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Studies in Henry James

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## 5 Short Fiction: The Aspern Papers

*The Aspern Papers* is one of Henry James's most successful and best known *nouvelles*, and it immediately poses a question of definition.

In his critical writings James distinguished the short story from the *nouvelle*, not only in terms of length but of inner form. In 'The Story-teller at Large: Mr. Henry Harland' (1898) he wrote of the short story as 'a form delightful and difficult ... an easy thing, no doubt, to do a little with', but very difficult if one is 'trying for the more, for the extension of the picture, the full and vivid summary'. And he went on:

Are there not two quite distinct effects to be produced by this rigour of brevity—the two that best make up for the many left unachieved as requiring a larger canvas? The one with which we are most familiar is that of the detached incident, single and sharp, as clear as a pistol-shot; the other, of rarer performance, is that of the impression, comparatively generalised—simplified, foreshortened, reduced to a particular perspective—of a complexity or a continuity. The former is an adventure comparatively safe, in which you have, for the most part, but to put one foot after the other. It is just the risks of the latter, on the contrary, that make the best of the sport. These are naturally—given the general reduced scale—immense, for nothing is less intelligible than bad foreshortening, which, if it fails to mean everything intended, means less than nothing.

The second possibility already foreshadows a different kind of 'short story' altogether: in the prefaces written for the New York Edition of his works (1907-1909) the distinction is at first tentatively, then conclusively pursued:

A short story, to my sense and as the term is used in magazines, has to choose between being either an anecdote or a picture and can but play its part strictly according to its kind. I rejoice in the anecdote, but I revel in the picture; though having doubtless at times to note that a given attempt may place itself near the dividing-line. (Preface to vol. VII)

The anecdote consists, ever, of something that has oddly happened to someone, and the first of its duties is to point directly to the person whom it so distinguishes. He may be you or I or any one else, but a condition of our interest—perhaps the principal one—is that the anecdote shall know him, and shall accordingly speak of him, as its subject. (Preface to vol. X).

The anecdote is to be followed 'as much as possible from its outer edge in rather than from its centre outward', but it is opposed to the very idea of development: it requires 'chemical reductions and condensations' and implies the 'struggle to keep compression rich' (preface to vol. XIII). When the story is allowed to develop both in comparative length and thematically, however, it becomes a *novelle*: 'on the dimensional ground—for length and breadth—our ideal, the beautiful and best *novelle*' (which had accounted for so many triumphs of Turgeniev, Balzac, Maupassant, Bourget, and had been poorly followed in the English-speaking countries):

Shades and differences, varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily *developed*, languished, to extinction, under the hard-and-fast rule of the 'from six to eight thousand words'—when, for one's benefit, the rigour was a little relaxed. (Preface to vol. XII).

'For myself', James added, 'I delighted in the shapely *novelle* ... of which the main merit and sign is the effort to do the complicated thing

with a strong brevity and lucidity—to arrive, on behalf of the multiplicity, at a certain science of control'. In view of all this, though it appears in James's collections of short stories, *The Aspen Papers* should properly be considered a *novelle*, and it is consequently treated as such in this essay.<sup>1</sup>

The story belongs to a period, the 1880s, in which the writer, after having amply explored the international theme—i.e., the differences in morals and manners between Americans and Europeans—turned his attention to the European world, in particular to the problems of conscience and individual behaviour.<sup>2</sup> James began, and for the most part composed, his *novelle* while at Villa Brichieri, near Florence, after having spent a few weeks in Venice, at Casa Alvisi, and completed it in the latter city, this time as a guest at Palazzo Barbaro.<sup>3</sup> The story is part of a group of works centered on Italy, which exploit its romantic atmosphere and the richness of its environmental and thematic suggestiveness.

The *novelle* is entirely set in Venice and is famous for the masterly way in which it evokes the city. Venice changes from the colors of spring to those of autumn, passing through the sultriness of summer, but it is more than the privileged background of the action. It is also a metaphorical landscape, the topical place for an investigation aimed at revisiting or reviving the past, the symbolic dimension of an obsession that courts drama and ends up in defeat. The very nature of the city, however, gives this obsession not only a sense of death but also something like an ironic tone or at least a partially amused qualification.

<sup>1</sup> The *novelle* was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (March-May 1888). Quotations are from Henry James, *Literary Criticism, Essays, American and English Writers*, New York, The Library of America, 1984, p. 285; *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur, New York, Scribners, 1934, pp. 139, 181, 233, 240, 220, 231; see also *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. James E. Miller, Lincoln, Nebraska U. P., 1972, pp. 99-105.

<sup>2</sup> See Sergio Perosa, *Henry James and the Experimental Novel*, Charlottesville, Virginia U. P., 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Middle Years, 1882-1895*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1962, pp. 213-226.

Furthermore, it is among the most popular of James's stories on account of its narrative style, which is calm and mature, full of echoes and reverberations, fluid and fluent. It is a style capable of a strong dramatic vividness as well as a nostalgic coloring; yet it is veined with hesitations and suspensions, second thoughts and ambivalences in which the perspectives of ambiguity lie hidden or suddenly show themselves.

Finally, it is one of James's paradigmatic works because one finds here, in explicit or in barely noticeable form, side by side or subtly interwoven, many of his central and most crucial themes: the contrast between privacy and the public light to which the artist is exposed; the opposition of art and life; the gap between intellectual passion and human involvement; the urge to learn and to know, which at every step may betray the temptation or the exercise of an underhanded power, a form of violence to others. And one could add the terrible weight or at least the ambiguous presence of the past in our lives, the difficulty in rediscovering or reliving it without disturbing one's correct relationship with the present; the weak resistance of one's conscience to the violence of time; the power of temptation or perversion that money can have; the distortions due to isolation imposed by circumstances or sought in order to turn away from the world; disasters and disturbances caused by a self-centered vision of reality—or perhaps courted when the protagonist is entrusted with both the narration and the qualification of it.

Another crucial Jamesian motive appears in the story and its unfolding: to what extent can one trust the tale or the teller (if the teller is the subject of the experience)? Does not the heuristic obsession itself, the will to know, create its own monsters? In this case, even the most banal facts can be artificially colored with the tones of tragedy and melodrama, can take on hallucinatory dimensions, become lost in the tortuousness of the labyrinthine mind (a motive which is present in *The Aspern Papers* not only tangentially, but centrally, though it is not immediately perceivable).

We are then confronted with a circular movement, since the partially comic element, the ironic-grotesque germ from which James had started, not only reappears at the end of the tale but also unfolds step by step with his exploration of the drama: a drama that is caused by the protagonist's poorly concealed curiosity, by the sphinx-like face that, according to the gothic tradition, the past takes on to 'chill' the living.

James got the germ of his story from a conversation about Count Gamba, a nephew of the Guiccioli, and about the letters of Byron of which that family proved to be 'rather illiberal and dangerous guardians.' Owing to their 'discreditable' character, one of them was perhaps even burned. This germ joined with another anecdote, which concerned not only Byron but also Shelley: Jane Clairmont (or, as she preferred to be called, Claire), once Byron's mistress and the mother of his daughter Allegra, had lived until the age of eighty in Florence, with a niece and in total isolation, jealously guarding the letters she received from the two poets. An ardent Shelley fan, Captain Silsbee succeeded in being taken in by them as a boarder, hoping to lay hands on those letters at her death: the niece, however, a fifty-year-old spinster, had offered him the letters in exchange for marriage. The poor captain (according to the anecdote) *court encore*, was supposedly still running.

As James wrote in the Notebooks:

Certainly there is a little subject there: the picture of the two faded, queer, poor and discredited old English women—living on into a strange generation, in their musty corner of a foreign town—with these illustrious letters their most precious possession. Then the plot of the Shelley fanatic—his watchings and waitings—the way he *converses* the treasure. The denouement needn't be the one related of poor Silsbee; and at any rate the general situation is in itself a subject and a picture. It strikes me much. The interest would be in some price that the man has to pay—that the old woman—or the survivor—sets upon the papers. His hesitations—his struggle—for he really would give almost anything.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, eds Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers, New York, Oxford U. P., 1986, pp. 33-34.

Here are almost all the elements of the story: two women isolated from the world, tied to the memory of the poet and the old city, the poetry lover who wants to gain possession of the letters, and their ambiguous relationship. Added to this is the fundamental idea of the *price* to be paid for the papers (or in general for the literary passion, for the violation of privacy and the disturbance of conscience) and of the protagonist's hesitations, through which he becomes conscious, at least subliminally, of the moral question involved in his behavior.

For reasons of delicacy, James chose to move the setting to Venice, a choice that would prove very felicitous and decisive. And just as he transformed the two women into two American expatriates, he ran a calculated risk by making the great poet of the past an American bard. This was historically unlikely, given the period in which the poet would have lived (the early decades of the nineteenth century),<sup>5</sup> but James found here a sort of challenge.

As so often with him, he was interested in the atmosphere of total mystery, of emptiness and absence, with which he could surround his Jeffrey Aspern. Another characteristic change concerned Juliana, Miss Bordereau, the custodian of the precious letters: *she* conceives the idea that in order to have the letters, the fanatical admirer of Aspern should marry her spinster niece. In this way, as a firm counterpoint to and litmus test of the exaltation of the protagonist's discovery, James inserts the sordid theme of money and 'exchange' value,<sup>6</sup> since the plot of the old woman ends up paralleling that of the protagonist.

A final point should be noted. James made his protagonist the narrator of the story, by relating everything—intentions, facts, events, possible motivations and interpretations—to his point of view and to his word. Thus the *nouvelle* calls for direct participation on the part of the

<sup>5</sup> James himself discussed this 'vicious practice' in his Preface to vol. XII: 'I find his [Jeffrey Aspern's] link with reality then just in the tone of the picture wrought round him ... The retort to that of course was that such a plea represented no "link" with reality—... but only a link, and flimsy enough too, with the deepest depths of the artificial' (see *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 166-167, 168).

reader and acquires immediacy. Knowing James, however, and knowing that his narrators should be not blindly and thoroughly trusted—the example of *The Turn of the Screw* is a good case in point—one must maintain throughout a modicum of doubt.

The protagonist, who remains without a name to the end, engages in a regular siege against the *sancta sanctorum* of Miss Bordereau's house in Venice, where he insinuates himself as a boarder by paying an enormous rent. There he moves about rather craftily in order to lay hands on the treasure of the much desired Aspern papers. His is a continuous but decisive movement of *rapprochement*. First, he approaches the palace (modelled on Palazzo Cappello in Rio Marino)<sup>6</sup> in which he then installs himself; next, from the garden, he moves towards the rooms of the old woman and gets himself invited in by persistently sending them flowers; then he accosms the poor niece, Miss Tina (the name was rightly changed to Tina for the New York Edition),<sup>7</sup> in whom he tries to arouse not only sympathy but also complicity; he then approaches the old woman and, finally, the room in which he thinks the papers are hidden and while groping about with his candle, he is suddenly discovered and unmasked by old Miss Bordereau.

There, for the first time, she reveals to him her eyes, now no longer covered as usual by a green 'curtain'. This episode is not only the crowning touch of a gothic vein à la Poe that runs through the story, but also the first of two major dramatic climaxes around which it is masterfully constructed. At that point, the protagonist takes the final step in an escalation by which his literary passion risks both the violation of another's privacy and the violation of that person's very conscience and heart. At that point, this fanatic lover of the poet and his poetry, this passionate student of relics and memories, he who at all costs wants

<sup>6</sup> See Marilja Battilana, *Venezia sponda e simbolo nella narrativa di Henry James*, Milano: Laboratorio delle arti, 1971, p. 112, and p. 145 for a picture of it; see also Edel, *The Middle Years*, p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> 'Tina' is in Venetian a man's name, not a woman's.

to revive the past and unite it to the present, truly risks reducing himself to what Miss Bordereau reproaches him with being: a 'publishing scoundrel'.

This scene, however, is in the penultimate (the eighth) section: as one moves towards that culminating scene, one realizes that the siege is not unilateral, that, instead, one is dealing with a *reciprocal* ambiguous game of cat and mouse, that Miss Bordereau is also involved in the escalation process. The exorbitant rent that she demands as a ploy to discourage the boarder, and that instead he is willing to pay, betrays his real interest. But it also becomes a means for securing a dowry for her niece. Since the presence of the boarder cannot but revive in her the weak sparks of a life on the verge of being extinguished, the terrible old woman, in her own way as crafty and as rapacious as the intruder, contrives the idea of making his interest in the Aspern papers the bait that she hopes will lead him into the arms of poor Tita and will wed him forever to her house, her memories and to Aspern.

This is why the green screen that Miss Bordereau always wears over her eyes is more than a symbol of her reserve, of the mystery that she is guarding, of the intense past of passion and poetry that she has lived, a barrier against intruders and the world. It is also—somewhat like the pastor's veil in Hawthorne's short story 'The Minister's Black Veil'—a mask, an indication of her mysterious and isolated nature, of the intrigue that she herself has laid out for the intruder. Thus, when she is caught without the veil, in the 'gothic' scene in which the protagonist's wrongdoing and violation are most evident, she can only die. But while she lies dying in Tita's arms, she entrusts her niece with the awkward prosecution of her plan.

The story then moves toward the second, decisive, major climax: Tita, who has saved the papers from destruction but is tied to the memory and the injunction of her aunt, cannot—not even she—divulge them or give them to a stranger. She can offer them, clumsily, only to someone who belongs to the family, a relative; someone who has a right to them. Dismayed, the protagonist wanders out to the Lido and to Malamocco

in a gondola—a scene of confusing displacements through the labyrinth of the city, which acts as a counterpoint to a preceding scene in which, always in a gondola, he had accompanied Tita through the Giudecca and on to St. Mark's, revealing to the poor recluse an unexpected perspective of unknown places and active people, reawakening in her the sense of a possible life outside of her palace-prison and the captivity of time and memory.

Then it was the graceful Venice of the cafés, swarming with life, vivid with colors, and opening to the world. Now it is the labyrinth of the lagoon and the canals that mirror the mind revolving around itself. Upon his return, at sunset, the questing protagonist, confused and torn within himself, finds himself in Sts. John and Paul Square. Contemplating the statue of Colleoni, which stands out high up in the square, he recognizes what separates his own type of stratagems and battles from that of the 'condottiere.' On the one side is life and action; on the other—his—reflection and the mere mental or intellectual passion. Not for nothing, at this crucial point, does Venice reveal or confirm itself to him as an enormous and busy theatre:

And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic and resonant, also resembles a theatre, with actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle; and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.<sup>8</sup>

He played his game inside, in a closed-in space, on an entirely inner stage, fascinated not by the spectacle that surrounded him but by the survivors and the ghosts of the past. His, we could say, is a drama of the mind, even to some extent a hallucination. Taught by the spectacle

<sup>8</sup> *The Complete Tales*, ed. Leon Edel, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963, vol. VI, p. 379.

of the city and in reaction to his very own sneaky and pusillanimous game—or perhaps because he is by now incapable of renouncing the possible crowning of his intellectual passion—he returns to the house the following day to declare himself ready for the sacrifice, ready to offer himself (is it not rather a question of exchanging or bartering himself?). But Miss Tria has understood her own pathetic failure, and having overcome her humiliation, late at night she burns the papers, one by one. Only a miniature of the poet and the sense of a painful loss remains for the fan of Aspen.

Even from this brief sketch, the complex role which the city has in the *nouvelle* is evident. It is not a mere background for the adventure, but an agent of it, not only the masterfully evoked milieu, but the symbolic extension in which the nature and the dilemmas of the characters are mirrored. On the one hand, we have a decadent, dying and self-enclosed world in which the cult of the past and the memory takes root like ivy in the tumble-down walls, and, on the other hand, the explosion of life, theatricality and colors capable of offering an antithesis—if not an antidote—to the prison of the past or of the soul which has turned in on itself.

In the Preface to the *nouvelle*, written twenty years later for the New York Edition of his works, James insisted on the challenge that the historical and scenic complexity of Italy flung at him and on the romantic thrill that Venice gave him. The charm which he confessed himself to be extremely attracted by was that of a close relationship with the past, a past directly touched and discovered almost behind the present. It was the charm 'of a final scene of the rich dim Shelley drama played out in the very theatre of our "modernity"', of an unexpected continuity that had drawn itself between then (1820) and now (1880).

It was a question, he wrote, of recovering and of evoking 'a palpable imaginable *visitable* past', 'fragrant of all, or of almost all, the poetry of the thing outlived and lost and gone, and yet in which the precious element of closeness, telling so of connexions but tasting so of differences, remains appreciable'. Yesterday and today were to touch and to remain

in perfect balance on the scales. What better scenario than Italy, and in particular Venice, to take in the 'afternoon light' of the Byronic age (even if Jeffrey Aspen is only weakly sketched as a New York poet)?<sup>9</sup>

Entirely absorbed by the idea of the *visitable* past, whose continuity with and almost overlapping of the present he was to evoke with so much empathy, James insisted on the tone of amusement and on the light form of the *nouvelle*, on the lack of a true relationship with the real (except for Venice, naturally), and on its ties, rather, with the deepest depths of the artificial. We acknowledge his success in this, including also the comic and the grotesque element that insinuates itself in the most dramatic moments and in the conclusion. But, as already suggested, there is no doubt that the events also touch upon some of James's most characteristic cords and involve crucial motifs of a much wider application.

To what extent does the protagonist's genuine interest in the great poet of the past mask a pernicious curiosity in the lives of others, which ends up in a violation of their privacy? His desire to save the poet's papers for posterity is legitimate and understandable. But in an epoch in which criticism (one should note) was essentially biographical, we can be sure that James ended up viewing the activities of his protagonist with dismay, repugnance and, finally, open condemnation.

In the revised version of the story for the New York Edition,<sup>10</sup> a good share of the changes and additions make his fault, or at least his neglect of the rights and feelings of others, more explicit. In various letters, in the *Notebooks*, and in a whole series of novels and short stories (from *The Bostonians* to *The Reverberator*, from 'The Real Right Thing' to 'Sir Dominick Ferrand' or 'The Papers'; but one could also include *The Sacred Fount*), James expressed directly or indirectly his disapproval of journalists, nosy biographers and 'publishing scoundrels'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 163-164.

<sup>10</sup> *The Aspen Papers* is grouped, in vol. XII, with *The Turn of the Screw*, 'The Liar', and 'The Two Faces'.

<sup>11</sup> See Henry James, *Parisian Sketches: Letters to the New York Tribune*, 1875.



On the other hand, his protagonist involves in his hypocrites and swindlers (the words are his) not only the survivors of the past, but also the pathetic Tita, in whom he awakens a nearly extinguished desire to live, only to frustrate it. Here the literary obsession ends up causing direct and perhaps irreparable damage to the soul and heart of a defenceless woman. The fact that the protagonist is also the narrator of the story serves, if anything, as some scholars maintain,<sup>12</sup> to disguise the vulgar nature of his interest, the shabby means of which he avails himself in order to satisfy it, the hyperbolic ends he boasts of, his very faults.

Not the least among these is an inability to live, his having substituted his interest in the past for his involvement in the present, intellectual abstraction for feelings, selfishness and self-centeredness for participation, mental fixation for the understanding of others ('In life without art you can find your account' James had written; 'but art without life is a poor affair').<sup>13</sup> In short, he would be, to a good extent, a villain.

It seems to me that—along these lines—one may go beyond James's own position in being too morally strict; there is no need to be too upset with the unfortunate fanatic of Jeffrey Aspern, who is sneaky but is ultimately moved by a genuine interest in his idol. After all, great poets must pay a price, the price demanded by fame: once a public figure, one must face the loss of one's absolute right to privacy. James himself, in the *Notebooks*,<sup>14</sup> did not minimize the responsibility one incurs by destroying literary papers and letters which belong to history.

<sup>12</sup> 1876, eds Leon Edel and Ilse Dussor Lind, London, Hart-Davis, 1958, pp. ix-xxvii; *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock, New York, Scribners, 1920, 2 vols., 1, pp. 46-47, 11, p. 304; *The Complete Notebooks*, p. 40; and James's final outburst in *The Question of Our Speech*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1905, pp. 43-44 (among others).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Charles G. Hoffman, *The Short Novels of Henry James*, New York, Bookman, 1957, pp. 45-47; Laurence Holland, *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James*, Princeton, Princeton U. P., 1964, pp. 139-154.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Deronda, 'A Conversation' (1876), in *Partial Portraits*, ed. Leon Edel, Ann Arbor, Michigan U. P., 1970, p. 92; *Literary Criticism: English Writers*, p. 992.

<sup>15</sup> *The Complete Notebooks*, p. 34 and *passim*.

But the word 'villain', even if it cannot be applied to the protagonist, is suggestive and appropriate in our case. There is a good deal of the 'gothic' or 'dark' element in *The Aspern Papers*, due precisely to its nature, its setting and its development (this is also supported by James's own remarks). In short, if it is not an out and out ghost story, it is something very close to it, and James did couple it with *The Turn of the Screw* in the New York Edition. If nothing else, he flirts with the gothic tradition and its motifs, and surely draws inspiration from Hawthorne and from Poe even if the mode, of course, is typically Jamesian.

We have already mentioned the gothic flavour of the nocturnal (and central) scene in which the protagonist is surprised and unmasked by Miss Bordereau, by the flash of her naked eyes. In writing about the 'afternoon light' of the epoch he intended to evoke, James specified that it was not yet 'darkened'.<sup>15</sup> To us, instead, it seems that in the way he evoked it, there is indeed a cape of darkness and obscurity, of gloom and (in every sense) blackness cast over it. The Venice we have already described, but also the self-enclosed and walled-up palace, its empty and ghostly rooms, and above all the garden (which recalls the one described in Hawthorne's 'Kappacin's Daughter') are typical elements of the American gothic tradition.

The way in which the protagonist sneaks about that palace in an attempt to revive, recover, and resuscitate the past snacks of an almost necromantic operation, which demands its victim and sows its disasters. Above all, once we have entered the almost bewitched circle (profoundly artificial, James defined it) of the story and the secret rooms of the palace, the figures of Miss Bordereau and Tita (especially, of course, the former) acquire an almost sinister light. They move about in silence and with the muffled step of ghosts, they sink into the darkness of dis-

<sup>15</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 164-165. For the latent Gothicism of the story see Holland, pp. 117-118; on its grotesque, as well as gothic, elements, see Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: The Drama of Fulfillment*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, pp. 58-78 (chapter 3: 'The Price of Power in *The Aspern Papers*').

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tances and seem to emerge from the obscure depths of the past, to live an entirely anachronistic, unreal and invented life.

In short, by going to seek them, by awakening them from their sleep and from their long silence, by arousing in them the glimmer of a painful rebirth, by removing the dust in which they are buried, the protagonist does nothing, when all is said and done, but conjure up ghosts, artificially prolong a state between life and death, seek to enter a past which, as in James's posthumous novel *The Sense of the Past*, ends up acquiring the characteristics of a nightmare or at least vibrating with sinister creakings and omens.

Here Venice and her charm fit perfectly, as do her aura of death and James's ability to subtly and ambiguously examine his characters' consciousnesses, his ability to suggest evil without naming it, and his probing of the dark side of the soul without making it appear. Naturally, James's use of irony is also relevant here and from it stems what I would define as the half-gothic, half-grotesque tone of the tale and that 'fusion of narrative modes' which is so often his distinguishing mark.

## 6 The Wings of the Dove and the Coldness of Venice

The Venetian setting of *The Wings of the Dove* partakes of, and is described in, two 19<sup>th</sup>-century archetypes (which then became s types):

(a) Venice as a particularly suitable seat for plots and conspiracies and betrayals;

(b) the 'decline-' or 'death-in-Venice' literary motif, which had a pedigree in 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature.

The first motif, which can be traced back to Elizabethan times, is detectable in various 19<sup>th</sup>-century works of fiction: in the US, for instance, in J. F. Cooper's sensational and 'gothic' novel *The Two Admirals* (1831); in England, in Wilkie Collins's 'detective' novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1878).

The second motif had its origin in modern Europe, in William Wordsworth's sonnet 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic' (1802, published 1807) and in the Romantic poets' 'double vision' (or indeed 'bleed vision') of Venice. After the Fall of Venice, decline, deterioration and death were perceived as inherent in her beauty and her splendour; conversely, her beauty appeared as especially attractive when corrupt, decaying or in decline. This romantic, post-Napoleonic perception of Venice as a place fostering feelings and yearnings for death, where death is experienced almost as 'a consummation devoutly to be wished'.