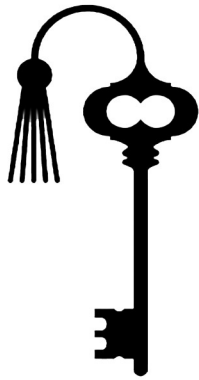


L I T E R A T U R Z I M M E R





The Arival

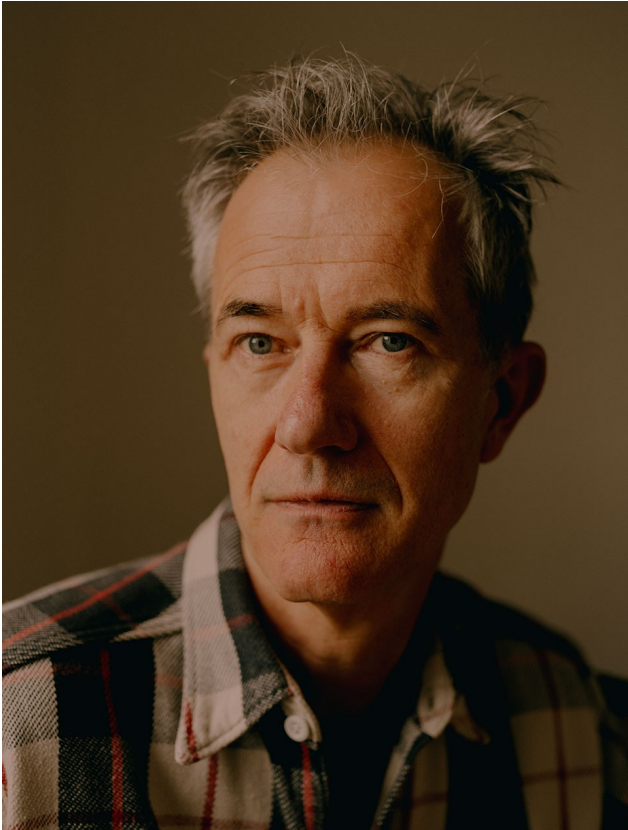
Thomas Mann



Death in Venice

Pounding work of the engine kept him from exploring fully, as the ship returned to its course through the San Marco canal. So he again set eyes on the most astounding landing, that blinding composition of fantastic architecture, which the Republic has to offer the awestruck looks of the approaching seafarer: the light grandeur of the Palace and the Bridge of Sighs, the columns topped with the lion and the saint close to the shore, the flauntingly projecting flank of St Mark's, the view of St Mark's Clock, and thus contemplating he thought that arriving in Venice from the train station was like entering a palace through the servants' entrance and that one should always, like himself, travel across the ocean to the most improbable of cities.

Geoff Dyer



Jeff in Venice, death in Varanasi

Once he got on a vaporetto at Piazzale Roma, though, he was in Venice proper. What fun it was, going everywhere by boat – even though the boat turned out to be as crowded as a rush-hour Tube in London. The difference was that this Tube was chugging down the Grand Canal, through the miracle of Venice at dusk! Venice in the grip of an insane heatwave! Venice the city that never disappointed and never surprised, the place that was exactly like it was meant to be (just hotter), exactly synonymous with every tourist's first impression of it. There was no real Venice: the real Venice was – and had always been – the Venice of postcards, photographs and films. Hardly a novel observation, that. It was what everyone always said, including Mary McCarthy. Except she'd taken it a stage further and said that the thing about Venice was that it was impossible to say anything about Venice that had not been said before, including this statement. Still, there was always the shock that such a place did actually exist, not just in books and pictures, but in real life, with all the accoutrements of Venice-ness crammed together: canals, palazzos, gondoliers, vaporetti and everything. A city built on water. What an impractical but wonderful idea. Jeff had read several accounts of how the city came to be built but it still didn't make sense. Better to think that it just appeared like this, fully formed and hunderds of years old in the instant it was founded.

Rainer Maria Rilke



Venezianischer Morgen

Richard Beer-Hofmann zugeeignet

Fürstlich verwöhnte Fenster sehen immer,
was manchesmal uns zu bemühen geruht:
die Stadt, die immer wieder, wo ein Schimmer
von Himmel trifft auf ein Gefühl von Flut,

sich bildet ohne irgendwann zu sein.
Ein jeder Morgen muss ihr die Opale
erst zeigen, die sie gestern trug, und Reihn
von Spiegelbildern ziehn aus dem Kanale
und sie erinnern an die andern Male:
dann giebt sie sich erst zu und fällt sich ein

wie eine Nymphe, die den Zeus empfing.
Das Ohrgehäng erklingt an ihrem Ohre;
sie aber hebt San Giorgio Maggiore
und lächelt lässig in das schöne Ding.

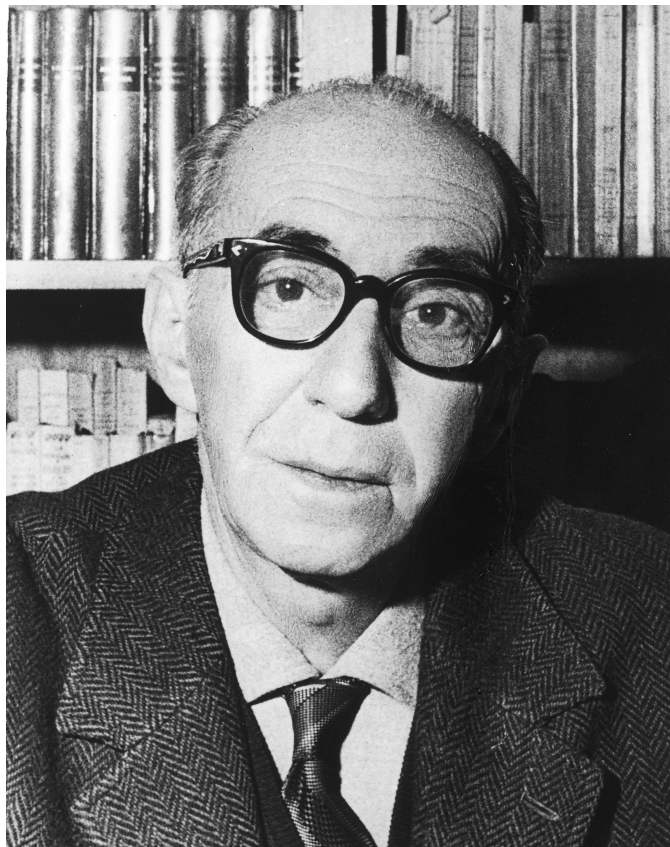
Jan Morris (1926–2020)



Venice

You can tell a Venetian by his face. Thousands of other Italians now live in Venice, but the true-born Venetian is often instantly recognizable. He probably has Slav blood in him, perhaps Austrian, possibly oriental tinctures from the distant past, and he is very far indeed from the stockmusic-hall Latin. Morose but calculating is the look in his limpid eye, and his mouth is enigmatical. His nose is very prominent, like the nose of a Renaissance grandee, and there is to his manner an air of home-spun guile and complacency, as of a man who has made a large fortune out of slightly shady dealings in artichokes. He is often bow-legged (but not from too much riding) and often pale (but not from lack of sunshine). Occasionally his glance contains a glint of sly contempt, and his smile is distant: usually he is a man of gentle reserve, courteous, ceremonious, his jacket neatly buttoned and his itchy palm discreetly gloved. The Venetians often remind me of Welshmen, and often of Jews, and sometimes of Icelanders, and occasionally of Afrikaners, for they have the introspective melancholy pride of people on their own, excluded from the fold of ordinary nations.

DIEGO VALERI
(1887 – 1976)



Primavera di Venezia

Senti, sotto la pietra, il soffocato
fremite della terra che formicola
di giovani violenze prigioniere?
Senti il respiro immenso che solleva
i palazzi, le cupole, le altane
più verso il cielo, e in cielo avventa cumuli
di nuvole d'argento, apre ferite
di luce azzurra, viva come sangue?...
O primavera che non puoi fiorire
in petali di pèsco, luccicare
in filo d'erba, bere nell'aria
per mille bocche il sole e la rugiada,
rovesciarti a torrente per le forre,
cantare con la lunga onda dei fiumi
per la pianura - o primavera schiava;
io non so cosa più soave e bella
di te, che fai tua festa d'un riflesso
blando d'acque e di cieli, d'uno strido
aspro di rondine, d'un rombo errante
di campane, d'un bianco sventolio
di cenci al sole, d'un fremer di vela
d'oro, nel vento che la gonfia e preme:
o primavera che non puoi dar fiore,
o giovinezza dal sepolto cuore.

Venezianischer Frühling

Hörst du, unter dem Stein, das erstickte
Beben der Erde, die wimmelt
von jungen, gefangenen Gewalten?
Spürst du den immensen Atem, der emporhebt
die Paläste, die Kuppeln, die Altane
höher zum Himmel, und in den Himmel wirft Haufen
silberner Wolken, Wunden reißt
aus blauem Licht, lebendig wie Blut?...
O Frühling, der du nicht blühen kannst
in Pfirsichblüten, nicht schimmern
im Grashalm, nicht trinken aus der Luft
mit tausend Mündern die Sonne und den Tau,
dich nicht als Sturzbach ergießen durch die Schluchten,
nicht singen mit der langen Welle der Flüsse
durch die Ebene – o versklavter Frühling;
ich kenne nichts Zarteres und Schöneres
als dich, der sein Fest feiert aus einem Reflex,
einem milden, von Wassern und Himmeln, aus einem Schrei,
dem herben, der Schwalbe, aus einem irrenden Dröhnen
der Glocken, aus einem weißen Flattern
von Lumpen in der Sonne, aus einem Beben eines Segels,
eines goldenen, im Wind, der es bläht und drängt:
o Frühling, der du keine Blüte geben kannst,
o Jugend mit dem begrabenen Herzen.

Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996)



Watermark

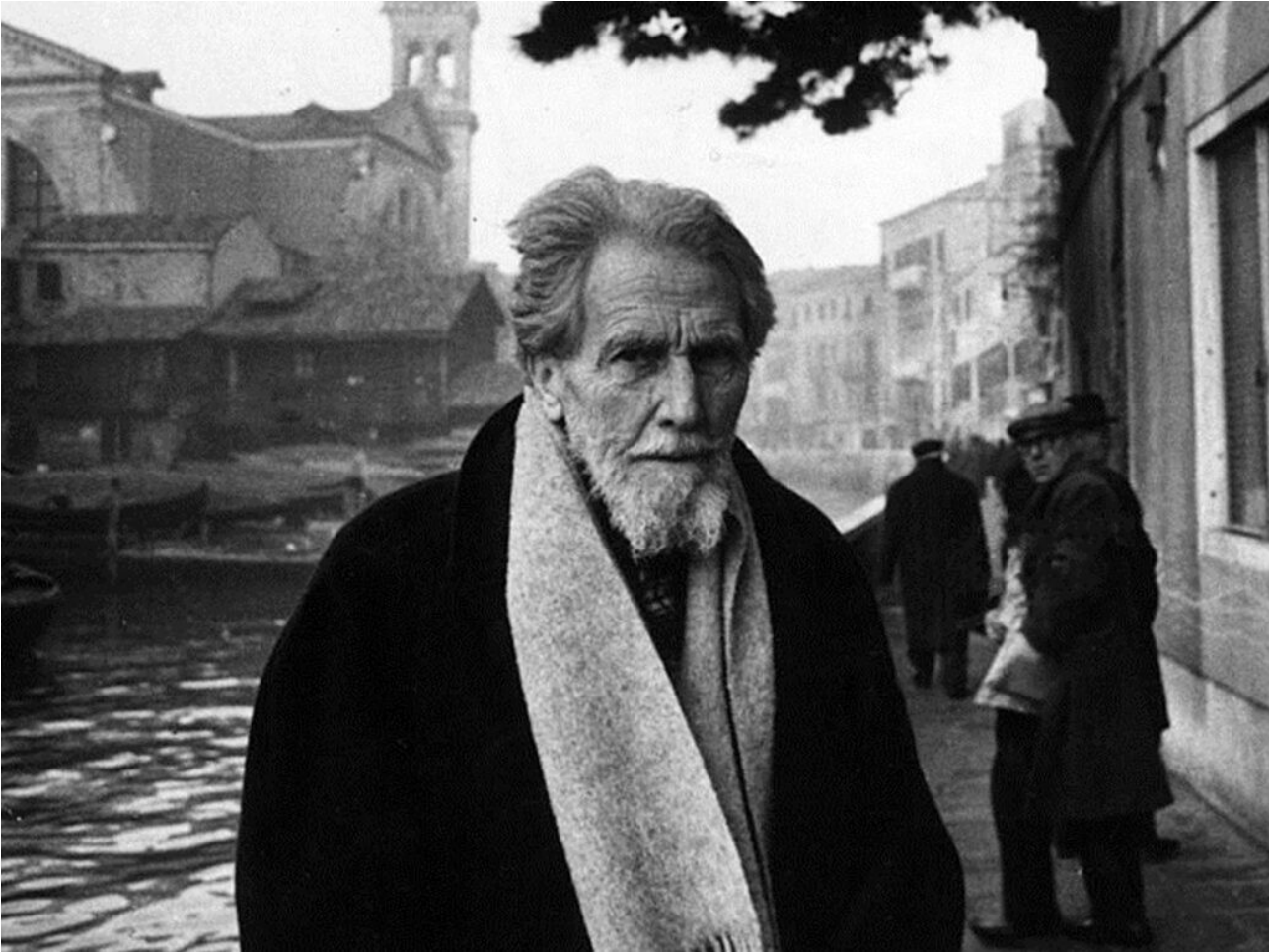
In winter you wake up in this city, especially on Sundays, to the chiming of its innumerable bells, as though behind your gauze curtains a gigantic china teaset were vibrating on a silver tray in the pearl-gray sky. You fling the window open and the room is instantly flooded with this outer, peal-laden haze, which is part damp oxygen, part coffee and prayers. No matter what sort of pills, and how many, you've got to swallow this morning, you feel it's not over for you yet. No matter, by the same token, how autonomous you are, how much you've been betrayed, how thorough and dispiriting in your self-knowledge, you assume there is still hope for you, or at least a future. (Hope, said Francis Bacon, is a good breakfast but bad supper.) This optimism derives from the haze, from the prayer part of it, especially if it's time for breakfast. On days like this, the city indeed acquires a porcelain aspect, what with all its zinc-covered cupolas resembling teapots or upturned cups, and the tilted profile of campaniles clinking like abandoned spoons and melting in the sky. Not to mention the seagulls and pigeons, now sharpening into focus, now melting into air.

...

Then the friend who gave me novels and who died a year ago took me to a semiofficial screening of the smuggled, and for that reason black-and-white, copy of Visconti's [Death in Venice] with Dirk Bogarde. Alas, the movie wasn't much to speak of; besides, I never liked the novel much either. Still, the long opening sequence with Mr. Bogarde in a deck chair aboard a steamer made me forget about the interfering credits and regret that I was not mortally ill; even today I am still capable of feeling that regret.

Then came the Veneziana. I began to feel that this city somehow was barging into focus, tottering on the verge of the three-dimensional. It was black-and-white, as befits something emerging from literature, or winter; aristocratic, darkish, cold, dimly lit, with twangs of Vivaldi and Cherubini in the background, with Bellini/Tiepolo/Titian-draped female bodies for clouds. And I vowed to myself that should I ever get out of my empire, should this eel ever escape the Baltic, the first thing I would do would be to come to Venice, rent a room on the ground floor of some palazzo so that the waves raised by passing boats would splash against my window, write a couple of elegies while extinguishing my cigarettes on the damp stony floor, cough and drink, and, when the money got short, instead of boarding a train, buy myself a little Browning and blow my brains out on the spot, unable to die in Venice of natural causes.

EZRA POUND
(1885 – 1972)



Canto XLV

With Usura

With usura hath no man a house of good stone
each block cut smooth and well fitting
that design might cover their face,
with usura
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall
harpes et luz
or where virgin receiveth message
and halo projects from incision,
with usura
seeth no man Gonzaga his heirs and his concubines
no picture is made to endure nor to live with
but it is made to sell and sell quickly
with usura, sin against nature,
is thy bread ever more of stale rags
is thy bread dry as paper,
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour
with usura the line grows thick
with usura is no clear demarcation
and no man can find site for his dwelling.

Stonecutter is kept from his stone
weaver is kept from his loom
WITH USURA
wool comes not to market
sheep bringeth no gain with usura
Usura is a murrain, usura
blunteth the needle in the maid's hand
and stoppeth the spinner's cunning. Pietro Lombardo
came not by usura
Duccio came not by usura
nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin' not by usura
nor was 'La Calunnia' painted.
Came not by usura Angelico; came not Ambrogio Praedis,
Came no church of cut stone signed: Adamo me fecit.
Not by usura St. Trophime
Not by usura Saint Hilaire,
Usura rusteth the chisel
It rusteth the craft and the craftsman
It gnaweth the thread in the loom
None learneth to weave gold in her pattern;
Azure hath a canker by usura; cramoisi is unbroidered
Emerald findeth no Memling
Usura slayeth the child in the womb
It stayeth the young man's courting
It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth

between the young bride and her bridegroom

CONTRA NATURAM

They have brought whores for Eleusis

Corpses are set to banquet

at behest of usura.

Carlos Penela



Preguntas chegando o inverno
perante á Chiesa del Redentore.

Quen verá unha noite afundirse
esas cúpulas de escarcha antiga
co mesmo tremor que o dos soños máis secretos
derrubándose...

Onde estarán os nosos pasos, estes,
cando os palacios sexan ao fin,
como o teu mundo, escuramente devorados
polas ondas, polo sal de días mortos...

En que cunco acharás vivas as rosas,
en que espello escribirás mais unha palabra,
en que rostro verás, aínda, unha lucerna,
nesas días de cinza que han de vir...

A que anxo consagrarás o teu silencio,
por que aves saberás do regreso da vida e a semente,
dos oficios dese amor en ti embranquecendo
logo dos óboes calaren entre follas estragadas...

Que Sibila ollará para esas cores como chagas
dos canais ardendo no solpor do outono
se o corazón do mundo se quebrar e, devagar,
esta tarde fráxil é esquecida...?

Questions at the Approach of Winter
before the Chiesa del Redentore

by Carlos Penela

Who will see, one night, those domes
of ancient frost sink down
with the same tremor as that of the most secret dreams
collapsing...

Where will our steps be, these very ones,
when the palaces are at last,
like your world, obscurely devoured
by the waves, by the salt of dead days...

In what bowl will you find the roses alive,
on what mirror will you write one more word,
in what face will you still see a lamp,
in those days of ash yet to come...

To what angel will you consecrate your silence,
through which birds will you know of the return of life and seed,
of the rites of that love whitening within you
after the oboes fall silent among ravaged leaves...

Which Sibyl will gaze upon those colors like wounds
of the canals burning in the autumn sunset
if the heart of the world should break and, slowly,
this fragile evening is forgotten...?

Andrej Grilc



Sisyphus in the desert

Venice

The scent of snow from the mainland, of algae, of motorboats, of garlic and shopping carts from the corridors, of dampness, of wooden beams, of small bottles of rose perfume from the bathroom, of worn socks on the floor.

First we will lie down on the bed, close our eyes, and forget words. We will listen to the wind of the bora, which sometimes moans and sometimes howls; we will listen to how the wood in the roof strains, like an overturned boat, and we are in a barrel with the humming of the sea boiling, with the creaking of floating piers, the cries of seagulls trying to land on the windowsill. The attic apartment was a vessel, and we were on autopilot with closed eyelids, holding hands. Surrendered to whatever will be.

Mr. O opened his eyes, Maja was lying on her side and looking at him. He kissed her; she did not resist. Her lips were calm and cold. He kissed her innocently, briefly, the way children kiss in kindergarten. She smiled and kissed him back.

At night his upside-down roof-ship tightened and gained buoyancy. Mr. O slowly descended above the city. His pajamas were inflated, his silk trousers filled with air. He bore a striking resemblance to the Turks in Ottoman garments in Bellini painting in a renewed attempt at liberation in the name of God, the greatest God.

If the locals had looked up at the sky, they would have recognized in Mr. O merely a bloated, bothersome Austrian with exactly the same agenda as the Turks, and would have ignored him one and all. E bee.

Then Mr. O, looking downward, noticed that the water from the lagoon had receded. Venice had become a city of mud. The Giudecca Canal had turned into the largest square in the world. Vaporetti, belly-up, lay like dead fish on the seabed. Seagulls did not know what to do with all their new freedom and cried out. Pigeons quickly occupied their new niche and searched for food. Mr. O then noticed that there were no longer any people in the city, no other animals, not even himself—only birds. Would seagulls, now without human presence, turn to killing pigeons, he wondered, to an incestuous cannibalistic diet, as had already happened in London, another watery city? Birds had once again taken primacy over the lagoon as its primary owners. The Venetians had settled in the marsh according to the rule that wherever 12 cranes sat on a patch of land, that was a good place for foundations. Birds are the sacred animals of the city. Flocks occupied the empty palaces, falcons the church bell towers. Bird droppings and feathers covered the facades and bridges. Loud chirping and wild avian roaring could be heard from every stone, oriental-decorated cage. As the poet says, time comes from water, and time is God. And on this night, when there was no water, there was neither time nor God in the city. Birds, and only birds, darted through the canals and settled the city so delicately and lightly that it now seemed made of feathers, weightless—detached from gravity by the absence of water and lifted into the sky.

He awoke to the sound of seagulls screaming and fighting over severed heads of fish shipments that had been delivered by boat to the fish market beneath the apartment window.

He watched the woman beside him for a long time, who was sleeping across more than half the bed. She had raven-black hair on nearly childlike shoulders, and on her ankle, neck, and shoulder blade she had tattooed drawings of flowers. She breathed silently, almost as if pretending to sleep. Could

he have any feelings for her, could anything develop from this? He decided it was unlikely, especially given her youth and the way they had met. He already felt somewhat guilty about his actions; he could already see that in the afternoon he would become nervous, bored, and disappointed that she would not be able to follow his melancholy, which always overwhelms him in this city. What else is Venice but a city of melancholy? He would free her from obligation. The direct train to Vienna leaves at 16:35.

He closed his eyes and inhaled—but step by step, first coffee.

He went for a walk to clear his thoughts. Giudecca was a village unto itself; although it was just a small stretch of water away from the most tourist-obsessed square under the sun, it was calm, people knew each other, and even tourists were greeted with a smile when they tried to order drinks in Italian at the bar. Mr. O knew the island like the back of his hand; years ago he had had a friend who was a pianist, and because she traveled a lot, she sometimes left him the keys to her apartment. From the northern side of the island, one could see at a glance three churches designed by the great father of architecture, Palladio: San Giorgio, Il Redentore, and Zitelle.

The problem with Giudecca was its coldness, its northern, shadowy side. So he took the vaporetto no. 2 to the sunny Zattere promenade for coffee, where both locals and the rare tourists basked in the direct sunlight at the cafés.

He was bothered by the loud talking of Italians. He thought that perhaps speaking loudly means speaking the truth. Being loud means being transparent, hiding nothing. Everyone can hear you, without mumbling. Mr. O knew that he himself would never be capable of such a thing. He had a quiet voice, almost a whisper, and people would tilt their heads when trying to make out his words.

On the terrace of a café, two tables away, he noticed an old man sitting by the sea reading a newspaper. A hunter's hat, thick brown sunglasses, a dark coat, leather gloves, and a dachshund that wriggled about seeking his attention. Crossed legs, relaxed posture, the sun on his face.

Mr. O was observing himself in the future—observing the person he wished he could become in the future. And not in the distant future either. After all, he was leaning past the halfway point of his life. To retire in Venice, following Brodsky, Ezra Pound, Berio, Stravinsky, and other greats.

Then he noticed that the old man was not reading a newspaper but that the papers in his hands were medical reports. Slowly he placed them into a plastic sleeve that you insert into a binder. So there exists a binder with all one's illnesses.

He shuddered and suddenly came to hate his future self-image.

He bought a chocolate croissant and a cappuccino for Maja and headed back toward the Airbnb. The pavement, which was at the same time the edge of the island, was wet from the splashing sea. The east wind had thoroughly ruffled the sea. He remembered the complaints of a friend who had said that if you stay in this place too long, you go mad. He had long pondered why that was, then concluded it was probably due to the lack of green. And indeed, wherever he looked there was only blue—sky, sea, damp ground, concrete bridges, gray-blue tones, a shorter piccolo and others that locals, in their internal game, do not call grande but lungo.

He decided to show her the Accademia, the art museum, half church, half palace. He longed for company, for the first time this month. And why not—while he was here, it was easier to follow a conversation than to surrender to his own blues.

EMBARKATION

J. Brodsky

A tear can be shed in this place on several occasions. Assuming that beauty is the distribution of light in the fashion most congenial to one's retina, a tear is an acknowledgment of the retina's, as well as the tear's, failure to retain beauty. On the whole, love comes with the speed of light; separation, with that of sound. It is the deterioration of the greater speed to the lesser that moistens one's eye. Because one is finite, a departure from this place always feels final; leaving it behind is leaving it forever. For leaving is a banishment of the eye to the provinces of the other senses; at best, to the crevices and crevasses of the brain. For the eye identifies itself not with the body it belongs to but with the object of its attention. And to the eye, for purely optical reasons, departure is not the body leaving the city but the city abandoning the pupil. Likewise, disappearance of the beloved, especially a gradual one, causes grief no matter who, and for what peripatetic reason, is actually in motion. As the world goes, this city is the eye's beloved. After it, everything is a letdown. A tear is the anticipation of the eye's future.

Jan Morris

The allure of Venice, though, is distinct from art and architecture. There is something curiously sensual to it, if not actually sexual. 'Venice casts about you', as a nineteenth-century Frenchman put it, 'a charm as tender as the charm of woman. Other cities have admirers. Venice alone has lovers'. James Howell assured his readers, in the seventeenth century, that if once they knew the rare beauty of the Virgin City, they would 'quickly make love to her'. And Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed some of this libidinous or perhaps narcotic rapture when she wrote that 'nothing is like it, nothing equal to it, not a second Venice in the world'. Today the place is loud with motor boats, tawdry with tourism, far from virginal: but when I lean from my window in the early morning, when the air is sea-fresh and the day unsullied, when there is a soft splash of oars beneath my terrace, and the distant hum of a ship's turbines, when the first sun gleams on the golden angel of the Campanile, and the shadows slowly stir along the dark line of the palaces - then a queer delicious yearning still overcomes me, as though some creature of unattainable desirability is passing by outside.

And in the last analysis, the glory of the place lies in the grand fact of Venice herself: the brilliance and strangeness of her history, the wide melancholy lagoon that surrounds her, the convoluted sea-splendour that keeps her, to this day, unique among the cities. When at last you leave these waters, pack away your straw hat and swing out to sea, all the old dazzle of Venice will linger in your mind; and her smell of mud, incense, fish, age, filth and velvet will hang around your nostrils; and the soft lap of her back- canals will echo in your ears; and wherever you go in life you will feel somewhere over your shoulder, a pink, castellated, shimmering presence, the domes and riggings and crooked pinnacles of the Serenissima.

L I T E R A T U R Z I M M E R

