

x. *Signor Canaletto's Crocodile*

*(Canaletto, The San Marco Basin
with the Bucintoro on Ascension Day.)*



On Ascension Day each year,
to honour battles gloriously won,
the Bucindoro and its passengers appear
to re-enact, with due solemnity,
the betrothal of the city and the sea.

Beyond the gilded helm
the wedding ring is cast. The deed is done.
It falls into the silver dappled realm
till once again its day of glory comes
with trumpet and the playful tap of drums.

On the evening of the holy festival,
fortune's gratified inheritors
bask with studied nonchalance,
till the water stirs
and I move, discreetly sculptural,
with an amiable glance
at the bemused paralysis
induced by my lazy withdrawal from view.

Behind the fluid masque of the lagoon,
these eyes watch all the sodden crevices
and every unclosed shutter, every stone
and every floating interest passing through.

Beneath the frayed and fractured quays
I see how the ebb and flow of the tide
mirrors the praise of the passing sun
for the beauty of our city-bride –
rising heavenward, radiant, at ease.

When you stood high above Jerusalem
I could taste the longing in the tears
rolling down your face,
for I too weep with mournful care
for La Serenissima - beloved place,
whose beauty is beyond compare.

I weep amid the howls and jeers,
the wounds of shame
and bitter circumstance,
as public harmony
allows no reference
to my place in history
or my name.

Signor Canaletto has my measure.
I think we understand each other well.
When observed with sympathy and leisure
his art exerts a potent spell,
for he knows how to enhance
every watery expanse
with two eyes furtively at play -
not too near and not too far away.

My place in Signor Canaletto's high esteem
has created quite a stir
and evokes the mysteries of carnival
where masques are never what they seem.

Mine is the most inscrutable of all,
yet masques are but a signature
a ripple on a proud reality
where much has been achieved.

This city's high repute in far off lands,
inspires a litany of gratitude.
We salute those nimble hands
who have conceived
countless works of music and the arts
and we must certainly include

heroic travellers to distant parts.
(Signor Polo comes to mind.)

Lets not forget, in these enlightened days,
Signor Casanova and his praise
of femininity.
(I know him well
and, if you are inclined,
there is some possibility
of gentlemanly conversation.)

His memoirs tell
how Signor Casanova overcame
(not unlike yourself) the pain
of uninvited notoriety.

He admires your reputation
with our older families
whose children can be carried off
by plagues and other tragedies,
imperilling the future of the line.

They pray with heartfelt piety,
for you to bless their married state
with the joyful sign
of fruitfulness – well above
what is required.

And yet, though much to be desired,
without due vigilance,
fecundity is sure to dissipate
the family inheritance.

So gentlefolk of high repute
will always passionately pray,
that a child of meagre expectations
might renounce the low temptations
of the world and leave to others the pursuit
of earthly gain and harmless play.

I watch their delicate design
unfolding like a pirouette
as, with serene and smiling etiquette,
they eat and drink your bread and wine.