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**An Italian Affair: the impact of Italy on the
woman traveller in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*
and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady***

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the impact of Italy on the woman traveller, primarily through an analysis of the ways they are presented in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. The dissertation will examine the travel writings, journals and letters of George Eliot and Henry James in order to gain an insight into their own perceptions of the country. The travel writings of Victorian women travellers will also be discussed. The investigation is split into three chapters. The first chapter analyses the time spent by George Eliot and Henry James in Italy and their thoughts and experiences of the country and how this impacted on their novels. It will be discussed whether the style of their writing in their journals, letters and essays is different to their novels. The second chapter focuses mainly on the two heroines of the novels, Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer, and examines the effect that Italy had on them. This chapter will also look briefly at other women characters in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and in other novels and novellas by Henry James, and how Italy affected their lives and situations. The third chapter studies the travel writings of Victorian women who visited Italy. This chapter also reflects on how tourism to Italy enabled Victorian women to re-imagine their own reality at home. The conclusion will briefly discuss two novels by E. M. Forster to analyse how the depiction of the woman traveller to Italy had changed by the early twentieth century.

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Introduction

Italy was a popular destination for women travellers in the nineteenth century so it was an appropriate country for Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer to travel to in the novels *Middlemarch* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. Both George Eliot and Henry James had spent time in Italy and they wrote about it in their travel journals, essays and letters. Their experiences of Italian culture, art and architecture inspired their writing and influenced their decision to include Italy in these novels. The wealth of classical civilisation from Italy meant that links could easily be made between the past and the present and inferences drawn from myths and legend. Both of these novels discussed common themes such as the old and the new, so it was a natural choice to place modern American or English women in the setting of the ancient Italian world, and the surrounding artwork enforced this analogy further. Italy was a more appropriate choice than Greece as these novels are mainly focussing on the heroines and their experiences in Italy, and Greece was seen, since the days of Plato, as a predominantly male environment. For example, E. M. Forster uses Greece as a setting in his novel, *Maurice* (written 1913-1914), and this deals with themes of male homosexuality.

By considering the travel writings, journals and letters of George Eliot and Henry James one can gain a better understanding of their novels and the author's reasons for choosing Italy as a destination for their heroines. These two authors have been chosen for discussion as they offer differing perspectives of Italy as both had different experiences of the country when they travelled there. Their varying emotions about Italy affect how they handle those parts of their novels that are set there. Henry James expresses his love for the country in his selection of travel essays, *Italian*

Hours:

The charm was, as always in Italy, in the tone and the air and the happy hazard of things, which made any positive pretension or claimed importance a

comparatively trifling question. We slid, in the steep little place, more or less down hill... We stayed no long time, and “went to see” nothing; yet we communicated to intensity, we lay at our ease in the bosom of the past, we practised intimacy, in short, an intimacy so much greater than the mere accidental and ostensible: the difficulty for the right and grateful expression of which makes the old, the familiar tax on the luxury of loving Italy.¹

He emphasises here the link that the traveller feels with the past and the ancient world whilst in Italy. This sense of the past is a theme of his novels too, and George Eliot also noted the aspect of the Ancient world when she travelled to Italy. In the Campo Vaccino in Rome she described carts and animals ‘mingling a simple form of actual life with those signs of the highly artificial life that had been crowded here in ages gone by.’² She uses these traces of Ancient Rome, in her novel *Middlemarch*, to make comments and reflections on her characters. Eliot utilises the mythical art and buildings of Rome to make classical references, thus linking the past world with the modern one. Margaret Harris argues that:

What George Eliot is pointing to in the works of art in the Vatican – the statue of Cleopatra, or Ariadne, for example – is not the fixed ‘meaning’ of a recoverable past, but the continual process of making new meanings.³

She is reading the past in relation to the present whilst in Italy and then putting this afterwards into the writing of her novel.

Italy is an ideal location for Dorothea Brooke’s honeymoon, in *Middlemarch*, as her naivety and youthfulness are emphasised even more in the setting of Ancient Rome. Similarly, for Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Italy provides the perfect backdrop for her marriage to Gilbert Osmond. Isabel realises her own position in the world when surrounded by so much history and culture, and James’s setting

¹ Henry James, *Italian Hours*, (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 320.

² George Eliot, quoted in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. John Rignall (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1997), p. 12.

³ Margaret Harris, ‘What Eliot Saw in Europe: The Evidence of her Journals’, in *George Eliot and Europe*, p. 13.

allows him to make comments about beauty, art and aesthetics that are all pivotal to the plot of his novel. The heroines of these novels are at important moments in their lives when they arrive in Italy and this country allows them the confidence to make decisions, or reflect on ones they have made, in a way they wouldn't have been able to do had they remained at home. Italy awakens their sense of their own importance and enables them to re-evaluate their place in the world and to ponder the larger issues in life whilst surrounded by so much history. Dorothea is disturbed by Rome when she encounters it:

after the brief narrow experience of her girlhood she was beholding Rome, the city of visible history, where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar.⁴

This is a very dark description of the Italian city and the words such as 'funeral' and 'strange' give a negative portrayal of Rome and express Dorothea's misery and state of mind. This can be compared to Isabel Archer's initial impressions of Italy, who comments that: 'Everything seems to me beautiful and precious.'⁵ Isabel is said to have 'performed all those acts of mental prostration in which, on a first visit to Italy, youth and enthusiasm so freely indulge' (p. 250). Her experience is different to Dorothea's and is more positive, but both women are stirred emotionally by Italy and its impact has an effect on the choices they make later on in the novels. Other women characters in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and in other novels and novellas by Henry James, are affected by Italy and will be looked at. However, the focus of this dissertation will mainly be on the heroines, Dorothea and Isabel, as they, like their two authors, provide a good contrast in their impressions and reflections on Italy.

⁴ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p. 180. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

⁵ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), p. 259. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

The impressions of the Victorian woman traveller will then briefly be compared and contrasted with those of Dorothea and Isabel and their authors. The benefit of looking at some travel writings, and also studying facts and figures about tourism to Italy in the nineteenth century, is to gain a better insight into the novels and reflections of the authors. The perspectives portrayed in the novels can then be looked at against actual experiences and the heroines' predicaments can be placed into the context of the growing tourism industry of Victorian times. It will be discussed how Italy, and travel, enabled the Victorian woman traveller to re-imagine her own reality after experiencing a different, and more relaxed, culture abroad.

Chapter 1 – George Eliot and Henry James in Italy

George Eliot and Henry James decided to feature Italy in their novels, *Middlemarch* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. Both authors had visited Italy before writing these texts and their experiences and responses to the country contributed to their choice of setting parts of their novels there. *Middlemarch* was published in 1870 and George Eliot had visited Italy on many occasions during the 1860s. Similarly, Henry James had travelled to Italy in 1869, as well as in the early 1870s, before *The Portrait of a Lady* was published in 1881. Each author experienced a different response to Italy whilst staying there and these differing emotions are reflected in their writing and in their representations of the country. Whilst it is simplistic to argue that authors only draw from their own experiences in their novels and that therefore they are not feats of their imagination, the travels they have made undoubtedly impact on their writing and there must be reasons for the authors' choice of location. We can therefore analyse why Italy, and certain cities and places in Italy, were chosen in these two novels.

In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea journeys to Rome on her honeymoon with Casaubon. The novel is set in the years 1829-32, and in this period the Grand Tour was at the height of its popularity so Italy was a natural destination for them. George Eliot drew on her own experiences of Italy when she was writing her novel and she included many of the observations she made whilst visiting there. Harris and Johnston point out in their Introduction to Eliot's essay, 'Recollections of Italy. 1860', how there are some direct transpositions from her travel essay into her novel:

Dorothea's disorientation. . . . the painter, Overbeck, whose maroon velvet cap and grey scarf are given to Naumann, GE and GHJ's [George Eliot and George Henry Lewes] disappointment in the frescoes of Cupid and Psyche in

the Farnesian palace, transmuted in Casaubon's obtuse scholarly comments in chapter 20; her pleasure in the Campagna.⁶

This all shows that Eliot's experiences in Italy had a direct impact on her novel. Eliot first visited Rome in 1860 and her initial impressions were unfavourable:

At last we came in sight of Rome, but there was nothing imposing to be seen. The chief object was what I afterwards knew to be one of the aqueducts, but which I then in the vagueness of my conceptions guessed to be the ruins of baths. The railway station where we alighted looked remote and countrified: only three omnibuses and one family carriage were waiting, so that we were obliged to take our chance in one of the omnibuses....as soon as that business was settled we walked out to look at Rome – not without a rather heavy load of disappointment on our minds from the vision we had of it from the omnibus windows. A weary length of dirty uninteresting streets had brought us within the dome of St. Peter's which was not impressive, seen in a peeping makeshift manner, just rising above the houses; and the Castle of St. Angelo seemed but a shabby likeness of the engravings. Not one iota had I seen that corresponded with my preconceptions.⁷

When George Eliot later travelled to Florence and Venice, she was more enthusiastic and complimentary about her time spent there and about the cities themselves. She stated, 'and then on to Florence, which, unlike Rome, looks inviting as one catches sight (from the railway) of its cupolas and towers and its embosoming hills – the greenest of hills, sprinkled everywhere with white villas.'⁸ In Venice she wrote:

Soon we were in a gondola on the Grand Canal, looking out at the moonlit buildings and water. What stillness! What beauty! Looking out from the high window of our hotel on the Grand Canal, I felt that it was a pity to go to bed: Venice was more beautiful than romances had feigned.⁹

⁶ Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (eds.), *The Journals of George Eliot*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 332.

⁷ George Eliot, 'Recollections of Italy, 1860' in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 341.

⁸ George Eliot, 'Recollections of Italy, 1860', p. 354.

⁹ George Eliot, 'Recollections of Italy, 1860', p. 362.

It is interesting that Eliot chooses to set Dorothea's honeymoon in Rome, the Italian city she was least impressed with. This suggests that Eliot is making the point that Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon is doomed from the start by placing them in the Rome that disappointed her so much rather than in the romantic Venice that she adored and chose as her own honeymoon destination after she had married John Walter Cross. Eliot may have felt that the scenes that 'resembled strongly that mixture of ruined grandeur with modern life which I had always had in my imagination at the mention of Rome' were more suitable for the setting of her novel as it provided her with the contradictory elements of place that she could contrast with her characters' predicaments.¹⁰

Henry James also featured Italy in his novel and had his heroine, Isabel Archer, travel to Florence and Rome in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Henry James clearly displayed in his letters and travel writings that he loved Italy and enjoyed staying there for long periods of time. When he first arrived in Rome in October 1869, he wrote a letter to his brother, William James, describing his emotions:

Here I am then in the Eternal City.... From midday to dusk I have been roaming the streets.... At last-for the first time - I live! It beats everything: it leaves the Rome of your fancy - your education - nowhere.... I went reeling and moaning thro' the streets, in a fever of enjoyment. In the course of four or five hours I traversed almost the whole of Rome and got a glimpse of everything - the Forum, the Coliseum (stupendissimo!), the Pantheon, the Capitol, St. Peter's, the Column of Trajan, the Castle of St. Angelo - all the Piazzas and ruins and monuments. The effect is something indescribable. For the first time I know what the picturesque is.¹¹

This initial impression didn't wear off and even in 1874 he wrote to his friend, Grace Norton that:

¹⁰ George Eliot quoted in Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 43.

¹¹ Henry James, Letter to William James dated October 30th 1869 in *Letters I. 1843-1875*, ed. Leon Edel, (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 159-160.

One's wanderings in Rome, during the mild sunny afternoons of midwinter are a most prodigious intellectual dissipation. The whole place keeps playing such everlasting tunes on one's imagination, that it seems, at first, when such music stops, that one's whole intellectual life has stopped.¹²

He was similarly impressed when he visited Florence and he wrote to his sister, Alice, in October 1869 that he had 'never seen a city which took my fancy so fully and speedily.'¹³ He also wrote about his feelings of this city in a letter to his father in January 1870:

no mere account of Florence – no catalogue of her treasures or colloquy of her charms – can bring you to a knowledge of her benignant influence. It isn't this that or the other thing; her pictures, her streets or her hills – it's the lovely genius of the place – its ineffable spirit – its incalculable felicity....Florence has an immortal soul.¹⁴

The fact that Henry James chose to position Isabel Archer in these two cities, and to make Italy her home, rather than America or England, enabled James to make comments about her character and her beauty. As Isabel was surrounded by the famous artwork and sculptures of Italy in the galleries and churches, comparisons are easily drawn between herself and them. Italy, with its classical and artistic heritage, is an ideal location for a novel about a 'portrait'. His novel is concerned with questions of beauty and Isabel meets and marries Gilbert Osmond in Italy and he is an art connoisseur who has amassed valuable private collections of 'choice objects' (p. 304). By placing Isabel amongst the beauty of Italy, and displaying her near the statue of Antinous and the Faun (see Appendix 1), which was described in the 1881 Murray handbook to Rome (which Isabel carried around with her) as 'the most beautiful' of

¹² Henry James, Letter to Grace Norton dated January 14th 1874 in *Letters I. 1843-1875*, ed. Leon Edel, p. 427.

¹³ Henry James, Letter to Alice James dated October 6th (?) 1869 in *Letters I. 1843-1875*, p. 149. (Henry James's question mark)

¹⁴ Henry James, Letter to Henry James Sr. dated January 4th 1870, in *Letters I, 1843-1875*, pp. 188-189.

all in Rome, James is suggesting that Isabel will become another artefact in Osmond's collection by marrying him.¹⁵ Angela Leighton notes how:

Italy...by the 1860s is already associated with an aestheticism that claims its own modernity from the contradictions of the past. The plethora of texts which invoke statues or paintings, buried, broken or come to life, is a sign of how much artwork signals both a peculiarly self aware commodification and a covert recovery of the material body.¹⁶

By invoking this image of the statue in the reader's mind, James is both sharing a classical knowledge with the reader and is making a statement about his character and her role in the novel.

Both Eliot and James use artwork and figures from classical mythology in their novels to make statements about their characters and their predicaments and this is why Italy is such an ideal location as one is surrounded by ancient sculptures and paintings there. As the characters visit the well-known churches and galleries of Rome, they are strategically positioned next to significant works of art. A nineteenth-century reader, who was well educated in the Classical World, would have recognised the inferences made by these choices. For example, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Lord Warburton 'stood before...the statue of the Dying Gladiator' when Isabel encounters him in the gallery of the Capitol (p. 302). The critic John Bell describes this statue in the Murray handbook: 'It is a most tragical and touching representation, and no one can meditate upon it without the most melancholy feelings.'¹⁷ This suggests to the reader that Lord Warburton is being likened to the Dying Gladiator as he has failed in his attempt to marry Isabel (see Appendix 2). In *Middlemarch*, Ladislaw is standing by 'the Belvedere Torso in the Vatican' when he sees Dorothea in Rome (p. 176).

¹⁵ Felicia Bonaparte, 'Explanatory Notes' in *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 593

¹⁶ Angela Leighton, 'Resurrections of the body: women writers and the idea of the Renaissance' in *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-century British women writers and artists in Italy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 222-238, p. 228.

¹⁷ Roger Luckhurst, 'Explanatory Notes' in *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 592.

This statue represents Apollo, who was the Greek God of Light, and it therefore associates Ladislaw with the sun and light in contrast to Casaubon's darkness (see Appendix 3). This is a common thread in the novel and Ladislaw is described as 'a bright creature, abundant in uncertain promises' (p. 443). Casaubon, in contrast, lives at 'Lowick', which could be read as 'low wick' and suggests a lack of light.¹⁸

George Eliot places her heroine, Dorothea Brooke, by 'the reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra' who 'lies in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and tenderness' (p. 177) (see Appendix 4). Dorothea herself is described as:

a breathing blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. (p. 177)

Dorothea sounds like a goddess herself here, and her name in fact means 'the gift of the gods', and this links her all the more with Ariadne. In Greek mythology, Ariadne, who was abandoned by Theseus, was also the person who held the clue that enabled him to escape from the labyrinth. This complexity of character is played out in Dorothea as she wishes to help Casaubon with his work but he refuses her assistance. Eliot is implying here that Dorothea could in fact hold the key that could help him in the pursuit of his studies and enable him to find his way out of the darkness.

Casaubon himself comments that Dorothea's 'society has happily prevented me from that too continuous prosecution of thought beyond the hours of study which has been the snare of my solitary life' but he fails to realise that she could help him further (p. 187). This description of Dorothea, by the statue, also raises the issue of religion.

Dorothea's 'Quakerish grey drapery' highlights the fact that she is a Protestant

¹⁸ Felicia Bonaparte, 'Introduction' in *Middlemarch*, p. xiv.

woman faced with the intensity and profusion of Catholic Italy. There is also the Pagan world of art that surrounds her and this appears to Dorothea to be decadent. All this adds to the fact that Italy is a problem, even a crisis for Dorothea. Eliot herself was uncomfortable with the Catholic religion of the country and her and Lewes both regretted that their 1860 visit to Rome coincided with Holy Week. Eliot found the ceremonies ‘a melancholy hollow business’ and Lewes was ‘wearied with the hollow sham of shams in the shape of Papal Ceremonies, washing the feet of the Apostles &c. Thoroughly disgusted with the whole business.’¹⁹ Eliot’s concern with religion is filtering into her novel here as Italy brings these issues to the fore.

George Eliot’s essay ‘Recollections of Italy: 1860’ was criticised by many for its lack of emotion and for not conveying how affected she had been by what she saw on her travels. Lord Acton stated:

The Italian journey reveals that weakness of the historic faculty which is a pervading element in her life. . . . Italy was little more to her than a vast museum, and Rome with all the monuments and institutions which link the old world with the new, interested her less than the galleries of Florence. She surveys the grand array of tombs in St Peter’s and remarks nothing but some peasants feeling the teeth of Canova’s lion.²⁰

This quote appears to be unfair to Eliot and Lord Acton’s derogatory and patronising tone suggests that he feels her gender was an issue to her appreciation. George Eliot, however, comments in her ‘Recollections’: ‘We have finished our journey to Italy- the journey I had looked forward to for years, rather with the hope of the new elements it would bring to my culture than with the hope of immediate pleasure.’²¹ She was therefore aware of a compelling need to add new experiences to her cultural life and to make good use of these in her novel writing and perhaps this was more

¹⁹ Eliot and Lewes, quoted in Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy*, p. 44.

²⁰ Lord Acton, *Nineteenth Century*, 17 March 1885, quoted in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Harris and Johnston p. 328.

²¹ Eliot, quoted in Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 41.

important to her than expressing her immediate pleasure in her journals and travel essays. Harris argues that George Eliot is not seduced by the travel-writing genre:

into representing a quest for buried truth or a purer state of being as the goal of her travels. There is a consciousness in the journal of history being constantly re-made in her fiction...there is an engagement with the layers of previous civilisations and with competing histories.²²

Her historic and artistic appreciation and knowledge is certainly utilised in *Middlemarch* as it is an experimental novel which tackles many important questions on science, life, history, art and many more.

Henry James was also critical of Eliot's 'various journals and notes of her visits to the Continent' as he said they were:

singularly vague in expression on the subject of the general and particular spectacle – the life and manners, the works of art. She enumerates diligently all the pictures and statues she sees, and the way she does so is proof of her active, earnest intellectual habits; but it is rarely apparent that they have...said much to her, or that what they have said is one of their deeper secrets.²³

It is possible that James thought Eliot should have had the same reactions as he himself did to the art in Italy. Perhaps Eliot was not as emotionally engaged with the Italian art as James and this is a reason for the 'vague' expressions. In Eliot's novels, *Adam Bede* (1859) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), she makes various references to the Dutch school of art that featured homely, domestic scenes and this may have been more to her liking. George Eliot was more interested in the art of Italy on her second visit there than on her first. George Henry Lewes remarks on this when he writes about when he and George Eliot returned to Italy in 1864 with the artist Frederic Burton: 'We are paying special attention to the works of the early Venetian painters

²² Margaret Harris, 'What Eliot Saw in Europe', in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. John Rignall, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 15.

²³ Henry James, review of Cross, quoted in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Harris and Johnston, p. 329.

which on our former visit we had scarcely time to notice.’²⁴ Even though he is talking about Venice here, it implies that on Eliot’s visit to Rome she didn’t fully appreciate its artistic splendour and that maybe Dorothea also would have been more enamoured by Rome on a second visit. Eliot is implying that Rome requires a degree of sophistication, knowledge and maturity that Dorothea lacks at this point in her life as she is ‘a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meagre Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the handscreen sort’ (p. 181).

The art of letter and journal writing requires a different style to that of a novel. George Eliot’s travel writings lack the more analytical and descriptive nature of her novels and she has been criticised for this. Henry James, in his review of John Walter Cross’s *George Eliot’s Life, as Related in Her Letters and Journals*, stated:

George Eliot’s letters and journals are only a partial expression of her spirit..... They do not explain her novels; they reflect in a singularly limited degree the process of growth of these great works; but it must be added that even a superficial acquaintance with the author was sufficient to assure one that her rich and complicated mind did not overflow in idle confidences.²⁵

He also said, in the same review, that her letters had: ‘A certain greyness of tone, something measured and subdued, as a person talking without ever raising her voice.’²⁶ His sister, Alice James, was also disappointed by *Eliot’s Letters and Journals* and after reading them she referred to Eliot’s ‘futile whining’ and the ‘ponderous dreariness’ of the book.²⁷ Alice wrote, in her diary, that:

Not one burst of joy, not one ray of humour, not one living breath in one of her letters and journals, the commonplace and platitude of these last, giving her impressions of the Continent, pictures and people, is simply incredible! Then to think of those books compact of wisdom, humour, and the richest

²⁴ George Henry Lewes in *The Letters of George Henry Lewes* quoted in *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Harris and Johnston, p. 369.

²⁵ Henry James quoted in Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 3.

²⁶ Henry James quoted in Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*, p. 1.

²⁷ Alice James quoted in Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her letters and Fiction*, p.1.

humanity, and of her as the creator of the immortal *Maggie*, in short, what a horrible disillusion!....What an abject coward she seems to have been about physical pain, as if it weren't degrading eno[ugh] to have head-aches, without jotting them down in a row.²⁸

This disappointment could, however, stem from the reader's expectations when reading the journals and letters. Alice is horrified at the difference between Eliot's novels and her personal writings, yet failed to appreciate that these were for a different audience and purpose. It should also be noted that Cross only selected the most highbrow of Eliot's letters to include in his anthology and he often failed to include some of her more amusing and entertaining ones. Rebecca Mead argues that:

Eliot's reputation was not helped by the publication of Cross's *Life* in 1886. In editing her letters and journals, Cross discarded the mundane or indiscreet and retained the oracular. This was an editorial choice that emphasised Eliot's own undeniable inclinations.....The priggish, judgemental adolescent was not entirely displaced by the broad-minded, empathetic intellectual.²⁹

Margaret Harris argues that the 'piecemeal publication' of Eliot's travel journals 'has distracted attention from the craft of their construction', and if 'read complete' they 'turn out to be texts as self-conscious as James's own.'³⁰ Perhaps, therefore, Eliot has been judged harshly because of this collection and a much wider view of her writings needs to be taken in order to understand and appreciate her humour and lifestyle.

These could all be reasons why Eliot's descriptions of Italy are not as enthusiastic or dramatic as those of Henry James. She wasn't writing to entertain and maybe she didn't feel that she was in a qualified position to comment on the beauty of the art and architecture of Rome. She had stated in a letter to her friend, Francois D'Albert Durade: "I do not write about Rome: you have read much better things on

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rebecca Mead, *The Road to Middlemarch: My Life with George Eliot*, (London: Granta Books, 2014), p. 217.

³⁰ Margaret Harris, 'What Eliot Saw in Europe: The Evidence of her Journals', in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. By John Rignall, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2000), p. 2.

that subject than I can tell you.³¹ She also wrote to Mrs Richard Congreave whilst in Rome that: ‘I shall tell you nothing of what we have seen. Have you not a husband who has seen it all, and can tell you much better?’³² However, in her essay on Italy she does show enthusiasm for the ‘wonderful spectacle of the illumination of St. Peter’s. That really is a thing so wondrous, so magically beautiful, that one can’t find in one’s heart to say, it is not worth doing.’³³ Dorothea also sees ‘the vastness of St Peter’s, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery’ (p. 182). However, to Dorothea the image is like a ‘disease of the retina’ as she continues to see it all her life (p. 182). This is a negative portrayal of the church but it also does express the spectacle and impact of the building that Eliot felt when she encountered it and the ‘hideous red drapery’ that Eliot noticed when she travelled there has made its way into Dorothea’s impression.³⁴ However, as the church is a Roman Catholic one, Eliot is suggesting here that Dorothea’s narrow, Protestant upbringing makes her fail to understand the Italian culture and religion.

Isabel Archer also expresses her amazement at the size and impact of St. Peter’s. When asked her opinion of it by Osmond, she states how, ‘It’s very large and very bright’ and calls it ‘the greatest of human temples’ (p. 297). Henry James, in a letter to his brother, wrote: ‘In St. Peter’s I stayed some time. It’s even beyond its reputation. It was filled with foreign ecclesiastics – great armies encamped in prayer on the marble plains of its pavement – an inexhaustible physiognomical study.’³⁵

³¹ George Eliot, Letter to Francois D’Albert Durade dated 17th April 1860, *Selections from George Eliot’s Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, (London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 246.

³² George Eliot, Letter to Mrs. Richard Congreave dated 4-6 April 1860, *Selections from George Eliot’s Letters*, (London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 244.

³³ George Eliot, ‘Recollections of Italy, 1860’, p. 345.

³⁴ George Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Harris and Johnston, p. 344.

³⁵ Henry James, Letter to William James dated October 30th 1869, *Letters I. 1843-1875*, p. 160.

Isabel also visits the Coliseum and she sits ‘in the despoiled arena (p. 519). Henry James, in his travel essay ‘A Roman Holiday’ wrote:

One of course never passes the Colosseum without paying it one’s respects – without going in under one of the hundred portals and crossing the long oval and sitting down a while, generally at the foot of the cross in the centre.³⁶

By placing Isabel in ‘[t]he great enclosure’, however, James is suggesting that the reader should compare her to the Christian sacrificial victims and to the gladiators who have stood there in the past about to face their death (p. 520). At this point in the novel, Isabel has realised that she has been the victim of the corruption and trickery of Madame Merle and Osmond and this is emphasised by the fact that the stadium is ‘half in shadow’ and the ominous ‘multitude of swallows kept circling and plunging’ (p. 520). She encounters Edward Rosier ‘planted in the middle of the arena’ and he is another victim of the machinations of Merle and Osmond (p.520). When the relationship between Merle and Osmond is made clear to Isabel, and it is apparent that she has been tricked and deceived by them, she seeks refuge and escape from the ruins of Rome by visiting the countryside:

On such occasions she had several resorts; the most accessible of which perhaps was a seat on the low parapet which edges the wide grassy space before the high, cold front of Saint John Lateran, when you look across the Campagna (p. 511).

Isabel’s reflections on the Campagna area echo those of the art critic John Ruskin, who stated in *Modern Painters* in 1844: ‘Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on earth than the solitary extent of the Campagna of Rome under the evening light.’³⁷

Both Eliot and James enjoyed visiting the countryside, or ‘Campagna’, in Italy and this is shown in their travel writings and in their novels. George Eliot wrote:

The sight of the Campagna on one side...was worth the trouble...we..enjoyed a brighter view of the Campagna in the afternoon sunlight. Then we lingered

³⁶ Henry James, *Italian Hours*, (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 129-130.

³⁷ John Ruskin, quoted in ‘Explanatory Notes’, Roger Luckhurst, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 599.

in a little croft enclosed by plantations and enjoyed this familiar-looking bit of grass with wild flowers perhaps more even than the greatest novelties.³⁸

In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea is shown to prefer the countryside to the city of Rome:

She had been led through the best galleries, had been taken to the chief points of view, had been shown the grandest ruins and the most glorious churches, and she had ended by oftenest choosing to drive out to the Campagna where she could feel alone with the earth and sky, away from the oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes. (p. 181)

Dorothea's desire to escape the city and go out to the countryside is also an indication of her wanting to escape the marriage she had entered and the 'dream-like strangeness of her bridal life' (p. 180). James also wrote of his love of the Campagna in his essay,

Roman Rides:

It was mild midwinter, the season peculiarly of colour on the Roman Campagna; and the light was full of that mellow purple glow, that tempered intensity, which haunts the after-visions of those who have known Rome like the memory of some supremely irresponsible pleasure...I measured the deep delight of knowing the Campagna...To ride once, in these conditions, is of course to ride again and to allot to the Campagna a generous share of the time one spends in Rome. It is a pleasure that doubles one's horizon.³⁹

James draws on his love of the 'Campagna' in his novel as, like Dorothea, Isabel also takes refuge in the countryside around Rome and James shows how it can be a place she can escape to: 'Isabel took a drive alone that afternoon; she wished to be far away, under the sky, where she could descend from her carriage and tread upon the daisies' (p. 511). This idyll of the countryside is replicated in both texts as the two writers clearly felt it to be a place that could provide comfort and peace for themselves and for their heroines.

³⁸ George Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Harris and Johnston, p. 347.

³⁹ Henry James, *Italian Hours*, pp.139-140.

In his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, James tells of how he wrote some of his novel whilst staying in Venice:

I had rooms on Riva Schiavoni, at the top of a house near the passage leading off to San Zaccaria; the waterside life, the wondrous lagoon spread before me, and the ceaseless human chatter of Venice came in at my windows, to which I seem to myself to have been constantly driven... as if to see whether, out in the blue channel, the ship of some right suggestion, of some better phrase, of the next happy twist of my subject, the next true touch for my canvas, mightn't come into sight.⁴⁰

No part of *The Portrait of a Lady* is set in Venice, and yet something of the city's colour and space must have entered the novel as he worked there. As Isabel's life descends into turmoil, maybe the city's reputation for treachery seeped into the novel. He was certainly inspired by the Italy he had seen on his travels. He even asked himself: 'How can places that speak *in general* so to the imagination not give it, at the moment, the particular thing it wants?'⁴¹

The novels he had read had also inspired him in his writing and *Middlemarch* was certainly a factor in him wanting to organise 'an ado about Isabel Archer.'⁴² James had critiqued *Middlemarch* in the magazine, *Galaxy*, in March 1873 and he called it 'one of the strongest and one of the weakest of English novels.'⁴³ James felt that not enough was written about the heroine of the novel and he wanted to create a text that was written and constructed around his 'Lady'. He argued that Eliot's concession to the importance of Dorothea or Rosamond 'suffers the abatement that these slimnesses are, when figuring as the main props of the theme, never suffered to be sole ministers of its appeal, but have their inadequacy eked out with comic relief

⁴⁰ Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 4.

⁴² Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 9.

⁴³ Henry James, *Henry James: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 958.

and underplots.⁴⁴ He, therefore, in his novel, decided to: ‘place the centre of the subject in the young woman’s own consciousness.’⁴⁵ What James fails to mention here is that Eliot’s aim behind writing her novel was a different one and she did not want to write a book just about a heroine but wished instead to write ‘A Study of Provincial Life’ and thus, needed to encompass lots of other Middlemarchers’ stories into her text. Leslie Stephen wrote, in Eliot’s obituary, in December 1880 that:

The poor woman was not content to simply write amusing stories.....she ventured to speculate upon human life and its meaning, and...she endeavoured to embody her convictions in imaginative shapes, and probably wished to infect her readers with them.⁴⁶

It was important to James that Isabel travels to Europe and he declared: ‘the first thing she’ll do will be to come to Europe.....Coming to Europe is....in this wonderful age, a mild adventure.’⁴⁷ This sense of adventure is displayed in Isabel’s first impressions of Italy when she is in San Remo:

The charm of the Mediterranean coast only deepened for our heroine on acquaintance, for it was the threshold of Italy, the gate of admirations. Italy, as yet imperfectly seen and felt, stretched before her as a land of promise, a land in which a love of the beautiful might be comforted by endless knowledge. (p. 228)

James also comments that ‘the ‘international’ light lay....thick and rich upon the scene. It was the light in which so much of the picture hung.’⁴⁸ The placing of an American woman in Italy is crucial to the whole basis of the novel and it highlights one of James’s key themes of the Old World meeting the New. The uneasy relationship of the past, represented by Italy, and the new, represented by America, Osmond and his art, crops up repeatedly in the novel and the juxtaposition of the two worlds emphasises the difficult choices that Isabel has to make. This theme of the past

⁴⁴ Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Leslie Stephen quoted in ‘Introduction’ to *Middlemarch*, Felicia Bonaparte, p. x.

⁴⁷ Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 17.

and the present also features in *Middlemarch* and Eliot highlights this when invoking classical mythology. It has been argued that what Eliot is showing here ‘is not the fixed ‘meaning’ of a recoverable past, but the continued process of making new meanings.’⁴⁹ In this novel, Dorothea moves on from the old world of Casaubon and Italy for her new world of Ladislaw and London. Age is highlighted as one of the main themes of this text as ‘Book Two’ is entitled ‘Old and Young’. Eliot was also engaging with scientific issues in her novel and she was most interested in Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* that had been published in 1859. Darwin’s theory of evolution emphasised ‘the genesis of the present in the past’ and ‘rendered the past a part of the present and of all future time to come.’⁵⁰ Ladislaw advocates Darwinism, in the novel, by seeing all ‘miscellaneousness of Rome’ as providing a way to save the traveller from ‘seeing the world’s ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital connexion’ (p. 198). Ladislaw sees old and young as all mixed together: ‘Rome had given him quite a new sense of history as a whole’ (p. 199).

In both texts, the heroines are at pivotal moments in their lives whilst in Italy and have to make important decisions. They are at the precarious stage of their lives where they are entering their adulthood, and their older husbands and the weight of history that exists in the classical cities of Rome and Florence highlights their youthfulness. These common contrasting themes of young/old, past/present and classical mythology/modern art are going to be explored in more detail in the next chapter through a close analysis of the two heroines of the novels, Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer, and their experience of Italy.

⁴⁹ Harris and Johnston (eds.), *The Journals of George Eliot*, p. 333.

⁵⁰ Felicia Bonaparte, ‘Introduction’ in *Middlemarch*, p. xxviii.

Chapter 2 – Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer in Italy

When Dorothea first arrives in Rome, she beholds ‘the city of visible history, where the past of a whole hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral images and trophies gathered from afar’ (p. 180). This dark death-like image conveys Dorothea’s misery as she spends her honeymoon in Italy. The reader is told by Eliot’s narrator to contrast the opinions of ‘those who have looked at Rome with the quickening power of a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes’ with Dorothea’s predicament:

The gigantic broken revelations of the Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meagre Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the handscreen sort. (p. 181)

Dorothea cannot appreciate Rome because of her lack of a classical education. Italy has opened up lots of questions for her about life that she has not contemplated before. The impact of Rome on an inexperienced young woman is clearly expressed here in Eliot’s imagery of male power, ‘Imperial and Papal’, set against the feminine idea of a schoolgirl ‘fed on meagre Protestant histories’ and art reduced to ‘handscreens’. Rome was ‘unintelligible’ to Dorothea and the ‘[r]uins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence’ (p. 181). Instead of seeing the beauty of the city she saw ‘a vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation’ (p. 181). This violent imagery conveys vividly the impact of Italy on an inexperienced young woman traveller. The description of the place as ‘sensuous and spiritual’ implies that Pagan Rome appears to Dorothea to be

decadent, coming as she does from the provincial town of Middlemarch. Nora Tomlinson describes Rome as ‘a kind of ultimate metropolis, lying at the centre both of a vast and ancient empire and of the Roman Catholic world.’⁵¹ Dorothea’s education and provincial upbringing have not prepared her for this Rome and it jars her ‘as with an electric shock’ (p. 181).

Isabel Archer’s first impressions of Rome can be contrasted sharply with those of Dorothea as the narrator of *The Portrait of a Lady* explains:

I may not attempt to report in its fullness our young woman’s response to the deep appeal of Rome, to analyse her feelings as she trod the pavement of the Forum or to number her pulsations as she crossed the threshold of Saint Peter’s. It is enough to say that her impression was such as might have been expected of a person of her freshness and eagerness. She had always been fond of history, and here was history in the stones of the street and the atoms of the sunshine. She had an imagination that kindled at the mention of great deeds, and wherever she turned some great deed had been acted. These things strongly moved her, but moved her all inwardly. (p. 289)

For Isabel, her age was not a barrier to her appreciation of Rome, as it was for Dorothea, but rather she brought a new excitement to the city. This can be compared to the fever of delight that Henry James wrote of to his brother when he first visited Rome (his joy was expressed more outwardly than Isabel’s however) when he described himself ‘reeling and moaning thro’ the streets.’⁵² He also expressed his amazement at the city in a letter to his sister Alice, on 11th July 1869:

In spite of an immense deal of dove-tailing and intermingling, Pagan & Christian Rome keeps tolerably distinct & the ancient city is a fact that you can appreciate more or less in its purity. Appreciate, but not express! No words can reproduce the eloquence of a Roman block of blunted marble or a mass of eternal brickwork.⁵³

⁵¹ Nora Tomlinson, ‘Middlemarch: The Social and Historical Context’, in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Realisms*, ed. Delia Da Sousa Correa, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 236.

⁵² Henry James, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, ed. By Fred Kaplan, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), p.111.

⁵³ Henry James, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, ed. By Fred Kaplan, p. 112.

Similarly, Dorothea's lack of enthusiasm for Rome can be compared with George Eliot's when she first arrived there and experienced that 'there was nothing imposing to be seen.'⁵⁴ It is too simplistic to argue that the writer places all of their own experiences of a city onto their heroine, however some of James' enthusiasm for Rome, and Eliot's lack of it, appears to have been carried over into their novels. It might be more prudent to argue that the authors chose to place their heroines at these stages of their life in this city for certain purposes. Isabel needed a place to awaken her senses in such a way that she would fall in love with Osmond and marry him, and Dorothea's predicament required a setting to expose how unhappy she was in her relationship.

Dorothea's view of her marriage changed whilst she was in Italy: 'since they had been in Rome...she had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger and repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness' (p. 184). The age difference between Dorothea and her husband is emphasised all the more in this ancient city and '[w]hat was fresh to her mind was worn out to his' (p. 184). His lack of interest in visiting the:

celebrated frescoes designed or painted by Raphael which most persons think it worth while to visit...did not help to justify the glories of the Eternal City, or to give her the hope that if she knew more about them the world would be joyously illuminated for her. (pp. 184-5)

Casaubon makes sightseeing seem 'dreary' to Dorothea (p. 184). This view is reminiscent of Eliot's description of the 'dirty, uninteresting streets' and the 'not impressive' dome of St. Peter's that she referred to in her travel writing.⁵⁵ If we can contrast this to how Eliot felt about Florence and Venice – 'I think the view from Fiesole the most beautiful of all' and 'What beauty!...Venice was more beautiful than

⁵⁴ George Eliot, *George Eliot's Life*, Vol. II of 3 as related in her letters and journals, ed. By J.W. Cross (London: Amazon, 2013), Kindle edition, pt. 1794-1800.

⁵⁵ George Eliot, 'Recollections of Italy. 1860', p. 341.

romances had feigned' - we can see that the choice of setting her novel in Rome was a deliberate one as it reflected Dorothea's state of mind and the position of her marriage more accurately than these other two Italian cities would have done.⁵⁶ Andrew Thompson argues that Rome is also 'a correlative of Casaubon's own endeavours to reconstruct a past world and of his failure to do so.'⁵⁷ The ancient art and architecture of this capital city reinforces both his age and his insignificance.

Isabel Archer is just as impressed with Florence, as she was with Rome, when she visits there. Her emotions are 'excited...by the beautiful city of Florence, which pleased her not less than Madame Merle had promised' (p. 249). Her youthfulness is again shown to benefit her enjoyment as:

She performed all those acts of mental prostration in which, on a first visit to Italy, youth and enthusiasm so freely indulge; she felt her heart beat in the presence of immortal genius and knew the sweetness of rising tears in eyes to which faded fresco and darkened marble grew dim. (p. 250)

The lure of the past and the link that Italy shares with the ancient world are an attraction for a young American woman like Isabel who thinks that '[t]o live in such a place was...to hold to her ear all day a shell of the sea of the past. This vague eternal rumour kept her imagination awake' (p. 250). James uses this imagery to emphasise the awareness that the woman traveller to Italy has of the ancient world that surrounds them. Italy is an important place culturally for women and it is a place that guides Isabel and Dorothea from innocence to knowledge. The word 'eternal' is an echo of *Middlemarch* and the search for the eternal truth in the 'Eternal City' (p.185, *Middlemarch*). Felicia Bonaparte says of Eliot that:

⁵⁶ George Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. By Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston, pp. 354 and 362.

⁵⁷ Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy: Literary, Cultural and Political Influences from Dante to the Risorgimento*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 125.

She was one of the first to recognise that the crisis of faith had turned all the creeds into mythologies and that in those collected myths might be gathered the universal and eternal truths of religion free of their theological forms.⁵⁸

So, maybe, James was hinting at the religious side of the city here or it could be that he was adding a gothic element to his story as the historic buildings in the ‘narrow and sombre Florentine streets.....recalled the strife of medieval factions’ (p. 250).

Whereas Isabel’s imagination is awakened in Italy, Dorothea struggles to see its purpose and remarks how, ‘in Rome it seems as if there were so many things, which are more wanted in the world than pictures’ (p. 194). She shows her frustration with her life here as, when all the famous works of art surround her, she only sees the insignificance of it all. In the Vatican, instead of seeing the statues:

she was inwardly seeing the light of years to come in her own home and over the English fields and elms and hedge-bordered highroads; and feeling that the way in which they might be filled with joyful devotedness was not so clear to her as it had been. (p. 190)

Dorothea’s response to Rome is presented not only as provincial but also as limited.

Although, Nora Tomlinson argues that ‘Rome itself is not shown to be the embodiment of values that are somehow able to lift Dorothea out of her provincial ignorance.’⁵⁹ Eliot’s choice of language here suggests that Dorothea is sensing a clash of nature and culture, with England representing the natural world to Dorothea and Italy, the cultural one. However, her home of Lowick is not shown to be a refuge for her either. If Dorothea is to attain fulfilment, then this will have less to do with her place in a provincial world than with her own personal striving. It takes the trip to Rome for her to discover her greatest gift – a sympathetic awareness of the needs of others. Tomlinson argues that the novel is suggesting that ‘Dorothea’s moral

⁵⁸ Felicia Bonaparte, ‘Introduction’ in *Middlemarch*, p. xxxvii.

⁵⁹ Nora Tomlinson, ‘*Middlemarch*: The Social and Historical Context’ in *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Realisms*, ed. Delia Da Sousa Correa, p. 237.

imprisonment is an aspect of the provincial life she leads with Mr Casaubon.⁶⁰ The ‘new motive’ that is born to her during her time in Italy is that her husband ‘had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference’ (pp. 197-198). He has his own needs in the marriage, just as much as she does. Eliot needed her heroine to be in Italy to realise this, as the country’s historical and cultural atmosphere enabled her to ponder questions about life and its importance.

When Isabel first arrives in Rome, ‘she was very happy; she would even have been willing to take those hours for the happiest she was ever to know’ (p. 289). So, rather than being frightened by the confused mixture of the past and present worlds, like Dorothea, Isabel was enthralled and excited by it. However, she does also feel that the ‘sense of the terrible human past was heavy to her’, as it was to Dorothea (p. 289). Isabel’s imagination is set alive in Italy as:

Her consciousness was so mixed that she scarcely knew where the different parts of it would lead her, and she went about in a repressed ecstasy of contemplation, seeing often in the things she looked at a great deal more than was there, and yet not seeing many of the items enumerated in her Murray. (p. 289)

The setting has had such an effect on her: ‘Rome, as Ralph said, confessed to the psychological moment’ (p. 289). The past and the future are also highlighted when Isabel sits on a column near the foundations of the Capitol and encounters Lord Warburton:

Keen as was her interest in the rugged relics of the Roman past that lay scattered about her ...her thoughts...had wandered...From the Roman past to Isabel Archer’s future was a long stride, but her imagination had taken it in a single flight and now hovered in slow circles over the nearer and richer field. (p. 290)

⁶⁰ Tomlinson, ‘*Middlemarch: The Social and Historical Context*’, p. 237.

The very fact that such ancient relics surround her only emphasises all the more her place in the world and what she is going to choose to do with her life. This is similar to Dorothea's experience, when she sees Middlemarch in her thoughts whilst in Rome, but she only felt confusion. James's use of the word 'imagination' to describe Isabel's thoughts sheds a more positive light on her visions and gives a sense of the exciting possibilities that have been opened up to her through her travel to Italy.

As Dorothea's optimism in her marriage grows, during her time in Italy, so does her faith in Rome. Whilst at Naumann's studio, Dorothea feels:

happier than she had done for a long while before. Every one about her seemed good, and she said to herself that Rome, if she had only been less ignorant, would have been full of beauty: its sadness would have been winged with hope. (p. 201)

She also tries to explain her anxiety about art to Ladislav by stating:

I should like to make life beautiful – I mean everybody's life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it. (p. 205)

Dorothea, here, is anticipating William Morris who wanted art to make life beautiful rather than having art for art's sake. Art in the modern world was essential to all things as opposed to the art of the Old World. Dorothea goes on to say:

I should be quite willing to enjoy the art here, but there is so much that I don't know the reason of – so much that seems to me a consecration of ugliness rather than beauty. The painting and sculpture may be wonderful, but the feeling is often low and brutal, and sometimes even ridiculous. Here and there I see what takes me at once as noble – something that I might compare with the Alban Mountains or the sunset from the Pincian Hill; but that makes it the greater pity that there is so little of the best kind among all that mass of things over which men have toiled so. (p. 206)

Eliot herself believed that the artist had a responsibility and these words of Dorothea's are reminiscent of Eliot's when she talks of the beauty of the Italian countryside in contrast to her views on the art she sees in Rome. For example, when writing about

the frescoes by Raphael representing the story of Cupid and Psyche she merely says 'we did not linger long to look at them, as they disappointed us.'⁶¹

The art in Rome has an altogether different effect on Isabel Archer. In the gallery of the Capitol she is described as being in a state of bliss amongst the sculptures:

She sat down in the centre of the circle of these presences, regarding them vaguely, resting her eyes on their beautiful blank faces; listening, as it were, to their eternal silence. It is impossible in Rome, at least, to look long at the great company of Greek sculptures without feeling the effect of their noble quietude...I say in Rome especially, because the Roman air is an exquisite medium for such impressions. The golden sunshine mingles with them, the deep stillness of the past, so vivid yet, though it is nothing but a void full of names, seems to throw a solemn spell upon them. (p. 303)

The sense of the past embedded in the statues only adds to her enjoyment. However, after her marriage to Osmond, Isabel's fondness for the past changes as her happiness in her relationship begins to fade. Whereas in *Middlemarch* the 'modern' was represented in Ladislaw and was viewed in a positive light, in this novel when Osmond announces that, 'My wife and I like everything that's really new – not the mere pretence of it' and he calls Caspar Goodwood 'so modern', there is the sense that the new world is at odds with the old and that to be 'modern' one must reject all that Rome has to offer (pp.498-9). Osmond's statement to Goodwood is interesting: 'The modern world's after all very fine. Now you're thoroughly modern and yet are not at all common' (p. 498). This implies that there is a clash of the two cultures and, by setting America against Italy, James suggests that Isabel has got to choose either one or the other.

The themes of national identity and the difference between Europe and America, or the Old World versus the New, are ones that appear in many of James's novels and novellas, and as he himself chose to repatriate himself as British it is

⁶¹ George Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Harris and Johnston, p. 346.

obviously an area that greatly interested him. However, it is not a straightforward choice for Isabel as she comments herself that ‘the whole past is between them’ when she refers to the relationship between her husband and Madame Merle (p. 537). This is a past that she cannot be a part of as she has newly arrived from the New World, unlike Merle and Osmond who have resided in Europe for a long time. Goodwood, Isabel, Merle and Osmond are all Americans, yet perhaps James is suggesting here that Europe changes the person the longer time one spends there. The old and the new worlds overlap in this novel as characters change their allegiances between them. At the end of the novel, Madame Merle states that she shall ‘go to America’ (p. 551). She is giving up on the past and is embracing the new. This can be contrasted with the fact that, arguably the most modern female character of the book, Henrietta Stackpole, chooses to give up America and settles in England to marry Mr Bantling. Isabel expresses disappointment in Henrietta (who describes herself as ‘a woman of my modern type’): ‘she didn’t see how Henrietta could give up her country. She herself had relaxed her hold of it, but it had never been her country as it had been Henrietta’s’ (p.558-9). Henrietta’s change of opinion is shocking to Isabel and she is disappointed that her sense of judgment on this issue has been challenged.

When Isabel discovers the web of deceit she has been tangled up in by the plotting of Madame Merle and her husband, she seeks refuge in the Roman countryside. The city of Rome still provides comfort for her but it is because ‘in a world of ruins the ruin of her happiness seemed a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet still were upright’ (p. 511). Her perception of Rome had changed, as her life had:

She had become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion. But she had grown to think of it chiefly as the place where people had suffered. (p. 511)

She is described as dropping 'her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself and grew objective' (p. 511) It is telling that she seeks out a small 'mouldy' church to sit in 'to which no one came' compared to the 'very large and very bright' St. Peter's in which she had talked to Osmond in at the happy outset of their relationship (p. 511 and p. 297).

The contrasting aspects of the past and the present and the effects of the classical world on the modern are recurring themes in both novels. Another theme that appears in both books is the differences between the young and the old and this is highlighted by the age difference between Dorothea and Isabel and their husbands. This factor in their relationships is emphasised even more against the background of ancient Italy and the problems that this age difference might present are made more apparent when contrasted with the younger male characters such as Ladislav, Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood. Isabel's youthfulness is stressed from the start to Osmond when Madame Merle first suggests that he take an interest in her. Osmond is concerned that youth suggests ignorance but, after meeting Isabel, he perceives 'a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects' (p. 304). He sees that Isabel can become another artefact in his collection and the fact that she has turned down a marriage proposal from the younger and titled Lord Warburton suggests that she is worthy of his attention.

In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea and Ladislav's youth is emphasised by referring to him as the 'young man' and her as the 'young Madonna' in stark contrast to Casaubon who 'looks more like an uncle' (p. 176 and p.178). Ladislav tells Dorothea she is 'too young' and then invokes classical references to display this:

You talk as if you had never known any youth. It is monstrous – as if you had had a vision of Hades in your childhood, like the boy in the legend. You have

been brought up in some horrible notions that choose the sweetest women to devour – like Minotaurs. And now you will go and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried alive. (p. 206)

The contrast of the classical world emphasises all the more how young she is in the context of the ancient world of myth and legend that surrounds her. Dorothea states: ‘I have often felt since I have been in Rome that most of our lives would look much uglier and more bungling than the pictures, if they could be put on the wall’ (p.206). Italy has presented concepts about life and existence that she had not contemplated before. This ancient world, however, may open up questions for Dorothea but it does not provide the answers. Ladislav is keen to point out the threat of the modern world when he says, ‘The subject Mr Casaubon has chosen is as changing as chemistry: new discoveries are constantly making new points of view’ (p. 207). This clash of the ancient and new worlds, and the old and the young, is personified in the characters of Casaubon and Ladislav with Dorothea being perched between the two. Casaubon’s pursuit of the Key to all Mythologies is shown to be fruitless as he is stuck in the dark, ‘rayless’, compared to Ladislav whose ‘hair seemed to shake out light’ (p. 196). The contrast is made apparent to Dorothea as Will’s ‘sunny brightness’ is hard to ignore (p. 196). In *Middlemarch*, change to the new and modern is progress and should be embraced.

The heroines of these novels are both affected and changed by Italy in their own ways, and their age, marriage, social position and friendships are all important factors in this. The classical world of Italy acts as an awakening for both Dorothea and Isabel. Even though Isabel travels to England, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, France and Switzerland, it is in Italy where James chooses to set his love story and where his heroine decides to settle down. This is because of the artistic, historical and cultural possibilities that Italy provided for the Victorian woman traveller. Italy was a place

that could guide women from innocence to cultural knowledge. Travel is shown to have changed Isabel:

She had ranged, she would have said, through space and surveyed much of mankind, and was therefore now, in her own eyes, a very different person from the frivolous young woman from Albany who had begun to take the measure of Europe on the lawn at Gardencourt a couple of years before. She flattered herself she had harvested wisdom and learned a great deal more of life. (p. 318)

But, although travel had changed her, after marriage it was decided 'that they should live for the present in Italy. It was in Italy that they had met, Italy had been a party to their first impressions of each other, and Italy should be a party to their happiness' (p. 351). James too decided to settle down outside of America as he chose to live in England. The Continent is indeed a choice and, as Americans, Isabel and James can move freely; this is a liberty on which they depend and live by. Michael Gorra argues that James, by 'settling in the Old World he had, paradoxically, left his past behind, and for Isabel Archer, as indeed for James himself, the consummation of her utterly American desire to choose will be to elect a European home.'⁶² The Italian home Isabel and Osmond settle in is:

a kind of domestic fortress, a pile which bore a stern old Roman name, which smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence, which was mentioned in 'Murray' and visited by tourists who looked, on a vague survey, disappointed and depressed (p.363).

It is interesting that Isabel now lives in a tourist attraction when she herself was once the tourist; she is now being looked at rather than doing the sightseeing. Isabel tells Mr Rosier that she and Osmond had chosen to live in the Palazzo Roccanera 'for the love of local colour' (p. 363). This statement implies a love of Italy but also a feeling of otherness where she sees herself still as separate to the Italians. Travel changes

⁶² Michael Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*, (New York and London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2012), p.54.

Dorothea too as her father comments on her return that, ‘Rome has agreed with you, I see – happiness, frescoes, the antique – that sort of thing’ (p. 259). However, Eliot comments that, ‘No one would ever know what she thought of a wedding journey to Rome’, hinting perhaps that a honeymoon in that ancient city has awakened other feelings and emotions in her that have therefore affected her thoughts toward her husband. Rome may appear to have ‘agreed’ with Dorothea but not with the state of her marriage.

Italy has had an impact on the heroines of these novels but there are other female characters in them, and in other works of Eliot and James, who are also affected and changed by their travels and experiences of Italy. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the characters of Madame Merle and Pansy both provide stark contrasts to Isabel. As James states in his Preface, this novel is about ‘organising an ado about Isabel Archer’, so the other female characters operate around her and serve as points of comparison and contrast (p. 9). Madame Merle is a portrayal of a worldlier, older woman who is most at home in Italy as she is cosmopolitan and sophisticated. When Isabel first meets her she finds her to be ‘a very attractive person....with a sort of world-wide smile, a thing that over-reached frontiers’ (pp. 181-2). Madame Merle is described as having ‘thick, fair hair, arranged somehow “classically” as if she were a Bust, Isabel judged – a Juno or a Niobe’ (p. 183). These classical Greek references link Madame Merle with the Old World from the start and are telling about the significance she will have later in the book. Juno was the goddess of women and childbirth and the jealous wife of Jupiter, and Niobe was the mother of seven sons and seven daughters killed by Apollo and Artemis, who wept for them until transformed into stone. This all hints at the fact that Madame Merle is later discovered to be Pansy’s mother and Osmond’s mistress. Gorra argues that Madame Merle ‘speaks for

Europe' in contrast to Isabel who is 'the voice of American exceptionalism, a woman who sings of herself, and only herself; who believes her possessions are arbitrary.'⁶³

This is certainly true of the Isabel who rejected Lord Warburton and all that he had to offer, but it is arguable whether this is true of the Isabel who decides to marry Osmond and thus becomes another of his 'possessions'. Madame Merle, however, is certainly at home in Italy and Ralph tells Isabel that she 'couldn't have a better guide' to show her around the world as 'she's the great round world itself!' (p. 255). This hints that Serena Merle is in control of everything and should have been a warning to Isabel of the power that she yielded.

Madame Merle's character highlights the problematic identity of expatriate Americans in Europe in a novel that raises vital questions about both cultural and individual identity. She states in the novel:

If we're not good Americans we're certainly poor Europeans; we've no natural place here. We're mere parasites, crawling over the surface; we haven't our feet in the soil...A woman perhaps can get on; a woman...has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl (pp. 202-203).

She is making the point here that American women in Europe are less disadvantaged than American men as they lack any secure status or active role in life wherever they are, yet American men in Europe lack identity because they lack activity. Delia da Sousa Correa argues that Merle's attitudes here are 'very American' and represent an 'endorsement of the Puritan work-ethic that James himself found highly problematic.'⁶⁴ Her comments suggest that men are nothing of significance unless they play a useful role in life. By setting his English and American characters in Italy, James allowed these questions of identity to be raised and discussed and, as James's

⁶³ Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*, p. 114.

⁶⁴ Delia da Sousa Correa, 'The Portrait of a Lady: Identity and Gender', in *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Identities* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 118.

international theme is linked with issues specifically relevant to the lives of women, the novel can also comment on gender roles in Italian society.

Pansy is depicted as the picture of innocence and provides another stark contrast to Isabel, who seems worldly-wise in comparison. Pansy is described as being a 'jeune fille' and 'she lacks in a deplorable degree the quality known and esteemed in the appearance of females as style' (pp. 367-8). Pansy has grown up in Italy and is at home there but her life has been confined to an education in convents so she has led a sheltered life and her freedoms have been restricted. She has not had the opportunities to travel that Isabel has had and as a result 'was not modern' but was instead 'delightfully old-fashioned' (p.368). Pansy was born in Italy with American parents, yet she knows nothing of the New World. She has been raised on a European model, protected and cosseted and formidably polished. She has been denied the freedoms of the American woman traveller to Italy and instead has been brought up as a young lady of Italy, the like of which are dismissed by the American girl, Daisy Miller, in James's novella: 'I, thank goodness, am not a young lady of this country. The young ladies of this country have a dreadfully poky time of it, so far as I can learn.'⁶⁵ This novella highlights the differences between Italian and American women and exposes what James called 'the international situation' in Europe.⁶⁶

Henrietta Stackpole is very modern and her character portrays a different type of American woman traveller in the nineteenth century. Henrietta represents the 'new' American woman whose self-reliant nature is more pragmatic than Isabel's trust in her power of choice. Miss Stackpole tells Isabel, 'You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views... You must be prepared on many occasions in life to please no one at all – not even yourself' (p. 223). Travel, however,

⁶⁵ Henry James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1984), p. 178.

⁶⁶ Michael Swan, 'Introduction' in *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p. 10.

has changed even her by the end of the novel and she 'confessed herself human and feminine' by stating that she had changed as 'a woman has to change a good deal to marry' (p. 558). Henrietta chooses to settle in England, rejecting America and the New World. This decision reflects nineteenth-century views in respect of women and marriage.

Two other women characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* that live in Italy are the Countess Gemini and Mrs Touchett. The Countess is 'a woman of high fashion' and is married to an Italian who 'goes in...for everything English' (pp. 257-8). There are 'some stories about her' and an air of scandal is attached to her so she is portrayed as someone who has perhaps been corrupted by Italy and its culture (p. 252). Mrs Touchett is described by Osmond as 'an old Florentine; I mean literally an old one; not a modern outsider. She's a contemporary of the Medici; she must have been present at the burning of Savonarola' (p. 262). This is perhaps a nod towards George Eliot's novel, *Romola* (1862-3), which is set in the time when the religious reformer Savonarola rose to control the city of Florence. However, even though these ladies were American and English, they have spent so much time in Italy that they have learnt to adapt to fit into their community and have lost their national identity as a result. This blurring of the nationalities shows how Italy can affect the woman traveller if they choose to remain there. They provide two very different examples of what Isabel could become if she stays in the country and makes it her home. Osmond tells Isabel that, 'A woman's natural mission is to be where she's most appreciated' (p. 267). Isabel had planned to travel the world but makes the decision to settle in Italy and this decision impinges on the rest of her life.

Henry James chose Italy as the setting for many of his novels, novellas and short stories because of the artistic, cultural and historical opportunities it provided for

his characters. In *Daisy Miller* (1878), the narrative starts in Switzerland and then moves to Rome. Different rules are shown to apply in these countries for young women and Daisy cannot flirt with the same freedom in Italy and tragic circumstances result from her behaviour there. Catholic Italy has a different culture to Switzerland and Daisy fails to realise that her conduct there is less acceptable. Italy, in this novella, is shown to be the death of the young female protagonist as Daisy dies in Rome of both malaria and the stigma she gains when she compromises her reputation after walking with an Italian man at night in the Coliseum. Michael Swan argues that, ‘James poetically sacrifices Daisy to Europe, just as he sacrificed Roderick, Newman and Isabel. Europe is master and has eaten well the forbidden fruit.’⁶⁷ In *Daisy Miller*, Italy is depicted as a dangerous place to be as James uses descriptions such as ‘the cynical streets of Rome’.⁶⁸ The Palace of the Caesars is a ‘beautiful abode of flowering desolation’ and all the ruins of Ancient Rome provide a perfect backdrop for the ‘ruin’ of Daisy and her fall from grace.⁶⁹ The Coliseum, and its link to Christian sacrifices, again is used by James to display the victims of his story in a vulnerable setting. Daisy is portrayed in ‘the dusky circle of the Colosseum... among the cavernous shadows’ and its ‘historic atmosphere... was no better than a villainous miasma.’⁷⁰ This novella displays clearly the perils of the Old World as Daisy falls ill from encountering the city at night in the ‘plaguey dark.’⁷¹ Rome, in this tale, is a place of disease and historic Italy is a significant setting as it emphasises the decay of the ancient world.

⁶⁷ Michael Swan, ‘Introduction’ in *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1963), p. 10.

⁶⁸ Henry James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p. 183.

⁶⁹ James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p. 185.

⁷⁰ James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p.187.

⁷¹ James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p. 190.

Another of James's novellas, *The Aspern Papers* (1888), is set in Italy but this time the story is centred in Venice. James writes in his Preface that, '[t]he air of old-time Italy invests it.'⁷² In this novella, the main women characters are Miss Bordereau and her niece who are 'two shy, mysterious and ... scarcely respectable Americans' who 'now lived obscurely in Venice.'⁷³ Italy is shown to have changed the women as they state how they 'used to be' American: 'It's so many years ago. We don't seem to be anything now.'⁷⁴ However, they are no longer travellers to Italy, but are residents, and this is reflected in the way that they now think of Americans as foreigners: Miss Tina says, 'I think that in Venice the *forestieri* [foreigners] in general often give a great deal for something that after all isn't much.'⁷⁵ Italy in this story is shown to be a place of escape and also isolation as the women 'lived on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a sequestered and dilapidated old palace.'⁷⁶ Venice is the ideal location as it is made up of islands that can only be reached by boat or gondola. Venice is a place of secrets, a city where it is easy to get lost and lose yourself so it was a perfect setting for two women who wished to hide away from society and conceal some letters.

James also uses Venice as the setting for his novel, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). John Bayley, in his Introduction to this novel, comments: 'In his earlier fiction James had often openly contrasted American manners and assumptions with European ones, American innocence and strength with European worldliness and experience', however Milly Theale in this book, 'is the solitary American champion, demonstrating among other things James's own obscure longing to the tradition and

⁷² Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), p. xxiii.

⁷³ James, *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, p. 97.

⁷⁴ James, *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, p. 106.

⁷⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ James, *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, p. 97.

the country in which he had been born and bred.⁷⁷ Venice, rather than Rome, is the ideal location for this novel as it ‘enhances the sexual motif’ and for ‘James as tourist, as well as artist, Venice was a repository of ancient sex.’⁷⁸ James’s friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson, had fallen to her death from the window of her Venetian home so it was a natural setting for the haunting end to this novel. The American heroine of the novel, Milly Theale, evokes the foreboding atmosphere of Venice when she states, ‘I adore the place....I think I should like....to die here.’⁷⁹ Venice provides the perfect atmosphere and backdrop to the events of the novel:

It was a Venice all of evil that had broken out for them alike....a Venice of cold lashing rain from a low black sky, of wicked wind raging through narrow passes, of general arrest and interruption, with the people engaged in all the water-life huddled, stranded and wageless, bored and cynical, under archways and bridges (p. 415).

James displays a different side to Italy in this novel than he does in *The Portrait of a Lady* and he emphasises here the sense of haunting that the country holds. Whether this was because his friend had died in Venice or because his ‘own sister, Alice, had died of cancer a few years before he wrote *The Wings of the Dove*’, so he was at a different stage of his life then when he wrote *The Portrait of a Lady*, is unclear.⁸⁰ However, it does show how Italy can repeatedly be used as a setting to evoke different emotions and responses from the reader.

In *Middlemarch*, we encounter no other women characters in Italy so we cannot judge any other female perceptions to Rome other than Dorothea’s. George Eliot does write about Italy in some of her other novels. *Romola* (1862-3) is set in Renaissance Florence so we cannot analyse a nineteenth-century woman travellers’ perspective in this historical novel. *Daniel Deronda* (1876) features Italy as one of its

⁷⁷ John Bayley, ‘Introduction’ in *The Wings of the Dove*, (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 24.

⁷⁸ Bayley, ‘Introduction’ in *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 347.

⁸⁰ John Bayley, ‘Introduction’ in *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 19.

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settings and is the backdrop for the meeting of Daniel with his mother, and the novel's heroine, Gwendolen Harleth, travels to Europe, but this work will not be focussed on here. The next chapter will now analyse a Victorian woman traveller's impressions of Italy.

Chapter 3 – Escapism: how Italy enabled Victorian women travellers to re-imagine their own reality

Victorian women travellers went to Italy for a number of reasons: religion, art, culture, architecture, myths and Roman education, history, family, health and financial aspects. Italian living expenses were smaller than in England and the climate was thought to be beneficial to one's health. Eliot's husband, Cross, commented on Eliot's health and the benefits of travel:

My general impression....had been that her health was always very low, and that she was almost constantly ailing. I was more surprised, after our marriage, to find that from the day she set her foot on Continental soil, till the day she returned to Witley, she was never ill – never even unwell. She began at once to look many years younger.⁸¹

The presence of relatives already in Italy was also a good reason to visit. However, the most common reason must have been all the artistic and cultural merits that the country had to offer. Once there, the women travellers sometimes discovered that Italy was different to their classical preconceptions and the impressions that they had gained from the artwork and literature of the time. Hilary Fraser points out that Victorian 'writers, artists, critics and historians were busily constructing their own versions of Renaissance Italy.'⁸² These versions often gave women travellers the wrong impression of Italy or lead them to have a higher expectation of what they would encounter whilst there. Fraser further comments about Italy, that, 'there was no doubt as to its usefulness as a vehicle for the critical examination of contemporary cultural, political and intellectual issues. The past, and another country, provided

⁸¹ Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, quoted in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. John Rignall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 10.

⁸² Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 1.

access to nineteenth-century England.⁸³ By visiting the ancient world of Italy, Victorian women could re-examine and re-imagine their own realities back in America or England when they returned from their travels. Henry James notes in his *Florentine Notes* (1874) that, in Italy, ‘the past seems to have left a sensible deposit, an aroma, an atmosphere. This ghostly presence tells you no secrets, but it prompts you to try to guess a few.’⁸⁴ This sense of the past and the immense history of the place had a profound effect on many Victorian women travellers and many chose to write about their experiences in the form of letters, journals or travel essays.

The novelist and society figure, Sydney, Lady Morgan, travelled to Italy to write a book on the country. When she visited the Uffizi gallery in Florence she wrote that she experienced, ‘a rush of recollections, a fulness [sic.] of hope, that almost amounts to a physical sensation.the breath shortens, as imagination hurries from object to object, and knows not where to pause, or what to enjoy.’⁸⁵ This is reminiscent of Henry James, when he arrived in Rome, and felt that it was a place ‘even beyond its reputation.’⁸⁶ Other women travel writers were not as impressed as they felt the weight of expectation from their classical education and previous impressions, gathered from art and literature, about the country. This can be compared to George Eliot, who when she arrived in Rome, saw ‘[n]ot one iota...that corresponded with my preconceptions.’⁸⁷ The travel writer, Elizabeth M. Sewell wrote that Rome ‘looked...like a set of barracks.’⁸⁸ She further commented:

⁸³ Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Henry James, ‘Florentine Notes’ in *Italian Hours*, (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 263.

⁸⁵ Sydney, Lady Morgan, quoted in Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 31.

⁸⁶ Henry James, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, ed. By Fred Kaplan, p. 112.

⁸⁷ George Eliot, *George Eliot’s Life*, Vol. II of 3 as related in her letters and journals, ed. J.W. Cross, Kindle edition, pt. 1794-1800.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth M. Sewell, ‘Impressions of Rome, Florence and Turin (1862)’, in *An Anthology of Women’s Travel Writings*, ed. By Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 113-117 (p.113).

I had one great advantage myself in entering Rome; I was placed in a carriage with a friend who had seen it before, and who did not wish to talk. If I had been called upon to express enthusiasm or admiration. I should have been greatly disturbed; for, in truth, I felt but little of either. A first view of any place, of which one has for years formed to oneself a definite picture, must necessarily be a shock, even if it does not prove a disappointment.⁸⁹

Her preconceptions of what Rome should have been like had affected her enjoyment of the country when she finally visited there.

The popularity of Italy as a tourist attraction increased in the Victorian era. Henry James said it became a resting place for ‘the deposed, the defeated, the disenchanted, the wounded, or even only the bored.’⁹⁰ Tourism in Italy was not new as the Grand Tour had been popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but this was essentially a male experience. Women, however, began to travel to the continent from 1800 and ‘by the last decades of the century they had increased so much that they began to outnumber male tourists.’⁹¹ There was a set itinerary to their travel to Italy and many guidebooks, such as Isabel Archer’s faithful *Murray’s* series of guides, helped them on their journey. Most tours spent autumn in Florence, Rome for Christmas and New Year, south to Naples for the remainder of the winter, returned to Rome for Holy Week and Easter and then stopped at Venice on the way home. The first ‘Cook’s tour’ of Venice was arranged in 1864 and these further increased tourism to the country.⁹²

The *Murray’s* guides were a product of the boom in English tourism to the Continent. What George Eliot saw on her travels, especially in Italy, conforms to the orthodoxy represented by John Murray in his guidebooks. Margaret Harris states:

⁸⁹ Elizabeth M. Sewell, ‘Impressions of Rome, Florence and Turin (1862)’, in *An Anthology of Women’s Travel Writings*, ed. Foster and Mills, p. 116.

⁹⁰ Peter Ackroyd, *Venice: Pure City*, (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 52.

⁹¹ Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, p. 34.

⁹² Peter Ackroyd, *Venice: Pure City*, p. 290.

John Murray offered his personal experience as guidance to a clientele among the affluent middle class...Murray had clear assumptions about the English traveller...who is warned that the Continent must be assumed to be dirty and populated by rogues.⁹³

When Eliot travelled to Italy in 1860, she constructed her journey as a version of the Grand Tour, much like Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Harris argues that Eliot's account of her Italian holiday:

acknowledges the class (aristocratic) and gender (male) implications of the Grand Tour, and is frequently cast in Romantic tropes of dream and transport. Throughout, there is appraisal of the experiences of the travellers against a set of romantic expectations of the classical world...which George Eliot finds fulfilled without either reaching heights of romantic epiphany, or confronting Italy as a mystic Other.⁹⁴

Eliot in *Middlemarch* invoked this classical world, as analogies are made there between her characters and the mythical figures in the Italian artwork.

Travel to Italy enabled British and American women to explore the more passionate side to their nature and to relax away from the constraints of their life at home. This belief in travel as a form of escapism was a theme that was expressed in many travel writings. Mrs. Trollope spoke enthusiastically about 'the pleasure of having our minds awakened to fresh impressions and new trains of thought.'⁹⁵

Elizabeth Barrett Browning noted the advantage of Florentine life was its 'innocent gaiety...shining away every thought of Northern cares and taxes, such as make people grave in England.'⁹⁶ Mary Shelley also expressed the rewards of travel to Italy:

⁹³ Margaret Harris, 'What Eliot saw in Europe: The Evidence of her Journals', in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. John Rignall, p. 8.

⁹⁴ Harris, 'What Eliot saw in Europe: The Evidence of her Journals', in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. Rignall, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Mrs. Trollope, quoted in Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, pp. 39-40.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, quoted in Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, p. 40.

When we visit Italy we become what the Italians were censured for being – enjoyers of the beauties of nature, the elegance of art, the delights of climate, the recollections of the past, and the pleasures of society, without a thought beyond.⁹⁷

Italy had the effect of making the Victorian women travellers forget their cares and worries back at home. Whereas women travel writers who visited places such as Africa felt they had to justify their own existence and lifestyle, travellers to Italy felt none of these constraints and could relax and forget ‘practical life...with its cares, and anxieties, and disappointments.’⁹⁸ The time they spent in Italy provided a change from their everyday lives and gave them the chance to transform their lives on their return through this period of reflection. It has been seen, in the novels *Middlemarch* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, that Dorothea and Isabel both pondered questions about their life and the decisions they had to make whilst visiting Italy. The very nature of the country, its history and atmosphere, made these women reflect on their own past life as so much history surrounded them.

Any form of travel opened up the possibilities for women to experience risks and self-exploration that they wouldn’t have experienced had they remained at home. The danger posed by Italian men to foreign women is a theme that is raised in Henry James’s story, *Daisy Miller*. Daisy is frowned upon by American society in Rome for walking around with an Italian man at night. The American man, Winterbourne expresses his disgust: ‘Would a nice girl – even allowing for her being a little American flirt – make a rendezvous with a presumably low-lived foreigner?’⁹⁹ The Italian men, in this story, are referred to as ‘mysterious’, ‘cavalier’ and ‘polished’.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Mary Shelley, quoted in Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, p. 40.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth M. Sewell, quoted in Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, p. 41.

⁹⁹ Henry James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁰ Henry James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, pp. 174-175, p. 180.

Daisy's Italian friend, Mr Giovanelli, is described in a sinister way: 'He smiled and bowed and showed his white teeth, he curled his moustaches and rolled his eyes, and performed all the proper functions of a handsome Italian at an evening party.'¹⁰¹ This fear of the foreigner is one that crops up in many nineteenth-century novels. In *The Woman in White* (1859-60) by Wilkie Collins, the villain of the novel, Count Fosco, exemplifies the British fear of the foreigner and his 'marked peculiarity...singles him out from the rank and file of humanity.'¹⁰² The idea of the risky side of travel was also one of the attractions for women tourists in Italy. After reading Gothic novels, such as those by Ann Radcliffe, travel to a foreign country appeared more exciting and encounters with the unknown opened up possibilities for different experiences.

Tourism grew so much in Italy that James referred to the travellers in Venice as, 'the incessant troop of those either bewilderedly making or fondly renewing acquaintance with the dazzling city.'¹⁰³ Since many of the characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* then decided to stay and live in Italy, it is interesting to see how many Victorian travellers made this choice. The 1872 *Murray's Handbook of Rome* notes that 'in 1870 there were just 457 permanently resident Protestants in a city where the total population approached 250,000.'¹⁰⁴ The Italian census for 1871, however, offers a rather different figure and states the number of Protestants was 3,798.¹⁰⁵ The historian John Pemble suggests that a reason for this discrepancy could be that the 1871 figure may have included the 'temporary population in hotels and lodgings.'¹⁰⁶ An '1894 survey of "Americans Abroad" in *Lippincott's* notes that while Rome then

¹⁰¹ Henry James, *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, p.177.

¹⁰² Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 221.

¹⁰³ Henry James, *Italian Hours*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

received 30,000 of James's countrymen as visitors each year, there were still just 200 permanent American inhabitants.¹⁰⁷ This all suggests that not as many Americans chose to stay and live in Italy as you might think, having read James's novels. His novels focus on just a small part of the Italian community and whilst many Americans and English people travelled there, the expatriate society was still relatively small. This is why everyone knew each other so well within it, as James comments in *The Wings of the Dove* that: 'the middle of Piazza San Marco' was 'a great social saloon.'¹⁰⁸ It is said that Napoleon coined the description of Saint Mark's Square as 'the finest drawing room in Europe.'¹⁰⁹

It is interesting how different cities in Italy are used by Henry James to express many emotions in his characters and to explore varying aspects of his novels. Venice appears to be a place of mystery, secrecy and intrigue and is used to this effect in *The Aspern Papers* and *The Wings of the Dove*. Shirley Foster argues that Venice, to the Victorian woman traveller:

signified a dream or visionary world uniting the historical past and personal desire.... Venice offered to women release from the everyday, an opportunity to forget the sphere of duties and responsibilities and to abandon themselves to pure sensation.... Venice is.....a compellingly enchanted environment which unsettles as well as attracts.¹¹⁰

All of this provides that Venice is the perfect setting for these two works by James as they both have elements of secrecy and corruption in their plots. Florence is a city that has famous art galleries so is used in *The Portrait of a Lady* as a way for Isabel to explore these beautiful artefacts and paintings and to be exhibited as a point of comparison with them. It is telling that Isabel and Osmond marry in Florence, this

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 371.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Ackroyd, *Venice: Pure City*, p. 434.

¹¹⁰ Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, pp. 42-44.

city of beauty, and she thereby becomes another artefact in his collection. Rome features in *Daisy Miller*, *The Portrait of a Lady* and Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Rome provides a lot of classical architecture and artwork together with the surrounding campagna, or countryside. The heritage of this ancient city enables the themes of the past and the present, the old and the young, to be explored in greater detail and to better effect. By placing their heroines amongst the ruins of Rome, Eliot and James can make statements about their vulnerability and insignificance in the surroundings of this ancient world.

In many ways, Italy provided a fresh start for Isabel and Dorothea, and women travellers such as themselves, as it let them appear cut off from their pasts. Gorra argues that: 'the American girl's Europe becomes a place in which one can explore the limits of the self in itself, unbound by the fetters of national origin.'¹¹¹ The fact that they were foreign, or 'Other', in Italy meant that the woman traveller could act in a way that they were unable to at home. Peter Ackroyd comments that Italy, 'offered a refuge from the horrors of industrialism that were even then afflicting England, and a cosy metaphor for an admired and much-lamented past.'¹¹² Italy allowed Victorian women to escape their life at home and also to re-imagine their past and future in a magical setting. The history, art and architecture of the country enabled them to do this more easily as it all invoked and stirred emotions within them that enabled their deep passions and natures to surface.

¹¹¹ Michael Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*, p. 151.

¹¹² Ackroyd, *Venice: Pure City*, p.291.

Conclusion

The Victorian women travellers, like Dorothea and Isabel, went to Italy in search of the past and in the hope that all the classical civilisation and history they experienced there would help them to better understand their own lives at home. Through this exploration, they were also making a past and heritage for us to look at and study. Thus, all of the pasts are linked together in a layered history and Italy provides the perfect example of this as the sense of the past surrounds the visitor at every turn. As Isabel notes in *The Portrait of a Lady*: ‘here was history in the stones of the street and the atoms of the sunshine’ (p.289).

Towards the end of the novel, when Isabel has discovered the truth about the relationship of her husband and Madame Merle, she seeks refuge in the Roman countryside and in the Rome ‘where people had suffered (p. 511). Gorra argues that Italy ‘works to normalise her own trouble in a way that a setting in New York’s bustling modernity would not.’¹¹³ Rome shares her suffering as it has a past imbued into its stones that suggests that other people have been through this turmoil before and that she is not alone. Dorothea experiences similar emotions in Rome, but she is more scared of them than Isabel and finds the heavy sense of the past ‘unintelligible (p. 181). Italy provides a setting that exposes Dorothea’s innocence and inexperience in a dramatic way. By placing these two heroines in the Ancient World, they can find a way to survive in their present lives and their experience of a foreign country provides them with a confidence to face their futures. Dorothea and Isabel have both learnt, through their time spent in Italy, that the past is all around us. Their lives have been determined by things that had happened before they were thought of, by a past they were ignorant of and that they are only now just beginning to understand.

¹¹³ Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*, p. 270.

In the early twentieth century, Italy was still being used as a setting for English women to discover themselves and to lose their innocence. E. M. Forster set some of his novels there. In his novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), a middle-class English widow marries an Italian man who is ten years younger than her. After telling her to not ‘go with that awful tourist idea that Italy’s only a museum of antiquities and art. Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land’, her brother-in-law is horrified to discover that she has in fact married one and he travels to Italy to confront her.¹¹⁴ In this novel, Italy is presented as a place that has corrupted Lilia Herriton and she dies as a result of her behaviour. However, rather than frowning at the loose morals of Italy and its culture, Forster instead uses Italy as a place to expose the narrowness and rigidity of the English.

Italy is also used as the setting for Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908). This novel’s heroine, Lucy Honeychurch, travels to Italy where she encounters a spirit totally new to her. She acquires a new view of the world and finds that she can no longer be happy with her old life when she returns home. John Sayre Martin argues that:

The Florence that she looks out on from the security of her bedroom window is more than a city of art and monuments for which a Baedeker can serve as sufficient guide, it is a city of life – and death. The very next morning when she finds herself adrift in Santa Croce without her Baedeker, it is a symbolic warning that she will need more than a book to guide her.¹¹⁵

Italy provides the location for Lucy to fall in love. She acts in a way that she would not have been allowed to had she been in England. The Italy presented in this novel is one of violence (Lucy witnesses a stabbing by the Loggia) and one of passion (Lucy

¹¹⁴ E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, (London: Penguin, 1976)

¹¹⁵ John Sayre Martin, *E. M. Forster: The endless journey*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 92.

is kissed by George on a trip out to Tuscan countryside). Italy opens up emotions in Lucy that she would not had experienced at home:

It was not exactly that a man had died; something had happened to the living: they had come to a situation where character tells, and where Childhood enters upon the branching paths of Youth.....Leaning her elbows on the parapet, she contemplated the River Arno, whose roar was suggesting some unexplained melody to her ears.¹¹⁶

She is growing up in Italy and by setting these romantic scenes there, rather than in England, Forster is allowing his heroine the freedom to act the way she wishes to rather than the way that society requires. At the end of this novel, the happy couple return to Florence and the final 'song' the lovers hear is the Arno 'bearing down the snows of winter into the Mediterranean.'¹¹⁷ They have found their happiness and the freedom to be themselves in Italy, and England is once again exposed by Forster to be a more introverted society in comparison.

Forster's books are in dialogue with Eliot's *Middlemarch* and James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, but they reflect the changes of twentieth-century literature and go further in expressing the intimate side of relationships. Lucy experiences many of the same emotions as Dorothea and Isabel, whilst visiting Italy, but she is shown to act on them in a way that they don't. Italy, however, is shown to be a place that still stirs emotions and provides a place of escape in which women can discover their true selves. Italy's link to the Ancient World enabled women to re-examine their own lives with the weight of history surrounding them. It is a place that guides Victorian women, and women travellers of the future, from innocence to knowledge and both Eliot and James, through their travels there, understood that it was a perfect place to set their novels.

¹¹⁶ E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Forster, *A Room with a View*, p. 230.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Antinous

Image taken from www.wikipedia.org (accessed 8th September 2015).

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Appendix 2



The Dying Gladiator

Image taken from www.wikipedia.org (accessed 8th September 2015)

Appendix

3



Apollo Belvedere, after Leochares. Image taken from www.wikipedia.org

(accessed 8th September 2015)

Appendix 4



The Sleeping Ariadne, Pergamene School.

Image taken from www.wikipedia.org (accessed 8th September 2015).