”. The word defined itself in his mind, associated with a light image, something which rose from the water as mist does and went up, towards the damp sky of the morning.

Free Me

Time: 3:00

High Water level: M 1.60

He had completely forgotten about Abdul. He almost went back to sleep leaving him there, when his attention was awakened by the noise of metal coming from behind a worn out and wobbky piece of furniture.

“What’s going on, explorer?” he asked the child displaying a bit of cheerfulness, as if to be forgiven for his distraction.

Abdul emerged wrapped up in a chain with the links as big as his fist. Laughing and content, he walked slowly and bent over under the weight of all that metal.

“It’s the chain of an anchor” Thomas said. “It’s been here forever because a long time ago, the grandparents’ grandparents kept their boat in here.”

The child walked towards him like a convict and when he was close to him, he let the chain fall at his feet in a clattering noise. Thomas watched him curiously.

Abdul took one extremity of the chain, lifted it up with difficulty, and began to make it run along Thomas’ wrists. Then around his ankles. It was a difficult job for him, so skinny and with thin little bones. At each movement, with a serious and concentrated air, he gave off a brief, guttural sound. Finally, he nearly tied the extremities of the chain.

“Prisoner.”

Thomas looked at him: Felix and Margherita wanted him to forget. But how could he? Even when he was playing, the memory of his father in jail came back.

“Free me” he said to him.

The child shook his head.

They looked at each other for a while.

In the silence, you could hear their breathing and the sea beyond the wall.

Thomas had an idea.

In the silence, that followed, he examined it, he cherished it, he embraced it.

He easily freed himself from the chain.

“The prisoner won” he said rubbing his hands.

He rolled up the chain and put it back in its place. The defeated look he had had all night, disappeared from his face.

“I want to reward you” he said cheerfully to the child, who was looking at him puzzled.

He gently pushed Abdul towards the staircase and led him to the living room at the foot of the shelf.

He took out the case containing his collection as if it were a shrine with the remains of a saint.

“This is the silverware with the little lion, you see? The ones I was telling you about before.”

Any child, when seeing what the reward consisted in, would have been disappointed: what kind of reward are five pieces of old silverware?

Not Abdul.

He was interested and looked at them without even having the instinct to grab them. Keeping his little hands inside his pajama pockets, he stood looking admiringly at the silver shining in the light; he studied the shape of the decoration caressing it with his eyes, then he slowly walked around the case.

“The lion doesn’t fly” Thomas said.

“No”.

“Teaspoon. Spoon. Knife” Thomas listed in an instructional tone. “Fish knife, small fish fork” he continued. “There is only one missing.”

“Fork?” the child asked.

“Good” said Thomas.

“You pronounced fork well! Did dad teach you?”

“Mom.”

“Good for mom, every once in a while she does something useful.”

Then he added.

“The big fork is missing, but I hope not for long. One day it will be there, and the collection will be complete.”

Abdul delicately stuck his finger in the satin recess intended for the fork.

Thomas placed the whole case in his hands.

“You may ask me for it any time you want and I will give it to you.”

He was delivering a treasure to him.

The child nodded as if to thank him.

“Because you’re good, you don’t break anything. You’re delicate, you move slowly. When he was little, your dad tore everything he touched, to pieces.”

The child yawned. Thomas delicately took his hand and placed it in front of his mouth.

“I made you sleepy, huh?” he said to him.

He put away the case, picked up Abdul in his arms, brought him to his bed, and put him under his little blue blanket covered with stars.

The Right Thing

Time: 7:30

High Water level: M 1.66

The water level had risen another five centimeters.

All three, father, son, and daughter in law, got ready to go out. Abdul was still sleeping.

First thing in the morning, Felix and Margherita were already furious at the idea of spending another day fighting with buckets, umbrellas, and water pumps.

By mistake, Felix put on Margherita's rubber boot, and his foot got stuck half way.

While he was helping his son to free himself, Thomas found the way to ask him in a low voice: "Are you really sure of your decision regarding the house? We will still discuss it, right?" he added in a conciliatory manner.

"Dad, a real estate agent is coming by this evening to sign the sale proxy" Felix said looking for a most neutral tone of voice. "I am certain that by leaving we'll do the right thing."

Once again, Thomas felt the deep pain in his gut, but he didn't show it.

The circle of his destiny was tightening up.

"So will you buy the nails for the rocking horse? Felix asked to get off the subject.

"Yes, certainly" his father replied, cordially and agreeably.

"Don't forget, dad" said the sappy Margherita. "Come back before Irina leaves." They had left Abdul asleep in custody of the cleaning lady, who would leave two hours later.

"Certainly!" Thomas repeated, deferentially.

Then he clarified: "I'm not your dad.

The hardware store was three *calli* away.

As in all the other stores of the area, the owner and the salespeople were busy mopping up water, which, despite the sluiced gate had seeped in during the night. Rags and scrubbing brushes everywhere.

That morning, Thomas was the first customer and the owner welcomed him with a smile.

“Hey, California! Have you seen my girlfriend?”

The man lifted up a broom with which he was mopping up away a brown disgusting sludge of soggy pulp.

“In the past few days, she and I have been together from morning to evening: even my wife is jealous!” and he smacked a kiss on the handle. “But this is the way the world goes! The weather, the women, the men? No one knows who’s in charge!

Thomas smiled to be polite. He had something else on his mind.

“I’d like a large lock.” he said, a glowing look in his eyes.

The other guy dropped his broom and disappeared into the back, he returned a little later and placed the merchandise on the counter.

“There are two kinds. The titanium one is more expensive, but humidity doesn’t hurt it! In ten years it will be just the same.”

“The regular one is enough for me” said Thomas sure of himself.

The shopkeeper, who was also among those whom California had known forever, and with whom he had exchanged nothing but precious witty remarks of the moment, looked at him suspiciously.

“Why all this economy?”

“If you sell the cheaper ones as well, it means that they’re good for something, right?”

“You’ve never watched your money before, California. Have you become stingy all of a sudden?”

“No, it’s just that today we’re here, tomorrow, who knows? What will I do with a lock that lasts for ten years?”

The man became intrigued. “May I ask you what you’ll use it for? Perhaps I could give you some advice.”

Thomas looked at him for a few seconds, then: “No” he replied sarcastically.

He paid for the lock and put it in his pocket. He was about to leave when he remembered that he needed to buy nails for the rocking horse as well.

After he walked out of the store, he glanced distractedly at the package in which the storeowner had wrapped the nails. It was an old newspaper page, which described the death of a whale that had ended up near the Miami shore. Thomas felt it was essential to give that news item one last chance at life: he quickly emptied the package of nails into his coat pocket; he laid out the page and read the article.

No one knew why the animal had beached itself. It weighed twenty-five tons, and one of the possible theories of its death was ‘oil spilled in the ocean’.

He thought that, sooner or later, he should try to find out more about it. But now he had something more urgent to do.

Farther Away

Time: 13:00

High Water level: M 1.60

“Here: try to get on!”

Thomas set the horse, which began to rock, on the green and red hexagonal tiles worn by time.

“It’s called rocking horse” he said to Abdul. “Do you have real ones, real horses? Or do you have camels? Or kangaroos? Of course not, what an idiot, kangaroos are in Australia ... So, Abdul, do you know that you need to climb onto the horse?”

Abdul looked at him, then grabbed the animal’s ear and stopped it from rocking.

“*Donkey!*” he uttered.

“No, it’s not a donkey, it’s a horse! *Cloppiti cloppiti*” Thomas said.

The child climbed onto the back of the horse, inserted his feet in the stirrup, and placed his hands where they were supposed to be placed.

“Go on, move now” Thomas urged him.

The child rocked two or three times pushing himself softly, he shook the reins half-heartedly and immediately got off.

“Don’t you like it? Your grandma Ivonne used to go on it as well.”

The child took the animal by the reins and dragged it to the kitchen. He behaved as if he were alone, all locked in himself, as if he moved in a world which was only his.

He had the same deep concentration as on the day before, when Thomas caught him staring at the faucet and at the chandelier.

Abdul picked up a plate. He filled it with water and placed it on the floor in front of the horse.

He took the reins and pulled them down till the horse could touch the plate with its muzzle. Then he lost interest in the horse.

“Even your dad used to play with it when he was little ... This dad here. Papa` Felix. Not the other one.” He hesitated for a moment, then he carried on: “Not the one in prison.”

A flash of surprise went through the child’s eyes.

It’s what Thomas wanted by mentioning the child’s real father, convinced as he was, that only by remembering could one forget.

Abdul’s eyes turned red but the tears stayed in, held back by an invisible barrier.

“Do you remember your real dad?” Thomas asked him with the caution of someone defusing a mine.

The child fluttered his eyelashes without moving anything else, two teardrops rushed down his motionless cheeks.

They stood there looking at each other for a while.

“Spoon, knife, fork” Abdul said, hopping below the shelf.

“Of course. I told you that I would give them to you.”

Happy with himself, he took the case and placed it in front of Abdul.

“You may look at them and also take them out of the box!”

He left him like that, holding the spoon in one hand and the knife with the rounded tip in the other. Abdul moved them around as if they were a slender gentleman and a round-faced woman who jumped on the table and chased each other; who then sometimes stopped, kissed, and soon after began to chase each other again.

Thomas felt a certain apprehension when hearing the fork bang against the knife, but he

trusted Abdul. And at that moment, it was important for Abdul to be busy so that he would not decide to follow him. He, therefore, allowed the spoon and the teaspoon to become a father and a son walking together.

Then came the soldier knives, one slick and slender, the other with a flat face and saw teeth, who tried to tear apart the other two. But the heroic teaspoon threw itself to the ground and tripped the soldiers, who fell with a great clatter in the tinted table's deep lake, while father and son escaped with their round and shiny faces leaning one against the other.

He took the initiative to call Felix and Margherita to tell them everything was going well.

They didn't expect the phone call.

"Your dad is becoming a normal person" Margherita said. "He cares about other people not worrying."

"Well, I wouldn't kid myself."

The store's lighting system had gone haywire: the lights of the window flashed on their own, just like at Christmas time. Margherita dried the light fixtures one by one, meticulously: she blew on them with the warm air of a battery-charged hair dryer. With all that water around, she didn't feel confident using the electrical outlet.

Thomas went down to the basement.

He took out the long chain, which Abdul had discovered the night before. He unrolled it with slow movements and with his eyes always pointed at the top of the staircase, fearing he might attract his grandson's attention. He then placed it in a bag so that he could easily transport it. Finally he took the megaphone and he wiped it clean.

Forgotten in a corner, were some old newspapers. Thomas asked himself why his daughter-in-law was storing them there if she was going to let them grow moldy.

Margherita had collected them a few months before, during the time when she and Felix were waiting for a child to be assigned to them, but they had already known that it would be an African child. She had kept all the articles concerning poverty, droughts; the causes of one and of the other.

In a sudden impulse of curiosity, Thomas gave a quick look at some of those articles. "Later on. I will read them later on," he said to himself. And he promised it also to the beached whale which just that morning had attracted his attention, awakening in him a new interest.

He went back upstairs with his heavy loot.

Abdul, still concentrated on his silverware game, took a while before he noticed his grandfather who was messing about with a can of paint and a white bed sheet on which he was brushing incomprehensible marks.

At a certain point, the grandfather raised his head and looked at him: "it will dry right away" he said proudly.

Then he took the megaphone, he brought it to his mouth and repeated with a booming voice: "IT WILL DRY RIGHT AWAY!"

The little one laughed because of the grandfather's loud nasal sound in the megaphone. So Thomas then placed the megaphone in front of Abdul's mouth and said: "this is needed in order to make one's voice louder, so that one can be heard from far away."

"It will dry right away! It will dry right away!" the child then repeated.

"There, good. You have already learned. I will then explain everything to you now," he added.

This is the Key

The window of the old kitchen had been taken out; in its place was a grating with thick black bars, screened over by a tight-mesh net to keep out mice and trash.

Since the morning, Thomas had done nothing but think about that grating: whether it was strong enough, whether it was too much in sight.

He decided that the best moment would be the afternoon, a little before it got dark.

At the set time he went out, the chain wrapped around his shoulder, like a mountain climber who sets out on a rope-climbing expedition.

He went down the outside staircase of the house and with an agile leap jumped onto the boardwalk, which covered the *calle*. Then he walked around one corner and then another, until he arrived at the *fondamenta* in the back of the house. The boardwalk ended abruptly below the surface of the water, which flooded the canal, and suddenly Thomas found himself immersed up to his groin.

The phone conversation with Ernest came back to mind and the bright colorful view of the bay.

He imagined San Francisco as if it got submerged by a large wave; a powerful and raging one. Then he remembered the map with which, the day before, he had attempted to entertain Abdul, imagining the blue of the ocean overflowing like watered-down ink and mixing with the red, yellow, orange, and purple colors of the whole world's coastal states.

From North to South, from East to West, the result was a huge brown spot, a world in the grip of a topographic cataclysm where there were no longer barriers between land and sea.

When he arrived in front of the kitchen's grating, he stayed for a while to watch the lapping

motion of the waves going in and out through the window's wide opening. The waves rippled around the bars. The frayed seaweed moved around like the tentacles of a multitude of caged animals, trying in vain to escape.

There was no one nearby. In order to reach the Chinese pizzeria, the one you could see from the living room window, those few tourists who went all the way to the Giudecca during that season, had to walk the opposite way to get there.

The old kitchen, when it was still in use, faced onto a small dark sidewalk, which was now submerged by the waters of the canal.

The chain began to cause his shoulder to ache. He approached the grating and touched it lightly with his hands before looking inside. He had always avoided doing that, preferring to keep intact the memory of the old kitchen. He was about to visit a place of memories, and he feared that he would be consumed by nostalgia.

Finally he made up his mind; he introduced his nose and eyes between one bar and the other, but he kept his eyelids half-closed, to take in total vision a little bit at a time, wanting it but at the same time fearing it.

He saw an empty place, wet, dark. Disappointing. As if he had believed that he would explore his personal Atlantis, finding it still magical and intact, but instead, when looking inside himself, he had introduced his head into the intense pain he constantly felt inside.

The marble table, which glistened with rose-colored veins on the day of the flooding, had collapsed: the wooden legs, weakened out by the water, had given way under the weight of the shelf. On the floor were stone fragments on which a decaying vegetation had clung. The walls had turned black and then ... he couldn't recall, but other than the table, they had taken away

everything from the room, a room which had lost its identity.

The old kitchen was like a huge hole.

For a moment he thought of dropping the project which had taken him all the way there.

He thought of giving in to his son's wishes and of selling everything and leaving Venice.

He thought of going back inside, of taking off his boots, of drying himself. Of perhaps getting into bed, rolling into a ball, and being carried away just like that by the movers who would empty out his house and his life.

But the window of the upstairs floor opened then, and he could hear the gentle tapping sound of the shutters. He looked up and saw the grayish cone of the megaphone appear, and a soft nasal voice yelling with a broken pronunciation.

“Grandpa! Grandpa!”

“Yes!” he replied.

“*Are you ready?*”

No, Thomas was not ready.

“Wait! Wait a little longer” he yelled as he looked up.

There was no more time. In a rush he removed the chain from his shoulder and began to place it through one bar and another, in order to form a sort of slip-knot. Then he pulled on it: it held fast. With the same motion, he obtained two other lower slip-knots. And another on the side. He climbed onto the grating: one bar, two, three, five. That was the right height. The lock was wearing a hole in his pocket; he could feel the coldness of the iron against his thigh. He was in a sweat, however.

No one's Place

Time: 16:00

High Water level: M 1.60

One day, Marina came back to Venice.

She went to look for Thomas at the Excelsior because she no longer had his phone number.

She showed up at the bar tense in her shoulders, feeling embarrassed because she felt humbled, there, surrounded by a luxury she had never seen.

Beach changing rooms, which looked like houses. Carpets on the sand. Beach chairs like lounges. And then huge halls, terraces, chandeliers, show windows displaying jewelry, hallways so wide that, with partition walls one could set up apartments for four families.

When he saw her sitting next to the bar's dark briar-root counter, he recognized her immediately, and he too felt ill at ease.

He said to her quickly: "I get off in half an hour, I'll see you outside" and he gently signaled her to go out. He disguised his awkward feeling with professional seriousness.

He was used to dealing with American actors, there. During the Film Festival, he had toasted with a tipsy Robert De Niro and had given a tablet for headaches to Meryl Streep.

The other waiters envied him, and so did the senior bar manager, because Thomas spoke with the same accent as the Hollywood celebrities, who referred to him if they needed anything.

One day he found himself face to face with Robert Redford, who kept staring at him intently. Thomas displayed a slightly embarrassed smile and served him a drink with exaggerated deference, as if he wanted to apologize for the resemblance. The celebrity thanked him and

Thomas was struck by the simplicity of his manners, almost as if Redford, on his part, was apologizing for his fame. Thomas asked him the courtesy of personally buying him the drink. The actor accepted awkwardly, as if he didn't find it fair, but didn't want to disappoint him. Then he asked him what his name was and where he was from. "I'm Californian just like you" Thomas replied. "From Benicia."

A little later, his manager approached the counter and asked Thomas if he could speak with him. With rather quick tones he explained the situation to him: Mr. Redford had to return immediately to the United States where he had an important meeting, but that evening he was supposed to put in an appearance at a meeting with the Italian public in one of the hotel rooms.

"We noticed your extraordinary resemblance to Mr. Redford and we would like to ask you, obviously with fair payment, if this evening you could be ..." the manager hesitated for a moment, "his stand in."

On the spur of the moment, Thomas replied that he was only a barman and that he certainly would not measure up. But the manager was reassuring: "we'll think of everything ourselves, we will even make you appear a little older, so that you will look like him even more. You will only need to say, in English obviously, something like: "I thank the Italian public for the warm welcome they have given me."

Thomas accepted, almost surprised with himself.

They dressed him, combed his hair—fixing his haircut a little—and put make up on him accentuating his wrinkles.

In the suite where they had set up the make up room, he met Redford once again with his suitcase in his hand. The celebrity shook hands with him and said: "I am very grateful to you, Thomas!" Then he left.

That evening everything worked out perfectly. Thomas was impeccable in his role; he pronounced the all-important phrase with a perfect Californian accent after having practiced it for an hour in front of the mirror, and the crowd applauded him. He felt a wonderful thrill.

They took several photographs of him, and one of the weekly tabloids published a series of them, also implying that even Robert Redford, despite his position as a politically and socially involved man, had submitted to the flattery of plastic surgery: “He looks twenty years younger” they wrote in the caption below the photograph of Thomas smiling at the audience.

When Marina walked out of the Excelsior, the automatic glass windows opened wide before her while she was looking for the door handle. She crossed the street and sat on the low wall where photographers usually stay while waiting for actors and film directors.

During the wait, she dangled her legs like a little girl.

When Thomas saw her, he felt uneasy again, but not as much as before. Because other than the clothes, which she had obviously bought at the market, when she was seen against the light, with the canal behind her, he found her still to be very beautiful.

He approached the wall until he could lean on her knees and held her in a subtle embrace, immediately finding that old-time intimacy again.

Yes, Marina was still the same.

Beautiful.

Or perhaps not so beautiful.

Perhaps aged.

But it was Marina, and it would have been her even a hundred years from now.

They exchanged a very long kiss.

“I have to go back home in a short while” Thomas said to her. “I have a dilemma these days.”

“And what should I do?”

“Come with me.”

He told her that his wife was ill, very ill, and that they could not leave her alone. There was a woman who took care of her every day except for Thursday afternoon. One Thursday each of them, husband, son, and daughter-in-law took turns staying with Ivonne.

That day it was Thomas' turn.

The trip on the vaporetto from Lido to San Marco, and then from San Marco to Giudecca, seemed too short for both. There was much to tell each other about their lives, while they were really searching for the nerve to express other feelings.

“Did the trial for your husband's death happen in the end?”

“Yes, didn't you read about it?”

“No, you know that I don't read the papers that much.”

“They were all acquitted and we didn't get anything. But it wasn't for the money: I'm sorry for him, he suffered so much and didn't even get satisfaction”.

“It's a scandal.”

“I knew that it would end that way.”

“In America it would have ended up differently.”

“You think so? The world is the same everywhere. Anyway, there will be an appeal. I don't want to keep my hopes up, but one never knows ...”

Thomas held one of her hand tightly in his, as to keep her warm.

“I'm so sorry” he said to her awkwardly.

Even Marina's mother had died, but that was a liberation: she was no longer able to do anything on her own, but her mind had remained lucid and she suffered a lot.

Now that she was a widow and an orphan, the thought of Thomas had obsessed her. And she immediately went back to look for him, without thinking that he was married and that she had always promised herself not to be a family-splitter.

Thomas listened and looked at her, but didn't say anything.

"Did you think of me at all?"

"No" he instinctively responded.

"I thought it was supposed to be hell without me."

"You were right, the pain of love sooner or later goes away: or if it were really forever, like hell is, who would want to fall in love anymore?"

"It was not like hell for me, but I have not forgotten you."

"However, after a while I stopped thinking about you. I found it hard to forget you, but then you just left my mind. I loved my wife again. A lot. Today, when I saw you, it was as if you had come from another world."

His world now was to look after Ivonne who could no longer understand what was happening around her.

"I'm sorry" Marina said.

"Yes, It's torture, poor woman."

"No. I mean, yes, it is torture for your wife. But I meant to say that I'm sorry that you didn't think of me any longer."

"I'm sorry."

Thomas asked himself why he was lying to her, why he did not wish to give her the

satisfaction of telling her that he had not forgotten her. Of course, it had not been such a torment to make his life impossible, but with how much sorrow does one live without thinking about it every day? Even though in the meantime these sorrows dig deeply; a part of his inner sorrow was also she. Having lost her. Having thrown away an opportunity for happiness.

Marina was a source of regret.

“But what illness is your wife suffering from? May I ask you?”

“The doctors haven’t figured it out. They say that she is too young to have illnesses, which occur in elderly people. But she has the same symptoms. They even suggested the “mad cow disease”, can you believe that? Those are all figments of the imagination.”

They got off one stop before; they walked for a while and arrived right at the house.

Marina was about to leave for Bassano.

“I told you that I didn’t think of you ... ” he repeated to her. “It’s normal to forget a person even after loving her. Life goes on. Things end, with time.

He knew that Marina was upset when she said to him, mortified: “I was wrong to come and look for you.”

“Perhaps yes. If you have to suffer because of it, yes ... “ he said tenderly.

But he didn’t want her to leave like that, so he insisted that she go inside the house. “Then we can talk a little more.”

“And your wife?”

“Don’t worry, she no longer knows what’s going on. You wait for me in another room and I’ll do what I need to do. The food is ready, I only need to make sure that she doesn’t start rambling on, then give her the medicine and place her in front of the TV.

“So she does understand what’s going on.”

“Very little. She has moments of lucidity, but they are more and more rare.”

“And if she realizes that I’m here?”

“I’ll tell her that you came to clean the house.”

Marina felt even more uncomfortable, but she accepted to go inside anyway.

Thomas left her in the living room. She preferred not to sit on the couch. She remained seated next to the table, on the edge of the chair.

She didn’t know what to do; she looked around.

She blew warm air on the glass of the table, a game she used to play as a child when she was bored. She left round rings of haze, which she immediately erased with the sleeve of her sweater. Then she blew again.

Every once in a while, she would hear a noise, a word coming from the other room. Ivonne’s voice, and Thomas’ affectionate and monotonous tone.

When it began to rain, she went to the window. It was becoming dark. She approached the windows to see how hard the rain was falling: it was an intermittent but heavy rain; every drop hit the canal like a pebble, raising a crown of splashes.

She started the ring game again. They were nicer on the window, definitely clearer and well-defined, and she could also doodle on it with her finger.

She asked herself what she was doing there, waiting for the stranger Thomas had become to her eyes after he told her that he had not thought about her any longer.

She felt ridiculous for having believed that even he, just like as she had, would remain attached for all those years in hopes of finding each other, one day.

“Life goes on. Things end, with time.”

How many times had she also said that to herself. But she had not been able to shed forever the illusion that there are things which have nothing to do with time, and which therefore last.

She had definitely made a mistake.

She should have run away from that house, but her legs were as heavy as marble.

Thomas found her standing up, her back to him, completely still. He stopped to look at her, but she did not turn around. He wondered if she had not heard him or if she was pretending.

He embraced her from the back, held her tightly, and then lay his head between her neck and her shoulder. They stayed like that for a while: his weight pushed her towards the window, this time the circles came on their own, without the blowing.

Marina turned around and let herself go in that embrace, he raised his head from her shoulder just to find himself face to face with her.

They kissed, and slowly Thomas, while still kissing her, guided her towards the staircase leading downstairs, to the old kitchen.

The most hidden place in the house, no one's place.

Marina found herself with her shoulders against the damp wall, while he was biting her lips, her chin, her neck, as if he wanted to eat her whole being.

She had trouble keeping up with that passion. She felt not only passion in Thomas, but resentment as well.

Her back was wet, she tried to move away from the wall, but she couldn't.

Frantically he undressed her and let the clothes fall to the floor one piece after the other. She recognized his hands perfectly, as if in all those years he had never stopped touching her, holding

her, caressing her.

Until that moment, Marina had not been able to perform any action. She felt that she had to do something.

With difficulty she freed herself from his embrace, and clumsily unbuckled his belt.

Thomas stopped, dropped his arms, and looked at her, frightened. Then he gave her a last kiss and stepped back.

There was no noise, nothing.

“I can’t do this to her.” There was distress in his voice, he shrugged his shoulders. Marina remained naked against the damp wall. She stared at him as he went up the staircase in a ridiculous silence, with his shoulders hunched.

Marina couldn’t know that beyond the scraped wall, Thomas had envisioned for an instant, the old furnished kitchen. He had seen the lunches, the dinners, the Christmases. The day he had walked in to meet Ivonne’s parents; the time that Felix had jumped like a monkey, from the table to the window and had hung upside down from the grating.

He had seen Ivonne passed out.

And the false promise.

“I can’t do this to her” Thomas repeated as he was going up the stairs.

Marina got dressed, feeling a chill at the touch of her cold clothes, feeling the damp taste even in her mouth.

When she returned upstairs, they hugged and kissed like brother and sister.

“It means that it was fate that we would never meet at the right moment.”

Outside, she stopped to think about her life.

An orphan. A widow.

Without Thomas to dream of anymore.

Free.

This is the Key

Time: 17:00

High Water level: M 1.60

“Abdul!” yelled Thomas.

“Hey!” the child responded in his megaphone.

“*Ready for the mission?*”

“*OK, ready!*”

After following his grandfather’s instructions, Abdul placed the megaphone on a sort of tripod set up on the windowsill. Then with his calm and measured actions, he untied a bed sheet that Thomas had left hanging on the window: the cloth, freed from the tape, which was wrapped around it, waved heavily in the emptiness above the old kitchen’s grating.

The last task, which Thomas had entrusted him with, was that of putting his mouth close to the megaphone and of making as much confusion as possible. He asked him to sing a song at the top of his lungs, to yell, to swear. He could do it in any language he chose, with the loudest voice he had.

“Do you know *fuck*?”

“Yes.”

“You can say *fuck* as well!”

There was a glint in the child’s eyes.

He found the mission exciting.

Thomas was hanging chained to the evacuated kitchen's grating; a convict at the bars.

The bed sheet where he had written in big letters: "If Venice sinks, I will go down with her! I will never leave my house!", fluttered above him.

In the air, distorted by Abdul's soft voice, one could hear the notes of a song, which sounded familiar to Thomas for having heard it absent-mindedly, but obsessively, during the soccer games of the World Cup. Like most Americans he didn't like soccer, just the opposite of Felix who avidly followed, not only the Italian championship, but all of the most important international games as well. He recalled that one day his son had told him that the chant was similar to an African folk song. Perhaps this was why Abdul was familiar with it.

Abdul.

After having sung the World Cup's theme song three or four times, he came out with a series of "*Fuck!*" pronounced with wildly varied intonations. Thomas sensed his effort in trying to come up with a big and frightening voice, but the result was a sweetly pathetic howling, like the one a puppy would make.

Later the child began pronouncing incoherent words, guttural sounds in a mysterious dialect. And again a sequence of "mommy mommy mommy", and some "blah blah", which could make one think of idle TV chatter.

Thomas imagined his grandson, with his mouth resting on the megaphone and the rest of his body thrashing about free and unrestrained.

And he, below, blocked by the chain, with the soles of his boots on the surface of the water and the freezing current coming from the empty kitchen's cave, felt almost immediately cold.

The edge of the lock pierced his wrist. He had tightened it too much, but couldn't do anything about it at this point: his neck, his feet, his left arm were clamped in the slip-knots which he had

tied so well.

Only his right arm was left free. In order to alleviate the pain he tried to loosen the grip on his wrist, but the weight of his body kept the chain tight. He immediately realized that there was really nothing to do.

He stayed like that for a while, immobilized, frozen, alone.

He was overcome by fear. Fear that nobody would notice him; that the child would not be able to explain that the grandfather was down there, hanging. Fear that they would report him missing too soon.

“In the course of my life”, he asked himself, “was I successful in having people love me enough to worry about my absence?”

A chilly shiver ran down his spine, the expectation of a negative response or a wind draft.

Who knows, they would have found him weeks later, by then a skeleton, eaten by the seagulls. It wasn't easy to get to where he was: one had to go down the boardwalk and go into the water, as he had done; or one could take a boat and go through the canal.

And it was exactly by boat that a few neighbors arrived in front of the grating, and immediately asked him the reason for that dramatic set-up. With his free hand, Thomas pointed at the bed sheet waving above.

They smiled without saying anything; they muttered something among each other and greeted him with the same distracted gesture one greets a neighbor looking out the window or standing at the doorstep.

The first one to approach the landing to get to Thomas was the Chinese pizza man, attracted by Abdul's performance. Without any amazement, as if it were normal for someone to chain himself to the grating of his own house, he simply asked him if he needed anything. Soon after,

even some of the pizza man's workers came over to peek; the expressions on their faces were a mix of curiosity and amusement, but he immediately sent them back because it was time to prepare the pizza dough.

A few at a time, curious people arrived: they would read the sign, they would look at him, and they would then look elsewhere, as if they didn't have a real person in front of them but a decorative element of the façade.

As soon as he heard about something that *California* had done with a chain, the owner of the hardware store became alarmed and ran to look for him.

"You are really an idiot!" he told Thomas when he finally reached him. He felt responsible for that situation, at least for having sold him the lock.

Thomas told him about the son's intention to leave Venice, and about his own decision to oppose him with the ostentatious act he was carrying out.

The shopkeeper more or less understood the sense of what he was saying, but deep inside, he really didn't care, he just wanted to get Thomas down from there.

"Come on, come down, I'll help you."

"I tossed the key into the water."

I told you that you're an idiot, California! I'll go back to the store, and I'll get the clippers, and I'll free you right away."

"If I see you come back with them, I'll choke myself!" He showed him that all he needed to do was to stretch out an arm in order to tighten the chain at his neck.

"The water is still rising. Do you by any chance want to drown?"

"But haven't you read up above?"

The guy looked at the bed sheet and shook his head in surrender.

Rumors about a chained man, started going around; about a man who had hanged himself and survived by a miracle; about an old man who wanted to kill himself after having been evicted.

About a crazy man who wanted to die in order to save Venice.

People came from the canal with motorboats, small boats, and canoes.

A woman brought a thermos with tea, the bread store salesperson placed two or three cherry sweets and had a kid deliver them to Thomas.

Abdul had stopped making noise, perhaps he was hungry and had gone back to nibble at something. Although Margherita had strongly advised him against foods difficult to digest for a stomach used to fasting, and especially, against soft drinks, Thomas had left bread, salami, and Coke ready on the table for him.

When it got dark, the bystanders lit up the area with flashlights, some even with candles: at times it seemed like a procession to the crypt of a martyr. They looked at Thomas as if he were on display and commented on that sort of absurd story which now, thanks to word of mouth, was well known to all, at least in its essential traits: it was about a father's act of protest against a son who wanted to sell the house and take him to an unknown land, far away from Venice, the city he had chosen as his promised land when he was a young man.

A son without a heart.

But what did this have to do with the sign on the bed sheet: "If Venice sinks, I'm going down

with it?"

The throng of spectators thickened also with tourists searching for Italian folklore. The first local newspaper reporters arrived. The cameras pointed their lenses on Thomas: "What is the meaning of your act?" "Whom is your protest aimed at?" "Are you an ecologist?"

Thomas was speechless.

He wanted to play a trick on Felix, perhaps he just wanted the neighbors to talk about it and then say to his son: "Poor California, you can't do this to him."

He had not planned the interviews, the TV, and all those people he didn't know.

He wasn't that kind of person.

He always seemed sure of himself, but he had never spoken in public except as Robert Redford. And it was only a matter of one sentence.

Even when, at Harry's Bar or at the Excelsior, he would serve large tables with numerous people, and all of them looked at him attentively to hear about the menu, he would become quite nervous, even though all he had to talk about were sea urchins and clams.

He was a big, determined, often unfriendly man, but in front of people, his fragility came to the surface.

On the other hand, he knew that he could not escape.

He felt the need for something familiar which would help him regain a little self-confidence.

The few times when he had spoken among a lot of people, to the wind perhaps, but with conviction, and without fear, had been at the demonstrations against the petrochemical company. When he yelled into the megaphone.

He asked the owner of the hardware store, who in the meantime had returned to him, to go

into the house and to get the megaphone for him. And while he was there, if he could check on the child, and make sure that he had eaten. That he was safe. That he didn't sit too close to the television screen.

The Right Cause

“I have never been interested in environmental problems ...”

He said it with barely audible voice, to the point that the megaphone “struggled” to amplify it. “I thought only of myself and of my family. In fact, if you ask my son he will tell you that I didn’t even think about my family, only of myself. And this is not true.”

People swallowed, moved by the convincing sincerity of Thomas’ voice.

He thought he could not go through with this.

Then, suddenly, he felt an echo from inside. An echo which came from the past, from the years when he loved Marina and the desire for her made him feel alive. “I am no longer afraid of anything now”, he remembered thinking, that one and only time they made love.

That moment he knew he still had enough energy to take on the world if only he wanted to; or enough to fly over it, without letting anything weaken him. All he needed was to let it out; unleash that pent-up energy and use it to defend his own cause.

A veil opened up in Thomas’ mind: his wasn’t a private matter anymore, an ordinary quarrel between a father and a son who never liked each other.

No, it was now his cause.

He liked having a cause.

He lowered the megaphone and began to speak with his bare voice, without any fear or uncertainty.

The reporters brought their microphones as close as possible. People moved closer around him in order to better hear.

“Venice is destined to die slowly. The sea is rising, rising. Each year more and more. The

experts tell us that the city can be saved. They're already working on it, did you know? Have you heard about it?"

Reporters and curious people nodded.

"Good! I haven't!"

They laughed.

"Until yesterday. Troubles had always passed by me without my being aware of them. But everything is changing now. They're talking about glaciers melting, of lands, which will disappear, submerged by water; including Venice. And for this reason, my son has decided to move away: he wants to live in a dry city. In a place that is not sinking. One that does not smell of mold. And because he's a good son, he wants to take me with him."

His audience nodded with approval, not finding the idea so absurd and, above all, appreciating the fact that the son had decided not to abandon his father.

"When he told me, I felt despair. Because here in Venice I have everything. I'm not Italian as you are: I'm Venetian. If you went to live anywhere else, you would still be Italian. I am nothing anymore: I was born in America, but all my memories are in Venice. Outside of Venice I'm nobody."

At first there was a scattered applause, then a general one.

It was the first time in his life, that Thomas received an applause.

"Today, while I was buying this ..." and he shook his left hand causing the lock to bang against the grating, "I got some nails as well. From him." And he pointed at the owner of the hardware store, who blushed. "He wrapped them up for me in a newspaper page. You know, you must pay attention to the newspaper pages the hardware store owner gives you. In them you may find news that's intended for you, because it wants to be discovered and to be read by you. It

may happen to you at the hardware store, at the fish shop, or even in the basement of your house, or when you clean up after your dog. That news waits for us, it's waiting just for us."

Everyone nodded, as if they had received a revelation.

"Here, on that newspaper page, I found the news that was awaiting me, news that had followed me for who knows how long: the news of a dead whale. Listen, in the past, I could never care less about whales, about bears, about glaciers. A glacier melts? Don't worry: we have refrigerators! A whale dies? It's OK, there are others!"

General laughter.

"But no: now the glaciers are melting in my own home" and he pointed at the kitchen behind him. "Maybe we can find water from the North Pole in here as well. Who knows? It's all connected" and he tried to stretch his arm. But the chain tightened around his neck, choking him.

They all remained on edge, hesitant: should they intervene and help him out?

But Thomas managed to free himself, and continued as if nothing had happened.

"It's all one big chain. And in this chain there's me as well. There's my son who's tired of living in a wet environment. There are your feet soaking in the water. In the chain, is this city, which is becoming an amusement park. If we Venetians leave, in a few years, they will place gates all around Venice and lock it in the evening. Like Disneyworld, do you understand? With gondoliers instead of Mickey Mouse and Goofy!"

This time people applauded him enthusiastically.

He was surprised, but could not avoid feeling a thrill of satisfaction.

Ivonne, who several years before had placed a megaphone in his hands in exchange for a betrayal, would have been proud of him now.

“This is the key! The right key to save Venice!” someone said.

“We must begin with the people, the feelings of the people!” the baker’s assistant called out. She had arrived just in time to hear Thomas’ speech. She surprised even herself: she had never before said anything that smart.

A chain of comments began to unroll.

“Inside our homes is our history, our loved ones!” the hardware store owner said.

In order to save Venice, we must save us Venetians, we must save our memories. And for the world as well, we must do the same!”

Saving Venice does not mean worrying only about buildings, but also about feelings, thoughts, human lives!”

“In order to save the Earth, we must love it.”

Sentiments, passions, ideals discovered on the moment.

At a certain point someone yelled:

“In order to save Venice we have to save the Venetians!”

And immediately the reporters called their editors to suggest that slogan as the opening headline for the next day’s edition.

That same night, articles explaining what was happening around a flooded home in the Giudecca, were written in a hurry. Articles describing a new Environmental Movement, and of their leader who had chained himself to his house in order to make the public aware of the rising threat of the sea and of global warming.

Issues which Thomas continued to know little or nothing about.

I'm Not Coming Down

Time: 20:30

High Water level: M 1.60

They were returning home after a cold and wet day, dreaming of a warm meal. Not that they expected Thomas to have prepared it for them, but it was nice to delude oneself.

On the vaporetto, Margherita thought about her child already tucked in under the covers. Sitting in the back where no one else was sitting, she pulled out a hairdryer from her bag, placed it under her sweater, and turned it on.

The warm blast comforted her.

In his impeccable but definitely lightweight coat, the real estate agent in front of her was shivering.

Felix was beginning to regret having called him precisely on that evening; it would have been better to wait for a more appropriate time, when the high water had receded and the work pace at the store had resumed to its ordinary routine.

Instead, stressed out as they were from their day, they would need to show him around: this is the living room, here are the bedrooms, below is the storage room. But Felix felt that he had to keep his father under pressure, without giving him the time to fight back, and when the agency had heard about a small building for sale in the Giudecca, they pushed to see it immediately. There was a German buyer who had been waiting for a long time for a residence of that size.

“You were telling me that the ground floor is in a ruinous state, but that with adequate renovations it can be salvaged?” the agent asked Felix.

“Yes, this is what my father always said but it’s an expense that we never chose to take on.”

“My agency could send a consultant for an inspection.”

Felix nodded, but just at that moment, right before docking, they saw the strange turmoil that awaited them.

Lights, voices, people.

Husband and wife instinctively searched for each other’s hand. Had something happened to the child? They got off in a hurry, and they would have jumped into the water as well and swum to get there faster.

The real estate agent struggled along behind them, his shiny shoes sliding on the slippery surface, his trouser hem soaked.

They arrived, their hearts in their throats.

Margherita rushed up the stairway of the house.

As soon as she walked into the living room, her anxiety was placated.

The child was sleeping on the couch, holding the teaspoon in one hand and the rounded knife from his grandfather’s precious collection in the other.

Before giving him a kiss on the forehead, and taking him in her arms, she gently took the silverware from him and polished it with care; she recovered the other two pieces, which were resting on the table next to the case and put everything back in its place on the shelf.

Only later did she become aware of the remarkable silence in the house. She called in a soft voice, so as not to wake the child:

“Thomas? Where are you?”

No answer. The house seemed empty.

“Dad!” Margherita called a little louder.

Abdul opened his eyes.

“Dad!” Felix whispered weakly through clenched teeth.

He saw him after going around the house, following the direction where curious bystanders were staring.

Chained, a skilled entertainer, Thomas was, at that moment, mesmerizing his audience with the story of how he had started his silverware collection.

The whole event was recorded for TV.

“He had it under his toupee!” he was saying when Felix finally reached him; the only serious face among all the amused people who delighted in Thomas’ story.

“What are you doing?”

“Can’t you see?”

The laughter ceased altogether, as if it were turned off by a switch. Thirty, forty napes turned towards Felix and all he could see were accusatory looks and wrinkled brows.

People understood that the man who was addressing their hero with such a rude and informal tone could only be the heartless son who wanted to force his father out of Venice.

The glaring white spotlight of the TV camera slipped away from Thomas and aimed at the bed sheet. Felix, who had not yet noticed it, had barely the time to react when the beam of light fully lit up his look of dismay.

A female reporter placed her microphone within an inch of his mouth and asked him point blank:

“Why do you want the death of Venice?”

A second reporter in his boat followed, and then another who struggled with his trousers

rolled up to his thighs and his bare feet.

“Why don’t you believe that something can be done to save the city and the world from the effects of global warming?”

“Give me your opinion on the Mose project.”

To Felix this all seemed like a bad dream.

On the contrary, it was all real.

“As a matter of fact ... my intention was just to move to a different house!”

He glanced around looking for the real estate agent who would confirm his statement.

He was no longer there.

So he approached his father, followed by the TV camera and by the persistent curiosity of the general public.

I Was a Child

“Why?”

“And you’re asking me?”

“Do you think that what you’re doing makes any sense?”

“And do you think it makes sense to sell your mother’s house?”

Now it’s *our* house. Last night I was edgy, and I apologize. I said that the house was only mine, but you know that I don’t think that way. Everything mom owned is ours. Mine and yours.”

“It’s the papers that count.”

“When the ownership of the house went to me, I released a statement to the notary where I committed myself to doing nothing without your signature.

“And why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because you’re arrogant, dad, and if you had known I wouldn’t even have had the opportunity to talk to you! You wouldn’t have listened to me.”

“I’m arrogant? Oh really? So I want the notary right here!”

“The notary?”

“Precisely him. I want him here, now!”

“At this time?”

“I’m not moving from here until I have the guarantee, signed by the notary, that we will never leave Venice!”

“Dad, I’m tired, I worked all day. It was cold in the store, there was water everywhere. I can’t take it anymore. Come down and we’ll talk about it again at home.”

“I’m not coming down unless you commit yourself in front of a notary.”

“But where will I find a notary at this time?”

“I can wait till tomorrow. I will wait for him here.”

“You can’t stay there all night.”

“Why not? I have lots of friends; they even brought me dinner.”

“You will have a stroke! Come down, please.”

“I threw away the key to the lock.”

“You threw away the key?”

“Far away, into the canal”

“Don’t be a wise ass with me, dad!”

“It’s true, I threw it away. Ask around!”

“ ... “

“ ... “

“I know that you never liked me.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Every time you look at me I feel that you don’t like me. It was my mother who saved me, who helped me gain self-esteem and believe in myself. In spite of you!”

“I don’t think that this is the right place to discuss matters like this in front of everyone.

“I was never the “right” son for you, and I really want to know why. Perhaps you can explain it to me in front of everyone.

“Everything you’re saying is bullshit!”

“It’s bullshit because you don’t know how to answer me. I don’t like you either, you are ill tempered and arrogant. But I love you anyway.”

“You and your mother have excluded me for a lifetime. Since you were born, all her thoughts

have been for no one but you.”

“When I was born you disappeared.”

“No, she disappeared when you were born!”

“But dad, I was a child! I had a mother who cuddled me and you were never there.”

“I was never there because I was working.”

“No, dad. You were not there, period! You didn’t even know where I went to school. I don’t recall one time, one single time, when you played with me.”

“It’s not true, Felix. One time we played Indians and Cowboys. Don’t you recall?”

“How could I forget? You always wanted to win.”

“I did it to shape your character. I was able to turn you into a shit like your father: aren’t you happy?”

“Mom always said to me: thank goodness for you, Felix.”

“Even when she got sick, she wanted you close to her, only you.”

“What would have happened to the store without me? *Dontlaic ricordino*. I used to like it so much when I was little, when mom told me the story.

“I didn’t know.”

“What?”

“That she had told you the story.”

“Oh come on! *Dontlaic ricordino*: the first thing you said to each other when you met.”

“Even our dearest memories she shared with you.”

“Of course. She told me about you because she wanted me to love you.”

“In the ambulance ... she talked only with you.”

“Do you want to know what she told me in the ambulance?”

“You always denied that she said anything to you.

“That she *had* said. You got the verb wrong, this time.”

“Yes, I got it wrong. However, don’t forget that I’m American.”

“Dad, in the ambulance mom said: ‘Should something happen to me, promise me that you will not abandon your father.’ And I promised her.”

“...”

“What now? You have nothing else to say?”

“You agreed not to abandon this poor incompetent idiot.”

“I don’t want to listen to you any longer, dad!”

“And I don’t want to listen to you!”

“Then I guess that you want to stay there in the cold and wait for who knows what? You want to keep living in Venice and watch your house sink day after day? Be my guest. I am now going off to sleep. In a warm place. Good night!”

“Good night! But don’t forget to call the notary.”

The TV camera followed Felix until he walked into the house.

“Do you have any other statements to make?” the female reporter asked him with her usual aggressive tone.

Felix turned around.

“Yes, I actually do have one” he said.

If he was supposed to be the bad guy, he might as well live up to the expectations.

“Sons who kill their fathers in an angry fit of madness should receive more understanding!”

As soon as he said this, he felt relieved.

The reporter looked at him with her mouth aghast and turned off the microphone.

Taken Aback

Felix carefully turned the key in the keyhole.

The house was dark but in the bedroom, at the top of the staircase, the bed-side lamp light was turned on. Felix heard Abdul's little bird voice, articulating words in Italian. His surprise was such that he forgot all his worries, his father's whims, the flooded store: it was the first time that he heard his son speak Italian.

He stopped and held his breath; something overwhelmed him. He felt an almost painful joy.

His son was becoming more and more *his son*.

"Sp-oon, fork!" the child said.

"The fork is not there." It was the mother speaking, gently.

"What is this called, this thing that is used to cut meat?" she asked him.

"Fork!" the child repeated.

The mother laughed.

"Come on, Abdul, you know very well what it's called."

Knowingly, the child giggled as well.

"Fork".

"No, come on."

And mother and son burst out laughing.

"Knife!" Abdul said with a condescending tone, as if to please Margherita.

Felix couldn't help but smile, his eyes burning with emotion.

But it didn't last long. As soon as he realized that the child's words were accompanied by tinkling silverware, he was overcome by the childhood fear of being scolded by dad.

When he walked into Abdul's bedroom he immediately noticed that on the bedside table was Thomas' case. Empty.

"You shouldn't have given it to him!" he said abruptly to Margherita.

"If that lunatic out there finds out, he will cause an endless scene! He's down there, telling everyone that he's searching for the fork!"

Felix stretched out his hand to take away the silverware from his son's hand and put everything back in its place without leaving any trace, but Margherita stopped him.

"He gave them to him!"

Felix was taken aback.

"Dad gave them to him? Are you sure?"

Yes, she was sure.

Even Abdul nodded.

Enviously, Felix watched the child grab the box with familiarity and command, leaving fingerprints on the shiny wood and on the silver.

At that moment he ceased to be an adult and a parent. He went back to being the child of a long time ago: jealous, extremely jealous of the newcomer who, in such a short time, had been able to gain a preferential treatment, which had not been granted to him, ever.

Finally

Time 6:00 AM

High Water Level: M 1:20

That evening, in the kitchens of Venice and surroundings the unpaired forks and knives had their moment of glory. Particularly the silver forks with a relief design on the handle, but also those with other ornaments, or those made with less noble materials.

That evening, the TV News told the story of a man who had chained himself to the window gratings of his house for a noble cause, and who for some time, had been looking for a certain piece of silverware.

The object was a very precious souvenir for him, and precious had become each gesture, each word of the man who was so courageously challenging the cold air and the high water in order to save Venice.

The day after, there were several people in Venice, in the outskirts and beyond, who brought their small offerings to Thomas, hoping that it was exactly the piece that he was looking for. And it didn't matter if it wasn't, the important thing was to demonstrate their affection and solidarity to him.

As the night progressed, the platoon of the most devoted spectators diminished until they had all left. As always, once the TV cameras were gone, the curious people were gone as well.

Only his loyal friend, the owner of the hardware store had organized himself in order not to

leave Thomas alone. He stayed there all night, aboard a small rubber boat where he had loaded his toolbox, ready, at the first signal from his friend, to cut through the lock. His wife had given him an inflatable pillow in the shape of a horseshoe, those used in trains or planes, and albeit with difficulty, he was able to convince Thomas to place it behind his head. He then threw him a blanket, which didn't help much since the freezing damp air came from behind the grating. It was the sirocco wind which was swirling around inside the one-time kitchen, it cooled down against the walls as in the cooling system of a refrigerator and it blew icy-cold against Thomas's shoulders and back.

Marina arrived when the sky and water were purple.

Even Thomas' arm was purple; it was black and blue where the lock was cutting his wrist.

Marina also had her own fork in her bag, sought out among the few valuable things her mother had left as her inheritance. She wasn't prepared for the high water; she didn't even have her boots, so she entrusted her fate to the hardware store owner.

She signaled with her hand and he turned on the engine of the boat and helped her on board.

"Do you know him?" he asked her.

"Yes, I've known him for a long time."

At that moment Thomas had dozed off, his head tilted forward.

Marina climbed onto the grate until she reached him.

She was the first person who had the courage to come so close. Everyone else, including Felix, had considered the grating space as something not to desecrate. As if it meant climbing onto an altar or to embrace a Jesus on the cross.

"Thomas ... it's Marina."

With one hand she held on to the iron bar, with the other she raised his head.

Thomas opened his eyelids, revealing watery eyes. He gazed at her for a few seconds, without considering that she might be the product of a dream or of his imagination. But something was not clear to him.

“How did you find out about this?”

“The TV ...”

“Yesterday I thought about you, a lot.”

“However it was the TV to tell me you were here.”

“You’re so warm.”

And you’re a piece of ice.”

Marina touched one of his cheeks and she had the sensation of touching a stone. “Do you want to die here?” she asked him.

“Die?”

“Why, what else do you think would happen to you if you should keep hanging here like an idiot? You will have a stroke and you will die!”

Thomas had always treated his body as if it were an indestructible machine, and as such at his constant service. He really hadn’t considered that he could have a stroke, as Marina said.

“Look at your arm: it looks like radicchio.”

It was black and blue and bruised, but it didn’t cause him any pain.

“How much longer will you be able to last?”

“Marina, I always thought that our next encounter would have been more romantic.”

“Why, you thought that we would meet again?”

“Yes.”

“But how come? You told me that you had forgotten me, you sent me away.”

“No, Marina, it wasn’t true.”

“Thomas, think. Come down from there. Look, I brought you something that I found at home.”

She searched in her bag and took out a medium-sized fork, the color warmer than silver, almost golden. The handle was massive, bulging with a blossoming wreath, buds and leaves intertwined for its full length: just a short smooth space separated that luxuriance of decorations from the base of the prongs. There were no winged lions. Marina had polished it well before placing it in her bag.

“Is this the fork you were looking for? You know, it wasn’t clear from the TV.”

Thomas looked at the fork. It looked infinitely beautiful and desirable, more than the one with the winged lion that he had been looking for. The glittering of that rare and magnificent object filled his eyes. He immediately wanted it to become his.

With his free hand, he took possession of the fork as if it had been the one that he had always searched for, and as if he had finally found it after walking for hours picking through trash with his pointed stick.

He tried to hug Marina, but he was thrown off balance. The chain skipped a link on the grating’s bar and tightened around his throat.

Promptly, she reached towards him to prevent him from being choked by it.

“Yes ... it’s the fork that I was looking for” said Thomas, and he abandoned himself to savor her body which radiated a clean smell.

“So then, come down.”

He could not refuse her offer.

Stop Reminiscing

Time: 6:50 AM

High Water level: 0.60

The sea quickly receded as if the drain plug had been taken out in a bathtub.

The city streets were littered with everything that the water had snatched from the basements or had been sucked in from the sewers. People started to wander around the *calli* saying: “Finally, about time.”

It took longer than expected to free Thomas: the hardware store owner, clinging to the grating, was frozen as well after the night out in the open.

When finally the chain slid away and immediately sank in the waters of the canal, Thomas tried to bend his back and his knee, but felt that he was going to break into pieces.

The small crowd of the day before was returning. They were mostly young kids, who wanted to pass through before going to work or to university.

They stared at the empty crypt. They looked up and saw the bed sheet waving by itself: without Thomas, it looked faded.

“Captain!” one of them called seeing him climb the stairs of his house.

Thomas turned around.

“Are you abandoning the ship?”

“Never!”

“So we won?”

“Not yet, but we’re not giving up!”

It was a little after seven AM when he walked into the house accompanied by Marina.

She sat on the couch feeling a bit intimidated.

“I’d better leave” she said immediately.

The memory of when, years before, she had walked into that house, unsettled her.

“Absolutely not: he said. “You’re staying here.”

Felix had fallen asleep just a couple of hours before, after having racked his brain between the thought of the promise made to his mother about not abandoning Thomas and the right to decide what the best future for his family would be.

He had had to admit to himself that he loved that unbearable man. But that he detested him as well to the point of never wanting to see him again.

He woke up his wife in the middle of the night to share with her the anguishing thoughts that tormented him. They spoke for a long time, and finally, thanks to her calm reflections, he was able to relax and get to sleep.

Someone had brought the megaphone back home. As soon as Thomas saw it, he stood at the bottom of the staircase leading up to the bedrooms, and yelled into it:

“Wake up, I need to speak to you!”

Felix and Margherita got up in a daze.

Abdul jumped out of bed and bounced cheerfully down the stairs.

“Grandpa, grandpa!” he said enthusiastically. “Fork?”

“I found it!” said Thomas while the child embraced his legs. “Look!”

He then looked at his “partner in crime” Marina and pulled out the golden fork from his pocket.

“Here, go put it in the case.”

Abdul took the fork gently and stroked the flowers one by one with his fingertip. He had nothing to say regarding its difference with the rest of the pieces of his collection. In fact, he immediately ran to place it in the space provided for it inside the case.

Felix and Margherita were not surprised by Marina’s presence. They welcomed her in the same normal way one would accept, in dreams, a penguin at one’s table, or a dead aunt who tucks you in bed.

They sat on the sofa.

Abdul squeezed in between them.

“This is Marina” Thomas announced.

Her eyes widened, as she immediately felt at the center of attention.

Thomas spoke directly to Felix:

“Along with your mother, she is the woman I have loved most in my life. I met her when Ivonne was alive and healthy. With this woman” and he dramatically pointed at Marina, “I betrayed your mother. I tried to forget her; I even thought I had succeeded. But I continued to carry her inside year after year.”

Marina would have liked to disappear. Felix too. And so did Margherita. Abdul could not figure out why everyone was trying to sink into the sofa’s pillows while grandpa was telling one of his stories.

The night before, Abdul had listened to him with great attention, even though he could barely understand anything Thomas was saying.

“Your mother never knew: I couldn’t give her this sorrow. Because I loved your mother. But I loved Marina very much as well.”

Margherita took Felix’s hand and he squeezed it. Abdul snuggled next to his parents.

“Marina and I will live together, here in Venice.”

Marina was caught off guard. She didn’t know anything about it. They hadn’t spoken about it. But she was a free woman; she could have the luxury of indulging in new and unexpected situations, of letting herself go to a grumpy and intrusive man who made decisions for her without consulting her, but who seemed to have read her mind a few hours before when, as she was locking her front door, she had said to herself: “I would never want to come back here.”

“I’ve decided that this house will be sold, and that the proceeds will be used to buy two other ones: one here in Venice, for us” and he pointed once again at Marina, “the other for you, wherever you like. I will often come by to visit Abdul. I believe that this is what your mother intended” he said, still addressing Felix, “when she asked you to take care of me.”

“I don’t believe so” the son replied.

“She meant for you to take care of my happiness, not to treat me as an incompetent. She meant to let me be free.”

Margherita stood up and went to the window.

“Dad, there are several people down here waiting for you to repeat to them how sacred memory is. Last night Felix and I spoke at length, and we made the decision to stay in Venice altogether. Even the child has become attached to you.”

Then she stared at Marina. What she didn’t say, but which Felix and Thomas read in her stare, was: but we cannot live together with a stranger. Marina looked at Thomas.

They got off the vaporetto at San Marco: Venice, so wet, was beautiful.

“What did you tell them at work?”

“Nothing. I just asked a co-worker to replace me.”

They walked close to one another, inside a faint fog which let through a glimpse of sun, yellowish and misty. The garbage truck teams had already cleaned up, but a few souvenirs from the sea were still to be found on the streets.

Thomas asked himself what he would have done had he found, at that precise moment, the precious fork that he had been searching for.

“I would pick it up as if it were nothing special and I would hide it in a safe place where Marina could never find it” he thought. “Not to disappoint her. I am well aware that this would be the first betrayal, the first deception with her. But it is fate that we can never be completely honest all the way. With anyone!”

A group of kids was following them.

They carried a banner which said: “Memories are our future.”

They were waiting for a hint from Thomas, a meaningful word, but he had nothing left to say.

There, had he found the fork at that moment, he would have given it to them. He would have come up with the idea that it was the symbol of their movement. The kids would have treasured it in a worthy way, as he would have done had he found it before Marina brought him the golden one with the flowery handle.

He could feel them staring at his back and he turned around.

“Captain!” the same kid from the morning before said to him.

“At your command!” Thomas replied.

“It’s the captain who commands!”

”Here in the Veneto you always reply with ‘at your command’: even the captain replies ‘at your command’”

“But you’re from California!”

“I don’t remember California anymore.”

“OK: we will then name you honorary citizen of Venice as the founder of our movement.”

A handful of people, but quite committed.

“Thank you, I am honored to be an honorary!” Thomas said clicking his heels together.

“And the ship?”

“The captain never abandons his ship. Even when in the water, the captain has more roots than a tree in the mountains.”

The kids, pleased, said good-bye and continued on with their banner headed who knows where.

The hotel, the one of the first and only time, had remained the same. Just a little older and mustier in its damp smell mixed with dust.

“We left your house like two homeless people, we don’t have anything, not even a bag with a pair of spare underwear” Marina said.

“Let’s rest here for a bit, just the two of us, then we can go back” said Thomas lightly touching her hips.

“Your family will never accept me.”

“The kitchen can be saved. We will have an extra room, we won’t bother anyone.”

“Your daughter-in-law looked at me in such a way!”

Margherita is not a bad person. I'm the bad guy. Even with my son, it is I who's the bad guy. They decided not to leave Venice in order to meet me half way: perhaps they care about me.

The wall-to-wall carpeting made a squishing sound at every step. But as they went upstairs, the setting became more comfortable: the rooms had been renovated just a while before. Painted in yellow, they smelled clean.

With the cold temperature as an excuse, they quickly got under the blankets, hiding one from the other.

Naked and in each other's arms.

They feared that, because of the time gone by, their eyes might not acknowledge, what their skin certainly would recognize.

FRIDAY

TIME 8:30 AM

NO HIGH WATER

Bibliography

- Adams, Hazard, ed. *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Revised Edition. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992.
- Bazin, Andre`. *What is Cinema?* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967.
- Bell, Ian A. F., ed. *Henry James. Fiction as History*. USA: Vision Press and Barnes & Noble, 1985.
- Berendt, John. *The City of Falling Angels*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Bertellini, Giorgio. *The Cinema of Italy*. Wallflower Press: London, 2004.
- Berto, Giuseppe. *Anonimo Veneziano*. Milano: Rizzoli, 1971.
- Bettetini, Gianfranco. *The Language and Technique of the Film*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973.
- Bodkin, Maud. *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*. London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern World. Ten Great Writers*. New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1989.
- Bragaglia, Cristina. *Il piacere del racconto. Narrativa italiana e cinema (1895-1990)*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1993.
- Braudy, Leo and Cohen, Marshall. *Film Theory and Criticism, Introductory Readings*. (sixth edition). New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Calhoun, Craig, ed. *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.
- Carravetta, Peter. "Dopo Zarathustra. Temi e figure tra Nietzsche e D'Annunzio" in *Quaderni dannunziani*, 1988.
- Christ, Ronald. *The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Allusion*. New York: New York University Press, 1969.
- Clarke, David B., ed. *The Cinematic City*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Davis, R.C. and Marvin, G.R. *Venice the Tourist Maze. A Cultural Critique of the World's Most Touristed City*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004.

- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. *Il Fuoco*. Milano: Mondadori, 1996.
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. *The Flame*. Translation by Susan Bassnett. New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1991.
- De Levita, David J. M.D. *The Concept of Identity*. Paris and The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1965.
- Du Maurier, Daphne *Don't Look Now*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971.
- Edel, Leon, ed. *Henry James. A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.
- Ewen, S. and Ewen, E. *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality* (Revised Edition). New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008.
- Garret, Martin. *Venice*. Brooklyn, NY and Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2001.
- Heilbut, Anthony. *Thomas Mann. Eros and Literature*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995.
- Kappeler, Susanne. *Writing and Reading in Henry James*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Kristeva, Julia. "From One Identity to Another", in *Classical Theory Since Plato*. Revised Edition, Hazard Adams, ed. Fort Worth, New York, Tokyo: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1971.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translation by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991
- Lapsley, R. and Westlake, M. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1988.
- Leary, Mark R. And Tangney, June Price. Ed. *Handbook of Self and Identity*. New York and London: The Guildford Press, 2003.
- Little, William, et al. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. London: Oxford at the Clarend Press. Volume II, 1964.
- Macnaughton, William R. *Henry James: The Later Novels*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.
- Mango, Cyril. *Byzantine Architecture*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, Publishers, 1976.
- Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice and seven other stories*. USA: Vintage, 1961.

- Marcus, Millicent. *Filmmaking by the book: Italian cinema and Literary Adaptation*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Martin, Judith. *No Vulgar Hotel. The Desire and Pursuit of Venice*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- Mazzarella, Arturo. *Il piacere e la morte: sul primo D'Annunzio*. Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1983.
- McEwan, Ian. *The Comfort of Strangers*. New York: Vintage, 1981.
- McGregor James H. S. *Venice From the Ground Up*. Cambridge, MA, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Mennell, Stephen. "The Formation of We-Images: A Process Theory", in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Craig Calhoun, ed. Boston and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996. Pp. 175-176.
- Meyers, Emile. *Identity & Reality*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962.
- Mitchell, Donald, ed. *Benjamin Britten. Death in Venice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Morris, A. E. J. *History of Urban Form. Before the Industrial Revolutions*. Essex, England: Longman, 1994.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*. USA: Harcourt, 1989.
- Munafò Ornella, ed. *Translation Atti: The Journal of Literary Translation. The Italian Book in America*. New York: The Translation Center on behalf of the Ministry of Affairs in Rome. 1986
- Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Baroque Architecture*. New York, Abrams: 1971.
- Norwich, John Julius. *A History of Venice*. New York: The Vintage Press, 1989.
- Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. *Luchino Visconti*. London: Bfi Publishing, 2003.
- Patridge, Colin. *Senso—Visconti's film and Boito's Novella. A Case Study in the Relation between Literature and Film*, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991.
- Pavignano Anna. *Da domani mi alzo tardi*. Roma: Edizioni e/o 2007.
- Pavignano Anna. *In bilico sul mare*. Roma: Edizioni e/o 2009
- Pavignano, Anna. *Venezia, un sogno*. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2012

- Raimondi, Ezio. *Il silenzio della gorgone*. Bologna: Zanichelli, 1980.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970.
- Rondolino, Gianni. *Luchino Visconti*. Torino: Utet, 2003.
- Rondolino, Gianni. *Storia del cinema*. Torino: Utet, 2006.
- Ruskin, John. *The Stones of Venice*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1960.
- Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960.
- Schmidgall, Gary. *Literature as Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Shiel, Mark and Fitzmaurice, Tony, ed. *Cinema and the City. Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context.*: Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Stam, Robert. *Literature and Film. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.
- Stam, Robert. *Literature through Film. Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.
- Stirling, Monica. *A Screen of Time: A Study of Luchino Visconti*. New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.
- Stokes, Adrian. *Stones of Rimini*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Stokes, Adrian. *The Quattrocento: a different conception of Italian Renaissance*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Testa, Carlo. *Masters of Two Arts. Re-creation of European Literatures in Italian Cinema*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.
- Traupman, John C. *The New College Latin & English Dictionary*. New York: Bantham Books, 1978.
- Weekly, Ernest. *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English.*: New York: Dover Publications, Inc. Volumes I and II, 1967.
- Woodward, Kathryn, ed. *Identity and Difference. Culture, Media and Identities*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997.

Filmography

“Senso” (Luchino Visconti, 1954).

Anonimo Veneziano (Enrico Maria Salerno, 1970).

Death in Venice (Luchino Visconti, 1971).

Don't look now (Nicholas Roeg, 1973).

L'innocente (Luchino Visconti, 1976).

The Comfort of Strangers (Paul Schrader, 1991).

Il postino (Michael Radford, 1994).

Sul mare (Alessandro D'Alatri, 2010).