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TRACING WASTE
ENVISIONING SUSTAINABILITY
Reflections on Tourism and Community Practices
for Collective Futures

edited by
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foreword
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SECTION I: Tracing Waste in Tourist Destinations

The first section examines to what extent the tourism industry contributes to waste production not only in terms of residual materials, but also as landscapes, identities, narratives, and language barriers. The chapters collected under this section analyse diverse territories - from the Venetian Lagoon to the North-East Alps, moving also through urban and suburban contexts - in order to reveal how extractive economies, aesthetic commodification, and circular narratives of sustainability often conceal new forms of exploitation. By merging artistic, narrative, sociological, translation and ecological perspectives, this first part of the volume maps the systemic contradictions of tourism's promise of renewal, showing how the rhetoric of "sustainability" may reproduce sometimes, rather than overcome, the same logic of waste.

1. Reshaping Wastelands: Contemporary Representations and Accounts from the Venetian Lagoon

Francesca Pangallo

Abstract:

This chapter examines how Venice and its lagoon are represented in contemporary literary narratives, often in contrast to the promotional and tourist imagery associated with the city. Using the concept of *wasteland* as a cultural and literary reference, the chapter first examines T. S. Eliot's depiction of desolate land (1922) in a post-World War context, tracing how it has evolved into a major cultural touchstone, informing subsequent reinterpretations of the term. This includes the documentary *Waste Land* (2010), in which disposable waste is transformed into art both physically and symbolically, exemplifying contemporary understandings of *wastelands* shaped by environmental crises and Anthropocene dynamics. Drawing on Armiero's concept of the *Wasteocene* (2021) and other scholarship in the Environmental Humanities, the analysis then turns to contemporary narratives and significant events located in the Venetian lagoon. Two major trends in tourist perception are examined: the pursuit of authenticity, central to the visitor experience, and the fascination with collapse, exemplified by scenarios of Venice sinking underwater, both of which inspire urgency to visit. Through these perspectives, literary representations of the lagoon are read as wastelands – spaces where cultural, ecological, and social dynamics intersect, often absent or distorted in tourist narratives. This chapter ultimately presents Venice not merely as an idyllic or deteriorating site, but as a complex, multifaceted territory, where literature illuminates the city's ecological fragility, social tensions, and broader challenges for contemporary humanity.

Keywords: Venice, Venetian Lagoon, Wasteland, Waste, Contemporary Literature, Environmental Humanities, Italian Literature, Tourism, Tourist Storytelling, Tourist Communication.

“Unreal city,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn”

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*,
vv. 60-61, 1922.

1.1 Introduction: what is a “wasteland” and how it applies to present scenarios

The term *wasteland* is, in many respects, inherently poetic: while its primary definition conveys a geological or utilitarian meaning, referring to a desert (WASTELAND Synonyms: 17 Similar Words | Merriam-Webster Thesaurus) or to a devastated, uncultivated land (WASTELAND Definition & Meaning | Dictionary.com), it also carries remarkable literary resonance and allegorical potential. To describe a term as “poetic” implies that it is not only evocative, but also multi-layered and symbolically charged. Supporting this interpretation of the term, we might consider how most readers would not associate this word with a specific location (on Google Maps, for example), but rather with T. S. Eliot’s iconic poem *The Waste Land* (1922). In modern and contemporary discourse, the meaning of *wasteland* has further evolved from these literary origins, acquiring historical and metaphorical significance within ongoing debates on humanity’s global challenges. My line of inquiry employs the term *wasteland* as a critical lens through which to examine contemporary representations of the Venetian lagoon in Italian 20th and 21st century literature. The purpose is to monitor the evolution of this unique cultural landscape when depicted as a land rendered desolate

due to human industrial intervention, mass tourism, and climate change. Ultimately, the main goal is to critically engage with contemporary literary portraits of Venice and its lagoon, in order to question and unmask the contradictions often inherent in tourist-driven narratives.

Before dealing with the authors and literary accounts selected for this research, I will briefly discuss two illustrative examples of the *wasteland* concept from fictional and artistic perspectives, placing them in the context of current debates in Environmental Humanities. This premise serves to establish a broader critical framework for those who are approaching these themes for the first time, and to highlight the semantic range and cultural influence of the term *wasteland* itself to justify its use as a category for investigation. Ultimately, this introduction provides an overview on how the term *wasteland* functions as a compelling, allegorical device for interpreting ecological crisis, historical trauma, and overall, the fractured relationship between humans and the natural world.

1.1.1 *Wasteland as a literary landscape*

As briefly mentioned, one of the most significant references highlighting the multiple uses, meanings, and connotations of the term *wasteland* can be found in the homonymous poem by Thomas Stearns Eliot: *The Waste Land* was first published in October 1922 in the inaugural issue of the journal *The Criterion* (Melchionda, 1976: 7; Lane, 2022) – a quarterly British magazine edited by Eliot himself.¹ The poem's influence reached well be-

¹ “*The Criterion*, which I edited throughout the whole seventeen years during which it appeared, was founded by (Lilian) Lady Rothermere at the end of 1921: in the first number appeared *The Waste Land*.” T.S. Eliot's *Preface* to the magazine's Collected Edition (1922-1939), available in a digitalized edition on *The Internet Archive* library: <https://archive.org/details/criterion19221930007unse/page/n7/mode/1up> (Last access: July 23rd, 2025).

yond the First Post-war period, resonating throughout the entire 20th century, especially after the Second World War. Although the word *wasteland* never appears in the body of Eliot's poem – neither in its compound nor separated form – its presence is nonetheless evoked throughout: from the epigraph to the final section, the poem immerses the reader in a constellation of scenes and symbols that conjure what might be termed *wastelanding* – a landscape not only marked by ruin, but also engaged in an ongoing process of fragmentation and decline.

Scholars who have sought thematic or formal unity in Eliot's work seem to agree that despite the diversity of the *fragments* (as Ezra Pound referred to the poem's lines due to the high number of scenes) and the reader's sense of disorientation, the main thrust of Eliot's argument is that both hope and renovation are lost for the world and its living creatures:

L'unità del poema è stata cercata a lungo a livello tematico. Si può dire anzi che un momento essenziale della critica eliotiana vecchia e nuova sia costituito dall'identificazione del tema o dei temi di base e dalla valutazione della loro portata in vista della comprensione totale dell'opera. [...]. L'enunciato di base del poema è che *tutta* la Terra, scenario di *tutta* la Storia, ha perso la sua capacità generativa, è inaridita. La condizione del suolo è figura fedele dei personaggi che vi si aggirano. (Melchionda, 1976: 17, emphasis in the original)

One of the most explicitly developed themes central to the poem (and one that echoes well with the multifaceted connotations of the word *wasteland*) is death. Two of the five sections have titles referring directly to mortality and loss.² Moreover, the spectres of Europe's devastation following the First World War weigh on Eliot's verses, even those which adopt a Biblical or classicist tone. The poem, largely studied for its intertextual richness, is full of allusions and implicit quotations from many

² I refer in detail to the following section titles: "The Burial of the Dead" (41), and "Death by Water" (53).

other relevant authors, most included in what Harold Bloom defined as the “Western canon” (1994). While Eliot’s sources are key to the Western literary tradition, they do not all originate from the work’s period of publication. Among the figures whose voices echo throughout the poem are Geoffrey Chaucer, Dante Alighieri, and William Shakespeare. These references serve not merely as literary homage, but as vital components in Eliot’s portrayal of the spiritual and existential wasteland of the modern world.

Thanks to T. S. Eliot’s poem, and to his complex and critical reworking of scenes drawn from a wide intertextual tradition, the concept of the *wasteland* in twentieth-century Western literature has come to denote more than a site of physical desolation or death. Conditioned by the historical moment of its emergence, it has assumed the quality of an affection: an atmosphere engaged with cultural and existential significance. In Eliot’s poetics, *wastelanding* may manifest as an urban condition (ll. 60–76), a temporal rupture (ll. 1–18), or a state of psychological dislocation (ll. 360–366), extending its resonance beyond the text and into the critical lexicon of modernity.

1.1.2 *Wasteland as an artistic laboratory*

The second example originates from the film industry: the documentary *Waste Land* (2010) - *Lixo Extraordinário*, in Portuguese – directed by Lucy Walker, was filmed in Jardim Gramacho, a neighbourhood north of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where until 2012 one of the largest landfills in the world was located. The film follows Brazilian artist and photographer Vik Muniz as he interacts with a team of waste recycling collectors – *catadores* in the movie – who vary in age, sex, and personal background. Through a series of interviews and collaborative art projects, Muniz shares their stories as individuals while inviting reflection on what their job means to them,

as well as focusing on the broader implications of their work as members of the working class and as persons with dignity, agency, and resilience.

At the beginning of film, Muniz explains that at this stage of his career, after some previous experiments in mixing materials and social projects for art purposes,³ he feels the need to challenge himself, claiming that his purpose as an artist should “be able to change the life of a group of people, with the same materials that they deal with every day.” (Muniz in Walker, 2010: 7’15”). Together with the *catadores*, Muniz begins a collaborative project where he photographs each individual in a pose that reflects their personality and story. Together they then reproduce each photograph on a large-scale portrait, where the images are then filled with residual waste of all sorts: glass, metals, PVC, and more. This process transforms the discarded materials into an artistic medium, making the subjects co-creators, reframing both the concept of waste and those who manage it.

The choice of waste as the primary medium in the collaborative process leads the viewer to reflect on the landfill workers’ social status, and more generally on how their living conditions are perceived. Jardim Gramacho is portrayed not simply as a dump site, but as a wasteland in an Eliotian sense: a no man’s land, inhabited by people who are often regarded from an external perspective as ‘disposable’, as ‘lost souls’. Before Muniz’s involvement, the community of waste pickers and the ACAMJG association - “Associação dos Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano de Jardim Gramacho” - had mostly remained invisible, despite their dignity, wisdom, and their essential contribution to recycling and environmental sustainability of their land.

³ (see the portraits from the *Sugar Children Series*, 1996 - for reference: Vik Muniz | Valentina, The Fastest | The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

1.1.3 *Wasteland as a place of relationships and individual crisis*

The conditions experienced by Rio's *catadores*, together with their stories (including the initial interest Muniz showed in them) represent an apt, impactful example of what scholar Marco Armiero would ten years later call "wasting relationships":

Waste as a relation (wasting) *produces* the targeted community rather than solely selecting it as the ideal place for an unwanted facility [...]. The production of waste is connected to the production of the other, or the outside, and of the "us." [...] Othering means to change the "nature" of the other while simultaneously using it to preserve a privilege. (Armiero, 2021: 2, emphasis in the original)

For Armiero, waste becomes the element through which the mechanisms of capitalist and neo-colonialist exploitation are revealed, mechanisms which renders both the planet and its living beings disposable for the benefit of a small, wealthy – and predominantly white – minority: "through the Wasteocene, I intend to stress the contaminated nature of capitalism and its endurance within the texture of life" (Armiero 2021: 10). Later in the book, Armiero directly mentions and discusses the film *Waste Land*. Despite acknowledging the limitations and controversies of some of its dynamics, pointed out by other scholars (see: Mil- lar 2018 and Kantaris 2016, in Armiero, 2021: 51), the author recognises Muniz's initiative as "a beautiful act of resistance against the Wasteocene" (51), not only because of its ripple effect on the community, but on a deeper level due to its symbolic reversal of the dominant logic of disposability:

As the Wasteocene imposes that these people are garbage, Muniz's project appropriates this assumption and overturns it. The powerful portraits of those *catadores* are made of recycled materials but they are not garbage at all; actually, one of them was sold in an auction in London, while altogether they became an extremely successful exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio. The selling of the

portraits and the prizes received for the movie helped the association of waste pickers to realize some of their objectives, including the acquisition of some trucks and the creation of a public library in the favela. However, more than for the material support for the catadores, I believe that Muniz's project was successful in challenging the main pillar of the Wasteocene, that is, the othering regime which produces worthless people who not only work with waste but are deemed waste themselves. [...] The exhibition at the Modern Art Museum in Rio de Janeiro is an occupation of the cultural space of the city; for the catadores it was the first time they set foot in a museum and they did so through both their portraits and their bodies. (Armiero, 2021: 51-52)

Armiero's Wasteocene description resonates with Ernesto De Martino's formula "*crisi della presenza*" (1959) – *crisis of presence* in English (De Martino 2015: 85) – recently used by scholar Federico Luisetti to reflect on earth-beings' legal status during the climate emergency (2023). De Martino originally used this formula in the 1960s to describe how, in certain rural regions of Southern Italy (specifically Lucania, which today largely corresponds to the Basilicata region), communities affected by natural and existential trauma responded through practices such as magic, spells, and trance states as methods to cope. The *crisis of presence* is essentially a breakdown of an individual's sense of self, identity, and agency in the face of overwhelming cultural or existential pressures.

One could argue that the community of *catadores* in Walker's documentary have a similar experience: in the precarious living conditions of the favelas, as the workers struggle with both material deprivation and the stigmatizing gaze of society, the art-making works as a magical practice of empowerment and relief, providing support for the difficulties encountered in daily life at the landfill. Scenes illustrate how pickers are aware of the social stigma attached to their work: one character emphasizes moments such as riding the bus as a constant reminder of her disturbing

work conditions, and how other passengers perceive her appearance (Magna de França Santos in Walker, 2010: 39'26''). Early on in the project, another character expresses her anxiety and pain in response to the idea of going back to work as a *catadora* once the portraits are completed, and asks Muniz and his staff if they can employ her, even with a small salary, so she can keep working with them rather than going back to the dump (Isis Rodrigues Garros in Walker, 2010: 1h 8'1''). Yet, these feelings of shame and invisibility coexist with a sense of pride in their work, given that their money is earned in an honest way. Often, pickers arrive at Jardim Gramacho after terrible family tragedies, and see their work not only as decent but also as a morally preferable alternative to drug trafficking or prostitution – often constituting the only other viable options for survival in such environments.

The *crisis of presence* is well demonstrated here as a response to Armiero's *wasting relationship* dynamics, or even as a consequence of that mechanism, with humans and communities being caught in the Wasteocene's vortex. As briefly mentioned earlier, Professor Federico Luisetti has built on De Martino's formula to express a new, updated feeling of existential crisis, currently linked to climate change:

My thesis is that the implosion of the sense of reality and individuality captured by De Martino in post-World War II Italy has now escalated into a geohistorical dimension: climate change and the environmental catastrophe have caused a crisis of presence of planetary proportions, which is reframing the experience of being a subject in the age of global ecological disruption. (Luisetti, 2023: 2)

It is possible to see how the sense of desolation and crisis expressed by Eliot's *Waste Land* aligns with De Martino's post-WWII *crisis of presence*, and ultimately with Luisetti's statement. A century earlier, Eliot's poem had already extended the feeling of crises and collapse (a feeling that cities, cultures, nature and all aspects of human society endured after WWI) to a *geohistor-*

ical dimension. Ultimately, between Eliot's poem and Muniz's project, it is possible to spot how the term *wasteland* evolved into a metaphor not only for material decay and spiritual emptiness, but also as a metaphor for "global ecological disruption" (Luisetti, 2023: 2). The word "waste-land" intertwines the meaning of "waste" as both desolate and disposable garbage, and the meaning of "land" as a specific location (Jardim Gramacho) that reflects broader environmental and social issues such as pollution, displacement, war, and systemic marginalisation.

From a humanities and cultural perspective, *wasteland* has thus become an increasingly layered and paradoxical concept: it addresses the absence of life, meaning the destruction of urban and human landscapes due to belligerent actions (Eliot), but also the presence of both causes and effects related to global issues and environmental disasters (Luisetti). It focuses on the collective dimension of injustice established by the Wasteocene (Armiero), while including a strong sense of individual deadlock and impasse (De Martino) due to the contemporary scenario and the transformation of society.

Keeping in mind these various meanings and circumstances surrounding the term *wasteland*, the next section will present it as a semantic and literary category applicable to a specific site of interest: the city of Venice and its lagoon. Through a selection of narrative representations of the Venetian environment from contemporary literature, I will argue how the lagoon landscape and the so-called "City of Water" represent paradigmatic examples of contemporary *wastelands*. This interpretation contrasts sharply with the prevailing tourist imagery of Venice, which continues to promote a romanticised and commodified vision. Ultimately, this research effort is addressed to present alternatives to dominant narratives, proposing that tourist-driven storytelling itself can become a *wastelanding* mechanism: by producing and promoting appeal at all costs, it contributes to the erosion of local identity, the displacement of communities, and the transforma-

tion of cultural sites into desolate spaces filled with pollution, unaffordable housing, and souvenir shops.

1.2 The city of unique, wasteful experiences

There have been countless representations of Venice in literature, arts, and film throughout history. More recently, the issue of tourism has been included more frequently in narratives and cultural activity, often representing a platform for debate rather than merely presenting a background issue. As the number of daily visitors to Venice keeps increasing while the number of residents declines (see § 3.1, Baravalle: 74), many authors, artists, and activists have been monitoring the inevitable change of the city-landscape, often denouncing the situation through acts of public resistance⁴ and proposing alternative accounts⁵ which focus on the authenticity and ‘true calling’ of the Lagoon city – being a small yet very liveable urban centre – in contrast to the glazed, artificial scene created for visitors and profit. One element often attributed to tourists’ perception of Venice is how they find ordinary, everyday activities to be fascinating, and think of everything as being extraordinary: canals, bridges, wells, houses and buildings, colours or materials – collectively, it all communicates uniqueness and ‘bizarreness’ at the same time. As proof of this tourist craving for uniqueness, it is significant that the official municipality’s tourist website is called “Venezia é Unica”: Venice is *unique* (<https://www.veneziaunica.it/it>).

⁴ See, for example, the protests for the wedding of Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sanchez, involving the actions and performances of the group “Extinction Rebellion Venezia” and the initiatives and the town meetings organized by the local committee “No space for Bezos”.

⁵ See, for example, the movies *Molecole* (2020) and *Welcome Venice* (2021) by Andrea Segre, or *Cielo aperto* (2023) by Ruggero Romano. For further references within this volume, see Baravalle: 84–85.

It is true that as tourists, the hope and craving for authenticity has become a driving factor in choosing the type of place, food, or activity to experience (see § 8.2.2, De Luca-Ferri: 194-197). However, in an urban environment where every single corner or business has been devoted to profit, expectations of authenticity are bound to remain unmet. In his most recent novel, writer Tiziano Scarpa expresses this genuine feeling from an unusual perspective: a Venetian citizen - born and raised in one of the most tourist-saturated destinations worldwide - abroad for vacation, as a visitor himself:

I turisti sono pochissimi. E così abbiamo l'illusione di aver trovato un posto in disparte, più autentico, meno sdato [*sic*] e anche meno sporto sulle nostre aspettative: ciò che viviamo in questa spiaggetta non è stato organizzato per compiacere noi turisti, offrendoci ciò che i greci pensano possa far piacere agli stranieri, ma qualcosa che funziona così di per sé e casomai, se capita, può accogliere anche ciò che non c'entra, ciò che non era previsto: noi. I turisti sperano sempre di trovare qualcosa che non li prevedeva, un posto, una situazione *tourist free*, e di entrarci dentro, di viverla. (Scarpa, 2023: 86)

In this quote, Scarpa articulates this contradiction of wanting to feel included – to have a pleasurable experience while away from home – whilst reflecting that a certain level of discomfort, or an unexpected event, can enormously benefit a visitor's experience. This dynamic fits well into an example of storytelling: the stories that one is more eager to share on social media are often about the uniqueness of places, found outside the usual tourist routes. This attitude is especially encouraged in a city like Venice, where the maze-like geometry of its canals and *calli*, the silent atmosphere at night, and many other common features are seen as exceptional elements by visitors, even if they are normal urban features for residents.

This type of altered, conflicted fascination is visible for example in the overview of experiences in Venice offered through Airbnb (<https://www.airbnb.com/s/Venice--Italy/experiences>), where

in order to be memorable and authentic (see § 2.1, Armano: 48-50), any activity package stresses the “local” element as being unique and privileged: the “hidden canals”, “secret gardens”, “small groups/guided-tour only”, and “authentic glass-making classes” constitute nowadays a distinctly average and ‘synthetic’ visitor experience. How can both tourist communication and proposed tourist experiences form the basis of a ‘truthful’ visit to the lagoon city, without falling into predictable stereotypes? Literature has definitely engaged with this question, presenting some significant ideas that depict extreme expectations of authenticity.

1.2.1 Waste collection: tourist or local business?

Benvenuti a Ultra-Venezia is a fictional, dystopian essay authored again by Tiziano Scarpa (2023b). In this literary piece, which opens the Iperborea “Passenger” volume about Venice (Scarpa *et. Al.*, 2023), the discussion starts openly with concern for over-tourism within the city’s historic centre. A first-person narrator acts as a guide around the lagoon for a group of rich, important guests, explaining the problems of urban life in Venice and what surviving in such a landscape means, starting with its altered social profile:

Abbiamo raggiunto una soglia epocale: i visitatori quotidiani sono pari agli abitanti stabili. [...] E che cosa sono, i turisti? La parte che guarda una città, la fotografa e la riflette come uno specchio. C’è Venezia, gli abitanti; e c’è Meta-Venezia, i turisti. Due parti di un organismo simbiotico, in cui azione e immaginazione riflessa convivono. Considerate questo corpo demografico, fatto per metà di muscoli e ossa, e per l’altra metà di grappoli d’occhi e smartphone. Possiamo ancora chiamarlo corpo? (Scarpa, 2023b: 10)

In this narrative, while the purpose is still to demonstrate the remarkable and dramatic uniqueness of Venice through its canals and islands, the narrator proposes an “exceptional guided tour”

[it. “una guida d’eccezione”] (Scarpa, 2023b: 9) of a very unusual and well-hidden local site: the Veritas⁶ dump centres of the Municipality of Venice, one located at Sacca San Biagio – a part of Sacca Fisola Island (Giudecca, Venice) – and the other in Fusina (Marghera), on the mainland. “Ultra-Venezia” is the place where everything, especially the tourist presence, is turned into a *wasteland* in a literal yet inverse sense: not a landfill, but a place that survives thanks to garbage production and accumulation. Not a poor, desolate land, but rather an intriguing opportunity for business:

Saltiamo il fosso, evolviamoci: la fabbrica dei forestieri deve diventare l’industria della produzione turistica di rifiuti. Venezia, e con lei l’Italia, non può immalinconirsi nella nostalgia del suo passato industriale. Noi siamo ancora una potenza che fabbrica, che produce! [...] Allevare turisti, come pesci attirati in laguna: vale a dire allevare produttori di rifiuti. (Scarpa, 2023b: 25)

Whether tourists or citizens like it or not, Scarpa’s fictional guided tour suggests that even with the complete transformation of Venice into what the author defines as “Meta-Venice” – an ecosystem skewed towards *reflection* (tourists) rather than *action* (citizens) – the commercial aspect of Venice, historically a “business-city” [it. “città-azienda”] (Scarpa, 2023 b: 10), will never decrease. The city will only change its modes of production, investing in a different, but still unique, product: residual waste. “Ultra-Venezia” provides readers with a vision that strongly contrasts with the most frequent images shown on promotional campaigns or social media about the city of Venice. In this case, the use of waste as a narrative tool further develops connections with and implications for a real, practical challenge in the city. The presence of tourists produces a daily quantity of garbage that has an impact on both locals’ and visitors’ perspectives, especially when looking at how waste collection is carried out in

⁶ See: Veritas Group: Waste Management and Water Services in Veneto: [Gruppo Veritas](#) (Last access: July 25th, 2025).

Venice – unique due to the city's geographic features. Waste collectors go door to door, six days a week, to pick up both recycled and general waste. There are several rules to adhere to in terms of recycling and disposing of garbage bags in the historic centre, like in every other urban environment. In Venice, however, a rigid schedule and timetable for pickup and street cleaning is employed to reduce the accumulation of garbage and to limit infestations of animals such as seagulls, pigeons, and rats.

The waste collection process in Venice also provided a research interest for writer and photographer Andrea Semplici. In his latest publication, titled *MaterVenezia. Racconto di due città* (2024), Semplici attempts to prove how the cities of Venice and Matera – the former in the North and the latter in the South (one city being based on water and the other being made out of stones) – share more stories and features than one can imagine. Currently, in both places, tourism represents simultaneously the strongest attraction and the most significant threat to their unique urban setting and hybrid relationship with the natural ecosystem in which they are located. Semplici's perception of waste collection in Venice apparently clashes with the simple assumption 'that tourists leave trash everywhere': in the book, he actually claims the opposite: that Venice is a very clean city compared to many other urban environments in Italy. The only plausible evidence for such a statement might derive not from the waste-maker's perspective, as Scarpa presents (the tourist view), but from the waste collector, the "spazzino". In Semplici's narrative-reportage, Venice becomes a virtuous example of a clean city through an understanding and acknowledgement of the difficult and meticulous working system undertaken by pickers and street cleaners (both meanings are included in the local term *spazzino*). In the quote below, Semplici describes a part of his waste-related research, following the character of Grazia, one of the 84 women waste-collectors (Semplici, 2024: 37) currently hired by the local waste-management company "Veritas":

Mestiere di forza, lo spazzino. E qui sei a Venezia: ci vogliono braccia, gambe, ostinazione, una buona destrezza, molta pazienza. Ho una sensazione: che gli spazzini siano tutti belli, giovani, forti, allegri. Ne ho incontrati tanti nei miei giorni veneziani. Alle sei del mattino mi sono sembrati i soli abitanti della città.

Si comincia a spazzare. Grazia prepara la scopa di saggina. La liscia, ne allunga gli "stecchi", li allinea. Mi fa vedere il movimento che il corpo deve fare. L'arco che la scopa deve percorrere per non lasciare indietro nemmeno una cartaccia, nemmeno la polvere. Fa dei mucchi a ogni angolo. Bisogna ripassare a raccogliarli. [...]. Saluta i negozianti che stanno aprendo bottega. Si chiamano per nome "Ciao, Davide". "Ciao, Grazia". Le consegnano i rifiuti depositandoli nel carrello. [...] Penso che a Matera, città piccola, non conosco il nome di chi pulisce il mio vicolo. Viva il paese di Venezia. (Semplici, 2024: 37)

From Semplici's portrait, it feels possible to pose a contrast to Venice's 'wastelanding' processes by depicting (or supporting) this safe space, where human relationships can still be saved, and the complete transformation of the city into a tourist money-making trap - or into a waste-making business, as suggested in Scarpa's short story - can be prevented, with a place of mutual support and quiet living taking its place. The *crisis of presence* that Venetian residents are experiencing due to overtourism could be then contained by collective actions, or *commoning practices*, as per Armiero's contribution, opposed to 'wasting' relationships:

[...] as my focus is on wasting rather than waste, I maintain that commoning is the antidote. By "commoning" I mean the ensemble of socio-ecological practices which (re) produce commons, transforming it from a "thing" into a collective practice, a relationship. [...] I argue that commoning is to (re)production through sharing as wasting is to extraction through othering. In other words, while wasting relationships are based on consuming and "other- ing," that is, on sorting out what and who is waste, commoning practices are based on reproducing resources and communities. (Armiero 2021: 13)

1.2.2 *Wasteland as utopia*

An excellent example of commoning practices in contemporary Venice is represented by the case of *Poveglia per tutti*: the true story of an island of the Venetian lagoon, Poveglia, that was put up for sale by auction in 2014 by the local state property administration, and a group of Venetian citizens. The group created a committee *Poveglia per tutti* ("Poveglia for all") and collected money to make an offer to manage the island, to prevent it from becoming private property and to keep it as a public space for locals (Cavallo and Visentin, 2021). The case raised international attention at the time (Davies 2014), and again recently (Nadeau, 2025). After more than 10 years of political neglect, court appeals, and delayed decisions by the local administration, on July 2nd, 2025, the management of Poveglia island was officially assigned to the association *Poveglia per tutti* for the next six years, with the aim of creating a park and a space accessible for all citizens (Agenzia del Demanio - Venezia: l'Isola di Poveglia in concessione all'Associazione Poveglia per tutti).

Poveglia, (an actual *wasteland*, as the island was abandoned during the 1960s), thanks to the private initiative and efforts of Venetian residents, will now benefit from a concrete plan to guarantee its maintenance and liveability, becoming a symbol of Armiero's *commoning* and social action within the Venetian lagoon. The case of Poveglia was of widespread interest, as the whole dynamic upholds a powerful storytelling appeal. From a narrative perspective, Poveglia's hardships and ultimate happy ending perfectly follows the pattern of Christopher Vogler's "hero's journey" (1992, 2007).⁷ The symbolic weight of the actions and events linked to *Poveglia per tutti*'s committee are not part of what Vogler labels as the "Ordinary World" – in this context, where the dominant *status quo* operates, Poveglia would have been sold out to private

⁷ As further reference, note that Vogler was respectively influenced by Joseph Campbell's studies (who was in turn inspired by Jungian archetypes) on the monomyths (Campbell, 1949).

investors. This happened to other islands of the Venetian lagoon's archipelago, such as Sacca Sessola and San Clemente, for example (see Mantegoli, 2023: 156-157). Instead, the residents' calls to action to save Poveglia belong to Vogler's "Special World" – an extraordinary story in which the hero needs to change in order to change the world too, as the only way to save themselves and fulfil their destiny. Unlike traditional tourist narratives, however, the outcome of Poveglia's story is a positive one due to the difficulties encountered and overcome by the local community, who unified to collect money and (above all) preserve cultural identity as a form of resistance to the politics of overtourism within public and private investments.

The removal of disturbing elements and hardships in favour of displaying an untouched, decadent beauty – which underpins Venice's tourist image – actually prevents visitors from witnessing the complexity involved in living in such a unique city, as well as removing the collective richness that accompanies it. Venice could be eventually narrated not by focusing on the economic perspective, but by enhancing the human element that characterises and protects the true authenticity of the city. From Scarpa's dystopia, all the way to Poveglia's utopia, the *wasteland* dimension is a key image of both degradation and emancipation. In these examples – whether they are fictional or factual – Venice and its islands share an element of crisis that ties together all *wastelanding* features mentioned above. The place represents not only an evocative, symbolic landscape in its desolation, but also a place of relationship and individual commitment, emerging as a result of the dire circumstances and emergency situation which affects the lagoon ecosystem.

1.3 The collapse of an artificial ecosystem

The accounts mentioned in the previous paragraphs involve both environmental features (lagoon topography, waste

pollution) and cultural traits (resident identity, collectives vs overtourism) that are linked to active wastelanding processes in contemporary Venice and its lagoon. From a communication perspective, referring to Venice as an *ecosystem* in recent public discourse⁸ is relevant, as it acknowledges the presence of both human and non-human subjects⁹ as fundamental agents. Stones, water, wood, specific flora and fauna, and of course human intervention, have created a unique landscape over the centuries, which now requires protection from future dangers such as (primarily) global warming. Literature has also been investigating the alterations and transformation of the Venetian lagoon environment in relation to climate change and industrialisation processes: it is from these narratives' perspectives that new declinations of the wasteland concept within the Venice lagoon ecosystem emerge, especially in connection with the phenomenon of the high tide.

The idea that the city of Venice can disappear underwater is an appalling (and yet fascinating) scenario from fictional, scientific, and tourism perspectives. A trend known as *last-tourism destination*, or *last-chance tourism* – a definition that originally emerged in the 2000s with the increasing demand for visiting glaciers in the Arctic regions before they melt (see Lemelin *et. al.*, 2012) – has also impacted the Venetian lagoon, signalling it as a place to visit urgently – not only because of its uniqueness, but because of its fragility. Given the present threat of global warming, the risk of the city sinking due to the sea levels rising is becoming less of an improbable catastrophe – as a collateral, controversial effect, this environmental emergency has been attracting

⁸ As a reference, see the project “Ecosistema futuro” launched in S. Marco Square, Venice, on May 14th, 2025 within the Future Day Festival: Future Day 2025. Mettere il futuro al centro del dibattito pubblico, politico e culturale (Last Access: Aug 10th, 2025).

⁹ About the juridical definition of non-human subject, or *earth-being*, see Luisetti, 2023: 10-14.

even more tourists, who are taking the opportunity to visit the ‘City on Water’ before it is too late.¹⁰ Last-chance tourism carries multiple paradoxes as a socio-economic phenomenon, the most important being a matter of sustainability, as “tourists travelling long distances [...] are disproportionately responsible (per capita) for increased emissions, which ironically impact the health of the very resource they are there to see” (Lemelin *et al.*, 2010: 488).

In recent years, the local administration in Venice has been taking action to safeguard the city from both natural and human agents. A key measure has been the installation of M.O.S.E. – *Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico* – a system of mobile dams for limiting the seawater level, active since October 2020. Another measure has been the introduction of paid entrance to the city,¹¹ adopted during spring of years 2024 and 2025, for any visitor coming from outside the Veneto region and not staying overnight in the city. Both these methods provoked widespread criticism from local and international communities, raising the critical question of what it means to protect an ecosystem in danger, and to what extent humans have interfered – or can keep interfering – with the natural development and conservation of such ecosystems.

While British author and journalist Simon Jenkins claimed in *The Guardian* that “some 49,000 remaining Venetian residents cannot possibly pay for the salvation of their city. Thirty million visitors to Venice can” (Jenkins, 2024), Venetian residents have positioned themselves mostly against this measure, especially in relation to the increasing housing request and the eviction pol-

¹⁰ See, for example, the ranking of the following last-chance tourist destinations compiled in 2024: Last Chance tourism: The trend that is pushing people to visit destinations likely to disappear | Times of India Travel (Last Access: Aug 7th, 2025).

¹¹ In Italian: “cda” – which stands for *contributo di accesso*. For further info, see: Cos’è il Contributo di accesso - Venezia Unica (Last Access: Aug 10th, 2025).

icy carried out by the administration. In a report provocatively titled ["Per Venezia ci vorrebbe un ticket d'uscita"](#), the association "Ocio" – *Osservatorio CivicO sulla casa e la residenza – Venezia*, denounced the contradictory attitude of the poor, unsupportive housing policy for residents compared to the intricate systems established for the entrance ticket fee payment and monitoring system:

Per quanto riguarda Venezia e lo spopolamento che la caratterizza, soprattutto delle famiglie più deboli economicamente, viene lecito chiedersi se l'imponente apparato di gestione e controllo di chi arriva in città messo a punto per il ticket d'ingresso non possa essere più utile se orientato a conoscere i motivi e le condizioni di chi dalla città è costretto ad andarsene: un monitoraggio della questione abitativa e della reale efficacia delle proprie politiche sulla casa aiuterebbe l'amministrazione a guardare in faccia la realtà e agire di conseguenza (Ocio, May 18th, 2024).

As for the functioning and maintenance of MO.S.E., writer and contributor Alessandro Marzo Magno offered a thorough overview of the controversial approaches and of the hydrogeological consequences spawned by human interventions in the lagoon since the 1200s. In his piece *Terra e acqua* (2023: 48-67), Marzo Magno claims that, despite the alleged innovative mechanism employed by MO.S.E. and the confidence placed in the project by politicians, the strategy of using artificial dams to preserve the lagoon area is nothing new. The idea has been around since the 16th century (2023: 57), given the risk of silt ingress caused by the nearby Alpine rivers (such as the Piave or Brenta), independently of the many interventions in and alterations to river beds that Venetians have been carrying out in the region. Today, the nature of the hydrogeological risk has changed: rivers are no longer as dangerous as the Adriatic sea currently is, representing the biggest danger to the lagoon (which explains the positioning of the MO.S.E. dams along the inlets between the islands of

Lido and Pellestrina, towards the open-sea side of the lagoon). However, the concept of safeguarding the natural shape of the lagoon environment has been pursued less for quite some time, according to Marzo Magno: “Dalla fine del Seicento la Laguna è ormai un ambiente artificiale, totalmente disegnato dall’intervento umano per bloccarne la naturale evoluzione” (60).

1.3.1 *Lagoon wastelands as science fiction*

The idea that Venice and its lagoon have been relentlessly losing their unique environmental features due to anthropic intervention through engineering and industrialisation processes brings us back to the *wasteland* scenario. A certain familiarity with this scenario and its language is due to science fiction. In his last academic work, exploring ecological features within contemporary Italian science fiction, Marco Malvestio dedicates the first part of his investigation to “Post-Boom Wastelands” (2025: 30-85), analysing to what extent “Italian science fiction interacts with the environmental and social changes” (2025: 23) occurring between the 1950s and the early 2010s. Interestingly, Malvestio identifies oil and waste production as the two most relevant factors influencing the way selected authors described wastelanding processes in the post WWII years – proving again, as for T.S. Eliot, how war represents the most essential condition for constructing both literal and metaphorical wasteland conditions.

As discussed earlier in response to Scarpa’s literary piece, in the same way in which disposable waste in Venice possesses narrative agency, oil and its related industrial production processes can be seen as active agents in the transformation of the Venetian lagoon into a post-war, factory dystopia.¹² The petro-

¹² As an image reference, see the introductory sequences to Andrea Segre’s documentary *Il pianeta in mare* (04’-06’-21’’), available on RayPlay: <https://www.raipplay.it/video/2024/03/il-pianeta-in-mare-fc0ea657-d5fc-4d2f-abdc-b711c64df245.html> (Last Access: Aug 11th, 2025).

chemical plant of Porto Marghera for example – today inactive – had previously shaped the lagoon environment and its iconic skyline since the early 1900s. This industrial development turned Venice into one of the most industrialised areas of Italy, which reached its apex during the 1960s, permanently altering the lagoon's biogeological shape and equilibrium (see § 3.2, Baravalle: 74 ff.). In particular, by excavating two water routes from the mainland into and through the lagoon – the Vittorio Emanuele canal from Marghera to the city of Venice, and the canale dei Petroli from Marghera to the Alberoni far end of the Lido island – the lagoon seabed has been subject to constant erosion and to the persistent draining operations employed as a countermeasure (see Longhin, 2022: 52-53).

The potential collapse of Venice due to high tide or the erosion of the lagoon seabed is deeply intertwined with human intervention in the lagoon's landscape. The effects and implications of such actions have been presented through literature by author and engineer Paolo Barbaro, who depicted a very science fiction influenced wasteland-lagoon in his short story collection *Ultime isole*. First published in 1992 for Marsilio, the collection has been re-published after 30 years by Wetlands books (2022) as part of the collection "Fondamenta", which includes titles that provide a "counter-narration of the city's past that illuminates its present, deconstructing the easy mask of myth and restoring awareness of how the margin is actually the founding stone of urban events" (<https://wetlandsbooks.com/en/catalogo>). In *Ultime isole*, fictional characters are always trying to change their own fates – and those of the lagoon space – by carrying out technical and engineering work over the same period of time identified in Malvestio's "Post-boom wastelands". The series of pioneering projects described in Barbaro's stories were, in the 1990s, considered pure science-fiction madness, even if they had their basis in fact: a good example can be found in the short story *Isola delle Polveri*, the second work in the collection. In this account, the

situation is the same as for today's 'last-chance tourism': Venice is sinking, and therefore the urgency of saving the lagoon archipelago becomes a great challenge to be embraced.

Venezia affonda – dicono in giro per il mondo – duecento isole con tutte le loro bellezze, eccetera, bisogna intervenire. 'Operazione in laguna/Salvare un'isola' è l'idea delle Grandi Imprese. E noi eccoci qui. 'Cominciare con un'isola, una sola, ma cominciare' (Barbaro, 2022: 77).

This story recounts the attempt to save the island Poveglia (called "Isola delle Polveri" in the narration) by raising its foundations with a vertical countermovement of the lagoon floor from below. Today, thanks to an article submitted by Barbaro himself and published in the national newspaper *La Stampa* on November 8th, 1989, we know that a similar experiment was actually conducted on Poveglia, as the island was "lifted up by 10 centimetres, through injections of cement" (It. "alzata di 10 centimetri con iniezioni di cemento". Barbaro, 1989). Tiziano Scarpa, in the essay *La città sospesa* (which serves as the introduction to Barbaro's collection in the 2022 edition), talks about this technological utopia, referring to the experimental uplift executed at Poveglia in 1989, and connects these accounts with Barbaro's narrative to propose a way of seeing the lagoon and Venice:

Era propagandistica, era aziendalistica, era fantascientifica questa fiducia di Paolo Barbaro nella possibilità di preservare Venezia dalle acque alte con una spinta geotecnica infera? Forse. Ma non bisogna dimenticare una cosa: Barbaro ha sempre guardato Venezia da sotto in su; ha dedicato (a Venezia e alla vita) un'attenzione quasi ossessiva per ciò che sta sotto la superficie: il sottosuolo e gli ambienti sottomarini; anzi, sottolagunari. [...] Alla superficiale Venezia, alle sue acque poco profonde, Barbaro ha restituito ciò che più di tutto le manca: l'abisso, l'inconscio, le grotte archetipiche, i substrati che pochi riuscivano a vedere. (Scarpa, 2022: 8).

Reflecting on Scarpa's words, Venice still needs – maybe now more than ever – an overview that privileges the 'up-

side-down' perspective: a city that can still survive thanks to its dust, waste, darkness and smell – a literal *wasteland*, in our context – and not because of its wonderful palazzi and churches, as the narrator's voice in "Isola delle polveri" notes:

Una luce riflessa, un faro lontano: case e case, una accanto all'altra, compaiono finalmente nel buio non più buio, a un soffio dalla terrazza, dalla finestra, dal balconcino. Muri disastriati, tetti a onde, finestrone sbilenchi. Ma nonostante tutto, case: roba abitata, con fischi e sospiri. Pietre marce, acqua in agguato, turbini di polvere; però sta in piedi, sta in piedi. Dev'essere questa, Venezia. (Barbaro, 2022: 79).

According to Barbaro's literary view, it is necessary for the mud foundations of the city to be highlighted, recounted and dissected once again, taking into account all its possible angles and snags, to replace the estrangement that connects it with humans (as a species living in the age of extinction threats) with a propulsive, intellectually useful attitude, rather than a feeling of immobilisation. From this perspective, Venice and its lagoon, with all its problems and all its virtuous initiatives (such as the collective set up by residents on the real Poveglia Island) has not yet exhausted ways to communicate with our cultural unconscious: it is in this 'upside-down' zone, where the most conflictual and problematic aspects of Venice are buried, where new solutions – and new stories – could be found. As Engineer Pino, a character from Barbaro's tale, says to the narrator: "Chissà – mi batte sulla spalla – se Venezia sprofonda sul serio: il marcio, caro mio, non sprofonda mai" (Barbaro 2022, 80).

1.4 Conclusions: Venice's far/near future

Through this investigation, we have seen how the term *wasteland* has evolved far beyond its literal meaning of barren land, acquiring layered literary, cultural, and ecological signifi-

cance. From Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which transformed it into a metaphor for historical trauma and existential desolation, to Muniz's *Waste Land* documentary, which reclaims waste as an artistic item with dignity and a tool for social resistance, the concept has become a lens for understanding both collective crises and individual struggles. Scholar Armiero extended its scope to the "Wasteocene" and global climate emergency, and through Luisetti's study we can frame the word *wasteland* as an allegory for exploitation, displacement, and ecological collapse. In this chapter, a *wasteland* is not merely absence, but a paradoxical space where cultural, social, and environmental contradictions converge, making it a powerful container to analyse representations of Venice and its lagoon as contemporary sites of decay under the pressures of tourism, industrialisation, and climate change.

Looking at the literary examples, readers could perceive that the Venetian lagoon is in some way a compromised wasteland, but that it also retains potential to evolve, not necessarily in a way that always represents positive models (see the case of *Ultra-Venezia*), but in a way that will at least grant some form of survival. This feeling, observed alongside the perspective and communications related to tourism, prompts a rethinking of business and its connections with Venice's cultural heritage, with the aim of conserving any possibility of its endurance (even outside the actual lagoon area) for visitors and visitor experiences. Veneto's latest tourist campaign emphasised this aspect by using Venice as the main element of the region's tourism business strategy, summarised by the slogan "Veneto – the land of Venice" (Veneto EU). Here, the city has openly become more than a symbol: it has evolved into a *brand*, suitable for linking every other tourist destination back to the city – for example, the Dolomites can be promoted as "the mountain of Venice" (The land of Venice, il nuovo brand di Regione Veneto - Latitudes). In line with this approach, since the 30th of July 2024 the slogan had officially been registered as a brand (Marchio turistico regionale - Regione del Veneto) and will be val-

id for a period of at least ten years, with the possibility of renewal. However, literature suggests that what will happen to the city in the near future may differ significantly from such a vision.

In the same year that “The Land of Venice” was registered as a brand by the regional administration, writer Ginevra Lamberti published *Il pozzo vale più del tempo*, a climate fiction book (February 2024), based on the survival adventures of young Dalia Masiero, a female protagonist growing up in a hypothetical near future where temperatures have reached over 50 degrees Celsius during the summer. For Lamberti, the same Veneto region has turned from “The Land of Venice” into a “Far West”, as the book’s back cover cites,¹³ providing a fictional setting where human communities struggle for survival and have to move across valleys within the forest. In Lamberti’s dystopia, the city of Venice didn’t find a way to resist Anthropocenic changes, and indeed collapsed underwater, while its populations fled due to the impact of tourism and the rising sea water levels. In the following quote, the character of Orsola provides a record of what the city used to be before its decay:

Deve sapere, Dalia, che io vengo da un’isola costruita sull’acqua salmastra. Lei, da quanto ho capito, ha conosciuto solo residui di acqua dolce chiusi nei confini di un lago. Noi nell’acqua avevamo il sale che consumava la pietra e condiva anche l’aria. Era un sale diverso da quello del mare aperto, con un gusto diluito e sporcato dal torbido della laguna. La laguna, forse lei non lo sa, è un finto lago e una premonizione di mare. La mia isola stava nella moltitudine dell’esistenza e al confine con tutto il resto. (Lamberti, 2024: 113).

In the story, the lagoon – beautifully recounted as a “fake lake” and a “premonition of the sea” by one of its natives – has transformed into an impossible landscape to inhabit: a wasteland beyond the re-definition of Luisetti’s “crisis of presence”, where

¹³ As reference, see the online book outline: <https://www.marsilioeditori.it/libri/scheda-libro/2972066/il-pozzo-vale-pi-del-tempo>.

animals become aggressive towards each another, and both temperature and sea-levels are doomed to increase exponentially:

L'ho lasciata più di vent'anni fa, quando ho capito che il tempo che ci è dato vivere non è qualcosa di ciclico. Niente di quello che è stato tornerà. Non possiamo fare altro che andare avanti. Ho capito che la temperatura non sarebbe diminuita e che l'acqua non avrebbe smesso di salire, che gli insetti non avrebbero smesso di essere malsani e io non avrei smesso di affacciarmi alla finestra e, guardando giù, vedere il piccolo canale delle monachelle punteggiato da carcasse di pesci beccati da gabbiani sempre più folli e aggressivi. [...]

Ho venduto la mia casa, che era grande e bella e in alto e luminosa, a una famiglia tutta tonda di ottimismo che veniva dall'altra parte dell'oceano. [...] Del resto, la mia città di pietra sull'acqua era già da tempo popolata dai nostri stessi fantasmi. (Lamberti, 2024: 113-114).

Significantly, Orsola's account of what Venice and the lagoon used to be like ends with a reference to mass tourism – in this case Americans buying off properties in the city, with a note of “optimism” that clashes in Lamberti's narration with the general feeling of desolation her characters are forced to deal with. The sense of optimism seems to match, instead, the tones of the Veneto Region's “Land of Venice” format, a synergy confirming that, once again, literature has further explored representations of the ‘City on Water’ with outcomes that fundamentally differ from tourist imagery. Nevertheless, it is key to acknowledge how contemporary representations of Venice and its lagoon as a wasteland, from a literary perspective, can ultimately have a positive impact in helping to rethink tourist communication from both visitors and local businesses' points of view. Wasting relationships are at the very base of the Wasteocene – we can think of *wastelanding* narratives as a core vision for the near future of the Venetian lagoon, a scenario which does not match the grandiose, optimistic storytelling designed for most visitor experiences perhaps, but certainly an alternative, unorthodox view that could also spur visitors' interest.

As Danston brilliantly illustrates in her work *Against nature* (2019), the three main passions humans activate in response to any breakdown of normal laws or orders in nature are *horror*, *terror* and *wonder* (2019: 33-43). After analysing the previous narratives, one might argue that contemporary literature, in a similar way, is strongly oriented towards turning the standard and positivist vision of Venice into its opposite, implying that our reactions to such scenarios can also be passionate in the way Daston describes them: “things that befall rather than move us, not so much states as sieges of the soul.” (34). When it comes to lagoon-wastelands, the most anomalous landscape of desolation and collapse (which unfortunately also represents the most natural and likely evolution of such territories, given their environmental and economic challenges) could potentially provoke similar reactions to those investigated in Danston’s work. Readers may be horrified and disgusted (as per Scarpa’s promising waste-production business), or feel terror, as in the case of Lamberti’s post-apocalyptic vision. They might eventually experience wonder, in line with Barbaro’s science fiction approach to the deformation of the lagoon’s landscape. Each case, however – despite its fictional nature – is key to envision new answers and connections, to avoid the complete exploitation and decay of the city of Venice and its fragile ecosystem.

In conclusion, the literary reimagining of Venice and its lagoon as a *wasteland* reveals more than just dystopian speculation: it offers a necessary counter-narrative to tourist branding and optimistic marketing strategies. By confronting us with horror, terror, and wonder, these texts compel readers to engage with ecological fragility, cultural erosion, and the contradictions of global capitalism. If official discourse reduces Venice to a consumable image, literature insists instead on its role as a warning, a mirror, and a site of possibility: a place where rethinking our relationship to environment, heritage, and survival becomes urgent. Ultimately, to read Venice through the lens of the *waste-*

land is not only to witness its decline, but to confront the urgent question of how its story – and our own relationship to fragile environments – might still be rewritten.

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