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Between Pen and Palette

***The Image(s) of Venice in the Work of F. Hopkinson
Smith***

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2011 the Association of Venetian Gondoliers published a free booklet entitled *Gondola Days 2011*¹, the booklet was to be given to those tourists who would experience the thrill of a gondola ride in Venice, and provided the essential information on the most popular symbol of this city, that is the gondola. Interestingly, the highly suggestive title had already been used in a completely different context, the academic world: in fact, in 1992, Erica Hirshler² carried out a relevant study on the presence of American artists in Venice and quoted the fortunate expression in the title of her essay: “Gondola Days: American Painters in Venice”. A decade later, another significant scholarly publication explored the complex world of Anglo-American artists and patrons in Venice in a charming volume called *Gondola Days. Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Palazzo Barbaro Circle*³. Evidently, the expression “Gondola Days” proved to be a success for it capitalized on the symbolism of the gondola by turning it into the iconic signifier of a world which was unmistakably associated with Venice and its magical allure.

Created at the end of the nineteenth century,⁴ this powerful verbal image overcame the tyranny of time and space; while its author, Francis Hopkinson Smith⁵, was relegated to obscurity, for his name quickly faded away from the American collective memory after 1915, the year he died. A prolific writer and painter⁶, F. Hopkinson Smith wrote a number of novels, novelettes and travelogues which helped him attain a respected position in the literary world of nineteenth century America: he was portrayed as a gifted storyteller by his contemporaries (including Mark Twain), and he was also an insatiable traveler and artist who recorded his experiences abroad in a number of travelogues and paintings, which were usually praised by the critics and the general

¹ *Gondola Days 2011*, Venezia: Lineadacqua edizioni, 2011.

² Erica Hirshler, “Gondola Days: American Painters in Venice” in *The Lure of Italy. American Artists and the Italian Experience 1760-1914*, Theodore Stebbins (ed) New York: Harry N. Adams Inc Publishers, 1992.

³ Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (ed), *Gondola Days. Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Palazzo Barbaro Circle*³, Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004.

⁴ Smith’s travelogue *Gondola Days* was published in 1897, and it was the second edition of a volume which had been previously issued under the title *Venice of To-Day* in 1895. While the text of the two editions was the same, the format was radically different: *Venice of To-Day* was a luxurious folio with over two hundred reproductions of Smith’s Venetian views, both watercolors and charcoals; while *Gondola Days* catered to a larger public for it had a smaller format and fewer illustrations.

⁵ Francis Hopkinson Smith was born in 1838 and died in 1915.

⁶ Smith was also a successful engineer.

public. In addition, his energetic and vibrant personality helped him create a popular “public persona” and achieve celebrity status especially in New York City: he was also an active member of important clubs such as the Tile Club, the Aldine Club and the American Watercolor Society. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, after his death, Smith was quickly forgotten; both his literary works and his paintings seemed to be too old-fashioned and ordinary when compared to the innovative perspective suggested by the new avant-garde movements. Smith’s sentimental romances and vernacular watercolors represented mainstream nineteenth-century American culture and therefore, they were destined to be swept away by the overwhelming tide of modernity.

Thanks to a recent revival of interest in the presence of American artists in Venice, Smith’s name has resurfaced, being usually associated with his most notable work on the city, the illustrated travelogue *Venice of To-Day* (1895) and his Venetian watercolors and charcoals, which can still be purchased in antique shops and online auctions. However, it is important to point out that few scholarly works have explored in depth Smith’s literary and artistic production⁷; whenever Francis Hopkinson Smith is mentioned, his name appears within a broader context which usually illustrates the (conventional) response of American genre and landscape painters to Venice and its beauty. In recent years, much has been written about the presence of American artists in Venice during the nineteenth century and several studies have focused on those artists, painters and writers, who have challenged the typified image of Venice by depicting (verbally and visually) unusual views of the city.

Artists like Sargent and Prendergast successfully transcended the narrow limits of the stereotypical vision of Venice: in fact, their works challenged the popular image of the city which was primarily based on a series of cultural and literary conventions, through which Venice and its inhabitants were interpreted and represented. But these artists were still the exception, not the rule, for nineteenth century American culture perceived Venice as the epitome of the exotic and the picturesque, a soothing pre-modern world which offered a safe form of difference to industrialized and urbanized America. In a sense, for many Americans Venice was an imaginary landscape as much as a real one, a space onto which they projected a whole range of pre-existing and culturally defined images of the city. Henry James aptly pointed out that one could visit Venice without

⁷ See Nick Madorno’s essay “Francis Hopkinson Smith: His Drawings of the White Mountains and Venice”, and Theodore Hornberger’s keen study of the relation between writing and painting in Smith’s works: “The Effect of Painting on the Fiction of F. Hopkinson Smith” and “Painters and Painting in the Writings of F. Hopkinson Smith”. Annette Stott mentions Smith’s watercolors of Dordrecht in her essay “Paintings by Antimodern American Artists of the Nineteenth Century”.

actually going there, as he commented on the impressive output of visual and written works which represented and re-interpreted the city: significantly, Venice was the main subject of watercolors and etchings, travelogues and travel guides, novels and short stories, articles in newspapers and magazines.

Nineteenth-century American readers and viewers were offered the opportunity to experience Venice through a multiplication of images of the city, which emphasized both the aesthetic dimension of its eccentric landscape and the pervasive presence of the past. In addition, Venice and its inhabitants were ascribed a mythical resonance for they were associated with the romanticized image of an archaic and pre-industrialized world, which was untouched by time and by the inevitable changes brought by modernity. In one sense, Venice had become an element of cultural discourse in nineteenth-century American society, and unsurprisingly, Hopkinson Smith remarked that the Italian city belonged to the American cultural tradition as much as Rip Van Winkle or Santa Claus! It is worth noting, that consequently, the popular image of Venice within American culture was subservient to a series of clichés and interpretative conventions which were reflected in a conspicuous amount of written and visual records of the city, including Hopkinson Smith's works. Moreover, the exploration of America's interpretation of Venice is crucial to a better understanding of those forces which were shaping and/or challenging American identity during the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly the anti-modernist tendencies⁸ representing a cultural and social response to America's progress and industrialization. On the one hand, Venice with its exoticism and picturesque quality was the perfect answer to the escapist attitude which pervaded nineteenth-century American culture, as it is clearly visible in Smith's works; on the other hand though, Venice's elusive nature and transient beauty puzzled American tourists and artists forcing them to reconcile their imaginary city with their actual experience of the real one. This tension resulted in a kaleidoscope of composite images and narratives which emphasized the on-going dialogue between America and a city, Venice, which epitomized that "otherness" perceived as utterly different and eccentric but nonetheless enticing.

Captivated by Venice's beauty, which he discovered in the early 1880s, Francis Hopkinson Smith offered a visual and written portrayal of the city, for he sensed that one medium could not suffice to depict its alluring charm. Wavering between pen and

⁸ My dissertation owes a scholarly debt to Jackson Lears's seminal study on the role of antimodernism in American culture. See Lears. *No Place of Grace. Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

palette, he produced an impressive array of works centred around his “Venetian experience”. Significantly, his watercolours and travel writings on Venice, especially *Venice of To-Day* (1895), become the magnifying lens through which we can explore the way mainstream American culture engaged in redefining the image of Venice and all the pictorial possibilities associated with it. Moreover, Hopkinson Smith’s most famous work on Venice, his travelogue *Venice of To-Day*⁹ offered a cultural and aesthetic itinerary which was illustrative of Smith’s fascination (and obsession) with the city. A devotee of the picturesque, as he often pointed out¹⁰, Smith viewed Venice as the emblem of picturesqueness, which he tried to capture through words and images representing the enticing beauty of old gardens, decaying palaces, secluded waterways, charming gondoliers and shimmering domes. As a consequence, Smith’s vernacular views of Venice, whether written or visual, catered to the average art-amateur and reader, for they often reflected the culturally structured perception of the city and its inhabitants, by offering a familiar image of Venice. However, it is worth noting that Hopkinson Smith’s perception and representation of Venice went beyond the mere decorative concern at times, for he sensed the inevitable complexities characterizing a city which had to come to terms with the tyranny of its own aestheticized image and the problems posed by modernity. In an attempt to portray the “Venice of To-Day”, to use Smith’s words, Smith juxtaposed a romanticized view of the city and its inhabitants with unexpected and more authentic glimpses of modern Venice, while at the same time, he emphasized those elements, light and color, which were (and still are) the essence of the city’s overwhelming beauty. Constantly shifting between the narrative voice and the painter’s gaze, Hopkinson Smith offered a cultural and aesthetic exploration of Venice, revealing some of the cultural and literary philtres through which the city was perceived and re-interpreted by America’s collective imagination. A study of the figure of Francis Hopkinson Smith and his works raises relevant questions concerning the social and cultural frame work within which Smith’s career(s) flourished. I used newspaper and magazine articles to reconstruct the image of an artist who in one sense, embodied the myth of the self-made American man, exemplified by his rapid but well-deserved rise to fame. As to Smith’s literary and artistic production

⁹ See also *Gondola Days* (1897).

¹⁰ See for instance the title of Smith’s travelogue *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy, travelled by a painter in search of the Picturesque* (1886).

Jackson Lears¹¹'s keen study on American antimodernism provided the interpretative frame work through which I was able to approach the complexities of Smith's discourse, and specifically the sentimental and anti-modernist traits of such discourse.

The comparison between Smith's main text on Venice (*Venice of To-Day*) and a number of other texts¹² on the same subject, including magazine articles and travel guides, have helped me explore the meaningful connections between Smith's Venice and the Venice described by other American writers, artists and travellers. Moreover, the analysis of Smith's "a hundred different Venices" has helped me shed some light on the complex relationship between imaginary landscapes and real ones; while at the same time it has emphasized the crucial role played by cultural and literary stereotypes in the definition of "foreign spaces".

As I am aware of the fact that I have just hit the tip of the iceberg with my work on Hopkinson Smith, I hope this dissertation may make a contribution, even if a modest one, to this study.

¹¹ Lears. *No Place of Grace. Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

¹² Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, Twain's *The Innocents Abroad*, Howells's *Venetian Life*, Clement's *The Queen of The Adriatic*.

CHAPTER 1

“Hop: the life and the times of F.H. Smith”

“The speaker announced the marriage of material and spiritual progress. His audience nodded approval. There was no limit to American abundance. There was no impediment to the partnership of Protestantism and science. The audience applauded. They rose stiffly to leave. It was an age of confidence.”

(T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*)

“He had packed into his life the work of ten men. Engineer, contractor, business man, raconteur, painter, illustrator, lecturer, essayist, novelist, short-story writer - he was all these, and in all these ha attained an enviable high mark, while in several he was in the first flight.”

(T.N. Page “Francis Hopkinson Smith”)

1.1 “Hop”¹³



A.B. Frost, “Translooscence”, in Smith, F. Hopkinson. *American Illustrators*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892.

Francis Hopkinson Smith, who wrote and edited a volume concerning the most influential American illustrators of the 19th century, placed this reproduction of a watercolor by A.B. Frost as the opening image of chapter five¹⁴. The title of the picture,

¹³ As of today there are no extensive monographs on the life and works of Francis Hopkinson Smith; nonetheless his name can be found in *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, in Regina Soria’s *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century American Artists in Italy 1760-1914*, and especially in those publications regarding the presence of American artists in Venice in the 19th century, such as, for example, Margareta Lovell’s works on the subject (see *Venice The American View, 1860-1920*, California: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1984). In 1985 the Jordan Volpe Gallery of New York organized an exhibition of Smith’s European watercolors, on that occasion Terry Carbone researched the artist’s life and wrote a well-documented catalogue of the show. In an attempt to draw an accurate picture of this multifaceted figure, these sources were consulted together with a conspicuous number of newspapers and magazine articles about F. H. Smith (including interviews, reviews of his books and exhibitions, obituaries) which were published between 1870 and 1915. These articles helped shed some light on his personality and on his accomplishments, while at the same time they emphasized the peculiar cultural background within which his popularity flourished. They were published in *The Aldine*, *American Art News*, *The Art Journal*, *The Boston Transcript*, *The Century*, *The Critic*, *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly*, *Munsey’s Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Outlook*, *Scribner’s Monthly*, and *The Sketchbook*.

¹⁴ F. Hopkinson Smith, *American Illustrators*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892. In the preface to the book Smith briefly discusses the status of American art and focuses his attention on those artists living in New York “the centre of our American Bohemia” (Smith 1892, I) as he defines it. He also praises the new generation of American illustrators and predicts American art will rise to prominence in years to come. The book comprises a large number of plates and text engravings by several illustrators (R. Blum, K. Cox, W. Homer, F.S. Church, C.S. Reinhart, W.H. Low, A.B. Frost, W.L. Metcalf, F. Remington) together with Smith’s comments on their works.

“Translooscence” (clearly a play on words), is followed by the ironic quick-witted caption which reads: “you can bet your bottom dollar we’re onto the Venice caper; a little paint, a little work, and lots of empty paper - a caricature of F. Hopkinson Smith’s manner” (Smith 1892). The scene which appears in the picture is evidently set in Venice, as the view of the lagoon and of the distant city skyline suggests: in the foreground, on the right, three mooring posts, which look like anthropomorphous candy canes, are watching the strenuous efforts of a painter (Smith) in a gondola, who is sketching on an improbable oversized canvas. The gondola with its recognizable felze functions as a temporary giant easel, while a nimble gondolier is sculling, and two small sailboats are appearing in the distance. The exaggerated water reflections created by all the elements of the composition (gondola, bell tower, poles, sailboats) seem to hint at the idea of that “translucence/translooscence” which the title refers to, while at the same time, the overall picture resembles a cartoon strip with its satirical undertones. The combination of Frost’s picture and the words in the caption try to sum up Smith’s fascination with Venice and his unremitting attempts to capture its beauty through “the pencil and the palette” as Smith himself admitted in his preface to *Gondola Days* (Smith 1897, preface): the tone is, of course, ironic but the most interesting aspect is that Smith, who was the author of the book in which this plate appeared, deliberately chose to mock his own artistic aspirations (and obsessions) by showing Frost’s caricature. It was 1892¹⁵, and by then Smith had attained a respected position in the art world: his watercolors were praised by critics for their workmanship (*NYT*¹⁶ 1884, April 25), his books were popular thanks to their “light, vivacious prose” and “a human element, a movement of life, and a tone of sentiment” (*The Century* 1887, 125) which characterized them. Already a successful construction engineer, Smith was slowly becoming a celebrity; he had secured his status as a gifted watercolorist, a tireless traveler and a notable writer, therefore he could afford a little self-mockery when it came to his approach to his favorite subjects and locations.

His annual travel routine always included Venice¹⁷ which had quickly become his favorite “summer destination”: Smith would spend the whole day sketching en plein air, often in a gondola, always looking for the most picturesque spots (Page 1915,

¹⁵ Smith’s *American Illustrators* was published in 1892.

¹⁶ I will use the abbreviation *NYT* for *The New York Times* when quoting the articles.

¹⁷ Smith made his first trip to Europe in 1883 (Carbone 1985, 9), before “discovering” Europe as the perfect location for the picturesque, Smith had travelled extensively to Cuba and Mexico (*ibid.*)

309)¹⁸. At the end of the summer he would go back to the USA with an impressive output of watercolors and charcoal sketches, which would be exhibited in local art galleries¹⁹: the exhibitions were “gradually assuming the condition of annuals” (*NYT* 1896, January 7) as one commentator pointed out, and thanks to Smith’s “visual records” of his trips, Americans could experience “the local flavor” of those exotic locations while staying at home. It is important to note that Smith’s artistic career flourished relatively late in life, since he was already in his forties when he started exhibiting his watercolors, and he published his first novel at the age of 56²⁰!

The late blooming of his artistic talents was viewed as an additional sign of his extraordinary versatility. In fact, once Smith had established his engineering firm in New York in the 1870s, and after he had reached the financial stability he needed, thanks to important commissions like the construction of the foundations for the Statue of Liberty and the Race Rock Lighthouse, he embarked on a prolific literary career and published several novels²¹ and travelogues²²; he also continued to travel abroad to those picturesque locations²³, whose peculiar charm he recorded in his watercolors, while he kept on giving lectures on art when he was back in his native country (Page 1915, 305-309). Smith’s upward movement towards fame and fortune looked appealing to the average American, who eventually turned out to be the potential reader of his novels or the occasional admirer (and buyer) of his cheerful European watercolors; “Hop²⁴”’s energetic personality and stubborn pursuit of his outside interests embodied the optimism of an age which witnessed complex and profound changes in American society as T. Jackson Lears has pointed out (Lears 1981). In addition to that, the development of his career and personal life echoed that contradicting mix of resilient idealism and shrewd realism which defined the American dream and which at the same

¹⁸ According to Page’s account “with almost furious energy and devotion he [Smith] would be out early in the morning to get “his effects”, of which he used to talk so eloquently - and all day long till the sunset effects died away [...] he worked with inconceivable enthusiasm and rapidity” (Page 1915, 309).

¹⁹ For instance the Albright Art Gallery, the Avery Gallery, New York, the Gallery of Doll & Richards, Boston and the Copley Gallery, Boston (source: the Boston Art Archives/New England Art Information, Willietta G. Ball Collection of Clippings, c. 1900-1930)

²⁰ The novel was *Colonel Carter of Cartersville: a novel* and was published in 1891. It was immediately popular especially because of the main character of Colonel Carter, who embodied the southern gentleman *par excellence*.

²¹ His short stories had often appeared in *The Century* in the 1890s, but it was his first novel *Colonel Carter of Cartersville (1891)* which made him famous.

²² In 1889 Smith published his first travel book *A White Umbrella in Mexico*, followed by *Well Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy (1890)*, and *Gondola Days (1898)*.

²³ His favorite destinations were Mexico, London, Spain, Holland, Venice and Constantinople (*The Outlook* 1915, April 21).

²⁴ “Hop” was Smith’s nickname among friends and colleagues. The nickname was later adopted by journalists as well when referring to Smith.

time represented the necessary bases for America's success. Determined to nourish his passion for art and literature, Smith was also able to capitalize on that passion, as an anonymous journalist aptly remarked:

having amassed a small fortune through his work as an engineer and contractor, Hop Smith for the past 25 years spent from a third to a half of the year in Europe, his favourite haunts being Venice, Holland and the Thames River Valley, England, with an occasional excursion to Constantinople, and his clever sparkling watercolors of all these localities are ever popular with American art lovers. A good business man, Mr. Smith more than paid for his annual European trips through the sale of his watercolors at his exhibitions held every winter (AAN 1915, April 10).

This winning combination of artistic skills and business abilities were noticed by other commentators, and significantly, when Cromwell Childe from the *New York Times* wrote an article on Smith, he depicted him as a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (reassuring and devoid of any evil traits of course!), whose personality was split into two different individuals: Frank H. Smith, the contractor and businessman, and F. Hopkinson Smith, the charming "littérateur, artist, lecturer, after-dinner speaker"²⁵, and bon vivant, whose fame in varied fields of art and letters is widespread" (NYT 1898, May 14). According to Childe's description, the energetic contractor Frank Smith was "a resolute, keen man who knows the value of each fraction of a dollar, and as a genius for "specifications" (*ibid.*), moreover, he is so confident and knowledgeable about construction engineering that "even the National Government meets its match when it undertakes to cross swords with him over technical matters" (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the charming writer and painter Hopkinson Smith toured the world looking for picturesque spots, he explored the realms of color, chiaroscuro and composition in Venice or Constantinople, and he focused his attention on the elements of fiction, while creating unforgettable characters like Colonel Carter or Tom Grogan. Childe's clever article offered an interesting portrait of Smith as it emphasized the interdependence of his business-like mentality and his creative abilities; in an attempt to unveil the key to Smith's success and

²⁵ Smith's notable performances as an after-dinner speaker seem to perfectly fit Lear's description of 19th century American banquets and their after-dinner orators! (Lears 1981, 4). Mark Twain described Smith as a gifted storyteller: "Smith, the artist, took me one winter's night, with others, five years before, and caroused us with roasted oysters and Southern stories and hilarity [...] until three or four in the morning" (Twain 1923, 152).

popularity, Childe grasped the double nature of two seemingly contradictory careers: the artist Hopkinson Smith could afford a carefree and creative Bohemian approach to life without having to deal with the discomforts of such a life, since the businessman Frank Smith guaranteed the financial security and social position which were the necessary conditions for a lifestyle characterized by an emphasis on “the cultivation of [the] aesthetic faculty” (Veblen 1899, 74)²⁶, art and literature as to Smith’s case:

From this it will be seen that in his own line F.H. Smith fairly matches Hopkinson Smith in skill and degree of success. A curious circumstance of this remarkable case is that each of these men helps the other. The urbanity, conversational knack, and sense of humor possessed by Hopkinson Smith aid Frank H. Smith amazingly in his commercial dealings, while Frank H. Smith not only gathers “copy”, ideas and knowledge for Hopkinson, but he enables him to become perhaps the best business professional man of the day. Artists and authors are bad business men as a rule, but not F. Hopkinson Smith, (with Frank H. Smith at his ear and elbow). From the very first day Hopkinson Smith sprang into being artistically he has had never a manuscript rejected or a canvas or sketch go to waste. With Frank H. Smith counseling him in the watches of the night he has met his market and worked up the demand for his work, so that now editors, publishers, and picture buyers clamor for him. It is no easier for the other Smith to get a lighthouse contract than it is for Hopkinson Smith to sell all he produces -and at top prices- in an artistic or literary way (Childe 1898, May 14).

Echoing Childe’s portrayal of Smith, another journalist enthusiastically depicted him as a man who was defined by his versatile approach to life, and who was able to express himself in a variety of ways since:

In every way, in observation, in knowledge, in experience, Hopkinson Smith was a man of the real world as well as of the world of science and art. His early years in Maryland, and his varied residence and travel through his long life of 76 years, gave him a ready cosmopolitan grasp of scene and character that made distinctive everything he wrote and everything he accomplished. His greatest achievement is

²⁶ Childe’s description of the contractor bears a striking resemblance to the “successful, aggressive male, the man of strength, resource, and intrepidity” (Veblen 1899, 74) who, according to Veblen, has to cultivate the aesthetic faculty and to lead a life of leisure in order to prove his gentrified status.

that is work is stamped with the seal of a personality (*Boston Transcript* 1915, April 8).

It is interesting to note both articles emphasize that Smith succeeded in reconciling the artist with the businessman (that is the above-mentioned “man of the world”), two figures who epitomized opposite and contradicting models in the American social landscape; significantly, his being successful both as an engineering contractor and as an artist, proved that he could fully exploit the potential of a practical mind to build lighthouses and breakwaters, while pursuing the aesthetically pleasing at the same time. Smith’s versatility and his subsequent accomplishments both as an artist and as a businessman, turned him into the symbol of an age²⁷ which placed a high value on the combination of entrepreneurial skills and the ability of artistic creation, since it had discovered the intrinsic marketable quality which was deeply embedded in the art object²⁸. Not only did Smith enjoy painting and writing, but he was also able to turn the pursuit of his artistic interests into a profitable business so that his products, watercolors or books, actually sold well as a journalist remarked in an article on art and business ability. The anonymous journalist emphasized all those elements (profit associated with the art object, the choice of the potential buyer, the ability to identify such buyer, the negotiation between aesthetic and monetary values) which became the leitmotiv of the art market and of the “culture industry” in years to come:

There are paintings and paintings, and the young artist who starts out to make his living might do well to study the methods of the versatile New Yorker who may be called the best business man in the fraternity²⁹, F. Hopkinson Smith. Every season,

²⁷ See the seminal study by Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of The Leisure Class*, ed. Martha Banta, Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1899. For the concept of culture as a commodity and for an analysis of the consequences of this notion in modern society see also Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. G.S. Noerr, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002.

²⁸ The notion of the art object as a product which can be “consumed” and used as a means of attaining social status, respectability, and power has been associated with the role of collecting and collectors, particularly female collectors, in the American social and cultural landscape at the end of the 20th century: this complex issue has been analyzed at length in *Power Underestimated: American Women Art Collectors*, ed. Rosella Mamoli Zorzi *et.al.*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2011. The essays “Henry James: Fictional and Real-Life Art Collectors” by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi and Simone Francescato’s “Women Collector vs. Woman Appreciator: Art Consumption in Henry James’s *The Spoils of Poynton*” have helped me explore the relationship between collectors, that is the potential buyers, and artists, that is the producers, and often marketers, (see for example Hopkinson Smith) of their “art products”.

²⁹ The fraternity the journalist refers to is the Tile Club: a club of painters who lived in New York and who were devoted to outdoor painting: the club was extremely popular in the 1880s especially for their

when his annual exhibition comes around, somebody calls attention to the fact that Mr. Smith writes novels, builds lighthouses, and paints pictures, all with equal facility and profit. While other men are saying that “the native artist has no chance,” he is selling his pictures for two, three, and five hundred dollars, and the purchaser who gets one has a delight to his eyes, while the vender makes a good profit from his holiday. The secret lies in Mr. Smith’s practical mind. Without doubt he could paint “noble canvases” if he wished to do so. He could paint pictures which would bring the critics about, and perhaps take a prize or two; but he knows better. The average man - and to have a market you must reach the average man - is not a millionaire or gallery owner. He has rooms with paper on the walls, and he lives in them. When he buys a picture, he wants something that will harmonize with his surroundings, that will be in good taste, no more aggressive than an open window. He gets it when he buys a picture from Mr. Smith (*anonymous BAA*)³⁰.

Whether by instinct or by choice, Smith grasped the potential value embedded in his work, and as the above article amply demonstrated, he skillfully built his career on the aesthetic consensus of the average man, and, we may argue, being aware he was not a Sargent or a Whistler or a James, he accepted and pursued “a middle course” between realism and idealism³¹ both in painting and writing. As a result, his books and paintings conveyed that “decorative”, enjoyable quality which satisfied the general public:

It is what we see that *interests* and *delights* us; only when we deliberately gather together all the sources of our *pleasure* do we recognize what we owe to the transparency of the vehicle of vision, and Mr. Smith’s prose is so simply *satisfying* that it never occurs to us to praise it. [...] there are great books, and clever books, and instructive books, and profound books, but if anyone wants a book that is thoroughly *enjoyable* he will do well to but or borrow “*A Day at Laguerre’s*”(NYT 1893, January 29).

works on tiles, as the name of the Club suggests, and for their firm belief in the painting technique en plein air. Later on, many of its members became famous, W. Homer, W.M. Chase, Twachtman and Smith. A luxury edition of the Book of The Tile Club was also published to illustrate these artists’ remarkable accomplishments, the curator of the book was Smith, who was also one the most prominent figures of the Club.

³⁰ Abbreviation: the Boston Art Archives/New England Art Information, Willietta G. Ball Collection of Clippings, c. 1900-1930.

³¹ See NYT 1886, May 5.

Similarly, the emphasis on the enjoyable quality of his works can be found in many reviews of his watercolors exhibition as well:

the sunlit skies and warm airs which Mr. Smith presents to us makes it a *pleasant* experience to step from the street into the gallery where his works are shown [...] and an hour spent in a study of his present display [the exhibition of Smith's European watercolors] will be found both *pleasant* and *profitable* (*NYT* 1898, January 15).

Already a prolific writer and painter, "Hop" quickly became one the most remarkable personalities in the American artistic and cultural milieu, significantly, he was a member of a number of prestigious art clubs and associations such as the Tile Club, the American Watercolor Society, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and many others; he also received several awards for his artwork³² and took part in many expositions³³. His lectures on art were highly popular and he was often invited as a guest-speaker to conferences and formal dinners: those who attended them noticed how "his voice has the peculiar ring and his gestures the illustrative significance which are acquired to the full by no one but the American lecturer" (*The Critic* 1898, April 2)³⁴. Outspoken and extremely self-confident when giving his personal opinions, some of his remarks often caused much controversy: for instance, on the occasion of a formal dinner of the New York Southern Society, he harshly criticized New York by describing it as "uncivil, uncourteous, the most insolent city on the face of the globe" and above all, obsessed by Mammon and the pursuit of wealth (*NYT* 1910, February 23)³⁵. Smith's statements sparked a heated debate which unfolded in the pages of the

³² Smith was awarded the following medals: "bronze medal at the PanAmerican Exposition, Buffalo 1901; silver medal at the Charleston Exposition, 1902; a gold medal at the Philadelphia Art Club, 1902; and a gold medal by the American Art Society, 1902" (Catalogue of an Exhibition of Watercolors and Charcoal Drawings by Francis Hopkinson Smith, Buffalo: the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy and Allbright Art Gallery, 1907.)

³³ He also participated in the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago (1893), and brought some Venetian gondoliers to the event in order to recreate a more authentic image of Venice so that visitors could experience the picturesque atmosphere which characterized the city.

³⁴ According to an article which appeared in the *New York Times* Smith's fee for a lecture amounted to \$150 (*NYT* 1899, June 2).

³⁵ On February 22, 1910 during the annual "Dixie dinner" of the New York Southern society, Smith attacked New Yorkers' materialism and lack of manners, while praising the inborn courtesy which, according to him, defined Southern gentlemen. He also pointed out that the inhabitants of the city were so busy that they had no time for being kind to other people. His remarks were reported in an article which appeared in *The New York Times* the next day (*NYT* 1910, February 23).

New York Times, where offended New Yorkers responded to his blunt remarks³⁶ and accused him of being hypocritical³⁷. But Smith was not afraid to share his controversial opinions on delicate issues, and therefore he often commented on a wide range of subjects such as slavery³⁸, President Wilson's policy in Mexico³⁹, yellow journals⁴⁰ even on the role of tipping in American society⁴¹! On many occasions his controversial views obviously made him enemies: nonetheless, he was still regarded as a prominent figure in the American cultural landscape and whatever he said or did, he always attracted a great deal of press attention and provoked people's reaction. Newspapers⁴² and magazines kept track of his annual trips to Europe, they reported on his exhibitions of watercolors and charcoal drawings, they reviewed his books, and they even expressed concern when he was arrested by the British police while he was sketching in a taxicab in London (*NYT* 1912, November 12). Smith was indeed well-connected as he had several important friends on both sides of the Atlantic, and throughout the years he had earned a reputation as a cheery and charming Southern gentleman endowed with the Yankee's strength: it was not surprising that at his funeral "the ex-president

³⁶ After reporting Smith's observations on New York, the *New York Times* published two more articles on this controversial issue: the first one was published on February 27 and bore the telling title "Is New York really an insolent city? The indictment of Mr. F. Hopkinson Smith and what some well-known citizens have to say of it" (see note 14 for one of the interviews which was reported in the article), the second one comprised a letter to the editor by "a grateful Virginian", who tried to mitigate the ongoing quarrel by defending Smith and praising life in New York at the same time (*NYT* 1910, February 28). Besides emphasizing Smith's social status and attitude, these articles concerning the thrust-and-parry over the alleged "insolence" of New Yorkers are particularly significant as they show the real tension still existing between Southerners and Northerners who lived in the city. The tension was clearly associated with the complex issue relating to post-civil war reconstruction of the cultural identity (and status) of both Southerners and Northerners: in this regard it is important to note the article dated February 27 1910, which is relatively late if compared to what it is usually considered the immediate post war period (1866-1898). But on the other hand, we know that the opposition South-North in terms of values, survived the reconstruction efforts, and it became one of the most significant subtexts of the American cultural discourse (see the website created by the University of Virginia which is an excellent and accurate source of information on the civil war and post-civil war period, www.xroads.virginia.edu).

³⁷ Colonel Harvey's fiery response to Smith accusations exemplifies the way several New Yorkers felt about the whole issue: "Some of those interviewed had ideas about Mr. Smith as well as about New York, Col. Harvey's were condensed and trenchant: "New York is a big and busy place" he said, "and Mr. Hopkinson Smith is a big and busy man." Hence the clash. Or is it a confession? Let us see. [...] "Materialism is rampant." He declares. Witness the bank account of Mr. Hopkinson Smith!" (*NYT* 1910, February 27).

³⁸ Smith criticized Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* arguing that this novel did not depict a truthful image of the South, later on, he also argued that African-Americans shouldn't be granted the right to vote; obviously such view of slavery and civil rights issues revealed a rather conservative attitude as a journalist cleverly remarked in the *New York Times* in 1906 (*NYT* 1906, January 28), in the article the journalist drew a parallel between Ruskin's reactionary attitudes and Smith's.

³⁹ *NYT* 1913, November 24.

⁴⁰ *NYT* 1906, March 25.

⁴¹ *NYT* 1905, May 28; *NYT* 1905, May 30; *NYT* 1905, June 5; *NYT* 1905, June 11.

⁴² The *New York Times* had the largest number of articles about Smith.

Theodore Roosevelt [a close friend of his] headed the twenty-two honorary pallbearers” as the *New York Times* reported (*NYT* 1915, April 12).

As previously noted, the obituaries of Smith reveal he was regarded as a sort of quintessential American self-made man who had been able to pursue several careers and had managed to be successful in all of them: “a clever engineer, a good painter, a charming writer, and a fluent speaker”(AAN⁴³ 1915, April 10), Smith was remembered and “known not only in this country, but in Europe, as a manysided man of genius. He lectured and conversed as ably as he painted, built lighthouses and wrote novels, and was throughout his life true in many ways to the traditions of the South” (*Boston Transcript*, 1915, April 8). Described as a man of many talents, and therefore resembling the American champion of insatiable versatility *par excellence*, Benjamin Franklin, the National Cyclopedia of American Biography offered this enthusiastic description of Smith:

He is not an engineer and contractor, but also an industrious and talented, a man of versatile genius, who has attained a high mark of success in many different lines [...] as a public lecturer Mr. Smith has gained an enviable reputation and presents his subjects [...] as skillfully as he wields a pen in constructing a story, handles a brush in producing an art work that commands the attention of critics and the highest price in the art market, or plans the construction of a government lighthouse (*The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 326).

In a heartfelt article⁴⁴ which commemorated his talented friend, the American ambassador and writer Thomas Nelson Page⁴⁵ analyzed Smith’s successful career and

⁴³ *American Art News*.

⁴⁴ The article appeared in *Scribner’s Monthly* in September 1915, few months after Smith’s death, which had occurred on April 7th of the same year. Although Page eulogizes his late friend Smith, he also draws an accurate portrait of his vibrant personality, while at the same time he offers a thorough overview of his several accomplishments in many different fields: engineering, literature, painting, and illustration. The article is indeed a very useful source of biographical information on Smith’s work and personal life since Page adds interesting and amusing anecdotes, which reveal Smith’s strong personality and his go-getter attitude.

⁴⁵ Thomas Nelson Page (1853-1922) was a Virginian writer and lawyer and he was also American ambassador to Italy for six years. He met Hopkinson Smith during a formal dinner at the Aldine Club in New York, and he soon became one of his closest friends. Page and Smith shared an interest in literature and in the Old South, which they both portrayed in their stories. One of Page’s most popular works was *In Ole Virginia* (1887), a collection of short stories depicting life in the Old South before the Civil War (see *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). As some critics have pointed out, Page’s works often painted a romanticized image of the South and its inhabitants, a mythical place whose stability was based on a system of values, which cherished loyalty, honor and duty (see Kimball King, “Introduction” to Thomas

predicted his name would be remembered in years to come thanks to his engineering works⁴⁶, his popular lectures on art, his paintings, his novels and above all “a tradition of his extraordinary versatility” (Page 1915, 309). According to Page, the secret of Smith’s success lay in his ability to experiment with different artistic media together with his adventurous attitude towards life and its challenges: his exuberant versatility became his trademark. As previously noted, Smith caught the public and the critics’ attention and reached a crescendo of popularity, as amply demonstrated by the significant number of magazine and newspaper articles written on him at the time⁴⁷. Other journalists echoed Page’s words as they announced a secure spot for him in the niche of time, suggesting that “posterity must decide whether Race Rock Lighthouse, the narrative of Colonel Carter, or some one of his many admirable and strikingly individual pictures was his best work” (NYT 1915, April 9). But history proved Smith’s enthusiastic supporters wrong: the contours of his figure faded away, and quickly disappeared from the American cultural landscape. Obviously, Smith’s abilities as a writer and a painter cannot be compared to Sargent’s exquisite talent or James’s profound vision of the contradicting dynamics between art and life: nonetheless, his life and works are worth being analyzed as they are culturally telling, and they offer an additional portrayal of a complex age, which witnessed a multitude of opposite forces, the forces which shaped and defined American cultural and social identity at the end of the 19th century⁴⁸. Smith’s novels and paintings serve indeed as a lens through which it is possible to see the way America looked at Europe and at itself.

Nelson Page, in *Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories*, 1969). Some stories and characters created by Smith echoed Page’s depiction of the South, for example, the characters in his highly successful book *Colonel Carter of Cartersville*, which was published in 1891; for an interesting analysis of the role of the southern white male figure in both Smith’s *Colonel Carter of Cartersville* and Page’s *Marse Chan* see the essay by Caroline Gebhard in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. A.G. Jones and S.V. Donaldson, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997.

⁴⁶ The Race Rock Lighthouse in New London Harbor was considered by many Smith’s greatest achievement in the field of construction engineering.

⁴⁷ After moving to New York, Smith became a prominent figure in the local cultural landscape, and *The New York Times* chronicled his rise to popularity through the publication of several articles on him. These articles ranged over a variety of topics concerning Smith: his engineering work, his frequent trips to Europe, his watercolors, his books, his political views, which were often controversial.

⁴⁸ See the seminal study by T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

1.2 A jack-of-all trades – master of... some

Not only did Hopkinson Smith epitomize the image of the self-made man American because of all his accomplishments in several fields, but his origins and family history bestowed an additional mythical aura on his figure, since at the same time, they emphasized the fact that his “Americanness” was the result of a unique combination of notable ancestors and temperamental traits. America lacked a proper aristocracy and it lacked a tradition based on titles of nobility and ancient lineage as well; therefore the idea of American nobility was not associated with acquisition solely by birth like on the other side of the Atlantic. As a consequence, other criteria had to be used to confer “noble” status on those Americans who sought a “noble descent” within their social context. Wealth, high culture and a strong tradition of patriotism became the elements which defined the “new” American aristocracy and at the same time, they substituted the aristocracy of inherited titles and bloodline, which on the other hand, characterized the European social landscape. As I have previously noted, the majority of biographical articles and obituaries on Smith dwelt upon his all-American noble origins: in these articles the aristocratic quality of Smith’s ancestors was presented as a direct consequence of their remarkable deeds rather than a consequence of lineage, and the emphasis on their patriotic ardor and intellectual virtues seemed to echo Jefferson’s belief in that “aristocracy of talent”⁴⁹ which contrasted with the traditional notion of aristocracy based on titles of nobility.

Born in Baltimore in 1838, Smith was described as “a southerner by birth” (*Boston Transcript* 1915, April 8), coming “of an old Virginia stock” (*ibid.*) while notably, “his descent was from a distinguished American line” (*ibid.*): such line was closely interwoven with his ancestors’ deeds and their patriotic virtues, and it was “honorable”, as an article in *The Art Amateur*⁵⁰ suggested, because Smith’s forefathers had earned respectability and consequently, a distinguished lineage, thanks to their patriotism during the Revolution and their pursuit of artistic excellence as well. One of the earliest articles dedicated to Smith and his drawings⁵¹ enthusiastically reminded the reader that

⁴⁹ See Thomas Jefferson’s letter to John Adams dated 28 October 1813, in which Jefferson defines the concept of “natural aristocracy” in contrast with the idea of aristocracy based on birth and or wealth.

⁵⁰ See *The Art Amateur* 1883, Vol. VIII, No. 3.

⁵¹ The article appeared in *The Aldine* in 1878, and in the same year *The Art Journal* published a similar article on Walter Shirlaw and F. Hopkinson Smith as well. Both articles focused on Smith’s drawings and charcoal sketches, which portrayed the American landscape, in particular the White Mountains. These works earned him recognition by the art world and marked the beginning of his career as an artist.

Smith came “for many generations back, of an amateur artistic family, which is also eminent in patriotism, politics, law and literature” (*The Aldine* 1878): the family’s artistic and patriotic inclinations were well represented by Smith’s great-grandfather Francis Hopkinson, and his great uncle Judge Joseph Hopkinson:

“His [Smith’s] great-grandfather, *whose names he bears*⁵², Francis Hopkinson, signed the Declaration of Independence, and left several volumes of witty and satirical writings, which had much influence in political affairs during the Revolution. He was the author of “The Battle of The Kegs”, and his son was the eminent Judge Joseph Hopkinson, of Philadelphia, who became the first President of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and who also wrote the national song of “Hail Columbia” (*The Aldine* 1878).

Having inherited his ancestors’ talent, Smith’s versatility proved that he was following in their footsteps, especially his great-grandfather’s, who had been an amateur watercolorist, a revolutionary, one of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence and, above all, “the poet of the Revolution whose spirited and sometimes stinging verses supplemented the vigorous orations in which the colonists in arms ably defined their cause” (*The Outlook* 1915, April 21). Smith was extremely proud of his great-grandfather’s achievements and virtues, and feeling the need for his scrutinizing gaze, he kept a portrait of Francis Hopkinson in the dining room (*NYT* 1898, April 2); the painting was proudly displayed together with “the framed bond given by his ancestor, Francis Hopkinson, [...] as a security for a loan, and the lender’s receipt, showing that the gentleman honestly paid his debt” (*The Critic* 1898, April 2). Not only did Smith bear his great-grandfather’s name, but evidently he had also inherited his versatility and moral values as well; the portrait and the framed bond served as mementos of a remarkable line of ancestors, whose example inspired Hop’s attitude towards life and its challenges⁵³. As mentioned above, Smith skillfully used his inherited Southern gentility and artistic talent to make a name for himself, since he boldly embarked on

⁵² My italics.

⁵³ See for instance, the article on Smith which appeared in *The Critic* in 1898, in which the journalist interviewing Smith described the author’s house and pointed out that Smith was “apt to show you the framed bond” that his great-grandfather had given in exchange for a loan which he promptly repaid (*The Critic* 1898, April 2). Evidently, in showing the bond and in telling the story behind it, Smith wanted to emphasize his ancestor’s honesty, maybe suggesting it was indeed a peculiar trait of Southern gentility. Many of Smith’s stories focused on characters who had retained a chivalrous nature and they aptly fit the image of the Southern gentleman.

several different careers, which turned him into a unique all-American Jack-of-all trades. At first a successful engineer, then a respected painter, a popular writer and an admired lecturer, Smith earned the critics' respect and people's admiration for he embodied the spirit of pragmatic optimism which (apparently)⁵⁴ pervaded American society during the second half of the 19th century. Smith's first step toward success, and a trademark of his extraordinary versatility, was epitomized by his engineering work, which included the construction of breakwaters, seawalls and lighthouses, and which enabled him to gain a respected position among colleagues and the general public.

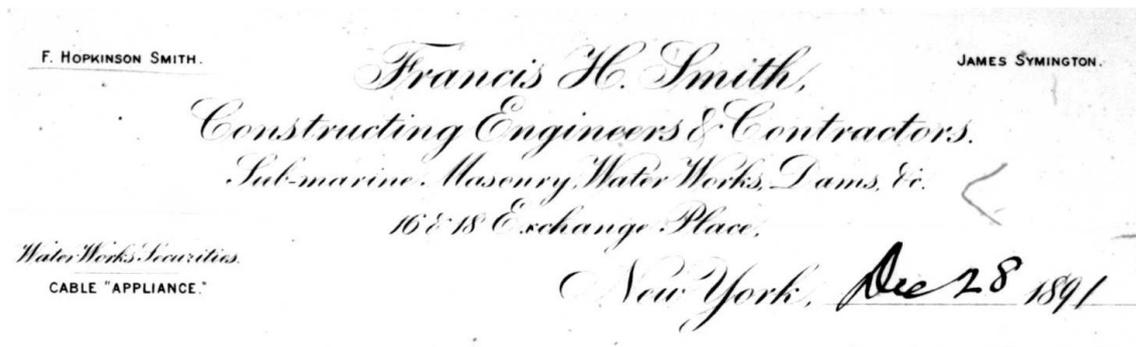
1.3 A builder of lighthouses

Inspired by a family tradition which comprised notable and talented ancestors, Smith's parents had planned to send their son to Princeton, but after a series of family misfortunes and financial difficulties, young Hopkinson was forced to start working at an early age as a shipping clerk, then he helped his brother in his iron foundry and became superintendent there (AAN 1915, April 10)⁵⁵. Although Smith could not fully pursue his artistic interests, he always kept on working as an amateur artist and being mostly self taught⁵⁶, he specialized in charcoal drawing and watercolors. But with the advent of the Civil War Hop lost his job and decided to move to New York, where he joined forces with another amateur artist and engineer, James Symington: they established their own engineering firm and started working on a series of relevant construction projects ranging from breakwaters and jetties to lighthouses (*ibid.*).

⁵⁴ In his seminal study *No Place of Grace* Jackson Lears problematizes the notion of American optimism in the 19th century, and through a detailed analysis of anti-modernist tendencies in American culture he offers a complex picture of a society which had to face the contradicting dynamics of modernization and its reactions against it.

⁵⁵ According to *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* while in Baltimore, Smith was "educated to the profession of a mechanical engineer" (326), and therefore he acquired the skills and knowledge necessary for his future job.

⁵⁶ According to an article published in *American Art News* in 1915, Smith had received a sort of semi-formal artistic training when he was living in Baltimore; the article reported that he had learned to draw and paint under the guidance of a local artist named Miller (AAN 1915, April 10).



As the above letterhead⁵⁷ indicates, Smith’s firm specialized in “submarine masonry”, “water works” and dams, consequently, the firm often worked for the government, and in fact they built “the Block Island breakwater, the Connecticut river jetties, the old sea wall around Governor’s Island” (AAN 1915, April 10), and another one near Tompkinsville (NCAB 326)⁵⁸. Their most notable and challenging works though, were the foundations and the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty and the Race Rock Lighthouse near New London. Smith was awarded the contract for the foundations of the Statue of Liberty on August 14, 1883 as *The New York Times* reported⁵⁹; a brief controversy followed since another engineer, Michael Fay, claimed that he qualified for the contract because he was the lowest bidder for the project (NYT 1883, August 22) but his motion was dismissed and finally Smith’s firm took on the commission. By the 1880s Smith had reached a respected position as an engineer, especially because of his most memorable accomplishment in the field of marine engineering: the construction of the Race Rock Lighthouse⁶⁰ in New London Harbor.

The building of the lighthouse lasted from 1872 to 1878, and it was an extremely challenging task for Smith had to build both the lighthouse and the artificial island on which the lighthouse was placed; in addition to that, the team of construction workers had to face severe weather conditions together with heavy seas and occasional ice fields

⁵⁷ Stauffer Literary Papers, AAA, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

⁵⁸ National Cyclopaedia of American Biography.

⁵⁹ “The contract for laying the foundation of the pedestal of the statue of Liberty Enlightening the World was yesterday awarded to F. Hopkinson Smith at \$8.94 a cubic yard. The whole cost of the work will be \$51,000 or \$52,000. The contractor will furnish the material except the cement. [...] the foundation is to be completed Nov. 15, and the contractor is to leave his hoisting plant for the future operations of the committee” (NYT 1883, August 15). There were some delays in the construction and the foundation was completed two months after the suggested date. (NYT 1883, November 16)

⁶⁰ The Race Rock Lighthouse is located 8 miles from New London in Connecticut: additional information can be found in “Historically Famous Lighthouses”, United States Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, http://www.uscg.mil/history/web/lighthouses/h_famouslighthouses.pdf

too (Smith 1899, *FLPM*⁶¹). But it is through Smith's own words⁶² that one can fully perceive all the challenges and difficulties which lay at the heart of the unenviable task of building the lighthouse in that peculiar location: first of all, an artificial island had to be built, and only after that, the lighthouse could be built on top of it as Hop, who supervised the work on the ground⁶³, pointed out:

The engineering problem presented by the Government, in its call for proposals, was the building of an artificial island in the form of an ellipse, 125 x 100 feet, to be composed of heavy rough stone, thrown overboard from the deck of a working boat, and the erection thereon of a granite pier in the form of a frustrum of a cone [...] On top of the cone was to be placed the keeper's dwelling - a small stone structure of six rooms - and on the roof of this dwelling was to be placed the lantern. Over the top surface and down the under-water slopes of this artificial island [...] was to be laid a pavement of big granite blocks weighing eight and ten tons each. This pavement was designed to bind tight the whole mass of rough stone, strengthening and protecting it from floating ice and storms (Smith 1899, *FLPM* 513).

The task was indeed a very difficult one, if not impossible: nonetheless, Smith, once again, was able to make the best out of a challenging situation, and after carefully considering the pros and cons of such an enterprise, he took on the job and dedicated six years of his life to it. It is interesting to note that Smith's adventurous and pro-active attitude was reflected even in the words he used when he assessed all the risks involved in the situation: "the situation selected for the light [see quotation above] made the problem of its construction a *peculiar and interesting*⁶⁴ one" (*ibid.*). A capable engineer and a natural born leader, Smith was also the engineer responsible for the work on the ground, and he was fully aware of the many additional problems one would encounter

⁶¹ *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 1899, Vol. XLVIII, May-October. See footnote 48.

⁶² Smith wrote an article on Race Rock Lighthouse for the magazine *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*. The article was published in 1899, and it offered a very detailed account of the construction of the lighthouse: in addition, it was also well documented with several drawings which illustrated the different stages of construction, these drawings, of course, had been made by Smith. Not only was the article a useful source of technical information on construction engineering, but it dealt with an engaging story as well, whereas Smith, who was a talented storyteller, managed to convey a sense of the epic struggle which characterized the whole enterprise.

⁶³ His partner J. Symington stayed in New York and took care of the business there (Smith 1899, *FLPM* 514). For additional information on Symington who was an engineer and an artist like Smith, see the article by Henry Milford Steele "An Artist in Business" in *The Quarterly Illustrator*, vol. 2, No.5, Jan-Mar 1894.

⁶⁴ My italics.

in his position: these problems ranged from the choice of the right crew of workers to facing extremely severe weather conditions, which could damage the construction site and slow down operations⁶⁵. Smith supervised the work site, he selected the crew and the crew leader, he dealt with Government officials whenever plans needed to be modified, and was always on call in case unforeseen problems arose; he faced storms and setbacks, but he never lost his optimistic attitude and a firm belief in the completion of the project. After almost six years of work, the lighthouse became fully operational in 1878 and it could finally provide the light that would keep ships away from the dangerous shoals and consequently from wrecking. The successful outcome of the project marked a turning point in Smith's career as he achieved prominence as an engineer; but Smith's heartfelt account of the building of Race Rock Lighthouse also disclosed the image of a man who was willing to share the recognition he had been given with those "unsung heroes"⁶⁶ (the crew workers and their leader, Captain T. Scott) whose hard work and resilience had been the key to the success of the enterprise: "the success of a submarine work of this magnitude [...] does not depend so much on the skill of the engineer as upon the nerve, pluck and loyalty of the men who handle the material" (Smith 1899, *FLPM* 514). Captain T. Scott's personality captured Smith's imagination in such a way that it became the source of inspiration for his novel *Caleb West, Master Diver*⁶⁷: and in his 1899 article Smith dwelt upon those peculiar traits which made Captain Scott a fascinating symbol of the American hero, that is, the everyday man who silently helped build a little piece of America through his hard work:

And it is to men like him, who risk their lives daily in the construction of our coast lights and defenses, and in manning the boats of our life-saving stations, that the country owes much of its strength; men who have never clamored for their rights [...] men who are as brave as they are modest. To this man, then, Captain Thomas A.

⁶⁵ See Smith's article in *FLMP*.

⁶⁶ See a 1905 interview in which Smith claimed that "this country is full of heroes who have never been appreciated, moreover, and I want to get some of them in my books" (*NYT* 1905, January 29). As a matter of fact, one of Smith's most popular books was *Caleb West, Master Diver*, which was inspired by and based on the lives of the workers he had met during the construction of the lighthouse, in particular Captain T. Scott.

⁶⁷ The book was published in 1898.

Scott, Captain Tom⁶⁸, as I shall hereafter call him, the successful carrying out of our contract was due (Smith 1899, *FLPM* 516).

When Smith died every obituary or article on him mentioned the building of the lighthouse as one of his biggest accomplishments, Page's words, who knew Smith well, aptly described Smith's bold undertaking and what it meant to him:

The government⁶⁹ is a careful and a justly exacting employer. It lays down its rules for precisions, and demands full measure. To build a lighthouse on Race Rock, whose name tells the rip of the tide that races about and over it, was a real achievement. The bid for it was a gauge of Smith's courage and self-confidence and before it was complete he had need for both. It is twenty-odd years since I heard from him the story of that early venture, but it is still fresh with me. And it stands to-day in my memory as a triumph of courage, resourcefulness, and common sense over discouragement and disaster in many forms. [...] When it was finished Race Rock was ready to stand the fury of every storm, and its contractor was equally prepared to meet the buffets of the heaviest seas (Page 1915, 306-307).

Eventually, Smith and his team managed to overcome a number of difficulties, and significantly, the construction of the Race Rock Lighthouse became a symbol of the titanic struggle between man's resiliency and nature's strength. Illustrative in this regard is the fact that Smith himself considered this work his best engineering work as it was often pointed out in many articles: "Of all his engineering work Mr. Smith always insisted that he was most proud of the Race Rock Lighthouse" (*NYT* 1915, April 8) and "[Smith] built Race Rock Lighthouse, miles out at sea at the mouth of New London harbor. Of all his engineering work, I think he took most pride in this last as his greatest achievement. And justly." (Page 1915, 307). On the one hand, Smith knew he had succeeded in a very difficult task and that thanks to the successful result of his

⁶⁸ The choice of changing Captain Scott's name into "Captain Tom" clearly marks Smith's attempt to fictionalize the real captain by turning him into a character of one of his stories.

⁶⁹ The construction of the Race Rock Lighthouse was commissioned by the Federal Government as Smith reported in the article he wrote for *Leslie's Popular Monthly*: "After several minor appropriations had reverted to the Treasury, pending the adoption of a plan for the light's construction, Congress finally appropriated \$150,000 to begin its erection, and plans and specifications were prepared under the direction of the late Colonel I.C. Woodruff, U.S.A. Corps of Engineers, and the contract was awarded to my firm, consisting of my partner, Mr. James Symington, and myself, we being the lowest bidders" (Smith 1899, in *FLPM*).

project, he had been able to make a name for himself and to secure a respected position for his firm as well. On the other hand, he also realized he had been given a rare opportunity: he had met old sea dogs like “Captain Tom”, he had seen the real life of men at sea, struggling to moor their working boats or fighting against high tides: their ordinary lives had to be turned into an extraordinary tale, and so Smith took inspiration from those men’s experiences to create one of his most successful novels: *Caleb West, Master Diver*. The book quickly became popular for it came “like a refreshing breeze on a sultry summer’s day” (*NYT* 1898, April 23) and “it makes one feel that life is really worth the living (*ibid.*); later it was also dramatized for theatre production. After the construction of Race Rock Lighthouse Smith took on other relevant projects, he became president of the New York and Mount Vernon Water Company, while the earnings from his engineering job guaranteed the financial security he needed in order to pursue all his other careers. Lastly, there is a telling detail which exemplifies the interdependence of Smith’s several talents and his popularity as well: when the editors Charles Scribner’s Sons had to chose a name for a luxurious subscription edition of Smith’s collected writings⁷⁰ the choice fell on “The Beacon Edition” as it suggested Smith’s most remarkable achievement in the field of engineering that is the construction of the Race Rock Lighthouse. In addition, after explaining that “the name of the edition [was] derived from the author’s prominence as an engineer and as a builder of lighthouses” (Smith 1902, n.a.), the editors pointed out that not only was every volume of the collection richly illustrated, but it also bore “as a water mark on each page the device of a light-house”: a constant reminder of the author’s versatile talent. Being already an accomplished engineer, in 1878 forty-year-old Smith was ready for something new and he was busy preparing to make his next move: pencils and brushes were waiting for him.

⁷⁰ The Beacon Edition included both novels and short stories by Smith, who had revised them and grouped them under different themes; the collection comprised ten volumes and was sold “only by subscriptions and in sets” as the advertising leaflet pointed out. According to the same leaflet the ten volumes were arranged in the following way: “vol. I Laguerre’s and Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy, vol. II A White Umbrella in Mexico and Other Lands, vol. III Colonel Carter of Cartersville and Others, vol. IV Tom Grogan, vol. V Gondola Days, vol. VI Caleb West: Master Diver, vol. VII The Other Fellow and Tile Club Stories, vols. VIII and IX he Fortunes of Oliver Horn, vol. X A New Volume of Stories, title to be announced later” (Smith 1902, n.p.)

1.4 A Notable Painter and a Prolific Writer

Hopkinson Smith's eclectic talent and versatility were fully revealed when in the 1870s he embarked on a successful artistic career: Smith had always been interested in painting, particularly in outdoor painting as he recalled in the lectures he gave for the Art Institute of Chicago: "I have been an outdoor painter since I was sixteen years of age; have never in my whole life painted what is known as a studio picture evolved from my memory or from my inner consciousness" (Smith 1915, 1). In addition, he came from a family of amateur artists like his great-grandfather Francis Hopkinson who was an amateur watercolorist and his great-uncle who was an amateur painter as well. Primarily self-taught, (or at least this was what Smith claimed⁷¹), he had studied painting under the guidance of Swain Gifford (*ibid.*) and had "received some lessons in drawing from an artist named Miller, residing in Baltimore" (*BFA*⁷² 1915).

Hopkinson Smith was particularly fond of two mediums: charcoal and water-color, he excelled in both, and throughout his life he produced an impressive amount of charcoal sketches and watercolors. According to Smith, charcoal had peculiar qualities which could not be found in any other medium, and in addition, the use of charcoal encouraged a more spontaneous and immediate rendering of the subject: "charcoal is the unhampered, the free, the personal individual medium. No water, no oil, no palette, no squeezing of tubes or wiping of tints; no scraping, scumbling, or other dilatory and exasperating necessities" (Smith 1915, 54); Smith firmly believed that "a drawing in charcoal is really a record of man's temperament" (*ibid.*) for in a sense, a charcoal drawing reflected "pre-eminently the personality of the individual, his buoyancy, his perfect health, the quickness of his gestures" (*ibid.*). Significantly thanks to his charcoal sketches of the White Mountains Hopkinson Smith attracted the attention of the art critics and the general public when he exhibited four charcoal⁷³ drawings of the White Mountains at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 (Madormo 1985, 69). An article which appeared in *The Aldine* in 1878 reported: "for the past fifteen years

⁷¹ Nick Madormo has aptly remarked: "the notion propagated in the press that Smith never received formal art training (the mysterious Mr. Miller aside) may have benefited his reputation but was not entirely truthful. As a civil engineer responsible for the construction of major public works, Smith must have received training in fundamentals of draftsmanship". (Madormo 1985, 73).

⁷² The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy.

⁷³ Throughout his life Smith continued to draw charcoal sketches, one of his most notable works was a volume entitled *In Dickens's London* (1914) which comprised twenty four reproductions of Smith's charcoal drawings depicting the most picturesque spots of London.

Mr. Smith has spent at least six weeks every summer in the White Mountains; and has given that magnificently picturesque section of our country a more thorough examination and artistic illustration than any other man” (The Aldine 1878, 196).

Not only was Smith praised for his charcoal drawings, but he was also considered an excellent watercolorist, who could master the technique despite the fact he had received no formal training. Smith’s fascination for the effect of light on color was aptly reflected in his watercolors, which aptly captured the vivid and tantalizing hues of places like Constantinople and Venice as Hoeber reported in his enthusiastic review of Smith’s craft:

He [Smith] knows his métier as do few men [...] the brilliancy of dazzling daylight, when the heavens are full of glorious white clouds where rifts of blue are seen, the sparkle of growing vegetation, of greens of many tints and field flower of gay tones, houses of red and white, and crowds in lively apparel, suggesting much movement, all these delight our artist, and he indicates them with a sure brush and equally certain brightness of pigment (Hoeber 1906, 348).

Hopkinson Smith’s painting style was not revolutionary but it retained a pleasurable quality which catered to the average viewer and buyer of his works, while at the same time, it focused on the picturesque and enjoyable elements of a landscape, light and color. As Theodore Hornberger has aptly remarked, Hopkinson Smith admired the painters belonging to the Hudson River School and the Munich School as well⁷⁴, (Hornberger 1944), while on the other hand, he was critical of post-impressionism and the experimental style of the Avant-garde movements, revealing a rather conservative attitude:

What will ensue, the art world over, before the wheel travels its full periphery, no man knows. It will not be the hysteria of paint, I feel assured, with its dabbers, spotters, and smearers; nor will it be the litters of the cub-ists, that new breed of artistic pups, sponsors for “the girl coming down-stairs”, or “the stairs coming down the girl”, or “the coming girl and the down-stairs”, it makes no difference which, all are equally incoherent and unintelligible (Smith 1915, 22).

⁷⁴ Hopkinson Smith admired the painters of the Barbizon school such as Rousseau, Corot, Daubigny, Diaz, Millet (Smith 1915, 32) but also Vibert (*NYT* 1886, May 5), Ziem (who is widely mentioned in his writings on Venice) and Sorolla y Bastida.

Hopkinson Smith believed in the fact that art should be intelligible to those who looked at it, and his choices in terms of style and subjects reflected his attempt to “show that the good, the beautiful, and the true were all to be found in a middle-course between realism and impressionism” (*NYT* 1886, May 5).

Smith was defined by his contemporaries as “the man who paints pictures that are stories and writes stories that are pictures” (Sturgis 1901, 16), this sentence aptly illustrated Smith’s ability to entertain his public not only with the paintbrush but also with the pen.

Smith started writing when he was in his late forties, and unsurprisingly, he quickly became a best-selling author: by the end of his life he had written more than thirty works, including novels, novelettes, short stories and travelogues, which were re-issued in a collected edition⁷⁵. Hopkinson Smith’s popularity as a writer⁷⁶ was due to fact that he created memorable figures such as Colonel Carter of Cartersville (1891) or Oliver Horn (1902), and he often portrayed Southern characters who were endowed with “the most of those gentle and chivalrous manners” (*NYT* 1902, September 13). His sentimental “old-fashioned romances” appealed to readers as they depicted the elusiveness of human nature without losing sight of the brighter side of life. Smith’s literary works, like his paintings, rarely dwelt on the dramatic but instead they focused on “color” in terms of characters and landscape. His strong sense of narrative was the defining trait of his craft and of his personality as well, for he was regarded an extraordinary lecturer and toastmaster by his contemporaries. A great admirer of Dickens, Smith tried to portrayed American life and at the same time he created a kaleidoscope of colorful characters as his friend and writer Thomas Nelson Page remarked:

The reader in the next generation who wishes to get a bird’s eye view of American life, at least on the Atlantic seaboard in our time, will find it in the works of F. Hopkinson Smith. They cover a broad gamut. The decayed gentleman and gentlewoman, the old black mammy, the fisherman and seafaring men of New England’s rock-bound coast, lifesaving crews of the Jersey shore, the travelling salesman, the metropolitan and cosmopolitan clubman, the nomad at home in all

⁷⁵ Hopkinson Smith’s most popular works of fiction were: *Colonel Carter of Cartersville* (1891); *A Day at Laguerre’s and Other Days* (1892); *A gentle Vagabond and Some Others* (1895); *Tom Grogan* (1896); *Caleb West, Master Diver* (1898); *The Fortunes of Oliver Horn* (1902); *Peter* (1908); *Felix O’Day* (1915).

⁷⁶ Theodore Hornberger has explored the role of painting in Smith’s fiction in his keen study “The Effect of Painting on the Fiction of F. Hopkinson Smith”, 1944.

capitals and in all countries, are all drawn with broad, swift, sure lines, and drawn to the life with complete sympathy and knowledge (Page 1915, 311).

Newspapers and magazines chronicled Smith's prolific literary career through articles, interviews and reviews of his most notable works and in a sense, they also chronicled Smith's rise to fame; greatly admired and extremely popular, Smith became a celebrity⁷⁷ and a prominent figure in the American cultural landscape of the late nineteenth century. It is not surprising that when the young and unaware Jane Peterson⁷⁸ arrived in Venice at the beginning of the twentieth century, she immediately recognized the already "famous" Hopkinson Smith and significantly, she depicted him as in iconic American figure:

One morning in Venice, she came across an artist painting the "Salute", the very subject she had painted the day before. He was surrounded by a crowd of Italian children similar to the crowd that always annoyed her when she was painting and she joined the group, completely absorbed by the mad dashing way in which the artist was putting on his watercolor. Soon his paper was completely wet. He lifted up slowly, put it on the ground to dry and turned to both at [?] the crowd. He spied her, the only American and said "you're an American, where do you come from?" she answered: "yes I'm an American I come from New York" he said "I come from N.Y. too but I was born in Baltimore. How long have you been here?" she answered "Six weeks; how long have you been here?" "I've been here every year in the past twenty years" she looked at his canvas, she looked at him and thought born in Baltimore, lives in N.Y., has been in Venice every year for the last twenty years... "oh I know who you are, you are Hopkinson Smith" (Peterson 1907-1981).⁷⁹

⁷⁷ See *The New York Times* article "Glimpses of Celebrities", the article describes the attitude and behaviour of a number of celebrities including F. Hopkinson Smith, Edith Wharton, Oliver Herford "seen through the eyes of a book clerk" (*NYT* 1912, Dec1).

⁷⁸ Jane Peterson, American painter (1876-1965).

⁷⁹ My transcription of a manuscript by Jane Peterson entitled "Hopkinson Smith Story" (Jane Peterson Papers, 1907-1981. AAA, Smithsonian Institution). Jane's encounter with Smith was crucial to Peterson's artistic career. Smith introduced Peterson to his friend Sorolla y Bastida, a Spanish Impressionist painter, and she became his pupil.



F. Hopkinson Smith, ca. 1905/ J.E. Chickering, photographer, Charles Scribner's Sons, Art Reference Dept. records, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, digital id no. 2780.

CHAPTER 2

“The Wondrous City of the Sea”

“You desire to embrace it, to caress it, to possess it;
and finally a soft sense of possession grows up
and your visit becomes a perpetual love-affair”

(H. James, *Venice*)

“What if, after all, there should be no Venice?”

(F.H. Smith, *Venice of To-Day*)

2.1 A Venetian Prelude

After having successfully established his position as an engineer, Smith embarked on a literary and artistic career in the 1880s. He had been an amateur painter since he was a teenager, and he had followed in the footsteps of his great-uncle who had been an amateur painter and the first president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (Carbone 1985, 6). But besides being a passionate artist, Smith was also a tireless traveler, who spent his summers abroad, mostly in Europe, wandering through England, Spain, Turkey, Holland and of course, Venice. However, before making Europe his favorite summer destination, Smith had also spent a considerable amount of time both in Mexico and Cuba⁸⁰; he had recorded his impressions and adventures in those countries in a travelogue called *A White Umbrella in Mexico*, which was published in 1889. Significantly, in the preface to the book Smith compared Mexico's picturesque charm and beauty to Venice's unfathomable allure, while at the same time, he reinterpreted the Mexican landscape through the aesthetic lens of his Italian and more specifically, Venetian experience so that Mexico was described as "a tropical Venice" (Smith 1889, 4), a picturesque place where the artist was given the chance "to revel in an Italian sun lighting up a semi-tropical land" (Smith 1889, 3). On the one hand, Smith's words remarked his deep fascination with Mexico, but on the other, they also revealed that Venice⁸¹ was always on his mind, to paraphrase a well-known song. Smith took his first trip to Europe in the 1880s⁸², and from that moment on, every summer he would sail with his family⁸³ "for his annual sojourn in his beloved Venice" (*NYT* 1903, July 11), where he spent his time sketching and painting his Venetian views, which were mostly watercolors and charcoal sketches. In 1886, Smith illustrated a deluxe edition of a collection of lines by J.R. Lowell, Whittier and Holmes: the

⁸⁰ Edward Strahan commented on Smith's views of Cuba in an article in 1883: "his trip to Cuba, two winters ago, resulted in a prolific series of paintings, that attracted wide notice, and sold promptly" (Strahan 1883, 64).

⁸¹ The connection between Mexico and Venice is also emphasized in the last chapter of the book entitled "Tzintzuntzan and the Titian": in fact, Smith discovers a painting by Titian, a replica of his well-known Entombment, in a remote Mexican village.

⁸² According to Teresa Carbone Smith took his first trip to Europe in 1883, however, some records show that in 1880 Mrs. John L. Gardner lent a painting by Smith, probably the watercolor *Venice, The Grand Canal with Santa Maria della Salute*, to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Hendy 1974, 240) for an exhibition; thus this may indicate that Smith's first encounter with Venice happened before 1883.

⁸³ In an article on Smith dated 1908, William H. Shelton reported that "Mr. Smith's family has been met since in Europe for fourteen consecutive Summers, [...] Since the daughter was a child of six [...], the Summer home has been in Venice or Constantinople, Holland or Spain, and the friends of the family among officials, diplomats, and natives of those lands over sea are scarcely less numerous than the friends in America" (*NYT* 1898, April 2).

picture which represented Whittier's line "Venice at her watery gates" is probably one of the first documented Venetian views by Smith. His skillful use of the artistic medium⁸⁴ allowed him to focus on and emphasize the translucent effects of light on water, as he combined them with the misty hazy atmosphere in the background⁸⁵. The focus of the composition is an elegant gondola with its felze, moored alongside the entrance of a stately palace. The picture evoked a sense of stillness and timelessness, and it also anticipated a motif in Smith's visual and later, verbal representation of Venice: the gondola.



"Venice at her Watery Gates" (*Old Lines in New Black and White*)

Endowed with incredible energy, Smith was also a very prolific artist as his friend Thomas Nelson Page remarked in a description of him painting in Venice:

with almost furious energy and devotion he would be out early in the morning to get his "effects" [...] and all day long till the sunset effects died away, and the soft

⁸⁴ At the beginning of his artistic career Smith was praised by art critics for his charcoal sketches, which depicted the American landscape, in particular the White Mountains (*The Art Journal* 1878), and for his watercolors as well. Although he was basically self-taught he mastered both mediums.

⁸⁵ There is a striking resemblance between this view of Venice and the views of Dutch canals which Smith painted during the same period of time, see, for example, his watercolor "Groote Kirk, Dordrecht" (1880s); both works emphasized the dreamlike and timeless atmosphere which characterized the two cities.

saffron of the lagoons faded to a pallid gray, he worked with inconceivable enthusiasm and rapidity. Neither rain nor wind made a difference (Page, 1915).

Smith's summer stays in Europe would be usually followed by the exhibitions of his watercolors and charcoal sketches in the United States, as a number of newspaper articles remarked, announcing, year after year, what had become a tradition both in New York and Boston⁸⁶, Smith's annual exhibition of his European watercolors: "Mr. Smith offers us forty pictures this year, that may be said to be up to his usual average and, daintly framed, they present in Mr. Avery's gallery an attractive group" (*NYT* 1895, January 8); "an annually recurring event in the New York art world, that has come to be one of its recognized institutions, is the exhibition every winter of the water colors of F. Hopkinson Smith" (Maxwell 1899, 438), and again:

The Avery Galleries⁸⁷, on Fifth Avenue, near Thirty-four Street, generally brighten up About this season of the year with an interesting record of Hopkinson Smith's travels during the previous summer in Europe. His exhibitions are gradually assuming the condition of annuals, since his foreign trips are made regularly, and he always has ready his notebook or sketch block (*NYT* 1896, January 7).

Not only did prominent galleries host Smith's exhibition, but also many local clubs, of which Smith was often a member, became the perfect venues for his exhibits as a newspaper article reported in 1892:

The Aldine Club gave a dinner last evening at its clubhouse, 20 Lafayette Place, to F. Hopkinson Smith, the writer and artist, which brought together about sixty of the leading representatives of art and literature in this city, and which was an enjoyable success in every way. It was tendered to Mr. Smith by way of inaugurating a loan exhibition of a series of his water-color paintings entitled "Summer Days in Venice" which will be exhibited at the club for several days (*NYT* 1892, December 24).

⁸⁶ See Dora Morrell's article in *Brush and Pencil* (April 1899), in which she reviewed an exhibition of Smith's watercolors which was held in Boston: "F. Hopkinson Smith had an exhibit of water colors from views along the Thames, in Holland, and elsewhere. Mr. Smith's water colors are brilliant and pure. This was one of the best exhibits he has had in this city" (Morrell 1899, 41).

⁸⁷ This Gallery was located in New York City, and Smith's exhibitions were often held there.

Defined as “a studious impressionist” (Maxwell 1899, 443) Smith was very meticulous about his painting technique⁸⁸, both colors and paper were carefully chosen according to the specific effect he sought :his views of Venice were appreciated and praised both by critics⁸⁹ and by the general public for they conveyed the summer-like charm of the city, its translucent color and dazzling light, not to mention “the sheer sensory delight which he [Smith] experienced there” (Carbone 1985, 9), and which viewers could experience as well by looking at (and maybe buying) Smith’s watercolors. A look at the catalogues of these exhibitions reveals a significant number of works with a Venetian subject: “Where a Doge lived”, “Porta della Carta”, “The Leaning Tower of San Castello”, “My Lady’s Gondola” and “A Venetian Cab-Stand”⁹⁰: the highly suggestive titles of Smith’s works evoked the image of a city which was perceived as exotic and picturesque by many nineteenth century Americans, and as a consequence, these images were particularly appealing to them⁹¹.

Significantly, two colorful vernacular views of Venice by Smith also appeared in Howells’s *Venetian Life*⁹²: they represented “A Fruit Stall”⁹³ and “A Corner of the Rialto”⁹⁴: these pictures aptly portrayed the “riot of color” (Hoeber 1906, 348) and light which interlaced the sensory experience of Venice with the vivid perception of its palpitating life.

⁸⁸ Smith discussed his painting technique at length and in a series of lectures (the so-called Scammon series) he delivered for the Art Institute of Chicago in 1914, these lectures were later collected in the book *Outdoor Sketching* (1915).

⁸⁹ See the article “Clever View of a Clever Painter, Discriminating Praise for the Water Colors of F. Hopkinson Smith” (Willietta G. Ball Collection of Clippings, the Boston Art Archives, Boston Public Library)

⁹⁰ Source: catalogue of the exhibition of watercolors by F. H. Smith, at the Copley Gallery, 103 Newbury Street, Boston, from January 16 to January 28, 1911.

⁹¹ Smith’s watercolors and charcoal sketches catered to a significant part of the art purchasing public: his works, particularly his views of Europe, were easily sold at auctions (*NYT* 1884, April 26) and exhibitions, as an article in *Art Amateur* pointed out while commenting on “the rapidity with which he [Smith] sold all the pictures he made there [in Venice] last summer” (quoted in Lovell 1984, 14).

⁹² There were several editions of *Venetian Life*, the one containing Smith’s illustrations was published in 1892. It included reproductions of watercolors by F.H. Smith, C. Hassam, R. Turner and R.H. Nicholls.

⁹³ *Venetian Life*, Vol. I, p. 134 (1892).

⁹⁴ *Venetian Life*, Vol. II, p. 134 (1892).



“A Fruit Stall” (*Venetian Life*)

In “The Fruit Stall” Smith succeeded in rendering the vibrant hues created by the reflection of summer light on the colorful elements (the awnings, the baskets full fruit and vegetables, the women’s dresses) of the composition;



“A Corner of the Rialto” (*Venetian Life*)

whereas in “A Corner of the Rialto” he captured the alluring charm of ordinary life in one of the most renowned and picturesque spots of Venice⁹⁵.

Being already the favorite subject of his paintings, Venice became also the subject of Smith’s narrative in 1886 when he published the travelogue *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy, travelled by a Painter in search of the Picturesque*. The title of the book was rather telling, as it suggested the main features of Smith’s artistic quest: an insatiable traveler, Smith seemed to perfectly embody Gilpin’s “picturesque traveler” (Gilpin 1794, 77), who could be also viewed as “a surrogate explorer”⁹⁶ (Whale 1994, 176), to use John Whale’s words, whose sense of mobility and energy intersected his fascination with the exotic and the picturesque. Not only was Smith a traveler, but he was also a painter, and as he pointed out, his craft allowed him to enjoy a privileged status: “a painter has peculiar advantages over less fortunate people. His sketchbook is a passport and his white umbrella a flag of truce in all lands under the sun, be it savage or civilized” (Smith 1887, 2).

In addition, Smith reminded his readers that the artist’s discriminating gaze was often capable of seeing things which the average traveler might have missed offering an interesting viewpoint on scenes which would be otherwise perceived as ordinary: “if, therefore, by reason of my craft and its advantages, I can show you some things you may perhaps have overlook in your own wanderings, I shall be more than satisfied” (Smith 1897, 3). As the title of the book clearly indicated, the other pivotal element which characterized Smith’s aesthetics was the notion of “picturesqueness”⁹⁷: however, Smith did not provide a theoretical definition of the picturesque, he simply recorded

⁹⁵ It is worth noting that Smith’s watercolor “A Corner of the Rialto” displays many “stock items” (Mamoli Zorzi 1990) which characterized Smith’s picturesque perception of Venice, and which he verbally rendered in *Venice of To-Day*: the gondolier in his gondola, the idlers lolling along the bridge, the peddler with his colorful basket full of goods and the shawled Venetian woman going about her business as usual.

⁹⁶ For a keen exploration of the relationship between travel and the aesthetic category of the picturesque, see John Whale, “Romantics, explorers and Picturesque travelers” (1994) in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. S. Copley and P. Garside, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁹⁷ The many issues concerning the elusive and complex category of the picturesque have been aptly explored a by a number of critics, see for example, Hussey’s seminal work *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1967; recent criticism has highlighted the “conflicts between the status of the Picturesque as a theoretical category and its manifestation as a popular fashion” (Copley 1994, 1), according to many critics such conflicts and contradictions were already present in the works of Gilpin, Knight and Price, who are considered the first theorists of the Picturesque, on this very relevant issue see *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. S. Copley and P. Garside, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. For an in-depth study of the role of picturesque aesthetics in America see Conron, *American Picturesque*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

and emphasized those elements which, in his own opinion, reflected the picturesque⁹⁸ quality of a landscape: such elements⁹⁹ varied from place to place, whether it was Dordrecht with its quiet canals, Istanbul with its glimmering minarets or Venice with the shimmering water reflections of its palaces and bridges. We may argue that the picturesqueness which characterized Smith's works was the result of the interplay between the artist's gaze and the eccentric and unusual landscapes he observed. In one sense, Smith's notion of picturesque transcended the narrow limits of the mere decorative concern¹⁰⁰, for Smith's strong sense of narrative helped him re-interpret the "ordinary" experience of a place through a vivid and colorful rendering of it. As several contemporary reviews of his watercolors and travelogues remarked, Smith's pictures of travel reflected his "infallible eye for the picturesque¹⁰¹" (Page 1915, 305) and his "ability to catch an entertaining point of view" (Hoerber 1906, 347), while at the same time, they delighted the reader/viewer through a vernacular depiction of places¹⁰² and people, always perceived as utterly different but unmistakably charming. Illustrative in this regard is a review of Smith's watercolor exhibition at the Albright Gallery:

When Mr. Smith paints a picture of Venice it is not crowded with imaginary palaces - of proportions and architectural details that do not exist - as we so often find the case in the works of the great Turner - but he presents us the Venice of to-day as it is to-

⁹⁸ Several reviews of Smith's works emphasized their picturesqueness; as early as 1878, that is, at the very beginning of Smith's artistic career, an art critic who was commenting on one of Smith's charcoal sketches remarked: "his "Old Smithy" (90) is likewise a good example, vigorous, broad, and picturesque" (Moran 1878, 92). See also an article in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* in which the journalist praised "[Smith's] own picturesque language" (Maxwell 1899, 443) which turned him into "the keen artistic reporter, scenting a pictorial fact from afar and making it live on paper with relentless fidelity" (*ibid.*).

⁹⁹ Smith's notion of picturesque encompassed a variety of elements: exoticism, local flavor, a pre-modern and simpler way of living, the sense of time decay.

¹⁰⁰ Copley and Garside have aptly remarked that "The Picturesque aesthetic emerges as strongly in literary narratives (in written tours and in fiction) as it does in visual art or practical landscaping" while at the same time "pictorial Picturesque representation [often] suppresses narrative for decorative effect" (Copley 1994, 6).

¹⁰¹ In nineteenth century America the term picturesque had indeed become a popular word, which at times lacked a precise and clear definition, nonetheless, many articles emphasized the importance of the picturesque quality in works of art, and several artists wrote about it, see for example Smith's essay "The Picturesque Side" in *Some Artists at the Fair* (1893) and George Parsons Lathrop's essay "Glimpses of Picturesque Places" in *Discussion on American Art and Artists* (1883).

¹⁰² Smith's favorite "picturesque" locations included Venice, Istanbul, Cuba, Mexico, Holland and Spain. However, Smith was particularly fascinated by Venice and Istanbul (Smith 1915, 8-13): according to him, the two cities shared similar characteristics: a marked Oriental trait, the palpable presence of the past, and tantalizing hues. Smith's romanticized vision of the East was fully expressed by his portrayals of these locations.

day, with its magnificence on one hand, its poverty on the other, its invariable artistic character and its pervasive charm (*Academy Notes*)¹⁰³.

Significantly, to Smith's eyes, the place which fully epitomized the picturesque was Venice: in fact, the city was endowed with a peculiar charm which was the result of the combination of a number of elements: the exotic, a peculiar sense of timelessness, chromatic redundancy, eccentric architecture, and local color. In a memorable passage in *Venice of To-Day* Smith provided the reader with an exhaustive classification of the picturesque elements which were to be found in Venice:

The quality of the picturesque saturates Venice. You find it in her stately structure; in her spacious Piazza, with its noble Campanile, clock tower, and façade of San Marco; in her tapering towers, deep-wrought bronze, and creamy marble; in her cluster of butterfly sails on far-off, wide horizons; in her opalescent dawns, flaming sunsets, and star-lit summer nights. You find it in the gatherings about her countless bridges spanning dark water-ways; in the ever-changing color of crowded markets; in lazy gardens lolling over broken walls; in twisted canals, quaint doorways, and soggy, ooze-covered landing steps. You find it, too, in many a dingy place, many a lop-sided old palace [...] you feel it especially in the narrow side canal of the Public Garden, in the region back of Rialto¹⁰⁴ (Smith 1897, 85).

Smith's detailed, all-inclusive list offered a visual, emotional and cultural map suggesting the topoi on which not only artists but travelers as well, could base their perception of Venice.

As previously mentioned, Smith devoted four chapters to Venice in his travelogue *Well-Worn of Spain, Holland and Italy*¹⁰⁵: "On the Riva, Venice", "A Summer's Day in Venice", "the Top of the Gondola", and "Behind the Rialto". Some of the themes which would be fully explored in *Venice of To-Day* were already present in those earlier descriptions of Venice: the loyal gondolier, whose image was rendered through the character of Ingenio; the slower and more relaxed lifestyle which characterized "pre-

¹⁰³ This review was quoted in an anonymous and undated article (Willietta G. Ball Collection of Clippings, the Boston Art Archives, Boston Public Library) and it was attributed to Charles M. Kurtz.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, "Back of the Rialto" was also the title of the illustration on the frontispiece of *Gondola Days* (1897).

¹⁰⁵ The book included sixteen phototype reproductions of Smith's watercolors, and it was also available in a folio edition.

modern” Venetian society and its “dolce far niente”, and finally, Smith’s own fascination with Venetian crowds.

Ingenio seems to be the main character of Smith’s sentimental narrative in the “Venetian chapters” of the book: portrayed as “a wrinkled old sea-dog, with gray hair and stooping shoulders, who has the air of a retired buccaneer and the voice of a girl” (Smith 1886, 77) he fully epitomizes the image of the Venetian gondolier, who is perceived as a loyal and caring companion, endowed with gentleman-like qualities, and who is crucial to the artist’s understanding of the complexities of the Venetian landscape and culture. Smith praises Ingenio’s “gentle, loyal soul” (Smith 1886, 96) for he is touched by “the intense personal interest he [Ingenio] takes in my affairs” (*ibid.*): if on the one hand, Smith’s depiction of his relationship with Ingenio reflects the image of idealized companionship, on the other, his comparison between the gondolier and Friday¹⁰⁶ strongly suggests the idea of Smith’s condescending attitude towards him: “this morning he [Ingenio] is as happy over the arrival of these golden-winged boats from beyond the Lido as he was my man Friday crying a sail! And I his shipwrecked master” (Smith 1886, 97). Moreover, Smith adds a touch of sentimentality to the figure of Ingenio and to his story, as he reveals that his loyal gondolier has a crippled daughter named Giulietta: through a crescendo of sentimental clichés Smith describes his visit to the gondolier’s humble house where he meets Ingenio’s “pre-maturely old” (Smith 1886, 110) wife and his beloved child:

In a moment more the door reopens and Ingenio enters, carrying in his arms a pale, hollowed-cheeked child, about ten years of age, who looks at me wonderingly with her great round eyes. [...] I shall never forget the tender way with which the old man placed her on a low stool at his side, caressing her hair, holding fast her hand, and talking to her in a low undertone in his soft Italian; nor the tremor in his voice when he leaned over to me and said, pointing to his crippled daughter: “this one belongs to me”. It was all the child he had, poor fellow (Smith 1886, 111).

Throughout the book Smith’s strong sense of narrative prevails over a more descriptive tone, especially in the chapters on Venice, for Smith tries to draw vernacular sketches which are expressive of the spirit of the city: rather than focusing on the landscape

¹⁰⁶ *Robinson Crusoe*.

Smith focuses on the locals, turning them into the characters of a series of colorful anecdotes¹⁰⁷. As to Smith's perception of the Venetian crowd, his depiction of the locals going about their daily routine is closely associated with the idea of picturesque and with the widespread stereotypical view of genre painters: "the woman carrying her two copper water-pails slung to a light yoke" (Smith 1886, 91) is reminiscent of Duveneck's watercarriers¹⁰⁸, while "the girls stringing beads" (*ibid.*) echo Blum's bead stringers¹⁰⁹, and then a long procession of people representing Venetian "types": "the fishermen carrying their nets [...], another painter with his trap [...], the tangle-haired children with abbreviated clothing and faces like Raphael's cherubs; the old hags [...], the fat priest in his sandals" (*ibid.*) and finally, "the flower girl in a costume not her own" (*ibid.*).

Smith's travelogue received positive reviews which remarked his "light, vivacious prose and the beauty of these selections from his studies as a painter" (*The Atlantic Monthly* 1887, 126), together with Smith's ability to portray the "human element, a movement of life, and a tone of sentiment" (*ibid.*) which captured the readers' attention. By 1890 Smith had reached a prominent position in the American cultural landscape, for he was considered a gifted writer and painter, who had succeeded in producing an impressive output of works, which offered vivid and entertaining transcriptions of real life. His articles and short stories were widely published in popular magazines such as *The Century* and *Scribner's Magazine* while he continued traveling and painting his notable views of far-away places.

In December 1891, Smith published a short story entitled "Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier", which appeared in *Scribner's Magazine*, and which was later included in a collection of short stories called *Stories of Italy* (1894): the story, as the title suggests, deals with a Venetian subject and particularly with Espero Gorgoni, a gondolier, who becomes Smith's gondolier for Ingenio¹¹⁰ has died. Young and athletic, Espero¹¹¹ is portrayed by Smith as a charming semi-god, who embodies the spirit of his native place, Venice. Captivated by Espero's beauty and athleticism Smith chooses him among the other gondoliers who are crowding the canal: "I cannot say why I singled him out [...] perhaps, too, it may have been his frank, handsome, young face with its merry, black

¹⁰⁷ See for example, the story of Smith's gondolier, Ingenio, but also the portrayal of a nun at the Church of the Pietà.

¹⁰⁸ See Duveneck's painting *Watercarriers, Venice*.

¹⁰⁹ See Blum's *Bead Stringers*.

¹¹⁰ Smith's gondolier in *Well Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy*.

¹¹¹ Espero appears in *Venice of To-Day* as well.

eyes” (Smith 1891, 690). In order to add a mythical allure to the man and a mysterious twist to the story, Smith reveals Espero’s noble origins only at the end of the story: in fact, Smith tells us that his gondolier belongs to the Castellani¹¹² family, a “noble” family of gondoliers who have served the Doge for centuries. Smith makes the startling discovery when he visits Espero’s picturesque house and sees a collection of portraits of his ancestors: they are all wearing the bright red hood which associates them with the Castellani faction: “Espero’s eyes twinkled, and a quizzical, half-triumphant smile broke over his face. “These are all my ancestors, signor. We have been gondoliers for two hundred years. I am a Castellani!”” (Smith 1891, 697).

The other pivotal character in this short story is the city of Venice: whereas *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy* is centered around the anecdotal rendering of picturesque scenes and characters, in “Espero Gorgoni” Smith interlaces his sentimental narrative with a vivid visual description of Venice’s eccentric cityscape. The city is perceived and described in terms of a sensuous and aesthetic experience; thus, to Smith’s eyes Venice appears as a place whose visual allure is the result of an enticing combination of light and color. Overwhelmed by Venice’s chromatic richness, Smith surrenders to its charm while he remarks that one cannot but “drink[ing] in the beauty about you” (Smith 1891, 688). Smith’s portrayals of the Venetian landscape reveal that in a sense, the painter has prevailed over the writer, as these descriptions emphasize the preponderance of sight in the artist’s perception of the city: Smith depicts the dazzling view of the Gran Canal focusing on the chromatic effects of all the elements in the composition, almost creating the image through “verbal brushstrokes”:

Nowhere in the wide world there is such a sight. A double row of creamy white palaces tiled in red and topped with quaint chimneys. Overhanging balconies of marble bursting with flowers, with gay awnings above and streaming shadows below. Two lines of narrow quays crowded with people flashing bright bits of

¹¹² The Castellani and the Nicolotti were indeed two rival factions in Venice. However, neither of them belonged to the Venetian aristocracy. Smith might have got the information on these factions from Hillard, in fact in his book *Six Months in Italy*, Hillard wrote: “the gondoliers are, were, divided into two parties, or factions, the Castellani and the Nicolotti, the former wearing red bonnets, and the latter the black. It was a division founded upon locality [...] the Castellani formed the aristocratic faction, and the Nicolotti the democratic. The doge, from his residence in St. Mark’s Place was held to belong to the Castellani” (Hillard 1853, 73). Similarly, Smith wrote: “I rambled on, telling him [Espero] of those things I thought would please him the most. Of how these Arsenalotti became gondoliers, joining the Castellani - the gondoliers at that time being divided into two parties, the Castellani, who wore red hoods, and the Nicolletti [sic], who wore black hoods. Of how these Castellani were aristocrats and had portioned out to them the eastern part of the city where the Doge lived, his residence being in the Piazza of San Marco; while the Nicolletti [sic] were publicans” (Smith 1891, 693).

color in the blazing sun. [...] lazy red-sailed luggers melon-loaded with crinkled green shadows crawling beneath their bows; while at the far end over the glistening highway, beaded with people, curves the beautiful bridge, an ivory arch against a turquoise sky (Smith 1891, 691).

Significantly, Smith's gaze guides the reader's perception of the city, while at the same time it allows the reader to see the visual color pattern which Smith, being a painter, immediately perceives. Smith, like many other artists, falls under the spell of Venice's colorful palette, as a consequence, his verbal rendering of the Venetian landscape metamorphoses into the visual exploration of a world, Venice, which is primarily defined by the ongoing dialogue between light and color, as Bernard Berenson aptly remarked in 1888: "one soon forgets to think of form here, going almost mad on color, thinking in color, talking color, almost living on color. And for one that enjoys color this certainly is paradise" (quoted in Hirshler 1992, 12). Significantly, many years later, when Smith gave his lectures on outdoor painting at the Art Institute of Chicago he echoed Berenson's words in a description of the Venetian landscape, as he emphasized the relation between the watery impermanence of the Venetian colors and the peculiar Venetian light¹¹³:

Every inch of its water-surface part of everything about it, so clear are the reflections; full of moods, whims, and fancies, this wave space [...] breaking into ribbons of color - swirls of twisted doorways, flags, awnings, flowerladen balconies, black-shawled Venetian beauties all upside down, interwoven with strips of turquoise sky and green waters - a bewildering, intoxicating jumble of tatters and tangles, maddening in detail, brilliant in color, harmonious in tone: the whole scintillating with a picturesqueness beyond the ken or brush of any painter living or dead (Smith 1915, 5).

The short story "Espero Gorgoni" marked a turning point in Smith's portrayal of the city, as it anticipated some of the main traits of Smith's major work on Venice, *Venice of*

¹¹³ In his seminal study of the "form" of Venice Sergio Bettini has aptly explored the peculiar nature of the city whose space is defined by water, air and color: "la natura veneziana non é di monti o colline o masse d'alberi. É di acqua e aria: cioè di elementi puri, quasi immateriali: non plastici, ma di colore. L'immagine della città di Venezia sboccia tra l'aria e l'acqua, illimitate come "dimensioni": puri valori qualitativi [...] tanto la distesa del mare, quanto la distesa del cielo, non sono che superfici, quasi assolute, di colore" (Bettini 1960, 50).

To-Day, which was indeed Smith's attempt to record the elusive nature and tantalizing hues of his beloved city.

2.2 *Venice of To-Day and Gondola Days*

Smith's fascination for Venice reached its crescendo with the publication of the travelogue *Venice of To-Day* in 1895¹¹⁴: the book summoned up the thoughts, the impressions and the images which had been inspired by Smith's frequent Venetian visits and therefore by the opportunity to experience Venice to the fullest. Some of those images and impressions had already appeared in his previous works, for instance, in the short story "Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier" and in the travelogue *Well-worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy*¹¹⁵, but in *Venice of To-Day* they became the pivotal elements which helped Hop shape a clearer vision of the city. They also functioned as the counterpoint tunes he used in an attempt to compose a polyphonic rendering of Venice and its peculiarities, ranging from its architectural beauties to its picturesque inhabitants. It is worth noting that Smith's travelogue reflected a well-established tradition of American travel writings which focused on Italy, and which included a wide array of works: "guide books¹¹⁶, travelogues by notable writers such as Hawthorne, Jarves¹¹⁷, Howells and Twain, and articles in magazines¹¹⁸ and newspapers¹¹⁹ as well" (Stowe 1994, 5). The experience of Italy, and particularly of

¹¹⁴ See Theodore Hornberger, "The Effect of Painting on the Fiction of F. Hopkinson Smith", p.168. For images and text I consulted the 1896 edition of *Venice of To-Day*, at The Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department.

¹¹⁵ See paragraph 2.1

¹¹⁶ The most popular guidebooks among Americans were the Murrays and the Baedekers.

¹¹⁷ Much has been written on the presence of American artists in Italy and in Venice during the 19th century; see for example Julian Halsby, *Venice: The Artist's Vision*; Margaretta Lowell, *Venice: The American View, 1860-1920*; Sergio Romano (ed) *Gli Americani e l'Italia*; Theodore Stebbins, *The Lure of Italy: American artists and the Italian experience 1760-1914*; *Gondola Days: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Palazzo Barbaro Circle*.

¹¹⁸ James's writings on Venice, which were collected in the volume *Italian Hours*, had been initially published as single articles in several magazines like *The Century* and *Scribner's Magazine*.

¹¹⁹ Newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Boston Daily Globe* offered an overwhelming number of articles on Italy and on Venice: a look at these articles will reveal a typified image of the Italian city, which was one of the prominent subjects of the articles: these descriptions profusely focused on the city's most famous monuments such as St.Mark's Square, "The Campanile" (the belfry), and the Salute, but they also depicted the "local color" of Venice and its inhabitants, including lace makers, gondolas and

Venice, was offered to Americans through the words and the gaze of writers, journalists, and painters, who in many cases reinforced the exotic image of the city¹²⁰ and all the clichés associated with it¹²¹. Smith's work was initially published as a subscription book, and it consisted of both text and illustrations which helped construct a written and visual itinerary of the city. With its large folio format, its colorful reproductions of Smith's watercolors and its careful combination of words and images, the book closely resembled a luxurious scrapbook¹²², which testified an imaginary (and possibly real) visit to one of the most charming destinations in the world. As Smith wrote in the preface to the book, the interdependence of written and visual elements was one of the key features of this work, for the peculiarities of the Venetian landscape, as Smith saw them, could be aptly rendered only through an ongoing dialogue between the two modes of expression:

No pen alone can tell this story. The *pencil*¹²³ and the *palette*¹²⁴ must lend their touch when one would *picture*¹²⁵ the wide sweep of her piazzas, the abandon of her gardens, the charm of her canal and street life, the happy indolence of her people, the faded sumptuousness of her homes (Smith 1897, n.p.).

gondoliers, and "lazzaroni" (*BDG* 1872, April 4; *BDG* 1873, January 6; *BDG* 1873, August 2; *NYT* 1899, March 5)

¹²⁰ See for example, Duveneck's painting *The Watercarriers, Venice* (1884), which epitomized the exotic and picturesque view of Venice through the portrayal of "typical" Venetian inhabitants such as the gorgeous dark haired women at work, the poor but joyful Venetian children idling along the *riva*, and the fishermen chatting in the distance. The painting, as critics have pointed out, is highly anecdotal and descriptive, especially when compared to the fresher and bolder view of the same subject which was rendered by Sargent in his *Venetian Water Carriers* (Adelson 2006, 25).

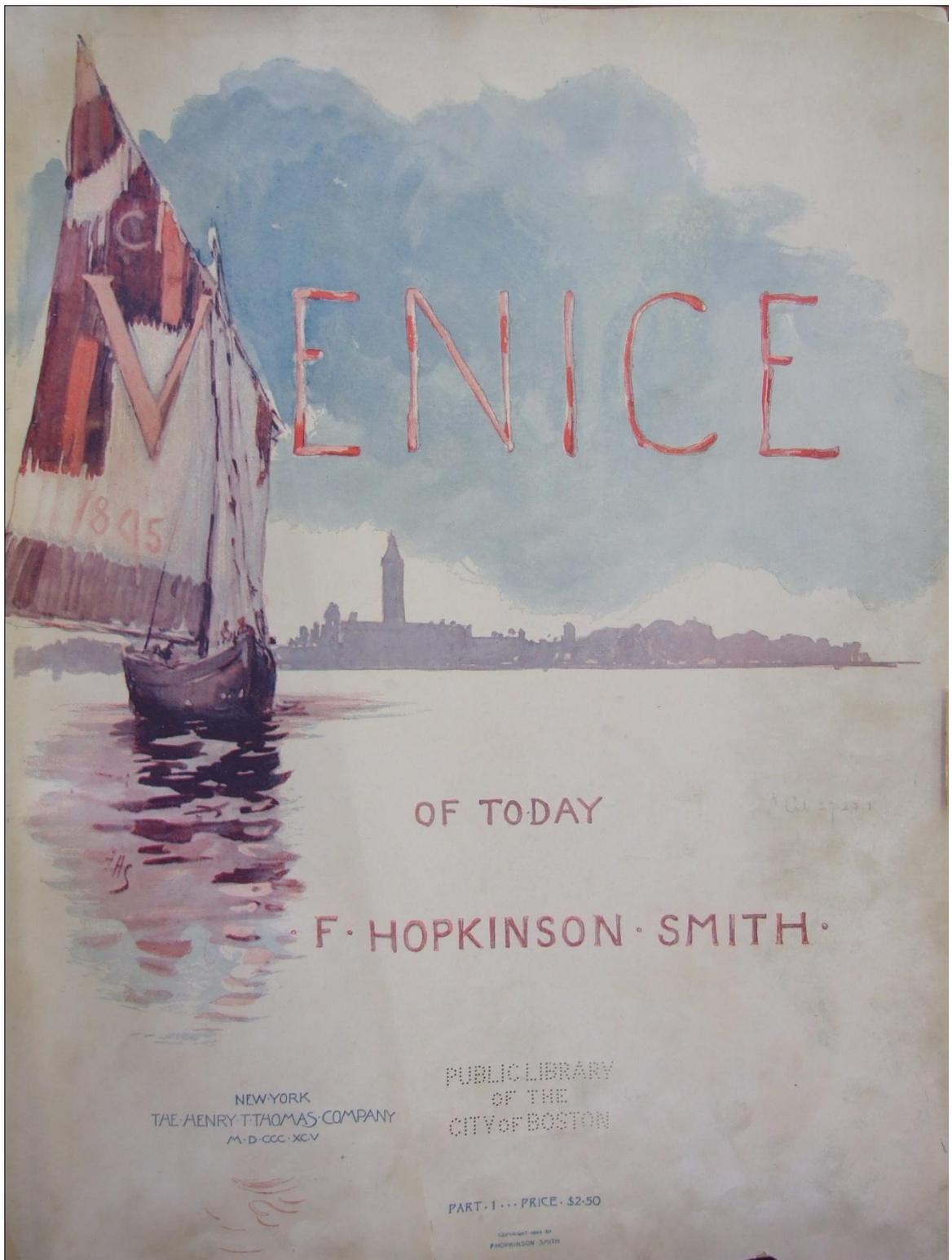
¹²¹ It is necessary to point out that some artists and writers challenged the stereotyped vision of Venice which was merely based on the notion of picturesque and timelessness; or at least, they tried to provide the reader and the viewer with a more complex image of the city taking into account the process of modernization and the related changes which the city itself was facing. Among them, painters like Sargent, Whistler, Chase, and Prendergast (Mowll Mathews 2009) depicted the more modern and "unpicturesque" aspects of Venice (Chong 2004, 95). Similarly, writers like James became quickly aware of the ambivalent nature of the city, and of the metamorphosis which was taking place within it, so that at the same time, Venice was viewed as "an exquisitely serene and undiversified city, the eternal *morceau de musee*" (Auchard 1992, xxv, Introduction to James's *Italian Hours*), but it was also similar to a "delicious [...] disturbingly moribund scene - where, except for incremental decay, time had virtually stood still" (*ibid.*).

¹²² See for example, the scrapbooks of Venice made by William Vaughn Tupper (1835-1898), a wealthy American who toured Europe and the Middle East and created an impressive array of scrapbooks to document his trips: in these scrapbooks he combined images (usually photographs and postcards) of the places he had visited with famous quotes regarding the city and his own comments. (For all the information on Tupper and his scrapbooks I am indebted to the exhibition "Away we go: an exhibition of vintage travel posters" which was held by the Boston Public Library in 2010, and which featured Tupper's Venice scrapbook on display)

¹²³ My italics.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*



Venice of To-Day, 1895 (courtesy of the Boston public Library, Fine Arts Department)



GONDOLA
DAYS

F·HOPKINSON·SMITH

Smith, who was a painter, an illustrator and a writer, was particularly aware of the interrelation between the arts, especially between painting and writing (Hornberger 162), and he knew that he could extensively use his “picturing power” (Pattee 1922, 409)¹²⁶ in his descriptions of scenes and landscapes; such descriptions could come in the shape of a watercolor or of a written passage. According to Smith, painting and writing were two complementary means of expression which allowed him a more versatile approach to the representation of reality. Moreover, the idea of conveying the local color of a place, in this case Venice, was of central importance in the development of Smith’s travelogues: as he often stated in his prefaces to them, he made every effort “to paint the scenery, dialect, manners, and characters peculiar to the more picturesque localities” (Taylor 1936, 255 quoted in Horneberger, 163).¹²⁷

Many illustrations in *Venice of To-Day* mirrored Smith’s marked interest in the picturesque aspects of the city, while at the same time they helped the reader *visualize* the landscapes and situations which had already been described or evoked through words. The emphasis on the importance of images in *Venice of To-Day* was also testified by the accurate indexes which listed all the illustrations featured in the book, and divided them into specific categories, which reflected their function and their relation with the written text: such detailed lists mapped the visual landscape which the reader could experience while reading the book. The illustrations were therefore arranged in the following groups: “Plates in color¹²⁸”, “Plates in black and white”, “Text illustrations in color” and “Text illustrations in black and white”: the last two categories clearly indicated there was a direct reference to the text, for each image usually represented a specific passage from it. The titles of the plates, on the other hand, often revealed a merely denotative function, i.e. “The Rialto Bridge” or “Ronconas from River Po”, although on occasion, they capitalized on the allusive power of words to establish a link between the subject of the plate and the emotional landscape evoked in the text, i.e. “A Breathless Lagoon”¹²⁹. It is important to note that other travelogues, like Howells’s *Venetian Life*¹³⁰ (1866) and Smith’s *A White*

¹²⁶ Quoted in Hornberger, 170.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Hornberger, 163.

¹²⁸ Some of these plates can still be purchased nowadays in antique shops or through online auctions of collectible books, and many of Smith’s works are also available in second hand book shops as dismissed library books.

¹²⁹ The title of this plate and its image are connected to one of Smith’s first descriptions of Venice in the preface, where he emphasizes the sensual nature of the city which “intoxicates with her music as you lie in your gondola adrift on the *bosom* of some *breathless lagoon*” (Smith 1897, n.p.)

¹³⁰ Howell’s book had been illustrated by different authors including Francis Hopkinson Smith.

Umbrella in Mexico (1889), included some illustrations as well, but they played a more marginal role when compared to the relevance given to those in *Venice of To-Day*. Illustrative in this regard was the use of illustrations in several popular travelogues and guidebooks of that time, books like Howell's *Venetian Life* or Clement's *The Queen of The Adriatic*, included illustrations which depicted the most popular views of Venice¹³¹, or which offered a glimpse of the most picturesque spots of the city: moreover, many illustrations were often reproductions of watercolors and sketches by notable American artists and illustrators¹³². Compared to other travelogues Smith's book was indeed one of a kind, for it was written and illustrated by the same author, who used two different media, the written one and the visual one, to convey his vision of the city, which consequently, was the result of an engaging interplay between the two modes of representation. As previously noted, the two hundred images in *Venice of To-Day* played a significant role as well; they accompanied words but they also functioned as iconic signifiers since they helped readers objectify and externalize the perceptions and images of the city, which had been created by Smith's verbal discourse. In addition to this, the lazy readers could just skip the text and its copious descriptions of canals and *campi*, while they could just focus on a mere visual journey through pictures. This might be the reason why T. Hornberger classified *Venice of To-Day* under the category which he defined as "Illustrated books in which the text is of less importance than the illustrations"¹³³. Such classification aptly reflected a number of works by Smith which did focus on the pictorial effect of their illustrations rather than on the written text which accompanied them, and initially *Venice of To-Day* was indeed one of them. But on the other hand, the subsequent reissue of the book under a different title (*Gondola Days*¹³⁴), with fewer illustrations¹³⁵ and in a paperback format, suggests a marked shift in the way the book was perceived and it also raises questions about its use. Evidently, the new version of Smith's work favored the text over the images: the text itself,

¹³¹ For example a look at the travelogues, guidebooks and newspaper articles of that time will reveal a countless number of plates portraying the Bridge of Sighs, which was indeed one of the most represented subjects. An image of the Bridge of Sighs was included in *Venice of To-Day*.

¹³² For instance the 1892 edition of *Venetian Life* included a series of aquatint plates reproducing watercolors by C. Hassam, R.H. Nicolls, F.H. Smith, and R. Turner.

¹³³ Hornberger's list comprised the following works by Smith: *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland, and Italy, Traveled by a Painter in Search of the Picturesque*; *A White Umbrella in Mexico*; *Venice of To-Day*; *Charcoals of New and Old New York*; *In Thackeray's London*; *In Dickens's London* (Hornberger, 168)

¹³⁴ *Gondola Days* was published in 1897.

¹³⁵ The number of illustrations in *Gondola Days* was drastically reduced to ten, while the previous edition of the book (*Venice of To-Day*) comprised two hundred illustrations! It is necessary to consider the fact that this substantial reduction of pictures might have depended on the high costs of image reproduction in books.

though, had remained unchanged as it was clearly stated in the reassuring note by the publishers which appeared in the opening pages of the new edition:

The text of this volume is the same as that of “Venice of To-Day”, recently published by Henry T. Thomas Company¹³⁶, of New York, as a subscription book, in large quarto and folio form, with over two hundred illustrations¹³⁷ by the Author, in color and in black and white (Smith 1897, n.p.).

Such an emphasis on the written itinerary rather than on the visual one, implies that this was a book which demanded to be read and used as a travel guide as well: in fact, a *New York Times* article which surveyed people’s preferred readings while travelling on steamers to Europe, listed *Gondola Days* as one of the most popular books on the ship. American passengers would get familiar with the places which awaited them on the other side of the Atlantic by reading books which “dealt with anticipated scenes, varying from the “Gondola Days” of F. Hopkinson Smith to the “Ave Roma Immortalis” of Crawford” (*NYT* 1899, April 1). In addition to this, a look at the catalogues of libraries in nineteenth and twentieth century American hotels will reveal Smith’s presence among standard authors of both fiction and non-fiction books: his *Gondola Days* appeared in at least four library catalogues¹³⁸ (Lopez 1974, 219), and two other hotels, The Hotel Francis (San Francisco) and the Hotel Touraine (Boston), listed respectively, fourteen and six “miscellaneous” works by Smith in their library catalogues too (*ibid.*). Had you been a weary traveler and guest of one of those hotels, you could have borrowed Smith’s book and enjoyed his enticing descriptions of Venetian sunsets and gondola races!

As I have previously noted, the two diverse editions of Smith’s travelogue were also marked by two very different titles: “*Venice of To-Day*” (1895) and “*Gondola Days*” (1897). The title “*Venice of To-Day*” was somehow reminiscent of Howells’s *Venetian life* for both titles suggested that the focus of interest was on a city whose life pulsed in its streets and its inhabitants, and not only in old palaces and hidden gardens. At the same time, Smith’s title established an unusual connection between Venice, whose image was mostly associated with its past, and a sense of modernity conveyed by the

¹³⁶ *Gondola Days* was published by Houghton Mifflin Company and the Riverside Press.

¹³⁷ As previously noted, *Venice of To-Day* comprised more than two-hundred reproductions of Smith’s Venetian watercolors and charcoal sketches together with a smaller number of photographs depicting Venice and its inhabitants. See chapter 4 for an analysis of the illustrations and photographs.

¹³⁸ The Hotel Pennsylvania, the Hotel Statler (St. Louis), the 1919 Hotel Statler (Buffalo) and the 1923 Hotel Statler library catalogues (Lopez 1974, 219).

word “To-Day”, as if the author could provide a never-before-seen “snapshot” of modern life¹³⁹ in the old city *par excellence*: an ambitious plan indeed. But despite Smith’s good intentions and efforts, the bewitching power of Venice, combined with the inescapable tradition of its typified images, lurked in the shadow, so that, whether consciously or not, Smith, like most of his contemporaries, ended up portraying an anthropomorphous city, whose alluring charm subdued the artist’s imagination and whose appeal to his senses determined, and limited, paradoxically, its own pictorial possibilities as Giuseppina Dal Canton has argued:

La città [Venice], morfologicamente più predisposta al continuo cangiamento, anzi alla metamorfosi (si pensi alla peculiare dimensione di Venezia, sospesa fra acqua e cielo), sembra paradossalmente destinata ad esercitare una tirannia nei confronti della propria immagine, una tirannia consistente nella conservazione e nella ripetizione delle iconografie fino alla loro riduzione a stereotipi” (Dal Canton 1997, 155).

The city Smith saw and described in his preface to the book, did not seem to escape the usual stereotypical vision of it. Such vision after all, was based on a wide array of crystallized topoi: the pervading sense of timelessness which coexisted with a weighty past, the allure of its inhabitants’ *dolce far niente*¹⁴⁰, the peculiar combination of light, air and water which offered infinite representational possibilities, a dreamlike landscape which saturated one’s senses with the intensity of its colors. On the one hand, Smith was indeed influenced by the conventional view of Venice which was popular among 19th century Americans, and consequently, he was also influenced by the clichés through which the “New World” perceived the “old” world, and in particular the Italian city. On the other hand, Smith’s marked interest in local color and his passion for

¹³⁹ A parallel could be drawn between Smith’s *Venice of To-Day* and Howells’s *Venetian Life*. As several critics have pointed out, Howells tried to represent the “real” Venice, using “a method of representation based on authenticity and accuracy” (Buonomo 1996, 59). In a sense he refused the superimposed literary and cultural images which had shaped the way the city was perceived and then described. Moreover, according to Tony Tanner Howells succeeded in giving us “what few other writers do - some sense of everyday life in nineteenth century Venice” (Tanner 1992, 7): Tanner aptly argues that in doing so, Howells depicts Venice “with the magic left out” (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁰ The image of the Italian “*dolce far niente*” was a popular cliché among foreigners, and it often affected their perception of Italy and the Italian way of living.

outdoor painting could be fully expressed the moment Venice became the subject of Smith's artistic discourse as he declared in his foreword to *Venice of To-Day*¹⁴¹:

I have made no attempt in these pages to review the splendors of the past, or to probe the many vital questions which concern the present, of this wondrous City of the Sea. Neither have I ventured to discuss the marvels of her architecture, the wealth of her literature and art, nor the growing importance of her commerce and manufactures. I have contented myself rather with the Venice that you see in the sunlight of a summer's day - the Venice that bewilders with her glory when you land at her water - gate; that delights with her color when you idle along the Riva; that intoxicates with her music as you lie in your gondola adrift on the bosom of some breathless lagoon-the Venice of mould-stained palace, quaint caffè and arching bridge; of fragrant incense, cool, dimlighted church, and noiseless priest; of strong armed men and graceful women- the Venice of *light* and *life*, of sea and sky and melody (Smith 1897, n.p.).

Although in this preface Smith tried to distance himself from the temptation of a ruskinian subject matter (the splendors of the past and the probing questions on the present state of the city), his language did reveal a rhapsodic and highly suggestive ruskinian tone, while at the same time, it presented the city as the quintessential picturesque location¹⁴², characterized by “the wide sweep of her piazzas, the *abandon*¹⁴³ of her gardens, the *charm* of her canal and street life, the *happy indolence* of her people, the *faded sumptuousness* of her homes” (Smith 1897, n.p.). This description suggests Smith was fully aware of the tantalizing effect Venice had on those who visited it, and in particular on those who were willing “to surrender” themselves (and their senses!) to its alluring charm and to the brilliancy of its tantalizing colors. As for the most picturesque aspects of the city, the table of contents¹⁴⁴ in the book provided a thorough imaginary map, which focused on all the elements Smith had described in his preface: “An Arrival; Gondola Days; Along the Riva; The Piazza of

¹⁴¹ The same preface appeared in *Gondola Days* as well.

¹⁴² A comparison between this preface and the preface to *A White Umbrella in Mexico* reveals a number of similarities: for example, in both texts Smith put emphasis on his pursuit (obsession!) of the picturesque quality of a landscape, while he also remarked his abiding interest in the depiction of *light* and *color*: as it was proven by the fact he would always choose places (Mexico, Venice, but also Spain and later Constantinople) whose images were defined by the presence of light and color.

¹⁴³ My italics.

¹⁴⁴ It remained unchanged in both editions of the book.

San Marco; In an Old Garden; Among the Fishermen; A Gondola Race; Some Venetian Caffes; On the Hotel Steps; Open-Air Markets; On Rainy Days; Legacies of the Past; Life in the Streets; Night in Venice” (Smith 1897, n.p.). No quaint picturesque glimpse of Venice had been left out, and it was always mixed with some interspersed references to its glorious past and to its everyday charm. Being a travelogue, and not a guidebook, *Venice of To-Day* lacked the prescriptive tone which was often one of the most prominent features of the Murrays and the Baedekers: and on the other hand, it offered a multi-layered experience of the city through Smith’s authoritative voice, while providing an imaginary space in which the reader could construct and deconstruct his/her own perception of Venice, whether he had visited it or not. Unfortunately, there are no written reviews of *Venice of To-Day*¹⁴⁵ by Smith’s contemporaries. Two years later though, the same book was reissued in a smaller format and it was made available to a larger number of readers: as previously noted, the text became more important than the illustrations, and the title of the book was changed to *Gondola Days*, which was also the title of one of the chapters. The new title was indeed a catchy one, for it openly referred to the most peculiar symbol of the city: the gondola. 19th century Americans were well acquainted with Venetian gondolas: they had seen them in paintings, they had seen gondolas and their gondoliers in Chicago during the World’s Columbian Exhibition¹⁴⁶, and some of them, in an attempt to recreate an improbable Venice at home (Hirschler 124), had even brought them to the US. In fact, Thomas Moran placed his Venetian gondola “in a pond near his home in East Hampton, Long Island. There, poled by George Fowler, a Mohawk employed by the family, the gondola became a pleasure craft for the family and guests” (*ibid.*), while “Hollis Hunnewell of Wellesly, Massachusetts, had one, providing a charming if inaccurate counterpoint to the Italianate garden, with its topiary and classical balustrade, that he constructed on the shores of Lake Waban” (*ibid.*).

The gondola fully epitomized Venice for it represented one of its most typical and picturesque aspects, while at the same time, it captivated the visitor’s imagination: Venice would not have been Venice, without its swift “black swans” as Smith called them, gliding over its translucent canals. The title itself, *Gondola Days*¹⁴⁷, stressed the

¹⁴⁵ It is important to keep in mind this work was a subscription book, and therefore its circulation might have been limited.

¹⁴⁶ As Regina Soria reminds us “Smith had brought [his] Venetian gondoliers [to the Chicago Exhibition] for authenticity” (Soria 1982, 272).

¹⁴⁷ An 1883 article on Italian cities (Venice, Rome and Ischia) from *The Boston Daily Globe*, bore a similar title: “Italian days”.

association of the temporal dimension (extraordinary days spent in an extraordinary city) with an object, the gondola, which was invested with symbolic resonance, and which above all, defined the locus in which the aesthetic experience would take place: to every reader such title functioned as the key which would open the door to the infinite representational interpretations of the Venetian landscape. Not only did Smith's fascination with gondolas become his trademark, but gondolas were also his preferred means of transport when in Venice, and the perfect spot from which he could observe and paint the city, as it was often reported in the interviews and articles on him:

“Most of my works is confined to out of doors. Then I journeyed to Venice, and there I remained during September and October.” “I suppose you painted many water colors from your gondola, Mr. Smith?” “Yes, I have what may be called a studio-gondola in Venice.[...] The “Canal San Giuseppe” was painted from a gondola” (*NYT* 1907, January 20).

Given a *gondola*¹⁴⁸, a fair day, a sketch book on one's knees, and there is little of artistic in that man's soul [Smith] who can not find a motive over which to grow enthusiastic (Hoeber 1906, 348).

It is worth noting that the chapter of *Venice of To-Day* which inspired the title of *Gondola Days*, described a whole day, which was also the artist's first day in the city, spent in a gondola. Not only did such an unusual means of transport provide Smith with a privileged viewpoint, but at the same time, it intensified the sensuous experience of Venice, while emphasizing the radiant beauty of its architecture. Last but not least, as Smith himself remarked, a gondola trip would convey a peculiar feeling of power over the topography of a city which was marked by the puzzling interweaving of vertical (its magnificent buildings) and horizontal (its alleys and canals) lines:

Here is a whole barge, galleon, Bucentaur, all to yourself; noiseless, alert, subservient to your airest whim, obedient to the lightest touch. You float between earth and sky. You feel like a potentate out for an airing, housed like a Rajah, served like Cleopatra, and rowed like a Doge. You command space and dominate the elements (Smith 1897, 14).

¹⁴⁸ My italics.

We do not know whether the new title for *Venice of To-Day* was Smith's choice or his editor's, but it is not difficult to imagine the evocative power that such title could have over the reader, who with the book in his hands, was ready to embark on an imaginary (and maybe real, some day) journey to Venice, guided by Smith's words and images. As Henry James noted in one of his essays on Venice "of all cities of the world [it] is the easiest to visit without going there" (James 1992, 7), Smith's travelogue helped the reader to do so.

2.3 "The greenest island" of Smith's Imagination

Perpetually painted and described by painters, poets and writers, in less than twenty years¹⁴⁹ Venice had become part of Smith's physical, emotional and imaginary landscape too. Venice was indeed like no other city in the world, not only because of its peculiar shape, history and traditions, but also because it had been perceived by generations of writers and artists as the city where memory and imagination conflated, thus creating a unique place which somehow belonged to everyone and to no one at the same time. In his seminal study¹⁵⁰ on the relationship between Venice and writing, Tony Tanner has pointed out:

Venice - the place, the name, the dream - seems to lend itself to, to attract a new variety of, appreciations, recuperations and dazzled hallucinations. In decay and decline (particularly in decay and decline), falling or sinking to ruins and fragments yet saturated with secretive sexuality [...] Venice becomes for many writers what it

¹⁴⁹ Smith's first stay in Venice dated back to the 1880s, from that moment on Smith would spend part of his summers in Europe, and in particular in Venice (Carbone 1985, 9); he would usually stay at the hotel Britannia (which is now the hotel Regina) "the best hotel in Venice" (Smith 1897, 6), as he declared in *Gondola Days*. Smith quickly became known to the other American painters who were staying in the city (see Pennell's remark on him in one of his letters to Whistler); and his "Venetian holidays", together with the extensive body of works he would always bring back home, became legendary among art critics and the public as well. (*The Critic* 1898, April 2; *NYT* 1894, December 24)

¹⁵⁰ See Tony Tanner, *Venice Desired*, Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992.

was, in anticipation, for Byron: “the greenest island of my imagination” (Tanner 1992, 5)

Byron’s definition of Venice had grasped the quintessential nature of a city, whose enchanting power lay in its ability to multiply its own self-reflecting image and to fix it upon those who had fallen under its spell. But paradoxically, Venice represented both an external and an internal landscape, and therefore it was subject to the projections and perceptions of those artists who, in an effort to capture its tantalizing beauty, tried to re-write it, re-paint it and re-imagine it. Constantly wavering between stereotypical images and the ungraspable essence of its charm, Venice exerted its alluring magic on travelers and artists, including Smith. But Venice was also characterized by the never-ending tension between those elements which determined its appearance and its essence: air and water and land were constantly struggling against one another to dominate a place, whose physical boundaries were as evanescent as its colors and its lights at sunset. Defined by its own contradictory nature, Venice became simultaneously the real and the unreal city *par excellence*: the inescapable presence of its past mixed with its overwhelming topography turned it indeed into a real and visitable space which could be fully experienced through one’s senses; on the other hand though, the fleeting effect of its architecture combined with its transmuting watery landscape, transformed the city into a ghost-like vision, constantly changing in the eyes of the observer. Smith’s attitude toward Venice, a dream-like city and the city of his dreams, resembled Byron’s approach to it: “I loved her from my boyhood; she to me was as a fairy city of the heart” (Byron, XVIII¹⁵¹).

Like Byron, Smith perceived the Italian city as an imaginary space, that “greenest island of his imagination” which his mind and his heart had inhabited even before arriving there: “you really begin to arrive in Venice when you leave Milan” Smith remarked, for “your train is hardly out of the station before you have conjured up all the visions and traditions of your childhood [...] As you speed on in the dusty train, your memory-fed imagination takes new flights” (Smith 1897, 1). Hop’s words prove that “Venice can become an integral part of one’s mental landscape before one even sets foot there” as a critic has aptly pointed out (Ross 1994, 114). The fact that according to Smith, the idea of Venice and his own ideas about Venice, belonged to “the traditions of his childhood” indicated that Venice was indeed part of the cultural discourse in 19th

¹⁵¹ Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto IV.

century America: not only had the Italian city become one of the preferred destinations by Americans, but a mythical resonance had been ascribed to it as well. Fearing that his expectations would not be met, Smith's mind is paralyzed by a dreadful doubt: "What if, after all, there should be no Venice?" (Smith 1897, 2) he wonders, but such thought is unbearable, for according to Smith, Venice is part of the American tradition as much as Rip Van Winkle and Santa Claus! (*ibid.*)

Smith's trepidation for the long awaited encounter with the city reflected a feeling which was shared by other American travelers, and it was often described in many magazine and newspapers articles which dealt with the "Venetian experience" and which also used a similar language: highly emotional, full of images and references to the previous literary descriptions of the city, and rhapsodic in tone: "We were at last in Venice. There was no illusion this time" (*BDG* 1874, May 13): "When last I wrote from Verona we were upon the eve of setting out for Venice, the city so unlike all other cities of the world. As we approached by rail upon a viaduct built over the waters of the laguna I eagerly peered from the windows of the cars to get my first glimpse of the city that had so long been the subject of my dreams" (*BDG* 1873, January 6), and even many years later, well after the turn of the century, William E. Curtis¹⁵² described the city and shared the same excitement with which Hop had depicted it more than ten years earlier:

Venice - after all, there is no place like Venice. Canton, Peking, Moscow and Constantinople are all most interesting and unique in their way, but there is only one Venice, and there can never be another. [...] there is no place that gives so much immediate or so much lasting satisfaction. The tourist can remember more about Venice than of any other city because it is so unique it never disappoints the anticipations (*BDG* 1910, May 10).

As I have previously noted, before reaching Venice Smith had envisioned his own picture of the "unreal city", a place of which he gave a detailed description and which focused on its oriental and exotic features. While the train is speeding up and Smith's final destination is getting closer he imagines a "city full of dreams"¹⁵³, and bathed in color as well:

¹⁵² The title of Curtis's article echoed Smith's words and travelogue, for it was "The Venice of today"!

¹⁵³ "The Seven Old Men" by Charles Baudelaire.

great rows of *white* palaces running sheer into the water; picture book galleys reflected upside down in *red* lagoons; domes and minarets, kiosks, towers and steeples, queer-arched temples, and the like. [...] *gold* encrusted barges, hung with Persian carpets, rowed by slaves double banked, and trailing rare brocades in a sea of *China blue*, to meet you at the water landing” (Smith 1897, 1).

Smith’s peculiar taxonomy recalled a multilayered variety of images of the city, which had also been shaped by notable writers and artists like Byron, Turner, Ruskin, Rogers¹⁵⁴, Shelley, and Whistler, and also by a more conventional and popular vision which associated Venice with the East, and therefore with the exotic *par excellence* (the domes, the minarets, the Persian carpets and the slaves too). As Nancy M. Mathews has pointed out, many books on Venice, such as Smith’s *Venice of To-Day*¹⁵⁵, catered to the tourist market and they were often “illustrated with artists’ sketches of the formal and informal sites of the city” (Mathews 2003, 17) for their purpose was to “train[ed] the tourist’s eye to see it [Venice] as an artist would” (*ibid.*); in doing so, they also stimulated a specific emotional and aesthetic response to the Venetian landscape. If we consider Smith’s book from this perspective, we can argue that even his narrative, for example in chapter 1 “An arrival”, reflected an attempt to shape the way a tourist, and in particular an American tourist, would see and perceive Venice. Chapter 1, as the title suggests, describes Smith’s arrival in the city: the experience is depicted as an emotional and mental process through which the narrator/tourist/artist negotiates his own personal image of Venice, an internal landscape, with the real city, an external landscape: the “invisible city”¹⁵⁶ meets the “visible” one. Smith employs Smith narrates The first encounter with the city in second person: in this chapter, Smith uses the more inclusive and involving “you”¹⁵⁷ instead of the autobiographical and more intimate

¹⁵⁴ Roger’s poem “Italy” was widely popular among 19th century Americans, his description of Venice helped enhance the image of Venice as the dreamlike city *par excellence*: “and from the land we went - as to a floating city steering in, and gliding up her streets as in a dream” (Samuel Rogers, *Italy*).

¹⁵⁵ According to Prof. Mathews, Smith’s *Venice of To-Day* and its illustrations, and *The Queen of the Adriatic* by Clara Erskine Clement (1893), were widely used to shape American tourists’ aesthetic and emotional response to the city. (Mathews, 17).

¹⁵⁶ I have borrowed Calvino’s idea of “invisible city”. See Italo Calvino, *Le Città Invisibili*

¹⁵⁷ We also have to keep in mind that the English pronoun “you” can be used as an indefinite pronoun, but even when it is used with this function “it is a more friendly [compared to “one”] pronoun and implies that the speaker can imagine himself in such a position”, whereas “one” is more impersonal” (Thomson 1960, 79) Smith clearly chose “you” for his opening chapter, while for instance, the author of *The Queen of The Adriatic* extensively used “one” in the opening pages of her book: “The Venice which one visits to-day is so curiously a part and not a part of the ancient Venice of which we dream, that one

“I”¹⁵⁸. Thanks to this choice, Smith manages to establish a direct connection with his reader for on the one hand, he invites him/her to partake in an experience which is deeply charged with emotional undertones, and on the other, he is able to implicitly shape and influence the way the reader, who can also be a potential visitor in the future, will react to his own first encounter with Venice. After all, a journalist from the *New York Times* remarked in an 1899 article on “books at sea”, that several passengers of the ships heading to Europe would read books like *Gondola Days* or “*Ave Roma Immortalis*” to get familiar with the “anticipated scenes” (NYT 1899, April 1) which described the places they were going to visit. Travel guides like the Murrays and the Baedekers would provide the necessary information an American tourist needed in order to explore the city and to understand its topography, its monuments and its past; but travelogues like Smith’s *Gondola Days* would provide such tourist with the ability to transform the travelling experience into an aesthetic one as well.

Through Smith’s words and illustrations, the reader/tourist was able to “simulate the artist’s experience of canals and piazzas” (Mathews 2003, 17), while at the same time he shared with Smith the deep sense of wonder and bewilderment which Venice infused into those who visited it. It is worth noting that while other writers’ descriptions of their first encounter with the city immediately focused on the effects that such an encounter generated, Smith is one of the few, if not the only one, who dwelt upon the different stages of that “precursive flight of your imagination” as Henry James described it, (James 1873, 51) which summoned the much anticipated vision of Venice and which usually took place before getting to the city, and therefore before *seeing* it. The “anticipated vision”, which characterized the approach to Venice of many Americans, was the result of a peculiar combination of elements at work: the influence of three notable British figures and their works on Venice, that is William Turner, Lord Byron and John Ruskin (Lovell 1984, 12), the large output of paintings and photographs of the city, which were widely available to Americans at home, and last, but not least, the impressive amount of guides and travelogues featuring Venice¹⁵⁹ as the main subject. Consequently, Venice had become a “familiar” place to many Americans even before

feels [...] a strange sense of duality [...]. He has a genuine sympathy with the past, and regrets that he has not the enchanter’s wand to bring it all back again, long enough, at least, for him to revel in its magnificence” (Clement 1893, 1). Throughout his book Smith alternates the use of “I” with “you”.

¹⁵⁸ In *Venetian Life* Howells employed the first person form to narrate his arrival in Venice. (Howells 1867, 12).

¹⁵⁹ For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between American artists and Venice see: Margareta Lovell, *Venice: The American View*, and Erica Hirshler, “‘Gondola Days’: American Painters in Venice” in *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience 1760-1914*.

setting foot there, for, as Smith remarked in the opening pages of *Gondola Days*, the city was part of the American collective memory, which had carefully built an imaginary (and imagined) Venetian landscape and had made it its own: “You have conjured up all the visions and traditions of your childhood” (Smith 1897, 1), so that “as you speed on in the dusty train, your *memory-fed imagination*¹⁶⁰ takes new flight” (*ibid.*). Smith’s words echoed James’s “precursive flight” while at the same time they suggested that the Venice envisioned by many American tourists on the verge of visiting the city for the first time, was indeed “a landscape already heavily inscribed by poets, travel writers, and even novelists” (Stowe 1994, 14) to the extent that its role in American culture was as significant as Irving’s Rip Van Winkle or Santa Claus (Smith 1897, 2). Similarly, Hillard had pointed out the same aspect in his book *Six Months in Italy* in 1853: “The wonders of Venice broke upon us so suddenly that it was not easy to separate the pictures in the memory from those which were before the eyes” (Hillard 1853, 22): those “memory-fed” visions of Venice had become part of the American cultural canon so that: “Pictures and engravings introduce us to its [of Venice] peculiar architecture, and we come into its presence with an image in our thoughts, and are not unprepared for what we see” (Hillard 1853, 2). But Like many other writers, Smith was also fully aware of the fact that to the eyes of the American tourist, and artist, Venice was, above all, “a mental panorama” (Smith 1897, 1) which conflated a wide array of images and dreams as well: as a consequence, the actual experience of the real Venice could be viewed by the visitor as a dreaded moment, since it questioned his/her inner image of the city and it forced him/her to deconstruct such image in order to negotiate a new one. As I have previously noted, Smith described the moments preceding an arrival in Venice, while at the same time he managed to give us a keen insight into the contradictory mix of fear, excitement and disbelief which were often experienced by travelers when they were getting closer to the city of their dreams.

In Smith’s narrative, the relatively short distance between Milan and Venice (and precisely the hotel room in Venice), becomes a mental and sentimental journey which reflects the process by which a naïve but excited American traveler comes to term with the real Venice, similar to all his/her dreams and visions, but inexplicably different as well. The chapter begins with the train departing from the station in Milan, and as Smith points out “you really begin to arrive in Venice when you leave Milan” (Smith 1897, 1): being excited about the imminent encounter with the city, the traveler recalls

¹⁶⁰ My italics.

all the images which make up his own personal view of it. It is a Ruskinian Venice, in which its stones and its architecture define an alluring landscape, filled with self-reflecting palaces, domes, minarets and steeples, whose Oriental trait is emphasized by a kaleidoscope of colors: it is the Venice which appears in “picture-books” and in paintings, it is the Venice popularized in newspapers and magazines:

Great rows of white palaces running sheer into the water; [...] domes and minarets, kiosks, towers, and steeples, queer-arched temples, and the like. [...] Gold-encrusted barges, hung with Persian carpets, rowed by slaves double-banked, and trailing rare brocades in sea of China blue (Smith 1897, 1).

The arrival in Verona represents a momentary detour for the imaginative traveler, as the Shakespearean echoes from *Romeo and Juliet* flash through his mind: “The very name [Verona] suggests the gay lover of the bal masque, the poisoned vial, and the calcium moonlight illuminating the wooden tomb of the stage set graveyard. You instinctively look around for the fair Juliet and her nurse” (Smith 1897, 1). But this distraction is short-lived: when the traveler reaches Padua all his certainties disappear and the excitement is substituted by a feeling of sheer terror for the traveler questions the very existence of Venice: “A deadening suspicion enters your mind. What if, after all, there should be no Venice?” (Smith 1897, 2). And the thoughts which follow this disturbing question, sound like an anguished cry for help:

As this suspicion deepens, the blood clogs in your veins, and a thousand shivers go down your spine. You begin to fear that all these traditions of your childhood, all these dreams and fancies, are like the thousand and one other lies that have been told to and believed by you since the days when you spelled out words in two syllables (*ibid.*).

The idea of Venice as a “fictional” place rather than a real one, problematizes the traveler’s own sense of reality, for the city becomes the place in which the distance between imagination and experience (reality) is dramatically confronted. Finally the train leaves Mestre, the last stop before Venice, and for a moment, the smell of the sea

and of the lagoons¹⁶¹ raises the traveler's hopes since it provides him with a reassuring proof: Rogers's "glorious City in the Sea"¹⁶² does exist! As the traveler leans out of the coach he catches "a glimpse of a long, *monotonous*¹⁶³ bridge, and away off in the purple haze, the *dreary*¹⁶⁴ outline of a distant city" (Smith 1897, 3): the traveler's hopes and dreams are suddenly shattered for the city he sees in the distance does not correspond to the alluring and colorful image in his mind, on the contrary, all the colors have disappeared as Venice appears dull, and no different from any other city in the world. The subsequent sight of the railway station, "dingy, besmoked, beraftered, beglazed" (*ibid.*), deepens the visitor's disappointment, which is so profound that "you are not angry. You are merely broken-hearted." Because "another idol of your childhood [is] shattered; another coin that your soul coveted, [is] nailed to the wall of you experience - a counterfeit!" (*ibid.*). The traveler is puzzled indeed, for the Venice he discovers does not measure up to his expectations: it is the city he has seen in the distance, a colorless and "dreary" city, and it is the one that awaits him inside the railway station, and which embodied by a "vulgar modern horde" (Smith 1897, 4) of shouting porters, passengers, custom house officers and from which the traveler tries to firmly distance himself. That glimpse of "modern" Venice is enough to shatter a whole tradition of images, thoughts, emotions and desires associated with the old city *par excellence*: lost and defeated, the traveler steps outside the train station in search of some relief. Finally, an epiphany takes place and the real city manifests itself revealing its picturesque inhabitants, its gondolas, its quaint but astonishing architecture:

One step, and you stand in the light. Now look! Below, at your feet, a great flight of marble steps drops down to the water's edge. Crowding the steps is a throng of gondoliers, porters, women with fans and gay-colored gowns, priests, fruit-sellers, water-carriers¹⁶⁵, and peddlers. At the edge, and away over as far as the beautiful marble church, a flock of gondolas like black swans curve in and out. Beyond the stretches the double line of church and palace, bordering the glistening highway.

¹⁶¹ "You smell the salt air of the Adriatic through the open car window. Instantly your hopes revive" (Smith 1897, 3). Smith's sentence recalls James's description of a similar moment "There was the same last intolerable delay at Mestre, just before your first glimpse of the lagoon confirms the already distinct sea-smell which has added speed to the precursive flight of your imagination" (James 1992, 52)

¹⁶² See Samuel Rogers's *Italy*.

¹⁶³ My italics.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Smith's description of the crowd of Venetians standing in front of him, can be also viewed as a thorough rendering of all the picturesque "types" who characterized the Venetian landscape and who were often portrayed by artists, see, for instance, Duvneck's painting *Watercarriers, Venice*.

Over all is the soft golden haze, the shimmer, the translucence of the Venetian summer sunset (Smith 1897, 5).

It is worth noting that both James and Smith choose a summer day's sunset as the "perfect" moment to experience the city for the first time and to the fullest: "I came into Venice, just as I had done before, toward the end of a summer's day, when the shadows begin to lengthen and the light to glow, and found that the attendant sensations bore repetition remarkably well" (James 1992, 51). The visual potential of Venice at sunset had been fully explored by James in the ravishing description of a Venetian sunset which appeared in the short story "Traveling companions" in 1870:

We went back over the lagoon in the glow of sunset, in a golden silence [...] a golden clearness so perfect that the rosy flush on the marble palaces seemed as light and pure as the life-blood on the forehead of a sleeping child. There is no Venice like the Venice of that magical hour. For that brief period her ancient glory returns. The sky arches over her like a vast imperial canopy crowded with its clustering mysteries of light. Her whole aspect is one of unspotted splendor. No other city takes the crimson evanescence of day with such magnificent effect (James 1962, 204).

Perhaps bearing this description in mind, Smith echoed James's words as he remarked: "It is the summer, of course, never the winter" (Smith 1897, 8)¹⁶⁶, for the tantalizing beauty of this city is fully revealed when the silhouette of the Salute is set against the glaring setting sun and the whole city is glowing with color:

This drift back, square in the face of the royal sun, attended by all pomp and glory of a departing day! What shall be said of this reveling, rioting dominant god of the west, clothed in purple and fine gold; [...] saturated, steeped, drunken with color; every steeple, tower, and dome ablaze; [...] the Giudecca, flashing like burning gold. Somehow you cannot sit and take your ease in the fullness of all this beauty and grandeur. [...] Suddenly a delicate violet light falls about you; the lines of

¹⁶⁶ Howells, on the other hand, arrived in Venice on a cold winter dawn, being fully aware that "[I] was not so full of Soul as I might have been in warmer weather" (Howells 1867, 12). Venice was associated with summer weather and southern Mediterranean light.

palaces grow purple; the water is dulled to a soft gray, broken by long, undulating waves of blue.[...] the little cupola high up on the dome of the Redentore still burns pink and gold (Smith 1897, 26-27).

But the traveler's emotional and physical journey, as it is described in chapter one, has not ended yet, for he still has to reach the hotel where he is going to stay. In the warm light of the sunset the traveler is finally able to *see* the city, and as Smith suggests, he is overwhelmed by an intoxicating combination of light, colors and smell: Venice has a dazzling effect on his senses¹⁶⁷, and this effect is so extreme and unexpected that words can barely describe it: "so intense is the surprise, so foreign to your traditions and dreams the actuality" (Smith 1897, 5). As in a trance, the traveler experiences a "fine confusion of sense and spirit" (Howells 1867, 13) while the gondola is silently gliding through the narrow canals, taking him to his hotel room. The night is slowly falling, and as the lingering shadows accentuate the surreal light of Venice, the traveler's eyes rest on a multitude of fragmentary visions of the city, a "kaleidoscope of glimpses" (Mathews 2003, 17) which recalls Whistler's *Nocturnes*¹⁶⁸:

The palaces and warehouses shut out the sky. On you go- under low bridges of marble, fringed with people leaning listlessly over; around past corners, their red and yellow bricks worn into ridges by thousand of rounding boats; past open plazas crowded with the teeming life of the city. The shadows deepen; the waters glint like flakes of broken gold-leaf. High up in an opening you catch a glimpse of a tower, rose-pink in the fading light; it is the Campanile. Further on, you slip beneath an arch caught between two palaces and held in midair. You look up, shuddering as you trace the outlines of the fatal bridge of sighs. For a moment all is dark. Then you glide into a sea of opal, of amethyst and sapphire (Smith 1897, 5).

¹⁶⁷ The sensuous appeal of Venice had been widely pointed out by many writers such as Hillard and Jarves, but also James and Howells. In his article "Venice: an Early Impression" (1873) James stressed that "the mere use of one's eyes in Venice is happiness enough, and generous observers find it hard to keep an account of their profits in this line", similarly, Smith often emphasized the visual impact of the city on the observer. Both James and Smith were particularly interested in the visual perception of Venice, for Smith was also a painter, and James had studied painting under J. La Farge.

¹⁶⁸ Prof. Mathews has argued that Smith's illustrations for *Venice of To-Day* were strongly influenced by Whistler's "misty paintings and delicate etchings" (Mathews 2003, 17) of the city; similarly, even Smith's written descriptions of Venice reflected this influence.

To the traveler's eyes the nocturnal Venice appears as a place where "Every thing is dreamlike and unsubstantial; a fairy pageant floating upon the waters; a city of cloudland rather than of the earth" (Hillard 1853, 24). Fascinated and puzzled by the alluring charm of the city, the traveler realizes that the real images which now are meeting his eyes have surpassed all his expectations, while at the same time, they force him to focus on the aesthetic and emotional reconfiguration of his internal landscape: "No, it is not the Venice of your childhood; not the dream of your youth. It is softer, more mellow, more restful, more exquisite in its harmonies" (Smith 1897, 7). The contradicting dynamics between imagination and experience, between the imagined Venice and the real one, are solved by the paradoxical vision of a city, which encompasses two cities at once: the one belonging to the material world, and therefore made of stones and tangible, and the one which appears in the reflection of the first one¹⁶⁹: both cities seem to be interchangeable for their borders are blurred and transient. When the weary traveler finally arrives at the hotel¹⁷⁰ he can observe the city from a different viewpoint, while he is standing on the balcony of his hotel room: the previous view from the gondola offered shifting visual fragments of the city and its architecture, and therefore the sense of sight was primarily engaged. On the other hand, while on the balcony, the traveler is allowed to get an overall view of the astonishing panorama, but most of all, he can activate his sense of sound and fully perceive the peculiar silence and stillness, which distinguish the Venetian landscape from any other landscape: this silence is perceived as in contrast with "the disturbing noise of modernity"¹⁷¹ which affects all the other cities but Venice.

The only element which has the power to break the spell of the Venetian silence is melody, and as the sound of a distant song from a gondola reaches the traveler's ears, the tension of the journey is finally relieved while his eyes fill with tears. (Smith 1897, 7) As I have previously noted, in my interpretation, Smith's ability as a storyteller is

¹⁶⁹ See Calvino's description of "Valdrada", which strongly resembles Venice: "Così il viaggiatore vede arrivando due città: una diritta sopra il lago e una riflessa capovolta [...] le due Valdrade vivono l'una per l'altra guardandosi negli occhi" (Calvino 1993, 53).

¹⁷⁰ The hotel mentioned by Smith in the text is the Hotel Britannia, and this is the very hotel where Smith used to spend his summer holidays when in Venice (AAA).

¹⁷¹ In fact, when the traveler first arrives at the train station in Venice, he is clearly disappointed and irritated by the presence of "the vulgar modern horde" of people who "are all shouting" (Smith 1897, 4); other writers like Howells, for instance, pointed out "the beautiful silence" of Venice as one of the most peculiar elements of the city, and which was rarely found in modern urban environments. It is also worth noting that Smith himself resided in New York, and therefore he constantly had to deal with a hectic and noisy urban landscape. The anti-modernity of Venice, which was mostly regarded as a positive trait, was marked indeed by this unique relation between sound and silence. On the other hand, though, it is important to remember that both Howells and Smith commented on the noise of Venice's busy markets and alleys.

clearly evident in this first chapter: unlike many descriptions of Venice which can be found in other travelogues¹⁷², Smith carefully built a narrative which on the one hand, emphasized the emotional and sentimental approach to the city; while on the other, it systematically dealt with the mental and physical topoi which marked the average American's experience in Venice, and which consequently defined America's "topographical love affair" (Simpson 2003, 34) with it. Smith describes the different emotional stages the traveler has to go through when dealing with the peculiar process of de-construction and re-construction of an internal and external landscape, a process which characterizes the act of traveling and which, in a sense, defines every creative act as well¹⁷³. The traveler's emotional roller coaster is exemplified by the physical and mental itinerary which Smith accurately describes: each location, in fact, corresponds to a different emotion and reaction to the idea of Venice (before getting there) and to the real Venice (after getting there). The following table might help illustrate the two parallel itineraries:

Milan - the train station: Excitement and Impatience:
imagining Venice "memory-fed visions the city" (Smith 1897, 1).

Verona: Momentary shift of focus:
literary echoes (Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*) associated with the city.

Padua: Anguish/Terror:
the traveler's cultural certainties are questioned by the recurring doubt over the real existence of Venice "A deadening suspicion enters your mind: what if, after all, there should be no Venice?"; "the blood clogs in your veins and a thousand shivers go down your spine" (Smith 1897, pp. 2-3).

¹⁷² See Clement's *The Queen of The Adriatic* (1893), and Hillard's *Six Months in Italy* (1853).

¹⁷³ For an in-depth analysis of the role of travel in nineteenth century American culture see the seminal work by William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad, European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. According to Stowe "writing and travel are creative acts, ways of giving form and meaning to actions and perceptions, of shaping experience for comprehension, use, and pleasure" (Stowe 1994, 13).

Mestre (right after the train leaves the train station): Temporary relief/Hope:
the traveler's hopes are revived by the fact he can "smell the salt air of the Adriatic"
(Smith 1897, 3), a proof of the tangible dimension of Venice.

Crossing the bridge/

arrival at the train station in Venice: Disillusion/Disappointment/Anger:
the city is exactly like all the other modern cities. Its image does not reflect the image
popularized by the tradition. "Another idol of your childhood shattered" (Smith 1897,
3), Venice perceived as "a counterfeit" (*ibid.*)!

Outside the train station

(the first real glimpse of the Venetian landscape): Deep sense of Relief:
identification of the typical elements which mark the image of Venice, according to the
American cultural tradition (picturesque inhabitants, gondolas, architecture - churches
and palaces - light and color).

Surprise: the landscape initially perceived as familiar, is now viewed as quaint, utterly
different because of its eccentric topography: "So foreign to your traditions and
dreams" (Smith 1897, 5).

Amazement/Confusion: the traveler is disoriented.

The Gondola ride:

Awe:
identification and recognition of the cultural topoi that define the city: "It is the
Campanile"; "Shuddering as you trace the outlines of the Fatal Bridge of Sights"
(Smith 1897, 5) but viewed from a constantly shifting perspective. Emphasis on the
sensuous experience of Venice (in particularly the sense of smell and sight).

The hotel/ Balcony of the hotel room:

Denouement/ Release of tension.
Highly sentimental tone employed by the narrator:
the scene reaches the emotional climax as the traveler cries, overwhelmed by his
emotions.

In this first chapter, not only does Smith itemize the picturesque elements of the Venetian landscape and seascape¹⁷⁴, but it also itemizes the emotions and expectations associated with them. By focusing on these elements, he also offers a more “modern” approach to the city for he implicitly dwells both on the visitor’s pre-existing images of it and on his reactions to it, while at the same time, he stresses the cultural relevance these images have, while the traveler, who is discovering Venice for the first time, tries to come to terms with the topographical and visual complexity of this peculiar environment.

The visitor, as Smith’s remarks, cannot escape the overwhelming feelings aroused by the beauty of this place, and realizes that the real experience of the city is utterly different from, and far better than, the dream of the city: “you look about you, the stillness filling your soul, the soft air embracing you [...] no, it is not the Venice of your childhood; not the *dream*¹⁷⁵ of your youth. It is softer, more mellow, more restful, more exquisite in its harmonies” (Smith 1897, 7). The Venice Smith describes in the opening pages of his travelogue, does reflect the Venice of the literary tradition, a moonlit and evanescent city whose unfathomable allure subdues one’s senses and imagination: “the Venice of light and life, of sea and sky and melody” (Smith 1897, n.p.). Surprisingly, it is the same city which the much less sentimental and much more cunning Mark Twain catches a glimpse of in his own modern and unorthodox version of *The Pilgrims’ Progress* that is *The Innocents Abroad*¹⁷⁶:

In a few minutes we swept gracefully out into the Grand Canal, and under the mellow moonlight the Venice of poetry and romance stood revealed. [...] there was life and motion everywhere, and yet everywhere there was a hush, a stealthy sort of stillness. Music came floating over the waters- Venice was complete (Twain 1872, 156).

Echoing his friend’s words Smith gets in gondola and “glide[s] into a sea of opal, of amethyst and sapphire” (Smith 1897, 5), surrounded by a stillness which fills the soul

¹⁷⁴ See Appadurai’s definition of “scapes” as “perspectival constructs through which humans impose meaning on an environment” (quoted in Davis & Marvin, *Venice The Tourist Maze*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 5). Taking Appadurai’s notion into consideration, Davis and Marvin have divided Venice, the “experiential city” (Davis 2004, 5) into four “scapes”, that is, Timescape, Landscape, Seascape and Worldscape. Surprisingly, the titles of the chapters in Smith’s travelogue can be grouped under these four categories, as they reflect the shifting perspectives on Venice’s salient traits.

¹⁷⁵ My italics.

¹⁷⁶ See Mamoli Zorzi “The text is the city: the representation of Venice in Two tales by Irving and Poe and a novel by Cooper” in *RSA VI*, no. 8, 1990, p.286.

and which is interrupted only by the most pleasant “soft, low strain of music” (*ibid.*, 7) while the city is slowly revealing “all the beauty and romance of five centuries” (*ibid.*, n.p.).

Smith was fully aware of his obsession with Venice, which had become a leitmotif of his verbal and visual narrative, as it represented the “radical otherness” (Lovell 1984, 12) against which American culture would measure itself; in addition to this, like many of his contemporaries, Smith viewed the city as an alternative urban space which was indeed “physically remote” (*ibid.*, 12) and exotic, and which, at the same time, allowed Americans to experience a “a non-industrial and archaic”(*ibid.*, 12) dimension to life. Smith presented the city as the antidote to the vulgarity of modern life, and in particular to the vulgarity of an age obsessed by money and profit:

If I have given to Venice a prominent place among the cities of the earth it is because in this selfish, materialistic, money-getting age, it is a joy to live, if only for a day, where a song is more prized than a soldo; where the poorest pauper laughingly shares his scanty crust; where to be kind to a child is a habit, to be neglectful of old age a shame; a city the relics of whose past are the lessons of our future (Smith 1897, n.p.).

Smith’s portrayal of life in Venice was of course, idealized and it reinforced a widespread image of the city among American tourists and artists: thanks to its peculiar topography and history, Venice “resisted” modernity and all the subsequent and inevitable changes brought by it; since America could not do the same, for modernity, modernization and urbanization were the traits that defined its core identity, many Americans projected their nostalgia for a prelapsarian “innocence” onto a city which appeared as the embodiment of all the aesthetic and moral values associated with “anti-modern¹⁷⁷ utopian landscapes” (Stott 1989, 59). In one sense, Smith’s life epitomized such attitude: spending most of the year in New York City, where he also ran a profitable business activity, Smith was part of the “money-getting” society which he had described so harshly in his preface. Then, every year, summer would bring a change of scenery (and mentality) for Smith would move to Venice¹⁷⁸ and would spend

¹⁷⁷ For an in-depth analysis of anti-modernism and anti-modernist tendencies within 19th century American society see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

¹⁷⁸ While Venice remained Smith’s preferred destination, other cities such as Dordrecht and Constantinople were later added to his “list of favorite locations”: these cities shared a number of

his summer days there, while he enjoyed the slow paced Venetian life and benefited from it. Smith's approach to Venice as the "anti-modern" place *par excellence* also revealed the contradictory attitude which was deeply rooted in the American mentality of that time and in Smith as well: on the one hand, the modern elements (busy city life, the mechanization of labor and intense urbanization) of American society were condemned as they were viewed as the ailments which had forced Americans to give up the values of the pre-industrial (and pre-civil war) years. In fact, many artists like Smith:

deplored the aesthetic desolation of modern American machinery, the coldness of man-made materials, the noise and speed of city life, the lack of visual variety in a cosmopolitan world, and an array of moral regressions from the disintegration of the family to the impersonality of corporate and government institutions" (Stott 1989, 47).

Venice represented what America had lost: with its teeming street life, its quiet alleys and waterways, the *dolce far niente* of its inhabitants and the possibility to lead a relaxed life style, the city offered a solution to a difficult compromise, for American visitors could experience life as it used to be before industrialization, (in America as well) without having to give up all the benefits of modernization, which after all, were awaiting them back home¹⁷⁹.

Smith's interest in pre-industrial landscapes had already appeared in a number of drawings and watercolors depicting some Dutch towns, in particular Dordrecht: as Annette Stott has aptly pointed out Smith was fascinated by the "ancient visage of the city [Dordrecht]" (Stott 1989, 54) and its unique mix of medieval streets and silent waterways¹⁸⁰. In one sense, such interest anticipated Smith's intense fascination with Venice whose cityscape was similar to Dutch towns, for it displayed a pre-modern

common traits, they appeared as "exotic" and "remote", but above all, because of their slow-paced, old-fashioned and genuine lifestyle, they embodied that "anti-modern and picturesque landscape" which Smith sought and which had become the main source of inspiration for his paintings.

¹⁷⁹ In his study of America's antimodernist tendencies during the 19th century, Lears has aptly stressed the ambivalent attitude American culture had toward modernization and toward its effects: "antimodernism was not simply escapism; it was ambivalent, often coexisting with enthusiasm for material progress" (Lears 1981, XV). In one sense, Smith's diversified careers reflected this ambivalent and apparently contradictory attitude.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Smith's watercolor of Dordrecht *Behind the Groot Kirk, ca. 1880s*, The Brooklyn Museum, which obviously shares some common traits with Smith's subsequent watercolors of Venetian canals: the watery reflection of the overhanging palaces (Venice) and houses (Dordrecht), the presence of a small boat gliding on the water which often defined the recognizable "punctum" of the composition, the emphasis on the light effects created by the mirror-like interplay between the liquid element and the sky.

environment which was untouched by the effects of industrialization. On the other hand, though, Venice was also markedly different from any another “pre-modern” city or town, since it was characterized by a peculiar saturation of color and light which could not be found anywhere else. Consequently, the appealing combination of anti-modern traits, luminous colors, and the constant presence of the past together with a peculiar sense of timelessness, gave Venice that additional “je-ne sais-quoi” which turned it into the preferred subject of many painters, including Smith. Illustrative in this regard was an article by Polly King which was published in *Monthly Illustrator* in 1895: while praising Italy’s alluring charm King attempted to draw a parallel between rural New England and old Italy, arguing that they shared common picturesque traits. But the fascination with old Italy was so intense and deep, that the journalist ended up celebrating Italy’s mysterious charm rather than focusing on the beauty of New England. King’s description of Venice fully reflected the emotional and intellectual response of several American artists to the Venetian landscape:

There is one part of the world, however, which we may never equal in charm, which, in spite of all we know of it, for all the thousands of times that it has been painted, is in itself ever new in its wondrous and unique beauty. This is the city of Venice, which, like Ninon d’Eclos, boasts more lovers in her age and decay than in the prime of her beauty and loveliness (King 1895, 366).

Significantly, Hopkinson Smith was one of the most passionate lovers of the city, and his travelogue *Venice of To-Day* was an attempt to grasp and celebrate its protean nature.

Both text and images in *Venice of To-Day* focused on the picturesque aspects of Venetian life, and they often conveyed “vernacular views” (Lovell 1984, 129) of the city, which according to Smith, functioned as the perfect antidotes to the evils of modern life, and its “selfish, materialistic and money-getting” (Smith 1897, n.p.) lifestyle¹⁸¹. As Margareta Lovell has suggested, Smith’s watercolors of Venice combined a romanticized vision of the city with a colorful rendering of its vernacular present, while he tried to achieve a similar effect through the many written descriptions of daily life in Venice, which are present in his travelogue. Echoing a Ruskinian

¹⁸¹ An 1898 article in the magazine *The Critic* reported that Smith “sees that materialism is the bane of our civilization” (*The Critic* 1898, April 2).

attitude toward the dreadful effects of modernity on Venice, Smith commented on the new fish-market in Rialto and described it as “a modern horror of cast iron and ribbed glass” (Smith 1897, 144); paradoxically, the bold engineer who had benefited from the technical advances brought by progress in order to build lighthouses and breakwaters, was remarkably resistant to change and feared the adverse consequences of modernity on his beloved city: “Oh, if the polluting touch of so-called modern progress could only be kept away from this rarest of cities!” (Smith 1897, 144). Similarly, Polly King, a journalist from the *Monthly Illustrator*, shared Smith’s viewpoint and described Venice as the symbol of an epic struggle against the devastating consequences of modernity: “Florence has been modernized out of all recognition [...], tramcars run about the Eternal City but Venice still stands entrenched amidst her canals, against the march of modern improvements, as in the Middle Ages against the Goths and the Vandals” (King 1895, 366). As early as 1853 the well-known travel book *Six Months in Italy* by Hillard illustrated the beneficial effects of a visit to Italy, describing such visit as a temporary break from the discomforts caused by a more modern, that is American, way of living:

The change from America to Italy, from movement to repose, from the present to the past, from hope to memory, is soothing and delightful for a time [...] A residence in that country [Italy] enlarges that shadowy realm of *imagination and memory*¹⁸², into which we can always escape when chased by troubles. In moments of weariness and despondency, when the weight of life is pressing hard upon us, the pictures which we have brought from Italy will rise up before us with restoring power; those lovely forms will breathe their own peace over the troubled spirit: the beauty which is there stamped upon the earth, expressed in marble and upon canvas, will glide into the mind, and help the thoughts to rise above dwarfing cares and debasing pleasures (Hillard 1853, 561).

Fifty years later¹⁸³ Smith experienced the same “soothing” effects described by Hillard, while his Venetian watercolors and travelogue brought the pleasurable images and “the beneficent influence of a slower, quieter way of life into the parlors of American homes” (Stott 1989, 49).

¹⁸² My italics.

¹⁸³ Hillard’s book was published in 1853.

As already mentioned above, Smith tried to come to terms with the simultaneous and puzzling coexistence of the past and the present in Venice through a romanticized, picturesque and pre-modern portrayal of it, while at the same time, he also had to reconcile his own personal vision with the significant stratification of literary¹⁸⁴ and cultural images, which had inevitably shaped the way the city was perceived and described and which had influenced him as well. Smith's travel book, like many other works by his contemporaries, seemed to suggest that Venice and its image were constantly poised over a never-ending tension between representations based on clichés¹⁸⁵ and restless attempts to explore its pictorial possibilities in a new and original way. Like Smith, most foreign artists in Venice, whether consciously or not, were influenced by previous typified images of the city and as Mamoli Zorzi has pointed out, warning against the "risk" of the prominent aesthetic quality of Venice, "the visual and literary "philters", through which it [Venice] is seen are always there: they superimpose themselves over any fresh perception of the city" (Mamoli Zorzi 1990, 286). But it is also true that on the other hand, to each artist, the legibility of the Venetian landscape was as mutable as its watery self-reflecting image as Smith noted: "Venice is a hundred different Venices to as many different painters. If it were not so, you would not be here to-day, nor love it as you do" (Smith 1897, 40)¹⁸⁶. In remarking the unfixed and mutable quality which characterized the perception of the Venetian landscape, Smith also drew the attention to the fact that Venice was at the same time, an external and internal landscape whose features often varied according to the gaze which interpreted it. As previously discussed, Hop's gaze was steeped in a tradition which included a wide array of topoi and which was well-reflected in *Venice of To-Day*: the awkward combination of timelessness and history, the saturating effect of light and colors, the picturesqueness of its inhabitants and their "pre-modern" lifestyle, and finally the

¹⁸⁴ For the representation of Venice in literary texts see; M.L. Ross *Storied Cities Literary Imaginings of Florence, Venice and Rome*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1994; Mamoli Zorzi, "The Text is the City: the Representation of Venice in two Tales by Irving and Poe and a Novel by Cooper", in RSA, Chiarella, Sassari, Anno VI, no. 8, 1990.

¹⁸⁵ See Sergio Perosa's remarks on the role of clichés in the representation of Venice and Florence: "James aveva avvertito dell'impossibilità d'un atteggiamento originale verso le due città [Venice and Florence], tutto é già stato detto, compresa la constatazione che, per entrambe, il cliché é vero, rappresenta l'accrezione di quanto per secoli ne hanno scritto, dipinto, cantato gli artisti" (Perosa 1993, 157).

¹⁸⁶ In the same passage Smith praised Ziem and he remarked that his portrayal of Venice was the most effective in terms of colors and light: "Besides, when you think it all over, you will admit that Ziem, of all living painters, has best rendered its sensuous, color-soaked side" (Smith 1897, 40). But in an article published just one year later (1898) Smith seemed to contradict his own appreciative comment on Ziem as he accused him (and Turner) of conveying an image of the city which did not correspond to the real one: "Truth first, however. Neither Turner nor Ziem have painted Venice truly" (*The Critic* 1898, April 2).

sensuous appeal of a landscape whose distinctive features engaged the visitor's imagination to such an extent that the boundaries between the imaginary and the real perception of it would often become blurred.

In his seminal study of the literary representations of Venice, *Venice Desired*, Tony Tanner has largely discussed the relationship between this city and the erotic/sensuous connotations which its name and image have always evoked, in fact Tanner reminds us that "more than any other city it [Venice] is inextricably associated with desire. Desire of Venice, desire for Venice, desire in Venice" (Tanner 1992, 4). The perception of Venice as "the place of love, lechery, sensuality, prostitution" (Tanner 1992, 5) is, according to Tanner, the result of a combination of several literary and cultural interpretations of the city, which have created a multifaceted vision of it. Similarly, Redford has aptly remarked that the image of Venice was built upon the paradoxical interdependence of two contrasting images and myths: Venice "città galante" that is the licentious city *par excellence*, symbolized by the image of the Venetian Courtesans; and Venice, "stato di libertà", that is the autonomous and free state aptly represented by the description of "Venice as the unconquered bride and Virgin", "the maiden city"¹⁸⁷ (Redford 1996, 52), whose valuable virtues were epitomized by the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension¹⁸⁸ during which "she [Venice] took herself a Mate, She must espouse the everlasting Sea" (quoted in Redford 1996, 58). In addition to these paradoxical dynamics which implicitly suggested an accentuated feminine trait of the city, and emphasized the ambiguous and complex imagery associated with the city, it is worth keeping in mind that to the eyes of many visitors, the physical experience of Venice, of its topography and of its hues, was first of all, a sensual experience, for it aroused and engaged the visitors' senses, which were often overwhelmed by the richness of its beauty. It is not surprising that many 19th century descriptions of Venice by Americans emphasized the fact that the experience of the city was both sensually

¹⁸⁷ In his book *Venice and the Grand Tour*, Redford discusses the myth of Venice as "the maiden city" and the symbolism of Virginité which established a connection between England and Venice, while at the same time it shaped the way British culture perceived the independent Venetian republic (Redford 1996, 54).

¹⁸⁸ Festa della Sensa (Ascension): on that day Venetians celebrate the traditional "Sposalizio del mare", a symbolical wedding ceremony during which, the doge, representing Venice, marries the Adriatic Sea (Negri 1853, 91). Redford notes that this celebration "suggests a fertility rite crossed with a ritual voyage, which defines the spatial contours of the community while taming (by feminizing) a potentially hostile outside force" (Redford 1996, 58). Smith may have implicitly referred to this celebration in his description of the flooded Saint Mark's square as he commented "the sea is on a rampage. The bridegroom is in search of the bride [Venice]. This time the Adriatic has come to wed the city" (Smith 1897, 148); in Smith's interpretation the bridegroom is represented by the Sea.

and aesthetically pleasing as it was reported for instance, in an article from *The Boston Daily Globe* in 1874:

it [Venice] has a charm which the transient visitor [...] is not apt to discover, unless he happen to come in the limpid Spring time or in the golden October days when even the most evanescent qualities of the atmosphere and light and color have a subtlety which must penetrate every nature in which coarseness is not hopelessly ingrained (*BDG* 1874, October 29).

The experience, the journalist argues, is so intense that “one must let his own individuality be as it were absorbed in the peculiar character of the place” (*ibid.*). Similarly, Henry James describes the feeling of being absorbed by the city, whose charm and power penetrates one’s senses and soul so that “it is by living there from day to day that you feel the fullness of her charm; that you invite her exquisite influence to sink into your spirit” (James 1882, 11). James’s Venice turns into an anthropomorphous entity whose dazzling charm ignites the erotic tension between the observer/visitor and the observed/visited city: “the place seems to personify itself, to become human and sentient and conscious of your affection. You desire to embrace it, to caress it, to possess it; and finally a soft sense of possession grows up and your visit becomes a perpetual love-affair” (James 1882, 11-12). In a very similar way Smith echoes James’s words when he describes the intoxicating effect of the city which forces its visitors to an unconditional emotional surrender: “you would throw open, wide open, the great swinging gates of your soul. You not only would enjoy, you would *absorb, drink it, fill*¹⁸⁹ yourself to the brim” (Smith 1897, 20), both will and senses are subdued to the city’s tantalizing beauty as Smith indicates: “analyze the feeling as you may, despise its sentiment or decry it altogether, the fact remains, that once get this drug of Venice into your Venice, and you never recover” (*ibid.*, 200).

Both James and Smith compare the city to a woman whose seductive power is irresistible, and whose true nature is at the same time puzzling and unfathomable. But James’s description of Venice emphasizes also a subtle uncanny undertone which characterizes the city (Perosa 1993, 157): “the creature varies like a nervous woman,

¹⁸⁹ My italics. It is interesting to note Smith’s extensive use of words like *absorb, fill, drink*, which obviously recall the imagery of water, of a liquid element, which is constantly flowing and whose boundaries are always mutable and uncertain; it is also the primeval element which defines Venice and with which the city is fully identified by Smith, even in this description of the visitor’s reaction to it. In such a description the visitor is almost compared to an empty vase or an empty space which is “filled by” and “flooded by” (Tanner 8) the all-pervasive (like water!) seductive power of Venice.

whom you know only when you know all the aspects of her beauty. She has high spirits or low, she is pale or red, grey or pink cold or warm, fresh or wan, according to the weather or the hour” (James 1882, 11).

Smith’s depiction on the other hand, focuses on the mythical allure of a creature resembling both an enchantress and a lover: “once under the spell of her presence, they [painters] are never again free from the fascinations of this Mistress¹⁹⁰ of the Adriatic” (Smith 1897, 56); “this white goddess of the sea has a thousand lovers, and, like all other lovers the world over, each one believes that he alone holds the key to her heart” (*ibid.*, 57) and again “it is Venice the Beloved, and there is none other!”. Smith profusely uses the word “mistress” and “goddess” to identify the city, calling it “a matchless Goddess of Air and Light and Melody¹⁹¹” (*ibid.*, 200), while he compares it to a mermaid-like female entity who exerts a spell on her worshippers, and whose beauty is as enticing as a siren call: “it is the spirit of idolatry born of her never-ending beauty, that marks the marvelous power which Venice wields over human hearts, compelling them, no matter how dull and leaden, to reverence and love” (*ibid.*, 200). Smith was indeed, one of the most loyal worshippers of Venice: enthralled by its unfathomable charm, he tried to capture its protean form, while at the same time, like many of his contemporaries, he re-told and re-imagined the city, drawing both on his personal experience of it and on the inescapable cultural and literary “lenses” through which the city had been perceived by the many travelers and artists who had visited it. In a sense, Smith’s Venice seems to share the same intense, puzzling allure which defines Shakespeare’s Cleopatra and which transforms her into the emblem of timeless beauty: “age cannot wither, nor custom stale her *infinite variety*¹⁹²: other women cloy the appetites they feed, but she makes hungry, where most she satisfies” (Shakespeare 1968, 153-154).

¹⁹⁰ Venice was often referred to as “The Queen of the Adriatic”: the expression was widely popular and it appeared in newspaper and magazine articles and in books as well; see for instance, the travel book on Venice by Clement which was entitled *The Queen of the Adriatic*. But in this passage, Smith uses the word “mistress” instead of “queen”: if on the one hand, the word echoes indeed the term “queen” for it suggests the idea of “a woman in a position of authority, ownership or control” (Collins English Dictionary), on the other hand, it may also hint at the additional meaning of the word which was associated with sexual imagery and with relationships between lovers.

¹⁹¹ This definition might refer to Ruskin’s lecture and essay “The Queen of Air, being a Study of Greek Myths of Cloud and Storm” (1869).

¹⁹² My italics.

CHAPTER 3

“A Hundred different Venices”

“Take some golden sunshine, some expensive gondolas, and narrow canals.
Add some busy piazzas... mix with days of Italian sunshine...
decorate with ancient buildings... leave in the oven for three long months.
And you have made Venice”

(L.Punchiard)

3.1 Sketching from a gondola

As the very title of Smith's travelogue *Gondola Days* suggests, the idea of Venice has always encompassed the image of its elegant gondolas gliding over the narrow canals; not only are gondolas illustrative of the peculiar relationship between the city's complex architecture and the element which defines it, that is water, but they have also become the most recognizable symbols of the uniqueness of Venice. Smith's title in fact, does not even mention the city, but the term used to describe this quaint means of transport, is sufficient to immediately and unmistakably identify the location. According to Davis and Marvin, a gondola is the "floating signifier" (Davis 2004, 133) which allows tourists and artists "to engage with the [Venetian] seascape" (*ibid.*, 135) for it provides access to the "real" spatial dimension of a city, which is after all, built on water. Needless to say that the image of Venice was closely associated with its gondolas in 19th century American culture as well¹⁹³: as early as 1866, in fact, Hillard reminded American travelers that "gondolas are inseparable from our idea of Venice as flowers are from that of a garden" (Hillard 1853, 45) and that "they are the most gliding, delicate, and feminine of all the forms of transport that ever floated upon the waves" (*ibid.*). Throughout the nineteenth century travel guides and magazine articles would often include a description of or a comment on gondolas, while suggesting that the full experience of Venice could not be complete if it lacked a gondola ride: "the gondola is the carriage of Venice, and a most delightful one it is. [...] A finely outlined, handsomely ornamented flat-bottomed boat is the gondola. It rests lightly upon the water, and is propelled and guided as easily as an Indian's birch bark canoe" (*BDG* 1892, May 22)¹⁹⁴. By the second half of the 19th century, gondola trips had become part of a ritual¹⁹⁵ which American visitors were eager to experience and which was often described in travelogues, including Smith¹⁹⁶'s, and in newspapers articles: the arrival at

¹⁹³ Travel guides like the Beadeker had a whole section dedicated to the description of gondolas and gondoliers. Similarly, Clement's book *The Queen of The Adriatic*.

¹⁹⁴ This article was published in the *Boston Daily Globe* in 1892, and it dealt with the controversy caused by the introduction of steamboats (vaporetti) in Venice and the gondoliers' strike to protest against it. For an analysis of the effects of such change see Davis, *Venice the Tourist Maze*, in particular the chapter on gondolas "the Floating Signifier" pp. 136-143.

¹⁹⁵ In their keen and thorough analysis of the tourists' perception of Venice, Davis and Marvin have pointed out that the ritual of the gondola ride has survived even in the age of mass tourism, for it is still considered by tourists as one of the most relevant experiences in Venice; according to Davis and Marvin it creates the illusion that thanks to it the tourist has the opportunity "to come into closer contact with the 'real Venice of the Venetians'" (Davis 2004, 155).

¹⁹⁶ See chapter 1 "An Arrival", in *Gondola Days*. See also Hillard's *Six Months in Italy*, Clement's *The Queen of the Adriatic*, Howells's *Venetian Life* and Twain's *Innocents Abroad*.

the train station in Venice was usually followed by a gondola trip, during which the visitor had a chance to marvel at the breathtaking views of Venetian palaces and bridges seen from a completely different perspective, while the gondolier was taking him/her to his/her hotel:

An unwonted hush seemed to prevail, no noisy cabs or cabmen, only the long line of gondolas with their silent gondoliers. We took our seats in one, Miss C. and I, under the bright awning, and all the weariness and anxiety of an arrival in a strange city, were forgotten as we glided out upon the waters of the Grand Canal [...] Swiftly and gracefully we wound through that tangle of boats, our silent and watchful gondolier on duty at the stern (*BDG* 1873, June 6).

It is important to note that in 19th century Venice there were indeed other kinds of boats¹⁹⁷ used for transportation¹⁹⁸, and therefore the gondola was not the only choice available; besides, gondolas were considered the symbols of “the luxury of Venice” (*BDG* 1892, May 22), for they were often used “for pleasure and accommodation, not for business” (*ibid.*) mostly by well-to-do Venetian families as the journalist suggests: “only people of the class who in our cities [American cities] keep carriages possess a gondola” (*ibid.*). Many travel writers like Smith, were aware of the fact that the average Venetian would scarcely use a gondola for everyday business:

The average citizen, as I have said, almost always walks. When there are no bridges across the Grand Canal he must of course rely on the gondola. Not the luxurious gondola with curtains and silk-fringed cushions, but a gondola half worn-out and now used as a ferryboat at the *traghetto*. [...] For longer distances, say from the railroad station to the Piazza, the Public Garden, or the Lido, he boards one of the little steamers that scurry up and down the Grand Canal or the Giudecca and the waters of some of the lagoons - really the only energetic things in Venice. (Smith 1897, 187-188)

¹⁹⁷ For instance the *sandolo*.

¹⁹⁸ See the previously mentioned article from the *Boston Daily Globe*, in which the journalist points out that “even when bringing strangers from the railroad stations and the foreign steamers, the heavy luggage is left to be transported by the barca - a more common flat - bottomed boat used for merchandise” (*BDG* 1892, May 22), while the gondola is transporting the tourist to the hotel. Evidently, the experience of the gondola ride, in this case, is devoid of its mere functional purpose, whereas it focuses on conveying a romanticized and aestheticized view of the city.

If Venetians did not use gondolas very often, or as often as they could, who really benefited from this fascinating means of transport which resisted modernization and which retained the anachronistic flavor of ancient times? Tourists and artists like Hopkinson Smith. As mentioned above, the gondola and gondolier were intimately connected to the American tourist's experience of Venice, since they aptly reflected "such touristic ideals as graceful servility, relaxed luxury, arcane skills, and unobtrusive knowledge" (Davis 2004, 136) which were part of the pre-conceived image of Venice in 19th century American culture. In addition to this, while in gondola, the visitor felt highly empowered and ready to experience the city's complex topography to the fullest, since the peculiar viewpoint from the boat would allow him to have direct contact with the amphibious nature of Venice, which after all, was also its quintessential trait. Smith keenly grasped the tantalizing mix of excitement and curiosity, which characterized the first gondola ride of the many Americans arriving in Venice: "It is like nothing else of its kind your feet have ever touched - so yielding and yet so firm; so shallow and yet stanch; so light, so buoyant, and so welcoming to peace, rest and comfort" (Smith 1897, 13); the dazzling feeling of empowerment is so intense that "you float between earth and sky" (*ibid.*, 14) while "you command space and dominate the elements" (*ibid.*). Smith's enchanted description of the experience of the gondola ride reveals his fascination with gondolas and gondoliers, a fascination so intense that on the occasion of the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, Smith brought Venetian gondoliers from the Italian city (Soria 1982, 272), so that "Venetian gondolas [could] serenely glide[d] their way through the pomp and circumstance of the Court of Honor" (Hirschler 1992, 124). According to Smith's recollection of the event, he was able to bring at least four gondoliers to Chicago: Espero, Marco, Luigi and Francesco¹⁹⁹ (Smith 1893, 101), who helped recreate an authentic feeling of the Venetian atmosphere; thus, for a brief moment Smith could imagine himself back in the Italian city, surrounded by the familiar faces and voices while enjoying the Venetian seascape: "for an instant I am in Venice again, while they [the above-mentioned gondoliers] all talk to me at once, telling me of their friends and mine whom we have known there - subjects far more

¹⁹⁹ In his account of the Exposition, Smith does not mention Giorgio among the Venetian gondoliers attending the event: Giorgio was apparently one of his favorite gondoliers and his name appeared a number of times in *Venice of To-Day*. In the book *Memoirs of an Editor* the author suggests that Giorgio on the other hand, did go to Chicago for the Exposition as he had been invited by Smith himself (Mitchell 1924, 420).

absorbing than all the surprises of this new world” (Smith 1893, 101). A few minutes later Smith made a triumphant entrance into the exposition pavilion, while gliding on the water carried by a Venetian gondola: the new world meets the old one, or better, as Hirschler has rightly suggested, the new world manages to take a piece of Venice home, and according to Smith, the encounter seems to be a fortunate one: “there is to me a seeming fitness in entering the Court of Honor reclining in a gondola and rowed by a gondolier. No other craft that floats could so perfectly harmonize with these surroundings; none so dainty, so graceful, so dignified” (Smith 1893, 102).

Smith’s description of the picturesque gondola on the Lagoon²⁰⁰ blends the image of the “Ancient City”, Venice and that one of the “White City of the Lake”, Chicago, so that the physical and imaginative boundary between the two cities becomes blurred and ambiguous: Smith’s reverie shifts from one city to the other, offering a puzzling kaleidoscope of images, in which the gondola functions as the iconic and cultural link between the two worlds: “they [gondolas] are to lagoons what the flowers are to the esplanades, or the swans to the smaller inlets. [...] the gondola revives the traditions and customs of those earlier centuries, when this great White City of the Lake was still in its glory” (Smith 1893, 102). According to Smith’s comment, gondolas have substituted canoes as the visible signs of the city’s glorious past.

Smith was indeed fascinated, if not obsessed, by gondolas, and all his writings on Venice included ravishing and detailed descriptions of this peculiar means of transport; other American writers like Howells and Twain, on the other hand, perceived a gloomy and almost sinister quality in the way gondolas looked²⁰¹, while at the same time they viewed gondolas as commodified and anachronistic objects through which the city tried to revive its own past and cater to naïve tourists in search of the “real Venice”. Howells compared gondolas to “dark, funereal barges” (Howells 1866, 13), while Twain after calling the gondola “a hearse”, openly expressed his own disappointment in one of the most memorable passages from *Innocents Abroad*:

²⁰⁰ The “Lagoon” Smith refers to is the one which was built artificially for the Exposition, but evidently he uses the word advisedly, playing on the suggestiveness of the term, which obviously could also refer to the Venetian Lagoon.

²⁰¹ Clara Erskine Clement echoed Twain and Howells in her description of Venetian gondolas: “the gondolas, alas! All look as if ready for a funeral, black, only somber black. This seems an unnecessary extension of the time when the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children; for many more than three or four generations have perambulated these fascinating waters in these dismal boats” (Clement 1893, 8).

[we] entered a hearse²⁰² belonging to the Grand Hotel d'Europe. At any rate, it was more like a hearse than anything else, though to speak by the card, it was a gondola. And this was the storied gondola of Venice! [...] This the famed gondola and this the gorgeous gondolier! - the one an inky, rusty old canoe with a sable hearse - body clapped on to the middle of it, and the other a mangy, barefooted guttersnipe with a portion of his raiment on exhibition which should have been sacred from public scrutiny (Twain 1872, 155)²⁰³

Twain's description did challenge the romanticized and widely popularized image of Venetian gondolas and their gondoliers, which was often found in magazine articles, travel guides and travelogues²⁰⁴. As for Smith, he never abandoned that peculiar sense of awe he had experienced when seeing a gondola for the first time; through a highly sentimental tone Smith aestheticized and romanticized the quaint Venetian boat, while he used the recurring image of the swan to describe it: "a flock of gondolas like black swans curve in and out" (Smith 1897, 4) waited for the newly comer, as soon as stepped outside the noisy and too modern train station, a "floating signifier" (Davis 2004, 133) whose dark hues, to Smith's eyes, did not suggest a gloomy atmosphere, but they emphasized the rare and sophisticated elegance of a swan: "how like a knowing swan it bends its head, the iron blade of the bow, and glides out upon the bosom of the Grand Cana! You stop for a moment, noting the long, narrow body, *blue-black and silver*²⁰⁵ in the morning light, as graceful in its curves as a bird" (Smith 1897, 13). Smith's gondola turns into an anthropomorphous form, which tantalizes the writer's imagination and fuels his emotional and aesthetic response to it, while he tries to capture and fix its protean nature through words:

²⁰² Leonardo Buonomo has noted that Twain, like Cooper and Howells "follows Goethe's example in identifying the gondola with the hearse" (Buonomo 1996, n.p.).

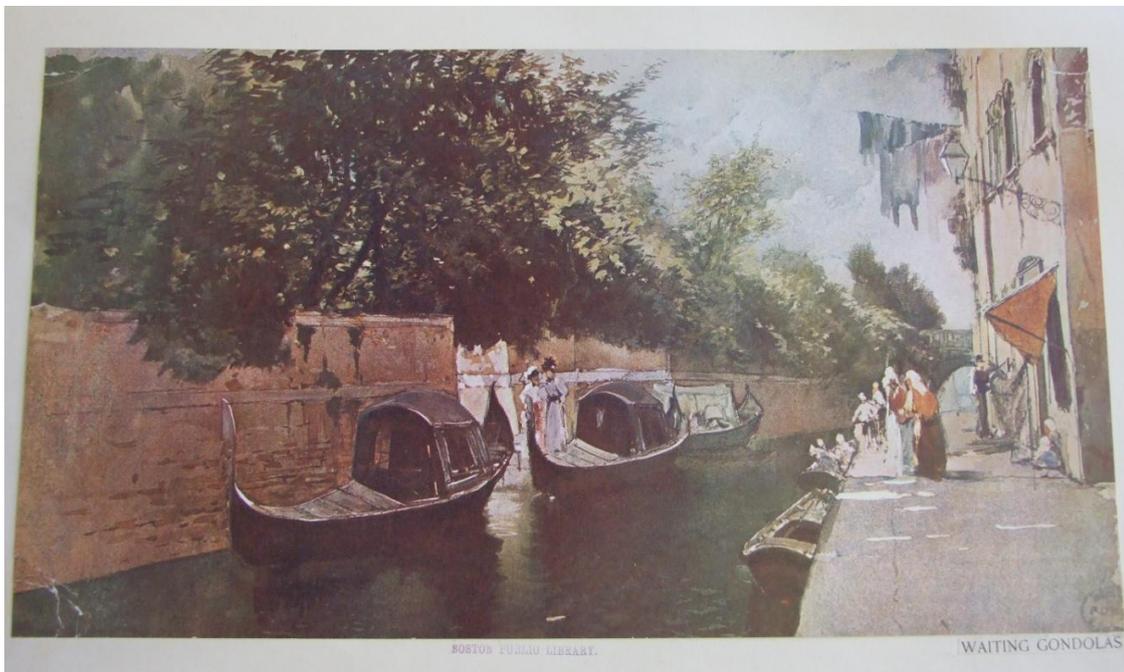
²⁰³ It is important to note, though, that after the initial disappointment Twain's perception of gondolas slightly shifts and in the following chapter he describes the gondolier and his gondola in a different way, revealing a more moderate and appreciative tone: "His [the gondolier's] attitude is stately; he is lithe and supple; all his movements are full of grace. When his long canoe, and his fine figure, towering from its high perch on the stern, are cut against the evening sky, they make a picture that is very novel and striking to a foreign eye" (Twain 1872, 164).

²⁰⁴ See for example Hillard's comparison between a gondola and a graceful woman: "a row boat walks through the water like a man of business tramping through the mud, but a gondola trips over it like a maiden over a ball-room floor" (Hillard 1853, 45); while even Henry James admitted that "of the beautiful free stroke with which the gondola, especially when there are two oars, is impelled, you never, in the venetian scene, grow weary" (James 1909, 39).

²⁰⁵ My italics.

A long, lithe, swan-like, moving boat, black as an Inquisitor's gown save for the dainty awning. A something bearing itself proudly with head high in air - alive or still, alert or restful, and obedient to your lightest touch - half sea-gull reveling in the sunlight, half dolphin cutting the dark water" (Smith 1891, 690).

Gondolas are also featured in many of Smith's Venetian watercolors²⁰⁶ and in many illustrations of *Venice of To-Day* as well: Smith would often depict them with their felze, while he would rarely include gondoliers in the composition²⁰⁷. Gondoliers, on the other hand, were often mentioned and dealt with in the written narrative of *Venice of To-Day*: Smith gave detailed information about their lives and habits, always showing an affectionate attitude towards them, as his own words suggested:



"Waiting Gondolas" (*Venice of To-Day*)

²⁰⁶ See for example, *Venetian Cab Stand* (c. 1902, charcoal, watercolor, and gouache on paper) and *Venice* (c. 1882, pencil, watercolor, and gouache on paper), (Carbone 1985).

²⁰⁷ Smith was above all a landscape and outdoor painter, consequently, most of his works focused on the rendering of the effects of light and color on landscape and on architectural elements; a single figure would be seldom portrayed by the artist, and when he finally introduced figures in his compositions they were often incidental to the portrayal of crowds. In fact, in an interview published in the *New York Times* in 1907 Smith declared: "this year [1907] I have made a departure in my work, as you will note in the present exhibition at the Noé gallery. I have introduced figures into the pictures" (*NYT* 1907, January 20). In his novels and short stories, however, Smith concentrated his attention on characters, that is, the equivalents of figures in painting, and he did the same in *Venice of To-Day*, which is full of anecdotal descriptions (often typified) of "Venetian characters" such as the gondolier, the hotel porter, Professor Croisac, the fisherman's wife, the lazzarone, the old countess and many others.

“In Venice my gondola is always my home, and my gondolier always my best friend” (Smith 1891, 690). Having spent every summer in Venice for more than twenty years, Smith was well acquainted with a number of gondoliers, and being a painter, he often relied on them and on their gondolas to explore the city’s intricate maze of waterways and therefore to gain access to quaint locations and hidden nooks²⁰⁸. Gondoliers were of central importance in the development of the cultural perception of the city: they were viewed as “the interlocutor[s] who [has] allowed outsiders to exploit the Venetian waterscape and experience the city on the terms in which it was built” (Davis 2004, 135), since “the man who rows the gondola long has been held as quintessentially Venetian as the canals themselves: if Venice has the distinction of being the archetype of itself, then the gondolier is [and was in the 19th century as well] the master icon of Venice” (*ibid.*). Gondoliers were often ascribed a mythical resonance for they were viewed as the tangible sign of “the perfect welding together of man and boat” (Smith 1891, 690), extraordinary creatures whose amazing skills allowed them to “blend[ing] with and yet control[ling]” (*ibid.*) their vessel, so that “both man and boat seemed but parts of one organism, a sort of marine Centaur, as free and fearless as that wonderful myth of the olden time” (Smith 1891, 690).

As I have previously mentioned, gondoliers knew the city very well and they would often help American visitors, particularly artists, discover the most “picturesque” locations of the city: this would often happen with the gondoliers on duty at palazzo Barbaro who would get notable guests such as Henry James, Anders Zorn and Isabella Gardner, “into churches and palaces” (Chong 2004, 110), while they would also “help them track down interesting people, and [would] show them quiet and unusual aspects of Venice” (*ibid.*). In addition to this, gondolas often became convenient open air studios from which painters could sketch and paint their Venetian views as Smith himself remarked in an interview: ““I suppose you painted many water colors from your gondolas, Mr. Smith?” “Yes, I have what may be called a *studio-gondola*²⁰⁹ in Venice. The “Canal San Giuseppe”²¹⁰ was painted from my gondola”” (*NYT* 1907, January 20).

Like many other American artists and colleagues, Smith was deeply fascinated by gondoliers, and his descriptions of them followed in the footsteps of a literary and

²⁰⁸ Alan Chong has remarked that a significant number of painters like Whistler, Cammarano, Zorn, Sargent, Smith and many others, depended on their gondoliers’ knowledge of Venetian topography in their search for “unusual views of the city” (Chong 2004, 109-110).

²⁰⁹ My italics.

²¹⁰ One of Smith’s watercolors.

cultural tradition which associated the gondolier with the image of a quintessential Venetian demigod, whose intimate knowledge of the city combined with his athleticism, skills and “exotic”²¹¹ beauty, reinforced the mythical aura which surrounded him. As early as 1853, George Hillard had commented on “the stature and beauty of the gondoliers” (Hillard 1853, 46) while describing their athletic ability and their charm: “among the gondoliers, figures are frequently to be met with which present the finest combination of strength and grace. Their forms rapidly darting along, and relieved against the sky, often reminded me of a statue of Mercury waked to life” (*ibid.*). Similarly, Henry James professed his admiration for “the solitary gondolier”²¹² (James 1909, 39):

I delight in their [gondoliers’] sun-burnt complexions and their childish dialect; I know them only by their merits, and I am grossly prejudiced in their favour. They are interesting and touching, [...] the best of them at any rate are in their line great artists. On the swarming feast-days, on the strange feast-night of the Redentore, their steering is a miracle of ease. The master-hands, the celebrities and winners of prizes - you may see them on the private gondolas in spotless white, with brilliant sashes and ribbons (James 1992, 39-40).

Even Mark Twain, who had looked at Venice with a critical eye in his *Innocents Abroad*, praised his gondolier’s skills and undeniable charm and remarked that:

His attitude is stately; he is lithe and supple; all his movements are full of grace. When his long canoe²¹³, and his fine figure, towering from its high perch on the

²¹¹ Exotic and *erotic* at the same time, as Alan Chong has aptly pointed out in his study of the relationship between American artists and Venetian gondoliers, and in particular between the literary critic John Addington Symonds and the Venetian gondolier Angelo Fusato. While emphasizing the sexual allure which often surrounded gondoliers, Chong argues that “infatuation with gondoliers was common enough among gay and straight, men and women [...]. Talking about, writing about, and depicting beautiful gondoliers brought no censure. Moreover, there was a touching and genuine concern for these powerful symbols of authentic Venice. The cynical dismissed the fascination with gondoliers as romantic foolishness, while Symonds’s relationship with Angelo [Fusato] was sometimes derided as nothing more than prostitution” (Chong 2004, 113).

²¹² James associated the image of the solitary gondolier with “the solitary horseman of the old-fashioned novel” (James 1992, 39), whose solitude was obviously linked to a melancholy mood.

²¹³ The comparison between the canoe and the gondola is also illustrative of the initial American perception of Venice, in fact, Erica Hirshler has aptly remarked that “they [Americans] had been trying to define Venice in distinctively American terms since they first saw it” (Hirshler 1992, 124), and therefore it should not be surprising that “everyone described gondolas as resembling Native American

stern, are cut against the evening sky, they make a picture that is very novel and striking to the foreign eye (Twain 1872, 164).

Smith's interest in gondoliers and consequently, his portrayals of them echoed both Hillard and James's words: in the opening pages of *Venice of To-Day* Smith offered the reader an enticing description of one of his favourite gondoliers, Espero²¹⁴; Smith's words focused on conveying the fascinating and somehow mysterious nature of a man, the gondolier, who fully epitomized the charm and the beauty of Venice:

You remember the face, *brown and sunny*, the eyes laughing, the curve of the black mustache, and how the wavy short hair curled about his neck and struggled out from under his cap. He has on another suit, newly starched and snow-white; a loose shirt, a wide collar trimmed with blue, and duck trousers. Around his waist is a wide blue sash, the ends hanging to his knees. About his throat is a loose silk scarf—so loose that you note the *broad, manly chest*, the *muscles of the neck half concealed* by the cross-barred boating-shirt covering the *brown skin*²¹⁵ (Smith 1897, 10)²¹⁶.

Smith's description of the gondolier's athleticism seemed to suggest a sensual allure. Smith's gondolier with his broad chest and sturdy muscles, exuded strength and vigor, almost suggesting the image of an athlete from Ancient Greece, while at the same time, his colorful and picturesque attire hinted at the typified image of gondoliers which visitors expected to find in Venice, and which had been recorded by many artists²¹⁷ and writers. Smith's physical description of Espero was also well-exemplified by a picture²¹⁸ in *Venice of To-Day*, which depicted another gondolier, named Luigi, and

bark canoes" (*ibid.*). Similarly, an article in *The Boston Daily Globe* described the gondola as "an Indian's birch bark canoe" (*BDG* 1892, May 22).

²¹⁴ Espero was also the main character in Smith's short story "Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier".

²¹⁵ My italics.

²¹⁶ This description of Espero resembles a similar one in the short story "Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier": "he [Espero] stood erect in the sunlight, twisting the gondola with his oar, his loose shirt, with throat and chest bare in highest light against the dark water, his head bound with a red kerchief, his well knit, graceful figure swaying in the movement of the whole [boat]" (Smith 1891, 690).

²¹⁷ See for example, Sargent's painting *Head of a Gondolier* (1880-1882) and his studies of gondoliers, but also Anders Zorn's several sketches of gondoliers (Chong 2004, 113-114).

²¹⁸ An 1880 photograph of Angelo Fusato, who was Symonds's gondolier and lover (Chong 2004, 111-113), reveals striking similarities with the one depicting Luigi; the two gondoliers wears similar attires and hats, they strike the same pose, and both representations of the two men seem to emphasize their exotic beauty and manliness. The similarities between the two pictures raise relevant issues regarding the

who apparently was as handsome as the first one! Both gondoliers, Espero and Luigi, who had been respectively, verbally and visually described by Smith, seemed to perfectly fit that picturesque representation of gondoliers which was extremely popular among American visitors, who often equated gondoliers with the “authentic” prototypes of the Venetian character.

As Alan Chong has aptly pointed out, “the gondolier-worship” was a typical trait of many American artists in Venice (Chong 2004, 110), and Smith himself fell under the fascinating spell of many gondoliers who had served him.

Like several American visitors and artists, Smith formed close friendships with his Venetian gondoliers²¹⁹, whose skills and virtues were extensively celebrated by him in *Venice of To-Day*²²⁰: Espero, Giorgio, Ingenio and Luigi²²¹ became recurring names (and I would dare to say, themes) in Smith’s narrative. Espero was probably the most popular figure among Smith’s gondoliers: as previously mentioned, Smith fictionalized his first encounter with this gondolier in his highly sentimental short story “Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier”, in which he depicted the Venetian boatman as a handsome, dignified and charming man, while finding in him “an aristocratic of gondoliers, since he belongs [according to what Smith told his readers in the short story] to the Castellani family²²²” (*NYT* n. p.).

Fascinated by Espero’s athletic and outdoorsy countenance, Smith celebrated Espero’s beauty also in his account of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition, to which he had brought some Venetian gondoliers “for authenticity” (Soria 1982, 270) as Regina Soria has suggested. The description of the handsome gondolier in Smith’s account bears a close resemblance to the one in *Venice of To-Day*: the setting is different, for the painter and the gondolier are in Chicago, and not in Venice, but the exotic and

way gondoliers were perceived and portrayed by American visitors but they are also illustrative of how gondoliers (or Venetians) shaped their own image according to the expectations of the visitors’ gaze.

²¹⁹ The sexual allure which surrounded the figure of the gondolier was due to the fact that many gondoliers were basically male prostitutes as Ian Littlewood has aptly pointed out (Littlewood 2001, pp. 80-81), in fact for many British and American tourists, both males and females, gondoliers represented the quintessential image of the exotic and charming lover, who offered the possibility of a gratifying sexual experience in a foreign land, gondoliers “were the staple fare of tourists in search of sexual adventure” (*ibid.*).

²²⁰ Smith made direct references to these gondoliers also in other writings like the short story “Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier” (1891), the travelogue *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy* (1886), and in some newspaper and magazine interviews too (*NYT* 1907, January 20; *Scribner’s Monthly* 1915).

²²¹ There are photographs portraying both Giorgio and Luigi, but unfortunately there are no pictures of Espero. On the other hand, Smith mentioned Espero and Luigi in some interviews, while he never commented on Giorgio (*NYT* 1907, January 20).

²²² See note on the two Venetian factions of the Castellani and Nicolotti, see note 103.

picturesque feelings conveyed by the unmistakable sight of Espero's striking features help recreate a fleeting image of Venice, Smith's beloved city:

Under this awning, flat on his back, sound asleep, lies a gondolier, fresh from Venice. Despite his nondescript costume of brigand's leggings and cavalier's cap I cannot mistake that broad chest and sunny face, the crisp black hair, and the fine lines of the throat and thigh. "Espero!" I call out in glad surprise. "*Commandi Signore*", comes the quick reply, as he springs to his feet. (Smith 1893, 101)

Other Venetian gondoliers, Marco, Luigi²²³ and Francesco²²⁴, quickly join Espero and Smith, and overwhelmed by the emotional reunion, Smith points out: "for the instant I am in Venice again, while they [the gondoliers] talk to me at once, telling me of their friends and mine whom we have known there-subjects far more absorbing than all the surprises of the new world" (*ibid.*).

Already the main character in one of Smith's short stories, and also one of the most popular attractions at the Columbian Exhibition, Espero played a relevant role in *Venice of To-Day*, too. Not only was Espero endowed with an alluring combination of strength and elegance, but he also possessed complete mastery of rowing as Smith pointed out: "he [Espero] is standing erect, his whole body swaying with that long, graceful, sweeping stroke which is the envy of the young gondoliers and the despair of the old; Espero, as you know, has been twice winner in the gondola races" (Smith 1897, 40). Smith's remarks on Espero's skills reflected foreigners' fascination with the subtle art of rowing a gondola as Howells had aptly underlined in *Venetian Life*²²⁵: "the skill with which the gondoliers manage their graceful craft is always admired by strangers, and is certainly remarkable. [...] under the hands of the gondolier, however, the gondola seems a living thing, full of grace and winning movement" (Howells 1867, 197).

However, Espero's skills as a rower and his good looks were just some of the qualities which endowed him with legendary status to Smith's eyes; in fact, Hop was particularly fascinated by Espero's cheerful personality and zealous attitude which combined masculine energy with a docile and caring disposition. After celebrating Espero's

²²³ Luigi is described as "a superb fellow [...], as handsome as a Venetian, and every inch a gondolier" (*ibid.*)

²²⁴ According to Smith, Marco was a gondolier at the *traghetto* near the Salute, while Francesco was Luigi's brother and worked for "the Countess", whose palace was located opposite the Accademia (Smith 1893, 101). All these gondoliers are mentioned in *Venice of To-Day* as well.

²²⁵ In the chapter "Venetian Traits and Characters", in *Venetian Life*, Howells describes and discusses at length, the life and nature of the gondolier.

picturesque charm (Smith 1897, 10), Smith commented on his nature, noting that “there is a cheeriness, a breeziness, a spring about this young fellow [Espero] that inspires you” (Smith 1897, 10-11). Captivated by his gondolier’s enticing personality, Smith suggested that Espero’s peculiar spirit was intimately connected with and defined by the city, Venice, to which he undoubtedly belonged: “as you look down into his face you feel that he [Espero] is part of the air, of the sunshine, of the perfume of the oleanders. He belongs to everything about him, and everything belongs to him” (Smith 1897, 11), “he has inherited all this glory of palace, sea, and sky, from the day of his birth, and can live in it every hour in the year” (*ibid.*, 12), and again “Espero has breathed her [Venice] air always, and hundreds of nights have come and gone for him” (*ibid.*, 200). Smith’s words clearly suggested the identification of Espero with Venice, while at the same time they highlighted the privileged status enjoyed by the gondolier, who, in Smith’s imagination, had become one with the city. Having realized his gondolier’s fortunate position, Smith benevolently expressed his envy of his servant’s lifestyle: “he is in many things deeply coveted by you, greatly your master. If you had his chest and his forearm, his sunny temper, his perfect digestion and contentment, you could easily spare one half of your world’s belongings in payment” (Smith 1897, 11), and “soon you will begin to realize that despite your belongings - wealth to this gondolier beyond his wildest dreams - he in reality is the richer of the two²²⁶” (*ibid.*, 12). Smith described the relationship with Espero in terms of a servant/master relation, while at the same time, he emphasized Espero’s zealous and caring attitude which, according to him, was reverential but always dignified: Smith’s words suggested the almost “chivalrous”²²⁷ nature of the relationship between his gondolier, a loyal servant, and himself, his benevolent master, hinting at a bond between the two men, which ideally transcended their different social positions, and which was based on ideal values such as mutual respect and loyalty, together with deep affectionate feelings. Smith

²²⁶ Smith’s admiration for Espero’s “pre-modern” and simpler lifestyle is culturally telling, for it could be viewed as a reflection of the widespread anti-modernist attitude which characterized American culture at the end of the 19th century. The very complex issue of anti-modernist (counter)-culture in 19th century American society has been aptly explored in T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1981. A city like Venice and its inhabitants were perceived by many Americans as the embodiment of a relaxed pre-modern lifestyle. This lifestyle often symbolized the antidote to America’s fast-paced society heavily marked by urbanization and industrialization, for a keen analysis of the works of American anti-modernist painters in Holland see A. Stott, “Dutch Utopia: Paintings by Antimodern American Artists of the Nineteenth Century”; Stott considers Hopkinson Smith an anti-modernist painter.

²²⁷ My use of the term “chivalrous” refers to the original meaning of the word, which was closely connected to the principles and the qualities which characterized knighthood and its related lifestyle, including the relationship between the ideal knight and his squire.

realized that Espero's "costume, [his] manner, the very way he holds his hat, show you at a glance that [...] for the time being he is your servant" (Smith 1897, 11), but he was also aware of his gondolier's attachment to him:

When your fatal day comes and your trunk is packed, he will stand at the water-stairs of the station, hat in hand, the tears in his eyes, [...] if your gondolier is like my own gondolier, Espero - my Espero Gorgoni²²⁸, whom I love - you would find him on his knees in the church next the station, whispering a prayer for your safe journey across the sea, and spending one of your miserable francs for some blessed candles to burn until you reached home" (Smith 1897, 12).

We may argue that Smith's sentimental description of his gondolier's farewell reflected to some extent, the longlasting friendships, which he had formed with Espero and the other gondoliers; it is also worth noting, that artists like Smith depended on their Venetian boatmen for their search for "paintable" locations, so they would often end up spending much time together, sharing a number of experiences and seeing each other on a daily basis²²⁹. In fact, in an interview published in *The New York Times* in 1907, Smith proudly stated that "Espero, another gondola-boy, ha[s]d been a companion on the Venetian canals for fourteen years"²³⁰ (*NYT* 1907, January 20). Whether he did it consciously or not, Smith used the word "companion" to define Espero, and, by doing so, he underlined the peculiar nature of a relationship, which had turned into a friendship throughout the years. On the one hand, in *Venice of To-Day* Smith summed up his genuine feelings for Espero for he expressed his appreciation of his gondolier's loyalty and generosity; on the other, Smith's attitude toward his gondolier may have also reflected his attempt to democratize the relation between employer (Smith) and employee (Espero)²³¹:

When you have lived a month with him [your gondolier] and have caught the spirit of the man, you will forget all about these several relations of servant and master.

²²⁸ By mentioning the gondolier's full name Smith made it clear that he was referring to the main character of the short story (1891), whose title bore the same name "Espero Gorgoni".

²²⁹ Smith came to Venice every summer for almost twenty years, where he would usually hire the same gondoliers, Espero and Luigi (see footnote below).

²³⁰ In the same interview Smith talked about another gondolier named Luigi, whose picture appeared in a commemorative article on Smith written by Thomas Nelson Page in 1915: "my gondola-boy, Luigi, who is mentioned in a number of my stories, has accompanied me on painting expeditions for sixteen years" (*NYT* 1907, January 20).

²³¹ See Jackson Lears's analysis of the notion of "bourgeoisie democracy", which, in a sense, Smith represented.

[...] When you have spent half the night at the Lido, he swimming at your side, or have rowed all the way to Torcello, or have heard early mass at San Rosario, away up the Giudecca, he kneeling before you, his hat on the cool pavement next to your own, you will begin to lose sight even of the francs, and want to own gondola and all yourself, that you may make *him* guest and thus discharge somewhat the ever-increasing obligation of hospitality under which he places you (Smith 1897, 11).

Smith's portrayal of Espero provided an idealized and romanticized image of the gondolier, an image which Smith projected onto his other gondoliers like Ingenio²³² and Giorgio as well: in fact, Smith's gondoliers shared similar traits for they were depicted as handsome and athletic, loyal and zealous, they epitomized the polymorphous and alluring nature of Venice itself, while they also conveyed the authentic experience of the city.

Giorgio was another gondolier mentioned in *Venice of To-Day*: in his travelogue Smith provided Giorgio's full name and address "Tagliapietra Giorgio, of the Traghetto of Santa Salute" (Smith 1897, 105), he added some "picturesque" biographical information on him "he [Giorgio] lives a few canals away from the Calcina²³³, with his mother, his widowed sister and her children, in a small house with a garden all figs and oleanders. His bedroom is next to his mother's, on the second floor, overlooking the blossoms" (*ibid.*), and he also pointed out that Giorgio was his stand-by when Espero was not available (*ibid.*). Like Espero, Giorgio was handsome, energetic and gentle, and Smith trusted him fully, in fact, he would often send him to his friends so "that they may enjoy the luxury of spending a day with a man [Giorgio] who has a score and more of sunshiny summers packed away in his heart, and not a cloud in any one of them" (Smith 1897, 105); thanks to Giorgio "your Venice will be all the more delightful because of *his buoyant strength, his cheeriness, and his courtesy*²³⁴" (*ibid.*).

It is important to note that Smith's description of Giorgio focused on his caring attitude and on his "feminine" sensibility: while having breakfast together, in fact, Smith notices that "Giorgio serves you as daintily as would a woman" (Smith 1897, 23) and he takes care of him with the devotion which is usually typical of women; but Giorgio's delicate and compassionate spirit is fully revealed when he tries to comfort his friend

²³² See chapter 2 for additional information on the figure of Ingenio, who appeared in *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy* (1886), and who was mentioned in the short story "Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier" too.

²³³ The Caffé Calcina, see Smith 1897, 104.

²³⁴ My italics. Smith uses the same adjectives to describe Espero.

and gondolier, Pietro, who has just lost in a gondola race. Smith witnesses Giorgio's affectionate attempts to ease Pietro's bitter disappointment over his own defeat: "Giorgio was over the rail of Pietro's boat, patting his back, stroking his head, comforting him as you would think only a woman could - but then you do not know Giorgio" (Smith 1897, 114). Overwhelmed by his feelings, Pietro:

[he] lifted up his face and looked into Giorgio's eyes with an expression so woe-begone, and full of such intense suffering, that Giorgio instinctively flung his arm around the great, splendid fellow's neck. Then came a few broken words, a tender caressing stroke of Giorgio's hand, a drawing of Pietro's head down on his breast as if it had been a girl's, and then, still comforting him [...] Giorgio bent his head-*and kissed him*²³⁵ (Smith 1897, 114).

Smith also argues that Giorgio's kiss and loving attitude towards Pietro do not undermine his masculinity, on the contrary, the gondolier is infused with both masculine and feminine qualities, which make him even more dignified and charming: "nobody laughed. It [the kiss] did not shock the crowd; nobody thought Giorgio unmanly or foolish, or Pietro silly or effeminate" (Smith 1897, 115). In addition, Smith underlines a seminal difference between Italian (and to a larger extent Mediterranean) culture, which accepts and encourages public displays of affection and American culture, which usually restrains such displays. Hop openly criticizes the latter's attitude: "the infernal Anglo-Saxon custom of always wearing a mask of reserve, if your heart breaks, has never reached these people" (*ibid.*). The "kiss scene", as we may call it, is indeed culturally telling for it reveals not only Smith's profound fascination with his gondoliers and the culture they represented; but it also provides interesting insights into the way 19th century American anti-modernists (and Smith²³⁶ was paradoxically one of them) sought "androgynous alternatives to bourgeois masculinity" (Lears 1981, 223) in other "premodern"²³⁷ cultures.

Evidently, Smith and Giorgio had formed a close friendship throughout the many years spent together in Venice: Giorgio deeply admired Smith and cherished his patron's

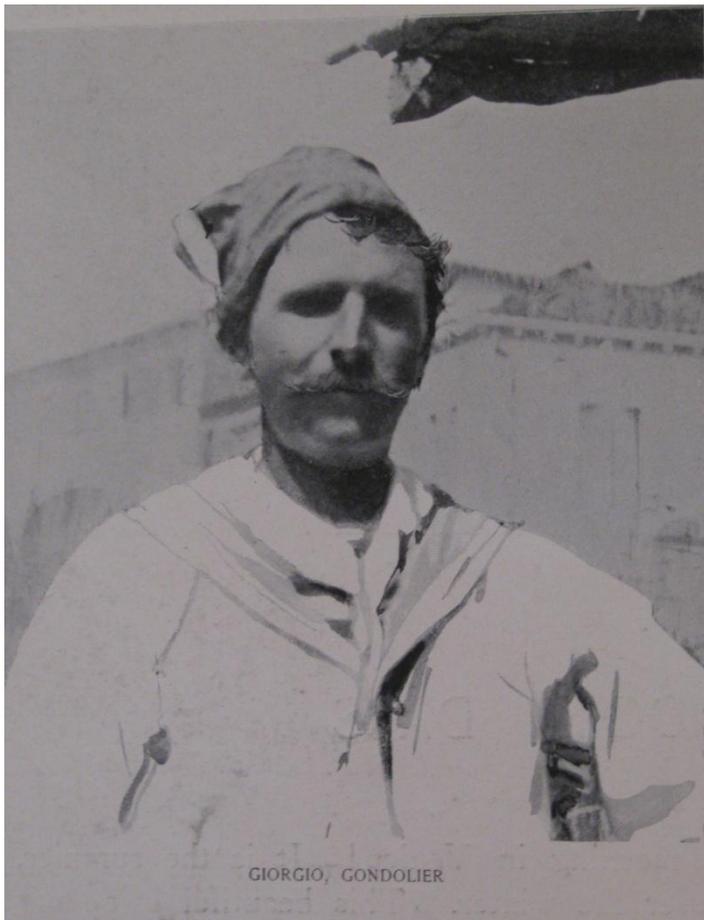
²³⁵ Smith's italics.

²³⁶ There is indeed a connection between Smith's sentimentalism, which often characterized his narrative, and some of his anti-modernist tendencies. (on the relation between sentimental literature and the dominant culture in 19th century America, see Lears 1981, 7-32).

²³⁷ For a thorough discussion on the Victorian ambivalent attitude towards masculinity and femininity see chapter 6 in T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

esteem as Edward P. Mitchell remarked in his book *Memoirs of an Editor* (Mitchell 1924, 418-420).

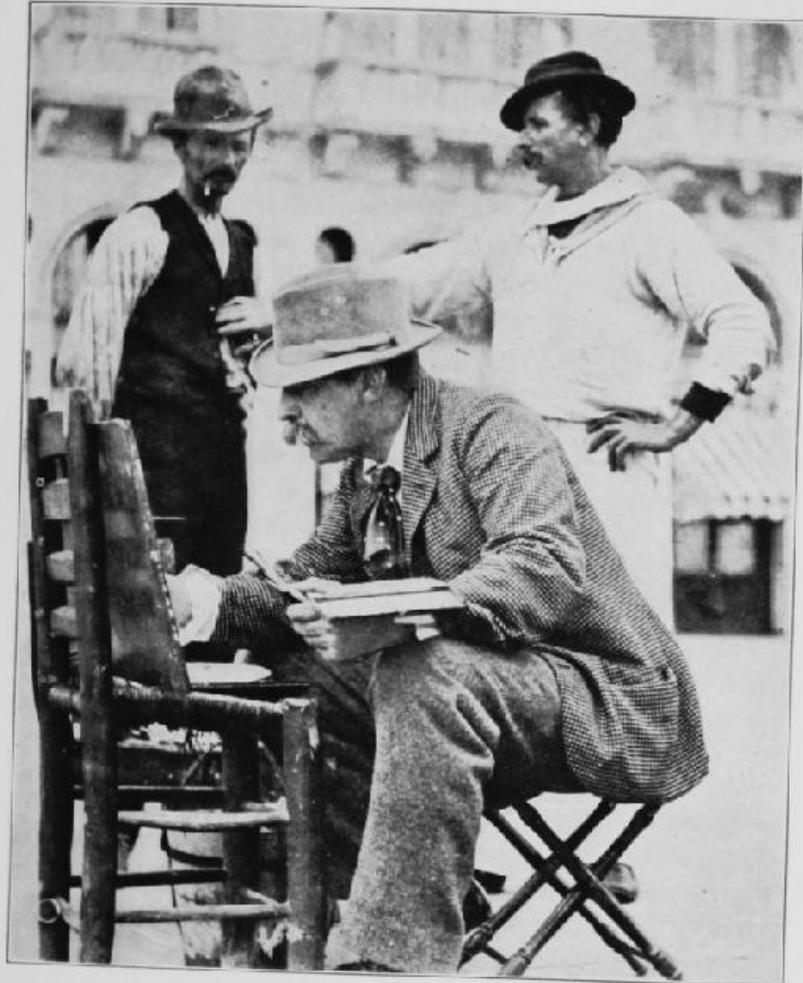
Unfortunately, there are few pictures of Giorgio: one of them was in *Venice of To-Day*, while the most significant one²³⁸ was published in *Memoirs of an Editor*: it depicts Smith and Giorgio in Venice and it aptly illustrates the relation between the American painter and the Venetian “gondola-boy”, as Smith called his gondoliers. Smith is in the foreground, he is sitting in front of a chair, turned into a temporary easel, and he is painting; elegantly dressed, wearing a suit, a hat and a tie, Smith is completely absorbed in his work. Giorgio is standing in the background, looking worried, while he is trying to protect his master by holding back a nosy onlooker with his stretched right arm. Giorgio is wearing the typical gondolier attire²³⁹, and the analysis of his profile and face features seems to confirm it is the same man depicted in the photograph of *Venice of To-Day*.



“Giorgio, Gondolier” (*Venice of To-Day*)

²³⁸ Unlike other pictures of Smith and his gondoliers, this picture is not dated.

²³⁹ “After lunch Giorgio stops at his house [...] and slips into the white suit just laundered for him” (Smith 1897, 105).



SMITH AND GIORGIO AT VENICE

“Smith and Giorgio at Venice” (*Memoirs of an Editor*)

Whether it was a staged picture or not, the photograph of Smith and Giorgio in Venice is a powerful image, for it aptly represents the close relationship between the painter and his “assistant” Giorgio, who is somehow watching over him. Although the picture

draws heavily on the popular cliché of the foreign outdoor painter sketching in Venice, it provides, or at least it attempts to, a peculiar view of the scene. Giorgio's stretched arm functions as the *punctum*²⁴⁰ of the composition, since the gondolier's gesture defines the emotional frame, within which the main characters act their roles and re-act to one-another; paradoxically, Giorgio's stretched arm "pur restando un "particolare" [...] riempie l'intera fotografia" (Barthes 1980, 47).

Besides Espero and Giorgio, Smith mentions other gondoliers in *Venice of To-Day*, in particular in the chapter which is dedicated to the description of a regata²⁴¹: Pietro, who is defeated by Pasquale in the gondola race, his brother Marco, who rows with him; Giuseppe and Carlo, who compete in the race as well. The chapter begins with the portrayal of an unidentified gondolier²⁴² who is making his toilet as he is getting ready for the competition. The gondolier's good looks and vigor, a topos in Smith's narrative, are outlined in detail: "she [the gondolier's girlfriend] watches the handsome, broadly-built young fellow. As he stands erect in the gondola, the sunlight flashing from his wet arms, I note the fine lines of his chest, the bronzed neck and throat, and the knotted muscles along the wrist and forearm" (Smith 1897, 102). Pietro competes in a regatta, which is not, as Smith clarifies, the popular annual regatta²⁴³, which would usually attract tourists: "to-day [...] I shall see, not the annual regatta [sic], that great spectacle with the Gran Canal crowded with tourists and sightseers solidly banked from the water's edge to the very balconies" (*ibid.*, 103); in fact, Smith has the privilege of experiencing, as he suggests, a more "authentic" aspect of Venetian life, since the regatta he will see, is "an old-time contest²⁴⁴ between the two factions of the gondoliers, the Nicoletti and Castellani; a contest really of and for the Venetians themselves" (*ibid.*).

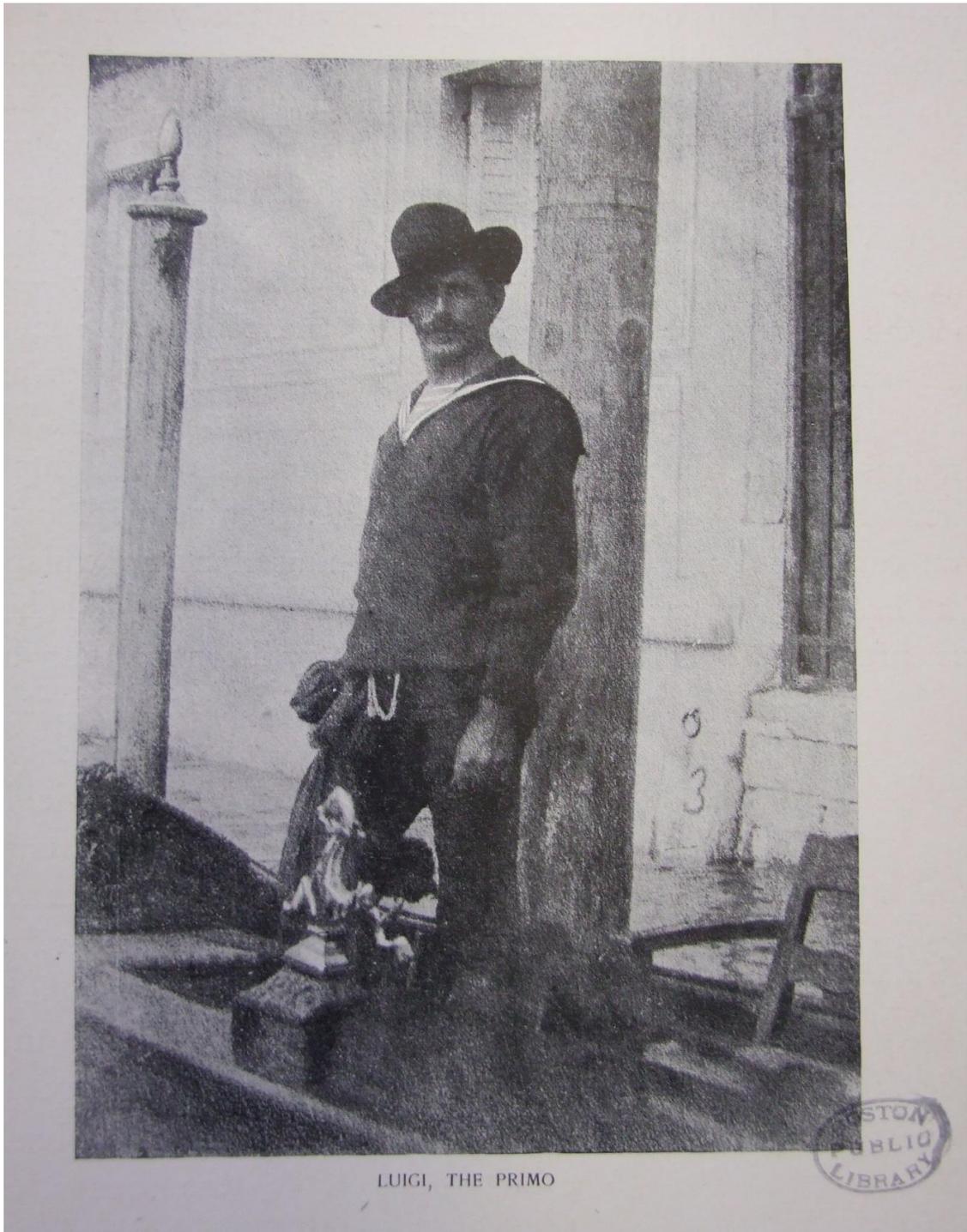
²⁴⁰ I use the term *punctum* according to Roland Barthes's analysis of images in photographs (Barthes 1980, 5-60).

²⁴¹ Chapter 7: "A Gondola Race".

²⁴² Smith (and the reader) will find out later that the gondolier is Pietro.

²⁴³ On the Regata Storica and its role in 19th century Venetian culture see M. Fincardi, "Regata del XX Settembre, ovvero il rinnovarsi delle tradizioni virili veneziane a fine XIX secolo".

²⁴⁴ According to the information given by Smith, this competition was held in October (Smith 1897, 108), and the course of the race started "at the Lido, running thence to the great flour-mill up the Giudecca [the Stucky Mill], and down again to the stake-boat off the Public Garden" (*ibid.*).

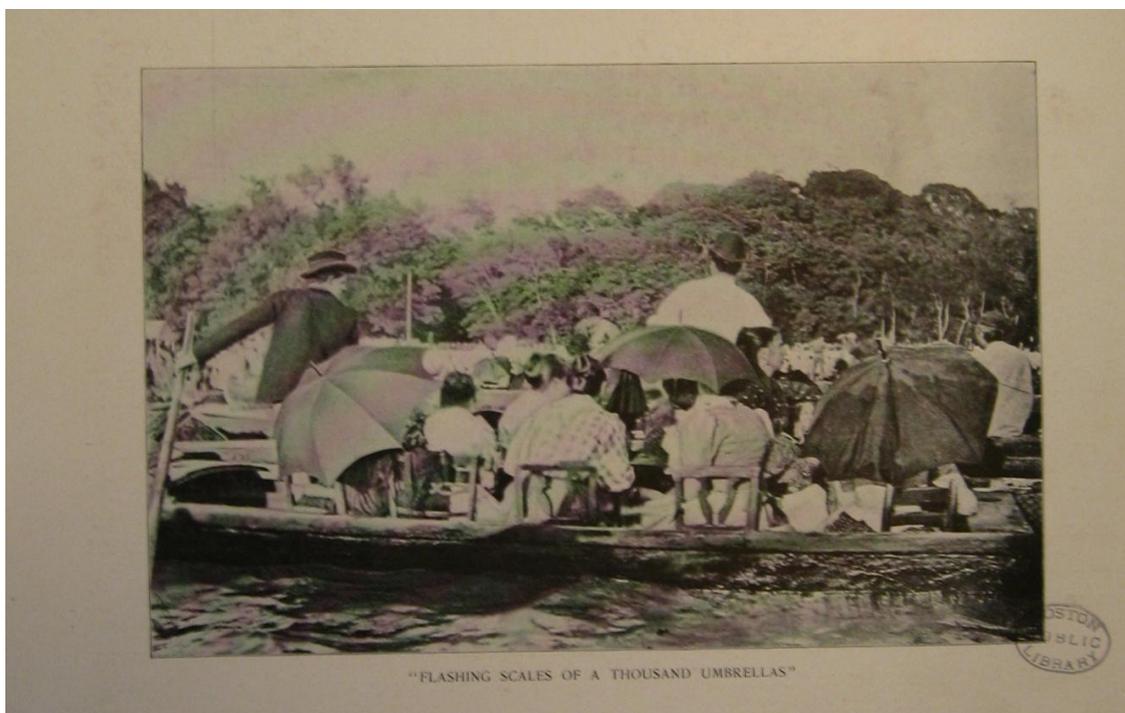


LUIGI, THE PRIMO

“A Picture of Luigi, a Gondolier” (*Venice of To-Day*)

As the race begins, Smith’s attention focuses on the festive mood and the widespread excitement of the spectators, while he accurately describes the crowd gathered in the boats and along the banks:

You see at a glance that Venice is astir. All along the Zattere, on every wood-boat, *barco*, and barge, on every bridge, balcony, and house top, abreast the wide *fondamenta* fronting the great warehouses, and away down the edge below the Redentore, the people are swarming like flies. Out on the Giudecca, anchored to the channel spiles, is a double line of boats [...]. These lie stretched out on the water like two great sea-serpents. Between these two sea-monsters, with their flashing scales of a thousand umbrellas, is an open roadway of glistening silver (Smith 1897, 107)



“Flashing Scales of a Thousand Umbrellas” (*Venice of To-Day*)

Enchanted with the vision of the colorful multitude of people he sees, Smith, like many other foreign artists, tries to “characterize the crowds that were such an important part of the experience of this unique city” (Mathews 2009, 40); significantly, his depiction of the audience is rendered through visual imagery, which focuses on movement and color effects: the crowds are compared to twisting sea creatures, whose “flashing scales of a thousand umbrellas” (Smith 1897, 107) dazzle the observer, while everywhere there “was a dense floating mass of human beings, cheering, singing, and laughing, waving colors, and calling out the names of their favorites in rapid crescendo” (*ibid.*,

109). Smith, the painter, uses his words the way he would use a brush in order to paint an image of the teeming city which is saturated with light and color:

The balustrade of the broad walk of the Public Garden was a huge flower-bed of blossoming hats and fans, spotted with myriads of parasols in full bloom. [...] The palaces along the Riva were a broad ribbon of color with a binding of black coats and hats. [...] The red-sailed fishing-boats hurried in for the finish, their canvas aflame against the deepening blue. Over all the sunlight danced and blazed and shimmered, gilding and bronzing the roof-jewels of San Marco, flashing from oar blade, brass, and ferro, silvering the pigeons (Smith 1897, 109-110).

Then, a sudden outburst of energy, colors and sounds welcomes the racing gondoliers, so that “the gale became a tempest - the roar was deafening; women waved their shawls in the air; men, swinging their hats, shouted themselves hoarse” (*ibid.*, 111). The gondoliers’ display of their masculine energy and strength reaches its peak when Pasquale, “lashing the water, surging forward, springing with every gain” (Smith 1897, 113), wins the race. By dedicating a whole chapter to this regatta, Smith paid homage to his beloved gondoliers and to their craft, while he also capitalized on the alluring charm and evocative power of Venetian festivals and traditions, which fascinated American visitors, since they epitomized the co-existence of the past and the present, of history and modernity²⁴⁵.

A gondolier is also one of the main characters in the legend of the Contessa Alberoni, a story which Professor Croisac, a picturesque Frenchman living in Venice, tells Smith during one of their several outings together²⁴⁶: according to the legend, the beautiful Venetian Contessa decides to lead a secluded life and therefore to retire from public life forever, after she has overheard her gondolier’s remarks on her fading beauty. The gondolier’s careless comment functions as a looking-glass which marks and confirms the unstoppable passing of time, while his “words which fell upon her ears like earth upon her coffin” (Smith 1897, 81), condemn the Countess to her untimely seclusion.

Not only were gondoliers and gondolas part the physical landscape surrounding Smith when he was in Venice, but as his writings have amply demonstrated, they were also

²⁴⁵ The relationship between Venetian traditional festivals and American tourism in Venice has been aptly explored by N.M. Mathews in “Festivals, Tourism, and the Americanizing of Venice” in Mathews, *Prendergast in Italy*, London and New York: Merrell, 2009.

²⁴⁶ The story is narrated by the Professor in the chapter “In an Old Garden”.

part of his intellectual and emotional landscape: thanks to his gondoliers²⁴⁷, Smith could discover and reach those picturesque locations which interested him, while at the same time, sketching from a gondola gave him also the opportunity to experiment with unusual viewpoints. Smith's gondoliers helped him establish a physical, aesthetic and emotional connection with a city, Venice, whose complex and fathomless nature was (and is) largely defined by its intricate spatial organization. It is interesting to note that when in London, Smith tried to recreate a *modus operandi* similar to the one he had used in Venice: in fact, a 1912 newspaper article reported that "Hopkinson Smith sketches Thackeray in a taxicab" (*NYT* 1912, November 24)! Drawing street scenes from cabs was a technique which Hop had already used in his wanderings all over the world, for he liked the idea of painting from "a moving thing" (Smith 1891, 688), but at the end, no cabs, no tartanas, and no volantes²⁴⁸, could equal the secretive charm and pleasure conveyed by a gondola and its gondolier:

But with all this a cab is not a gondola. In a gondola you are never shaken by the tired beast resting his other leg, nor by the small boy who looks in at the window, nor by the cabby, who falls asleep on the box and awakes periodically with a start that repeats a shiver through your brush hand... [...] In place of this there is a cosy curtain closed *nest* - a little *boudoir*²⁴⁹ with down cushions, and silk fringes and soft morocco coverings; kept afloat by a long, lithe, swan - like, moving boat (Smith 1891, 690).

Significantly, Smith often pointed out that whenever he was in his gondola in Venice, he felt at home.

²⁴⁷ Luigi was another Venetian gondolier who served Smith for sixteen years: his name was present in some of Smith's short stories on Venice, as Smith claimed in a newspaper interview dated January 20, 1907 (*NYT* 1907, January 20). In addition to this, a surviving photograph taken in Venice in 1906, depicted Smith in Luigi's gondola, while the caption below stated that Luigi was "associated with so many of Mr. Smith's Stories" (*Scribner's Monthly*, September 1915, p. 304).

²⁴⁸ Smith made a long and detailed list of all the means of transport from which he usually sketched cityscapes and landscapes when he was abroad, see Smith, "Espero Gorgoni, Gondolier", 1891, p. 688.

²⁴⁹ My italics.

3.2 Local Color(s)

In his preface to *Venice of To-Day*, Hopkinson Smith openly declared his artistic and emotional love affair with Venice and invited his readers to join him in his search of the most enticing and picturesque aspects of Venetian life. After surrendering to the alluring charm of the “Queen of the Adriatic”, he carefully itemized all the elements which had turned the city into an aesthetic Mecca visited by generations of visitors, including Americans: “the wide sweep of her piazzas, the abandon of her gardens, the charm of her canal and street life, the happy indolence of her people, the faded sumptuousness of her homes” (Smith 1897, n. p.). Smith made clear that his travelogue was not meant to provide a study of the city’s architecture, of its literature and art, and of its economy²⁵⁰ like a travel guide; on the contrary, it was a written and visual record of the artist’s cultural and emotional reaction to a city, Venice, which was seen through the lens of the picturesque. On the one hand, in fact, Smith’s list offered an accurate inventory of the places and situations to which a visitor would be exposed in Venice, and which obviously, marked the ordinary and authentic experience of the city: its piazzas, its gardens, its canal and street life, its people and its houses. On the other hand, Smith added a descriptive term to every element mentioned in the list, and each term marked a specific sensation or emotion associated with the city, suggesting that Smith’s experience of Venice and his subsequent interpretation of it, were inextricably interwoven with a number of culturally-defined topoi. Thus, Smith’s list of the Venetian marvels called the readers’ attention to a kaleidoscope of images of the city, which they were widely familiar with because of a well-established literary and visual tradition: “the wide sweep” (Smith 1897, n.p.) of Venetian Piazzas; “the abandon” (*ibid.*) of Venetian gardens, “the charm” (*ibid.*) of Venetian life in the streets and in the canals, “the happy indolence” (*ibid.*) of its inhabitants, and “the faded sumptuousness” (*ibid.*) of its buildings. Like many other travelers visiting Venice, Smith’s eye concentrated on some of what Rosella Mamoli Zorzi has called, the typical “stock items” (Mamoli Zorzi 1990, 289), which were associated with the perception of the city: the eccentric mixture of grandeur and decay which defined the city’s architecture and which suggested the simultaneous presence of the past and the present; the

²⁵⁰ “I have made no attempt in these pages to review the splendors of the past, or to probe the many vital questions which concern the present, of this wondrous city of the Sea. Neither have I ventured to discuss the marvels of her architecture, the wealth of her literature and art, nor the growing importance of her commerce and manufactures” (Smith 1897, n.p., preface).

interplay between its enclosed spaces (gardens and palaces) and the blatant openness of its piazzas and campi, metaphors for the idiosyncratic Venetian topography; and finally, the slower and relaxed pace of life in Venice, which contrasted sharply with America's highly productive but frantic lifestyle. As previously noted, Smith was not immune from the influence of aesthetic filters on his interpretation of the city; his being an artist obviously caused him to emphasize the aesthetic perception of reality and his keen interest in the picturesque aspects of landscape influenced his choice of paintable subjects²⁵¹. In addition to this, Smith was dealing with a city whose image had been crystallized by "the assumed perception of its beauty" (Mamoli Zorzi 1990, 286) as Rosella Mamoli Zorzi has aptly remarked in her analysis of the intertextual representations of Venice²⁵²:

The so called "beauty" of Venice- its art- stops or blocks off the perception of any other aspect. Its "beauty" never changes, and the visual and literary "philtres", through which it is seen are always there: they superimpose themselves over any fresh perception of the city, permanent Claude-glasses in the hands of the writers (*ibid.*).

These aesthetic filters were also combined with several cultural filters, which were no doubt linked to the authoritative voices of writers like Rogers, Byron, Shelley, Ruskin and painters like Turner and Whistler: through their words and brushes these artists had created an imaginary Venice, a pre-existing text against which every visitor, including Smith, had to measure his/her experience of the real city. But Smith's Venice, as it was described in *Venice of To-Day*, revealed also two different shades of meaning: on the one hand, it did reflect the picturesque city *par excellence*, and therefore some of the stereotypical views which Americans attached to it. On the other, probably influenced by Howells's *Venetian Life*, Smith tried to convey a more authentic portrayal of the city and its inhabitants: the titles of some of the chapters in *Venice of To-Day* exemplified Smith's attempt to focus on the reality of modern Venice rather than solely on the

²⁵¹ Venice was often described by Smith (and by many other painters, especially genre painters) as the realm of picturesqueness (Smith 1897, 85).

²⁵² According to Mamoli Zorzi Howells succeeded in offering a more authentic and fresher view of the city, and therefore he "managed to break through the aesthetic perception of Venice" (Mamoli Zorzi 1990, 286); while Mark Twain, who apparently gave an anti-literal and anti-mythical interpretation of Venice in his *Innocents Abroad*, could not resist its alluring charm and eventually he ended up giving "his partly enchanted representation of Venice" (*ibid.*).

imaginary and literary projection of it: “Along the Riva”, “Among the Fishermen”, “Some Venetian Caffes”, “On the Hotel Steps” “Open-air Markets”, and “Life in the Streets”. In a sense, these titles seemed to suggest Hop’s effort to echo the accurate study of Venetians and their environment, which had been carried out by Howells in his *Venetian Life*: but Smith’s anthropological approach was often undermined by his marked narrative sentimentality and his tendency to romanticize reality²⁵³.

Significantly, Smith’s writing presented some authentic and accurate pictures of life in Venice, together with a romanticized and often typified representation of the city and its inhabitants; the result was a contradictory but fascinating mixture of picturesque glimpses and genuine sketches offering a composite picture of contemporary Venice the way Smith perceived it. Smith’s interpretation of the city, especially in *Venice of To-Day*, reflected his keen interest in the picturesque aspects of it, which were presented as the multifaceted hues of Venice’s local color: I use the term “color” advisedly, in fact, in Smith’s case, the term had a peculiar resonance for it reflected his resilient pursuit of a chromatic rendering of life in the fields of painting and writing, whether he decided to use a brush or a pen in order to do so:

The picturesque aspects of things seen in high light by a man [Smith] alive to his finger-tips lost none of their charm when they were transferred to the pages which gave the early impressions of a painter whose vitality needed another medium of expression. But those impressions were not mere transcriptions, and their writer was not a passive impressionist. The human element always made an intimate appeal to his heart, and the atmosphere which gave his studies their charm was charged with personality (*The Outlook*, 1915, April 21).

Therefore, Smith’s depiction of Venetian local color, which according to him, was well symbolized by its quaint cafes and open-air markets, by its fishermen, its gondoliers and its tramps, and by its religious and secular festivals, mirrored his firm belief in the fact that “a traveler, even with an ordinary pair of eyes and ears, can get much nearer to the heart of a people in their cafes, streets and markets than in their museums, galleries, and palaces” (Smith 1886, 3). Being a novelist and especially, a gifted story teller,

²⁵³ In a sense, we could argue that narration prevailed over description in Smith’s writings; Smith employed a descriptive tone when he wanted to provide a rendering of a specific landscape, in these descriptions he would put emphasis on the visual perception of color and light effects, thus revealing a painter’s approach to his subject matter.

Smith was particularly interested in portraying human nature and people²⁵⁴, thus in *Venice of To-Day*, he tried to render Venice's color, its picturesqueness, through the depiction of its inhabitants, whom he turned into the characters of memorable sketches as one of his contemporaries pointed out commenting on Smith's interpretation of the places he had visited: "even in Venice the human story is never interrupted" (*The Outlook* 1915, April 21). In one sense, the narrative voice in *Venice of To-Day* revealed indeed the true nature of an author who was able to "combine[d] an eye for the picturesque and a strong and abiding interest in his fellow men" (*NYT* 1915, April 9). Illustrative in this regard, was Smith's portrayal of a Venetian lasagnone²⁵⁵ called Luigi, who became also the symbol of Hop's fascination with the more stereotypical notion of that "happy indolence" he had mentioned in his preface to *Venice of To-Day*. But in order to fully comprehend Smith's characterization of Luigi, it is necessary to compare it with Howells's description of a lasagnone. In the chapter dedicated to the study of "Venetian traits and characters"²⁵⁶ Howells conveyed a detailed and exact depiction of a Venetian loafer, reflecting his elaboration of "an anthropological aesthetic" (Buonomo 1996, 60) he used to "read" not only Venice, but also, its culture and its people. Howells's portrayal begins with a clear definition of the nature of the Venetian lasagnone, that is, his temperament, social status and behavior: "the lasagnone is a loafer, as an Italian can be a loafer, without the admixture of ruffianism, which blemishes most loafers of northern race. He may be quite worthless, and even impertinent, but he cannot be a rowdy" (Howells 1867, 200). Then Howells warns his readers "in Venice he must not be confounded with other loiterers at the caffes [...]". The truth is, the lasagnone does not flourish in the best caffes; he comes to perfection in cheaper resorts, for he is commonly not rich" (*ibid.*, 201); with regard to the lasagnone's specific interests, Howells claims: "I never see him read the papers - neither the Italian papers, nor the Parisian journals [...], and he likes to pretend to a knowledge of English, uttering upon occasion, with great relish, such distinctively English words as "Yes" and "Not"" (*ibid.*). As the description continues, Howells focuses on the characterization of the loafer's behavior with women and presents him

²⁵⁴ In a newspaper interview dated 1905, Smith expressed his interest in the portrayal of human nature, and particularly of those "unsung heroes" whom he had met in real life (*NYT* 1905, January 29), see for example his rendering of Captain Scott in the novel *Caleb West, Master Diver*. Smith's novels and short stories, which were widely popular in the USA, were often praised by critics for his good characterizations (*The Outlook* 1915, April 21, p. 912; *NYT* 1895, December 1; *NYT* 1893, January 29).

²⁵⁵ The term "lasagnone" was used to indicate an idler. See also Howells's description of the typical Venetian lasagnone (Howells 1867, 200-201).

²⁵⁶ See chapter XX in Howells's *Venetian Life*.

as a rather clumsy Latin lover. Who is constantly trying to hit on women: “this is his sole business and mission, the cruel²⁵⁷ lasagnone-to break ladies the heart. He spares no condition, -neither rank nor wealth is any defense against him” (*ibid.*). Finally, after admitting the idler’s good natured and simple heart²⁵⁸ Howells dismisses him with a solemn but ironical blessing: “go, harmless lasagnone, to thy lodging in some mysterious height, and breaks hearts if thou wilt. They are quickly mended” (Howells 1867, 201). Howells’s words offered indeed an accurate portrayal of the lasagnone, and in a sense, they also revealed the writer’s sympathy for this Venetian type; but on the other hand, the ironic tone Howells used, remarked his detached approach (attitude) towards the whole scene and the characters involved in it. We could argue that Howells²⁵⁹’s approach reflected his attempt to provide a realistic depiction of Venetian reality, without adding other “fictional” or “sentimental” elements, which would embellish, but also disfigure such reality, as Buonomo has aptly pointed out (Buonomo 1996, 60).

By contrast, Hopkinson Smith tackled the same issue from a completely different perspective. Being a sentimentalist²⁶⁰ writer, he presented a portrayal of his lasagnone, Luigi, which was aimed at influencing and shaping the reader’s emotional response to the described scene and its main character. In addition to this, through the figure of Luigi, Smith provided an idealized and romanticized image of “happy poverty”, which was perceived as one of the predominant traits of life in Venice, and which obviously, represented a widespread cliché among American visitors: clearly Smith’s interpretation of the figure of the lasagnone suggested that the happy and poor idler was part of the picturesque Venetian landscape as much as its charming beadstringers, lace makers and fishermen. In order to emphasize the narrator’s emotional involvement in the scene Smith presents Luigi as “a very dear friend of [mine] his” (Smith 1897, 32), almost suggesting the democratic quality of their friendship, for Luigi belongs to a

²⁵⁷ Howells’s use of the term “cruel” is clearly ironic.

²⁵⁸ “His heart is not bad. He would go half an hour out of his way to put you in the direction of the Piazza. A little thing can make him happy” (Howells 1867, 201).

²⁵⁹ Howells became a strong supporter of realism in literature and argued that realism “was nothing more or less than the truthful treatment of material” (quotation taken from *The Norton Anthology* Vol. II, 232), consequently he was extremely critical of the emphasis on sentimentality, which characterized both culture and genteel literature in post-Civil war America.

²⁶⁰ The very complex issue of sentimentalism in 19th century American culture has been aptly explored by a number of critics: Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth Century American Literature*; Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*; but also Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture*. I am deeply indebted to Prof. Davis, Fulbright Professor at Ca’ Foscari, whose course on sentimentalism has helped me expand my knowledge on the issue.

lower social class. But Smith also focuses on Luigi's charming personality: "he is a happy-hearted, devil-may-care young fellow" (Smith 1897, 32); "a magnificent condensation of bone, muscle, and sinew; this Greek god of a tramp, unselfish, good-tempered, sunny-hearted, wanting nothing, having everything, envying nobody, happy as a lark, one continuous song all day long" (*ibid.*, 35). Hop does not hide the fact that his friend falls under the category of the "professional idler" as he is indeed a lasagnone: "this beggar, tramp, lasagnone - ragged, barefooted, and sunbrowned, [...] this friend of mine, this royal pauper, Luigi, never in the recollection of any mortal man or woman was known to do a stroke of work" (*ibid.*, 33), but as Smith promptly remarks "yet one cannot call him a burden on society" (*ibid.*, 34). Significantly, according to Smith, Luigi's charm and above all picturesqueness, lie in the fact that he can afford to lead a careless lifestyle which is not subject to the demands of a fast-paced, industrialized and urbanized society (in other words 19th American society); Luigi's lifestyle though, is somehow connected to his social and economical status, that is, his being poor. The relationship of cause and effect which is at the basis of Luigi's peculiar condition, poverty, is dangerously misread and re-interpreted through a confusing paradigm which equates poverty with a simpler and implicitly happier life. As a consequence, Luigi, who is "leading his Adam-before-the-fall sort of existence" (Smith 1897, 35) becomes the most eloquent symbol of the Venetian poor, who are perceived as charmingly pre-modern and mythical, because their lifestyle is somehow associated with a slower, simpler and more serene pace of life as one of Smith's remarks clearly indicate:

I seriously consider the advisability of my pensioning him [Luigi] for the remainder of his life on one lira a day, a fabulous sum to him, merely to be sure that nothing in the future will ever spoil his temper and so rob me of the ecstasy of knowing and of being always able to find one supremely happy human creature on this earth²⁶¹ (Smith 1897, 35).

Paradoxically, Smith was fascinated by Luigi's attitude²⁶² and condition to the point that like several other American visitors, he overlooked the possible harsh reality of

²⁶¹ I do not question Smith's sincerity when he expresses his appreciation of Luigi's temperament and lifestyle, but in my opinion Smith's attitude was culturally telling for it represented the stereotyped vision of Italy and Venice, which was widespread among 19th century Americans.

²⁶² Besides Luigi, Smith mentions other tramps like him, showing his sympathy towards them and describing them as picturesque Bohemians: "my dear friend Luigi is one of these vagrant Bohemians,

poverty²⁶³ and its implications, while at the same he elaborated an idealized image of it²⁶⁴.

Similarly to other American tourists and artists too, Smith “looked to Europe’s [in this case Venice] lower working classes to capture what they saw as true leisure - a relaxed lifestyle that constituted a productive and healthy part of everyday life” (Stott 1989, 49). Smith’s celebration of the Venetian *dolce far niente*, (to use Smith’s own words), which he viewed as the image of a simpler, happier and healthier way of living, was also exemplified by his frequent remarks on and his colorful sketches of everyday life in the streets: “no Venetian is ever hurried, and few are rich, - very many of them living in complete ignorance of the exact whereabouts of their next repast” (Smith 1897, 176); “there is always time to talk, in Venice. Then the *dolce far niente* air that pervades these streets!” (*ibid.*, 185). Smith realized that the picturesque atmosphere of this *dolce far niente* was undoubtedly enhanced by Venice’s peculiar topography, its intricate maze of streets and bridges which forced the visitor to walk everywhere as Smith aptly highlighted:

and so is Vittorio, and little Appo, with shoulders like a stone Hercules and quite as hard, and so, also are Antonio and the rest”; “and not only Luigi and his fellow-tramps, - delightful fellows every one of them, and dear particular friends of mine” (Smith 1897, 178-179).

²⁶³ Luigi’s poverty is rather evident: according to Smith, he usually sleeps outside in the streets (Smith 1897, 178) and he depends on people’s generosity for food (Smith 1897, 32).

²⁶⁴ Smith called Venetian tramps like Luigi and Vittorio “poverty stricken cavaliere[s] of the Riva”, by doing so, he suggested the implicit nobility and dignified status which supposedly characterized them and which ascribed a mythical resonance to their condition.



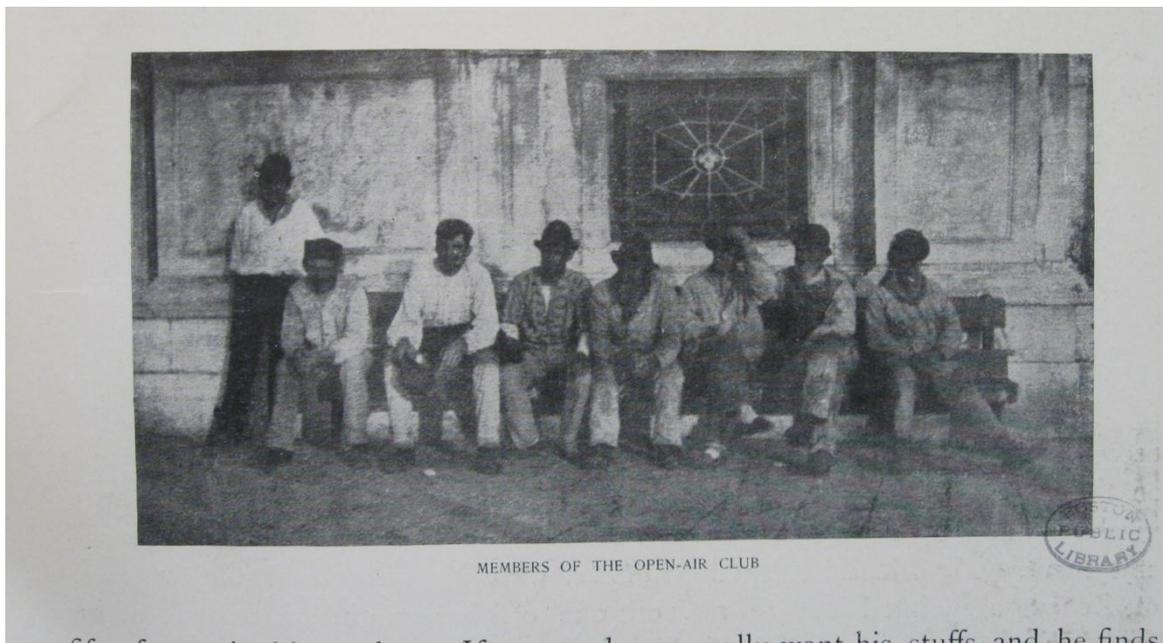
“The Open-Air Club-Room” (*Venice of To-Day*)

Smith’s portrayal of the members of the open-air club room, as he described it “This bridge has always been the open-air club room of the entire neighbourhood - everybody who has any lounging to do is a life member” (Smith 1897, 31).

“and the walking, strange to say, in this city anchored miles out at the sea, with nearly every street paved with ripples, is particularly good” (Smith 1897, 176).

In a whole chapter devoted to “Life in the Streets”, Smith portrayed the colorful Venetians whom he had encountered in his city rambles; unsurprisingly, they embodied the picturesque spirit which always pervaded Smith’s Venice. So while the American artist is pleasantly moving through the “twists and turns and crookedness” (Smith 1897, 176) of the Venetian streets, his eyes rest on the colorful characters, who seem to have come out of one of Carpaccio’s paintings because of their variety and narrative potential (which Smith skillfully exploits). For Smith, like for Carpaccio, “the city was thus a background to explore and a story to tell” (Del Puppo 2009, 141). Such story, in Smith’s case, is full of interesting characters, who compose Venice’s social fabric: “the stream of idlers [...] the people who live in the big and little streets, - who eat, sleep,

and are merry, and who, in the warm summer days and nights, see to have no other home” (Smith 1897, 178); then the street vendors “the candy man with teetering scales, [...] and the girl selling the bright red handkerchiefs, blue suspenders, gorgeous neckties, and pearl buttons” (*ibid.*, 180); “and, too, the grave, dignified, utterly useless, and highly ornamental *gendarmes*²⁶⁵, always in pairs [...] with the same mournful strut” (*ibid.*). The characters’ parade continues as Smith meets Alessandro, the boy sculptor who tries to sell his little clay sculptures to tourists, while “tramping the streets of Venice, his little wooden board filled with Madonnas, Spanish matadors, and Don Quixotes” (Smith 1897, 183); Smith feels a kinship with the young artist as he wonders “was he not a brother artist, and though poor and with a very slender hold on fame and fortune, had art any dividing lines?” (*ibid.*, 182).



“Members of the Open Air Club” (*Venice of To-Day*)

This chapter features the larger number of pictures when compared to the other chapters in the book; these photos depict the locals described by Smith’s narrative. As he was not a figure painter, he had to rely on photographs to illustrate some of characters who appear in this chapter.

But it is the girls, Venetian girls, who capture Smith’s attention and imagination as he muses over their picturesque charm:

Such a vision of beauty! Such a wealth of purple-grape purple-black hair; such luminous black eyes, real gazelle’s, soft and velvety; so exquisitely graceful; so

²⁶⁵ Smith’s italics.

charming and naïve; so *unkempt*, so *ragged*, so entirely *unlaundered*, *unscrubbed*, and *slovenly*²⁶⁶! But you must look twice at a Venetian beauty. You may miss her good points otherwise. You think at first sight that she is only the last half of my description, until you follow the flowing lines under the cheap, shabby shawl and skirt, and study the face (Smith 1897, 184).

As Smith keeps on walking he runs into “another feature of these streets” (Smith 1897, 188), that is the bric-a-brac dealer Ananias, who patiently awaits his foreign preys on the sidewalk in front of his shop or near their hotels, in order to sell them his trinkets, “a church lamp, or an altar-cloth spotted with candle grease” (*ibid.*). Perceived as a true predator who capitalizes on his victims’ ingenuity and superficial knowledge of Venetian artifacts, Smith draws a vivid sketch of this improbable Venetian art dealer by comparing him to a dangerous spider: “he haunts a narrow crack of a street leading from the Campo San Mois  to the Piazza” (Smith 1897, 189), and “here this wily spider weaves his web for foreign flies, retreating with his victim into his hole, a little shop, dark as a pocket, whenever he has his fangs completely fastened upon the fly’s wallet” (*ibid.*). The colorful portrait is enhanced by Smith’s rendering of Ananias’s thick English accent while he is trying to persuade the unfortunate tourist into buying an Old Italian altar-cloth²⁶⁷: “no, nod modern; seexteenth century. Vrom a vary olt church in Padua. Zat von you saw on ze Beazzi²⁶⁸ yesterday vas modern and vary often, but I assure you, shentleman, zat zees ees antique and more seldom. Ant for dree hundredt francs eet ees re-diklous” (Smith 1897, 190-191).

It is important to note that Smith’s vernacular portrait of the Venetian crowd included also a peculiar group of people, to which he surely belonged and to which he turned his attention: painters. Significantly, Smith perceived them (and therefore himself) as particularly picturesque, as he emphasized their strenuous efforts to capture and

²⁶⁶ My italics. Smith’s description of these women’s appearance highlighted the fact they evidently belonged to the lower class (they look untidy and dirty), but significantly, Smith saw them through the lens of the popular clich  which equated the poverty of the Venetian population with a vague and contradictory notion of picturesque beauty as Margareta Lovell has aptly remarked (Lovell 1984, 13). In a sense, Smith, like many other American artists, particularly painters (see for example Duveneck’s *Water carriers, Venice*), aestheticized those elements which in a different environment, for instance in an American city, would have been considered ugly and disturbing. On the one hand, such attitude did reflect a pre-conceived literary interpretation of Venice and its inhabitants; on the other, this interpretation was also symbolic of “the place’s power to stereotype the literary visitor’s perceptions” (Ross 1994), as Michael Ross has rightly remarked.

²⁶⁷ Smith’s ironic remarks reveal that the old altar-cloth is definitely a fake: “you are a stranger and do not know that the silk factory at the corner furnished the cloth the week before for five francs a metre, Ananias the grease, and this wife the needle that sewed together” (Smith 1897, 190), thus Ananias is trying to rip off the naïve tourist.

²⁶⁸ Probably another dealer.

represent the “ultimate” image of an elusive city: in one sense, all these artists had become “prominent, omnipresent fixtures in the cityscape” (Lovell 1984, 12). In fact, not only did painters from all over the world, crowd (the) Venetian streets and corners, but thanks to their constant presence and eccentric behavior, they legitimately became part of the local color as Smith suggested:

The painters come, of course-all kinds of painters²⁶⁹, for all kinds of subjects. Every morning, all over the canals and quays, you find a new growth of white umbrellas, like mushrooms, sprung up in the night. Since the days of Canaletto these men have painted and repainted these same stretches of water, palace, and sky. Many of the older men are long since dead and forgotten, but the work of those of today you know: Ziem²⁷⁰ first [...]; and Rico²⁷¹ and Ruskin and Whistler (Smith 1897, 56).

In order to illustrate the polychromatic image conveyed by the presence of these painters, Smith focuses his narrative on two distinct sketches. The first sketch deals with an unidentified painter, who, rather comically, everyday marks his “artistic” territory by securing his preferred spot in a Venetian square, in that very location, every season, year after year, he tries to paint his views of Venice:

The painter with the canvas ten feet long and six feet high, [...] this particular painter occupies the centre of a square bounded by four chairs and some yards of connecting white ribbon, - the chairs turned in so that nobody can sit on them. He has been here for many seasons. He comes every afternoon at five and paints for an hour (Smith 1897, 187).

²⁶⁹ From the 1870s onward a significant number of American artists, like Frank Duveneck and his students (called “The Duveneck Boys”), but also Blum, Whistler, Sargent, and Prendergast, spent a considerable amount of time in Venice, sketching and painting several views of the city (Lovell 1984). Many of them would stay at the Casa Jankovitz, a Venetian guesthouse which was very popular among artists. Marc Simpson has pointed out that Casa Jankovitz and Casa Kirsch became the centers of a small community of American expatriates, who would often meet there: “both *pensionari* proved to be splendid places for work and play, yielding an environment “more intensified, more concentrated” than elsewhere” (Simpson 2003, 36).

²⁷⁰ Felix Ziem (1822-1911) was a French painter who became quite successful during his lifetime and exhibited some of his works at the French Salons; he was particularly fond of Venice and Constantinople, which he often visited and painted in a number of canvases. A tireless traveler and a prolific artist, his output was impressive as it consisted of some 5,000 paintings, which were “repetitive, obsessionnelle et inégale. Canaletto revisite par Turner” (Beauge 2004, 47).

²⁷¹ Martin Rico (1833-1908). Smith mentioned Martin Rico in his book *Outdoor Sketching* (1915).

But this painter is just one of the innumerable examples of foreign artists at work in Venice as Smith promptly clarifies: “yet he is not the only painter in the streets. You will find them all over Venice. Some under their umbrellas, the more knowing under short gondola-sails rigged like an awning, under which they crawl out of the blazing heat. I am one of the more knowing” (*ibid.*).

The second painter Smith describes is an artist named “Marks”²⁷², whom he calls “a painter of sunrises” (Smith 1897, 56): Smith’s depiction turns Marks into the emblem of all painters’ fascination and obsession with Venice, for this artist, according to Smith, falls under the spell of the eccentric Venetian cityscape, and particularly of a spot near the Public Garden, which offers a breathtaking view of the lagoon at dawn:

[Marks] has never yet recovered from his first thrill of delight when early one morning his gondolier²⁷³ rowed him down the lagoon and made fast to a cluster of spiles off the Public Garden. When the sun rose behind the sycamores and threw a flood of gold across the sleeping city, and flashed upon the sails of the fishing-boats drifting up from the Lido, Marks lost his heart (*ibid.*, 57).

By depicting Marks’ s aesthetic and emotional reaction to the sudden revelation of Venice’s beauty, Smith seems to suggest that the artist’s experience of the city is indeed a true epiphany, consequently, the one-time vision of this Venetian dawn becomes the painter’s obsession, to the point that he cannot “see” and represent anything else but this image:

He is still tied up every summer to the same cluster of spiles, painting the glory of the morning sky and the drifting boats. He will never want to paint anything else. He will not listen to you when you tell him of the sunsets up the Giudecca, or the soft pearly light of the dawn silvering the Salute, or the picturesque life of the fisher-folk of Malamocco (Smith 1897, 57).

²⁷² There were several painters who lived in the 19th Century and who bore the last name “Marks”: Albert Marks (Metz); Bernard Barnett Samuel Marks (1827 Cardiff); Marks Ferdinand Louis (1861 Bayeux) and finally, H. Stacy Marks (Thieme Becker XXII, 119). H. Stacy Marks was born in London on September 13, 1829 and died on January 9, 1898. He attended the Royal Academy of Arts, of which he also became a member in 1878 (source: Royal Academy of Arts, www.racollection.org.uk). His name as a prominent oil painter (but he was also a watercolorist), appeared in a book by Tristram J. Ellis, *Sketching from Nature*, Macmillan & Co., London and it is mentioned in the 19th century American magazine *The Collector and art Critic* (*The Collector and Art Critic* 1900, January 13, 105). Unfortunately Smith does not indicate the painter’s first name, and therefore it is rather difficult, almost impossible, to identify the artist he mentions.

²⁷³ Note how thanks to his gondolier the painter “discovers” this picturesque location.

In one sense, Smith's depiction of the painter Marks was reminiscent of his own passion for Venice and of his own attitude toward it; significantly, like Marks, Smith himself had become part of the Venetian landscape during his summer stays, as it was often indicated in newspaper articles²⁷⁴ and by other American artists as well²⁷⁵. In fact, while writing from Venice, Joseph Pennell²⁷⁶ noted in a letter to Whistler: "There is nothing very exciting here save the place [Venice] - that is better than [ever?] as to people - There are [visions?] of Hop Smith like this [drawing of an artist painting at an easel on a Venetian quay with a crowd watching] doing a little water cooler on the Riva" (Pennell 1901, September 22). Pennell's words suggested the idea that the image of Smith at work had become indeed a common view for those who were in the city, and therefore, Smith had metamorphosed into the epitome of all those artists who had literally invaded Venice in an attempt to provide their own interpretations of it through their brush and palette, as Charles C. Coleman remarked in a letter to Elihu Vedder: "Venice swarms with artists" (quoted in Lovell 1984, 15). While very few travelogues extensively described the significant presence of foreign artists in the city, by naming them, depicting them and typifying them, Smith emphasized the role these artists played in shaping the cultural and aesthetic perception of Venice, while at the same time he tried to expose the dynamics of the complex relationship between the artist's gazing eye and the subject of such observation, the landscape. In fact, Smith's portrayal of this relation hinted at "that self-conscious reenactment of the creative and interpretative process" (Lovell 1984, 15) which only few artists had grasped or at least depicted with regard to their accounts of "the Venetian experience" (*ibid.*): Smith's picturesque representation the artist in Venice suggested the fascinating images created by self-reflecting mirrors, in which the observer (the painter) had been transformed into the observed, and therefore into the subject of somebody else's artistic discourse, in our case, Smith's discourse.

Margaretta Lovell has amply commented on the fact that strangely, but significantly, the figure of the artist at work in Venice is usually absent in most pictures representing

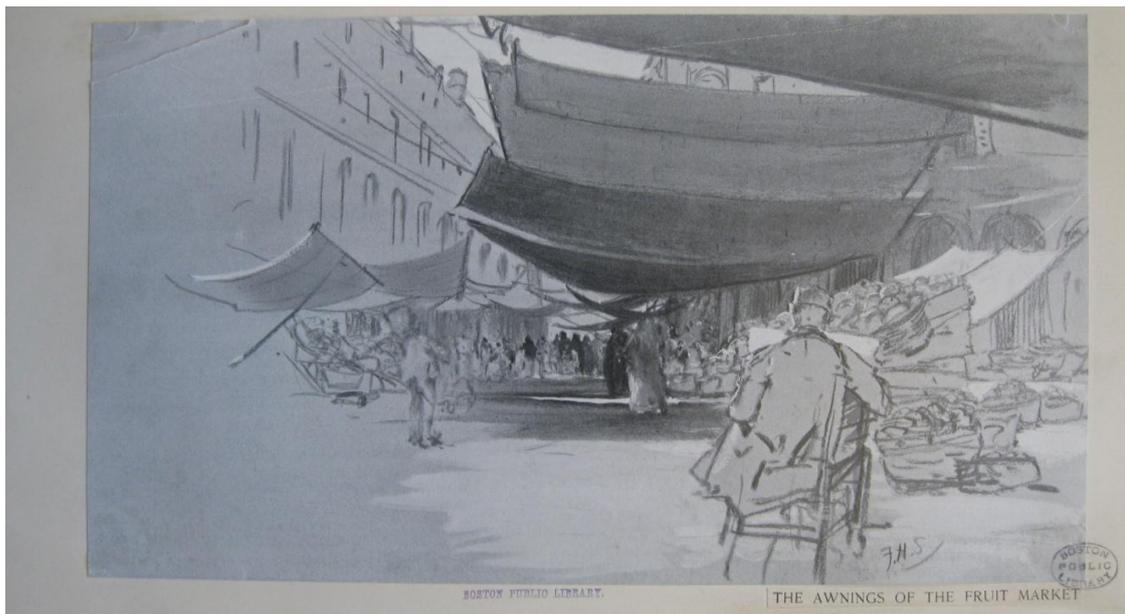
²⁷⁴ "he [Smith] made Venice quite his own some years since" (*NYT* 1896, January 7); "the Summer home has been in Venice" (*NYT* 1898, April 2); see also Arthur Hoeber's article "The Watercolors of F. Hopkinson Smith" (*The Sketch Book* 1906, June, pp. 347-351)

²⁷⁵ See Jane Peterson's account of her first encounter with Hopkinson Smith in Venice. (Jane Peterson's Notes, File AAA). See also A.B. Frost's caricature of Hopkinson Smith sketching in Venice (chapter 1).

²⁷⁶ Pennell was in Venice in September 1901, Smith would often spend September and October in Venice as he indicated in a newspaper interview (*NYT* 1907, January 20).

the city; according to Lovell, the only two exceptions were a painting by Thomas Moran, called *Splendor of Venice* (1889), and a drawing by Robert Blum, which depicted Whistler leaning out of a window and sketching the Riva below (Lovell 1984, pp. 15-16). In my opinion, Smith can be added to this list of notable exceptions, for he depicted an unidentified artist, maybe himself, while he is sketching or painting a view of the busy Rialto market.

Not only did Smith illustrate this process through words, but he also offered his readers a rare depiction of a painter trying to record one of the most picturesque spots in Venice, the fruit market of Rialto²⁷⁷: Smith places the painter in the foreground, he is facing the subject he is drawing (the market stalls and the locals passing by), while at the same time he is turning his back to the reader/viewer: the painter could be Smith, but his hidden face may also suggest that this very painter is the symbolic representation of every artist painting in Venice.



“The Awnings of the Fruit Market” (*Venice of To-Day*)

As previously mentioned, Smith’s focus on the depiction of the Venetian local color included a wide array of subjects, which ranged from the people crowding Venice’s streets and piazzas to the fishermen who lived in the fishing quarter on the island of the Giudecca.

²⁷⁷ The chapter “Open Air Markets” in *Venice of To-Day* is entirely devoted to the description of Venetian open markets, among which the fruit market of Rialto.

Like Baudelaire's flaneur, Smith was deeply fascinated by the spectacle of the crowd parading in front of him, whose movement and energy he aptly conveyed in a compelling depiction of St. Mark's square, which, after all, was the ultimate stage for the Venetian spectacle, to use Howells's words. On a warm summer evening, the square becomes the symbol of "a Venice of life and joyousness and stir" (Smith 1897, 51), while its cafes are filling up with locals and tourists: Smith, a true flaneur²⁷⁸, is observing the scene and paradoxically, like Baudelaire's painter²⁷⁹, he tries to capture a snapshot of modern life in Venice. The contrast between the old Venice and the modern one is enhanced by the fact that Smith has just visited the basilica, and therefore he has experienced the dreamlike and inescapable presence of the past to the fullest, so that the moment a ray of light illuminates the dark aisles in the church, Smith literally "awake[s] to the life of to-day". As he steps outside, his eyes are captivated by the nocturnal vision of a lively city, teeming with people, and imbued with colors, energy and movement²⁸⁰ for he notes "the whole Piazza is ablaze and literally packed with people" (Smith 1897, 54). Smith's pen successfully offers a portrait of the many characters, who make up this "solid mass" (*ibid.*) to use his own words: the officers "in full regalia [...] their swords dangling and ringing as they walk" (Smith 1897, 52); the old Countess, whose real age is a much debated topic among Venetians; Professor Croisac, an old French Professor and a fine connoisseur of Venetian legends and mysteries; Gustavo, the waiter who is the epitome of hospitality and politeness; a typical Italian mother and her daughters, who are trying to get the officers' attention (Smith 1897, 52-54); and also "bareheaded girls, who have been all day stringing beads in some courtyard; old crones in rags from below the shipyards; fishermen in from Chioggia; sailors; stevedores, and soldiers in their linen suits, besides sight-seers and wayfarers from the four corners of the earth²⁸¹" (*ibid.*, 55). Thanks to Smith's words,

²⁷⁸ See Baudelaire's depiction of the flaneur in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life": "la foule est son domaine [...] Sa passion et sa profession, c'est d'*épouser la foule*. Pour le parfait flaneur, pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitive et l'infini" (Baudelaire 1863, 790).

²⁷⁹ I am referring to the title of Baudelaire's famous essay "Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne" (see footnote above).

²⁸⁰ The sense of flowing movement conveyed by the mass of people is aptly rendered by Smith through the use of specific verbs and nouns associated with water imagery: "from under the clock tower *pours* a steady *stream* of people merging in the crowds about the band-stand. Another *current flows in* through the west entrance" (Smith 1897, pp. 51-52).

²⁸¹ This list seems to itemize those characters which were often sought by painters for they represented the picturesque subjects *par excellence*.

Venice's most famous square metamorphosed into a multicolored carousel²⁸², as he depicted its variable hues with striking immediacy, while emphasizing the alluring combination of movement and sound which characterized the open space of the piazza. On the one hand, St. Mark's was indeed the center of social activity, but on the other, there were also other less known areas which revealed the true color of Venice in terms of its inhabitants and dwellers. Having spent every summer in Venice for almost twenty years, Smith was well-acquainted with such areas, and particularly with Via Garibaldi and the Public Gardens, whose peculiar charm he recorded, once again, both through his pen and his brush. As Smith remarked, his discovery of the quaint topography of Venice was often made by walking: it is during one of these rambles that Smith got to Via Garibaldi, and he immediately perceived and described the picturesque allure of the place, which was (and still is) radically different from the more touristed areas as Smith promptly noted: "there are no palaces here, only a double row of shops, their upper windows and balconies festooned with drying clothes, their doors choked with piles of fruit and merchandise" (Smith 1897, 36). The detail of the drying clothes hanging outside and the absence of palaces, suggested a more provincial part of the city, probably inhabited by common people, who were busy performing their daily routine. If on the one hand, such image of the city conveyed a greater sense of authenticity, for it seemed to capture the essence the real life in Venice; on the other, it reinforced a sentimental and stereotypical view of it, as it was amply illustrated by Smith's watercolor *Down the Via Garibaldi*, whose reproduction in *Venice of To-Day* helped the readers visualize the landscape which had been described in the text.

²⁸² See also James's famous image of St. Mark's square described as "an enormous saloon" (James 1882, 10), while Riva degli Schiavoni resembled "a promenade deck" (*ibid*). James highlighted the almost overwhelming presence of the socializing crowd (Mathews 2009, 40).



“Down the Via Garibaldi” (*Venice of To-Day*)

Significantly, Smith’s watercolor functioned as a commentary on the written description of the scene, while at the same time it emphasized those picturesque elements which the writer’s pen might have missed. The colorful shop with its awnings and fruit baskets on the right side of the picture engages the viewer’s attention, while on the left side an Italian beauty dressed in a rustic costume is standing in the shade. In the foreground, a group of Venetian women wearing their black shawls are chatting, while a black felze lies on the ground just right in front them. Some idlers are leaning over the balustrade of a bridge in the distance, while a warm light pervades the scene suggesting the lazy atmosphere of a hot summer day. This picture itemized and capitalized on those picturesque elements (the dark shawled Venetian women, the felze, the idlers, the pigeons) which had become some of the defining traits of the romanticized view of the city and of its inhabitants. Smith’s pictorial and descriptive approach to Venice was indeed the result of several elements at work: nonetheless, the interpretative conventions which had shaped America’s view of Venice had to come to terms with the actual experience of the city; and some artists, including Smith, expressed the tension between the imagined city and the real one in their works, while they wavered between a picturesque representation of it and a more authentic one.

As Smith moved along Via Garibaldi, he finally reached the Public Gardens where he encountered a crowd of “Venetians of To-Day” (Smith 1897, 37), whom he accurately described in a compelling image:

You will find them [Venetians] lolling on the benches, grouped about the pretty caffes, taking their coffee or eating ices; leaning by the hour over the balustrade and watching the boats and little steamers. The children romp and play, the candy man and the sellers of sweet cakes ply their trade and the vender with cool drinks stands over his curious four-legged tray [...] the officers are here too [...] fine ladies saunter along, preceded by their babies, half smothered in lace and borne on pillows in the arms of Italian peasants [...]; and barefooted, frowzy-headed girls from the rookeries behind the Arsenal idle about, four or five abreast, their arms locked, mocking the sailors and filling the air with laughter (Smith 1897, 37).



“Afternoon Promenade, Public Garden” (*Venice of To-Day*)

Smith’s watercolor “Afternoon promenade, public garden”, which was reproduced as an illustration in *Venice of To-Day*, provided a visual commentary on the sketch of the Venetian crowd he had skillfully drawn through words; like in the watercolor “Down the Via Garibaldi”, Smith selected those picturesque elements which could be easily recognized as “cultural signifiers” by viewers, for they would be associated with the

canonical image of the city, as it was perceived (and often imagined²⁸³) by American readers/viewers. A cooler light pervades the scene, while the horizon is raised almost to the top of the paper, emphasizing the silhouette and the horizontal motif of the palaces and churches seen in the distance. At the same time, the vertical motif of the belfries, of the masts and of the sails (and the people's silhouettes) break the distant level lines of the city's architecture. The public garden fills half the sheet on the right side, while the other half is filled by the lagoon, evoking a harbor scene with its typical boats (the gondolas and the colorful sailboats). A woman, probably a peasant, as her rustic clothes suggest, is leaning over the balustrade in a pensive mood, while an elegantly dressed lady is walking holding her parasol. A small crowd pinpointed by bright umbrellas, is gathering in the background, while the omnipresent pigeons huddle in the foreground. Smith's verbal rendering of the exotic festivity of the crowd at the Public Garden was not fully reflected by the picture which bore the same title; by focusing on vernacular details and their lyrical effect, this picture did not fully convey that sense of immediacy and spontaneous vitality which, on the contrary, Smith's pen had aptly represented in the passage which has been previously mentioned. Smith's deft use of colors and his carefully arranged composition imbued this (postcard)-view of the Garden with picturesque charm, but consequently, they crystallized the scene by conveying an image of timeless immobility²⁸⁴.

According to Smith's description, the Public Gardens seemed to offer the possibility of a more intimate glimpse of Venetian life, while at the same time Smith's emphasis on the relaxed promenading of Venetians evoked the iconic image of Venice as the realm of *the dolce far niente*, to use Smith's own words.

To Smith's eyes (and for many American visitors as well), Venice appeared as the antidote to the frantic and alienating lifestyle of American cities:

In this selfish, materialistic, money-getting age, it is a joy to live, if only for a day, where a song is more prized than a soldo; where the poorest pauper laughingly shares his scanty crust; where to be kind to a child a habit, to be neglectful of old age a shame. (Smith 1897, n. p.)

²⁸³ See Rosella Mamoli Zorzi's essay on some of the pre-existing literary representations of Venice, "The Text is the City: the Representation of Venice in two Tales by Irving and Poe and a novel by Cooper".

²⁸⁴ For a totally different view, see for example, Prendergast's watercolor "Via Garibaldi" (1898-1899), which aptly portrayed the spontaneous and joyful movement of the crowd strolling in the street and near the Public Garden. It is tempting to think that, paradoxically, Prendergast's watercolor would have matched Smith's verbal depiction of the local crowd.

In a sense, such words reflected indeed the escapist attitude which characterized 19th century American culture and which was epitomized by the flourishing of sentimental literature in the United States (Lears 1981, 17); Lears has aptly remarked that the dominant culture viewed sentimentality as “a portal of escape” (*ibid.*) from the brutalities and complexity brought by the massive urbanization and industrialization of 19th century America²⁸⁵. Smith’s sentimental perception of Venice suggested the image of a mythic *elsewhere* which embodied those values (a relaxed and simpler lifestyle, the importance of community spirit), whose very existence was dramatically threatened by modern lifestyle²⁸⁶ in America: furthermore, Venice seemed “to fill[ed] an emotional void as Americans attempted to uphold an ideal way of living that was no longer possible in a technologically progressive America” (Fiorino-Iannace 2004). Oddly but interestingly, Smith’s view of Venice implied the coexistence of two cities: a city often perceived as pre-modern and read (if not imagined) through the picturesque and the sentimental, and a real city which at times offered glimpses of its authenticity and modernity. This peculiar juxtaposition is well-exemplified by the countless portrayals of Venetian locals, which Smith made throughout the book. As I have already remarked, some depictions of the locals offered a vernacular and lyrical view of them, for instance, Smith’s representation of the fishermen and their quarter at the Giudecca²⁸⁷, which according to him, emerged as the ultimate image of picturesqueness:

I know best the fishing quarter of Ponte Lungo and the district near by, from the wooden bridge to the lagoon, with the side canal running along the *Fondamenta della Pallada*²⁸⁸ [sic].²⁸⁹ This to me is not only the most picturesque quarter of

²⁸⁵ It is important to keep in mind that as Lears has remarked, antimodernism was a complex phenomenon whose nature was defined by its contradicting dynamics; thus antimodernism “was not simply escapism; it was ambivalent, often coexisting with enthusiasm for material progress” (Lears 1981, XV). We may argue that Hopkinson Smith was symbolic of this ambivalence: on the one hand, he was the successful engineer and business man who had based his career upon a firm belief in progress and technological advances (see the construction of Race Rock lighthouse for instance); on the other, he was the writer who wrote “old-fashioned sentimental romances” (The Outlook 1915, April 21) and the artist, who would always seek the picturesque in exotic locations such as Cuba, Mexico, Spain, Constantinople and of course, Venice.

²⁸⁶ See also Annette Stott’s essay “Dutch Utopia: Paintings by Antimodern American Artists of the Nineteenth Century”.

²⁸⁷ A whole chapter “Among the Fishermen” is dedicated to the fishermen’s quarter located on the Island of the Giudecca. The preposition “among” which appears in the title of the chapter, might suggest Smith’s will to connect with and to be part of a world perceived as utterly remote, but nonetheless extremely fascinating.

²⁸⁸ Smith’s italics.

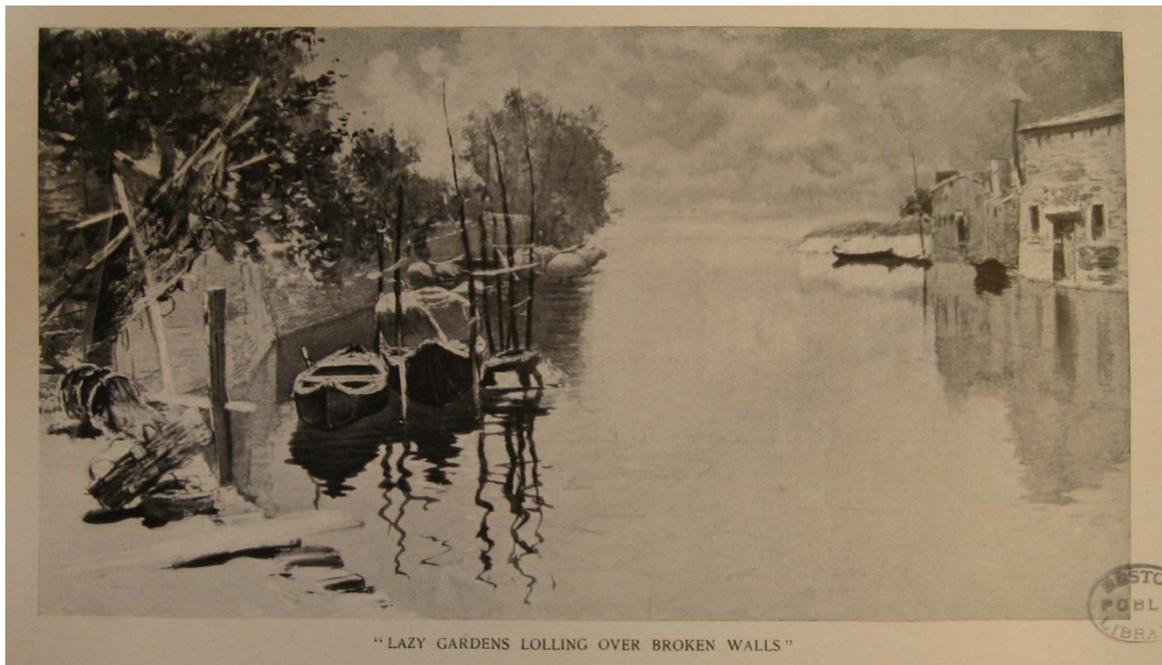
²⁸⁹ Fondamenta della Palada.

Venice, but quite the most picturesque spot I know in Europe, except, perhaps, Scutari on the Golden Horn²⁹⁰ (Smith 1897, 85).

Smith was immediately captivated by the quaint charm of the area, and he accurately described it by providing a list of those picturesque elements (buildings and people), which conjured a kaleidoscope of colorful images. In fact, Smith's discriminating gaze notes that there are no palaces (Smith 1897, 88), instead, "sometimes, tucked away in a garden, you will find an old chateau" (*ibid.*), a type of building which conveys a more alluring sense of mystery²⁹¹. In the previous chapter Smith is told the fascinating legend of the Contessa Alberoni who used to live in a chateau on the Giudecca. But something else captures Smith's attention and imagination, a row of buildings, which "might once have been warehouses loaded with the wealth of the East" (Smith 1897, 88) and which "are now stuffed full of old sails, snarled seines, great fish baskets, oars, fishermen, fisher-wives, fisher-children, rags, old clothes, bits of carpet, and gay, blossoming plants in nondescript pots" (*ibid.*). Smith's description continues with the images of an old garden, a long rambling wall, wooden bridges and narrow canals (Smith 1897, 90): he has definitely entered the realm of the picturesque *par excellence* as even the illustrations accompanying the text seem to suggest.

²⁹⁰ Smith was equally fascinated by Istanbul, where he spent a considerable amount of time during his summer visits to Europe. He also wrote some articles on the city emphasizing its picturesque charm, see: "Under The Minarets", *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 83 issue 496 (September 1891); "Howling Dervishes", *The New York Times* (September 13, 1891); "A Personally Conduct Arrest in Constantinople", *The Century* 51 issue 5 (March 1896) and "The Picturesque Side" in *Some Artists at the Fair* (1893).

²⁹¹ In the previous chapter Professor Croisac tells Smith the fascinating story of the beautiful Contessa Alberoni who used to live in a chateau on the island of Giudecca.



“Lazy Gardens Lolling over Broken Walls” (*Venice of To-Day*)

Echoing Henry James who, in 1882, had aptly remarked that “the life of her [Venice’s] people and the strangeness of her constitution become a perpetual comedy, or at least a perpetual drama” (James 1882, 29), Smith turned the locals of the Giudecca into the colorful characters of a series of sketches, which focused on the simple and carefree way of living of the Venetian fishermen and their families: Smith re-created a pre-modern world populated by children “bareheaded, barefooted, and most of them barebacked” (Smith 1897, 90), described as “little rascally, hatless, shoeless, shirtless, trousers-everything-less, except noise and activity” (*ibid.*, 96), while “they yell like Comanches” (*ibid.*), they play tricks on painters as “they cry *Soldi, soldi, Signore*²⁹²” (*ibid.*). While the fishermen are working²⁹³ surrounded by their crab-baskets and nets, the women “choke up the doorways, stringing beads²⁹⁴, making lace, sitting in bunches listening to a story by some old crone, or breaking out into song, the whole neighborhood joining in the chorus” (Smith 1897, 90). The characters’ parade continues when Smith focuses on the Marcelli family, whose members are Smith’s “very intimate and charming friends” (Smith 1897, 91), as he eagerly points out: there is Amelia, whose picturesque beauty is captured by artists for she is a child model (*ibid.*); young

²⁹² Smith’s italics.

²⁹³ In this chapter Smith accurately describes the customs and habits of the fishermen and their environment as well. See for his example his description of the mussel-gatherers (Smith 1897, 99).

²⁹⁴ Smith’s picturesque description could be considered the verbal equivalent of many paintings by 19th century American artists, who portrayed romanticized images of Venetians performing their daily activities, see for instance, Blum’s *Bead stringers*.

Antonio, a wannabe gondolier, and their parents, the very loud and colorful Signora Marcelli and her quiet husband Signor Marcelli²⁹⁵, whose almost Socratic wisdom is distilled into the motto “gulls scream and women scold, but fishing and life go on just the same” (Smith 1897, 94).

Smith’s narrative is not immune from a certain degree of sentimentality, particularly, when he confronts the life of toil led by the fishermen and their families; on the other hand though, he succeeds in giving a lively and colorful picture of these Venetians, while at the same time he ascribes a mythical resonance to them. By leading a life based on ancient work rituals and simple traditions, these fishermen seem to fully embody the peculiar quality of timelessness which characterizes the spirit of the city, an ever-changing quality which Smith’s eyes see through the idealizing lens of nostalgia:

These several grades of fishermen have changed but little, either in habits, costume, or the handling of their craft, since the early days of the republic. [...] Whatever changes have taken place in the political and social economy of Venice, they have affected but little these lovers of the lagoons. What mattered it to whom they paid taxes, - whether to doge, Corsican, Austrian, or king, - there were as good fish in the sea as had ever been caught, and as long as their religion lasted, so long would people eat fish and Friday come round every week of the year (Smith 1897, 100).

Although Smith’s depiction of the Venetian fishermen was often rendered through a marked anecdotal tone (sometimes condescending), it is worth noting that unlike many popular travel guides and travelogues, Smith turned his attention to a category of Venetians which was often overlooked by the many voices which had narrated the Venetian experience.

²⁹⁵ Smith’s portrayal of the Marcelli’s family is accompanied by the photographs of young Antonio, little Amelia and Signor Marcelli.



“The Madonna of the Fishermen” (*Venice of To-Day*)

However stereotyped Smith’s vision of these locals might be, we could argue that his interest in depicting their lives reflected a genuine desire to connect with them and with the city (and culture) they represented; furthermore, as William Vance has remarked, by focusing on ordinary common people like the fishermen or the idlers, Smith “not only responded to democratic taste but constituted a democratic affirmation” (Vance, quoted in Buonomo 1996, 16), for he implicitly suggested these people were worth being represented by an artist’s pen or brush. Smith might have sounded a little condescending at times when he described Venetians and their customs, and he was surely influenced by some clichés, but one cannot deny he often displayed a sympathetic attitude towards the locals²⁹⁶ he met during his Venetian visits²⁹⁷.

Significantly, Smith’s depiction of local color resulted in a wide array of sketches which revealed the contradicting dynamics of his gaze: in fact, he was an artist who was capable of juxtaposing the usual picturesque views of the city and its inhabitants with unexpected glimpses of its modernity, his portrayal of crowds represented the

²⁹⁶ See for example, Smith’s portrayal of the Signora Marcelli (Smith 1897, 92) or his depictions of loafers like Luigi and Vittorio (Smith 1897, 33-35), and Professor Croisac (Smith 1897, 60-63).

²⁹⁷ Buonomo has noted that it was rare for American travellers in Italy to establish close relationships with the locals, their relationships mainly consisted of “brief, ordinary encounters with the low orders of society” (Buonomo 1996, 22) and as a consequence, these travelers would end up “deal[ing] with men and women who were, one might say, doubly foreign: in both culture and class” (*ibid.* 23). As for Smith, his writings and newspapers interviews seemed to suggest that, after having spent more than twenty summers in Venice, he did form lasting friendships with some of the locals.

frontier, on which his passion for the sentimental and the picturesque came to terms with his commitment to authenticity, as it is shown by the following examples:

Soon the current from away up near the Piazza begins to flow down towards the Public Garden [...]. Priests come, and students; sailors on a half day's leave; stevedores from the salt waterhouses; fishermen; peddlers; with knickknacks and sweetmeats; throngs from the hotels; and slender, graceful Venetians, out for their afternoon stroll in twos and threes, with high combs and gay shawls, worn as a Spanish Donna would her mantilla - bewitching creatures [...] with restless butterfly fans, and restless wicked eyes too, that flash and coax as they saunter along (Smith 1897, 29-31).

This description of the “Grand Promenade of Venice” (Smith 1897, 29) evoked the picturesque crowd of a city, which was indeed perceived as remote, exotic and even more bewitching than its female inhabitants by 19th century American culture. In a sense, Smith’s colorful rendering of these characters on the Venetian scene matched the expectations of the American readers, who could literally “build” their imaginary Venice without crossing the Atlantic to visit it, for painters and writers like Smith, would provide them with an emotional, aesthetic and cultural map of the city. But Smith revealed his surprising palette when, having set aside the bead stringers and the fishermen, he portrayed the unusual and dazzling image of a modern crowd of local workers getting off work: “a long sinuous snake of employees - there are some seven thousand of them - [which] crawls from out the arsenal gates, curves over the arsenal bridge, and heads up the Riva” (Smith 1897, 41). The Venice of *the dolce far niente* is momentarily obliterated by a more modern and less picturesque city which is composed of employees clocking off, of gas lamps (Smith 1897, 202) lighting up dark alleys and squares, of little steamers “scurry[ing] up and down the Grand Canal” (Smith 1897, 188), of gray rainy days (Smith 1897, 145), and of tourists invading the most fashionable Venetian cafes like “the fragments of an American linen - duster brigade, with red guide - books²⁹⁸ and faces, in charge of a special agent” (Smith 1897, 121). Significantly, Smith’s spatial and cultural experience of Venice is also linked to the image of its cafés, in fact, in the chapter entitled “Some Venetian Cafés”, Smith provides the reader with a detailed map of the Venetian restaurants, and at the same

²⁹⁸ Probably their Baedekers.

time he itemizes them by associating each location with a description of the regular customers:

All the artists, architects, and musicians meet at the Florian's; all the Venetians go to the *Quadri*; the Germans and late Austrians, to the *Bauer-Grunwald*; the stay-over-nights, to the Oriental on the Riva; the stevedores, to the *Veneta Marina* below the Arsenal; and my dear friend Luigi and his fellow tramps, to a little hole in the wall on the *Via Garibaldi* (Smith 1897, 116).

Smith's attentive gaze focuses both on the notable habitués of the cafés in St. Mark's square²⁹⁹ (Smith 1897, 119-120), and on the waiters, who seem to fully embody the essence of Venetian sociability and grace; the omnipresent silhouettes of Gustavo or Florio³⁰⁰ are set against the colorful background of the "piazza", while their Harlequin-like agility and elegance (*ibid.*, 119) turn them into timeless mythical figures as Smith points out: "the same waiters, too, hurry about - they live on for centuries - wearing the same coats and neckties, and carrying the same napkins. I myself have never seen a dead waiter, and, now I happen to think of it, I have never heard of one" (*ibid.*, 119). Nonetheless, Smith's discriminating (and democratizing) eye gives special attention to the cafés of the rich as well as to cafés of the poor³⁰¹: thus, Smith offers a vivid and accurate rendering of the latter, in an attempt to portray the wide variety of cafés, attended by the locals. According to Smith's description, the cafés of the poor mostly consist of food stalls selling "a mess of kidneys or an indescribable stew", together with "a miniature octopus, called *fulpe* [sic], a little sea horror" (Smith 1897, 123) and "cook boats" (*ibid.*, 122) that is, takeaways on the water. Mesmerized by the picturesqueness of the "floating caffè [sic]" (*ibid.*, 122), Smith celebrates the simple but tasty foods offered by these quaint floating restaurants, while at the same time, he suggests that the combination of the salt air and the fascinating seascape surrounding the venue may contribute to enhance the flavor of their food by making "the coffee so savory, the fish and rolls so delicious, and the fruit so refreshing" (Smith 1897, 122).

²⁹⁹ Smith's list of the regulars of the Florian includes Professor Croisac, an unidentified Countess of indeterminate age, the Archduke's sister, a Spanish nobleman and a Royal Academician (Smith 1897, 120).

³⁰⁰ Florio and Gustavo are two waiters of the Florian who are mentioned by Smith (Smith 1897, 120).

³⁰¹ Capitalizing on the widespread cliché of picturesque poverty, Smith equals the cafés of the locals with the cafés of the poor, except for the bohemian Café Calcina, which is presented as the café of the artists, especially foreign artists.

Moreover, Smith notes that besides the food stalls and the cook-boats, Venice swarms with hidden cafés, whose delightful cuisine and cozy atmosphere welcome a number of Bohemians and artists. The most popular among these cafés, and Smith's favorite, is the "*Caffé Calcina*³⁰²" (Smith 1897, 124), which is located near Rio San Vio along the Zattere. According to Smith, the patio of the Café Calcina with its luxuriant oleanders and vines, "is one of the few restful spots of the wide earth" (*ibid.*), but the alluring charm of this café and guesthouse lies in the fact that notable artists such as Turner, Whistler, Ruskin³⁰³, Browning, Rico and many others have sojourned in its rooms and have relaxed in its patio as Smith points out:

To your great surprise, the Caffé Calcina has been the favorite resort of good Bohemians for nearly a century. You learn that Turner painted his sunset sketches from its upper windows, and that dozens of more modern painters have lived in the rooms above; that Whistler and Rico and scores of others have broken bread and had toothsome omelets its vines; and, more precious than all, that Ruskin and Browning have shared many a bottle of honest Chianti with these same oleanders above their heads [...] in the years when the Sage of Brentwood was teaching the world to love his Venice (Smith 1897, 125).

Smith's words ascribe mythical resonance to this café by turning it into a shrine to those great artists who have successfully captured the essence of Venice and who have influenced generations of artists with their works, including Smith.

By mixing a strong sense of narrative with a keen eye for the picturesque, Smith tried to depict his emotional and aesthetic response to a city he had a chance to experience every summer for more than twenty years: the result was an appealing but often contradictory combination of views of Venice which juxtaposed a romanticized and stereotypical image of it with a fresher and more authentic portrayal of its complexities.

3.3 Old gardens, old palaces and old stories: the tyranny of the past

Although Smith's interpretation of Venice was centered around the picturesqueness of

³⁰² Smith is probably referring to the Pensione Calcina, which still exists nowadays.

³⁰³ A commemorative plaque on the building, which is still visible today, reminds visitors that Ruskin sojourned in the guest house.

its eccentric landscape and of its inhabitants, Smith was not immune, like many other American travelers and artists, to the effects of the fascinating and all-pervading presence of the Past in a city which “presented itself as the distilled essence of the past” and as a sort of “time capsule” (Lovell 1984, 14) to the eyes of many American visitors at the end of the nineteenth century. Travel guides, travel accounts and travelogues often focused on detailed descriptions of those precious “stones”, to use Ruskin’s words, which represented the tangible signs of Venice’s glorious and ambiguous past; at the same time such descriptions were accompanied by sketches of those legendary figures (the Doge, the Council of Ten, Marino Faliero or Count Carmagnola) whose stories had helped create the myth of Venice³⁰⁴ as a place of freedom and tolerance but also of intrigue and mystery³⁰⁵. Smith clearly pointed out in his preface to *Venice of To-Day* that he was not interested in “review[ing] the splendors of the past” (Smith 1897, n.p.), on the contrary, he wanted to focus on his interpretation of contemporary Venice, perceived and described in terms of a sensual and aesthetic experience. However, Smith could not fully escape the haunting presence of History, which had inevitably shaped the (physical and cultural) image of the city, and which had resulted in a series of cultural and literary myths³⁰⁶.

This ambiguous interdependence of History and Myth was epitomized, for example, by Byron’s description of the Bridge of Sighs in Canto IV of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*; generations of travelers and writers would be influenced by the byronical image of the bridge which represented the metaphorical connection between the magnificent past of the Republic (the palace) and its tradition of mysteries and crime (the prison). Both Ruskin and Howells did criticize Byron’s Venice, as they denounced the effects of these super-imposed literary and cultural interpretations of the city³⁰⁷ which had created a conventional and unreal place; nonetheless the myth of Venice “as the city of nocturnal intrigue, of various degrees of “Gothic” atmospheres, of guilt and stiletos” (Mamoli Zorzi 1990, 290) did survive and it appeared also in Smith’s *Venice of To-Day*. Capitalizing on his readers’ familiarity with the legends and stories of the

³⁰⁴ The mythical image of Venice has been aptly explored by Bruce Redford in the book *Venice and the Grand Tour* (1996).

³⁰⁵ See for example Clara Erskine Clement’s book *The Queen of the Adriatic* (1893) which comprised some chapters devoted to Venice’s mythical past and its legendary figures: “The Doges: their Power and Achievements”; “Marino Faliero; Vettore Pisani and Carlo Zeno”; “The Two Foscari; Carmagnola and Colleoni”; “Venetian Women: Caterina Cornaro, Rosalba Carriera”. See also Hillard’s *Six Months in Italy* (1853).

³⁰⁶ See Rosella Mamoli Zorzi’s essay “The Text is the City: the Representation of Venice in two Tales by Irving and Poe and a Novel by Cooper”, especially pp. 290-291.

³⁰⁷ See Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* and Howells’s *Venetian Life* (1867).

“Gothic” Venice, Smith offers a thorough catalogue of macabre images and characters which associate the history of the city with death and intrigue. In fact, while Smith is standing in St. Mark’s square mesmerized by the beauty of its buildings he cannot help noticing “and behind all this beauty of form and charm of handicraft, how lurid the background of tradition, cruelty, and crime!” (Smith 1897, 44). Such dark background is then portrayed by Smith’s exhaustive list:

Poor Doge Francesco Foscari, condemning his own innocent son Jacopo to exile and death, [...]; the traitor Marino Faliero, beheaded on the Giant Stairs³⁰⁸ of the palace, his head bounding to the pavement below; the perfidies of the Council of Ten; the state murders, tortures, and banishments; the horrors of the prisons of the Piombi; the silent death strokes of the unsigned denunciations dropped into the *Bocca del Leone* [...] nightly filled with the secrets of the living, daily emptied of the secrets of the dead. All are here before you. The very stones their victims trod lie beneath your feet, their water-soaked cells but a step away (*ibid.*).

Smith’s list continues as he tells Count Carmagnola³⁰⁹’s story while pointing out that the pages of the book describing the Venetian past are “rubricated in blood and black-lettered in crime” (Smith 1897, 46). It is important to note though, that Smith’s emphasis on the history of Venice reflected his interest in a subject matter which catered to his marked sense of narrative, and therefore it gave him the possibility to enter the realm of romance, in which he felt particularly at ease. However, Smith was not interested in exploring or analyzing the historical facts *per se*, they functioned as the colorful background against which he could set the picturesque image of contemporary Venice and the stories associated with it.

The chapter which explicitly deals with the overwhelming presence of the past in Venice is aptly entitled “Legacies of the Past”: such legacies are the magnificent palaces and churches which Smith visits under the guidance of his French friend, Professor Croisac. Professor Croisac is probably the most puzzling and charming character in *Venice of To-Day*, Smith’s detailed and realistic description of the

³⁰⁸ Gregory Dowling has aptly pointed out that the Giants’ Staircase (described in Byron’s *Marino Faliero*) was actually built in 1484-1501, while Faliero’s execution took place in 1355. (Dowling 2008, 25). There it could not be the same staircase.

³⁰⁹ Smith might have read or seen Pasquale Negri’s tragedy *Carmagnola* (1849), Smith knew other works by this Venetian author including the travel account *Soggiorno in Venezia*, which had been published and edited by Negri in 1853. The story of Count Carmagnola was also told by C.E. Clement in her book *The Queen of the Adriatic* (1893).

Professor seems to suggest that this figure was probably based on a real person, but unfortunately, there are no records which report somebody bearing that name. The Professor³¹⁰ is described as an eccentric intellectual and a story-teller of remarkable ability, he is considered a leading authority on the history of the city thanks to his deep knowledge of Venetian legends and customs, and the locals often refer to him as the “Professor of Modern Languages and Ancient Legends” (Smith 1897, 59). Like Smith, the Professor has a marked sense of narrative which he combines with a genuine passion for old romances as many of his stories reveal. In fact, prizing his friend’s peculiar talent Smith points out:

The old Frenchman had justly earned his title. He had not only made every tradition and fable of Venice his own, often puzzling and charming the Venetians themselves with his intimate knowledge of the many romances of their past, but he could tell most wonderful tales of the gorgeous fetes of the seventeenth century, the social life of the nobility, their escapades, intrigues and scandals (Smith 1897, 59).

Fascinated by Professor Croisac’s enticing charm, Smith ascribes a mythical aura to his figure, suggesting that his French friend may be indeed an impoverished aristocrat who has retained the distinguished elegance and grace of his former social status: “he is so erect, so gentle, so soft-voiced, so sincere, and so genuine [...] that you cannot divest yourself of the idea that he really is an old marquis, temporarily exiled from some far away court, and to be treated with the greatest deference” (Smith 1897, 54). Croisac’s combination of decayed nobility and timeless charm seems to suggest the very qualities which characterize his portrayal of Venice in the stories and legends he tells. Smith emphasizes Croisac’s intimate connection with the city and its past by remarking that “he is as much a part of its [Venice] history as the pigeons [...] he is a perfectly straight, pale, punctilious, and exquisitely deferential *relic*³¹¹ of a bygone time” (*ibid.*). To Smith’s eyes Croisac fully epitomizes the peculiar juxtaposition of the present and the past which distinguishes and defines Venice: in addition, by comparing the Professor to a “relic” Smith transforms him into the tangible sign (and symbol) of the pervasive presence of history which affects Smith’s contemporary Venice as well.

³¹⁰ Although Professor Croisac seems to be a real character rather than an invented one, I was unable to find any proof of his identity. His name does not appear in the Readers’ Register of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana for the years 1895-1896. The register is kept at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice. We thank dr. Carlo Campana for making the registers available to us.

³¹¹ My italics.

Croisac becomes a picturesque Virgil as he guides Smith “through all the relics of the past, illustrative of an age in Venice as sumptuous as it was artistic” (Smith 1897, 156): such relics are also the cultural landmarks which allow visitors to interrogate and explore the historical dimension of the city, as Smith implicitly suggests by providing a detailed list³¹² of the palaces, churches and monuments which usually make up the tourist’ experience of Venice: in one sense, Smith’s list summarizes the itineraries³¹³ which could be found in travel guidebooks like the Baedekers or the Murrays. Accompanied by the French Professor, Smith’s pilgrimage begins with a visit to Palazzo Albrizzi, where the beauty of its magnificent ceiling and the charm of the Contessa’s hidden garden capture the artist’s attention. As Smith’s journey through historical Venice continues, he visits “a dozen or more of these legacies of the past” (Smith 1897, 160), the Church of the Frari³¹⁴ and finally the Scuola of San Rocco, where he admires “the superb staircase [...] lined with the marvelous colorings of Titian and Tintoretto” (Smith 1897, 170). Smith’s visual and spatial experience of the Venetian past is enhanced by Croisac’s anecdotal reinterpretation of Venetian history: the Professor’s narrative focuses on those legends and stories³¹⁵ which clearly associate the city with a romanticized vision of its glorious and mysterious past. In one sense, through Croisac’s voice Smith articulates the Venice of the literary tradition, an imaginary space defined by a series of pre-existing and super-imposed images (Mamoli Zorzi 1990), which paradoxically transform the real city into a mere reflection of the

³¹² Significantly Smith’s list includes a number of palaces, among which Palazzo Albrizzi, Palazzo Rezzonico, Palazzo Barbaro, Palazzo Pesaro, Palazzo Farsetti, Palazzo Barbarigo, Palazzo Mocenigo and Desdemona’s house (Smith 1897, 156-157), for each palace Smith provides a brief description of its main features, whether architectural or historical, drawing on the literary and cultural subtext which permeated the nineteenth century perception of Venetian history; as to the religious landmarks, Smith mentions the church of San Giovanni e Paolo, the church of the Frari, the church of the Gesuati, San Giorgio, and “a dozen other picturesque churches” (Smith 1897, 158).

³¹³ Smith provides the reader with a visual representation of the itinerary he describes: in fact, this chapter offers an interesting combination of photographs and illustrations which depict the landmarks mentioned by Smith. Photographs: “The Ceiling in the Palazzo Albrizzi”; “A Venetian Salon of Today”; “Grand Hall, Palazzo Albrizzi”; “Statua coleoni [sic]”. Charcoal sketches and watercolors: “Where Browning died”; “Church of San Rosario”; “Sir Henry Layard’s house, Entrance”; “Canal Entrance, Palazzo Barbaro”; “Palazzo Contarini”; “Ponte Pagni”; “Grand Staircase, Palazzo Barbaro”; “Where Howells lived”; “The Salute from San Giorgio”.

³¹⁴ Smith expresses fascination with the Church of the Frari which he describes as “certainly, after San Marco, the most picturesque and harmonious in coloring of all the churches of Venice” (Smith 1897, 169); as to the monument of Titian and the tomb of Canova he remarks: “to his credit be it said, the Professor had no raptures over this outrage in marble” (*ibid.*).

³¹⁵ Some of these stories deal with popular figures such as Caterina Cornaro, Doge Foscari, Patrizio Grimani, while at the same time they portray the dreamlike atmosphere of the parties and banquets hosted by Venetian aristocrats in their sumptuous palaces.

mythical and literary one. The element of intertextuality³¹⁶ which characterizes the city portrayed by Smith via Croisac, is clearly revealed by the fact that the Professor “uses” two books, and therefore two texts, to construct the image of Venice: the first book he mentions is Giustina Renier Michiel’s book *Origine delle Feste Veneziane*³¹⁷ (1829) and the second one is Edmondo Lundy’s *Misteri di Venezia*³¹⁸ which according to Smith’s footnote, was written in 1750. Using these two texts as the main source of his stories, Croisac conveys an anecdotal re-interpretation of the Venetian past, through a series of colorful vignettes, especially those inspired by Lundy’s account of his Venetian adventures³¹⁹ (Smith 1897, 164-169). Smith does acknowledge the fascinating and inescapable presence of the past in modern Venice by creating the character of Professor Croisac, who in a sense epitomizes this connection between the present and the past. Nonetheless, Smith’s strong sense of narrative prevails over his interest in the account of historical facts, so that the Venice of the past becomes the perfect setting for Croisac’s (and therefore Smith’s) Venetian tales, which “evoke[s] the private histories of notables long gone” (Lovell 1984, 129) rather than focusing on “the public tale of Venice’s political history” (*ibid.*). In *Venice of To-Day* and particularly in this chapter,

³¹⁶ As to the notion of the intertextual representations of Venice, I am indebted to Mamoli Zorzi’s essay “The Text is the City: the Representation of Venice in two Tales by Irving and Poe and a Novel by Copper” (1990), which aptly explores the relation between literary texts on Venice and the mythical image of the city created by these texts.

³¹⁷ Michiel’s book dealt with the tradition, the history and the role of Venetian festivals and rites during the ancient regime. See Marco Fincardi’s essay “Regata del XX Settembre, ovvero il rinnovarsi delle tradizioni virili veneziane a fine XIX secolo”.

³¹⁸ Smith mentioned Edmondo Lundy as the author of the chronicle *Misteri di Venezia* (1750). He was probably referring to Lundy’s *Soggiorno in Venezia*, which could be attributed to Pasquale Negri Pasquale Negri, a prolific Venetian author, published the book *Soggiorno in Venezia di Edmondo Lundy* in 1853; Negri presented the book as his transcription of a manuscript by Edmondo Lundy, a Swiss merchant who visited Venice in the 1750s. It is not clear whether the manuscript is one of the literary devices often used by writers to write their works, or if Pasquale Negri actually found and revised Lundy’s manuscript. In the first edition of the book Negri stated he was only the editor/publisher of the manuscript by Edmondo Lundy. Presented as Lundy’s personal travel account of his Venetian stay, in reality, *Soggiorno in Venezia* was a mixture between a travelogue and a travel guidebook, and it dealt with a wide array of subjects: it illustrated Venetian traditions (see the chapters “Regata”, “Festa del Redentore”, “Caccia dei Tori”), customs (“Morte ed e Elezione del Doge”, “Consiglio dei Dieci”) and folklore (see the chapters which focus on these popular legends “Veneranda Porta”, “Bianca da Collalto” “Giustina Rossi”), but it also depicted the population of Venice and its different “types” such as “Gondolieri”, “Avvocati”, “Medici”, “I Tagliatabarri.” The book was indeed a vivid and thorough portrayal of Venice and Venetian life, and it might have inspired Smith’s travelogue; we may assume Smith read the book, even if, on the other hand, Smith’s knowledge of the Italian language is debatable; according to Lovell “Smith spoke very little Italian” (Lovell 1984, 128), and in *Well-Worn Roads of Spain, Holland and Italy* Smith himself admitted that he could not speak Italian very well (Smith 1886, 77). Consequently, Smith might have read a translated version of Negri’s book.

³¹⁹ Lundy’s adventures, which were reported by Croisac, suggested some of the typical topoi which were associated with the image of Venice: the story of Lundy’s affair with the Venetian Duchessa (Smith 1897, 165), for instance, reflected the widely accepted representation of the city as “Città Galante”, whose population often exuded an ambiguous sexual allure because of its licentious mores. Lundy’s Venice was also a place of deceit and intrigue as it appeared in the sketch of the Venetian Borsaiuoli (pick-pockets) (*ibid.*, 167).

Smith's emotional and cultural response to the pervasive presence of the past in Venice is rendered through a romanticized and vernacular representation of the city, which reflects the artist's imaginary inner landscape rather than the real external landscape he actually sees and experiences. In addition, the presence of four distinct voices³²⁰ in the above-mentioned chapter³²¹, emphasizes a polyphonic rendering of the city, while at the same time, it suggests the infinite representational possibilities, whether verbal or visual, which Venice inevitably evokes.

As we have previously argued, Smith's Venice is both the realm of the picturesque and "the realm of romance", to use Margareta Lovell's words (Lovell 1984, 129): illustrative in this regard is Smith's fascination with Venetian gardens, whose luxuriant and secretive beauty tickles Smith's imagination. When Smith visits Palazzo Albrizzi he is mesmerized by its walled garden, whose secluded nature and quaint beauty conjure up a kaleidoscope of images suggesting the mysterious and sensual allure of the place. Surrounded by decaying walls and shrouded in the tangled overgrowth of its trees and bushes, the Albrizzi garden metamorphoses into a "hortus conclusus" offering Smith an unusual glimpse of (tamed) wilderness:

And such a garden! Framed in by high prison walls, their tops patrolled by sentinels of stealthy creepers and wide-eyed morning glories! A garden with a little glass-covered arbor in the centre plot, holding a tiny figure of the Virgin; circular stone benches for two, and no more; tree-trunks twisted into seats, with encircling branches for shoulders and back, and all, too, a thousand miles in the wilderness for anything you could hear or see of the great city about you (Smith 1897, 159-161).

The fluctuant image of the water-bound city is momentarily obliterated by the presence of this enclosed space, in which nature and civilization intermingle as the natural elements are juxtaposed with the artificial ones. Even the bridge connecting the palace, and specifically, the Contessa's boudoir³²², to the garden reflects the sense of sensual abandon conveyed by the luxuriant vegetation as Smith notes: "and such a bridge! All smothered in vines, threading their way in and out the iron lattice-work of the construction, and sending their tendrils swinging, heads down, like acrobats, to the

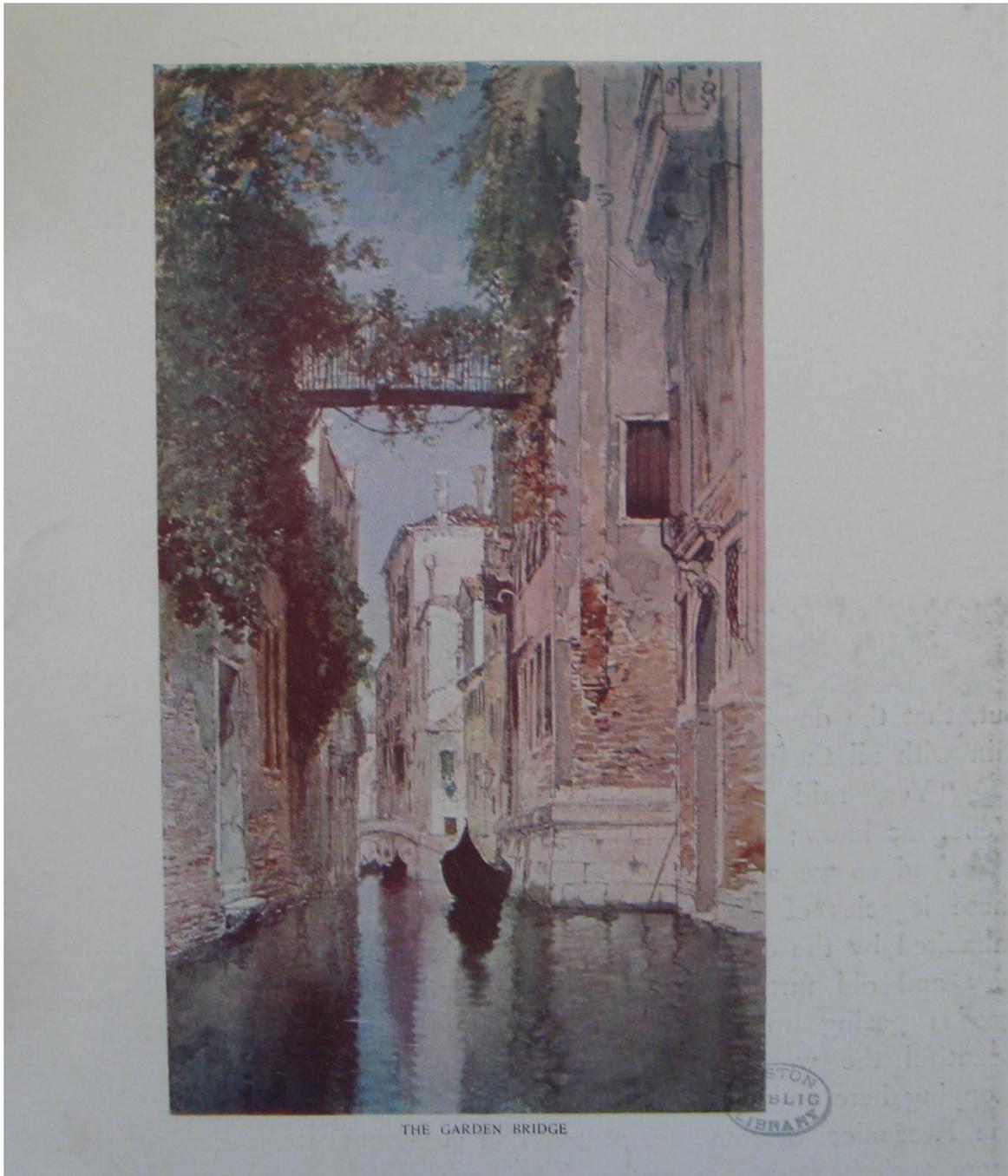
³²⁰ We could argue there are four different narrators in this chapter: Smith, Croisac, but also Lundy and Michiel; significantly, each narrator tells his/her own story on Venice, thus presenting his/her own peculiar perspective.

³²¹ "Legacies of the Past" (Smith 1897, 155-175).

³²² It is worth noting that the room Smith mentions is not any room, but a boudoir, and the term obviously suggests the image of a very private setting associated with female sensuality.

water below” (Smith 1897, 159). Smith’s mind starts wandering through the realm of romance as the Albrizzi garden becomes the perfect setting for “lovers and intrigues and secret plots, and muffled figures smuggled through mysterious water-gates, and stolen whisperings in the soft summer night” (Smith 1897, 160). Being a secluded and hidden space within the city, the Albrizzi garden is then described as the open-air bedroom of an aristocratic Venetian beauty: “A garden so utterly shut in, and so entirely shut out, that the daughter of a Doge could take her morning bath³²³ in the fountain with all the privacy of a boudoir” (Smith 1897, 160).

³²³ The sensual secrecy of the woman’s bath in the garden is almost reminiscent of Tintoretto’s portrayal of “Susannah and the Elders” (1555-1556).



“The Garden Bridge” (*Venice of To-Day*)

Smith’s brush offers the visual rendering of his verbal description of the Albrizzi garden. Gardens often appeared in his watercolors which depicted the narrow Venetian canals, see for example *Venice: Canal Scene I* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)³²⁴.

Smith ascribes a sensual allure to the scene, while at the same time he emphasizes the status of Venetian gardens which are both inaccessible and aristocratic; in other words, as Smith points out, Venetian gardens are urban oases devoted to the enjoyment of the

³²⁴ For an analysis of this watercolor see Margaretta Lovell, *Venice: The American View 1860-1920*, (1984), p. 128.

few. According to Smith, gardens represent a spatial counter-discourse in a city which is poised over air and water, and whose identity is defined by the tension between these two elements: “you think, perhaps, there are no gardens in Venice; that it is all a sweep of palace front and shimmering sea; [...] really, if you but knew it, almost every palace hides a garden nestling beneath its balconies” (Smith 1897, 58). Attracted by the hidden gardens of Venice, Smith describes them as exotic specimens, whose luxuriant vegetation is mixed with “crumbling walls” (Smith 1897, 59) and “broken statues” (*ibid.*, 58), to Smith’s eyes they are the place where nature and artifice come together, suggesting a sense of timelessness and picturesque beauty.

In fact, there is another garden in *Venice of To-Day* which becomes the focus of Smith’s narrative for it is closely associated with those qualities: it is an “old garden” (Smith 1897, 65) of a “chateau”³²⁵, “half in ruins” (*ibid.*), on the island of the Giudecca, where a beautiful Venetian noblewoman, Contessa Alberoni, used to live. Smith’s choice of words in his description of the setting emphasizes a gothic atmosphere of mystery and romance, and since we are dealing with a Venetian legend, it is Professor Croisac who is telling the story. Thus, Croisac and Smith reach the island of the Giudecca and visit the ruins of the garden and of the chateau; modern Venice is suddenly erased by the vision of picturesque scenery encompassing the chateau and its surrounding garden:

Once inside, however, with the gate swung-to on its rusty hinges, you felt instantly that the world had been shut away forever. Here were long arbors bordered by ancient box, with arching roofs of purple grapes. Against the high walls stood fragments of statues, some headless, some with broken arms or battered faces. Near the centre of the great quadrangle was a sunken basin, covered with mould, and green with the scum of stagnant water (Smith 1897, 69).

The image of the abandoned garden with its ghost-like appearance conveys a deep sense of solitude, while Smith’s description emphasizes the processes of decay and loss which have affected the landscape; the garden is now a “tangled waste” (Smith 1897, 69), while on the other hand, the remains of the house somehow suggest the magnificence of the old days: “a once noble chateau or summer home, built of stone in the classic style of architecture, the pediment of the porch supported by a row of white marble columns” (*ibid.*). However, Smith waters down the gothic (almost sublime), and

³²⁵ Unfortunately I have not been able to locate this “chateau” on the island of the Giudecca.

dangerously tragic atmosphere, as he points out that a part of the garden is inhabited by some fishermen, by the old gardener Angelo and his daughter: the modern Venice encounters the Venice of the past. In a sense, Smith offers his reader a safe and reassuring image of decay and ruin, which is charming but not threatening or deathlike, by suggesting that the abandoned garden and chateau can still pulsate with life: “it was a ruin, and yet not a hopeless one. You could see that each year the flowers struggled into life again” (Smith 1897, 70). While the gardener and his daughter welcome the two guests with a basket of fruit and a bottle of wine, Croisac begins his story: the legend of the beautiful Contessa Alberoni is centered around her mysterious disappearance from the Venetian social scene, and her subsequent seclusion in the chateau at the Giudecca, where she spent the rest of her life with “the only man she ever loved” (Smith 1897, 78). As to the reason behind her seclusion Croisac reveals that the Countess’s decision to disappear was due to the fact she heard a harsh remark on her fading beauty. The story itself, as Smith points out, is not a particularly enticing story, and he listens to it with disbelief, almost questioning the reliability of the narrator, Professor Croisac, for he wonders: “was the romance to which I had listened only the romance of the Contessa, or had he [Croisac] unconsciously woven into its meshes some of the silken threads of his own past?” (Smith 1897, 79). Smith suggests that Croisac’s story functions as a catalyst which allows him to fully experience the past, whose tangible signs are present in the decaying garden and mansion. In fact, only after hearing the story Smith becomes aware of his surroundings and realizes that “the whole romance, in spite of its improbability and my thoughtless laughter, had affected me deeply” (Smith 1897, 83). He starts wandering through the abandoned garden and the old mansion as he tries to “feel the presence of the past” (Smith 1897, 85) through the images evoked by Croisac’s story.

3.4 Picture this!

The luxurious edition of *Venice of To-Day* included over two-hundred illustrations accompanied by a series of photographs as well. The photographs mainly dealt with Venetian subjects, and they also depicted some of the characters described by Smith in his vivid sketches of Venetian life. As we have already remarked, Smith was not a

figure painter and therefore he had to rely on a different medium to convey the visual representation of the individuals he portrayed verbally. Unfortunately we have no photographs of Professor Croisac, but we do have pictures of the many locals who fascinated F. Hopkinson Smith: the gondoliers, the idlers, the fishermen, the waiters, the outdoor painters and many others. Some of these characters are even identified through their name like “Luigi, the Primo”, “Amelia, the Child Model”, “Giorgio” and “Signor Marcelli” suggesting they were indeed real people. The other photographs in the book represent historical sites and significant landmarks like “The Interior of St. Marks” and “The Ceiling of Palazzo Albrizzi”, and the omnipresent “Colleoni Monument”; other photographs offer vernacular views of everyday life in Venice. Some of these pictures seem to suggest “a staged authenticity” for they provide what we could define as a “postcard view” of Venice and its inhabitants. We do not know who took these pictures and when they were taken, but a startling detail might help us shed some light on their authenticity and implicitly, their relation with the written text. The photograph entitled “Morning Gossip” in *Venice of To-Day* portrays a narrow Venetian calle crowded with typical Venetians who are chatting and lolling, while the “dolce far niente” atmosphere dominates the scene. One might think this picture was taken specifically in order to illustrate Smith’s book. But surprisingly, the exact same picture appeared in and decorated the scrapbook of Venice which belonged to a wealthy Bostonian traveller called Mr. Tupper³²⁶ (1835-1898). A tireless traveller, Tupper would purchase the photographs of the locations he visited from local photographers, and then he would “assemble” visual and written records of his journeys by juxtaposing the pictures with the descriptions of what they represented.

³²⁶ Vol 44. Tupper Scrapbooks Collection, Boston Public Library.

drop into oblivion, only waking to life wh



MORNING GOSSIP

the other—argument only ending in cigaret
their songs—songs started perhaps by some
sleep, who stretches himself into shape with a
fire in tangled grass, until the whole Campo
snatches from *Marta* and *Puritani*, or some

“Morning Gossip” (*Venice of To-Day*)

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³²⁷ Smith's articles appeared in several magazines like *the Century*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner's Magazine*. They mostly comprised short stories and travel accounts, except for *Colonel Carter of Cartersville*, *Caleb West* and *Tom Grogan* which were serialized novels.

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