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Venice: “A Tropical Marshland, Steaming, Monstrous, Rank”

Unlike many cities whose swampy beginnings have been lost from memory and buried beneath their pavements, Venice’s creation and ongoing life in a lagoon is still plain for all to see today and is perhaps its most distinctive and marketable feature to tourists. The Venetians made a virtue out of necessity by canalizing its wetlands, whereas other cities made a necessary vice by largely filling their wetlands. Venice is the wetland city par excellence, one of very few in the world, certainly in the Western world, whose wetland history is visible. Other cities, such as those discussed in the present book, are wetland cities, but this is invisible, a matter of memory and a fact of history whose traces are present to be read and retrieved from city blocks, streets, and parks, rather than a matter of present visibility as in Venice whose inscription of the city on its wetlands can be read in its canals. The fact that other cities were wetland cities is usually only apparent to the trained, historically informed eye that sees the absent wetlands before and/or below the present city, whereas Venice as a wetland city is plain to see for those who have the eyes to see it. Unlike all the other cities set in, or beside, wetlands that they drained and filled, Venice dredged canals and used the dredging to fill the wetlands in order to create the (is)lands on which the city was built (instead of just filling wetlands, the usual practice for the development of cities).

Venice's beginnings can easily be traced in its canals and urban islands. Venice, Lewis Mumford (1961: 321) relates, was

the creation of a group of refugees from Padua in the fifth century A.D. [CE], fleeing across the lagoons from the invader. The shallow waters of the Adriatic took the place of the stone wall for protection, and the swamps and islands, connected only by water, suggested the dredging of canals to fill in the nearby land and to establish channels of transportation. The gondola (mentioned as early as 1094) was the perfect technological adaptation to these narrow, shallow waterways.

As von Clausewitz, the theorist of war, said, swamps are easy to defend and hard to attack. The Venetians not only dredged wetlands to create canals and channels of transportation, and used the dredging to fill in wetlands to create (is)lands, but they also developed a transportation technology in the gondola suited to the wetland city and its canals that were not only channels of transportation for people and goods, but also channels of communication for messages and messengers. These canals and channels were, and still are, the lifeblood of the body of the city of Venice that course through its arteries of commerce and through its veins of culture and everyday life. The former circulate commercial life from the financial heart of the city while the latter keep the body of the city going and return it to the heart to be repumped through the body of the city.

Venice was founded in a lagoon where fresh and salt water are mixed, where there were salt marshes and swamps, and where mud flats were exposed at low tide (Ackroyd, 2010: 3). Venice's watery beginnings have haunted and fascinated writers for ages. Thomas Mann ([1912] 1971: 5) in his novella, *Death in Venice*, for Ackroyd (2010: 402) "the most famous narrative to have emerged from the city," imagines the site for the city before it was founded. The protagonist, Gustave Aschenbach, has a vision of "a landscape, a tropical marshland, beneath a reeking sky, steaming, monstrous, rank—a kind of primeval wilderness-world of island, morasses and alluvial channels." These are the stock-in-trade pejorative descriptions of a wetland of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the lexicon of what I call "standard swamp-speak" (Giblett, 1996: 229). After citing this passage in part, Ackroyd (2010: 62) comments that "it is a vision of Venice itself in its original state. But it is a city that no one else will ever see." Why? Because it is in fact a vision of the site for the city before the city was built rather than of the city itself, before

the wetlands were canalized by dredging and the wetlands filled with dredging separating out land from water. Venice for Mann ([1912] 1971: 20) is “this most improbable of cities.”

Venice is mainly improbable because of its site. The Venetian lagoon, like all wetlands, was for Ackroyd (2010: 4) “an ambiguous area that is neither land nor sea.” The founders of Venice were confronted with the same problem that all builders of swamp cities and marsh metropolises face: how to build a settlement on what Ackroyd calls the “shifting ground” of “mud and water” (7)? Like many cities founded in or near a wetland, Venice was founded by “reclaiming earth from water” (10) as if water had no right or legitimate claim to earth, as if the city had every right to claim earth back from water and so “conquer the water” (14). Of course, the water can re-reclaim the city back as it did in New Orleans with hurricane Katrina and as it periodically does in Venice with the “*acqua alta*” or high tide, when “that sea of filthy black water swelled up from the very pavements,” as Donna Leon (1996: 355) describes it in her detective novel of this title. *Acqua alta* is also invoked in terms of “the disgusting water” (355) that is not in the canals or the sea “where it belonged” (355–356), but in the city where it does not belong and where it turns Venice into “this filthy city” (356) with its “slimy waters” (377). Water here is dirt in Mary Douglas’s (1966: 35) sense of “matter out of place.”

The wetland is matter out of place par excellence. Wetlands have been seen as places of liquid and solid, air and water, heat and cool, light and dark, day and night, life and death with each taking the other’s place. The wetland is matter out of place in all the major Western categories of matter: solid, gas, heat/light, and liquid. Wetlands mix all four Western elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Even with their living waters, wetlands have been constituted as dead matter. The typical response to the dirtiness of wetlands has been to try and put matter back in its proper place wherever possible, and where it is impossible to denigrate their deviation from the norm. Drainage, for instance, is putting the earth and water of the wetland back in their respective, and respectable, places. In the process wetlands are put in their subjugated place and drylands substituted in their place instead. Also in the process the “ecosystem services” that wetlands provide to human and nonhuman life are destroyed.

On this dryland surface, the city could then be inscribed. Venice had, as Ackroyd (2010: 16) puts it, “a fluid origin, indeed one written in water.” Yet

cities in wetlands, like Venice, cannot write in, or on, water as it is impossible to make a mark in or on water, certainly a mark as hard and fixed as a city on something as soft and fluid as water. Writing on water is evanescent and ephemeral, the making and leaving of traces. The builders of Venice had to dredge the land from the water and drain the water from the land in order to make their mark on a dry horizontal surface by inscribing monuments and monumental buildings on that surface and erecting them in vertical space. It was not so much the case that, as Ackroyd puts it, “the city was built upon water” (17), as that the city was built upon land where water had once been and from which the land was wrested. Venice was the initial victor in the battle of the elements of earth against water, but it may lose the war with water with water re-reclaiming the city back from the earth through slow subsidence (400) and rising water levels brought about by climate change.

The relationship between Venice and water is an obvious feature of the city and is often noted by writers. Venice for Calvino ([1974] 1997: 79) is a “city of water,” a hydropolis, though a Western city is always a city of land almost by definition and so for Ackroyd (2010: 18) the city of Venice is “half land and half water” as “the location of the city . . . is the union of water and earth” (91), an aquaterrapolis. The city-builders broke this union as they, like the God of Genesis (1:2, 6–7), divided land from water, disambiguated the wetland that is neither land nor water and built “the ambiguous city . . . on the water” (Ackroyd, 2010: 164). Depending on how you look at it, Venice is either or both a divine city in this sense that it divided land from water, and/or it is a sinful, satanic city that appropriates the divine power of dividing land from water. Ackroyd’s subtitle of *Pure City* for his book about Venice seems to be a misnomer, unless by “pure” he means archetypal.

Venice is a divine and demonic city combining the best of both worlds and having a bet both ways. By the sixteenth century Venice was, as Maus (2008: 1111) puts it in her introduction to Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, “the richest city in Renaissance Europe” for the simple reason that “although it had no natural resources to speak of . . . it was located where the products of Asia could most conveniently be exchanged with those of western Europe.” Venice for Cracknell (2000: 62–63) is “a great maritime and mercantile city,” a “city for merchants,” “a city, above all, for the adventurous and curious, like Marco Polo” or “like Galileo,” as well as “the Serene

City” and “ultimately, too, the city of power.” As such and in sum, Smith (2012: 221) calls Venice “the forerunner of the modern world city,” such as London and New York. This was the case, partly because Venice was what Cosgrove (1982: 145) calls “a prototype of the mercantile city,” and of mercantile capital(ism), a capital of mercantilism, and partly because it was the forerunner of, and prototype for, those later aquaterrapolises that drained and filled their wetlands. The Venetians did not do this in Venice, but did so in their possessions on the Italian mainland (as Cosgrove (1988) has discussed). Venice was the prototype for Venetian drainage and reclamation of its mainland territories, as it was for other cities.

Venice was the forerunner of the modern world city, such as London and New York, situated both as the terminus of trade routes between the east and the west, and as an aquaterrapolis between land and water. Situated on the littoral between land and water in the wetland, these mercantile capitals, maritime metropolises, and port cities located on rivers reaped the rewards of both the hinterland behind flowing downstream toward them and the overseas lands before them sailing toward them, and were a point of exchange between these lands. Without the wetland on which they were built, these cities would not have prospered as they did because of their location as trading and port cities on the littoral between land and sea, and, in the case of London and New York, at the “mouth” of a river. The wetland was the liminal zone between land and water (river and sea), inland and ocean.

By dividing the land from the water like God, the builders of Venice founded a low profile, human-scale city largely of horizontal surface, unlike the city of vertical height, such as Babel with its tower and later Chicago and New York with their towering and sublime skyscrapers. In an essay written in 1922, Georg Simmel (cited by Ackroyd, 2010: 38) described Venice as “the tragedy of a surface that has been left by its foundation.” Ackroyd comments that Venice’s attention to “surface without depth provokes a sense of mystery and unknowability” (38). Beneath the surface of the city of Venice lurks the depths of the wetlands in which it is located, the land on which it was founded and the water it dredged and the land it drained; beneath the surface of the present lie the depths of the past by which it is haunted in the present (376). For Ackroyd “beneath the waters of the city lie strata of mud and clay and sand” (261). Beneath the surface of what Ackroyd calls “the unreal city”

(93) of Venice for Dickens (cited by Ackroyd, 2010: 93) lies “dismal, awful, horrible stone cells,” just as for him beneath the surface of genteel America lay the dismal, disease-ridden, horrifying swamps of the south (see Giblett, 1996: 188). Dickens for Ackroyd (2010: 96) “meditates upon scenes of dreadful night” beneath the aquaterrestrial city of Venice, just as James Thomson and Rudyard Kipling meditated on the terrestrial cities of dreadful night of London, Lahore, and Calcutta in a poem, a story, and a collection with the title of *The City of Dreadful Night*.

As a city of surface and as a city of water transportation, Venice for Ackroyd (2010: 49, 53, 68, 93) is, like Paris, “a city that seems almost to float” insisting later that it is “the floating city” and that “it floated upon the water.” It provides both “firmness in a floating world” (180) and “a fixed point in a floating world” (181). Venice is the floating city, but the floating city is moored and cannot float free from its moorings, such as a gondola is able to do. Venice for Dibdin (1994: 333) is the “waterborne city,” borne by water but also born out of water, born out of a watery womb of water as if the lagoon gave birth to the city and borne on water in its gondolas and other vessels. Venice for Ackroyd (2010: 52) is “like a mother . . . It was a womb of safety.” For Ackroyd this mother was not “Mother Earth” as she “did not bear it or rear it” (332). It was not the Mother Earth of agriculture, both benign and malign, that bore and reared Venice, but the Great Mother or Goddess of the swamps, both creative and destructive, who enwombed and nurtured the city. In “the uterine embrace of the womb” (94), in “this watery and uterine landscape” (377) of primeval slime life began. Venice for Ackroyd is “a place of slime and ooze and mould” (403). Slime for Jean-Paul Sartre in his gendered construction of reality is a feminized substance associated with women’s bodies that he fears and denigrates with misogynist horror (see Giblett, 1996: 39–47). Presumably he would have regarded Venice, or this aspect of it, in the same way. Slime for Sartre is neither desirable, nor pleasurable, nor a source of new life.

Venice is a site and a city where sexualized desires, fears, and pleasures, and the gendered construction of reality, are played out. Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion* (1987: 49) explores sexual desire and pleasure (both straight and lesbian) and ambiguous gender and speciation as, Villanelle, one of its central characters/narrators is a cross-dressing, bisexual, web-footed woman for “rumor has it that the inhabitants of this city [surrounded by water

with watery alleys for streets and roads] walk on water. That, more bizarre still, their feet are webbed. Not all feet, but the feet of the boatmen.” When Villanelle is born with webbed feet, she has already crossed the gender and animal/human/divine divides, and she will cross-dress and alternate sexual preference too as a highly ambiguous and mobile figure. Venice is the fitting setting and locale for such a story as it is “the city of disguises” (56, 92, 100, 150), “the city of mazes” (49, 52, 109), “the city of uncertainty” (58), “a changeable city” where “new waterways force themselves over dry land” (97), the “watery city that is never the same” (99), the “enchanted city” in which “all things seem possible” (76), and finally there is “the city within the city” (53), a city that “enfolds upon itself” (113), an invaginated, feminized city, unlike Paris, “that tart of towns” (52).

Venice for Ackroyd (2010: 329) is “the city of Venus, the goddess [who] was born from the sea.” For him, the sea is the mother of the city, but it is the Great Mother of the lagoon in which it is located and the swamp in which it is situated that gave birth to the city. Father Law drained the Great Mother of the swamp and the lagoon and gave birth out of its brain box to the city of Venice, like Zeus giving birth to Pallas Athene. Venice is thus also the city of Zeus or Jupiter. Father Law bore it and reared it. Daddy’s girl grew up into a whore. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Venice, Ackroyd relates, was being “characterized as a whore” and as “a decrepit courtesan,” just like Paris (as we saw in an earlier chapter) (342). Benjamin (1979: 173) relates how the well-known list of the seven deadly sins located each of the sins in an Italian city with “voluptuousness in Venice.”

Writers have been divided on Venice, as they were on Paris. Along similar lines to Sartre on slime, D. H. Lawrence described Venice as the “abhorrent, green, slippery city,” whereas Ruskin described it as “the paradise of cities” (cited by Ackroyd, 2010: 91). In other words, it is a slimy and sublime city, hellish and heavenly, monstrous and monumental at the same time and in the same place, just like Paris and London as we have seen. Venice is “the gate of heaven” (353) and “the holy city” as well as the gateway to hell and the sinful city. Venice in Jeanette Winterson’s (1987: 104) *The Passion* is “the city of Satan.” Venice is both divine and infernal, as the title of chapter 30 of Ackroyd’s book about Venice suggests. “The city of earthly beauty” (Ackroyd, 2010: 92) below is the mirror image of the city of heavenly sublimity above.

Rather than rising Babel-like to heaven, Venice lies flat on the earth and reflects the heavenly city above in the mirror-like waters of the earthly swamp city below. But below and before the city are the wetlands on which it was built. Beneath the earthly city is the hellish and unhealthy underworld. For Ackroyd “the city represents in the most delicate and disquieting way the ambiguous domain between the natural and the artificial, suggesting that there may be some third entity” (67). Venice is the hybrid city of nature and culture, a city in which, as Hirst and Woolley (1982: 23) put it, “there is no hard and fast divide between nature and culture,” a city of a culture of nature, or what I call for short “culnature” (see Giblett, 2011).

Venice is like national parks in that both are culnature in which nature is in the process of becoming culture through gradual accretion and incorporation, or the place where some sort of steady state, or homeostasis, between the two is ostensibly put on display. Both are instances of what Alexander Wilson (1992) calls “the culture of nature” as suggested in the title of his classic study, *The Culture of Nature*. Yet rather than one “culture of nature” as Wilson seemed to imply or suggest, a number of cultures of nature struggle for hegemony, including the first nature of the natural world of native peoples and the second nature of the human world of herding, tilling, mining, forging, and building, to which could be added dredging, draining, and filling of wetlands. Second nature works over first nature. Yet second nature is cultural, a “culture of nature.” Venice was founded in and by the second culture of nature. This gave rise to the third culture of nature of modernity and industrial technologies, and the fourth culture of nature of hypermodernity and communication technologies (see Giblett, 2011: chapter 1) both of which have had their impact and left their mark on Venice.

Venice not only mixes and unmixes earth and water, but also mixes air and water. Noxious vapors circulate in the air above the city. These vapors emanate from its noxious waters. Jean Cocteau (cited by Ackroyd, 2010: 408) described Venice as “a sick and fevered city, floating on stagnant waters, discharging miasmal vapors.” The miasmatic theory of disease was discredited in the 1890s, but the evocative and pejorative language of miasma and smell lives on, especially in recent detective fiction set in Venice. Michael Dibdin (1994: 46) in *Dead Lagoon* describes a Venetian canal where “the fetid odour of the disturbed mud hung heavy in the air, a noxious miasma so strong that

it was almost tangible.” Nor has the moral hierarchy of places been discredited. Garrett (2001: 204) describes how the detective hero in *Dead Lagoon* “encounters layers of corruption” beneath the touristic surface of the city, just as there are layers of decay in the wetlands beneath the city and before its foundation.

Similarly Donna Leon (1994: 108) in *The Anonymous Venetian*, one of an entire series of detective novels set in Venice, describes “the penetrating stench of corruption that always lurked beneath the water.” Ackroyd (2010: 409) comments that “the writers of crime are drawn to this noxious city where fugitive odors can be sensed beneath the beauties of the surface.” The fugitive odors beneath the surface become a figure for the fugitives from justice beneath the surface of polite Venetian society. These fugitives hark back to Cain, the first builder of cities in the bible, and the first fugitive from God’s wrath (see Ellul, 1970: 1). Fugitives and fugitive odors go together in Venice, just like “murky water” and “murky matters” do for Dibdin (1994: 15 and 17). Such writers are merely following in the muddy footprints of the Futurist Marinetti (cited by Garrett, 2001: 187) for whom Venice was “this putrefying city, magnificent sore from the past.” The putrescent boil of Venice occasionally bursts to reveal its current and past darkness and rottenness.

Writers of crime stories, like Dibdin and Leon, are also drawn to this s(ub)lime city where the airy, superstructural world above is founded on the muddy, substructural world below. For Donna Leon ([1992] 2009: 54–55) in *Death at la Fenice* the Rialto Bridge is “typically Venetian . . . looking, from a distance, lofty and ethereal but revealing itself, upon closer reflection, to be firmly grounded in the mud of the city.” Venice sublimates the solid into the ethereal above, but is founded on the transformation of the liquid below and before into the solid between the liquid and the ethereal. Venice for Leon in *Death at la Fenice* is also “the most beautiful city in the world” (218), but it is also the most sublimated city in the world because it transformed not only solid matter into ethereal structures, but also liquid water into a solid city. This process is mirrored in the mixing of air and water in “a thick fog” that Leon describes as “seeping up from the waters on which the city was built” and which “lay upon the waters like a curse” (304). The famous Venetian fogs have the effect for Dibdin (1994: 101) of “making the familiar strange and

unlikely” in a kind of architectural reprise of the kind of effect the Russian Formalists loved in literature of “making strange.”

Donna Leon’s *Death at la Fenice* for Ruth Cracknell (2000: 22) is “the perfect introduction to Venice. No one else captures so succinctly the everyday life of the Serene City; no one else captures that particular devotion of the Venetians to their city, nor the faint contempt felt by them towards any not similarly blessed.” Yet this is not an introduction to Venice, nor the capturing of the everyday life of the Serene City that most Venetians are privy too, nor with which they might concur, as Leon’s novels written and published in English have not, according to Salvatore Ciriaco (pers. comm.), a native Venetian, been translated into Italian as she is an American and regarded as an outsider. Perhaps she is also treated with the faint contempt that Venetians direct towards those who are not Venetian, and so she is in a good position to convey this contempt to her readers. Leon may capture that particular devotion of the Venetians to their city better than anyone else, but she also captures the dark underside of the city of Venice, if not better than anyone else, then certainly more extensively over the course of her entire detective series set there.

Venice was not really “a city built on water” (as Sennett (1994: 216) says), but more like Boston’s Back Bay Fens, and as Dibdin (1994: 184) relates, “constructed on a subterranean forest of ... piles ... laid down centuries ago to stabilize the mud-banks of the lagoon and make them habitable.” Venice was also built over septic tanks, or “black wells,” into which, Dibdin writes, “flowed such effluvia as could not be directly discharged into the canals” (46). Effluvia are the liquid counterpart to gaseous miasma. Both are bad. Like miasma, as malaria is literally “bad air,” so effluvia are “bad water.”

Wetlands can be bad not only for physical health, but also for mental health. Venice’s unique heritage and inheritance as a wetland city not only had physical and moral effects but also mental affects. “Living on water” for Ackroyd (2010: 377; see also 34) “opens the mind to the supernatural and to unconscious association.” Why? For the simple reason that the wetland is, and has been used as, a figure for the unconscious (see Giblett, 1996: 37). With Venice situated in a dredged swamp this gave rise to a particular psychopathology, or more precisely psychogeopathology rising up from the unconscious and repressed wetlands. Ackroyd (2010: 52 and 407) refers to Venice’s

“watery and melancholy nature” and to a melancholy “induced by the presence of water.” Melancholy is the appropriate neurosis for a city founded by destroying wetlands and by creating canals and for a city driven by trade and the profit motive, the home of the merchant of Venice. The Venetian state for Ackroyd “represented the first great triumph of mercantilist capitalism in Europe” (123), not least over its precapitalist wetland location. Venice bears the melancholic psychological scars of its wetland destruction.

Melancholia in association with the city of Venice is played out in Vera Brittain’s ([1933] 1978) autobiographical study, *Testament of Youth*. As she “glides smoothly” in a gondola “over the rippling grey silk of the Grand Canal” on her post-World War I tour of Europe, the view of Venice for Brittain is tinged with melancholy and mourning as she associates the Venetian waters with the death of her fiancé in France and of her brother in Italy during the war (479). The Grand Canal is associated not only with melancholy and mourning but also with magic as Brittain, “with melancholy possessiveness . . . looked upon those enchanted waters . . . those fairy lagoons, incredible as a gorgeous mirage in the muffled silence.” These are the benign waters of the patriarchal mother earth. She imagines that her brother “had died saving this beauty from the fate of Ypres,” in other words, saving the beauty of the city of Venice from the horror of trench warfare, in particular its mud.

Brittain read about the mud of trench warfare in the letters her brother and fiancé wrote to her and had immediate experience of it as a nurse in France and in the aftermath of the death of her fiancé. In one of his letters from the trenches Brittain’s ([1933] 1978: 206) fiancé related that they were “very wet and muddy . . . The whole of one’s world, at least one’s visible and palpable world, is mud in various stages of solidity or stickiness.” Mud mixes the elements of earth and water, whereas cities and roads separate them as a rule, or should do. Brittain experienced the mud firsthand when she arrived on the western front and found that “the roads were liquid with such mud as only wartime France could produce after a few days of rain.” The solidity of earth was liquefied into mud.

The mud of trench warfare, especially its smell, is associated for Brittain ([1933] 1978) with death when she goes through the “kit” of her fiancé after his death. She wrote to her brother that everything was “simply caked with mud” and she felt “overwhelmed by the horror of war” as “the smell of those

clothes was the smell of graveyards and the Dead. The mud of France which covered them was not ordinary mud; it had not the usual clean pure smell of earth, but it was as though it were saturated with dead bodies—dead that had been dead a long, long time” (225). The mud of trench warfare had the smell of death in which earth, water, and dead bodies (and shit [though she does not mention this]) were mixed. It did have not the usual smell of mud in which earth and water were mixed. Brittain distinguishes the clean, pure smell of earth from the horrific, dirty smell of the mud of trench warfare.

Like many writers about World War I (see Giblett, 2009: chapter 4), Brittain ([1933] 1978: 355) associates the mud of trench warfare with swamps and marshes, such as when she describes how “the terrific gales and whipping rains of late autumn ... turned the shell-gashed flats of Flanders into an ocean of marshy mud that made death by drowning almost as difficult to avoid as death from gun-fire.” Yet the wetlandscape of trench warfare is an artificial marsh made by modern industrial warfare, not a native marsh made by hydrogeological processes and ancestral hands.

The wetlandscape of trench warfare is also melancholic for Brittain ([1933] 1978: 356), such as when she describes how “the Flanders offensive was subsiding dismally into the mud” and refers to “melancholy Flanders” on the next page. Brittain experiences mourning and melancholia during and after World War I, yet she also experiences these affects in Venice after the war in combination with the magic of the maternal waters of the wetlands—perhaps hardly surprising given her strong feminist beliefs, though she is unable to distinguish the canalized waters of the patriarchal city from the matrifocal waters of the wetlands that preceded the city and which the city destroyed. Although she distinguishes the dirty, impure smell of trench warfare from the clean pure smell of earth, she does not regard the former as the product of patriarchal and industrial trench warfare and the latter as the progeny of maternal marshes, nor does she distinguish the artificial “man-made” marshes of modern industrial warfare from the native marshes made by hydrogeological processes and ancestral hands.

In a recent discussion of melancholy in relation to Walter Benjamin’s work on the German mourning play, and applicable also to Brittain’s mourning and melancholia, Ferber (2013: 20) reiterates along Freudian lines that “the lost object continues to exist, now as part of the dejected subject.” The lost

wetlands destroyed by cities continue to exist, now as part of the dejected subject of the citizen who maintains “a relationship with an absent lost object” (43), just as the subject maintains a relationship with absent lost wetlands by being oblivious to them or by retelling their stories, by remarking their presence in the past on maps and their absence in the present on maps too. The aim thereby is that “the relationship between subject and object is overturned” (46). Subject and object become what Kristeva (1982: 1–2) calls (the) *abject*, or what Nietzsche called the *body* (see Giblett, 2008a: 3–5). The subject and object return to the *presubject* and *preobject* phase in which both were *abject*. The *abject* precedes the subject and the object. It is the third party that made both possible. The dejected subject is no longer dejected, but *abjected* and is no longer subject, but *abject*.

This desubjectification, deobjectification, and abjection contrasts with what Ferber (2013: 59) describes as “the destructive nature of the melancholic’s response to loss” in which “the melancholic devours his lost love-object in order to retain it; in demonstrating his endless loyalty, he destroys it. Therein lies the paradox: the only way to retain the object is to destroy it.” The melancholic devours his lost love-object of wetlands by using monstrous drainers and dredgers in order to retain them (literally behind retaining walls as in Venice) and retrain them and their aberrant water (as in Venice in canals), but in doing so kills the wetland as a living being, as a habitat for other living beings. He kills the thing he loves, rather than loving the thing he kills as indigenous cultures do (see Giblett, 2011: 215). For Ferber (2013: 73) “the melancholic’s lost object is either dead (in the case of human loss) or absent (in the case of a more abstract loss).” In the case of the destruction and loss of a wetland, the melancholic’s lost object is both dead (a case of nonhuman loss) *and* absent (a case of a concrete loss).

Moreover, for Ferber (2013: 73), “in both cases the pathology lies in the subject’s inability to recognize the loss and the insistence of maintaining the dead object as ‘half-alive’ within the melancholic consciousness, thus rendering the boundary between life and death indefinite and thus indistinct.” In the case of the destruction and loss of a wetland, the psychogeopathology lies not only within what Ferber outlines, but also within not recognizing the wetland as a place of both life and death in which life and death are mixed, but wherein the boundary between them is definite and

thus distinct. The melancholic's half-alive lost object for Ferber is "what is not yet dead but no longer alive" (102). This object is buried alive in a tomb when, Ferber goes on to relate, "the melancholic carves out an internal tomb for his lost object, engendering an internal topography in which the living ego and the dead object coexist" (102), just as in Venice the city goes on living above its entombed dead lagoons of once living wombs of wetlands.

In the concrete cases of the subject's relation to nonhuman living objects, such as animals and wetlands, the living ego and the dead object coexist by the living ego continuing to live by killing the object (see Giblett, 2008a: 119–120; Giblett and Tolonen, 2012: 41 and 45). They are entombed as dead object but they were once life-giving wombs. Death, as Ferber (2013: 104) concludes, "does not mark the end of life ... the two states exist concomitantly," as they do in the wetland's ecology. Moreover, for Ferber "the dead are never completely dead, and the past can never be hermetically closed" (115). The lost wetlands are never completely dead, and the past is still an open book for all to see and read, as it is in Venice. Venice is the wetland city par excellence not only in terms of its past and its history as a city founded in a swamp, but also in the present and its current culture as a rich source of metaphor and of psychological travail in which the metaphors are symptomatic of its mournful and melancholic psychogeopathology.