SECOND DEATH IN VENICE: COGNITIVE MAPPING IN THE VENETIAN FICTIONS OF JEANETTE WINTERTON, IAN MCEWAN, AND ROBERT COOVER

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract


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Venice has long been a privileged site for writers in English, but for much of this century, it seemed there was little left to say. Since 1980, however, there has been a marked return to Venice as a literary setting, and this thesis examines the material conditions—cultural, political, historical, and geographical—that are responsible for that return. It considers the creative interdependence of city and culture, and their intersection with Venetian topography in contemporary literature, specifically in Ian McEwan's The Comfort of Strangers, Jeanette Winterson's The Passion, and Robert Coover's Pinocchio in Venice.

The new twentieth-century cities are being mapped and
produced by contemporary writers of fiction like Angela Carter, Paul Auster, Bret Easton Ellis, and William Gibson, and theorists like Marshall Berman, Edward Soja, Elizabeth Grosz, and Christine Boyer, who are interpreting and making sense of our urban state of mind much as Baudelaire and Dickens, Mayhew and Engels, made sense of that of the nineteenth. Such mapping shapes the thinking in this thesis, and the new Venetian novels are unquestionably part of this same broad literary continuum, but at the same time they are situated, quite literally, elsewhere. While these texts are seen as a return of the repressed other of an earlier literary Venice and hence as driven by the compulsion to repeat, they are also (and perhaps more importantly) seen as moves toward a cognitive mapping of an as yet illegible, shifting, and bewildering landscape. McEwan, Winterson, and Coover discover in Venice a means of articulating a late-twentieth-century sensibility, not from the vantage point of the abstract metropolis of modernity or the edge city of postmodernity, but from within the contained symbolic landscape of the medieval city/Renaissance urbs that is Venice. Through the reading and deconstruction of existing maps/writings/readings of a clearly articulated, legible city whose mythologized history can be traced back at least fifteen centuries and which has changed little topographically since the Renaissance, these writers map—and shape—an as yet uncharted late-twentieth-century mind shift.
For Jem Bates

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VENETIA
CITTÀ NOBILISSIMA E SINGOLAR.
DESCRIPTA DIL. SANZINIO CON NOVEM VOC.
AGGIunte DIL. GIOVANNI MARTINI.
Introduction

An ideal typus . . . contains all antitheses tranquilly. Venice is this, and more.
-- Manfredo Tafuri, Venice and the Renaissance

There is nothing new in noting the creative interdependence of city and culture; the idea that the writing of the city is as much a productive as a descriptive process is as old as the oldest urban forms, and the parallel and intertwined development of the transformation of cities and thought in the modern period has been extensively documented.¹ The new cities of the plain are being mapped (and produced) by contemporary writers of fiction like Angela Carter, William Gibson, Paul Auster, Toni Morrison, and Bret Easton Ellis, and theorists like Jane Jacobs, Marshall Berman, Edward Soja, Richard Sennett, Elizabeth Grosz, and Christine Boyer, who are interpreting and making sense of our twentieth-century urban state of mind much as Baudelaire and Dickens, Mayhew and Engels, made sense of that of the nineteenth.² This study, however, begins, quite literally, somewhere else. It

¹. See, for example, Bradbury and McFarlane, especially 95-171; Caws; Schorske; Sennett, Conscience; Sharpe and Wallock.

². Sharpe and Wallock, 12, 16-19.
is grounded in the astonishing number of writers—including Ian McEwan, Jeanette Winterson, and Robert Coover, who form the basis of this study—who in the course of the last fifteen years have discovered a means of articulating a late-twentieth-century sensibility, not from the vantage point of the abstract metropolis of modernity or the edge city of postmodernity, but from within the contained symbolic landscape of the medieval city/Renaissance urbs that is Venice.

There is also nothing new in the fascination Venice holds for anglophone writers, and an outline of the long history of this interest situates this study both temporally and spatially. Thomas Nashe invented a visit for The Unfortunate Traveller (1594), and Thomas Coryate and Fynes Moryson recounted their first-hand experiences at the beginning of the seventeenth century. For Shakespeare it was a setting for racial otherness (The Merchant of Venice was first produced in 1598, Othello in 1604), and for Jonson’s Volpone (1605), a sink for greed, lust, and deceit. Venice was, as it would be for different reasons for Henry James three hundred years later, Italianissima! But it was with the rise of Romanticism that Venice truly became a key symbolic landscape within the English imagination, its decline in political and commercial power and a mirroring physical decay providing a means to express the horror of psychological and moral failure. It continued to be central
for the Victorians, but things changed with the beginning of
the new century. The impression Venice gives of having
surrendered itself to tourism, of having become a kind of
theme park rather than a lived-in city, underlies the mixture
of distaste and fascination expressed by many writers at the
end of the twentieth century, yet as early as 1882, Henry
James had discovered the "barbarians" to be "in full
possession." His beloved city, filled with German, English,
American, and French tourists, had become nothing more than
"a battered peep-show and bazaar" (7). Venice, an essential
stop on the eighteenth-century Grand Tour, had by the end of
the nineteenth evolved—or degenerated, depending on your
point of view—into a popular tourist destination. While
wealthy visitors and foreign residents had since the
eighteenth century bemoaned the presence of the wrong kind of
tourist—always exempting themselves from the category—by

3. James mournfully recorded that "life" in Venice was over.
"The vast mausoleum has a turnstile at the door, and a
functionary in a shabby uniform lets you in, as per tariff,
to see how dead it is" (32). James’s metaphorical turnstile
almost became a reality with politician Gianni de Michelis’s
plans for Expo 2000 to be held in Venice ("Death of
Venice?").

4. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who has every reason to
distance herself from those she speaks of here, wrote from
Venice in a letter to the Countess of Pomfret in 1740 “... I
am impatient to hear good sense pronounced in my native
tongue; having only heard my language out of the mouths of
boys and governors [i.e., tutors] for these five months ... the
greater part of them having kept an inviolable fidelity
to the languages their nurses taught them; their whole
business abroad (as far as I can perceive) being to buy new
clothes, in which they shine in some obscure coffee house,
the turn of the century the Lido was one of the most fashionable seaside resorts in Europe. The sense of a barbarian invasion was intensified as any pretense of the educational importance of travel was dropped, and Venice became as famous for the exposure it offered the body to sun and sand as it had been for the exposure it offered the mind to a thousand years of European cultural heritage. The art treasures housed in neighbourhood churches and scuole, or guild halls, that had drawn Ruskin and his contemporaries were all but forgotten, and the “barren,” “solitary,” and “savage” Lido, where Shelley and Byron (and Shelley’s Julian and Maddalo) had ridden on horseback eighty years earlier, had been “the victim of villainous improvements” (James 28), “civilized” by grand hotels, lodging houses, boulevards, and ranks of bathing huts. D.H. Lawrence, far from finding literary inspiration, and with a nod to Henry James, savaged the holiday-makers as “an endless heap of seals come up for mating” and Venice itself as infested with “too many

where they are sure of meeting only one another; . . . I look on them as the greatest blockheads in nature; and, to say truth, the compound of booby and petit maitre makes up a very odd sort of animal” (56–57). One hundred and fifty years later, Ruskin addressed the “new tourists” in his St Mark’s Rest, snappishly subtitled “The History of Venice: Written for the Help of the Few Travellers Who Still Care for Her Monuments”: “You wretched little cast-iron gaspipe of a cockney that you are, who insist that your soul’s your own . . . as if anybody else would ever care to have it! is there yet life enough in the molecules, and plasm, and general mess of the making of you, to feel for an instant what [the cry ‘VIVA SAN MARCO’] once meant, upon the lips of men?” (92)
gondolas, too many motor-launches, too many steamers, too many pigeons, too many ices, too many cocktails, too many men-servants wanting tips, too many languages rattling, too much, too much sun, too much smell, of Venice” (270).

Literary activity in the first years of the century was desultory. Henry James had published the third and last of his Venetian novels in 1902, Mann’s Der Tod in Venedig was finally completed and published in 1912, and Proust held the city in his sights until he completed À la recherche du temps perdu in 1923. Hofmannsthal obstinately continued to write about Venice, despite the advice of his friend Jakob Wasserman that he should set his (never completed) Andreas elsewhere, since Venice was much overused (Allemann n.8, 144). Pound wrote A Lume Spento (1908) there; the “Venetian”

5. James had admitted that sometimes, on a June evening, when you find yourself “on a balcony that overhangs the Grand Canal” you may feel there are “too many gondolas, too many lanterns, too many serenades in front of the hotels” (30).

6. The material that follows is tabulated in Appendix 1.

7. A number of twentieth-century novels about Venice in languages other than English are important to contemporary anglophone texts: Death in Venice, as this study will show, has been as influential in shaping Anglo-American readings of Venice in the twentieth century as Ruskin’s Stones of Venice was in the nineteenth. Although the influence of Proust is less obvious, it is also important, as is that of William Weaver’s translation of Calvino’s Le Città Invisibili.

8. I thank Helmut Reichenbacher for drawing this essay to my attention.
cantos (XXIV–XXVI) were written between 1928 and 1930.\footnote{Venice is a central element for the Cantos as a whole, of course.}

Frederick Rolfe's (Baron Corvo) decadent masterpiece *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* was completed in 1909 (although, bearing out his paranoid fantasies, it would not find a publisher until 1934). Edith Wharton published *The Glimpses of the Moon* in 1922, and L.P. Hartley *Simonetta Perkins* three years later, but by 1931 the English publisher Ernest Rhys could safely ask "Who dares write about Venice now?" (308; qtd in Pemble 189). Most did not, with a handful of more or less notable exceptions: Ernest Hemingway's *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950), Bernard Malamud's *Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), and Muriel Spark's *Territorial Rights* (1979) are all Venetian novels, and Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* (1972) may not, as the Khan complains to Marco Polo, speak directly of Venice, but it reveals this city to be the absent presence implicit in the description of all others. Mary McCarthy, L.P. Hartley, and Daphne du Maurier published short stories. McCarthy’s *New Yorker* essays were published as *Venice Observed* in 1956, and James Morris’s part-historical part-contemporary account, *Venice*, in 1960. Both books have never been out of print.

Around 1980, things changed dramatically. As Appendix I shows, from 1900 to 1979, a new novel written in English and
set in Venice was published every four years or so. The rate increased to around one a year in the eighties, and I have counted a further twenty-four published between 1991 and 1997. I have excluded from this list such important texts as Philippe Sollers' *Watteau in Venice* (1991), because it is in translation, and Witi Ihimaera's *The Matriarch* (1986), Jane Urquhart's *The Whirlpool* (1986) and *Changing Heaven* (1991), and Jeanette Winterson’s *Art & Lies* (1994), because while the Venetian component of each is important, it takes up only a small part of the novel.

The texts I refer to cover a broad range of novelistic forms, broken down, necessarily but all too arbitrarily, as follows: the eccentric paracriticism of Michèle Roberts (The Book of Mrs Noah, 1987) and Robert Coover (*Pinocchio in Venice*, 1991); the "decadent" literary fictions of Ian McEwan (*The Comfort of Strangers*, 1981), Maggie Gee (*Where Are the Snows*, 1991), and Harold Brodkey (*Profane Friendship*, 1994); the literary confessional meditations of Joseph Brodsky (*Watermark*, 1992); the historiographical metafictions of Barry Unsworth (*Stone Virgin*, 1985) and Jeanette Winterson

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10. It is difficult to trace popular fiction once it is out of print, and so it is difficult to be confident about these figures, but I was able to study the catalogue of the Marciana's eccentric Tursi Collection, a gift made to the library of modern non-Italian literature set in Venice. It is not being updated, but it contains references to popular novels I would not have been able to trace otherwise. I thank Marino Zorzi, director of the library, for giving me access to this little-known archive.
(The Passion, 1987); the literary historical fictions of Dorothy Dunnett (the House of Niccolò series, but particularly The Unicorn Hunt, 1993), David Thompson (The Mirrormaker, 1993), Ross King (Domino, 1995), and James Cowan (A Mapmaker's Dream: The Meditations of Fra Mauro, Cartographer to the Court of Venice, 1996); the Gothic fiction of Anne Rice (Cry to Heaven, 1982); the detective fiction of Donna Leon (the Guido Brunetti series, 1991-97) and Michael Dibdin (Dead Lagoon, 1994); the mysteries of Edward Sklepowich (the Urbino Macintyre series, 1991-93); and the popular romances of Ardythe Ashley (The Christ of the Butterflies (1991), Erica Jong (Serenissima, 1987), and Judith Krantz (Lovers, 1994).

For all their formal variety, these texts are part of a broad literary continuum that interprets and shapes culture by reading and writing cities. I focus on three literary fictions from this list—Winterson's The Passion, McEwan's The Comfort of Strangers, and Coover's Pinocchio in Venice—in order to explore the questions that began to nag at me long before I thought of beginning this study: Why Venice, and why now? What, if anything, might the return to Venice as a literary site have to do with a contemporary urban state of mind? In discussing Coover, I will consider the intertextual importance for his postmodernist Pinocchio of James Joyce's quintessential modernist city novel, and I introduce it briefly here because, just as Venice seems an
odd locus from which to illustrate a postmodernist condition, so does Dublin to illustrate a modernist one.

Malcolm Bradbury defines "The Cities of Modernism" (97-104) as "culture-capitals" that for a variety of historical reasons, and at different moments in the course of the first part of the twentieth century, were the focuses of intellectual and cultural exchange, nurturing and generating growth and innovation. The city became culture as it "appropriated most of the functions and communications of society, most of its population, and the further extremities of its technological, commercial, industrial [and] intellectual experience" (97). Cities like Paris, Berlin, London, and Vienna became cultural and political crucibles of civilization as they drew in young local artists and thinkers and writers from other parts of the world.

In sharp contrast, the Dublin Joyce describes is commercially, technologically, and, at least in terms of international exchange, culturally stagnant. Far from encouraging growth and movement, it is distinguished by that old saw of Joycean criticism, "paralysis." If the modernist city is a magnet drawing an international community of artists and thinkers into its orbit, the magnetism of Joyce's Dublin operates quite differently. Its force of attraction is confined to a refusal to release its stranglehold on its own, and it seems to repulse rather than attract foreigners. Stephen Dedalus has been drawn back reluctantly to the city
of his birth from Paris—defined by Bradbury as the quintessentially vibrant centre of modernism—by the death of his mother, and he longs to escape. Dublin is not a modernist city, yet it proves to be the perfect setting for the paradigmatic modernist novel.

Like Joyce's Dublin, Venice has long been something of a backwater. But standing waters can be rich, and Joyce saw in his city, as McEwan, Winterson, Coover, and others see in the city of Venice, a historical matrix in which the traces of a cultural past, present, and future were held in synchronous, kaleidoscopic suspension. In *Ulysses* Joyce reworks three thousand years of Western literary history within his Dublin world in little, on a single June day in 1904. Contemporary writers find a similar teatro del mondo in Venice.

Joyce described and reinscribed in the structure of *Ulysses*, and against the background of Dublin's littoral natural landscape and its built environment, the tension that exists between the flux and rigidity of urban culture. He likened the city to a Daedalian labyrinth, now a space of Hellish confusion and monstrosity, now one, if parodically so, of art, beauty, learning, and potential transformation. Rigidity and flux are the conditions of urbanity used to distinguish aspects of modern cities since the eighteenth century, but in Joyce's Dublin signs of flux and fixity and labyrinthine confusion are doubled because they are inscribed on the surface as well as in the deep structure of the city.
His protagonists travel through a space divided by the River Liffey and contained by the Grand and Royal Canals and the protean, shapeshifting sea, and as they move from one solid, built space to another, between classrooms and libraries and hospitals and cemeteries, they move back and forth across the Liffey and walk on the tidal foreshore that blurs the space between land and sea, a marginal space that is revealed and concealed with every tide. Such oppositions and juxtapositions are, of course, even more marked in Venice.

In the knowledge that no reading is ever innocent, and that the city we find is likely to be the one we seek, this study reads The Passion, The Comfort of Strangers, and Pinocchio in Venice, situated as they are within the "map" of the actual city of Venice, as reinterpretations and revisions of western culture, and specifically of western literary history, and as steps toward a "cognitive mapping" of an as yet illegible, shifting, and bewildering

11. Referring particularly to Michel Foucault, Martin Jay, and W.J.T. Mitchell, James Duncan's The City as Text counters traditional cultural geography with its privileging of vision, or observation. Since we can have no unmediated access to reality but must interpret "an epistemological field constructed as much linguistically as visually" (Jay 182), we can only begin to know the text that is the city once we have a sense of the whole of which the text is a part (14).

12. Sharpe and Wallock note that it is difficult to view the city clearly, since our research is necessarily conditioned by a long history of earlier views of the urban field (8-9). As has long been recognized, and as this introduction will show, this is particularly so in the case of Venice.
contemporary landscape. Through the reading (and deconstruction) of existing maps/writings/readings of an articulated, legible Italian city whose mythologized history can be traced back at least twelve centuries and which has changed little topographically since the Renaissance, these English-speaking writers map—and shape—a profound and as yet uncharted late-twentieth-century mind shift.

The literary (re)turn to Venice in the last fifteen years is highly self-conscious. As Andreas Huyssen has recently pointed out, we live in a period that has witnessed, paradoxically in a time characterized by the waning of history and by cultural amnesia, "a memory boom of unprecedented proportions" (5). Always an object of fascination for the west and, as a historical archive that promised direct access to the "truth" of the past, "the preserver of its memories and the mirror that revealed it to itself" (Pemble 73), Venice has become an object of what

13. John Pemble refers specifically to the work of the German historian Leopold Ranke, who "introduced a new idol into the temple of European scholarship" (73) in the form of the archive. It was to replace old-fashioned historiography based on chronicles, memoirs, etc. Historically, Venetian officials had been obliged to document every action they took, every piece of intelligence they received, and the State Archives contained the reports and dispatches of local officials as well as those of foreign envoys sent back from other parts of Italy, Germany, France, England, and so on. These documents, some 12 million bundles and volumes in spite of some losses due to accident and confiscation by French and Austrian occupying forces after the end of the Republic, were believed to provide direct access to the truth of four hundred years of European history, and thus became a focus for nineteenth-century European scholarship.
Huyssen terms "museal desire." The city is a realization of what he calls the creative fissure that occurs between the past and the present and between historical events and their contemporary representation. For Winterson, McEwan, and Coover, as for Barry Unsworth, Maggie Gee, and Michèle Roberts, Venice continues to function as an archive of western culture, although they see and seek different elements from those that were important for writers in the nineteenth century. Each approaches the archive differently, yet for each it is at once a productive theatre of contestation and "an anchoring space" within millennial uncertainty that enables an engagement with the present and with the future. Venice-as-museum is not, for these writers, a symptom of conservative nostalgia. Nor can the great pleasure afforded by the return to Venice as a literary site be read simply as a form of cultural compensation (Huyssen 28); these are not exquisite representations meant to stand in lieu of a city that is slipping from our grasp. Rather, the perfect stillness of this "burial chamber" of our collective western past is broken open to become, if not exactly Huyssen's "site of resurrections" (15), a site of possibility and potential.

Such a use of Venice, and particularly of its narrative construction, is not a purely contemporary phenomenon. Historically it has served repeatedly as a model for rethinking western culture, and the western world has long
seen in Venice, and particularly in its selective memory of Venetian history, what it has chosen to see—as Huysen so neatly puts it, "[o]bjects of the past have always been pulled into the present via the gaze that hit them" (31)—and each interpretation has complicated and enriched the palimpsest. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, the myth of Venice as the embodiment of "good government" was increasingly self-consciously inscribed by Venetians. Denis Cosgrove explains, for example, that for Venetian humanist historians in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

[T]heir city represented the perfect society, a realized utopia comparable with, but superior in its practical expression to, contemporary utopias conceived in the speculative philosophies of their mainland peers. Venice, it was argued, was perfect because the original settlers in the lagoons had grasped the rational structure of creation and had incorporated its rules into their institutions. They were Roman citizens from mainland cities—Padua, Concordia, Aquileia—who had forsaken their homes to preserve liberty. Balance and harmony were products of a mixed government which combined monarchy in the person of the Doge, aristocracy in the 300 senators and popular republican rule in the broad membership of the 2,000-strong Great Council. Mixed government had allowed Venice to endure unchanged for a thousand years, sustaining republican liberty.
while other formerly free cities of Italy had all fallen under signorial despotism. A perfect constitution allowed for individual freedom and was maintained through the individual piety and self-sacrifice of Venetians. ("Myth" 147)

This myth was seized upon outside the Republic, where it served to support moves toward democratic systems in response to monarchical absolutism. Venetian Renaissance republicanism and a long history of independence and political stability were held up as proof that ancient democratic systems could work in a modern world. 14 Bouwsma

14. Witness these typical remarks: "The fact of being a republic threw around Venice an aura not so much of particularism as of universal validity. In a Europe where liberty was taking on new shades of meaning in the face of the assertion of monarchical absolutism, the longstanding liberty of Venice assumed a new significance and fascination. While Venice was interpreting it as the most effective cause of its own political stability in the past and its organic survival into the future, Europe was making it a key point of reference, an ideal, and a myth" (Tenenti 37). "[Venice's] long-continued independence, the stability of its institutions, the existence of an aristocratic governing class distinguished from the large mass of labourers and artisans, the 'mixed' quality of the régime, which prevented the domination of a single individual or faction, these were the elements from which the Venetian myth was constructed. These ideas existed in a somewhat unformulated way in the consciousness of the Venetian patricians . . . [and] the myth continued with some modifications to command the allegiance of the Venetians as an argument for republicanism throughout the period of Paruta and Sarpi but enjoyed its greatest fortune abroad in the political debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Florence, France, England and Holland" (Gilmore 439). "Venice, then, was the embodiment of political reason, a virtue that had previously been manifested chiefly by the ancients. And because of certain peculiarities claimed for her history, she could be seen as the means by which ancient political wisdom had been
notes that in the Renaissance the Republic could serve simultaneously as an analogy for many things, depending on the ideological environment and the political requirements of the reader: broad political participation or benevolent oligarchy; feisty courage in the face of challenges from greater powers or the values of peace; simple piety or the pleasures of sophisticated living (454). In the eighteenth century, Venice could be read in terms of Enlightenment philosophy as a perfected historical example of what Carl Schorske terms "the city as virtue," a progressive, sophisticated centre of art and commerce, enabling and encouraging social mobility (96-97). The Serene Republic's long-lived political independence and capacity to survive and thrive within the liminal space repeatedly traversed by large and powerful religious and secular enemies now made her an attractive model for emerging nation states and burgeoning empires alike.

But for some Enlightenment readers Venice was less admirable, and the Republic's foregrounded denatured urbanism was the problem. It is no surprise that Rousseau, who had spent a year as secretary to the French Ambassador to Venice from 1742 to 1743, saw the government of this most un-natural

transmitted to the modern world. For she had, as her admirers insisted, come out of the ancient world but had avoided its general collapse. She was living proof, therefore, of what men longed to believe: that ancient political virtue could find effective expression in the modern world" (Bouwsma 453).
of cities as "un tribunal de sang," and in the nineteenth century, following its defeat by Napoleon in 1797, Venice was further rewritten as evil and corrupt. The shift in perception can be attributed in part to a change in the attitude to "citiness" and in part to the specific social and political circumstances that surrounded the Republic's fall. With the rise of European industrialism and its destructive effects on both town and country, the city had come to stand for alienation rather than civilizing cooperation and interaction: the promise of the eighteenth-century city as virtue was superseded by the reality of the city as vice. Venice, most urban of cities, slipped from the pedestal to the pit, in spite of the fact that the industrialism that was changing the face of town and country landscape in northern Europe was hardly a Venetian problem.

A new, largely French historiography influenced by a desire to justify Napoleon's actions found a readership in an England that was all too ready to see Venice's punishment as fitting: Venice had fallen to Napoleon, as Ruskin would later agree, because a pious, hardworking community of free men had allowed a "democratic" system of mixed government to degenerate into an autocracy characterized by secrecy, deviousness, and a love of luxury—-all of which, conveniently, could also be interpreted as signs of Venice's

15. Rousseau, in Du Contrat social, qtd in Pemble, 88.
corruption through its historical links with the Orient. Further, for an Anglo-Saxon sensibility inclined to read the fall in terms of guilt and divine retribution, a thousand years of independence, coinciding as it did with the end of the century, was "not just aesthetically satisfying, but deeply portentous" (Pemble 87–88).16 As the century wore on, a combination of social darwinism, eugenics, and orientalism encouraged an allegorized reading of the myth of Venice as a warning to England, a latterday Serenissima grown greedy, slothful, and vulnerable as a result of easy riches skimmed from its own eastern empire.17 No longer a paradise on earth, virginal and impregnable because honest and just, historical Venice was viewed as a kind of Miltonic Pandemonium, hedonistic, tyrannical, inscrutable, avaricious, and cruel (116).18

From the middle of the century on, Venice began to be read as good and evil. Ruskin’s prophetic and highly

16. This section is indebted to Pemble’s fascinating reading of the English response to Venice, following its defeat by France.

17. In both cases, of course, the reality was that empires are expensive to run, and skimmed riches accumulated in the pockets of a few individuals and families (and, in the case of England, private companies), rather than in the coffers of the state itself.

18. Pemble argues that the palace built by Milton’s fallen angel influenced Anglo-Saxon attitudes to luxurious cities, from Delhi and Lucknow to Venice, so that denunciations of Venetian vice took on a particularly evangelical and self-righteous air (88–92).
selective rewriting of a city that encapsulated a fall from (Gothic/medieval) virtue to (neoclassical/Renaissance) vice (1: 3-5) would shape the perceptions of Venice readers well into the twentieth century. In 1861, three years after the publication of *The Stones of Venice*, John Stuart Mill could praise Venice as one of the few states noteworthy for “systematically wise collective policy and . . . great individual capacities for government” (Pemble 98); in 1871 Disraeli, in order to disclaim the discomfiting allegorical connections made by Ruskin, described a most un-British “suspicious and tyrannical oligarchy.” But by the end of the nineteenth century it was the general view that “the Republic had combined unexceptional vices with unique virtues” (Pemble 102). A hundred years after its defeat by Napoleon, theories of divine retribution had for the most part given way to theories of degeneration: Venice, increasingly described in botanical and biological terms, had, as must all things, grown weak with age. The decadent movement recognized in Venice (and in the writings of Ruskin, the city’s greatest apologist as well as its scourge) not simply the mix of beauty and death that had drawn the Romantics, but a gorgeous rotting splendour, the lovelier for its narcissistic and death-driven perversity. Of all the

exemplary textual Venices that inform the literature of the end of the twentieth century, this last is perhaps the most influential, and the most strongly misread.

In its geographical and architectural complexity, too, Venice lends itself to multiple readings.

The first and perhaps most obvious reason for the renewal of the city's status as a key symbolic landscape for contemporary literature has Romantic as well as fin-de-siècle resonances. Particularly since the disastrous floods of 1966 and 1979, which first brought Venice's vulnerability to the world's attention, it has become a symbol for the fate of the earth, and for our apparent inability to save ourselves from ourselves, let alone from the power of nature. This Venice, a double for that of Byron and Shelley and for that of Ruskin, haunts the new writing. It is a given that Venice was a central topos for the nineteenth-century Anglo-American imagination, fascinating not only because of the Romantic attraction to "beauty in decay" and the frisson accompanying the possibility that all that faded loveliness might yet slip back beneath the waters from which it had so improbably arisen, but also because of the ambiguity and paradox that inform its cultural heritage. In the late twentieth century,

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20. In 1967 David Lowenthal asked what it was that made for "key symbolic landscapes--landscapes that perennially catch the attention of mankind and seem to stand for, reflect or incorporate, the meaning and purpose of life itself" (qtd in Cosgrove, "Myth" 146).
the psychic lack Venice promises to fill continues to be linked to Romantic desire and loss, but as we approach "the end of history," when concepts of reality, truth, and meaning are thrown into question by the idea of difference, the idea of Venice has come to serve a wider purpose. For the writers who form the basis of this study, Venice is a site from within which the historical construction of western thinking is questioned, and where the neat binary oppositions of true/false, pious/sinful, mind/body, masculine/feminine, presence/absence, and so on collapse into a mixture that is at once confusing and stimulating. Venice enables the interrogation of what appears natural in culture because it is undeniably material and in perfect aesthetic harmony with the physical environment that shaped it and is shaped by it, but at the same time it is blatantly fraudulent, a glorious work of art, built against all odds—against nature.

As the aesthetically harmonious and pleasingly discrete city, "the jewel of the Adriatic," Venice fulfils Burke's definition of the beautiful in that, in response to the dictates of the environment, and in sharp contrast with the cities of a post-industrial age, it is small, delicate, and architecturally congruent. 21 Everything exists on the glittering surface of this floating city: for political and

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21. The beautiful may be distinguished by its smallness, "smoothness, gradual variation and delicacy of form" (Burke 62).
historical reasons--reasons that have made the idea of the façade or mask a metaphor for Venice--colore has always been more important here than disegno.\textsuperscript{22} The reasons for this are difficult to trace, but the limitations imposed by Venice’s particular topography are in part accountable. Civic architecture tends to be light and delicate, domestic in scale, for the purely practical reason that the substrate precluded tall or heavy buildings, and even the grandest

\textsuperscript{22} Hugh Honour notes that “[n]eo-classical theorists . . . ruled that to pay more attention to colour [colore] than to line [disegno] was to rank the transient and variable above the eternal and sure, to appeal to the senses rather than to the mind. Immutable truths could be expressed only in pure forms with firmly defined contours” (49-50). It is interesting for readings of the city that in architectural terms, structural design, at least before Palladio, was far less important in Venice than it was in northern centres of power or in central Italian cites like Florence; the use of mosaic and sculptural decoration as a major element in the articulation of a building was a Byzantine inheritance. Venice displayed its wealth and strength, its political connections, and--somewhat paradoxically, given the origins of Venetian architecture--its eventual independence from Byzantium, by means of what Ruskin termed “encrustation.” In place of the awe-inspiring juxtapositions of mass and space of northern High Gothic, for example, Venetian public architecture set out to impress through juxtapositions of colour, texture, and sculptural ornament that was an expression of the city’s historical links as well as its present power. Power was inscribed in the richness of the ornamentation, as well as through its trophy value, rather than through the form itself. Decoration was often piecemeal, and in the case of San Marco took centuries, leading Ruskin to liken the end result to a beautifully barnacled sea creature. Venetian art, too, was influenced by Byzantium, and it is, as John Steer notes, a truism that it is “painterly,” relying on juxtapositions of colour and decorative effect, whereas that of central Italy developed a more “sculptural” character: “Venetian painting . . . is about colour, light, and space, and only secondarily about form” (7, 10).
palazzi are constrained by a shortage of available land. Although their political systems were different and their official buildings fulfilled somewhat different purposes, it is instructive to compare, say, Florence's fortress-like Palazzo Vecchio with its Venetian near-counterpart, the Palazzo Ducale.

The whole possesses the integrity of the well-made object, not because of uniform planning or even a dominant architectural style--for example, the Basilica of San Marco is a mixture of Byzantine and Gothic, the Venetian Gothic Palazzo Ducale has a Renaissance courtyard, and the buildings that line the rest of the Piazza and the Piazzetta are, except for occasional Gothic frills and furbelows, Renaissance and nineteenth-century neoclassical--but because throughout the city the buildings are necessarily packed so close together they give the impression of forming a single coherent structure. Venice is an utterly manufactured thing, set against no natural landmarks except the light and water that are as integral to its construction as bricks and marble: Henry James saw harmonizing Venetian light as "a mighty magician" and "the greatest artist of them all" (54). The play of water and light creates visual congruity, the passage of the sun and shifting weather marking a detail here, throwing an object into shadow there, and a kind of chiaroscuro effect results from the repeated pattern--what Cosgrove in his fascinating account of the construction of
the Venetian townscape calls the "counterpoint"—of mysteriously dark enclosed canals and alleys that suddenly give onto open spaces of pale stone or reflective water ("Myth" 148).

But intertwined with this perfect image of delicate beauty is that of a darker city. This other city is inspired in part by a mythologized reputation for "Byzantine" conspiracy, secrecy, torture, and assassination, and in part, in the face of "beauty in decay," by the chilling mirror it holds up to the inexorable power of Nature to destroy all we have made. This is the city as culture, and as the chaos that succeeds it, as well as a primordial chaos that preceded it (pace Malcolm Bradbury). 23 For the 1,200 years that the islands we have come to think of as Venice have floated serene between sea and sky, 24 the treacherous surrounding lagoon has both protected them from military invasion and threatened them with death by drowning. Established settlements and whole islands have been submerged in the

23. "The city has become culture, or perhaps the chaos that succeeds it" (Bradbury 97).

24. I am referring here to the foundation of the administrative centre that was established around what is now the Piazza San Marco at the beginning of the ninth century, rather than the fifth-century settlement of, say, Torcello, since, although recent archaeological evidence reported by Ammerman, de Min, and Housley shows there was some settlement on the Rialtine islands as early as the sixth century (913-16), the shift of the Ducal seat there in 809 marks the beginning of Venice's history as a Mediterranean power.
course of the city’s history, and others have been rendered uninhabitable as silt from the rivers flowing into the lagoon destroyed drainage patterns and created malarial swamps. The balance between water as destroyer and water as protector has always been too delicate for comfort; Venetian serenity always included an element of bluster.

The “other” Venice may not qualify as a site of sublime terror, but I am reminded of Richard Sennett’s reading of Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth house, built on the flood plain of Illinois, as “a modern expression of the sublime.” Sennett describes the house as floating on steel stilts above a landscape that is “beautiful . . . but uncomfortable” and the house itself as refusing any sense of domesticity, “a space in which we experience the terror of nature sharpened by a building offering no promise of refuge” (112-13). For the literature that forms the basis of this study, Venice is both a figure for western culture and a figure for the sense of hubris experienced in the face of nature never before so flouted. The consequences of centuries of deforestation and subsequent silting and changes to the hydrological balance in the lagoon have often proved disastrous but are as nothing compared to those of fifty years of twentieth-century industry. Pollution has upset the ecological balance and eaten away at the foundations of pine and Istrian stone, causing buildings to tilt and settle; artesian wells sunk to extract fresh water for mainland industries located at Porto
Marghera and Mestre have caused the islands on which the city is built to subside at an unprecedented rate as the water table has been lowered; the construction of channels to accommodate large commercial vessels has created dangerous changes to tidal patterns within the lagoon; meanwhile global warming promises raised sea levels. It seems that this most perfect of western culture's creations may, finally, offer no refuge from the sea.

Repeatedly Venice has served the Anglo-American imagination as a metaphor for the past as lost object of desire. In this avatar, the city is a kind of architectural fable that has long existed outside the crumbling reality. It is the city we know before we ever visit, through literature and painting, and increasingly through the writings of art historians, geographers, and architects. Despite its physical vulnerability and social instability, contemporary urban planners venerate it as "a shrine to livability" (Garreau 10), a city that grew into its ideal wholeness in response to a community's changing needs and desires, and now rests in perfect, perfected stasis. It is a foil for the recent phenomenon Joel Garreau has termed the "edge city," which has come to be seen as symptomatic of an ahistorical modern world that has denied all contact with the past and with community. All too alive, and in grotesque contrast with the city beautiful's classical deathly
stillness, new de-centred urban fields,25 "urban villages, technoburbs, suburban downtowns, suburban activity centers, major diversified centers," are perceived as sprawling across the new frontier like monsters from a B-grade movie, sucking the heart out of old downtown areas and flattening before them both history and the landscape that once defined the boundary of city and country.26 In contrast to this illegible confusion, Venice, its feminized body exposed to the world's gaze, offers a meaningful story of the past.

But this is only one view of Venice, and late-twentieth-century writers discover behind the fixed classical mask a second city of fluid meanings and border crossings that render it a kind of allegory for the new cities. The first city, the city that floats, visible, on the surface, is a tangible, legible space within which, as art historians and geographers have explained, a series of myths and power relations have been precisely articulated and an ideology codified, through town planning and artistic embellishment. Rooted in the given circumstances of its lagoonal

25. Sharpe and Wallock divide the history of the modern city since the early nineteenth century into three phases: concentrated settlement followed by a central city surrounded by a suburban ring, followed by decentred urban fields, as the centre dies and is replaced by frontiers of growth on the peripheries, nodes spread out along highways (9).

26. The term "edge city" was coined by Garreau to describe the way new cities are being created worldwide on the fringes of existing urban landscapes. His overall analysis of edge cities is by no means as negative as this brief reference might suggest (10).
environment, the second is just as much "Venice" as the first, but it is full of ambiguity and all but impossible to map. Essential to the existence of the first, it is its resistant other, and recalls the ancient myth of the labyrinth, a fluid space of transformation that has traditionally stood for the psychic inward journey, and increasingly for textuality itself. Distinguished by death and decay, it is a figure for Kristevan abjection: all border. Together Renaissance urbs and mythic/psychic labyrinth form a kind of meta-city, a precisely articulated grammar for cultural reading coupled with a refusal of fixed narrative, by means of which contemporary writers comment upon the real-world edge cities with which we are struggling to come to terms.

Far from perfected, the second Venice is inherently liminal, an abject, halfway thing, denying the fixity the first city inscribes. Poised between land and sea and constructed of both, Venice is not just another coastal city; nor yet, strictly speaking, an island. And while the waters of the Adriatic define its borders and maintain its virginal purity, with every tide they also penetrate its labyrinthine body: the Bride of the Adriatic is at once virgin and whore. And every tide that flushes out the muck of the city, keeping it alive, also eats away at its foundations, hastening its death. This study focuses on ways in which this constant oscillation between one Venice and another, between reality
and fantasy, Thanatos and Eros, Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, is reflected in the literature that turns upon such metaphors as androgyny and the death drive and the compulsion to repeat.

A further set of borders that contribute to the city's construction as a site of transformation are the historical, cultural, and geopolitical divisions between west and east, north and south. Venice is at the border of Christian west and the otherness of the east, and for Ruskin at least--whose articulation of the grammar of Venetian Gothic and Renaissance architecture perhaps most formed our Anglo aesthetic and moral reading of Venice--it also serves as a fantasized meeting point for the cultural stereotypes of the cool rationality of northern Europe and the sunny, passionate Mediterranean. To extend the paradox, this land/sea, east/west, north/south position is as central as it is marginal. Because Venice had no land-based capital, trade was its source of power from the earliest days of settlement. By the tenth century, trade commissions had been set up from Spain to Syria, and by the thirteenth Venice was not only one of the two largest cities in Europe27 (with Milan) and a

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27. There is some disagreement on the question of Venice’s peak historical population. Jan Morris puts it at about 80,000 in 1202, just before the sack of Constantinople which led to the creation of the Venetian Empire (Empire 12); Patricia Fortini Brown says it was 120,000 at the end of the thirteenth century (31). In the sixteenth century it may have reached 190,000 (Macadam 41) although Cosgrove (Palladian 30) puts it at around 150,000. Marino Zorzi, Venetian historian
centre for international commerce, but also the heart of a sprawling empire acquired to facilitate trading activity.\textsuperscript{28}

Sooner or later, by fair means or foul, everything came to Venice. The Serenissima absorbed, or rather it made part of its decorative mask, everything it touched. As early as the eleventh century Doge Domenico Selvo had ordered every merchant vessel to bring back eastern works of art for the embellishment of the city. In 1309 the Collegio wrote to the galley captain Gabriele Dandolo:

\begin{quote}
Since our Church of San Marco has need of marbles in fine condition, and since we have heard reports that on the island of Mykonos and also other Roman islands [of
\end{quote}

and director of the Libreria Marciana, agrees with Cosgrove (personal communication). Today the population of the Venetian islands is about 75,000.

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\textsuperscript{28} Morris, \textit{Empire} 4, 118; Tenenti 27. Morris and Tenenti agree that, before the occupation of the terraferma at least, Venetian expansion had always been undertaken with predominantly economic ends in view, that Venice was never interested in empire for empire's sake. At its height in the fifteenth century, besides the terraferma holdings in northern Italy, the Venetian Empire was made up of strings of ports and islands that stretched down the Dalmation coast to take in Corfu, then east to Crete and Cyprus, and north into the Aegean, and to Constantinople. Although Venetians did settle in the Aegean, and although there were longstanding Venetian market gardens on Crete and sugar plantations in Cyprus, for the most part acquisitions were valued commercially as trading posts and safe havens for Venetian merchant mariners and protection from pirates, and for the access they gave to the Levant and the Black Sea. Tenenti contends, however, that while the importance of the \textit{Stato da Mar} remained paramount throughout the history of the Empire, the hankering after the lost homelands of the Veneto remained, and while they were never much use for turning a profit, they became indispensable to the social prestige of quattrocento Venetian patricians (21).
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the eastern Mediterranean], that there . . . are to be found the most beautiful marbles of every color and type, we ask . . . that when you are in those parts . . . you make inquiries everywhere about those marbles which are whole shafts or pieces thereof, and about medium-sized columns--white, veined, green, porphyry, and every [other] type. And if they are beautiful, you should procure them and load them into our galleys as ballast. (qtd in Brown 29)

Many of the icons that most clearly speak “Venice” were commissioned, purchased, or looted from lands to the east. The Piazza is, as Jan Morris puts it, “pure empire” (Empire 179). The two columns that mark the entrance to the Piazzetta, which leads to the Basilica, were carried home from the eastern Mediterranean (a third slipped off the edge of the Molo as it was being unloaded, and remains there yet), and the lion of Saint Mark atop one of them is generally agreed to be a transformed Levantine chimaera. The façade of the Basilica is a collage of eastern pillars, sculptures, and marble brought back to Venice in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The four horses of San Marco, which quickly came to symbolize Venetian freedom and independence, and the porphyry emperors on the Tesoro were booty from the sacking of Constantinople and were intended to be read as trophies marking a turning point in Venetian history (Morris, Empire 15; Honour, Guide 26, 32, 38; Jacoff 8; Brown 19-20).
This "meeting of cultures," to put a positive gloss on what was as often as not rape and pillage, is architecturally inscribed on the city's body, and it is central to the place of Venice in the late-twentieth-century texts that are examined in this study that there was little sublation. In spite of a sea change that has rendered Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance art and architecture unmistakably Venetian, it is their juxtaposition rather than any kind of synthesis that has rendered them rich and strange. The material traces of the order of meaning by which the west has constructed itself are preserved here in a kind of time warp. In contrast, say, to Haussmann's Paris of grand boulevards, which divided and destroyed the medieval city and the communities that lived in its networks of narrow streets (Sennett, Flesh 329-32), or to Le Corbusier's New York, the "truly abstract city," where "the mind is liberated" because the (European) past is expunged, Venice is a collage, in touch with time.30

29. Le Corbusier praised New York as "a city in the process of becoming," a kind of Tower of Babel, out of which would metamorphose not chaos but order, free of the filth and confusion of the Old World (98-110). It is of course their European past the builders of New York sought to expunge; that of the indigenous inhabitants of Manhattan was invisible to them.

30. I take the term from Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's Collage City, although they are not referring to Venice when they use it.

As I complete this study, Patricia Fortini Brown's fine historical study of the Venetian sense of the past has just been published. She supports my argument when she says of the
In order to show how Venice might contribute to a cognitive mapping of late-twentieth-century urban space, it is essential to look not merely at outsiders' interpretations of Venice as text, but at the historical construction of Venice as a signifying system that translated cultural and political desire into urban form for the purposes of the construction, first, of the Venetian city state and, then, of its mercantilist empire. Cultural geographers Denis Cosgrove and James Duncan explain how buildings and architectural detail, spatial relationships and ceremony, are employed in urban design as a form of rhetoric that is used to reproduce an internal vision, which subsequently reinternalizes and reinforces that vision within a community ("Myth" 145-69; Palladian 9-10, 35-41; Duncan 11-24). They read urban landscape not simply as the reflection of particular cultural practices but as a discursive field that encodes information productive of power and resistant to it; landscape becomes a signifying system of social and political importance. Venice's self-construction, which drew together a number of disputatious groups of refugees forced to survive on a construction of the city as a visual text: "In essence, the special quality of the renovatio of the thirteenth century was a venezianità grounded in what may be called an 'aesthetic of diversity.' It rested upon two major principles: accumulation, or aggregation, and incorporation (but not absorption). Tangible works that can be seen and touched--buildings, spolia, icons, mosaics, sculpture, artifacts--were more powerful than texts in creating a civic identity of a reassuring historical density, for they were unmediated testimony: unprovable, thus unchallengeable" (29).
scattering of tiny marshy islands into the grand manifestation of the Word of God and a mighty empire, "Lords of a Quarter and a Half-Quarter of the Roman [Byzantine] Empire" (Empire 12), makes it particularly rich in terms of such a reading. Focusing on the Renaissance, Cosgrove explains Venice's self-fashioning between 1480 and 1580 as part of a long history of mythologizing, and notes that this narrative is itself dependent upon a series of earlier ones, leading back to the visitation of Saint Mark by an angel some four hundred years before the first refugees fled to the lagoon.

According to the Venetian version, the city was founded on March 25, 421, precisely at midday. The early history of Venice is at best hazy, but the process of original settlement was certainly more piecemeal than this suggests, and from the beginning the scattered settlements in the salt

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31. Michael Jacoff notes that the tradition that the city was founded on the Feast of the Annunciation, 421, probably goes back no further than the 1330s (52 n.15). Patricia Fortini Brown says "an obscure literary tradition" goes back to at least the twelfth century and was recorded, and readily taken up by Venice, in a chronicle by a Paduan physician, Jacopo Dondi, in the 1330s (Brown 38).

Patricia Fortini Brown points out that the earliest, and in her view, "basically accurate," surviving chronicle, written in the late eleventh century, dates the first migration of mainland refugees to the sixth century, when the people of Aquileia fled before the Christian Longobards. By the twelfth century the chronicles not only emphasized a Trojan pre-history, but also pushed the flight from the mainland back a century, so that not fellow Christians but Attila, "an impious pagan," was responsible for the settlement of the islands by "specifically Christian refugees" (Brown 11-13).
marshes at the northern end of the Adriatic were problem rather than ideology driven. There were settlements in the lagoon before the refugees arrived. Visitors from the rich and fertile Veneto had long used the lagoons for fishing and hunting and the production of salt but, so the mythologized history goes, from the beginning of the fifth century they were forced to retreat to these naturally moated sanctuaries as successive waves of invaders—most notably the Visigoths under Alaric, who sacked Rome in 410, and Attila’s Huns—swept south. The tiny sand banks and low-lying swampy islands were inhospitable, and at first the refugees returned home to their farms whenever it was safe, but with continuing “barbarian” invasions the numbers of Roman citizens forced to watch their mainland cities burn from the relative safety of the lagoons grew larger and their periods of exile longer, until in 568 the island communities, (who had by now transferred their sacred relics, and even building materials such as the bricks, marble columns, and reliefs used to build Santa Maria Assunta on Torcello), were established enough to form a loose—and quarrelsome—alliance of elected representatives. God may have been on their side, but exile

32. The historical material that follows is informed by Morris, Venice 19-20; Norwich 4-5; Hibbert 3-5.

33. The settlements in the lagoon chose the protection of the Byzantine Empire (and certainly their historical cultural inheritance is Byzantine rather than Roman), though from an early date they were largely self-governing. The idea of Venice having always been an independent entity is part of
must have seemed cruel to a people used to the comforts of some of the old Roman Empire’s finest cities, and, in an age when political power depended upon the control of land, a natural moat, salt, and good fishing, small recompense for the loss of the fertile lands of the Veneto. It was probably not until 810, when an attempted invasion by Charlemagne’s son Pepin drew the Venetians together against a common foe (Norwich 21), that the lagoon ceased to be thought of as a place of exile. Nonetheless, the people who would become Venetians held on; they created settlements and then the city destined to become a centre of the medieval and Renaissance worlds. The scale of its founding myth is epic. Venice’s history begins with the survival of a scattering of refugees, the mythology—the Serenissima did not become an independent state until the ninth century.

34. Speaking of conditions in the middle of the seventh century, Umberto Franzoi states: “Una vita più intensa si va certamente organizzando ora in laguna, ma tutte le operazioni politiche religiose ad un certo livello si riferiscono sempre alla possibilità di ritornare sulla terraferma. Gli esponenti religiosi e politici che vengono in laguna, malgrado questo abbia dato loro la possibilità di salvezza fisica e spirituale, considerano ancora il territorio una terra di esilio da abbandonare rapidamente ogni qualvolta in terraferma si verifichino condizioni appena possibili” (46). [Life was certainly being organized at a more intensive level in the lagoon now, but to a certain degree all the political and religious structures always looked to the possibility of a return to the terraferma. Despite the fact that it provided them with the chance of physical and spiritual salvation, the religious and political representatives who came to the lagoon still considered it a land of exile, to be quickly abandoned in favour of the terraferma as soon as conditions would allow. My translation.]
"frightened men," as John Julius Norwich calls them (4), but politically, Venice needed a different narrative. In the centuries that followed, a more dignified past whose roots could be traced back to antiquity was invented, a past inscribed visually in the text of the city, but also in written texts like the twelfth-century "Origo civitatum italie seu venetiarum," which invented for Venice a Trojan pedigree (Brown 12-13).

For 350 years the Rialtine islands drew few settlers. There were a number of reasons for this. They were muddy rather than sandy, particularly susceptible to acqua alta even then, and surrounded by treacherous channels and shoals (Norwich 18). But in 810, these very characteristics combined to make them attractive. Though Malamocco on the Lido did not actually fall, Pepin showed the then capital to be vulnerable to attack, and the less accessible, less populated Rialtine islands were agreed upon as a new administrative centre by the beleaguered communities (Norwich 23). Land reclamation began in earnest, and a major construction program was undertaken. Thousands upon thousands of wooden piles were driven into the clay floor of

35. The practical disadvantages to settlement on the Rialtine Islands had kept the population very small up until this time. A result of this was relative political neutrality, since a land-based power struggle had not had the opportunity to develop and fester as it had in other parts of the lagoon. This of course added to their suitability as a new centre of power.
the lagoon, strong enough to support buildings not only of wood but also of brick and Istrian stone; canals were built, islands buttressed and drained, and the first Palazzo Ducale was raised on the site of the existing one. The foundations for what would become the central narrative node of Venice as text were in place.

Denis Cosgrove writes, "It is not strictly accurate to speak of a myth of Venice before the late fifteenth century" ("Myth" 146), but Patricia Fortini Brown finds evidence of the invention of a civic past in the city's chronicles and histories as well as in the articulation of the urban environment (Brown 11). The construction of the city as a text of mythic stature was an almost continuous process, beginning in earnest in 828, when, possibly by order of the Doge, a body said to be that of Saint Mark the Evangelist was stolen from Alexandria by two Venetian fishermen (Norwich 28-29). In an age when every important European city was linked to a powerful historico-religious figure, this relic was to be the linchpin in the narrative of the city as divinely ordained. Two suitable sites already existed for re-interment: the Venetian see was still situated some eighty kilometres to the east at Grado, where the Patriarch occupied the (formerly Aquileian) episcopal throne of Saint Mark

36. Many of these piles, petrified by the water that surrounds them, still serve their original purpose after more than a thousand years (Norwich 27). It is pollution, not the water itself, that is destroying them now.
(Norwich 11-12), and closer to home the cathedral of San Pietro had recently been constructed on the island of San Castello, barely a stone’s throw away at the south-eastern tip of the Rialtine archipelago. The first was too remote to be considered seriously, given the need to centralize administrative power; to have laid the body in the second would still have guaranteed Venice’s status as an axis mundi and a city to be reckoned with. However, Doge Giustiniano Participazio saw that the body could also lend cohesive spiritual weight to a fledgling secular administration that continued to be threatened by internecine struggles. He ordered the construction of a chapel abutting the new centre of political power. The first chapel dedicated to Saint Mark was set in the garden that separated the fortified Palazzo Ducale from the church of the city’s existing Greek patron saint, the summarily demoted San Teodoro. The existing Basilica is built on the site of the original chapel, and today may give a false impression in terms of sacred and profane hierarchies since it stands back from the water at the conjunction of the Piazzetta and the Piazza San Marco, but at the time of the construction of the original buildings the waters of the Bacino reached as far as the chapel and its south-facing, previously “official” entry. In its thirteenth-century form the west façade of the Palazzo was probably set back roughly six metres from its present position, so that the richly embellished south façade of the
Basilica would have commanded the gaze of all who arrived in Venice (Jacoff 10). The Palazzo’s position may have been prime, in twentieth-century real estate-speak, but the original construction was after all a protective fort, and to all intents and purposes Church and State were set side by side, facing the waters that were the source of the city’s salvation and of her future greatness.

A convenient founding legend was recalled or invented that not only justified the theft of the body of Mark but further reinforced the image of Venice as the Word fulfilled. As James Duncan says of the tradition of such myths, what it would do, rather than any basis in historical fact, is what counts (Duncan 90). According to the legend, the Evangelist, journeying through the lagoon on his way from the church he had founded at Aquileia37 to his ministry in North Africa, was “snatched into ecstasy” and heard an angel say “Pax tibi, Marce, evangelista meus. Hic requiescet corpus tuum.” In Ruskin’s recounting of this “hardly ingenious” tale, the angel left less to the imagination, foretelling the building of “una stupenda, ne più vedutta Città” (a marvel, a city the like of which had not been seen--my translation) (2.58).

The link between sacred and secular, so important in Winterson’s The Passion and Coover’s Pinocchio though for

37. The claims of Grado to the body were reinforced by the fact that Saint Mark was said to have founded the church at Aquileia, whose people were forced south to Grado by the Christian Longobards.
very different reasons, was writ in stone, the presence of
the saint lending heavenly authority to the new
administration and to the Serenissima as a whole as a second
eternal city. But there was a third element in this spatial
allegory of power relations and it, too, is central to late-
twentieth-century literature. The sea was the source of the
city’s wealth and power, its protective wall against invasion
by empires of east or west, and its foundation in every
sense. Palazzo and Basilica faced the Piazzetta, which
opened onto the confluence of the Canal Grande and the Canale
di Giudecca at the Bacino di San Marco, and from there onto
the lagoon and the Adriatic—and the world that for Venetian
traders would extend from the Levant and Central Asia in the
east to Flanders in the north. The Piazzetta was the grand
entry to the city. Not only did all heads of state, trade
missions, and commercial vessels arrive and depart from this
point, but it formed the backdrop for formal rituals that
reinscribed and reinforced Venice’s relationship to the sea,
such as the annual re-enactment of its marriage to the
Adriatic on Ascension Day, and for the staging of Renaissance
teatri dei mondi.

Through the process of “encrustation,” the image of a
virginal and eternal city was continually reinforced,
reaching its apogee in the late fifteenth and sixteenth
centuries when the reinscription of the myth of Venice as a
realized utopia was undertaken on several interlinked
levels;\textsuperscript{38} it is this image of built perfection that appeals to our late-twentieth-century sensibility, in the grip of a crisis of intelligibility, and underpins the cognitive mapping undertaken by Winterson, McEwan, and Coover. The writings of Venetian humanist philosophers like Marin Sanudo described and produced a city that was the balanced, harmonious effect of mixed government maintained through "the individual piety and self-sacrifice" of its citizens (Sanudo 4-21; Cosgrove, "Myth" 147); and while Venetians set more store by their own forebears than by a mythologized ancient inheritance (Brown 43), with the emergence of the concept of landscape in Europe, artists not only celebrated the beauty of the city and its history, but set biblical stories and the lives of the saints within recognizably Venetian townscapes; Tintoretto populated his giant Paradiso, commissioned for the Grand Council Chamber of the Palazzo Ducale, with powerful Venetians (Cosgrove, Palladian 40). A Christian past was brought into conjunction with a Venetian present. The Renaissance began a little later in Venice than in, say, Florence, and neoclassical redevelopment was occurring throughout Italy, but the need to reassure Venetians and persuade their political and trading friends and enemies that the Republic remained a power to be reckoned with was particularly urgent at this time. Although Venice's loss of

\textsuperscript{38} Cosgrove, "Myth" 149-53. The section that follows is informed by Cosgrove's essay.
power was a far more gradual process than some commentators (most famously, Ruskin) have suggested, and the reasons for it many and complex, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were certainly a time of crisis. Not only was Venice at war with the League of Cambrai and struggling to regain and retain the lands of the Veneto against armies it could not hope to match, but Venetian trading hegemony was being eroded. The rise of Turkish power and the fall of Byzantium in 1453 fundamentally weakened Venice's commercial links with the east. The discovery of the New World and alternative sea routes to old markets, and the development of sailing ships that could cover vast stretches of ocean beyond the range of sail-assisted Venetian galleys, for all their efficiency, capacity, and speed, gradually forced Venice from the centre of world trade to its periphery.

Cosgrove focuses on the commonplace of Venice-as-theatre that is a central and repeated organizing trope for late-twentieth-century texts set in Venice (Palladian 1). In his earlier essay focusing on the city's mythic construction, he divides the Renaissance restructuring of the city as text into three "key nodes," each with a distinct purpose: the secular and religious administrative space around San Marco and the Palazzo Ducale; the mercantile area surrounding the Rialto; and, discreetly enclosed behind high walls, the factories and shipyards of the Arsenale.

The profane medieval muddle of temporary and
semi-permanent booths was cleared from the Piazza and the Piazzetta to create a formal open space suited to the staging of grand public ceremony befitting Venice's status. The Piazza was framed by the Basilica, the Torre dell'Orologio and the two neoclassical wings of the procuratie housing the governing élite, linked by the church of San Geminiano (which would be demolished after the defeat by the French and replaced by the Napoleonic wing). Sansovino's Libreria Marciana was erected on the northern side of the Piazzetta, balancing the Gothic Palazzo Ducale on the south. The two spaces were articulated by the campanile, and the wooden stalls that had sheltered against it were replaced by the elaborately carved loggetta (also designed by Sansovino), based on the idea of a triumphal arch, and which Salvadori says "may well have been intended to give Piazza San Marco the same symbolic meaning as the Roman Forum at a time when Venice aspired to be a 'New Rome'" (108). Sacred and lay power and knowledge could be seen to be joined in built perfection, the body of Saint Mark continuing to legitimate secular government, and constructed beauty was in harmony with the beauty of the lagoon as the "theatre of nature."

Although the Rialto resisted the reorganization imposed on the more static space of the Piazza, merchant bankers and international traders, along with the fruit and vegetable and fish markets, were clustered around the bridge at the Rialto, and factories and foundries formerly situated in the area.
that would become Europe's first Jewish ghetto were relocated to the Arsenale. 39

The cityscape was thus restructured as a legible, clearly articulated, powerful, harmonious whole for anyone arriving at the Piazzetta as well as for its own citizens, reinscribing and reinforcing the myth of Venice as the materialization of The Word, perfected and eternal. The power behind the textual construct has long since vanished, but the form has survived largely unchanged for five hundred years, and as this study will show, it continues to be interpreted and reinterpreted in literature written in English.

The Venice in which Winterson, McEwan, and Coover situate their texts is, then, at once a mythico-historical, a geographical, and a literary construct, and in the chapters that follow I will argue that, by adopting and deconstructing an existing literary as well as a visual urban grammar, they help construct the new vocabulary that will enable the writing and the interpretation of the as yet illegible cities of the late twentieth century. They confront troubling issues of contemporary culture by shifting their characters.

39. Venice's trading interests meant it was from the earliest times a cosmopolitan city, and the ghettoization of all foreigners, including Jews, into various parts of the city was another aspect of the city's textualization. ("Ghetto" may be a Venetian pronunciation of the verb %ettare, to cast [metal in a foundry], or it may come from an obsolete Venetian word for neighbourhood.)
onto a foreign and historicized stage, albeit one English and American actors have long made their own. When they use the grammar of this known city with its legible forms to grapple with confusing contemporary moral issues, they are part of a long tradition of city reading, and in an age in which despair is a prevailing motif, they are, if not exactly optimistic, not pessimistic either. Venice is not seen in utopian terms; sorrow and ruin and loss are as common in literary Venice at the end of the twentieth century as they were in the mid-nineteenth when Ruskin set about catching the city on paper before it vanished forever, or at the turn of the century when Mann struggled to complete *Death in Venice*, but despair is tempered by a recognition of the human potential for change, or of human courage, or of the human capacity for love.

Each of these writers deconstructs contemporary western social behaviours, exposing historical and culturally constructed patterns against a clearly articulated historicized landscape, and the resulting act of recognition repeatedly offers the possibility of a shift in these behaviours. In Coover's *Pinocchio*, this effective deconstruction is the consequence of bringing together within a complex discursive field two "imagination": the creative imagination of Romanticism, and the dialogic imagination of Mikhail Bakhtin, and although Bakhtin is not an intertext for Winterson or McEwan, it is useful to extend this framework to
all three texts. The metaphoric journey to the heart of the labyrinth each of the texts undertakes at once mirrors the courageous, if solipsistic, inward journey to the core of the self, and is itself the Romantic act of the creative imagination—the making of the text. Many monsters are faced at the dark heart of the Venetian labyrinth, and not the least of these is the rich palimpsest of earlier discourses each new one must engage. The struggle that takes place there is, I will suggest, at once the test of the Romantic hero and the Bloomian struggle of the ephebe poet with his or her strong precursors, and the dialogic engagement that makes possible an alternative narrative, a Bakhtinian "answering word." After Harold Bloom's discussion of the internalization of the quest romance, the Romantic goal may be perceived to be not merely the text itself, but the text—and the act of cultural deconstruction and reconstruction—it makes possible. For Bloom, the deepest satisfactions of reading Blake or Wordsworth come from an awareness that both believed in different ways that "the pleasures of poetry were only forepleasures" in the sense that poems, finally, were scaffoldings for a more imaginative vision, and not ends in themselves. He likens their project to that of Freud, not only in that they provide a map of the mind, but in that they believe the map can be put to a "saving use" (Ringers 13). This "saving use" is essential to the project of each of the writers whose "creative misreadings" (Misreading 4) form the
"scaffoldings" of this study.

Each text positions itself in the known and knowable, ordered and legible Renaissance city of Venice, and within a known and knowable sea of stories. Each undertakes this double act of the imagination in order to step from a space of unified wholeness into an unknown space of diversity, disorder, and unreadability. It is the liminal space of the rite of passage, the symbolic site of creative destruction, and the textual act is Bloom’s act of creative misreading. To enter it requires an act of the creative imagination that enables the double movement that engages dialogically with earlier literatures in order to take us through the Bakhtinian loophole from the terrible inevitability of the despairing view of “death in Venice” Mann describes, to something closer to open-ended possibility.

Such an engagement is of course overtly political. This study suggests the position these writers take up is a particularly postmodern one in that, rebellious children of a modernist age in which demolition signified improvement because it wiped the slate clean of the dark chaos of history, they self-consciously begin in the past in order to map the present and to shape the future. To recognize the past and its shaping power in this way is not to long to return to it; the “return” these texts make is not a nostalgic one. Rather, Venice for all its perfect centred “citiness” is repeatedly read in edgier ways that make it a prototype for the phenomenon of the
twentieth-century decentred city, not least because (like Las Vegas or Los Angeles) it was built by speculators and developers. And, like those cities, its driving economic force has always been based on an economy of service—in Venice’s case, trading, banking, and (then as now) tourism—rather than on one of production. As Sharon Zukin points out, the space of “the market” is inherently liminal, a site of transition and transaction and change (28–29). Venice as Great Museum for what was perhaps the medieval and Renaissance world’s Great Market, serves as a site from which to examine the contemporary “moral landscape,” contemporary issues of cultural capital, and the organization of cultural consumption.

40. When the Crusaders sacked the holy city of Constantinople in 1204–5, the Venetians favoured silver and gold and things of beauty, and also sacred relics. While Franks and Flemings melted down the great statue of Bellerophon for its bronze, for example, the Venetians sent off less easily transported consignments that contained such things as the quadriga of horses from Constantine’s Hippodrome, the icon of the Virgin of Nikopoeia, and a plethora of sacred relics that would not only beautify the city and inscribe its power for all to see, but would increase the city’s attraction and consequently its income as a pilgrim port (Morris, Empire 40; Norwich 140).
Interchapter

Venice and Psychic Topography: Twentieth-Century Parables of the Death Drive

The topological space of the city, its dark, after-hours underworld, echoes Freud’s topology of the psyche. The journey and its narration parallels the process by which the unconscious material is transformed.

-- Laura Mulvey, “The Oedipus Myth”

While this study is by no means a purely psychoanalytic one, the nature of contemporary Anglo-American literature set in Venice and the construction of the city itself mean that my writing about them is informed by Freudian and Lacanian topographies of the mind and by the central psychoanalytic tenets of repetition and death. Because I will myself repeatedly return to psychoanalytic concepts, this interchapter serves to define my terms.

The Venetian narrative landscape in all its seductive otherness has long been read in terms of the feminine body--hallucinatory object of and liminal obstacle to the hero’s desire. The (active) hero’s journey takes place across and within a (passive) landscape, and this narrative pattern also serves as an allegory for the journey through social space,
from youth to maturity, and for the journey into the centre of the self.\(^1\) Such allegories persist at the end of the twentieth century and, as I have already stated, this study will in one form or another trace a series of journeys into the monstrous heart of the labyrinth. But if we are agreed that we read, construct, and reconstruct in our own image the cities we inhabit both in the material world and in artistic representation, it is not surprising that new narrative paradigms impinge upon old ones. Of the new chronicles of our modern western Zeitgeist, perhaps none has been more influential than psychoanalysis, and the narrative topography of Venice in the late twentieth century has with barely a ripple--on its "Imaginary" surface, at least--accommodated that mapped by Freud and redrawn by Lacan: the centrality of death to the Venetian narrative and to psychoanalysis makes them a perfect fit for each other.

The effect of the incorporation of psychoanalysis into

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1. Much research was done into the narrative of the journey in the first part of this century by structuralists like Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. One aspect of Propp's study of the patterns in myth and folk tales and their historical transformations examined the journey of the narrative hero through geographical space as a metaphor for a second journey through social space, from innocence to experience, youth to maturity, and so on. Important for my purposes is the way in which earlier work on narrativity was taken up in the 1980s by Laura Mulvey and Teresa De Lauretis and read through a psychoanalytic lens in order to examine the construction of gender within narrative form by means of the division between active masculine protagonists (who traverse the landscape, cross boundaries, develop and mature), and passive, feminized space.
narrative structures as a whole is that Venice as the city-in-crisis is more than ever before read as an allegory for the world-in-crisis and for the subject-in-crisis, each on the verge of a catastrophic collapse that recalls "the shattered world of the Trauerspiel" (Eagleton 20). The fragmentation of the city, which has been reflected in that of fictional protagonists and culture alike since the Renaissance, is intensified as the crumbling Venetian stage bears witness to allegories of psychic disintegration expressed in bodily mutilation and murder and also in a wider politics of social disintegration and post-industrial environmental degradation. Jeanette Winterson exposes a politics of nation and patriotism that fragments and mutilates Europe itself, where "peace," as one of her narrators remarks, "is only ever a respite from the war to come" (108). Ian McEwan uncovers in Venice a sadomasochism inherent in relations between men and women that "embodie[s] and declare[s] a powerful single organizing principle, which distort[s] all relations, all truth" (125): its destructiveness extends far beyond "philosophy in the bedroom." For Caryl Phillips (The Nature of Blood 1997), Venice is the stage for two Renaissance tragedies of the failure of community, scenes from our shared cultural past that are painfully, compulsively repeated in the present. The first is a story of neighbourhood informers and state murder carried out at the behest of an antisemitic populace,
and the second (Othello’s) is a story of exile and racism. Their twentieth-century repetitions are staged in Germany, and in Israel. Maggie Gee’s Venice (Where Are the Snows? 1991), disappearing at last beneath the waters of the Adriatic as the Romantics had fantasized, is a post-millennial figure for the end of everything, brought about by a rootless, feckless consumer culture that wonders at the world’s stupidity in not getting out of its way.

The Venetian landscape of the new anglophone literature maintains the ancient form of the trial by landscape in which the hero’s journey through time and space is an allegory for a spiritual quest (the repetition that speaks the death drive, as I shall go on to discuss, is built into the texts at this level as at every other), but it has been complicated by the topography of the psyche: the mapping of the Venetian literary landscape at this specific time is influenced and enriched by Freudian and post-Freudian maps of the mind. Far from displacing earlier structures, this framework further integrates the hero’s journey out into the world with the journey in, since the psychoanalytic narrative reveals the ego to be an effect of an originary bodily experience that may be misrecognized and refused, but never escaped.

Cities in general have long been viewed as labyrinthine and as feminized “containers” of culture, but just as the material construction of Venice speaks particularly forcefully the interrelation of labyrinth/city/text, so it is
conspicuously available to the psychic anthropomorphizing I propose. Freud compared the interrelationship of id and ego with the Dutch reclamation of the Zuider Zee: "Where id was, there shall ego be" (*New Introductory Lectures* 80). The same analogy might be applied to Venice, and following Lacan's rereading of id and ego the correspondence is even stronger.

I have referred to the collapse of form into content in terms of the labyrinth in Venetian texts, and in suggesting the Lacanian topography of Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic as a means of understanding the function of Venice for contemporary texts, I will show that by the same means "death" too is rendered to the reader unmediated in the

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2. Freud also famously used Rome and Pompeii as analogies, if analogies he recognized to be less than ideal, for the mind. He saw the Eternal City as containing within its late-Renaissance reconstruction, much of which is still visible, traces of the first settlement on the Palatine. "It is hardly necessary to remark that all these remains of ancient Rome are found dovetailed into the jumble of a great metropolis which has grown up in the last few centuries since the Renaissance. There is certainly not a little that is ancient still buried in the soil of the city or beneath its modern buildings. This is the manner in which the past is preserved in historical sites like Rome" (*Civilization* 70). He asks us to imagine that the city is "a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past--an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one . . ." In this imaginary psychic city, destroyed buildings would exist simultaneously with their replacements: "where the Coliseum now stands we could at the same time admire Nero's vanished Golden House," and so on (*Civilization* 69-71). His reading of Jensen's novella *Gradiva* (*Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva* 3-93) enabled him to use the city of Pompeii and its archaeological excavation as a figure for repression and the unconscious.
structure of the city. The inscription of death in contemporary readings of Venice is a doubled one. On one level, the city is viewed as dying, and contemporary writing reflects and plays on this as it responds to strong precursors like Mann's *Death in Venice*. Such repetition leads into a second level where responses are problematized by psychoanalysis and the "simple" fact of death becomes intertwined with the death drive. Freud's shocking proposition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "the goal of living is dying," that the organism's desire (unrecognized by the ego) is to return to an inanimate state, is taken up and developed by Lacan for whom the death drive is linked to the development of the subject's imaginary identity in the mirror stage, and the construction of the psyche in terms of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. I will discuss this psychic topography, and the centrality to it of what Lacan terms the "second death," in terms of the loose analogy I draw between the topography of the psyche and the topography of the city of Venice. And I will return to and develop these correspondences as they surface from time to time in the readings that follow.

For the purposes of my discussion, the Venetian lagoon may be likened to the Lacanian Real, a primal oceanic chaos that offers no foothold and into which the subject-city is born premature. In the fifth and sixth centuries, its concatenation of fragile and marshy islands as yet lacking an

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administrative centre were described as "secured only by osier and wattle against the wildness of the sea" (Cassiodorus, qtd in Norwich: 6). This linked but as yet incoherent gathering serves as a geographical rendering of the Lacanian corps morcelé—Lacan's punning l'hommelette, the scrambled self that is the newborn child's experience of its uncoordinated body before it takes on the image of itself as a coherent whole in response to a mental identification with the images that surround it. In keeping with this fragmented experience of the newborn child, the built city of Venice is analogous to the Gestalt the child assumes with what Lacan terms the mirror stage. As the mirror offers the young child a psychical map that is a fantasy of self-mastery and wholeness in place of its experience of itself as a body-in-bits-and-pieces, so Venice, constructed over and by the exclusion of muddy origins (actual and metaphorical), may be read as an ideal urbs, a reflection of beliefs about western civilization and culture and the place of The City within those constructs. But just as the mirror-constructed ego always contains a trace of the chaos it denied, of what

3. From the much-quoted letter sent in 523 by Cassiodorus, Prefect to Theodoric the Ostrogoth, whose capital was at Ravenna, politely demanding Venetian support.

4. As discussed in the Introduction, Venice excludes its origins and creates a narrative in support of such exclusion in the creation of the city itself and of a mythologized historiography. An illusory past is captured in what can be seen to be an expression of cultural méconnaissance as the constructed image is mistaken for the thing itself.
was lost, so Venice retains a dangerous and undeniable trace of primordial ooze, suggesting the possibility/inevitability of a return to the condition of the Real. Finally, the Symbolic order finds its analogue in the textualizing of the city—not in this instance the building of the city itself as text, the function of which according to this schema would be rather to uphold Imaginary integrity, but the historical and fictional writing and rewriting of the city that, in an act of creative destruction, troubles such integrity by introducing the potential for change.

The death drive colonizes all three registers of the Lacanian topography, and is materialized in the dynamic conflict of their intersection. In this Venetian allegory, death inhabits the Real of the sea that threatens the material city with inundation; it inhabits the Imaginary city that in its dreamlike stillness insists on stasis in the face of such a return; and, finally, on the level of the Symbolic, it inhabits the deconstructive literature of the late twentieth century. The Venetian texts to which I now turn each speak the death drive, and are the linguistic expression of the metonymic displacement of desire, signifying repression and the loss of an original jouissance. Winterson’s The Passion, McEwan’s The Comfort of Strangers, and Coover’s Pinocchio in Venice all resolve upon biological death and the return to stasis that implies, but death is doubled because these texts also introduce a discontinuity
into the Venetian narrative that I will argue is suggestive of the Lacanian "second death." Their discourse insinuates itself into the resistance of the Imaginary, seeking out and forcing open gaps—"creative fissures," to return to Huyssen—through which the excluded waters of the Real flood back. As Lacan responds to Freud ("Where id was, there shall ego be"), "the subject is there to rediscover where it was—I anticipate—the real. . . . Where it was, the Ich . . . the subject, must come into existence" (Four Fundamentals 45): in other words, the ego constructs itself from the id and will continue to coexist uneasily, painfully, pleasurably, with it. Venice, the city of our imagination and of the Imaginary, becomes the seam that simultaneously separates as it joins the Real and the Symbolic. In turn, the late-twentieth-century texts I will discuss are the agency at once of the death drive and of cultural transformation, in that they facilitate the disruption of the Imaginary identity of the idealized city and reveal a "second Venice" of fragmentation and disintegration.

It goes without saying that the message of the death drive that occupies the heart of the labyrinth of psychoanalytic concepts is writ large in the disintegration of the "body" of the city and in its constant struggle against encroaching and polluted water, but as I have begun to suggest, something productive rather than elegaic takes place in contemporary literature set in Venice, and it takes
place at the level of the "second death." Lacan takes as his point of departure Freud's hypothetical and essentially biological thesis that the satisfaction the organism seeks "beyond the pleasure principle" is stasis and sameness over difference and change.\(^5\) Freud proposed that human desire, which sometimes seems driven not toward pleasure but rather toward the compulsive repetition of things that are painful, is linked to fantasies of wholeness that can be traced back to a lost and longed for dream of pre-gendered completeness, before the child is forced, with the oedipal stage, to forsake the bliss of oneness with its mother and to take up a fixed gendered position.\(^6\) He concluded that this inarticulable, unrecognized desire goes back even further beyond pre-oedipal bliss to the state of total stasis before birth. Beyond Eros, the desire for sexual union and life, Freud posited, lies a contradictory and unrecognized desire

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5. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is viewed as central to Lacan's return to Freud, as the death drive is viewed as central to psychoanalysis. See, for example, Gallop 98, and Ragland ch.3.

6. Freud distinguished between two types of repetition. The first is the process by which the subject masters the pain of loss and so reinforces the sense of his or her own identity. His famous example of this is his infant grandson's *fort/da* game in which the child stages a fantasy of control over the disappearance and return of his mother by discarding and retrieving a cotton reel attached to a piece of string (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 14-17). The second form of repetition is linked to the traumatic experience that shatters the boundaries of the ego, and that cannot be mastered. The subject compulsively restages the event mentally in an attempt to bind it retrospectively, and so regain the sense of constancy that has been lost.
for death, a return to the body of the mother, and to mother earth, whence we came. In the course of the oedipalization of the subject, the body of the woman, the longed for and forever lost maternal body, comes to stand at once for Eros and life, and for Thanatos and death. For Freud, then, the desire is for the death of the organism, although it finds expression in the psychic register.

Lacan develops this aspect of Freud’s theory by means of linguistic concepts that link psychic development to the entry into language and the loss and subsequent alienation this imposes on the subject. The “second death” does drive the subject toward “an earlier state of things,” but far from a desire for stasis, its aim is the breakdown of dreams of coherence. In Lacan’s narrative, the alienated subject constituted by exclusion in the mirror stage desires not to regain oneness with another but to return to the originary inchoate part of itself that is lost: the fragmented body always just out of reach in the chaos of the Real. Both “deaths” are central to the narratives I will call on to illustrate this proposition, but while the misrecognized Freudian goal beyond the pleasure principle is the stasis that accompanies the end of the biological organism, and, by analogy, of the city and of culture, the Lacanian “second death” may be seen to be an agent of change and difference, and while it is to be feared because it threatens the hard-won integrity of the Imaginary ego, it is also, albeit
unconsciously, to be desired as it provides access to the lost and inaccessible Real. In the readings that follow I will demonstrate, by means of the fictions of Winterson, McEwan, and Coover, how this transformative force that operates at the heart of the human psyche becomes an agency for a kind of psychic and cultural shift. Just as the talking cure is an interface between psyche and body, between ego and id, so these "talking books" are an interface between Venice and what it symbolizes for our cultural psyche and the potential of the unthinkable otherness that lies "beyond the pleasure principle."
Chapter One

Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson’s The Passion

The Venice of Jeanette Winterson’s The Passion (1987) is a shifting thing—at once a tangible site of Imaginary wholeness, entire, sun-warmed, and filled with life, and a dark, mysterious labyrinth of transformation, danger, and death. Death is inscribed within this ambiguous space by means of intertextual and linguistic repetition and quotation, and that inscription is emphasized and reinforced by the city’s overdetermined topographical structure. Venice is a figure for two privileged and inextricably linked psychoanalytic tropes: death and the body of the woman. For as long as cities have existed they have been symbolically figured as feminine, and Venice’s seductive decorative beauty, its historical reputation for duplicity,
its topography, at once contained and enclosed by water and penetrated by it, has rendered it an ideal vehicle for the historical and cultural burden of ambivalence that inheres in the female body and is mirrored in theories of urbanism. Winterson emphasises this ambiguity by setting her narrative in a space that is at once productive, the nurturing space of culture, and destructive, the primordial abyss, the engulfing "monstrous-feminine" (Creed). Together, her two protagonists enter a doubled labyrinth that is a site of birth and re-birth and re-union, and a wasteland of exile, fragmentation, and death. Villanelle, a Venetian gambler sold to Napoleon's army as a whore, is re-born in returning to her family and her old life and slipping easily back and forth between the surface city and the changeful space of the labyrinth that each are mirrors for her own beautiful, amphibious body. Her stolen heart is discovered and returned to its rightful place, and she gives birth to a child. Henri, a French deserter from Napoleon's army, has a very different experience of the city. In a ritual cleansing he shaves off his "ruffian's beard" and casts it into the canal outside his window (112), and for a moment he thinks he has escaped his past—in Venice, "[s]uch things are possible" (125)—but he remains an exile unable to navigate the labyrinth and is swallowed up into madness and
despair.

The Passion is set in Napoleonic France and Venice in the first years of the nineteenth century. It sidesteps the contentious first phase of the French Revolution and the overthrow of Louis XVI\(^1\) to begin with the institution of the Empire in 1804,\(^2\) an event that for many historians signals the end of the first Revolutionary period.\(^3\) The choice of this historiographic ground of empire and expansionist warfare over that of revolution is not arbitrary; rather, it is constitutive of a text whose political focus, while

1. There are flashbacks to the Revolution and the Terror, but Henri’s village only heard rumours, and “We were always helpless, whoever was in power” (16).

2. Simon Schama, in noting the range of historical responses to the Revolution over the last two hundred years, says all are agreed that it “had indeed been the crucible of modernity: the vessel in which all the characteristics of the modern social world, for good or ill, had been distilled” (xiv). Contemporary historians have avoided addressing Revolutionary violence, partly for fear of giving succour to contemporary counter-Revolutionary views. For Schama, however, “it was not merely an unfortunate by-product of politics, or the disagreeable instrument by which other more virtuous ends were accomplished or vicious ones thwarted. In some depressingly unavoidable sense, violence was the Revolution itself” (Schama xv). Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm likened Schama’s political position on Revolutionary violence and the Terror to that of Burke and Carlyle, Dickens and Orczy (Hobsbawm 4).

3. Locating the end of the Revolution proper continues to be a source of dispute. Napoleon declared it over in 1799 (Schama 4), and some historians place it as late as the defeat at Waterloo.
manifestly gender and sexuality rather than politics in the national sense, addresses contemporary as well as historical sources of war and violence by informing a historical narrative with the psychoanalytic one of the death drive.4

The choice of this period is also self-conscious in literary historical terms. In The Passion the psychic lack Venice promises to fill is expressed in a narrative of Romantic desire and loss played out against a background of High Romanticism that includes the rise and fall of Napoleon, who was of central importance to both Byron and Shelley. Winterson’s soldier protagonist is a type of Romantic quester, a figure for Harold Bloom’s Promethean hero “who stands finally, quite alone, upon a tower that is only himself” (Ringers 19).

The narrative operates at the level of the individual, but the implications are broader. It is set within the zone of the Romantic dreaming into existence of the modern nation state, and while a concept so fraught with historical

4. Little critical work has yet been published on Winterson, and reviews and interviews have tended to focus on issues of gender and sexuality. Lisa Moore, who in a recent interesting essay suggests wider issues are important in The Passion and that “spatial and linguistic dislocation maps neatly on to the plot of imperial aggression” (115), points out that “conflict in this fictional world is always romantic conflict; even war is primarily an opportunity for Henri to express his obsessive love for Napoleon . . . Winterson’s novels may be read politically, but they themselves make no explicit political argument” (113).
complexity cannot be traced to any kind of simple root cause, it has become a modern excuse for the compulsively repetitive European "tradition of senseless nationalist warfare." This chapter considers some implications of this for a text that, structured as it is around an interplay of linguistic and intertextual repetition that focuses on death and mutilation, and whose narrative journey ends within the confined space of a dying city, is an exemplum of the death drive.

The narrative begins at Boulogne, "the springboard of Empire" (8), where Napoleon's troops are preparing to run the British Navy's blockade and invade England. Fifteen years have passed since the storming of the Bastille, and five since Napoleon's coup d'état and the rise of the first modern military dictatorship. The modern European nation state has achieved its savage birth. The historical locus is the Napoleonic Wars but it is significant for her narrative as a whole that, far from embodying revolutionary fervour or sans-culottes blood lust, Winterson's French people are phlegmatic, even melancholic. Writing in

5. Of the destruction of the Croatian city of Vukovar in the early stages of the recent war in the Balkans, Michael Ignatieff argues there was no military objective; only "a desire to hurt, humiliate and punish." The town should not be rebuilt, but declared a European heritage site, since "[w]hat could be more European, after all, than our tradition of senseless nationalist warfare?" (31).
retrospect and struggling to make sense of the horror of the past, her soldier-narrator describes his compatriots as "a lukewarm people" who "long to feel," yet are afraid to do so: "Not much touches us, but we long to be touched. We lie awake at night willing the darkness to part and show us a vision. Our children frighten us in their intimacy, but we make sure they grow up like us. Lukewarm like us" (7).

Such repressed desire is available to be channelled into the blind patriotism that diverts energy away from post-Revolution reconstruction toward offensive imperial warfare: "If we had the courage to love we would not so value these acts of war" (154). Armed conflict is exposed as a form of erotic displacement. The unconscious desire for death masquerades as love, as the psychic drive, which has no pre-given object, is all too easily redirected from the pursuit of sexual love, children, and community onto nationalism and patria, Napoleon and Empire:

He was in love with himself and France joined in. It was a romance. Perhaps all romance is like that; not a contract between equal parties but an explosion of dreams and desires that can find no outlet in everyday life. (13)

The characterizing of the French as a passionless people is of course an oversimplification, and Winterson's
Venetians, with just as little basis in historical reality, are perceived as all but unmoved by ideas of nationalism because they are not afraid to feel, and so passion is not displaced. Venice's defeat by Napoleon brought to an end a thousand years of independence, but while the French are scorned, they are ignored rather than hated (53); there is no suggestion of resistance, no suggestion that blood must be spilt to restore lost national virtue. Instead of joining in the destruction that is the conspicuous effect of French nationalism, Venetians have simply "abandoned [themselves] to pleasure," and Venice has become "an enchanted island for the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted" (52). There is suffering and sullen rage, though that indeed is repressed, exiled to the depths of the labyrinth from where it must one day resurface, but for the period of this narrative at least, life in the surface city proceeds in the pleasurable, frivolous, and somewhat sinister manner that had from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made Venice notorious as the revel of the earth.

Early in the novel a little girl asks Henri as he leaves home to join Napoleon's army, "Will you kill people?" Filled with "innocent" patriotism, he assures her he won't kill anybody--just "the enemy." The child then asks: "What is
enemy?” (8, 79). This is the crux. Winterson problematizes the notion of human violence and its expression in a nationalism that relies on a fictionalized narrative for which people are prepared to kill, by revealing the complex nature of the elusive notion of “enemy” and the danger of locating evil “out there,” as though it were the sole attribute and the sole responsibility of the Other. Where to situate human violence is a question that has exercised psychoanalysis since its beginnings. There is of course no question that the social and political injustice that exists “out there” leads to violence. But The Passion, immersed in the historical reality of the destruction wrought by war, looks at the extent to which the violence “out there” is mirrored and complicated by a destructiveness that is an effect of the vicissitudes of psychic life, and asks—rhetorically—does violence inhabit only the body of the enemy Other the soldier sets out to confront in the name of Napoleon and France, or is his monster also himself, an inevitable effect of his construction as a human subject?

The Passion describes two separate but interlinked journeys undertaken by Henri and Villanelle through the

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6. Henri remembers and repeats this initial encounter at the beginning of the third section. The repetition has a particular resonance, since his innocence has by this time been displaced by the experience of the killing fields of Ulm, Austerlitz, Eylau, Friedland, and Moscow.
bloody wasteland that is Napoleon's Europe and into the Venetian labyrinth. The text itself is a quest narrative that operates at a number of different levels, at once a journey through space and time and a journey "along the blood" (68), a Romance trial by landscape that inexorably leads to the monster at the heart of the labyrinth; a Romantic voyage intérieur whose unrecognized goal proves equally monstrous; and a journey through a Daedalian work of art that, for all that Winterson denies him a place in her (Harold) Bloomian list of precursors, is Joycean both in its references and in its textual complexity.7

By means of a series of textual mirrorings and repetitions, The Passion, itself a textual labyrinth, 

7. Joyce is one "monster" at the heart of a textual labyrinth with whom, to stay with Bloom a moment longer, Winterson wrestles, as Jacob wrestled the Everliving, as all strong poets must wrestle their strong precursors. For Winterson, ephie poet that she clearly believes herself to be (she is notorious for her comments about the centrality of her position in literary history), Joyce is a precursor with whose "phantom presence" she must wrestle. (Bloom refers to Jacob's "wrestling" as a metaphor for poetic struggle and influence in A Map of Misreading [17].) Winterson's list of "vital" Modernists in Art Objects includes Woolf, Radclyffe Hall, Eliot, Graves, Pound, Yeats, and others, and excludes Joyce (126). She makes it clear that not all those she includes influence her work—she's talking about what influences her to collect first editions, after all—and while she chides Joyce for his "unhelpful" linguistic innovations (81), she surely refers to A Portrait and to Stephen Dedalus when she states "every true writer finds a gift of wings. To assume that the wings can be ready bought and fitted is a problem for modern Daedaluses everywhere" (173).
journeys through the labyrinth that is Venice and a labyrinth of other texts that extends through time and space. Some of these texts, from the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Book of Isaiah, and the Old English lament of The Wanderer, to Eliot’s The Waste Land and Four Quartets, were also responses to war, as was Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle. The Passion, like the death drive, resolves upon biological death and the return to stasis that implies, but death is doubled because a discontinuity is introduced into the narrative that is suggestive of the Lacanian “second death.”

In a text whose trajectory takes it through eight years of war, and which ends in mutilation and murder, these layers of repetition uncannily inscribe on the surface and in the deeper structure what Freud posited is the subject’s inarticulable longing for death. It—or at least that portion of it related in Henri’s voice—is on one level a hysterical text, the poetically encoded symptom he constructs to maintain a fiction of coherence in the face of disintegration. “Hysterics,” as Breuer famously said, “suffer mainly from reminiscences” (Breuer and Freud 7), and reminiscence is embedded and re-embedded in Henri’s narrative, which is a mixture of elegiac memoir and melancholic spiritual autobiography, a remembrance of things
past. There is much of the exiled "earth-walker" of *The Wanderer* in Henri, who, in the course of recounting his story in a silence broken only by the sounds of sea birds, communes with the ghosts of lost warrior companions who drift in and out of a winter landscape that reflects the landscape of his mind. By means of such intertextual repetition, Winterson further emphasizes the role of repeating in keeping at bay the trauma. Unsuccessfully repressed, the event that cannot be bound, Freud suggested, "returns" to express itself as a symptom on the body as the psyche attempts to bind the original event.

As I have discussed, the message of the death drive that occupies the heart of the labyrinth of psychoanalytic concepts is writ large in the labyrinthine construction of

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8. Something of this *ubi sunt* formula is reflected again when, during a night vigil, Henri hears "the dead moan round the rock" (158), recalling Tennyson's elegiac post-epic *Ulysses*, who, like Henri, is speaking to his own phantoms when he says "the deep moans round with many voices." To reinforce this possibility, I would note earlier references in the text to *Ulysses*—not forgetting, of course, that Homer's *Odyssey* is not only the fundamental quest romance but, for Harold Bloom, the first Romantic poem (*Ringers* 3). Speaking of the lies that are the foundation of patriotism, Henri states: "And the heaviest lie? That we could go home and pick up where we had left off. That our hearts would be waiting behind the door with the dog. Not all men are as fortunate as *Ulysses*" (83). Of the dangers of passion, Villanelle makes reference to the irresistible power of "the siren calls" "so terrible to hear" (145), and in one of a string of opaque comments about her own writing, Winterson warns that with *The Passion* we might "be back at the Trojan horse" (*Art Objects* 189).
Venice as well as in its disintegration and in its constant struggle against encroaching and polluted water. But something productive as well as elegiac takes place in The Passion, and it occurs at the level of the second death. The misrecognized Freudian goal beyond the pleasure principle, the stasis that accompanies the end of the biological organism, is the death in life Henri chooses on the prison island of San Servolo,⁹ and The Passion is in many respects an apotropaic gesture against the void. But the second death also operates from within the text. His record of his experiences is a heroic act of bearing witness that refuses the desire for wholeness at the same time as it struggles to construct it, forcing open gaps through which the excluded Real floods back. Contact with the Real plunges Henri into the imprisonment of madness, but the text he writes is an expression of the transformative force that operates both in the human psyche and in literature.

The oscillation between life and death that focuses on the body of the woman in the psychoanalytic narrative is realized in Venice, which in turn provides a shifting

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9. The former Benedictine monastery on the Venetian island of San Servolo has been an insane asylum for almost a century when Henri is incarcerated. It is the island Shelley's protagonists travel to in his Julian and Maddalo in order to visit a French madman who bears some resemblance to Henri and who would have been an inmate at the time. I take Winterson's "San Servolo" to be a typographical error.
backdrop for this narrative in which nothing is stable. Death-driven repetition is coupled with a constant refusal of the fixed position the subject takes up in order to enter the Symbolic order; gender, as central to the psychoanalytic narrative as the death drive itself, is an oscillatory thing, reflecting the structure of the amphibious body of the city. This mixture is further reinforced as borders between one position and another are constantly breached and structuring binaries like good and evil, true and false, culture and nature, city and country, are destabilized. In one of a series of mirrorings, Henri discovers that the "monsters and devils" the French army has been sent to kill in Russia are no different from the people he has grown up amongst, "a hearth people" like Henri's family, and their need for the Czar as "a little father" is "a mirror of [the] longing" that drew him to follow Napoleon (81). And Henri's village in its pastoral simplicity contains kindness and cruelty, joy and despair, in much the same measure as does the Serene Republic of Venice, the epitome of urban sophistication and artifice.

Repetition and instability are interwoven at structural as well as linguistic levels. The Passion is a prose novel, but it is self-consciously structured according to musical and poetic forms: mixture is inscribed on the body of the
text itself. It is lyrical and most of the texts repetitively woven into it are themselves poetic: the Book of Isaiah and The Wanderer as well as Hardy, Auden, Eliot, and the poetic prose of Joyce haunt the writing about war and death and exile and waste, and references to Romantic poetry, particularly to Shelley's Julian and Maddalo, reinforce the post-Romantic sensibility of the whole. Although Henri would have been an inmate at the time of the visit by Julian (Byron) and Maddalo (Shelley), Shelley's "maniac" is not Winterson's, for all that they have much in common. Maddalo knew the Frenchman before he lost his mind, and likens him to Julian, and the similarities to Henri are striking. Both

10. Winterson states her intention "to break down the assumed barriers between poetry and prose" since "the novel form is finished." She does admit such a mixing of genres is not an entirely new concept (Art Objects 191).

11. (Maddalo): 'I knew one like you
Who to this city came some months ago,
With whom I argued in this sort, and he
Is now gone mad,—and so he answered me,—
Poor fellow! but if you would like to go
We'll visit him, and his wild talk will show
How vain are such aspiring theories.'
(Julian): 'I hope to prove the induction otherwise,
And that a want of that true theory, still,
Which seeks a "soul of goodness" in things ill
Or in himself or others, has thus bowed
His being—there are some by nature proud,
Who patient in all else demand but this—
To love and be beloved with gentleness;
And being scorned, what wonder if they die
Some living death? this is not destiny
But man's own wilful ill.'

(195-211)
are Frenchmen living in the asylum by choice, both are educated, gentle, and mad, and both grieve a lost lover. Many years after his visit Julian learns the Frenchman’s story, but he chooses not to share it and so it remains a mystery.

Many of these references have to do with what, for want of a better word, I will call a sensibility rather than with more direct repetition. For example, Henri in his Romantic imprisonment in the “dark tower” on San Servolo, sings—to quote Abrams quoting Shelley—“to cheer [his] own solitude with sweet sounds” (326). He says, “I go on writing so that I will always have something to read” (159), and yet, like his Romantic predecessors, his “poetic text” addresses wider issues and this “bearing witness” is directed to an outside audience. And because repetition generally is so strongly foregrounded, isolated phrases such as a Wordsworthian “along the blood” (68) and a Coleridgean “frost at midnight” (100) resonate as they might not otherwise with the Romanticism of the whole.

Winterson’s interest in musical form is more overtly foregrounded in Art & Lies (1994), also set in part in Venice, with its references to Der Rosenkavalier and “Handel,” but The Passion is much influenced by Eliot, including Four Quartets, and like that poem the novel recalls
a musical structure.\textsuperscript{12} Its four sections suggest a composition for two voices in imitative counterpoint—a fugue, perhaps. The voices are very different, but each turns upon the themes of passion and love and loss. The opening theme is presented in a first movement by Henri. It is taken up and repeated in a different key, in a second movement, by Villanelle. In the third movement and in the closing coda, the voices interweave. Themes and phrases and leitmotifs introduced and repeated in one movement by one voice are taken up and modulated in another movement by the other. It is a kind of dialogue, but it also suggests the way in which the repressed returns—and is returned to—again and again: an unheimlich recapitulation.

To stay with formal repetition, the lyrics of this "fugue" recall the highly stylized, highly repetitive poetic form of the villanelle for which Winterson names her Venetian hero. The Renaissance villanelle—and it may be significant that, like The Passion, it has its roots in both France and Italy—sang of pastoral pleasures. But in the twentieth century, perhaps since Freud taught us to think about

\textsuperscript{12} In Art Objects she states: "There is at present no twentieth-century poem that means more to me than Four Quartets . . . it remains a vital influence on my life and on my work" (129). In terms of this particular work, The Waste Land, "The Hollow Men," and The Rock are also manifestly important.
repetition in terms of the darkness that inhabits such pleasure, the music has gone, and poets have adopted the form to speak of death and loss—think of Dylan Thomas's elegy to his father, "Do not go gentle into that good night"; William Empson's "Missing Dates," which tells of human failure and despair; and Elizabeth Bishop's deceptively light-hearted cataloguing in "One Art" of a lifetime of loss and grief.\textsuperscript{13} Auden's villanelle, "But I Can't," with its echoes of war and deserts and the roses of redemption of the Isaiah poet, is a strong presence in \textit{The Passion}.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The revival of the form coincided with the \textit{fin de siècle}. Robert Adams Day notes it had "a great vogue among the precious poetasters of the naughty nineties in England" and was a "weary" cliché by the time Joyce has Stephen Dedalus record his on the back of a cigarette packet in \textit{A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man} (Day 77-78). The Modernists breathed new life into the cliché.

\textsuperscript{14} In its repetitive structure as well as its polemical force and its self-conscious rendering of the traumatic experience of war and exile in literature, the Book of Isaiah is a direct influence on Auden's ambivalent war-time vision of a redeemed world, as it is for Winterson's.

\begin{verbatim}
Time will say nothing but I told you so, \hfill (a)
Time only knows the price we have to pay; \hfill (b)
If I could tell you I would let you know. \hfill (a)

If I should weep when clowns put on their show, \hfill (a)
If I should stumble when musicians play, \hfill (b)
Time will say nothing but I told you so. \hfill (a)

There are no fortunes to be told, although, \hfill (a)
Because I love you more than I can say, \hfill (b)
If I could tell you I would let you know. \hfill (a)
\end{verbatim}
The form has just two rhymes, and the whole of the first and the third lines are each repeated three and perhaps four times in the course of its six three-line stanzas. In the style of the modernist villanelle, The Passion sings of the impossibility of love, and of loss and death, and several epigrammatic and somewhat gnomic lines echo uncannily back and forth between Henri's and Villanelle's narratives: "Will you kill people, Henri?" (8, 79); "The cities of the interior are vast, and do not lie on any map" (114, 150, 152); "You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play" (66, 73, 133), and what you hazard is "the valuable, fabulous thing" (90, 94, 104, 120, 150, 151). Many of the repetitions chime not just with each other but with other

The winds must come from somewhere when they blow, (a)
There must be reasons why the leaves decay; (b)
Time will say nothing but I told you so. (a)

Perhaps the roses really want to grow, (a)
The vision seriously intends to stay; (b)
If I could tell you I would let you know. (a)

Suppose the lions all get up and go, (a)
And all the brooks and soldiers run away; (b)
Will time say nothing but I told you so? (a)
If I could tell you I would let you know. (a)

Bearing in mind Auden's villanelle and Henri's imprisonment on San Servolo and his plans to turn his tiny, arid wasteland into a paradise of roses and water, note the following lines: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose . . . And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: . . . no lion shall be there." Isaiah 35:1-9.
texts. The stones of the churches in Boulogne and in Venice "cry out," echoing Luke 19.40 (43, 63), and with the monotonous rhythm of Eliot's "The Hollow Men," Villanelle defines passion in terms of the unstable no-place it inhabits: "Somewhere between God and the Devil," "In between freezing and melting. In between love and despair. In between fear and sex, passion is" (55, 62, 68, 76).\(^\text{15}\) And not quite echoing Auden's reflection that "[p]erhaps the roses really want to grow," she, for whom love is always subject to chance, says the heart is mocked in believing "roses bloom because we want them to" (76). This brings us back to Auden's source in Isaiah--a text as epigrammatic and repetitive as Winterson's own. Like the Isaiah poet, who is engaged in the transformation of trauma into poetry, the metaphorical transformation of the wilderness into a garden, ends by telling us he will transform his rocky island, now a "barbed tangle of thorns" (155), into a "forest of red roses" (160).

The last repeated line of Henri's narrative is the focus of the whole: "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." This admonition is repeated throughout (5, 13, 40, 69, 160) and Winterson repeats it herself in Art Objects, warning her

15. Compare Section V of "The Hollow Men": for example, "Between the conception / And the creation / Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the Shadow."
readers, and, perhaps, specifically warning off any uppity literary critics, to “beware of writers bearing gifts” because “we can be taken in by someone who offers truth with a wink and says ‘I’m telling you stories. Trust me’” (71, 189). She notes: "I know how to get a crowd around when I unpack my bag, and if one person buys The Dog Woman, and another, a pair of webbed feet, and another, a talking orange called Jeanette, and you, a forest of red roses on a salt-rock, then I am glad of my wares" (189).

The Passion gathers a heterogeneous mixture of stories within two intertwined narratives, and this together with an expressed bias toward literary sleight of hand results in a narrative ground that, in another reflection of the Venetian landscape, is unstable from the reader’s perspective. Henri’s journal of his experience of the Napoleonic Wars, obsessively reworked, rewritten, reread over a period of twenty years, is at once a Bildungsroman and an elegy of exile. Villanelle’s is an oral account, perhaps as retold/reimagined by Henri. From story to story history is juxtaposed with tales of goblins and humans who have animal-like or superhuman attributes, tales of Gothic horror are interlaced with musings on love and war, and the whole narrative is repetitively illustrated with metaphorical references from biblical and classical mythology. We assume
Henri's voice to be ironic when, on recounting a tale of an Irish priest's boots reduced to the size of a thumbnail by "the little people," he advises: "Trust me, I'm telling you stories" (39-40). But Villanelle uses the same words after telling a fantastic story of web-footed Venetian boatmen who walk on water and, in a twist that undermines our readerly position as interpreters of irony, this story proves to be "true." 16 What are we to make of it? Perhaps what we are to trust is not the tale but the constructive and reconstructive act of telling, the creative force of narrative.

Winterson's emphasis on the power of telling, together with the palimpsestic repetition of earlier texts, brings me back to Joyce, who took storytelling and its political potential seriously. The labyrinthine form of The Passion, together with its conflation of human and animal forms and the use of biblical and classical mythology and Celtic folklore, is strongly suggestive of Joyce's labyrinthine, arabesque fictions. Many of the similarities with A Portrait might be attributed to a shared intimate knowledge of the Bible that expresses itself in a tendency to "[think] in types and tropes constantly," as Robert Scholes has said of

16. "Irony," Linda Hutcheon notes, "happens as part of a communicative process." It "comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between intentions and interpretations" (13).
Joyce (Scholes 475-76), or even to the common theme of a young man's alienation and exile. But of all the images from A Portrait that are reflected in the unstable mirror of The Passion, Winterson's own bird girl, with her tellingly poetic name, is the most striking.

Stephen Dedalus's epiphany turns on his semi-mystical eroticized vision of a girl standing in shallow water at a beach on Dublin Bay:

She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some darkplumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (185-86)

Stephen retreats to ponder his epiphanic experience and writes--what else--the villanelle that is embedded in A Portrait.
Villanelle is in a sense Henri’s muse as the girl on Dublin Bay is Stephen’s. He recalls that “[b]eing with her was like pressing your eye to a particularly vivid kaleidoscope” (109), and “[i]t is as though I wrote in a foreign language that I am suddenly able to read. Wordlessly she explains me to myself . . .” (159). But Winterson gives an ironic twist to Stephen’s vision as object of the male gaze. Like his metamorphosing creature, Villanelle bears strong similarities to a water bird, but instead of the comforting, softly feminine birdlike plumage of Stephen’s vision she has webbed feet. Unlike Stephen’s girl, Villanelle doesn’t simply look part bird; like some mythical creature--like the Sphinx, or the Minotaur at the dark heart of the labyrinth--she is a mixture of human and animal, and the instability of such abject mixture reinforces the mutability of her gendered identity. Laura Doan, in a discussion of “the double gender encoding of Villanelle’s body” says “the masculine [is marked] by the slightest tissue of skin strategically situated between the toes” (149). Villanelle’s description of her feet at birth support this reading (Passion 51-52), but Henri describes something far less discreet: “[T]hey are not what I’d usually call feet. She unfolds them like a fan and folds them in on themselves in the same way” (Passion 135-36). These are not just
slightly odd human feet; Villanelle’s feet are those of a water bird. They are marvellous in themselves but—as Doan notes—they are the more remarkable since, as Villanelle explains, webbed feet are considered to be a specifically masculine characteristic possessed only by Venetian boatmen. Contradicting the Lacanian framework within which one either “is” or “has” the phallus, Villanelle identifies with both feminine and masculine subject positions, and, as with the city that is her mirror, this double identification is written on the body. She cannot swim and Henri doesn’t see her wading as Stephen does the girl on Dublin Bay, and the image of his playful struggle to piggyback her across the Piazza San Marco during acqua alta subverts Stephen’s description of his poised and silent vision. Henri stumbles, Villanelle’s remarkable feet trail in the water because she’s tall and he’s tiny; he is exhausted by the time they reach dry ground and in a manner most unbecoming a muse, she teases him for his weakness. Desire and gendered subjectivity are further complicated because there can be no object of the gaze in this scene since there is no viewer: their bodies together make a suitably Joycean (and “lupine,” since there is much of Orlando in Villanelle) composite “man-womanly” bird. The “fixed and phantasmatic affair” that is sexual identity under the paternal law (Butler 66) is upset,
rendered as shifting and ambiguous as Venice itself.

All this repetition brings my discussion to the trauma—the experience that cannot be bound—which is central to repetition. The event that shapes Henri's narrative occurs with the first real violence he witnesses on joining the army, and it coincides with what was to have been his first sexual experience. At a brothel near the encampment at Boulogne he witnesses an army cook's sickening brutalization of a whore. The cook later loses his job, and Henri steps into his shoes. He doesn't see or hear of his predecessor for eight years, but in a return of the repressed, he turns up at the end of Henri's journey in a recognition scene that recalls the original trauma.

Henri leaves home to join Napoleon, discovering in him, and, by analogy, in French nationalism, a passion he had longed to feel all his life. He dreams of being a drummer, but is put to work wringing the necks of the chickens Napoleon crams into his mouth and swallows whole, much as he is consuming France and will later consume Europe. Against

17. There are a number of references that support the dangerous delusions surrounding Napoleon's governing "appetite" (3). The world is his Lacanian objet petit a, to be ingested and swallowed up by the bodily ego in a manner that is a psychic reflection of his physical eating habits. Henri, on delivering a whole roast chicken to Napoleon's tent, observes him sitting alone, turning and turning a globe in his hands, "holding it tenderly with both hands as if it were a breast," and he knows that once alone he will turn his
the background of the rest of the text, Napoleon's indiscriminate greed becomes a nice analogy for a death-driven desire to engulf national difference into the oneness of empire, as though to resolve disconcerting European mixture into reassuring sameness. Henri graduates from throttling to cooking Napoleon's birds, accompanies him to Paris for his coronation, and eventually makes the fateful journey to Moscow. There he deserts, his deathly passion for his emperor over, but not resolved.

Villanelle's journey begins in Venice. She cross-dresses, and it is while she is dressed as a boy that she falls in love with a woman. Like Henri, she experiences passion for the first time. Her lover, however, is content to remain married, and in her grief Villanelle strikes a bargain with a rich, boorish Frenchman who has made his fortune by supplying meat of questionable provenance to Napoleon's armies. He has terrible hands, and on her body they remind her of the suckers of squid (64), or of boils bursting (96) but he agrees to her conditions that they leave attention to the chicken, wishing "his whole face were mouth to cram a whole bird" (4). In retrospect, Henri recognizes he had viewed the world as an extension of himself, as something one might own as one owns a house and garden. The freezing winter that tormented and killed his ill-equipped soldiers was for him quite simply the larder that kept his food fresh (5) and the sea in which they drowned was his rain barrel (8).
Venice to travel the world, and she agrees to continue to
dress as a boy, for his sexual pleasure. “Just the three of
us. Him, me and my codpiece” (96). After two years she
flees, and after three more on the road returns home, where
her husband finds her out and sells her as a whore to
Napoleon’s army. Two years later, she and Henri meet on the
outskirts of the burning city of Moscow and together they
escape south. They become lovers, and Henri will be the
father of Villanelle’s daughter. Villanelle loves him dearly
and their relationship is sexual, but she reminds him,
“You’re my brother” (117). Only Henri’s love qualifies as
passion.

It is 1813 when they reach Venice. Villanelle takes
Henri by the hand and guides him into an “impossible maze,”
“a city of madmen” where streets appear and disappear from
one day to the next, and the churches the French tore down to
make way for the public gardens rise up on foggy nights (110,
112). They wander between an Imaginary, gorgeous, golden
city filled with life and scented with baking bread, and a
Gothic sunless “waste land” of rats and slime and decay,
inhabited by refugees of war who are the living dead. For
Villanelle the labyrinth is the maternal body as the source
of endless pleasure, but it sets Henri’s teeth on edge. For
him it is the place of abjection where meaning collapses, and
he is lost, physically and metaphorically. He asks for a map, but Villanelle cannot give him one, since Venice is a living, shifting thing (113). The city of disguises is a mirror for the subjects it contains, since if you live in Venice “what you are one day will not constrain you on the next. You may explore yourself freely and, if you have wit or wealth, no one will stand in your way” (150).

Villanelle returns to her old trade. Gambling, with its links to carnival and masquerade, was a synecdoche for Venetian decadence and vice from the seventeenth century until the period following the fall of the Republic, and while the casino where she works, “raking dice and spreading cards and lifting wallets where I could” (54), is a workaday world for her, it is the heart of Winterson’s textual labyrinth, a liminal place where everything may be risked. It is the setting for a number of encounters that have driven the narrative: here she met “the Queen of spades,” the married woman to whom she lost her heart; here she met and agreed to marry the rich French dealer in flesh, and here he sold her to the army; here he will find Henri and Villanelle, and all will be revealed.

She is drawn to the “smell [of] urgency” that clings to gamblers: “It’s somewhere between fear and sex. Passion, I suppose” (55). She dismisses the “hobbyists” who can take it
or leave it: "I like passion, I like to be among the desperate" (90), and she understands that "[w]e gamble with the hope of winning, but it's the thought of what we might lose that excites us" (89). Such gamblers rarely play for money: what they risk is the second death, the shattering of the self that plunges them into the feared and desired chaos of the Real. Of the serious gamblers, there are two kinds: those who are astute and "always [keep] something back, something to play with another time," and those who wait to gamble "the valuable, fabulous thing," a risk that may be taken only once (90, 94). Villanelle and Henri belong to the second category.

"[T]he valuable, fabulous thing" the "Devil’s gambler" (90) is prepared to risk suggests the relationship between the Imaginary and the Real. There is always a risk that the Imaginary ego, once fractured, may not be able to regain its integrity, and for those who risk this shattering, the stakes lie in the Lacanian "second death," in the fantasy of the recovery of the corps morcelé. Henri’s madness hinges on a scene of actual bodily mutilation, but it is reinforced by other images of dismemberment and evisceration. He recalls trying to piece together the body of a friend blown apart by a cannonball, “but when I came back for his legs they were indistinguishable from the other legs” (108). Soldiers slit
open the bellies of their dead horses and burrow into them to keep from freezing (80). He tells us they set their hearts aside in order to be able to function and, mad with hunger, chopped off their own arms for food (82). Embedded in Villanelle’s narrative is a tale of physical mutilation worthy of Edgar Allan Poe, more “civilized” than Henri’s war experiences, and more chilling for that reason. Most of the patrons of the casino gambled for money, but a rich regular client, because he had fortunes to spare, looked elsewhere for the thrill that attaches to the risk of loss. He entered into a wager with a stranger for which the forfeit was “dismemberment piece by piece, beginning with the hands” (93). The players at the casino comforted themselves that the penalty would not be exacted “but one day, months later . . . we received a pair of hands, manicured and quite white, mounted on green baize in a glass case” (90-94). It is an allegory for the risks Villanelle and Henri take, which lead to the shattering not of the physical body but of the ego; their experience of the Lacanian body-in-bits-and-pieces takes place at the level of the psyche, although its pain is registered on the body.

Falling in love for Villanelle is the “serious accident” Catherine Clément calls syncope and that Clément too compares to gambling—a contradictory passion that, like particular
kinds of music or certain disorders such as epilepsy, suspends for a marvellous/terrifying moment the experience of living (16). To “lose one’s heart” is a figurative commonplace, a dead metaphor, but Winterson, in restoring it to life, reminds us of the corporeality of the resulting pleasure and pain in language that recalls that of Sappho watching her lover with another. Villanelle lost her sense of self, the sense of self-control conferred by the Imaginary order, and was for a time plunged into the shattering pain and pleasure of the Real. She lived “in a hectic stupor” (62), forgetting to sleep or to eat; the hours of the day had no meaning and when she met her lover she discovered she had lost not just her heart but her tongue; she was without language, the privileged marker of membership within the Symbolic, and her reliable body was reduced to a mass of disconnected sensations: “I couldn’t speak. . . . Lovers are not at their best when it matters. Mouths dry up, palms sweat, conversation flags, and all the time the heart is threatening to fly from the body once and for all” (65, 66).18 It was, she says, as though she had tumbled through a

18. This psychic wounding that finds its expression on the body is literalized when her lover steals her heart and hides it in a jar. Henri breaks into her lover’s house and finds it, beating steadily, and he returns it to her. In a scene that is to say the least abject, she gulps it down, and it takes up its old function (120-21).
trapdoor into another world where she could not understand the language (68). Her experience of being in love is like Henri’s of being in Venice.

In a text full of mirrorings, Henri and Villanelle both see themselves reflected in the world around them. Emphasizing the alienation inherent in this Lacanian mirror construction by speaking of himself in the third person, Henri recalls how as a child he saw his reflection in such homely images as his father’s shaving mirror and his mother’s shining copper saucepan. The mirror offers the illusion of a single stable image, but he prefers the saucepan because in its uneven surface “he can see all the distortions of his face. He sees many possible faces and so he sees what he might become” (26). It may be suitably prophetic that a child who will become a cook should admire his face in a cooking pot, but it is more telling that he should construct his mirror self out of an image associated with domesticity and the feminine, with heart and hearth. Villanelle’s mirror is another shifting surface: the lagoon, which also serves as a mirror to Venice. She, too, sees “the future glittering” there, and “in the distortions of my face what I might become” (62). While the associations of Venice and water are, like Henri’s saucepan, gendered female, they are liminal and incline to the uncanny rather than the homely.
A further mirror scene is central to the trauma that leads Henri to lose his mind, as he has already lost his heart. He comes face to face with his monster in Villanelle’s casino. While she works, he sits in a windowseat, contemplating the past. The Romance journey through the wasteland and into the labyrinth is accomplished and, although Henri knows he must think about returning to his French village, it seems the travellers are safe. Mirrored in the dark glass of a window he sees at last not what might be but “the face I had become” and reflects, “So the past had gone. I had escaped. Such things are possible” (125). But recalling the kind of ambiguity that inheres in the puzzling figures caught in the mirrors of domestic genre paintings like van Eyck’s Arnolfini Wedding or Velázquez’s Las Meninas, the frame is shared by two other figures: "Villanelle . . . with a man standing in front of her blocking her way. . . . He was very wide, a great black expanse like a matador’s cloak" (125), recalling the Minotaur, that symbol of perversion the labyrinth conceals. The man slaps Villanelle. She runs to reach the boat she has moored downstairs, and in order to reach her before her pursuer does, Henri throws open the looking-glass window and jumps beyond it, into what will prove to be a nightmare of the Real. They escape and are almost home when the stranger
from the casino reaches them. It is Villanelle’s husband, who, it turns out, is also the cook from Henri’s past.

Twelve years later, Henri tells us “[w]hat happened next is still not clear” (127), though he has thought about it, written it, reread what he has written, ever since. He does remember the cook coming at Villanelle and the image recalls vividly the scene of his original trauma eight years before when he had seen him move to strike the whore in the army brothel. Henri himself suggests the link between the two scenes: “I had never been to a Casino before and I was disappointed the way the brothel had disappointed me years earlier” (125) (my emphasis). On that occasion Henri had wanted to act, but, never a violent man, he had not. This time he does, and in the ensuing struggle the cook falls on him, and they lie together in the narrow boat, locked in an ugly mirror embrace. Henri, who in all his years in the army had never lacked courage but had killed no one, now stabs his enemy Other, again and again. 19 The sexual connotations of this bodily penetration are obvious enough, but what makes it particularly shocking is the complication that inheres in the

19. Villanelle says, “Henri is a gentle man. . . . He told me, on the way home from Moscow, that he had been in the army eight years without so much as wounding another man. . . . He was no coward though, he’d risked his own life over and over again to get a man off the field. Patrick told me that” (147).
fact that, while Henri wields the blade, it belongs to Villanelle. When the cook is dead, in a scene reminiscent of Jacobean tragedy, Henri hacks a hole, scoops out the heart with his hand, and offers it to her (128). With this bloody mutilation, the border between inside and outside is breached, and the heart of the labyrinth has truly become a place of abject horror.

This is the tragic recognition scene, “the moment when what was hidden is revealed” (125). Henri confronts the violent Other, and experiences another uncanny mirroring. What is revealed and then borne out by the memoir Henri writes in his solitary madness is that the cook’s cruel jealousy and his desire to control Villanelle resemble Henri’s Romantic all-or-nothing passion for her. It is this collapse of the border between himself and his violent Other that is the horror Henri tries to repress, and that returns to haunt him in the nightmare stasis of the imprisonment he chooses. In the figurative journey through the looking glass, the boundary that has separated him from men like the cook and Napoleon, self from Other, is shattered, and Henri is possessed by the traumatic event. He is sentenced to life imprisonment in Shelley’s lunatic asylum on San Servolo, where he is surrounded by the ghosts and ghostly doubles that people his text. As he tries to rebuild the borders that
have collapsed between his Imaginary ego and the fragmented body of the Real, he re-enacts the deadly struggle between himself and the part of himself he denies: he wakes night after night with the cook’s murderous hands on his throat, but the hands are Henri’s own (135, 147). This is not a symbolic dream that might be interpreted in order to effect a “cure.” It re-enacts the trauma with terrifying accuracy. He demands that Villanelle marry him, and when she says she cannot, he insists he’s her husband, and mimics the cook as he threatened her on the night of the murder. He recalls: “I remember his mouth opening and coming towards her, . . . [a] pale pink mouth, a cavern of flesh and then his tongue, just visible like a worm from its hole” (128). Months after the event, Villanelle remembers Henri on the last occasion he agreed to make love: “he put his hands to my throat and slowly pushed his tongue out of his mouth like a pink worm. ‘I’m your husband,’ he said . . . and he came leaning towards me, his eyes round and glassy and his tongue so pink” (148).

A second haunting double is Napoleon. Both are tiny, both end imprisoned on an isolated rocky island. Henri advises us he knows when the emperor is paying a visit to his cell on San Servolo because the odor of chicken gives him away—a further ironized sign of their doubleness, since Henri had earlier commented that he himself smelt of chicken
during his years as Napoleon’s cook (6), and, more figuratively, he feared the “whiff of Bonaparte” about him would give him away as a French soldier during the escape from Moscow (105). Henri wears his war-time complicity on his body. But most important, his description of Napoleon in his madness mirrors his own neurotic writing and rewriting of his repetitive memoir: “He talks about his past obsessively because the dead have no future and their present is recollection. They are in eternity because time has stopped” (134)—as it has for Henri.

Villanelle plans Henri’s escape, but when she comes for him he refuses to go: “Was she mad? I’d have to kill again” (152). The reason Henri gives for his grief, and the ostensible reason for his insanity, is Villanelle’s refusal to marry him, her failure to match his passion with her own. His grief is real, as is his love, but his behaviour and his belief that to return to the world would necessitate a return to killing suggest his decision is a response to his war experiences. The return of the repressed in the form of the cook triggers in Henri a capacity for violence he had denied, and the asylum, for all its horror, offers a place of safety within which he is able to contain what he perceives to be his own terrifying potential.

Henri’s retirement into isolation and madness, his
obsessive cataloguing of his war experiences and his terrible nightmares all suggest he is suffering from the kind of trauma that during the European war of 1914-18 would come to be termed "shell shock" and that has now been subsumed under the blanket designation "post-traumatic stress disorder." It is not surprising that his madness should take this form but it is particularly interesting given the feminized connotations of shell shock, on the one hand, and the ambiguity attached to his own gendered subjectivity, on the other. Elaine Showalter devotes a chapter of her study of women and madness to the hysterical and neurasthenic patterns of behaviour diagnosed in soldiers during and after the First World War because such manifestations of nervous disorder had previously been associated with women--indeed "the term 'shell shock' [provided] a masculine-sounding substitute for the effeminate associations of 'hysteria' and [disguised] the troubling parallels between male war neurosis and the female nervous disorders epidemic before the war" (172). Part of the explanation Showalter offers is that, far from providing the great masculine adventure, war feminized conscripts, who experienced powerlessness in the face of danger and lost any sense of being in control, of being "autonomous actor[s] in
the manipulable world.\textsuperscript{20} Henri and his friends dream of adventure, but, ill-equipped, ill-trained, and half-starved, their reality is that described by Showalter. Henri is further feminized by being confined to the kitchen, his battlefield function restricted to rescuing the wounded and, in what sounds like a dream recounted by a veteran of the First World War, futilely trying to piece together the broken bodies of the dead (108).

His murder and mutilation of the cook can be explained in terms of Lacan's reading of the death drive's origins in the violent splitting of the subject against itself with the advent of the mirror stage, where the trace remains in feared and longed for images of dismemberment. Henri breaks through the repressive mirror of the Imaginary and for a brief moment, in the destruction of the body of his hated Other, regains access to the Real and the primal chaos of the \textit{corps morcelé}. From the beginning of his war experience he has maintained an Imaginary barrier between himself and the violence he has witnessed: it was always perpetrated by the Other, not because Henri fails to recognize his complicity but because "I could never lose myself in the cannonfire, in the moment of combat and hate. My mind ran before me with

\footnotesize{20. Philip Hamilton Gibbs, \textit{Now It Can Be Told} (New York, 1920), 547-48, qtd. in Showalter, 190.}
pictures of dead fields and all that had taken years to make, lost in a day or so" (123). But when Villanelle is threatened in a scene that returns Henri to the earlier trauma in the brothel in Boulogne, the boundary between Real and Imaginary is breached. A jouissant shattering of the ideal self is reflected in the mangled body of his “double”:

I had the knife in my hand and I thrust it at his side. As he rolled I thrust it in his belly. I heard it suckle his guts. I pulled it out, angry knife at being so torn away, and I let it go in again, through the years of good living. That goose and claret flesh soon fell away. My shirt was soaked in blood. Villanelle dragged him off me, half off me, and I stood up, not unsteady at all. I told her to help me turn him over and she did so, watching me.

When we had him belly up and running blood I tore his shirt from the collar down and looked at his chest. . . . I . . . made a rip with my silver friend, such an eager blade. I cut a triangle in about the right place and scooped out the shape with my hand, like coring an apple (128).

No longer able to deny that the violence he abhors is internal as well as external, Henri is confronted with a split self he cannot accept and retreats from a world that
has become intolerable.

I have suggested it is difficult to define Venice because its oscillation refuses fixity, and the fluidity of Villanelle’s gendered identity, and her body’s freakish mixture of human and animal, makes it as difficult to define her. Like Venice she inhabits a phantasmagorical space in which she is now an “ordinary woman,” now a fantastical creature. Like her city, she is amphibious, a thing of land and water. Her ability to walk on water, in a book filled with references to biblical as well as sexual passion, is a distinctly masculine characteristic, and this masculinity is further emphasized in Winterson’s Venice where webbed feet are a kind of cultural fantasy, a phallic signifier of secret power. Her amphibious, sexually ambiguous body and the paradoxical amphibious body of Venice both refuse the neat binary oppositions of true and false, good and evil, masculine and feminine, and against such paradoxical grounds Winterson begins to trace disruptive, transformative possibility. The dichotomies by which we have come to know ourselves and by which we distinguish ourselves from the Other that in times of war can conveniently become the enemy Other, in the body of this city and in the body of this woman collapse into mutability and confusion, a condition that in its frightening and fascinating unrepresentability is
suggestive of the Real and a jouissance beyond oedipal law.

There is no catharsis at the heart of Winterson’s novel. The revelation of the monster, far from leading to redemption, signals a retreat into despair and madness, and Henri’s villanesque text, peopled with the ghosts of his past, is no replacement for life among the living. But The Passion is nothing if not ambivalent and the text Henri produces from within his Romantic dark tower, in the company of the ruined and set against the immortal sea of Romanticism and within a Venetian “sea of stories,” is a powerful act of the creative imagination. The trauma that cannot be bound, the impossible experience of war Henri must carry within himself, is transformed into the potentially communicative and therefore potentially productive medium of poetry.

Henri’s narrative, filled with references to loss and fragmentation, exposes a politics of patriotism that promises a seamless unity based on blood brotherhood to be a deceitful mask for the death-driven force that maims and mutilates not just its citizen heroes but the whole of Europe, within which “peace” will only ever be “a respite from the war to come” (108). Henri became a soldier because he fell in love with Napoleon and what he believed he stood for. He thought he was “doing a service to the world, setting it free, setting myself free in the process” (153).
Villanelle, too pragmatic to be taken in by the rhetoric of nationalism, views the repetitious human condition from the level of the subject constructed in psychic loss and alienation: "Men are violent; that's all there is to it" (109).
Chapter Two

Sadism Demands a Story: Ian McEwan's The Comfort of Strangers

Ian McEwan's The Comfort of Strangers (1981) is, at one level, an unheimlich tale of gothic horror; at another it is an engaged meditation on the historical, cultural, and psychoanalytic narratives that uphold the economy Kaja Silverman tellingly terms the "dominant fiction [that] solicits our faith above all else in the unity of the family, and the adequacy of the male subject" (Male Subjectivity 15-16). This fiction is, she says, "the ideological system through which the normative subject lives its relation to the symbolic order and [quoting Ernesto Laclau (24)], it is the mechanism by which a society 'tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences'" (Male Subjectivity 54). It is a narrative pattern that Laura Mulvey famously recognized to be sadistic in her seminal essay on cinema and the objectifying male gaze (Mulvey 14-
McEwan negotiates these two textual zones against a narrative plot-space that is somewhat different from Winterson’s or Coover’s in that the city’s decay and its own imminent death are not foregrounded. This Venice mirrors the death that is the focus of the narrative simply because it is morphologically feminized. Always oscillatory, it is alternately legible, sunlit, and expansive—for instance, as it opens out onto the Bacino di San Marco and the Adriatic—and darkened, damp, and confusing as it collapses back into the jouissant horror and womblike enclosure of the labyrinth that is Castello and Cannaregio. The topographical space McEwan’s protagonists must negotiate is a mirror for Freud’s topography of the psyche, and further, the shifting movement between the two aspects of the city is reflected in two mirroring stories of sadomasochism that come together within this doubled space: the dark, pure perversity of Robert and Caroline’s relationship is the overt expression of that which, repressed, structures the normalcy of Colin and Mary’s.

My reading addresses the shaping influence of tragedy McEwan borrows from Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice, but my focus is on McEwan’s overt intertextual engagement with psychoanalysis’s rereading of ancient tragedy in the form of the Oedipus complex, as well as with theories of scopophilia and of sadism and masochism. Linked to this is the influence
of feminist theories of reading that were being promulgated at the time McEwan was writing--readings that, as Mulvey said of her work, enable the narrative of psychoanalysis to be used as a political weapon to expose the violent structuring force of "the unconscious of patriarchal society" (14).

Repetition and death are, as I have said, recurrent tropes in contemporary literature set in Venice, and The Comfort of Strangers fits this paradigm all too neatly. McEwan's story of Colin and Mary and Robert and Caroline, culminating as it does in a sadomasochistic murder in which perverse perpetrators and "innocent" victims are alike complicit, is an expression of what Freud termed the "merciless violence" the super-ego can come to exercise over the ego, and which can spiral into "a pure culture of the death instinct" (Freud, Ego 53). This chapter examines the uncanny pattern that is exposed as Colin and Mary, McEwan's English protagonists, unconsciously map a journey that repeats that of countless literary Venetian travellers before them, but that also repeats much older journeys, tracing the violent repressed "ancient dreams" (McEwan 124) Freud read in order to explain the structure of the psyche. After the killing Mary stumblingly tries to understand what happened by articulating what she calls the violent "single organizing principle" that distorts "all relations, all truth" (125), but she stops almost before she begins. My reading sees the text itself as just such a beginning, set as it is against
this particular city, a city that is both a museum of western
culture and a figure for the doubled space of Lacanian
Imaginary wholeness and the fragmentation of the Real. I
will suggest Colin and Mary’s relationship—somewhat
dishonest, somewhat dull, occasionally passionate, largely
comfortable—finds a mirror in the unqualified perversity of
Robert and Caroline’s; normative sexuality and the
relationships it engenders are inherently violent because
they have their basis in premises that are inherently
perverse. Not surprisingly, Comfort has itself often been
read as perverse, but I will suggest rather that in its
effort to uncover aspects of culture that are dangerously
repressed, it offers a point from which to begin to rethink
culture, and so it is potentially regenerative.

As Colin and Mary are drawn into the liminal space of
the labyrinth and toward death, a sense of fatal
inevitability is reinforced through the repetition of images,
phrases, and vocabulary within the text, as well as by echoes
of earlier texts. The most striking intertext is Death in
Venice. Both are novellas their authors have confessed were
difficult to write,¹ and McEwan takes up Mann’s juxtaposition

¹. Mann was very open about the autobiographical aspects of
Death in Venice. His experiences on holiday there in 1911
provided much of the material, and he has said that he found
it impossibly difficult to complete (Reed 153-54). McEwan
has said that “something” of a visit he made to Venice with
his partner in 1978 “found its way into the book.” It goes
without saying that Colin and Mary are no more Ian McEwan and
Penny Allen than Gustav von Aschenbach is Thomas Mann, but he
of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, his references to Platonic thought juxtaposed with anxieties surrounding sexuality and the power of the repressed ancient myth of Dionysus within the contemporary sexual imagination. Mann’s expressed concern is with the place in society of art and the artist at the beginning of the century, and McEwan’s with Platonic oppositional logic—the “powerful single organizing principle” (McEwan 125) that shapes western metaphysics.

McEwan’s text by no means mirrors Mann’s, but a series of elliptical and increasingly unheimlich doublings and echoes accrue as the protagonists lose their bearings in the labyrinth. In both cases, the narrative is driven by the homoerotic attraction of an older man to a beautiful younger one, through whom some kind of transcendent state is to be achieved.\(^2\) Interestingly, pollution and decay are almost entirely metaphorical in McEwan’s late-twentieth-century Venice, and the only plague is high-season tourists, yet there is a sense of threat (“It’s like a prison here,” Mary complains to Colin (50)), and in spite or, unconsciously,

found the writing “painful,” and in writing Colin’s death, he felt as if he were writing his own (Haffenden 177, 183).

\(^2\) Mann’s and McEwan’s literary “Venices” recall northern European attitudes to Italy as a site of sexual libertinism and of homosexuality that have persisted since the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth, when the Grand Tour was at its most popular, Italy was viewed not only as the cradle of the classical past, fulfilling a nostalgic desire for learning and art, but also, as George S. Rousseau points out, as “the mother and nurse of sodomy” (176-77).
because of it, the visitors, like Aschenbach, choose not to leave. It is as though, like him, they "[share] the city's secret, the city's guilt" (Mann 65). An unattractive yet somehow alluring "Dionysiac" stranger entices them into the labyrinth until all escape routes are shut off, and Aschenbach's quiet death in the presence of his "pale and lovely Summoner" (73) is replaced by a horrifying parody of the Maenadic frenzy and bloody mutilation of his bacchantic dream.

Other repetitions have less to do with the overall structure of the text, but are none the less forceful. For instance, it is a commonplace that Venetians, and even Venetian tourists, dress particularly elegantly--Joseph Brodsky suggests it is as though they take up a challenge to match the city's constructed beauty (Watermark 24-28). Like Aschenbach, McEwan's tourists spend a good deal of time in "self-obsessed" (McEwan 13) narcissistic grooming. Each dresses with infinite care, Aschenbach because, "[l]ike any lover, he desired to please," (67) and Colin and Mary "as though somewhere among the thousands they were soon to join, there waited someone who cared deeply how they appeared" (13). The hotel barber daubs Aschenbach's lips "the colour of ripe strawberries" (68); Colin's lips, too, will be carefully rouged, but with spilt blood rather than makeup (120). Of Aschenbach's self-mastery, "a nice observer" said: "'You see, Aschenbach has always lived like this'--here the
speaker closed the fingers of his left hand to a fist—'never like this'—and he let his open hand hang relaxed from the back of his chair" (9). In the light of this, Colin's dangling wrist as he lounges on the hotel balcony, and as he is later mimicked by Robert, is telling (15, 103). Mann's "laughing song," performed by a strolling player who is uncannily like the mysterious "horned" figure Aschenbach saw outside the mausoleum in Munich just before he was overwhelmed by the fatal urge to visit Venice (60), is echoed in an attenuated contemporary version Colin and Mary hear played over and over on a jukebox in Robert's dismal Venetian gay bar (29-30; 102-3). On the Lido, they watch adolescents play aggressive games at the water's edge, recalling the "rather lawless and out-of-hand" fight between Mann's Tadzio and Jaschiu (72), but in McEwan's text the game centres on a young man and a young woman, underscoring that what is at stake in The Comfort of Strangers is the maintenance of a violent and dangerous patriarchal law that insists not simply on the centrality of heterosexuality but on its rightness (92-93, 95).

In his earliest writings about sadism and masochism, Freud noted that their most remarkable feature is that they oscillate. They "are habitually to be found to occur together in the same individual. . . . A sadist is always at the same time a masochist" (Three Essays 159). Not only are they "[t]he most common and the most significant of all the
perversions" (157), but, he suggests, they are culturally serviceable, since they encompass attitudes to masculine activity and aggression and feminine passivity and compliance that are compatible with normative heterosexuality. He recognises they can develop into something more overtly dangerous (Ego 53). McEwan draws attention to the deadly persistence of sadomasochism within the late-twentieth-century western sexual imagination; for all that death is central, the driving force that pushes the subject beyond the pleasure principle is not the desire for death, but the normative production of gendered subjectivity Freud explained by means of the story of Oedipus. A version of the oedipal narrative is the driving force behind the sadomasochistic violence of McEwan's story, but despite its overt "nastiness," The Comfort of Strangers is regenerative because McEwan opens up the possibility of rereading that narrative and all its ramifications. Such rereading is the political act of survival Adrienne Rich termed "re-vision."

3. I use the word advisedly; reviewers of his earlier work too have repeatedly accused him of it. When he was accepted for East Anglia's now famous creative writing course (the only student in its first year), Angus Wilson (one of his advisers) said he especially liked his writing's "nastiness" (Lawson 45).

4. I am drawn to refer to Rich because lines from her "Sibling Mysteries," published in Dream of a Common Language in 1978, provide McEwan with an epigraph: "how we dwelt in two worlds / the daughters and the mothers / in the kingdom of the sons" (Dream 49). (McEwan says, speaking of Comfort, "People of our generation, who grew up in the 1950s, grew up in the time of the fathers" (Haffenden 179). Rich's essay, a
McEwan's textual Venice is a complex allegorical construction. Within the larger frame of the city as death and as the body of the woman—the obstacle, whether traversed or desired by the hero—recur motifs of theatrical drama and the museum, and the specularity that informs each of them. Recalling Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, neither the city itself nor the always already familiar landmarks against which the narrative takes place are ever named.5

His young bourgeois protagonists lose their way in a multilayered liminal space that is at once a physical labyrinth and a maze of constructs whose roots are in western culture's distant social and psychic past—and his hypocrite lecteur must negotiate the equally complex space of the 1971 address to the MLA published as "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" in 1972, is not a direct intertext but it was a central influence on feminist thinking at the time *The Comfort of Strangers* was published. It was reprinted in 1976 and collected in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* in 1979.

5. McEwan manipulates the city's topography to suit his purpose: "The unnaming of Venice gave me, I thought at the time, a degree of descriptive freedom. I think I rotated parts of the city to catch the sunset. I also wanted to be set free of the place-name tedium that can bog down fictions set in real cities. Finally, an unnamed city was a better sink for C and M's vulnerability" (personal communication, September 1, 1996). But no one could doubt this is Venice: the Zattere, Palladio's Redentore church viewed from Colin and Mary's hotel on the Giudecca, the Fondamenta Nuove, the Piazza and Basilica of San Marco, the Lido and the island of San Michele are rendered with meticulous realism. He quotes, almost verbatim, the famous description of the domes and west façade of the Basilica from *The Stones of Venice* (2: 67), but in keeping with the namelessness of the rest, he excises a reference to the Lido, and doesn't credit Ruskin (49).
mirror construction that is the text itself. The Lacanian psychic topography referred to in the Interchapter of this study is particularly clearly articulated; not surprisingly, given the associations that exist between sadism and looking, in this most to-be-looked-at of cities the Imaginary, with its fantasies of cohesion and mirror likeness, holds sway. Further, the Imaginary contaminates the Symbolic so that language, rather than disrupting Imaginary cohesion by introducing the possibility of difference and change, upholds the mask that disguises as it disavows the presence of the Real. The division between vision and language, looking and speaking (underscored by the fact that Venice exists to be admired, and that Colin and Mary don’t speak the language that surrounds them), can be plotted according to the text’s division into chapters. In the first two, Colin and Mary are “not on speaking terms” (11). Foregrounded against this absence of language, against its failure, are a plethora of concepts that are linked to what Jacqueline Rose termed the field of vision: narcissism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, performance, and audience, together with such signifiers as mirrors, cameras, photographs, binoculars, and the “screen” of the retina. Scopophilia persists throughout the text, but there is a marked increase in speech beyond the second chapter. Chapter three, for example, consists almost entirely of a lengthy confessional monologue acted out before a captive audience, and it is followed by a series of
dialogues, cross-examinations, and confessions which continue until the final pages, when the text subsides helplessly back into speechlessness. Chapter seven stands out against the others in that it seems almost a celebration of linguistic exchange. The standard methods of argument of the western rhetorical tradition that have dominated Colin and Mary’s conversations until now are “re-visioned” and replaced by what at first appear to be more open-ended exchanges that move toward recognizing, articulating, and analyzing desires that threaten Imaginary identity and unity. Up to this point,

The unspoken assumption . . . was that a subject was best explored by taking the opposing view, even if it was not quite the view one held oneself; a considered opinion was less important than the fact of opposition. The idea, if it was an idea and not a habit of mind, was that adversaries, fearing contradiction, would be more rigorous in argument, like scientists proposing innovation to their colleagues. (80)

Now topics begin to be “explored” rather than “defensively reiterated, or forced into elaborate irrelevancies” (81) that maintain and protect the rigid mask of the Imaginary. But by the next chapter Colin and Mary have lapsed back into resistance and reticence, recognizing that, oxymoronically, all the talk of the past few days that has been in such contrast to their earlier speechlessness,
has been an "unacknowledged conspiracy of silence" (91) that has allowed the unspeakable to remain unspoken. The horror that lies beneath the mask of language they have created is revealed to be the "merciless violence" of the novel's structuring sadism, and because it is unnamed, it retains its terrible power to control and subjugate, to punish or to forgive, and thus to drive the narrative. "Sadism demands a story" (Mulvey 22; De Lauretis 103).

As I have discussed in the introduction to this study, for all its labyrinthine confusion, Venice is in many ways a clearly articulated space, its medieval construction rendered still more legible through Renaissance town planning. Henri Lefebvre has said that "more than any other place, [it] bears witness to the existence . . . of a unitary code or common language of the city" (73), but codes and common languages have to be deciphered and assimilated before they can provide a key. Pattern eludes Colin and Mary. They persistently leave behind the easily read tourist areas of San Marco and Dorsoduro for the labyrinthine alleys of Castello and Cannaregio, but "the fine old churches, the altar-pieces, the stone bridges" (12) remain alienated, illegible fragments rather than taking on shape as individual parishes that have, over hundreds of years, coalesced into a complex but unified whole. By day Colin and Mary distractedly experience the city as a series of jumbled images projected in rapid succession against the screen of the eye as they are swept
along on a tide of tourists (12, 14). At night, after the crush subsides,⁶ instead of actively plotting a course on a map or choosing a path according to the logic of the city's configuration, they are led, passively, by their senses.⁷ They dip into the unmappable, invisible city after the manner of the flaneur, responding randomly to the tantalizing curve of a street here or a colour there, or to the smell of frying fish, or to the comforting sight of a distant stranger (21, 24).

That this failure to map urban space proves deadly suggests by extension the careful attention that must be paid to the negotiation of McEwan's mirroring textual space—it is easy for the reader, too, "to get lost [walking] from one page to another" (20). It is necessary to move back and forth within the text, literally or by means of memory, recognizing and misrecognizing, remembering and misremembering, noting a repeated phrase or image, interpreting now this piece of the puzzle and now that, until

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6. Because Venice cannot offer enough beds to accommodate its thousands of visitors, most come by day and are funnelled out by train as night falls. By late evening the city is surprisingly quiet, even at the busiest times of year.

7. Colin and Mary do occasionally resort to maps, which might be expected to give an overview of the city, but even those seem designed to confuse rather than assist, offering Venice as a series of disconnected fragments. One, for example, "divided the city into five manageable sections, none of them, unfortunately, overlapping. The hotel was in the top quarter of map two, an expensive, inefficient restaurant at the foot of map three" (21).
pattern and meaning are gradually revealed. Colin and Mary move impulsively, their failure to read or to remember almost wilful, but the reader must make links between images, words, and silences, no matter how apparently innocent or insignificant, and further, must move beyond the bounds of the text itself, since if it is to be understood and interpreted, it will be necessary to extrapolate an allegorical "mental map of city space . . . to that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms" (Jameson 415).

Like Jameson in his discussion of Kevin Lynch and cognitive mapping, McEwan draws an analogy between the inability to map urban space and the inability to map social structure (Jameson 416). The Comfort of Strangers is about the repercussions attending the failure to read and negotiate a city, but more importantly it is about a failure to read and negotiate, to reread, renegotiate, and re-vision, the culture for which Venice stands as a kind of museum. McEwan’s Venice has been, like Conrad’s London, “one of the dark places of the earth” and the “meaning” of his narrative, like Marlow’s, is “not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which [brings] it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (Conrad 5). Conrad’s London is the dark heart of the British Empire but, given McEwan’s
echoes of Conrad in the unnameableness of his city and its landmarks and the unspeakable horror he uncovers at its heart, it is interesting that Marlow's direct reference is not to the modern commercial metropolis but to the settlement on the banks of the Thames "when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago." There is a striking similarity between Marlow's fantasized description of London's river as he imagines it to have been and historical reconstructions of the Venetian lagoon when the refugees of the old cities of Altino, Aquileia, Concordia, and Padova fled there. Compare, for example, John Julius Norwich's musings about the first Venetians: "who in their senses . . . would leave the fertile plains of Lombardy to build a settlement--let alone a city--among these marshy, malarial wastes, on little islets of sand and couchgrass, the playthings of current and tide?" (40), and those of Marlow, who imagines "[s]andbanks, marshes . . . precious little to eat fit for a civilised man . . . cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death--death skulking in the air, in the water" (6). The emotional responses of Marlow's conjured Roman commander, too, might be those of the early Venetians (and of McEwan's tourists), who may well have felt themselves to be "in the midst of the incomprehensible," faced with "[t]he fascination of the abomination . . . the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate" (6). McEwan's gothic "tale" is a waking dream of corruption, imprisonment,
mutation, and death whose extrapolated "meaning" is an exposition of the shaping power of the sexual imagination, and of social structure as it finds its expression in contemporary sexual politics. The "horror" he exposes at the heart of the unnameable lies not so much in human cruelty and ritualized murder, or even in the passive collusion of its alienated victims, as in the uncanny precision of the mirroring of the first narrative by the second, of the "tale" by the "meaning." The sadism that has demanded the tale of Robert and Caroline and Colin and Mary "embodies and declares," Mary realizes after Colin's death, "a powerful single organizing principle" (125) that at once explains and is explained by the psychopathology of western patriarchy.

Claustrophobic enclosure is emphasized by McEwan's introducing only four characters. Three of them are alien to Venice. Mary and Colin are visitors, moving through a museal space where one may look at a culture through its artifacts, skimming across the surface without the need to go deeper. Caroline is Canadian, and has been imprisoned within the house since her arrival with Robert several years earlier. Robert spent his formative years in London, the son of a career diplomat, but he inherited property in Venice and functions within a milieu of local people as the other three do not. Of the four, only he has the key, the controlling power that comes from a knowledge of the city that enables him to co-opt it as a stage for the drama by means of which
he will transform psychic reality into real event.

Colin and Mary have been lovers for seven years. We learn little about Mary’s life and even less of his, but significantly, given the text’s theatrical aspect, and the place in it of the voyeurism/exhibitionism binary, they have both been actors (67, 75). McEwan alludes, directly or indirectly, to three tragedies that turn on family romance and violence and its corollary, the gaining of wisdom—The Bacchae, Oedipus Rex, and Hamlet—and Mary and Colin will each be assigned specific roles to play in the restaging of Dionysiac passion that is at the same time a restaging of the Freudian family romance and the culmination of a drama at once absurd and tragic, contemporary and ancient. Their love is “no longer a great passion” but they insist they are not bored—rather they are closest friends, so close they feel like “misted mirror” images of each other. Reinforcing this, Caroline remarks that they look “almost like twins” (18, 63, 67). But such a superficially attractive ease of resemblance disguises a perilous denial of difference that fixes them within the static realm of illusion, narcissism, and the Imaginary, and outside language and the Symbolic. The

8. It is interesting to note in the light of McEwan’s reference to Hamlet (Caroline hasn’t read it) that Nietzsche saw Dionysian man as resembling Hamlet: “both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge.” This terrible knowledge strips away “the veils of illusion” and renders them both passive in the face of “the eternal nature of things” (60).
Imaginary city they glide across is similarly illusory and will prove similarly dangerous.

From the beginning, their holiday proves exhausting. The hotel on the Zattere in the Dorsoduro sestiere is noisy; they sleep badly and suffer recurrent nightmares of infantilization, passivity, and helplessness, exacerbated by the assumption by hotel staff of their normal daily chores until they become incapable of so much as picking up a dropped towel (13-14). Mary’s dreams suggest she feels trapped by her family and incapable of protecting her children, and Colin’s are so purely Freudian—"of flying . . . of crumbling teeth, of appearing naked before a seated stranger" (12)—as to have been cribbed from The Interpretation of Dreams, as indeed they have been.9 These dreams of helplessness and exposure will be realized as the narrative progresses until, immobile, Mary will watch Colin bleed to death before her.

Each morning they allow themselves to be swept along with thousands of other visitors, “dutifully fulfill[ing] the...
many tasks of tourism the ancient city imposed” (14). It is a passive, even masochistic, routine from which they return exhausted to sleep away the afternoons before rising with the sunset to bathe and dress and set out again as night falls, in search of somewhere to eat. All this is, of course, normal enough behaviour for people on holiday, but in the context of the whole it is disturbing. Not only are they somewhat sleep-deprived, but they sleep and dream during the sunlit, “rational” part of the day, and wake to occupy an irrational dream space at night. Sleeping and waking, dream and reality, blend into a waking dream, until they begin to sleep not just at inappropriate times but in inappropriate places—first in the street, and then in the house of a far from comforting stranger.

They lose themselves, but instead of taking pleasure in the aimlessness of the flaneur as might have been possible had each been alone (the flaneur is, after all, necessarily a solitary figure), they spend hours exasperatedly retracing their steps. The closeness of their relationship, artificially intensified by their isolation in a foreign city, leads to an unspoken stultifying identification with the other’s desire, and thus to compromise and resentment. From the beginning there is a sense that more than just their holiday is out of kilter. Arguments are “resolved” without ever being articulated. Mary feels as though she is sleepwalking not just through the labyrinth of Venice but
through her life, and longs for the “comfort” of the ordered existence of her childhood, “for time and events to be at least partially subject to control” (19). Things are critically out of balance, but McEwan is at his most coolly witty in these opening pages, and his protagonists’ situation is amusing as well as disquieting in its familiarity. By such means complicity is from the opening pages extended from McEwan’s victims to include his hypocrite lecteur.

Late in the evening, Colin and Mary are lost and hungry and bickering when their path is blocked by the third actor in the drama, who offers to guide them to a restaurant (26). Robert’s machismo and misogyny are apparent from the start, yet Mary agrees to follow him. They do need to eat, she is irritated with Colin and, perhaps in spite of herself, the overconfident, controlling stranger appeals to her expressed desire for the “comfort” of order and certainty. He leads them deeper into the labyrinth, further and further from the brightly lit legibility of the key nodes of San Marco and Dorsoduro to a gay bar somewhere in Cannaregio or Castello. It turns out there is no food but, beguiled at finding themselves amongst local people in this city of visitors, they stay, a captive audience for Robert’s long, patently rehearsed confessional monologue about his childhood, an ugly case study of oedipal desire, paternal violence, sibling

10. In an uncanny mirroring, Robert will confess that he, too, has long been a sleepwalker (39).
hatred, and revenge. It is a violation of social mores in that it is the kind of case history that might be confided to an analyst rather than to strangers. He stops only as the bar closes, and then he disappears, leaving Colin and Mary, hungry, tired, and now slightly drunk, to make their own way back to Dorsoduro. Still hopelessly lost, they wander on until dawn, snatching an hour’s sleep in a narrow street near the Ospedale Civile on the Fondamenta Nuove, about as far away from their hotel as it is possible to be. When day dawns, they take the vaporetto to San Marco, returning to the area of the city they know, whose code they have deciphered. By now they are suffering from dehydration as well as hunger and lack of sleep and, despite the heat and the high-season crowds, they pause at one of the cafés in the Piazza instead of taking the ten-minute walk across to the Zattere and the relative quiet of their hotel.

By now their mental and emotional state parodically suggests that of the exhausted initiate undergoing the trials of the labyrinth. When they meet Robert a second time—or rather, as later becomes clear, when he shows himself to them a second time—they are no match for his insistence that he offer them yet more “hospitality.” Recalling Aschenbach’s Charon-like gondolier, he hails a water-taxi and carries them off to his house, which proves to be uncannily close to the calle in which they had fallen asleep a few hours before.

Again they sleep during the day, to wake in a room whose
walls are barred by the rays of the setting sun shining orange through shutters, recalling Mary’s earlier feeling of imprisonment (50, 55). But now, despite the fact that their clothes have mysteriously vanished, she “feel[s] good” (58). She wakes first and spends a long time staring at Colin, her mirror twin. Her gaze catalogues the parts of his naked body in terms that suggest a sculpted beauty that is iconic, not quite real in its androgyny. He has a narrow waist, slender, hairless legs, and “abnormally” small feet. The skin of his ears is “so pale and fine” as to be “almost translucent,” their construction so intricate as to be “impossible.” His eyebrows are dark and straight, his lashes long and thick, and his “unnaturally” fine dark hair curls on his slender, womanly neck. His nose in profile lies classically “flat, along the face,” its nostrils no more than sculpted “commas” (56). The description could be of a classical sculpture, or, looking forward to the photographs Robert takes and their immobilizing two-dimensionality, a Renaissance martyred saint;¹¹ or the eroticized, horizontally posed male nudes of late-eighteenth-, early-nineteenth-century French

¹¹. As is discussed in the section of this study that deals with Coover’s Pinocchio in Venice, Venice has a striking number of elegant, androgynous Sebastians, including those of Da Murano, Conegliano, Mantegna, Tiziano, and Giovanni Bellini, and of course the figure of Sebastian is central to Death in Venice and Aschenbach’s martyrdom to the cruel discipline of his work.
neoclassical painting— for example, Anne-Louis Girodet’s The Sleep of Endymion or Pierre-Narcisse Guérin’s Aurora and Cephalus. A childlike physical flawlessness and vulnerability and an ambiguous sexuality are emphasized by the fact that his arms are folded foetally across his chest and he lies face down with only the upper part of his body, twisted somewhat awkwardly toward Mary, so that neither pubic hair nor genitals are visible. There is in such images of androgyny, as Francette Pacteau has pointed out, the promise of the (impossible) erasure of sexual difference as the resolution of the narcissistic desire for pregendered completeness and self-sufficiency (Pacteau, 63). In the light of their unspoken sense of entrapment within their “mirror” relationship, it is telling that Mary moves to stroke Colin but, rather than wake him, chooses instead to gaze without touching. She leaves him to sleep while she practises yoga— that most inward-looking of disciplines, and a witty confirmation of the narcissistic nature of her pleasure in looking. (For Freud, of course, scopophilia is foreplay and properly should lead to intercourse; anything else risks perversion [Three Essays, 156–57]).

12. My reading of Colin’s body in terms of iconography employed in French neoclassical painting is influenced by Thomas Crow’s fascinating paper “Observations on Style and History in French Painting of the Male Nude, 1785–1794,” which uses these paintings as illustrations of shifts that occurred in the period in the depiction of classical subjects.
This lengthy construction of Colin as the object of the gaze is the first description we have of him, and it is telling that it is framed by the first overt reference to a structuring scopic régime that has been foregrounded from the beginning. Robert, described in some detail on his first appearance, is Colin’s physical antithesis. The oppositionality of the representation of the two men, as arresting as the mirroring that exists between Colin and Mary, begs to be read in iconographical terms: naked and clothed, supine and upright, passive and active, innocent and knowing, spectacle and spectator, and so on.

At their first meeting, for example, Colin is dressed in white, and Robert wears a black shirt that is both a declaration of his machismo and, in the light of his politics and his nostalgia for the way the world was during his father’s and grandfather’s lifetimes, a sinister nod toward Italian fascism and the reinscription of the patriarchal values that accompanied it. The associations of light and dark, innocence and experience are overt, but as the narrative progresses, white clothes are also associated with the feminine: Robert best remembers his beloved mother in white; the only article of clothing available when Colin and Mary wake in Robert’s house is a woman’s white dressing gown; and when they return to the house, Caroline is dressed in white, “like a ward sister” (38, 55, 105). Robert projects an immediacy and a worldliness that contrast with Colin’s
vague, somewhat petulant passivity. Colin is confined to
two-dimensionality, immobilized by the camera, while Robert
is actively present, a Mulveyan three-dimensional figure in
the landscape, alert, moving surely across the feminine space
of the city, manipulating his surroundings and the people he
comes across, and donning a masquerade of masculinity that
declares his virility. In a nice juxtaposition, Colin cannot
get the attention of a waiter in the Piazza, but a few
minutes later the water-taxi drivers squabble for Robert’s
custom. The contrast becomes even more striking when Colin
is described in sleep. Contained and displayed within the
feminine space of a shuttered bedroom, he is utterly passive,
prone, still, oblivious to the world around him. Each man is
portrayed as other than human; Colin’s slender beauty, which
causes Mary to liken him to a god (58) and Robert to liken
him to an angel (70), serves to accentuate Robert’s
brutishness. Returning to the reference to The Bacchae
McEwan takes from Mann, if Colin is godlike, Robert is like a
satyr. He is “apelike”: stocky, with long muscular arms,
large hairy hands, and a carefully exposed “pelt” of chest
hair (26). Finally, Robert creates himself as a three-

13. A reference to an “ape-like” man occurs again in the
vignette of the game-playing adolescents Colin observes on
the Lido. Given the context, the stakes of the “game” staged
between an “ape” and a shy, calf-like girl are raised so that
his playful slaps and the laughing encouragement of the rest
of the group parody the sadomasochistic nature of socially
sanctioned patterns of sexual behaviour.
dimensional character within the narrative; the reader learns a great deal more than he or she might wish to know about his psychic reality. Colin, on the other hand, remains as two-dimensional as the photographs that are a record of the last days of his life.

From the moment Colin wakes, the carefully staged direction of the drama becomes clearer. Since the one piece of clothing to be found is a woman’s dressing gown, only one of them can go to find out what is happening, and unless Colin is prepared to cross-dress (he does put the gown on for a moment), it must be Mary. She finds herself in a gallery that is more like a museum than a home. Like Pandora, or Bluebeard’s bride, with all that those figures conjure up of forbidden secrets and locked rooms or cupboards, female sexual curiosity, and guilt, she tries to open a sideboard, “a monstrosity of reflecting surfaces whose every drawer had a brass knob in the shape of a woman’s head” (60), but all the drawers are locked, the dangerous knowledge they might contain denied her.

The fourth protagonist is introduced. Caroline has been watching Mary’s breach of etiquette from a balcony, and as they begin to talk, she continues to stare, adding a twist to the increasingly complicated field of vision when she owns to having watched Colin and Mary as they slept (61, 62). This admission of voyeurism is the more strange not only because, as we know from the text, each was “naked and lay above the
sheets" (55) but because of its juxtaposition with Mary’s observation of her sleeping lover. With what we already know of Colin and Mary’s mirror relationship, Caroline’s confession nudges Mary’s narcissistic delight in her lover’s beauty from an uncomplicated pleasure in looking toward something abnormal, perverse. Mary is uncomfortable but barely responds to Caroline’s disclosure and when Colin hears, he merely asks Caroline if she’s American, as if that would explain either her unusual behaviour or her remarkable lack of embarrassment (64). The relative ease with which they both accept this objectification recalls their “self-obsessed” grooming, their ritual preparation before stepping into the city as though onto a stage (13).

For all this looking, the stream of language continues unabated as Caroline presses Mary to “confess” her feelings for Colin and her views on sexual love. She is comically confused by Mary’s ironic description of a women’s theatre group she had belonged to and the problems they’d had working together. Based on her own experience, and in a nice comment on semiotic and structuralist theories of narrative form, Caroline is stunned by the idea of a play without a man in it, since without an active masculine figure to create the action, “what could happen?”

In keeping with the pattern of display and vision, Robert acts as cicerone for Colin in a tour of the “family museum”—furniture, paintings, books, sculpture, and such
prosaic items as brushes and razors, a riding crop and a fly swat (59, 70-73)--that are his paternal legacy. A collection of memorabilia, it parodies the cultural authority and validation offered by the museum--doubly resonant in the context of this city that is itself a museum to the past--for not only does it prove to be a collection of fragments shored against the ruins of patriarchal culture, but things are valued less for themselves than for their associations with his father and grandfather, who inhabited a golden time when men were men and women knew their place: a series of "murky," artistically insignificant paintings are prized first because his grandfather collected them, and second because his father showed that "certain brushstrokes were those of a master"; opera glasses are revered because both men witnessed particular performances through them. He delivers a banal homily--in the light of Death in Venice as an intertext it is a parody of a Platonic dialogue--philosophizing that we are confused and unhappy because men don't believe in themselves and "[w]omen treat them like children, because they can't take them seriously." For all that women talk of freedom, they want masculine aggression and dream of captivity. Colin, "affable, but strained," responds with mocking banter about "the good old days." It is an encounter between strangers who have little in common, establishing the boundaries of small talk, but Robert has no conception of boundaries, social, bodily, or psychic. His transgressive
behaviour is more tangible than his wife's, and he punches Colin in the stomach, "a relaxed, easy blow which... might almost have seemed playful," had it not knocked him to the floor. As efficiently as he had rendered Colin helpless, and further establishing the hierarchy he perceives to exist in their relationship, he picks him up and helps him recover his breath. Suggesting complicity, he winks. No one else sees what has happened and, although Colin falls into the role of chastised child by sulking for most of the evening, nothing is said (72-73).

Colin and Mary's response to this unpleasant encounter is as odd as the encounter itself. During the next few days the womblike enclosure of the city is further reinforced as they retreat to their hotel room, and make love continually. Conversation is renewed along with sexual passion, and not only do they discuss their lives and rework old arguments about gender and class politics from a personal rather than from their usual detached, analytical perspective, but each tries to actually listen to the other. They playfully invent sadistic fantasies, each imagining themselves in the active position, but neither the fantasies nor what might underlie them ever enters into the intense conversations they conduct outside sex.14 They barely refer to the experience at Robert

14. I refer to the fantasies as sadistic rather than sadomasochistic since each is the sadist in his or her own fantasy. For all that Colin will be the victim of Caroline and Robert's sadism, it is important to note that he does not
and Caroline’s that marked the shift in their relationship; they speak neither of the sadomasochism each later admits they recognized in the other couple, nor of the coercion to which they each acquiesced.

After three days Mary, a little self-consciously and for the first time since their jouissant idyll began, slips downstairs to have breakfast alone, and when she sees Colin smiling down from the balcony, she is jarred by an uncanny sense of unease "at the back of her mind, just beyond her reach...like a vivid dream that cannot be recalled" (84). The anxiety persists and the next day she wakes at dawn, struggling out of a horrifying nightmare she doesn’t explain, except to say she realizes that seeing Colin on the balcony had reminded her of a photograph Robert had shown her. It was blown up and indistinct, but she now knows the man in the picture was Colin. At first Colin placates her, but as she begins to formulate her thoughts, he cuts her off dismissively, then falls asleep. She doesn’t name the unnameable, and the moment is lost (84-87).

Later the same day they leave behind the claustrophobic enclosure of the city for the Lido and the open Adriatic. At the edge of the ocean, they begin to speak about the photograph, recognizing it now as evidence of Robert’s

fantasize that position: he is purely the object in the fantasy, a kind of blank page on which the fantasies of the others are expressed.
predatory voyeurism. They admit they were both aware of the sadomasochistic nature of Caroline and Robert's relationship, and Colin confesses Robert had hit him. But as they begin to talk, their mode of conversation relapses into adversarial detachment, and instead of being discovered and examined, their appalling fascination is masked—and, repressed, it will retain its power. Their lovemaking and passionate talk now seem, paradoxically, "nothing more than a form of parasitism, an unacknowledged conspiracy of silence" (91). Sickened, they return to their earlier irritable taciturnity, papering over the glimpsed sadomasochism that lies at the heart of their relationship without speaking of it. On the way back to the vaporetto,¹⁵ Colin returns to the question of Robert and the photograph, but this time it is Mary who forestalls discussion, shrugging it off as though she has forgotten the horror she had glimpsed only a few hours before. Their silence on the return journey is broken only by an apparently casual agreement to walk back to the hotel.

¹⁵. McEwan says the boat's "funnel, which was the shape of a battered top hat, gave the boat the appearance of a dishevelled undertaker." Gaetano D'Elia and Christopher Williams note that "everyone," including Mann, refers to the funereal aspect of the gondola, and that McEwan resists except in this description (239). It's a while since Venetian vaparetti or motorscafì actually had funnels, but perhaps some still did in the late 1970s when McEwan was in Venice, or perhaps it is a reference to Visconti's rather than Mann's Death in Venice and the boat Aschenbach takes from Pola to Venice—or an unconscious reference to Heart of Darkness. Whatever, it works perfectly in terms of the narrative and Colin and Mary's journey from the Lido to Castello as a crossing of the Lethe.
from the Ospedale Civile stop on the Fondamenta instead of going on to San Marco, because "[i]t will be quicker" (98). With their record for negotiating the city, it's hardly a convincing reason, and when Caroline waves from her balcony they walk toward her, still without speaking. The return to the enclosure of the city is dramatically intensified by the return to the imprisoning house that had seen the rebirth of their passion, and will see Colin's death.

Robert immediately leads Colin back to the bar he had first taken them to. The women remain, and at Mary's insistence it is now Caroline's turn to talk, to confess. She agrees, but there's a condition: "I'll tell you about my back . . . [w]hen you've told me how good you think this tea is" (107). The tea is spiked, and by the time Caroline has explained the development of her relationship with Robert, his "deep loathing" for her ("It wasn't theatre" 109), the pleasure she came to take in the pain as well as in her feelings of guilt and helplessness (108-9), Mary's silence is no longer voluntary. Like Bluebeard's bride, her curiosity is satisfied and, like her, she is in no position to retreat to take stock of her newfound knowledge. The men return, and Mary, her still, silent gaze fixed on the scene being enacted before her, takes up the role of "made-to-order-witness" (Silverman, Threshold 126; n.6, 243) to the ritualistic murder of her lover. Like Pentheus manipulated by Dionysus, she is forced to watch what she has refused to see. It is,
and it is not, theatre.

In retrospect, Mary will "attribute much of what followed" to the lateness of the hour at which she and Colin left their hotel on the evening of their first encounter with Robert (19). This suggests an ongoing disavowal since it has become clear that the meeting was not a chance one, that sooner or later Robert would have made his move. Any number of moments during the series of events that followed might be read as fatal thresholds crossed: Mary and Colin follow an antipathetic stranger to a bar and stay until it closes although, contrary to what was promised, there is no food; although they have a perfectly comfortable hotel room, they place themselves in the hands of the same man the next day and go to his house to recover from an experience for which he was in large part responsible; they stay to dinner despite mounting evidence of their hosts' aberrant rather than merely eccentric behaviour; they stay after Robert punches Colin; they don't discuss the photograph after Mary's nightmare, and so on. "What followed" can better be explained by the distorting power Mary describes as "men's ancient dreams of hurting, and women's of being hurt" (125). The protagonists' oscillatory behaviours converge, and are a perfect fit.

The matching pieces of the textual puzzle McEwan creates coalesce around the vision/language division: the first is a
grainy blow-up of Colin standing on the hotel balcony;\textsuperscript{16} the second, the oedipal story within the story Robert narrates to Colin and Mary.

The picture is, like Venice itself, a figure for the text's structuring scopophilia; at the same time, and again like Venice, it is a figure for reading and interpretation and the role of memory. Associated with the photograph that frames Colin as "spectacle" is an enfilade of gazes that extends to include not only Robert, Caroline, and Mary, but also the reader, in a complex structure of fascination and complicity. Mary's uncanny experience of seeing Colin on the hotel balcony nudges her memory and she struggles to recall what turns out to be the forgotten photograph. She remains within the narcissistic economy that applied when she looked at his sleeping body, but she is in the same line of vision Robert was in when he took the photograph and this results in a subtle shift, actual and metaphorical, in her perspective. She sees as though through the lens of Robert's camera, her gaze contaminated by his, rather as earlier her pleasure in looking at Colin's sleeping body was corrupted by its juxtaposition with Caroline's voyeurism. She is inserted into the (masculine) position of the bearer of the gaze as Colin has been placed in the (feminine) position of its

\textsuperscript{16} The image has something of the haunting effect of the photograph in Cortázar's short story "Blow-Up" and in Antonioni's film of the same name (1966).
object. This does not make her a voyeur, but it does further align her with Robert and Caroline on their side of the voyeur/exhibitionist binary, and foreshadows her role as coerced witness to Colin’s murder.

Caroline, too, gazes at the photographic image of Colin from Robert’s perspective. Confined within the prison of his house, the only perspective available to her is the one he chooses. The camera becomes her eye, and the photograph of Colin provides what she lacks: access to a world in which she can make something happen. As she looks, she crosses from the position of masochistic object to share the visually active role of voyeur and begins to plan with Robert how to transform sadomasochistic fantasy into deadly reality (114). "It’s like stepping into a mirror," she explains to Mary.

The field of vision encompasses the reader, hypocrite lecteur and mirror witness to the unfolding drama. Just as Mary struggles to recall the photograph and to interpret the circumstances surrounding its existence, so the reader must remember and bring together a series of random textual and intertextual elements surrounding the same image, metaphorically narrowing his or her eyes until the un/heimlich fragments achieve their terrible clarity. Mary’s gaze is fascinated and complicit; her desire to know leads her into the trap Robert and Caroline have set. The reader’s desire to know suggests a similar complicity.

McEwan’s textual staging distracts attention from the
blown-up photograph when it is first mentioned, so that it is as easy for readers to overlook its importance as it is for Mary; we too are victims of McEwan’s dramatic irony. Dinner at Robert and Caroline’s apartment is over. Caroline and Colin are “centre stage” as she hints at her imprisonment and insists Colin promise that he and Mary will visit again (76). Mary overhears, moves “upstage” away from the conversation, and suggests it is time to leave. She glances first at a magazine and then at the photograph in what appears to be no more than “stage business.” She is curious enough to take the picture in her hand and can make out a man smoking on a balcony, but like the thousands of other images that have “fallen dully on her retina” (12) over the past few days, it holds no meaning for her. Robert takes it from her after a few seconds, but not until the noose is drawn tight does McEwan let us know that he showed it to her (87). He does, however, provide a number of textual “clues” to the photograph’s provenance and to its importance, clues that weave the image back into the text. Not only is it a visual reprise of the early linguistic description of Colin smoking a joint on the hotel balcony (15, 16), but photography has been foregrounded from the beginning by its presence and by its absence. By the time the picture is mentioned, seemingly disconnected references to photography, cameras, and lenses have become a kind of leitmotif. A camera is an instrument of domination and torture in Mary’s nightmares: she dreams
her ex-husband has cornered her and spent hours relentlessly teaching her to operate his camera—as he once actually did—as she sighed and moaned and begged him to stop (12). She is bleached to photographic “silver and sepia” by street lighting, becoming the living embodiment of Robert’s gaze as he stalks and photographs them (22). In a shop window “a single camera lens [is] mounted on a velvet plinth,” accorded the kind of reverence usually reserved for works of art or precious jewellery (24), and in this city of tourists, where “[t]wo-thirds, perhaps, of the adult males [carry] cameras” (47), it is textually appropriate that Colin, as object rather than bearer of the gaze, takes no pictures. Before they leave the hotel, he watches tourists capturing the city and each other on film and recounts an anecdote about it to Mary, as a man in a small boat on the Giudecca Canal returns binoculars to their case (15, 16, 18). The binoculars chime uncannily with the suggestions of theatricality, and more particularly with those of voyeurism, recalling the description a few pages earlier of Colin and Mary’s “exhibitionist” ritualized toilet preparations. Finally, when they encounter Robert later that evening, he is carrying a camera, although it is quite dark, and he still has it with him the next day in the Piazza (26, 52). None of these references is accorded particular attention; they shift into focus only as they pile up against each other.

The record of Robert and Caroline’s perverse looking
takes the form of a collage of photographs Mary later sees on the bedroom wall of their house. They are of Colin, framed and cropped so that Mary is for the most part either completely excised or present only as a meaningless fragment. Again he is viewed as a kind of icon of male beauty, reduced to two-dimensionality, killed into art. He is pictured with suitcases at the moment of his arrival, walking into the hotel, sleeping naked on a bed, standing in the Piazza, on a balcony, and so on. Mary can place most of the images, but one of them makes no sense. The light is poor, suggesting the photograph was taken after sunset, and it shows her walking with Colin across a square that is deserted except for a dog (114). Unlike the balcony picture, the textual clues are suggestive rather than conclusive, but the description is intentionally chilling because, if we have been observant, as she has not, it indicates that on the night Robert took them to his bar he had shadowed them from the beginning. He took the photograph of Robert on the balcony presumably, as Mary guesses, "from a boat, a little way beyond the café," and if he was the man with the binoculars, he left his observation post only as they kissed and went inside to make love. The picture Mary cannot place might reveal he was still watching them as they began their late evening search for a restaurant: "[T]his was the starting point for nearly all their expeditions. But for a man stacking chairs outside a café, watched by a dog and,
further off, another man, the square was deserted” (21). Is the other man Robert, who chose this moment to take the photograph? In the light of this possibility the brief, reassuring sight of a figure moving toward them and a cat-like movement in a doorway (24, 25) become eerie foreshadowings of the sudden appearance of the “squat figure [that] stepped out of the dark into a pool of streetlight, blocking their path” (26), as Robert steps theatrically into the spotlight, and introduces himself. Just as, three days after Mary saw it, the forgotten outline of the balcony photograph triggers a sense of unnameable dread “at the back of her mind, just beyond her reach” (83-87), so the blurred and unheimlich elements of the text begin to form a pattern for the reader.

A second key to the textual puzzle is a story within the story that explains Robert’s careful orchestration of Colin’s murder in terms of childhood trauma and the effort to master it by reproducing the experience in all its painful horror. Robert’s perverse bar-room soliloquy may have its basis in the real events of his childhood, but it is an expression of his psychic reality (108). In keeping with the many other theatricalized aspects of the text, he prepares himself as an actor might, pausing, adjusting his body and breathing—going into character (31). There is neither opportunity nor need for a response from Mary and Colin, who are set up as audience rather than as interlocutors; this may be a self-
telling, but he is not interested in the talking cure. There is something of Browning's technique in what is essentially an interior monologue, and—perhaps not entirely unconsciously—it is psychologically revealing of Robert and incriminating of the feared and respected father he longs to emulate. For all that he professes only admiration, he provides a portrait, complete with Hitlerian moustache, of a vain, manipulative petty tyrant, whose inner sanctum deserves to be defiled by his powerless son.

Just as the photograph may be read as a figure for scopophilia in the text, Robert's family narrative is a figure for the Oedipus complex, with its foundations in violence, eroticism, and guilt. Robert's account circulates around fantasies of possession of the mother, and paternal retribution for his forbidden desire to be the father and for his failure to measure up to the father, to be like the father (Freud, Ego 34). He describes fantasies of humiliation and punishment that are echoed in the wider structuring violence of the "dominant fiction" that informs the text as a whole. Although his behaviour is sadistic, what demands his story is not in fact sadism but sadism's oscillatory other, an unconscious primary masochism that will ensure his public punishment and humiliation; consequently, for all that he and Caroline make elaborate escape plans, he leaves behind an incontrovertible trail of evidence. The unconscious desire to master the trauma of childhood betrayal
and punishment at the hands of his father leads to the reproduction of his psychic reality in an effort, not to bind it, but to shatter the guilty ego once and for all, and in so doing to achieve a jouissance that can only be attained with the complete destruction of the self. This will be effected beyond the frame of the text, once he becomes the object of the gaze of society and the law.

Robert is the youngest of five siblings, the only son and, according to his monologue, not merely his stern father’s favourite but “his passion” (32). He idealizes his beautiful mother, and whenever his father is away, shares her bed until, at the age of ten, he meets Caroline and transfers his love to her. His father is a terrifying figure (“even the ambassador was afraid of [him]”)17 who pits his daughters against their younger brother. His sisters are frightening, too: a more or less undifferentiated Medusan “tangle of ribbon and lace and curls,” they turn their castrating fury on their little brother in their parents’ absence (31-40). His oldest sisters—tellingly named Eva and Maria—are punished for reaching sexual maturity while he, as the male heir and “the next head of the family,” is set up by his father in a false position of power over them. His father pretends to allow Robert to infantilize his sisters,

17. It is interesting that Robert casually reveals to his audience in this fantasy of hierarchies of power that his father was not actually an ambassador; Caroline’s, on the other hand, was (108).
forbidding them to go out unchaperoned or exchange girlish socks for silk stockings. But, as he discovers, the dangerous female body is not so easily contained, and in their parents’ absence his sisters flaunt their outlawed sexuality before his fascinated gaze, transforming themselves from “tall schoolgirls” into “real women” as they put on the fascinating and threatening masquerade of femininity in the form of their mother’s clothes and makeup. As they pose narcissistically for each other, he follows them, “looking at them all the time, just looking.” At dinner that night, Robert betrays his sisters, and in his father’s study, a forbidden, secret place of gold leaf, chandeliers, and red velvet, he witnesses his sisters being beaten (32-35).

They take their revenge by persuading him to swallow castor oil before gorging on the chocolate that is forbidden him by his father because it was “bad for boys. It made them weak in character, like girls” (35). As the room begins to swim, Eva and Maria bind him and lock him in his father’s tabooed study (“Bravo Robert! . . . Now you are big Papa”), where he throws up and defecates on his father’s precious rugs, using “the affairs of state” on his father’s desk in a comically pathetic attempt to hide his guilt. Before his father’s return, the sisters untie their brother, and leave him to his fate. Now it is his turn to be beaten, for failing to measure up to his paternal inheritance, for proving to be no better than a weak-willed girl.
Freud explains this kind of fantasy in terms of the negative Oedipus and "moral masochism"; the split subject turns upon itself, the super-ego hounding and punishing the ego. What Freud describes as "an unconscious sense of guilt" drives the subject "to seek punishment at the hands of a parental power." The ego, which is after all, as Silverman reminds us, "first and foremost a bodily ego" (Freud, Ego 26), becomes "the erotogenic zone of choice, the site where [the moral masochist] seeks to be beaten" (Silverman, Male Subjectivity 188-89). In the case of the female subject, masochism is more or less acceptable within the formations of normative heterosexuality, in keeping with the binaries that define woman as the gentle, passive, childlike, weak, evil, lacking, guilty complement of man. The positive resolution of the Oedipus complex, which validates the little girl's willingness to subordinate herself to the masculine subject, means such fantasy may be acknowledged consciously. She identifies with her (powerless, passive) mother and "loves" her (powerful, active) father. With maturity she will "become" the mother and transfer her love for the father to a patriarchal husband. However pathological her behaviour may

18. "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface." Strachey's footnote adds: "I.e. the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body" (Ego 26).
be, Caroline recognizes her love of suffering and her desire to be destroyed; Robert has had to repress the homosexual desire to be beaten/loved by the father, so that his desire to be destroyed is unavailable to consciousness. Misrecognized, it is outside his control, even more dangerous than his sadism or Caroline’s desire for self-destruction.

She describes the history of their marriage, which proceeded smoothly enough until they were unable to conceive a child. Robert, anxious to step into his father’s position, “was desperate to be a father, desperate to have sons, but nothing came of it” (33, 108). Further proof of his “castration” was exposed as doctors discovered there was “something wrong with his sperm” (108). Unable to be the father, he began to hurt Caroline as they had sex, punishing in her a femininity he feared in himself. She could no longer see her parents because she was so clearly a battered wife, and when Robert’s grandfather died they moved to Venice. They found their roles irresistible, and the level of violence and the pleasure they took from it escalated until Robert broke Caroline’s back. They had stepped into the Real, and according to Caroline, they were both frightened and thrilled and “the idea of death . . . wouldn’t go away” (110). “We had,” she says, “arrived at the point we had been heading towards all the time” (109), and that “point” is also the geographical, topographical space of Venice as the body of the woman and as the Real of fascination, horror, and death.
At a physical level, Robert is in control, but at the level of the psyche, the power relation is less clear. As she makes Mary "understand" the drama she is about to witness, it becomes clear that Caroline takes Robert "seriously" only within the frame of her bodily pain: for the rest, she views him as a child who stretches the truth and makes up stories about his past to tell in his bar (108), he is obsessive about his father and grandfather, and his collection of their possessions is his "little museum" (111). His desire may be unavailable to his consciousness, but it is all too available to be manipulated by Caroline's desire.

Robert must prove that he is not weak like his sisters; indeed he must show that he is like the father, and he must be the father, whom he introjects as the sadistic super-ego. His conscious drive to destroy Colin, whom he views as exemplary of the gender "confusion and unhappiness" that is disrupting patriarchal culture (73), masks an unconscious drive toward his own humiliation and destruction. The murder ensures the annihilation of his castrated self, and makes "real" the father of his psychic reality. In "punishing" Colin, he is able at last to step into his father's shoes and punish his failed, effeminate self once and for all, and this ultimate transgression will guarantee the ego's exposure and destruction at the hands of the Law as parental power. Part of Robert and Caroline's planning ("You'd never believe how much planning there was to do" [113]) includes their escape,
but because the unconscious aim of Robert’s desire is to engineer a repetition of his childhood trauma, he ensures he will be caught and punished by leaving a legible trail: air tickets are booked in their own names; before Robert kills Colin he parades him through the streets leading to his bar, telling everyone they meet they are lovers, and Mary is set up as a witness. In the wake of his crime, he defiles the patriarchal house as he had once defiled his father’s study, smearing it with the blood of his victim that is the guilty and abject trace of his own feminized aberrance.

McEwan makes surprisingly little of the unsettling Venetian juxtaposition of built space and water. There are few of the unheimlich images of water edging its way across thresholds that are characteristic of “Venetian” novels, and although Mary and Colin do make two symbolic crossings to Robert and Caroline’s house by water, they are for the most part labyrinth walkers. Rather, he creates his Venice in the traditional dichotomous image of the medieval city as a figure for light and dark, order and confusion, sacred and profane. The dichotomy is, of course, a Venetian one, and therefore far from simple. The labyrinth, described in terms of confusion, “gloom,” and “total darkness,” fans out from the legibility of the “brilliantly-lit open ground” surrounding the “glittering façade” of San Marco (47). Monstrosity is located in McEwan’s Venice, but the labyrinth is ever a liminal space of change and potential as well as
one of death, and there is always the possibility the traveller might prevail, to return stronger and wiser. On their first visit to Robert and Caroline's house, Mary and Colin do glimpse "the horror," and for a moment it seems they might be capable of "re-vision," but the moment passes, and they are sucked back toward death.

In McEwan's text, the immense space of the Piazza San Marco, which stands in such striking juxtaposition to the dark enclosure of the surrounding streets, is not the medieval sacred one of refuge or pilgrimage. It is "a bright sea of paying customers" who, dwarfed by its immensity, surge and wheel as if to imitate the attendant flocks of feeding pigeons. The lines McEwan (mis)quotes from Ruskin's description of the west façade of the Basilica come to suggest not so much the triumphant transformation of nature into art as nature robbed of life and movement, fixated as if by magic into a beautiful but brittle stasis that recalls the dangerous realm of narcissistic illusion inhabited by Colin and Mary:

the crests of the arches, as if in ecstasy, broke into marble foam and tossed themselves far into the blue sky in flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray, as if breakers on a shore had been frost-bound before they fell. (49)

The Piazza with its surrounding buildings does form a legible space, but while Mary and Colin are able to negotiate
it as they cannot the labyrinth, they experience it as no more than a shallow façade, an impressive exhibit within a museum whose sacred and historical meanings are all but lost.

I have spoken of the structure of McEwan’s text as a negotiation of two textual zones, the “tale” and the “meaning,” against the “mental map” of Venice, by means of which a tale of gothic horror informs a discussion of our “dominant fiction,” just as an individual capacity for “map reading” extends from the negotiation of urban space to the negotiation of social structure. The trauma faced by patriarchal culture at the end of the twentieth century is vividly figured in Robert’s personal trauma. The disruption of the “dominant fiction” by feminism and the development of gender politics reflect Robert’s after-the-event construction of his childhood, and each threatens his Imaginary relation with the phallus. His museum, reflecting the role of Venice as a museum to western culture, is a defence against chaos, a collection of fragments he has shored against the ruins of a society he views as undermined by a feminizing force that is bringing him, and patriarchy as a whole, face to face with loss.

His irrepressible, castrating sisters tricked him into exposing his weakness for sugar, and by analogy, his femininity. For all that he appears to have succeeded in hobbling and imprisoning his wife where he was unable to control his siblings, she too views him as childish, and he
has been unable to make her the bearer of his sons. Men, Robert explains to Colin, are filled with self-loathing because they “don’t believe in themselves as men,” and women, whatever they may tell themselves about a desire for freedom, actually long for masculine aggression, and cannot take seriously men who—unlike his father and his grandfather—are “like children” (72-73). His “recital” could perhaps be reworded: “I don’t believe in myself as a man, and Caroline treats me as a child because, for all that she is terrified of me, she cannot take me seriously.” Robert must perform a masquerade of masculinity in the face of the appalling abyss of the feminine. Constructed by castration and lack, he maintains an active, sadistic position while unconsciously desiring that of the passive masochist. Such a response has terrible repercussions: Colin dies because the aim of Robert’s unconscious drive is his own discovery and punishment. The city that is the stage for this drama is itself a similarly doubled construction of façade and abyss.

In the last lines of the text, Mary sits beside her lover’s body in the hospital mortuary, and begins to explain the story Caroline told her on the afternoon of the murder, and to extrapolate from that “her theory, tentative at this stage, of course, which explained how the imagination, the sexual imagination, men’s ancient dreams of hurting, and women’s of being hurt, embodied and declared a powerful single organizing principle, which distorted all relations,
all truth" (125). But she is suddenly distracted by something in her line of vision--Colin's hair has been arranged wrongly--and she loses the thread of her argument rather as she repeatedly lost her way in the city. The challenge of McEwan's text is that we do not lose the thread, that we uncover the sadomasochistic patterns by which we have narrated ourselves into being, since only then will we be able to undertake the task of "re-vision." Adrienne Rich states that we must recognize that a change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if there is to be a real shift in the old political order, and insists that for this to happen, we must re-read and re-vision the literature of the past that has constructed us:

Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is . . . more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge . . . is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us. . . . A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential
if we are not going to see the old political order reassert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (35)

McEwan's polemic is as urgent as Rich's own, but he is writing fiction, and "meaning" is veiled behind a gothic "tale" so shocking that it obscures its political aim. The narrative structure that foregrounds the violence of the "single organizing principle" that is patriarchal law, and that equates remembering and re-vision with survival, suggests that to ignore the narratives of psychoanalysis as a collection of "analytic tools whereby we can critique the way social reality is engendered by unconscious fantasies" (Cornell 76) will be fatal. Venice in its legibility and its topographical dualism is for McEwan (as for other writers at the end of the twentieth century) a cognitive map not only of our culture but of the topography of the psyche from which to take the first "tentative" (125) steps toward that critique.
Chapter Three

Robert Coover’s Pinocchio in Venice: A Talking Book

Robert Coover’s Pinocchio in Venice (1991) is both a retelling of and a sequel to Carlo Collodi’s children’s story The Adventures of Pinocchio (1881-82). At the end of the original story, Pinocchio has been transformed from a puppet into an adolescent boy; at the beginning of the retelling he is, in real time, about a century old. Venice is an ideal setting for a tale of metamorphosis, since it is a literary commonplace that the city is, like Pinocchio, the product of a magical transformation. Ruskin describes a city made of frost-bound breakers transfixed into glittering marble and crenellated stone set with semi-precious jewels (2: 67-68); Byron, in Childe Harold, a fairy-tale city conjured up from the mud of the lagoon “at the stroke of an enchanter’s wand”
(4.1), and Pound "a forest of marble" (Canto XVII). But
Coover's Venice is undergoing a second metamorphosis that
will return it to its swampy origins and in this it is a
mirror for his Pinocchio's body, fast reverting to wood.
Neither one thing nor the other, at the border of life and
death, city and protagonist are both inscribed with an
uncertainty that is frightening and fascinating. This
chapter will show how, in a further mirroring, the grotesque
body of the puppet and the body of the city, long an icon for
carnival, illustrate Coover's dialogic engagement with a
range of discourses, from Homer to Calvino, from Plato to
Derrida. It is an engagement with the body of western
literary history that leads to its renovation.

Now a professor emeritus at an ivy league college,
Coover's Pinocchio has as much in common with Gustav von
Aschenbach, the protagonist of Death in Venice, as he has
with a talking puppet, and Coover wittily infects Thomas
Mann's moral fable for grownups with Collodi's didactic one
for children. He takes advantage of Collodi's ambivalence
toward his protagonist (Perella 55) to address questions
relating to the acquisition of bourgeois subjectivity, and in
doing so he examines ambivalences in Mann's
semi-autobiographical novella about artistic creativity and

1. Pound's metaphor is particularly ingenious, since not only
is his city a Dantean "dark wood," but Venice's foundations
are of Istrian pine.
the role of the writer in the early twentieth century. It's a seriously funny critique, and a self-reflexively parodic study of the role of the artist and thinker in Coover's own historical moment--our historical moment--of literary and theoretical discontent.

Both Coover's Pinocchio and Mann's Aschenbach have spent their adult lives striving for perfection, in the pursuit of idealized beauty and truth, and both have achieved a public dignity. Mann and Coover agree to be inimical to the artistic imagination. Both are physically frail, their success a "heroism born of weakness" (Mann 11). Both are deeply dissatisfied, both are drawn, with uncharacteristic spontaneity, to visit Venice, and both will die there. In common with the pattern of death-driven repetition found in McEwan's and Winterson's Venice novels, as well as Mann's, the traces of Pinocchio's repressed puppet self will return

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2. In an autobiographical sketch, Mann states that a trip to the Lido furnished him with all the material for the novella, and that his task was merely to interpret it. Like his protagonist, he was at a literary standstill, and at a crossroads in his development (von Gronicka 46; Reed 149). Coover cunningly plays on that semi-autobiographical element at his own expense. Pinenut teaches at an East Coast university, for example, and when he nestles into the soft bosom of the Blue Fairy who was his "mother" when he was a puppet, the "home" he is really searching for on his return to Venice, it reminds him of a cornfield in Iowa. Coover is a member of the faculty at Brown University, and he is by birth an Iowan.
to haunt him. In the century that has followed the publication of Collodi's Pinocchio, a flourishing Pinocchio industry has developed that encompasses long-nosed souvenir puppets and masks hawked at shops and market stalls in Italy and in Little Italies from Toronto to Melbourne, together with adaptations in various media. Disney's 1940 animated film--a radical departure from Collodi's text and a source of some embarrassment to Coover's Professor Pinenut--is still widely available on video and is rereleased in cinemas from time to time. In the fine essay that introduces his 1986 parallel Italian and English edition of Collodi's text, Nicolas J. Perella points out that more recently the academy has taken "this most fortunate of Italy's minor classics" to its heart, because of the subtlety of its linguistic and narrative

3. Aschenbach inhabits Coover's Pinocchio's thinking, and his every step. Both see premonitory visions on arriving in the city: Aschenbach sees an old fop pretending to be a youth, and Pinocchio a crazed figure fleeing through the streets. Aschenbach will "become" the fool he despised as Pinocchio will become the fleeing madman, and Aschenbach's fool. Both have a strange encounter with a gondolier; both have problems with missing luggage; both sit in deck chairs on Venetian beaches (though Aschenbach's beach is the Lido and Pinocchio's is the space where a derelict warehouse meets the lagoon). Both have doubts about being in Venice at all but by the time they realize they should have gone, it is too late. Both feverishly hunt an unsuitably young lover through the labyrinth, and both delude themselves as to the nature of their desire with parodic readings of Plato's Phaedrus. Aschenbach dreams of a Bacchanalian orgy, and Pinocchio lives its terrifying reality. Often Coover weaves together serendipitous figures from Collodi's and Mann's texts. For example, Aschenbach, the original Pinocchio, and Professor Pinenut are all beguiled by the sight of tombstones.
strategies, its literary and sociocultural allusiveness, and its use of archetypal patterns and images (Perella 2, 5). At conferences and in scholarly journals Pinocchio is interpreted theologically, psychoanalytically, sociopolitically, anthroposophically, allegorically, and historicoculturally. The puppet is earnestly compared to Odysseus, Aeneas, Christ, and Dante, as well as to Renzo, the working-class hero of Manzoni’s revered political novel, I Promessi Sposi (1827-40) (4). In 1983 “a panel of more than sixty contemporary writers . . . were asked whether they agreed that this ‘puppet-people-Italy,’ matured through grief and misfortune, represents one of the truest searches into the national identity” (Perella 4).

Robert Coover’s Pinocchio in Venice is, then, part of a century-long tradition of adaptation and interpretation that includes popular and academic culture—and he delights in the carnivalesque trap he sets for academic readers of his text, who must either take the bait and join the somewhat solemn endeavours of Pinocchio scholars (and those of Coover’s own Professor Pinenut) or simply stand back and applaud.

But Coover is manifestly outside the tradition, too, in that, as his deliberate engagement with Bakhtin would

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4. Perella, who is referring to Renato Bertachini’s Le “Avventure” ritrovate: Pinocchio e gli scrittori italiani del Novecento, advises that there was, “predictably,” no agreement, since Pinocchio, written soon after the birth of the Italian state, is a native son of Tuscany and not of Italy as a whole.
suggest, his reading of Collodi’s puppet is as expansive and all-encompassing as most translations, rewritings, and interpretations have been “monolithically reductive” (Perella 2), and this section will discuss the process by which Coover lovingly compounds Collodi’s ambiguity and intertextual richness to create not just a Pinocchio but a text whose body is a type of carnivalesque grotesque.\footnote{In one of many complex juxtapositions, Coover emphasizes the (Bakhtinian) grotesque nature of Pinocchio’s body. First, the puppet’s final journey takes place not within Collodi’s Tuscan countryside but within Venice, which has long been associated with carnival, and it takes place during the days leading up to Lent, which are traditionally associated with carnivalesque festivity and the celebration of the grotesque body. Second, the links Collodi made between his puppet and the transgressive art form of commedia dell’arte are reinforced in that not only are the commedia puppets given much fuller roles in Coover’s text, but they have shifted their transgressive presentations off the stage and away from the footlights that separate actors and audience and onto the street, where everyone joins the performance. Finally, the body of Collodi’s puppet was “grotesque” as opposed to “classical” in Bakhtinian terms, and this aspect of the original text, too, is emphasized by Coover. Pinocchio’s body, with its resistance to authority and its protuberant, unruly nose, is a figure for the “becoming, change and renewal” (Bakhtin: 1968 109) that characterizes the grotesque. Coover emphasizes this, together with the accompanying discourses of “low” culture (street theatre, various forms of billingsgate, carnivalesque feasting and the accompanying expulsion of bodily waste, and so on), through parodic references to the “classical” body, closed, perfect, unchanging. (Pinocchio’s profession of art historian lends itself to disquisitions on binarism of the classical and the grotesque.) In the street, Pinocchio is one with the lively teeming collective body of the crowd, but in the deathly quiet of the cemetery of S. Michele, a classically perfect marble representation of a young boy is wept over by the grotesque figure of his grotesque, aged, and dissolute model, and in the early morning quiet of the Church of S. Sebastiano, Pinocchio gazes up at Veronese’s paintings of saints and madonnas, and crossly compares his own tiny, misshapen and now grotesquely collapsing body with the changeless perfection of Renaissance representations of the}
The Bakhtinian grotesque body that is *Pinocchio* in Venice may contain "everything," but its wholeness consists in its kaleidoscopic fragmentation. In the context of Venice, it is like nothing more than the façade of San Marco, a collage of bits and pieces that are nonetheless of a piece. It is a witty anthology of literary bric-a-brac—and it is an encyclopedic incorporation (in the most bodily sense of that word) of western literary history. Coover places himself in a long line of literary thieves of language, as is foregrounded from the outset in the verbal parallelism contained in his title, subsuming as it does both *The Adventures of Pinocchio* and *Death in Venice*. Collodi and Mann are central, and references to both appear throughout Coover's text and throughout this chapter, but they are only two strands in a densely interwoven and ever unravelling text. I will refer, sometimes in detail, sometimes in passing, to a handful of Coover's intertexts, including Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, Dante's *Purgatorio*, the Gospels of the New Testament, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and The Dialogic Imagination, and Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy," recognizing that in the process of choosing these few I must silence classically proportioned male nude. These discourses find a mirror in the body of the city, now classical in its unchanging perfection, now a grotesque mix of water and land, polluted and unstable.
other voices in what is, in Bakhtinian terms, a monologic maiming of the text. With the exception of Eliot’s Prufrock, included in part because it beautifully illustrates Coover’s technique and adds a dimension to our understanding of the sad folly of Professor Pinenut’s carefully (mis)spent life, I have selected those texts that manifestly are part of the structure of Coover’s own.

None of these textual precursors confines Coover, but each is an aspect of a flexible frame that is grotesque in its carnivalesque “Here Comes Everybody” capacity to extend, incorporate, and transform. Not all the dialogues Coover undertakes with other texts are as easily recognized as those with Collodi and Mann, but their structuring influence is insistent. Joyce, Derrida, Bakhtin, and Coover are all concerned with temporal and spatial simultaneity that breaks down the binary logic of then and now, inside and outside, good and evil, and that lends itself to being read against the unstable background of the city mapped in the course of this study. They all engage in word play that is eccentric and communicative, and along with Dante, Eliot, Mann, and the writers of the Gospels, they all expand the horizons of their own texts by writing in the margins of other people’s. Coover’s linguistic bellylaughter skilfully brings texts into contact as he reinterprets and--to return to McEwan--revisions them in the light of each other. It is part of a tradition but at the same time it is, in the words of
Coover's female commedia hero Columbina, "a whole new lazzo" (Coover 307).  

The shift Coover undertakes in rewriting Collodi's text is also marked temporally and spatially. Collodi's Pinocchio was published in the years following Unification and is set in an imaginary but recognizably Tuscan landscape. Coover transports Pinocchio a century forward in time so that the new story, like its predecessor, addresses contemporary issues. He removes him from the Tuscan countryside and its associations with nationalism, centralized republican political power, and the Florentine dialect—the language of Dante and, in the late nineteenth century, the official language of the new Italian state—and sets him down in Venice, a space this study has from the beginning shown to be liminal, and where the language moves back and forth across the border between standard Italian and Venetian vernacular (see, for example, 136-37).

We learn from Coover that, like many young Italians, Collodi's ragazzino per-bene, his proper boy, headed for the New World. He disguised his Italian roots by anglicizing his name from the trippingly iambic "Pinocchio" to the sturdily trochaic "Pinenut," got himself an education, and worked as an actor then script writer in Hollywood—shades not only of

6. In Coover's context, lazzo, a joke or trick, translates as a commedia routine.
Disney but also of Mann. Haunted by his promise to the Blue-Haired Fairy to "always behave himself" (Collodi 343), he disavowed the entertainment industry, an act of second-stage repression that ensured his lifelong misery, but in Venice, after many painful trials—and many intertextual negotiations—his repression will be lifted. In the space of four days, as Pinocchio makes his way through the labyrinth, Collodi's *Bildungsroman* will be reread but in reverse, as though "The Movie of His Life" (the title given to chapter 8) were being rewound at breakneck speed, returning the puppet to his wooden beginnings.

Perhaps because he wishes to avoid further temptations to pleasure, Pinocchio has locked himself in an ivory tower and forged a distinguished academic career as an art historian turned humanist philosopher. On one level he still regrets his backsliding flirtation with show business, but it has provided an undeniably useful confessional tool in his

7. Aside from its obvious emphasis on Pinocchio's wooden-headedness, there is a hidden joke in Coover's choice of this particular anglicization. In a footnote to his essay, which would almost certainly have been known to Coover, Perella explains that, while *pinocchio* survived into the nineteenth century as the standard Italian for "pinenut," variations on the twentieth-century *pignolo* were already common. He adds that "[w]hile it is quite likely that many of the first readers of Collodi's tale were amused at hearing of a family of Pinenuts, clearly no translator would be so rash as to anglicize the puppet's name" (n.10, 477).

8. Collodi's fairy is simply referred to as the Blue Fairy (though her hair is blue), but I have throughout adopted Coover's renaming of her as the Blue-Haired Fairy.
work, which resembles not only Aschenbach’s but also that contentious subjectively subjective strand of late-twentieth-century critical practice, autobiographical criticism (115). He is in the process of writing his capo lavoro. Mamma is to be “a vast autobiographical tapestry in which are woven all the rich, varied strands of his unique personal destiny under the single predominating theme of virtuous love and the lonely ennobling labor that gives it exemplary substance . . . but the book’s conclusion, like rectitude itself in an earlier unhappier time, continues to elude him.” In a nice piece of reflexivity that refers to his work, to his death, and to the text that is Pinocchio in Venice, we are told he has come home in search of “that synthesizing metaphor that might adequately encapsulate the unified whole his life has been, and so provide him with his closing chapter” (14).

Aschenbach’s earnest tones echo through Pinocchio’s thoughts from the beginning. His own great epic, Maia (the mother of Hermes), is a “richly patterned tapestry . . . that gathers up the threads of many human destinies in the warp of a single idea,” and like Pinocchio, Aschenbach comes to Venice because he finds himself unable to complete the work he has undertaken: “it would not yield either to patient effort, or a swift coup de main” (Mann 7, 8).

The new Pinocchio has grown as comically pompous as the old one was comically wicked and, as his smug self-perception suggests, he remains as self-deluded as ever. He denies both
the joyous aspects of his years as a puppet and the
unhappiness of those as a human. While he dimly comes to
realize that the demonic Venice he finds himself in is not
after all Collodi’s Island of the Busy Bees (14) but an
amalgam of Catchafool and Playland, one by one he repeats his

9. Acchiappa-citrulli, or Catchafool, and Paese de’ balocchi,
or Playland, are scenes of two of the puppet’s many falls
from grace. I outline their translation into Coover’s text
as examples of his witty play and his re-politicization of
Collodi. Coover’s late-twentieth-century tourist trap is a
mirror for both places, and in his fantasy the Procuratie
Vecchie, which line the north side of the Piazza San Marco,
have been converted into rip-off timeshare apartments and are
renamed the Palazzo dei balocchi.

Collodi’s Catchafool— in Coover’s translation “Fools’
Trap, city of the shorn”— is a town next to the Field of
Miracles, where La Volpe and Il Gatto fleece the foolish
puppet, persuading him to bury his precious gold coins in a
got-rich-quick scheme. Catchafool itself is “crowded with
mangy dogs,” and their equally mangy descendants are Coover’s
Pinocchio’s doggedly true Venetian friends, Alidoro and
Melampetta. Collodi’s metaphorical fleeced sheep and
peacocks and pheasants “mourning their brilliant feathers of
gold and silver lost forevermore” become the tourists and
wealthy retirees modern Venice “skins” in order to make its
living (Collodi 219-21; Coover 101-2). The Field of Miracles
is transformed into the giant petrochemical complex at Porto
Marghera across the lagoon from Venice, responsible for the
destruction of the water table beneath Venice and the
dredging of shipping channels, which together may constitute
the worst threat the city has ever faced in a long and vexed
history (Coover 108; see also my introduction). Collodi’s
Pinocchio is led into Catchafool by La Volpe and Il Gatto.
Like figures from a danse macabre, cross-dressed and wearing
carnival masks, they are the first to draw him into the city
and toward his death when he arrives in Venice in Coover’s
sequel (Collodi 219; Coover 15-38).

“Che bel paese!” Pinocchio exclaims aloud on his first
evening as, slightly drunk, a little maudlin, and shorn once
more, he tries to find his way back from Il Gambero Rosso
(scene of an earlier fleecing in Collodi, 167-73) to his non-
existent hotel. These are the very words he uttered a
hundred years or so before on learning of the existence of
Playland, where he would undergo his donkey metamorphosis
(Collodi, 352-53; 373 ff).
old puppet mistakes—misjudgments that led to a catalogue of
trials including death by hanging, death by drowning,
metamorphosis into a donkey, and, worst of all, a series of
cruel separations from his "mother," whose "tough love"
included not just disappearing but regularly pretending to
have died of grief because Pinocchio was so wicked. A final
fall is inevitable; that it will be a fortunate one is
revealed only as the book closes.

Pinocchio arrives in an unreal city shrouded in
disorienting fog and rendered unheimlich for protagonist and
hypocrite lecteur alike by the first of a series of
repetitions. We are drawn Pentheus-like into this textual
theatre without footlights, much as Italo Calvino's reader is
drawn into If on a Winter's Night a Traveller, that most
reflexive of novels about novels, writing, and reading.
Words and phrases from the eponymous second fragment of the
first chapter of Calvino's text, scattered across Coover's
opening pages, encode a warning that Pinocchio in Venice,
too, is not only a text about other texts, but a text about
writers and readers: "Watch out," Calvino's narrator warns,
"it is surely a method of involving you gradually, capturing
you in the story before you realize it—a trap" (Calvino
12). Calvino's warning has the ring of the unheeded "good

10. Calvino opens with the information that "The novel begins
in a railway station," the "glass doors" to a bar are
"befogged," and what can be made out through them is "misty,"
"as if seen by nearsighted eyes." Pinocchio's
nearsightedness leads to his confusing the station's "glass
advice" that has haunted Pinocchio all his life, from the moment he emerged from the block of wood, and began his journey from one "Fools' Trap" to another.

Marco Polo airport is fogbound and Pinocchio's flight is diverted to Milan, so that he arrives by the last train at Venice's "back door" (Mann 19, Coover 13), Stazione Santa Lucia. (Coover advises that it is in fact only foreigners [like Mann, of course] who think of it in this way, preferring the approach by sea and landfall at the quay that links the Doge's Palace and the Piazzetta to the lagoon.) A carnivalesque sensibility that will inform the whole text is foreshadowed in the image of the station's jarringly modernist functionalism, which stands in stark contrast to the city's organic bodiliness and physical decrepitude: the station is "a gleaming syringe . . . inserted into the rear end [a carnivalesquely open orifice] of Venice's Grand Canal, into which it pumps steady infusions of fresh provender and daily draws off the waste" (20). In keeping with the doors" with "swirling fog." Both stations are ill lit, and "coal dust . . . hovers" (10) in Calvino's. Pinocchio, recalling Collodi's original story, has arrived "as though pursued by assassins in coal sacks." (Collodi's "assassins" are Il Gatto and La Volpe in disguise.) There are cats in both stations, although Il Gatto, Pinocchio's old enemy, is hidden behind a carnival mask. Both travellers suspect they are "in the wrong place at the wrong time" and are burdened with "great misgivings and an excess of luggage" (Coover 13). Calvino's protagonist is aware he is "caught in a trap" (11), and is anxious to get rid of his baggage. Pinocchio's old enemies relieve him of his, including his precious computer. This proves to be the fulfilment of an unconscious desire, as misrecognized as the desire for that which lies beyond the pleasure principle (Calvino 10-24; Coover 13-19).
conventions of quest, Pinocchio Pilgrim is exhausted by the journey through the wasteland before the labyrinth is ever reached. He is very old, alone, ill, and suffering from that quintessentially twentieth-century, bourgeois affliction, jet lag. From the moment he steps onto the station platform, he is snatched into a Saturnalian space of transformation that is a Venetian pastiche of Hades, mystery cycle, Dantean *Purgatorio*, *Trauerspiel*, *commedia dell’arte*, and Joycean Nighttown. It’s a Bakhtinian theatre without footlights in which there can be no audience since everyone, for good or ill, is drawn into the performance,\footnote{“[C]arnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is the laws of its own freedom” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 7).} and it is also a virtuoso exegesis of Bakhtinian dialogism. Coover raids the history of western literature, art, architecture, and philosophy, much as Venice raided the Adriatic and the Mediterranean in its self-construction as an urban text. He draws almost three thousand years of literature, represented by dozens of heterogeneous voices, into dialogic collision and coexistence in a single moment in time and space, and it is out of this linguistic chaos that new possibilities arise. In a joyful Rabelaisian feast of scatology, profanity, and
learnèd allusion, Coover parodies and brings into blasphemous relativity an encyclopedic selection of western literature’s “supreme fictions,” outdoing even as he builds on Collodi’s and Mann’s intertextuality, and within a frame that is generously, jubilantly, “divinely” comic and a homage to Joyce’s refusal of novelistic decorum.\(^\text{12}\)

*Pinocchio in Venice* is nothing if not indecorous, but Coover’s excesses, like those of the textuality of the city itself, are never gratuitous because they always inform as well as embellish the narrative on one level or another.

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12. As I have said, it is not possible to deal with all Coover’s intertexts, but I list some of them here, to give a sense of the extent of his enterprise. Many texts fit more than one category, but I have mentioned each once only. He incorporates Anglo-Saxon and medieval allegorical dream vision (“The Dream of the Rood,” Dante’s *Purgatorio*); quest narratives, particularly the grail tradition; tales of metamorphosis (*The Golden Ass*, *Pinocchio*, the “Circe” section of *Ulysses*); biblical narratives (*The Book of Jonah*, *the Gospels*); theatrical drama (*Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, a Freudian reading of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonnus*, *Shakespeare’s Macbeth* and *Othello*, Congreve’s *The Double Dealer*, the tradition of *commedia dell’arte*); prose fiction (*Rabelais’s *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, Gogol’s *The Overcoat,* Mann’s *Death in Venice*, *Joyce’s Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, William Gibson’s *Necromancer*, Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, and gumshoe detective fiction); philosophy and theory (*Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice*, Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism and the carnivalesque, Derrida’s reading of Plato’s *pharmakon*, Henry Louis Gates’s *The Signifying Monkey*); and poetry (*Byron’s *Childe Harold*, Browning’s *Sordello*, Pound’s “Venetian cantos” [including the early drafts], Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*). Visual texts, too, are important, including Bellini’s *Madonna of the Small Trees*; Veronese’s decoration of his parish church of San Sebastiano, particularly his Saint Sebastians; Tiepolo’s angels; and Palladio’s San Giorgio Maggiore, whose expression of the dialogue between classical form and Venetian Gothic enrages Professor Pinenut, as it had John Ruskin before him.
Like many contemporary novels set in Venice, the structure of the text self-consciously mimics the layers and ambivalences of the city, but Coover pushes familiar literary Venetian correspondences (fluidity, masking and theatricality, sexuality, monstrous-femininity, corruption, death, and so on) to their limits, and in doing so he inspires the body of his carnivalesque text to expand and distort into increasingly grotesque shifting shapes.

Any analysis of *Pinocchio in Venice* is problematic in that it is inevitably an attempt at mastery. Coover’s self-conscious reading of Bakhtinian carnival and Derridean *différence* mocks me as I try to separate one element of the narrative from another, one text from the others, in order to spread before you some kind of ordered “meaning,” since Coover’s meaning always lies in a system of differences, dependent on dialogic intersection, jarring juxtaposition, grotesque mixture, and instability. I have decided to enter into the spirit of things and to take up the stock position that would seem to be mine at this Menippian cena, this Rabelaisian feast, this blasphemous last supper— that of the loquacious pedant. Accepting the inevitable pratfalls and the mess that must attend my attempt at an orderly dissection of this marvellous body, I am comforted that this critical anatomy is in keeping with the text at least inasmuch as it reflects that undergone by the old professor’s own body as it crosses the border into the Lacanian Real. Already so thin
that he could be "a foldout in an anatomy book" (72), he will be dismembered twice: once as he recounts his perversely erotic metamorphosis from puppet to real boy ("The Original Wet Dream," chapter 20, esp. 220-22), and a second time as the process is reversed and, in a bizarre parody of ancient regenerative sacrificial rituals, what little is left of him is torn apart and eaten by a maenadic mob of tourists, before his dismantling is completed, lovingly, life-givingly, by the Blue-Haired Fairy (289-90; 329).

Northrop Frye’s Anatomy of Fiction provides a broad frame for Coover’s complex structure, in all its paradoxical fragmentation and inclusive wholeness. Frye divides narrative fiction into four hybridizing categories: novel, confession, anatomy, and romance. The Anatomy of Melancholy is an anatomy, but Tristram Shandy is hybrid, in that it is a novel that contains features characteristic of the anatomy. De Quincey’s Opium Eater is a romance-confession, Moby-Dick a romance-anatomy, Pamela a novel containing aspects of romance and anatomy, and so on. Joyce’s Ulysses, however, is “a complete prose epic with all four forms employed in it, all of practically equal importance, and all essential to one another, so that the book is a unity and not an aggregate” (314). I would argue that Ulysses is both of these, and applying Frye’s criteria, Pinocchio in Venice falls within even as it spills beyond this last compendious category, and as Coover parodically, transgressively, with an eye always to
différance, rereads generic fictional forms and master narratives, he too produces a unity and an aggregate, within a postmodern metafiction.

In the "anatomy" that follows, four incisions are made into the text, each of them designed to reveal particular but closely interrelated elements of the whole body. The first discovers a selection of the fictions that are particularly influential to both the form and the content of *Pinocchio in Venice*. The second examines the city itself as an intertext, at once a mirror for Pinocchio's own bodily and psychic disintegration and a stage for the carnival of which he discovers himself to be part. The third incision focuses on other aspects of carnival, first viewing Coover's text as a Menippean satire, then as a dialogue with Bakhtinian carnivalesque and the dialogic; the last reveals Coover's paracritical engagement with Derrida's ongoing critique of western metaphysics and, specifically, with his long essay "Plato's Pharmacy."

The first incision in this anatomy will begin to reveal in more detail a selection of the fictional forms and master narratives whose shaping roles are particularly important: those by Apuleius, the writers of the Christian gospels, and, most of all, Dante and Joyce. Because Collodi and Mann are necessarily referred to throughout, they are all but passed over here; others, too, are best dealt with as they illustrate other aspects of the text.
Apuleius's Menippean satire *The Golden Ass*, which comes to Coover via Collodi, lends its structure of metamorphosis and the journey to redemption. Coover makes much of Pinocchio's donkey days, from his startling rereading of "The Dream of the Rood" (84-86) to the transfiguring fire in which Pinocchio, encased in dough moulded to the shape of an ass, is cooked in a pizza oven (270 ff.).

The Gospels of the New Testament and the heroic quest of the Messiah through pain and sacrifice to a space of redemption also enter Coover's narrative via Collodi. Collodi's *Pinocchio* parodies the Christian narrative; Coover takes the parody several steps further, with added blasphemy and brio. Geppetto, the Blue-Haired Fairy, and Pinocchio are in both texts a parodic Holy Family, but for Coover they are also the protagonists in the psychoanalytic family drama.

Dante's *Commedia* also hinges on metamorphosis and the Christian drama, and it too is an important intertext for Collodi. Coover borrows the doubled structure of the *Purgatorio* as Pinocchio, who is an exile like his precursor,\(^\text{13}\) undertakes a literal journey through a city that becomes the intermediate, liminal space that lies between the *Inferno* of his life as a human subject and the *Paradiso* that will succeed it. A mirroring spiritual journey takes him toward a

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13. In political exile from Florence, Dante wrote the *Commedia* in Ravenna and spent time in nearby Venice--indeed he died while returning to Ravenna from a visit there. The Arsenale is said to have influenced the hellish imagery in the *Inferno*. 

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level of understanding that will enable him to discard intellectual knowledge—philosophy—in favour of love. During four days over Easter, Dante Pilgrim journeys toward Beatrice and redemption; in the four days leading to Mardi Gras, the culmination of carnival before the grim days of Lent,⁴ Pinocchio Pilgrim travels through Venice—as-purgatory, toward the Blue-Haired Fairy. Coover’s is in a long and venerable line of anglophone rereadings of Dante, which include Chaucer, Milton, Eliot, and Pound. The latter is another exile with links to Venice, and it is interesting to contrast his response to Dante with Coover’s. Pound’s Cantos are structurally and thematically based on the Commedia and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is an ironic inversion of it, in which Dante Pilgrim’s dignity is replaced by Mauberley’s self-pity, an inheritance of classical, Italian, and Provençal poetry gives way to nineties decadence, and love fails (Hutcheon, “Modern Parody and Bakhtin” 88). Lost in Dante’s dark wood, Pinocchio, too, is self-pitying, and dignity has always

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⁴. The etymological origins of “carnival” are the subject of contestation, but Coover plays on its likely origins in the “[Latin] carmem levare, or [Italian] carne levare, . . . meaning ‘the putting away or removal of flesh (as food),’ the name being proper to the eve of Ash Wednesday” (OED). Pinocchio’s body provides the basis of the feast (and the links to earlier pagan festivals of the dying god are obvious), but in returning to wood he also “puts away” his own flesh much as he had “put it on” in the metamorphosis from puppet to human.
escaped him,\textsuperscript{15} but like Dante he will come to recognize that his desire for recognition ("Would he have given all that up [he asks himself] for so small a thing as the truth?" \textsuperscript{[109]}) is a kind of pride and that his greed for knowledge must be replaced by self-knowledge.

Pinocchio’s "exemplary pilgrimage [which] moved the world" (Coover 109) is, in Collodi’s as well as in Coover’s version, a parodic gloss on that of Dante. From the beginning he has been lost in a dark wood\textsuperscript{16} and, as Professor Pinenut, has lived a life of exile. Like Dante, he is driven by the desire to know, but that desire is underpinned by

\textsuperscript{15.} Pinocchio throws embarrassing temper tantrums when his importance is not recognized--for instance, on arriving in the city, or when threatened with arrest by the Venetian police, or over his university’s attempt to curtail his franking privileges or deprive him of his second office. Part of the problem is he has never managed to look the part of the scholar philosopher. Not only does his recalcitrant nose continue to make a fool of him, but he reflects that even after he “put on flesh” he continued “to look like a spindly unstrung puppet, no bigger than a pennyworth of cheese, a veritable insult to the rules of human proportion--where was the heroic frame, the hairy chest, where--someone has a lot to answer for!--were the powerful thighs?” (118).

\textsuperscript{16.} Collodi’s Pinocchio is lost and cruelly tormented in a fairytale dark wood, pursued by Il Gatto and La Volpone, who hang him and leave him for dead, and Professor Pinenut recalls first discovering the little white house of the Fairy "in the deep dark woods" (70). Trees in Venice, on the other hand, are notably domesticated, and for Coover the emphasis is on cut rather than growing timber, and provides opportunities for comparisons to be drawn between the body of the city and that of the puppet. For example, Pinocchio, on falling into the lagoon, comes face to face with “the foundations of this mysterious enterprise and of his own as well . . . the ancient bits of wood, driven deep, holding the whole apparition up” (155).
another, less worthy desire, for fame. And like Dante the constant inspiration of his life's work has been a long-dead little girl he fell in love with when they were both children, and who has since watched his every move, and marked his every error. The Fairy is internalized as the superego, and, as Melampetta, descendant of Collodi's watchdog and one of Pinocchio's purgatorial guides, recognizes, Pinocchio is driven by "a motherlode of guilt" (73).

An abiding theme of the Purgatorio is reunion and reconciliation, and Dante brings together not only old friends, enemies, families, and lovers, but dispersed communities of texts. In carnivalized Venice Pinocchio is reunited with the ghosts of his past, and within the text, dozens of disparate literary voices are brought into dialogue. As Dante is reunited with Beatrice, a type of Christ, Pinocchio is reunited with the Blue-Haired Fairy who is all the great mothers of religious belief and of literature, a type of Anna Livia Plurabelle: tender, savage, forgiving, monstrous, engulfing, and renewing.17 His body is

17. The Goddess Isis, who is responsible for the reverse metamorphosis of Apuleius's ass, is also many "mothers" in one: "I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, Queen of the Dead, first also among the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world below. Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole earth venerates me" (Apuleius 183).
destroyed by the cruelty of carnival, but that destruction enables his rebirth into the carnivalesque body of the folk, and into the all-encompassing body of the text we are reading.

Homer’s *Odyssey* is a central intertext for Collodi, but it is Joyce’s voice that is most clearly heard in *Pinocchio in Venice*. Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century shares much with Venice at its end: by European standards both are relatively small cities, and although Dublin could boast a community of writers the like of which Venice has never produced in all its history, it too is hardly a nexus for cultural change. But, as Pinocchio discovers when he tumbles into a side canal (155) (and as I have said in the introduction to this study), standing waters can be rich.

Coover’s text shares characteristics with Joyce’s in its structure and in its details. Both cities are watery, in flux, and both texts reflect this, subsuming earlier texts, breaking them down and bringing them together in a destructive-reconstructive flood of words. Both have a Grand Canal, and, to turn to *Finnegans Wake* for a moment, there is, as I have suggested, surely something of the riverine Anna Livia Plurabelle in Coover’s Blue-Haired Fairy, who in her latest avatar is a college co-ed called Bluebell. For all that both texts are in some respects so novelistically realistic that routes may be traced down to the narrowest lanes and alleys, both are labyrinthine, essentially
disorientating, hallucinatory, nightmarish. Both are filled with the hubbub of hundreds of voices—those of their protagonists competing with those of their intertexts. Both cities are peopled with ghosts, including Stephen Dedalus's revenant mother and the Blue-Haired Fairy who, from her inception in Collodi's text, has never been able to make up her mind whether she is dead or alive, and Bloom and Pinocchio each pay a visit to "Hades" in the form of a cemetery (Ulysses, chapter 6 "Hades"; Coover, chapter 19 "At L'Omino's Tomb" and chapter 20 "The Original Wet Dream").

Pinocchio's body undergoes a literal anatomy as he journeys through a Venetian purgatory, until his human flesh is removed, and he is literally stripped back to the bare wood, the body-in-bits-and-pieces of his pre-existence. Coover plays on this fragmentation of the body within the text as Joyce does: sections of the text are devoted, for example, to the ear (Pinocchio's are the first of his organs to be shed), the genitals (in Pinocchio's case, his nose), flesh, and the skeleton. The Lestrygonians chapter in Ulysses focuses on the oesophagus, as does chapter 2 of Pinocchio in Venice, while chapters 3 and 4 focus on the whole alimentary tract. There are references to feasting (in the course of which Pinocchio, we are told, skipped the sliced stuffed oesophagus [12]), to constipation, and to diarrhoea, and the metaphor extends to the body of the city itself (20).
Both texts contain set pieces devoted to Platonic discourse in libraries: Joyce’s “Scylla and Charybdis” takes place in the National Library in Dublin and Coover’s chapter 21, “Plato’s Prank,” in the Libreria Marciana, the original Venetian state library. Pinocchio, perched between Plato and Aristotle who have been his own Scylla and Charybdis and whose portraits flank the entry to the Salone Sansoviniano, rehearses a mock-Platonic speech to Bluebell as Phaedrus (236).

At the end of the Cyclops section, Bloom/Jesus/Moses becomes Elijah as he escapes The Citizen to ascend into heaven amid clouds of angels—“like a shot off a shovel” (12.1910-18). Pinocchio has visions of angels, too, but he escapes the carabinieri to experience a bathetic descent rather than Bloom’s “apotheosis.” Ignoring Arlecchino’s warning to stick to him “like shit to a shovel” (141), he is distracted by a glimpse of the Fairy, “just drifting by as though in an angelic vision” (154). He staggers through a tiny underpass, misses his footing, and as though “pitched from a slick shovel” (155), he undergoes a Dantean lustration in the “slimy ooze” of Rio di Santa Margherita.

Joyce loosely ordered Ulysses according to the patterns of the Odyssey, latinizing the name of Homer’s epic hero as though to suggest from the outset that his story of exile and homecoming is one that is always in process. It comes to Joyce already much translated and retranslated and
reinterpreted, and it will continue to evolve as language, and the culture it speaks and creates, constantly shifts and changes over time and through space. In Ulysses he reworks the body of western literary history within his Dublin world in little, and Coover finds a similar teatro del mondo in Venice.

Bearing in mind the place of the theatrical in this story of repressed puppetness, I make a second incision in order to expose Venice itself, the city-as-text, as a theatre without footlights for Coover's carnival. Venice's long history of civic display and of carnival, together with the latter's contemporary revival in all its tinselly tawdry, provide a backdrop for Coover's brilliant exegesis of Bakhtinian carnivalesque. But Pinocchio steps onto a stage that is complicated by a number of other ghostly presences.

Coover's linguistic and textual borrowings parallel the encrustations of stolen booty in the Piazza San Marco. The bronze horses and the tiny porphyry emperors carried home from Constantinople after the Fourth Crusade and appliquéd to the Basilica and the Treasury may be admired simply for themselves, or they may be read more broadly to reveal a subtext of imperial wealth and power. Similarly, Coover's

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18. As noted in the introduction to this study, Venetian carnival was resurrected in 1980 as a late-winter money spinner when, as Coover's Lion of San Marco inimitably puts it, "the swampy cold [creeps] up through the cracked flagstones like death sticking a finger up your asshole, and [it's] so quiet you can hear a pigeon shit" (Coover 291), and tourists take their golden coins to warmer climes.
text may be enjoyed simply for its linguistic brilliance and its Rabelaisian comedy, or it may be read for its subtexts in all their serious parody—though the reader risks becoming carnival’s fool in the process. As the following example suggests, “encrustation” may be—if in a grotesquely carnivalesque manner—elegantly simple and purely decorative: Pinocchio is safely tucked up in cashmere blankets, gazing out over the flooded Piazzetta from a high balcony next to Coducci’s famous clock tower, his trials seemingly over. Commenting on the matchless view of the Palazzo Ducale and the Libreria Marciana framing San Giorgio Maggiore across the lagoon, he refers effusively to Byron’s “winged lion’s marble piles” (Byron, *Childe Harold* 4.1). From his position on the tower next to him, the marble lion himself picks up the pun and mutters “[a] damned nuisance, I can tell you, and no bloody cure for them either” (178).

But at just this point in the text, there is a more complex example of “encrustation.” A series of quotations and allusions brings into dialogic juxtaposition Collodi, Eliot, Shakespeare, and Hollywood. Pinocchio has been “rescued” from his Venetian nightmare by Eugenio, an old enemy from his short career as a schoolboy, and is recuperating in the luxurious nursing home that was once the Procuratie Vecchie—ominously renamed the Palazzo dei balocchi in memory of Collodi’s Playland. Gulled again, he is cast down from his balcony into the Piazza. His would-be
murderer is one Marten, a servant directed to nurse him, but who has an ancient vendetta to settle. As Don Corleone, another frail elderly Italo-American, could have warned Pinocchio, hospital staff are not always to be trusted, and I can almost hear the gravelly Chicago-Sicilian accent as Marten murmurs before tossing the old man out into space: "It was a wrong bound to [my father's] finger." Marten reveals himself to be a third-generation descendant of the criminal "brotherhood" of martens sent to the cooking pot when Collodi's Pinocchio, serving as a watch dog, "[sang] like a canary" and gave them away as they stole his master's chickens (184). By means of this parodic reference to contemporary Mafia blood feud and revenge, Coover brings Collodi into jarring dialogic conjunction first with a Renaissance revenge tragedy, Shakespeare's Macbeth, then with that most intertextual--and perhaps most chilling because most bloodless--of modernist dramatic monologues, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. Eliot's aging protagonist regrets a life wasted not because of murderous ambition but because "measured out . . . with coffee spoons" (Prufrock 51). Marten responds to Pinocchio's own philosophical dramatic monologue about the necessary rejection of theatricality and history--"indeed all arts with concepts of time other than eternity"--in the pursuit of the Platonic ideal: "It is," agrees Marten, "a fairy tale full of wind, master, you are right, an empty masquerade, a handful of dead
flies . . .” (175). On one level, the reference to the Scottish king’s speech at news of the death of his wife just before his own at the hands of MacDuff underscores Pinocchio’s impending death and his self-pitying, self-willed blind regret. More importantly, given the intertextual importance of Bakhtinian carnivalesque to *Pinocchio in Venice*, Marten’s speech leaves unspoken Macbeth’s reference to the theatre that Pinocchio has had to deny. Pinocchio, who during these last days spent in Venice looks back petulantly on a life he is coming to realize might have been a lot less futile had he not rigorously repressed any impulse toward pleasure, responds with a line--truer to its source this time--from *Prufrock*: “No, no, . . . that’s not what I mean at all” (Coover 175; *Prufrock* 97). This reference brings into focus other Prufrockian echoes. Both men walk the streets of an unreal city in search of an elusive answer. On his arrival at Santa Lucia, Pinocchio’s aged body makes its way along the platform “like a crab,” reminding us of Prufrock whose tough outer shell has protected him from pain but also from love and who in his loneliness soliloquizes: “I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (Coover 15; *Prufrock* 73-74).

19. Compare:

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. *Macbeth* V.5 24-28
(And the house specialty at the restaurant where Pinocchio eats on leaving the station is stuffed crab [34]!)

When his old enemy Il Gatto, disguised as a female tourist bureau clerk, drops his key, it clatters to the floor "like a coffee spoon" (Coover 17; Prufrock 51). Both cities are wreathed in fog, which, because it has closed the airport and resulted in Pinocchio's late-night arrival, delivers him into the hands of his old enemies. It "rubs," "licks," "lingers," "slips," and "curls" about Prufrock's city (15-22), and, sometimes threatening and sometimes promising, it haunts Pinocchio's: "swirling," "coiling," or "like teasing wisps of bluish hair" it adds to his disorientation (13, 258, 293), mirroring his short-sightedness and the descending fog of old age (13, 178). Prufrock himself holds up a mirror to Professor Pinenut's sorry hairless thinness and to his fussy sartorial vanity as well as to his much-regretted failure to have "dared," and his dawning realization that he may indeed have been "obtuse," "ridiculous," "the Fool" (Prufrock 117-19).

Prufrock predicts people will say of him: "How his hair is growing thin!" and "how his arms and legs are thin!" (41, 44); Melampettra on first seeing Pinocchio's body sighs: "He's thin as a nail, he's lost all his hair" (68).

To stay with Venice as stage, there is probably a greater concentration of churches within its three square miles of more or less dry land than any comparable space in the world, and the inscription of Christian symbolism into
every aspect of the landscape chimes with Collodi's own intertextual play on his puppet as a parodic Christ figure. For all his innate "bad puppetness," Pinocchio is, like Christ, the product of a "Strange Birth," as chapter 7 is entitled. His "mother" is the Blue-Haired Fairy who shares otherworldly powers as well as her colour with the Virgin Mary. Pinocchio's "father" Geppetto (Joseph) was a carpenter who (in a nice twist on the virgin birth) created his son from a block of wood, and Coover reminds us of his old professor's Christian and puppet inheritances when, there being no room at the Venetian inn, he is "swaddled... like a wizened parody of the Christ child from a rigid Trecento nativity, [and laid] on a bed of woodchips and sawdust" (57). The novel's final scene is a kind of pietà, as the Fairy lays the puppet across her lap, and tends to his broken body (328-29).

The city's topography is, on both a physical and a metaphysical level, part of Coover's interlacing network of narratives. Pinocchio's pilgrimage takes him through a landscape undergoing a hallucinatory disintegration that reflects his own. Acqua alta turns the Piazza San Marco and the buildings that give it form into a storm-tossed ship about to loose its moorings from the surrounding labyrinth and carry its ancient mariners out to sea and a delicious "watery doom" (185). As though Hell were yawning beneath it, whole sections of the cemetery island of San Michele heave
and tremble, and headstones are sucked into oblivion before Pinocchio's eyes (216). In San Sebastiano, the paintings and frescoes come alive to torment him, and like scenes from a macabre Disney animation, pews "[slide] apart and then together again with great clashing noises like monstrous gates," and the floor rises and falls and splits apart beneath his feet to reveal heaps of mouldering bones (128).  

As I have discussed in the introduction to this study, decay together with the liminality and doubleness that pervade Venice's history and its geographical and topographical construction have long been read metaphorically in literature in terms of psychic loss. Winterson's The Passion and McEwan's The Comfort of Strangers use intertextual and linguistic repetition to inscribe textually the psychic drive that forces the narrative subject beyond the pleasure principle toward stasis and death, and also into the productive space of the psychical Real Lacan termed the second death. In discussing those texts, I have suggested

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20. The unrestored mosaic floors of Venetian churches do indeed "undulate"—San Marco is a prime example. Terrazzo is said to have been a Venetian invention, preferred to sheet marble because of its capacity to flex rather than break as foundations shift. San Sebastiano, however, was restored in the early 1990s, and while its floor may have been wavy once, it was more or less level when I saw it in 1994.

The decoration of San Sebastiano in its three-dimensionality lends itself to Coover's reading. Every surface, from the doors of the organ to the elaborate pillars, is frescoed or hung with paintings, and as Madlyn Kahr has noted, Gerolamo Campagna's sculpted figures are so of a piece with Veronese’s frescoed ones that they seem animatedly to step out of the paintings (235). I thank Mary Kisler for drawing Kahr's essay to my attention.
that Venice is itself an urban text that encompasses within its own seductively perfected and seductively crumbling body both the longed for stasis that lies beyond the pleasure principle and the desired and feared psychical mutilation and fragmentation of the bodily ego in the Real. Coover’s Venice is unquestionably a figure for death, yet, “pocked, ravaged, bombed, flooded, tourist-trampled, plague-ridden, pillaged, debauched, defaced, shaken by earthquake, sapped and polluted,” it is “still stubbornly, comically afloat” (178; my emphasis), and from within this edgy comedy, Pinocchio, who died as a puppet at the end of Collodi’s text, in Coover’s undergoes a second death that produces the possibility of something else. Pinocchio’s narrative journey through Coover’s parodically purgatorial city is a cruelly comic satire, but at the same time it is a Romantic comedy, and Romanticism’s mirrorings of the self in the decaying, befogged landscape are juxtaposed with comedy’s promises of renewal. Pinocchio may echo Aschenbach, but Coover ensures that enough of the repressed puppet survives to allow for the positive ending Mann felt he must repress. Aschenbach had once written that “almost everything conspicuously great is great in despite: has come into being in defiance of affliction and pain; poverty, destitution, bodily weakness, vice, passion, and a thousand other obstructions,” and he ponders a “heroism born of weakness” that is able “to produce, at least for a while, the effect of greatness” (Mann
Pinocchio grumbles that, while he once stated "that nearly everything great which comes into being does so in spite of something--in spite of sorrow or suffering, poverty, destitution, physical weakness, depravity, metamorphosis, the plague, being born a puppet," he has only now begun to recognize "the lingering power" not of Mann's *despite*, but of the plain old "spite" (Coover's emphasis) that has given rise to his misery (Coover 59). Both men have been inspired in their lifelong struggle for dignity by "the conception of an intellectual and virginal manliness, which clenches its teeth and stands in modest defiance of the swords and spears that pierce its side" (Mann 11), a concept given form in the figure of Saint Sebastian. 21 "Traditionally the martyr is shown standing contented as a wooden post, bathed in golden light... and stuffed with arrows as though he might be sprouting them like twigs" (Coover 114), but when the old art history professor finds himself face to face with Veronese's paintings in Scarpagnino's church of San Sebastiano, he notes irritably that this isn't the Sebastiano of Giovanni Bellini. For that matter, Veronese's is not the languid boy of Andrea da Murano, Conegliano, Mantegna, or Tiziano either (Coover, like Mann, will have seen gorgeous if perversely "contented" examples of all of these in Venice). Veronese's is "a man of action," Pinocchio grumbles, "a warrior, a politician of...

21. Conveniently for Coover, and as he points out, Sebastian was martyred twice and so gives form to the "second death" (118, 120).
sorts who plays to the galleries, striking operatic poses” (118), but, much worse, he lacks “the languid gaze” (114, 117) that was the subject of Pinocchio’s early groundbreaking and academically scandalous monographs. Rather than providing publishing opportunities in the form of arcane interpretation, Veronese’s saint looks “a bit fearful” and “turns black with death and doubt” (114). Like Pinocchio, he is almost human. Paradoxically, it is Pinocchio’s own human “weakness,” so far from his own life-denying “quest for the abiding forms within life’s ceaseless mutations” (115), that insists he let fall his lifelong repression and overcome the seemingly impossible odds presented by his dying body to achieve not a metaphysical but a bodily reunion with the Blue-Haired Fairy. Pinocchio follows his famous nose, and death and the body of the woman and the body of the city are conflated to enable what is, to say the least, an astonishing coupling. It is the scene of the puppet’s rebirth, a final jouissant metamorphosis that is in striking contrast to that which takes place in Collodi.

Coover’s text brings together Bakhtin and Lacan, as Pinocchio’s second death is enacted upon the stage that is the inherently corrupt “shabby but bejeweled old tart of a city” (175), and while the public scenes of carnival feasting

22. Coover parodies mercilessly theories of the gaze, but Pinocchio’s early work would also have been produced at a time when art historical criticism tended to be historically rather than theoretically or even narratively based.
and Pinocchio’s cruel humiliation and dismemberment take place in the brightly lit Piazza San Marco, his encounter with the Real, his second death, takes place far from there. The Lion of San Marco, emblem of the saint and symbol of the city, advises that “all the famous pomp and grandeur, the bloody glorious empire and all the tedious shit that went with it,” were never anything more than a “mask the old Queen put on to hide her cankers and pox pits” (291)—and he should know, given that aside from a short exile in Paris after the defeat by Napoleon, he has lived and worked in Venice and its empire for eleven hundred years. We learn from him that Venice’s true face is not in fact hidden behind the mask but is, like the devil’s, on its carnivalesque behind, in the decomposing “little piss-pockets” (291) of Castello and Cannaregio, where traces of the swamp from which the city was created threaten to overwhelm the seamless wholeness of built perfection that has enabled centuries of Venice readers to see the city as a realized utopia. The misrecognized earthly paradise, “The Original Wet Dream” (the title given to chapter 20) Pinocchio has sought at the heart of the labyrinth, is not after all to be found in the Piazza, but in the narrow hundred-metre stretch of canal called the Rio dei Miracoli. Any number of back alleys might have served as well, but the particular juxtaposition of buildings, courtyards, and campi, and their names, means they are ideally suited to Coover’s intertextual purpose. At one end
stands the derelict Teatro Malibran and the Corte del Milion where Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, the teller of a thousand tales (some would say lies), is reputed to have lived, and at the other stands Santa Maria dei Miracoli, Lombardo's perfect Renaissance church dedicated to a miracle-working Virgin. The paved apron in front of it is named the Campo dei Miracoli, "the Field of Miracles." It is here that Pinocchio will be redeemed.23

A third anatomical incision into the grotesque body of

23. In a further nice example of Coover's encrustation, Pinocchio and the Lion of San Marco flee the carnival and huddle together "in the wet shadows" of the back steps of the derelict theatre, sharing a bottle of grappa to keep fear and the cold at bay. In his earliest work, which was written in Venice, Pound was rewriting in order to exorcise Browning (who not only lived and wrote in Venice from time to time but also died there), much as the young Browning rewrote in order to exorcise Shelley. Browning's Sordello sits on "a ruined palace step / at Venice," pondering "in this magic weather" the possibility of turning aside from the "dishevelled ghost" that drives him to tell his tale, in favour of life in the form of the beautiful young women working the vegetable boats before him (*Sordello* 3.III). In these lines, early discarded workings for the *Cantos*, Pound scoffs at Browning's self-indulgence:

Your "palace step"?
My stone seat was the Dogana's curb
And there were not "those girls", there was
one flare, one face.
'Twas all I ever saw, but it was real."
(From Canto I)

The Dogana (the Venetian customs house that commands the entry to the Grand Canal) is a public, commercial space, unlike the privileged private space offered by a palazzo. In the light of this, it is marvellously telling that Pinocchio, who began his Venetian journey hammering fruitlessly on the door of a deserted ruined palace, and who has spent his adult life resisting all things theatrical, should end as he does, "on the run" and hiding out at the back entrance of a derelict theatre (292).
Coover’s text is linked to this aspect of the city as theatre and as text. It reveals elements of the carnivalesque, beginning with one of its manifestations, Menippean satire, since, as Frye suggested, this is a form that might usefully be renamed an anatomy (Frye 309-12), before moving on to Coover’s paracritical dialogue with Bakhtin. Collodi is the central intertext for this aspect of Pinocchio, and, indirectly, Collodi’s own Menippean source, Apuleius’s The Golden Ass, a second-century satire in which a man is transformed into an ass and, after much humiliation and suffering, is redeemed by the goddess Isis. Apart from the overarching themes of metamorphosis, suffering, and redemption, both Pinocchios are marked by a number of Menippean characteristics. A primary one is the encyclopedic incorporation of a range of literary texts and stylistic forms, from parodies of philosophical dialogues to popular culture, which in Coover’s text takes in traditional Italian punning and word play, cursing, quotation from other languages and dialects, and the cool talk of film noir. Professor Pinenut’s all-too-human folly is mocked at every turn through parodic learnèd dialogue and digressions on philosophy and art, and although the humour can be humiliating and even destructive, it is ultimately regenerative. As he retraces the steps of his life journey, he is publicly debased, mocked, beaten, roasted alive, and
dismembered, but as the pieces of his human body are peeled away, the original wooden form is revealed and will, like the bodies of the commedia puppets and, most importantly, like the body of literature, be recycled to achieve a carnivalesque and lively immortality.

Professor Pinenut is a stock character, and the other characters, too, again borrowed from Collodi, fit Menippean patterns. The members of Collodi’s dramatico-vegetal-company, a travelling puppet show, for example, are based on commedia dell’arte masks. Commedia fits Coover’s purpose particularly well because not only is it essentially carnivalesque, but it has a long Venetian history. It relies on physical and verbal abuse for laughs; it was from the beginning polyglot, its players combining a range of dialects as they travelled from place to place (Rudlin 7); and it is infinitely adaptable. It has travelled across national borders and across four centuries, always retaining its core elements of folk humour and improvised masking as it has adapted to particular environments. In its embodiment of carnivalesque, all voices may be heard, and none need be lost; rather as Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, and Monty Python combined commedia techniques with contemporary comedy, Pinocchio’s “brothers-in-wood” have metamorphosed into the Great Puppet Show Vegetal Punk Rock Band. There have been

24. Professor Pinenut’s bodily and psychic sufferings are of course no crueler than those experienced by the wooden puppet designed to serve as a lesson to children.
changes since their first meeting with Pinocchio. The puppets' revolution (a favourite puppet-theatre lazzo) has occurred: a descendant of the cruel old puppetmaster Mangiafoco still makes and mends them, but these days for the most part he sells carnival masks to tourists (more Venetian "fleecing") while the puppets engage in a somewhat directionless form of agitprop street theatre. Bits and pieces of individual puppets have worn out, become worm infested, or suffered unfortunate accidents, and the ones with purple hair and safety-pin earrings are new, but thanks to careful recycling the core of the troop--Pulcinello, Arlecchino, Dottore, Capitano Spavento, Colombina, Truffaldino, Il Zoppo, and Brighella--are figures for Coover's repetition-with-difference.

Collodi's La Volpe and Il Gatto are stock charlatans who, cross-dressed and wearing bauta and mask, gull the old professor one last time. Pinocchio's old schoolmate Eugenio is the stock arriviste. Carried off to Playland with Pinocchio by Collodi's "Little Man" (we learn he became his sexual favourite), he has made a fortune from the industries at Mestre and Porto Marghera, and is in the process of turning the Palazzo Ducale into another time-share scheme. He's a modern-day parody of the stereotype of the medieval Venetian merchant politician, and it's fitting that he should

25. Rudlin notes in his handbook for commedia actors, "new stock characters [are invented] on the assumption that the old ones have lost their social relevance" (7).
have set his sights on the Doge's Palace. Melampetta, the "Philosophical Watchdog" who provides the title for chapter 6, and Pinocchio himself are figures for Menippean satire's *philosophus gloriosus*. Pinocchio is also the perfect pedant.

A central stock scene in Menippean satire is the marvellously termed deipnosophysstical interpolation. Coover's *cena* or feast and the philosophical discourse essential to it, is egregiously scatalogical--the doubling inherent in carnivalesque linguistic punning is rendered bodily. In a revisitation of an earlier feast at a country inn called the Gambero Rosso (the Red Crawfish) (Collodi 166), Pinocchio, in the company of his old enemies Il Gatto and La Volpe, eats a meal of Gargantuan proportions, washed down with a giddying catalogue of local wines (Coover 30, 33-36). But this is only a precursor to the feast that counts in carnivalesque terms. The old professor suffers an attack of diarrhoea, and it falls to Melampetta and Alidoro, the old police mastiff who first encountered Pinocchio when they were pup and puppet, to begin the process of recreating his clean and proper wooden body. As he and Melampetta discourse, the old dogs deconstruct the professor's confessional dialogue and his hard-won human body with their tongues (66-78). Amidst much blasphemy and good-natured Rabelaisian punning, and with a cheerful fortitude that contrasts starkly with Pinocchio's "in spite of" heroism, they lick away his excrement, and make a start on his
solipsistic metaphysics and his bourgeois subjectivity. As they work they inadvertently lick away scraps of flesh, and somewhere along the line an ear that Geppetto had tacked on as an afterthought is inadvertently knocked off.\textsuperscript{26} It is the first step toward the revelation, literal and metaphorical, of the puppet beneath ("it's the naked truth we want, the unvarnished reality!" [76]) and is an example of Coover's excess-with-a-purpose, since this literal purgation and cleansing links \textit{commedia dell'arte} to a quite different \textit{commedia}--the purgation and cleansing undergone by Dante Pilgrim as he makes his way through his own \textit{Purgatorio} to seek redemption in the presence of his dead beloved, Beatrice. His sins and imperfections, too, are slowly, painfully stripped away until he is a new man.

During the course of this odd lustration the \textit{philosophus gloriosus} recovers from his embarrassment sufficiently to hold forth on his work in progress. He advises the talking dogs that his "one intense insight that change[d] everything" was the "seeming paradox" that he had called his Blue-Haired Fairy into existence, rather than she him. Alidoro gently points out it is difficult to distinguish between what his old friend is saying and what the dogs are cleaning off his body: "If Mela and me aren't the real thing, old comrade,

\textsuperscript{26} His famous phallic nose was of course just such an add-on, but it is the one part of his body still in good working order and, never successfully repressed, it will guide him to "paradise."
then you’ve beshit yourself with zabaglione!” (66).
Zabaglione or not, the scatological cena proceeds:

[Pinocchio] surrendered his body and its terrible truths, until now his solitary burden, concealed from all the world, to the intimate attentions of his two friends. “Come now,” Melampetta had urged, “... we must answer frankly with tongues of our own, keeping in mind that God so loved a clean behind that, having given his only begotten faeces, as they say in French, he invented the downy angels for bumfodder as humble examples for us all. ... [I]t’s time for the divine services, for complines and eucharists, for libations, oblations, and ablutions, oralsons and lickanies, for leccaturas from the book of life.” (67-68)

But Menippean satire is only one aspect of Coover’s textual carnival. In the introduction I referred to 
Pinocchio in Venice as paracriticism, and I will begin to address that aspect of the text by looking at the dialogue Coover undertakes with Bakhtin’s Rabelais and His World, the politicized manifestation of his overarching theory that has come to be termed dialogism. Coover exploits the disruptive possibilities of what Bakhtin called “novelness,” a space within which historical, social, cultural, and political discourses collide. But for all the pleasure Coover takes in creating a carnival on paper, he never allows such aspects as world-upside-down to overwhelm the dialogism that pervades
Bakhtin's carnival. It is the dialogic that is at the heart of Bakhtin's view of the novel's historical development, and in terms of language and power it is the dialogic that leads to the textual metamorphosis that is Coover's text. At the same time, in suitably dialogic fashion, the carnivalesque is central because it enables Coover, within the frame of his novel, to actually do what critical theory can only describe: to engage monologic discourse in what Julia Kristeva calls serious laughter (Desire in Language 80). *Pinocchio in Venice* is a dialogic engagement with Bakhtin that delights in grotesque realist becoming and renewal, but while it reinscribes the regenerative power of the folk, it is no accident that Coover's "folk" are represented by two very old dogs, a troop of commedia puppets, and a crowd of tourists come to Venice for the party that is contemporary carnival. The dogs may be as wise as any in literature, but they are dogs. The puppets, for all that they are catalysts for change, are every bit as interested in stealing a sack or two of Byzantine treasure and heading for Hollywood on the proceeds as they are in challenging the system at home. The tourists are represented by drunken Juventus fans. Coover's carnival is politically disruptive but is not aimed at long-term change.

Bakhtin's theorizing of dialogism and the carnivalesque is an eccentric rewriting of western European literary history in terms of the novel (or rather, "novelness," which
may occur in other genres, and need not occur in the novel), as a struggle between monologism and a dialogism that actively engages the world as text. The surface structure of his formal dissertation on Rabelais is a major contribution to Renaissance criticism and to the theory of literary history; in the light of his own methodology, its simultaneous "hidden interior polemic" is his "dialogic meditation on freedom" (Holquist and Clark 298), an exposure of the horrors of Stalinism and a statement of his faith in the subversive potential of the people of the new Soviet Union. Coover's response to Mann and Collodi is similarly multifaceted.

Michael McKeon writes that, where for Lévi-Strauss literary history is a sorry narrative of the deterioration of originary mythic structures ending in the exhausted fragments we term the novel (McKeon 5-6), for Bakhtin such a fragmentation is as revitalizing a process as that undertaken by Dante: "the history of literary forms becomes not an incarceration but a liberation from dead form, not displacement but an emplacement within 'the zone of reality'" (13-14). Through the process of incorporation and transformation that is Pinocchio in Venice, discourses

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27. Kristeva points out that in the polyphonic novel "the writer can use another's word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had." One effect of the creation of such ambiguity may be to create a "hidden interior polemic. . . . It is the writer who 'speaks,' but a foreign discourse is constantly present in the speech that it distorts" (Desire in Language, 73).
apparently frozen in time and space are relativized, opened up to question and re-evaluation. The past ceases to be a golden age from which, according to Lukács, we in the age of the novel are forever alienated, and becomes part of the continuum of history. Terry Eagleton sees in Bakhtin’s dialogic engagement with Gargantua and Pantagruel the “dialectical flash of correspondence” that occurs between Rabelais’s France and Bakhtin’s Russia, through which “the sterile landscape of Stalinism is transfigured into the ‘state of emergency’ that it truly is” (Eagleton 144-45). Rabelais and His World is clearly far more than a literary critical homage to Gargantua and Pantagruel and the popular humour of the French Renaissance. By bringing the folk humour that troubled official medieval ideology face to face with Stalinist ideology, Bakhtin’s dialogical method decentres and explodes the monologism of totalitarianism. Recalling what Holquist and Clark refer to as “a rip in the fabric of time” when the Soviet Union was a theatre without footlights (296), it becomes simultaneously Bakhtin’s dream of a society free from alienation, and his profound expression of sorrow at the failure of the revolution, his recognition of the moment in history before the Bolsheviks crushed the other transgressive voices with which, briefly, they had been joined. Bakhtin’s invocation of the carnival becomes his disguised eulogy to a fleeting revolution destroyed by monologism—totalitarian, centripetal, closed,
and death-dealing, everything dialogism is not and everything the revolution had set out to overcome. The amorphous equivalent of Rabelais's medieval Catholicism and of Bakhtin's Stalinism that is attacked through Coover's "hidden interior polemic" is the shadowy late-capitalist power structure that controls and undermines society as it quite literally undermines the foundations of Venice, but his dialogic engagement with Mann and Collodi also addresses broader issues of western philosophy at the heart of our social, cultural, and political systems.

To appreciate the complexity of Pinocchio in Venice, it is necessary to understand the dialogic nature of Bakhtin's concept of "novelness," language, and subjectivity, all of which exist in order to mean. For Bakhtin, literary history is a struggle amongst genres, the novel its "hero" because of its "indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality" (Holquist 7). As Holquist interprets Bakhtin, it is central that dialogism remain an "open event," avoiding monologic rigidity, but its "master assumption" is that there is no figure without a ground, and if there is a "dialogic law," it is that "nothing exists in itself" (22, 145). Every speech act exists in history and is at once a reply to the past and an address to the future; every subject "authors" itself in the context of the always already existent world and in relation to the other; every text absorbs and modifies
other texts, creating its own precursors.

For Bakhtin, the human body must constitute itself as a subject amidst the centrifugal forces of the world and the centripetal forces of cognition, at the point where the chaos of events that constitute the given world clash with the forces of society that serve to "unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world," and so render meaning from chaos (Dialogic Imagination 270). Subjectivity becomes a dialogic relation through which the subject itself achieves meaning: human "being" is an ongoing construction that makes sense to itself and to society. As a text must limit the possibilities available to it in order to make sense, the self, apparently infinite, must "author" itself through a limited other, since paradoxically it can only imagine its own life through the observation of another's. The subject's life continues for a given length of time that cannot be grasped by the subject since its own birth and death occur outside its conscious experience: we each experience ourselves and our time on earth as infinite, though we know from observation that we are framed by birth and death. The Bakhtinian subject experiences a splitting not unlike that which Lacan later posited as the price for entrance into language: to enter the symbolic order, to take on subjectivity, is to take on the limited and mortal nature of the other, but for the Bakhtinian as for the Kristevan subject, infinite plenitude is not relinquished. The subject
is split, but the halves experience the world simultaneously. Part of the power of "novelness" for Bakhtin lies in the ability of the author of a text to create this kind of subjectivity. He distinguishes between "character" (monologic, finished, determined by the author), and "person" (open, always in process, occupying a unique position in time and space and participating in a dialogic, even symbiotic, relation with the other). Subjectivity becomes "the event of being a self."

Collodi's subject, for all his ambivalence, is monologic; Coover's "achieves" dialogism. Collodi's "real boy" who becomes Coover's academic success has repressed "person"; his "character" is determined by the dictates of the Blue-Haired Fairy and the didactic requirements of the text. At the close of Collodi's text, "character" is triumphant. Pinocchio will not regain access to "person," to the other half of his split self, until he enters a second text, and faces a "second death" in Coover's cruelly carnivalized city.

Professor Pinenut recalls his acquisition of speaking subjectivity in a parody of the psychoanalytic narrative, and when it comes to the splitting of the subject, it is this narrative rather than Bakhtin's that is foregrounded. Geppetto began the process as he fashioned the puppet's body from bits and pieces hacked from a wooden log. He "fashioned eyes for him to see by," but did not have control over how
the emerging puppet saw, and Pinocchio rolled them mischievously and made the old man jump; he shaped a mouth, but its tongue was mocking; he attached articulated arms and legs but Pinocchio used them to pull off the old man's wig, and to kick him in the shins. Lastly, Geppetto gave him a "nose," which proved to be beyond not just Geppetto's but Pinocchio's own control, and Geppetto fulfilled his role in the psychical family romance in angrily hacking it down to size. Pinocchio continued to resist repression and refused to take up the position of the bourgeois subject until he learned about loss and guilt at the knees of his psychical mother, his beloved Blue-Haired Fairy.28

To return to Bakhtin, subjectivity, language, and texts make sense of the world and so enrich its capacity to mean, but there is a cost: as the infinite number of experiences is reduced, potential is narrowed. The novel is important to Bakhtin because its inherent dialogism means it is least reductive of variety. Recognizing that all language is always already inscribed, it refuses final answers and denies

28. Coover's Pinocchio remembers his body being formed, hacked and whittled from wood, but he feels "deep disquiet" about the time before he was in possession of his Imaginary body. He wonders where he came from, and what may have been lost in his construction. Were the slivers and shavings Geppetto discarded "lost fragments of a being once whole, monadic scraps of his original wooden integrity, now tragically scattered?" (213) The Blue-Haired Fairy will return him to this forever lost and forever longed for space of the Real as she gently takes him apart and consigns him to the infinite plenitude of the body of the folk, and to the infinite plenitude of pre-existence.
the possibility of Pinocchio's "pure thoughts . . . uncontaminated by history" (176). Criticism has always sought to account for literary precursors; as Kristeva notes, any text is a "mosaic of quotations" and the transformation of other texts, but writing, after Bakhtin, becomes the reading of an anterior literary corpus, its absorption, and a response (Desire in Language 66)--Joycean "quashed quotatoes and messages of mottage." For Kristeva, such a meeting involves not only renewal but also contradiction; Michael André Bernstein sees it as an agon (300). In Coover's case, the movement is, rather, a doubled one that recognizes ambiguities and ambivalences in a series of texts, and problematizes them through juxtaposition. The ambivalences are Bakhtinian loopholes that enable what has been silenced within a text to speak. Coover's response to Collodi, for example, discovers the ragazzino per-bene, exemplum of the flower of the new nation state of Italy, to be an unpleasant prig who grows up to be a highly educated, self-absorbed fool. Such a reading can be supported by Collodi's text and is one he would have appreciated.29 Coover's linked response

29. Perella notes that "Collodi himself was among the first to feel uneasy about the tale's ending . . . which he once told a friend he could not remember having written [though] the manuscript copy leaves no doubt." In what Perella says "may well be the story's cruellest image," the chestnut-haired, blue-eyed "real boy" eyes his discarded puppet self, "propped against a chair, its head turned to one side, its arms dangling, and its legs crossed and folded in the middle so that it was a wonder that it stood up at all," and says "with a great deal of satisfaction: 'How funny I was when I was a puppet! And how glad I am now that I've become a
to the ambivalence Mann is known to have felt toward contemporary theories of art in Germany as well as toward the figure of Aschenbach, is parodic and moving. By means of a discussion of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in art, Mann began to address issues that were of particular social and critical moment at the beginning of the century, specifically questions linked to the role of the artist, and l'art pour l'art and the Decadence's emphasis on external beauty. Aschenbach's mock-Platonic speech to Phaedrus/Tadzio placed his concerns in the wider framework of western philosophy. As I will presently discuss, Coover, dialogically, takes up the Platonic line Mann has thrown him, much as Pinocchio takes up the theatrical one the Blue-Haired Fairy throws to him, and replies with a corresponding set of contemporary questions at the century's end, and, as I will end by discussing, by means of a Derridean questioning of Platonic thought. *Pinocchio in Venice*, bursting with dozens of competing voices, is "a talking book" (329), and it provides Mann's *Death in Venice* with a Bakhtinian answering word.

In contrast to Saussure, for whom the sign has meaning only in its difference from other signs within a closed system, Bakhtin insists on the materiality of language. His primary concern is with parole (where Saussure's is with langue), with the dialogic nature of the speech act within the system rather than with the system itself. Socially and proper boy!'" (55, 461).
historically formed amongst a field of possibilities (as opposed to Saussure's system of rules) that is always already inscribed with meaning and always open to reinterpretation, any given speech act is a response, and is always addressed to another. The "living conversation" that exists between Mann and Coover and Collodi and Coover is exemplary of Bakhtin's "word":

[D]irectly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word . . . it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. (Dialogic Imagination 280)

Coover's Pinocchio, whose grotesque body contains both Collodi's puppet and Mann's Professor von Aschenbach, exists as a subject position within an ongoing dialogue between the centrifugal forces of the existing environment and the centripetal ordering of language; Coover's text, too, occurs where the forces of change and stasis meet, and both are functions of the dialogic. Within a sea of voices, Coover brings together Collodi, Mann, and Bakhtin, and out of that dialogic exchange, he forms an answering word.

In the years following the translation of Bakhtin into English, beginning with Rabelais and His World in 1968, the political relevance--or not--of carnival's physical
manifestation, as well as dialogism, became central topics in literary and cultural studies, and in literature itself. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1984) distinguished between licensed carnival and a deeper understanding of the power of laughter, which could destroy death through redemption from fear, and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) delighted in grotesque realist becoming and renewal, but also provided a chilling description of carnival's dark side as Sadeian, cruel, and amoral. Terry Eagleton felt that for all that it may be "bulging with positive life," Bakhtinian carnival is "a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art" (148), but others recognized a more "serious" and therefore more politically powerful aspect to carnivalesque laughter as it operated at the level of language. As early as 1966, Kristeva said of the political force of carnival that it "produce[s] a more flagrant dialogism than any other discourse. Disputing the laws of language . . . the carnival challenges God, authority and social law; in so far as it is dialogical, it is rebellious" (*Desire in Language* 79; my emphasis). While recognizing that

30. Carter had not read Bakhtin when she wrote *Nights at the Circus* (personal communication), but she freely admitted she incorporated "theory" into her fiction--*Nights*, for example, includes a panoptical system based on that outlined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Nevertheless, her reading of the carnivalesque illustrates the breadth of Bakhtin's influence on contemporary thought.
in contemporary society . . . [t]here is a tendency to blot out the carnival's dramatic (murderous, cynical and revolutionary in the sense of dialectical transformation) aspects, which Bakhtin emphasized, and which he recognized in Menippean writings . . . [t]he laughter of the carnival is not simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is serious" (80). Linda Hutcheon reads carnival in terms of parody, but because her sense of parody is far from "simple," she sees that, while the carnivalesque could act as a custodian for the past, reinforcing convention as it mocked it, it could also contest norms in order to renovate them ("Modern Parody and Bakhtin" 101-2). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White suggest it is fruitless to argue whether carnival was a force for conservatism or for revolution. The theory of the carnivalesque is important for the broader understanding it offers of "the dialectics of social classification," and for an understanding of social structures and of "binary extremism" in class society (26). Coover's paracriticism is both a textual embodiment of the carnivalesque, and part of the continuum of thinking about Bakhtin.

The central Bakhtinian binary opposition that has been part of carnival's rebirth in contemporary literature is that of the classical and the grotesque. Collodi's Pinocchio is a metaphor for the grotesque body of the folk, and that metaphor is the key to Collodi's subtext: the construction of
a new Italian bourgeoisie. The original story of Pinocchio was begun only twenty years after Unification,\textsuperscript{31} when it was felt that, if the new Italy were to compete with its northern neighbours, a hardworking middle class would have to be created largely from the peasantry, perceived to be sensuous, lazy, and essentially anarchic. With Unification, a static system based on ties to land and local community began to be transformed by the capitalist nexus of individual upward mobility, the nuclear family, and the labour market (and in the fairy-tale case of Pinocchio an injection of financial capital in the form of a purse magically filled with gold coins as a reward for becoming a dutiful son/citizen [Collodi 461]). Collodi’s text is part of the improvement project, and the puppet an instructive example of the carnivalesque grotesque body which would have to be excluded in the creation of the modern nation state. Until Pinocchio learns to toe the line, his is a far from reliable, far from docile, and with that famous nose, inappropriately sexual, body, and with Collodi’s discomfiting ending the puppet we have come to love is silenced, murdered one last time, by the dictates of a monologic text. Read together with Collodi’s, Coover’s project illustrates the Bakhtinian loophole, the double movement that makes present what was absent. He exposes the exemplary life of self-sacrifice leading to redemption—the

\textsuperscript{31} Venice was the last state to join the new nation of Italy, in 1866.
classical structure that is the foundation of the bourgeoisification Collodi half recommends, half resists—\( \text{in all its bleak misery.} \) Coover's Pinocchio's life has been devoted to pleasing the Blue-Haired Fairy, the first object of his desire. A figure for death, she was dead, or pretending to be, from the beginning (Collodi 183), and in the course of the puppet's trials, she repeats the trick every time he is "bad." This punishment is a metaphor for the bad-tasting "good" medicine she taught him to take, but Coover's text reveals that, while it may have turned him into a "real boy," its effects were poisonous rather than curative.

This brings me to the fourth and last incision in this anatomy, which reveals Coover's paracritical dialogue with Derrida, and particularly with Derrida's long essay "Plato's Pharmacy." This aspect of the textual body of Pinocchio in Venice incorporates a giddying series of intertextual word plays, which includes Coover's play on Derrida's play on Plato's play on the word pharmakon as remedy and poison, as "good" and "bad" medicine. Of course the wooden-headed puppet was born from a wooden log, and in one of a series of droll "wooden" puns that run through his text, Coover links log to the logos, word, logic, reason, leading neatly into Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence, the
privileging of unity over presence, and speech over writing.\textsuperscript{32}

"Plato's Pharmacy" is a reading of the \textit{Phaedrus}, the Platonic dialogue that is also central to \textit{Death in Venice}.\textsuperscript{33} Mann focuses, parodically, on that part of the dialogue concerned with love and lust, and the role of beauty in guiding us toward a higher realm (Mann 70-71), and Coover, as always, parodies Mann's parody.\textsuperscript{34} Derrida discovers an

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\textsuperscript{32} Coover's punning on Pinocchio's wooden "roots" wittily parodies aspects of the Romance trial by landscape in that like countless wanderers before him, including Dante, Pound, and Leopold Bloom [\textit{Ulysses} 4.179], the wooden and wooden-headed puppet is lost in a metaphysical "dark wood." Pinocchio is accused of being "under the lignilingual curse," and of being "a good-for-nothing whoreson legno da catasta [heap of wood]" (179-80). Doctors brought in to treat his warped body view it as a mirror for his warped mind, further proof that "he's rotten to the very pith!" (181). His theories have been ridiculed as "thin laminations, scarcely concealing a deep-rooted psychosis" and he has been accused of being unable to see "the forest for the tree" (115). Before Pinocchio's ritual dismemberment, Eugenio "eulogizes" him with a catalogue of botanical puns. He is "our own Marco the Pole come home to us like so much drifting flotsam stumping back to his deepest roots [having taken] on all the knotty problems of the wormy world, branching out into his-tree, sophis-tree and rudiment-tree ribal-tree," and so on (287).

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{The Golden Ass} also contains mock-Platonic dialogue.

\textsuperscript{34} As I have mentioned, in the Salone Sansoviano of the Libreria Marciana Pinocchio has come face to face with Aristotle and Plato, "the warring figures from his . . . intellectual history" (231), and reaffirmed his anti-Aristotelian position. Now snuggled against Bluebell's bosom, he "tells himself with an outburst of rapture that what he sees there before his crossed eyes is beauty's very essence: form as divine thought, the single and pure perfection which resides in the mind, of which an image and likeness, rare and holy and soft as a powder puff, is here raised up for adoration. He wishes to explain this to her, discreetly of course, never once forgetting that she is the student, he her teacher and moral exemplar, wishes to tell
ambivalence in Plato's attitude to the morality of writing, and in the course of doing so he asks, self-reflexively, a question that is central to Aschenbach's and Pinenut's Venetian experience of self-recognition: "Is writing seemly? Does the writer cut a respectable figure?" (Derrida 74)

The dialogue between Plato and Mann and between Plato and Derrida is straightforward, but it is Coover's genius that, by means of his reading of Derrida, he is able to bring Collodi and Mann, who are to say the least an unlikely couple, into jarringly disjunctive yet productive dialogue, bringing to light elements in each that allow for the possibility of new readings. There is, as I have discussed, a cruelly repressive aspect to Collodi's Bildungsroman that chimes with Aschenbach's own repression, and Coover focuses on that repression rather than on the "happily ever after" of Pinocchio's metamorphosis into a human child. He rereads Collodi through a darkly carnivalesque lens, interweaving Aschenbach's encounter with Dionysian passion with a reversal of Collodi's puppet's journey to create an apocalyptic voyage into the labyrinthine Real that is at once funny, and as cruelly shocking as that undertaken by McEwan's Mary and

her that beauty, my dear Bluebell, beauty alone is both lovely and visible at once, and indeed touchable as well, it is all that we can know of the spiritual by way of the senses and is the discriminating person's route to it, if approached with the appropriate fear and reverence and without getting overexcited, if you can help it, just a matter, the route that is, of following your nose, so to speak" (236).
Colin or Winterson’s Henri.\textsuperscript{35}

The link that draws Collodi into the dialogue is achieved by means of Derrida’s investigation of Plato’s use of the word \textit{pharmakon} and its cognates in the \textit{Phaedrus} and elsewhere through which he “unfold[s] those dimensions of Plato’s text that work against the grain of (Plato’s own) Platonism” as a system of metaphysical binarity (Johnson, xxiv). In the \textit{Phaedrus}, \textit{pharmakon} is used to refer to writing as opposed to speech as a kind of drug, and Derrida uses this to illustrate the difference that constitutes language. He argues that the term should be translated as both remedy and poison, not as one or the other. Coover takes this up, and reminds us that Collodi’s Blue-Haired Fairy’s gift of life to Pinocchio, which entailed his metamorphosis from puppet to human, hinged on his learning to take the Blue-Haired Fairy’s bitter “good medicine” that rid him of his “bad” puppetness and transformed him into un \textit{ragazzino per-bene}, which might be translated only somewhat ironically as “a bourgeois masculine subject.” There is, as I have noted, an element of ambiguity in Collodi’s ending, and Coover exploits this in order to make it clear that the gift of human subjectivity, the hand the Fairy has dealt Pinocchio, is a far from straightforward one. The \textit{pharmakon} always “partakes of both good and ill, of the agreeable and

\textsuperscript{35} I refer to the whole of Coover’s text, but in particular to the Dionysiac “feast” in which Pinocchio’s body is cooked and eaten (chapter 26, esp. 289-90).
the disagreeable" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 99) and in the case of Pinocchio, in giving him "life," it destroys everything in him that is life-affirming.

In both narratives, everything Pinocchio does in his effort to be good is aimed at pleasing the Fairy and at regaining oneness with her, the first object of his desire. In Coover’s version, Pinocchio’s friends are quick to recognize that her maternal influence is far from healthy—she is, after all, even in the original version, an avatar of death. Collodi’s Fairy is a gruesome necrophiliac who likes to play unpleasant, spooky games with little boys, games that Coover’s text reveals are designed to leave them intimidated, guilt-ridden, and dependent on her, to say nothing of sexually perverse. Her medicine, far from doing Pinocchio good, seems to have ruined his life: the pharmakon as poison. Collodi’s story was about a puppet who became a proper boy; Coover’s contains all the characters and all the episodes from the original but it brings into the dialogue what is repressed in Collodi. The narrative rolls back on itself: Pinocchio, far from discarding his wooden self as he did at the end of Collodi’s story, demands, with his dying breath, that the puppet be allowed to live.

Coover’s Pinocchio, like Collodi’s, learns much through his suffering. However, instead of continuing the savage repression of his naughty, joyous other, he rejects his human self, and his all-too-human achievements. Through this,
Coover is able not only to recuperate the puppet but to suggest the "something more positive" Mann could not allow Aschenbach. Like Aschenbach, and like Collodi's puppet, Pinocchio dies at the end of Coover's narrative, but this is the longed for "second death." He is able to make a good death as the last fragments of his human body are removed, and the anarchic puppet is revealed. With great courage, and a mixture of fear, excitement, and serenity, he faces the abyss and there makes peace on his own terms with the Blue-Haired Fairy as the monstrous-feminine. She notes as she cradles his quite literally fragmented body, no more now than a bundle of crumbling wooden sticks, that really he's only fit for recycling. Pinocchio has found his "closing chapter" (14) and in a nice piece of reflexivity she whispers: "We'll make a book out of you!" In response to Bakhtin's dialogism, to Derrida's invisible presence, to difference, and to the pharmakon as remedy and poison, the

36. There are ambivalences too in Death in Venice. Mann had intended the outcome to be a positive one, and a shift away from his usual coolly analytical style. He had been reading Nietzsche, and considered whether Platonic dialogue might not provide a key to a renewal in art, which was to have been neither Apollonian nor Dionysian, but it provided no answer. T.J. Reed's convincing reading suggests that the ambivalences in the text, which include its ambiguous ending and the "strange mixture of enthusiasm and criticism, classical beauty and penetration, elevation and sordidness," may be attributed to the fact that he found himself unable to complete the text as he had planned it, and it remained unfinished until he read Lukács's essay on Socrates. Lukács provided Mann with "a sterner, potentially moral view at a time when Mann was deeply dissatisfied with the story as he had begun it" (Reed 166). (Lukács's essay is "Longing and Form," 91-106.)
pharmakon as speech and writing, and with a wink to Henry Louis Gates’s “signifyin[g],” Pinocchio undergoes a last metamorphosis. “[W]ith his vanishing voice” that will not vanish because it will be part of the endless dialogue of literature that contains past, present, and future, he replies: “But a talking book, Mamma! A talking book . . .!” (329)

The central Derridean différance that informs every aspect of Coover’s Pinocchio’s journey, and is central to my reading of it, is crystallized as the text ends not with a whimper but with Pinocchio’s jouissant Joycean “yes . . .! Good . . .” (330), which brims with potential and denies linguistic boundaries as it denies Mann’s tragic ending. The difference hinges in large part upon linguistic play that dances across a carnivalesque world-upside-down, and is achieved by means of a Derridean “double gesture” that refuses to simply reverse Platonic oppositions but unsettles and displaces them (as Bakhtinian dialogism doesn’t merely reread earlier texts but opens them up to new interpretations), and so creates a new and productive medium (Margins 329). Bakhtinian theories of the dialogic and of carnival and Derrida’s questioning of western metaphysics become part of the complex matrix of the grotesque body of the text that is a mirror at once for the palimpsest that is the mythologized textual city of Venice and for the ludic space that is the grotesque body of the city itself, in a
process that shatters in order to reincorporate and revivify the fragmented body of western literature. Coover’s text becomes an exemplum of Plato’s *pharmakon* in that it is an interweaving of texts that is a remedy against forgetting at the same time as it is a risky unravelling of that history from which a new fabric may be formed.

Coover’s text is not merely an engagement with *différance*; it is a seriously ludic, infinitely iterable “staging” of Derrida’s questioning of the metaphysics of presence. In a neat reverse mirroring of Derrida’s own practice of bringing literary texts to bear on his critique of western philosophy, Coover undermines that tradition’s logocentrism by an overt inscription of philosophy— in particular a rereading of Derrida’s rereading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*— on the grotesque body of western literature.
Epilogue

Venice is an allegory for western civilization and its discontents, and this study has set out to show how it functions as a spatio-temporal location for the working through of that allegory as a means of understanding the construction of our late-twentieth-century urbanized subjectivity. It is at once a record of a thousand years of human inspiration and ingenuity and, in its dissolution, visible evidence of a concomitant self-destructiveness that can perhaps best be defined as psychotic. As a site for contemporary literature it can seem semiotically overdetermined. Not simply a metaphor for our capacity for creation and destruction but a nexus for a convergence of ancient metaphors of desire, Venice is a map for modern western culture and for the modern psyche as it has been charted and shaped by psychoanalysis. The city that is the focus of these texts is material enough, yet it is also a fantasy city that lies somewhere beyond the pleasure principle. The key to its discovery is the conflated figure
of death and the fantasy of the Woman. Labyrinthine, amphibious, seductive, monstrous, Venice is the liminal space of the hero’s journey, and the eroticized, sexually ambiguous body that holds out a promise of a pre-symbolic, pre-gendered plenitude.

The labyrinth is of course also a metaphor for human art and its risks—Daedalus almost failed to find his way out of his own elaborate construction—and for as long as cities have stood for the idea of the labyrinth, they have also served as allegories for artifice in opposition to nature. In Venice, the idea of the city as artifice has reached its height. As the medieval city expanded, it subsumed every inch of available space, forming a dense and architecturally cohesive carapace of brick and marble over the marshy landscape, until in the sixteenth century even the edges of canals were faced with stone and streets and lanes and the campi that had until then served as a reminder of muddy origins were uniformly paved over, reinforcing the sense of the city as a seamless human construction.

I have set out to uncover a series of mirrorings and repetitions the occur between a textualized city and a city that is a work of art, and a continuum of texts. Winterson’s The Passion, McEwan’s The Comfort of Strangers, and Coover’s Pinocchio in Venice each resist the imposition of reductive paradigms, yet they all circle around repetition and return and the possibilities for transformation that occur when
illusory notions of stability and wholeness are revealed to be inhabited by difference. Rereadings of such earlier forms as revenge tragedy, epic and Romantic quest, and Menippean satire, as well as of specific earlier texts, articulate the death drive, and the figure of death recalls the figure of the woman, recalls the labyrinth, recalls the city until, as with all writing about Venice, this study has come to reflect the structure it set out to explore. Its borders have proved to be as permeable as those of the literature I have discussed and of the city itself.

I have referred to Joyce's Dublin, transformed by him into a key symbolic landscape for literary modernism, and Venice's construction as metaphor may also usefully be considered in relation to other western cities that have been central to the Anglo-American imagination during the course of the last two centuries. London, Paris, and New York have all been interpreted as labyrinthine spaces of creativity, confusion, and despair, but Venice, quite simply, is a labyrinth. Because it is devoid of the taxis, subways, and buses that can be called upon to spirit the traveller magically and safely from one point to the next in other cities, not only literary characters but every inhabitant and every visitor who leaves water transport behind and steps beyond the Piazza San Marco turns flâneur, and in placing one foot before the other, traces the ancient pattern of the maze, potentially entering its space of instruction and
danger.¹ In Venice literature, form and content are conflated, and a further layer of complexity is added as characters and readers must simultaneously retrace a labyrinth of earlier texts, some of which are shaped by the real space of the city: Winterson's Henri and Villanelle, McEwan's Colin and Mary, and Coover's Pinocchio negotiate a city already traced and given literary form by other forestieri including Ruskin and Mann and Shelley. The ancient figure of the labyrinth and the monstrous desire it conceals is conflated with the labyrinthine topography of the psyche which continues to shape and reflect writing about Venice at the end of the twentieth century. Just as the first-time visitor to Venice enters an always already known city, writers and readers of literature set in Venice enter an uncannily familiar narrative space about which everything has already been said, in which all that follows is repetition, and which yet remains a space of mystery and potential.

¹. Venice is, of course, a kind of doubled labyrinth; one is made of water, and can be negotiated with the help of water taxis, gondolas, and vaporetti, but large areas of the city are accessible only on foot.
Appendix

Twentieth-century Fictions in English, Set in Venice

1901-1950


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Elinor Wylie</td>
<td>The Venetian Glass Nephew</td>
<td>New York: Doubleday</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>Bax, Clifford</td>
<td>Bianca Cappello</td>
<td>London: Howe</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Margaret Kennedy</td>
<td>The Fool of the Family</td>
<td>New York: Doubleday</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>Cecil Roberts</td>
<td>The Guests Arrive</td>
<td>London: Hodder</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Ernest Hemingway</td>
<td>Across the River and Into the Trees</td>
<td>New York: Scribner’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Thomas Sterling</td>
<td>The Evil of the Day</td>
<td>New York: Simon and Schuster</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Stephen Spender</td>
<td>Engaged in Writing</td>
<td>London: Hamilton</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1960-1980</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Reginald Hill</td>
<td>Another Death in Venice</td>
<td>London: Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Muriel Spark</td>
<td>Territorial Rights</td>
<td>London: Macmillan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>W.E.D. Ross (Clarissa Ross)</td>
<td>Venetian Moon.</td>
<td>New York: Jove</td>
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<td><strong>1981-1990</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Caterina Edwards</td>
<td>The Lion’s Mouth</td>
<td>Edmonton: NeWest</td>
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<td>1982</td>
<td>Anne Rice</td>
<td>Cry to Heaven</td>
<td>New York: Knopf</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>Penelope Lively</td>
<td>Perfect Happiness</td>
<td>London: Heinemann</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>Barry Unsworth</td>
<td>Stone Virgin</td>
<td>London: Hamilton</td>
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1990-1997

Novels in which Venice plays a small but important role


**Venice novels in translation**


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