

**A Tale of Two Cities:  
Florence and Rome from the  
Grand Tour to Study Abroad**

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## **Introduction**

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In North American society, travel and intercultural exchange have always played a central role in the formation of citizens, giving them an opportunity to define their personal identity. For this reason, the United States has constantly aimed at maintaining and renewing economic and cultural relations with the rest of the world. Until the late nineteenth century, to Americans travel abroad, in particular to Europe, meant cultural and personal enrichment. The Old World, with its history and culture, served as a source of inspiration for building the habits and customs of the citizens of the New. In the course of that century, numerous reports and novels inspired by travel experiences were written, and these literary forms still today invite generations of young people to travel abroad. This is the context in which, from the early decades of the twentieth century, many North American universities began to include in their curriculum a period of study outside the national borders. A report drawn up in 2013 by the Tuscan Regional Institute for Economic Planning titled *Educating in Paradise: The Value of North American University Programs in Italy. Characteristics, Impact, and Prospects* and edited by Portia Prebys (Ferrara: Edisai, 2013) brought to light how Italy is one of the favorite destinations for the students who choose to do this. Among the many Italian cities, Florence and Rome are the ones which welcome the greatest number of foreign students. This conference discusses the myth surrounding these two cities in the American collective imagination: Florence because of the republican political system perfected in the Renaissance and Rome for its central role in classical antiquity.

What are the reasons that motivate people to travel? Where and when does the need to travel arise? In the contemporary world travel in its various forms and meanings represents one of the fundamental dimensions of life. However, even in pre-industrial times people set forth on journeys, and they did so much more frequently than we might expect. In ancient societies people moved around for political and military exigencies, that is to say to maintain control over a given territory and ensure contacts among various regions. This was the case in the vast empires of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, and Persians, where this necessity led to the development of waterways and land routes and the main categories of travelers were soldiers, government officials, and messengers. An equally strong spur was economic: to trade the goods produced in the various areas it was necessary to move about, and this brought about the rise of a traveling merchant class.

Finally, we should not forget that, alongside these ‘professional’ motives, certainly the prevalent ones, there were others of a cultural and religious nature. As early as the Egypt of the Pharaohs, substantial crowds took to the roads to be present at the Min festival, the mysteries of Osiris or the procession of the god

Amon who, during the Opet festival, came up the Nile to visit his harem at Luxor. The oracle of Amon at Thebes, like the Greek oracles later on, was consulted not only by sovereigns but also by travelers of every social rank.

Without setting aside political-military and economic reasons, the Greek world assigned to travel the value of a more complex experience that combined various needs. Ulysses, the prototype of the hero-traveler of antiquity, was moved to leave home above all by the desire for knowledge, and this need did not remain limited to the sphere of poetry and myth. Great historical figures like Pythagoras (570-490 BC), Solon (640-560 BC), and Pausanias (died around 470 BC) undertook long journeys in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, as did scholars like Herodotus (ca. 484 – 430 BC) and Strabo (ca. 63 BC – 24 AD), stimulated by curiosity of a geographic, historical, or ethnological nature. The great pan-Hellenic festivals of Delphi and Olympia, meanwhile, were the occasion for travel inspired by a fervor underpinned by religion, sports, and art at the same time. All this despite the fact that land communications were quite difficult in a country where roads were very few and could be covered only on foot or on the back of a mule or horse.

The situation in Rome and in its vast empire was very different in this respect. Here the overland roads – which continued quite efficiently in maritime routes radiating from the major ports – were numerous and favored lowland straight lines, often relying on large infrastructure works like bridges or even tunnels for their support. The expression of a system of relations among men based on social, political and military security, these roads were primarily destined to the circulation of soldiers and of information, the transmission of which was guaranteed by a postal service handled completely by the Roman government. Travel for religious purposes was quite limited, while – at least among the higher social ranks – travel in Greece was the vogue, whether to follow the teaching of famous rhetoricians or to visit the monuments of a civilization whose deep cultural roots were widely acknowledged. Within the framework of the more general trend toward mobility, we should not underestimate the role of habits like taking the waters at thermal spas or spending the warmest months outside the city, which took many Romans to Tivoli, the Campania region, the Bay of Naples, the Albani hills, or the Sabine area.

The end of the Roman empire with its excellent communications system and the multiplication of political boundaries, civil disorder, and lack of security which characterized the early Middle Ages limited, at least in western Europe, the possibility for people to move about. Even though long-distance trade did not die out completely, the economy assumed a more distinctly local dimension and the function of merchants was reduced. Nonetheless, even this period had its travelers, who defied the hardships and dangers of the road: wayfarers, hermits in search of God, but above all pilgrims. In the Christian West, it was mainly Palestine, laden with remembrances of the Old Testament and the life of Christ, which attracted a growing number of the faithful, who in the journey to the Holy Land saw a chance

for asceticism and expiation. But as early as AD 1000 Jerusalem shared top honors as a pilgrimage site with Rome, the site of the acts of the apostles Peter and Paul and many other martyrs, and Santiago de Compostela, in northern Spain, where the mortal remains of Saint James are believed to be located.

The new dynamism which animated European society after the year 1000, manifested by population growth and expanding economic horizons, was a powerful spur to mobility. Almost all social ranks began to perceive travel as a necessity, a habit, even an ideal. Pilgrimages, which melded noble religious aspirations with a desire for adventure, spread to become a mass phenomenon. Businessmen in great numbers resumed accompanying their goods along sea and land routes. Monks became wanderers to spread the word of God, and scholars and students began to travel in search of good teachers.

In the thirteenth century, as a result of the rise of the Mongolian empire and the hopes that this event aroused in the West about the possibility to form a united front against Islam, a period began of great trips to the East. These initiatives, which were initially diplomatic in nature, opened the way to missions of exploration as well as to the penetration of religious and above all commercial operations from Europe. The most famous name is without doubt Marco Polo, who between 1271 and 1295 traversed the Asian continent as far as Beijing, but other Europeans are documented in China, India, along the Volga River, in Turkistan and Persia. Attempts to expand trade also westward are reported. Genoese sailors, going past the Straits of Gibraltar, explored the Atlantic coast of Africa to reach the gold mines of Senegal. In 1291 the Vivaldi brothers undertook a long journey perhaps aimed, like Christopher Columbus two centuries later, at touching the Indies by sailing west, but they disappeared soon after reaching the Canary Islands. A real expansion of maritime trade beyond the Mediterranean was only achieved in the fourteenth century, when the construction of faster and larger ships spurred Genoa and Venice to establish relations with the economic centers of France, England, and Flanders.

At the end of the Middle Ages, Christopher Columbus's trip across the ocean in 1492 initiated an age characterized by discoveries and conquests of new space. The travelers' routes now embraced the latitudes of the wide world, and the leading actors along those routes were missionaries, geographers, students of natural phenomena, and of course the merchants, bold protagonists of intercontinental trade. This expansion of the explorable space of the world, however, even though it had significant repercussions on the concept of travel, whose values of discovery and adventure were stressed, in actuality only involved a restricted elite. More meaningful for our discussion here is the fact that the centuries of the Early Modern Age witnessed, also within the confines of the European continent, a substantial increase in the mobility of people and a greater influence of this on individual experience.

Religious and economic motives did not lose their relevance, but alongside these others took on new import. An example is the migration of specialized

craftsmen and artists, not unknown in the Middle Ages but more frequent now with the improvement in the system of communications and the determination of established powers to attract them; another is the recovery in grand style of thermal tourism, so dear to the ancient Romans. It was to treat his skin eruptions and take the waters at Plombières, France, and later at Baden, Switzerland, that the French writer Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) undertook his long tour of Europe. In the seventeenth century, too, the aristocrats of the court of Louis XIV regularly frequented spas.

But the most interesting innovation was the emergence of travel as an opportunity for instruction. This pedagogical concept of travel took hold, during the seventeenth century, above all in England, where young men of good families, having finished boarding school, had to complete their education by visiting Europe. They went abroad under the guidance of a tutor to master the languages, culture, and institutions of other countries, and to develop, in contact with monuments and works of art, the aesthetic sense necessary for a gentleman. Starting in the last seventeenth century this experience, so characteristic of a certain class of persons, which could take several years and involve long stays in the principal art centers of Europe (Italy in particular), also had its own specific title, the Grand Tour. In the seventeenth century, too, the fashion spread among the European nobility of travel for entertainment. In 1618 the erudite Englishman Fynes Morysion published the first guide aimed at those who intended to visit Europe for pleasure. After that, parallel with the growing demand for trips to the principal European countries, a vast number of publications appeared on this topic: vademecums, diaries, essays, chronicles, and reports.

In the course of the nineteenth century educational travel became a central element also in North American culture. Travel abroad, especially in Europe, meant for the well-to-do American an opportunity for cultural and personal enrichment impossible to achieve without direct contact with the customs and habits of the Old World. The numerous reports and novels inspired by the experiences of travelers of that time formed the foundations of North American travel literature, guiding and inspiring new generations of explorers and tourists towards ancient destinations. Famous authors like Washington Irving, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Henry James brought American public opinion closer to the place where the classical tradition has its origins, Italy. The world of collecting brought to Italy politicians, industrialists, financiers, collectors and artists ready to take their distance from industrial America and draw near to the cultural heritage which the Renaissance, in the opinion of many, brought with it, convinced that the essence of this historical period was living again in the United States, the land of progress in search of an ideological and cultural matrix that could be the base of the economic individualism of its citizens. Among the most popular cities was Venice, whose lagoon atmosphere made the city, in the eyes of Americans, the meeting point between East and West. Rome and Florence became favored destinations of antiquarians and intellectuals, Rome for its imperial glories



and the baroque papacy, Florence because it was identified with the Renaissance, a period when a strong aesthetic sensibility and social solidarity rooted in religious and ethical values were bound indissolubly to an economy inexorably devoted to profit. Late nineteenth-century Americans found in the Italian Renaissance the spiritual ancestors who could legitimate the democratic and capitalist values of the Gilded Age, the period of sudden economic growth that subverted the social order after the Civil War, described by Mark Twain in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner in his masterwork published in 1873 by the American Publishing Company with the title *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*.

From the mid-nineteenth century many Americans became enamored of this historical period and began writing memoirs of their trips during which they bought books, manuscripts, pictures, sculptures, and objects of every sort, in some cases for private collections, in others on behalf of museums and universities. Numerous masterpieces of Italian medieval and Renaissance art are now in the great museums of Boston, New York, and Washington, just as numerous buildings arose in the Renaissance style during this period. Emblematic in this regard is the splendid Venetian-style house built for Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston and filled with paintings she bought on the advice of Bernard Berenson.

Travel in Italy enabled the ruling class of American elites to conceive of the human and cultural formation of the younger generations as entailing a period of study far from the national shores, in particular in Old Europe, in the conviction that the educational impact of an experience of study abroad would stimulate the acquisition of multicultural skills that would give them greater self-awareness. Thus, through travel, the tools were acquired that were necessary to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the new ranks of leaders, following a fashion that made the rising generation open to otherness by means of the healthy exercise of comparison. Italy became one of the most desired destinations, no longer just the focus of medieval *itineraria* but the favored goal of new cultural pilgrims ready by now to absorb the teaching of the classics, study the Italian language, learn diplomacy, dance, horseback riding, fencing, history, art, architecture, and medicine. Travel in Italy became central to American culture and the fundamental moment for satisfying the demands of the *nouveaux riches* in search of forms of education that could open them up to life and to diversity. For an area like North America, where cultures and traditions very distant from each other have coexisted for centuries, travel and cultural exchange are aspects that historically are vitally important. Travel abroad becomes a moment for defining one's identity, deepening the relation with the home country of one's ancestry and with the nations with which economic and cultural relations are maintained.

In this context, some North American universities began adding study abroad programs to their curriculum. An example is Indiana University, which around 1875 began organizing summer stays in European localities in Switzerland, France, Great Britain and Germany. These were not actual study programs because no credit was earned. Nonetheless it was the beginning of a process which grew

throughout the twentieth century, with important milestones, and led to the institution of the Institute of International Education in 1919 and in 1923 to the first academically recognized study abroad program, that of the University of Delaware. Following this model, in 1931, the first study abroad program in Italy was established by Smith College in Florence, in Piazza della Signoria.

At the same time, recognition and appreciation of an international formation for university students grew. As a result of the experiences of the two world wars, a greater sensitivity to foreign relations spread through North America, as the creation of the Fulbright Program in 1946 bears witness, promoted by Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas and aimed at promoting an international climate of communication and trust. The establishment of Fulbright fellowships transformed the world of study abroad from an opportunity reserved for the elite, opening it up to the middle class and making it a cultural practice on an ever wider scale, practically a mass phenomenon and an opportunity whose scope is diversified today only in terms of location, type of classroom experience, and program duration.

Between 2010 and 2011 the number of North American students who came to study in Europe reached 149,663, concentrated in the two leading countries in this sector, Great Britain and Italy: 33,783 students in Great Britain and 30,631 in Italy. The fact that the greatest number of North American students go to Great Britain for their studies is due to their use of the same language, which makes both study and social relations easier. Italy's second-place position is even more interesting if evaluated in the 2011-2012 academic year, when the number of North American students increased by 8%, narrowing the gap with Great Britain. The Open Doors data, based on statistics furnished by home campuses about their study abroad programs for students from the United States studying in Italy during that same period, report even greater numbers, some 20% more than the 30,631 indicated above. In technical terms, this is because the Association of American College and University Programs in Italy (AACUPI) does not count short programs, which are included in the total of students coming to Italy calculated by the Global Education offices of the home universities. This phenomenon has significant economic impact: for the period examined here, the total spending resulting from study abroad programs in Italy as reported by AACUPI amounts to 544,400,000 euros, which must be increased by 20% (€108,880,000) to reflect the more inclusive number furnished by Open Doors. This means that the total spent by North American programs in Italy in the 2011-2012 academic year was €653,288,000.

The report drawn up in 2013 by the Istituto Regionale per la Programmazione Economica della Toscana – *Rapporto IRPET 2013*, p. 38 – confirms that the presence of North American programs in Italy is strongly polarized between Rome and Florence, cities that for their tradition, history, and presence of art works and monuments symbolize the Italian heritage of art and culture. In 2014, of the some 150 North American university programs in Italy,

34% gravitated around Rome and another 24% around Florence. To make this picture even clearer and show how concentrated the presence of North American students is in Rome and Florence, suffice it to note that the total number of American students in these two cities represents 80% of the total number enrolled in Italy.

The heritage of art, history, and culture is the main element of attraction for Italy among North American students studying abroad. At least until now, Italy does not seem to have suffered from the competition of other countries that offer a more advanced educational system and more affordable costs. The world of study abroad, however, is experiencing a number of important developments and expansions, so that now, besides the programs in the traditional European destinations, study programs are emerging in Asia, South America, Africa, Oceania, and the Middle East, to the point that in the United States universities offer their students the opportunity to choose a study program virtually anywhere in the world.

The permanent presence of North American study programs mobilizes economic resources, creates opportunities for employment, contributes to the internationalization of the local university systems and increases their prestige and overall quality, creating the conditions for exchange and growth for students and teachers. In the face of such impressive numbers I believe we should ask ourselves what are the motives that lead someone to come study in Italy, and above all why at the present time the preferred destinations for study tours continue to be Rome and Florence. These are the two cities that attract the majority of American students who are undertaking the course of their intellectual development: shouldn't this be thought of as a tremendous asset to be acknowledged, protected, and promoted?



## Florence and Its Myth

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In recent years the myth of Florence continues to be nourished by the world of study abroad programs run by North American universities, which for many years now are established on Italian soil, concentrated for the most part in Rome and in Florence. If the case of Rome is more easily understood because this city has in the course of its three-thousand-year history been the prime great metropolis of humankind, *caput mundi*, that of Florence is more complex and harder to explain. The fact is that Florence holds its own against Rome, with the record of having the first study abroad program, which introduced the custom among American college students of an extended stay in Italy for purposes of study when Smith College established its program in Florence in 1931. The purpose of the initiative adopted by the Board of the College in Northampton, Massachusetts, was to create in Florence a bridge with the United States so that all enrolled students could have the chance to enrich their course work with a period of study abroad in the acknowledged capital of the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup>

Smith's creation of its Florence program spotlights the natural vocation of the American people to complete their personal and cultural formation by an extended study tour outside the country, in particular in the Old World of Europe. It also highlights the political importance that these institutions have had for Italy in the course of their history: the Smith College program was up and running when the Fascist regime emerged as an antagonist of Western democracies, and it spread its cultural parameters in Italy and in Europe and unleashed anti-Fascist reactions thanks to the initiatives of Michele Cantarella, his wife Helen, and the historian Gaetano Salvemini, who was connected with Smith during his exile at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edoardo Tacchi, *I programmi universitari americani in Italia. Un profilo storico e un bilancio sulla didattica dell'italiano L2*, thesis, Università per Stranieri di Siena, Academic Year 2009/2010, p. 9. The data, here and elsewhere, are taken from the Rapporto IRPET 2013. *Educating in Paradise: Il valore dei Programmi Universitari Nord Americani in Italia. Caratteristiche, Impatto e Prospettive*, ed. by Portia Prebys (Ferrara: Edisai, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> On the topic of Italian antifascism in the United States, see *L'antifascismo italiano negli Stati Uniti durante la seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. by Antonio Varsori (Rome: Archivio Trimestrale, 1984); Alessandro Baldini, Paolo Palma, *Gli antifascisti italiani in America, 1942-1944: la Legione nel carteggio di Pacciardi con Borgese, Salvemini, Sforza e Sturzo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1990); Renato Camurri, "Idee in movimento: l'esilio degli intellettuali italiani negli Stati Uniti (1930-1945)", *Memoria e ricerca* (2009), 31, pp. 44-62; Enzo Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini negli anni dell'America*, Preface to *L'Italia vista dall'America*, in Gaetano Salvemini, *Opere*, IX vols (Feltrinelli: Milan, 1966-74), vol. VII, ed. by Enzo Tagliacozzo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969); John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Michele Cantarella, *Bibliografia salvemimiana* (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1986).

But when did this phenomenon that continues to affect the lives of generations of Americans and motivate them to make a cultural pilgrimage to cities like Rome and Florence begin? Where can we find the early signs of this practice that in recent years has represented – and continues to represent – a significant cultural and economic resource for Italy? The debate on the interpretation of the Renaissance in the United States has found in scholars like Anthony Molho and Marcello Fantoni, followed by others such as John Najemy, Edward Muir, Mark Jurjevic, and Stefano Baldassari attentive, persuasive readings that converge to identify it as the origin of the long history of American interest in Florence, first in the sphere of collecting and cultural consumption of the upper classes in the middle of the nineteenth century and later, starting in the 1930s, in the academic world, where Florentine republicanism was used both to legitimize the young American democracy in search of antecedents and to contrast the totalitarian regimes that were spreading in Europe in those years.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporaneously with what was happening in England, where in the course of the nineteenth century the Italian Renaissance became a source of inspiration for a wealthy lifestyle, the upper classes of North America began seeking their roots by traveling to the Old World, a new trend aimed at educating and above all at legitimizing their status as *nouveaux riches*. Moreover, the Renaissance paradigm offered by Florence made it possible to link the American economy, devoted primarily to profit, to a strong aesthetic sensibility and a deeply felt and experienced social solidarity rooted in religious and ethical values. These new American cultural pilgrims found in the Florence of the Renaissance a shared ideological and cultural matrix in which the economic individualism that underpinned their lives was tempered by the political liberty that Renaissance Florence appeared to have constructed, which was strong enough to stand up first to the emperor and then to the Church of Rome. These emerging classes in

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3 Anthony Molho, "Italian History in American Universities", in *Italia e Stati Uniti d'America: concordanze e dissonanze* (Rome: Il Veltro, 1981), pp. 201-24 (with Italian translation on pp. 224-44); Anthony Molho, "Gli storici americani e il Rinascimento italiano", *Cheiron*, XVI (1991), pp. 9-26; and Anthony Molho, "The Italian Renaissance Made in the USA", in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. by Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 263-94; Marcello Fantoni, "Introduction", in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze. Idea e costruzione del Rinascimento*, ed. by Marcello Fantoni (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 13-21; and Marcello Fantoni, "Renaissance Republics and Principalities in Anglo-American Historiography", in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze*, pp. 35-53. On the reflections on North American culture vis-à-vis the Florentine Renaissance cf. John M. Najemy, "Linguaggi storiografici sulla Firenze rinascimentale", *Rivista Storica Italiana*, CICVII (1985), pp. 192-59; Edward Muir, "The Italian Renaissance in America", *The American Historical Review*, C (1995), pp. 1095-18; Mark Jurjevic, "Hedgehogs and Foxes: The Present and Future of Italian Renaissance Intellectual History", *Past and Present*, CICV (2007), pp. 241-68; Stefano U. Baldassari, "Interpretazioni statunitensi del Rinascimento fiorentino", in *Vespucci, Firenze e le Americhe*, ed. by Giuliano Pinto, Leonardo Rombai, Claudia Tripodi (Florence: Olschki, 2014), pp. 329-44. On the debate concerning the interpretation of the Renaissance in the United States see *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Allen J. Grieco, Michael Rocke, Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi (Florence: Olschki, 2002); and *Palgrave Advances in Renaissance Historiography*, ed. by Jonathan Woolfson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

America had well in mind the conflict fomented by Florence more than once in the second half of the fourteenth century with the Church of Rome, anticipating as it were the Protestant spirit so close to the heart of the world that Mark Twain (1835-1910) described in *The Gilded Age*.<sup>4</sup>



The Breakers, a Vanderbilt mansion located on Ochre Point Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island, United States on the Atlantic Ocean.

In Florence spiritual ancestors were sought who could legitimize the democratic and capitalistic ideals of late nineteenth-century America and a romanticized ideal of economic and political liberty. Florence was the city in which the collective imagination identified a long process that led to the modern age, perhaps because it was perceived, more than any other geopolitical entity in Italy of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, as the place dedicated to the understanding of European history and culture.

“Of all Italian cities Florence has been the cradle of the Renaissance.”<sup>5</sup> Thus John Harold Plumb (1911-2001) coined in 1961 the phrase now used to describe Florence, the place where between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries

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4 Molho, “The Italian Renaissance Made in the USA”, pp. 261-94; Fantoni, “Renaissance republics and principalities”, pp. 35-53. On Protestant prejudice against Italian Catholicism, see Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, “‘Exchanging Glances’: Florentines and the Anglo-American Community in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century”, in *Otherness: Anglo-American Women in 19th and 20th Century Florence*, ed. by Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, *Italian History and Culture*, VII (2001), pp. 69-90. On travels by Americans in the late nineteenth century, see William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad. European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (Routledge: London, 2000).

5 John H. Plumb, *The Italian Renaissance: A Concise Survey of Its History and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 48.

men of letters, artists, and scientists produced a social change so great that it transformed one of the many city-states of Italy of the communes into one of the most important centers of the rebirth of world culture.<sup>6</sup> Florence is the homeland of Dante who – if in the Italy of Francesco De Sanctis he was the interlocutor for forging Italian identity through the identification of the poet’s birthplace with the national language, literature and culture – in the United States, through the vision of a scholar like Charles Singleton (1909-1985), became the emblem of the man who does not seek a relationship with God through the pope, a sort of visionary prophet inspired by the Bible who corresponds to the ideals of Puritan America.<sup>7</sup> Florence is the city of Giotto and thus of the revolution in painting which anticipated the Renaissance,<sup>8</sup> but it is also the city of Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti, the two greatest creators and theoreticians of the new architecture founded on a knowledge of classical antiquity.<sup>9</sup> Florence, too, is the city of Leonardo Bruni, the champion of civic humanism who stood up to the despotism promulgated by the dukes of Milan,<sup>10</sup> just as it was the site of Savonarola’s preaching, the precursor, in his thundering denunciation of the vanity of the patrician class and the corruption of the Roman curia, of the Protestantism which

6 John Najemy, “Studi americani sulla cultura e sulla storia sociale e politica dell’Italia comunale (secc. XII-XIV)”, in *La civiltà comunale italiana nella storiografia internazionale*, ed. by Andrea Zorzi (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2008), pp. 93-115.

7 See the book *Studi americani su Dante*, ed. by Gian Carlo Alessio and Robert Holländer (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989); also *Dante and Modern American Criticism*, ed. by Dino S. Cervigni, *Annali d’italianistica*, 8 (1990), pp. 5-419 (in this collection see the essays on Singleton by Zygmunt G. Barański, “Reflecting on Dante in America”, pp. 58-86, and Rocco Montano, “Il commento alla Divina commedia di Charles S. Singleton”, pp. 104-14). On Dante studies, cf. Steven Botterill, “Dante studies and the study of Dante”, *Annali d’italianistica*, 8 (1990), pp. 88-102. On Singleton, cf. Dante Della Terza, “La critica dantesca in America: la lezione singletoniana”, in *Giornata internazionale di studi in onore di Charles S. Singleton*, ed. by Anthony Oldcorn, *Lecture classensi*, 18 (1989), pp. 131-44; and Giuseppe Mazzotta, “The American criticism of Charles Singleton”, *Dante studies*, 104 (1986), pp. 27-44.

8 Richard Offner, *Studies in Florentine painting: The fourteenth century* (New York: F.F. Sherman, 1927); Richard Offner, *Italian primitives at Yale University, comments and revisions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927); Richard Offner, *A critical and historical corpus of Florentine painting* (New York: Institute of Fine Arts, 1930). On Offner, see the recent collection of his essays, accompanied by studies on him: Richard Offner, *A discerning eye: Essays on early Italian painting*, ed. by Andrew Ladis (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

9 On the impact of classical antiquity on Renaissance architects, see Howard Saalman, “Santa Maria del Fiore: 1294-1418”, *Art Bulletin*, 46 (1964), pp. 471-500; and Howard Saalman, *The church of Santa Trinita in Florence* (New York: College Art Association of America, 1966). In this same direction, cf. also Marvin Trachtenberg, *The campanile of Florence cathedral: ‘Giotto’s tower’* (New York: New York University Press, 1971); Marvin Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the eye: Urbanism, art, and power in early modern Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Margaret Haines, “La grande impresa civica di Santa Maria del Fiore”, *Nuova rivista storica*, 86 (2002), pp. 19-48. In the same direction cf. also Margaret Haines, “L’arte della Lana e l’Opera del Duomo a Firenze con un accenno a Ghiberti tra due istituzioni”, in *Opera: carattere e ruolo delle fabbriche cittadine fino all’inizio dell’età moderna*, ed. by Margaret Haines and Lucio Riccetti (Florence: Olschki, 1996), pp. 267-94; and Diane Finiello Zervas, “Orsannichele and its operai, 1336-1436”, in *Opera: carattere e ruolo delle fabbriche cittadine*, pp. 315-43; Diane Finiello Zervas, *The Parte Guelfa, Brunelleschi and Donatello* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J.J. Augustin, 1988).

10 Fabrizio Ricciardelli, *The Myth of Republicanism in Renaissance Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).



Donald Weinstein has read as anticipating middle class morality.<sup>11</sup> It is the city of Michelangelo's *David*, of Botticelli's *Spring* and *Birth of Venus*, and the dome of Florence Cathedral, masterpieces replicated countless times in the media and over time raised to the role of icons of Renaissance art and technology. It is the city of Niccolò Machiavelli, the theoretician of the "ruler" (prince) who supported republicanism and revealed to the people the injustice and violence of political power, showing them by contrast the value of liberty.<sup>12</sup>



Domenico di Michelino (1417-1491), *The Comedy Illuminating Florence (Dante and the Three Kingdoms, detail)*, 1465, Oil on canvas, Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.

To speak of Florence in terms of "cradle of the Renaissance" thus means dealing also with the culture that spawned that concept. This "Florence-centrism," in large part the fruit of nineteenth-century culture, can be traced back to the Enlightenment contrast between republic and tyranny, a postulate on which Europe drew during the Romantic Age to identify in the Italy of the city republics the salient political characteristics, as Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi (1773-1842) wrote in his *Histoire des républiques italiennes* (1809-1818), of the nineteenth-century democracies.<sup>13</sup> Its Medici dimension was formulated by the English historian William Roscoe (1753-1831),<sup>14</sup> who in the wake of François-Marie

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11 Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

12 Marcello Fantoni, "Il Rinascimento fiorentino", in *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa*, vol. I, *Storia e storiografia*, ed. by Marcello Fantoni (Treviso: Cassamarca, 2005), pp. 165-284.

13 Pierangelo Schiera, "Presentazione", in J.-Ch.-L. Sismonde de Sismondi, *Storia delle repubbliche italiane* (Turin: Bollati-Boringhieri, 1996), pp. IX-XCVI.

14 Stella Fletcher, *Roscoe and Italy, The Reception of Italian Renaissance History and Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012). See also William Roscoe, *The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici called the Magnificent*

Arouet Voltaire (1694-1778) and later Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) found the way to meld together the myths of the Renaissance, Florence, and the Medici family.<sup>15</sup>

It would be later, in the period of the Restoration, that Florence, after having been a brief stop for travelers attracted by the classical world, moved from its marginal position in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to which it had been relegated by a blind Counter-Reformation policy that deliberately canceled out the memory of a large part of humanist culture, Dante first and foremost. Numerous novels and historical-literary texts that appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century contributed considerably to the city's rising fortune. Personages and events from Florentine history were thus bent to the contrasting needs of their interpreters, offering up reconstructions of the past that appealed to the tastes and satisfied the need for identification for various generations and types of contemporaries.

The first to absorb Renaissance culture and make it their own were not however the rich Americans of the so-called – as Mark Twain styled it – Gilded Age,<sup>16</sup> but the Germans who in the years from 1850 to 1880 identified the modernity, and thus the idealism and *laissez-faire* ideology widespread throughout their country, with the Italian, and above all Florentine, Renaissance. At the end of the century a vibrant renaissance of the Italian Renaissance took hold in German culture, made up of academic studies, to be sure, but above all consisting of a strong cultural involvement in which phenomena concerning the collective taste and imagination are crucial elements.

Adopting the model of the American Academy established in Rome in 1894, a group of German scholars, their need for identification fulfilled, founded in 1897 the Kunsthistorisches Institut, a research center whose purpose was to promote the study of the history of Italian art and architecture and Italian history. The Kunsthistorisches Institut, which since 2002 belongs to Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, has as its mission today the study of Italian culture from late antiquity to the early modern age and the training on an international level of new generations of scholars in this field. Alongside the many individual research projects, numerous projects financed by other institutions are carried out in the institute, as well as multiple instances of international cooperation with

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(Liverpool: J M'Creert, 1795); and Amedeo Quondam, "William Roscoe e l'invenzione del Rinascimento", in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze*, pp. 283-84.

15 J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Amedeo Quondam, *Tre inglesi, l'Italia, il Rinascimento. Sondaggi sulla tradizione di un rapporto culturale e affettivo* (Naples: Liguori, 2006).

16 Contemporary critics, while praising Mark Twain's humor and satire, did not consider *The Gilded Age. A Tale of Today* (first published in 1873) a success, because the independent stories written by each author did not mesh well. A review published in 1874 compared the novel to a badly-mixed salad dressing, in which "the ingredients are capital, the use of them faulty": *The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 130.

universities, museums, and research institutes. Every year about sixty scholars work in the “Kunst,” as it is popularly called, on topics that encompass a span of time centered around the Renaissance. The library can boast 310,000 volumes, more than 1,000 current journals, many rare books, and a photo archive among the most important for Italian history and culture. With its extensive program of scholarly events open to the public and the active contribution of its users (up to one-hundred per day), the Kunsthistorisches Institut acts as a forum for the lively scholarly exchange of ideas, open to an international and interdisciplinary dimension.

During this same period, in America it was virtually only art dealers who took an interest – completely superficial and for material gain – in the Italian Renaissance. Curiosity about the Italian Renaissance was nourished by institutions open to a limited number of scholars and already successful artists, for the purpose of providing them an extended period of direct contact with the object of their research.<sup>17</sup> Wealthy Americans, drawing on their significant natural and financial resources, were ready to risk and invest just as the Florentine merchants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had done, and for this reason they felt themselves to be the direct heirs of the Italian Renaissance. James Jackson Jarves (1818-1888) brought to America a substantial collection of Italian pictures, in particular from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in the conviction that a knowledge of Italian culture of the past could have a positive influence on the moral development of Americans.<sup>18</sup> In an article he wrote for the *New York Times* on 30 October 1881, titled emblematically “The Ideal Florentine: A Life Story Full of Lessons for Merchant Princes,” the Bostonian collector and writer presented to the American general public Giovanni di Paolo Rucellai (1403-1481), the Florentine merchant banker who was able to balance his wealth with generous philanthropy:

Here we see the ideal Florentine, the complete type of enterprising, sagacious, “level-headed” citizen, respectable, successful and esteemed in every relation of life, pious without bigotry, acquisitive without stinginess, thrifty and yet munificent, every action closely calculated in

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17 Elisa Camporeale, “Visioni americane d’interni del Rinascimento italiano: dalla Gilded Age agli anni Venti”, in *Archivio storico italiano*, Vol. CLXXIII (2015), pp. 483-517. For a picture of some studies which spread the myth of the Italian Renaissance in the United States, see Flaminia Gennari Santori, “Renaissance fin de siècle: Models of Patronage and Patterns of Taste in American Press and Fiction (1880-1914)”, in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by John E. Law, L. Østermark-Johansen (London: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 105-20 (pp. 106-11).

18 On Jarves, see Flaminia Gennari Santori, “James Jackson Jarves and the diffusion of Tuscan painting in the United States”, in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze*, pp. 177-206; and Molho, “The Italian Renaissance Made in USA”, pp. 266-67. See also Alan Chong, “The American Discovery of Cassone Painting”, in *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance*, ed. by Cristelle Baskins (Boston: Periscope Publishing, 2008), pp. 66-93 (p. 75).

its consequences, scholarly, moral, hospitable, and self-controlled, one of the veritable makers of Florence; not so absorbed in the narrow horizon of self or “set”, as not to take a broad view of the interests of his city, and to give and labor zealously to promote them.<sup>19</sup>

Continuing to appeal to late nineteenth-century society in search of legitimation, Jarves added: “In the same manner as were the Florentines, we are traveling the same road socially, mercantilely, and artistically, if not yet politically.”<sup>20</sup>



James Jackson Jarves (1818-1888), American newspaper editor, and art critic who is remembered above all as the first American art collector to buy Italian primitives and Old Masters.

The new American entrepreneurial magnates, named Astor, Mellon, Morgan, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and Whitney, even though lacking aristocratic titles, were fully aware of the codes of behavior subscribed to by the nobility that had dominated Europe for centuries. First-generation millionaires like Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919) and Samuel Henry Kress (1863-1955) felt fully justified in acquiring by any means treasures and art works of the Italian, and above all Florentine, Renaissance. They compiled important art collections such as the Gardner Museum in Boston; the Cloisters, the Morgan Library, and the Frick, Blumenthal, and Lehman collections in New York; the Buckingham collection at the Art Institute of Chicago; the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical

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<sup>19</sup> Molho, “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA”, p. 267.

<sup>20</sup> James Jackson Jarves, “A Lesson for Merchant Princes”, in James Jackson Jarves, *Italian Rambles. Studies of Life and Manners in New and Old Italy* (New York: Sampson, 1883), p. 361, quoted in Molho, “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA”, p. 267.

Gardens in San Marino, California; the Hearst Castle in San Simeon, California; the Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida; and the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in Miami.<sup>21</sup>



George Blumenthal Residence (Arch. Samuel Breck Parkman Trowbridge and Goodhue Livingston).  
50 East 70th Street at Park Avenue, New York City, N.Y. 10021.

The association between the bankers and patrons of the Florentine Renaissance and the new North American magnates of the nineteenth century is the fruit of the need on the latter's part to legitimate themselves through an exemplary model of individual development. In the Renaissance in Florence, as in the late nineteenth century in the United States, the individual broke free of the limitations imposed by the preceding culture: medieval culture for the Florentines, reactionary culture for the Americans. Furthermore, the American interpretation of the Florentine Renaissance identified in the secular spirit that distinguished Florence from other contemporary cities as it made Florence a forerunner of the Reform movement.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Camporeale, "Visioni americane d'interni del Rinascimento italiano", pp. 486-87. Just to mention the Gardner Museum in Boston, the Renaissance works preserved in this mausoleum of Italian culture are the following: Giotto, *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* (1320-1325 circa); Fra Angelico, *The Death and Assumption of the Virgin* (1434 circa); Piero della Francesca, *Hercules* (after 1465); Carlo Crivelli, *Saint George Slaying the Dragon* (1470); Sandro Botticelli, *The Virgin and Child with an Angel* (1470 circa) and *The Tragedy of Lucretia* (1498 circa); Michelangelo, *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna* (1545 circa); Raphael, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (1503-1505 circa); Benvenuto Cellini, *Bust of Bindo Altoviti* (1550 circa).

22 Baldassarri, "Interpretazioni", pp. 332-33.

In a famous passage from his book *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, published in 1860, Jacob Burckhardt states that the modern characteristics of the individual are delineated for the first time in Renaissance Florence:

In the Middle Ages [...] man was conscious of himself as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis, man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such.<sup>23</sup>

Before academic and scholarly historiography appeared on the scene, enthusiasm for the Italian world found inspiration in Dante and the artistic and literary culture of his time. American love for Dante dates back to the 1840s and was fed by translations of the *Divine Comedy* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Charles Eliot Norton, a group who formed in 1881 the Dante Society of America, which still publishes today, without interruption, the journal *Dante Studies*.<sup>24</sup> In the late nineteenth century the Republic of Florence received from the international scholarly community investiture as epicenter of the Renaissance, making the myth of the city penetrate the academic world and bringing with it the mental outlooks that had been the soul of this myth. In this context the Florentine Renaissance, intrinsically republican, began to be perceived as inspiration for the political system of the United States. The first courses in European history followed a scheme in which the Florentine Renaissance was the crucial nexus. The trauma of the first World War facilitated the creation of courses in the new category of Western Civilization, consolidating and expanding even more its founding role in western culture. The Italian, and especially Florentine, Renaissance acquired in this framework the status of a watershed in the thousand-year course of a civilization that from classical Greece, passing through ancient

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<sup>23</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> Among the best-known Dante scholars in America, for brevity's sake I cite only the works of John Freccero, *Dante: The poetics of conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969); Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 1983); Robert Hollander, *Dante's epistle to Cangrande* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, poet of the desert: History and allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979); Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's vision and the circle of knowledge* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's poets: Textuality and truth in the Comedy* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *The transfiguration of history at the center of Dante's Paradise* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Robert P. Harrison, *The body of Beatrice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Rome, was revived first in Dante's Florence and later in fifteenth-century Italy. Gaetano Salvemini's masterful essay on "Florence in the Time of Dante," written during his exile at Harvard University, the institution of higher learning that took him in when he fled his native Italy corrupted by Fascism, moves from an illuminating discussion of the White and Black Guelphs to open onto republican Florence, which in terms of government by the people introduced, in the second half of the thirteenth century, a model that for Salvemini can be applied to all the contemporary democracies.<sup>25</sup>

Roberto Sabatino Lopez, too, persecuted in Fascist Italy for his Jewish origins, in 1939 went into exile, settling at Yale University where he taught the origins of Europe, centering his studies around the Renaissance. Utilizing Yale's economic resources and cultural vision, Lopez brought to New Haven the entire Spinelli collection, a group of manuscripts which I studied during my Ph.D. work at the University of Warwick. This collection, for example, contains the unpublished and hitherto unknown copy of a manuscript of letters that the Florentine notary Lapo da Castiglionchio (died 1381), forced into exile in 1378 after the Ciompi uprising,<sup>26</sup> wrote to his children.<sup>27</sup> Above all, it preserves for future generations more than 100,000 documents about the Florentine family dating from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The collection enriches the study of Florentine social history by means of documents that record the concerns of merchants, farmers, workers, slaves, women, and children in thousands of wills, marriage contracts, personal diaries, family letters, lists of expenses, tax returns, and account books.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Gaetano Salvemini, "Florence in the Time of Dante", *Spectulum*, XI, 3, (1936), pp. 317-26.

26 Fabrizio Ricciardelli, "L'esclusione politica a Firenze e Lapo da Castiglionchio", in *Antica possessione con belli costumi. Due giornate di studio su Lapo da Castiglionchio il Vecchio* (Firenze-Pontassieve, 3-4 ottobre 2003). Con la nuova edizione dell'epistola al figlio Bernardo, ed. by Franek Sznura (Florence: ASKA, 2005), pp. 46-61.

27 On Lapo da Castiglionchio see Marco Palma, "Lapo da Castiglionchio", in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XX (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1979), pp. 40-44, and Alessandro Valori, "Tra orgoglio aristocratico e identità comunale: Lapo da Castiglionchio sulla 'vera nobiltà'", *Archivio Storico Italiano*, CLIV (1996), pp. 437-78.

28 Robert G. Babcock, *The Spinelli Family. Guide to an Exhibition at the Beinecke Library* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).



Letters by or related to Lapo da Castiglionchio and his family, *Letters*, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, MS 815, f. 1.

Through the filter of the Enlightenment the Florentine Renaissance comes down to the contemporary world, beginning to be perceived as an interactive phenomenon in constant dialogue with the present day according to the principles of *imitatio* of the ancients introduced by Petrarch and followed by the humanists.<sup>29</sup> Anthony Molho's essay on "The Italian Renaissance. Made in the USA," published in a book on the study of the interpretation of the past by American historians (*Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, Princeton 1998), explains how in the period between the two world wars the North American university world by this point considered the Italian Renaissance to be "[...] an integral part of courses on the history of civilization."<sup>30</sup>

The concept of Western Civilization now defines the process of evolution of a common civilization that leads from the ancient East to twentieth-century America. The spread of this axiom was boosted by the flight of many European scholars to North American universities in an attempt to avoid the consequences of the rise of totalitarian regimes in their home countries. Salvemini (to Harvard), Lopez (to Yale), Hans Baron (the University of Chicago), and Paul Kristeller

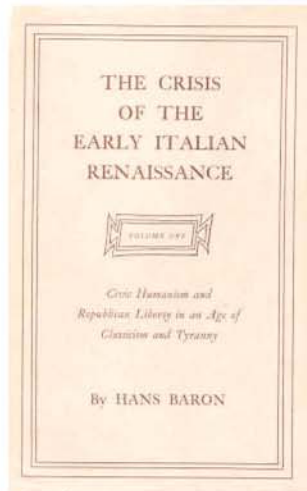
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<sup>29</sup> On the influence that, according to some American scholars, of Petrarch on the history of early humanism, see George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); Carol Everhart Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); William J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); William J. Kennedy, *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Molho, "The Italian Renaissance Made in the USA", p. 268.



(Columbia University) are just some of the many European intellectuals who were welcomed by elite universities in America. The work of these scholars helped to consolidate the existence of a line of direct descent between the contemporary United States and the Italian, especially Florentine, Renaissance. The fruit *par excellence* of this climate is the thesis of civic humanism advanced in the 1940s and 1950s by Eugenio Garin and Hans Baron. It was Baron, naturally in the wake of Jules Michelet (1798-1874) and Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), who read Florentine humanism as the origin of the “[...] positive values of modern European civilization.”<sup>31</sup>



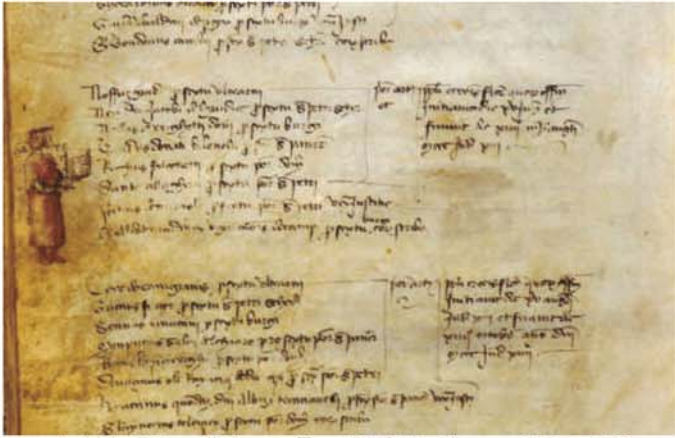
Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955). First published in two volumes, the work was reissued in a one-volume Princeton edition in 1966.

Civic humanism, which unites the passion for letters to devotion to the civic ideals of liberty, is of course a concept very much in keeping with the premise that the idea of *libertas* which would be the foundation of modern democracies was developed in the resistance put up by the Florentine republic to Visconti expansionist policies. In his book *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Baron links the birth of civic humanism as the reaction of Florentine intellectuals such as Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and Giannozzo Manetti to the threat presented by the Milanese expansionism of the tyrant Giangaleazzo Visconti. Baron recalls that it was Bruni in his *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis* (1402) – following in the footsteps of Tacitus in his *Historiae* – who set up a parallel between the advent of the tyranny of Augustus, resulting in the end of the

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<sup>31</sup> Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 47.

Roman Republic, and the *signoria* of the Visconti in Milan, perceived as a concrete threat to the liberty of Florence, a city republic governed by artisans and members of the so-called “*popolo*.” Openly inspired by the model of western democracies fighting against Nazism, Baron’s interpretation, albeit unilateral and in some cases forced, still represents a central point of reference for the interpretation of early Renaissance Florentine civilization.<sup>32</sup>



Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Tratte*, 57, f. 14v, Florence, 15 June 1300.

Registration of the Priors in office for the bimonthly period 15 June-14 August, 1300.

Dante Alighieri figures among those elected, and there is a colored portrait of him in the margins.

The Renaissance as a category of historiography became a consistent paradigm in keeping with ideological resistance to Fascist and Communist totalitarianism. Exiles from Nazi Germany like Ernst Kantorowicz, Ernst Cassirer, Felix Gilbert, Erwin Panofsky, Theodor Mommsen, and above all, as cited above, Baron and Kristeller, developed a historiography centered around the Renaissance aimed at demonstrating the shift of the origins of American civilization from Elizabethan England to fourteenth and fifteenth-century Florence. Following in the path blazed by this tradition, in 1961 the Harvard University center in Italy was created, choosing Florence as its adopted city. Thus Villa I Tatti in Settignano became the home of one of the most important foreign institutions in terms of quality and quantity of academic production on the Italian Renaissance. Here its founder Bernard Berenson (1865-1959) instituted fellowships that offered time and tranquility to promising students. With its vast collection of books, photographs, and art works, the Harvard University Center for Renaissance Studies offers every year numerous post-doctoral fellowships to students from all over the world, who are asked to turn their research into books that enrich the study of Italian history

<sup>32</sup> Baron, *The Crisis*, p. 58

and culture. This institute has as its aim the sharing among the fellows of the fruits of their labors within the framework of an international community. The lectures and seminars organized by the center are published in the journal *I Tatti Studies* and in four series of books: *Bernard Berenson Lectures*, *Villa I Tatti*, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, and the *I Tatti Renaissance Library*. This last series, put out by the Harvard University Press, is especially significant because it publishes sources both in Latin and in the vulgate with facing-page English translation. This means that Anglo-American culture is progressively appropriating not only the myth of the Renaissance, but also its substance.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1970s studies proliferated on the political and ideological processes that took place in Florence between the middle of the fourteenth century and the end of the fifteenth, reading them in a modern key. The creation of the state of Florence began to be seen as the formation of a centralized structure and the progressive delineation of a modern organization. The advent of new technologies which enable historians to store and access data helps them bring into focus the patronage and ritual aspects of Florentine statecraft. Prosopographical and political-science studies on the ruling classes and those inspired by network analysis and anthropology bring to light a reality that increasingly contradicts the earlier conventional reading. Alongside Burckhardt's viewpoint, according to which humanist culture is the principal driving force of Italian – and thus European – society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a view of Florentine society and public life dominated by personal relationships of neighborhood, kinship and patronage began to emerge: dense relations, deeply rooted and concretely active in the social-political dialectic that led to constant social conflict which adopted the practice of exclusion as its form of political resolution.<sup>34</sup> The assumption that the Renaissance arose from the democratic fervor of the medieval cities governed as communes is a very intriguing thesis that, however, remains a conviction, and thus an illusion, of a few isolated voices who read the expansion of the ruling class promoted by the governments of the people as a revolutionary process and not as an opportunity that was lost as a result of the inability of the people to place at the center of political power, as Cicero exhorted for republics, the *civis*.<sup>35</sup>

We are thus in the sphere of the study of state building, and once again Florence is at the center of discussion among historians. The paradigm it represents seems to fit perfectly with the moment of the foundation of European unity which

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33 *Renaissance Civic Humanism. Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. by James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The historiographical picture of the Italian Renaissance is discussed in *Palgrave Advances in Renaissance Historiography*, ed. by Jonathan Woolfson (London: Palgrave, 2005).

34 Fabrizio Ricciardelli, *The Politics of Exclusion in Early Renaissance Florence* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

35 John M. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280-1400* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

grew out of the end of the second world war. The example of the Florentine commune, which promoted the “functional beauty” of its *contado* and employed massive resources in the field of architecture in a territory that was very hard to render uniform, resembled in its evolution the historical process within which the common European identity was forged. “They become administrative capitals of the expanded Florentine state and the main resting places on the routes that brought people and merchandise from all over Europe,”<sup>36</sup> wrote Daniel Friedman describing the *Terre Nuove*, “[...] the new towns [which] were built to serve Florence [...]”.<sup>37</sup>

The axioms of Michelet and Burckhardt furnish the ingredients for the Renaissance vogue that took shape both in intellectual and popular forms: From Bernard Berenson with the foundation of his Villa I Tatti to E.M. Forster with *A Room with a View*, an idea of what can be called the American Renaissance took hold in the collective imagination, that is to say, the fulfillment of the affinities between the Florentine Renaissance and the American present. Thus, between the late 1950s and early 1960s we see in Italy the first expansion of the phenomenon of American university programs in Italy. History, art history, classical studies, and above all the Renaissance that rose on the foundations of the proto-democracy of communal society are the reasons why an ever-growing number of young Americans chose to live temporarily in Italy for purposes of study. Thus in Florence, just to give some examples, study centers were set up by Syracuse University (1959), Middlebury College (1959), Stanford University (1960), and Gonzaga University (1963). Events in subsequent years confirmed this trend which heightened the impression that Florence, together with Rome, were the focus of this phenomenon. Florida State University (1966), California State University (1966), and Rutgers University (1969) started Florence programs. By the end of the 1960s Italy had become the preferred destination for wide sectors of the American student population who chose to pursue part of their education abroad. In the early 1970s, especially as the US economy expanded, the American programs in Italy increased in number and began to grow, continuing to choose Rome and Florence as their location. Opening their doors in Florence in this period were Johns Hopkins University (1971), Kent State University (1972), Bowling Green State University (at Studio Art Centers International, SACI) (1975), the University of Connecticut (now the International Studies Institute at Palazzo Rucellai) (1978), and Georgetown University (1979).<sup>38</sup>

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36 Daniel Friedman, *The Florentine Towns. Urban Design in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 6.

37 Friedman, *The Florentine Towns*, p. 6.

38 The data are taken from Tacchi, *I programmi universitari americani*, especially the section on the *Sviluppo e definizione del fenomeno: dagli scholars ai juniors* (pp. 11-16).

American culture's attention to the Florentine Renaissance, which between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth identified an appendix to the Grand Tour as the instrument for legitimation of the new American ruling class in search of cultured origins and the legitimation of the new American democracy in search of republican origins, now found new nourishment in study abroad programs, which differ from the elite model of the academies because they provide opportunities for more in-depth study not only to a restricted circle of scholars but to undergraduate students, enabling them to follow a course of specialization in Italian culture abroad. In the specific case of Italy, the American university programs are arranged as extensions of the home campus, each one with its own academic philosophy and its own faculty, each with its own students, who are usually already enrolled in a specific course of study in the United States or Canada and are only very rarely recruited on Italian soil. Italy is the only country in the world up to now that has been able to imitate the model of the study abroad programs adopted by US universities and still today, practically eighty years since the first program opened, the North American presence abroad represents, as Portia Prebys, president of AACUPI (Association of American College and University Programs in Italy), says, a real "historical anomaly."<sup>39</sup>

Published in 2000, the first study by IRPET (Istituto Regionale per la Programmazione Economica in Toscana) of North American colleges and universities reports that these programs have constantly and progressively increased decade by decade since the 1960s. As I mentioned at the beginning, the most recent data supplied to me by AACUPI attest that of the about sixty American study abroad programs in Tuscany, around fifty are in Florence.

Florence or not, these institutions are the expression of a form of mass cultural tourism whose origins are well in the past and whose effects have been so completely absorbed as to be unconsciously transmitted from generation to generation. The most interesting fact is that in both Florence and Rome many North American institutions have begun to open up exponentially to the pure and applied sciences. But the aims of the American universities in Italy are not all the same, and not everyone produces publications on Italian history and culture or the sciences. In the cases where studies are published, these are expressions of a desire to expand communication between scholars and students working in different disciplines but nonetheless interested in discovering different ways of conceiving the formative *paideia* of human beings. Thus these institutions promote research on Italian history, contribute to strengthening archives and libraries, and favor an increasingly rich multimedia documentation. Moreover, there are programs which

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<sup>39</sup> Portia Prebys, *Educating in Paradise: Thirty Years of Realities and Experiences of North American Colleges and Universities in Italy* (Ferrara: Edisai, 2009), pp. 19-28.

promote medical conferences and others where the study of mathematics and physics is accompanied by courses in engineering.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, Florence is a cultural paradigm through which still today young Americans trace the origins of the values of democracy, freedom, rational thought, individualism, the scientific method, and the capacity for critical reflection on their lives which are at the base of their way of living, their political thought. The result is that Florence, in its role as dispenser of a cultural model, continues to nourish its culture through its myth, probably because without the myth that generates curiosity culture is not nourished, that is to say it does not find the economic resources necessary for it to exist. We can therefore debate all we want about why Florence has become over time a mythological city; the fact remains that through this mental process the city has found – and continues to find – new and increasing synergies to feed and spread culture in the world.



Giuseppe Zocchi (b. ca. 1717, Firenze, d. 1767, Firenze), *The Piazza della Signoria in Florence*, Oil on canvas, 57 x 87 cm, Private collection.

The ideological and institutional foundations that distinguish the Republic of Florence become a part of the North American imagination and nourish a myth dear to the “young” American society which wants to assimilate the experience

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<sup>40</sup> Syracuse University in Florence published for a number of years now the *Villa Rossa Book Series* presenting research on Florentine, Tuscan, and Italian history and art history (<http://suflorence.syr.edu/publications/VillaRossaBS/>); since 2014 Kent State University published, with Viella publishing house in Rome, the series *Kent State University European Studies* (<http://www.viella.it/catalogo/collana/56>). New York University at Villa La Pietra has published for years the papers of the meetings organized by it and finances the publication of the research done by its teachers, while the International Studies Institute (ISI) Florence, the Consortium for Public Universities created in 2005, which includes Pennsylvania State University, University of Connecticut, University of Virginia, Arizona State University, University of Maryland, and University of Melbourne (Australia), organizes lecture series and contributes to the publication of essays on Italian history and culture with the Firenze University Press, the publishing house of the Università degli Studi di Firenze.

lived by the citizens of Renaissance Italy, inspired by the classics of the ancient past and the civic values that make them capable of self-government. Florence offers a model that is a perfect fit because from the second half of the thirteenth century to the sixteenth it developed a political experiment based on new juridical principles that enabled the participation of the non-aristocratic classes, in other words of the *people*, in the management of the common weal. North American culture has absorbed into its own DNA the awareness that the political and economic institutions created in the course of the Italian Renaissance, above all in Florence, are at the base of their own system of social life, and that it is precisely these institutions that represent, more in general, an essential paradigm for the formation of the modern western world. Florence continues to be still today, I would say completely unawares, the source of the values that shape the modern intellectual formation and that North American and European citizens identify as the origin of the contemporary world.





## Renaissance Florence from the American Pond: 150 Years of Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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One of the most famous book openings in Western literature is the Dickens novel that inspired the title of our conference: *A Tale of Two Cities*. This *incipit* – as we know – reads as follows

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.<sup>2</sup>

Introducing the first edition of his well-known collection of lectures titled *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* in 1957, Erwin Panofsky wrote:

To bring the first and second lectures up to date – and, as far as possible, up to standard – proved to be more difficult and time-consuming than had been anticipated [...]. And what made the process of revision demoralizing as well as laborious was the fact that practically no week went by without giving birth to some new contribution which demanded attention. No man can read, within a given time, all that a hundred others can write, and in the end I came to see that, as regards the Renaissance Question, it has become impossible to be either comprehensive or original: not only all the wrong but even all the right things seem to have been said.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons of space, I must limit bibliographic references in this article. For further bibliography on the topic discussed here, see my following essay: “Centocinquant’anni (o quasi) di Rinascimento fiorentino in Nord America”, *Italian Poetry Review*, 7 (2012), pp. 235-56 and “Interpretazioni statunitensi del Rinascimento fiorentino”, in *Vespucci, Firenze e le Americhe*, ed. by Giuliano Pinto, Leonardo Rombai, and Claudia Tripodi (Florence: Olschki, 2014), pp. 329-44.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2003), p. 3 (chapter I: *The Period*).

<sup>3</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stokholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960), p. xviii.

And yet, one only needs to read the preface to a recent monograph that stands a fine chance of becoming another classic in Renaissance studies to find an altogether different – if not opposite – view. I am referring to Noel Malcom's *Agents of Empire*, where the renowned English historian writes:

Towards the end of the Second World War, the municipal archive of the Slovenian city of Koper (Capodistria) was taken away by the Italian authorities. Since then it has remained, unconsulted and unconsultable, in a store-room of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice. Some, but not all, of the manuscripts were microfilmed in the 1960s, and the films were deposited at the Archivio di Stato in Trieste, where I have tried to study them. The quality of the filming was exceptionally low; I am full of gratitude to the staff of the Archivio di Stato in Trieste, who were wonderfully helpful in trying to find ways to improve the legibility of this material, but the difficulties in some cases were almost insuperable. This archive, consisting of many hundreds of bound manuscript volumes dating back to the Middle Ages, represents the greatest single source of potential knowledge about any Venetian-Slovenian city; it is or should be a vital part of the cultural heritage of the Slovenian people. If it were returned to its proper home in Koper, or even if it were made available to scholars in Venice, it could be used to generate much new understanding of both Venetian and Slovenian history. That the present situation should obtain, nearly 70 years after the end of the Second World War, is an absolute scandal.<sup>4</sup>

I shall return to this passionate call for editions of hitherto unpublished texts at the end of my essay. For the time being, I'd like to follow one of the Ciceronian rules that humanists liked best, and state from the outset what my main topic will be. In the next ten pages or so I'll try to provide an overview (although inevitably short and incomplete) of the major interpretations of the Florentine Renaissance that Anglo-American (mostly North American) scholars have offered from the late XIX century to the present. We are speaking, clearly, of a vast subject. It is our luck that several distinguished scholars – especially in the last 30 years or so – have touched on it: Christopher Celenza, Marcello Fantoni, Mark

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<sup>4</sup> Noel Malcom, *Agents of Empire. Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), p. xxii.

Jurdjevic, Edward Muir, John Najemy, Michael Wyatt and, above all, Anthony Molho.<sup>5</sup>

Owing to the high number of studies devoted to Anglo-American readings of the Florentine Renaissance, I shall first provide a brief summary of the major phases that have gradually led to a “reassessment” of the whole notion of this historic time period. In doing so, I shall highlight the main developments (even if contradictory) within this rich scholarly scenario. A turning point in this process is Hans Baron’s fundamental volume *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. First published in 1955 and then expanded into a new edition eleven years later, this study by the famous German scholar – who fled his native Germany in the late 1930s, moving to England first and finally to the U.S. – raised early Quattrocento Florence to a crucial role in European history. The debate – not to say the polemic – that Baron’s thesis stirred is still far from abating today.

I shall focus on it shortly. First, however, I find it necessary, for the sake of clarity, to outline the various phases of Anglo-American interest in the Italian (and, above all, Florentine) Renaissance. We must begin with a late nineteenth-century phenomenon that, originating as a sort of “appendix” to the so-called Grand Tour, is usually referred to as “The American Renaissance.” Within it, several well-known figures stand out, starting with *independent scholars* such as James Jackson Jarves and Bernard Berenson.<sup>6</sup> Although very different in their level of education,

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<sup>5</sup> In alphabetical order, see Christopher S. Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin’s Legacy* (Baltimore-London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 151-56 (corresponding to the Appendix); Marcello Fantoni, “Introduzione”, in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze. Idea e costruzione del Rinascimento. Atti del Convegno, Georgetown University at Villa ‘Le Balze’: Fiesole, 19-20 giugno 1997*, ed. by Marcello Fantoni (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), pp. 13-21 and his essay there (pp. 35-53) titled “Renaissance Republics and Principalities in Anglo-American Historiography”; Mark Jurdjevic, “Hedgehogs and Foxes: The Present and Future of Italian Renaissance Intellectual History”, *Past and Present*, 195 (2007), pp. 241-68; Anthony Molho, “Italian History in American Universities”, in *Italia e Stati Uniti d’America: concordanze e dissonanze. Atti del convegno: Roma, 11-12 febbraio 1980*, (Rome: Il Veltro, 1981), pp. 201-24 (Italian translation on pp. 224-44); Anthony Molho, “Gli storici americani e il Rinascimento italiano”, *Chevron*, 16 (1991), pp. 9-26; Anthony Molho, “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA”, in *Imagined Histories. American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. by Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 263-94; Edward Muir, “The Italian Renaissance in America”, *The American Historical Review*, 20 (1995), pp. 1095-118; John Najemy, “Linguaggi storiografici sulla Firenze rinascimentale”, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 197 (1985), pp. 192-259. See also the essays collected in the following volumes: *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century. Acts of an International Conference: Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 9-11, 1999*, ed. by Allen J. Grieco, Michael Rocke, Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi (Florence: Olschki, 2002) and *Palgrave Advances in Renaissance Historiography*, ed. by Jonathan Woolfson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See Flaminia Gennari Santori, “James Jackson Jarves and the Diffusion of Tuscan Painting in the United States”, in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze*, pp. 177-206 and (in the same volume) Patricia Rubin, “Bernard Berenson, Villa I Tatti, and the Visualization of the Italian Renaissance”, pp. 207-22. On Berenson, in particular his Harvard years, see Jonathan K. Nelson, *Berenson and Harvard. Bernard and Mary as Students* (<http://berenson.itatti.harvard.edu>). More in general, on the Italian Renaissance revival and its wide impact on the visual arts in the U.S. towards the end of the XIX century see now the excellent essay by Elisa Camporeale, “Visioni americane d’interni del Rinascimento italiano: dalla ‘Gilded Age’ agli anni Venti”, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 173 (2015), pp. 483-517, with extensive bibliography.

artistic expertise and managerial savvy, both Jarves and Berenson saw the study of late medieval and Renaissance Italian art as a valuable means of shaping a knowledgeable and refined ruling class. Among their most pressing goals was overcoming that inferiority complex towards European *élitès* that so many famous novels of the time describe. In their eyes, the Italian Renaissance was to serve a much-needed educational purpose. Though less urgently and from a different standpoint, the same goal was pursued by many of their colleagues in Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> Given the formative importance that it attributed to the visual arts, we may call this first stage “aesthetic.”

Its mission is easily noticeable in the writings that Jarves published to refine his fellow Americans, above all the wealthiest tycoons. To the same purpose, he launched a series of medieval and Renaissance art exhibits several years before the foundation of the main museums in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> A telling and much-quoted example is Jarves’s *A Lesson for Merchant Princes*, that is, a chapter from his lengthy *Italian Rambles* (1883). In it he upholds the figure of the successful Florentine Renaissance banker as a “model citizen.” From among various candidates to this laudable role he selects Giovanni Rucellai, whom he describes as follows:

Here we see the ideal Florentine, the complete type of enterprising, sagacious, “level-headed” citizen, respectable, successful and esteemed in every relation of life, pious without bigotry, acquisitive without stinginess, thrifty and yet munificent, every action closely calculated in its consequences, scholarly, moral, hospitable, and self-controlled, one of the veritable makers of Florence; not so absorbed in the narrow horizon of self or “set”, as not to take a broad view of the interests of his city, and to give and labour zealously to promote them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As anticipated, reasons of space prevent me from providing exhaustive bibliography on such figures as William Roscoe, Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds. Important information on their views of the Italian Renaissance can be found in the studies listed above in note 1. See also Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); John B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); *Roscoe and Italy. The Reception of Italian Renaissance History and Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. by Stella Fletcher (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Stephen J. Milner, “Manufacturing the Renaissance: Modern Merchant Princes and the Origins of the Manchester Dante Society”, in *Culture in Manchester: Institutions and Urban Change since 1850*, ed. by Janet Wolff (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 61-94.

<sup>8</sup> Jakob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by Samuel G. C. Middlemore, with an introduction by Peter Burke and notes by Peter Murray (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> James Jackson Jarves, *A Lesson for Merchant Princes*, in his *Italian Rambles: Studies of Life and Manners in New and Old Italy* (New York: Sampson, 1883), p. 361, cited in Molho, *The Italian Renaissance*, p. 267. A few years later, in his preface to *The Venetian Painters*, Bernard Berenson wrote: “We ourselves, because of our faith in science and the power of work, are instinctively in sympathy with the Renaissance [...]. The spirit which animates us was anticipated by the spirit of the Renaissance, and more than anticipated. That spirit

To prove his point, Jarves undscores several affinities that – he believes – Renaissance Florentines and late XIX century Americans share: “We are traveling the same road, socially, mercantilely, and artistically, if not yet politically.” He thus alludes to a passage from Giovanni Rucellai’s memoirs to conclude as follows: “If we are to build on American soil cities like Florence, world renowned for art and science even more than for commerce and luxury, we must breed merchant princes cultured like Rucellai, and deeply imbued with his maxims, that it is pleasanter and more honorable to spend money for wise purposes than to make it.”<sup>10</sup>

Many scholars – as I said – have cited Jarves’s ideal portrait of Giovanni Rucellai. This is far from suprising. In the enthusiastic passage quoted above one finds the main reasons behind the growing American interest in the Italian Renaissance. They are reasons – let it be said in passing – that lasted well beyond this first, long phase that we may call (as I said) “aesthetic,” comprising the period from the mid XIX century to the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> Among them is – first and foremost – the notion of the individual and its development, which would later fall under the overarching definition of “self-fashioning.” According to Jacob Burckhardt’s famous thesis, from the Italian Renaissance onwards Europeans started freeing themselves from the frets imposed by medieval culture. In an often quoted passage of his 1860 *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (which Samuel Middlemore translated into English 18 years later)<sup>12</sup> Burckhardt claims:

In the Middle Ages [...] man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time

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seems like the small rough model after which ours is being fashioned”. I cite from Bernard Berenson, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance, with an index of their works* (New York-London: Putnam’s Sons, 1894), p. vi.

10 Jackson Jarves, *A Lesson for Merchant Princes*, cited in Molho, *The Italian Renaissance*, p. 267. This passage from Giovanni Rucellai’s *Zibaldone* is often quoted by Anglo American scholars discussing Renaissance economics. See, for instance, Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 84-85.

11 On the Grand Tour as a prologue to this “aesthetic phase” see Van W. Brooks, *The Dream of Arcadia: American Writers in Italy, 1760-1915* (London: Dent, 1958); Paul R. Baker, *The Fortunate Pilgrims: Americans in Italy, 1800-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964) and Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914* (Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1992).

12 On Samuel George Chetwynd Middlemore’s English translation of *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* see Benjamin G. Kohl, “The Myth of the Renaissance Despot”, in *Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. by John E. Law and Bernadette Paton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 61-73, especially pp. 68-69.

asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such.<sup>13</sup>

This statement proved no less famous than controversial. Still today, we often find it cited in studies on the notion of individual and how such notion developed during the Italian Renaissance.<sup>14</sup> What I'd like to point out now are the other features that made Jarves's "portrait" of Giovanni Rucellai so memorable and influential. First of all, there is an eminently lay spirit – Jarves believes – that helps distinguish Florence from the other main Italian centers, upholding it as a laudable harbinger of the Protestant Reformation in various ways. One can already find this feature towards the end of the XVIII century in William Roscoe's view of Florentine culture at the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent.<sup>15</sup> In the second half of the following century this reading was strengthened by the Risorgimento ideals that most Anglo-Americans embraced. In doing so, they often provided a forced reading of the Savonarolan movement, singling it out as a unique event within the Italian Renaissance. From this ideological perspective, only Venice could offer – to a certain, though much less dramatic extent – a significant term of comparison. The frequent clashes with papal authority that marked Florentine history from the late Middle Ages onwards made this city stand out as a laudable precursor of the Protestant spirit.<sup>16</sup>

A further major element in this reading was Florence's mercantile success, which was mostly celebrated through idealized portraits of such figures as (in addition to Rucellai) Palla and Filippo Strozzi, Luca Pitti, Cosimo de' Medici and, above all, Lorenzo the Magnificent. Consequently, Florence was turned into a proto-capitalist experiment, if not the very cradle of capitalism itself. A kind of capitalism – let it be said in passing – that was not just financial but cognitive, too,

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13 Jakob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by Samuel G. C. Middlemore, with an introduction by Peter Burke and notes by Peter Murray (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 98.

14 See for instance, the introductory essay in Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought. Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1948).

15 See Amedeo Quondam, "William Roscoe e l'invenzione del Rinascimento", in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze*, pp. 249-338. On pp. 283-84, Quondam writes: "Nell'impianto di questa fondazione del mito di Firenze si profila anche un altro elemento, sempre di natura fortemente ideologica: solo qui, nell'esperienza eccezionale e del tutto anomala (rispetto alle altre città-stato italiane) di Firenze, sembra trovare risarcimento quella strutturale differenza dell'Italia rispetto alle altre nazioni 'moderne' d'Europa, che per antico luogo comune è riconosciuto nella mancanza della Riforma. Con il suo regime popolare, democratico e repubblicano, con il suo *character* di mercanti, banchieri, imprenditori, Firenze può essere considerata come preventivamente predisposta all'etica protestante: riformata prima della Riforma e senza la Riforma".

16 On the profound and lasting anti-Catholic bias, see the following essay and the bibliography reported therein: Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, "'Exchanging Glances': Florentines and the Anglo-American Community in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century", in *Otherness: Anglo-American Women in 19th and 20th Century Florence*, ed. by Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, *Italian History and Culture*, 7 (2001), pp. 69-90.

in its successful efforts at discovering and promoting talent. Several factors would serve as evidence of this praiseworthy tendency. Among them were the city's unusual high social mobility and the privileged status enjoyed by such categories of citizens as artists and humanists. Most of them were born into humble or middle-class families from the surrounding territory before moving to the capital of the Florentine state.

The passage by Jarves cited above can thus help us see how and why patronage became a crucial component of North American society in the late XIX century. It is not accidental if still today patronage proves a most appealing topic to Renaissance scholars in the U.S. Moreover, within such a strategic and ideological reading of the Renaissance, the political system of Quattrocento Florence performed on characteristics similar to those of the newly born United States of America, thus coming across as intrinsically republican.

This last feature will prove particularly prominent in the second stage of the American interpretation of the Florentine Renaissance, that is, from the 1930s onwards. In those years, epoch-making events in European history forced numerous scholars and scientists (mostly Germans of Jewish descent) to leave their home countries and migrate to the U.S. Many soon integrated themselves in North American society. A conspicuous number went on to hold distinguished posts as university professors. In that capacity they managed to create important studies centers that would form a whole generation of specialists in a variety of disciplines, from science to the humanities. This proved most beneficial to the development of Renaissance studies overseas.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, it is fair to claim that a truly North American school in this field was born of those German scholars (such as Hans Baron, Ernst Cassirer, Felix Gilbert, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Theodor E. Mommsen Jr. and Erwin Panofsky) who fled Nazi Germany. This led to the making of a strong university curriculum that strengthened what, until then, had been rather incoherent and merely introductory "Western Civilization" courses. Not surprisingly, the teachers of such courses had never produced any significant monograph on the Renaissance. Ferdinand Schevill may be considered the only relevant exception. However, Schevill's works, though

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<sup>17</sup> On this wide phenomenon, see the following studies: Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship. A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965) and Henry Stuart Hughes, *The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought, 1930-1965* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). More specifically, on German scholars in the U.S. and their contribution to an American perspective on the Italian Renaissance, see James Sheehan, "The German Renaissance in America", in *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 47-63. The only major exception in this debate seems to be Gene Brucker, "Florence Redux", in *Beyond Florence. The Contours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. by Paula Findlen, Michelle M. Fontaine and Duane J. Osheim (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 5-12, who writes: "The influence of German refugee scholars (Baron, Kristeller, Mommsen, Gilbert) on this generation of Americans has been exaggerated" (p. 5).

useful, reveal a somewhat semi-popular character.<sup>18</sup> As Anthony Molho put it in one of his essays on this topic:

Few subdisciplines of the historical profession grew so rapidly following World War II, and acquired as enviable a reputation as did Renaissance history. For about twenty years following the mid-1950s, Renaissance history was a great success story, if one is to measure success by the number of interesting and much admired works produced in it and by the number of intellectually ambitious young historians who were attracted to the field. There is little question that this turnabout was the result of the German émigrés' influence on the profession.<sup>19</sup>

Both Molho and Fantoni have convincingly illustrated the main reasons for this "success story."<sup>20</sup> First and foremost, the notion of *Bildung* pervading the study of history in German universities ever since the early XIX century could easily adapt itself to the North American search for a "usable past" to be imparted through "Western Civilization" courses. Second, the appealing interdisciplinarity of the research that most German scholars pursued embraced all the topics and the ideals proper to the predominant North American reading of the Renaissance since the late XIX century. In this approach, several disciplines (above all politics, economics, social history and literature) worked together. Their main combined efforts were aimed at solving such fascinating problems (though usually rather vague ones) as the dawn of modernity, the birth of capitalism, the notion of the individual or the stark opposition between a lay view of progress on the one hand and a form of piety perceived as inherently conservative on the other.

Above all, what raised the Renaissance (especially its Florentine version) to the privileged position that it enjoyed in those years was the particular climate caused by the "Cold War." This position, one should add, was privileged in both the North American university curriculum and the related book market. It is not by accident that the first volume of *Renaissance Quarterly* came out in 1947 and the Renaissance Society of America (based in New York City, of all places, specifically on Fifth Avenue) was founded seven years later. It is the heated climate that scholars who have discussed this topic often sum up by quoting a famous statement by Conyers Read in his 1949 presidential address to the members

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18 See, for instance, Ferdinand Schevill's *History of Florence from the Founding of the City through the Renaissance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1936), *The Medici* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1949) and his anthology *The First Century of Italian Humanism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1928).

19 Molho, "The Italian Renaissance", p. 273.

20 Fantoni, "Renaissance Republics", pp. 44-47.



of the American Historical Association. On that occasion, Read (an expert on Tudor England) stated as follows:

Total war, whether hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The historian is no freer from his obligation than the physicist [...]. This sounds like the advocacy of one form of social control against another. In short, it is.<sup>21</sup>

Other famous history professors teaching in American universities at that time expressed the same feelings. In doing so, they often emphasized how a better knowledge of European culture and its basic ideals (starting with a longing for freedom and democracy) could prove crucial to shaping a praiseworthy generation of eminent scholars and, more generally speaking, engaged citizens. Support from both – they held – would be necessary in the war against communism. Understandably, a number of university professors who had migrated from Nazi Germany to the USA as a consequence of Hitler's regime contributed to this kind of propaganda.

Among them Hans Baron stood out. As clearly outlined by Riccardo Fubini and other colleagues, this German scholar had a significant, lasting impact on the American interpretation of the Italian (and, above all, Florentine) Renaissance.<sup>22</sup> We may call this second phase (which lasted from the 1950s to the 1970s) "politically engaged." There are various reasons for this label. First, the notion of civic humanism (*bürgerhumanismus*) – underlying both Baron's research method and all of his writings – was most fit to the pressing and urgent needs that Read pointed out to the members of the American Historical Association in his 1949 speech quoted above.

Baron's highly influential monograph *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* is a case in point. Suffice it here to quote a passage that the German historian kept in the revised 1966 edition, which came out eleven years after the first. The book, as is well known, mainly deals with the war that pitted the Florentine Republic against Giangaleazzo Visconti, duke of Milan, for over a decade, that is, until Giangaleazzo's sudden death in 1402. What Baron saw in this conflict is the same threat against the United Kingdom that was brought by

21 Cited in Molho, "The Italian Renaissance", p. 279. In those same years, Ernst Kantorowicz expressed a very similar opinion; see Andrea Celli, *Dante e l'Oriente. Le fonti islamiche nella storiografia novecentesca* (Rome: Carocci, 2013), pp. 96-97.

22 See Riccardo Fubini, "Renaissance Historian: The Career of Hans Baron," *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), pp. 541-74. Baron died on November 26, 1988. See also the papers (mostly by Baron students) collected in *The American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 107-44; Kay Schiller, "Hans Baron's Humanism," *Storia della storiografia*, 34 (1998), pp. 51-97; Jurđjevic, "Hedgehogs and Foxes," and Laurent Baggioni, *La forteresse de la raison. Lectures de l'humanisme politique florentin d'après l'oeuvre de Coluccio Salutati* (Geneva: Droz, 2015), especially pp. 13-75.

Napoleon and, more than a century later, by Hitler. The threat was not only aimed at the United Kingdom as a nation but as the main representative of all those values (starting with political freedom) that it meant in Baron's eyes. Describing the grim scenario facing the Florentines after the Milanese seizure of Bologna in the summer of 1402, Baron wrote:

One cannot trace the history of this explosive stage in the genesis of the state-system of the Renaissance without being struck by its resemblance to events in modern history when unifying conquest loomed over Europe. In a like fashion, Napoleon and Hitler, poised on the coast of the English channel and made confident by their victories over every relevant power but one, waited for the propitious time for their final leap – until the historic moment had passed and unforeseen developments had upset the apparently inevitable course of fate. This is the only perspective from which one can adequately reconstruct the crisis of the summer of 1402 and grasp its material and psychological significance for the political history of the Renaissance, and in particular for the growth of the Florentine civic spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Many years later, commenting on this short manifesto of civic humanism in a series of papers that the *American Historical Review* devoted to Baron, historian Werner Gundersheimer wrote: "Though a German refugee myself, I was struck by the singular inappropriateness of the homology of Giangaleazzo Visconti with Napoleon and Hitler, as well as the analogy between the British empire and the Florentine republic."<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the inappropriateness of Baron's comparison, what matters most here for us is the profound and lasting consequence that Baron's interpretation of the Renaissance had. Upholding the Florentine republic as standard-bearer of all the positive ideals passed down by the Italian Renaissance inevitably contributed to what Fantoni has duly criticized as "the construction of a Renaissance without princes."<sup>25</sup> Grafted as it was onto a political prejudice dating from the mid XIX century, tied to the search for a so-called *usable past* and favored by a kind of historiography that often blurred differences between time periods, Baron's reading led to a sort of *damnatio memoriae* of Renaissance courts

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23 Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance. Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 40.

24 Werner Gundersheimer, "Hans Baron's Renaissance Humanism: A Comment," *The American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), p. 143.

25 Fantoni, "Renaissance Republics," p. 42.

in North American scholarship. This is how Fantoni sums up the scholarly scenario we are talking about in the U.S. from the first edition of Baron's *Crisis* (again, 1955) to the mid 1980s:

With some few scattered exceptions, the years between 1955 and 1985 are the years "without princes," and even when works or parts of works treat the subject, they repropose an unchanging scheme of interpretation and pass along the equivocation that the age of the communes is "the" Renaissance.<sup>26</sup>

It is worth noting that Gundersheimer, whose criticism of Baron's parallel between Giangaleazzo Visconti and Adolf Hitler we have noted, authored the first monograph in the U.S. devoted to an Italian Renaissance court. And yet, his study on the Este family, published in 1973, has often been criticized as a biased (that is, optimistic and unrealistically positive) reading of the Ferrarese regime. According to his critics, Gundersheimer tries to portray the Este as benevolent rulers supported by the majority of their people. No less revealing, in my opinion, is that it took some twenty years before the second monograph on an Italian Renaissance court appeared in the U.S. I am speaking of Gregory Lubkin's book on Galeazzo Maria Sforza published by The University of California Press in 1994. More importantly, in this case too scholars noticed the same old clichés (mostly dating from the XIX century) on "Renaissance despots," all to the advantage of republican (or pseudo-republican) governments of the time, starting with Florence.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, in the 1960s the American perception of the Italian Renaissance had gradually begun to change, like many other received ideals in that decade. For starters, not all the European intellectuals who had moved to the other side of the Atlantic some thirty years earlier shared Baron's black-and-white view of the Italian Quattrocento. We have already noted Gundersheimer's case and his refusal of the notorious simile joining Hitler and Giangaleazzo Visconti. What matters most if we wish to discuss the school of studies established in the U.S. by German emigrés after World War II is the publication (in the early Sixties) of two volumes on the history of Florence by Gene Brucker and Lauro Martines. The works I am alluding to appeared in 1962 and 1963, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

In their books both Brucker and Martines paid particular attention to archival documents. The information these sources disclosed led the two young

<sup>26</sup> Fantoni, "Renaissance Republics", p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> See Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court. Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994). On this book's shortcomings according to most critics, see Fantoni, "Renaissance Republics", p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> See Gene Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) and Lauro Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

scholars to a much more cautious attitude than Baron's in passing judgments on the time period they studied. More confrontational than Brucker and Martines, though sharing similar convictions, proved Jerrold Seigel in his rejection of Baron's thesis. A telling example is an essay by Seigel that appeared in the same year (1966) as the revised edition of Baron's *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. Even more scathing was Seigel's book titled *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism*, which came out in 1968. In both works Seigel argued that the propaganda orchestrated by the Florentine humanists (what Baron labeled *civic humanism*) was not much different from that put forth by the other major Italian cities of that time.<sup>29</sup> Also, Seigel held, very similar realities lay behind the use of the same rhetorical commonplaces. In sum, the stark difference posited by Baron between Milan and Florence (that is, tyranny versus republicanism) was – according to Seigel – a naive (if not intentionally misleading) oversimplification.

Although many historians accused Seigel of being too harsh a critic of his older colleague, who in turn replied with no less passion, both their polemic and the heated debate that ensued revealed that the times were ripe for a new approach to the Italian Renaissance in North America. All this was happening – after all – in 1968, when students were protesting on university campuses throughout the U.S. In addition, many other factors of various kinds – social, political and, broadly speaking, cultural – led all historians to a general reassessment of their disciplines in those years. One can thus speak of a new attitude towards Renaissance Florence among American scholars from the late Sixties onwards, a phase that we may call – using a figure of speech – “a crisis after Baron's *Crisis*.” Although in various ways and to a different extent, all the specialists mentioned in the opening of this essay have highlighted how in the late Sixties and early Seventies new trends and methods started shifting the attention of much American Renaissance scholarship towards previously unexplored or marginalized topics.

Such is the case, for instance, of economics and, even more so, sociology. Mostly thanks to David Herlihy's pioneering efforts, both disciplines started being approached from a demographic perspective and through the means promoted by the so-called “Annales” school imported from France. A true monument to this kind of pursuit is the study of the 1427 Florentine tax assessment by Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber.<sup>30</sup> Herlihy must also be credited with raising interest in previously neglected

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29 See Jerrold E. Seigel's essay “‘Civic Humanism’ or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni”, *Past and Present*, 34, 1966, pp. 3-48 and his book *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

30 See David Herlihy-Christian Klapisch-Zuber, *Les toscans et leur familles: Une étude du catasto florentine de 1427* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques – Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1978). The volume is also available in English translation: *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1985).

time periods and geographic areas.<sup>31</sup> Similar credit must be given to Erich Cochrane, another North American scholar who, like Herlihy, graduated from Yale University. Cochrane became known for his research on what he called the “forgotten centuries” of Florentine and, more in general, Italian history.<sup>32</sup>

Understandably, for at least some twenty years, from the 1970s onwards, these innovative approaches (coupled as they were with interest in themes suggested by sociology, feminism, anthropology and economic history and the related development of gender studies and microhistory)<sup>33</sup> caused a sense of confusion among American Renaissance scholars.<sup>34</sup> In this unprecedented, at once puzzling and suggestive academic scenario, social history came to the fore through a wide gamut of works. Many of them, however, proved difficult to reconcile with one another. Understandably, this often increased the vertiginous sense that many colleagues lamented in those years.<sup>35</sup> Traditional convictions on the modernity of the Italian Renaissance,<sup>36</sup> its sharp break from the Middle Ages,<sup>37</sup> the ensuing

31 Herlihy's works on Pisa and Pistoia in the Middle Ages are a case in point. See *Pisa in the Early Renaissance: A Study of Urban Growth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); “Population, Plague and Social Change in Rural Pistoia”, *Economic History Review*, 18 (1965), pp. 225-44, and *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia. The Social History of An Italian Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

32 In particular, see Eric W. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

33 On U.S. microhistory in this field, the studies by Brucker and Brown enjoyed particular success. See Gene Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986) and Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts. The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For another innovative research based on archival documents, see Michael Roche, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

34 A telling example is the essay by William J. Bouwsma, “The Renaissance and the Drama of Western History,” *The American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), pp. 1-15, which re-elaborates the presidential address he gave the previous year at the American Historical Association. See also the studies by Molho, Muir and Najemy mentioned in note 1 above.

35 Discussing the American contribution to Italian Renaissance studies between the 1960s and the 1990s, Molho writes: “For Renaissance historians, Florence, thanks to the extraordinary riches of its archives, could serve as a test case for the working out of social processes, especially the modernization of its political culture. The study of the Renaissance had always encouraged a degree of interdisciplinarity, with historians of art, literature, and politics learning and borrowing ideas from each other. The American contribution to this tradition was to add to this dialogue questions generated by sociologists, political scientists, economists, and, in later years, anthropologists.” I quote from Molho, *The Italian Renaissance*, pp. 280-81. A decade later, commenting on the development of social history in American academia from the Sixties onwards, Celenza wrote as follows: “Those who did this type of work, the first social historians, were breaking with the past and doing revolutionary scholarship that was not always initially appreciated. Moreover, in the United States, the move to social history proved to be in harmony with the political beliefs of many academics coming of age in the 1960s. Although this sense was not always consciously articulated, social history became the ‘right’ kind of history to be doing. Practicing social history came to serve as a sign that one was socially engaged and willing to turn from the grand narratives of political history to focus instead on those who had been slighted by the grand narrative tradition.” I quote from Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, p. xv.

36 In this respect, a significant contribution came from Charles Trinkaus, on whose work (often in keeping with Paul Oskar Kristeller's approach) see Molho, “The Italian Renaissance,” p. 284. On Kristeller and his plea not to project anachronistic expectations onto

discovery of the individual,<sup>38</sup> the crucial role played by fifteenth-century Florence,<sup>39</sup> its lay and capitalist spirit,<sup>40</sup> the republican nature of its government (which set it apart from most Italian cities),<sup>41</sup> the participation of women and underprivileged classes to the shaping of its public image (or “myth”)<sup>42</sup> and so on, were all either questioned or simply put aside as groundless.

But not surprisingly, Florence maintained its privileged position. Among the various reasons were the extraordinary wealth of documents preserved in Florentine archives and libraries. No less important were the city’s outstanding

the Renaissance, see the end of this paper. Finally, on the notion of modernity as applied to this time period, see James Hankins, “Religion and the Modernity of Renaissance Humanism,” in *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, ed. by Angelo Mazzocco (Leiden: Brill 2006), pp. 137-53.

37 As Hankins wrote some ten years ago “Belief in a fundamental continuity between medieval and Renaissance culture is undoubtedly now dominant through most of the Anglo-Saxon academic universe.” I quote from Hankins, “Religion and the Modernity”, p. 138.

38 On this topic see the essays collected in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, ed. by William J. Connell (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2002) and the vast bibliography reported therein. It is worth recalling that Richard Trexler’s well-known research started out as a reaction against the notion of the Renaissance as the age of individualism. As he wrote: “Formal behavior was as alive with meaning in the Renaissance as in any other culture. Yet this simple fact has long been ignored by historians, heirs of a tradition that speaks of the period as one of individualism.” I quote from Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. xxv-xxvi. The same year saw the publication of another highly influential monograph on this subject: Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). Though focused on sixteenth-century England, Greenblatt’s study further stimulated the debate on the Italian Renaissance as the age of individualism.

39 A telling example is the volume of collected essays titled *Beyond Florence*.

40 In this regard, special attention should be given to the studies by Richard A. Goldthwaite, showing increasing skepticism on Florence as the “cradle” of modern capitalism. See in particular the following books: *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) and *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). More recently, see Franco Franceschi, “La storiografia economica sul Rinascimento e le sue metamorfosi: qualche riflessione,” in *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 153-72. Not surprisingly, the American scholar Franceschi mentions most often is Goldthwaite.

41 Reacting to Baron’s *Crisis*, many American scholars have questioned this feature of Florentine politics, as noted in Jurdjevic, “Hedgehogs and Foxes.” See, above all, James Hankins, “The ‘Baron Thesis’ after Forty Years, and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), pp. 309-38 and his introduction to *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, ed. by James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-13. Reaction to Baron’s reading of Florentine politics in the Quattrocento gradually led most American scholars (in particular Gene Brucker, Marvin Becker and John Najemy) to emphasize the idea of oligarchy and apply it to Renaissance Florence. In doing so they agreed with British colleagues such as Philip J. Jones. On Jones and his study of late medieval and Renaissance Italian oligarchies see the essays in *Communes and Despots*.

42 On gender studies and a feminist approach to the Italian Renaissance from the 1970s onwards, major contributions came from American scholars such as David Herlihy, Joan Kelly, Margaret L. King and Donald Weinstein. See the bibliography reported in my essay “The Dream of Transparency: Women in Renaissance Utopias,” *Esperienze Letterarie*, 32 (2007), pp. 3-25 and Gianna Pomata, “Knowledge-freshening Wind: Gender and the Renewal of Renaissance Studies,” in *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 173-92. On the notion of “myth” applied to Renaissance Florence, see the recent monograph by Fabrizio Ricciardelli, *The Myth of Republicanism in Renaissance Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

artistic patrimony and the solid support for further research that a number of studies could provide.<sup>43</sup> At least initially, neither renewed interest in Venice nor a series of groundbreaking works on other Italian Renaissance cities jeopardized Florence's primacy.<sup>44</sup> Yet, it was impossible to deny that studies and expectations of various kinds had succeeded in shattering an image of this city and its history that – although partially invented – had proved clear, useful, and reassuring to generations of American professors, students, and readers.

At times the reaction to this traditional historiographic paradigm has been quite violent, revealing its polemical and provocative spirit in the very titles of essays and books.<sup>45</sup> Yet, crises and disputed points can also be beneficial. In this specific case, they led to the discovery of fruitful paths that, although long pointed out by eminent specialists, had never been explored in full. In our field of studies, the last years have witnessed a sort of return to the origins or (to use a special metaphor) “back to basics.” Needless to say, this “rediscovery” has been pursued in ways and by means that are typical of our time.

Consequently, a whole variety of computer tools and digital resources (software, websites, databases etc.) have contributed to the study and the publication of sources. Sometimes these sources have been made available in critical editions with facing English translations. We are speaking, as it were, of two sides of the same coin. The strategy and the goals are similar to those that have made it possible to salvage classical studies in North American campuses from near-extinction, as Christopher Celenza showed a few years ago.<sup>46</sup> Philology – duly supported by her sister disciplines (paleography, codicology, translation theory and practice) – has finally gained a prominent role in U.S. scholarship on the Renaissance. One can thus claim that we have perhaps entered the “textual phase”

43 See, for instance, Thomas Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 3: “All of the chapters in this book concern the history of Florence. It is the rich deposits of materials in Florence that brought me to that lovely city originally and have brought me back several times. Studying the history of Florence, however, has another advantage. As a fertile and important field of research, it has attracted the efforts of outstanding scholars, especially those interested in social historical topics, such as family and women. Their work has provided a sophisticated and enlightening context for my own”. Other important studies by Kuehn on this and similar topics are *Emancipation in Late Medieval Florence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982) and *Heirs, Kin, and Creditors in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

44 James Hankins holds a different opinion, at least as far as political thought is concerned. In his eyes, after over two decades of original research it is fair to claim that “In general the study of regional humanisms in Italy has undermined Baronian claims about the centrality of Florentine republican humanism in the history of the movement”. I quote from Hankins, “Renaissance Humanism”, p. 83. On Renaissance Venice and its perception by American scholars see R. Pecchioli, *Dal mito di Venezia all'ideologia americana. Itinerari e modelli della storiografia sul repubblicanesimo dell'età moderna* (Venice: Marsilio, 1983).

45 A well-known case is A. Molho, “Cosimo de' Medici: 'Pater Patriae' or Padrino?”, *Stanford Italian Review*, 1 (1979), pp. 5-33. Recently, this formula has found its way into the title of a successful semi-popular study; see Paul Strathern, *The Medici. Godfathers of the Renaissance* (London: Vintage Books, 2007).

46 See Celenza, *The Lost Italian Renaissance*, especially pp. 134-50 and pp. 151-56.

in the history of American perception of the Italian Renaissance. Long lamented as conspicuous for its absence in U.S. academia, philology is finally recognized as a fundamental skill that scholars in this field must possess. This has led to the offering of graduate courses and seminars (mostly on line, sometimes in the form of videos and, if in class, through specific summer schools) on the one hand, and to the launching of new publication series on the other.

Among the latter, the most illustrious and prolific are “The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe” and “I Tatti Renaissance Library.” Their volumes have been adopted as textbooks in many university courses. Directed by Margaret King and Albert Rabil Jr. since its launch in 1996, “The Other Voice” is devoted to Renaissance women writers and gender studies. To this day, it has published more than a hundred volumes.<sup>47</sup> “I Tatti Renaissance Library”, instead, was created in 2001 with the famous Harvard scholar James Hankins always serving as its general editor. Mostly focused on Latin texts by Italian humanists, it is now approaching its 90th volume.<sup>48</sup> Both series make available in English – provided with informative introductory essays, bibliography and footnotes – texts that have long been rare or nearly impossible to find. It is particularly interesting, in light of what I have just said about this new “textual” stage in American scholarship, that “I Tatti Renaissance Library” also offers the original language next to its English translation. Finally, works in this Harvard UP series are provided with a critical apparatus, though less rich than in most European editions.

Renaissance scholars are well acquainted with these publications. It is not necessary now to discuss the history and the goals of these two series. Those interested in this kind of information can easily gather it from the publishers’ websites. What I find important to emphasize here, instead, is that the need of providing – first and foremost – Renaissance texts in a reliable format before trying to offer any interpretation of that time period was a conviction often repeated by one of those eminent scholars who moved to the U.S. in their flight from Nazi Germany. I am speaking of Paul Oskar Kristeller. In 1943 an epoch-making issue of *The Journal of the History of Ideas* came out. All the essays it featured were devoted to an assessment of contemporary Renaissance scholarship.<sup>49</sup> As was typical of him, Kristeller contributed with a short yet sharp article. In it he invited his colleagues to refrain from projecting their own political agendas on the past, so as not to encourage (whether consciously or not) a misleading interpretation of

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47 See [www.theothervoiceineme.com](http://www.theothervoiceineme.com).

48 See [www.hup.harvard.edu](http://www.hup.harvard.edu). In regard to “I Tatti Renaissance Library” special credit should be given to the then director of Villa I Tatti, Walter Kaiser, who conceived this series with Hankins.

49 *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 4 (1943), pp. 1-63. Hans Baron featured among the contributors to this issue (pp. 21-48) with an essay titled “Towards a More Positive Evaluation of Fifteenth-Century Renaissance.” The following year Erwin Panofsky commented on this series of papers in *The Kenyon Review*.



history. What mattered most, Kristeller argued, was the discovery and publication of sources according to sound philological criteria.<sup>50</sup>

What the great German scholar called for was, in essence, the good old school that never seems to have been young, to quote another famous saying by Dickens (as we did at the beginning of this essay that is now about to end). Not surprisingly, some twenty years later Kristeller would begin editing his famous, most useful and immense *Iter Italicum*. Luckily, this *finding list of uncatalogued or incompletely catalogued humanistic manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and other libraries*, as its subtitle reads, is now available on line.<sup>51</sup> Though late, it seems that Lady Philology may have finally charmed Renaissance scholars on the other side of the pond as well.

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50 See Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Place of Classical Humanism in Renaissance Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 4 (1943), pp. 59-63. On p. 62 one reads: "The only thing that really counts in Renaissance studies is the actual investigation of extensive source materials which have not yet been included in any extant synthesis."

51 On Kristeller's view of the Italian Renaissance, see the following essays by James Hankins: "Two Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism: Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller," *Comparative Criticism*, 23 (2001), pp. 3-19 and *Religion and Modernity*. See also John Monfasani, "Towards the Genesis of the Kristeller Thesis of Renaissance Humanism: Four Bibliographical Notes," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53 (2000), pp. 1156-68. From among Kristeller's own essays, see especially *The Humanist Movement* in his volume *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. by Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 21-32.



## Statues and History. Florence and Italy in the Eyes of Anglo-Saxons and Chinese Travellers

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I'm here to speak as an art historian and as a traveller and even as a traveller in my own city. This paper aims at remembering the importance of monuments-particularly statues for past travellers to Florence. I will mention not only Anglo-American tourists, but also a few Chinese travellers of the last two centuries. A long time ago my feelings about becoming an educated traveller became very affected by reading Italo Calvino's *Invisible cities*. His book uses imagination to see beyond the boundaries of history, geography, race and politics. Calvino describes a conversation between Marco Polo and the emperor Kublai Khan. The text is a collection of brief prose poems describing exotic cities as narrated by Polo. They do not really exist, yet they possess real qualities somehow modern and ancient, Italian and Chinese, real and imaginary.

In the last two years together with my wife Zhang Zheng Ying, who is from Taiwan we published:

- a) the Chinese guide to Santa Croce of Florence: the largest Franciscan church in the world and a true civic pantheon for Florence and Italy because of the many burial monuments dedicated to great Italians such as Dante and Michelangelo;
- b) a special Chinese guide to Florence published with the support of Palazzo Rucellai: a guide where the city is described according to some walking tours in the historical centre, being that very centre a large World Heritage site. We mostly concentrated on monuments and buildings and not on interiors. Both of those texts are not merely descriptive of the art works in Santa Croce or in Florence.

We noticed that the majority of the publications in Chinese available in Florence were:

- c) Mandarin translations of English translations of old Italian texts, lacking proper information about history and culture if targeting an educated Chinese reader;
- d) Walking alone and not together with a group could make an authentic difference to induce higher awareness about cultural peculiarities such as the many statues that furnished several corners of Florence.

In my humble opinion taking a lonely walk is still a very good way to grasp something of an old city like Florence and its landmarks, although often

you'd get disappointed. What happens is that nowadays we think we can be knowledgeable of things before they appear vividly in front of our eyes. So whenever there's no match between cliché information and three-dimensional reality disappointment might grow.

I've been a teacher to non Italians for some 20 years and most of my teaching revolves around a compare-contrast system. Primarily I teach for Gonzaga in Florence, which is a Catholic and Jesuit University so I have as a reference a strong tradition of intercultural exchanges with both America and Far East Asia. Actually since I started my travels in Far East Asia 11 years ago to simply accept and even nourish differences has been truly refreshing for my mind. The risk naturally is to personally perpetuate an idle fascination for other cultures, a simple-minded taste for the exotic. However I will follow this comparative approach even here.

The comparison between Italy and China is actually traditional. It started with Marco Polo's *Milione* and continued till Chinese authors of the early twentieth century. For example in the Ming dynasty Father Matteo Ricci S.J. – describing the capital city of Nanjing to his fellow Jesuits in Rome – wrote that to visualize Nanjing one Italian or European was to imagine a city very similar to Florence with its river and its bridges. Notice that Marco Polo, Matteo Ricci and Giuseppe Castiglione are the most famous Westerners in Chinese history: three Italians, one merchant from Venice and two Jesuit missionaries.

Ricci's remark testifies to how wealthy and sophisticated Florence had become very famous outside of its small borders. Remember that till the nineteenth century Italy was divided in small states and Father Ricci was no Florentine. However I wonder if Ricci's comparison was known to Italian and Chinese politicians that in the 1960s established Nanjing and Florence as twin cities. Let's go back now to a more "lay" territory. The downtown area of Florence, so labelled by Unesco as the World Heritage site of Firenze does show some consistency if you contrast it to New York, Tokyo or Taipei: its outlook mostly was the result of transformations that occurred in the sixteenth century with some alteration of the late nineteenth century.

Nowadays the contemporary and general idea of the so-called Renaissance period seems to be enraptured within a strong aesthetical perspective. Yet to fully understand the development of such a crucial phase for Italy and the city of Florence, we must remember its beginning in a general period of growth that transformed European society and economy. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the medieval world of feudalism gradually disappeared, being replaced by larger centralized states and smaller republics. Florence was one of the first European republics with a strong and innovative constitution and a pristine form of parliament, later on admired by politicians as Thomas Jefferson.

Thence Firenze is full of landmarks of its glorious pasts, landmarks and monuments that orient any tour downtown and also are so famous as to be imagined before visitors actually get to Florence. So that people generally try to

match in their minds what they had imagined or what they had read about the past of Florence or Rome with the real and the contemporary outlook of the city.

This is not all together a new phenomenon. Even early American visitors in Italy were at times unable to separate the antique from the contemporary, a problem noted by the Boston writer George Stillman Hillard in his guidebook *Six Months in Italy* (1854): “Many of the ruins in Rome are not happily placed for effect upon the eye and mind. They do not stand apart in solitary grandeur, forming a shrine for memory and thought, and evolving an atmosphere of their own. They are often in unfavourable positions and bear the shadow in disenchanting proximities [...]. The trail of the present is every where over the past.”

Nowadays in our contemporary global frame, we register the predominance of a rather weak universality primarily satisfied in understanding data coming out of daily experience, or items and notions that appear creative commercially speaking. Whatever is defined present and relevant by American media works as a tyrant force, taking the lead especially over young minds at home and experiencing the world, that is whenever they could encounter other cultures, other nations and cities. Therefore even the relics of Florence underlying its grand political history have become just the background of a tourist experience or of creativity seeking what is apparently scandalous and innovative. Today we might notice an alteration in the imagination about foreign or exotic cities. Previously most travellers – racist as they might have been – were after a difference in culture and history whenever they visited cultural centres like Rome or Florence. I’m referring to an ideal and realistic Italian difference or Japanese difference, the peculiarity of Florence, Tokyo, or Beijing.

Now I bet that most foreign visitors perceive Florence as just another resort in a modern Grand Tour and whatever is familiar or matches comments on Facebook is becoming comforting, maybe not inspiring but truly enjoyable. Surely monuments in old western cities such as Firenze or Rome and works of art in religious shrines are often surrounded by incomprehension. I’m talking about the necessity and the opportunity to address clearly which were the political, religious and social issues at stake when some of those masterpieces were carved for the Florentine government or the Catholic Church.

In the world of political correctness some of our monuments might become relics of a distant dead language. Generally, only those viewers who have an archaeological or religious disposition intend to decode and frame that old language in its original and historical setting. Let’s take a look at some of the Florentine landmarks. First of all a landmark was to attract the attention of a passerby with its new details, but in the typical Italian neo-classical mentality it was to fit into a context, promoting a novelty not yet harmonized with the whole area where the building would be erected.

As an example let’s take the Loggia della Signoria. We can use this building to learn about the history of Florence. It was built between 1376 and 1402

to hold public ceremonies for the Florentine Republic, such as the swearing into office of the Gonfaloniere and the Priori. Later with the fall of the Republic to Medici power it became the place for the throne of the duke of Florence Cosimo I. Cosimo commissioned the very first statue for the building in 1545: the *Perseus* by Benvenuto Cellini. This was the beginning of a long process that continued till recent times. The Loggia became a museum in open air for famous statues. So that in the 1840s when a new site for Michelangelo's *David* was to be identified some architects proposed to move the *David* beneath the arches of the Loggia, before the giant statue was transferred to the Accademia Museum. This building became very famous so that the city of Munich decided to have a nineteenth century version of it and Hitler loved both the original and its German version.

Nowadays the Loggia della Signoria is really a museum in open air, with severe problems of maintenance and protection. Yet most visitors do not know anything about its original and very political function, or they noticed the propaganda significance of most of those statues for the Medici tyrants ruling Florence after the end of the Republic.

Let's briefly mention some English travelers to Florence. One of the oldest of which we have a record was Fynes Morison, who was fascinated by the city of Florence and its statues. He got in touch with the French-Flemish sculptor Jean du Bologne who had decided to become a Florentine sculptor with the name of Giambologna. Morison was taken especially by the equestrian monument to Cosimo I, that being a contemporary equivalent to the Marcus Aurelius Michelangelo had situated on a renowned Capitoline Hill in Rome.

In 1617, Moryson published the three volumes of *An Itinerary: Containing His Ten Years Travel Through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohemia, Switzerland, Netherland, Denmark, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland and Ireland*. Moryson had to translate his texts from Latin in order to find a larger audience. Moryson wrote, "In the house of John Bolene, great Flemish bronze sculptor, I've seen a large equestrian statue in bronze tall 15 Florentine braccia, its belly ample enough to house 24 men, of which 4 only in the neck of the horse. And that horse is designed as if walking. This statue was erected for Duke Cosimo and it is esteemed worthy of 18.000 golden crowns."

One traveller to Italy especially Venice, Rome and Florence was one of the most important English poets of all times John Milton. Here are some of his words about Florence "In [Florence], which I have always admired above all others because of the elegance, not just of its tongue, but also of its wit, I lingered for about two months. There I at once became the friend of many gentlemen eminent in rank and learning, whose private academies I frequented – a Florentine institution which deserves great praise not only for promoting humane studies but also for encouraging friendly intercourse."

Historians have noticed how the title of Milton's poem *Il Penseroso* (*The Serious Man*) – a 1645 vision of poetic melancholy – had been inspired by *il*

*Pensieroso*: the erudite nickname of Michelangelo's *Lorenzo di Urbino*, located in San Lorenzo, near the palace where Milton was staying in Firenze.

After Milton the community of British visitors in Florence grew immensely. People were not only attracted by the beauty of the Renaissance city, but also by its own peculiar and sophisticated cultural milieu. An example is given to us by the Anglo-German painter Johann Zoffany and his notorious *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1772–1778). Queen Charlotte of England had sent Zoffany to Florence to paint the famous canvas, and Zoffany included in his work some of the illustrious Britons of Firenze visiting that very Sancta Sanctorum of the Uffizi. Zoffany gained special privileges for his endeavour with the help of Count George Cowper. Thence he included in the *Tribuna* a portrait of Cowper looking at his recent acquisition: Raphael's *Madonna*.

The statues of the Uffizi and of some Florentine squares were so famous among British collectors that many artists in Florence specialized in a market of small size copies (mostly bronzes) and in the new medium of China-like porcelain: a new industry for Florence promoted by Count Carlo Ginori beginning in 1736.

Zoffany painted in his *Tribuna* Horace Walpole and his friend the diplomat and a long standing British resident in town Horace Mann. Mann and Walpole kept open houses for British visitors at Florence. Their correspondence informs us about projects in Florence such as one to transform the Loggia della Signoria into the entrance of the Uffizi. They were even writing to the Lorraine administration to suggest the transferring of important statues to more significant corners of Florence. That was the case of Giambologna's *Hercules and Centaur* and of a Roman statue of Ajax, for which Mann suggested precisely a new location under the Loggia della Signoria: something that truly happened but a century later.

The Grand Duke of Tuscany Peter Leopold Asburg-Lorraine was aware of the growing tourist market in Florence. He reformed the Uffizi accordingly, and he even ordered the very first English guide to the museum. Pietro Leopoldo was also interested in the American Revolution which he sponsored through his envoy Filippo Mazzei, who became a great collaborator of Thomas Jefferson. Mazzei's contribution was later acknowledged by John F. Kennedy in his book *A Nation of Immigrants*. Kennedy wrote that: "The great doctrine 'All men are created equal' and incorporated into the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson, was paraphrased from the writing of Philip Mazzei, an Italian-born patriot and pamphleteer, who was a close friend of Jefferson. A few alleged scholars try to discredit Mazzei as the creator of this statement and idea, saying that 'there is no mention of it anywhere until after the Declaration was published.' This phrase appears in Italian in Mazzei's own hand, written in Italian, several years prior to the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Mazzei and Jefferson often exchanged ideas about true liberty and freedom. No one man can take complete credit for the ideals of American democracy."

The new ideas from America and France influenced many British writers and artists. The most important to mention for our topic is Lord Byron, who

described the tombs of Michelangelo, Machiavelli and Galileo in Santa Croce in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as "covered with dust which is even in itself an immortality." Byron's texts influenced Americans for three decades following his death in 1824, and they were instrumental in transforming Florence and especially Venice into "fairy cities of the heart" for American Grand Tourists. Additionally, John Ruskin's, *Stones of Venice* (1851) was important in altering Americans' opinion of Venice. Excerpts of his book were reprinted in the American art periodical, *The Crayon*, in 1855.

A plethora of American writers started to visit and stay in Florence from James Fenimore Cooper to Ezra Pound from Hawthorne to Mark Twain and Henry James. The impact of Florentine and Italian art is evident for some of them as is the case of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun: or the Romance of Monte Beni*, published in 1860. One of the characters, Donatello, the Count of Monte Beni, although his appearance resembles Praxiteles' *Faun*, has a rather odd name for an Italian patrician of the nineteenth century, evidently inspired by the famous Florentine sculptor Donatello Bardi.

Artists from America loved to come to Florence feeling inspired by both Renaissance colleagues and the new political situation in Italy with the long process of independence and unification. Florence for its particular cosmopolitan environment became a base favoured by many American sculptors. The tradition started with Bostonian Horatio Greenough, who settled in Florence in 1828 remaining until 1851. Other Americans followed Greenough to practice their art in the city of Donatello and Michelangelo. For example Hiram Powers moved to Florence in 1837, remained until his death in 1873, never returning to the United States. Powers enjoyed a reputation both in America and in Europe. His *The Greek Slave* (1841–43; 1846, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), became the most famous American statue of the century, maybe because of the influence of Florentine masters such as Benvenuto Cellini.

Beginning in the 1870s, various books promoted the Renaissance period in a bright light. Some English texts were of grand importance for the fame of Florence: Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) and John Addington Symonds's *The Renaissance in Italy, The Fine Arts* (1877), as well as two volumes by the Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt: *The Cicerone: A Guide to the Works of Art in Italy* (1873); originally published in German in 1855) and *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1878; originally published in German in 1860). General American reaction to Burckhardt was positive, and many Americans began to regard themselves as children of the Italian Renaissance.

The great American painter John Singer Sargent was actually born in Florence of American parents. Indeed some of his painting gives us the impression of the very inspiring location that Florence was for many Anglo-American travellers and artists.



At the end of the nineteenth century, the fame of the Renaissance arrived even in Japan and China, almost contemporary to the Western fascination for Far East Asia. The destruction of historical portions of Beijing (including the Yuan Ming Yuan palace partly designed by the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione for the Qianlong Emperor) during the Second Opium war by Anglo-French troops and the decadence of Qing China somehow promoted a new comparison with Italy among Chinese writers. Italy had changed. China was still the same. Italy had been capable of resurrecting and even uniting, and new Italians became famous in China: mostly General Garibaldi who fought against different totalitarian regimes in Italy and South America, and Prime Minister Cavour, the mind behind the bloody unification of Italy.

Kang Youwei (1858 –1927) was a prominent political thinker during the reigns of the late Qing Emperors. He became the leader of a nationalistic movement which was to establish a constitutional monarchy in China. Kang visited Italy and in Naples he was deeply impressed by a real (or imaginary) monumental statue depicting Camillo Cavour. Kang called Cavour the greatest European genius of the period. He wrote that the Naples statue showed Cavour “with the strong body of a God descending on earth to rescue Italy.” Kang was so moved by that inspirational monument that he was hoping China would find its own Cavour.

Another case was that of the female writer and traveller Shan Shili (1856-1943). Born to a scholarly family she followed her husband, Qian Xun, in his diplomatic affairs from Japan to the Vatican. After her return to China in 1909, Shan wrote *Guiqian ji*: a record of what she had seen in Europe. Her admiration for the Vatican *Laocoön* was based on German philosophers and their interest for Classical Rome and Greece. In front of the *Laocoön* she felt she was confronted with the native pain of the human condition. She stated that most of the famous art works originated from mythology, and analyzed different countries’ aesthetics, arts and poetry. All of this contrast-comparison was to promote a call for Chinese people to save their country from the decadence of late Ching Dynasty.

For writer and journalist Liang Qichao, the major flaw of Chinese old historians was their failure to foster a deep national awareness, which he promoted as necessary for a stronger and modern nation. Liang was calling for the rise of historical consciousness among Chinese intellectuals. Thence he advocated the “Great Man theory” in his 1899 piece, *Heroes and the Times (Yīngxióng yǔ Shíshì)*, where he wrote biographies of European state-builders such as Otto von Bismarck, Horatio Nelson, Oliver Cromwell, Lajos Kossuth, Giuseppe Mazzini, and Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour.

Liang Qichao even wrote a musical drama entitled *Xin Luoma (La nuova Roma)* where he compared Italy and China. Among its protagonist are Garibaldi, Cavour and Dante. They appeared as characters of the Chinese opera, and Dante is shown as Taoist Immortal riding a crane. The message of the play was simple yet of epic quality: China was sick and had to imitate Italy to fight against foreign powers and Qing decadence.

To conclude I will mention the burial monument (1873) to the Florentine play writer and activist Giovan Battista Niccolini (1782-1861) carved by Pio Fedi for the basilica of Santa Croce. The figure of Fedi's *Libertà* possibly influenced the New York *Statue of Liberty* by Frédéric Bartholdi. It is true that Bartholdi came to Italy and Florence to applaud Giuseppe Garibaldi as his personal hero and the hero of Italian national independence in the eyes of many Italians and foreign residents in Florence.

## American Cultural Experiences in Florence and Italy. Reality and Perpetuation of a Myth

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### Introduction: *a sui generis* ethnography

The reflections in this essay originate from my ethnographical observations in the city of Florence and from my experience as docent with young American students during their semester abroad. I started teaching on American studying-abroad programmes in Florence in 2007. The aim of my courses was to introduce the concept of culture in a sociological and anthropological sense. Concepts and methods learned in the first part of the semester were afterwards applied to Italian culture, to identify its specific features; briefly, Italian-ness was compared with traits of the American, Northern European and Mediterranean cultural heritage. As well as learning theoretical propositions and paradigms, students were invited to undertake a journey of self-awareness, to internalise the themes tackled during the term and apply them in a critical manner. Students' social and cultural experiences were used to elaborate concepts that had emerged during the course. In particular, they were asked to reflect and write short autobiographical papers.

At the end of the semester, the students had to review all the papers and write a totally free reflection about their experiences abroad. In addition to this biographical material, interpretations are based on my *sui generis* participant observation of the way young (and adult) Americans experience the city of Florence. Living in the "Cradle of the Renaissance" gives the sociologist a privileged ethnographical vantage point, since the city hosts around 45 American colleges. If we consider the small size of the city centre, we can grasp that the density of young American students in Florence is one of the highest in the entire world.<sup>1</sup>

### The self-perpetuating romantic perspective

There is perhaps no other city in which the overall impression, vividness and memory, and in which nature and culture working in unison, create in the viewer so strong an impression of a work of art, even from the *most superficial point of view*.<sup>2</sup>

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1 A study conducted by IRPET (Regional Institute for Economic Planning of Tuscany) estimated the presence of 8,000 American students studying and living in the centre of Florence: Portia Prebys, *Educating in Paradise. The Value of North American Study Abroad Programs in Italy* (Ferrara: EdiSai, 2013).

2 George Simmel, "Florence [1906], *Theory Culture Society*, 24 (2007), pp. 38-41 (p. 39, emphasis is mine).

One of the many acquisitions sprouting from the Renaissance cultural recast is the revolution of the human conception of space: from heaven to the landscape beyond. We might ponder this as a major shift toward anthropocentric representations in the arts (such as Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*) and an imaginable turning point for modern scientific thought: the "observer/observed" distinction.<sup>3</sup> Or, to extend the speculation, as the beginning of the "disenchantment of the world";<sup>4</sup> which is exactly the opposite movement to the ongoing "re-enchantment" dynamic sustaining foreigners' experience of Florence.

I venture to formulate the hypothesis that these *are not* common interpretative frameworks for the "typical" foreigner, especially North American and North European, visiting Florence nowadays – intellectual<sup>5</sup> travelers probably have other ideas in mind too. I believe, instead, that Florence – Tuscany, Italy – is experienced and interpreted through the eyes of Frances, the protagonist of the bestselling book and successful movie *Under the Tuscan Sun*. If this is the case, as I will try to argue, there is nothing new under the Tuscan sun – and by that I do not mean that the experience of Florence is not culturally enriching and enjoyable.

The 1996 memoir by American author Frances Mayes was the New York Times notable book of 1997 and New York Times bestseller for more than two and a half years. It has been translated into 18 languages and the film adaptation by Audrey Wells (2003) was a box office success earning \$43,610,723 domestically and a further \$15,268,000 internationally, totaling \$58,878,723 worldwide.<sup>6</sup> All of this to say: the story has been read and seen by many people all over the world (and especially in the US).

The book includes several chapters of recipes, and this choice, as we will see, is closely connected to the quest for the "authentic" Italian experience, where food & wine are essential elements of the romantic approach I am trying to describe. But let's take one step at a time.

Frances is a writer suffering from writer's block; she isn't sure what to do with her life after her divorce; she is emotionally crushed. How (i.e. where) can she start a new life? Where can she find new existential meanings? What place on earth will favor an emotional rebirth? Where can she come across the contemporary version of the Sangre Reel, a modest private balm for the soul? The answer is simple: Italy (Tuscany, Florence), of course.

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3 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* [1620] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889).

4 Friedrich Schiller, *Letter Upon the Aesthetic: education of Man* [1794] (New York: Collier, 1910); and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1864-1920] (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930).

5 By "intellectual" I mean a person with elevated cultural and symbolic capital. Obtaining a college degree (up to Ph.D.) and being exposed to cultural entertainment does not necessarily entail a critical-creative approach to travel experiences. We can indeed imagine an intellectual traveler's ideology alongside the overt and axiomatic mass tourist's ideology.

6 "Under the Tuscan Sun" Box Office Mojo. Retrieved May 4, 2016.

George Simmel interprets Florence in exactly the opposite way: the perfect place for those who are at peace with themselves and with their lives, either because they have achieved what they wanted or because they have somehow accepted their life as it is.

The inner boundaries of Florence are the boundaries of art. Florence is not a piece of earth on which to prostrate oneself in order to feel the heartbeat of existence with its dark warmth, its unformed strength, in the way that we can sense it in the forests of Germany, at the ocean, and even in the flower gardens of some anonymous small town. That is why *Florence offers us no foundation in epochs in which one might want to start all over again and to encounter the sources of life once more*, when one must orient oneself within those confusions of the soul to an entirely original existence. Florence is the good fortune of those *fully mature human beings who have achieved or renounced what is essential in life*, and who for this possession or renunciation are seeking only its form.<sup>7</sup>

I find Simmel's interpretation eye-opening; nevertheless the pathway to Italy and Tuscany is well-trodden and has been amply delineated over centuries of other kinds of storytelling: *Under the Tuscan Sun* moves along a cultural highway that resonates deeply with the North American/European reader-viewer-traveler. The plot of the bestselling book continues in the same vein. Patty, Frances' best friend, gives her a ticket for a two-week tour of the Tuscany region – I would not be surprised to find a travel agency promoting a tour to Florence or Siena like this: "Your emotional life is in pieces? No problem! Join the authentic Tuscan tour." Through a series of apparently serendipitous events, Frances purchases a decaying villa in the Tuscan countryside and – in a simple-to-grasp metaphor for the reconstruction of her Self-identity – decides to restore it. Naturally she has an affair with an Italian man, Marcello,<sup>8</sup> but obviously (as we shall see) the story is short-lived. Moreover, again unsurprisingly, after having experienced the unfamiliar and unknown the protagonist's sentimental adventure ends with a return home. At the end of the story, Frances falls in love with an American man (who is also a writer): the totally and safe and familiar, in terms of both culture and class.

We can find more or less the same characterization and plot in *The Portrait of a Lady* (Henry James; film adaptation by Jane Campion, 1996) and in *A Room*

<sup>7</sup> Georg Simmel, "Florenz," in *Der Tag, Erster Teil Illustrierter Zeitung*, 111 (Berlin), English Translation "Florence," *Theory Culture Society*, 24 (2007), pp. 38–41 (p. 41, emphasis is mine).

<sup>8</sup> Even the choice of the name sounds strategic: Marcello Mastroianni was a famous Italian actor and romantic icon in Fellini's movies.

with a View (Edward Forster; film adaptation by James Ivory, 1985). The protagonist is always a woman (American or English) in search of her Self-identity. And the common subtext of all these stories – or rather, the *Grand-Tour-Grand-Theme* with its articulations – is pure dichotomy: the New World and the Old. The modern, rational, civilized, “cold” New World (or northern Europe) *versus* the irrational, uncivilized but passionate and romantic Old World: Italy (Tuscany, Florence).<sup>9</sup>

Florence and its surrounding landscape – Chianti region included, which is incidentally only a tiny part of the extremely varied region of Tuscany – are the idealized places (better: settings or movie “locations”) for the emotional journey into the past: to the roots of Western civilization. Within this never-changing land the traveler will be able to find and freely express herself again, revitalizing the natural, genuine and primary union with human nature.

Florence (Tuscany, Italy) is the place where everybody slows down and enjoys life, eating every day with the extended family for six hours (three at lunch and three at dinner): all of my students arrive with this image and most of them bring it back home intact – despite all of my attempts to deconstruct the stereotype or to enrich it.<sup>10</sup> Needless to say this is a notion of a pre-modern, traditional Tuscany (Italy) that does not exist and, incidentally, never did exist. No one with even a smattering of historical knowledge (or a sense of reality, if you prefer) could imagine an Italian peasant – or indeed a peasant anywhere in the world – having sufficient time and money to slow down and enjoy life. Any person with a viable balance between the pleasure and the reality principle,<sup>11</sup> can interpret the romantic traditional Italian image as a *topos* in the tourist gaze.

Nevertheless, this archetypal narrative – a sort of Italian Dream – written centuries ago still has an iron grip on foreigners’ experiences of Italy: the self-perpetuating myth becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to observe how this North-South Europe dichotomy constitutes a historic reversal of the classic distinction “civilized south vs. uncivilized north.” The Nordic “barbarians” (such as the Germanics, Celts, etc.), originally compared to the Hellenistic Greco-Roman civilisation, were considered uncivilized or uncultured people. The etymology of the word “barbarian” reveals a constant historical shift. From Medieval Latin *barbarinus* (source of Old French *barbarin* “Berber, pagan, Saracen, barbarian”), from Latin *barbaria* “foreign country,” from Greek *barbaros* “foreign, strange, ignorant.” Greek *barbaroi* meant “all that are not Greek,” but especially the Medes and Persians. Originally not entirely pejorative, its sense darkened after the Persian wars. The Romans (technically themselves *barbaroi*) took up the word and applied it to tribes or nations which had no Greek or Roman accomplishments. The noun is from late 14c., “person speaking a language different from one’s own,” also (c. 1400) “native of the Barbary coast;” meaning “rude, wild person” is from 1610s.

<sup>10</sup> The presence of a stereotype bars the processing of new or unexpected information. The stereotypization in certain cases is a selective idealization of others. Such images might appear positive, but they are still one-sided projections and may confine the other to a set role or ability (Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1920).

The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come “true”. This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, regardless of its adherence to social reality, the Grand Tour script is a fundamental template for understanding foreigners’ experiences in Florence. It is the theorem of the definition of the situation that lies at the center of the *locus foci* interpretation: “It is not important whether or not the interpretation is correct [...]. If men define things as real, they are real in their consequences.”<sup>13</sup> The foreigners’ *Will to Believe*<sup>14</sup> is viable to the extent that the potential local *controcanto* (mine) *Will to Doubt*<sup>15</sup> is equally acceptable. Although it is not my purpose here to theoretically analyze the relation between beliefs and reality, it is evident that people tend to reduce cognitive dissonance by altering existing thoughts or adding new ones to create consistency.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as I will argue, the romantic idea of Florence is reinforced by tourist guides and by the locals themselves, who are not the passive recipients of foreigners’ representations and projections. Locals are indeed playing on the same stage following the same script but with a different role and objective: they make money out of the romantic narrative.

The self-perpetuating narrative has a profound adherence to the social reality even from a conventional sociological viewpoint. If we look at intra-cultural weddings in Florence (both partners from a foreign country), Great Britain is in the first place with 309 weddings (followed by US with 255 and Japan with 136).<sup>17</sup>

As I see it, the romantic appraisal of the Renaissance is still the dominant image of Florence. More precisely, the aesthetic appreciation of the Renaissance. Other social, political and philosophical aspects of the Renaissance, and their relation to the present, are overshadowed, creating a sort of reversal of the Renaissance *Weltanschauung*, from “Cradle of the Renaissance” to “Museum” or “Sepulcher of the Renaissance.” Are there any other modern myths guiding tourists

12 Robert K. Merton, “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *The Antioch Review*, 8, 2, (1948), pp. 193-210.

13 William Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1923), p. 42. This echoes Walter Lippmann’s “picture in our heads” metaphor of a stereotype: “Whether right or wrong [...]. Imagination is shaped by the pictures seen [...]. Consequently, they lead to stereotypes that are hard to shake”: Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* [1922] (London: Free Press, 1965), p. 95.

14 William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956).

15 Alfred H. Lloyd, *The Will to Doubt: An Essay in Philosophy for the General Thinker* (London: Sonnenschein, 1907).

16 Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

17 Weddings between foreign citizens of the same nationality celebrated in the city of Florence between 2006 and 2012.

and foreigners to Florence? We will see that these “Made in Italy” representations connected to the cult of authenticity do not differ from the never-ending romantic myth. A modern or postmodern myth of Florence does not exist. The main narrative for foreigners coming to Florence and Tuscany is still that of the Grand Tour travelers, which inevitably led, and still does, to the quest for “Florence without Florentines.” The foreigners’ romantic *coup d’oeil* may induce a deceptive vision of Italian life and social reality. If so, there is nothing new “Under the Tuscan Sun”: the Grand Tour archetype and narrative is alive and kicking.

### The visible and invisible city

If instead of Frances-Under-the-Tuscan-Sun – or Elizabeth and Robert Barrett Browning, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, James Joyce, Ezra Pound<sup>18</sup> – you take as literary guide Marco Polo, the protagonist of Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*,<sup>19</sup> the cultural and imaginative perspective will change a lot. Marco Polo will indeed lead you nowhere – let me repeat this: nowhere! Marco Polo in his conversation with the Kublai Khan describes 55 cities, or, better, the imaginative potential of those cities. At one point of the story Kublai Khan starts to notice that all Marco Polo’s cities look alike. Kublai interrupts Marco and asks for more precision, more adherence to reality: “Where is it? What is its name?” Marco Polo replies:

It has neither name nor place. I shall repeat the reason why I was describing it to you: from the number of imaginable cities we must exclude those whose elements are assembled without a connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse. With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.<sup>20</sup>

“I have neither desires nor fears,” the Khan answered, “and my dreams are composed either by my mind or by chance.” And Marco:

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18 Some examples of the non-automatic link between high cultural capital and sociological imagination: these authors have alimented the Grand Tour romantic narrative.

19 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (New York: Harcourt, 1972).

20 Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 43.



Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls [...]. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours [...]. Or the question it asks you, forcing you to answer, like Thebes through the mouth of the Sphinx.<sup>21</sup>

Italo Calvino brings back to the center of the discourse the traveler's self-identity, his/her biography and the subjective-existential questions asked to the visited city-country. Thus, in a certain sense, Calvino gives more autonomy and freedom to the traveler. He can get off the beaten track, paved with the city's "seven or seventy wonders" – that is: anything that is supposed to be worth seeing – and freely ask whatever he/she wants. Nevertheless, the city (life, reality) cannot be at one's disposal. The city has its own identity, story and autonomy. You can ask the city anything you want, but you may not receive the expected answers nor can you expect the city to mirror your narcissistic projections.

The Sphinx guarded the entrance to the Greek city of Thebes and in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* before allowing travelers to pass she set them a riddle. Oedipus can be seen as a threshold figure not only in the transition between the old religious practices, represented by the death of the Sphinx and the rise of the new Olympian deities, but as a character in a liminal transition. The Oedipus-traveller undergoes a trial attempting to change his alien status. We could imagine the riddle as the narrative, the myth that consciously or unconsciously is guiding foreigners' cultural explorations in Florence (Tuscany, Italy). The riddle needs to be unravelled in order to acquire a critical awareness of the ongoing experience of otherness.

Therefore, a critical warning is required for those attempting to experience the city in an autonomous and active way. The city-museum of Florence is probably not the best place in the world for those seeking a vital turning-point, an existential change. It is worth recalling again George Simmel's interpretation: "Florence is the good fortune of those fully mature human beings who have achieved or renounced what is essential in life, and who for this possession or renunciation are seeking only its form."<sup>22</sup>

Continuing to pursue Calvino's passage and Simmel's viewpoint, Florence asks the American traveler: "Are you in peace? Have you done what you wanted? Or if you haven't, can you give up and just live?" Florence has given the Renaissance to humanity, now she is resting, peacefully. Did the visitors find their own peace? Books and movies keep telling us another story. Escaping the rigid grid of the Protestant life of northern Europe and North America, people come here

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21 Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, p. 44.

22 Simmel, *Florence*, p. 41.

to find passion, romance, love. Florence has a “connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse” and the city keeps giving the same responses to foreigners who keep asking the same questions, guided by the same desires and fears. Are the answers satisfactory? Even in the Grand Tour romantic narrative the answers to love and work are somewhere else: back at home.

### The invisible Italian

There is a powerful potential “mythical engine” – or *mythomoteur* –<sup>23</sup> for young and adult people who decide to visit or sojourn in Florence (Tuscany, Italy). I posit that the Grand Tour<sup>24</sup> archetype and narrative – translated into modern and late modern terms – is still the guiding light of foreigners’ experiences in Florence (Italy, South Europe). The Romantic myth of Italy and Southern Europe that persists to the present is constructed upon a polar meta-narrative, a sort of grand-dichotomy: rational and progressive cultures of North Europe (where the modern *homo fictus* lives), *versus* the irrational, backward society of the south (Italy), inhabited by the southerner *homo naturalis*. Northerners visit the warm climate of the mainly Catholic south (primarily on vacation or sabbatical) to immerse themselves in an apparently chaotic and sensual lifestyle in an attempt to whet their imaginative appetites.

Joseph Luzzi, in his essays *Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth* (2002), analyzes, among others, J.W. Goethe’s *Italianische Reise* (1796) and Germaine de Staël’s (Madame de Staël) *Corinne ou l’Italie* (1807), articulating the Grand Tour “Modern North / Ancient South” meta-narrative in four main themes:

- Italy’s majestic cultural residue from Antiquity and the Renaissance overwhelms any signs of cultural (social, political) activity in modern Italy;
- Italy and its people are effeminate, and this gender characteristic explains their aptitude in the imaginative sphere, in creative fields;
- Italians are primitive and violent people, nevertheless this primitive nature contributes to their creative accomplishments;
- Italian society and public order do not exist.

The Grand Tour provided North European aristocrats with firsthand experience of cultural materials studied only in books. This high-culture encounter was accompanied by the socio-anthropological stumbling upon the Italian savages;

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23 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1986).

24 The Grand Tour was the traditional trip of Europe undertaken by mainly upper-class European young men of means. The custom flourished in 1660 and was associated with a standard itinerary. It served as an educational rite of passage.

the magnificent and vital Italian past is always opposed to the waning of contemporary Italy. The Grand-Tour-Grand-Dichotomy (North/South) is enriched with other binary oppositions: male/female; living/dead; freedom/oppression.

Another dichotomy – Protestant/Catholic – can provide us with a fundamental interpretative key. Goethe suggests a link between the Italian propensity to murder and Catholicism: “The murderer manages to reach a church, and that ends the matter” (24 November 1786). On the other hand Goethe celebrates Italy as the “world’s university.” Luzzi points out that, like a university, Italy represents: “A locus of education and self-exploration, at a physical remove from the confines of one’s normal life (for Goethe, Weimar), and of *limited temporal duration* (for European aristocrats, the length of the Grand Tour).”<sup>25</sup> The “limited temporal duration” is a crucial point: Italy is, technically, a vacation from the everyday life of northern Europe and North America; but “never take a joke too far”: real life is back at home, in the North.

If Italy was an educational forum and recreational moment, Italians were the unworthy, paltry inhabitants of this splendid stage: “The only thing I can say about this [Italian] nation is that it is made up of primitive people who, under all their splendid trappings of religion and the arts, are not a whit different from what they would be if they lived in caves or forests” (Goethe, 24 November 1786). A “primitive” nature supports cultural creativity and imagination, a sort of Rousseau primitivism: “By describing Italians as primitive and violent, Goethe implies that, like Schiller’s naive artists, the Italians remain capable of the powerful aesthetic visions of their remote ancestors.”<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between glorious past *versus* decadent contemporary society is underlined also by Byron in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-1818): “Italy is ‘Mother of the Arts’ and ‘Parent of Our Religion’; Europe shall redeem [Italy] and conquer the ‘barbarian tide’ that threatens it.”<sup>27</sup> Here Italy, through a female archetype, is seen as the source of Europe’s culture and faith. But if you just step outside the churches, such culture disappears.

In Santa Croce’s holy precincts lie  
Ashes which make it holier, dust which is  
Even in itself an immortality,  
Though there were nothing save the past, and this,  
The particle of those sublimities  
Which have relapsed to chaos: – here repose

25 Joseph Luzzi, “Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth”, *MLN*, 117, 1 (2002), pp. 48-83 (p. 61).

26 Luzzi, “Italy without Italians”, p. 64.

27 George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage and Other Romantica Poems* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1936), pp.

Angelo's, Alfieri's bones, and his,  
 The starry Galileo, with his woes;  
 Here Machiavelli's earth return'd to whence it rose  
 (LIV 478–86).

Santa Croce has inspired many famous travelers. A few years after Byron, Stendhal visited the cathedral and became overly emotional.

I was in a sort of ecstasy, from the idea of being in Florence, *close to the great men whose tombs I had seen*. Absorbed in the contemplation of *sublime beauty* [...] I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations [...]. Everything spoke so vividly to my soul. Ah, if I could only forget. I had palpitations of the heart, what in Berlin they call “nerves.” Life was drained from me. I walked with the fear of falling.<sup>28</sup>

It's the “Stendhal syndrome”<sup>29</sup> – also known as the “Florence Syndrome” or hyperkulturemia. Anyhow, whether the traveler is more or less overwhelmed by the sublime beauty of tombs, Italy is recognized as a collective sepulcher; and in this celebration of the distant past, Italians seem to disappear: “In Rome, at least in the first enthusiasm of your recognition of ancient time, you see nothing of the Italians.”<sup>30</sup> Italy's graves are the perfect setting for a solitary meditation, thus: “Italy without Italians.” And this is considered by Luzzi as a “*locus classicus* in the foreign gaze at Italy.”<sup>31</sup>

Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* is the story of the love affair between a half-English and half-Italian poetess and her noble Italian Grand Tourist Oswald. For the latter, as for Goethe, Italy represents a physical remove from his “real home” and “real self”; the Grand Tour is a period of exploration, of play: in short, a vacation. The North/South divide is well described through Oswald's accounts: Italy is “intoxicating,” England is “rigid”; Italy “strikes the imagination,” England “enters into the soul”; Italy represents the “arts,” England embodies

28 Stendhal, *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio* [1817] (London: Clader, 1959).

29 Since Stendhal's account, there have been many cases of people experiencing similar psychosomatic effects – mostly at the Uffizi Gallery. In 1979 the condition was labelled “Stendhal Syndrome” by the Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini (head of psychiatry at Florence's Santa Maria Nuova Hospital at the time). She observed that many tourists seemed to be overcome by symptoms ranging from temporary panic attacks to bouts of madness – lasting only two or three days (Graziella Magherini, *La sindrome di Stendhal* (Firenze: Ponte alle Grazie, 2003).

30 Percy B. Shelley, *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* [1818] (London: Pitman & Sons, 1912).

31 Luzzi, “Italy without Italians”, p. 56.

“opinions and tastes.” Even the gender archetype, with all its corollaries, is obviously present: Italy is the “Woman of the world.”

In Oswald’s eyes, Italy, like a woman, seduces and entrances, plies with art; England, a more masculine land, provides the “true goods” of life: independence, liberty, and security. Italy, in short, becomes in de Staël’s novel the woman of the world. Italy is also mistress of the arts; in *Corinne*, the fields of creative endeavor are associated with the feminine categories of caprice, reverie, and weakness.<sup>32</sup>

The lack of a public sphere and of moral regulatory principles in Italy is clearly pointed out by de Staël: “Since society does not set itself up as a judge of anything, it allows everything” (vi.2). On the other side, such a society-less Italian culture fosters an attitude that, according to de Staël, is missing in modern northern Europe: the triumph of personal, emotional justice over public, rational law.

Luzzi finally analyzes Ugo Foscolo’s *Lettere scritte dall’Inghilterra*, where the Italian poet tries to reorient the foreigners’ gaze upon Italy, uncovering those features of Italian society and culture that have been hidden from view by the Grand Tour narrative: the Italian language, the social customs of the Italians themselves, the historical events that shaped the Italian nation.

The attempt has little success according to Luzzi. The Romantic generalizations about Italy – feminine, premodern, sepulchral space, whose present cannot escape the burden of its past – will be repeated by Elizabeth and Robert Barrett Browning; D.H. Lawrence; Henry James; James Joyce; Ezra Pound. They would travel to the Peninsula in search of that same Italian-less Italy.

### **Italian culture on and off stage**

All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players  
(William Shakespeare)

Every semester I invite my students to stay in touch with ongoing Italian (and European) social, cultural, economic and political life. I have constructed a blog for this purpose, where students can read online newspaper articles about Florence, Italy and Europe. This is a simple way to propose a comprehensive and updated interpretative framework for their experience abroad. The risk of remaining trapped in a partial representation of Italy and Italian people is, in fact, very high. As we have seen, since the Grand Tour, the leading themes of foreigner

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32 Luzzi, “Italy without Italians,” p. 70.

experience in the peninsula are connected with a dreamy, and to a lesser degree intellectual, approach towards “Italy without Italians.” Most of my students, despite all of my attempts, remain stuck to the traditional romantic image. Their semester abroad is understandably dedicated to experiencing the Italian *dolce vita*. Nevertheless, it is quite impressive how class discussion most of the time does not even scratch the rock of romantic rhetoric. With a little empathy, this is easy to understand. As for the grand tourer of the past, this is “the” time of their life. It is a sort of last shot of youth. American students know that graduation will spell the end of their youth game. Afterwards, they will go back, finish their senior year and start the American struggle for work, money and performances. As I wrote elsewhere,<sup>33</sup> they want to “make the most” of such an extraordinary experience. It’s a moment in life that is not going to happen again; it is something very precise that sticks out in the young biographies. Moreover, the youngsters have been urged by their parents and their older fellow students that – within the limited time of a semester – they must “take advantage of it.”

The sociological question is: how? I found two leading and recurrent themes, or, better, precepts, underpinning the youngsters’ idea of how life abroad should be; these two *topoi* nourish each other and could be synthesised as: clocking up as many experiences as possible in the least time. Depending on the adopted angle of observation, this formula can be considered as both a production and a consumption criterion. In any case, it appears that there is an economic drive directing expectations, motivations and actual behaviour. The social discourse clearly pre- and per-forms an attitude towards the construction of the experience agenda which sounds like “fill the bottle to the top!” What we now need to ask ourselves is: what is the liquid in the bottle?

In the first place we can detect a travelling criterion moulded on the canon of “worthiness.”<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes (1957/1972) described the Blu-Hachette guides (comparable to today’s Lonely Planet) as fetish objects of contemporary tourism. The tourist is led by the guide to places where it is “worth going.” The “worth” canon, according to Barthes, makes all trips, at least structurally, standardised. Furthermore, we can also observe how some of the favoured weekend travel destinations fuel a particular experience of the chosen places: Venice during carnival, Dublin on St. Patrick’s Day, Munich during the Oktoberfest. It is something like an extra-extraordinary experience (out of the United States, out of everyday life). If I were to shed my adultcentrism, I could put myself in the youngsters’ shoes, and imagine myself at the Oktoberfest or in Venice during the Carnival. However, being on the other side – an adult and a professor – clearly I

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33 Pierluca Birindelli, *The Passage from Youth to Adulthood Narrative and Cultural Thresholds* (Lemham, MA: University Press of America, 2014).

34 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* [1957] (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

have to play my role with responsibility; otherwise, I would be a Candlewick kind of adult, inviting young people to fully enjoy their “Land of Toys.”

For the sake of critical observation, it is necessary to point out some hermeneutic risks that might cripple the young and adult American capacity to understand who we – the Italians – are. Again following Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, “identification” is one of the key figures of the rhetoric of myth regarding other people and cultures. The identification process reveals the inability to imagine the Other; in the experience of confrontation otherness is thus reduced to sameness. In short: the foreigner projects his/her images (acquired through the media and the ongoing social discourse) on the other. The recognition dialectic is therefore blocked, crystallized around a number of stereotypes. Sometimes, when the Other cannot (because the vividness of the reality is enormously incoherent with the myth) or refuses to be reduced – some Florentines might reject the image of the magnificent artistic past seeing it as the terrific immobile present – a rhetorical figure comes to the aid in such an emergency: *exoticism* – “The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown.”<sup>35</sup>

Another mechanism identified by Roland Barthes is the “deprivation of history.” In our case, the following features usually compose Italian *anima locus* (soul of a place): art, wine, olive oil, fashion, *dolce vita*, passion, etc. All these aspects are certainly part of the Italian identity, but they are by no means all of it: there is more to say and the representation needs to be updated. For instance, the image of the Italian extended family that gathers everyday around the dining table, with several children running around the house, is false: we have one of the lowest fertility rates in the world and that extended family exists only in a mythical rural past.

Italians are thus “deprived” of (at least) 150 years of their history. It is obviously impossible to grasp “who we are” bracketing out: how we became a republic, two world wars, fascism, the strongest communist party in the west, terrorism, our compressed modernization process, the cultural backwardness (not only of the south), corruption, organized crime, a middle class with a low cultural capital and a weak sense of the public good, the weakness of our educational system, the lowest percentage of people reading books in Europe, and so on.

Thus the interpretation of “us,” “the Other,” the locals, seems to be trapped in a distant past. This does not mean that the Other – in our case Italians and Florentines – is a “victim” of the touristic gaze; we make profits, we sell and we are active players on this stage. As social scientists, we need to reconstruct the script of the play, to identify the frontage and the backstage. Adopting Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical approach,<sup>36</sup> we can interpret the interaction between

35 Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 152.

36 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

foreigner and locals as a play, where Italians and Foreigners are both playing their parts. I see this as a more fruitful (and realistic) interpretation; a much more heuristic strategy than the one portraying Italians (Florentines) as passive creatures laboring under the burden of the colonizing North Europeans and North Americans.

### **Staged authenticity and social performance**

Several years ago I was interviewed by a journalist from *The Florentine*, the local English newspaper.<sup>37</sup> She wanted to know my opinion about an interesting commercial operation. The once abandoned Castelfalfi, an 800-year-old Tuscan village, was being reborn. Europe's major travel group, the Germany-based company TUI, bought the entire village and surrounding 2,700 acres of countryside. The project, one of the largest in Europe, promised to bring the village back to life by offering visitors an "authentic taste of Tuscany". TUI renovated 41 properties in the village, 3 hotels, and 29 villas in the surrounding area. The resulting self-contained resort has a 36-hole golf course, three swimming pools, tennis courts, at least eight shops, spa, pizzeria, cookery school and restaurant. The Catholic church will also be asked to revive Sunday services. Although TUI is targeting American, British and German buyers, the company is aiming for a goal of one-third of its sales to Italians, in order to retain the "authentic Italian feel."

The journalist asked me a loaded question: "How can a village created for foreigners retain any kind of genuine authenticity?" I answered as expected: "There is of course the chance this will become a Disneyland version of an Italian village." If this point was clear for the English journalist, it took me almost half an hour to explain the rest of the story. Finally my point was clear:

Italy is used to trading on its history and past; we've been doing it since the times of the Grand Tour. We Italians are not passive in projects like this. It is not colonization by the British or Germans, everyone benefits. The tourists get great food, weather and views, and we Italians get money and other profits from it.<sup>38</sup>

Following Goffman's "dramaturgical approach," the "trade" between Americans and locals takes place in Florentine everyday life. The interaction between actors can be interpreted as a "performance," moulded by location and audience, created to provide others with "impressions" that are consonant with the

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<sup>37</sup> "Sleeping Beauty: Castelfalfi Returns to Life": Kirsten Hills, November 25, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> *The Florentine*, November 25, 2011.



desired goals of the actors.<sup>39</sup> He tells us that tourists are motivated by the desire for authentic experiences. But it is very difficult to understand whether the experience is authentic. “It is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation.”

Tourist settings can be arranged in a continuum starting from the frontstage and ending at the backstage, reproducing the natural trajectory of an individual’s initial entry into a social situation. Goffman’s front region – the social space tourists attempt to overcome – might lead to a touristic front region that has been decorated to appear like a back region. Is this causing a loss of cultural authenticity and producing a sort of “McDisneyization.”<sup>40</sup> According to MacCannell local cultures construct “staged authenticity,” a kind of commodified authenticity that inevitably thwarts the modern tourist’s search for the authentic. On the other hand, commodification brings money into communities and revives traditions that would otherwise die out.

The quest for authenticity can be interpreted as being “one of them,” or at one with “them”; this means being permitted to share back regions with “them.” This sharing allows one to see behind the others’ mere performances, to perceive and accept the others for what they really are. Sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the natives, and, at the same time, they are deprecated for always failing to achieve these goals. But Goffman warns that under certain conditions it is difficult to separate frontstage from backstage and that these are sometimes transformed into each other.

A way to unravel the riddle is to be aware of the narrative, the script sustaining the quest for authenticity. As I have argued, I believe the leading themes of the Grand Tour are still alive. Therefore, the search for the authentic Italian life leads to precise places. Thus, to “get off the beaten path” means denying what resonates with the American and northern European idea of Italian life. Is this desirable for the young or adult Americans who are visiting Florence (Tuscany, Italy)? Since they are not anthropologists or sociologists, my answer is negative.

Nowadays we can find the same Grand Tour themes in the way Italian food is presented. A semiotic interpretation of Italian restaurants in the US tells us that Italian-ness is connected to the idea of rusticity, and marketed to reassure the consumers of the genuine “ethnic experience.”<sup>41</sup> The study, analysing verbal and

39 Dean MacCannell, “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 79, 3, (1973), pp. 589-603.

40 George Ritzer, *McDisneylandysation and Post-Tourism. Touring Culture: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997).

41 Davide Ghirardelli, “Commodified Identities: The Myth of Italian Food in the United States,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 28 (2004), pp. 307-24.

non-verbal communication<sup>42</sup> strategies, came to the conclusion that the constituents of the myth of Italian food are: romance, family, rusticity, Old World memory-nostalgia, slow-paced lifestyle, genuineness-unadulterated and expressivity. The similarity between these traits and the leading themes of the Grand Tourer of the past is evident.

According to the American cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander “Behind every actor’s social and theatrical performance lies the already established skein of collective representations that compose culture – the universe of basic narratives and codes and the cookbook of rhetorical configurations from which every performance draws.”<sup>43</sup> And Alexander tells us that performances in complex societies “seek to overcome fragmentation by creating flow and achieving authenticity.” Alexander’s theory of cultural pragmatics argues that early societies with shared narratives, beliefs, and values maintain a high degree of fusion as regards social performance. In complex and fragmented societies, the components of social performance have become de-fused, to perform successfully actors have to re-fuse them to avoid them appearing inauthentic: “Failed performances are those in which the actor, whether individual or collective, has been unable to sew back together the elements of performance to make them seem connected seamlessly.”<sup>44</sup>

What I am exploring here is whether the social/cultural performances played out in Florence by young and adult Americans are fused, de-fused or, as I argue, re-fused. According to Alexander there are several elements that must be fused in order for the performance to succeed in both communicating its meaning and establishing its authenticity. If we imagine Florence as the stage of a social-cultural performance, the *background representations* – the shared narratives, convictions and symbolic repertoire of a particular group – are there and very active: the experience of traveling and being on stage in Florence, and in Italy in general, is rooted in the cultural bedrock of the Grand Tour narrative – a stratification of meanings sedimented over centuries. And even the *scripts*, or *the script* – the salient background features called up in each social performance – is to hand and functional. The Grand Tour scripts and those acted out by young and adult Americans abroad are substantially the same, and the narrative is underpinned by touristic guides. The *actors* of the social performance – students, their parents, home college and hosting institution abroad, peers that came before them etc. – generally have a modest “self-consciousness about themselves as actors.” Everybody is front stage, the backstage is apparently deserted: “For participants

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42 The green, white, and red colour combination; the use of vegetables and the rustic kitchen/bistro theme evoking the Italian “relaxed, family atmosphere”; the old-world theme, such as black-and-white photos evoking nostalgic feelings.

43 Ghirardelli, “Commodified Identities,” p. 550.

44 Ghirardelli, “Commodified Identities,” p. 529.

and observers, rituals are not considered to be a performance in the contemporary sense at all but rather to be a natural and necessary dimension of ongoing social life.”<sup>45</sup> And the locals act naturally too: far from being passive bystanders at the foreigners’ performance, they are on stage and directly or indirectly making a living out of the romantic projection. In my case, the *audience* could be conceived as those who would wish to be there, and who subscribe to the significance even if they cannot be there: the dense psychological identification with the performance is endorsed. Being Florence, the *means of symbolic production* – the physical venue, the media, the costumes, the props – and the *mise-en-scène* (the staging and choreography) are inevitably fused. Regarding *social power*, the status of the foreigner players is homogeneous and in this case too the social performance is fused, or refused. In Florence the “staged authenticity” is a fused social performance.

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<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy,” *Sociological Theory*, 22, 4 (2004), pp. 527-73 (p. 535)



**Living in a Florentine Villa:  
the Anglo-American Community in Florence  
between XIX and Early XX Century**

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A few years ago, while I was studying a XIV century Florentine convent, I happened to encounter the name of a rather unknown English writer, Ouida, that was one among the thousands of Anglo-Americans who had chosen Florence to spend a short or a longer period of their life in the XIX and early XX century. In this paper I will, therefore, present, together with some famous cases, the Ouida story, the very unfortunate story of a lady eventually evicted from the villa she rented. In the past years, the theme of how the Anglo-American community lived in the city and described it with words or brush strokes has been the object of a series of congresses and exhibitions: it is not my role here to summarize a few of them. In June of 1997 a congress was held at Villa Le Balze, Georgetown University, organized by Marcello Fantoni in collaboration with Daniela Lamberini, *The Anglo-Americans in Florence: idea and construction of the Renaissance*.<sup>1</sup> In 2011 prof. Serena Cenni, who had already organized a congress on Vernon Lee and D.H. Lawrence,<sup>2</sup> collected scholars to reflect once again on the relationship between Florence and the Anglo Americans.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer 2004 the exhibition *I giardini delle regine* was devoted to the myth of Florence in the pre-Raphaelite entourage,<sup>4</sup> and in 2012 Francesca Bardazzi and Carlo Sisi organized at Palazzo Strozzi *Americani a Firenze: Sargent e gli impressionisti del nuovo mondo*, on the American impressionist painters, who had worked in Florence, and their mutual exchange with Tuscan painters.<sup>5</sup>

The popularity of the grand duchy's capital as a destination and its worldwide fame owed a great deal to the Anglo American community. It can even be said that it was the Anglo Americans who made Florence the artistic capital of the world. If in the second half of the 19th century a third of the population of

<sup>1</sup> *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze: idea e costruzione del Rinascimento*, ed. by Marcello Fantoni (Roma: Bulzoni, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Violet del Palmerino. *Aspetti della cultura cosmopolita nel salotto di Vernon Lee: 1889-1935*, ed. by Serena Cenni, Sophie Geoffroy and Elisa Bizzotto (Firenze: Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, 2014) and D. H. Lawrence, *Firenze e la sfida di Lady Chatterley: il corpo, la fiamma, il desiderio*, ed. by Serena Cenni and Nick Ceramella (Firenze: Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> *Una sconfinata infatuazione. Firenze e la Toscana nelle metamorfosi della cultura angloamericana: 1861-1915*, ed. by Serena Cenni and Francesca Di Blasio (Firenze: Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> *I giardini delle regine: il mito di Firenze nell'ambiente preraffaellita e nella cultura angloamericana fra Ottocento e Novecento*, ed. by Margherita Ciacci and Grazia Gobbi Sica (Livorno, Sillabe: 2004).

<sup>5</sup> *Americani a Firenze. Sargent e gli impressionisti del nuovo mondo*, ed. by Francesca Bardazzi and Carlo Sisi (Venezia: Marsilio, 2012).

Florence was made up of foreigners, the majority of them came from Great Britain<sup>6</sup> and later from the United States (other foreign colonies who played a significant part in the Tuscan tradition were the German and French ones).<sup>7</sup> As the British writer and scholar Lord Acton, born in Florence, at Villa La Pietra,<sup>8</sup> said, Florence was “the only Italian city with a strong English accent.”<sup>9</sup>

The so-called Anglo-Florentines formed a cultured community, which rented and bought houses, painted and sculpted,<sup>10</sup> collected works of art and worked as art dealers sending pieces back home, but wrote as well, and not just letters about their travels or fictional novels, but also guidebooks of the city they elected as a temporary or permanent residence. In many cases, in fact, the travel to Italy and the settlement in Florence was transformed from a pilgrimage to a permanent residence, even till the burial place and the eternal houses.

In 1827 the Swiss Reformed Evangelical Church purchased some land outside the 14th century walls of the city, close to Porta a Pinti (a city gate subsequently demolished along with the city walls), for the purpose of constructing an international and ecumenical cemetery. A “garden of memory,” that arrived to contain 1,409 tombs of writers, artists, merchants and other personalities from sixteen different countries. The cemetery, which became too small for the needs of a growing foreign colony in the city but which had no room to expand, was finally

6 See Giuliana Artom Treves, *Anglo-fiorentini di cento anni fa* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1953).

7 On the German community see Bernd Roeck, *Florenz 1900. Die suche nach Arcadian* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2011), pp. 107-20. On the French community see: Pier Filippo Covoni, “L’arrivo dei francesi a Firenze,” in *Toscana granducale*, ed. by Ludovica Sebregondi (Roma: Editalia, 1996) pp. 33-34 and Cristina Giannini, “Enrico ed Amicie de Lardereel ‘francesi di Firenze’: gusto, collezionismo, mondanità e relazioni di una colonia straniera,” in *Palazzo de Lardereel a Livorno. La rappresentazione di un’ascesa sociale nella Toscana dell’Ottocento*, ed. by Lucia Frattarelli Fischer and Maria Teresa Lazzarini (Milano: Electa, 1992), pp. 71-93; Sophie Geoffroy, “Vernon Lee et ses amis français 1925-35,” in *Violet del Palmerino. Aspetti della cultura cosmopolita nel salotto di Vernon Lee: 1889-1935*, ed. by Serena Cenni, Sophie Geoffroy and Elisa Bizzotto (Firenze: Consiglio Regionale della Toscana, 2014), pp. 43-71. On the Swiss community see: Giovanni Cipriani, “Gli svizzeri a Firenze nell’Ottocento. Una folta presenza nell’industria, nella ristorazione e nell’albergheria,” *Arte e Storia*, 11 (2010), pp. 260-71 and, in the same journal, Renata Broggin, “Una meta tradizionale. Mestieranti, artigiani e imprenditori del Loarnese a Firenze,” pp. 272-83 and Alessandro Volpi, “Svizzeri a Firenze nell’economia e nella finanza. Commercianti, banchieri e imprenditori,” pp. 284-91.

8 On Villa La Pietra and its collections see: Francesca Baldry, “La casa museo di Villa La Pietra a Firenze, dalla dimora degli Acton al centro universitario della New York University (1903-2013),” in *Casa museo, famiglie proprietarie e loro collezioni d’arte: esperienze a confronto*, ed. by Ruggiero Ranieri (Bologna: Pendragon, 2014), pp. 227-51 and Richard Turner, *La Pietra. Florence, a Family and a Villa* (Milano: Edizioni Olivares, 2002).

9 Harold Acton, *Florence, a traveller’s companion*, ed. by Edward Chaney (Firenze: Atheneum, 1986), p. 30.

10 See Attilio Brilli, “Il ‘Genius Loci’,” in *L’idea di Firenze. Temi e interpretazioni nell’arte straniera dell’Ottocento*, ed. by Maurizio Bossi and Lucia Tonini (Firenze: Centro Di, 1989) pp. 239-42 and the catalogue *The lure of Italy. American artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914*, ed. by Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. (Wilmington: Acme Bookbinding, 1992).

closed in 1877, and substituted by the Allori cemetery, opened in 1860, a veritable pantheon of American painters and artists in Florence.<sup>11</sup>

*Ville toute Anglaise*, the Goncourt brothers, Jules and Edmond, declared the city in 1855, “where the palaces are almost the same dismal black as the city of London, and where everything seems to smile upon the English.”<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of the XXth century, thirty thousand of the two hundred thousand residents of Florence were English or American.<sup>13</sup>

Loving Florence for its beauty, its history, its republican values but also its decadence, little treasure city, the Boston of Italy, the Anglo Americans occupied not only the centre but mostly the environs: their story is also linked with the residences outside the city that often, in the transfers of ownership that followed the decline of the Medici and the cost-cutting policy of the Lorraine, ended up in their hands. As Gobbi Sica illustrates in her book *The Florentine Villas* of 2007,<sup>14</sup> the hillside villas became the chosen residences of a sizeable foreign colony which elected to live in this city of art, an artistic workshop where people lived cheek by jowl with masterpieces of the past and where the existential mirage of a possible balance between life and art proved a reality for many scholars and art lovers.<sup>15</sup> Their image of what was truly “Florentine” was realised in their art collections, sometimes embroidered by new settings aimed at recreating the atmosphere of the past by idealising it.<sup>16</sup> The villas and castles on the surrounding hills became fairy-tale residences, images of long ago, restored, furnished and decorated to evoke the atmosphere of past eras, now relived with a contemporary and fresh sensibility which proposed to re-invent the “spirit of place.”<sup>17</sup> One of the earliest examples,

11 On the Pinti cemetery: Guida Fantuzzi, “Il cimitero protestante di Porta a’ Pinti. Luogo di sepoltura degli Svizzeri fino al 1878,” *Arte e Storia*, 11 (2010), pp. 320-29. See also in the same journal the contribution by Ketty Uehelinger, “Non omnis moriar. Il cimitero degli Allori a Firenze,” pp. 332-37.

12 The quote appears in David Leavitt, *Florence: a delicate case* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 43

13 Leavitt, *Florence: a delicate case*, p. 43. Beside the studies quoted above, there is still no coherent study on their demographic presence in the city: see Clara Louise Dentler, *Famous Americans in Florence* (Firenze: Giunti, 1976), Clara Louise Dentler, *Famous Foreigners in Florence, 1400-1900* (Firenze: Bemporad Marzocco, 1964), the catalogue offered in Claudio Paolini, *A sentimental Journey. Inglese e Americani a Firenze tra Ottocento e Novecento. I luoghi, le case, gli alberghi* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2013) and Luigi Mascilli Migliorini, “Stranieri a Firenze,” in *Firenze, 1815 -1945*, ed. by Giorgio Mori and Piero Roggi (Firenze: Le Monnier 1990), pp. 465-85.

14 Maria Grazia Gobbi Sica, *The Florentine villa: architecture, history, society* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

15 See also the new catalogue *Ville e giardini nei dintorni di Firenze. Da Fiesole ad Artimino*, with English version, ed. by Stefano Casciu and Mariachiara Pozzana (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2010).

16 See the observations by Francesca Baldry, “La comunità Anglo-Americana e Firenze tra la fine dell’Ottocento e l’inizio del Novecento,” in *Federigo e la bottega degli Angeli. Palazzo Davanzati tra realtà e sogno* (Livorno: Sillabe, 2009), pp. 10-25.

17 It is not the case, here, to retrace the history of the Florentine house-museum and their collections, but on the theme see at least: Daniela Lamberini, “Residenti Anglo-Americani e genius loci: ricostruzioni e restauri delle dimore fiorentine,” in *Gli Anglo-Americani a Firenze*, pp. 125-41 and in the same book Claudio Paolini, “Oggetti come specchio dell’anima: per una rilettura dell’artigianato artistico

was the case of Margaret Orford, Horace Walpole's sister in law, who in 1772 acquired the Villa Medici at Fiesole, built between 1451 and 1457: the property became Villa Spence in the 19th century, house of the British painter William Blundell Spence, remaining in Anglo-Saxon hands even after that, inhabited by Lady Sybil Cutting (widow of William Bayard Cutting and mother of the writer Iris Origo), and again, the Mac Calman.<sup>18</sup>

It is possible to follow this never-ending infatuation of the Anglo-Americans with the Florentine villas thanks to a series of illustrated publications: between 1872 and 1874 the American writer Henry James was correspondent from Rome of the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Nation*, and in 1909, he collected his articles in a book, illustrated in colours by Joseph Pennell, American printmaker and illustrator, pioneer with his wife in cycling tourism throughout Europe.<sup>19</sup>

In 1901 Joseph Pennell had already been to Italy to illustrate Maurice Hewlett's *The Road in Tuscany* and later, he created sketches for Henry James' aforementioned *Italian Hours*. During the 1880s, the Pennells – Joseph and his adventurous wife Elizabeth – made many friends among the Anglo-American community in Florence, including writer Vernon Lee, Pre-Raphaelite painter Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and poet Agnes Mary Frances Robinson.<sup>20</sup>

The Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist and short story writer Edith Wharton, fluent in French, German, and Italian, made her first journey to Europe at the age of four, when her parents took her to Europe for six years. She would eventually cross the Atlantic sixty times. In Europe, her primary destination was Italy and her husband, Edward Wharton, shared her love of travel and for many years they spent at least four months of each year abroad, mainly on the Italian

fiorentino nelle dimore degli anglo-americani," pp. 143-63, Susanne E. L. Probst, "La fortuna del museo 'inglese' a Firenze: il Museo Subbert," 223-33 and Brenda Preyer, "Renaissance 'Art and Life' in scholarship and palace of Herbert P. Horne," pp. 235-47; see also Herbert Percy, *Horne e Firenze. Atti della giornata di studi*, ed. by Elisabetta Nardinocchi (Firenze: Edizioni della Meridiana 2005); Francesca Baldry, "Le stanze del gusto. Case e case museo di collezionisti e antiquari a Firenze tra Otto e Novecento," in *Le stanze dei tesori. Collezionisti e antiquari a Firenze tra Ottocento e Novecento with english version*, ed. by Lucia Mannini (Firenze: Polistampa, 2011), pp. 44-64; Francesca Baldry, *John Temple Leader e il Castello di Vincigliata. Un episodio di restauro e di collezionismo nella Firenze dell'Ottocento* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1997). For the peculiar case of I Tatti, see below, note 27-29.

18 On the XV century history of the villa see Donata Mazzini, *Villa Medici a Fiesole: Leon Battista Alberti e il prototipo di villa rinascimentale* (Firenze: Centro Di, 2004) and Amanda Lillie, "Fiesole: 'locus amoenus' or penitential landscape?," *I Tatti Studies*, 11 (2008), pp. 11-55.

19 The books *Italian Hours* was published in 1909 both in the UK and the US: Henry James, *Italian Hours* (London: William Heinemann, 1909) and Henry James, *Italian Hours* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909). I will further quote from the Boston edition.

20 On Joseph Pennell see: Meaghan Clarke, "Seeing in black-and-white: incidents in print culture," *Art History*, 35 (2012), pp. 574-95; *La Toscana di Joseph Pennell tra Otto e Novecento*, ed. by Lucia Monaci Moran (Firenze: Olschki 2004) and *An American artist in Tuscany: Joseph Pennell (1858 - 1926)*, ed. by Attilio Brilli, Simonetta Neri. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1999).



peninsula.<sup>21</sup> Usually considered Wharton's first published travel book, *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, published in 1904 is marked by a high level of scholarship and is dedicated to Vernon Lee, spiritual guide and companion of her travels. The volume was commissioned by Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the *Century Magazine*, to accompany the watercolours of Maxfield Parrish, and also includes drawings of some of the gardens and villas, as well as black and white sketches. The book is primarily a learned survey of garden architecture and ornamentation rather than a study of the villas themselves: Edith visited more than 75 villas and their gardens and made great efforts in sketching the history of the villas, most of which were built during the Renaissance and Baroque periods.<sup>22</sup>

The chapter called "Florentine Villas" is dedicated to the villas and gardens in and near Florence. According to her, the designers of the Tuscan "pleasure-garden" showed a certain restraint in importing "Baroque exuberance," which Wharton attributes to "Florentine thrift and conservatism." The hills surrounding the city are rich in ancient villas, but many have been owned by foreigners whose owners eradicated the old parterres and vineyards under the influence of the English landscape architects Humphrey Repton and Lancelot Brown, who promoted the "Britannic craving for a lawn." But Florence does contain, however, one of the most splendid and accessible of all villas and gardens: the Boboli Garden on the hillside behind the Pitti Palace. Wharton describes these gardens in detail, as well as other villas and gardens in the vicinity, including the Villa Corsini and the Villa Gamberaia at Settignano.

More popular, but rich in details and descriptions, are the guides written by Edward Hutton, a wealthy English friend of Bernard Berenson who rented the villa di Boccaccio at Settignano above Florence from 1901, later founding the British Institute in Florence. Hutton wrote *Florence and Northern Tuscany* in 1907, and the famous *Country Walks about Florence* (1908), dedicated to Janet Ross and illustrated by the incisions by Adelaide Marchi, in pure picturesque style.<sup>23</sup>

Janet Duff Gordon, to whom Hutton's book was dedicated, was the daughter of Sir Alexander Duff Gordon, and Lucie, Lady Duff Gordon: born in Bloomsbury she grew up in a highly cultured atmosphere among England's leading intellectual and literary figures. In 1860, being 18 years old, she married a forty year-old banker, Henry Ross, and with him she moved to Alexandria, in Egypt, where Henry was a partner in a British bank. When in 1867 the Egyptian banking

21 On Edith Wharton's life see Shari Benstock, *No gifts from chance: a biography of Edith Wharton* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994) and Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007).

22 On the wide phenomenon of the Anglo-Americans renting Florentine Villas, see at least Lamberini, "Residenti anglo-americani e 'genius loci': ricostruzioni e restauri delle dimore fiorentine," in *Gli anglo-americani a Firenze*, pp. 125-42 and Paolini, "Oggetto come specchio dell'anima."

23 Edward Hutton, *Country walks about Florence* (London: Methuen, 1908).

system underwent a crisis that diminished Henry Ross's investments and ended his banking career, the couple decided against returning to England because of the high cost of living and instead they explored living on the continent, looking initially at an estate in France: they eventually moved to Florence, leaving their only child, Alexander to be educated in England. As many of the Anglo-Americans, they initially lived in a couple of apartments on the Lungarno Acciaiuoli and the Lungarno Torrigiani, and after their unsuccessful attempt to buy Fenis Castle near Aosta, the ultimately rented Villa Castagnolo seven miles west of Florence in Lastra a Signa from Marchese Lotteringio della Stufa.<sup>24</sup>

In 1888, the Rosses acquired Villa di Poggio Gherardo outside Florence, near Settignano, a villa famously referenced by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, and that came with three attached farms and operated by tenant farmers.<sup>25</sup> In the Villa Janet was conducting occasional dealing in art and a salon of sorts on Sundays, and she became famous for her cookbook of Tuscan recipes, and among many other publications, another volume on the Florentine villas.<sup>26</sup> It was probably thanks to her knowledge of what was available on the estate market of the Florentine Villas, that she helped the art historian and writer Bernard Berenson find and purchase a neighbouring villa, I Tatti.<sup>27</sup>

The American art historian Bernard Berenson (June 26, 1865 – October 6, 1959) was a major figure in pioneering art attribution and therefore establishing the market for paintings by the “old masters.” Born Bernhard Valvrojenski in Lithuania to a Litvak family, he emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, whereupon the family name was changed to “Berenson.” Among US collectors of the early 1900s, Berenson was regarded as the pre-eminent authority on Renaissance Art: he played a pivotal role as an advisor to several important American art collectors, such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, who needed help in navigating the complex and treacherous market of newly-fashionable Renaissance Art.<sup>28</sup>

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24 Alyson Price, “Janet Ross a Poggio Gherardo,” in *Una sconfinata infatuazione*, pp. 79-88 and in the same volume Irene Campolmi, “Janet Ross: collezionista d'arte o marchande amateur? Un insolito caso di collezionismo femminile nella Firenze di fine Ottocento,” pp. 89-138. On Janet Ross see also the biographies: Sarah Benjamin, *Castle of Tuscany: The remarkable life of Janet Ross* (Sydney: Murdoch Books, 2006) and Ben Downing, *Queen Bee of Tuscany: The Redoubtable Janet Ross* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013).

25 On the villa see Marilena Tamassia, “Uno sguardo sulla Villa di Poggio Gherardo: in ricordo di Umberto Baldini, direttore del Gabinetto Fotografico,” *Critica d'arte*, 69 (2008), pp. 127-34.

26 Janet Ross, *Florentine Villas* (London: J. M. Dent and co., 1904). A first limited edition was published in 1901 by Dent with Nelly Erichsen drawings. In 1905 Janet Ross published a new (but very similar to the 1904 one) book on the subject: Janet Ross, *Florentine Palaces and Their Stories* (London: Dent, 1905), with illustrations by Adelaide Marchi.

27 On I Tatti and the Berensons see at least Patricia Rubin, “Bernad Berenson, Villa I Tatti, and the visualization of the Italian Renaissance,” in *Gli Anglo-Americani a Firenze*, pp. 207-21.

28 On the vast theme, see at least: Patricia Lee Rubin, “Portrait of a Lady: Isabella Stewart Gardner, Bernard Berenson and the Market for Renaissance Art in America,” *Apollo*, 152 (2000), pp. 37-44.

Berenson relocated to I Tatti, a villa set on a hillside between Settignano and Fiesole in December 1900, when he married Mary Costelloe. The Villa, now The Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, houses the Berenson collection of Italian primitives, and of Chinese and Islamic art, as well as a research library of 140,000 volumes and a collection of 250,000 photographs.<sup>29</sup> (fig. 1)

As prof. Patricia Rubin recently studied, the Berensons first rented the villa from John Temple Leader only acquiring it from Temple Leader's heir, Lord Westbury, in December 1907. From the beginning of their tenancy the villa required some renovation, intended as relatively minor modifications or modernizations, such as plumbing and wiring. After purchasing it, however, these quickly became major improvements.<sup>30</sup> They were at first done by local builders mainly under Mary's supervision. The seventeenth-century farmhouse became a Renaissance-style villa under the direction of the English architect and writer Geoffrey Scott,<sup>31</sup> while a formal garden in the Anglo-Italian Renaissance style was laid out by the English landscape architect Cecil Pinsent, a then young and then inexperienced garden designer who had been touring Tuscany making topographic drawings of buildings together with his friend Geoffrey Scott: I Tatti were to become a formidable test, through which Pinsent could become a recognized specialist of the formal garden, that recreates the landscape of the early Renaissance style, conceived as an outdoor extension of the house, an unfolding sequence, designed with the open intention of reviving the Italian style.<sup>32</sup>

"The *locus amoenus* created by the Berensons for themselves and their friends, although alluding to Renaissance architectural style in its chosen idiom, was an evocation of or invocation to cultural values, not an imitation of Renaissance forms. It was to be a setting congenial to study and to reflection as well as a site for convivial conversation. It was neither a restoration nor a recreation of a Renaissance residence. With its stately libraries and its picture gallery, its model was as much the English country house as the Tuscan villa. At the time of its conception and decoration I Tatti's relation to Florence and Florentine traditions and the city's actual life was as tangential as its location. "Berensonville" as Mary once called it, was removed from its surroundings, as a social entity and as

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29 On the collection of the old masters, see the new catalogue Carl Brandon Strehlke, *Machtelt Israëls, The Bernard and Mary Berenson Collection of European Paintings at I Tatti* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2015).

30 Lee Rubin, "Bernard Berenson", p. 209.

31 See Richard M. Dunn, *Geoffrey Scott and the Berenson circle: literary and aesthetic life in the early 20th century* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1998).

32 On Pinsent and the gardens he designed in and around Florence see: Francesca Romana Liserra, *Giardini anglo-fiorentini. Il Rinascimento all'inglese di Cecil Pinsent* (Firenze: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2008).

a visual construction. Its language was cosmopolitan and proclaimed clearly that its owner was ‘a man of the world’.<sup>33</sup> (fig. 2)

If compared with the Berensons’ successful model, a completely different, and rather peculiar and unknown story is the one of the English novelist Ouida, who rented the hidden gem of Villa Le Campora, the former convent of St. Maria al Sepolcro. The convent of Le Campora, situated almost two kilometres outside Porta S. Pier Gattolini (nowadays Porta Romana), on the way to Marignolle, was founded around 1350 by a group of hermits. In the 1370s, the convent, protected by the Albizi family, became the mother house of the monastic order of the Girolamites and for nearly fifty years it enjoyed a period of wealth and splendour: in the second half of the XIV century the apse of the church and the two flanking chapels were frescoed and of them only the Benini chapel survived nowadays (fig. 3). This period of prosperity lasted for only a half century. In 1434, after almost fifteen years of failed attempts, Le Campora was acquired by the Benedictine convent of the *Badia Fiorentina*, in order to be used mostly as a summer house: it continued though to live in splendour, as XVII century descriptions testified, and it hosted the Vettori *Annunciation* by Neri di Bicci and the famous *Vision of St. Bernard* for the Del Pugliese family by Filippino Lippi. Yet what was transformed into a private house at the beginning of XIX century, was a radically altered site.<sup>34</sup>

As happened for many religious institutions, in 1815 the convent was sold to private owners: the mother-house, the Badia had been already deconsacrated in 1808 with the Napoleonic suppressions of religious orders.<sup>35</sup> The buyer of Le Campora was Francesco del Corona, a rich Florentine merchant, who in 1846 obtained, or rather purchased the title of Noble of San Miniato. We do not know the exact conditions of the convent at the time of the purchase, but Francesco del Corona’s restorations were massive in order to transform the convent into a villa in keeping with the style of the early nineteenth century. (fig. 4)

From the Del Corona the English novelist Ouida rented the villa for a few years, from 1891 to 1894, when she left Florence for Lucca, after her mother’s

33 Lee Rubin, “Bernard Berenson,” p. 210.

34 On the partially destroyed convent of Le Campora and its artworks see Laura Fenelli, “Il convento scomparso: note per una ricostruzione del complesso fiorentino di Santa Maria al Sepolcro (Le Campora),” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 55 (2013, 2), pp. 146-81 and Laura Fenelli, “Una Gerusalemme tra le ‘campora’ fiorentine,” in *Come a Gerusalemme: evocazioni, riproduzioni, imitazioni dei luoghi santi tra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Firenze, SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo: 2013), pp. 231-49. On the XIX century tenants and owners and XX century rediscovery of Le Campora see: Laura Fenelli “Le Campora, 1908: Discovering a Trecento Fresco Cycle,” *Predella*, 38 (2015) [online] 12, 2015 [forthcoming].

35 On the suppression of religious orders in Florence enacted by Pietro Leopoldo and later by the French government see: Osanna Fantozzi Micali, *Pietro Rosselli, Le soppressioni dei conventi a Firenze. Riuso e trasformazioni dal secolo XVIII in poi* (Firenze: Editrice Fiorentina, 1980); Ivo Biagiatti, “La soppressione dei conventi,” in *La Toscana nell’età della rivoluzione napoleonica*, ed. by Ivan Tognarini (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1985), pp. 443-69. See also, in the same volume: Maurizio Bassetti, *La soppressione dei Beni nazionali in Toscana: il dipartimento dell’Arno*, pp. 471-504

death. Ouida is the pseudonym of Maria Louise Ramé, born at Bury St. Edmunds, England, by Susan Sutton, a wine merchant's daughter and a French father: her *nom de plume* derives from a childish mispronunciation of her own name. She moved to London in 1867, where she started her literary career at the Langham Hotel. There, according to the hotel promotional materials, she wrote in bed, by candlelight, with the curtains drawn and surrounded by purple flowers. Neither beautiful nor elegant, she enjoyed an expensive and extravagant life, running up huge hotel and florist bills, and commanding soirees that included soldiers, politicians, literary lights (including Oscar Wilde, Algernon Swinburne, Robert Browning and Wilkie Collins), and artists like John Millais. In 1871 she travelled in Italy for the first time. In 1874, she settled permanently with her mother in Florence, and there long pursued her work as a novelist, throwing herself full force into the social life of the Anglo-Florentine colony.<sup>36</sup>

Although successful, Ouida did not manage her money well. A civil list pension of £150 a year was offered to her by the prime minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, on the application of Alfred Austin, George Wyndham, and Walburga, Lady Paget, which she reluctantly accepted after a request by her friend, Lady Howard of Glossop, on 16 July 1906. Her incapacity of managing her money wisely forced her continuous moving from one location to another: her case is exemplary of what was the path followed by the Anglo-Americans in Florence, at first usually renting apartments in the city centre, and later almost escaping into the countryside. At first Ouida rented an "apartment" at the Palazzo Vagnonville, between piazza Vittorio Veneto and the lungarno Amerigo Vespucci, a palace built between the 1870s and the 1880s, when the area was one of the most exclusive in the city.<sup>37</sup> Later she moved to the Villa Farinola at Scandicci,<sup>38</sup> south of Bellosguardo, three miles from Florence, where she lived in great style, entertained largely, collected *objets d'art*, dressed expensively but not tastefully, drove good horses, and kept many dogs, to which she was deeply attached.

In her novel *Pascarel*, she wrote a vivid description of a villa based on the Villa Farinola where she lived. "The villa was high up on the mountain side – vast, dusky, crumbling, desolate without, as all such places are, and within full of that harmless charm of freedom, space, antiquity, and stillness that does no less perpetually belong to them. Where these old villas stand on their pale olive slopes, those who are strange to them see only the peeling plaster, the discoloured stones,

36 For the various scandals in which Ouida was involved in Florence see: Margherita Ciacci, "Tra fiction e realtà: il caso di Ouida nella Firenze di fine Ottocento," with bibliographic appendix by di L. Desideri, *Antologia Vieusseux*, N.S. XII, 34 (2006), pp. 61-96 and Eileen Bigland, *Ouida: The Passionate Victorian* (London and New York: Jarrolds, 1950).

37 On the Palazzo Vagnonville see Carlo Cresti, *Luigi Zangheri, Architetti e ingegneri nella Toscana dell'Ottocento* (Firenze: Uniedit, 1978), p. 36.

38 Leavitt, *Florence: a delicate case*, pp. 41-47.

the desolate courts, the grass-grown flags, broken statues, the straying vines, the look of loneliness and decay. But those who know them well, love them and learn otherwise; learn the infinite charm of those vast silent halls, of those endless echoing corridors and cloisters, of those wide wind-swept sunbathed chambers, of those shadowy loggias, where the rose-flow of the oleander burns in the dimness of the arches [...] of that sense of infinite solitude, of infinite light, and stillness, and calm [...].<sup>39</sup>

From 1891 to 1894 Ouida rented Villa del Corona and in 1893<sup>40</sup> she wrote to her agent Tauchnitz and described the Villa del Corona to him, “a beautiful old place, which for seven centuries was a monastery, until it was secularized by the Great Napoleon” (fig. 5) and asked him for an advance on her next novel in order to avoid being evicted by the owner: “If I do not pay my rent for this villa on the eighth I shall be turned out of it,” she complained. When her friend Lady Paget, who had just bought the Torre di Belloguardo with her retired husband, the former British Ambassador, visited her in the villa in the same year,<sup>41</sup> she made no mention of the Trecento frescoes, describing only the desperate situation of the dilapidated house: “Her only furniture seemed to be a plaster cast of Gay’s bust,<sup>42</sup> for which she asked me years ago. There were only two or three chairs in many rooms I traversed, a pink-and gold paper hung in rags from the wall, there were no fires, no carpets.”<sup>43</sup>

Ouida’s mother died on 10 September, six weeks after the money arrived from Tauchnitz. Her corpse remained on the second floor of the villa for ten days since Ouida had no money to pay for the funeral. Finally, there was no choice but to bury her in the pauper section of the Allori Cemetery outside Florence. As Lady

39 Ouida, Pascarel. *Only a story* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), p. 245.

40 Natalie Schroeder and Shari Hodges Holt, *Ouida the Phenomenon: Evolving Social, Political, and Gender Concerns in Her Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 19 (where the Villa is mistakenly called Villa della Corona). The same mistake appears in Dentler, *Famous foreigners in Florence*, pp. 192-193, where Villa del Corona e Villa Le Campora are mistakenly understood as two different houses: “[...] between 1888 and the time she left Florence in 1894 she lived in palazzo Feroni on via de’ Serragli and on Belloguardo in villa della Carona (sic), (Now Burns Murdock) and in Villa Le Campora.”

41 Paget describes her visits to Ouida in 1893 in *Walpurga Ehrengarde Helena de Hohenthal Paget, Embassies of other days and further recollections* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), p. 552.

42 Gay is Sir Augustus Berkeley Paget (1823–1896), British Ambassador in Florence and Rome. In 1867 Augustus was posted to Florence, then the capital of the newly-formed Italy. He and Lady Paget moved to Rome in 1870, when Rome in turn became the capital. In 1887 Lady Paget rented the Villa Caprini in Fiesole, Florence and in 1893 when her husband retired to Britain, she bought the Torre di Belloguardo south of the city.

43 Quoted in Monica Stirling, *The Fine and the Wicked. The life and times of Ouida* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1957), p. 181.

Paget recounts, after being once more requested to pay, “I never went again and some months later she was evicted by the Carabinieri for not paying her rent.”<sup>44</sup>

It was probably this unparalleled mix of great fortune, history and decadence that made for almost a century the Florentine villas so appealing for the Anglo-Americans, like Henry James so vividly described:

The villas are innumerable and if you're an aching alien half the talk is about villas. This one has a story; that one has another; they all look as if they had stories – none in truth predominantly gay. Most of them are offered to rent (many of them are for sale) at prices unnaturally low; you may have a tower and a garden, a chapel and an expanse of thirty windows, for five hundred dollars a year. In imagination you hire three or four; you take possession and settle and stay. Your sense of the finest is something very grave and stately; your sense of the bravery at two or three of the best something quite tragic and sinister. From what does this latter impression come? You gather it as you stand there in the early dusk, with your eyes on the long, pale-brown façade, the enormous windows, the iron cages fastened to the lower ones. Part of the brooding expression of these great houses comes, even when they have not fallen into decay, from their look of having outlived their original use. Their extraordinary largeness and massiveness are a satire on their present fate. They weren't built with such a thickness of wall and depth of embrasure, such a solidity of staircases and superfluity of doorways, simply to afford an economical winter residence to English and American families. I don't know whether it was the appearance of these stony old villas, which seemed so dumbly conscious of a change of manners, that threw a tinge of melancholy over the general prospect; certain it is that, having always found this note as of a myriad old sadnesses in solution in the view of Florence, it seemed to me now particularly strong. “Lovely, lovely, but it makes me ‘blue’,” the sensitive stranger couldn't but help murmuring to himself as, in the late afternoon, he looked at the landscape from over one of the low parapets, and then, with his hands in his pockets, turned away indoors to candles and dinner.<sup>45</sup>

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44 Walpurga Ehrengarde Helena de Hohenthal Paget, *In My Tower* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1924), vol. I, p. 52. See also Bigland, *Ouida: The Passionate Victorian*, p. 209.

45 James, *Italian Hours*, p. 175.



Fig. 1: Bernard Berenson at Villa I Tatti, 1903. (Courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).



Fig. 2: A postcard of Bernard Berenson's Villa I Tatti, sent by Edith Wharton to Henry James, October 1911. (Courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).





Fig. 3: Ex-church of Santa Maria al Sepolcro, ca 1370, chapel of St. Anthony, Florence (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Max Planck Institute, photo collection).

171350

Arch. Mus. S. Bar.



Villa B. Corona

Florenz



Novo. Sopralatteo

Fig. 4: West Façade, Villa del Corona, Florence  
(Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Max Planck Institute, photo collection).

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*Villa del Corona*

*Amor*



*Das Kupferstichkabinett*

Fig. 5: Cloister, Villa del Corona, Florence  
(Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Max Planck Institute, photo collection).



**J. P. Morgan, the new Agostino Chigi**

Ingrid D. Rowland

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The American financier John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913).

The American financier John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) was a singular character, sickly and sensitive as a boy, domineering as an adult, as intensely interested in art and culture as he was in high finance. In the last twenty years of his life, he threw himself enthusiastically into collecting an eclectic variety of rare, expensive objects. As his biographer Jean Strouse writes, “he seemed to be engaged in a drama of rescue, gathering works that had been widely dispersed and giving them orderly new contexts under his own name.”<sup>1</sup> He acquired his immense collections of artworks, rare books, watches, tapestries, porcelains, and furniture with the help of scholarly advisors, sharing his bounty with institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library, and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the Wadsworth Athenaeum in his native Hartford, Connecticut. Initially, he kept most of his collections in England, where he also had a home, but even so, by 1900 he had more books and manuscripts in New York than he could fit in his study, his cellar, and a local private institution, the Lenox Library (which would eventually be incorporated into the New York Public Library). He began to think about building a separate private library near his Manhattan home.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), p. 485.

Originally, Morgan presented the idea to architect Whitney Warren, who suggested an elaborate Beaux-Arts design that did not appeal to the banker's taste.<sup>2</sup> In 1902, Morgan approached another architect, Charles Follen McKim, already well known for grand structures (the Boston Public Library, Columbia University) inspired by the buildings of classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance. McKim had been dealing with Morgan on another project, the future American Academy in Rome, and the two were able to reach a quick agreement about this second commission in New York. Morgan had already bought the land, a property on 36th Street between his own house and Park Avenue. Construction began shortly thereafter, with Morgan's nephew Junius Spencer Morgan acting as intermediary during Pierpont Morgan's frequent trips abroad.

From the beginning, the elder Morgan proved a demanding but interested client. The library's exterior structure consisted of ashlar blocks of Tennessee pink marble, finely dressed in the ancient technique of anathyrosis to emulate the mortarless masonry of classical Greece.<sup>3</sup> But the climate of New York subjected stone to more extreme conditions than the Mediterranean weather of Athens, and dictated greater precautions. McKim therefore insulated the building's horizontal seams with a fine layer of lead, interrupting the smooth surface of the marble but ensuring the building's greater durability. For this refinement and others like it, the Pierpont Morgan Library, by the time of its completion in 1906, had cost its owner a staggering \$1,200,000. Morgan, however, was delighted to pay for the building's magnificent detailing. McKim himself traveled to Rome to find a coffered wooden ceiling to install in the room that would serve as Morgan's study, and imported Renaissance fireplaces of Istrian marble. Columns of lapis lazuli and marble floors were shipped to New York from Rome, along with a great disk of porphyry, procured by a local resident and friend of both McKim and Morgan, the sculptor Thomas Waldo Story, whose abolitionist father, the sculptor William Wetmore Story, had moved to Rome before the American Civil War.<sup>4</sup>

Envisioning painted decorations in proper Renaissance style, McKim took Morgan in August of 1903 to see Henry Siddons Mowbray's murals for the University Club (yet another of McKim's designs for New York's elite). Mowbray's images, inspired by Renaissance frescoes in the Vatican (especially Pinturicchio's Borgia Apartments and Raphael's Logge), reflected his recent experiences in Rome, where he had served as acting director of the American

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2 Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier*, p. 487.

3 <http://www.themorgan.org/about/architectural-history/2> (accessed April 25, 2017).

4 Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier*, pp. 491-92; Henry James, *William Wetmore Story and his Friends, from Letters, Diaries, and Recollections* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903).

Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>5</sup> In May 1904, Morgan engaged Mowbray to paint the murals for his new library.

To manage the collection of more than ten thousand volumes, Morgan's resourceful nephew Junius suggested a glamorous 26-year-old clerk and expert on illuminated manuscripts from the Princeton Library, Belle da Costa Greene (at the time Junius was a student at Princeton). Claimed Portuguese descent to mask her



Belle da Costa Greene (1883-1950).

real origins, Belle Marion Greener was the daughter of the first African American to graduate from Harvard.<sup>6</sup> Morgan hired her in 1905, and she proved a dramatically successful asset to the institution.

Rome was a familiar place to the Library's creators. For wealthy Americans, the Grand Tour was still an essential rite of passage, with visitors staying for months on end, mixing with fellow expatriates and locals who often included members of the nobility as well as tour guides and service personnel. The late nineteenth century proved an especially stimulating time to visit. Rome, as the new capital of a united Italian nation state, was rapidly expanding in size and eager to project an atmosphere of international sophistication. New academic disciplines like archaeology and art history lent a real sense of excitement to the city's unique mixture of old and new, spearheaded by Rodolfo Lanciani, Professor of Roman Topography at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," who delighted both residents and visitors with his marvelous accounts of the city's history in both

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<sup>5</sup> Margaret Ferrand Thorp, "Literary Sculptors in the Caffé Greco," *American Quarterly*, 12, 2 (1960), pp. 161-74.

<sup>6</sup> Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier*, pp. 509-21; Heidi Ardizzone, *An Illuminated Life: Belle da Costa Greene's Journey from Prejudice to Privilege* (New York: Norton, 2007).

Italian and English, a language he commanded perfectly (his first wife was American, the second British).<sup>7</sup> Lanciani's *Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome* of 1897 advertised itself as *A Companion Book for Students and Visitors*; it was also a bestseller. A second book, *The Golden Days of the Renaissance in Rome*, published in 1906, memorably evoked precisely the period, and the personalities, that Morgan's library was endeavoring to recreate at the same time in a modern Manhattan setting.<sup>8</sup>

Of Lanciani's seven chapters, one is devoted to Raphael, the preferred artist at the turn of the century. Another sings the praises of the artist's most important private patron, the wily Sienese banker Agostino Chigi. If Raphael provided the direct inspiration for the style and subjects of Henry Siddons Mowbray's paintings for the Morgan Library, it was Chigi, the eminent financier and patron of the arts, who provided a Renaissance model for Morgan himself. How could Morgan have resisted the description that begins Lanciani's chapter on "Agostino Chigi 'Il Magnifico' and the 'Contrada dei Banchi'"? Agostino Chigi [...] was gifted by nature with such keen insight and exquisite tact in the art of trading, that before reaching his fortieth year he had become, financially, the most powerful man in the world. Republics and kingdoms, Christians and infidels, popes and sultans alike, showed the same anxiety to secure his help in monetary affairs, and to entrust to him the collectorship of their revenues and customs. No less 'magnifico' does he appear in connection with art and artists [...].<sup>9</sup>

McKim called Pierpont Morgan "Lorenzo the Magnificent" behind his back,<sup>10</sup> but Morgan knew better: he was "Magnificent" all right, but the "magnifico" he looked back to was Agostino Chigi, who had combined genius as a financier with refined patronage of the arts. Three hundred years after Agostino first built the family fortune, the Chigi family was still extremely prominent in Rome. From 1712 to 1970, when Pope Paul VI abolished aristocratic offices in the Vatican, the eldest son of the Chigi's Roman branch served as Guardian of the Conclave and Marshal of Holy Roman Church.<sup>11</sup> In Morgan's day, the holder of this distinction was Prince Mario Chigi della Rovere Albani (1832-1914), whose Roman palazzo on the Via del Corso is now the official residence of the Italian Prime Minister. Palazzo Chigi is also where Morgan saw walls covered in scarlet damask woven with the Chigi coat of arms; he used the same silk fabric for the

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7 An extensive entry on Lanciani appears in the online *Dictionary of Art Historians*: <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/lancianir.htm> (accessed April 25, 2017).

8 Rodolfo Lanciani, *The Golden Days of the Renaissance in Rome, from the Pontificate of Julius II to that of Paul III* (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Cambridge MA: The Riverside Press, 1906).

9 Lanciani, *The Golden Days*, p. 275.

10 Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier*, p. 492.

11 [www.palazzochigiana.it/palazzo/famiglia.htm](http://www.palazzochigiana.it/palazzo/famiglia.htm) (accessed April 25, 2017).



walls of his own study in the Morgan Library.<sup>12</sup> Yet despite their opulent palazzi and their illustrious spouses, both Prince Mario and Prince Ludovico Chigi (1866-1951) knew that they would have to change the way they lived in modern Italy. Like many Roman aristocrats, they faced new tax laws, put into place by the newborn Republic of Italy, that drastically altered their financial situation. After Italian unification, old propertied families were often desperately eager to sell off works of art, books, manuscripts, and properties, or to approve marriages with well-heeled young foreigners in exchange for a title. The Chigi were no exception. They were ready to sell, and Morgan was ready to buy.

He acquired land for the American Academy that had previously belonged to the Chigi family. The Academy building on the Janiculum Hill overlooked Chigi's famous villa in Trastevere, called the Villa Farnesina since its purchase by the Farnese family in 1579. And Morgan, or one of his agents, also fell for a hoax: they bought some documents forged in the late nineteenth century purporting to record Chigi's payment to Raphael on behalf of Pope Leo X for work on St. Peter's Basilica, a combination of names too marvelous to resist.<sup>13</sup> And all the while Morgan worked on creating an institution in New York that would rival the glories of Agostino Chigi's suburban villa on the banks of the Tiber.

Morgan, McKim, Mowbray and Greene could find information about Agostino Chigi from a variety of sources. François-Anatole Gruyer, a curator at the Louvre, had published his captivating two-volume study *Raphaël et l'Antiquité* in Paris in 1864.<sup>14</sup> The manuscript biography of Chigi drafted in the seventeenth century by his grand-nephew Fabio Chigi (the future Pope Alexander VII), went to press in 1878 with extensive notes by the Chigi family's librarian Giuseppe Cugnoni.<sup>15</sup> The art historians Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle published their monumental two-volume study of Raphael in 1882. Ludwig von Pastor's *History of the Popes*, a Catholic retort to Leopold von Ranke's *Die römischen Päpste* of 1834-36, had reached its eighth volume and Chigi's era by 1899.<sup>16</sup> And in 1880, a German classicist, Richard Förster, had devoted an entire monograph to the fresco decorations of Chigi's suburban villa, known since 1579 as the Villa Farnesina.<sup>17</sup> The fact that *Farnesina-Studien* was written in German would have posed no obstacle to Morgan, at least; he had been

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.themorgan.org/about/architectural-history/7> (accessed April 25, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483 -1602)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 14-34.

<sup>14</sup> François-Anatole Gruyer, *Raphaël et l'antiquité* (Paris: V[eu]ve Jules Renouard, 1864).

<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Cugnoni, *Agostino Chigi il magnifico* (Rome: Società Romana di Storia Patria, 1878).

<sup>16</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *Die römischen Päpste in den letzten vier Jahrhunderten* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1834-1836);

Ludwig von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters*, 40 vols (Freiburg i B.: Herder, 1854-1928).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Förster, *Farnesina-Studien: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Verhältnis der Renaissance zur Antike* (Rostock: Stuller'sche Hof- und Universitäts-Buchhandlung [Hermann Schmidt], 1880).

educated in Switzerland and Germany. In turning to Raphael and Chigi as sources of inspiration, Morgan conveyed a clear, easily understandable message that a new Renaissance was underway in New York, a Renaissance in which he was eager to play a role as dominant as the one Agostino Chigi had played three hundred years before during the pontificates of Julius II and Leo X, what Lanciani would term the “Golden Days of the Renaissance in Rome.”

Rather than paint in fresco, Mowbray used oil on canvas. As he would later write:

In most cases, in the present day, a decorator must paint his canvasses while the building is in process of construction. For the fresco, at least a year would be required for the walls to season before any work could be undertaken: now add this, one, or more likely two years, for the work itself, and you create a situation which would not be considered in present day methods of construction.<sup>18</sup>

At nearly 70, J.P. Morgan must have been particularly impatient to see his Library in its full glory. For the main reading room, Mowbray copied the design of the Villa Farnesina’s two downstairs loggias, a rectangular sunken ceiling surrounded, as shown in the following image, by semicircular lunettes alternating with hexagonal spandrels.



The Morgan Library & Museum, New York City.

The lunettes, inspired by Pinturicchio’s decorations for the Borgia Apartments in the Vatican Palace, show a modernized version of the Nine Muses and famous representatives of the arts they symbolize. The correspondences between heroes and arts do not work perfectly – Antonio da Sangallo was no poet –

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18 H. Siddons Mowbray, *Suggestions for a Beginner Undertaking a Decorative Ensemble Involving Paintings, Ornament, and Gold Work* (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1916), p. 8.

but the general point of this eclectic mix is to include science and the New World in this revised and updated Renaissance. So, in an endless circle, we have Dante, Comedy, Botticelli, Painting, Michelangelo, Architecture, Antonio da Sangallo, Poetry, Socrates, History, William Caxton, Music, Herodotus, Science, Galileo, Astronomy, Columbus, and Tragedy.<sup>19</sup>

The spandrels are inspired by Baldassare Peruzzi's spandrel decorations for the summer dining room of Chigi's villa, the Sala di Galatea, which Förster had



Baldassare Peruzzi, *Sala di Galatea*, Villa Farnesina, Rome.

identified as astrological symbols in his *Farnesina-Studien* of 1880.<sup>20</sup> Mowbray tailored his own astrological scheme specifically to Morgan's life, placing the Zodiacal signs of Aries and Gemini on either side of the door. Morgan, like Raphael, was born under the sign of Aries, on April 17, 1837 (Raphael was born on April 10, 1483), and married his second wife, Frances Louisa Tracy, on May 31, 1865, under the sign of Gemini. Gallantly, however, Morgan remembered his first wife, Amelia "Memie" Sturges. Opposite Gemini on the other side of the room, Mowbray placed Aquarius, the sign under which Memie had died of tuberculosis in February 1862, after only four months of marriage. Opposite Aries, the painter placed Libra, the sign Morgan adopted as a member of New York's Zodiac Club. Two myths about Proserpina, the queen of the Underworld, underline the fragility of human existence as they round out the celestial cycle. In order, then, the spandrels display: Aquarius, Neptune, Libra, Mars and Venus, Pisces, Minerva with Perseus holding the head of Medusa, Scorpio, Diana and Actaeon, Leo, Ceres, Capricorn, Juno, Pluto abducting Proserpina, Aries, Venus and Cupid, Gemini, Mercury rescuing Proserpina from the Underworld, Sagittarius, Vesta, Cancer,

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.themorgan.org/about/architectural-history/6> (accessed April 25, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Förster, *Farnesina-Studien*, pp. 39-60.

Jupiter enthroned with Juno, Virgo, Vulcan at his forge, Taurus, Apollo and Hercules.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequent research would show that Förster's interpretation of Chigi's decorated ceiling was correct. The astrological theme intrigued the Hamburg banker turned art historian Aby Warburg (whose New York-based brother Paul, with Morgan, would help found the U.S. Federal Reserve in 1910), and Fritz Saxl, the curator of Warburg's remarkable library, showed that the Peruzzi ceiling must show Chigi's horoscope at the time of his birth.<sup>22</sup> In 1984, Mary Quinlan-McGrath refined Saxl's calculation with the help of contemporary astronomical measurements, measurements independently confirmed by the simultaneous discovery of Chigi's birth notice in Siena.<sup>23</sup>

The opulent decorations for Morgan Library's entrance foyer, the Rotunda, feature stucco designs modeled on Raphael's Villa Madama and a dome inspired by Raphael's first great commission in Rome, the Stanza della Segnatura of the Vatican Palace (1508-1511).<sup>24</sup> Its three doors lead to the main reading room, to Morgan's office, and to the office of Belle da Costa Greene. The hexagons framed by ornamental stucco work (also executed by Mowbray) depict the bounty of Nature: Wheat, Flowers, Ceres (the Roman goddess of grain), the Vine, and Fruit. Stucco reliefs follow the same theme of Nature, bounty, and pleasure: Venus and Cupid, Mercury and Proserpina, Diana and one of her attendants, and Silenus with the young Bacchus. The dome paintings pursue more lofty themes: the roundels bear personifications of Religion, Philosophy, Science, and Art. Rectangular panels combine Morgan's Episcopal faith with his devotion to the classics by showing The Annunciation, The Crowning of Art, The Triumph of Light over Darkness (or Wisdom Subduing Force), and Knowledge Transmitted, symbolized by the School of Plato.<sup>25</sup>

The foyer also boasts columns of lapis lazuli and a porphyry roundel in the inlaid marble floor. J. P. Morgan was not to be outdone by tales of Agostino Chigi's marble statues and lavish parties.<sup>26</sup> He aimed to recreate a new Renaissance at the hub of the modern world. His collections and the antiquarian slant of his

21 <http://www.themorgan.org/about/architectural-history/6> (accessed April 25, 2017).

22 Fritz Saxl, *La fede astrologica di Agostino Chigi: interpretazioni dei dipinti di Baldassarre Peruzzi nella sala di Galatea della Farnesina* (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1934), p. 16 and pp. 28-29.

23 Mary Quinlan-McGrath, "The Astrological Vault of the Villa Farnesina: Agostino Chigi's Rising Sign," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 47 (1984), pp. 91-105; Ingrid Rowland, "The Birth Date of Agostino Chigi: Documentary Proof," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 47 (1984), pp. 192-93.

24 <http://www.themorgan.org/about/architectural-history/3> (accessed April 25, 2017).

25 <http://www.themorgan.org/about/architectural-history/3> (accessed April 25, 2017).

26 For Chigi's collection of antiques, see Costanza Barbieri, *Le 'magnificenze' di Agostino Chigi: Collezioni e passioni antiquarie nella Villa Farnesina* (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 2014).

library's decoration all serve a thoroughly modern man at the heart of contemporary society by linking Morgan's present to Chigi's past, and the more remote past of classical antiquity, in one seamless composition.



**A Tale of Two Asymmetries:  
“Medieval” and “Renaissance” in US Art History in Italy**

Lila Yawn

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The asymmetries in question are structuring features of current American academic life in Italy, and they are an odd couple. The first consists of a chronological disparity in the teaching of art history at US study abroad programs and universities – that is, the neglect, with respect to other eras, of that roughly thousand-year period commonly called the Middle Ages. The second asymmetry is closely related. It lies in the polarity between the scant didactic attention devoted to the Middle Ages and the extensive contributions of US-based researchers to scholarship on medieval Italian art. These two intersecting imbalances represent a missed educational opportunity whose impact goes far deeper, I believe, than what American students learn about art or architecture during their time in Italy.

At the outset, a disclaimer is in order. Although I will use “Middle Ages” and “Renaissance” freely, the two terms are deeply equivocal and wobbly in their chronological interface. If given the choice I would cease to use them entirely, except to teach students how they emerged and evolved in historical discourse. Today, however, they are necessary to my argument. As you will recall, the now-canonical notion that Europe underwent a long period of darkness with the waning of the classical cultures of antiquity and then lit up again centuries later in a glorious revival that ushered in the modern world was established above all by Jules Michelet, who first gave the word “Renaissance” currency as a chronological-cultural designation (*Histoire de France*, 1855), and by Jacob Burckhardt, whose *Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) popularized Michelet’s idea of the sixteenth century as a cultural and artistic Golden Age: an intellectual reawakening, when man discovered the world and man.<sup>1</sup> Michelet and Burckhardt elaborated upon a tripartite division of history that had taken shape centuries earlier, in humanist works of the Trecento and Quattrocento beginning with Petrarch (1304-

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Chamerot, 1855) (*Histoire de France*, par Jules Michelet, vol. 7); Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien: ein Versuch* (Basel: Schweighauser, 1860). On Michelet, Burckhardt, and their impact: Jo Tollebeek, “‘Renaissance’ and ‘fossilization’: Michelet, Burckhardt, and Huizinga,” *Renaissance Studies* (2001), pp. 354–66; Oscar A. Haac, review of Lucien Febvre, *Michelet et la Renaissance*, ed. Paule Braudel (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), and J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), *The French Review*, 69/3 (1996), pp. 495–96; J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Lucien Febvre, *Michelet et la Renaissance*, ed. by Paule Braudel (Paris: Flammarion, 1992); Philip Lee Ralph, *The Renaissance in Perspective* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1973), pp. 2–3; Hans Baron, “Burckhardt’s ‘Civilization of the Renaissance’ A Century after its Publication,” *Renaissance News*, 13/3 (1960), pp. 207–22. On Burckhardt’s relatively positive view of the Middle Ages see Baron, “Burckhardt’s ‘Civilization of the Renaissance,’” p. 208.

1374). It was Petrarch who first replaced the more segmented periodization schemes of late-ancient and medieval historiography (e.g. Jerome's four world monarchies; Augustine's six ages) with the idea of an ancient era of effulgence, followed by a thousand-year epoch of darkness, followed by glimmers of a renewal in his own age, including in his own poetic and scholarly activity.<sup>2</sup>

Through the development of this three-part scheme of history, there has never really been a consensus about what the Renaissance was or when it began, whether in the visual arts or in any other sector. The swings of inclusiveness over time and space can be dizzying. Nineteenth-century exhibitions of "medieval" art sometimes included works by Raphael, Titian, and other artists today commonly regarded as stars of the High Renaissance. Fascist-era political historians, on the other hand, considered the *medioevo* to have ended with the invasion of Charles V in 1530, ten years after Raphael's death.<sup>3</sup> Recent US and British scholarship tends to push the borders of the Renaissance backward in time into chronological terrain widely regarded as medieval, particularly in contemporary Italian scholarship. *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Renaissance* (2014) starts its timeline with the Sicilian Vespers of 1282 – two decades before the birth of Petrarch, who thought of himself as still living in the post-classical darkness (even if also helping to extinguish it).<sup>4</sup> Flavio Biondo (1392-1463), in contrast, seems to have situated the beginning of the end of the dark age in the era of Charlemagne, half a millennium before Petrarch.<sup>5</sup> My own entry-level courses on medieval art in Rome

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2 M. L. McLaughlin, "Humanist Concepts of Renaissance and Middle Ages in the Tre- and Quattrocento," *Renaissance Studies*, 2/2 (1988), pp. 131-42 (pp. 131-34, and pp. 137-38); Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948); Theodor Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" *Speculum*, 17/2 (1942), pp. 226-42 (pp. 238-40); and Wallace K. Ferguson, "Humanist Views of the Renaissance," *The American Historical Review*, 45/1 (1939), pp. 1-28 (pp. 11-13). See also: Robert Black, "The Renaissance and the Middle Ages: Chronologies, Ideologies, Geographies," in *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c.1300-c. 1550*, ed. by Alexander Lee, Pit Péporté, and Harry Schnitker (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 27-44. On Petrarch: Francisco Rico and Luca Marozzi, "Petrarca, Francesco," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 82 (2015), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-petrarca\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-petrarca_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) [25 September 2016].

3 D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 20; D. Medina Lasansky, "Urban Editing, Historic Preservation, and Political Rhetoric: The Fascist Redesign of San Gimignano," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 63/3 (2004), pp. 320-53, at pp. 320-21. On the variability of "Renaissance" see also: *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c.1300-c. 1550*, ed. by Alexander Lee, Pit Péporté, and Harry Schnitker (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); Jack Goody, *Renaissances: the One or the Many?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*, esp. pp. 20-387; and Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

4 *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by Michael Wyatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), xxi; Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" pp. 228-34; McLaughlin "Humanist Concepts of Renaissance," pp. 132-33.

5 Ferguson, "Humanist views of the Renaissance," p. 13; Riccardo Furbini, "Biondo, Flavio," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 10 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 1968), pp. 536-58 (p. 536 and p. 554).



conclude with the assassination of Cola di Rienzo (1354), Petrarch's contemporary, although they could just as easily finish with the definitive return of the papal court to Rome under Martin V Colonna (1420).

The remains of visual-material culture from the previous centuries in Italy are plentiful and stunning, although surprisingly few people know of their existence. Rome alone is thronged with medieval architecture and wall decorations, from the mosaic-encrusted basilicas of Santa Prassede, San Clemente, Santa Maria in Trastevere, and Santa Maria Maggiore, to the imposing architecture of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, the Lateran cloister, and the Torre delle Milizie – the tallest building on the skyline in the city center.<sup>6</sup> Discovered in 1996 and opened to the public for the first time only two years ago, the astonishing frescoes of the so-called “Aula Gotica” in the cardinal's palace at Santi Quattro Coronati include – among dozens of other figures, painted in the 1240s in a flamboyant and masterful style – a *spinario*, recalling the ancient bronze thorn-puller now in the Capitoline Museums; Mithras slaying the sacred bull; Andromeda (Perseus is now missing); and a three-faced personification of January sitting beside a line strung with sausages, cheeses, and a large and apparently hungry rat.<sup>7</sup> (Contrary to stereotype, medieval art can be light-hearted and funny.<sup>8</sup>)

The centuries in which these works were created (800-1350) also gave rise to some of Florence's most majestic buildings and dazzling figurative art. Think of the Baptistery of San Giovanni with its magnificent vault mosaics; or of San Miniato al Monte and its joyful, polychrome façade; of the Badia and the Bargello; of Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella; of the original core of Palazzo della Signoria; and of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, upon which Brunelleschi

6 On medieval art and architecture in Rome: *Old Saint Peter's, Rome*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick, John Osborne, Carol M. Richardson, and Joanna Story (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Serena Romano, *Riforma e tradizione: 1050-1198* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2006) (*La Pittura medievale a Roma*, ed. by Maria Andaloro and Serena Romano, *Corpus*, Vol. IV, pp. 312-1431); Serena Romano, *Il duecento e la cultura gotica, 1198-1287 ca.* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2012) (*La Pittura medievale a Roma, Corpus*, Vol. V); Richard Krauthheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312-1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Herbert Kessler and Johanna Zacharias, *Rome 1300: On the Path of the Pilgrim* (New Haven and London, 2000); Deborah Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1998). On medieval Rome more generally: Chris Wickham, *Medieval Rome: Stability and Crisis of a City, 900-1150* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *The Forgotten Story: Rome in the Communal Period*, trans. David Fairservice (Rome: Viella, 2016); Robert Brentano, *Rome Before Avignon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

7 Andreina Draghi, Claudio Noviello, Francesca Matera, and Giuseppina Filippi Moretti, *Gli affreschi dell'aula gotica del Monastero dei Santi Quattro Coronati: una storia ritrovata* (Milano: Skira, 2006); Romano, *Il duecento*, pp. 136-76. As the frescoes of the Aula Gotica suggest, much art of the Middle Ages in Rome, including works not specifically religious in character, probably ornamented domestic spaces whose preservation was not favored by sacred associations and functions and which consequently went lost.

8 On humor in medieval art see especially Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

would eventually impose his dome.<sup>9</sup> These medieval wonders bear witness to a technically virtuosic, aesthetically sophisticated culture of building and of art-making – and also to the flush, bullish medieval economy, medieval demographic boom, and sophisticated medieval urban culture that made Florence one of the principal cities of high- and late-medieval Europe.<sup>10</sup> The buildings in question nevertheless tend to receive very short shrift in the teaching of American undergraduates in Italy, except when treated as a prelude to the Renaissance, as a part of it, or as the physical context of its purportedly superior additions (e.g. Ghiberti's doors; Brunelleschi's dome).

The general neglect of the Middle Ages at American programs in Italy is all the more remarkable in light of the distinguished contributions of American scholars to the study of medieval art in Rome, Florence, and other parts of the Italian peninsula. Beginning with Charles Rufus Morey (1877-1955) and the learned émigrés who gave the study of art history a big boost in the US starting in the 1930s, Americans, by birth or adoption, have exerted a significant international impact on the study of medieval Italian art and architecture worldwide. I would like to devote most of my comments today to the first of the two asymmetries – that is, to the didactic imbalance – and so will tell this part of my tale more briefly, in the form of a few personal favorites from a much larger hall of fame.

My concise *albo d'oro* begins with Morey himself, founder of the *Index of Christian Art* (1917ff.), a vast thematic reference catalog of medieval iconography still very much in use today, albeit with an addition that its founder probably never imagined: an online database.<sup>11</sup> As chairman of the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton, Morey transformed the university into a powerhouse of medieval art-historical scholarship before leaving in 1945 to direct the American

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<sup>9</sup> Excellent starting points in the English-language literature on medieval Florence are Gene A. Brucker, *Florence, the Golden Age, 1138-1737* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983); and Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). Publications on individual buildings, artists, and themes are numerous – for example, Franklin Toker, *On holy ground: liturgy, architecture and urbanism in the cathedral and the streets of medieval Florence* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2009); Miklós Boskovits, Richard Offner, and Klara Steinweg, *The Mosaics of the Baptistery of Florence* (Florence: Giunti, 2007); Guido Tigler, *Toscana romanica* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2006); George W. Dameron, *Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Miklós Boskovits, *Ada Labriola, and Angelo Tartuferi, The Origins of Florentine Painting, 1100-1270* (Florence: Giunti, 1993); Alberto Busignani and Raffaello Bencini, *Le Chiese di Firenze: Il Battistero di San Giovanni* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1988); David Friedman, *Florentine New Towns: Urban Design in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: The Architectural History Foundation - Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1988); Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Campanile of Florence Cathedral: 'Giotto's Tower'* (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> See especially Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence*.

<sup>11</sup> *The Index of Christian Art*, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, <https://ica.princeton.edu> [25 September 2016].

Academy in Rome and, later, to serve as American cultural attaché to Italy.<sup>12</sup> The first Protestant elected to the Pontifical Academy of Archaeology, Morey was chosen to edit the catalog of the Museo Sacro of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, a singular compliment to his scholarly stature, especially given his nationality and religion.<sup>13</sup>

A generation younger than Morey, Edward Garrison (1900-1981) completed a mid-life MA at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York (1945) after a successful business career and then immigrated to Italy at roughly the same time as Morey. There, he proceeded to document and analyze hundreds of panel paintings, frescoes, and illuminated manuscripts of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, many of them previously unknown to art history.<sup>14</sup> The resulting publications – Garrison’s *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index* (1949) and his four-volume *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Italian Painting* (1953-1962) – are on a par with Morey’s *Index* in scope and longevity as points of reference for scholarship in their respective fields.

Arguably even more influential are the writings of Garrison’s contemporary, Richard Krautheimer (1897-1994), founding editor of the *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* (1933-1977) and, for many years, a professor at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, where Garrison studied.<sup>15</sup> German born and educated, Krautheimer began this magisterial compendium of the late-ancient and early medieval basilicas of Rome in 1930-33, just before immigrating to the United States to escape persecution.<sup>16</sup> The *Corpus*, which took more than forty-five years to complete, is one of the supreme monuments of twentieth-century architectural history of any period. Art-historical brilliance ran in Krautheimer’s family. Ernst Kitzinger (1912-2003), his cousin and a longtime professor at Harvard, wrote extensively on the mosaics of Norman Sicily and the interrelatedness of Byzantine and Western medieval art, especially in Italy.<sup>17</sup>

12 Francis Henry Taylor, “Charles Rufus Morey, 1877-1955,” *College Art Journal*, 15/2 (1955), pp. 139-42; “History of the Index,” in *The Index of Christian Art, Department of Art and Archaeology* (Princeton University: <https://ica.princeton.edu/history/> [26 September 2016]); “Morey, Charles Rufus” in *Dictionary of Art Historians*, Art History Webmasters Association, <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/moreyc.htm> [25 September 2016].

13 *Catalogo del Museo sacro della Biblioteca apostolica vaticana*, ed. by Charles Rufus Morey (Vatican City, 1936).

14 Julian Gardner, “Edward B. Garrison,” *The Burlington Magazine*, 124/947 (1982), pp. 96-97.

15 *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae = The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV-IX cent.)*, ed. by Richard Krautheimer et al., 5 vols. (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Christiana, 1937-1977).

16 Krautheimer was Jewish. On his career and reception: Willibald Sauerländer, “Richard Krautheimer (1897-1994),” *The Burlington Magazine*, 137/1103 (1995), pp. 119-20; Catherine Carver McCurrach, “Renovatio’ Reconsidered: Richard Krautheimer and the Iconography of Architecture,” *Gesta*, 50/1 (2011), pp. 41-69, at p. 50 and pp. 65-66 n. 45-46; Richard Krautheimer, *Dictionary of Art Historians*, Art History Webmasters Association, <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/krautheimerr.htm> [25 September 2016].

17 Rebecca W. Corrie, “Ernst Kitzinger (1912-2003),” *The Burlington Magazine*, 145/1208 (2003), pp. 796-97; Ernst Kitzinger, *Dictionary of Art Historians*, Art History Webmasters Association, <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/kitzingere.htm> [25 September 2016].

Building on the foundations put in place by Morey, Krautheimer, Garrison, Kitzinger, and others of their respective generations, scholarship on the art and architecture of medieval Italy has continued to thrive in the US. Witness the publications of Caroline Bruzelius, Dorothy Glass, Herbert Kessler, Dale Kinney, and William Tronzo (to name only a few of the most prominent Italian specialists currently at work), as well as those of their former dissertation advisees, many of them now mid-career professors with their own graduate students and alumni.<sup>18</sup> Fellowships from US granting agencies and institutions, including the Fulbright Foundation, the Delmas Foundation, The Harvard University Research Center at Villa I Tatti, and the American Academy in Rome, which each year awards several dedicated fellowships in medieval studies, make it possible for many American professors and Ph.D. candidates to conduct significant primary research on the ground in Italy. Meanwhile, the Italian Art Society, the Medieval Academy of America, the annual College Art Association meetings, and the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo – which alone is attended by circa three thousand participants per year – give US art historians specialized in medieval Italy regular occasions to meet and share their findings.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, study of medieval Italian art by American undergraduates is rare. To ascertain just how rare – that is, to what degree students enrolled at US programs in Italy for a semester have access to the formal study of medieval art – I surveyed the Spring 2016 course schedules of twenty universities, institutes, and study-abroad centers, nine of them in Rome and eleven in Florence.<sup>20</sup> My survey concentrated on programs with an ongoing presence in Italy that normally offer at least two art history courses per term as part of a liberal arts curriculum. The results are by no means comprehensive, but they suffice to bring out a few telling patterns.

Figure 1 lists the courses in five chronological categories – Classical Antiquity, Late Antiquity/Middle Ages, Renaissance/Baroque, Modern/Contemporary, and Transhistorical (i.e. covering three or more periods) – offered by each of the institutions surveyed. Where the pertinent information was

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18 See, for example, Caroline Bruzelius, *The Stones of Naples: Church Building in the Angevin Kingdom, 1266-1343* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Dorothy Glass, *Portals, Pilgrimage, and Crusade in Western Tuscany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Herbert Kessler and Johanna Zacharias, *Rome 1300: On the Path of the Pilgrim* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Dale Kinney, "Rome in the Twelfth Century: *Urbs fracta* and renovation" *Gesta*, 45/2 (2006), pp. 199-220; William Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). A few works by the next generation: Nick Camerlenghi, "Spitting the Core: The Twelfth-Century Transverse Wall at the Basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 58 (2013), pp. 115-42; Kirstin Noreen, "Re-Covering Christ in Late Medieval Rome: The Icon of Christ in the Sancta Sanctorum," *Gesta*, 49/2 (2010), pp. 117-35; Nino Zehomelidze, "The Aura of the Numinous and Its Reproduction: Medieval Paintings of the Savior in Rome and Latium," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 55 (2010), pp. 221-63.

19 On attendance at the International Medieval Congress: <https://wmich.edu/medievalcongress> [1 October 2016].

20 The information in these charts was gathered in February 2016 from course listings and syllabi on the websites of the study-abroad programs and universities surveyed.

available, different sections of the same course were tallied separately. The bottom row shows percentages by chronological category of the total number of sections offered at all of the institutions.

Art History Course Sections at Selected US Universities and Study Abroad Programs in Rome and in Florence, Spring 2016	Classical Antiquity	Late Antiquity Middle Ages	Renaissance Baroque	Modern Contemporary	Trans-historical	Grand Total
John Cabot University	13	2	8	7	1	31
Lorenzo de' Medici	0	0	12	6	7	25
Syracuse University	2	1	6	1	4	14
Temple University	0	1	4	4	1	10
Florence University of the Arts	0	0	3	3	3	9
Santa Reparata Intl School of Art	0	1	3	4	1	9
SACI Florence	0	0	3	4	1	8
American University of Rome	0	0	2	3	2	7
University of California	1	0	2	1	1	5
Loyola University Chicago	2	1	0	2	1	5
New York University	1	0	3	0	1	5
ISI Florence	0	0	3.5	0.5	1	5

Art History Course Sections at Selected US Universities and Study Abroad Programs in Rome and in Florence, Spring 2016	Classical Antiquity	Late Antiquity Middle Ages	Renaissance Baroque	Modern Contemporary	Trans-historical	Grand Total
Trinity College	1	1	1	0	1	4
California State University	1	1	1	1	0	4
Duquesne University	0	1	1	1	0	3
Richmond - Rome	0	0	1	0	2	3
University of Arkansas	0	0	0	2	1	3
Stanford University	0	0	1	0	1	2
Richmond - Florence	0	0	1	0	1	2
Florida State University	0	0	1	0	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	21	9	57	40	31	156
<b>% of TOTAL (rounded to nearest whole digit)</b>	13	6	36	25	20	100

In that final row, the first of my two asymmetries is already evident. Of the 156 course sections considered in all, more than a third (36%) focused on the early modern period – that is, on the Renaissance, Baroque, or both. Another fourth (25%) concentrated on Modern and Contemporary art, while Classical Antiquity made up another 13%. Courses that spanned multiple eras, normally cross-period surveys or thematic courses, made up another 20%. Strangely, the only single-digit value, that 6% at the bottom of column 2, accounts for courses on art of one of the longest of the four periods in question: Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (c.

300-1350). Under the medieval rubric I included courses on Byzantine and early Islamic art, in addition to those focused on Western Europe.

The next two charts (Figs. 2-3) list the same course sections divided by city. In Rome (Fig. 2), Classical Antiquity, Early Modernity, and Contemporaneity were remarkably well balanced, each accounting for about a quarter of the total offerings, although the strong showing of Classical Antiquity was due mainly to my home institution, John Cabot University. The Middle Ages and its correlates, by contrast, were the clear losers. They made up only 8% of the whole, and that figure probably over-represents the actual number of participating students; class sizes in medieval courses tend, in my experience, to be small. Of the Transhistorical courses, which account for the remaining 14%, some had medieval components in their descriptions or syllabi, but those elements were usually modest, often only a class period or two out of a fourteen-week semester.

In Florence the asymmetries were even more pronounced (Fig. 3). An overwhelming 44% of the course sections focused on Renaissance or Baroque art or architecture. Of those sections, furthermore, all but one concentrated specifically on the Renaissance (circa 34% of the total) or included the Baroque in the context of a Renaissance-Baroque survey (circa 9%). Of the remaining sections, 23% focused on Modern and/or Contemporary art, while another 25% touched upon three or more periods. Only 4% were dedicated to medieval art: three course sections in all (out of eighty-five total), one of which focused on the Trecento, a century that US art history often amalgamates to the Renaissance.

This imbalance is understandable from an administrative perspective. Many American students come to Italy, and above all to Florence, to study Renaissance art and culture, and program directors rightly accommodate their desire. The quantity and quality of material surviving from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Florence is staggering, and neglecting it would be absurd. When medieval courses are scheduled, furthermore, they often risk cancellation due to low enrollments. If I have been able to teach at least one course in medieval art in Rome nearly every semester for a decade now, and often several per term, it is thanks in no small measure to enlightened deans and directors who have allowed me to go forward with sometimes very small groups. (Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films and *Game of Thrones* have also helped; enrollments surged after their respective premiers.) American students tend to find medieval art fascinating once they experience it, but attracting them in the first place is a tall order.

Figure 2 - Art History Course Sections at Selected US Universities and Study Abroad Programs in Rome, Spring 2016	Classical Antiquity	Late Antiquity Middle Ages	Renaissance Baroque	Modern Contemporary	Transhistorical	Grand Total
John Cabot University	13	2	8	7	1	31
Temple University	0	1	4	4	1	10
American University of Rome	0	0	2	3	2	7
University of California	1	0	2	1	1	5
Loyola University Chicago	2	1	0	2	1	5
Trinity College	1	1	1	0	1	4
Duquesne University	0	1	1	1	0	3
Richmond	0	0	1	0	2	3
University of Arkansas	0	0	0	2	1	3
Total	17	6	19	20	10	71
Total % rounded to nearest whole digit	24	8	27	28	14	100



Figure 3 - Art History Course Sections at Selected US Universities and Study Abroad Programs in Florence, Spring 2016	Classical Antiquity	Late Antiquity Middle Ages	Renaissance Baroque	Modern Contemporary	Transhistorical	Grand total
Lorenzo de' Medici	0	0	12	6	7	25
Syracuse University	2	1	6	1	4	14
Florence University of the Arts	0	0	3	3	3	9
Santa Reparata Intl School of Art	0	1	3	4	1	9
SACI Florence	0	0	3	4	1	8
New York University	1	0	3	0	1	5
ISI Florence	0	0	3.5	0.5	1	5
California State University	1	1	1	1	0	4
Stanford University	0	0	1	0	1	2
Richmond	0	0	1	0	1	2
Florida State University	0	0	1	0	1	2
Total	4	3	38	20	21	85
Total % rounded to nearest whole digit	5	4	44	23	25	100

Yet, as I described above, Rome and Florence were important cities and venues of art-making in the Middle Ages, and Italy as we now know it would be unthinkable without the communal governments and vast building campaigns of the high- and late-medieval centuries. As the seat of the papacy and former capital of the Roman Empire, Rome remained one of the chief administrative and artistic centers of medieval Europe – a magnet to pilgrims and churchmen and a lively market for skilled artistry.<sup>21</sup> Its apostolic basilicas, martyrs' shrines, and sanctuaries enjoyed a quasi-mythical status in Western Christendom and served as supreme points of reference for art and architecture in other parts of Europe, both in the Middle Ages and in later eras.<sup>22</sup> One cannot possibly plumb the full historical depths of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, for example, without considering the now-lost Early Christian frescoes of Old St. Peter's Basilica and St. Paul's Outside the Walls and their millennium-long afterlife in copy after copy in manuscripts and on church walls.<sup>23</sup> More and more, historians of Renaissance art have begun to emphasize the continuities between the Middle Ages and their own period of study. Examples include Alexander Nagel's *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (2011) and Megan Holmes' *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (2013), both of which won the Charles Rufus Morey Award of the College Art Association.<sup>24</sup>

As a commercial, industrial, and military power, Florence, in its turn, was considerably greater than Rome in the high and later Middle Ages, and also much bigger than Florence itself would be in the Renaissance.<sup>25</sup> By most estimates the city's population was at least twice as large in 1300 as two centuries later, when Michelangelo sculpted his colossal *David* for the top of the cathedral.<sup>26</sup> Medieval Florence's immense grandeur, wealth, and creativity are still plain to see in its imposing city walls and in the magnificent buildings named a few paragraphs ago.<sup>27</sup>

Given how impressive the remains of medieval Rome and Florence are, why do American students not demand to know more about them? A first, most obvious response is that many young people are simply unaware: the Middle Ages are not on their intellectual radar in the same way the Renaissance is. More importantly, the images of the two periods that they bring with them, internalized

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21 See footnote 6 above.

22 For examples, see Richard Krautheimer, "The Carolingian Revival of Early Christian Architecture," *The Art Bulletin*, 24 (1942), pp. 1-38 (cf., McCurrach, "'Renovatio' Reconsidered").

23 Herbert Kessler, "'Caput et speculum omnium ecclesiarum': old St. Peter's and church decoration in medieval Latium," in *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms and Regional Traditions: Ten Contributions to a Colloquium Held at the Villa Spelman, Florence*, ed. by William Tronzo (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1989), pp. 119-47.

24 "Awards – Charles Rufus Morey Book Award," College Art Association, <http://www.collegeart.org/awards/moreypast> [2 October 2016].

25 Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence*, p. 1 and p. 33. On medieval Rome, see note 6 above.

26 Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence*, p. 33.

27 Tigler, *Toscana romanica*, 137-166; Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence*, pp. 2-5.

from films, television, children's books, common parlance, and high school history classes, very often reinforce the humanist model of a "dark" (barbaric, backward, ugly) Middle Ages vs. a "bright" (brilliant, progressive, beautiful) Renaissance. Here, at last, I come to that missed didactic opportunity mentioned at the outset – almost.

Let me return for a moment to the origin of the tripartite (i.e. light-dark-light) model of history. What, or who, did the humanist promulgators of the idea think had precipitated the decline into what they saw as a cultural darkness?<sup>28</sup> For Petrarch the answer was, above all, "barbarians" – non-Romans, foreigners – who (he held) had assumed control over the Roman Empire, overrunning and corrupting its splendid culture with their brutish ways.<sup>29</sup> Again, Petrarch seems to have regarded his own literary and scholarly activity as a new light in the long, ensuing darkness, an idea summed up publically with his crowning as poet laureate on Capitoline Hill in 1341.<sup>30</sup>

After Petrarch, the carving up of history into three periods of unequal value gradually solidified, especially in the works of Tuscan, and above all Florentine, humanists.<sup>31</sup> Founded on the high regard in which humanists held both ancient Roman culture and the Romanophile achievements of their own era and populace (including themselves), this fundamentally ethnocentric structuring of history is deeply embedded in Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550 and 1568), one of the founding texts of art history.<sup>32</sup> Vasari wrote of a "*rinascita*" (rebirth) in art, whose first signs he saw in the works of Nicola Pisano, Cimabue and Giotto, contemporaries of the great late-medieval monuments mentioned above.<sup>33</sup>

Vasari's biography of Cimabue is especially telling.<sup>34</sup> Apprenticed as a boy to Greek artists who had been called in by the city governors to revive the art of

28 See esp. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" p. 239; McLaughlin, "Humanist Concepts of Renaissance", pp. 132-133. On the terms "Middle Age" and "medieval" from a medievalist's perspective: Janet Nelson, "The Dark Ages," *History Workshop Journal*, 63 (2007), pp. 191-201; Fred Robinson, "Medieval, the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 59/4 (1984), pp. 745-56.

29 Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" esp. pp. 234-37.

30 Gerhard Regn and Bernhard Huss, "Petrarch's Rome: The History of the Africa and the Renaissance Project," *MLN*, 124/1 (2009), pp. 86-102 (pp. 86-89); McLaughlin, "Humanist Concepts of Renaissance," pp. 132-33; and Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" pp. 227-42, who also discusses Petrarch's previous ideas about periodization.

31 McLaughlin, "Humanist Concepts of Renaissance," p. 132, p. 135, and p. 141.

32 On Vasari: *Reading Vasari*, ed. by Anne B. Barriault, Andrew Ladis, Norman E. Land, and Jeryldene M. Wood (London: Philip Wilson Publishers and Georgia Museum of Art, 2005); Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari and Art History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995). On the two editions: Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini, commentary by Paola Barocchi (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1966-1976), Volume I – Testo, xvii-xxx.

33 Vasari, *Le Vite*, pp. 13-44, pp. 60-71, and pp. 95-123. On the literature on Vasari's concept of "rinascita": Matteo Burioni, "Vasari's rinascita: history, anthropology or art criticism?" in *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c.1500-c.1550*, ed. by Alexander Lee, Pit Péporté, and Harry Schmitker (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 116-127 (pp. 116-17).

34 Vasari, *Le Vite*, pp. 32-44.

painting, which Vasari says had been completely lost in Florence, Cimabue went on to surpass those masters and their “uncouth manner,” thus “giving honor to his country” and setting painting on a new course toward the perfection that it would attain two centuries later in Vasari’s time, above all among the artists of Vasari’s adoptive city, Florence.<sup>35</sup> In the Petrarchan fashion, Vasari treated the medieval centuries as barbaric and ruinous; and although he credited Greeks with reintroducing painting to Florence, they cared nothing for the “progress of art,” he wrote, and as a result painted “not in the excellent manner of the ancient Greeks, but in the rude modern style of their own day.”<sup>36</sup> In short: they were foreigners, mired in medieval, or more precisely in Byzantine, traditions; it took a native son, a Florentine, to set painting back on a path toward dignity.<sup>37</sup>

Vasari’s admiration for Cimabue was understandable. Cimabue was a very great painter. Yet Vasari’s narrative is also fundamentally chauvinistic: deeply celebratory of his own culture and adoptive city and disparaging of outsiders.<sup>38</sup> That same narrative is also still very much at the root of the way US academe carves up the history of art, from the chronological scope of courses to specializations at the doctoral level, and it still dictates the way many Americans, including our students, conceive of medieval art.

Now, all of this many sound parochial, coming, as it does, from a medieval art historian. Does it really matter that American students spending a semester in Italy learn little or nothing about twelfth-century buildings or thirteenth-century mosaics – or, if they do, that the information is presented along Vasarian lines, with those works treated as primitive foils, or at best as tentative precursors, to what came along in the 1400s and 1500s? I believe that it does matter, in more and deeper ways than one might expect. As Janet Nelson wrote in 2007, in an article devoted to the term “Dark Ages”: “Period labels are neither inert nor innocent. They attract value-loadings. ‘Classic(al)’ is good, in modern parlance, in American as in English English, and ‘modern’ is very good, while ‘medieval’ is bad.”<sup>39</sup>

35 Vasari was born in Arezzo but worked above all for the Medici. Vasari, *Le Vite*, pp. 36-37; Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters*, trans. Mrs. Jonathan Fostr, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, 2 vols. (Verona: Stamperia Valdonega, 1966), vol. 1, p. 5.

36 Vasari, *Lives*, p. 5; Vasari, *Le Vite*, p. 36: “i quali, non si curando passar più inanti, avevano fatte quelle opre nel modo che elle si veggono oggi, cioè non nella buona maniera greca antica, ma in quella goffa moderna di que’ tempi.”

37 Vasari also disparaged the “maniera tedesca” (German manner) in architecture (Anne-Marie Sankovite, “Gothic architecture in Vasari’s *rinascita* and Panofsky’s Renaissance,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 40 [2001], pp. 29-50). For bibliography on the historical critique of Vasari’s *Lives*: Hayden B. J. Maginnis, “Giotto’s World through Vasari’s Eyes,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 56/3 (1993), pp. 385-408 (p. 388, n. 1). See also Ernst H. Gombrich, “The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress and its Consequences,” in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1971), pp. 1-10.

38 “One of the prime motives inspiring all humanist history was patriotic sentiment. This was certainly true of Petrarch and true also of the historians of the following century [...]” (Ferguson, “Humanist views of the Renaissance,” p. 7).

39 Nelson, “The Dark Ages,” p. 192. On “medieval” as a pejorative, see also Nelson, “The Dark Ages,” pp. 194-195; Robinson, “Medieval, the Middle Ages,” pp. 751-56; Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *Medioevo militante: la politica di oggi alla prese*

If you have any doubt about the widespread validity of Nelson's statement, try putting "ISIS" (i.e. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and "medieval" together into the Google search engine. If your experience is anything like mine, you will get hundreds of thousands of results.<sup>40</sup> Read the top entries, and you will learn that "ISIS wants an insane medieval race war";<sup>41</sup> that the members of ISIS are "medieval monsters" who are striving to impose a "chilling medieval society in Iraq";<sup>42</sup> and that the only way to defeat them is to elect a US President who knows something about medieval history.<sup>43</sup> On occasion, you will also encounter a learned voice attempting to explain, countercurrent, that ISIS is not really medieval at all – that their put-on stereotypes have little to do with medieval realities. An article published in *The Guardian* in 2014 by sociologist Kevin McDonald says quite rightly that calling ISIS "medieval" is a way of attempting to "make sense of" their horrifically violent acts "as somehow radically 'other'."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, one very easy way in contemporary parlance to declare someone or something "radically other" and barbaric, is to pull out the M word: to call him, her, or it "medieval."

"Medieval" rings especially dire in the US, where our national identity is tightly tied up with the Renaissance and the perception that that era was the beginning of the world as we know it (and like it). Received mainly through Burckhardt, the Renaissance is still widely perceived in the US not only as a rebirth of classical civilization but also as that moment when man rediscovered both man and nature and, in consequence, invented (or reinvented) the individual, free thought, science, capitalism, and secular society – in short, all of those things that most make us modern, most American.<sup>45</sup> Those ideas of course say more about

*con barbari e crociati* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011); and Lila Yawn, "The Bright Side of the Knife: Dismemberment in Medieval Europe and the Modern Imagination," in *Wounds in the Middle Ages*, ed. by A. Kirkham and C. Warr (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 215-46.

40 When I tried this experiment in March 2016, 894,000 results came up.

41 Frankie Boyle, "ISIS wants an insane, medieval race war – and we've decided to give them one," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/04/isis-wants-an-insane-medieval-race-war-and-weve-decided-to-give-them-one> [2 October 2016].

42 "The New Dark Ages: the Chilling Medieval Society Isis Extremists Seek to Impose in Iraq," *Sunday Express*, June 21, 2014 <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/483920/Iraq-Isis-Extremists-Dark-Ages-Muslim-Baghdad-Jihadist> [2 October 2014].

43 "Carly Fiorina: My College Degree in Medieval History Will Help Me Fight ISIS," *NY Daily News*, 6 October 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/fiorina-degree-medieval-history-fight-isis-article-1.2386926> [2 October 2016]. For other disparaging uses of the term see Nelson, "The Dark Ages."

44 Kevin McDonald, "Isis Jihadis Aren't Medieval – They Are Shaped by Modern Western Philosophy," *The Guardian*, 2 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/09/isis-jihadi-shaped-by-modern-western-philosophy> [2 October 2016]. In a similar vein: Ishaan Tharoor, "Is the Islamic State 'Medieval'? A Medievalist Says No," *The Washington Post*, 10 October 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/10/isis-the-islamic-state-medieval-a-medievalist-says-no/> [2 October 2016]. Cf. Mustafa Akyol, "A Medieval Antidote to ISIS," *The New York Times*, 21 December 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/opinion/a-medieval-antidote-to-isis.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/opinion/a-medieval-antidote-to-isis.html?_r=0) [2 October 2016].

45 Hans Baron, "Burckhardt's 'Civilization of the Renaissance,'" pp. 207-22.

own self-conceptions than about the Renaissance. Yet their appeal in a country which defines itself as the quintessence of modernity, freedom, individualism, and capitalism cannot be overestimated.

The drawing of lines in the sand, the dividing of time (like people) into black and white, us versus them, is symptomatic of modes of thought all too common in the present-day US, especially (but not only) in national politics; and it still finds its way into much popular American writing about the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Consider this sentence from a *National Geographic* article from 2014 about Brunelleschi's dome. "Its looming, rounded profile, so unlike the angular lines of the Gothic, symbolize the Florentine Republic's freedom from tyrannous Milan, and even more so the Renaissance's liberation from the airless constraints of the Middle Ages."<sup>46</sup> "Airless constraints" is the least appropriate descriptor imaginable for the architectural styles prevalent across Europe in the centuries before and during Brunelleschi's age. The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (consecrated 1248), is one of the airiest works of architecture ever erected, and it has company in King's College Chapel in Cambridge, whose first stone was laid in 1446, a decade after Brunelleschi completed the cathedral dome.<sup>47</sup> Closer to home, I have a hard time seeing any "airless constraints" in the Basilica of St. Francis at Assisi, the Venetian cathedral of St. Mark, the Baptisteries of Parma and Pisa, or Florence's own Santa Croce, a handful of Italy's greatest medieval buildings. To borrow a phrase from Terry Jones, formerly of the Monty Python comedy troupe and more recently the author of a series of popular books on the Middle Ages, *National Geographic's* off-handed insult to medieval architecture "is a familiar story, but it's codswallop."<sup>48</sup> The work of Brunelleschi does not need a ponderous medieval antithesis to appear great. It simply *is* great. However, it would never have existed without a medieval building to rest upon and the remarkable developments of aesthetics and engineering that came before it.

Medieval-bashing is absolutely normal in American popular discourse, including from people who should know better. Consider Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve* (2011), which brims with untrue truisms about the Middle Ages but which nevertheless won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize and helped Greenblatt receive the prestigious Holberg Prize from the Norwegian government in 2016.<sup>49</sup> As if channeling for Petrarch through a thick filter of Michelet,

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46 Tom Mueller, "Brunelleschi's Dome: How Did a Hot-Tempered Goldsmith with No Formal Architectural Training Create the Most Miraculous Edifice of the Renaissance," *National Geographic*, February 2014, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/print/2014/02/il-duomo/mueller-text> [2 October 2016].

47 "History of the Chapel," Kings College Cambridge, <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/history.html> [2 October 2016].

48 Terry Jones and Alan Ereira, *Barbarians: an Alternative Roman History* (London: BBC Books, 2007), p. 13.

49 Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began* (London: Vintage Books, 2011); Jill Radsken, "Stephen Greenblatt wins Holberg Prize," *Harvard Gazette*, 11 March 2016, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2016/03/stephen-greenblatt-wins->

Greenblatt – an otherwise eminent professor of Renaissance literature at Harvard – describes the Middle Ages as a time when religion precluded rational thought; when education and culture lay dead; and when people lived in ignorance and filth in a world lit only by fire, the title of another popular, best-selling book by an award-winning author, the journalist and sometime professor William Manchester.<sup>50</sup> Manchester's other books were about World War II, John F. Kennedy, and Winston Churchill. He knew virtually nothing about the Middle Ages and said so in his Author's Note.<sup>51</sup>

Now, all of this leads back to the first of my two asymmetries: the neglect of the Middle Ages vis-à-vis other periods, especially the Renaissance, in teaching art history to American college students in Italy. Thanks to a ubiquitous disparaging of the Middle Ages in popular culture, from the Petrarchan biases of mass-market histories to the widespread use of "medieval" as a journalistic pejorative, many, and I expect most, US students arrive in Italy with a sense that the period before the Renaissance was uncouth, violent, and superstitious or, worse still, uninteresting – a period before genius or free thought, before science, before the valuing of the individual: a black hole predating all of those things that make our own age, and by implication us, superior to all that came before.

Teaching medieval art so infrequently and treating its culminating achievements as a warm-up for later, greater developments reinforces those stereotypes. It also cultivates an ethnocentrism that posits our own age as the highest point reached thus far, in a progressive model of history rooted in the writings of Renaissance thinkers, such as Vasari. In conclusion, I propose two remedies that are fairly easy to effect: first, to give the Middle Ages equal dignity in art history courses and equal time, wherever possible; and, second, to teach the Medieval-Renaissance divide as a historical construct, rather than presenting it as a fact – a natural dividing line. Combined, these are two very effective ways, I believe, to help students become more sophisticated, self-aware, historically savvy thinkers, who comprehend that boundaries and binary oppositions, including the

holberg-prize/ [2 October 2016]; "Stephen Greenblatt," Holberg Prize, <http://www.holbergprisen.no/en/holberg-prize/prize-winners/stephen-greenblatt> [2 October 2016]. For critiques: Jim Hinch, "Why Stephen Greenblatt Is Wrong – and Why It Matters," *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, 1 December 2012, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/why-stephen-greenblatt-is-wrong-and-why-it-matters/#1> [2 October 2012]; Colin Burrow, "The Swerve by Stephen Greenblatt – Review – A flawed but dazzling study of the origins of the Renaissance," *The Guardian*, 23 December 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/23/the-serve-stephen-greenblatt-review> [2 October 2016]; Michael Dirda, "Stephen Greenblatt's 'The Swerve,' reviewed by Michael Dirda," *The Washington Post*, 21 September 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/stephen-greenblatts-the-serve-reviewed-by-michael-dirda/2011/09/20/gIQA8WmVmK\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/stephen-greenblatts-the-serve-reviewed-by-michael-dirda/2011/09/20/gIQA8WmVmK_story.html) [2 October 2016].

<sup>50</sup> William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992). For a review: Jeremy DuQuesnay Adams, "Review of A World Lit Only by Fire. The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age", *Speculum*, 70/1 (1995), pp. 173-74.

<sup>51</sup> Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire*, pp. xiii-xiv.

“Othering” of peoples and cultures distant of our own (beginning with medieval culture), tend to be the most vigorously defended and culturally naturalized when they are also the most artificial.



## From Hawthorne to Bakhtin: Study Abroad in Rome as “Carnival”

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As a literary scholar who has turned her time and attention to administering study abroad programs both from the position of a sending institution and now as a receiving institution, I find it quite informative to use literary texts to understand (and to help others understand) how the students we work with in the field of international education experience the opportunities study abroad offers them. In speaking to hundreds, if not thousands, of students about the experiences they are having or have had, I am frequently struck by how often the following themes arise:

Students mention the “surreal” nature of the experience, which ends up feeling like a parallel life taking place while their “real life” is suspended for them back home;

Students discuss feeling like a completely different person while abroad, freed up from having to be who they are at home;

Students describe feeling like being on the threshold of their regular life, enjoying (unfortunately sometimes too much, as we know) a temporary liberation from their very structured, stressful, busy lives at home;

Students almost universally describe their time abroad in terms of happiness and exuberance, noting the festive nature of the experience, the travel, etc.

Students describe engaging in activities (volunteer, tutoring, internships, travel) in which they never have time or occasion at home, or would never have had the inclination at home. In other words, they are often more fully active participants in their experience abroad.

Over the years, I have become struck by the similarities between how students describe their experiences abroad and how the twentieth-century Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin describes the medieval and Renaissance Carnival, particularly but not exclusively in *Rabelais and his World*. In this text, Bakhtin argues for the importance of understanding the culture of folk humor and laughter in the Middle Ages and Renaissance:

All these forms of protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in all the countries of medieval Europe; they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval

cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood. To ignore or to underestimate the laughing people of the Middle Ages also distorts the picture of European culture's historic development.<sup>1</sup>

I, too, believe it does us a disservice to ignore this culture of laughter and festivity when we try to understand the allure of Western Europe, and particularly Italy, for students wanting to live and learn abroad over the past several centuries. To take the link between the Carnival and the study abroad experience even further, let us try to substitute the concept of "study abroad" into Bakhtin's further evocative descriptions of the Carnival:

"Thus Carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life [...]."<sup>2</sup>

Carnival and similar marketplace festivals, "were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance."<sup>3</sup>

"While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom."<sup>4</sup>

"As opposed to the official feast, one might say that the carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal."<sup>5</sup>

"The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance...The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations."<sup>6</sup>

"This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life."<sup>7</sup>

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1 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 5-6.

2 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 8.

3 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 9.

4 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 7.

5 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 10.

6 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 10.

7 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 10.

And finally, as mentioned earlier, during Carnival “they built a second world in which all medieval people participated more or less.”<sup>8</sup>

Bakhtin’s descriptions cited here are meant to set the scene for our understanding of Francois Rabelais’ novels (one can find similar relevant citations regarding the Carnival in his text on Dostoevsky’s writing, as well); I fully recognize that I am taking them out of their intended context, to some extent. But from the moment I read these descriptions, I have been drawn to the comparison to what our students – and the throngs of grand tourists before them – have always come to Italy to experience. For many students, their time abroad is much like the Carnival – a suspension of their daily, stressful, more structured lives; a time of rebirth and freedom and renewal and finding themselves; a parallel life that happens as their “regular” life is still happening back home; a festive time where travel is expected and actively-engaged, hands-on learning is encouraged; and finally a freedom from the social constructs of their home campuses that allows them to participate actively in daily life, meet new people, communicate in ways they otherwise cannot, and – for a time – be a different person if they so choose.

As is commonly known, the wealthy British and then Americans who came through Italy on the “Grand Tour” from the mid 1600s until the late 1800s, came to further their education (or perhaps “education,” depending on the case), by visiting the treasures of classical antiquity and the Renaissance and thus expanding their senses and their learning. And so, even going back to the beginning of the Grand Tour, the importance of hands-on learning – which we emphasize as a hallmark of study abroad today and which often stands as one of our best defenses against the cost to home campuses of maintaining campuses abroad – was of essence to the experience. As the Grand Tour evolved, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans – many of Puritan, Protestant background – were coming to Italy and especially Rome to, again, witness the creations of Antiquity and the Renaissance as well as the very different landscapes the country offered, the warmer climate, and a more exotic environment. As for many American students dreaming of coming to study in Italy today, this is much of what Nathaniel Hawthorne hoped to experience when he first came to Italy in early 1858.

Hawthorne had visions of what he would see and experience before arriving in Rome; and yet in many instances, judging by his *French and Italian Notebooks*, the reality he encountered proved to be disappointing. In his first journal entry upon arriving in Rome, from February 3, 1858, he writes: “We have been in Rome, I believe, a fortnight to day...and I have seldom or never spent so wretched a time anywhere. Our impressions were very unfortunate, arriving at midnight, half-frozen, in the wintry rain [...] seeking lodging, amongst the sunless,

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<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 6.

dreary alleys which are called streets in Rome.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, upon visiting St. Peter’s one day later that year he writes: “I have come – I think, finally – to the conclusion, that there... was a better St. Peter’s in my mind, before I came to Rome, than the real one turns out to be... It would be but compelling myself to take the actual for the ideal; an exchange which is always to our loss, in things physical and moral... [my vision] was better than Michel Angelo could build; for I said of mine ‘How vast it is!’ – and of his, ‘It is not so very big, after all!’ The reality is a failure [...]”<sup>10</sup>

For the fairly contained, New England-raised Hawthorne, Italy represented the exotic, endless layers of history and art piled atop one another, chaos and lack of structure. And this contrast may have contributed to his fairly frequent rejection of what he finds in Rome. As we see throughout his last novel, *The Marble Faun*, Italy proves to be too overwhelming for Hawthorne, too confusing and too uncontained, from its paintings and sculptures to its architecture, to its annual ritual of Carnival. When Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun* in 1860, eight years after his last novel had been published, it was after a period in which he spent four years serving his country as U.S. Consul for Liverpool (England), and then eighteen months in Italy, as a tourist (partly encouraged by his wife’s enthusiasm for Europe and its artistic treasures). *The Marble Faun* can be a frustrating novel, in so many ways. The text demonstrates Hawthorne’s seeming inability to appreciate Rome and Italy for anything more than just a backdrop to his heavy-handed morality tale; there are unexplained plot complications; the plot is interwoven with long, dry descriptions of the art his protagonists encounter, many lifted straight from Hawthorne’s *French and Italian Notebooks* in which he records in fairly minute detail his daily wanderings and observations, as well as his social interactions (which include almost no local Romans). It is almost as if Hawthorne was so overwhelmed by the “fever” of Rome that the novel he chose to set there barely comes together and seems more like a fable or a dream set upon the backdrop of Rome and its countryside.<sup>11</sup> So while in many ways *The Marble Faun* is a wonderful reflection of a “Grand Tour” experience and of an American’s time in

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9 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The French and Italian Notebooks*, ed. by Thomas Woodson (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1980), p. 53.

10 Hawthorne, *The French and Italian Notebooks*, p. 136.

11 See Hawthorne, *The French and Italian Notebooks*, p. 230 for Hawthorne’s conflicted reaction to his daughter’s desire exclamation of her love for Rome: “[...] Una spoke with somewhat alarming fervor of her love for Rome and regret at leaving it. We shall have done the poor child no good office in bringing her here, if the rest of her life is to be a dream of this ‘city of the soul,’ and an unsatisfied yearning to come back. On the other hand, nothing elevating and refining can be really injurious; and so I hope she will always be the better for Rome, even if her life should be spent where there are no pictures, no statues, nothing but the dryness and meagreness of a New England village.”

Rome in the late 1850s, it is also a heavy-handed warning to himself and others not to stray too far into the dark, exotic warmth of Italy, and the odd creatures that inhabit this ancient, overgrown land.

In teaching and working with students arriving in Rome, I often use *The Marble Faun* as a lesson in how not to approach one's time in Italy. For Hawthorne, in my mind, Rome tends to appear as either an endlessly tedious series of museums and sites to visit, or a sinister background to sinister, dark people who threaten the purity of his protagonists. Hawthorne's time in Rome was spent with other Americans and ex-patriots, dutifully viewing the antiques and ruins of Rome that he was supposed to view, and dryly writing everything down in his *Notebooks*; this is all evident throughout the novel, as both his protagonists and narrator do the same. In the most simplified terms, *The Marble Faun* is the story of two American Artists in Rome, Hilda and Kendall, who are the purest of New England pure and relatively stiff and contained, as their art (painted copies of ancient masters for her; white marble sculptures for him) reflects. Kendall is Hawthorne's alter ego and his hero; he loves Hilda with great sincerity and purity of thought and ultimately whisks her away from the scary, dirty darkness of Rome and their (criminal), non-New England companions.

Hawthorne's narrator describes Rome and its surrounding countryside in fairly unflattering terms: "The Italians appear to possess none of that emulative pride which we see in our New England villages...Everything, however sunny and luxuriant may be the scene around, is especially disheartening in the immediate neighborhood of an Italian home."<sup>12</sup> And again, while describing the Villa Borghese, he writes: "For if you come hither in summer, and stray through these glades in the golden sunset, Fever walks arm in arm with you, and Death awaits you at the end of the dim vista."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Hawthorne notes in his *Notebooks* on February 7, 1858: "I have plodded daily, for an hour or two, through the narrow, stony streets, that look worse than the worst backside lanes of any other city; indescribably ugly and disagreeable they are; so cold, so alley-like, so uncomfortably paved with little square stones, without side walks [...]"<sup>14</sup>

Despite his many criticisms, there existed even for Hawthorne, the allure of a warm, gay Italy, though he clearly wishes to demonstrate that he and his fellow compatriots are purer and "above" the native Romans. There is almost a desperate quality to the text, as if Hawthorne's desire to distance himself and his protagonists from the "dark natives" and exotic Rome ends up feeling like if he does not, he too might get pulled in. Nowhere is this more evident than in Hawthorne's descriptions of the Carnival, which is the climax of the novel and

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<sup>12</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 295.

<sup>13</sup> Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 56.

therefore plays a pivotal role. Hawthorne and his family were present in Rome for the Carnivals of 1858 and 1859, and he includes several entries of observations on the Carnival in his *Notebooks*, including writing, "Little as I have enjoyed the Carnival, I think I could make quite a brilliant sketch of it, without very widely departing from truth."<sup>15</sup> The description of the Carnival in *The Marble Faun*, which spans two of the final chapters, is not much more than a plot line imposed onto a compilation of Hawthorne's descriptions in his *Notebooks*, including such mundane items as his being hit by a cauliflower,<sup>16</sup> which then appears during Kenyon's experience at the Carnival at the end of *The Marble Faun*.<sup>17</sup>

If Rome held a somewhat unnerving allure for Hawthorne's more prim sensibilities, the Carnival was a completely upside-down world that in Hawthorne/Kenyon's descriptions seems overwhelming, frightening, grotesque, dirty, and unseemly. In fact, while Hawthorne has the "fallen-from-grace" Miriam and Donatello engaged with the Carnival throngs and participating fully through their dress and dancing,<sup>18</sup> Kenyon's is a "disjointed presence from the whole mad scene,"<sup>19</sup> and Hilda only emerges naively onto a balcony high above the chaos.<sup>20</sup>

Hawthorne's personal disdain for the Roman Carnival is evident from his descriptions in the novel: "To own the truth, the Carnival is alive, this present year, only because it has existed through centuries gone by. It is traditionary, not actual. If decrepit and melancholy Rome smiles, and laughs broadly, indeed, at Carnival-time, it is [...] with a half-conscious effort, like our self-deceptive pretence of jollity at a threadbare joke."<sup>21</sup> Soon after, he proclaims: "Now-a-days, the nosegays are gathered and tied up by sordid hands, chiefly of the most ordinary flowers [...]. Buying a basket-full, you find them miserably wilted...muddy, too, having been fished up from the pavement, where a hundred feet have trampled on them. You may see throngs of men and boys [...] gather up bouquets that were aimed amiss from balcony and carriage; these they sell again [...] defiled as they all are with the wicked filth of Rome."<sup>22</sup>

The denouement of Hawthorne's morality tale takes place during the Carnival, so that Kendall finds himself surrounded by the crowds along the Corso,

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15 Hawthorne, *French and Italian Notebooks*, p. 83.

16 Hawthorne, *French and Italian Notebooks*, p. 83

17 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 451.

18 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 443, and pp. 447-48.

19 David B. Kesterson, "Hawthorne's 'Mad, Merry Stream of Human Life': The Roman Carnival as Apocalyptic", in *The Marble Faun*, in *Value and Vision in American Literature: Literary Essays in Honor of Ray Lewis White*, ed. by Joseph Candido (Athens, OH: Ohio State University Press), p. 108.

20 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 451.

21 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, pp. 436-37.

22 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 440.

awaiting sign of the return of Hilda, who had mysteriously disappeared. While he waits, we the readers are treated with many extended descriptions of the Carnival, which do, in fact, correlate with many of Bakhtin's comments about the same: there is the grotesque physicality of many of the costumes and their "jokes", the abandoning of hierarchies, the customary forms of laughter; even, in Hawthorne's story arc, a sense of renewal and rebirth, as Hilda is finally at the end of the Carnival scenes, returned to Kendall and their love story can begin.<sup>23</sup>

Hawthorne's appreciation for Rome is therefore mixed with a disdain for a Rome that felt a little too out of control for him, especially during the Carnival. And just as Bakhtin's text emphasizes, and as Hawthorne makes clear in his *Notebooks*, Carnival represents a fixed time that ends and then begins again the next year, just as our students' time abroad is (usually) a fixed time, with a cyclical nature to it. It is somehow the knowledge that this time has an end that allows our students, Hawthorne's fictional crowds, and real Carnival participants, to be carried away by what that time represents – freedom from constraints and hierarchies, humor and festivity, physical immersion in a parallel life.

As if to firmly emphasize to the reader the finite end of Hawthorne's dalliance with exotic, festive Italy, he closes his novel with a postscript in which he attempts to wrap up the various plot strings and answer some of the mysteries still unexplained by the text. In the postscript, as he writes, "We three (Hawthorne and his two New England protagonists, Hilda and Kendall) had climbed to the top of Saint Peter's and were looking down upon the Rome which we were soon to leave..."<sup>24</sup>. Hawthorne has literally and physically removed himself and his protagonists from the frightening, mystery-filled, dark and dirty streets of Rome to where they are "remote in the upper air,"<sup>25</sup> just as Hawthorne spends much of his novel trying to keep himself and his protagonists as unsullied as possible by the lures of Rome, mostly with success. And thus, the novel itself – especially when seen as a companion to the *Notebooks* – is both an amazing travelogue of Hawthorne's months in Italy, full of descriptions of so many sites and works of art that we can only dream our students find a way to see in their time here, and an example of how not to spend time in Rome, how not to describe one's semester in Rome, how not to experience the "Carnival" of rebirth that is study abroad.

For Hawthorne, the line of distinction between his New England home and Rome is too sharply drawn; there is no immersion, no real interaction for his protagonists with Romans, not even (it appears) any kind of internal processing of his own experience in ways that might have somehow bridged the gap the novel describes between his life in New England and the life he experienced in Rome.

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23 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, pp. 436-54.

24 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 464.

25 Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 464.

Far from perceiving his time in Rome as a parallel life, or from seeing himself on the threshold of his regular life while in Rome, or experiencing his time in Rome as part of an opportunity to evolve as a person, we seem to see from Hawthorne only a whiff of relief that he and his protagonists have “survived” their Italian adventures and “escaped” without having been sullied by them.

This is, of course, not what anyone wants from students when they complete their time abroad. And so I prefer to read *The Marble Faun* as a cautionary tale, and one that can teach students how not to experience their time abroad, and how not to process it after the fact (i.e. seemingly not at all). Yet it appears from his text that even Hawthorne cannot fully resist the pull of Rome, once he has left; like so many of our students who return year after year to the place of their happiness, engagement, and renewal, Hawthorne, too remains connected to Rome years later, when writing his last novel: “When we have once known Rome, and left her where she lies, like a long decaying corpse, retaining a trace of the noble shape it was, but with accumulated dust and a fungous growth overspreading all its more admirable features [...] when we have left Rome in such mood as this, we are astonished by the discovery, by-and-by, that our heart-strings have mysteriously attached themselves to the Eternal City, and are drawing us thitherward again, as if it were more familiar, more intimately our home, than even the spot where we were born!”<sup>26</sup>

In order to not have students similarly dismiss their time abroad and then feel conflicted later, in order to find a better example for students of how they might process the experience while in Rome and after, I return again to Bakhtin, this time to a later text, “Response to a question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff”, from 1970. In this brief piece, Bakhtin writes: “There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one’s own, and view the culture through the eyes of this foreign culture [...]. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture [...]”<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, this is what we must encourage our students to do, and what will give the most meaning to students’ time abroad, however they experience it. They need to maintain a dialogue with the foreign culture that allows them to process and understand that culture; they need to embrace the physicality of the experience while they are in it; they need to remain on the threshold of that experience as well, keeping distance but not too much, and also seeing the parallels between this experience and their home experience; they need to integrate the

<sup>26</sup> Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p. 326.

<sup>27</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Response to a question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed.

by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist and trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 6-7.



renewal they find abroad into their experience at home. Only then will study abroad be less of a Carnival (à la Hawthorne) and yet more of a Carnival (à la Bakhtin).



## From Soldiers' Guides to Student Handbooks: Rome as Classroom during the Early Cold War

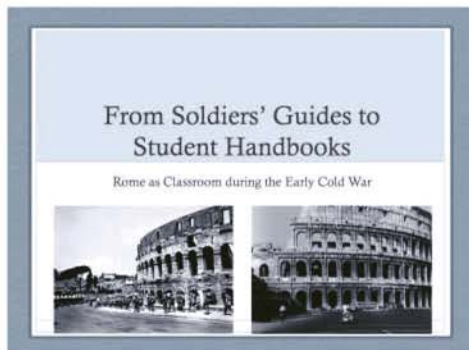
Anne Wingenter

(Loyola University Chicago Rome Center)

My essay looks at self-defined educational travel to and travel-related writing about Rome between 1944 and about 1965. Although I am focusing on those two decades in particular, and I will make an argument that those years are crucial for understanding even present-day study abroad in Rome, I should first acknowledge that the American relationship to Rome and vice versa is, of course, extremely complex. Just as present-day Rome is a palimpsest, contemporary visitors' experiences of Rome, are layered on top of and interlaced with those of earlier visitors to the city, and with the web of writing, painting, and later photographs and film that those earlier visitors produced. This is especially true of the student who is likely during their stay to engage with (or at least be encouraged to engage with) multiple Romes. That means that if time permitted, we might go all the way back and consider the influence of pilgrimage routes and the writings that sustained them, or to the art and writing of the Grand Tour or of the Romantic or Victorian eras. Undeniably, all of these color the experiences of Rome that I am going to talk about, but my point here, though is that for American students and other "educational tourists" Rome-as-classroom was both materially and ideologically transformed by the experiences of the mid-twentieth century. Those earlier layers, while always present, were imbued with new values as a result of both the Hot War and the ensuing Cold.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Stephen A. Freeman, "International Study at Home and Abroad," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 356 (1964), pp. 133-41; Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); *Institute of International Education 31st Annual Report* (New York: HE, 1950); Van L. Johnson, "A Classical Year in Italy," *The Classical World*, 56, 3 (1962), pp. 67-68; Joseph Liuzzi, "Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth," *MLN*, 117, 1 (2002), pp. 48-84; Anthony Pattison, *Assignment in Rome: The Story of a Pressman's Pilgrimage* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc. 1949); Mark Renella and Walton Whitney, "Planned Serendipity: American Travelers and the Transatlantic Voyage in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of Social History*, 38, 2 (2004), pp. 365-83; Edward Rice-Maximin, "A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958," *Journal of American History*, 91, 3 (2004), pp. 1078-79; Emily S. Rosenberg, "Revisiting Dollar Diplomacy: Narratives of Money and Manliness," *Diplomatic History*, 22, 2 (1998), pp. 177-98; Donald J. Shank, "The American Goes Abroad," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 335 (1961), pp. 99-111; Edmund Wilson, *Europe Without Baedeker, 1947* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1966).



Left: American soldiers march past the Coliseum, June 5, 1944, AP photo;  
Right: Film still, from *Roman Holiday*, 1953.

I have chosen, rather anomalously, to focus much of my talk with the last years of WWII. This is not, of course, a period typically associated with tourism, and the absolutely unprecedented numbers of Americans on Italian soil certainly did not come for that reason. And yet I believe that American educational programs in Rome after the war were profoundly shaped by the impact of war and occupation both structurally and pedagogically. In particular, it brought a present-oriented frame that, although it would fade somewhat over time, would never again be absent from the goals of educational travel.



Front pages from *The New York Times*, July 26, 1943 and February 13, 1944;  
and from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 14, 1943.

First, it is important to remember that, from the American perspective, the battle for Italy was the longest of the European theater. For nearly two years from the summer of 1943 until April of 1945, dispatches from the Italian front or from newly-occupied territory had filled American newspapers, radio broadcasts and newsreels taking second place to the “race for Berlin” only after the Normandy

invasions in June of 1944. Because Rome was the first Axis capital to be taken and because that D-day coincided almost precisely with the Allied entrance into Rome, that city, first as objective and then as accomplishment, had dominated the coverage of Italy.

Moreover, the nature of the Italian campaign, with the armistice followed by a period of co-belligerency and the continuation of the war against the Germans and Mussolini's Republic of Salò, meant that the issue of the "real Italy" and the "real Italians" remained of great interest both during and after the war.<sup>2</sup> The American narrative most common after the September 8<sup>th</sup> armistice interpreted the Italian people as essentially victims of their own weakness, first fooled and then forced into following a leader whom they did not really want or understand. We see this in the editorial cartoon.



Larger view of Carey Orr, 'Dragged back' *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 14, 1943, p. 1.

Newsreels about the fighting in Italy regularly adopted this rather paternalistic characterization and emphasized America's role – as "liberator" rather than invader. For example, one on the battle of San Pietro proclaimed in stentorian tones, "the people in their military innocence look upon us solely as their deliverers. It was to free them and their farmlands that we came" (*Battle of San Pietro*). Writing on the subject drew on earlier debates surrounding Italian fascism, and contributed to the victim/savior interpretation. Ultimately it became central to how Allied decisions about Italy were presented to the American home front. As President Roosevelt himself synthesized in his address on the occasion of the allied forces' entrance into Rome, "For this quarter-century, the Italian people were enslaved, they were degraded by the rule of Mussolini [...]. I think the American

<sup>2</sup> John F. Whitaker, *We Cannot Escape History* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), pp. 54-95; and Carlo Sforza, *The Real Italians: A Study in European Psychology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. vii-viii, pp. 137-40.

people as a whole approve the salvage of these human beings [...].<sup>3</sup> As we will see, this characterization of Italy and Italians and of America's role in "salvaging" them would also lend itself well to the political climate of the cold war and it would color the arguments made by many educational institutions to justify expanding international education and exchange in the post-war period.



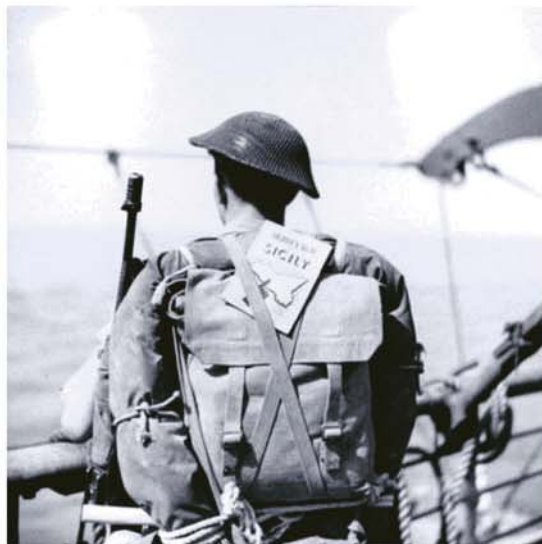
Photograph of General Mark Clark at the Campidoglio, AP photo. In the background, the front pages of *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 5, 1944.

The coverage of the push towards Rome was unique in war journalism also because the power of Rome-as-symbol offered so many opportunities for underlining its import. When the troops finally moved in, these themes dominated the press: Rome is the first capital in occupied Europe to be liberated. It is the birthplace of fascism. For centuries it was both the secular and religious center of the world [...]. Rome means something to Europe above any other city [...] it is potent as a symbol of the conflict between civilization and the new barbarism. On the morning of June 5 soldiers of the Fifth Army entered the city, bringing it liberation – not conquest, White Bread – not cannon [...]. At no time, not even when the Italians numbered themselves among our enemies, could one think of Rome as being of the enemy, for Rome is more than an Italian city, it belongs to the world because of common heritage.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat," June 5, 1944: online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.uesb.edu/ws/?pid=1654>.

<sup>4</sup> Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Abroad: The Americans Lead the Way into Rome," *New York Times*, 5 June, 1944, 18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2005); ProQuest Loyola University Rome, Italy, 2 January 2016, <http://www.proquest.com/>, p. 18. See also Herbert L. Matthews, "Rome is Up at Dawn to Cheer 5th Army: Joyful Crowds Greet Tanks and

Now, it was not just to people on the home front that these messages were promulgated. And this brings me to the first set of travel writings under consideration here: The Soldier's guides.

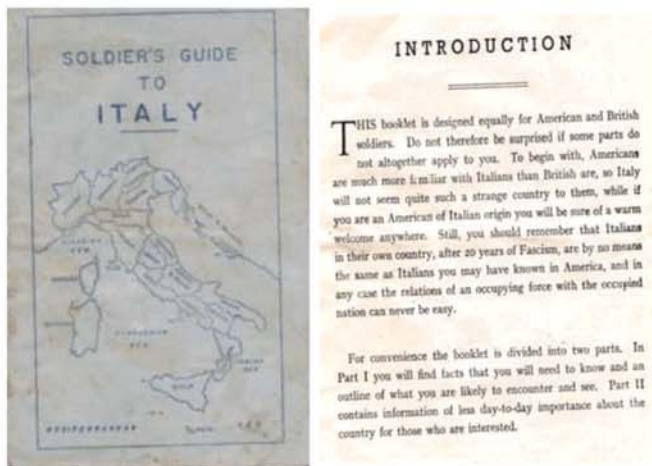


Allied soldier with *Soldier's guide to Sicily* photographed prior to the Sicily landing, July 1943. National Army Museum Study Collection.

The Allied military produced soldier's guides for all of the countries in the theatre of action. These briefly outlined local customs and culture and laid out how soldiers were expected to behave. The first produced for Italy was a soldier's guide to Sicily issued in early 1943 in advance of the July invasion. This guide contained basic practical information about the Island and some coverage of the "character and customs" of the Sicilians. It was quickly followed by a *Soldier's guide to Italy*. These two guides, like most soldiers' guides, are primarily practical in nature. They are also the first WWII guides that, when written, were about enemy nations. Despite that they draw clear lines between the Italian and German belligerents in keeping with the "victim" view laid out previously.

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Jeeps Threading City. Its Treasures Unhurt by War." *New York Times*, 6 June 1944, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2005); ProQuest Loyola University Library Rome, Italy, 2 January 2016, <http://www.proquest.com/>, p. 4.



Cover and first page of *Soldier's guide to Italy*, 1943.

As you can also see from this introduction, it is in these guides that we first see the assertion of a kind of “special relationship” between Italians and Americans. This will be another theme echoed in post-war student literature. Also worth noting is the section “for those who are interested” which amounts to a historical and cultural overview. Even in the midst of the war, the lure of Italy, and especially Rome was strong. Frequent connections were made also by war correspondents between the present invasion and past great events.

Between 1943 and 1947 a variety of guides to Italy, to Italian cities, to Italian History were published by the US and Allied armies for soldiers who were at first fighting and then serving as occupation forces on the peninsula.



Some examples of soldiers' guides produced by the Allied military government between 1944 and 1947. Note two editions of the guide to Rome.



The guides to Rome would attempt (though not terribly successfully) to set the tone for the occupation by again stressing the importance of the city and its universal connection to the “civilized world.” General Alexander’s preface to the second edition would be echoed in much of the literature that prepared students for a sojourn in Italy after the war. “Let us remember that Rome is the first capital city to be entered by us in our task of liberating Europe. Rome is the heritage of all the world and not only of Italy – Rome is the fountain of civilization. The eyes of all the world are upon our actions in the ‘Eternal City’ and we will show the world by our example the high standard of conduct and bearing of our victorious Allied Armies.” One can almost hear the echoing pleas in student handbooks even today regarding conduct and the notion of serving as an example.

In addition to providing these guides, the military organized tours and lectures in Italian history, art and architecture. They added English-language plaques identifying key sites in the Forum. They set up and/or commandeered specially-designated hotels, bars and restaurants and generally encouraged soldiers to visit cultural and historic sites. As the *Pocket guide to Italian cities* put it, “so far as your military duties permit, see as much as you can. You’ve got a great chance to do now, major expenses paid, what would cost you a lot of your own money after the war. Take advantage of it.” *A Soldier’s outline of Italian History* went further, insisting that being an informed tourist was part of a soldier’s duty while in Italy.

American soldiers returning from Italy will, because they fought here, be regarded as “experts”. Some such background as this booklet gives should be part of their “experting” equipment. This kind of understanding, made real by having seen the places where notable events happened, would be one of the most valuable souvenirs any soldier could take home with him from Italy. Certainly it will help him understand why Italy is the Italy of today, and will make one more American prepared to judge soundly the Italy of tomorrow. Again, the parallels with post-war advice to students are clear. A major component of the “international understanding” so touted by study-abroad programs in the 1950s and 60s would be that students would, because of their direct experience of foreign people and their history, be in a position to participate in a judicious exchange of national values.

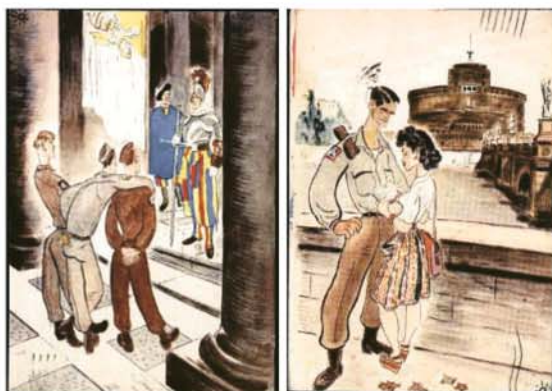
There is ample evidence that off-duty GIs took advantage of the opportunities offered them. Photos, oral history projects and memoirs attest to the lure of the eternal city and to the ways in which soldiers incorporated both ancient and contemporary history into their itineraries.



Snapshots of soldiers on leave in Rome and an excerpt from a letter home.  
Photos retrieved from [openeyespress.blogspot.com](http://openeyespress.blogspot.com), letter at <http://www.100thbattalion.org/>.

(As an aside I should note that the US military presence was a multi-cultural one, as will, eventually, be the American student presence. You can see a black soldier in the photo on the left, and the quote is from a letter written by a Nissei soldier. Just a few weeks after liberation of Rome – he's visited twice!)

Soldier's guides and the visiting patterns and letters of soldiers themselves suggest familiar rounds of traditionally visited sites, with the addition of significant places associated with Mussolini and the fascist regime. The result is a kind of telling of Rome and its history as a cautionary tale – great heights followed by inevitable decline; Mussolini as the latest in a long line of despots and dictators.



Two postcards showing allied soldiers in Rome c. 1946, personal collection.

When the war ended, the peculiar cold war situation of Italy kept American attention fixed there. The US and Britain considered it crucial for strategic as well as symbolic reasons that Italy remain in the Western sphere of influence, and so the “Big Three” had all agreed, yet the Italian communist party (PC) would become the largest outside of the Soviet bloc and there was great concern among US and UK observers that they might come to power through elections. Not only did this result in concerted US intervention, both covert and overt, on behalf of non-communist political parties and unions, but it also kept contemporary Italy, the plight of her people, and the debate over their “true” nature in the American spotlight for many years after the war.<sup>5</sup> Tourism and educational travel were to play a role as well.<sup>6</sup>

The years following the Second World War saw the implementation of the European Recovery Program, or Marshall Plan with the goal of rebuilding Western Europe and preventing the spread of communism. Marshall Plan officials targeted the Italian tourist industry and the rebuilding (and building) of tourist infrastructure as a key area for investment. Even as Americans grew weary of the cost of the program, they remained convinced that tourism represented an opportunity for some “dollar diplomacy” – a way of injecting needed currency into a struggling Western Europe while strengthening bonds which would cement “the Atlantic community” and demonstrate the superiority of “the American way of life”.<sup>7</sup>

Tourism, though still marketed primarily through the longstanding promises of romantic adventure and escape from routine, took on in addition a kind of moral gloss, the freedom of movement and relative prosperity of the American traveler contrasting pointedly with the immobility of those behind the Iron Curtain. American Express pamphlets urged tourists to be “ambassadors of good will.” Civic groups, churches and professional organizations chartered so-called “friendship tours” to promote international understanding; universities, government agencies and non-profit organizations promoted study abroad as an instrument of global cooperation and lasting peace. The Italian government and travel-related industries welcomed the opportunity to re-frame their history and explain their presence in ways that “rehabilitated” Italy and cemented their membership in the

5 Mario Del Pero, “The United States and Psychological Warfare in Italy, 1948-1955,” *Journal of American History*, 87, 4 (2001), pp. 1304-34; and James E. Miller, “Taking off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948”, *Diplomatic History*, 7, 1 (1983), pp. 35-56 (pp. 35-36).

6 Anne Wingenter, “Eternal City, Sawdust Caesar: Americans on Tour in Post-WWII Rome (1944-1960),” *Annali d’Italianistica*, 28 (2010), pp. 317-40.

7 Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina, 2004), pp. 9-10 and pp. 103-10; Carolyn Anderson, “Cold War Consumer Diplomacy and Movie-Induced Roman Holiday,” *Journal of Tourism History*, 3, 1 (2011), pp. 1-5; Foster Rhea Dulles, *Americans Abroad: Two Centuries of European Travel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), pp. 178-80.

Atlantic community. Cruise lines, airlines, hotel chains and travel agencies were only too happy to profit from the trend.



1955 Pan American airlines brochure 'Europe by Clipper'.

An increase in student travel exchange and study was a natural outgrowth of this renewed interest in travel. Numerous organizations emerged with the stated aim of promoting peaceful coexistence and respect between nations through student and teacher exchange programs.

The Fulbright Act, passed in 1946 would initially make \$137, 550, 000, derived from the disposal of surplus war materials abroad, available for educational exchange. Of the 22 initially participating countries, Italy, China and the UK had the most funds available with 20 million allotted to each. The Council on Student Travel formed in 1947 to help offset the cost of international travel. Within a decade the initial 32 member organizations – non-profit and cultural agencies – participating had increased to more than 70. The collective goal was to send students who would “represent the best in American standards” while “participating in a world-wide exchange of national values”.<sup>8</sup> In 1948 the Italian government signed an agreement that would finance student exchange (at first via the Marshall Plan) in both directions.<sup>9</sup>

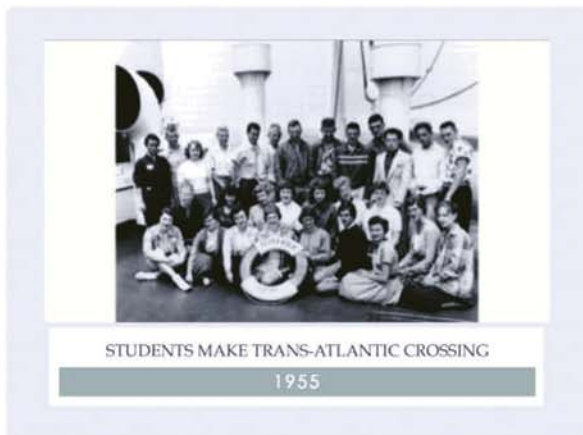
8 Lily Von Klemperer and Dieter Cunz, “The American Student Abroad,” *The Modern Language Journal*, 46, 2 (1962), pp. 82-84 (p. 84).

9 “Italy and U.S. Sign Pact On Student Exchanges”, *New York Times*, 19 Dec. 1948, 4; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2005); ProQuest Loyola University Library Rome, Italy, 2 January 2016, <http://www.proquest.com/>.



A mix of different student travel ads from the late 1950s and early 1960s, *The New York Times*.

For the first decade or so after the war, Rome was home primarily to graduate students and teachers, recipients of fellowships sponsored by the government or civic organizations. (For reasons beyond the scope of this talk, only in the 1960s did we see the first “branch campus” style programs set up.) They shared the Roman classroom with groups on shorter-term study or “hospitality” tours which regularly made Rome part of their itineraries. While the writings produced by and/or for these students of Rome show that they interacted with Rome in much the same way that travellers had since the Grand Tour – they also struggled to make that interaction into a lesson regarding the contemporary world.



Decommissioned troop ships were put to use in the 1950s and 60s to bring tourists to Europe. Many of them offered discount rates to students and teachers.

In fact, a present-oriented frame was a selling point for purveyors of educational exchange, and students and teachers seem to have bought into it fully. As one young classics teacher put it after spending a summer at the American

Academy, “First-hand observation and study of the relics of the past should give us keener insight to interpret the problems of the present”.<sup>10</sup> Just as soldiers’ guides had encouraged young GIs to seek understanding of their present circumstances as they toured the “Eternal City,” student handbooks and guides oriented toward the educational traveler made Rome and its history a lesson for the modern world.

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<sup>10</sup> Lydian Russell Bennett, “A Roman Summer,” *The Classical Journal*, 43, 6 (1948), pp. 359-65 (p. 365).

## Italy-Hollywood: Italian Imagery in American and British Cinema

Fulvio Orsitto

(Georgetown University at Villa Le Balze)

Gloria Pastorino

(Fairleigh Dickinson University)

### Part I: Italy-Hollywood. A Profitable Love Affair.

Since the early days of cinema, Italian films have had a strong impact on American filmmakers. Recognized and celebrated worldwide “for their ability to render historical epics in a realistic yet monumental fashion”,<sup>1</sup> the Italian motion pictures of this period influenced American productions especially in terms of storytelling, *mise en scène*, and technical innovations. As McDonald Carolan recalls, David Wark Griffith “felt personally challenged by the magnificence of Italian film artistry when news regarding the filming of his *Judith of Bethulia* (1913) were overshadowed by the release of Guazzoni’s masterpiece *Quo Vadis?* in 1912.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, when Giovanni Pastrone’s *Cabiria* (announced as an epic spectacle of unprecedented proportions) was distributed in the United States, Griffith – unanimously considered the father of American cinema – did not miss the opportunity to experience first-hand the new frontier of cinematic entertainment.<sup>3</sup> As McDonald Carolan argues:

D. W. Griffith’s encounter with *Cabiria* demonstrates the dynamic relationship between Italian and American film in the early years of cinema. The American director travelled from Los Angeles to San Francisco to see the Italian masterpiece and to view the effects of Pastrone’s inventive use of the dolly (*carrello* in Italian), which allowed him to mediate the lengths of his shots.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Mary Ann McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze. Italian Cinema, American Film* (Albany: State University of New York, 2014), p. 5.

2 McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 5.

3 Pastrone’s film represents the first tangible example of a cinematic product that was de facto also a cultural artefact and a social event. An artwork carefully crafted to rival with theatrical mega-productions of the time, *Cabiria* managed to emancipate cinema from being considered a “low” form of amusement, bringing its status closer to that of theater (higher classes’ preferred form of entertainment). In order to achieve this goal, Pastrone hired celebrated writer Gabriele D’Annunzio as a screenwriter (even though the Vate’s involvement was limited to the writing of some intertitles and the choosing of the names of the characters), and renowned musician Ildebrando Pizzetti (who provided the film’s soundtrack, composing for the occasion *the Fire Symphony*). For a more detailed account of the role played by D’Annunzio and Pizzetti in Pastrone’s film consult Gianni Rondolino, *I giorni di Cabiria* (Turin: Lindau, 1993). Moreover, this film’s uniqueness emerges also in terms of distribution since, as Caranti notes, “*Cabiria*, a differenza di molti altri film, viene distribuito in ogni continente” (“*Cabiria* unlike many other films is distributed on every continent”). Chiara Caranti, “*Cabiria* 1914 & 1931: la distribuzione in Italia e nel mondo,” in *Cabiria & Cabiria* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2006), p. 166.

4 McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 4-5. *Cabiria*’s pivotal role in the history of cinema (along with its influence on North American cinematography) has also been recently recognized by none other than Martin Scorsese. In his introduction to the



Fig. 1  
*Quo Vadis?* (1912)



Fig. 2  
*Cabiria* (1914)

As Mary P. Wood recalls, even though between 1910 and 1919 “Italy dominated national and world film markets with its grandiose epics,”<sup>5</sup> this golden age soon came to an end. In the 1920s the decline suffered by a film industry heavily wounded by the economic crisis following WWI<sup>6</sup> allowed for the Italian market to be conquered by foreign productions, most notably by those coming from North America. During this decade, Hollywood made several motion pictures in the peninsula, exploiting “Italy for its wealth of talent and natural beauty.”<sup>7</sup> Such movies – which, albeit indirectly, contributed to the weakening of the Italian film industry, as they diverted artistic and technical talent from domestic production – include Henry King’s *The White Sister* (1923) and *Romola* (1924), George Fitzmaurice’s *The Eternal City* (1923), and a version of *Ben Hur* (1925) directed by Fred Niblo and Charles Brabin.

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screening of the remastered copy of Pastrone’s film at Cannes in 2006, Scorsese – continuing the acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Italian cinema started with his 1999 documentary *My Voyage to Italy* – “said that watching this film disabused him of certain falsehoods regarding the history of cinema, including the belief that American directors such as Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille were responsible for introducing the lengthy historical epic, the use of dolly, and diffuse light.” McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 4. Indeed, as Mary P. Wood reminds us, Pastrone “patented many modifications to camera equipment, experimenting particularly with the dolly”: Mary P. Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 65.

5 Wood, *Italian Cinema*, p. 65.

6 For a more detailed account of the excessive taxation and overall lack of organization that also contributed to this decline, consult Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent’anni di cinema italiano. I. Dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Rome: Laterza, 1995); and “The Long March of American Cinema in Italy from Fascism to the Cold War,” in *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, ed. by David Ellwood Rob Kroes (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), pp. 139-45.

7 McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 8.





Fig. 3. American Productions in Italy during the 1920s

In the 1930s Fascism openly displayed its interest in the medium,<sup>8</sup> moved by the belief that the “seventh art” (to use Ricciotto Canudo’s label) could actually be a very powerful strategic weapon.<sup>9</sup> Although “fascist measures to promote cinema were essentially pragmatic”<sup>10</sup> and the regime’s involvement with film productions was mostly indirect (quite differently from that of Nazi Germany), motion pictures were often financed, promoted and censored with the clear goal to manipulate the past in order to construct “a unifying cultural memory,”<sup>11</sup> and (possibly) create a modern “fascistized” audience in the process. As regards the relationship between the Italian and the Hollywood film industry, it must be noted that, on the one hand, the numerous film institutions created by the regime in the second part of the *ventennio*<sup>12</sup> “represented an attempt to counter the cultural influence of the United States by proclaiming the value of Italian creativity and its ability to engage with a specifically Italian modern reality.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, however, “Italians realized that they had a lot to learn from the Americans about

8 For a more in-depth analysis of the ways in which fascism interacted with the Italian film industry and with the film medium in general, see Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema: 1896-1996* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 69-87.

9 “Film was used for propagandistic ends as evidenced by the mandatory screening of short LUCE (L’Unione cinematografica educativa) documentaries before feature films that depicted fascist cultural policies (and the draining of marshlands in particular) directed at improving rural life, traditional folklore, and the celebration of work done in the countryside. Mussolini’s life, deeds and travels were also portrayed in these short works.” McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 11. Given that the establishment of LUCE dates back to the 1920s – although scholars and film historians usually focus on the regime’s involvement with cinema during the second part of the *ventennio* – one may conclude that Fascism has always been aware of the importance of filmic propaganda.

10 Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell’aquila: Storia dell’Istituto Luce* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 2000), p. 63; quoted in Wood, *Italian Cinema*, p. 8.

11 Wood, *Italian Cinema*, p. 69.

12 One need only think of the establishment of the Venice Film Festival in 1932, of the Centro sperimentale di cinematografia (the national Film School) in 1935, and of the Cinecittà Studios in 1937.

13 Wood, *Italian Cinema*, p. 8.

film production. To that end, in October 1937, Benito Mussolini's son Vittorio, the editor of *Cinema*, visited Hollywood along with the cultural minister Luigi Freddi.<sup>14</sup>

Overall – as evidenced at the inaugural ceremony of Cinecittà by the gigantic poster of Mussolini near a banner stating that “Cinema is the strongest weapon” – this medium played a key role in the relationship that the regime built with the masses. Moreover, it is possible to say that Hollywood's influence was vital not only for acquiring certain levels of standardization within the national film industry (and a more effective know-how in terms of product marketability), but also because it infused the Italian flare for spectacle with a new vitality, visible in the way in which Fascism promoted itself almost as a cinematic product. Finally, it must be observed that, looking at the staging of this specific ceremony, one may also notice the regime's eclecticism in terms of visual and cultural influences, since Mussolini's pose and interaction with the camera is clearly reminiscent of Russian cinematic formalism and, more specifically, of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Camera* (1929).



Fig. 4  
'Cinema is the Strongest Weapon'

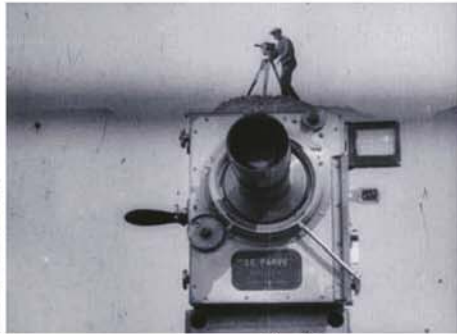


Fig. 5  
*The Man with a Camera* (1929)

After WWII, the end of fascist rule (and of its embargo on foreign movies) made the distribution of North American motion pictures in the peninsula once again possible. At first, “the vast backlog of American films threatened saturation of the market”.<sup>15</sup> However, for a five-year period spanning from the immediate aftermath of WWII to the end of the decade, Italian cinema also lived a creative golden age, inspired by an unprecedented call for realism resulting in a compelling urge to tell contemporary stories – perhaps as a reaction to the fascist insistence on the Italian glorious past (manipulated to fit the regime's needs). These Neorealist films were characterized “by programmatic calls for non-professional actors, on-

<sup>14</sup> McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Wood, *Italian Cinema*, p. 13.

location shooting, documentary style, and a focus upon social problems.”<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of the worldwide cinematic and cultural impact of this short-lived yet very fertile film movement, “few Neorealist works were popular with the public. Audiences were more drawn to the American films that came flooding into Italy.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as Peter Bondanella confirms, “while Italian Leftist intellectuals and social critics preferred a cinema devoted to social change, the public was more interested in imports from Hollywood or Italian films with less explicit ideological goals.”<sup>18</sup>

The 1950s were marked by the reappearance of standard industrial practices, and “as production budgets increased in an attempt to compete with American films, so the industry moved towards an American, capitalist model, where the demands of investors were important in defining the product.”<sup>19</sup> As Thompson and Bordwell remind us:

The state undersecretary in charge of entertainment, Giulio Andreotti, found a way of slowing the advance of American films while also curbing the embarrassing excesses of Neorealism. The so-called Andreotti law, which went into effect in 1949, not only established import limits and screen quotas but also provided loans to production firms. To receive a loan, however, a government committee had to approve the script, and films with an apolitical slant were rewarded with larger sums. Worse, a film could be denied an export license if it “slandered Italy”. The Andreotti law created preproduction censorship. This move coincided with a general drift away from the “purer” Neorealism of the period from 1944 to 1948.<sup>20</sup>

The postwar period also saw the comeback of foreign productions to Italy. Hollywood majors, above all, deftly took advantage of the competitive prices offered by the skilled craftsmen working at the Cinecittà studios and, in general, of the abundant artistic and technical talent available. These conditions, along with a series of advantageous tax breaks,<sup>21</sup> allowed the birth of a veritable “branch” of

16 Peter Bondanella, “From Italian Neorealism to the Golden Age of Cinecittà,” in *European Cinema*, ed. by Elizabeth Ezra (Oxford and New York: Oxford university Press, 2004), p. 124.

17 Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), p. 361.

18 Bondanella, “From Italian Neorealism”, p. 123.

19 Wood, *Italian Cinema*, p. 13.

20 Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, pp. 361-62.

21 From a political perspective, the interaction between Hollywood and Cinecittà is often narrated within the Cold War context: see Giuliana Muscio, “Invasion and Counterattack: Italian and American Film Relations in the Postwar Period,” in *Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, ed. by Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover: University

North American studios in the peninsula that film historians usually label “Hollywood on the Tiber,”<sup>22</sup> and that (through numerous ups and downs) lasted for about two decades.<sup>23</sup> From an economic perspective:

On the one hand if Hollywood’s presence in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s can easily be categorised as one of cultural domination and economic exploitation, on the other, the return of the majors to Italy meant that massive capital was injected into the local industry and the labour force. In fact, the Italian film industry flourished in the decade between the end of the 1950s and the 1960s, coinciding with the most prolific period of Hollywood’s investment in Italy.<sup>24</sup>

This new chapter of the interaction between Italy and Hollywood is inaugurated by “a significant milestone for relations between the cinemas of Italy and the United States,”<sup>25</sup> Mervyn LeRoy’s remake of Guazzoni’s *Quo Vadis?* (1912), which celebrates the coming back of the historical epic genre culminating in other North American productions on the Tiber, such as William Wyler’s *Ben-Hur* (1959) and Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *Cleopatra* (1963).

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Press of New England, 2000), pp. 116-31; and Christopher Wagstaff, “Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market,” in *Italy in the Cold War. Politics, Culture and Society 1945-58*, ed. by Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 90-114. In economic (and practical) terms co-productions were also encouraged. As Tiziana Ferrero-Regis argues, “once the US had re-conquered the Italian market, American producers [...] saw advantages in co-producing films in Italy as a way to utilize frozen money left from before the war and take advantage of tax incentives and subsidies from the state to Italian cinema producers”: Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema. Spaces, Contexts, Experiences* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2009), p. 51.

22 For a less historical (and more cultural) analysis of the rapport between Hollywood and the Cinecittà studios during this time period consult also Robert Shandley, *Runaway Romances: Hollywood’s Postwar Tour of Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); David Forgacs, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); and Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005).

23 As Ferrero-Regis points out, “the reasons for the abrupt withdrawal of US financing in Italy, starting from the middle of the 1960s, are various and well known. First, in the 1960s Italy was no longer a war-torn economy and industrialisation had pushed wages and workers’ benefits up. After the law on cinema that was passed in 1965, the Italian film industry started to show signs of a deep crisis. [...] The law imposed restrictions on the nationality of key figures, such as key actors, professionals, screenwriters, producers and directors, making it difficult to export internationally.” Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema*, p. 55.

24 Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema*, p. 48.

25 McDonald Carolan, *The Transatlantic Gaze*, p. 11.

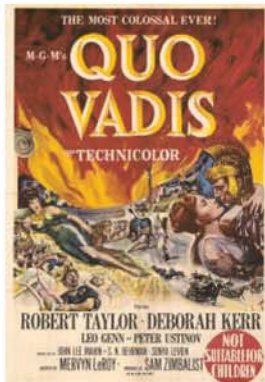


Fig. 6  
*Quo Vadis?* (1952)



Fig. 7  
*Ben-Hur* (1959)



Fig. 8  
*Cleopatra* (1963)

The Cinecittà studios were also used by Hollywood majors to produce more contemporary fares, such as Billy Wilder’s *Roman Holiday* (1953) and Jean Negulesco’s *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), and by North American-British co-productions like José Quintero’s *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1961).

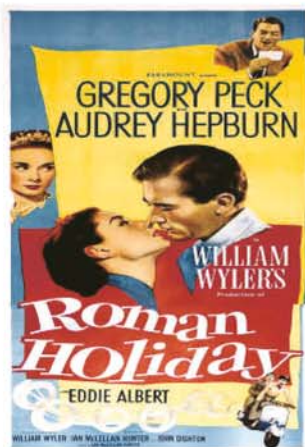


Fig. 9  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)



Fig. 10  
*Three Coins ...* (1954)



Fig. 11  
*The Roman Spring...* (1961)

Given the already mentioned withdrawal of North American financing in Italy, from the 1970s on Hollywood film productions (or co-productions) in the peninsula became a rarity. To find relevant new examples of (limited) US investments one would have to wait until the following decade, and the making of films such as Sergio Leone’s *C’era una volta in America/Once Upon a Time in America* (1983), Jean-Jacques Annaud’s *Il nome della rosa/The name of the Rose* (1986), and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *L’ultimo imperatore/The Last Emperor* (1987). In the 1990s, after Roberto Benigni’s international hit *La vita è bella/Life is*

*Beautiful* (1997), we witness a phenomenon that Elisabetta Anna Coletti has called “Miramaxizzazione,”<sup>26</sup> which consists in the fact that North American companies become not only involved in the marketing and distribution of foreign films in the United States, but they also invest on Italian projects with a global appeal – such as Franco Zeffirelli’s *Tea with Mussolini* (1999) and Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Malena* (2000) – even reaching out to Italian directors and contracting them to work abroad (as happened to Gabriele Muccino).

In the new millennium – in spite of “Hollywood’s global dispersion of economic activity, especially toward Eastern European countries [...] and renewed incentives in US states and cities”<sup>27</sup> – North American productions come back to Cinecittà in even greater numbers. From *auteurist* fares – like Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* (2002), Wes Anderson’s *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), and Woody Allen’s *To Rome with Love* (2012) – to filmic adaptations of literary best-sellers – such as Audrey Wells’ *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003), Ryan Murphy’s *Eat Pray Love* (2010), and Ron Howard’s *Angels and Demons* (2009) – and to commercial blockbusters like Steven Soderbergh’s *Ocean’s Twelve* (2004) and the umpteenth Bond film, the love affair is stronger than ever.

## Part II: Italian Imagery in American and British Films since WWII.

If one considers how Italy has been portrayed on the big screen in North American and British film productions since the post-war period, one may notice two main representational paradigms. The first and more “realistic” one (arguably, somewhat influenced by the Italian Neorealist tradition) aimed at showing a diegesis driven by fabricated (yet believable) interactions between American and Italian characters, making a visible effort to depict the latter ones without necessarily recurring to stereotypes. The second model – undoubtedly informed by the typical “dream-factory/classic-Hollywood” approach to storytelling – is based on the “display” of conventional narratives over foreign (Italian, in our case) background scenarios, i.e., on the depiction of real locations through back-projection screens over which the American characters lead the narrative (and the Italian ones are often reduced to mere caricatures). In order to discuss the first paradigm we will analyse William Wyler’s *Roman Holiday* (1953), while as an example of the second paradigm, we will consider Jean Negulesco’s *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954).

*Roman Holiday*, which also marks Audrey Hepburn’s debut, is the first film that made Rome available to American audiences in a way that both celebrates its glorious past and its charming present. It also serves the non-negligible purpose

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<sup>26</sup> See Elisabetta Anna Coletti, “Made in Italy Label Gains Celluloid Cachet,” in *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 October 2000. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2000/1004/pls4.html> (Last access May 13, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema*, p. 60.

of showing American audiences for what reason WWII was fought also on the Italian front. If *Rome, Open City* – one of the first Neorealist films, directed by Roberto Rossellini in 1945 – shows a war-torn country whose distant glory seems far and half forgotten, *Roman Holiday* shows the ebullient life and *joie de vivre* of a country in the process of being rebuilt, also thanks to American efforts. Its introduction to wide audiences through an impossible and dreamy love story paves the way for the success of subsequent Italian films celebrating Italy's rebirth, such as Fellini's *La dolce vita* seven years later. The symbol of the carefree life in a country where money may be tight but people keep ploughing through with a constructive attitude and a sunny disposition is the *Vespa*, the scooter created after World War II.<sup>28</sup> To Princess Ann, escaping from her stifling palace where tight schedules and coddling Countesses and Generals rule her life, a couple enjoying an evening out on a scooter seems the epitome of freedom.



Fig. 12  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)–From truck



Fig. 13  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)–Counter Shot

Soon after, she gets to experience the same freedom with Gregory Peck driving a Vespa and then attempting to drive it herself.

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<sup>28</sup> After the film was released sales increased by 100,000 in 1953. The film made several things famous, including the street where Peck's character lives, Via Margutta, which became a fashionable place to visit and live after the film was released.



Fig. 14  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)—Sightseeing



Fig. 15  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)—Freedom

The day of freedom through the streets of Rome takes the protagonists through some of the most iconic places in the city, but in a way that is both openly tourist-y and organically developing from a natural interaction with the city, including dancing on a barge by Castel Sant'Angelo and scenes at a farmer's market. The impression is that characters interact with the Italian capital and its inhabitants rather than simply passing through it.<sup>29</sup> Gregory Peck's character works for an American newspaper and lives in Rome, hence his understanding of the culture extends to some of the language as well, making interactions seem more realistic. Italian characters are not caricatures: they are funny, but in a charming way and they express themselves in understandably broken English (since they belong to lower classes whose understanding of English would be limited to superficial dealings with tourists). Thus, the taxi driver, Peck's landlord, and the barber who cuts the Princess' hair provide comic relief but are also animated by a genuine desire to communicate with the two protagonists. Of course, the kind florist who gives a carnation to a broke but lovely Princess embodies the gentle soul of Italians, who may be pushy in a market, trying to sell produce, but will not let a pretty lady go without a flower. Stereotypical? Perhaps, but true to nature. The film helped create myths as much as it used Rome's scenery.

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<sup>29</sup> Both characters are foreigners in Italy and their love affair with Rome is as strong as the one with each other.





Fig. 16  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)–A Flower



Fig. 17  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)–Street Vendor

This attitude in depicting the interaction between characters and their surroundings may be informed, at least at a superficial level, by postwar Neorealist narratives and by the way in which those fabricated (yet extremely realistic) films were able to bring what was usually left in the background to the forefront, conveying an innate and stronger sense of physicality, ultimately breathing life into landscapes and cityscapes. A case in point is Vittorio De Sica's ending sequence of *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948). Filmed on-location (like all Italian neorealist films), De Sica's movie presents us with a character deeply embedded in his surroundings. After having looked desperately (but in vain) for his stolen bicycle through every possible nook and cranny of a Rome more labyrinthine than ever, the protagonist finally comes to an inevitable decision in order to keep his job and be able to support his family: becoming a thief himself.

De Sica manages to convey this character's internal struggle through simple images and montage, with resorting to dialogue. What emerges, instead, in the tragic interaction between the protagonist and the city – as visible in the two shot/counter shot sequences visible from fig. 18 through 21 – is a silent dialogue in which Rome is not limited to being the background to the main action, but effectively becomes a fully-fleshed character.



Fig. 18  
*Ladri di biciclette* (1948)–Shot I



Fig. 19  
*Ladri di biciclette* (1948)–Counter Shot I



Fig. 20  
*Ladri di biciclette* (1948)–Shot II



Fig. 21  
*Ladri di biciclette* (1948)–Counter Shot II

*Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), by contrast, uses a totally different technique of *mise en scène*. Although the usage of the back-projection screen (instead of the on-location shooting) is flattened by the saturated colours of the cinemascope and made more realistic than usual by a masterful lighting, we clearly perceive a separation between the characters and the background, never fully buying into their Italian adventures (since they never truly seem to be immersed in Italian landscapes and cityscapes that do not surround them, but are merely behind them, as visible in fig. 22 through 25).



Fig. 22  
*Three Coins...* (1954)–Saint Peter



Fig. 23  
*Three Coins...* (1954)–Trevi Fountain



Fig. 24  
*Three Coins... (1954)*–Trevi Kiss I



Fig. 25  
*Three Coins... (1954)*–Trevi Kiss II

Moreover, the use of back-projection screens implicitly reminds audiences of a classic Hollywood tradition that characterizes certain film genres (especially sci-fi and action movies, but also Hitchcock's films following a European/German expressionist tradition), and that truly tests the spectators' suspension of disbelief. From the challenging flying scenes in TV Series like *Adventures of Superman* (1951-57) or in Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978), to the typical car chase recurring in Bond films like Terence Young's *Dr. No* (1963), one can clearly see how, for over three decades, this technical stratagem born to make the most impossible images possible, was also commonly used (even in big productions) to avoid filming on-location with a live-recorded audio.



Fig. 26. Back-Projection Screen in Hollywood – 1950s, 1960s, 1970s

What we would like to illustrate in the last part of this essay is that – in spite of motion pictures like *Roman Holiday*, clearly trying to convey a less superficial engagement with Italy and Italians – the majority of North American and British films set in Italy (and especially in Rome and Florence), seem to follow the example of *Three Coins in the Fountain*, avoiding any sort of real involvement with the country and its people and using them simply as a big back-projection screen onto which to display their (fundamentally) American or British stories. Interactions with charming Italians are possible, as long as they do not lead to long-term commitments; in films such as this one and subsequent ones modelled after it, Italy and Italians often serve as catalysts for bored women’s sexual awakening, leading them to find true love in the arms of more culturally appropriate partners, confirming the old Italian adage “*mogli e buoi dei paesi tuoi*.”<sup>30</sup> Rossano Brazzi appears in several of them as the ultimate (and apparently only) Italian *Latin lover*, the model of 1950s’ Italian beauty and refined charm who can stir unbridled passions.

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<sup>30</sup> Literally, “wives and oxen from your own country”: the proverb suggests that a successful relationship and life can only occur if one’s feelings and job align with one’s culture. No miscegenation and no exotic careers.

Only a year after *Three Coins in the Fountain* David Lean's *Summertime* (1955) depicts the adventures of a middle-aged elementary school secretary vacationing in Venice. Katherine Hepburn's romance with Rossano Brazzi ends badly because, once again, there is little hope of achieving anything meaningful once the glitz and glamour of a quintessentially and stereotypically romantic country wanes. Or, perhaps, playwrights such as H.E. Bates (upon whose play *The Time of the Cuckoo* the film is based<sup>31</sup>) and Tennessee Williams (in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*) can only register the inappropriateness and dangers for aging women looking for late-blooming romance in the wrong places.

There seems to be hope only for disillusioned women in dead-end jobs but still in their child bearing years, as Suzanne Pleshette demonstrates in her first major role in Delmer Daves' 1962 *Rome Adventure*. Forced to resign from the New England school where she is a librarian for having suggested to a student to read an inappropriate book, *Lovers Must Learn*, she declares, "I'm going where people really know about love: Rome." Even though Rossano Brazzi is her first love interest in Italy, she falls for a younger American architect (teen heartthrob Troy Donahue) who, eventually, asks her to marry him when she returns home after many complicated adventures. In the end it is not Rome, and the mature lover who could teach her how to let herself go, that solves her love life but an American man. It seems that women need a trip to fantasyland to gain the confidence and self-awareness they cannot achieve in their stifled lives at home; as Pleshette's character's employer in an American bookstore near Piazza Navona tells her, "The first time a good-looking Italian pinched my bottom I said to myself 'This is for me'." The bookstore owner is clearly waiting for her own homebred love architect, or she would have a job that allows her to understand more of the host country than simply pinches on bottoms, since her only customers in an American bookstore in Rome in the 1960s would have been non-Italians.

Teen movies are not exempt from this paradigm: Paul Wendkos' *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963) follows in the successful Gidget/Sandra Dee tradition (with a different actress) portraying hormonally restless adolescents on vacation in an exotic place before starting college and getting into all sorts of trouble while a family friend is trying to watch over them, only to return to their previous lives with a home-grown boy.<sup>32</sup> The idea is always that Italian males are the fantasy world which American (or English) women can indulge briefly before going back to real life (i.e., settling down with one of their own). The contemporary reality show side of this phenomenon can be seen in the episodes of *Jersey Shore* set in

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31 Rodgers and Sondheim's 1965 musical *Do I Hear a Waltz?* is based on the same play and looks just as trite and pathetic in its very sporadic revivals on Broadway.

32 The formula works in all seaside or exotic locations from Elvis Presley's *Girl Happy* or *Fun in Acapulco* to the Annette Funicello/Frankie Avalon "beach party" movies.

Italy, where all pretence of, at least marginally, interacting with natives are abandoned in favour of an exported close-knit, group of people who do the same things they do at home, oblivious of any cultural difference.



Fig. 27  
*Summertime* (1955)



Fig. 28  
*Rome Adventure* (1962)



Fig. 29  
*Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963)

It is almost as if in the American imagination Italy is the exotic East that the “Orient” was for Europeans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the attitude displayed in these films orientalises Italian culture and makes it strangely alluring, mysterious, and particularly alien. The divide between “us” and “them” is akin to Said’s definition of “orientalism” as a:

political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar [...] and the strange [...]. A certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner’s privilege; because his was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Even in *Roman Holiday* it is difficult not to notice the difference between the perfectly tall and handsome Gregory Peck and all Italian males who, by comparison, seem to belong to a different “race”. He does belong to the “stronger culture,” and all evidence to the contrary is purely circumstantial. As he and Princess Ann roam the streets of Rome discovering together a life of freedom in a naïve place, it is clear that they move through the vestiges of a glorious, culturally superior past that bears no relation with the impoverished present. Interaction is, therefore, possible only at a superficial level that does not interfere with the

33 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 43.

dominant culture. The same is true of a film like Norman Jewison's *Only You* (1994), which moves the protagonist, Faith, from Pittsburgh to Venice to the Tuscan countryside, to Rome, and to Positano, in search of her ideal man whose name has been spelled out by an Ouija board. Here too Italy is just a lovely set of pretty and iconic scenarios and quotations from famous antecedents.



Fig. 30  
*Only You* (1994)–Mouth of Truth



Fig. 31  
*Roman Holiday* (1953)–Mouth of Truth

That is why, even though filmed on location, these later movies still only use the scenery as a backdrop, rather than a potentially culturally enriching element. If any other part of the country is visited, it is usually one that is already part of the collective romantic imagination: the Verona mentioned by Shakespeare or the Alps, destination of the British “Grand Tour” for young upper-class men until the first half of the nineteenth century (and celebrated by Romantic poets) and of young women as well at the turn of the century, as evidenced in E.M. Forster’s novel *A Room with a View*. “Then the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and, instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy.”<sup>34</sup> This is how the protagonist, Lucy Honeychurch, wandering the streets of Florence without a Baedeker, begins her self-discovery, self-awareness, and coming of age in Italy. Lucy lets Italy charm her as she opens up to the sheer beauty of monuments and countryside, disregarding the dirty streets and over-sexed, easily inflamed, or just simple natives. Italy’s charm is described as “pernicious,” damaging for a young woman whose only purpose should be to absorb notions rather than lived culture. A couple of chapters later, as she laments that nothing ever happens to her, she witnesses a dispute between two Italian men; one of them gets stabbed and spits blood, Lucy faints, and revives in the arms of George Emerson, the non-conformist, British of course, young man who is staying with his father at the same *pensione* where Lucy and her cousin are staying. Reflecting on what they just witnessed, looking at the Arno, it is clear that the death of the Italian man has

34 E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), p. 24.

affected the two youngsters in a way that will change both of their lives for ever. Their next encounter alone at a picnic gets more blood flowing with a passionate stolen kiss amidst wheat stalks.

This brief series of events may summarize all Anglo/American experiences in Italy, be it the British “Grand Tour” or the American imitation of it at the end of the XIX century, made popular by Henry James and Edith Wharton among others. Italy seems to be a catalyst for all dormant passions, the longed-for awakening that rain-chilled Anglo/Americans (perhaps suffocated by too strict social conventions) could not dare to hope for. However, while this may be charming in the XIX century or at the turn of the XX, it proves anachronistic (if not downright insulting) at the turn of the XXI century for a country that is at the top of the world’s game in many sectors of economy and is also part of the G8. It is difficult to understand why Diane Lane’s character in *Under the Tuscan Sun* dresses like a 1950s woman in a 2003 film adaptation of a 1997 novel, or why another American character in the film feels the need to emulate Anita Eckberg’s character in *La dolce vita* and jump into fountains.



Fig. 32

*Under the Tuscan ...* (2003)–1950s Dress



Fig. 33

*Peyton Place* (1957)–Lana Turner’s 1950s Dress

The film seems to keep the *Rome Adventure* model of a disillusioned younger woman who finds an older, slightly wilder friend from her same culture and who acts as a warning of what could happen to her too if she did not find an appropriate and stable love interest. To a degree, modern films set in Italy combine the two previously discussed paradigms, without managing to modify the stereotypical attitude towards Italian culture: the Italy of romantic comedies can still only catalyze passions and self-awareness, but it cannot be understood.









Fig. 34  
*La dolce vita* (1960)—Dip in  
the Fountain



Fig. 35  
*Under the Tuscan ...* (2003)—Dolce Vita

It is no wonder, then, that Italian streets in the twenty-first century need to be populated by short old women with handkerchiefs on their heads, as they would have in economically depressed areas of the country during the war. It is of little importance that Italy is the fashion capital of the world and that in real life these women no longer exist: films set in Italy still need to feed the fantasy of a primitive, slightly backwards, raw country where passions can run wild.



Fig. 36  
*Under the Tuscan ...* (2003)—Old Ladies



Fig. 37  
*Eat, Pray, Love* (2010)—Old Lady

By the same token, Italians cannot speak normally, using words and keeping their voices down, as they actually do in Italy: they need to gesticulate as if in a constant dumb show, needing apish gestures to express what words clearly cannot convey.



Fig. 38  
*Eat, Pray, Love* (2010)—Yelling



Fig. 39  
*Eat, Pray, Love* (2010)—Gesticulating

In terms of eating habits, Italians normally do not eat while walking in the streets: it is considered uncouth. The exception to this etiquette rule is an ice cream cone. Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* may be the “patient zero” ice-cream eating foreigner in American films, but why do nuns eat ice-cream in all third-millennium “woman-in-search-of-her-lost-self” films? Are nuns a more demure counterpart of the “jumping-in-fountains” women? The two extremes between which the lost protagonist has to find her right middle ground?



Fig. 40  
*Under the Tuscan...* (2003)  
– Nuns & Gelato



Fig. 41  
*Eat, Pray, Love* (2010)  
– Nuns & Gelato

The attitude towards food seems to be the only thing that has changed in the past sixty years: once again, it would have been gauche to draw attention on what people ate, especially in the pre-economic boom of the 1950s, when food was scarce. In *Roman Holiday* the only food consumed is the ice cream cone.



Fig. 42  
*Roman Holiday* (1953) – Gelato Vendor



Fig. 43  
*Roman Holiday* (1953) – Gelato

The new stereotype about Italy now is that food is magnificent, so movies reflect this by showing American characters in films eating more than any human being should in a single seating. What is interesting in movies such as *Eat, Pray, Love* or *Under the Tuscan Sun* is that the road to self-awareness seems to need characters to fill emotional voids through food and sex.

It needs to be said that – fortunately – not all American or British films set in Italy follow this same model: Canadian director Anthony Minghella’s 1999 *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, for instance, is set in the 1950s and it is not as rife of national stereotypes as *Under the Tuscan Sun* or *Eat, Pray, Love*. Italians’ dress code is compatible with their social provenance and they, as a people, are generally not ruled by passions alone; aside from the occasional bus driver breaking spontaneously into song as he reaches the town’s square (where he is, of course, joined in the chorus by the priest),<sup>35</sup> or the depiction of the police as bumbling fools (who, however, understand who the killer is, unlike the smarter American detective who buys into Ripley’s carefully constructed lies) Italians seem to love music perhaps a bit too much, but still they appear to be “normal” and productive.

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<sup>35</sup> A possible reference to the famous series of films with Don Camillo and Peppone, respectively town priest and mayor, feuding friends/enemies on opposite sides of the political spectrum.



Fig. 44  
*The Talented...* (1999)–Singing Bus Driver



Fig. 45  
*The Talented...* (1999)–Singing

In fact, in the movie Italians work, while the American Dickie Greenleaf, his fiancée, his rich friends, and the obsessive hanger-on Tom Ripley enjoy the *dolce far niente* Italians are usually accused of endorsing. Sure, there is a good amount of screaming when the drowned body of a town's girl surfaces from the sea along with the Madonna's statue during the Feast of the Immaculate Conception – who wouldn't scream? Dickie, who is indirectly responsible for the girl's death, since he impregnated her with no intention to either marry her or pay for her abortion, yells that Italy is a backward country, but he is, in fact, the one who contributes to keeping it backward and he still does not feel at home anywhere else. There is a flare of *Cavalleria rusticana* melodrama in the girl's suicide for love, but overall the film's tone is not condescending towards the host country. Besides, the scene has an illustrious antecedent, which Minghella quotes, in Silvana's death scene in De Santis' *Riso Amaro* (1949). Homages continue in Dickie's own death scene, when he is hit by Tom on the boat off the San Remo coast, just like the pregnant girlfriend of the protagonist of George Stevens' *A Place in the Sun* (1951).



Fig. 46  
*A Place in the Sun* (1951)–Boat Killing



Fig. 47  
*The Talented...* (1999)–Boat Killing

Generally speaking, characters in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* are in Italy because they can afford to live abroad without working and they bring along their











own bohemian lifestyle without needing Italy as a catalyst. Consistently with any American novel or play set in Italy from the 1950s on,<sup>36</sup> Italy is just the setting of ex-pats' adventures. Nobody learns the language (not in a significant way) and nobody interacts with the natives other than marginally. Rome serves as the setting for Ripley's machinations to impersonate Dickie and obtain the life he wishes. It could have been any other city in Italy, except for the fact that its size makes it easier for Ripley to carry his plan through and that it has a pre-*Dolce vita* feel.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, when the protagonist is male things are different; several movies, from Nunnally Johnson's serious drama *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) and its romantic counterpart *It Started in Naples* (Melville Shavelson, 1960), to comedies such as Robert Mulligan's *Come September* or Melvin Frank's *Good Evening, Mrs. Campbell*, demonstrate that interaction is possible if the visiting American is male. Men are not on a spiritual journey of self-discovery: they are in Italy either because of the war or, later on, on business. Thus, in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* Gregory Peck has to confess to his American wife that he had an affair when overseas in 1944, and the result is a recently orphaned child who needs to be taken in and given all the opportunities of a life in America; in *It Started in Naples* Clark Gable travels to Naples to settle the estate of his late brother and discovers that he had an affair with a local woman and the resulting orphaned child lives with his aunt.<sup>38</sup> Gina Lollobrigida in *Good Evening, Mrs. Campbell* has to deal with the uncertainty of who is the father of her daughter Gia twenty years after she slept with three GIs stationed in Italy (the same plot that will later be used to shape the musical *Mamma Mia*); and the same actress is the recurrent September mistress of an American businessman who, eventually, marries her after a forced interaction with American teen-agers vacationing on the couple's favourite spot in Liguria makes them realize that they belong together. Nothing strange from an imperially male point of view: women, like countries, are there for the taking.

All this is perhaps understandable in the Fifties: after all, Americans helped "liberate" Italy in WWII and in part financed rebuilding it through subsidies to the Christian Democrat party to fend off the possibility of a Communist stronghold in the Mediterranean. Italy felt like a colony and was somehow treated as such. What is in many ways inexplicable, however, is how this attitude continues to be viable

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36 For instance, Sinclair Lewis' *World so Wide* (1951), set in Florence; Tennessee Williams' *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950); William Gaddis' *The Recognitions* (1955); or writings by Truman Capote and Gore Vidal – just to mention a few novels and plays set in Italy.

37 Dickie's interaction with the local girl (Silvana) and her consequent pregnancy do not imply an actual involvement with her culture either.

38 Incidentally, the scene in which the aunt, Sophia Loren, sings Renato Carosone's "Tu vuoi fa' l'americano" in a nightclub is quoted by Anthony Minghella in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* when Ripley, Dickie, and an Italian friend of Dickie and Silvana's sing the same song in a bar (see fig. 45).

in the 21st century. One would imagine that in the globalized world in which we live people would be more curious about learning how people in other cultures truly live, but in many American or British writers and filmmakers' imaginations Italy is still "that vast museum of magnificence and misery,"<sup>39</sup> that Mark Twain loved to hate.

*Under the Tuscan Sun* and *Eat, Pray, Love* are both filmed in the XXI century and based on fictionalized memoirs written respectively in 1996 (Frances Mayes) and 2006 (Elizabeth Gilbert). There is little difference between these two products of the XXI century and Merchant-Ivory's 1985 *A Room With A View* (E.M. Forster, 1908) or Mike Newell's 1992 *Enchanted April* (Elizabeth von Arnim, 1922), except for the fact that the latter two are based on good novels, written by writers who depict the thoughts, philosophies, perhaps stereotypes of their time, while the former two are fictionalized accounts of "real-life" stories still filtered through early XX century stereotypes and assumed notions, as if these two American women who spent some time in Italy looked but could not see that Italy has changed quite a bit in the last hundred years. Thus, in *A Room With A View* Lucy has to find herself and be true to the nature she denies herself for most of the film (in splendid Jane Austen tradition), until – thanks to her trip South – she embraces passion; in *Enchanted April* two disenchanted women in boring, loveless marriages live in gloomy, rainy, grey London and come to life in sunny Portofino along with two other lost (female) British souls. After a first day of rain, their moods change along with the weather and no cloud is ever seen again. Italians are secondary characters, comic relief, silly subservient creatures who either try to overcharge for food or ogle these exotic foreign women as if they had never seen a woman before. It is hard to believe that Anglo/American patterns of self-discovery cannot move beyond century-old assumed perceptions of "otherness."

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, or the New Pilgrims' Progress* (Hartford: The American Publishing Company, 1869), p. 296.

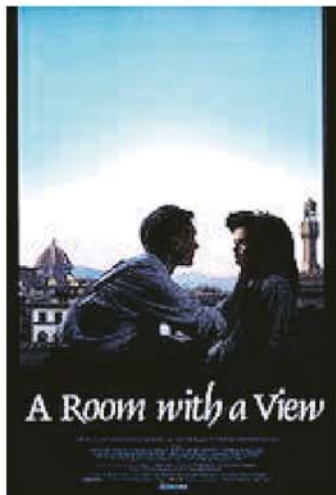


Fig. 48  
*A Room with a View* (1985)



Fig. 49  
*Enchanted April* (1992)

Yet, two other recent movies that show young women coming to understand themselves and their desires do not move too far from the model. *Stealing Beauty* – an Italian/British co-production directed by Bernardo Bertolucci in 1996 – attempts to describe the life of ex-pats in Tuscany, who live in a villa in perfect harmony with eccentric local people. Lucy’s goal is to discover the identity of her father, since her mother, a tormented poet, has just committed suicide. Her bildungsroman develops along a plethora of desires that she stirs up in all men around her, until she finds herself in the arms of the most unlikely candidate to take her virginity under a majestic tree. The film does not follow the paradigms delineated thus far, but it still retains the idea that Italy’s foreignness for Lucy is associated with a mystical aura that could only exist in Tuscany that allows bohemian, free-spirited artists to thrive. It is the same feeling one finds in *Under the Tuscan Sun*: less free and with no nudity, the film still implies that passions can develop magically only in old villas where the air smells of flowers and dew. It helps that Bertolucci is Italian, but even he cannot refrain from falling into the trap that sees Italy as a catalyst for awakenings to a world of pure sensuality. Lucy’s journey takes her to the brother of the Italian boy she pursued: she is the director’s projection of desires as a seemingly brainless object of beauty who is attempting to discover who she is in an hormonal whirlwind. *Letters to Juliet* returns to the usual pattern of a young American woman travelling to Italy and finding love with a fellow American. The love story is complicated by the traditional romance novel initial hatred-turned-into-love formula and by the parallel search for the long-lost Italian love of the man’s grandmother. The twists and turns of the plot are reminiscent of *Rome Adventure* and Italy is a pretty backdrop alluding to Shakespeare’s fictional heroine.



Fig. 50  
*Stealing Beauty* (1996)

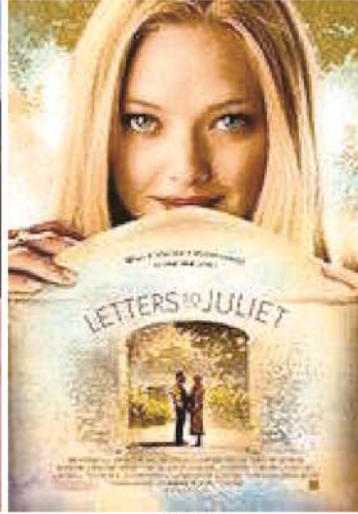


Fig. 51  
*Letters to Juliet* (2010)

Action films, thrillers, horror films set in Italy do follow the post-WWII idea that Italy is just a pretty set and interaction is either with buildings (that get blown up, shot at, or otherwise damaged) or with humans whose thoughts are irrelevant (since they may be shot, eaten, or shoved out of the way). But, at least, these settings are honest insofar as they depict people as they are, unless the purpose of the film is to create a cartoon, as is the case of Florian Henckel von Donnersmark's *The Tourist* (2010), where the police must look stupid. For example, a film like Anton Corbijn's *The American* (2010) could be set in any small town in the world where an American would stand out as "foreign" upon closer look. Rather than uninteresting and inaccurate cultural misconstructions, the film follows the genre's stereotypes: the lone hero not trusting anybody, the whore with a heart of gold who falls for him, the flawed but extremely wise new friendly acquaintance, the treacherous old opportunistic friend, and so forth. Castel del Monte, Castelvechio, and Sulmona are perfect locations, whose isolation atop hills in the *Apennines* enhances the protagonist's own isolation.

Three of the most recent 007 movies have a pit stop in Italy. Martin Campbell's *Casino Royale's* (2006) ending moves from the omnipresent Lake Como to the equally ubiquitous Venice where, however, the last scene is not a boat chase but a chase on foot through Venetian buildings ending up in one under repairs that crumbles to its death along with the female protagonist. Marc Forster's *Quantum of Solace* (2008) moves from a car chase around Lake Como – where *Carabinieri* do not look like idiots but just law enforcement agents with cars less powerful than an Aston Martin – to Siena, another crowd-pleasing location, where a rooftop chase provides some of the best 007 entertaining ever filmed. In a clever montage the *palio* functions as a brilliant counterpart of the chase through a maze







of a building and rooftops. Finally, Sam Mendes' *Spectre* (2015) features a spectacular six-minute nocturnal car chase, of course with Bond in a sleek Aston Martin, through the streets of Rome, as well as a scene at the Colosseum and at EUR. Narrow roads, cities on water, and iconic timeless monuments provide entertainment as well as a touch of class in the world of international espionage. Even Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* (2001) does a good job in depicting real people and locales in Florence, with the only possible stereotype of Italians as opera lovers who value Dante as their only true literary genius.

Action movies and psychological thrillers are not problematic: the Italy setting provides panache, but it could just as easily be France or any other place perceived as exotic, cultured, and visually appealing. What seems to be harder to achieve are good scripts for films that claim to go beyond a surface appreciation of the country: that is where stereotypes triumph. The recent *A Summer in Genoa* (Michael Winterbottom, 2008), while dealing with the very personal drama of a family trying to heal from the loss of the wife and mother of two girls, attempts at integrating the family's life with the life of the town. In the end, relationships with Italians are barely sketched out, but the purpose of the film is to show how seeing things from a different perspective can help the three main characters to find a new balance. The reason for going to Genoa is to take a summer school job and, eventually, perhaps move there permanently. The slow healing process brings the girls to refuse to go to an American school because the only way to understand life in Italy is to learn the language. Since one is a ten-year-old child and the other a sixteen-year-old girl, there is no question of finding one's self through romance. The older girl finds an Italian boyfriend as any adolescent would: not in order to find a great life-changing romance, but to experiment and have fun. He makes it easier for her to become part of a group of friends and feel "normal".

The father's loss is too recent for him to plunge into a new romance, no matter how interested one of his students is, so the film looks at the city as a stabilizing factor in their lives. Winterbottom's directorial choices include a series of aerial shots of the city, more prevalent in the first half hour of the film, when it is clear that the family is still trying to find its way through life. They are shown in rapid succession in jump cuts that get closer, but still cannot penetrate the city, until in the maze of the old city the girls, especially the little one, start to look up to find the sky in the narrow *carruggi* of the medieval town. Once Genoa is shown from within the healing process begins.



Fig. 52

*A Summer in Genoa* (2008)–Aerial Shot



Fig. 53

*A Summer in Genoa* (2008)–From Below

The city is omnipresent, albeit as a reflection, even in interior scenes (as shown in figure 54). It becomes a birth canal (see fig. 55), mother, cocoon, unknown, in parts impenetrable, somewhat dangerous, but ultimately protective.



Fig. 54

*A Summer in Genoa* (2008)–Reflection



Fig. 55

*A Summer in Genoa* (2008)–Carruggio

Even though an initial dialogue seems to take the direction of the tritest stereotypes (Father's friend: "You've never been to Italy before. Do you like pasta? Do you like ice cream? Then you'll be fine?"), the rest of the movie develops in quite a different direction and there seems to be a real effort at understanding the city's history at a deeper level. Even the food consumed is authentic (*trofie* with pesto) and prepared at home, served with wine even for the girls (a drop in the water, to toast without bringing bad luck on the family).



Fig. 56  
*A Summer in Genoa* (2008)—Making Pesto



Fig. 57  
*A Summer in Genoa* (2008)—Toast

Winterbottom's appreciation of Italy and its food is also documented in *A Trip to Italy* (2014) – a sequel of his own *The Trip* (2010) – where the two hosts embark upon a culinary journey from Liguria to Capri stopping in Tuscany, Rome and the Amalfi coast. Since they follow in the footsteps of Romantic poets almost two centuries later, the fact that the journey is not entirely stereotype free is part of the game.

In conclusion, even though, technically speaking, more contemporary films have abandoned the usage of the previously mentioned back-projection screen, they very often still continue to use the Italian landscape and monuments as a mere background, including the recent Woody Allen's 2012 *To Rome with Love* or Ella Lemhagen's 2015 film *All Roads Lead to Rome*, where thin plots based on a presumed magic of Rome and Italy do not move much beyond a superficial touristic appreciation of scenery and cappuccino.



## Afterword

Portia Prebys

(President – AACUPI)

Florence or Rome? That is, of course, the question at hand. Can you remember the very first time you saw the Colosseum? St. Peter's Basilica? Or, set eyes on the *David*? The Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore? Neither Time, nor Distance, can ever erase the memory of one's first visit to Rome, or to Florence.

The Grand Tour, no doubt, elicited strong emotions in the privileged young travellers, predominantly male, who embarked upon visiting most of the Europe that counted culturally on a grand scale, for substantial periods of time, from the mid 1600s until the late 1800s. These wayfarers of yesterday were well-prepared for their journey: intimately familiar with Greek and Latin, classical history and literature were part of their very being. Visiting the classical sites in Italy represented the culmination of a detailed, structured period of formation for life, a stage for rehearsing the glories of a gilded drama unfolding in time, before their very own eyes, hoarding stimulating multi-faceted memories, unforgettable stories to narrate, as well as objective and subjective judgments on sundry places and issues, both major and minor. The cultural advantages of the preparation for and the experience of the Grand Tour were unique and invaluable leaving the traveller further engaged in the universal moral debates on principles and personal aspirations for a lifetime well lived.

Just under a million international students choose annually to enroll at universities in the United States of America to acquire an excellent education based on the American model with a broad-based curriculum covering what are generally referred to as the "liberal arts." This trademark of American education formally reached Italian soil in 1931, in Florence, when Smith College established the first study abroad program for American students. Branch campuses of US-based colleges and universities have flourished in Italy since then, offering courses accredited through home institutions, to more than 30,000 students annually, thereby certifying the quality of instruction, applicable to a degree granted by the home academic entity. Of prime importance within these study abroad programs are intellectual vigor and the guarantee of upholding the administrative and curriculum-based quality assurance standards existing on home campuses.

Professionals in study abroad programs today in Italy lay down a red carpet for their exceptionally diverse and bright students to tread upon, providing an ideal study abroad experience on every level that, for the most part, unravels to fruition over a stay of between five to six months, on average. These fortunate

students engage academically and take seriously the advantages of the highly specialized coursework based on the best Italy offers in its glorious past and its sophisticated future. Frequenting public spaces, be they in Florence or in Rome, eventually offers and encourages a true exchange across cultural lines that is peculiar to the Italian peninsula. Inhabiting this particular milieu for even a short period of time results in both magic and reality, a romantic montage that sooner or later becomes a tangible platform for ideas, debate and future collaboration and application. As educators here, we commit to thrusting students' boundaries forward, challenging them to become makers and thinkers, today, with a future social purpose that was missing in the Grand Tour of previous eras. Oftentimes, true social engagement for them begins on Italian soil. We, too, are fortunate to be "educating in paradise."

Italy is a place to visit again and again and again. Here, there is no sense of urgency to living within the culture that surrounds literally everything, refinement that slowly permeates one's being. Our students gradually come to realize how, driven by their own cultural isolation, they vastly underestimate the power of geography and history as intrinsic to their education. Today's virtual images fade in comparison to the real sophistication and attraction of learning about Italian landmarks. No need for a "selfie": first-hand experience and dreams are more powerful and become challenging endeavors when one is forced to come to terms with the power of Geography and History, both of which tend to quickly begin to fill an enormous void. Distractions abound, of course, on the road to the acquisition of this kind of civilizing experience. However, intercultural communication on every level is the source of multi-cultural identity. Transformation can and does occur both in Florence and in Rome.

Sincere gratitude goes to our colleague, Fabrizio Ricciardelli, Director of the Kent State University, Florence Program, and his staff for identifying the topic of this volume and organizing the conference "A Tale of Two Cities: Florence and Rome from the Grand Tour to Study Abroad", held in Florence, at the Palazzo Vecchio, in the Salone dei Cinquecento, on March 9, 2016. Many thanks to Stefania Conturso and Thaddeus Jones for their assistance and to James Zarr without whom this publication would not have been possible.

Cav. Portia Prebys, President  
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Rome, July 15, 2017

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