

***Entrevue* and Venice: Integration of Henri de Régnier s Two Sides and Correspondence of Mirrors**

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ABSTRACT

I have taken up Henri de Régnier s *Entrevue*, a masterpiece whose story unravels in Venice, and by pointing out several interesting points to be found in this French novel, I have attempted to show that its relationship to this Italian city is inseparably close.

Régnier loved both the contemporary Venice and the Venice of the eighteenth century. Quite interestingly, however, these two sides of his are split and reunited in *Entrevue*. The narrator of this novel, a twentieth-century Frenchman who experiences a series of supernatural occurrences, keeps emphasizing his normality, and the normality, in his opinion, resides in his contentment with the contemporary Venice without recourse to its romantic past. This emphasis on the narrators normality is attributable to Régniers strategy to prevent the readers incredulity in the mysterious story

by making the narrator disbelieve what he encounters.

Régnier's love of eighteenth-century Venice, on the other hand, is also apparent in this novel. The novel is, in fact, saturated with eighteenth-century Venice: a long-dead Venetian aristocrat of the eighteenth century develops a mysterious relationship with the narrator; a series of bizarre events take place in an eighteenth-century Venetian apartment gorgeously decorated by the aristocrat; and there is also an important minor character of a Venetian, a kind of magician who lives like an eighteenth-century Venetian.

Introduced to the eighteenth-century apartment by this Venetian lover of occultism and living there alone, the narrator encounters its original owner, the eighteenth-century aristocrat, through the large looking glass fixed on a false door in the salon of the apartment. Structurally and metaphorically, it is by means of this mirror that Régnier's love of the contemporary Venice encounters and reunites with his love of eighteenth-century Venice.

We find the living and the present on one side of this mirror, while finding the dead and the past on the other side. This, however, is not the only example of symmetry and correspondence found in this novel. There are also others: the symmetry and correspondence between the Venetian architecture and its thousand images reflected in the water mirrors of its lagoons and canals; those between the living room, where the narrator experiences the supernatural, and its reflection in the large mirror, which is interestingly represented as a kind of water mirror; and those between the glass showcase from which the bust of the eighteenth-century aristocrat disappears and

the living room, which functions as a kind of glass showcase where the narrator is psychologically confined. Most of all, the story reaches its climax during a night in a microcosm of the living room in which the large water mirror of the looking glass is reflecting hundreds of small earthenware which are themselves reflecting candle lights, while at the same time this small cosmos lies in a macrocosm which is made up of thousands of the Venetian architecture with their reflections scintillating in the lagoons and canals under the moon.

Thus we can say that *Entrevue* is a novel inseparably related to Venice in two respects: firstly, it can only be written by a writer who is familiar both with the contemporary Venice and the Venice of the eighteenth century, and secondly, in no other city is more effectively presented the correspondence between a macrocosm formed by Venice with its water mirrors of lagoons and canals and a microcosm formed by the living room with its water mirror of the large looking glass.