

Writing Fragmented Venice

Three case studies of heterotopic literature:
The Comfort of Strangers, The Nature of Blood and
Don't Look Now

Master thesis Literary Studies

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Date of submission: 13 August 2012

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1 Of heterotopic spaces and literature: a Foucauldian concept.....	7
Exit modernism, enter space	10
The space of literature	11
2 A city from without: Venice’s literary imagination.....	14
Imagining a palimpsestic city.....	14
‘Outlandish’: recurrent themes in Venice literature	16
3 Heterotopic literature: three case studies	19
Case 1: <i>The Comfort of Strangers</i>	19
Case 2: <i>The Nature of Blood</i>	21
Case 3: <i>Don’t Look Now</i>	26
Conclusion.....	30
Bibliography.....	33

Introduction

Nobody knows better than you, wise Kublai, that one should never confound the city with the discourse that describes it.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* 67 (my translation)

Invisible Cities is a story filled with places that have never existed in reality. Main character Marco Polo pretends to report to the Tatar emperor Kublai Khan about all the cities of the realm he has visited, when he is actually only using his imagination. The emperor finds out and asks Polo why he can't tell him about real cities. The famous explorer then answers with the words quoted above: there is a difference between a place and the language used for its description. A similar distinction can be found between places or spaces and their appearance in literary texts. Language, descriptions of surroundings, sounds and smells are instruments that an author has at his disposal in order to tell a story. He creates a world which is parallel to the literal and tangible world.

We can take Marco Polo's words to a further level and ask ourselves what the interplay between the real and the imagined is. Or, to use the terms of Michael L. Ross: between the literal and the literary (115). The city of Venice, for instance, has sparked the imagination and creativity of many writers, resulting in a large number of literary versions of this city. Together, those texts form a kaleidoscopic image of Venice, giving its readers an idea of what the city could look, smell and sound like. But this image is not necessarily in accordance with the real Venice. Ross even sustains that it has become common to "coalesce" those two *modi* of Venice (115). How are we to consider the consequence of such an amalgamation?

In order to work towards an answer to that question, we will adopt the concept of heterotopia, as introduced by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984). In his lecture "Of Other Spaces" (1967), Foucault elaborates on the changing perception of time and space. He observes how, since the nineteenth century, perception has shifted from time-based to 'space-emphasized'. The increasing possibilities of travelling and global communication have

taken us into an “epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (22). As a result of this, we live in a world of simultaneity, rather than linearity. Thus, Foucault sees an increased importance for the dimension of space in our experience of the world, as “our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (23).

Since this space that we are living in cannot be reduced to a single characteristic, Foucault considers it to be “heterogeneous”. Said relations between spaces are “absolutely not superimposable on one another” (23) and thus of a network-like character. He is especially interested in “spaces which are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the other sites” (24). For this thesis, we will look at the space that Foucault terms heterotopia. This is a real place in which all the other real sites of a culture are “simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (24).

Venice possesses several of the heterotopic qualities Foucault distinguishes. It is an isolated city that is only accessible by boat or train. If one arrives by car, one is obliged to leave it behind and enter the city on foot. Furthermore, Venice is both like other cities (houses and streets built out of brick and stone) and completely unlike any other city (built in the sea and upon the water). It is not surprising that such a particular site has generated many literary texts and imaginations.

For several centuries Venice has been a literary setting, and the shape of this city’s literary image has been contributed to for an equally long time. As Ross observes, there are conventions when writing about a city, that “get handed down from writer to writer, until they turn into virtual *topoi*” (11). The Venetian *topoi* are part of an increase in imagination (most of it European) after Napoleon’s conquest in 1797 made the republic of Venice lose its independence (Tanner 4). The fall of the city inspired European and American authors, who subsequently made multiple use of the *topoi* of death and decay. In the course of time, this literary production has resulted in an ensemble of the literal city and all of its imagined forms (no matter how divergent from the literal form). The “signature” that, for instance, Andreas Mahler attributes to Venice is one of heterotopia: this city “creates universes that are intrinsically double” (38). This almost inevitable doubleness of created images can be found in the vast number of literary texts about Venice.

In the context of this thesis I am mainly interested in three recent imaginations, for various reasons. As they have only been written in the past forty years, they have not yet acquired a canonical status. There is, therefore, still a lot to be written and said about them. Furthermore, these imaginations belong to the same historical, post-war era, and they fit the historical frame in which Foucault introduced his notions of the heterotopia and the

dominance of space. Our test cases do have intertextual relations with some of the canonical works, which will therefore be taken into account as a background.

First, we will look at the novella *The Comfort of Strangers* by Ian McEwan, telling the story of a foreign couple that gets caught in the web of an ominous Italian man and his Canadian wife. We will focus on the themes of labyrinths and getting lost. Second, there is the novel *The Nature of Blood* by Caryl Phillips, which intertwines different parts of Venice's history, mainly by telling the story of a young Holocaust survivor and retelling the story of Othello. Of importance here, is the way in which Phillips brings together different storylines and text types. The third case is the film *Don't Look Now* by Nicolas Roeg, in which a foreign couple loses control over their lives in Venice after their daughter has died. We will look at Roeg's manipulation of the film's timeline and how he edits fragments into the story. All three cases are involved with heterotopic representations of Venice, in both their topics and forms.

Together with the plenitude of books and novels about Venice, there is also a vast scholarly debate on those primary texts. Themes such as "decadence and death" have been discussed extensively for many years (Perosa). Many analyses, however, focus on the rich imagination of Venice, or treat the literary texts as closed universes. The goal for this thesis is to study Foucault's concept in relation to the real and the imagined Venice in a different and – with regard to the literary studies – more productive way. We will add to the existing attempts of describing the real Venice in heterotopic terms and of finding Venice's heterotopic qualities in literature a next step: studying the heterotopic qualities of Venetian literature. We thus consider literature as an autonomous space or counter-space of reality, and not merely a reflection of reality itself. In said space, elements such as themes and textual forms can acquire heterotopic qualities. Up to now, this approach has only been ventured by Wiebke Amthor, in her analysis of heterotopic elements in texts and other art forms using Venice as their location (2009). Crucial to this thesis is the notion that spaces can be considered as linguistically structured: they only acquire meaning in relation to each other, especially in the mutual differences can they be defined. In this approach, the heterotopia is an ungrammatical space as it defies all spatial conventions and regularities.

This thesis starts with a chapter on Foucault's lecture 'Of Other Spaces' and a discussion of his heterotopia concept. The supposed growing importance of space in the perception of western cultures argued by Foucault, is examined by a confrontation with ideas on time and space of Fredric Jameson (who invokes help from Bakhtin). Concluding, we will look at the possibilities to examine literature from a heterotopic angle. The second chapter is

about the literary imagination of Venice. It gives an overview of the most dominant themes that have influenced and shaped this imagination, while looking at the development of that imagination over time. Heterotopic literature about Venice is the topic of the last chapter: here, we will study the three cases for their heterotopic qualities. Intertextual relations with canonical texts, literal and literary spatial characteristics, and networks of spatial relations will be discussed in the light of Foucault's heterotopia. Finally, after reviewing the specific cases of Venetian literature, we will try to provide a conclusion and an answer to the question that is at the centre of thesis: What is the value of a heterotopic approach for studying literature?

1 Of heterotopic spaces and literature: a Foucauldian concept

The idea of the heterotopia is one of the steps taken by Foucault in developing concepts of space as an agent, and it was first mentioned by him in the introduction to his book *The Order of Things* (1966). The emphasis of this – rather brief – passage is mostly on the implications of heterotopic and utopian spaces for language: the former “desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source” (xviii). The contestation of meaning manifests itself in the impossibility to describe that meaning and the reality it refers to. One year later, Foucault addressed an audience of architects with ‘Of Other Spaces’. This lecture is dedicated almost entirely to spaces, with a special interest for the heterotopia. Here, we see a changed perspective: from a linguistic point of view to a social – and perhaps architectural – view. The fragment from *The Order of Things* and ‘Of Other Spaces’ are the only texts by Foucault himself in which he defines the heterotopia and explores its possibilities and limits.

The change in Foucault’s appreciation of space towards a more social approach, is already inherent in the first paragraphs of ‘Of Other Spaces’. Quite possibly to convince his audience of the relevance of spatial discourses, he starts by going back to the Middle Ages and the way their perception of the world was dominated by space, instead of time. According to Foucault, western societies had developed hierarchies of spaces or sites which were to be found both in the “real life of men” (22), in sacred and profane places or urban and rural places, and in man’s ideas on the cosmos, distinguishing between terrestrial, celestial and supercelestial places (22). Foucault considers the nature of today’s spaces to be hierarchical too, which he explains by way of an exposition on the medieval ordering of space. One example of his is Dante Alighieri, who created a detailed account of the ordering of spaces in the afterlife in his *Divina Commedia*. He located a significant part of that afterlife – everything up to the Earthly Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory – on earth itself, attributing to the latter an important role in territory of the sacred.

The Middle Ages are then followed by the importance of Galileo, whose ideas made people realize that space was an “infinite, and infinitely open space” (23). Because of this shift in perception – all of a sudden there could be spaces that no soul had ever seen (or thought of) and possibilities extended beyond the known places on earth and the places that western cultures had imagined in space (the celestial and supercelestial) – Foucault argues

that, subsequently, a parallel shift must have taken place in the relation between mankind and its place in the universe. From “emplacement” (22): man’s position in the cosmos, to “localization” (23): man that is in motion, instead of occupying a given place. Eventually this localization has evolved into our current perception of “relations of proximity between points or elements” (23). We do not perceive space as something in which we are placed, or through which we travel, but as something that can be defined by its relation to ‘fellow’ spaces.

Having explained how we have come to the point where space is more important than time, Foucault goes deeper into the character and the potential meanings of places. He observes that, although Galileo has “desanctified” (23) the spatial by opening the door to a whole universe of spaces that would replace the divine sites of earth and heaven, a lot of spaces are still sacred. They are still considered as givens, instead of variables. Sacred spaces (and hierarchies) are private and public space, family and social space.

If we want to describe the space in which we live, Foucault argues, we have to be aware that it is defined by the network of relations with other spaces: “a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (23). This diversity is central in Foucault’s study of the utopia and the heterotopia, which are linked to all the other sites of a society and at the same time contradict those sites (24). The utopia is not a real place, but it is linked to real places by analogy, carrying characteristics of real sites of which it is the fully optimized ideal. The heterotopia, on the other hand, is a real place that interacts with other real places, to which it is a counter-site (24). As such, the heterotopia is an “effectively enacted utopia” (24). The relation a heterotopia has with other sites of a society, is complex: simultaneous representation, contestation and inversion.

Every heterotopia has its own internal order, because of the set of relations between a heterotopia and other spaces. It is a space that is governed by its own rules. As we have already seen, Foucault observes that the desanctification of space has never been applied to all types of spaces. There is, however, a difference with the sanctity of the family and private space. The internal ordering of heterotopias is not based on social and cultural factors – as is the decision to maintain a barrier between private and public space – but on the relations they maintain with other spaces. Because of the ambiguity inherent to the heterotopia, it is hard to “delimit or to formalize it” (23), in other words: to capture it in a description. This makes of the heterotopia a place of a secular sacred nature.

In order to delimit the term heterotopia and to structure the study of heterotopias, Foucault establishes six principles this particular type of space should meet. The first

principle is the assumption that all cultures have heterotopias (24). There is probably no society without its own rituals, assigned to specific locations or places within that culture. In other words: if there are places that carry a specific social and cultural meaning, then there are most likely also places that either double or invert that meaning.

The second principle is that a society can adjust the function of an existing heterotopia (25) according to that society's changing needs or beliefs. Foucault illustrates this with the changed position of cemeteries in western cultures: when people stopped believing in the eternal life of the soul, the burial ground was moved from the heart of the city (next to the church) to the edge of the city. Because of the inherent, growing importance of the remains of the dead, which are "the only trace of our existence" (25), societies started creating cemeteries as parallel cities for the dead. Thus, the changed belief in the afterlife also changed the nature of cemeteries: they became sites where the living could 'visit' the dead.

The third principle is that a heterotopia can combine real spaces that are not compatible with each other (25). Examples of this are the theatre, cinema and the original idea of the garden. The first two present the audience with sequences of different spaces (the locations where the narrative takes place) that in reality cannot be combined in one site. The third is the result of bringing vegetal and animal life from all parts of the world together in one location (comparable to our modern day zoo), thus creating a site in and through which other sites are invoked.

The fourth principle is about heterochrony, or the capability of a heterotopia to be linked to "slices in time" (26). Foucault sees in this principle a core characteristic of the heterotopia, which "begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (26). The two extremes of heterochrony Foucault distinguishes are the indefinite accumulation of time on the one hand (as in museums), and the mode of the festival or absolutely temporal on the other (as on festive occasions, when one experiences and lives the moments as if there were no time). This principle is an illustration of the dominance of space over time, as the former is able to break up the latter or make it irrelevant altogether.

The fifth principle is the opening and closing of a heterotopic site (26), making it less accessible than the public space. According to Foucault, there are two ways to enter a heterotopia: either one is obliged to enter, or one has to submit to "rites and purifications" (26). This principle strongly narrows down the number of spaces fit for heterotopic analysis, but at the same time it clearly marks possibilities for a literary application. We will come back to this further on in this chapter.

The sixth and last principle of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to “all the space that remains” (27). Foucault distinguishes two extremes here: illusion and compensation. A space of illusion has to “expose every real space” (27), meaning that everything present within this heterotopia is real and can be found in real spaces. A space of compensation is a space that Foucault calls “other” (27), where everything that can also be found in real places, is present in its perfect form. The difference between a space of compensation and a utopia, is that utopia is a non-place.

Foucault concludes his article with a contemplation on the nature of the boat. After having elaborated on all principles and characteristics of the heterotopia, he presents the most perfect example: the boat. It is a “floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself” (27).

Exit modernism, enter space

The observations on the importance of space brought to the fore by Foucault in the 1960s, were still topical almost forty years later. The title of Fredric Jameson’s article ‘The End of Temporality’ (2003) is an indirect indicator of that, as it refers to a changing perception of time. Jameson makes a case for the influence of postmodern theory on the increasing priority of the present over past and future. Having written his article well after Foucault’s lecture took place, Jameson has the position of being able to look back on twentieth century philosophy. He observes that, in literature, the last people who were interested in the notion of time were the modernists. Since writers and thinkers needed a new area to expand to, “space was supposed to replace time in the general ontological scheme of things” (695). As Jameson introduces his argument, he notes that in recent years the number of books dedicated to space have grown exponentially (696). Like Foucault, he deems the changing perspective to be so fundamental, as to call it an “epochal change” (696). From the modernists occupying themselves with unravelling the workings of time and the possibilities to shift its linearity (Proust’s famous madeleine, for example), literature had moved on to the postmodern studying “dominant” (696) space.

The shift from time to space, Jameson argues, also implies a shift in the relation between the individual and the world. “Time governs the realm of interiority” (697), which implies concepts such as self-consciousness, logic and subjectivity. All of those are subjects with which the modernists were occupied. Today’s interest in the spatial leads to an emphasis on elements of exteriority: “cities and globalization, but also other people and nature” (697).

It seems, however, that Jameson is not completely convinced of the distinction between characteristics of the temporal and the spatial. For instance, he mentions language as a phenomenon that can be placed in either of the two ‘categories’, because it can be used for the description of both the internal and the external and it has the capacity to describe both temporal processes (think, for instance, of the monologue intérieur) and spatial characteristics.

A possible solution for this problem lies in the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope: “a historical account of each specific space-time continuum as it jelled or crystallized” (697). Jameson suggests that the impossibility of separating time and space could be overcome by considering them as being two sides of the same coin. Referring to Kant, he argues that both are not visible, and that both are conditions preceding human life (697). The value of the chronotope for this thesis lies in its singularity of time and space. As we will see in the case studies, stories taking place in Venice are often a caesura in the lives of the characters, which makes the Venice episode in itself a specific point in the space-time continuum. Time freezes, as the balance shifts in favour of space.

The space of literature

The importance of the concept of heterotopia for (studying) literature is threefold. First, Foucault’s lecture offers us a way of thinking about spaces in general, about its nature and characteristics. He makes a plausible point that there is a relation between a society’s perception of time and the way that same society treats space. Similarly, there is a balance between time and space in literature. As discussed in the previous paragraph, Jameson argues that up to and including modernism, time had been more important in literature than space (696). In this thesis, the emphasis on space is a crucial element for the three studied cases.

Second, the idea of the heterotopia enables us to link literature and the world of the text or narrative to the real world. It makes us aware that they are not necessarily two separate things, but can in fact be brought together in one corpus. In his article ‘The Voids of Berlin’ (1997), Andreas Huyssen argues that the imaginations about a city can become intertwined with the views of the real city. He refers to Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* in his argument that “real and imaginary spaces commingle in the mind to shape our notions of specific cities” (57). This is where I would like to combine Foucault’s idea of the heterotopia with the notion that literature is of a palimpsestic nature. Because everything that is written about a certain space does not get lost when something new is written; instead, it is layered onto the existing narratives.

Subsequently, the question comes to mind: what is the relation between the real place and the imagined place? For example, if a story is set in a European capital, what kind of characters does the author fill this city's street with? And what do they talk about? What are the themes being discussed in the story? And what kind of image of this city is drawn? And how do those characters, themes and representations mingle with the real city? Answering those questions could bring us closer to describing the ensemble of imagined and real city. Huyssen's argument about the interplay between real and imaginary spaces can thus also be seen in the light of literature about Venice. Taking the heterotopic capacities of Venice – the network of the city's spatial relations with other cities – in consideration, literature about this space results in the notion of a heterotopic palimpsest.

Thirdly, Foucault's heterotopia provides a frame for studying texts as spaces. Heterotopic literature – as this genre would be called – is involved not mainly with storytelling, but also with the form in which that story is presented. This particular form, being the expression of the thought that space is not neutral or void of meaning, does play a role in the themes the author tries to get across to the reader. Russell West-Pavlov discusses the position of meaning in Foucault's space, observing a fundamental change in the way scholars and other thinkers address space. Until structuralism and poststructuralism they had always considered the factor space as a given. West-Pavlov thus argues that “space remains unthought within traditional meta-literature because it is the invisible framework which makes literature possible in the first place” (119). By questioning this assumption and shifting the view, (post)structuralism turns space into an agent, instead of a passive perimeter. Like spaces involved in a heterotopia, meaning is something that is determined in relation to its context. It is “produced, something specific to a time and a place, and that emerges out of that context”. In other words: we can perceive of meaning by looking at and combining different variables and conditions that we have observed, after which “truth is then delineated, not as something essential, intrinsic, or eternal, but as the contingent product of a process of production” (22-23).

Turning space from a static given into a literary agent brings new opportunities in terms of literary analysis and ascription of spatial value. The delineation of truth as mentioned above is similar to the combined space to which a heterotopia is linked: it is in the relation with the other sites, whether they be real or imagined, that the heterotopia acquires its meaning. This approach reveals the linguistic origin of the heterotopic concept, an origin Foucault briefly touches upon in the aforementioned introduction to *The Order of Things*. Ferdinand De Saussure, with his theory of the signifier and the signified, argued that meaning

is not essential to the symbol it is represented by – i.e. that a signifier is not inextricably connected to the signified – but that meaning is acquired in the relation between signifiers. Foucault translates this notion to a spatial dimension and argues that spaces only acquire their meaning through confrontation and negotiation with fellow spaces. Spaces are thus part of a network of meanings. If we look at the heterotopia, we can see the special position of heterotopias in such a network, since it is their capacity to either copy or invert the characteristics of other spaces. Linguistically this is a difficult position, because there seems to be no logic or law at work, as the heterotopia combines at will both reflections and inversions of single spaces. In linguistic terms the heterotopia is an ungrammatical space, with a distinct status within the spatial network.

Ungrammaticality would, then, also be the characteristic we should look for in heterotopic literature. Because if we isolate the heterotopic space as an unconventional (or even impossible) space, it brings up the question what literary texts look like that have adopted the heterotopia as their form or structure. Does heterotopic literature – like the linguistically different heterotopic space – have a particular nature that carries similar unconventional or ungrammatical elements, be they structure or story? But more importantly: to what effect do such texts deploy their heterotopic nature? We will return to these questions in chapter three, when we go deeper into the three literary test cases.

The concept of heterotopic palimpsest can be applied to literature by studying texts with two things in mind. First, the literary representation of a heterotopic space in a given work. For instance, Foucault's describes a boat as "a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself" ("Of Other Spaces" 27). This image could be transposed to a Venetian setting, in which the city itself functions as a boat. It carries similar characteristics: Venice is an ambiguous place because it is on the water, it is closed in on itself because of its limited accessibility. We could, thus, look for this kind of representation of Venice's heterotopic characteristics in literature. Second, there is the representation of heterotopia in the structure, form and narratological characteristics of the text. In other words, we would be considering the text itself as a space: a literary heterotopia. This latter approach will be primary for this thesis, as it will provide insight as to what the value of Foucault's concept is for literary studies.

2 A city from without: Venice's literary imagination

Studying a whole city such as Venice as a heterotopia means using Foucault's concept to the full extent. We will not be looking at one, limited space in which meaning is condensed. The factor that makes it possible to stretch the heterotopia to city-size is the limitedness of Venice. Geographically because it is an island, but also architecturally and culturally this city has its own identity. Not to forget the vast amount of (literary) representations created of it. In other words: Venice is a clearly demarcated idea.

Cities possess a plurality of features, there are many different elements out of which they are built up. Therefore, we will look for elements of the heterotopia concept in Venice and Venetian representations. Because Foucault regards heterotopic spaces as real spaces, he does not go into the possibility of literary representations of those spaces. We, on the other hand, will also include those themes that are typical to Venice's imagination, and thus form an inextricable part of the heterotopic palimpsest.

Imagining a palimpsestic city

The plethora of Venetian texts is so great that it evokes the observation that the real city is of minor importance: "the physical Venice could well disappear and literary Venices would still be created" (Mamoli Zorzi 225). The palimpsest that all of those texts form has heterotopic qualities. They are literary representations of Venice and thus constitute a counter-space to the actual city. In the introduction to their collection *Venetian Views, Venetian Blinds* (1999) Manfred Pfister and Barbara Schaff argue that Venice is the ultimate palimpsest: "both unrepresentable and represented over and over again" (3). This relentless interest in writing Venice is reflected in the works of many artists and authors which have used for their works the city's canals, streets and mixed nature of water and land.

There is a large interest for the city by non-Italian authors, which is reflected by many bestsellers about Venice and their authors' nationalities. Or as Tanner puts it: "Venice is not really ever written from the inside, but variously appropriated from without" (5). As a consequence, most of the academic secondary sources that were consulted for this thesis, address stories that were not written by Italians, but by north-European and American authors. It is important, without drawing conclusions on the value of those foreign representations, to

be aware of this over-representation. It is likely that this should influence the nature of the literary imagination of Venice.

In his book *Storied Cities* (1994), Michael L. Ross goes deeper into the way in which non-Italian authors have written about Rome, Florence and Venice. He observes that, as a consequence of all the different foreign authors that have visited those cities, few places “have been more copiously productive of ambivalence than Italy”. Ross argues that the “idiosyncrasies of perception” which Italian cities have evoked in those authors, should be studied in the subsequent “bewildering diversity” of texts (5). The variety Ross observes is characteristic of Venetian literature, but the canonical works do in fact share a certain persistent aspects.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no such thing as a consensus on Venice’s imagination, there has evolved over the years something that could be called a tradition. For example: Ross refers to the twentieth-century Italian author Giorgio Bassani, who has observed that literature about Venice often revolves around the same themes – such as death, evil and the carnal – leaving a sadly monotonous picture of this city (5). Ross poetically calls this “the long shadow of literary precedent”, which has created eventually a “convention [that] has a habit of hardening into cliché” (10). Writing about Venice and not using one of those themes has become an exception. The “literary overlay” has become so thick and so overly present, it is by now impossible to look at Venice innocently, “with an eye uncontaminated by textual reminiscence” (Ross 11). To illustrate his point, Ross refers to a statement by Jan Morris: “Everybody dies in Venice [...] the Venetians die in the normal course of events, and the visitors die as a matter of convention” (Ross 11, Morris 152).

Ross even takes his observations about this literary convention a step further by maintaining that “storied cities have a knack of propagating still more stories” (11), as they keep inspiring authors to add new narratives to the corpus. This means that in following the convention, authors create an exponential growth of likely stories, and which could eventually turn into a literary myth or narrative. Not all literary attempts, however, have led to the conventional themes described above. As Pfister and Schaff argue, there are fruitful ways – postmodern ones for instance – to give enough room to the “city’s potential of unstable and stratified meanings” (9).

Venice has different characteristics that have inspired authors to write about. The first one is the city’s nature of being completely different from ‘regular’ cities. Ross makes this immediately clear with the title of his first chapter on Venice: ‘This Most Improbable of Cities’. It is a qualification he has borrowed from Thomas Mann’s protagonist Gustav

Aschenbach, as he arrives in Venice by boat. Because the city is built on water, it is only possible to reach it by crossing that water, which gives the visitor the remarkable view of a constructed island without (natural) beaches. The buildings seem to float on the water, as a sort of *fata morgana* above the dry sand of a desert. It is this unlikeliness of living on the water that gives many the idea of entering a non-existent space. Pfister and Schaff argue that it is exactly at this point where fiction and Venice find each other: the crossing of the boundary between the real and the imaginary (4). Both concepts operate in this area of transition, which is almost a no man's land where the laws of both the real and the imaginary apply – or precisely the opposite.

This particular nature is what makes Venice attractive as an object for studying the heterotopic concept. As Amthor observes, Venice is both a heterotopia in itself (it carries Foucault's heterotopic characteristics) as a heterotopic "reference to west-European culture as a whole" (2), because everything in Venice is completely different from other cities on the continent. Since it is not clear what the city is – challenging the water or constantly fighting for its survival? (Amthor 3) – it represents both the boat and the fortress in the desert.

'Outlandish': recurrent themes in Venice literature

At a thematic level there is, too, a similarity between literature and Venice. This concerns the particular nature of the city that inspires authors to create representations: "It is only natural that a place whose truth is so outlandish should have inspired a horde of outlandish imaginings" (Ross 114). There are plenty examples of 'outlandish' texts to prove this statement true. Was it a coalescence of romanticism's desire for anomalies and Venice's 'inspiring' decay that have led to a literary emphasis on the divergent character of the city? Ross argues that "from the age of Shakespeare to the present, the city has been reinvented time and again by the literary imagination" (113). Those changing views on Venice have been influenced by the city's position on the world stage. In Shakespeare's time, for instance, Venice was a centre of trade between Europe and Asia. The city attracted people from all over Europe and was a melting pot of western and eastern cultures. Plays such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* carry marks of this mercantile tradition and international attractiveness. One would only need to think of their main characters: a merchant and an African general.

A few steps along the historical axis take us to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, in which Mann has transposed the city's decay to his dying protagonist Gustav Aschenbach. After Napoleon had conquered Venice in 1797 and the republic lost its independency, the city

became a marooned place. Wealth declined and a lot of buildings were left to erosion by weather and time (a theme that is strongly present in, for instance, Henry James' *The Aspern Papers*). Simultaneously, Venice turned into a topos for the European literary imagination (Tanner 4), as it became a strong (romantic) image of tragedy that inspired artists and authors. The examples of these two literary works demonstrate, as Ross argues, how the imagination of Venice has changed over time.

Adjacent to the theme of decay are those of eroticism and sensuality. In Venetian literature, pleasure "has an uncanny habit of dissolving into its contrary" (122), Ross argues as he demonstrates how the two are sides of the same medal. *Death in Venice* demonstrates how those can come together in one novella. The handsome but young Polish boy Tadzio has a sensual effect on Aschenbach. Aschenbach, already ill because of disease spread by the Venetian canals, is determined to keep spotting Tadzio in public or in his hotel. He is pulled closer and closer to his death by his (eventually fatal) desire.

The amount of secondary literature on Venice's sensual character is overwhelming and proof of how heavily literary imagination exploits this character. Toby Tanner, in his book with the telling title *Venice Desired* (1992), observes that Giacomo Casanova is perhaps the only truly Venetian author, but he fits this position better for his personification of the sensual city more than for his writings (4). Breaking with this convention can prove to be quite difficult, as Venice's image has since long been one of love, sensuality and prostitution (Tanner 5). And Ross states that "it seems natural to attribute a mesmerizing narcissism to the place itself" (127), so he brings to the fore the question of how just such an attribution is, considering that cities and buildings ought to be neutral (a term that is highly problematic in the light of Foucault's spatial concepts, in which space has agency and can very well be attributed meaning to by societies).

The three Venice representations that will be studied in this thesis all have their own relation with the most common themes in the tradition of Venetian literature. McEwan's protagonists are driven by a sensual and erotic desire, as they are striving for physical satisfaction. It takes the involvement of a third, passive-aggressive character (an Italian) to reach that state (Richter 190). This desire is countered by Venice's complex city map, which makes it hard for them to reach their destinations and hence their goals. The city is a counterforce to them. Phillips takes his protagonist to the poor side of Venice, where the houses are colourless and the city shows its 'other face'. Disclosing this other side of Venice is one of the main effects of the novel's convoluted construction. And Roeg's film is about both sensuality and decay, portraying a restaurateur and his wife, who try to overcome a

personal tragedy in each other's company. Their confused state is reflected in the film's shuffled chronology. All these three narrations use Venice (and its palimpsestic literary tradition) in their own heterotopic way as a location for the unfolding of their tragic plot.

3 Heterotopic literature: three case studies

Case 1: *The Comfort of Strangers*

Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981) is a novella about Mary and Colin, an American couple, who are on a short holiday in Venice. While they are trying to determine how they should proceed with their relationship, they fill their days in a rather passive fashion – sleeping and idling a lot. One night, as they go out for a stroll and get lost, they meet the Venetian Robert, who takes the hungry and thirsty couple to a bar. This evening and the following days, Robert and his Canadian wife Caroline impose themselves on Mary and Colin. Slowly the latter couple starts to realize that odd things are going on: for instance, that Robert beats up his wife, and that Robert seems to have taken countless pictures of Colin in public. The fatal ending to this novella seems to have been inevitable from the beginning.

McEwan's literary rendition of Venice is determined by one characteristic in particular: the city's labyrinthine quality. In doing so, the novel thematically reflects Venice's complexity of streets and canals. They make it difficult for visitors, tourists and other outsiders to find their way. There are hardly any regularities in the city's design, contributing to the sense that one just has to walk around and find one's destination with a lot of luck. A map can be useful, but only up to a certain point: the web of streets is so dense that it is still very likely for one to get lost.

Mary and Colin fail utterly at reading the city maps they have bought, and they “could spend an hour or so doubling back and round, consulting (Colin's trick) the position of the sun, to find themselves approaching a familiar landmark from an unexpected direction, and still lost” (4). The Venetian labyrinth forces the couple to let go of the ordering principle that is valid in any other city and adopt the ancient, basic method of determining their position by looking at the sun. Venice is thus a challenge to the ordering principle of many cities, which often reflects the human will to create a coherent community where people can find each other. Without a map as their usual guide, McEwan's characters are lured into the city's web of alleys and streets.

Venetian imagination often deploys the labyrinthine as an instrument to make characters lose their path and to make it harder for them to achieve their goals. McEwan even starts his novella with this state of confusion: “despite the maps, [Mary and Colin] frequently

became lost” (4). Apart from the fact that the maps are little useful to them, there is a “variety of maps [...] on sale” (9) – a significant remark emphasizing the lack of consensus on the city’s exact design. The complexity of this design is a foreshadowing of the fate of McEwan’s characters, since they are about to get lost metaphorically. The narrator hints at Colin’s upcoming misfortune right at the beginning of the story, even suggesting that he seeks this fate: “Colin remembered that they should have brought the maps. Without them they were certain to get lost. However, he said nothing” (10). The forgetting of the maps leads to meeting Robert and Caroline, and eventually to Robert’s murdering him. The fact that Colin does not tell Mary of his omission, implies a direct relation between the necessity of carrying a map in Venice and Colin’s death (Richter 184).

The difficulty of knowing and understanding Venice’s city map – which is the common way to describe a city: drawing streets and buildings – makes it equally difficult to know and define the city it represents. The “variety of maps” that is on sale in Venice reflects the fragmentedness in representation and meaning. Each map gives its own explanation of how the city should be defined and so, eventually, what the city is. On a surface level the narrow alleys, meandering canals, highly irregular pattern of streets make it difficult to give an accurate description of Venice. Each map maker makes his own representation and chooses his own priorities in what to depict. For the visitor from without, a sensible (but quite impossible) solution to this cartographical cacophony would be to consider all maps together and extract from them the essentials. One could guide oneself by using this virtual and elementary map.

The notion of such a map brings us to a deeper level of interpretation, namely that of the meaning of fragmentedness. The existence of different descriptions of Venice demonstrates the apparent difficulties in telling what this city is, i.e. what it represents. It makes Venice a space of a special kind: although we know it really exists and we can pinpoint its exact location, we can never fully comprehend its dimensions and sizes. Because there is not one single interpretation that can provide a conclusive answer, we have to consider all interpretations: Venice is not one of the available maps, it is all of them together. As the piling up of maps is a counter-space to the real Venice, it belongs to the heterotopic-palimpsest nature of the city.

There is a similarity between the variety of Venetian maps and Venetian literature. As has been discussed in chapter two, there has been a large literary production of Venetian narrations over the past centuries. Each historical period puts its own emphasis on the characteristics of the city, while maintaining certain constants such as characters’ fatal

destinies. Each new text tries to define Venice in a new way. In the apparent artistic need to continue writing Venice literature, there is an inherent urge for rewriting Venice. And again, as in the case of the maps, the ‘true’ Venice is not in one of the narrations, it is in the collective image they draw. The continuous rewriting of Venice is fundamental for the palimpsestic nature of this literary location.

The fifth heterotopic principle, covering the accessibility of a heterotopic site, addresses the “rites and purification” (26) that one needs to endure before entering the heterotopia. This aspect is present in the Venetian space, since it is not possible to enter it like any other city: one has to leave the car on the mainland or in a parking lot and take public transportation – bus, train, boat. Since there is no traffic in the Venetian lagoon, except for vaporetti and other shuttle boats, all transportation over ground has to go by foot. This is a ritual that requires people from without to adapt their pace. But this principle can also be applied to the fragmentedness of Venice representations. In the case of *The Comfort of Strangers* the rite consists in making oneself familiar with the city, with finding the way. He or she who manages to find the way in Venice, knows what the city is. The trouble with not understanding how the city is built up, is that one will never really will get to know it. In other words: one will never be allowed ‘inside’ the city, as an inextricable part of it.

The Comfort of Strangers is not a heterotopic text in its form or structure. The narration is clear, mostly chronological and McEwan has not introduced remarkable narrators and focalizations, or innovative or non-conventional ways of telling his story. It does, however, hint at the complexity of Venice as an ‘other’ space. Foucault’s linguistic approach of spaces becomes almost tangible here. The convention – the ‘grammar’ of cities – prescribes that a city can be caught in a map. But Venice is not like that and as we have seen it is this deviation from convention – this ungrammaticality – that defines the Venetian space. With ‘being lost’ as its central theme, McEwan’s novel topicalizes the impossibility to rationally understand this city. The various depictions of Venice’s structure, the maps, are the key element in the story representing the heterotopic structure, as they stand for the fragments the city is built up of.

Case 2: *The Nature of Blood*

Caryl Phillips’ novel *The Nature of Blood* (1997) is built up of several threads, each of which can be connected to another by congruent themes or characters. For this thesis, not all threads are relevant, but I will briefly mention them here because of their importance to the nature and

structure of the novel. The three main lines are those of Eva Stern, Othello and the Portobuffolè case. Eva Stern is a young Jewish girl who has survived a concentration camp but all of whose family has died at the end of the war. After she has been brought back to her home country by allied soldiers, Eva turns out not to be capable of reclaiming her place in society. She has been scarred too deeply by the horrific events of the war. Eva's story is preceded by that of her uncle Stephan, who is on the way – after fleeing from the Nazis - to the Middle-East to help founding the first Jewish state, Israel. The second thread is about Shakespeare's character Othello, closely following him as he wanders through Venice – practically unemployed, because there is no war – often downcast. Othello risks social rejection when he marries a senator's daughter, who comes from a superior social class. But that problem is quickly solved, when Othello is sent out to Cyprus to command the Venetian army against the Turks. The third thread takes place in the year 1480 in the village of Portobuffolè, depicting the trial of four Jewish immigrants. The men are accused of the ritual murder of a Christian boy and the chance of acquittal is not high. Apart from convincing evidence against them, the native population has great fears of foreigners, who have brought the plague to the village in the past. The Grand Council of the Venetian republic orders that the trial be moved to the capital, in order to prevent an unfair sentence.

The threads of this novel that are involved with representations of Venice are not stylistically similar. Those of Eva and Othello have a fictional tone, whereas the Portobuffolè part tends to non-fiction. Eva's confusion about her parents and sister is transferred to the reader, who does not know whether they are alive or not. The further the reader progresses in the story, the more he or she starts to put together the different pieces. Subsequently the realization rises that Eva cannot distinguish between what is real and what is not.

A tighter closeness between the character and the narrator is at work in Othello's thread, as he himself describes his thoughts and perceptions. Sentences such as:

I hear the soft splash of an oar as a boatman goes about his chilly business. I hear his laughter, then anonymous footfalls on stone, then water slapping against cold brick. In the distance a shrill voice cries from a hidden balcony and the icy water gurgles as though in reply" (106-107),

emphasise Othello's auditory sensations of Venice. His impressions are those of a non-hospitable city, as sounds and other aspects are described with daunting words like 'chilly', 'cold' and 'shrill'. The course of the story will prove those words to be a foreshadowing of

Venice's closedness towards Othello and his unavailing efforts to become part of the city's society.

Contrasting with these character-focused narrators is the Portobuffolè thread. This thread is presented as an historical account of events, resulting in a larger distance between the narrator and the characters (the distance between the latter and the reader is even larger, as he gets the information second hand). The historical and distanced style renders this thread more objective and non-fictional than the other two. A footnote is required, however, because the narrator has chosen to emphasize certain elements in his account. Several times, he points out that the Venetian administration acts opportunistically by protecting the Jewish population: "the Republic of Venice could pretend to be implementing a policy of some tolerance towards the Jews, while serving its own interests and ignoring the fact that it was further exposing the Jews to the multiple dangers of Christian hostility" (53). There is limited objectivity in remarks like this, since they make it morally difficult to take the Venetian side. But this footnote aside, the significance of the Portobuffolè thread is indeed in its historical approach. Its writing style is almost alien to the genre of the novel and distinguishes this thread from the others, invoking the sense that a non-fiction text has invaded the remaining fictional prose in *The Nature of Blood*. As we will see, this peculiarity is precisely one of the novel's heterotopic qualities.

In his book *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), Michael Rothberg discusses post-Holocaust memory and its influence on literature. His central argument is that collective memories of the past are never singular and clear-cut, but always subject to different interpretations or versions and never capable of single-handedly blocking-off other memories or other versions of the same event (cf. 3). *The Nature of Blood* is one of the cases Rothberg addresses, as it contains different voices and examines the Holocaust as an event that has generated both varying memories and, of course, an enormous amount of literary and informative texts. The intersected stories in this novel are a literary rendition of the concept of multidirectional memory.

Rothberg observes how Phillips manages to show the diversity and complexity of the Holocaust past, creating "new possibilities for thinking the relatedness of the unrelatable" (164). Those possibilities emerge as *The Nature of Blood* combines different voices and narrations: the storylines of Eva, Othello and Portobuffolè all have their own characters and narrators. Each narrator represents a voice characteristic for the story it is telling. Eva's deportation and post-war repatriation, for instance, is a completely different representation than Othello's wanderings through Venice. Not only do they live in different times, one is a

confused young woman and the other an accomplished military official from Africa. The storylines do, however, share the same themes of social minorities and racism. The differences between them are only seemingly so, as the similarities arise on the thematic level.

Another difference is the aforementioned distinction between closely involved and more distanced narrators. Michael Rothberg argues that Phillips deploys “more than a dozen narrative voices and shifts perspective several dozen times” (164). Some of those voices represent the minorities Phillips connects to the Holocaust. There are the European Jews who were transported to the concentration camps and their friends and family who survived them (like Eva) or who managed to escape the continent before deportation (like Stephan). But as Phillips traces the horrors of Nazism back to the roots of racism, he also finds the minority of non-European citizens in Venice (like Othello). Furthermore, in the margin of the main storylines there is Stephan Stern’s journey to Palestine, where he plans to join the Jewish people who are ready to found their own state.

The multivocality and multiperspectivity of these minorities in *The Nature of Blood* result in an ensemble of people who have suffered racism and suppression. Although this conclusion is not drawn explicitly, it is the theme that the storylines have in common. Venice, as the site on which those voices are projected, is portrayed in a fragmented fashion as all of the voices tell their own stories. Phillips’ novel demonstrates how this canonical literary space can be portrayed from the perspectives of different social minorities. As the narrative does not present a conclusive argument on how the reader should interpret the different stories, it is an example of Rothberg’s concept of the multidirectional memory. Phillips does not offer a new interpretation of the Holocaust history that would block-off earlier versions or render them obsolete. The existing palimpsest of Venetian literature remains and these additional memories or texts are included. The value of this particular novel is that it opens the door to a broad explanation of this history, one that makes us look over the boundaries of a demarcated historical period.

Toward the end of the novel, there are several short paragraphs with factual information. They provide the reader with basic, encyclopaedic information on themes that are at the basis of the storylines: ghetto, Venice, Othello. The etymological explanation of ‘ghetto’, for instance, is that it “was first used to describe the section of Venice where, in the sixteenth century, Jews were ordered to live apart from Christians in a ‘marshy and unwholesome site’ to the north of St Mark’s” (161). Apart from these brief descriptions, there is also a factual exposition of the procedure used by the Nazis to gas their prisoners (177-178). As Phillips is not able to “portray realistically a scene he can never know”, “the gas

chamber, is portrayed in a distanced and a-subjective third-person voice” (Rothberg 169). All those informative bits add an extra layer to the novel that is (like the Portbuffolè thread) alien to the genre of fiction. Although they do not have an active role in the story, in providing an informative background they create a bridge between reality and the fictional events of the main characters Eva and Othello. Furthermore, it is never explicitly mentioned how the reader should appreciate the connection between the fictional and non-fictional parts of the novel. It is up to him or her to judge (or refrain from judgment) and to connect the dots. Rothberg argues, furthermore, that the juxtaposition of “histories involving genocide, slavery, everyday racism, and state power [...] can serve more to bring differences into relief than to melt them into banal equation” (171). This literary example of multidirectionality reflects the heterotopic quality of Venice, as it permits internal incongruousness (or ungrammaticality) without demanding a solution.

The juxtapositions of textual types, non-fiction with fiction and of prosaic text with factual information, and “rapid shifts in perspective, a dense intertextual fabric” (Rothberg 164), force the reader to actively think about their meaning. Similarly, this goes for the stories presented in the novel’s threads. I would like to propose an analysis in which the city of Venice is the central or pivotal point. The stories of Othello and the four Jews are located there, and Eva is thematically connected to this city by the ghetto. Firstly, because she has lived in a ghetto in her home country. Secondly, because the Venetian ghetto plays an important role: the origin of the term ghetto is explained in the encyclopaedic fragment, a more practical explanation is included in the Portobuffolè part, a description is presented when Othello explores the ghetto. This juxtaposition of stories and themes around Venice demonstrates how different meanings can be connected to each other. It creates the possibility to link Venice to the Second World War in an unexpected way, because there is a cultural correspondence in the form of the ghetto. This reflection is one of the capacities of a literary heterotopia.

This novel forces the reader to think about the relation between what is real and what is not, by juxtaposing fictional and non-fictional stories. And, not unimportantly, about the possibility that they form an intelligible construction. Phillips poses the question if it is possible to think of Venice including both fiction and reality. Eventually, this is exactly how we perceive of the heterotopia: by considering the ensemble of pieces that create it.

The juxtaposition of the threads and fragments also has spatial aspects. In combining historical Venice, literary Venice and factual information, Phillips creates a literary application of Foucault’s third principle, that a “heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a

single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (25). Where Foucault himself mentions the heterotopic qualities of cinemas as they represent different locations in a single space, our novel encompasses various locations (Venice, Cyprus, London) in various historical periods (fifteenth century, twentieth century). Phillips makes use of the possibilities the textual medium offers to a full extent, to set up this construction. This spatial plurality results in a heterotopic textual space.

Furthermore, the book itself – in its material form – is the location where those other places come together on paper. All those spaces and different historical moments are combined on the pages of this novel. Foucault’s heterotopic space is a real, but other space. *The Nature of Blood*, in all its fragmentedness is such a space. It binds seemingly unrelated stories and texts together in one place.

Case 3: *Don’t Look Now*

Nicolas Roeg’s film *Don’t Look Now* (1973) is an adaptation of the short story with the same title by Daphne du Maurier, published in 1971. The couple John and Laura Baxter are staying in Venice for some time, where John is working on the restoration of a church. Before the departure for Venice, their daughter Christine drowned in a pond close to their house in England. During the stay in Venice, both Laura and John are occupied with Christine’s death. Then, Laura meets two English sisters, one of whom is blind and second sighted and claims to have seen Christine. When Laura hears about this and tells it to John, he does not believe the blind woman’s vision. Dead is dead to him. As the story progresses, however, strange things are happening to him. He frequently sees a small person walking in Venice in a red raincoat, similar to the one Christine was wearing when she drowned. A few hours after Laura has left Venice to look after their son, because he has had an accident back home in England, John sees Laura standing on a gondola. And finally, Heather, the blind woman, warns that John’s life is in danger while he is in Venice. Unfortunately, John does not leave Venice upon hearing this and he eventually walks into a deadly trap.

The narrative structure of *Don’t Look Now* is strongly influenced by the montage editing. Instead of offering a linear storyline, Roeg creates an alternative construction by using and reusing images and juxtaposing “reality and fantasy as well as subjective and objective images” (Schülting 199). He challenges the viewer to adopt a different perception than is normal in mainstream cinema. The film contains several fragments (i.e. images) that return several times. Most of them are introduced to us at the beginning of the film, when

John and Laura are still in England. As John is preparing an assignment in Venice, he studies a slide with the picture of a Venetian church interior. He suddenly knocks over a glass of wine and the liquid spreads over the slide, forming a red, blood-like stain. Meanwhile, his daughter Christine drowns outside, wearing a red raincoat. During the course of the story, all these elements – the slide, blood, the red coat, water and drowning – reappear on the screen.

These fragments are often shown for not more than one or two seconds, leaving the viewer little time to carefully and rationally work through the relations they have with the story: “the spectator in a way shares John Baxter’s fate by his or her inability to rationally organise the transitory impressions” (Schülting 202). The result is that the viewer has to interpret the fragments according to their essential characteristics, while many of them are connected to each other by thematic similarity, or association (Schülting 202). One of those is the colour red. The blood, the wine, the raincoat: all of them share the colour that – in the specific context of this film – evokes a sense of danger.

Another example is when the body of a woman is being hoisted out of the canal, bringing the image of Christine drowning back into our minds. This particular scene is preceded by a conversation between John and the bishop. They talk about prophecy – in which John does not believe – and the bishop confides to John that he wished that he would not have to believe in it. With this conversation in the back of our heads, we see the female corpse and Christine’s death converging. We know that John sensed something when his daughter drowned, so seeing that corpse in the canal only minutes after the conversation with the bishop, makes us wonder if Heather’s premonitions may have been true. Furthermore, the small cut between the conversation and the hoisting of the corpse suggests that, chronologically, the latter scene might not have followed the former. Heather’s warnings and the fact that the corpse is a woman’s, leave space for the assumption that the person being lifted from the canal is in fact Laura.

Another associative connection is between Christine and the dwarf-figure in the red coat walking around Venice. John has seen a similar figure in a red coat in the slide he was studying in at the moment of Christine’s death. The undeniable similarity between the two makes John curious. His discussions and conversations with Laura about Heather’s psychic abilities and her assertion that Christine is still alive, raise the question if the red dwarf might be Christine herself. The slide, which evoked the warning in John that something was wrong with Christine, turns out to have been the foreshadowing of his own death as well.

The fragmentedness in the scenes of *Don’t Look Now* breaches the story’s linearity. Fragments such as the aforementioned flash-forward and the recurring fragments of the slide

and the red coat, but also the lack of a “reliable narrational agency”, prevent that the “spectator order these images into a ‘chrono-logical’ story” (Schülting 199). The confusion that is caused by this construction represents the impossibility that we coherently perceive of the world and reality. The audience is forced to let go of a ‘chrono-logical’ approach and look for a non-rational and associative meaning. Here, the ungrammatical nature of the heterotopia returns in a slightly different way from the previous literary case. Where Phillips combined several storylines with their own characters and from separate historical periods, Roeg maintains basically a single storyline. But the fragmentations of the images and scenes shows us a city that distorts this seemingly simple narrative. It is this temporal ungrammaticality that forces the viewer to think about the meaning of all those different cinematic pieces.

Throughout the film, the breaching of the chronology serves to transfer John’s confusion over the events to the viewer. There is one scene, however, in which the chronology is only seemingly breached, and that is when John sees his own funeral boat, with Laura and the two sisters standing on deck. Because the coffin and John’s son are not visible from where he himself is standing, he thinks that Laura has not left the city and is instead being captured by the two sisters. It is only at the end of the film that we become aware of the fact that this scene is a flash-forward, when we see the funeral boat for the second time. This time, we do see the coffin and realise that, earlier on, we have experienced John’s second sight. In the light of the narrative’s chronology this scene is a breach, a flash-forward to the end. But for John and the viewer, the funeral boat is actually there and happening at that very moment. It is a representation of John’s second sight.

Schülting asserts (202) that, in this scene, the temporal factor causes the confusion. This is true, but only if we look at the storyline post-factum, after we have watched it. At the moment of watching the film, of seeing the funeral boat over John’s shoulder, it is not the temporal factor that confuses our perception. It is the assumption that Laura cannot be in two different spaces at the same time: on the way back to England and on a boat in Venice.

The discussed fragments are part of the third heterotopic principle that the heterotopia combines spaces which are incompatible with each other. The slide, the pond and the events in Venice belong to different spaces, all converging in Roeg’s montage: “different time strands are juxtaposed and produce spaces in which geometrical relations have been suspended” (Schülting 202). Roeg plays a psychological game, as he combines those spaces with different temporal units. The network of fragments that results from it is a heterotopic film that confuses the viewer. Another effect of this fragmentation allows Roeg to present the theme of his film: the importance of association. Where logic and rationality are incapable of

providing a conclusive explanation of the events – the psychic abilities of Heather and John are not accepted by rationality – it is by association of images and colours that the viewer can intelligibly reconstruct a meaning.

Schülting argues that Roeg has made his film a counterweight to the ample production of Venetian literature (207). The palimpsest of texts that rationally and logically communicate with each other and offer intertextual readings. *Don't Look Now* forces the viewer to let go of the habit to engage with logic, turning Venice into “an empty screen, on which images are ceaselessly projected – visions, apparitions and fantasies” (207). The value of this film partially lies in this difference from tradition, as it is an ‘other’ place. Like the heterotopia, it acquires its significance from this difference. Furthermore, as the plain and simple materiality of the screen is foregrounded, the medium itself is revealed as a heterotopic site: it is “the ‘site’ of the film and the site where its images become visible” (207). Foucault mentions the cinema in his explanation of the third principle, in a similar effort to emphasize the double nature of the screen: as both a site in itself and a site upon which other sites are projected (and come together by projection). The heteropic capacity of *Don't Look Now* is, thus, not only in the questioning of spatial and temporal order by an alternative narration. It can also be found in the emphasis on the material possibilities of the television screen.

Conclusion

The idea that has ignited the writing of this thesis, the notion of the heterotopia, is based on Foucault's observation that the perception of the world by western cultures has undergone a shift: space has replaced time as the dominant dimension. As a consequence, Jameson adds, literature has left behind the introverted and psychological approach of the modernists and written mainly about the exterior – cities and people.

Foucault's observation clears the way for his concept of the 'other' space: the heterotopia, that acquires its meaning from the relation it has with the sites it is surrounded by and connected to. That relation can be one of reflection or inversion. The essential principles of the six Foucault distinguishes, are those that address the limited access to the heterotopia, its capacity to maintain a non-conventional relation to time, and – most important to this thesis – its potential to combine real spaces that are not compatible with each other. This incompatibility can be tracked back to Ferdinand De Saussure's linguistic theory according to which signs or symbols are not intrinsically connected to their meaning, but are only meaningful in their difference with other signs. In this linguistic light, the heterotopia can be defined as an ungrammaticality within the laws of spatial grammar.

One of the possibilities of the heterotopia is the unification of a space on the one hand and the literary texts that represent those spaces on the other. As Huyssen argues, imaginations of a city can become intertwined with the perception of the real city. The city of Venice proves to be a valuable example of this approach not only because of its heterotopic qualities, but mostly because of the palimpsestic corpus of literary texts written about it. Every new story that takes place in Venice, will unavoidably have to take into account the countless texts that have been written before it.

The three literary representations of Venice that have been examined in this thesis, two texts and one film, demonstrate how Foucault's heterotopia can be applied as an instrument to thematically or spatially analyse a story. Of all three cases, *The Comfort of Strangers* gives the most elementary rendition of heterotopic literature, by thematically representing Venice as an 'other' place. The text itself, in its form and materiality, does not explore the literary possibilities Foucault's concept offers. Its spatiality as a text remains a conventional approach. But at the core of McEwan's story is the complex nature of Venice: the otherness of the city, the difficulty of understanding what the city is because of its dense web of streets,

alleys and canals – they play a central role in the storyline and the plot. The lack of order in Venice imposes itself on both protagonists and questions the order of their lives. The disruptive fragmentedness of Venetian city maps is an indication of the particular spatial character of the city. It makes *The Comfort of Strangers* a representation of how a heterotopia is different from other spaces, how it breaks the spatial order.

A more profound heterotopic influence can be found in *The Nature of Blood*. In this novel the notion that history and fiction, space and literature are connected, has evoked a literary strategy that consists of telling a meaningful story by putting together different threads and text genres, as if it were a collage. The many different stories and their narrators, the different genres of prose and more objective encyclopaedic parts: they form an ensemble that demonstrates how a novel can be built up of shards and still be a unity. In doing so, Phillips is able to transfer a complex message, the history of the Holocaust and its historical roots of racism in Venice, that would have been too complicated for a conventional novel. With this heterotopic literary approach Phillips also emphasizes the material and spatial dimension of literature, as the book becomes the place where all those stories and characters come together. *The Nature of Blood* is not only part of the heterotopic palimpsest of Venice and its literature, it is also a heterotopic space itself.

Don't Look Now takes the heterotopic approach of a narration to a deeper level. Roeg causes confusion by shuffling the film's timeline and re-using several images, rendering the structure fragmented. Where *The Nature of Blood* is an explicitly switching story, jumping between different historical periods and characters, *Don't Look Now* maintains one location and the same characters. But this fragmentedness is more venomous than in the other cases, because the story offers little grip as of how to perceive of the montaged chronology. Association of images is the only way to coherently extract meaning from this film. Furthermore, as with Phillips' novel, the montaging technique turns the screen into an agent. The images are so fragmented, that the projection function of the screen itself is emphasized. It is the location where the narration of *Don't Look Now* acquires its form.

Literature is space. Even if Foucault and Jameson would be proven wrong in their assertion that after modernism literature has focused primarily on space instead of time, it would be hard to deny that literary texts have a (material and immaterial) spatial dimension. Important for this thesis is, what the relation between a real city and the literary texts imagining that city does to those texts. Does the Venetian heterotopia also evoke a literary heterotopia? That's hard to say. Yes, two of the three studied cases clearly have a form that crosses the boundaries

of mainstream literature. But there is no evidence that these literary ‘ungrammaticalities’ have been caused directly by Venice’s special heterotopic character. And many other Venetian texts do not share this ungrammaticality (Although it is likely that unconventionality works better in a city with a magical or mystifying atmosphere, than in an average commuter village.)

The three studied cases demonstrate that an emphasis on the spatial aspects of literature benefit from a special literary location. In that respect, Venice is a useful site: it has a historically palimpsestic nature and it has proven to be a location that is hard to define culturally. The latter explains why literature, until today, has not stopped writing about Venice. While studying that palimpsest, Foucault’s heterotopic concept makes it possible to create and explain complex networks of meaning with parts originating from varying temporal and/or spatial orders. We can look for those networks in cities, books or films.

Heterotopic literature is literature that fulfils a ‘different’ task. It distinguishes itself from fellow texts by form: presented with a defamiliarizing appearance, it can force the reader to think over the meaning of this otherness. This literature can use other texts, by reflecting or inverting their forms and themes. Foucault’s heterotopia offers a framework to analyse this otherness and to place the link between the real and the imagined space. Heterotopic literature is both the other space (the counter-space of reality), and the other literature.

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