Everything is Relevant
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Untitled

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I’ve always had the same wish whenever I visit Venice. I would like to experience it the way Dirk Bogarde did at the opening of Visconti’s *Death in Venice*, the film based on Thomas Mann’s great novella. Bogarde is on a boat and entering Venice from the seaside. The atmosphere is grey and sanguine. The voyage is languorous, but then Venice opens up and its beauty and fragility only makes the heaviness of the mood all that more saturating. Like all dreams, the end is an idea; it is the passage that is real. Also like all dreams, nightmares and regrets lurk behind every turn. As we all know, dreams can collapse into nightmares very readily. In fact, they are interlinked.

In my dream of Venice, I arrive from the sea and the day is cold and layered in fog. I cannot see Venice, but I know it is impending. I can sense it in my bones. It is very easy to slip into a kind of aphasia, a kind of deep trance. The noise of the small motor, the splash of the sea, would lull me very easily. During these moments, I see people running and screaming in fear. I also see slaves tucked into cramped quarters on their way to the Americas. I see old and young struggling to escape to a less violent place; many of them do not make it. I see the horror of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, another story of a boat trip. I think that *Death in Venice* is not so separable from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in many ways.

Every so often, the sound of seagulls and the smell of the sea’s brine would re-alert me to Venice. And I would be lulled again, only this time by thoughts of its impossible beauty and perfection. It is what gives the world hope and, as in Henry James’s *The Wings of the Dove*, it would be a splendid place to die.

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1 Mann’s novella *Death in Venice* was first published in German in 1912. Luchino Visconti’s film of the same name was released in 1971. Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* appeared serially in 1899 and in book form in 1902. *The Wings of the Dove*, by Henry James, was published in 1902.