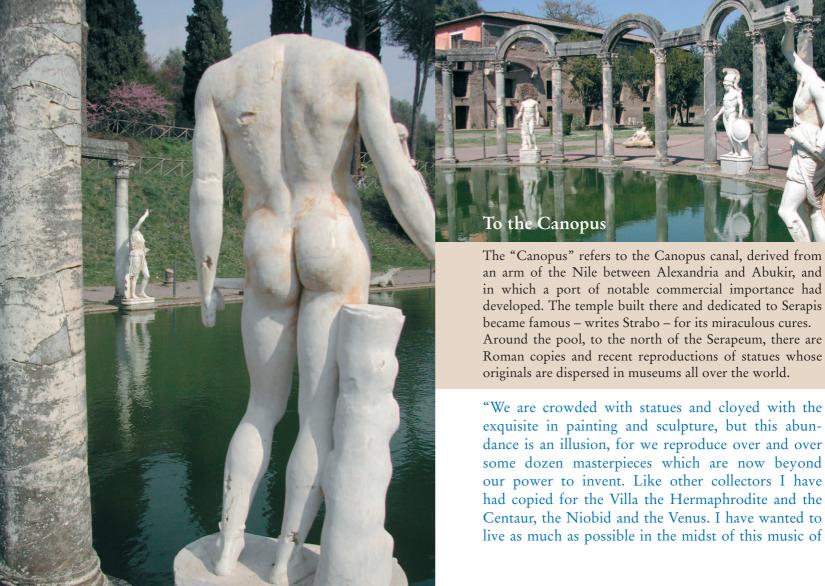


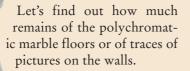
between heaven

A tour with Marguerite Yourcenar

Nicoletta Lanciano







"The Villa was the tomb of my travels, the last encampment of the nomad, the equivalent, though in marble, of the tents and pavilions of the princes of Asia. Almost everything that appeals to our taste has already been tried in the world of forms; I turned toward the realm of color: jasper as green as the depths of the sea, porphyry dense as flesh, basalt and somber obsidian. The crimson of the hangings was adorned with

more and more intricate embroideries; the mosaics of the walls or pavements were never too golden, too white, or too dark. Each building-stone was the strange concretion of a will, a memory, and sometimes a challenge. Each structure was the chart of a dream."







"Everything here was arranged to facilitate work as well as pleasure: the chancellery, the audience halls, and the court where I judged difficult cases in last appeal all saved me the tiring journeys between Tibur and Rome. I had given each of these edifices names reminiscent of Greece: the Pœcile, the Academy, the Prytaneum. I knew very well that this small valley planted with olive trees was not Tempe, but I was reaching the age when each beauteous place recalls another, fairer still, when each delight is weighted with the memory of past joys. I was willing to yield to nostalgia, that melancholy residue of desire. I had even given the name of Styx to a particularly somber corner of the park, and the name of Elysian Fields to a meadow strewn with anemones, thus preparing myself for that other world where the torments resemble those of this world, but where joys are nebulous, and inferior to our joys. But

most important of all, in the heart of this retreat I had built for myself a refuge more private still, an islet of marble at the center of a pool surrounded by colonnades; this gave me a room wholly apart, connected with, or rather, separated from the shore by a turning bridge so light that with one hand I could make it slide in its grooves. Into this summer pavilion I had two or three beloved statues moved, and the small bust of Augustus as a child, which Suetonius had given me in the period when we still were friends; I used to go there at the hour of siesta to sleep or to think, or to read. My dog would stretch out across the doorway, extending his paws somewhat stiffly now; reflections played on the marble; Diotimus would rest his cheek, to cool himself, against the smooth surface of an urn; my thoughts were on my successor."

Memoirs of Hadrian, p. 252-253

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