Gothic Uncanny Realm in Poe's "The Assignation"

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Abstract: This paper aims to investigate the relationship of the Gothic buildings along the canal and the psychological regression to the past in Poe's "The Assignation." Reading the story as a desire to restore paradise, drawing on psychological interpretations of the death of the protagonists, I argue that Poe uses the Gothic buildings and canal to paint a surreal realm whereby the narrator engages in the past and desires to restore a lost paradise, though he fails to attain this. The two interrelated poles of my analysis—the history of the buildings and the psyche of the hero—both point in the same direction: "The Assignation" is about desire for a lost ideal past of reason, light, and beauty that has been buried as remains in the Gothic buildings.

Keywords

Gothic building, paradise, incarceration, abyss, uncanny,

Edward W. Pitcher, in "Poe's 'The Assignation': A Reconsideration," argues that the narrator in the story has a perception so limited that he does not see the significance of the event that has just occurred along the canal of Venice. Pitcher believes that the narrator fails to comprehend the clue that indicates the assignation between the hero and the Marchesa Aphrodite at the moment the former rescues the latter's child from the water. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, in "The Flights of a Good Man's Mind," identifies the narrator as an "unintegrated self" who is unwilling to perceive a unifying love between the hero (the stranger) and Marchesa, but imposes a pornographic portrayal onto the world of the Venetian waters only to satisfy his sexual fantasy. The narrator's deliberate ignorance of another world that exists beyond appearance is caused by repressed emotions.[1] Repressed emotions are common in Poe's descriptions of space, set either in the background of a ruined house or mysterious water. However, the more gloomy and deathly the Venetian waters become in the narrator's description, the more enlightened a vision we can perceive in the faith of the couple. "The Assignation" is not a story that involves a kaleidoscopic portrait of transgressive lovers, but it is Poe's story about tracing heavenly light through the plot of romance in a gloomy, haunted palace. Poe uses the narrator's two contradictory emotions—repression of the past and a desire for its return—to illustrate a desire for the return of the past. In the paper, I argue that Poe uses the Gothic buildings and the canal to paint a surreal realm related to the memories of an ideal past.

The river in the "The Assignation" serves as an uncanny mediating realm that the hero plunges into, searching for treasure buried deep. The story begins with the scene of the Grand Canal where the narrator is crossing under the Bridge of Sighs on his gondola. The narrator describes what comes into his sight:

> …as my gondola arrived opposite the mouth of the canal San Marco, a female voice from its recesses broke suddenly upon the night, in one wild, hysterical, and long-continued shriek. Startled at the sound, I sprang upon my feet; while the gondolier, letting slip his single oar, lost it in the pitchy darkness beyond a chance of recovery, and we were consequently left to the guidance of the current which here sets from the greater into the smaller channel. Like some huge and sable-feathered condor, we were slowly drifting down toward the Bridge of Sighs, when a thousand flambeaux flashing from the windows, and down the staircases of the Ducal Palace, turned all at once that deep gloom into a livid and preternatural day.(Poe 68-69)

There are similarities to the beginning of "The Fall of the House of Usher." Like the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher," the narrator in "The Assignation" is withdrawing from common daily life and approaching a realm "unknown" to him. Whereas the eye-like windows of the skull-like house arrest the attention of the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher," a female shriek evokes his attention in "The Assignation." It seems both narrators upon entering the "unknown" realms are "awakened" from a befuddled state with a sudden jolt.

[1] Monika Elbert in "Poe's Gothic Mother and the Incubation of Language" perceives Poe's stories as tales of a dead mother, whose memory can never be repressed, and whose return depends on the sublime moment (the moment of the uncanny) in art. Elbert links the water image in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and that in "The Assignation" as a mirror into which the narrator looks with the unconscious desire to regain what he has lost. "The tarn," Elbert observes, "like the murky water of Venetian canals in 'The Assignation,' where the Marchesa's only child almost drowns, represents the maternal unknowable" (25). "

> A child, slipping from the arms of its own mother, had fallen from an upper window of the lofty structure into the deep and dim canal. The quiet waters had closed placidly over their victim; and, although my own gondola was the only one in sight, many a stout swimmer, already in the stream, was seeking in vain upon the surface…. (Poe 69)

The falling of the child into water is symbolic of the loss of treasure to the abyss. The theme of searching for treasure is a significant one in Poe's tales. Treasure might be buried deep underground or in the ocean. Stories like "The Golden Bug" and "The Cask of Amontillado" begin with the search for hidden treasure. Stories like "MS. Found in a Bottle" and "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" concern treasure in the water. Above the canal stands a goddess-like woman who seems to be the incarnation of Aphrodite. Her beauty evokes the age of beauty, which, as described in Greek myth, is a world of immortality and heroes. The downfall of the child and the distance between the goddess and the mortal human signify the loss of beauty, order, and reason. However, the distance from the ideal world stirs the passion of the mortal to approach the lost paradise. To retrieve the treasure, the mortal must go deep into the abyss to re-discover it. The action of rescuing the fallen child in the canal thus symbolizes the search for the lost ideal world.

The narrator on the gondola along the river goes through the rise and fall of civilizations, as well as that of the Gothic buildings, reviewing the age of reason and order, and that of chaos and disorder, for which the universal desire for the ideal past of reason, light, and beauty is instigated. He is attracted by the scenes in Venice—the Bridge, the Doge's Palace, the Grand Canal and the Palazo—a city of the afterlife and Elysium, or more specifically, by the destiny of the Marchesa and the protagonist whose souls are trapped in the abyss, and whose passion urges them to go beyond limits for happiness.

The Doge's Palace is a Gothic structure that has experienced numerous destructions and reconstructions since the ninth century. Its original material, Byzantine or Istrian stone, is hidden in Gothic architecture as the remains of a past, ideal order.[2] If life is "hidden within stone" (Fernández 54), the classical structure is symbolic of order, reason, and harmony. The inside of the Doge's Palace is a combination of heaven and earth in harmony through the classical sculptures and paintings.[3]The rooms in the Doge's Palace also contain paintings that show

[2]Named after the duke Doge Angelo Partecipazio, the Doge's Palace was built in 810 A.D. when the duke moved the seat of government from the Island of Malamocco to the area of the present-day Rialto. In the tenth century, the Doge's Palace was partially destroyed by a fire, and since then has been reconstructed. Only a few traces of the Byzantine or Istrian structure remain. The palace was made in the Gothic style starting from around 1340. The rebuilt palace suffered from a series of fires in 1480, 1547, and 1577. The reconstruction after the first fire was undertaken by Antonia Rizzo, who ushered in the Renaissance style. As the restoration began, he merged the original Gothic style into the neo-classical designs. The new palace was occupied by various administrative offices, among which was Napoleon's. By the end of the nineteenth century, it fell into decay. Now, it is managed as a Venetian museum.

See "Palazzo Ducale."http://smarthistory.org/palazzo-ducale/

See "The so-called Palazzo Ducale (Doge's palace)." http://venice.jc-r.net/doges-palace/

[3]The two globes in the centre of the hall of the "Scudo" Room, for example, are the sphere of the heavens and the sphere of earth, respectively. In the Four Doors Room, the portraits in which Venice receives the gifts of the sea god Neptune are reminiscent of Greek art, which emphasizes balance and harmony and represents the triumph of reason over matter. In the Antechamber to the Hall of the Full Council, there is an image of Venice distributing honours and rewards, and another image of Venice resting on a lion accompanied by Glory and Concord.

See "Palazzo Ducale."http://smarthistory.org/palazzo-ducale/

various Doges with the Christ, the Virgin, and saints.[4] Some paintings (or sculptures) indicate the allegorical significance of justice, reason, order, and harmony.[5] Some works of art that represent order and harmony have been removed or destroyed due to fire. Destruction is symbolic of the rise of evil on earth. Since the sixteenth century the Doge's Palace has been linked to the prison by the Bridge of Sighs. At the end of the nineteenth century, signs of decay in the palace were so obvious that it looked more like a haunted house than a heavenly terrace. The palace also had very few traces of its ancient Byzantium form and Greek art, but instead represented decline and gloom. This palace in Gothic style thus showed a lack of harmony, reason, and balance, which are emphasized in Classical art.

In addition to the Doge's Palace, various styles of architecture were hidden the age of the Roman and Byzantine Empires.[6] The Byzantine style is a late Roman style adopted by the Eastern Roman Empire. It has Roman elements, like the arches, domes and pillars. Such buildings also reflect the original need for practical defense against marauding tribes of Germans, Vikings or Muslims, so they are not open but closed like fortresses. Much of Italian architecture followed the same style until the Renaissance. The principle Byzantine buildings were churches, palaces, and monasteries, with elements of Roman architecture that represent

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See Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*. Boston: Butterworths, 1987.
See also Mark Rosen's *The Mapping of Power in Renaissance Italy*, page 19.

[4] In the State Advocacies' Chamber, for example, paintings of the Christ, the Virgin, and saints represent the Avogadori's legality and patrician class for the consolidation of Venice City.
See "Palazzo Ducale." http://smarthistory.org/palazzo-ducale/
See Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*. Boston: Butterworths, 1987.

[5] For example, the ceiling in the Chamber of Council of Ten is gilded with images of divinities and allegories illustrating the power of the Council of Ten in Venice, punishing the guilty and freeing the innocent. In the Chamber of the Great Council, episodes of Venetian history—virtues of heroes, allegorical glorification of the Republic, acts of valour or incidents of war, etc.— decorate the walls. In the State Advocacies' Chamber, the paintings show the Avogadori, who safeguarded the integrity of the city's patrician class.
See "Palazzo Ducale." http://smarthistory.org/palazzo-ducale/
See Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*. Boston: Butterworths, 1987.

[6] The original inhabitants along the path of the ancient river were the Adriatic Veneti groups. During the age of the Roman Empire and Byzantine Empire, the lagoon that the canal led into began to be populated. Since the early ninth century, when the Doge moved to Rialto, diverse styles of building have boomed up with the prosperous growth of civilization. The most commonly seen houses were "fondaco" houses along the river, built to contain the great number of foreign merchants working in Venice. Fondaco houses accompanied the trading activity in Venice. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Byzantine art was introduced into the local architecture as the Venetian-Byzantine style. The Venetian-Byzantine style still remains. Since the building materials and foundations were precious, they were usually kept and reused, mixed with new trends. Another favoured style was Venetian Gothic architecture. It began with the southern façade of the Doge's Palace in around 1340 after a fire had partially destroyed the palace. Few traces of the Byzantine or Istrian structure remained in the Gothic style palace. Elongated arches in fondaco houses were replaced with Gothic style arches—pointed or ogee or lobed arches. In the fifteenth century, the transition from Gothic style to Renaissance architecture was completed. In the sixteenth century, Baroque architecture appeared with the church Santa Maria della Salute Basilica (by the architect Baldassarre Longhena). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked the highest building activity along the Grand Canal as a great number of prosperous patrician families achieved their status and built their houses to signify their wealth and fame. In the eighteenth century, neoclassical architectures emerged. After the fall of the Republic (1797), most important buildings, including religious buildings, went into decline. They were either stripped of furnishings and works of art, or demolished during the time of Napoleon. Their decline continued until Gothic Revival.
See "Palazzo Ducale." http://smarthistory.org/palazzo-ducale/
See John Julius Norwich's *A History of Venice*.Penguin UK, 2003.

Greek ideals, but, more specifically, the elements of power. The ruined Byzantine buildings thus represent the loss of noble ideals.

While the decline of Byzantine style signifies loss in this manner, Gothic architecture represents a lack of harmony, reason, and balance, but also, as John Ruskin points out, a striving for perfection. What distinguishes Gothic architecture from Greek or Roman styles is its sense of conflict with unpredictable emotions evoked in the builders and those who view their work. Ruskin admires the unpredictable power of Gothic buildings, as it evokes the builder's faith in approaching the ideal. In *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin writes that Gothic architecture "recognized, in small things as well as great, the individual value of every soul. But it not only recognizes its value; it confesses its imperfection, in only bestowing dignity upon the acknowledgement of unworthiness" (160). John Matteson in "Constructing Ethics and the Ethics of Construction: John Ruskin and Humanity of the Builder" sets Ruskin above other architectural philosophers since he appreciates the value of ethics in Gothic construction: "Ruskin is valuable to us….He required above all that the process of building should…enlist the emotion, the imagination, and the intellect of the laborer" (295). Gothic architecture represents a lack of harmony, understanding, and balance, and has been associated with faith—especially religion, as it inspires awe and astonishment. In its interior spaces Gothic architecture is decorated with pictures from the Bible and scenes of heaven and hell. It is populated with statues of saints and gargoyles. Most important of all, it symbolizes men's passion to look for a lost heaven. John Matteson points out the power of spiritual resurrection in Gothic architecture, as follows:

> …it seems to me that much of the beauty of St. John the Divine lies in its unpredictability and its almost chaotic inclusiveness. In one space one finds a Poets' Corner; another wall is dedicated to correspondence from prisoners. Stained glass windows not only portray the Passion and the Resurrection, but also commemorate the sinking of the *Titanic* and celebrate the glories of ice hockey. The cathedral is both an architectural marvel and a shrine to human experience, in both its lowliest and its most exalted. (294)

Gothic architecture possesses an uncanny power that engages one with unpredictable emotions for spiritual deliverance. Ana González-Rivas Fernández, in "'The Assignation': An Aesthetic Encounter of Classical and Gothic," identifies art and space in "The Assignation" as "conflation of the gothic with the classical." Fernández perceives that the "past and present coexist" in "The Assignation" (56). Nevertheless, a world of afterlife and Elysium cannot be traced back to the present without the effect of a mosaic, a "cut and paste" that combines the order and harmony hidden in art and history.

Not only does past and present coexist, but also light and dark, with the Bridge of Sighs being a boundary of the two realms. This bridge, designed by Antoni Contino and built in 1602, is where prisoners could see the lagoon and San Giorgio through limestone windows one last time before being taken to jail, one last view of beautiful Venice. There is also a legend that lovers, if they kiss on the bridge, will be granted eternal joy and love. As the bridge that connects the New Prison to the Doge's Palace, the Bridge of Sighs mediates two different worlds—an imprisoned space and one of idealized beauty. Crossing the bridge over murky water thus symbolizes being suspended between incarceration and liberation. The bridge also symbolizes a contract of love signed between lovers. The interplay of the light and dark is presented in the

development and withdrawing of civilization along the Canal. This is reflected in the formation of the architecture.

In "The Assignation," Poe aims to retrieve traces of heavenly light through a romance set in a gloomy and haunted palace. He searches for the remains of the ideal age through the story in which the narrator perceives the heavenly light in hell. When the narrator is approaching the Bridge of Sighs he feels this light in the shape of "a thousand flambeaux flashing from the windows, and down the staircases of the Ducal Palace, turned all at once that deep gloom into a livid and preternatural day" (Poe 69). Along with the narrator's description of the identity of the Marchesa Aphrodite, a fissure between heaven and earth widens. The Marchesa falls from being a goddess to a mortal mother, who, trapped in a palace, gazes at the prison of the Old Republic that sits in front of her chamber window:

> …but still the young wife of the old and intriguing Mentoni, and the mother of that fair child, her first and only one, who now, deep beneath the murky water, was thinking in bitterness of heart upon her sweet caresses, and exhausting its little life in struggles to call upon her name.
>
> She stood alone…as the heavy marble hangs around the Niobe…her large lustrous eyes were not turned downward upon that grave wherein her brightest hope lay buried—but riveted in a widely different direction! The prison of the Old Republic is, I think, the stateliest building in all Venice—but how could that lady gaze so fixedly upon it, when beneath her lay stifling her own child? Yon dark, gloomy niche, too, yawns right opposite her chamber window.(Poe 69-70)

Niobe in Greek mythology is a mother whose prideful hubris brings about the death of all her fourteen children. Her loss means the loss of nobility. Nevertheless, her transformation into a weeping stone existing in perpetual solitude and sorrow evokes our sympathy. The Weeping Rock of Niobe symbolizes the fall of civilization—decline of the golden age. The Marchesa gazes at her prison, her grave, for she has been incarcerated in a lost world. Her passion and love, as her name Aphrodite suggests, have been repressed in the prison. Her only treasure is her child, and now he has fallen into the water, out of the sight of her mortal eyes.

By then the "Satyr-like" Mentoni (the Marchesa's husband) feels indifferent to the accident. The rescuers, after exhausting their efforts, assume that the child has died. A stranger then dives into the water and rescues the Marchesa's only treasure.

> …from the interior of that dark niche which has been already mentioned as forming a part of the Old Republican prison, and as fronting the lattice of the Marchesa, a figure muffled in a cloak, stepped out within reach of the light, and, pausing a moment upon the verge of the giddy descent, plunged headlong into the canal…. (Poe 70)

The hero is the only one who can retrieve this treasure from the abyss. However, the narrator has not seen the significance in the action of restoring the treasure, but instead simply explains the Marchesa's tears as a mother's appreciation for the stranger's brave action. Still, when he follows the hero into his palazzo, the mysterious relationship that this man has with the Marchesa gradually dawns upon him. The Gothic architecture—the stranger's palazzo—involves the passion of returning to heaven.

The title of the story, "The Assignation," refers to the meeting of the Marchesa and the hero, who creates an image of Eden in his palazzo. It is possible that Poe models this love affair on that between Lord Byron and Mary Chaworth. The image of water (the canal) symbolizes the entrance to the underworld that possesses the power of healing. Paul Devereux, in *Sacred Geography*, deciphers the hidden codes in geography. He associates a spring or waterfall in a temple or the head of a mountain with a gate to the underworld, the abode of invisible spirits. For example, the springhead around the base of the Carn Menyn outcrops is one of the sources of sacred water that the Celtic shamans or seers visit for spiritual healing. The Amazon Basin waterfalls, Devereux observes, are used by Jivaro Indians as "part of their initiation rituals" (20-21). The sacred water in the Aesculapion temple was dedicated to the god Aesculapius. The water under the Bridge of Sighs is an object that seems to mediate between the Marchesa and the hero, as well as a body (uncanny space) that the two characters affectively identify with for spiritual liberation. For Poe, spiritual liberation goes hand in hand with death. As soon as the Marchesa meets the hero, who has just rescued her child and returned him to her, he "has conquered" her heart. The Marchesa, as Edward W. Pitcher observes, perceives her treasure in the deep water, and she promises to meet her lover in the abyss by committing suicide.

> She is not the mother-figure transfixed by anxiety, then animated through the rescue of her child, despite the narrator's expectations ("She will now receive her child—she will press it to her heart" —*Works*, II, 154); rather she is a lover who is now pledged to a suicidal assignation because the trial in which the protagonist has triumphed (the restoration from the abyss of the child) is proof to her that life survives in "that hollow vale." (2)

The heroine believes that her assignation will take her towards liberation from prison, just like initiate's deliverance to the underworld and resurrection with a healed soul, as pure as the ancient goddess Aphrodite rising from the water at the moment of birth.

The hero's palazzo is described as a gloomy room which the sunlight brilliantly illuminates. It is Gothic architecture, which, like the other Gothic buildings in Poe's stories, stimulates a condition of "hypersensitivity." The psychological disturbance reflects the narrator's anxiety, not the hero's. Upon getting into the hero's residence, the narrator proceeds with a psychological regression to the past with the hero, yet the narrator cannot appreciate the enlightened vision, and instead feels horror. He feels "every part of the room" trembling to "the vibration of low, melancholy music" (Poe 73), and he sees himself surrounded by "one of those huge structures of gloomy yet fantastic pomp" (Poe 72) that makes him astonished. He approaches an uncanny realm through "a broad winding staircase of mosaics;" he is moving away from reality when he follows the hero "into an apartment whose unparalleled splendor burst through the opening door with an actual glare" (Poe 72). The narrator is approaching a world beyond appearance, yet he withdraws from that realm and becomes a fake artist.

Poe uses the art in the palazzo—the paintings—to reinforce the theme of perception beyond appearance. The paintings in the hero's palazzo shed "beams of natural glory mingled at length fitfully with the artificial light" (Poe 73). The paintings signify the remains of ancient civilizations. As art has the power of seizing each moment of glory in history, the paintings of the palazzo survive the age of chaos. The hero compares the "artificial light" of glory in his works of art to the *socle* at Sparta. The *socle*, a short plinth used as a wall base or supporter of a pedestal, sculpture or column, is commonly seen in ancient Greece as a stone-built base.

"Among a chaos of scarcely visible ruins," the stranger says, "is a kind of *socle*, upon which are still legible the letters ΛΑΞΜ" (Poe 73). The *socle* survives the destruction of the other parts of the temples and shrines. It becomes a symbol of the immortality of art, from which people with their keen eyes distinguish the divine, spiritual light. Just as the Doge's Palace contains the decorations and sculptures in its chambers that signify glory, reason, and beauty, the hero's palazzo contains manmade creations that have the spiritual light, which people desire to retrieve in the age of decay and loss of reason and order. The hero amuses himself as an original "Laughter" who shall laugh to die, and he is proud of his works of art. The hero perceives things beyond the appearance of the material world. His view of the world is analogous to the interior of the palazzo, which, as Wilbur indicates, is "symbolic of the visionary soul's transcendence of spatial and temporal limitations" (Wilbur 272). The palazzo itself is a "character" that holds the secrets "unknown" to the narrator, and it reflects the temperament of the hero, who has a vehement desire to create a surreal realm.

The hero has a countenance that is half-deity and half-mortal. The narrator describes how he looks as follows:

> With the mouth and chin of a deity—singular, wild, full, liquid eyes, whose shadows varied from pure hazel to intense and brilliant jet—and a profusion of curling, black hair, from which a forehead of unusual breadth gleamed forth at intervals all light and ivory. (Poe 72)

The description here reminds us of Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher."[7] They share the same traits of nobility, an aura of divinity, and are bound to a fantastic house that evokes their emotions of melancholy, yet they maintain their reason, a capability of approaching things beyond appearance. The hero, as Roderick does, invites the narrator to explore the mysteries inside the house as well as the inner world of its proprietor. As the narrator observes, the stranger is not so much a human, but a deity in human form since he has a "peculiarity of spirit which seemed to place him so essentially apart from all other human beings" (Poe 75).

The hero's palazzo preserves works of art inspired by both the Bible and pagan cultures. He has been seized by the invisible images that affect his emotions and draw him towards death. Though illogical, the hero's enumeration of the works of art in the house reveals his desire to sacrifice himself and cross the boundary to immortality. His house preserves the painting of Guido's *Madonna della Pietà*, the sculpture of Antinous, and the embellishments of the sphinxes of Egypt.[8]*Madonna della Pietà* shows the Virgin Mary and her crucified son. Antinous, the favorite youth of the Roman emperor Hadrian, drowned in the Nile for the emperor and was deified soon after his death. He was affiliated with the Egyptian god Osiris, for his deification

[7] The narrator's portrait of Roderick: "Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity;—these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten" (Poe 369).

[8] Poe's sphinxes here are the Egyptian sphinxes, rather than the Greek sphinxes. Different from the Greek sphinxes who assume the tragic personality, the Egyptian ones are benevolent guards of the tombs of the Pharaoh. In India, the sphinxes protect the soul from evil.

stood for resurrection from the Nile.[9]The portrait of the Marchesa Aphrodite divulges the secret to the narrator of an ideal world, unobtainable on earth, existing in dreams, myths, works of art, and the world of imagination.

The proprietor of the palazzo consciously creates an emotional atmosphere that fulfills his aspiration to beauty. He is a poet whose emotional effects recall Poe's view of the poet's thirst for beauty and love. Poe, in "Reviews of American Authors," says,

> This burning thirst belongs to the *immortal* essence of man's nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of his perennial life. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is not the mere appreciation of the beauty before us. It is a wild effort to reach the beauty above. (Poe 686)

When the proprietor mentions his possessions, he divulges more or less his engagement in the rite of sacrifice, as a moth immolated in fire in its transformation into immortality. As he creates his surreal realm—the process of sacrifice, death, and resurrection that the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher" has perceived in Roderick—the atmosphere in the palazzo evokes emotions for unknown reasons. In the grotesque and sublime house, the works of art function as a mediating realm and evoke the passions of perceiving images in depth. His soul, though incarcerated in a prison, is guarded by the Egyptian Sphinx until he is enlightened enough to take the journey towards truth. The portrait of the Marchesa Aphrodite reveals a divine realm that the protagonist desires to reach. The portrait of Madonna della Pietà reflects suffering and sacrifice on earth. The Gothic-style palazzo evokes, as Benjamin F. Fisher in "Poe and the Gothic tradition" notes, a fierce passion that urges the protagonists to go beyond reality:

> Both the stranger and his beloved are made analogous to what were in Poe's time admired as ultimates in statuary art, Canova's Venus and the Belvidere Apollo—a pair doubtless driven by passions beyond mundane imagination. The stranger-lover, modeled upon Lord Byron, has attempted to mitigate his frustrations in love by collecting artwork, which, however, is incongruous, as if to symbolize the imperfections caused when only the physical side of human nature is emphasized. Thus he and his beloved look to another world, on the far side of the grave, to consummate their genuine, spiritual love. (82-83)

[9]Antinous is associated with Persephone, Dionysos, and Osiris, since they all stand for the initiates who die and are revived to immortality. Though we know nothing of his mortal life, Antinous was believed to be born to a Greek family in the Roman province of Bithynia. He was a beautiful young boy who was "the favorite companion to the emperor Hadrian." Their love, "celebrated in antiquity and later denigrated by puritanical Christians, ended abruptly during a trip to Egypt, when the young Antinous drowned in the floodwaters of the Nile." To memorialize the young lover, Hadrian set up temples and thousands of religious images "enough for him to be declared the last pagan god of the Greco-Roman world."Antinous' influence on Christianity is immense. The early church fathers,"deeply disturbed by the resemblance of the dying savior god Antinous to the dying savior god Jesus, went to great pains to create some significant distance between them." The devotees of Antinous "were among the last pagan holdouts as Rome converted to Christianity." For the story of Antinous related to the myth of Osiris, see Delia Morgon's "The Last God of Rome." http://home.earthlink.net/~delia5/pagan/tcq/artrom-pap1.htm

In "The Assignation," Poe transforms visible objects into an uncanny mediating realm, and represents the interplay of life and death as well as the past and present. The world of the afterlife and Elysium can be represented through the effects of a mosaic in a surreal realm. A Gothic building or a memorial stone bridge along the river of Venice becomes the material whereby the narrator searches for the ideal age of reason and order, and an afterlife of bliss. Nevertheless, the narrator fails to approach the unifying happiness of love. The space that he describes is a Gothic one that can murder people,[10] and the hero is described as a mad man. The love between the hero and the Marchesa, as Fisher argues, becomes a pornographic story sacrificed for his fantastic impulses. The last scene of the death of the lover reminds us of Roderick Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher. A fierce passion hidden in Gothic architecture along the canal thus urges the protagonists to plunge into this abyss for their treasure buried deep into water. Such bliss goes hand in hand with death, and cannot be reduced by the narrator's misrepresentation of art.

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[10] For the discussion of Poe's murderer-house, see Kim Drain's "Poe's Death-Watches and the Architecture of Doubt." *New England Review* 27.2 (2006): 169-178.