

Please note: The photo-essay simply tells the story of the film in intermediate-level Italian. This is a basic, literal translation to assist Italian learners understand the text. In writing our photo-essays, we aim for a fluid Italian and write a translation to match it. We hope that this language-learning tool will be engaging and enlightening. It's no substitute for material written at a native-language level that explores the film in depth!

The images are an important part of the photo-essay. Each paragraph refers to specific images. Even if you don't understand Italian, please read this translation alongside the Italian version on the blog, so that you can have context for the words. These visuals also help us to know the movie better: they not only enrich the story, but they also show camera movements, editing, the symbols chosen by the director and thematic ideas. You will also have access to the links to other references in the blog itself.

Thank you, and enjoy!

Summertime, Parte I

David Lean, Dir. (1955)

What are we talking about?

Jane Hudson, a lonely, middle-aged American woman, takes a long planned-for trip to Venice. She meets Renato, a handsome Italian shopkeeper. She falls in love with the city ... and what will happen with Renato?

Getting to know them better

The movie opens with an overhead shot of the Orient Express roaring past the Venetian Lagoon.

A man on the train is reading a newspaper when a voice from off-screen interrupts: "Excuse me! Hold onto this a second, would you please?" An arm enters the frame and hands him a Venice guidebook.

The man lifts it up to his chest, posing for the home-movie camera.

"A little closer, if you don't mind. Up a little higher?"

Giving the orders is Jane Hudson (Katherine Hepburn), a tourist on her way to Venice for the first time. She films with the camera and looks quite delighted with the result.

"There now!" she says with satisfaction. "This is Venice we're coming into, isn't it?"

“Yes, we’ll be there in about two minutes now. This is the lagoon.”

“Oh, boy!” she says, leaning out the window, “I’ve got to get a shot of this.”

We see the kind of tourist that Jane is. She’s barely entered Venice and she is already enthusiastic about everything she is seeing.

“Is this your first visit to Venice?” her fellow passenger asks.

“Yes,” she answers, “And you?”

“No, I’ve been here several times. I hope you’re going to like it.”

“I’ve got to like it! I’ve come such a long way. I’ve saved up such a long time for this trip. Do you think I maybe *won’t* like it?”

“I’m sure you will like it. But not everybody likes it in the same way. Some people find it too quiet. Some people find it too noisy. And it *is* very noisy. But the majority find it very beautiful.”

The train comes screeching to a stop in the station. As Jane struggles with her luggage, the conductor hands some of her suitcases out the window to a porter, who takes off with them, to Jane’s dismay.

Jane follows after him, struggling through the crowd.

Finally she catches up to him and asks, “How much does the gondola cost?”

“A thousand lire.”

“How about the bus?”

“Twenty lire.”

“Bus!” and then, “Where is the bus?” she asks, looking around.

“There!” he replies, pointing to the canal.

Seeing a boat floating there, Jane is disbelieving and replies, “That’s a bus?!”

“Si, si,” he answers and starts walking onto the ramp with her suitcases still in hand.

Jane has problems keeping up with him while battling the crowd.

She makes it! She gives a tip to the man and the water bus takes off.

On the boat, a married couple – the McIlhenny’s – introduce themselves to Jane and they all shake hands. Mrs. McIlhenny says, “Buona sera!” with a strong American accent. Well, at least she’s trying!

Interrupting the conversation, Jane films some buildings they pass. “Isn’t that wonderful?!” she exclaims.

“Are you going on from Venice?” she asks her fellow passengers.

“Sure,” he says, “Next stop: Florence.”

Mrs. McIlhenny then quickly adds a list of Italian cities that they’re going to see. “We’re doing all of Italy,” she says. It turns out that they have seen every other country in Europe. It sounds like they ran a race across the continent, plus England.

“Some itinerary, “ comments Jane with appreciation, “How long have you been at it?”

They arrived on June 15 and they’ll be leaving on September 9.

“This year?” says Jane, confused. How is it possible to cover all that ground in so little time?

Noticing something, she suddenly brightens. “Well, do you believe it?” She’s seen that there are stop-and-go lights along the canal to regulate the traffic.

The water bus arrives at the stop, Jane looks all around and we look with her: steady traffic along the canal; a bridge across the canal; ancient apartment buildings that line its edges; a church in the distance.

The light changes to green, the boat starts moving again and Jane is happily savoring all of the new experiences.

Mr. McIlhenny is still boasting about their loaded schedule. “Our travel agency did a fantastic job for every step of the trip. Here, take a look at this.” The couple follows a strict daily schedule, except for two hours of “independent activity.” Jane looks mildly appalled.

The offscreen music soars as the water bus turns onto the Canal Grande, the main thoroughfare of Venice. Jane admires it all: the buildings along the waterfront, the cupolas and spires, the gondolas.

As Mr. McIlhenny babbles on, Jane looks up at the row of windows at the top of a building they are coasting past: the blinds are closed against the afternoon sun; potted plants sit on the window sills. The many shades of brown contrast beautifully with the blue sky.

They ask Jane where she's staying. It turns out she's staying at Pensione Fiorini: the same place as them!

The water bus reaches their stop and they disembark. Mrs. McIlhenny calls for a porter.

Jane and the porter walk across a piazza, Jane still looking all around her at the wonders of the city. She struggles to keep up with the man, partly because he really is walking quickly but also because she is absorbed in what she sees.

They pass through a narrow alley, which – like everything else Jane has seen – seems full of history.

They turn a corner and at last they have arrived! The porter announces, “Pensione Fiorini!”

Before she enters, Jane has to stop and take in the view: the unhurried gondoliers in their straw hats, the lustrous foliage that frames the windows and balconies, figures sitting on balconies or leaning on bridges over the canal.

Jane is enthralled. But then she has a shock. Out of nowhere a cascade of small objects comes flying through the air. A woman has just thrown a bucket of garbage from her balcony right into the canal!

After leaving Jane's suitcases in the pensione, the porter comes back outside, removes his cap and gives a small bow. The tip Jane gives him seems to please him a lot. She still might not understand how the currency works ...

A voice calls out, “Hi!” and Jane turns, smiling. But her smile fades when she sees that it’s just a little boy. “Hi,” she responds flatly and walks into the hotel. Pausing for a moment, she turns back and eyes the boy suspiciously.

But once she has entered this small hotel, she is charmed all over again. In the spacious entrance she admires the lobby with its curved staircase.

A woman’s singing brings her back to earth. She walks to the desk and rings the bell.

A woman’s voice calls out, “Giovanna!”

The owner, Signora Fiorini (Isa Miranda), walks into the frame. Smiling, she extends her hand to Jane, “Buona sera.”

While she is registering Jane, the off-screen singing continues. Once again, Signora Fiorini calls out, “Giovanna!” and to Jane, she comments, “My husband used to say, ‘If you’re not going to fire her, the least you can do is to strangle her.’”

Giovanna comes downstairs, greets Jane and starts to gather the suitcases.

“Oh, let me help her. They’re too heavy,” Jane protests.

“Oh, no! She’s strong like an ox,” replies the owner.

Signora Fiorini explains the layout of the pensione: “Now, that’s our dining room. And here we have our sitting room.”

“Oh, boy, this is lovely! I’m so happy to be here instead of in a hotel full of tourists ... like me.” They both laugh.

“Excuse me one moment,” the owner says as she opens a double door to reveal the veranda on this radiant day. “Wow!” says Jane.

Out on the veranda, Signora Fiorini pours some wine for a guest who stays hidden by his chair. Then she returns and offers a glass to Jane. But Jane has brought bourbon with her and proceeds to

enthusiastically fill two glasses with a mixture of wine and bourbon, saying, “Half Italian, half American.”

The two women, who are very different, get to know each other a little:

Signora Fiorini asks, “Is this your first trip to Europe?”

“How did you guess?”

“You don’t mind travelling all alone?”

“No, I like it.”

“Oh, I would hate it.”

“I’m the independent type. Always have been.”

Just then a young woman enters. Blonde and smiling, she wears a pretty white peasant blouse and a skirt with bold horizontal bands of color. The two older women stop talking and greet her.

Without pausing, the young woman introduces herself, “I’m Phyl Yaeger! Be seeing you!” and then breezes out to the veranda.

We follow her out to the veranda, which, as we now see, overlooks the canal. Phyl sits down in the arms of the man is relaxing there outside. She gives him a kiss and says, “This heat does things to me.”

As the owner leads Jane upstairs, she talks about the couple, who are married. “He’s an artist. They’ve been here for some time.” We hear some music, which is evidently coming from a record player. The owner complains about it, but Jane replies that she likes the music and the maid’s singing, “It’s Italy!”

“I put you high up so you would have plenty of air. It can be very hot, you know. Across the lagoon, you can see Murano. That’s where they make the glass.”

Jane steps out on her balcony and looks around at the wonder that is Venice: the lagoon, the rooftops, the open air.

“Grazie!” she says to the owner.

“For what?”

“For this,” Jane replies, pointing at the scene.

Jane tells the owner that she met a girl on the boat to Venice who was looking for a “mystical, magical miracle ... I guess she wants to find what she felt was missing all her life.” Perhaps Jane is also searching for something on her own long planned-for trip?

The guests sit out on the balcony and chat. Someone raises the topic of art, but Mr. McIlhenny doesn't like art and he lets everyone know that Italian food has been making him sick.

Jane is horrified. But Signora Fiorini isn't surprised. That's how Americans are. Then ironically, she goes on to criticize French food!

At last, Jane is left alone with Signora Fiorini, who invites Jane to join her and a friend for dinner. Jane declines, but the owner insists, “When you are in Italy, you should meet Italians! Please, join us!”

From the veranda, we see that the Yaegers are crossing a bridge nearby. They wave up and call out “Arrivederci!” Thus begins a motif of the film: everyone seems to have a partner or friend, but Jane is on her own.

The owner has some advice for Jane. “You know, Miss Hudson,” she says, “Those miracles can happen sometimes, but you must give a little push to make them happen.”