IMAGES OF ITALY AND ITALIANS IN THE MODERN ENGLISH NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

The English literary imagination has been nourished on the experience and idea of Italy for centuries, at least since Chaucer's Italian visits in 1372 and 1378. A combination of survey, critical analysis and theory, the thesis examines the idea of Italy and the Italians in fiction in English from Henry James to the present. The thesis provides an inclusive account of literary themes and motifs about Italy and the Italians in the modern English novel, defining the modern tradition of fiction about Italy established by James, E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence, and describing the continuities and discontinuities which extend to postmodern, international fiction in English about Italy and Italians.

No single theoretical model is employed. An eclectic approach is favoured in order to draw together cultural history, literary history, discourse analysis, literary criticism and biography. In addition, the aim has been to recapture and examine the sense of flux and the idea of self-realisation through art which characterise the Italianate impulse in past and present English fiction. In terms of method and focus, the thesis converses with ideas about Italy and the Italians, literary tradition, recent theories about the representation of place, and the notion of Italy as a favoured site for the development of literary identity and style.

An introduction traces the early development of the Italian image and establishes themes which appear in the succeeding chapters: otherness; cultural and self identity; the 'gaze'; 'seeing' as a metaphor for self-knowledge; the importance of place in the formation of identity; and the connections between artistic representation and place. The second chapter, on Henry James, defines some of the main terms of the recent tradition, including the relationship between Italy and the act of imaginative creation. The James chapter examines the influence of Romanticism on his Italian work; the 'Italian' contradictions in his fiction; and his search, expressed in traditional Italianate tropes, for a transcending equilibrium. James's Italian tales are given equal consideration with the novels, and both are discussed in relation to the travel essays collected as *Italian Hours*. The third chapter, on E.M. Forster, focuses on the conflict between chaos and order in Forster's Italian fiction, and his concern with further perennial 'Italian' themes, including paganism, the Edenic myth, and the importance of art in self-becoming. The Italian motifs in Forster's stories are compared with those in his Italian novels *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*. A shorter chapter on D.H. Lawrence outlines his problematic place in the tradition. The final section deals with Italianate postmodernism. A lengthy introduction raises general issues and is followed by closer readings of texts which demonstrate

the relevance of 'Italy' to postmodern writing in English. The English, American and Australian authors chosen for closer comment include Robert Coover, Robert Dessaix, Michael Dibdin, Ian McEwan, Michele Roberts, William Trevor and Jeanette Winterson. The final section illustrates the continuity of the image of Italy, especially the way its reputation as artifice lends itself to elaborate, postmodern metafiction.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

The thesis examines the idea of Italy and the Italians in fiction in English from Henry James to the present, defining the modern tradition established by James, E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence, and tracing the continuities and discontinuities in the tradition which extend to postmodern fiction. The major themes and images which characterise the Italianate impulse in modern English fiction are described, together with recent theories about the representation of place, and the notion of Italy as a favoured site for the development of literary identity and style. The idea of Italy as an aesthetic construct is a significant aspect of the continuing tradition of fiction about Italy — how the representation of Italy relates to literary form, and the ways in which form both represents and is represented by Italy.

'English' literature is defined in the thesis as literature written in English, including fiction written by Americans and Australians. The period covered is 1870 (the date of publication of James's first Italian story, "Travelling Companions") to 1996 (when Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* was published). The introduction outlines the early development of the Italian image and establishes themes and theoretical issues: otherness; the 'gaze'; cultural and self-identity; the importance of place in the formation of identity; and the connections between place and artistic representation. The second section, on Henry James, emphasises the 'Italian' and Romantic contradictions in his fiction, analysing his search in Italy for a transcending equilibrium, and his understanding of the relationship between Italy and the act of imaginative creation. The chapter on E.M. Forster focuses on the conflict between chaos and order in Forster's Italian fiction, and his concern with other perennial 'Italian' themes such as paganism, and the importance of art in self-becoming. A shorter chapter on D.H. Lawrence outlines his problematic place within the tradition. The final section deals with Italianate postmodernism; a discussion of general issues precedes closer readings of contemporary texts which demonstrate the continuity of the image of Italy, especially the way its reputation as artifice lends itself to elaborate, postmodern metafiction.

One of the 'grand narratives'[1] of English literature is the grand narrative of 'Italianism' and the multiplicity of narratives it encloses. The English literary imagination has thrived on the experience and idea of Italy for centuries, at least since Chaucer's Italian visits in 1372 and 1378. While Henry James might be regarded as having written the first modern 'Italian' novel, his version of Italy, with all its contradictions and ambiguities, did not arise *ex nihilo*. Over several hundred years, English perceptions and imaginings of Italy have been both consistent and contradictory. For the Elizabethans, as J.L. Lievsay observes in *The Elizabethan Image of Italy* (1964):

> the charmed name of Italy made an appeal such as might be exercised upon the imagination of the modern American by a combination of, say, Paris, Hong Kong and Rio de Janeiro. Italy – not yet a nation but that aggregation of separate states known as Milan, Venice, Tuscany, Naples, and Rome – was "the queen of the world and metropolitan mistress of all other cities" (to quote Thomas Nashe) ... With such a range of potential pleasure or disgust, it is small wonder that the Elizabethans found themselves divided in their opinions ... laudation and bitter attack stand side by side in the records they have left us.[2]

In the drama of the English Renaissance, Italy is a place where the 'real' features of the country (its landscape, geography, history, politics, society and culture) are inextricably intertwined with the imaginary place. In his essay "The Veneto, metatheatre, and Shakespeare" in Michel Marrapodi's *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian locations in Renaissance drama* (1993), Agostino Lombardo proposes that: "Italy is an Elizabethan myth fed by a thousand sources, not least by the travellers who 'narrate' it. Italy is the Papal State, the courts of the Renaissance, Machiavelli; it is desire, nostalgia, utopia; it is the stage on which anything can happen – loves,

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[1] The term is Jean-Francois Lyotard's: "The grand narrative has lost its credibility", he wrote in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 37. Lyotard defined "metanarratives" as narratives with a "legitimating function", and questioned their credibility, after Auschwitz. But in *The Postmodern Explained to Children* (1984), Lyotard stated that in 1979 he "went too far in identifying knowledge with narrative". *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, trans. Julian Pefanis & Morgan Thomas (Sydney: Power Publications, Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1992), p. 31. He does "not suggest that there are no longer any credible narratives at all ... Their [grand narratives'] decline does not stop countless other stories from continuing to weave the fabric of everyday life." There is a sovereignty of minor narratives that "allows them to escape the crisis of delegitimation ... because they never had any legitimating value." (31) In this thesis, the terms 'grand narrative' or 'metanarrative' are used to indicate these minor narratives, and more loosely to describe a collection of traditions or stories. 'Italianism' as a grand narrative makes no claim to finality nor seeks an end to narration.

[2] J.L. Lievsay, *The Elizabethan Image of Italy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 1.

murders, political intrigue, tragedies, comedies."[3] To adapt Malcolm Bradbury's formulation about 'America': 'Italy' is more than Italy.[4]

For Elizabethan playwrights, setting plays in Italy made possible the expression of political philosophy or satire that might be considered seditious in England. Further, Italy was conceived as a place of candour about sexual relations. For the Jacobean audience of Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1614), for instance, Italy was foreign and fantastical enough to allow them to escape from the social and political realities of their lives, but real enough to make plain the playwright's insights into sexuality and power in the home state. Andreas Mahler observes, in his contribution to Marrapodi's collection of essays on *Shakespeare's Italy*, that:

> In staging Italianate constructions of temptation and desire, English Renaissance drama addressed and probed virulent social, moral and gender-related problems of early modern English society: the problem of impression management, the problem of appearance and reality, the problem of sin, the problem of modern subjectivity. The early modern English myth of Italy ideally lent itself to the semantics needed for the representation of such issues. Italy was, therefore, a privileged site for creating alternative worlds that could be used for such discussion without being too close to English reality. English Italies reveal an 'Italian' England.[5]

Niccolo Machiavelli's writings, particularly *Il Principe* (*The Prince*, 1532), had a large impact on the Renaissance English imagination. His books, misinterpreted and misrepresented as they mostly were, earned the writer a reputation as a monstrous devil, and he came to represent all that the English most despised and feared in the Italians. Serious commentaries and popular stage-plays alike treated Machiavelli as a black-hearted villain, and for the Elizabethans he became a figure for projection and a symbol for whatever was most evil and loathsome in statecraft and human nature. It is not likely that many Elizabethan dramatists had a close acquaintance with Machiavelli's writings. The villainous traits of their characters were mostly borrowed from Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), and Christopher Marlowe's *The*

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[3] Agostino Lombardo, "The Veneto, metatheatre, and Shakespeare." *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian locations in Renaissance drama*, eds. Michel Marrapodi, A.J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo and L. Falzon Santucci (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 143-157. This reference pp. 144-5.

[4] See Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrims: Trans-Atlantic Mythologies and the Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995), p. 470. Bradbury comments on the ways Europe and America "invent" each other and how this "transatlantic narrative" is reflected in, reinforced by, and rises out of works of fiction.

Jew of Malta (1590), pre-eminently the two plays which gave birth to the Machiavellian knave on the Elizabethan stage.[6] Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*), translated into English in 1561, had an effect similar to Machiavelli's *The Prince*. *The Courtier* was widely read by Elizabethans, and there were many other popular Italian treatises on conduct and civility. These Italian 'handbooks' delineated the properties of nobleness, and prescribed the proper conduct in love and marriage, dress, table manners, and conversation. It was from them that the ideal of the English gentleman evolved. Paradoxically, the image of the Italians, detached from the less admirable attributes of the national character, was an image in which the Elizabethans saw reflected their own idealised, better selves. They fashioned themselves from the Italian Courtier, and the Italian Courtier became an Englishman in their minds. Together, the Prince and the Courtier represent the double-imaged Italian current in English imaginings about Italy from the 1400s to now. Machiavelli himself is a character who firmly resists closure. He is our contemporary Italian: the cool pragmatist, with an aesthetic of ease and surface elegance.

For the English, defining Italians has been a significant part of the individual and collective project of self-fashioning which, as Stephen Greenblatt observes in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), is a large part of the English imaginative purpose for Italy.[7] The political borders and identities which were a consuming preoccupation of the Elizabethan dramatists are an obsessive theme in Henry James's Italian fiction – for instance, the simultaneously real and symbolic Italian border in "At Isella" (1871), and Isabel Archer's real and symbolic border-crossing in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1888) – and recur in contemporary 'Italian' fictions such as Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987). James, Winterson, Forster in his Pan stories, Lawrence in his fiction and Italian essays, and Shakespeare in the plays he set in 'Italy' are concerned with estrangement as reconciliation; location as dislocation; ambiguous marginal states; interiors which lie beyond, and invasions from within.

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[5] Andreas Mahler, "Italian vices: cross-cultural constructions of temptation and desire in English Renaissance drama." *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian locations in Renaissance drama*, pp. 49-65. This reference p. 65.

[6] Mario Praz's study on Machiavelli is probably still the best. "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans." *The Flaming Heart: Essays on Crashaw, Machiavelli, and other studies in the relations between Italian and English literature from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), pp. 90-145.

[7] Stephen Greenblatt's useful term is from his work on the English Renaissance. Greenblatt's Introduction gives a number of definitions, including: "Self fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic, savage, witch, adultress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed." *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p. 9. The process of self-fashioning is richly dealt with by Yuri Lotman in *Universe of the Mind: a Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (London: I. B.Taurus & Co., 1990).

The Grand Tour

The English have been travelling to Italy since the 1400s. The first *History of Italy* in English was written in 1549 by William Thomas, who also wrote the first Italian dictionary and grammar for Englishmen (1550). Thomas's *History* was in fact the first English book about Italy. In it, he praised the Italians but noted the ambivalence in the Italian character: "Whereas temperance, modesty, and other civil virtues excel in the number of the Italian nobility more than in the nobility of any other nation that I know, so undoubtedly the fleshly appetite with unnatural heat and other things in them that be vicious do pass all the terms of reason or honesty."[8] The English perception of ambivalence in the Italians, and the English ambivalence *with respect to* the Italians, is one of the earliest recurring themes in the literature of the Grand Tour, and continues to the present.[9]

The first English text of the Grand Tour is Thomas Nugent's *The Grand Tour* (1749)[10], although Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts Of Italy In The Years 1701, 1702, 1703*, published in 1705, is in many ways the representative work of the Grand Tour. Kenneth Churchill notes the significance of 1764 in the history of the Tour: "For this was the year of Gibbon's visit to Italy. As a tourist Gibbon was almost a personification of the principles expounded in Bacon's essay *Of Travel*[11] which had helped to establish the pattern of the Grand Tour."[12] Nevertheless, it was Thomas Nugent who identified *la bella figura*: "They [the Italians] have a great relish for outward appearance, praises, pompous titles, and great names"[13]; and it was Hester Piozzi who in 1789 defined *dolce far niente*: "They [the Italians] are idle and they are merry: it is, I think, the worst we can say of them; they are idle because there is little for them to do, and merry

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[8] William Thomas, *The History of Italy* (1549), edited by George B. Parks for the Folger Shakespeare Library (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 13.

[9] See Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London & Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998). Chaney's book is a pre-history of the Grand Tour, offering a series of case-studies in Anglo-Italian cultural relations mainly from the Tudor and early Stuart periods.

[10] Thomas Nugent, *The Grand Tour: Containing an exact description of most of the cities, towns, and remarkable places of Europe*. 4 volumes. Printed in London for S. Birt, D. Browne, A. Miller & G. Hawkins, 1749. However, as Edward Chaney notes, the term "Grand Tour" occurs for the first time in an English context in Richard Lassels's *Voyage of Italy* (Paris, 1620). Edward Chaney, "The Grand Tour and Beyond: British Travellers in Southern Italy, 1545 to 1960." *Oxford, China and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on his Eightieth Birthday*, eds. Edward Chaney and Neil Ritchie (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), pp. 133-160, this reference pp. 134-5.

[11] "Of Travel." *Bacon's Essays* (1597), ed. J.M. McNeill (London: Macmillan, 1959), XVIII, pp. 49-52.

[12] Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 7.

[13] Thomas Nugent, *The Grand Tour: Containing an exact description of most of the cities, towns, and remarkable places of Europe*, III, p. 44, quoted by Andrew M. Canepa in "From Degenerate Scoundrel to Noble Savage: the

because they have little given them to think about."[14] It might be noted here that the Italian proverb *Un Inglese italianato e un diavolo incarnato* has a much earlier origin, in Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster* (1570), and probably earlier, as Ascham's comment seems to imply.[15] The saying has been quoted ever since, for example by E.M. Forster to make fun of Cecil in *A Room with a View*[16]; and most recently the principle is embodied in one of the characters in Barry Unsworth's *After Hannibal* (1996). The Englishman Blemish, in Unsworth's novel, is *un inglese italianato*, as the Italian lawyer Mancini is a Machiavel.[17] Of course, as the Elizabethans understood even more clearly, the saying is intended to disparage not merely that type of Englishman, but also the Italians.[18]

While the eighteenth-century is generally considered its classic phase, the Grand Tour lingered, in very different and rapidly changing forms, through the nineteenth-century.[19] As Mario Praz points out, in the declining years of the Grand Tour Italians became little more than a "picturesque spectacle for the eyes" and were exploited by travellers as "instruments of their pleasure."[20] In his study of the Italian stereotype in eighteenth-century British travel literature, Andrew M. Canepa quotes Enrico Nencioni, who wrote of English tourists in 1888 that: "A

Italian Stereotype in 18th Century British Travel Literature." *English Miscellany* 22, eds. Mario Praz & Giorgio Melchiori (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), p. 125.

[14] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and reflections made in the course of a journey through France, Italy and Germany 1789* ed. Herbert Barrows (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 177-8.

[15] "Heare, what the Italian sayth of the English man ... that is to say, you remaine men in shape and fashion, but become devils in life and condition. This is not, the opinion of one, for some private spite, but the judgement of all, in a common Proverbe." Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570). (Menston, England: The Scolar Press Ltd, 1967), p. 26.

[16] E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (1908), Penguin Classics 1978 edition, p. 116.

[17] Anthony Burgess explains the proverb: "In the first Elizabeth's reign Italians exposed to the travelling English used to say: '*Inglese Italianato, diavolo incarnato*', meaning that Englishmen turned into incarnate devils after their Italian education. They ceased to be mere English puddings; under a grey Midlands sky they yearned for flashing eyes and hot sunlight and wine by the bucket. They became, in a word, dissatisfied." "Thoughts on Travel." *Homage to QWERT YUIOP* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), pp. 47-49. Burgess's wry definition fits his interpretations of Lawrence and Lawrence's Italy.

[18] For a brief history of the proverb, and a comparison of Ascham and Nashe, see Patricia Ellul-Micallef, "Italian Pride and English Prejudice: The Reception of 'Otherness' in the Renaissance." *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* 6 (2001), pp. 87-101.

[19] Edward Chaney numbers Byron among "surviving 'Grand' tourists" in Rome in 1817, soon to be replaced by "'Cook's'" tourists, as steamship and railway replaced the coach. But Chaney regards Keppel Craven's *Excursion in the Abruzzi* (1838) and Ramage's *Nooks and By-Ways* (1868) as "Grand Tour literature", and notes that "Grand Tour literature" was still being written at the beginning of the twentieth century. He calls George Gissing's *By the Ionian Sea* (1901) "a key transitional text in the evolution of this genre." Edward Chaney, "The Grand Tour and Beyond: British Travellers in Southern Italy, 1545 to 1960." *Oxford, China and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on his Eightieth Birthday*, p. 155.

[20] The quotations, from Praz's Italian essay "Scoperta dell'Italia", *Studi e svaghi inglese* [Florence, 1937, pp. 279, 280], are found in Canepa, p. 143. Praz anticipates Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and postmodernism's critique of "the society of the spectacle", "the gaze", and scopophilia. Debord wrote, in 1967: "All of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, revised edition (Detroit, Michigan: Black & Red, 1977), paragraphs 1, 4.

country boy who would dance the tarantella with a girl from Trastevere upon a gondola to the music of a shepherd piper—this would be their Italian ideal."[21] The image indeed is to be found in Thackeray's novel *The Newcomes* (1855), although in a characteristic combination of ironic wit and self-mockery.[22] Henry James refers to the image in "Italy Revisited" (1877), to comment on the false literary image of contemporary Italy: "In one of Thackeray's novels occurs a mention of a young artist who sent to the Royal Academy a picture representing 'A Contadino dancing with a Trasteverina at the door of a Locanda, to the music of a Pifferaro.' It is in this attitude and with these conventional accessories that the world has hitherto seen fit to represent young Italy, and one does n't wonder that if the youth has any spirit he should at last begin to resent our insufferable aesthetic patronage."[23] Most Grand Tourists travelled and returned home with their religious, political and racial prejudices unchanged, and an enhanced notion of their own superiority, like Richardson, in *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), categorising those they met as "men, women and Italians".[24] Behind Richardson's comic classification of his characters there is the conviction that the English belong in a realistic milieu, and the Italians belong to an exotic, fictitious world. In Richardson's Italy, there are people with titles, large fortunes and names like Clementina; orange groves and temples; the apparatus of confinement and torture; persecution by Church and state; disguises and assassins; and men who stab for love. Furthermore, to most of the Grand Tourists, Italy was not only a foreign, romantic place, but exclusively (as James complained, in a late life volte-face) a land of the past.

In spite of a sense that Italy was post-Tour, and post-Romantic, 'Italy' was nevertheless a major inspiration of Victorian writers. John Addington Symonds claimed in 1879 that the influence of Italy was as strong in the literature of the nineteenth-century as in the literature of the Elizabethans. "As poets in the truest sense of the word," Symonds wrote, "we English live and breathe through sympathy with the Italians. The magnetic touch which is required to inflame the imagination of the North is derived from Italy."[25] One of the conclusions of John Pemble's study *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (1987) is that:

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[21] Enrico Nencioni's "Roma e gli scrittori inglesi"(1888) is quoted by Canepa, p. 143.
[22] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Newcomes* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1878), p. 211.
[23] Henry James, *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition, 1995), p. 103. These are good examples of cross-cultural intertextuality.
[24] Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), "Names of the Principal Persons." p. 5. As R.D. McMaster observes: "Thackeray had more than a passing fondness for *Sir Charles Grandison*." R.D. McMaster, *Thackeray's Cultural Frame of Reference* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), p. 56.
[25] John Addington Symonds, *Sketches and studies in Italy* (London: Smith Elder, 1879), p. 185.

> Denied a life of its own, the Mediterranean submitted to being recreated in the image of British longings and aversions, hopes and fears. Mallock [*Enchanted Island*, 140] wrote in the 1880s that the purpose of travelling is fulfilled "when the world shows us our dreams and illusions reflected, instead of our dreams and illusions destroyed." The Victorians were able to achieve that quest, because their journey was as much a mission as an odyssey. The Mediterranean that they visited was neither real nor ideal, but a world made less than either by prejudice and misconception.[26]

Pemble's exemplary account of *The Mediterranean Passion* demonstrates how frequently, in English notions of Italy, beliefs, aspirations and dreams weigh equally with visual perceptions and cultural realities. The 'Grand Tour' is not a single entity: it consists of the 'real' Grand Tour of documented history;[27] the literary myth; and the Grand Tour as a 'discourse', itself an intertextual weaving of other discourses.[28] Grand Tour studies have arisen from the idea of the Tour as a discourse: as a 'text', or more accurately a web of intertexts, to be interpreted. The discourse of the Grand Tour is made up of social and political histories, contextualism, desires, intuitions, and wish fulfilment. The value of Grand Tour studies is in the increasingly complex examination of the Tour as a cultural construct, and a period in the history of European sensibility whose effects our literature and civilisation continue to feel. Jonathan Keates, writing about *Grand Tour*, an exhibition held in 1996 at the Tate Gallery in London, quotes E.M. Forster on Italy: "'a country that's upset people since the beginning of the world' — we should be grateful for the myriad ways in which it continues to upset us."[29]

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[26] John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 274.

[27] See for example *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, compiled by John Ingamells (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997). This is an absorbing history (from contemporary accounts) of British travellers and residents in Italy in the eighteenth century.

[28] Discourse, in this context, is understood principally as the designation for a sequence of utterances, representations or texts: and secondly, as in Foucault, a larger framework of texts, ideas and attitudes, institutions and practices, engagements, tensions, conflicts and contradictions. For Foucault, discourse is elusively related to knowledge, power, pleasure and desire. Discursive practises "are embodied in ... processes, in institutions, in patterns of general behaviour, in forms of transmission and diffusion." Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: selected essays and interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 200.
For a useful list of the general principles and different meanings of 'discourse' see *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 207-210.

[29] *Times Literary Supplement*, December 22, 1996, pp. 18-19. According to reviews, *Grand Tour: The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century* (Tate Gallery, London, November 1996), and a text catalogue by Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bignamini (*Grand Tour: the lure of Italy in the eighteenth century*) reveals Italy's physiological and psychological impact on visiting artists. Bruce Redford's *Venice and the Grand Tour* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996) appeared at the same time as the Tate exhibition, with Chloe Chard's *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel writing and imaginative geography, 1600-1830* (Manchester: Manchester

In many postmodern works of fiction, when the Tour is invoked, a sense of disappointed ideals is uppermost. Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* (1991), Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* (1996) and the fiction of Jonathan Keates are exemplary. The cynicism in evidence in these texts accords with Fredric Jameson's explanation for the omnipresence of pastiche in postmodernism, and that it is: "compatible with ... an appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo-events and 'spectacles.'"[30] Spectacles, as Praz notes, were a defining characteristic of the Grand Tour, and the element of disappointment in postmodern texts (and their edgy, elliptical self-mockery) is a stylistic allusion to those earlier Grand Tour texts (and their overconfident, imperialistic inclusiveness). In the postmodern imagination, Italy is partly a metaphor for the past as a lost object of desire. A world of difference lies between what the eighteenth-century Grand Tour actually was and what the twentieth-century imagination desires it to have been. Postmodernists are seeking to recapture the mesmerizing lost reality (in Jameson's phrase)[31] of the Tour.

Theories of Place

The representation of Italy in English Renaissance drama is a prime example of the disparity between reality and ideality common in literary representations of place.[32] The 'reality' of a place is often less important than its imaginative or figurative value: the 'meaning' with which it is poetically endowed. Gaston Bachelard has identified the principle as a "poetics of space".[33] The last few years have seen a new interest in literary representations of places, and a proliferation of studies of the literary 'invention' of nations. Some of the most recent include: *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, by Vesna Goldsworthy (1998); Benita Parry's *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination 1880-1930* (1998); Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1998); *Imagining the Balkans*, by Maria Todorova (1997); and *Inventing Eastern Europe*, by Larry Wolff (1994).[34]

University Press, 1997). Chard's book "examines the forms of language that map out Italy and the warm south as an imaginative topography of pleasure within British and French travel writing." (*TLS* July 30, 1999, p. 32).

[30] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York & London: Verso, 1991), p. 18.

[31] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 19.

[32] An infamous instance is Hawthorne's comment about the Colosseum: "Byron's celebrated description is better than the reality." Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun. Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 23 volumes (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), vol. IV, p. 153.

[33] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964).

[34] Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998); Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination 1880-1930*

Such studies reveal the ways in which we create our own imaginative geography to make sense of distance and difference, and intensify our sense of self.[35] Imaginative geography legitimates a vocabulary, a set of representative figures or tropes, a universe of representative discourse. The literary connection between psychology and geography is not new. A great deal of poetry and prose fiction in the Italianate tradition from Byron (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*) and Wordsworth (*The Prelude*) to Ian McEwan (*The Comfort of Strangers*) and Michael Ondaatje (*The English Patient*) is about how people belong or relate to places, or are alienated from them; how people re-imagine their surroundings and infuse localities with emotion. Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is probably the best known and one of the most influential instances in the tradition. The poet sees himself at Rome, "a ruin amidst ruins" meditating amongst decay; in the Colosseum he has "a sense so deep and clear/That we become a part of what has been,/And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen."[36]

Yet theoretical works on the connection between literary criticism and place are relatively rare. J. Hillis Miller's obliquely deconstructionist *Topographies* is an exception. In *Topographies*, Hillis Miller writes of "the unplaceable place"[37], and how in philosophy or critical thinking "sooner or later ... the effort of mapping is interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable" (7).[38] Connecting place, self, other, and language and literature, Miller asks: "Why can desire not be satisfied in a happy coincidence of consciousness with the hidden other within the self? It haunts language [which] interferes with interpersonal relations, relations with the 'other'" (8). Miller is referring here to Lacan, for whom, he writes: "semiotic lines tie the self to hidden regions of the

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(London: Verso, 1998); Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[35] In Venice, the protagonist of Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* thinks of the city's architecture – the Piazza San Marco and its palaces and monuments – as "*place-markers* ... and thus a part of the immense integral Self that is this enchanted city, after all." (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 21. In James Cowan's novel, *The Mapmaker's Dream*, a 16th century cartographer to the court of Venice dreams of making the perfect map. The monk's map is a metaphor for the constructedness of place and reality. He concludes that maps, and texts, reveal how "*invisible geography* affects the way we think about place." James Cowan, *The Mapmaker's Dream* (Milson's Point, Sydney: Vintage, 1997), p. 40. The 'real' world, Cowan proposes, is the world we create to reflect our deepest image of ourselves.

[36] George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, xxv, cxxxvii. *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 1961 edition, pp. 230, 245.

[37] J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Standford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 7. Reading Hillis Miller carefully, it might be possible to regard a text as a topography.

[38] See also Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 4: "Postmodern Geographies: feminist politics of location." Kaplan draws out the relationship, identified by Foucault, between space/s and power/s. Also useful is *Space and Place: Theories of identity and location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald & Judith Squires (London: Lawrence

self, to others, and to that Other who is always presupposed within the self as outside the self" (10). Further: "Every narrative, without exception ... traces out in its course an arrangement of places, dwellings, and rooms joined by paths or roads. These arrangements could be mapped ... In narrative theory this might lead to the notion of 'fiction about fiction'" (11). *Topographies* suggests that fictions about place are potential metafictions.

Hillis Miller's theories about the coincidence of consciousness, self, other, language and desire are pertinent to the Italian fiction of Henry James, E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence. In the three writers, the encounter with Italians, or Pan, is an encounter with the "unmappable". More recently, the "effort of mapping which is interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable" underpins the obsessive preoccupation with maps in Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). Jonathan Keates's *The Strangers' Gallery* (1987) is in the same tradition: "Villafranca was suddenly his own city, he possessed it, disposed of its comings and goings, grasped its syntax ... Villafranca ... had become the territory of imagination and desire."[39] And *Topographies* is a useful model for an analysis of *After Hannibal* (1996), Barry Unsworth's novel about the landscape and history of Perugia. The novel's theme is "the connection between the transactions of power and the transactions of property"[40]; its structural conceit is a neighbourhood road, a *strada vicinale*. The *strade vicinali* in *After Hannibal* are topographies, and the novel's particular *strada vicinale* is really a semiotic road. Like language, it means to connect people, but in fact interferes with their relationships. Unsworth's metanarrative is profoundly representative of the connections between English fiction, place, the other, and Italy.

We look at Italy, and the world, through images and texts. In his introduction to *Venice Desired*, Tony Tanner writes: "A city's representational life is quite different from its historic, economic, demographic, cartographic, political, ceremonial, cultural life, though of course it may draw on and indirectly reflect or transcribe elements from all of these dimensions of the city's existence."[41] The strategies by which descriptions of a place "reflect" or "transcribe" a city's dimensions are one of the proper concerns of the semiotics of culture. Yuri Lotman's study, *Universe of the Mind: a Semiotic Theory of Culture* (1990) is exemplary, and Barthes has

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and Wishart, 1993), a collection of essays on "social and symbolic geographies" as emerging concerns of cultural studies.

[39] Jonathan Keates, *The Strangers' Gallery* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 61.

[40] Barry Unsworth, *After Hannibal* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 60.

[41] Tony Tanner, *Venice Desired* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), Introduction, vi.

written widely about the subject.[42] Books can describe people, places and Italian experiences so powerfully that a text acquires greater authority and 'reality' than the actuality it describes. Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily* (1996) is an example of seductive literary misappropriation, which can be dangerous. Robb's descriptions of things like Sicilian food and art, by the clarity of their authenticity, have lent authority to his theories of the *mafiosi*, which are only one version of the truth. The process is even more evident in *M*, Robb's controversial Life of Caravaggio (1998). The Elizabethans' misrepresentations of Machiavelli arose in a similar way, with the same effect. Yet misprisions can be an enrichment of the meanings of places, and texts.

Place and Englishness

Many of the studies of place referred to above are at the same time studies of the formation of national identities and, often, the condition of exile. It is clear that thinking about place and identity is a large part of contemporary thinking. Lesley Chamberlain's *Nietzsche in Turin: the end of the future* (1996) is exemplary. It is a book as much about that surrealist metaphysical city as about the philosopher, and contains Nietzsche's startling assertion that he found Turin "the first place where I am possible."[43] The phrase powerfully suggests the connection between place and identity. Many of the new studies of place and identity reflect the new interest in Englishness. In an article about Ian Buruma's *Voltaire's Coconuts: Anglomania in Europe* (1999), Bryan Appleyard writes: "The idea of English or, rather different, British identity is currently an urgent matter. Europe threatens our political and economic dissolution and America our cultural."[44] Jeremy Paxman's *The English* (1998) is another response to a contemporary sense of crisis, or at least uncertainty, about its subject.[45] Julian Barnes's novel *England, England* (1998) is a compelling piece of zeitgeist which brings together critical theory, and ideas from popular culture, about the constructedness of England and Englishness. The crucial aspect of each instance is a self-defining otherness. As the reviewer of Michael Bracewell's *England is*

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[42] See also Umberto Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: HarperCollins, 1995), especially "Italian Genius: phenomena of this sort must also be included in any panorama of Italian design." pp. 247-261. Eco's essay is about cultural anthropology; the Italian concept of space and its contradictions; and Italian objects, artefacts or spaces (eg espresso bars) found *within* Italian spaces.

[43] Lesley Chamberlain, *Nietzsche in Turin: the end of the future* (London: Quartet Books, 1996), p. 44.

[44] *Literary Review*, March 1999, p. 25.

[45] Reviewing Paxman's book for the TLS, Peter Clarke writes: "Our lack of national self-consciousness is surely one of the peculiarities of the English ... a characteristic response would be to congratulate ourselves, quietly, on intuitively anticipating the postmodernist insight that national identity is a state of mind." *Times Literary Supplement*, November 27, 1998, p. 9.

Mine (1997) observes: "Perhaps Englishness only makes sense when set directly alongside foreignness."[46]

The present English preoccupations and anxieties are reminiscent of what Ezra Pound called Henry James's "whole great assaying and weighing, the research for the significance of nationality."[47] It was T.S. Eliot who noted that James represents the value of being "everywhere a foreigner", adding the rather over-quoted remark: "It is the final perfection, the consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European — something which no born European, no person of any nationality, can become."[48] Eliot's observation might be extended to Englishmen who emulate Italians. Jan Morris writes: "Perhaps I am being romantic, when I see in the Italians some enlarged or clarified mirror image of us all, with all our failings and all our virtues. Perhaps I am only wishing, as so many of us do, that I could be more like an Italian myself."[49] Luigi Barzini contends: "In the heart of every man, wherever he is born, whatever his education and tastes, there is one small corner which is Italian, that part which finds regimentation irksome ... strict morality stifling, that part which loves frivolous and entertaining art, admires larger-than-life-size solitary heroes, and dreams of an impossible liberation from the strictures of a tidy existence."[50] D.H. Lawrence, simultaneously repudiating his Englishness and gathering it to him, writes, in *Aaron's Rod*: "Aaron strolled on, surprised himself at his gallant feeling of liberty: a feeling of bravado and almost swaggering carelessness which is Italy's best gift to an Englishman. He had crossed the dividing line, and the values of life, though ostensibly and verbally the same, were dynamically different."[51] In proposing that one of the greatest gifts Italy bestows is the arousal of the English imagination, Lawrence expresses an enduring sentiment in the relationship between Englishness and Italy, and a dominant theme in the literary tradition. Aaron Sisson's misadventures in Italy, and the expression "Italy's best gift to an Englishman" indicate the intertextual presence of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: "Italia! Oh Italia! Thou who hast/The fatal gift of beauty ..."[52]

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[46] Richard Coles, *The Times Literary Supplement*, July 25, 1997, p. 20. See also "Figures in a Landscape", D.J. Taylor's penetrating study of Englishness in the novel, in *After the War: the Novel and England since 1945* (London: HarperCollins Flamingo imprint, 1994), pp. 33-62.

[47] *The Little Review*, 1918. Quoted by Malcolm Bradbury, *The Expatriate Tradition in American Literature*, BAAS Pamphlets 9 (British Association for American Studies, 1982), p. 25.

[48] Eliot's essay is reprinted in, among other places, *The Shock of Recognition*, ed. Edmund Wilson (London: W.H. Allen, 1956); this comment is quoted by Malcolm Bradbury, *The Expatriate Tradition in American Literature*, p. 25.

[49] William Murray, *The Last Italian: Portrait of a People* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), Introduction.

[50] Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964), p. 337.

[51] D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (1922) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 152.

[52] *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, xlii. *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, p. 233.

Cultural Identity & Orientalism

Edward W. Said's definitive work, *Orientalism* (1987), changed our understanding of the formation and representation of cultural identities, the notion of essences, and national narratives. We live, as Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in a world of representations; and representations – their production, circulation, history and interpretation – are the essence of culture. All interpretation is interpretation of other cultures, texts, and peoples. Furthermore, Said asserts: "self-definition is one of the activities practised by all cultures: it has a rhetoric, a set of occasions, and authorities ... and a familiarity all its own."[53] The following passage from *Culture and Imperialism* connects that work and *Orientalism* in ways that can relate to 'Italianism':

> An example of the new knowledge would be the study of Orientalism or Africanism and, to take a related set, the study of Englishness and Frenchness. These identities are today analysed not as god-given essences, but as results of collaboration, between African history and the study of Africa in England, for instance ... we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations (although part of their enduring appeal is that they seem and are considered to be like essentializations) but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions: Greeks always require barbarians ... [and] such essentializations ... admit to a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference.[54]

The phrase "structures of attitude and reference" brings to mind Raymond Williams's seminal phrase "structure of feeling."[55] Italianism, like Orientalism, might be viewed as a structure of feeling.[56] Like Orientalism, the discourse of Italianism is a collection of texts, ideas, patterns of

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[53] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 42.

[54] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 60-1.

[55] Raymond Williams's "structure of feeling" is a key critical term in contemporary literary and cultural theory. Williams first used the expression in the 1950s, reformulating it several times, notably in *The Long Revolution* (1961) and *Culture* (1981). A structure of feeling is a social experience, not yet formalised as an aesthetic doctrine or political act. It is a "wide and deep possession" which sees culture as a process of complex ideological negotiations and historical shifts, and makes communication possible. For a brief definition and history of the term, see *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Third Edition (Hammersmith: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 836.

[56] Reed Way Dasenbrock refers to "the Orientalist tradition of representing Italy" in *Imitating the Italians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) and he is, I believe, the first critic to make the comparison. But his study is not concerned with that tradition, as he explains in his Introduction, pp. 1-13: "So there are two very different ways of thinking about Italy in English-language culture that need to be differentiated: the one is

imagery, vocabularies, generalisations and stereotypes. There is an Italian parallel in the English imagination to what V.G. Kiernan calls "Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient."[57] In *Little Dorrit* (1857), Mrs Flora Finching's monologue is a near surrealistic compendium of English daydreams of Italy: *In Italy is she really? With the grapes and figs growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief though if the organ-boys come away from the neighbourhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederas.*[58] Rose Macaulay observes, in her 1972 study of Forster, that: "There has always been recognised a pleasant amorous disease to which the English are peculiarly susceptible: falling in love with Italy."[59] Flora's imagist English fantasy is matched by the congeries of images in Philip Herriton's mind, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905): "At twenty-two he went to Italy with some cousins, and there he absorbed into one aesthetic whole olive-trees, blue sky, frescoes, country inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars."[60]

Said describes the way writers and scholars have "restructured the Orient by their art and made its colours, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms and motifs."[61] In a similar way, writers from the Renaissance, the period of the Grand Tour, and the present have scripted and appropriated Italy. The foreignness of the East, "all the unresolved eccentricity it displays," Said notes, "are redistributed in what is said or written about it."[62] Luigi Barzini observes of writing about Italy: "They [foreign writers] either love us or hate us too much. Their best books on Italy often contain brilliant flashes of intuition and some revealing truths, in a clutter of cliches, superficial appraisals, supine acceptance of preconceived notions, wrong information, and misspelled Italian words."[63] The rise of semiotics, which can add to representativeness[64], and

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interested in Italy, the other — to use Robert Browning's title — in the Englishman in Italy. Writers in the first tradition imitate Italians; writers in the second define themselves against the Italians." Dasenbrock errs in believing the distinction can be so easily made.

[57] V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1969), p. 55.

[58] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857). *The Oxford Illustrated Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 535-6. The next line is a premonition of postmodernity: *and dying gladiators and Belvederas though Mr. F. himself did not believe for his objection when in spirits was that the images could not be true.* (536)

[59] Rose Macaulay, *The Writings of E.M. Forster* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 35. Other Northerners, especially but not exclusively Germans, have fallen prey to the same obsession: for example Dostoevsky, Goethe, Gogol, Heine, Ibsen, Stendhal, Turgenev, Wagner and Zola. Van Wyck Brooks points this out in his Preface to *The Dream of Arcadia: American Writers & Artists in Italy 1760-1915* (New York: Dutton, 1958), ix.

[60] E.M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 70.

[61] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), Penguin edition 1995, p. 22.

[62] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 103.

[63] Barzini, *The Italians*, Foreword, xiv-xv.

postmodernism, which places an even greater disparity between the idea (image, or text) and reality, have intensified the "demonology" (Said's term) of the Italians. Said believes that Orientalism's generalisations have lost the sense of difference and strangeness, the "exotic sensuousness" of the East. Yet, in Italianism, the process can be positive as well as negative, so that expressions and the ideas they embody, such as *la bella figura* and *la dolce vita*, *sprezzatura* and *simpatico*, while appropriated and Englished, retain their mystery and seductiveness. As Graham Greene wrote in *The Human Factor*: "a prejudice has something in common with an ideal."[65] In imaginative literature and literary criticism, generalisations are not always unhelpful, if they contribute to complexification and not simplification. Collections of images and 'thought-words' (the words Barthes calls sirens), their traditions and histories, invite nuanced interpretative comparisons between, for instance, Dickens's Italy and Robert Dessaix's.

Italy and the gaze

The cultural essentialism involved in Orientalism closely relates to the 'gaze' that is pervasive in Italianism.[66] Jean-Paul Sartre, influenced by Heidegger's philosophy of phenomenology, first referred to "the gaze" (or "the look", as Hazel Barnes translates it) in his seminal study, *Being and Nothingness* (1943).[67] Since Sartre, the most significant contributions to the discourse of vision and the dialectic of "the eye" and "the gaze" are Lacan's critique of Sartre in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (1973), which includes four seminars Lacan gave in 1964, when he distinguished between "the eye" and "the gaze"[68]; Foucault's concept of "the unimpeded empire of the gaze" in his explication of the links between vision and consciousness and vision and power in *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*

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[64] Roland Barthes, writing about "the label of Roman-ness" in films, to make explicit the ambiguity of the sign, has unwittingly perhaps made the idea of Roman-ness only more elliptical and duplicitous. *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: HarperCollins' Paladin imprint, 1973), pp. 27-30.

[65] Graham Greene, *The Human Factor* (London: The Bodley Head, 1978), p. 103.

[66] There have been many versions of the history of vision and the visible, most recently Martin Jay's encyclopaedic *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also Matthew Bernstein & Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in film* (Tauris, 1997). The context of Bernstein and Studlar's study is film, but in several contributions there are suggestive parallels to fiction.

[67] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (Gallimard, 1943), trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1996 & London: Methuen, 1969), see Part Three, IV, "The Look." Routledge 1998 reprint, pp. 252-302. In this section, Sartre analyses "the look of the Other", and "the look which the eyes manifest."

[68] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).

(1973)[69]; and Debord's delineation of what he calls "the society of the spectacle" in his 1967 work of that name.[70]

Recent theoretical writings about visual perception display an intertextuality that can encompass, in addition to earlier vision theory, many of the most important strands in the literary tradition of 'Italy'. These include concepts of the other, self, and the imaginary; and the link between desire and vision which Lacan calls "the appetite of the eye"[71], exemplified by Henry James's "lust of the eyes" in his Italian essays and fiction. The "gaze" underpins the intense preoccupation with sight and seeing in the Italian writings of James and Forster (Forster uses the word itself in "Notes on the English Character"[72]); and the *flaneur* in James and the figure of the spectator in Forster. The "gaze" underlines traditional 'Italian' tropes such as illusionism, doubling and duplicity, and the many variations on metaphorical Italian clarity and illumination. In his essay "Barthes' Discretion" in *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes* (1997), Victor Burgin refers to "the gaze", and the mural paintings in the Doges's Palace in Venice which Lacan evinces to demonstrate the inseparability of power from visual pageantry, and the element of hypnotic fascination in voluntary submission. Such means of control, Burgin notes, are unstable, and the history of authority is one of struggle for mastery of the "twilight reverie."[73] The phrase "twilight reverie" strongly suggests Henry James, and James is invoked in another essay in the collection, by Marjorie Welish, who deconstructs Cy Twombly's abstract paintings *The Italians* and *The Bay of Naples*, describing the sensuous, visual effect which evokes the Mediterranean in these paintings and which, she says, comes from an assault of impressions, thoughts and feelings.[74] Welish's terms are apt for "Travelling Companions", and her expressions "porosity to the strangeness of the world' and "hallucinatory vivacity of sensations" describe the Italian experiences of Rowland Mallet and Roderick in *Roderick Hudson*, and James himself.

Many contemporary works about Italy emphasise sight and seeing. The [Italian] gaze may contribute to 'true' vision, as in Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* (1996), where Dessaix, following Forster, calls it "truly seeing". But sometimes the gaze is appropriative and

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[69] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 39.
[70] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, revised edition (Detroit, Michigan: Black & Red, 1977).
[71] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, p. 115.
[72] E.M. Forster, "Notes on the English Character." (1920) *Abinger Harvest* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1936), p. 8.
[73] Victor Burgin, "Barthes' Discretion." *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabate (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1997), pp. 19-31. This reference p. 27.
[74] Marjorie Welish, "The Art of Being Sparse, Porous, Scattered." *Writing the Image after Roland Barthes*, pp. 201-216.

voyeuristic, as in Rod Jones's *Nightpictures* (1997), where the all-seeing Eye is malevolent. The protagonist of Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* (1991) is constantly gazing – it is one of the most frequently repeated words and the strongest image in the novel: "the image that would haunt him for the rest of his life: the languid gaze."[75] The gaze is tied up in Coover's text (alongside his implicit ironic commentary on the French theorists) with identity, illusionism, truth, and the meaning of Italian art: "That languid gaze ... had something to do with the mysterious shimmering *light* of Venice, a light that, paradoxically, seemed permanently to fix before the eye the very flux that excluded all fixity ... 'persistence of vision' he called it ... The illusory *was*, for the great Venetian painters, *what was real* ... they *saw through*" (114-5). Coover reproduces the Venetian contours of the Italianate tradition, together with the knowingness and distance of postmodernism, simultaneously representing and ironising the tradition. Coover has written a great comic burlesque of the Italianate tradition. Notwithstanding, *Pinocchio in Venice* includes some of the most enduring 'Venetian' themes and images of Italy: Pinocchio "*gazing* out upon ... the celebrated *lightness* of the Piazza made doubly so this bright morning by its own crisp *doubling* in the square's limpid pool, this city of endless *illusions* seeming now to float in its symmetric fullness upon the *reflected* sky below" (185). [emphases added] The passage anticipates *Night Letters* (1996), in which Venice teaches Robert Dessaix's narrator "about gradually suffusing mere human knowing with timeless seeing ... in other words ... desire and reason work in unison once you've caught some glimpse of the Reality that is seeing you ... [and] *seeing* is the source of bliss in Dante's Paradise."[76]

Italy and form

Imaginative writings about Italy and Italians frequently concern issues not immediately 'about' Italy, including questions of artistic representation itself, and form. Italy is a way for writers to investigate fictional form and style. For Henry James, Italy represents perfect form: "the transcendent and perfect *idea* alone ... comprehensive grace ... the incomparable wrought *fusion* ... composition and form ... heroic grace."[77] For Forster it reveals "the harmony between

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[75] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 117.

[76] Robert Dessaix, *Night Letters* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 262-3.

[77] Henry James, "The Saint's Afternoon." *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard, pp. 316, 318. A new edition of Henry James's Venice letters, *Letters from the Palazzo Barbaro*, edited by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (London: Pushkin Press, 1998) reveals how for James living in Venice (in the opulence of its sights, sounds and pervasive 'presences' of Tintoretto and Ruskin) provoked questions of form, and influenced his artistic choices. The best work on the [Italian] evolution of James's narrative strategies is Sergio Perosa's *Henry James and the Experimental Form* (New York: New York University Press, 1980).

the works of man and the earth that upholds them ... the spirit in a reasonable form."[78] For Lawrence, the "perfect centre of the human world" (embodied by Florence) was a metaphor for the momentaneity and perfection of his art, a place where art could be, like "a plant in flower ... for the moment completely itself."[79] Robert Dessaix describes the effect of Italy upon texts as a Dantean "equipoise."[80]

For James, Forster and Lawrence, and the contemporary writers discussed in Part Five, circumscribed meanings give way, in Italy, to a plenitude, an excess of meaning that in turn has disorientation and loss of meaning as one of its results. 'Italy' (world, self, text) becomes a vast unravelling. Yet 'Italy' can only become a vast unravelling if it is also a crafted artefact, which is not exempt from meaning but subject to examination of its signification, rhetoric and forms of appeal. In these writers' texts – their crafted artefacts – while Italy represents form, it does not 'exist' in any *one* form, but is instead a composite of the images, interpretations and 'meanings' of Italy which comprise the grand continuous narrative of Italianism.

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[78] E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics, 1985), p. 278.
[79] D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 212, 232.
[80] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, p. 263.

PART TWO

HENRY JAMES AND ITALY

He was reading *The Wings of the Dove* ... He wanted to get to the Venice bit. He always felt better when he got to the Venice bit in books. There was a Venice bit in this book, wasn't there?

William Riviere, *A Venetian Theory of Heaven*[1]

[1] William Riviere, *A Venetian Theory of Heaven* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p. 157.

2.1 Introduction

Italy was Henry James's predestined other place. It was, to quote his now famous words, part of his "complex fate."[2] For James, Italy was a necessary place of the psyche and imagination, an alternative perception of life, an alternative notion of culture. It represented his sense of the doubleness of life and possible other worlds. James's biographer Leon Edel captures both the intensity and the doubleness of James's experience of Italy:

> It was as if this hot Italian sun and these dark shadows created by the venerable stones of old buildings alternately *warmed* and *cooled* his American blood so that *feeling* could first melt, and then be poured into the crucible of the *intellect*.[3]

My italics emphasise the conflict of the mind and senses. Italy reflected and embodied the polarities James felt within him: the divisions between spiritual and carnal, reason and passion; the competing impulses of puritanism and sensuality, and his ambivalent sexuality. Italy was pre-eminently an expression of and an arena for exploring these interior ambiguities and tensions which were also the essential paradoxes of art. The troubling aesthetic relationship between illusion and reality and the moral contradictions of 'sacred' and 'profane' were related, quintessentially Italian confusions. The divisions and dualities in James's prose have rightly been seen by many critics as reflections of the conflicts and contradictions within James himself. The psychobiographical interpretations of Leon Edel, S. Gorley Putt[4] and Manfred Mackenzie[5] exemplify this strain in Jamesian studies. But the oppositions and antitheses of James's Italian fiction were also characteristic of Romantic literature, and many critics, notably Daniel Mark Fogel[6], Kenneth Graham[7], Charles Schug[8] and, intermittently, Adeline Tintner[9] argue that James's fiction has its provenance in the literature of the Romantic Age.

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[2] The words occur in James's letter to Charles Eliot Norton, February 1872, stressing his desire to return to Europe, at the same time admitting that Europe was difficult and his feeling ambiguous: "It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe." *Henry James: A Life in Letters*, ed. Philip Horne (Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1991), p. 48.

[3] Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, 2 volumes (London: Peregrine Books, Penguin, 1977), Vol. 1, Book Two, The Passionate Pilgrimage 1869-70, pp. 250-251.

[4] S. Gorley Putt, *A Reader's Guide to Henry James* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966).

[5] Manfred Mackenzie, *Communities of Honor and Love in Henry James* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[6] Daniel Mark Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

[7] Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1995).

The problematic distinction between the terms 'Romantic' and 'romantic' needs to be addressed briefly at the beginning. Daniel Mark Fogel writes:

> In interpreting James as an inheritor of Romantic tradition, I mean to point quite specifically to his affinity with the writers of the Romantic period, particularly with the major English poets from about 1790 through 1830. By contrast, in the great majority of discussions of Henry James ... *romantic* and *romanticism* refer not to a literary epoch but to attitudes and dispositions in the author or his characters, whereas *romance* usually refers to a genre, either prose romance or a more broadly conceived literary type.[10]

In this thesis, Fogel's definitions will be followed. The distinction unfortunately is frequently lost, even in works by scholars like C.P. Brand, Kenneth Churchill and Leon Edel himself. James's affinity with the Romantic tradition is not merely a matter of specific allusions, although they are pervasive in his Italian work. The narrator of one of James's earliest tales (like James himself, on his first Italian journey) carries Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*; in *Roderick Hudson* Rowland Mallet carries Wordsworth in *his* pocket when he and Roderick travel to the Alps; Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller* quotes Byron at the Colosseum; and Claire Clairmont is a character in *The Aspern Papers*. More importantly, James inherited key elements of the Romantic tradition and made them central to his work. The most important of these include: the possibilities and fluidities of selfhood; the urge to express the self through art, the imagination and passion which is contrasted not only with the failure to do so, but with the dangers of such expression; the emphasis on experience; the search for the ideal; the notions of freedom, surrender and rapture combined with harmony and wholeness; and the value placed on intensity, and intensity as an aesthetic goal.

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[8] Charles Schug, *The Romantic Genesis of the Modern Novel* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburg Press, 1979).

[9] In particular, see Adeline R. Tintner's fastidious Keatsian analysis of *The Princess Casamassima*, in *The Book World of Henry James: Appropriating the Classics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), pp. 82-93.

[10] Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination*, Introduction, p. 1.
Charles Schug makes a similar comment: "The word *Romantic* is a dangerous one to use in literary criticism. Despite many attempts to pin it down, it eludes precise definition." (*The Romantic Genesis of the Modern Novel*, Introduction, p. 3). In her recently published book of critical essays, *Romanticism and its Discontents* (London: Viking, 2000) Anita Brookner too admits that 'Romanticism' slithers from intellectual grasp. She suggests a dozen definitions which are provocative, but as Rupert Christiansen writes in his review of the book: "Romanticism remains a paper tiger, and I don't think that this book can match Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* or M.H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* in establishing a single framing idea to guide us through 150 years of creativity." *The Spectator*, 19 August 2000, p. 32.

James's Italian novels tend to be Romantic in their structure as well as in their themes and images. Typically they dramatise quests for experience, in the course of which the questing character undergoes a change in perception so profound as to transform the self. The quests are fundamentally bipolar — inexperience becomes experience, innocence knowledge, incomprehension insight — and the final attitude of the Jamesian protagonist is reconciliation, a synthesis of the polarities inherent in the quest.[11] Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Keats's *Hyperion*, and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* are paradigmatic. *The Portrait of a Lady* epitomises the pattern, parts of which we might detect in all James's Italian work. Daniel Fogel uses the term "spiral dialectic" for the Romantic design of the journey, referring to Blake's description of the movement from innocence through experience to "organised innocence" which, as Fogel says, "seems particularly useful for students of Henry James".[12] Fogel does not mention Blake again in his study, and comments: "I would not argue for any particular attribution of influence—a man as widely read and as exposed to ideas as James would have felt the concept and design of the spiral return as a pervasive aspect of the thought of his age" (4). The comment recalls Dorothea Krook's suggestion that it is sensible to suppose James "took his view of reality and its essential logic" from the "ambient air of nineteenth-century speculation, whose main current was the preoccupation with the phenomenon of self-consciousness."[13] That is to say, perhaps, that Fogel and Krook recognise James's genius lies in his striking individuality, as well as in his affinity with a literary tradition.

James's debt to the Romantic tradition in his Italian fiction is most in evidence in his preoccupation with experience, intensity, consciousness, and duality and the urge to resolve it. James's only allegory, the dubiously Italianate "Benvolio" (1875), is an attempt to explicate duality. The tale is constructed entirely around irreconcilable oppositions – between the feeling, sensual self and the intellectual, spiritual self which are the two sides of the soul of the young poet Benvolio. Edel's discussion of "Benvolio" emphasises the dualities in the tale, to propose that James was posing a question about himself: how to reconcile "those two natures within himself—the inner America and the inner Europe—the Roderick and the Rowland". It was "the

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[11] For an excellent general essay on the Romantic quest, its spiral pattern and history, see M.H. Abrams, "Spiritual Travelers in Western Literature." *The Motif of the Journey in Nineteenth-Century Italian Literature*, eds. Bruno Magliocchetti & Anthony Verna (Gainesville, Fl: University Press of Florida, 1994), Introduction, pp. 1-20.

[12] Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination*, Introduction, p. 4.

[13] Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 410-11.

confrontation of puritan America and 'corrupt' Europe."[14] The resemblance to *Roderick Hudson* is obvious, but like many Jamesians, Edel over-emphasises the psychobiographical element in James's work. "Benvolio", he believes, "has in it less of the universal than of the autobiographical." Carl Maves, following Edel, states: "Benvolio is James himself, once again brooding over the claims of Sacred and Profane Love."[15] S. Gorley Putt goes further, to call both "Benvolio" and *Roderick Hudson* "parables of the split personality."[16] The basis of James's duality, according to Putt, is his "endless fascination in the contrast between those whose vocation was 'to be' and those whose ambition was 'to do'" (104). Putt is right in observing the "notes of antithesis or parallel, dissonance or assonance, contradiction or compensation" in James's fiction, but weakens his argument considerably by asserting that the "geminian" theme of dual natures, this "unresolved problem ... finally comes near to disintegrating James's prose style" (87). Fogel achieves a more balanced perspective. He warns of the reductive implications of the "psychogenetic" approach: "we are asked to believe that James's characteristic concerns and the forms in which he embodies them are best considered as arising from divisions of one sort or another within his own psyche. James's art becomes, in this view, a record of psychological compulsion, not of conscious artistic design."[17] Fogel prefers to interpret the Jamesian dialect as a result of the literary legacy of the Romantic age: "[James's] use of polarities thus becomes not a compulsion arising from psychic division ... but a legitimate attribute of a richly meaningful imaginative tradition" (165). Unhappily, in his eagerness to assert the continuity of the Romantic tradition, Fogel ignores most of the facts of James's written history as well as the James we know from letters, notebooks, criticism and essays. And Fogel, like Putt, mostly ignores Italy.

James's image of Italy was supremely a place of contraries and contradictions, and the 'Italian' ambiguity and dualities in his fiction are both expressions of inner conflicts and inherited from the Romantic tradition. The Romantic version of the ancient metaphor of the *peregrinatio vitae* took the figurative plot form of a *Bildungsreise* [educational journey], in which the protagonist is in quest of an ultimate reconciliation with a divided other or others, in a recovered paradise which is superior to the inherited paradise from which he set out because the recovered paradise has been earned by hard experience. In this, we recognise the theme of *The Portrait of a Lady*

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[14] *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, 12 volumes, ed. Leon Edel (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott, 1962-5) vol. iii. *1873-1875*, Introduction, p. 10. All quotations from the tales are from Edel's 12 volumes.

[15] Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism*, p. 56.

[16] S. Gorley Putt, *A Reader's Guide to Henry James* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), see Chapter III, "'Everyone Was a Little Someone Else': *Roderick Hudson*, *Confidence*, and parables of the split personality." pp. 85-106.

and the origin and purpose of Henry James's own Italian journey. The critical view needs to recognise the interplay of opposites in James's Italian fiction, registering the Romantic provenance of its structure and rhetoric of antitheses, and acknowledging the complex imperatives of his creative impulse. Especially to be taken into account in the Italian work is James's ambivalence about his Americanness and his desire to be European; his anxieties about the aesthetic sensibility and the vocation of writing; and the uniquely Jamesian self-divisions recorded by his biographer and apparent in his correspondence and notebooks. In addition, a number of recent critical texts demonstrate that early twentieth century literature is exceedingly susceptible of being characterised in terms of doubleness. Carola Kaplan and Anne Simpson, for example, the editors of *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and modernist literature*[18], show that writers in James's era felt themselves poised between the lost securities of the Victorian past and the terrifying abysses of modernity; and that they internalised the doubleness of the period, finding styles and forms in which to express their insights into its transitional nature. These writers were distinctively 'double' themselves, capable of appearing both Edwardian and modernist at the same time. That kind of doubleness was a quintessentially Jamesian predicament, which Italy and the Italian romance were ideally suited to represent.

The Italian romance was a well-established genre long before James. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is a convenient starting point for a survey of the tradition, and the Gothic novels written by Ann Radcliffe at the beginning of the nineteenth century are exemplary. In *Italy and the English Romantics*, C.P. Brand explains the Italianate fashion which began with Radcliffe and reached its height with the generation of Byron and Shelley: "To a large extent, the new interest in Italy was romantic—Italian literature from Dante to Foscolo was recognised to contain a strong romantic element; early Italian history provided just the settings and characters which delighted contemporary poets and novelists; Italian scenery, more than any other in Europe, was found to be wild and romantic."[19] Kenneth Churchill's survey of the relationship between Italy and English literature between 1746 and 1930 provides a brief, indispensable list of the novelists who continued the Italianate, romantic tradition. James was strongly influenced by major writers such as Dickens and George Eliot, but also by some of the many minor novelists,

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[17] Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination*, p. 165.

[18] Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson, eds., *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and modernist literature* (London: Macmillan, 1997).

[19] C.P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), Introduction, p. 3. Brand then notes: "At the same time, Italy possessed examples of classical artistry and balance in her literature and art of which the critics of romanticism could make use." Brand's observation foreshadows J.A. Ward's comment that James's art is the fusion of "a Neo-

including Ouida.[20] Hawthorne, (the "fantastic romancer" James called him[21]) and his haunting moonlit Rome were a major early influence, especially on *Daisy Miller*, *Roderick Hudson* and some of the tales. James wrote that Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* was "part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome, and is read by every English-speaking traveller who arrives there, who has been there, or who expects to go."[22] In addition, a number of European novels about Italy helped shape James's attitudes towards Italy and literature, notably Madame de Stael's *Corinne* (1807) and Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). Echoes of both Stendhal and Madame de Stael occur throughout James's fiction as well as in his letters and notebooks, and Stendhal was an especially profound and enduring influence. German Romanticism also had an impact on James, particularly Goethe, in *Wilhelm Meister*, his *Bildungsroman*; *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, his study in the romantic sensibility; and *Italian Journey*. Another major influence from the German tradition was Novalis's visionary prose romance *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Finally, the sensuality and eroticism of Gabriele D'Annunzio's work influenced James's perceptions of Italy, literature and romantic passion in the later phases of his life and writing.[23]

In his study of the relationship between Italy and English literature as it was around the middle of the nineteenth century, Kenneth Churchill writes that for novelists of this period, Italy was an easy option:

> Material which could be stretched out over only a few pages in a familiar English setting could, with a modicum of skill, be spun out almost indefinitely by the insertion of commonplace observations on Italian character and landscape, detailed accounts of picturesque Italian customs and a liberal sprinkling of Italian words and supposedly Italian turns of phrase. Happily, we are spared the necessity of going into any detailed

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Classicist James" and an "equally formidable Romanticist James." J.A. Ward, *The Search for Form* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), pp. 16-17.

[20] James knew, read and reviewed Ouida, at different times expressing both contempt and admiration. He once praised her for "her original genuine perception of the beauty ... of Italy: this almost inspired her—yet was mixed with such vulgarities and falsities too." Adeline Tintner shows that James was not above borrowing from Ouida (specifically for "Greville Fane" and *The Sacred Fount*): "Her personality, as well as her preposterous although intelligently assembled daydreams, provided James ... with material he could use to better purposes." *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James: An Intertextual Study* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1991), pp. 10-18.

[21] Henry James, "Review of *Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne*." *Italian Hours*, ed. Auchard, Appendix II, p. 333.

[22] Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879), ed. Tony Tanner (London: Macmillan & New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), p. 151.

[23] Again see Adeline Tintner for an analysis of the influence of D'Annunzio on James (specifically on James's 1902 "The Story in It"). *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James*, pp. 233-249.

consideration of novels of this sort, since Henry James has authoritatively and incomparably described that state of 'Italian' fiction ... in the years leading up to 1875:

> There has come to be a not unfounded mistrust of the Italian element in light literature. Italy has been made to supply so much of the easy picturesqueness, the crude local colour of poetry and the drama, that a use of this expedient is vaguely regarded as a sort of unlawful short-cut to success, — one of those coarsely mechanical moves at chess which, if you will, are strictly within the rules of the game, but which offer an antagonist strong provocation to fold up the board. Italians have been, from Mrs Radcliffe down, among the stock properties of romance; their associations are melodramatic, their very names are supposed to go a great way toward getting you into a credulous humour, and they are treated, as we may say, as bits of colouring-matter, which if placed in solution in the clear water of uninspired prose are warranted to suffuse it instantaneously with the most delectable hues. The growing refinement of the romancer's art has led this to be considered a rather gross device, calculated only to delude the simplest imaginations, and we may say that the presumption is now directly against an Italian in a novel, until he has pulled off his slouched hat and mantle and shown us features and limbs that an Anglo-Saxon would acknowledge.[24]

This is the discernment of James's maturity. His fugitive first novel, the largely and deservedly forgotten *Watch and Ward* (1871), assembles all the stereotypes and cliches referred to above in a plot Carl Maves describes as "having the virtue of rendering *Il Trovatore* nearly plausible."[25] "Its melodrama", Maves continues, "echoes the common Victorian conception of Italy as the place Anglo-Saxons instinctively go to do strange, immoral, exotic things". The influence of Mrs Radcliffe is still evident, and melodrama and exaggeration were part of the mystery and allure of Italy for James as for his predecessors. It should not be forgotten that melodrama is a mode which deals centrally with the terrors of loss and dispossession, and that the novelists who were influential on James (Dickens, Eliot, and Balzac, for example) used the form to good effect to deal with those themes, as James does in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Aspern Papers*. Yet it

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[24] Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1746-1930* (London, Macmillan, 1980), p. 136. Although Churchill does not adduce James's essay, the passage quoted is from James's review of W.D. Howells's *A Foregone Conclusion*, written for the *North American Review*, January 1875. Reprinted in *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, eds. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 486-7).

was James who redefined the Italian romance. Not only does his early work generally depart from the melodramatic mode of the tradition, from Radcliffe to Hawthorne and Ouida, to represent Italy realistically, but the later work represents it in an increasingly symbolic and self-referential mode. James himself hints at the possibility of a synthesis of styles (realist, romantic, and symbolist) in the frequently quoted passage from his Preface to the New York Edition of *The American*:

> The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later, in one way or another; ... The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that ... we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire ... experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it.[26]

James's art of fiction and use of Italy surpass in subtlety, complexity and modernity, that of any of his predecessors. His novels and tales take Italy as a dark, symbolic subject for stories about innocence and its enrichment or corruption by the experience of Italy. Italy represents all the riches of European art and history, but is also a place, in his imagination, of moral complexities, spiritual inertia, decadence and sexual betrayal. The Italy of James's fiction is elusive, experienced, dangerous, and the centre of civilisation and life. In Italy innocence must test and challenge experience, romance must be mitigated by realism, and these are aesthetic and moral tasks. The right recognition of experience and the formation of consciousness become the novelist's and his characters' main aim.

In James's fiction, as it kept pace with his liberating, transforming experience of Europe, Italy was to become an encompassing metaphor, and the background for his narratives of self-realisation. His stories questioned difference and nationality, the 'meaning' of Europe, and what it was to be American and an artist. They are stories which seek for a definition of culture and examine the nature of creativity. James's narratives reflect the complexities and contradictions of

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[25] Carl Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Works of Henry James* (Urbana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 82.

[26] *Henry James, The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1987), pp. 473-4. In *Romancing the Postmodern*, Diane Elam uses this passage to support her argument about the generic uncertainty of romance, and its connection with excess. She writes: "James explains that romance is essentially inessential, its only law the law of excess over itself ... James seems concerned precisely to insist that romance is the genre which liberates the representation of experience from known conditions and

life, represented by Italy, and like the places in Italy in which they are set, are also expressions of ambivalence. In some ways they are typical nineteenth-century narratives of crisis — the crises of national identity, exile and displacement, and spiritual decay. Thus they share the crisis of early modernism, which was in an important sense a crisis of ambivalence. James's work may, of course, be viewed from another perspective as an anti-modernist retreat into the Arcadian myth of an imagined Italy. In a characteristically Jamesian paradox, Italy represents both the splits and contradictions of life, and the possibility of wholeness and a balance between moral and aesthetic vision.

2.2 Henry James and Italian Places

Henry James's Italy was both a real and imagined place. Although he stated in his Preface to *Roderick Hudson* that "to name a place, in fiction, is to some degree to represent it"[27], he also declared, in his biography of William Wetmore Story, that he was guilty of having made "a mere Rome of words ... a Rome of my own which was no Rome of reality."[28] His Rome was all "a rare state of the imagination", and Venice, James wrote, "remains strangely the Venice of dreams more than any appreciable reality."[29] His Italy was supremely an accumulation of the literary responses of generations of earlier travellers. Particularly in his travel impressions, James reveals an awareness of his predecessors. John Ruskin was the most pervasive, in places anxiously resented influence; and James often took a volume of Ruskin with him on a journey, as he sometimes carried Stendhal and Goethe. The first essay in James's *Italian Hours* begins: "Venice. It is a great pleasure to write the word; but I am not sure there is not a certain impudence in pretending to add anything to it. Venice has been painted and described many thousands of times, and of all the cities of the world is the easiest to visit without going there."[30] Proust is famously the writer who endlessly deferred his visit to Venice, preferring instead to think and write about it. Leon Edel draws a comparison between Proust and James: "the Italy of Henry James was ... entirely of his own creation, a profound part of his being, a happy pastiche

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measurable states, including the United ones, with all their "vulgar communities." Diane Elan, *Romancing the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6-7.

[27] Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (1875), Preface to the New York Edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 39.

[28] Henry James, *William Wetmore Story and his Friends: from Letters, Diaries, and Recollections*, 2 volumes, (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1903), vol. i, p. 331.

[29] *Henry James: Letters*, 4 volumes, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974), vol. i. 1843-1875, p. 134 [September 21, 1869].

[30] "Venice." (1882) *Italian Hours*, p. 7.

of self-comfort ... His was, shall we say, a Proustian Italy."[31] Edel's comment is an amiable but crucial misreading. James's Venice was dream-like and imaginary but also seen and felt, and rendered with intense, poetic realism.

When James travelled there, Italy was already, as Tony Tanner writes: "a site of semantic excess, over-filled with desires, anticipations, dreams, expectations, experiential appropriations ... [a place] pre-eminently already written and already seen."[32] Baffled disappointment and bewilderment were the common reactions of earlier writer/travellers to hyperdescribed Italy, and this was especially so for Americans. Of the Colosseum, for example, Hawthorne writes in *The Marble Faun* that "Byron's celebrated description is better than the reality"[33], as he had written in his *Italian Notebooks* that "there was a better St Peter's in my mind, before I came to Rome, than the real one turns out to be."[34] For James, however, as he wrote in his Preface to the New York Edition of *The Aspern Papers*, "the pious fiction suffices."[35] For forty years, James continued to add to the encrustations of centuries, in 1909 gathering together his travel essays from 1870 to 1908, to publish them as *Italian Hours.* As John Auchard writes: "*Italian Hours* serves as a primary document of what, to one highly acute observer, Italy *was* from 1870 to 1908."[36]

James said he wanted his travel writing to be "a tissue of images and pictures" such as he admired in Theophile Gautier's *Italia.* Gautier, James believed, was "the apostle of visual observation – the poet of the look of things."[37] In his first Venetian essay (1872), James wrote: "The mere use of one's eyes in Venice is happiness enough."[38] Yet seeing is not merely seeing, and "visual rapture", as James writes in the same essay, aroused and satisfied "a fine healthy romantic appetite" (52). "His quest is for that which nourishes the eye", Edel observes, "and

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[31] Leon Edel, "The Italian Journeys of Henry James." *The Sweetest Impression of Life: the James Family and Italy*, eds. Agostino Lombardo & James W. Tuttleton (New York: New York University Press, and Rome: Instituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1990), pp. 8-21. This reference p. 10.

[32] Tony Tanner, "Proust, Ruskin, and *le desir de Venise.*" *Henry James e Venezia*, ed. Sergio Perosa ((Firenze: La Linea Veneta Nella Cultura Contemporanea, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1987), pp. 65-94. This reference p. 65.

[33] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun. Centenary Edition of The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. 23 volumes (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), Volume IV, p. 153.

[34] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The French and Italian Notebooks. Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Volume XIV, p. 136.

[35] Henry James, *The Aspern Papers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics Edition, 1984), Preface, p. 28.

[36] *Italian Hours*, Introduction, ix-x. Auchard's 1992 Introduction to James's collection is probably the best single essay on James's Italian travel writing. See also Tony Tanner on James as travel writer in *Writers and their Works: Henry James*, 3 volumes (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1979), vol. ii., 1882-1898, p. 25.

[37] *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, eds. Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 353.

[38] "Venice: An Early Impression." (1872) *Italian Hours*, p. 52.

through the eyes the sensibility."[39] In this respect, James's Italy resembles Browning's, especially the Rome and Florence of *The Ring and the Book*, which James described as "a bath of the senses and perceptions."[40] Browning, James thought, caught the "sights and sounds and stuffs" of Italy exactly, with "a swoop of practised perception". But Browning's Italy, James also thought, was more than a described landscape: the poet goes "deep down below the immediate"; his work has that "felt rich coloured air", a "perfect cloud of gold-dust" which contains all "the elements for which the name of Italy stands" (802). Browning's Italy was real and observed but abstract and imagined too. James struggles to express the strangely oblique connection between 'Italy' and the 'real' in Browning: "after all, the real is his quest, the very ideal of the real, the real most finely mixed with life, which *is* in the last analysis the ideal" (799). Similarly, in James's fiction, Italy is real, observed and remembered. But 'Italy' is also ideal and idealised; literary and poetic; a dream and an illusion; an invention of the imagination and a construct of language.

James's first Italian tale, "Travelling Companions" (1870), overburdened as it is with impressions, emotions and ideas, mirrors his first Italian tour of 1869-70.[41] The tale is a delirium of brimming, excessive sensations; the breathless, bewildered ornamentation of the prose highlighting the rush of experience. Like James's early letters and essays, it is filled with the newcomer's delight in Italy's landscapes and townscapes, and the zealous enthusiasm of a new convert to the South. The story strongly recalls the descriptions, art criticism and collected impressions of James's Italian essays, placing them into a fictional context. Although the tale resembles the travel diaries in many respects, it nevertheless *is* a fiction which, moreover, foreshadows James's lifelong Italian preoccupations and the themes of his subsequent 'Italian' fiction. The narrative is full of picturesqueness, romance, passion and mystery. The art of Italy is compellingly present, alongside the emotive and moral power exerted by its combination of spirituality and sensuality. There is the mixture of admiration and terror provoked, especially for an American, by the presence and weight of the past; and the further, bewildering paradox of the physical beauty and "misery and mendacity" of the Italians (191). Finally, in the relationship of Mr Brooke and Miss Evans James announces his 'international' theme.

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[39] Leon Edel, "The Italian Journeys of Henry James." *The Sweetest Impression of Life: the James Family and Italy*, eds. Agostino Lombardo & James W. Tuttleton, pp. 8-21. This reference p. 10.
[40] "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*." A lecture given to the Royal Society of Literature for the Centenary of Robert Browning, 1912. Revised for the Quarterly Review, July 1912. *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, p. 802.
[41] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales 1868-1872*, vol. ii.

What lifts the story beyond a mere fictionalised travelogue or essay on art is the way in which Brooke's character develops as his perceptions change. The tale may thus be interpreted as the formation of James's artistic credo — the artist as a young man. To say this, however, is to go against received critical opinion. Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley considers the tale "a mixture of travel report and art criticism with the story incidental and not at all necessary to the interest."[42] Carl Maves suggests that: "'Travelling Companions" finds its closest analogue in the sort of technicolour film that stitches together exotic locales with a thin romantic fable; it is the scenery that counts, people are only a pretext. The distance between author and narrator is often so infinitesimal as hardly to be calculable."[43] Bonney MacDonald comes closer to the truth when she suggests: "If James's early travel essays explore the process by which Italy impresses itself upon the imagination, James's early travel tales not only recreate the drama of that initiation but also examine the consequences of that revelatory experience."[44]

"Travelling Companions" is James's interpretation of the Grand Tour. One of the story's most important literary progenitors is Goethe's *Italienische Reise*.[45] In a short section in *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James* Adeline Tintner offers a compelling comparison between *Italienische Reise* and "Travelling Companions", although she relies strongly on such slender projections as "the inference is possible" and "there seems to be an unconscious reminder of Goethe"[46]; and her speculations about James's choice of the date for his first tour are dubious. But Tintner's analysis is to be preferred to Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley's. Otherwise so astute about James's sources, Pulsifer Kelley not only asserts that evidence is too slight to suggest James's familiarity with *Italienische Reise*[47] but says her only reason for mentioning Goethe at all in her study is "not for the fact that he did influence James but rather because he did not ... If Henry James had been acquainted with Goethe's book, references to the German writer would undoubtedly have appeared on many of the pages dealing with Rome, for to both James and Goethe Rome meant much the same tremendous thing" (145-6). It should be noted that James

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[42] Cornelia Pulsifer Kelly, *The Early Development of Henry James* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 114.

[43] Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Works of Henry James*, p. 10.

[44] Bonney Macdonald, *Henry James's* Italian Hours*: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), p. 58. The major theme of MacDonald's study is a comparison of the styles of the early and late travel sketches, in which she seeks to establish a connection between the two seemingly opposed models of perception and artistry: the one comprised of lucid, vivid descriptions and rooted in the power of the visible world, the other employing the "constitutive imagination" to "construct, indirectly constitute, and 'make life'." (Introduction, 5).

[45] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Italian Journey* (1786-1788), trans. W.H. Auden & Elizabeth Mayer (London: Penguin Books, 1962. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1970).

[46] Adeline R. Tintner, *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1991), pp. 49-52.

once acknowledged Goethe as a European "giant" who had been much in his own position with regard to the discovery of Italy.[48]

For Americans, the Tour represented the essential conflict of innocence and 'experience'. It was both a cultural and emotional rite-of-passage. The encounter with the riches of the classical past as well as the foreignness of the present provided ways for the novelist to probe notions of national and self identity. Henry James's literary exploration of Italy accompanied and expressed his growing self-awareness. His passion for Italian art was intimately connected with the 'meaning' of Europe, where his self-revelation was destined to take place. Italy's epiphanies involved a confrontation with the reality of sensuality, inescapably present in Italian art, which celebrated so unashamedly the beauties and pleasures of the human body. Not all Americans were prepared for the challenge. Hawthorne's distaste is reflected in his infamous remarks from Rome, about which James wrote:

> From the statues, as a general thing, he derives little profit ... He remains unreconciled to the nudity of the marbles. "I do not altogether see the necessity of our sculpturing another nakedness. Man is no longer a naked animal; his clothes are as natural to him as his skin, and we have no more right to undress him than to flay him." This is the sentiment of a man to whom sculpture was a sealed book.[49]

Further, James observed in *Hawthorne* that Hawthorne's "curious aversion to the representation of the nude in sculpture ... strikes the reader as a strange, vague, long-dormant heritage of his straight-laced Puritan ancestry."[50] In *Roderick Hudson*, Mrs Garland's plain Northampton opinion is that the statues in Rome are "undraped paganism".[51]

James Buzard has observed, in his recent study of the literature of tourism, that the purpose of James's/Brooke's narrative is, like that of the Grand Tour generally, "to establish his cultural credentials as ... a fully authorised participant in cultural discourse." Buzard examines "Travelling Companions" and "At Isella" and some other James texts to illustrate his thesis that James's European travel was both an "acculturating" and an "appropriating" process, and that

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[47] Pulsifer Kelley, *The Early Development of Henry James*, p. 133.
[48] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i. 1843-1875, p. 58.
[49] Review of *The French and Italian Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. *Nation*, vol. 14, 14 March 1872, pp. 172-3, reprinted in *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard, Appendix II, p. 333.
[50] Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879), ed. Tony Tanner (New York: MacMillan, 1967), p. 148.
[51] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 295.

this imaginative appropriation was highly ambivalent because it conflicted with James's "anti-touristic" desire to penetrate, that is to participate in, even belong to, the culture visited.[52] Buzard does not adduce him, but Stendhal was an important influence on James. Stendhal set out on his first Italian journey in 1800 with the object of furnishing his mind and cultivating his sentiments, in order to become a great dramatic poet. It was not merely a matter of acquiring an understanding and appreciation of classical or Renaissance architecture, sculpture and painting. Stendhal believed that to become an artist, he must, like Goethe, acquire experience of life. The stimulus to his imagination would be provided by living amongst Italians and watching their behaviour: "I must *live* ... yet chiefly bent on observing, so that later I might write."[53] And "*I am in Italy!*" he wrote, as he entered from Switzerland the Italian border town of Ivrea.[54] Stendhal's words echo in the words of the narrators of James's two earliest tales, especially the exultations of the young American entering the Italian border town in "At Isella". Stendhal's words resonate also of course in James's first letter from Rome: "At last — for the first time — I live!"[55]

The importance of "Travelling Companions" in the Jamesian canon lies in its definition of an artistic stance and aesthetic vision. Like the travel sketches, the story concentrates on direct impressions and felt experiences. Italy, "to the sympathetic retina" (184), is an intensely *felt*, visual experience; all its parts are discrete sensual phenomena. James records the narrator's visual perceptions and emotional responses, demonstrating the sensuous, voluptuous impact of Italy upon the visitor from the New World. Especially impressive are the cities and towns, and their churches and cathedrals – the "builded sublime".[56] Brooke/James enters his beautiful, feminine Italy at Milan, initiating his appropriation of "the South" with his awed gaze at the cathedral, where he has "chiefly a confused sense of an immense skyward elevation and a fierce blinding efflorescence of fantastic forms of marble."[57] Thus "Travelling Companions" begins, with an astonishingly sexual metaphor:

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[52] James Buzard, "Ambivalent Appropriations: Culture and the Tourist in James." *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture 1800-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 217-284. This reference p. 239.

[53] Stendhal, *Vie d'Henri Brulard*, II, 289. Cited in Matthew Josephson, *Stendhal, or The Pursuit of Happiness* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1946), p. 57.

[54] Also cited in Josephson, p. 60.

[55] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i. 1843-1875, p. 160.

[56] In an 1872 essay, writing of Milan Cathedral, James stated: "Viewed in this way [as the supreme embodiment of vigorous effort] a great building is the greatest conceivable work of art." "From Chambery to Milan." *Italian Hours*, p. 82.

[57] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii, 1868-1872, p. 177.

> The view from this spot is beyond all words, especially the view towards the long mountain line which shuts out the North. The sun was sinking … the long shadows fused and multiplied, and the bosky Lombard flats melted away into perfect Italy. This prospect offers a great emotion to the Northern traveller. A vague, delicious impulse of conquest stirs in his heart. From his dizzy vantage point, as he looks down at her, beautiful, historic, exposed, he embraces the whole land in the far-reaching range of his desire. (179)[58]

Invoking the Stendhalian association of romance and Italy, James comments that Brooke, departing from Milan, "turned the early pages of the enchanting romance of Italy". Turning the page, however, introduces an early example of Jamesian irony as Brooke discovers an un-Stendhalian Italy:

> What words can reproduce the picture which these Northern Italian towns project upon a sympathetic retina? They are shabby, deserted, dreary, decayed and unclean. In those August days the sun poured into them with a fierceness which might have seemed fatal to any lurking shadow of picturesque mystery. But taking them as cruel time had made them and left them, I found in them an immeasurable instruction and charm. (184)

Brooke has a sense of the long history of humanity beneath the surface of the landscape. In these hill towns: "all personal passions, all restless egotism, all worldly hopes, regrets and fears are stilled and absorbed in the steady perception of the material present" (184). Milan and the hill towns produce in him a state receptive to the lessons of Italy in enjoyment and surrender to the present, simply to look: Brooke travels on to Vicenza, "looking at Palladio's palaces and enjoying them in defiance of reason and Ruskin" (186).[59] These are the sensuous, romantic responses of a Protestant Anglo-American, surrendering to the aesthetic delights of the alien South. Brooke tells Miss Evans, in Milan Cathedral, that Italy instructs us:

> 'to forget all our cares and duties and sorrows. We must go in for the beautiful. Think of this great trap for the sunbeams, in this city of yellows and russets and crimsons, of liquid

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[58] For an extended discussion of the conception of Italy as feminine in James and his contemporaries, see James Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, Chapter 2, IV, "Gendered Geography." pp. 130-138.

[59] James's travel essays demonstrate his high and unfashionable valuation of Palladio, in contrast to John Ruskin's low opinion of the architect. Brooke alludes perhaps to Ruskin's implicit advocacy of a Puritanical, anti-Renaissance ethos of duty and self-sacrifice. Brooke's rebelliousness is another early example of Jamesian irony:

> vowels and glancing smiles being like one of our Northern cathedrals, a temple to Morality and Conscience. It doesn't belong to heaven but to earth, – to love and light and pleasure.'

When his proposal of marriage in Venice is refused, Brooke leaves for the Grand Tour of archaeological sites, museums and churches. His "restless fever of curiosity and delight", "ecstasy of quickened senses" and "nervous rapture" betray a heightened receptivity, an openness to the impressions of the senses which follow one upon another and give rise to more general, and sentimental, reflections. The Roman masonry in Padua, for instance, leads him to reflect that "there seemed an irresistible pathos in such a combination of shabbiness and beauty" (210). In the Museum of Bologna "mediocrity is so richly enshrined" (210); and the carved statues hidden from view amongst the intricate architectural flourishes of Milan Cathedral provoke the judgement that "among all the jewelled shrines and overwrought tabernacles of Italy, I have seen no such magnificent waste of labour, no such glorious synthesis of cunning secrets" (177).[60] The mixture of admiration and disapproval is characteristic of Brooke's Yankee Puritan response to the landscape and Italy as a whole. "Travelling Companions" is an initiation into foreignness and a glamorously different style of life. Here, there are "piazzas at midnight", and in this one tale all the famous cafes of Italy: Florian's, Caffe Quadri and Caffe Pedrocchi, the latter "a café monumental, scholastic, classical" (211). James is a *flaneur*, voluptuously inhaling the "picturesque" in a landscape which, like the art and people, the warmth in the sun, and exotic ices discovered in cafes, exudes romance and awakens an unfathomable, indescribable passion.[61]

"Travelling Companions" includes James's earliest fictional evocation of Venice:

> It was that enchanting Venetian hour when the ocean-touching sun sits melting to death, and the whole air seems to glow with the soft effusion of his golden substance. Within

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Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843-60) brought about a renovation in visual sensibility for a generation that had immured itself in pictorial conventions and visual clutter.

[60] James tends to draw lessons from architecture. In "From Chambery to Milan" he records that Milan Cathedral tempted him "to believe that beauty in great architecture is almost a secondary merit", that its "mass [which] makes it a supreme embodiment of vigorous effort ... of difficulties mastered, resources combined, labour, courage and patience. And there are people who tell us that art has nothing to do with morality!" *Italian Hours*, p. 82.

[61] James's definitive flaneur would be a combination of Theobald in "The Madonna of the Future" and Rowland Mallet in *Roderick Hudson*. Neither character quite perfected the art. Theobald was self-indulgent, and: "It often seemed to Mallet that he wholly lacked the prime requisite of a graceful flaneur – the simple, sensuous, confident relish of pleasure." (*Roderick Hudson*, p. 58). Charles Baudelaire described "the passionate spectator" in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life* which appeared in *Figaro* in 1863 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964). See

> the church, the deep-brown shadow-masses, the heavy thick-tinted air, the gorgeous composite darkness, reigned in richer, quainter, more fantastic gloom than my feeble pen can reproduce the likeness of. From these crude concavities of dome and semi-dome, where the multitudinous facets of pictorial mosaic shimmer and twinkle in their own dull brightness; from the vast antiquity of innumerable marbles, incrusting the walls in roughly mated slabs, cracked and polished and triple-tinted with eternal service; from the wavy carpet of compacted stone, where a thousand once-bright fragments glimmer through the long attrition of idle feet and devoted knees; from sombre gold and mellow alabaster, from porphyry and malachite, from long-dead crystal and the sparkle of undying lamps, – there proceeds a dense rich atmosphere of splendour and sanctity which transports the half-stupefied traveler ... I wandered for half an hour beneath those reverted cups of scintillating darkness, stumbling on the great stony swells of the pavement as I gazed upward.[62]

James's first fictional Venice has the luminous quality of the descriptions of the city found throughout his travel essays and fiction. Yet already Venice is invested with meaning: a "bright sad eloquence of ruin" (194), its over-ripeness is both exciting and repellent. James's first travelogue-tale describes a tourist's Italy (landscapes, townscapes, *flaneurie*, the *genius loci*), but he has begun to appropriate Italy for fiction, fashioning a romance from his first gathering of Italian images and impressions.

It is instructive here briefly to consider the Italian travel writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne and W.D. Howells, since James was not only contributing to but revising and reshaping a literary tradition. In the eighteen months Hawthorne spent in Italy (1858-9), he came to appreciate the beauty of Italian sights and acknowledged a fascination with Italian culture. Yet his Italian notebooks consistently register a curious detachment and even distaste. Italy seemed too demanding and intense for Hawthorne's sensibility. It is almost as if the contemplative New Englander found the visual stimulation and sensual drama of Italy more plentiful than his senses could receive. He responds with a baffled, hesitant, resistant provincialism, remaining an observer, like many of his fictional characters. At the Palazzo Borghese, for example, he is: "not in a frame of mind for admiration" and so cannot "achieve that free and generous surrender of

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Keith Tester, *Flaneur* (Routledge, 1994) for a re-evaluation of Baudelaire, a discussion of contemporary debate, and the flaneur in social theory.

[62] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii., p. 192.

self which ... is essential to the proper estimate of anything excellent."[63] Hawthorne frequently justifies his aesthetic response with a suggestion of moral judgement: "Old Rome does seem to lie here like a dead and mostly decayed corpse, retaining here and there a trace of the noble shape it was, but with a sort of fungus growth upon it, and no life but the worms that crawl in and out" (54). As instanced by his comment, noted earlier, about Byron's Colosseum and the "better" St Peter's in his mind, Hawthorne frequently retreated from the reality of Italy into ideality, and a preference for single, momentary and even partially obscured glimpses of works of art, rather than profound contemplation or deep immersion. True beauty, he seemed to believe, is secretive and elusive. At the Vatican, he records with satisfaction, the statues keep "a veil around them, which they sometimes withdrew, and let their beauty glow upon my sight;—only a glimpse, or two or three glimpses, or a little space of calm enjoyment; and then I see nothing but coloured marble again" (165-6). Like James, Hawthorne gathered impressions, but did not attempt, or was incapable of, a similar discernment.

William Dean Howells lived for lengthy periods in Venice as a diplomat. *Venetian Life* (1866)[64] and *Italian Journeys* (1867)[65] record his 1861-65 stay there. Howells, too, was impressed and fascinated, but like Hawthorne, baffled and ambivalent about the beauty of Venice and the intensity of the Venetians' lives. Like Hawthorne, he grew to consider parts of Italian culture unworthy of moral respect, and America the moral ideal. Howells's first view of the Forum, he wrote: "brought a keen sense of disappointment. I knew that they could only be mere fragments and rubbish, but I was not prepared to find them so."[66] Howells's disappointment shows that, like Hawthorne, he had preconceptions of Italy which did not match the reality, and as Bonney MacDonald perceptively notes, "it also outlines his desire for a more picturesque, tidy, and *redeemed* Italian past" and "a Yankee mistrust of disorder".[67] Like much of his Italian fiction, Howells's travel sketches are strong on 'local colour' and the picturesque, but rarely penetrate the surface of the Italian scene. As Nathalia Wright suggests, Howells "never quite got over the feeling that Italy had more meaning, especially for Americans, than he was able to comprehend."[68] His observations of everyday life in Italy are sharp, evocative and finely detailed,

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[63] Hawthorne, *The French and Italian Notebooks*, ed. Thomas Woodson, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, vol. XIV, pp. 110-1.
[64] William Dean Howells, *Venetian Life* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1866).
[65] William Dean Howells, *Italian Journeys* (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1867).
[66] Howells, *Italian Journeys*, p. 162.
[67] Bonney MacDonald, *Henry James's* Italian Hours*: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, p. 26.
[68] Nathalia Wright, *American Novelists in Italy: the Discoverers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), p. 196.

but there is nothing, as James later remarked, "to suggest that the author had ... surrendered himself to ... Italian initiations."[69]

James reviewed both Hawthorne's *French and Italian Notebooks* (in *Nation*, vol. 14, 14 March 1872, pp. 172-3) and Howells's *Italian Journeys* (in *North American Review* 106, January 1868, pp. 336-9).[70] The reviews highlight the particularities of Hawthorne's and Howells's Italies, and reveal something of James's developing style and intentions as a writer about the subject of Italy.[71] James praises Hawthorne's *Notebooks* for "show[ing] us one of the gentlest, lightest, and most leisurely of observers, strolling at his ease among foreign sights in blessed intellectual irresponsibility, and weaving his chance impressions into a tissue as smooth as fireside gossip" (332). But the praise is faint and qualified. Hawthorne's Italian observations, James says, are "charming", but not "rich" or "substantial". There is "nothing inflammable in his perception of things" (334), and his notes "are a record of things slight and usual" made in a "spirit of serene detachment" (333). Furthermore: "Excessively detached Mr Hawthorne remains, from the first, touching [Italian life] throughout mistrustfully, shrinkingly, and at the rare points at which he had, for the time, unlearnt his nationality." The review contains James's much-quoted opinion of Hawthorne's relationship to Italy:

> The strangeness, the remoteness, the Italianism of manners and objects, seems to oppress and confound him. He walks about bending a puzzled, ineffective gaze at things, full of a mild, genial desire to apprehend and penetrate, but with the light wings of his fancy just touching the surface of the massive consistency of fact about him, and with an air of good-humoured confession that he is too simply an idle Yankee *flaneur* to conclude on such matters. (333)

In his review of *Italian Journeys* (which mentions in passing Howells's earlier travel book), James praises Howells's "solid literary merit [which is] ... so rarely found in books of travel in our own tongue". James likes the "masses of local and historical colouring" and "forcible and living description", and "keenness of observation and vivacity of sympathy ... [his] eye for the small things of nature, of art, and of human life, which enables him to extract sweetness and

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[69] Henry James, "William Dean Howells." *Harper's Weekly* 30 (19 June 1886), p. 394. Cited by Bonney MacDonald in *Henry James's* Italian Hours*: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, p. 25.

[70] The reviews are reprinted as Appendix II: Henry James on Italian Travel Books, in *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard, pp. 325-343.

profit from adventures the most prosaic" (325-6). As with the Hawthorne review, James's praise is equivocal: "he is simply an observer, responsible only to a kindly heart, a lively fancy, and a healthy conscience" (326). The book is "a series of small personal adventures ... so slight and rapid that nothing comes of them but the impression of the moment" (327). James felt Howells did not put enough of himself into his notebooks: "he is not fond of generalising, nor of offering views and opinions. A certain poetical inconclusiveness pervades his book" (327). James ends his review with a useful comparison between Hawthorne and Howells:

> Mr Howells is, in short, a descriptive writer in a sense and with a perfection that, in our view, can be claimed for no American writer except Hawthorne. Hawthorne, indeed, was perfection, but he was only half descriptive. He kept an eye on an unseen world, and his points of contact with this actual sphere were few and slight. One feels through all his descriptions ... that he was not a man of the world,—of this world which we after all love so much better than any other. (328)

Howells, with his emphasis on accurate, objective observation, was perhaps too close to reality; Hawthorne, with his elusive vision, perhaps too distant. Neither writer fully captured 'Italy'. In the Howells review, James in 1868 seemed already conscious of attempting an aesthetic theory of Italy from a synthesis of the two styles:

> We go to Italy to gaze upon certain of the highest achievements of human power—achievements, moreover, which from the *visible and tangible nature*, are particularly well-adapted to represent to the *imagination* the maximum of man's creative force ... as the ideal and the perfection of human effort, and to invest the country of their birth with a sort of *half-sacred character*. (326-7) [my italics]

The emphasised words describe the components of James's evolving 'aesthetic theory'.

In *Roderick Hudson* (1875), direct sensual impressions are filtered through the consciousnesses of the two main characters, the American sculptor Roderick Hudson and his patron Rowland Mallett, and through the sensibilities of minor characters such as Mary Garland and Sam Singleton, who provide alternative American views of Italy and the art of Italy. Yet *Roderick*

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[71] For a full discussion of how and why James incorporated and reshaped the ideas and works of his predecessors, and explication of structure and motivation in James's "apprenticeship", see Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 104-65.

Hudson is still a novel of impressions. In his Preface to the New York Edition in 1907, James wrote of the novel that: "One fact about it indeed outlives all others; the fact that ... the loved Italy was the scene of my fiction ... Little enough of that medium may the novel, read over today, seem to supply; yet half the actual interest lurks for me in the earnest, baffled intention of making it felt."[72] Leon Edel observes that in choosing as his setting "the Rome of Goethe, of Shelley, of Keats ... James knew he was writing a kunstler-roman ... in the high romantic tradition."[73] Roderick indeed is depicted as the archetypal Byronic artist, and the novel dramatises typically romantic conflicts — those between passion and art, imagination and reason, innocence and experience, the real and the ideal. But for all the "high romantic tradition", *Roderick Hudson* is about the dangers of romanticism, aestheticism and false ideals. What distinguishes the novel and makes it an example of peculiarly Jamesian romanticism is the play between idealising lyricism and ironic criticism, much of which occurs in James's descriptions of the Italian settings. While the prose has mostly outgrown the effusive rapture of "Travelling Companions", *Roderick Hudson* contains some of James's most lyrical evocations of the Italian landscape and Roman art and architecture. For example, there is the long, slow, dreamy, moody, beautifully sustained passage of consummate Jamesian description which occurs at the point in the narrative when the two young men spend a few days on Lake Como, leading the "perfectly contemplative life".[74] Effect builds upon effect hypnotically. It was "earthly paradise", they "drank in the liquid light", and "it seemed ... a place for perfect oblivion of the disagreeable" (348). The narcotic effect of the prose is surely deliberate: the danger in the "perfectly contemplative life" is that it may become one of pure indolence, and James's concern is to show how Roderick's immersion in the lotus-eating atmosphere of Italy is accompanied by his growing idleness and creative impotence.

The theme of indolence and the destructive effect of an Italian immersion upon artists and Americans was one of James's constant Italian themes, and the burden of his biography of the American artist William Wetmore Storey (1903). The theme is established early in *Roderick Hudson*, in the description of a visit made by Roderick and Rowland Mallet to the Villa Ludovisi, "on a warm, still day, late in the Roman autumn". The two young men "had wandered out into the gardens, and were lounging away the morning under the spell of their magic picturesqueness" (103). The description of the morning in the Ludovisi Gardens sets the mood

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[72] Henry James, *Roderick Hudson*. First published in 1875. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics Edition, ed. Geoffrey Moore, 1986). From the Preface to the New York Edition, p. 38.
[73] *Roderick Hudson*, edited & introduced by Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), pp. 5-17.
[74] *Roderick Hudson*, Penguin Classics edition, p. 347.

of *Roderick Hudson*'s Rome, a "mood attuned to the mellow charm of a Roman villa" (103). Having seen the famous Juno at the Villa Ludovisi: "Roderick declared that he would go nowhere else; that after the Juno it was a profanation to look at anything but sky and trees" (103). There is irony in the fact that Roderick next looks upon Christina Light, the cause of his downfall. The Ludovisi passage has a companion piece a few pages on, when Roderick sets up his studio in Rome: "He had established himself in the basement of a huge, dusky, dilapidated old house, in that long, tortuous and pre-eminently Roman street which leads from the Corso to the Bridge of St Angelo ... The palace was crumbling and shabby and melancholy, but the river was delightful, the rent was a trifle, and everything was picturesque" (111). The Italian ambience of the novel is defined by these two ironically counterpointed passages. It is an atmosphere supremely romantic and – in the words James uses throughout the novel – dusky, magic, mellow, picturesque, melancholy, shabby. Roderick's studio is some distance from the Edenic innocence of his garden idyll, and at the start of his artist's life of dissolution.

In *Person, Place and Thing in Henry James's Novels*, Charles Anderson examines some of the main settings of *Roderick Hudson*.[75] As he points out, the Villa Ludovisi scene contains echoes of James's earlier travel writing, and seems to have been drawn from two essays written just before *Roderick Hudson*. Both "The After-Season in Rome" (1873) and "From A Roman Note-Book" (1873) describe morning strolls in the Gardens, and make the same contrast – between the man-made statuary and frescoes, and the cypress-lined prospect of Nature – which James makes in the novel. Anderson comments that: "sometimes ... James seems to have been so attracted by a picturesque description in his own travel essays that he could not resist the temptation to work it into his novel, regardless of any relevance to the action" (30). But the observation is only partly true. The particularity of the statue which "looks out with blank eyes from that dusky corner which must seem to her the last possible stage of a lapse from Olympus"[76] is important both to the narrative and the symbolic imagery from which James builds his morality tale. James's identification of Christina with the Juno is both romantic and ironic. Juno, wife of Jupiter and Roman goddess of love, beauty and sometimes light, was one part of the Capitoline Trinity: she was Nature as matter (or physical Nature); Jupiter was Nature as creative impulse; and Minerva was the mind that controls the creative impulse.[77] In the novel's

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[75] Charles Anderson, *Person, Place, and Thing in Henry James's Novels* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1977). Anderson's analysis is finely detailed, although he oversimplifies James's fiction with an insistence on "paste-ons" and too artificial a distinction between "scenes" and "scenery".

[76] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 103.

[77] See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948). Fourth edition, edited by Grevel Lindop (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1997), p. 325.

thematic structure, Christina, Roderick and Rowland are clearly the Capitoline Trinity. In identifying Rowland with Minerva, James could be suggesting something further about the character's (and perhaps his) personality and sexuality.[78]

William Vance observes that James makes use of the Colosseum "no fewer than five times at crucial moments in the lives of his characters."[79] James introduces this setting into *Roderick Hudson* with a simile from an earlier travel sketch. In the novel:

> There are accidents of ruggedness in the upper portions of the Coliseum which offer a fair imitation of the mighty excrescences in the face of an Alpine cliff ... In those days a multitude of delicate flowers and sprays of wild herbage had found a friendly soil in the hoary crevices, and they bloomed and nodded amid the antique masonry as naturally as if it were the boulders of a mountain.[80]

In "A Roman Holiday", James writes:

> The upper portions of the side toward the Esquiline seem as remote and lonely as an Alpine ridge, and you look up at their rugged sky-line ... with much the same feeling with which you might look at a grey cliff on which an eagle might lodge. This roughly mountainous quality of the great ruin is its chief interest; beauty of detail has pretty well vanished, especially since the high-growing wildflowers have been plucked away by the new government.[81]

Charles Anderson's comment that "the critic may be excused for looking over the novelist's shoulder as he scans his 'notes' for useable material"[82] is probably fair. But the work shows crafted precision and patterning. The scene at the Colosseum – in which Rowland prevents

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[78] I believe the possibility to be previously unidentified in James criticism.

[79] William L. Vance, "The Colosseum: American Uses of an Imperial Image." *Roman Images*, ed. Annabel Patterson (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 105-140. *Roderick Hudson* receives little attention in Vance's essay and two-volume study *America's Rome*. He has only two main comments on the novel. One is his observation about the Alpine topography of the Colosseum, and he does not refer to the travel sketch in which the simile occurs. Vance's second observation is more interesting: "the special symbolic appropriateness of the Colosseum is obviously its classical associations with athletic and heroic action ... even the definition of manliness." (129) He relates the manly connotations of the Colosseum to Christina's "tigerish challenge" (Vance's unfortunate phrase) to Roderick to prove himself. Vance errs in stating that Roderick is "so shaken" by this episode that "his decadence really begins at this point." (129) Roderick's decline had begun before then.

[80] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 214.

[81] "A Roman Holiday." (1873) *Italian Hours*, p. 130.

Roderick from climbing onto a dangerous, high ledge to pluck a flower for Christina – prefigures two later scenes: where Rowland impetuously scrambles onto a precipice in the Alps to pick a flower for Mary, and when Roderick plunges to his death from an Alpine cliff. A simile which might have seemed contrived fits neatly into the novel's structure of action and imagery.[83] The blue flower reveals James's debt to German Romanticism, particularly the work of the poet and philosopher Novalis (1772-1801). The image (symbolising something one cannot name, but for which one perpetually seeks) occurs many times throughout *Roderick Hudson* and other works. This episode from *Roderick Hudson* echoes a line from Stendhal's *De l'amour*: "Love is a precious flower; but one must have the desire to pluck it from the edge of a precipice."[84] James adapts the pure philosophy of the German for his version of romanticism: James's blue flower is always associated with romantic love.

Another instance of the blurring of distinctions between the travel impressions and early fiction is the lyrical description of Lake Como in *Roderick Hudson* which ends, after almost two pages: "It was all consummately picturesque; it was the Italy that we know from the steel engravings in old keepsakes and annuals, from the vignettes on music-sheets and the drop curtains at theatres."[85] James had used the same metaphor in one of his essays, writing of the scene at Lake Como: "I wondered where I had seen it all before – … Where, indeed, but at the Opera, when the manager has been more than usually regardless of expense."[86] While James frequently borrows the details from his travel essays for his novels, it is rarely in the perfunctory fashion of which he accused his contemporary William Dean Howells. In Howells's work, James wrote in a letter to the writer (which mostly praised his Italian novel *A Chance Acquaintance*) there was "a want of interfusion between the 'scenery' elements and the dramatic."[87] James was aware that even his travel writing consisted of more than 'first impressions': he wrote consciously of "the Italy that we know" – the "bewritten and bepainted" place (as he called Howells's Venice[88]) which was constructed of images from literature, painting and the theatre; and from dreams, 'memories' and the imagination.

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[82] Anderson, *Person, Place and Thing in Henry James's Novels*, p. 29.
[83] See Adeline Tintner, *The Book World of Henry James*, pp. 70-3.
[84] Quoted by Matthew Josephson, in *Stendhal, or The Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 238. The connection does not appear to have been previously noted. Tintner does not mention it in her study.
[85] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 347.
[86] "From Chambery to Milan." (1872) *Italian Hours*, p. 87.
[87] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i.1843-75, p. 401. James adds: "your people are better than their background."
[88] "William Dean Howells." *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, p. 498.

"Desolation", "ruin" and "monumental inscriptions" are softened by "tender verdure" and "the freshness of the year". Rome is lovely, and Daisy is pretty. The 'eternal' city makes human drama of Daisy's kind seem insignificant, yet it does not diminish, but rather elicits and heightens, the spirit of independence. Notwithstanding, James's ironic ambivalence does not permit an optimistic interpretation of Daisy's "Well, I *have* seen the Colosseum by moonlight! ... That's one good thing" (203).

It is true that James is assuming his readers' familiarity, if with no other text, with Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818). Byron's poem itself works by evoking and orchestrating many different histories and meanings: those of republican Rome, imperial, papal, Renaissance, antiquarian and modern Rome. *Childe Harold* celebrates the Colosseum and Rome itself as emblems of loss, endurance and style. It was also Byron, more than any other writer, who fixed the nocturnal vision of the Colosseum in our poetic consciousness.[98] He did so in his most often-quoted lines, from the dramatic poem *Manfred* (1817):

> I stood within the Coliseum's wall,
> Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome;
> The trees which grew along the broken arches
> When I was wandering, – upon such a night
> Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars
> Shone through the rents of ruin; ...
> ...
> A noble wreck in ruinous perfection![99]

Those are the lines Winterbourne is poised to murmur. James writes:

> When Winterbourne approached the dusky circle of the Colosseum, it occurred to him, as a lover of the picturesque, that the interior, in the pale moonshine, would be well

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[98] Goethe was one of the first to record his impressions of the Colosseum by moonlight: "Nobody who has not taken one can imagine the beauty of a walk through Rome by full moon. All details are swallowed up by the huge masses of light and shadow." J.W. Goethe, *Italian Journey* (1786-1788), Penguin Classics, p. 168.

[99] George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Manfred* Act III, Scene IV, 9-13, 28. *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 1961 edition, pp. 404-5. But Byron's most celebrated passage about the Colosseum is his translation of words spoken by the Anglo-Saxon scholar, Bede (673-735). Byron renders Bede:

> While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;
> When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall;
> And when Rome falls – the World.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, CXLV. *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, p. 246.

> worth a glance ... The place had never seemed to him more impressive ... As he stood there he began to murmur Byron's famous lines, out of *Manfred*; but before he had finished his quotation he remembered that if nocturnal meditations in the Colosseum are recommended by the poets, they are deprecated by the doctors. The historic atmosphere was there, certainly; but the historic atmosphere, scientifically considered, was no better than a villainous miasma.[100]

It is just after reciting from *Manfred* that Winterbourne rejects Daisy. Kenneth Graham rightly interprets Winterbourne's behaviour as "part of James's critique of timorousness and of the decay into mere aestheticism of the Byronic spirit."[101] Hawthorne earlier, in the Colosseum scene in *The Marble Faun* (1860), made a cynical observation about "a party of English or Americans paying the inevitable visit by moonlight, and exalting themselves with raptures that were Byron's not their own."[102] Hawthorne's attitude to Rome is ambivalent. He seems to approve of his characters' hedonistic joy, as artists, in "the thin delights of moonshine and romance" (184). Yet pleasure and the sweet melancholy of antiquity turn to terror as Hawthorne conjures images of demons and martyrs to frighten the party. Hawthorne's influence on *Roderick Hudson* is often noted, and the influence of *The Marble Faun*'s Colosseum scene is very strong in *Daisy Miller*. Hawthorne depicts a Gothic, pagan place and shows the dangerous effects of idealising and misinterpreting Rome upon New World innocents adventuring into aesthetics, sexuality and selfhood.

One of the conclusions of William Vance's chronicle of "America's Rome" is that:

> we can create a cumulative American image of the Colosseum that in its complexity expresses an ambivalent attitude toward imperial power, its rise, its glories and terrors, and its fall. The Colosseum becomes the Moby Dick of architecture, a sublimely multivalent symbol, sacred yet malignant, alien and dreadful yet magnificent, ravaged yet enduring.[103]

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[100] "Daisy Miller." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iv., p. 201.
Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever" (1936) is one of many post-Jamesian stories to exploit both the image of the Colosseum and its reputation as a dangerous place to visit by moonlight, and the resonances of *Daisy Miller*. In "Roman Fever", unconventional female Americans flirt with Rome and misinterpret Roman mores. The significance of Wharton's slight story lies in its moral ambiguity. John Dos Passos's novel *1919* exploits the same Roman images, and his Anne Elizabeth is a Daisy Miller of the new age.

[101] Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: A Literary Life*, p. 31.

[102] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun. The Centenary Edition*, p. 184.

[103] William Vance, *America's Rome*, 2 volumes (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), vol. 1, p. 45. Vance's resourceful study suffers from its inclusiveness. His approach is promiscuous throughout: minor

Henry James's Rome, as powerfully evoked in *Daisy Miller*, is ambiguous but ever-darkening: a dangerous, inhospitable place of moonlight and menace. The Colosseum, which Vance rightly identifies as the emblematic Roman ruin, is not only eternal but indifferent. Goethe personified the ruin: "Like the human spirit, the sun and moon have a quite different task to perform here than they have in other places, for here their glance is returned by gigantic, solid masses."[104] The defining qualities of the place are otherworldliness, and indifference.

Tony Tanner's "Proust, Ruskin, James and *Le Desir de Venise*" provides a penetrating analysis of James's Venetian novella *The Aspern Papers* (1888). But Tanner is a critic who sometimes cannot separate James's Italy from James's psyche, and his essay errs in that direction. More seriously, however, Tanner overlooks Venice: "We may note straight away that Venice, the golden city, does not appear in the story – indeed, Venice itself hardly appears ... we only see Venice through the greedy, violent, but appallingly selective and indeed blinkered, even blind, eyes of the narrator."[105] In fact, in *The Aspern Papers* James evokes the city in a masterly fashion. Its seasons change; public and private spaces, monuments, walls and corners are described; the Venetians and their special rhythms of speech are precisely observed; all contributing to prose which, like the travel essays, conjures a Venice of atmospheric density and truth. The frequently anthologised description from the novella of human, intimate Venice demonstrates James's ability to transcend cliché: here, 'theatrical' Venice. His simile echoes another great image of Venice, Napoleon's expression, the "drawing room of Europe"[106], which James uses again in *The Wings of a Dove*[107]:

> Without streets and vehicles, the uproar of wheels, the brutality of horses, and with its little winding ways where people crowd together, where voices sound as in the corridors of a house, where the human step circulates as if it skirted the angles of furniture and shoes never wear out, the place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which Piazza San Marco is the most ornamented corner, and palaces and churches, for the rest, play the part of great divans of repose, tables of entertainment, expanses of decoration. And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic and

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writers such as Julia Ward Howe and unknown ones such as Alfred Hayes are accorded the same consideration as Henry James and Hawthorne. No judgements are made on literary merit.

[104] J.W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*, p. 168.

[105] Tony Tanner, "Proust, Ruskin, James and *Le Desir de Venise*." *Henry James e Venezia*, p. 81.

[106] See Jan Morris, *The Venetian Empire* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), p. 13.

> resonant, also resembles a theatre with its actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.[108]

There are two, counterpoised gondola rides in the novella. Although one does indeed reflect the brokenness and confusion of the narrator's mind, both journeys possess such Venetian verisimilitude that it would be untrue to the text to describe one as naturalistic and the other as metaphoric. In the first episode, the narrator accompanies Tita through the Guidecca and on to St Mark's, revealing to the pitiable recluse a new Venice of unknown places and vivacious population, reawakening the possibility of a life outside her palace-prison and the captivity of time and memory. That trip captures graceful, guidebook Venice, vivid with colours, teeming with life, and opening to the world. In the narrator's second, solitary gondola ride, after he realises Tita will not give him the papers unless he marries her, he is rowed out to the Lido, then makes his way to Malamocco, returning to wander "void of purpose" through scenes of dismaying displacement. Now, the labyrinth of the lagoon and canals mirrors a mind revolving around itself.

What Tanner has not noticed is the fact that the further we explore the city, through the narrator's mind, the more the prose reveals a flayed quality, as if deprived of several layers of skin; and in this way we come to recognise and identify with the city and its history, Miss Bordereau and the poet Aspern, and the narrator himself. This is illustrated by the moment at the end of the second gondola ride when, having forgotten where and for how long he has been wandering the city, the narrator finds himself confronting Colleoni's famous statue:

> I only know that in the afternoon, when the air was aglow with the sunset, I was standing before the church of Saints John and Paul and looking up at the small square-jawed face of Bartolomeo Colleoni, the terrible *condottiere* who sits so sturdily astride of his huge bronze horse on the high pedestal on which Venetian gratitude maintains him. The statue is incomparable, the finest of all mounted figures ... but I was not thinking of that; I only

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[107] Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, first published 1902 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition of the New York edition, 1986), p. 146.

[108] Henry James, *The Aspern Papers*, first published in the New York Edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, 1907-9 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition, 1986), p. 140.

> found myself staring at the triumphant captain as if he had had an oracle on his lips. The western light shines into all his grimness at that hour and makes it wonderfully personal. But he continued to look far over my head, at the red immersion of another day – he had seen so many go down into the lagoon over the centuries – and if he were thinking of battles and stratagems they were of a different quality from any I had to tell him of. (139)

James's symbolic use of Venetian reality – here the city's most famous sculptural work – underscores the narrator's distance from reality, his disaffection, self-involvedness and immorality, which are the subject of the story. The vividly evoked city is a metaphorical landscape in which the consciousnesses and conflicts of the characters are mirrored: on the one hand, a decadent, dying and self-enclosed world in which memory and the past are forces for destruction; on the other hand, an explosion of life, theatricality and colour offering an antithesis to the prison of the past and the soul which has turned in on itself.

In *The Wings of a Dove*, in one important sense, James's Venice is a projection of his characters' conflicting emotions. Kenneth Graham's observation that James developed in fiction "a consciousness-permeated style that seeks to represent the felt complexity and interconnectedness of the real world"[109] is largely true. Merton Densher's Venice is an interior Venice, a reflection of his erotic obsessions and moral delusions. After Eugenio refuses to admit him to the Palazzo Leporelli, Densher stands in the damp *loggia* where he feels the gusts of the "first sea-storm of the autumn" and has "a sudden, sharp sense that everything had turned to the dismal."[110] "It was a Venice all of evil that had broken out for them" (415), and Densher, like the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, wanders Venice in confusion, the details of the city registering only as shifts in his feelings:

> The shock, in some form, had come, and he wondered about it while, threading his way among loungers as vague as himself, he dropped his eyes sightlessly on the rubbish in shops. There were stretches of the gallery paved with squares of red marble, greasy now with the salt spray; and the whole place ... was more than ever like a great drawing-room, the great drawing-room of Europe, profaned and bewildered by some reverse of fortune. (416)

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[109] Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: A Literary Life*, p. 169.
[110] *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 414.

The embedded reference to Napoleon here, as in *The Aspern Papers*, serves to emphasise the ruthless, exploitative and appropriative behaviour of the characters.

Daniel Mark Fogel observes that the storm in Venice signals a change not just in Merton's but also in Milly's consciousness: "The violence Milly feels in her abrupt disillusion about Densher—which is also a revelation of disorder in the moral universe—is impressed upon the reader by a dramatic change in the weather."[111] The sea storm is a symbolic device which marks Milly Theale's figurative 'sea-change' and preludes Densher's consequent transformation. At the same time, the storm evokes a very real "Venice of cold lashing rain from a low black sky, of wicked wind raging through narrow passes ... with the people engaged in all the water-life huddled ... under archways and bridges" (415). Carl Maves exaggerates in stating: "It is questionable, indeed, whether there is any 'real' Italian landscape in the novel at all, as there is in *The Portrait of a Lady* or ... *The Aspern Papers* ... Unlike the Italian settings in James's other fiction, the Venice of *The Wings of a Dove* is basically hallucinatory."[112] On the contrary, Venice is very present. But it is rendered in language which unites subjective intensity and precise objective detail so inextricably that one feels the characters *are* Venice, or that Venice is a character in the novel. The technique is a refinement of James's experiment in *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Rome "interfused and moderated [Isabel's] passion."[113] For the characters in *The Wings of a Dove*, as for the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, Venice represents an ungraspable, receding reality.

It has become a commonplace of Jamesian criticism to observe that James's fiction over time grew less realistic and more symbolic. This is irrefutable. Yet in spite of James's awareness of the 'already-written' images of his predecessors in the Italianate literary tradition, and his progressively increasing self-reflexivity, the Italy of his late works emerges from a lifetime's fastidious observation and the re-imaginings of his own mind. His prose (in Seamus Heaney's memorable description of poetry) is larger than fact but tied to fact. It contains the imagined "within the gravitational pull of the actual."[114] James spins a higher order of nuance and indirection out of places and impressions. The images and ideal forms in his mind commingled and reckoned with Italy's substantiality. His complaint that Hawthorne "kept an eye on an

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[111] Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination*, p. 81. Fogel's chapter on *The Wings of the Dove* provides a welcome new emphasis on marine and water imagery in the novel and James's Shakespearean use of the sea-storm.

[112] Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism*, pp. 114-6.

[113] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, first published 1881 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition, 1986), p. 654.

[114] Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (New York: Noonday Press paperback edition, 1996), p. 3.

unseen world, and his points of contact with this actual sphere ... were few and slight"[115] was noted earlier. The "supreme virtue of the novel", James insisted in *The Art of Fiction* (1884), was to capture "the air of reality (solidity of specification) ... [and] to render the look of things ... the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle."[116] In representing the places and human spectacles of Italy in his fiction, James employs the same technique he used to describe the shop in the opening of *The Golden Bowl*. Wishing to avoid the "systematic closeness" and "density" he considered flaws in Balzac's prose, James thought that his fictional shop must be: "but a shop of the mind, of the author's projected world, in which objects are primarily related to each other, and therefore not "taken from" a particular establishment anywhere, only an image distilled and intensified, as it were, from a drop of the essence of such establishments in general."[117] In a similar manner the places in Italy became distillation and essence. James wrote in 1909:

> The way in which the Italian scene on such occasions as this seems to purify itself to the transcendent and perfect *idea* alone – idea of beauty, of dignity, of comprehensive grace, with all accidents merged, all defects disowned, all experience outlived, and to gather itself up into the mute eloquence of what has just incalculably *been*, remains forever the secret and the lesson of the subtlest daughter of History ... Seen thus in great comprehensive iridescent stretches, it is the incomparable wrought *fusion*, fusion of human history and mortal passion with the elements of earth and air, of colour, composition and form, that constitute her appeal and give it the supreme heroic grace.[118]

James began *Italian Hours* with a tribute to Venice, an exquisite, other-worldly place where, however, vitality was on the wane. It is perhaps not an accident that he closed the volume forty years later with the 1901 and 1909 sections on the Bay of Naples. In the final and last-written section of *Italian Hours*, James admits that Naples struck him "as the last word; and it is the last word that comes back to me" (303). The distance travelled is vast, from the preoccupation with the tenebrous on the Grand Canal to the surprising appreciation in "The Saint's Afternoon" of "delightful tinselled bare-bodied babies" (309), "straw-bellied flasks of purple wine" (310, 313) and the abandon of "the tarantella" (313). In maturity James found Naples vital and congenial,

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[115] "*Italian Journeys*. By W.D. Howells." *North American Review* 1868. *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, p. 478.

[116] "The Art of Fiction." *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, p. 53.

[117] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, first published 1904 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1987), Preface, p. 25.

and few other travellers of his era did. His sympathy with the prospect of Naples in summer accords with the sexuality and passion at the heart of the three great works of the major phase. In James's last novel, *The Golden Bowl*, Italy represents sexuality and passion, distillation and essence, surrender and fusion. In the representation of 'place' in James's last Italian essay, in the "fusion" of the "Italian scene": "contemplation has become one with action and satisfaction one with desire — speaking always in the spirit of the inordinate lover of an enlightened use of our eyes" (317). In *The Golden Bowl* the moral, aesthetic and Romantic antithesis of 'being/feeling' and 'doing' announced in "Travelling Companions" and *Roderick Hudson* is resolved by the union of Maggie and Amerigo. The "mute eloquence" of Italy is reflected in the still eloquence of Maggie's and Amerigo's final, symbolic embrace.

2.3 James's sense of the sense of the past[119]

For James and many American writers who preceded him, Italy was an aesthetic necessity. Italy's complexity and antiquity were the source of inspiration these writers sought. "We go to Italy", James wrote in an essay on the *Italian Journeys* of William Dean Howells, "to gaze upon certain of the highest achievements of human power, —achievements, moreover, which from their visible and tangible nature, are particularly well adapted to represent to the imagination the *maximum* of man's creative force."[120] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1851 described the artist's Italy as "the land of his predilection, the land of his necessity".[121] James Fenimore Cooper in 1828 wrote that in America:

> There are no annals for the historian; no follies (beyond the most vulgar and commonplace) for the satirist; no manners for the dramatist; no obscure fictions for the writers of romances; no gross and hardy offences against decorum for the moralist; nor any of the rich artificial auxiliaries of poetry ... There is no costume for the peasant

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[118] "The Saint's Afternoon." Parts VI and VII (1909) *Italian Hours*, pp. 316, 318.

[119] T.S. Eliot's well-known remark about James's historic imprecision appeared in an essay in which he wrote of Hawthorne and James that: "Both men had that sense of the past which is peculiarly American, but in Hawthorne this sense exercised itself in a grip on the past itself; in James it is a sense of the sense." "The Hawthorne Aspect." *The Little Review* 5, no 4 (Aug, 1918), p. 510.

[120] "*Italian Journeys*, by W.D. Howells." *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, pp. 476-7.

[121] Quoted by James Tuttleton in his Preface to *The Sweetest Impression of Life*, p. 2

> (there is scarcely a peasant at all), no wig for the judge, no baton for the general, no diadem for the chief magistrate.[122]

In his Preface to *The Marble Faun*, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote that:

> No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance writers may find congenial and easily handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristics and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens and wall-flowers, need ruin to make them grow.[123]

And James himself wrote, in *Hawthorne*, in 1879, that:

> It takes so many things, as Hawthorne must have felt later in life, when he made the acquaintance of the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle – it takes such an accumulation of history and custom, such a complexity of manners and types, to form a fund of suggestion for the novelist.[124]

James's apprehension of this rich accumulation of experience pervades both his travel writing and the Italian fiction. *Italian Hours* is a record of his discovery everywhere in Italy of "the deep interfusion of the present with the past ... The grand air of it all was in one's very nostrils and seemed to come from sources too numerous and too complex to name. It was antiquity in solution, with every brown, mild figure, every note of the old speech, every tilt of the great flask, every shadow cast by every classic fragment, adding its touch to the impression."[125] In Siena in 1892 he writes of finding:

> in places of a heavily charged historic consciousness ... the general after-taste of experience, experience at large, the fine distilled essence of the matter, [which] seems to

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[122] From James Fenimore Cooper's *Notions of the Americans*, quoted in Benjamin Spencer, *The Quest for Nationality* (Syracuse, 1957), p. 199.
[123] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun. Centenary Edition*, Volume IV, Preface, p. 3.
[124] *Hawthorne* (1879). *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, pp. 315-457. This reference p. 351.
[125] "The Saint's Afternoon." *Italian Hours*, p. 311.

> breathe ... from the very stones and to make a strong, thick liquor of the very air ... [which was] the indestructible mixture of lived things, with its concentrated lingering odour.[126]

In "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women" (1899), James writes of a visit to Venice that:

> You profit to the full at such times by all the old voices, echoes, images—by that element of the history of Venice which represents all Europe as having at one time or another revelled or rested, asked for pleasure or patience there; which gives you the place supremely as the refuge of endless strange secrets, broken fortunes and wounded hearts.[127]

That Venice is the Venice James describes in *The Wings of the Dove* as the city "which had so notoriously, in all the years, witnessed more of the joy of life than any equal area in Europe."[128] The sense of the continuity of past and present – the "muchness", "miscellaneousness", and "superimpositions" of the place, "the whole promiscuous deposit—this huge historic compound"[129] – provides the key to James's perspective on the Italian past as he apprehended it in Italian places. Like those places, James's textual Italian past is palimpsestic. He writes about the classical past,[130] the pagan past, mediaeval Italy (in his essays), the Italian Renaissance, and the recent Romantic past. He was obsessed with the Italian art of the past, and the passions that created such great art. He relentlessly exploited the literary associations of his Italian settings. They were made up of landscapes (the Campagna, for instance, is zealously explored in the essays, Roman tales, and *The Portrait of a Lady*); cities and special 'meanings' of different cities; specific works of art, and architecture (the 'real' and literary pasts of emblematic Italian buildings and ruins of buildings). Everywhere in Italy James felt the pervasive, subterranean yet living, fertile presence of all the disparate elements of the Italian past.

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[126] "Siena Early and Late."(1909) *Italian Hours*, p. 234.
[127] "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women." (1899) *Italian Hours*, p. 65.
[128] *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 373.
[129] These expressions occur in James's 1873 Roman essays: "A Roman Holiday", "Roman Rides", "Roman Neighbourhoods" and "From a Roman Notebook" (all reprinted in *Italian Hours*). They are reiterated in "Very Modern Rome", his unpublished essay presented in 1954 by Richard Harrier for the *Harvard Library Bulletin* and cited by John Auchard in "A Note on the Text", *Italian Hours*, p. xxxix.
[130] No one has expressed better than Rose Macaulay the attraction of the classical past: "The ascendancy over men's minds of the ruins of the stupendous past, the past of history, legend and myth, at once factual and fantastic, stretching back and back into ages that can be surmised, is half mystical in basis. The intoxification, at once so heady and so devout, is not the romantic melancholy engendered by broken towers and mouldered stone; it is the soaring of the imagination into the high empyrean where huge episodes are tangled with myths and

The combination of the real, historical past and the 'sense' of the past were an integral part of the Italian experience for James and his contemporaries or near-contemporaries, and the raw material for their fiction. In Italy, James writes, after a visit to Arezzo:

> The seeker for the story of things has ... a hundred insidious arts; ... the story assaults him but from too many sides. He even feels at moments that he must sneak along on tiptoe in order not to have too much of it. Besides which the case all depends on the kind of use, the range of application, his tangled consciousness, or his intelligible genius, say, may come to recognize for it.[131]

The "kind of use" James has for the Italian past is to render it as a highly-charged, all-encompassing but generalised atmosphere, mostly without dates or historical details of persons, places or events. Rather, he writes descriptions of the "auras" of his settings, which deliver a charged but hazy ambience. Alan Holder, in *Three Voyagers in Search of Europe*, expresses the possibility that: "Perhaps this was the only way James's art could contain his sense of the past ... [and] in meditating on the history of a place, his sensibility came close to succumbing to that danger which always dogged it, especially in his later years, that of being simply flooded by his impressions ... James cherished discrimination, but confronted by the sheer quantity of the past, his mind threatened to buckle."[132] Holder's point about James's dependence on impressions of the past is correct, although it is not true that the tendency was more marked in James's later years. It was predominant in the essays and early fiction, especially "Travelling Companions" (1870) and *Roderick Hudson* (1875). The response of James's first narrator-hero is an example of the way Italy's past impinges upon his characters in an "intoxification" (Rose Macaulay's term) of sensual impressions:

> In these dead cities of Verona, Mantua, how life had revelled and postured in its strength! How sentiment and passion had blossomed and flowered! How much of history had been performed! What a wealth of mortality had ripened and decayed! I had never elsewhere got so deep an impression of the social secrets of mankind.[133]

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dreams; it is the stunning impact of world history on its amazed heirs." *Pleasure of Ruins* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953), p. 40.

[131] "A Chain of Cities."(1873) *Italian Hours*, p. 218.

[132] Alan Holder, *Three Voyagers in Search of Europe: a Study of Henry James, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), p. 200.

[133] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii., p. 184.

The late style is still impressionistic, but crystallises the essences of impressions of place and past, and in doing so makes those impressions sharper, more precise. The Venice of *The Wings of a Dove* is a definitive instance; Isabel Archer's Rome is almost that.

In *Roderick Hudson*, Rowland Mallet advises Mary Garland to take life by the hand, and in answer to her question whether by "life" he means " – all this splendour, all Rome – pictures, ruins, statues, beggars, monks", he replies: "It is not all of it, but it is a large part of it. All these things are impregnated with life; they are the results of an old and complex civilisation."[134] But even this is not "all of it": for in addition to the greatness of its past and its ravishing beauty, parts of Rome are "historic, in the sense of being weighted with a ponderous past, blighted with the melancholy of things that have had their day" (225). James's sense of the weight of the past – of Italy's pagan past – and the malevolence of that weight, was very strong. He saw the Roman ruins as symbols of the endurance of art, but felt a profound Puritanical unease in their presence, a spiritual discomfort with the power these objects from the pagan and imperial past seemed to exert. Leon Edel observes, in his introduction to the volume of tales in which "The Madonna of the Future" appears, that: "American artists, like James, knew then that they risked losing themselves in a dream of the European past."[135] James's ambivalence with regard to the Roman past is reflected in the Roman tales he wrote during his early visits to Rome: "The Last of the Valerii" and "Adina" (both 1874). While typically Jamesian, this ambivalence is also typically American. The celebrated and much quoted letter in which James describes the euphoria of his first day in Rome – "At last — for the first time — I live! … I went reeling and moaning thro' the streets, in a fever of enjoyment"[136] – drew this characteristic reply from his father:

> It is very good to get your first impressions of Rome, and I can sympathize with you fully. I feel that I myself should be horribly affected there by the historical picturesque. I should be extremely sensitive to it objectively, and would therefore all the more revolt from it subjectively, as hearing underneath it all the pent-up moaning and groaning soul of the race, struggling to be free or to come to consciousness. I am glad on the whole that my lot is cast in a land where life doesn't wait on death, and where consequently no natural but only an artificial picturesque is possible. The historical consciousness rules to

[134] *Roderick Hudson*, Penguin Classics, p. 263.
[135] Edel, *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, Introduction, p. 7.

> such a distorted excess in Europe that I have always been restless there, and ended by pining for the land of the future exclusively. Condemned to *remain* there I should stifle in a jiffy.[137]

Similar attitudes and fears dominate the two Roman tales and the early Roman novel *Roderick Hudson*, in which James has Mary Garland confess to Rowland, during a ramble amongst the ruins of the Palantine, that:

> it was coming over her ... that Rome was a ponderously sad place. "Everything", she said, "seems to say that all things are vanity. If one is doing something I suppose one feels a certain strength within one to say otherwise. But if one is idle, surely, it is depressing to live year after year among the ashes of things that once were mighty. If I were to remain here, I should become permanently 'low' as they say."[138]

Earlier, it has occurred to Rowland that:

> in spite of the charm which Rome flings over one's mood there ran through Rowland's meditations an undertone of melancholy ... Whether in an atmosphere
> so heavily weighted with echoes and memories one grows to believe that there is nothing in one's consciousness that is not foredoomed to moulder and crumble and become dust for the feet and possible malaria for the lungs of future generations the fact at least remains that one parts half willingly with one's hopes in Rome.[139]

Again, much of the subtext of James's fiction is illuminated by the family letters. William James, Henry's travelling companion, had written to their sister Alice that:

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[136] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i. 1843-1875, p. 160.

[137] Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen, *The James Family: Selections from the Writings of Henry James Senior, William, Henry and Alice James* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 289.

[138] *Roderick Hudson*, pp. 273-4.

[139] *Roderick Hudson*, pp. 159-60. Compare this passage with many in *The Marble Faun*: for example with Kenyon's vision of "the myriads of dead hopes that lie crushed into the soil of Rome"; and with the "Sylvan Dance" episode, set in the ruins in the Borghese Grove, when the mood of hedonistic enchantment is abruptly broken by Miriam's and Donatello's intuition of the evil in these satyrs, fauns and nymphs: "Just an instant before, it was Arcadia and the Golden Age. The spell being broken, it was now only that old tract of pleasure-ground ... where the crimes and calamities of ages, the many battles, blood relentlessly poured out, and deaths of myriads, have corrupted all the soil, creating an influence that makes the air deadly to human lungs." *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p. 927. As late as 1913, Norman Douglas described the Roman air as "the withering blast whose hot and clammy touch hastens death and putrefaction." *South Wind* (London: Martin Secker, 1917), p. 3. The belief that Rome's air was unhealthy easily translated to the

> Italy is a very *delightful* place to dip into but no more. I can't imagine how, unless one is earnestly studying history in some way, it can in the long run help injuring all one's active powers. The weight of the past world here is fatal, — one ends by becoming its mere parasite instead of its equivalent. This worship, this dependence on other men is abnormal. The ancients did things by doing the business of their own day, not by gaping at their grandfathers' tombs, — and the normal man of today will do likewise. Better fifty years of Cambridge, than a cycle of Cathay![140] Adieu. Your brutal and philistine Brother.[141]

The legendary, languorous, anti-Protestant 'air' of Rome was a common obsession of American writers of the period. Compare the protagonist of William Dean Howells's 1886 Italian novel *Indian Summer*, who blames the Italian landscape for his inertia:

> "It's too full of every possible interest. What a history is written all over it, public and private! If you don't take it simply like any other landscape, it becomes an oppression. It's well that tourists come to Italy so ignorant, and keep so. Otherwise they couldn't live to get home again; the past would crush them."[142]

But James vacillates and equivocates, and some time after his first letter from Rome, having spent many months of saturation in Italian art, he wrote to William: "[I] conceived at Naples a ten-fold deeper loathing than ever of the hideous heritage of the past, and felt for a moment as if I should like to devote my life to laying railroads and erecting blocks of stores on the most classic and romantic sites."[143] Yet in a letter written the next day (December 28, 1869) he confides that he took a train to Assisi, where he had "a deep delicious bath of mediaevalism" (182).

In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) the real landscape of Italy is barely present. Yet Italy and the Italian past pervade the work. The city of Rome and its ruins are a half baleful, half benevolent

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idea of a metaphoric moral sickness, a trope which had currency at least until 1936, when Edith Wharton wrote "Roman Fever".

[140] The allusion is to Tennyson's "Locksley Hall":

> Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

James uses the line again in *The Wings of a Dove* (1902), p. 132.

[141] Quoted by Matthiessen, *The James Family: Selections from the Writings*, p. 291.

[142] William Dean Howells, *Indian Summer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press World's Classics Paperback, 1988), p. 239.

presence; shadowy, powerful, pervasive, recalling James's observation about the "hand of Italy" in Browning's Florence: its touch to the imagination, he wrote, is "at once a caress and a menace."[144] *The Portrait of a Lady* departs from the realism of *Roderick Hudson*, a shift in style illustrated by the novels' differently described Romes.[145] Roderick's is the Rome of an excited American consciousness and Romantic expectations, and the city's landscapes and works of art are conventionally rendered. Isabel Archer's story begins on a similar note: "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."[146] The novel's greatest irony is that it is Gilbert Osmond's "love of the beautiful" and his "endless knowledge" that Isabel finds in Italy, and with which she replaces 'Italy' in her quest for experience and self-fulfilment. Her story is the story of a flawed and failed romanticism. She idealises Italy, life and Osmond, as Roderick Hudson idealises Italy, art and Christina.

The Roman settings of *The Portrait of a Lady* are seen through Isabel's eyes and suggest her shifting states of mind. In Rome, 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 ... These things strongly moved her, but moved her all inwardly" (336). Uncannily, Rome becomes an observer of Isabel Archer's story ("she had long before this taken old Rome into her confidence"), and almost another character in the novel. At the beginning of the book, Isabel tells her aunt that she likes "places in which things have happened – even if they're sad things." She prefers places that are "full of life; I mean full of experience – of people's feelings and sorrows" (81). Her aunt replies that if this is so, then Isabel must go to Florence, where there are places and houses "in which things have happened – especially deaths." When Isabel arrives in Florence, she finds that to live there was: "to hold to her ear all day a shell of the sea of the past. This vague eternal rumour kept her imagination awake" (297). James uses the same expression in his Roman notebooks, where he writes of the "intensely and adorably strange" sensation of riding on the Campagna, feeling the landscape so sad and so still, yet "so charged, to the supersensuous ear, with the murmur of an extinguished

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[143] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i, p. 182.

[144] "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*." *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, pp. 791-811. This reference p. 803.

[145] This is not to ignore James's statement in his Preface to the New York Edition that: "The centre of interest throughout 'Roderick' is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness" (*Roderick Hudson*, pp. 45-6). Rowland's consciousness *is* at the centre of the novel, *and* Rowland's Rome is realistically rendered.

[146] *The Portrait of a Lady*, pp. 274-5.

life".[147] In the early chapters of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Italy represents Isabel's hopes for a new and happy life, and in spite of the evil she knows to have happened in its past, life there holds only promise:

> [Isabel] 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. ... The sense of the terrible human past was heavy to her, but that of something altogether contemporary would suddenly give it wings that it could wave in the blue ... Keen as was her interest in the relics of the Roman past that lay scattered about her and in which the corrosion of centuries had still left so much of individual life, her thoughts, after resting a while on these things had wandered ... From the Roman past to Isabel's future was a long stride, but her imagination had taken it in a single flight. (336-7)[148]

In Isabel, James presents a character with a living, changing relationship with the past. She is his first character to find consolation in the vast sadness of Italy's past, which is exemplified in the ruins at Rome. As Michael Ross observes, "the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady* progresses from being fond of history to being part of it."[149] After her betrayal and loss of innocence in Italy, Isabel comes to an acceptance of her own suffering, through contemplating the suffering of the past:

> She had long before this taken old Rome into her confidence, for in a world of ruin the ruin of her happiness seemed a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and were still upright; she dropped her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself

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[147] "Roman Rides." (1873) *Italian Hours*, p. 140.

[148] In one of only three or four pages devoted to *The Portrait of a Lady* in his study of the Colosseum in American literature and painting, William Vance praises James's originality in his use of the Roman past in fiction: "The destiny of a contemporary American is linked to the grand historical images without the cynicism or satire of the mock-heroic tradition, without the naively self-aggrandising equations of the neo-classicists, and without the self-pity and rage of Byronic romanticism, all of which we find in other American instances." William L. Vance, "The Colosseum: American Uses of an Imperial Image." *Roman Images*, ed. Annabel Patterson, pp. 105-140. This reference p. 107.

[149] Michael Ross, *Storied Cities: Literary Imaginings of Florence, Venice, and Rome* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), Chapter 17: "A large capacity for ruin: *Roderick Hudson* and *The Portrait of a* Lady." pp. 247-264, this reference p. 253. Ross's study examines the ways in which non-Italian imaginations re-invent the three Italian cities of his title. The work is essentially a survey, which he states: "was not written to prove a theory, but it has a theoretical premise: that setting enters more profoundly into the life of literary works than it is fashionable to suppose." Ross's premise is hardly new; neither is it unfashionable to suppose that setting enters profoundly into literature.

> and grew objective, so that ... she could almost smile at it and think of its smallness. Small it was, in the large Roman record, and her haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot easily carried her from the less to the greater. She had grown deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; had grown to think of it chiefly as the place where people had suffered. This was what came to her in the staved churches, where the marble columns, transferred from pagan ruins, seemed to offer her a companionship in endurance ... [and] on that mighty plain [the Campagna] which is still so full of all that has passed from it ... she felt the touch of a vanished world.[150]

Hawthorne uses Rome's ruins in a similar, metaphoric way when he refers in *The Marble Faun* to the dweller in Rome who: "should learn to bear patiently his individual griefs, that endure only for one little lifetime, when here are the tokens of such infinite misfortune on an imperial scale, and when so many far landmarks of time, all around him, are bringing the remoteness of a thousand years ago into the sphere of yesterday."[151]

Thus, James's attitude to the Italian past was profoundly ambivalent. He shared the American admiration for the complex accumulation of histories, so visible and tangible in the ruins which emblematise those histories. But he harboured a Puritan suspicion of the potential dangers of enthrallment to the past, particularly the residual paganism in Italian landscapes and art. Principally, as an American with the ambition to be a novelist, James regarded Italy's past as a source of stories. In Italy's history, unlike America's, there were episodes providing material for romances. The characters and actions (folly, barbarism, vainglory, valour) in Italy's long, often violent history, offered object lessons in morality.

Before James, Charles Dickens in *Little Dorrit* (1857) and George Eliot in *Middlemarch* (1871-2) had depicted unhappy heroines in Rome. Kenneth Churchill observes that: "The important new feature of [*Little Dorrit*'s] treatment of Italy ... is the way in which this is integrated into the pattern of imagery running through the whole work, to become not simply a convenient setting for the death of Dorrit but also a means of exploring the state of mind of his daughter."[152] Churchill quotes from the Venetian sections of *Little Dorrit*, to illustrate that the beauty of the city is no more than the image of a prison for Little Dorrit. But it is in the Roman sequence of

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[150] *The Portrait of a Lady*, pp. 564-5.
[151] Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun. Centenary Edition of the Works*, Volume IV, p. 826.
[152] Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930*, p. 139.

the novel that the influence on James's *The Portrait of a Lady* is most apparent. Rome is a city of vanished dreams and hopeless reality for Dickens's heroine, who:

> would often ride out in a hired carriage ... and alight alone and wander among the ruins of old Rome ... [which] ... besides being what they were, to her, were ruins of the old Marshalsea – ruins of her own old life – ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it – ruins of its loves, hopes, cares and joys. Two ruined spheres of action and suffering were before the solitary girl often sitting on some broken fragment; and in the lonely places, under the blue sky, she saw them both together.[153]

Dickens puts into prose the analogy between a state of mind and the physical reality of Rome's ruins which Byron had created in poetry in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.[154] In George Eliot's later treatment of the theme in *Middlemarch*, her heroine Dorothea Brooke, also unhappily married in Rome, like Isabel finds herself in the "city of visible history ... oftenest choosing to drive out to the Campagna where she could feel alone with the earth and sky, away from the impressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes."[155] Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch* illustrates the tradition in which James was writing Isabel's history and to a certain extent Roderick Hudson's, Daisy Miller's and his own. The following passage demonstrates Eliot's influence on the mood, theme and Italianate imagery of *The Portrait of a Lady*:

> To those who have looked at Rome with the quickening power of a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes ... Rome may still be the spiritual centre and interpreter of the world, but let them conceive one more historical contrast: the gigantic broken revelations of that 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 ... The weight of unintelligible Rome might lie easily on bright nymphs to whom it formed a background for the brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society; but Dorothea had no such defence against deep impression. Ruins and basilicas, palaces

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[153] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 612.

[154] *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. See Cantos LXXVII; CIV; CVI; CXXXI; CXXXVII [... and the solemn scene/Derives from thee a sense so deep and clear/That we become a part of what has been,/And grow unto the spot, all-seeing but unseen."; and CLVIII [" ... even so this/Outshining and o'erwhelming edifice/Fools our fond gaze, and greatest of the great/Defies at first our Nature's littleness,/Till, growing with its growth, we thus dilate/Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate." *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron* (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 1961 edition, pp. 179-252.

[155] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-2) (Harmondsworth: Penguins Classics edition, 1994), pp. 192-3.

> 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; ... the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensual and spiritual, mixed confusedly ... with her personal lot. (192-3)[156]

The impact of the passage, and the chief terror in Dorothea's Puritan mind, derives from the anti-Protestant air of Rome: its splendour, weight, and the malevolence in its weight. And her upbringing has taught her to turn experiences into principles: her "quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain" (194), so that she cannot divorce her feelings from her surroundings.

The influence of Dickens and Eliot on James is especially vivid in the ways in which the ruins of the Roman past reflect and embody their heroines' inner landscapes of unhappiness, and their sense of oppression and personal ruin. Little Dorrit's and Dorothea's stories and their settings prefigure the coalescence of objective and subjective Romes – the inner and outer worlds – in Isabel Archer's story: "Rome ... interfused and moderated her passion."[157] Isabel's sense of herself as part of "the large Roman record" exactly balances the reader's sense of Rome as a part of Isabel's consciousness.

Osmond's Tuscan villa is where Isabel's picturesque Italian past starts to crumble into the reality of her present. The villa is "full of romantic objects" but its "empty, dusky rooms" are furnished with "faded hangings of damask and tapestries ... perverse-looking relics of mediaeval brass ... [and] primitive specimens of pictorial art" (279), so that "she was oppressed at last with the accumulation of beauty and knowledge to which she found herself introduced" (313). Isabel's increasing sense of Florentine corruption and decadence accompanies her growing awareness of the evil in her situation. Her sadness increases further in Rome, where the world of the novel darkens with James's description of the Palazzo Roccanera. Osmond's Rome is a corrosive city, and his Palazzo "smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence" (415). Ned Rosier sees it as "a kind of domestic fortress" and "a dungeon" (415) – a symbol both of Pansy's oppression

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[156] See Eleanor Cook, "The Italian Journey: From James to Eliot to Browning." *The Motif of the Journey in Nineteenth-Century Italian Literature*, eds. Bruno Magliocchetti & Anthony Verna (Gainesville, Fl: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 41-52. See also Baruch Hochman, "From *Middlemarch* to *The Portrait of a Lady*: Some Reflections on Henry James and the Traditions of the Novel." *Hebrew University Studies in Literature* 5 (1977), pp. 102-26.

[157] *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 654.

by her father and Isabel's entrapment in her marriage. Far from fulfilling Isabel's elation at finding herself "mistress of a house with a storied past", the Palazzo Roccanera quickly becomes "the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation" (478) and she feels "shut up with an odour of mould and decay". Like Osmond's "beautiful mind", the house gives neither light nor air. His mind, to Isabel, "indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her ... [and] she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" (474). Similarly, in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot has Dorothea reflect in Rome: "How was it that in the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither?"[158] For Dorothea and Isabel, the romantic notion of life as an endless vista of offered possibilities is proven false. The desire for self-fulfilment in Italy through art, the imagination and passion is thwarted. Kenneth Graham excludes *The Portrait of a Lady* from his discussion of James's romanticism, preferring to describe it as "the classic Victorian novel ... its plot built around choices and [an] intellectual pattern that interweaves free will and determinism."[159] In contrast, Daniel Fogel, strongly objecting to John Carlos Rowe's interpretation (which views James as a philosophical modernist) sees *The Portrait of a Lady* as the "crowning achievement of the Jamesian [Romantic] dialectic." Fogel bases his opinion on James's praise for Isabel's "nobleness of imagination" and her sense of "the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world."[160] Isabel Archer is betrayed by the realities of society and nineteenth-century ideas about women and marriage. But the deceptions practised in Italy, and the false expectations of the romantic Italianate sensibility contribute to her fate. James's judgement of romanticism, particularly literary Italianate romanticism, is implicit: "[Isabel] had had everything a girl could have ... abundant opportunity for dancing, plenty of new dresses, the London *Spectator*, the latest publications, the music of Gounod, *the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot.*[161] [my emphasis] Romantic illusions about the Italian past are both a consolation and a trap. In James's imagination, cruelty is closely woven into the fabric of Rome's past and lingers into its present.

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[158] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 195.
[159] Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: A Literary Life*, p. 59.
[160] Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination*, p. 171.
[161] *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 89.

In *The Aspern Papers* (1888), the recent, "visitable" past is inseparable from the city in which the story is set. Venice is the medium through which the characters move. In the Preface to the novella James wrote:

> I delight in the palpable imaginable *visitable* past – in the nearer distances and clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to ... That, to my imagination, is the past fragrant of all, or of almost all the poetry of the thing outlived and lost and gone, and yet in which the precious element of closeness, telling so of connections, but tasting so of differences, remains appreciable.[162]

What fascinated James most at this period of his writing life was not pagan Italy, but "the reality and the closeness of our relation to the past", and it is this aspect of the past which the Venetian tale explores. The mood of James's evocation of the immediate past is one of nostalgia and melancholy rather than menace. James describes the mood in his essay, "The Grand Canal": "Nowhere else has the past been laid to rest with such tenderness, such a sadness of resignation and remembrance. Nowhere else is the present so alien, so discontinuous, so like a crowd in a cemetery without garlands for the graves."[163] Venice is full of "superannuated things" – full of the "*reflection* of superannuated things."[164] In his biography of Story, James refers to "the lingering *lurid*"[165] in Venice. Its streets are not "blood-stained" like those of Rome[166], but the place is implacably and seedily past. There is a sense of desolation about Venice in this story, although a gentle desolation. The narrator of *The Aspern Papers* is a modern intruder into the city's genteel decadence, and hostile to the past he yearns, paradoxically, to possess. As Michael Ross writes:

> If Venice has become, in James's phrase, "the most beautiful of tombs", there is much to be said for treading lightly over its remains. That is precisely what the prying narrator refuses to do in regard to Juliana, who has lingered immured in her own personal past, feeding her leftover life with stale memories of passion and beauty.[167]

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[162] James's Preface to *The Aspern Papers*, New York Edition of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James 1907-9* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1984), p. 31.
[163] "The Grand Canal." (1892) *Italian Hours*, p. 33.
[164] "The Grand Canal." *Italian Hours*, p. 35.
[165] *William Wetmore Story*, vol. i, p. 195.
[166] James notes the expression "the blood-stained streets of Rome" from *The Marble Faun*, in *Hawthorne. Henry James, The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, p. 169.
[167] Michael Ross, *Storied Cities*, p. 146.

The Aspern Papers is another story – like "The Last of the Valerii", "Adina" and "The Madonna of the Future" – about a morbid and destructive obsession with the past in Italy. It is an example of Jamesian irony that the obsession belongs both to the narrator and those upon whom he preys, the Bordereau women. What is at risk in this tale is not only the loss of the Aspern papers, but the graver loss of the narrator's soul. Thus the work it most resembles in theme as much as setting is *The Wings of the Dove*, where Densher's soul is at stake in a game of money and love.

It is well known that James relocated the story of *The Aspern Papers* (which happened in fact in Florence) to Venice. Venice must have seemed the ideal setting for a narrative of a displaced past, grand and suppressed passion, and lost hopes. Decay, dislocation, and wilted refinement are the attributes of the city James associates in this novella with Juliana Bordereau (a fictional version of Byron's mistress Claire Clairmont). James himself said that Venice was the only city in which the story of Juliana was "thinkable", and "only in Byronic or more or less immediately post-Byronic Italy."[168] The impulse had taken him, he said, to project "the afternoon light" (32) of the Byronic Age. Adeline Tintner observes, rightly, that "a striking example of the hold that the English romantic poets had on the anglicized James is his fascination with Byron."[169] Tintner notes James's infatuation with "the Byronic hero, the man capable not only of adventure and the romantic quest but also of the production of art" (95). This seems an excellent basis for an exegesis of *Roderick Hudson*. However, Tintner is mistaken in her belief that "the hero-villain of *The Aspern Papers* is himself a Byronic man, attempting the seemingly impossible task of retrieving the precious papers of the great poet from the witch like Miss Bordereau. Although he fails in his attempt, he not only has the great adventure of his life but causes a romantic dream in the heart of a plain, middle-aged woman divorced from life" (95). Tintner appears, unusually for her, to miss the ironic, partially amused tone of James's story, some of which derives from James's ironic use of elements of the Gothic tradition.[170] James stated in his preface to the New York Edition that the "charm" in the story was that it was "a final scene of the rich Shelley drama played out in the very theatre of our 'modernity'", and that the "beauty that appealed" to him was its "forward continuity" between then (1820) and now (1880).[171]

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[168] *The Aspern Papers*, Preface to the New York Edition, Penguin Classics, p. 33.
[169] Adeline Tintner, *The Book World of Henry James*, p. 95.
[170] For the latent gothicism of *The Aspern Papers* see Laurence Holland, *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 117-8, and on the tale's grotesque, as well as gothic, elements see Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: The Drama of Fulfilment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), chapter 3, ("The Price of Power in *The Aspern Papers*."), pp. 58-78.
[171] *The Aspern Papers*, Preface to the New York Edition, pp. 30-1.

James always conceived of Venice as a city of loss, waste and belatedness, as much as hope and beauty, art and passion. For, in spite of the enduring monuments of art and architecture, in Venice the past is an absence. Layers of history have been effaced by successive layers of pasts and new histories. Time, in Venice, is chimerical, like the shimmering, dream-like effects of sky dissolving into water. The Bordereau palazzo is a symbol of James's vision of Venice in this afternoon light: "It was not particularly old, only two or three centuries; and it had an air not so much of decay as of quiet discouragement, as if it had rather missed its career."[172] There is a similar passage in "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women": "Dear old Venice has lost her complexion, her figure, her reputation, her self-respect; and yet, with it all, has so puzzlingly not lost a shred of her distinction."[173] The descriptions of Venice and the palazzo might apply to Juliana Bordereau who, equally decayed, is herself another symbol of the city's past. Her grotesque green eyeshade is a further metaphor for the Venetian past. The "mask", as the narrator refers to it, is a debased form of the quintessential Venetian costume, hiding and protecting the "sad-eyed witch" Juliana/Venice. At the same time, the eyeshade is a sort of *memento mori*, a mocking reminder of the gorgeous masks of Carnivale Venice, and a synecdoche for Juliana's lost beauty. At times Juliana becomes confused, in the hallucinating narrator's disordered senses, with the city of Venice itself. The narrator's mental disorientation is partly due to the traditional, Proustian disorientation induced by Venice. For Proust, Venice was a place of paradigmatic dissolution, like Turner's paintings, which show palaces dissolving and disappearing into cataclysms of light.[174] But some of the narrator's disorientation is due to his all-consuming, inebriating obsession. He discovers, as many have discovered in Venice, that not being able to tell where the land finishes and the water begins is connected to larger metaphysical uncertainties and doubts about social and moral boundaries. In *The Aspern Papers* James uses the dissolving horizon as a metaphor for the disjunction between intellectual passion and human involvement, and the opposition of art and life. The ambient deception reflects the narrator's moral confusions about the ("publishing") world, and the ambiguous presence of the past in our lives.

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[172] *The Aspern Papers*, p. 49.

[173] "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women." (1899) *Italian Hours*, pp. 61-2.

[174] Writers as diverse as Vernon Lee in "Out of Venice at Last" (1914), *The Golden Keys, and Other Essays on the Genius Loci* (New York: Dodd & Mead, 1925), p. 74, and George Steiner in "Echo, marble and the sounds of water" (*The Times Literary Supplement*, May 9 1997), p. 9, have referred to the disconcerting visual deception of the effect of "marble built upon water". William Hazlitt in *Notes of a Journey Through France and Italy* (1826), reprinted in *Complete Works* (London: Dent, 1932) remarked upon the anomalies and contradictions in Venice that reverse the natural order of things and make the city the "very essence of caprice, uncertainty, and vicissitude." (10: 267-8) Byron's Venice especially (remembering Byron's influence on James) is a place where: "All the delusion of the dizzy scene./Its false and true enchantments – art and nature,/Which swam before my giddy eyes ..." *Marino Faliero*, IV. i. 62-64. W.G. Sebald's Venice, in *Vertigo* (1999), extends the tradition.

In *The Aspern Papers*, the decadence of the city, Juliana's bereavement and the narrator's unnatural obsession collectively comprise a phantasmagorical vision which is one of the most remarkable things James wrote. In Venice, the past is a living presence; the sinister in the Venetian atmosphere of *The Aspern Papers* shimmers just beneath the surface, demonstrating James's ability to suggest evil without naming it. The tale illustrates James's ambivalent attitude to the past. Juliana and Tita, who cling fiercely to the past, are mistaken, but not inauthentic. Memory may allow a character to live in error, James seems to imply, but always to be forgiven, since what is important in fiction is that both memory and error should seem true to character. Tita and Juliana feel real to us because they feel real to themselves, their past, and private universes. The narrator's clinging relationship with the past is parasitically inauthentic. There is a compelling sense of tarnished glory and over-ripeness in James's city, and the two women live suffocated, arrested lives. But there is an equal sense of the profanation of Venice by the predatory American's vulgarity; the feeling that this rich, old world culture, the grandeur it shares with the Romantic Age, should be left to linger on. James's decadent and dying Venice is forgiven because it is true to its character.

James used the recent Italian past in two other minor fictions. Rome of the 1840s and 50s – Hawthorne's Italy, which James had not known first-hand – is the setting for both "The Diary of a Man of Fifty" (1879) and "The Solution" (1889). The former is a story of nostalgia and lost opportunity. It expresses James's sense of belatedness, and echoes the essay "Italy Revisited" of 1877, acknowledging that the old emotions and fascinations are still alive. James evokes a Rome bathed in the golden light of memory, the place of his imagination: "They told me I should find Italy greatly changed, [but] ... everything is so perfectly the same that I seem to be living my youth over again; all the forgotten impressions of that enchanting time came back to me."[175] James revisits this Italian "visitable past" in the equally slight "The Solution", with another elderly, reminiscing narrator who records his memories of a troubling but romantic episode in his youth. James evokes an indeterminate, idyllic, Arcadian Italy:

> I can live over lovely evenings ... when tables were set for supper in the garden and lighted by the fireflies, when some of the villagers – such voices as one heard and such

[175] "The Diary of a Man of Fifty." *The Complete Tales 1876-1882*, vol. iv, p. 389.

> natural art! – came in to sing for us, and when we all walked home in the moonlight with the ladies, singing ourselves, along the road.[176]

That was 1889, the last time James wrote of Rome in his fiction. In an essay of 1909 he recalls his last trip to Italy in 1903, using similar imagery, and the same elegiac tone, sense of Arcadian enchantment, and nostalgia as in the story. On this occasion too, there is "an evening meal spread, in the warm still darkness", and James's mind wanders back to "the city of his first unpremeditated rapture", remembering:

> more things than I can say — above all, as it were, the whole awkward past, the mild confused romance of the Rome one had loved and of which one was exactly taking leave under protection of the friendly lanterned and garlanded feast ... It was indeed a reconciling, it was an altogether penetrating, last hour.[177]

The "elements of the scene", the "composition", "all kept their appointment, to fond memory, with that especial form of Roman faith, the fine aesthetic conscience in things, that is never, never broken" (200). It is a preterite vanished world, but its "haunting Genius of Style" (196) is present and graspable. In the "supreme romantic solemnities and sublimities of landscape" (198) James detects "classic allusions and Byronic quotations" and "gave the reign to my sense of the sinister too, of that vague after-taste of evil things that lurks so often, for a suspicious sensibility, wherever the terrible game of the life of the Renaissance was played as the Italians played it" (197). The "ingenuity of quest" (195), James writes, was for a "remote and romantic tradition", and he finds "in the whole perfection of the setting the very ideal of the tradition of that *extraordinary in the romantic*, handed down to us, as the most attaching and inviting spell of Italy" (198). The past and the aesthetics of place come together, and the harmonies specific to the place are romantic, reconciling, redemptive. If memory is the crux of identity, as this intensely nostalgic and elegiac essay seems to suggest, then images of place determine the act of remembrance. James's sense of the Italian past and those who populated it, the setting, the Romantic image, and self-invention are fused.

James's image of the Italian past was coloured by a New World reverence for the Old, and tinctured with American Puritanism. His image of the Italian past was of a palimpsestic place of

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[176] "The Solution." *The Complete Tales 1888-1891*, vol. vii, p. 360.
[177] "A Few Other Roman Neighbourhoods." (1909) *Italian Hours*, p. 204.

accumulated historical experience, which he used metaphorically to describe his American characters' confrontation with 'experience' – their getting of wisdom. The places and pasts of Italy represent the inner consciousness of his characters: the characters inhabit the past as the past inhabits the characters. Isabel Archer and the narrator of *The Aspern Papers* are consummate exponents of the technique. James's was a romantic view of the Italian past, but with typically Jamesian irony, he shows that the romantic view is a cruel illusion. Roderick Hudson's image of himself as a Romantic genius in classical Rome (like Theobald in Renaissance Florence) is an example of a delusional character. Isabel Archer's romantic expectations of knowledge and happiness in Osmond's Florentine villa and Roman palazzo collapse under the oppression of his ancient surroundings and collections of the art of antiquity. James drew consolation from the Italian past, as Isabel draws consolation from the ruins of Rome. In Italy, he travelled a great distance, in space and time, thought and fiction. At the end, his relationship with the Italian past was romantic and reconciling, making sense of himself as an exile, and his need for the complexity of a spiritual, secular, palpable past.

2.4 Henry James and Italian Art

The imaginative use of Italian art is a significant element in the English tradition of writing about Italy. The practice took on vigour with the Romantic poets, amongst whom the major influences on James were Byron with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Shelley, and Browning with *The Ring and the Book*, *Old Pictures in Florence*, *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*. Writers of fiction, too, found Italy's famous works of art useful as literary devices, James's foremost models being George Eliot's *Romola* and *Middlemarch*, Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. American writers of James's generation and earlier[178]conceived of Italy as a place where the world's greatest works of art were situated within a landscape saturated in historical suggestion. In addition to its pagan vitality and relaxed sexual mores, Italy provided an atmosphere resonant with the creative genius of the past, in which Americans felt they themselves might become fully creative. To Americans, the life of an expatriate artist in Italy represented the ideal existence, and an ideal subject for fiction. Hawthorne depicted the lifestyle in *The Marble Faun*, and James in *Roderick Hudson*, which owes a great deal to the peculiar Hawthornean Roman world. In the Roman settings of *The Marble Faun*, artworks carry strong symbolic connotations, or reflect the spiritual states of the characters. The Faun is the central

metaphor, but Guido's painting of Beatrice Cenci is placed with deliberation in the text as a moral comment on Hilda's experience, and the Laocoon has a similar narrative function. But Hawthorne's use of art in *The Marble Faun* is less subtle than even James's earliest, less accomplished work, and in this regard as in all others, James's fiction surpasses his precursor's. Robert Emmet Long's study *Henry James and the Legacy of Hawthorne* includes an apt summary of the differences between the two writers:

> The polished surfaces and formal perfection of *The Portrait of a Lady* make *The Marble Faun* seem primitive by comparison. Compare ... the almost infinitely greater sophistication of James's treatment of art as encompassing metaphor with Hawthorne's more static use of works of art ... James's novel, like Hawthorne's, draws its title from a work of art; but it is significant that James chooses the painter's portrait for his title, for his interest in the novel is in the delineation of character as it evolves through social experience. How different from Hawthorne, whose characters have only a vague social identity, and do not expand, is James's portrait of Isabel Archer, which requires hundreds of pages to execute, and is not completed until, on the last page, her final gesture is made.[179]

While *The Marble Faun* exhibits the same quality of atmospheric density as *The Portrait of a Lady*, James's symbolic use of the city of Rome and its artworks is more richly suggestive and nuanced than Hawthorne's more explicit treatment of the same symbolic potential.[180] It is in the delineation of character, as James himself said in "The Art of Fiction", that the novelist "competes with life ... competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning."[181] In James's fiction, Italian art, as Emmet Long suggests, is representative chiefly of character and relationships.

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[178] Hawthorne (1804-64) was a generation earlier than James. James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) was the first American to produce a significant fictional treatment of Italy, but his novels were of Venice and Naples, not Rome, and he did not focus on art.

[179] Robert Emmet Long, *The Great Succession: Henry James and the Legacy of Hawthorne* (Pittsburg, Pa.: University of Pittsburg Press, 1979), p. 116.

[180] See also Jay Bochner, "Life in a Picture Gallery: Things in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Marble Faun*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 11 (1969), pp. 761-777.

[181] "The Art of Fiction." *Longman's Magazine*, September 1884. Reprinted in *Henry James, The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, pp. 186-206. This reference p. 195.

The vogue for Italian art in fiction was widespread amongst American writers largely because of their felt cultural status as provincials[182], and Italian art was invoked sometimes merely to impress readers with the writer's familiarity with classical antiquity and the Renaissance. Art was often used as a straight-forward form of local colour, much as the Italian landscape itself was used, purely to set scenes. Art was useful in advancing narratives and resolving plots. Almost all of Italy's best-known artworks were used for this purpose in James's first tale "Travelling Companions", in a kind of fictionalised catalogue of Italy's museums and churches. So too, Roderick's sketch of the mask of Juno introduces Christina Light into the narrative of *Roderick Hudson* and prefigures Roderick's downfall.[183] Specific works of art were frequently employed by James, and his predecessors and contemporaries, as symbols and metaphors and to represent the qualities, moods or attitudes of characters. In *The Portrait of a Lady* for instance, Henrietta Stackpole's response to the Correggio painting of the Virgin and Child in the Uffizi reflects her softening towards Mr. Bantling and the idea of marriage.[184] Warburton's pose before the *Dying Gladiator* in the same novel (352) emphasises his defeat (he has been vanquished in love); and Verrocchio's statue of *Colleoni* in *The Aspern Papers* underscores the rapacity of the novella's narrator.[185] Italian art was traditionally used to illustrate themes and ideas. For example, James uses classical sculpture and paintings of the Italian Renaissance to illustrate his themes of the burden of genius, in *Roderick Hudson*, and the burden of belatedness, in "The Madonna of the Future"; and to explore ideas about the sources of inspiration and the nature of artistic failure (again in *Roderick Hudson* and "The Madonna of the Future"). But art's principal purpose in James' fiction is to make moral points. For James, the moral value of art was all-important. Of Tintoretto, the painter he admired above any other, James states: "the great source of his impressiveness is that his indefatigable hand never drew a line that was not, as one may say, a moral line." [186] James's ironic juxtaposition of Daisy Miller and Velasquez's well-known portrait of Innocent the Tenth[187] is a comment on the difference between real and professed innocence; and the Juno in "The Last of the Valerii" (*passim*) provides a lesson about the dangers of becoming obsessed with the past and the pagan beauty of Italian art.

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[182] The best accounts of the influence of Italy on these writers are: Paul R. Baker, *The Fortunate Pilgrims: Americans in Italy 1800-1860* (Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1964); Van Wyck Brooks, *The Dream of Arcadia: American writers and artists in Italy 1760-1915* (New York: Dutton, 1958); and Nathalia Wright, *American Novelists in Italy, the Discoverers: Allston to James* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965).

[183] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 109.

[184] *The Portrait of a Lady*, pp. 505-6.

[185] *The Aspern Papers*, p. 139.

[186] "Venice: an Early Impression." (1872) *Italian Hours*, p. 55.

[187] "Daisy Miller." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iv., p. 196.

Italian art brings illumination and a wealth of metaphors to James's work, and in many senses informs its structure. Adeline R. Tintner claims: "There is hardly a tale among James's one hundred and twelve stories and twenty novels that does not contain within its net some artefact of status, great or small, of beauty or even of grotesquerie, provided it can concretely underlie some moral, human, or technical point James is making."[188] Italian art contributes to plot, and shapes the prose through which the reader discerns the underlying Jamesian themes. The art which so intoxicated James also raised questions about the aesthetic sensibility and the artistic temperament; about the place of the imagination in life and art, and its uneasy relationship with reality. Italian art provided James with ideas and theories which were to guide his intellectual and moral development as much as his artistic life. Art offered ways to explore in fiction what was at the heart of his image and expectations of the Grand Tour, and Italy and Europe. When James sends his characters to Italy, it is so that they might move progressively towards self-knowledge. And the main reason Italy was the perfect place for non-Italians, and northerners, to enlarge their experience and become truly alive is that it was a place imaginatively associated with the aesthetic, passionate and pagan aspects of human experience. Italy's iconic works of art were a significant part of the process of self-realisation because they represented, in themselves, the aesthetic and passionately-felt. Wherever Italy is evoked in James's fiction, art is an inevitable component of the scene. A powerful instance of the principle occurs in *The Princess Casamassima*, a novel in which Italy and Italian art might seem at first glance to be peripheral.[189] The epiphanic moment of Hyacinth Robinson's self-realisation comes to him in Venice, through a recognition that misery can be redeemed by art, by "the great achievements of which man has been capable" and "the conquest of learning and taste, the general fabric of civilisation."[190] Hyacinth's existential crisis in Venice – that great allegory of civilisation – prefigures the denouement of the novel, and connects his fraying personality to the faded but glorious city. That revelatory moment, and Hyacinth's transformation, are suggestively suffused with the radiance of centuries of Venetian art.

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[188] Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), Introduction, p. 2. For Henry James and Art, see Adeline R. Tintner, *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes: Thirteen Artists in his Work* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993). Tintner's are works of literary archaeology. Her knowledge of art is encyclopaedic, and she pursues associations, hidden allusions and sources relentlessly — so relentlessly that sometimes an *apercu* seems far-fetched. Too many correspondences between visual and verbal art are provided without enough engagement with recent theoretical scholarship.

[189] Alan Holder has an interesting perspective on the novel: "In *The Princess Casamassima* ... which may be said to have London as its real hero, Hyacinth Robinson finds the English capital 'the richest expression of the life of man', a judgement the more significant for his coming to it after having seen the splendours of Paris and Venice. Like Emerson and Hawthorne before him, James saw London as a modern-day Rome, the centre of an empire, the capital of the world." *Three Voyagers in Search of Europe*, p. 283.

[190] *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) 2 volumes (London: Macmillan, 1921), vol. ii., p. 130.

Like Hyacinth Robinson, Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* goes to Venice, to live amongst art. She experiences there, in the Palazzo Leporelli, "with all its romance and art and history", the great opening-out of her life. In this palazzo (her "great gilded shell"), within "the golden grace of the high rooms, chambers of art in themselves", Milly arranges the elements of her "Veronese picture" – her grand dinner party – to bring out "all its [the palazzo's] glory".[191] The general, glittering effect of James's imaginary Veronese is to recreate a scene from life in the Venetian Renaissance, and to symbolise Milly's hopes for a grand, full, splendid and triumphant life. The unnamed Bronzino portrait mentioned in the first half of the novel, which Milly sees in London, is an ironic counterpoint to the Veronese in the second half. The Bronzino prefigures Milly's death, as she is aware: "She was the image of the Bronzino ... she found herself looking at the mysterious portrait through tears ... And she was dead, dead, dead ... 'I shall never be better than this'" (194, 196).[192] The portrait symbolises Milly's early death, and the emptiness of her life up until this point.

For James, reality and artifice were one, in Italy, particularly in Venice.[193] In one of his Venetian essays James writes:

> The whole Venetian art-world is so near, so familiar, so much an extension and adjunct of the spreading actual ... art and life seem so interfused and, as it were, so consanguineous. All the splendour of light and colour, all the Venetian air and the Venetian history are on the walls and ceilings of the palaces; and all the genius of the masters, all the images and visions they have left upon canvas, seem to tremble in the sunbeams and dance upon the waves. That is the perpetual interest of the place – ... the churches and galleries ... offer you an exquisite reproduction of the things that surround you. All Venice was both model and painter, and life was so pictorial that art couldn't help becoming so. With all diminutions life is pictorial still, and you enjoy [Venetian works] because they are so social and so true.[194]

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[191] *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 361, 348, 381, and 386.
For a thorough exposition of the 'Veronese' which is Milly's party, see Charles Anderson's *Person, Place and Thing*, pp. 205-212.

[192] For the Bronzino, see Adeline Tintner, "Bronzino's *Lucrezia Panciatichi*." *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes*, pp. 100-104. The essay is another example of Tintner's literary detective work, from which she believes it possible to identify the portrait as a particular Bronzino, the *Lucrezia Panciatichi*.

[193] In Tony Tanner's memorable phrase, James's Italy was "a habitable Veronese". *Venice Desired* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 181.

[194] "Venice."(1882) *Italian Hours*, pp. 21-22.

Venice was living art, James thought, and Venetian works of art were "reproductions of the things that surround you". He wrote of Tintoretto: "one's observation of his pictures seems less an operation of the mind than a kind of supplementary experience of life."[195] The effect of Italian art on James, and its function in his fiction, was to conjure an alternative existence, a rich and spacious other world. In his evocations of place and the composition of his prose, James conveys his apprehension of the fusion of life and art: his novels are deliberately painterly in their effect. James often drew the analogy between writing and painting, claiming to envy the painter's materials and techniques. Italy and the Italian masters seemed particularly to provoke this feeling, especially Tintoretto, who, James believed, expressed the "largest eloquence of art". In his earliest essay (1872) on Venice, James wrote that: "[Tintoretto] *felt*, pictorially, the great, beautiful, terrible spectacle of human life, very much as Shakespeare felt it poetically" (57). In a letter to William James in 1869 he confided: "I'd give a great deal to be able to fling down a dozen of his [Tintoretto's] pictures into prose of corresponding force and colour."[196] *Roderick Hudson* shows James experimenting with the painterliness of prose: light is golden, dazzling and shining; there are lamps glowing in radiant circles; candlelight; shadows and darknesses; and *chiaroscuro*. The scene of Rowland's dinner for the expatriate artists of Rome is an example of the effect:

> They were standing before Roderick's statue of Eve, and the young sculptor had lifted up the lamp and was showing different parts of it to his companions. He was talking ardently – the lamplight covered his head and face. Rowland stood looking on, for the group struck him with its picturesque symbolism. Roderick, bearing the lamp and glowing in its radiant circle, seemed the beautiful image of a genius which combined sincerity with power. Gloriani, with his head on one side, pulling his long moustache and looking keenly from half-closed eyes at the lighted marble, represented art with a worldly motive.[197]

This composition, with its use of lighting to focus on the central figures in a group is strikingly reminiscent of Caravaggio. Particularly in this early work, James's technique might be viewed as another manifestation of his affinity with the Romantic tradition. L. J. Swingle describes "the obvious chiaroscuro effect Wordsworth favours in his imagery and choice of subject matter:

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[195] "Venice: an Early Impression." (1872) *Italian Hours*, p. 56.
[196] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i., pp. 139-40.
[197] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 127.

interweaving of light and dark, movement and rest, noise and silence."[198] What pleased Hawthorne about Italian subjects, James observed, was "their rich duskiness of colour, their chiaroscuro."[199] The light and shadow in James's own fiction are at once realistically conveyed *real* qualities of the Italian landscape, and metaphoric phantasmic substances. The metaphoric darkness of *The Portrait of a Lady* is the most powerful instance of this novelistic double vision. And although James commented of Hawthorne's "moonshiny romance" that "in truth, the lunar element is a little too pervasive" (447), the effects of moonshine are equally pervasive in his own work. In *Daisy Miller*, in which the influence of *The Marble Faun* is very clear, in one scene alone there is a "waning moon in the sky", "pale moonshine" and "luminous dusk".[200]

"Travelling Companions" (1870) is James's first attempt in fiction to come to terms with the nature and effects of Italian art. Paintings provide a backdrop to the action, and move it along: the growing relationship of Brooke and Miss Evans, and Brooke's maturing outlook, are reflected in the narrative's progress through a series of shared encounters with famous paintings. Brooke first meets Miss Evans standing in front of Leonardo's *The Last Supper*; their relationship is severed because of their ill-fated excursion to Padua to view the Giotto frescoes; and they are finally reunited and pledged to each other before Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*. The story and its pivotal works of art establish the narrator's/James's stance towards Italy and its art and culture, tracing the new arrival's astonishment, openness, and growing powers of discernment. The 'catalogue' of artworks reveals the overwhelming nature of the aesthetic experience, and the young man's reverence. The beauty he absorbs from the Italian landscape extends to Italian art: "But the great emotion, after all, was to feel myself among scenes in which art had ranged so freely."[201] Brooke's opening observation is of *The Last Supper*:

> The most strictly impressive picture in Italy is incontestably *The Last Supper* of Leonardo at Milan. A part of its immense solemnity is doubtless due to its being one of the first of the great Italian masterworks that you encounter in coming down from the North. Another secondary source of its interest resides in the very completeness of its decay. (171)

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[198] "Wordsworth's Contrarieties: A Prelude to Wordsworthian Complexity." *English Literary History*, XLIV (1977), p. 337. Swingle's essay's epigraph is "Sick, wearied out with contraries." *Prelude*, X, 900.
[199] *Hawthorne* (1879). *Henry James: Literary Criticism, Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, p. 364.
[200] "Daisy Miller." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iv, p. 201.
[201] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii, p. 185.

The narrator's choice of words in his opening statement to the reader is especially revealing. He *has seen* and *can conclude* "about all the great art treasures of Italy ... Tintoretto at Venice, Michael Angelo at Florence and Rome, Correggio at Parma." The pedagogic tone creates the effect of someone trying to sound sure of himself and his aesthetic principles. Brooke makes his declamatory, Baedekerish, Ruskinian judgements at the beginning of his tour, but having experienced the genius of the masters of the Renaissance at first-hand, he begins to trust his own eyes and responses, and not to rely on the opinions of others. In the presence of these painters, he says, "I really *felt* my intellect." The frescoes of Giotto in Padua "offer one of the deepest lessons of Italian travel", which is to abandon preconceived notions and allow the full stimulation of the imagination:

> I had been so ill-informed as to fancy that to talk about Giotto was to make more or less a fool of one's self, and that he was the especial property of the mere sentimentalists of criticism. But you no sooner cross the threshold of that little ruinous temple ... coated as with a murmured eloquence as from the infinite of art ... than you perceive with whom you have to deal. (209)

In paintings like Tintoretto's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, Brooke first notices the paradoxes presented by these painters ("the great painter of darkness being also the great painter of light") and later still, he learns about authenticity – in seeing and being. Miss Evans tells him: "we ought to learn from all this to be *real*; real even as Giotto is real; to discriminate between genuine and factitious sentiment; between the substantial and the trivial; between the essential and the superfluous; sentiment and sentimentality" (211). Tintoretto provoked thoughts about the opposition of real and ideal that were part of Romanticism's influence on James. James believed Tintoretto possessed a literary imagination capable of dissolving the tension between real and ideal: "The homeliest prose melts into the most ethereal poetry — the literal and the imaginative fairly confound their identity."[202]

Following the Padua episode, Brooke embarks on a tour of Italy's art museums, each stage revealing something more about Brooke and his *Bildungsreise*. After the tour, Brooke comments that he has begun to regard things "with less nervous rapture". By the time he is reunited with Miss Evans, standing before Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, the "latent symbolism" of the painting summarises what the art of Italy has taught him about life, and his

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[202] "Venice: An Early Impression." *Italian Hours*, p. 56.

feelings for Miss Evans. That is, that there is "love as sentiment" and "love as experience"; that there is "the passion that fancies" and "the passion that knows". Brooke learns through paintings to discern, particularly in romantic love, between what is real and not real; between false and true emotion; "living in poetry" and "living in stern prose". He is ready to propose marriage again, and this time is accepted. Throughout James's first Italian tale, art has been an instructive presence, a revelatory force, and transforming power. Its effects are mysterious, and the more mysterious for having confounded the narrator's expectations, but the grace, beauty and spirituality of Italy's art have enabled these two young Americans to recognise their love and bring it to fulfilment. "Travelling Companions" shows James trying to find a way to weave his feelings about art into a narrative – or weave a narrative out of his feelings about art. The tale suffers the same problems as any first fiction: its burden of information works against formal artistic instincts, and it has had to meet the deep need to say something about *itself*. But the story shows James using Italian art to parallel and articulate his expectations, preconceptions and experience of European culture, and the new, cosmopolitan life of the senses.

In "The Madonna of the Future" (1873), the Italian aesthetic experience and the reverence which Italian art inspires are not so instructive or benign. The seductive "golden Roman air" represents danger for the would-be artist, and James explores the theme of the artist-failure in Italy which Hawthorne introduced in *The Marble Faun*. "The Madonna of the Future" dramatises the folly of succumbing to the romance of an artist's life in Italy and idealising Italy and Art.[203] The story expresses James's insecurities, and the ambiguity and tension he felt, as an American and an artist in Italy. The narrator encounters Theobald, an American painter living in Italy, during the former's first night in Florence, a night of the senses and Jamesian "nervous rapture". Theobald, James's *alter ego*, declares:

> "We are the disinherited of art!" he cried. "We are condemned to be superficial! We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren, artificial deposit. Yes! We are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense. We have neither taste, nor tact, nor force ... Our crude climate, and garish culture, our silent past, our

[203] This minor genre of the artist-failure in Italy has itself has been travestied, by the American novelist Bernard Malamud, in his 1969 novel (a collection of his previously published 'Italian' short stories), *Pictures of Fidelman: an Exhibition*. The hero of this clever though hardly subtle parody of James's "The Madonna of the Future" is a "self-confessed failure as a painter" who travels to Italy where, in Florence, Rome and Venice, surrounded by vast deposits of art and history, he is paralysed by a classic anxiety of influence. Malamud's short

> deafening present … are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist, as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! … We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile."[204]

Theobald's complaints reflect the belief, expressed in James's Introduction to *Hawthorne*, that: "the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion."[205] But the narrator, who is James's alternative *alter ego* and a fictional manifestation of the duality of his creator's mind, provides a counter-statement:

> "You seem fairly at home in exile … and Florence seems to me a very pretty Siberia. But do you know my own thought? Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of nutritive soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, and all the rest of it. The worthy part, is to do something fine! There's no law in our glorious Constitution against that."[206]

The narrator's sense of outrage mirrors what James goes on to say in *Hawthorne*, after the remarks quoted above: "American civilisation has hitherto had other things to do than produce flowers."[207] In both the tale and his critical essay on Hawthorne, James expresses the puritan's moral compulsion to champion American practicality and the self-made ethic.

"The Madonna of the Future" includes some exemplary anthology pieces of Jamesian art criticism, but they are incidental to the point of the tale. Theobald is a Romantic Genius. While showing initial promise, he "loses his heart" to Italy, falls under its spell, and, intoxicated with the otherworldly beauty of Italian art, shapes his entire existence upon an unattainable ideal. Like Brooke, Roderick Hudson, and James himself, Theobald has set out to experience the art and beauty of Italy. His "worshipful gazing" inflames a "high aesthetic fever", an ecstasy of all-consuming reverence which prevents him from painting. He is so overwhelmed by the perfection of the masters that his own creative efforts are bound to fail. The art of Italy feeds his delusions and renders him impotent: "One by one, all profane desires, all mere worldly aims, have dropped away from me, and left me nothing but … the worship of the pure masters … My little studio

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fictions, and especially the Italian ones, explore the tense negotiation between art and life which was to become the theme of *his* late fiction.

[204] "The Madonna of the Future." *The Complete Tales 1873-1875*, vol. iii, pp. 14-15.

[205] *Hawthorne*, p. 320.

[206] "The Madonna of the Future." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, p. 15.

[207] *Hawthorne*, p. 320.

has never been profaned by superficial, feverish, mercenary work."[208] Theobald so cherishes his ideal of the Italian masters that he cannot perceive his distance from their achievements; he loses all critical judgement, and his praise, the narrator comments, is "more generous than just" in its unconditional and excessive reverence. Raphael's genius, for example, demonstrated by the *Madonna della Seggiola*, Theobald considers supreme because:

> "No lovely human outline could charm it to vulgar fact. He saw the fair form made perfect; he rose to the vision without tremor ... That's what they call idealism; the word's vastly abused, but the thing is good. It's my own creed, at any rate. Lovely Madonna, model at once and muse, I call you to witness that I too am an idealist." (20-1)[209]

In one of the travel essays of 1872 (the year of the story's composition), James notes that the paintings of Tintoretto resolve "the eternal problem of the conflict between idealism and realism ... I defy the keenest critic to say where one begins and the other ends."[210] (James continues here with the comments quoted earlier, about prose "melting" into poetry, and the fusion of "literal and imaginative".) It is precisely Theobald's tragedy that he cannot bring about this synthesis of the ideal and the real. Like Roderick Hudson, Theobald "cares only for perfect beauty".[211] His romantic aspirations, inseparable from his conception of the romantic genius and confusion of ideas about perfection and form, are blocked by egotism and idolatry. He is condemned to fantasise forever about his future, perfect work, which is to be "a *resume* of all the other Madonnas of the Italian school" (28). He fails to notice, in the twenty years he spends contemplating her, that Serafina, his "perfect" Florentine model for his perfect Madonna, ages and fades.

The obscene cats and monkeys produced from clay by Serafina's crass lover are a debased, profane art. They are, the narrator comments, "cynical and vulgar. Their imitative felicity was revolting" (44). But as he is dying, Theobald understands that the simple realism of the figures is something of which he himself is incapable:

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[208] "The Madonna of the Future." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, p. 16.
[209] The Madonnas of Filippo Lippi, Boticelli, Andrea del Sarto, and Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola* (*Madonna of the Chair*) were all described by James in his letters of 1874 (*Letters*, vol i.). Edel comments that for James the Madonnas were one of the most interesting things about Florence.
[210] "Venice: an Early Impression." *Italian Hours*, p. 56.
[211] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 123.

> "I'm the half of a genius! Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning ready fingers of some dull copyist, or some trivial artisan who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch! ... at least he does something. He's not a dawdler! Well for me if I had been vulgar and clever and reckless." (48)

For James, Italian art possesses great beauty, but obsessive worship of beautiful art destroys the idolater's peace of mind and creative powers. To an American Protestant at least, art should be instructive and moral. Art should teach us how to live. If it is to do so, as "The Madonna of the Future" seems to suggest, an appreciation of its beauty, especially in an artist, should be accompanied by seriousness of purpose. Dilettantism is a major theme of *Roderick Hudson*, which concerns the nature of the artistic temperament and the plight of the American artist. Roderick Hudson, like Theobald, arrives in Italy full of the promise of genius, and fails. Although more fully told, Roderick's story is essentially the same as Theobald's. Roderick's pride and egotism, like Theobald's, are greater than his genius, and his obsession with Christina Light, like Theobald's obsession with Serafina, undermines his ambitions as an artist. Roderick is another victim of the beauty of Italian art and the aesthetic idealism and fatal desire for perfection which it engenders: "'I mean never to make anything ugly ... I care only for perfect beauty ... I mean to go in for big things ... I mean to do things that are simple and vast and infinite ... Excuse me if I brag a little; all those Italian fellows in the Renaissance used to brag'" (123). Roderick's posturing here, at the artists' dinner party given by Rowland in Rome, is comical and almost endearing, but full of hubris. His vaunted ideal sculpture, *America*, like Theobald's Madonna, is destined to fail.

In *Roderick Hudson*, James moves away from the painters of the Italian Renaissance to focus on the sculpture of classical antiquity. Adeline Tintner observes that: "*Roderick Hudson* is the summation of James's response to the art of antiquity, for Roderick's goal is to reanimate the classical deities in his own work ... [and] because he has set himself the task of equalling, if not surpassing, his antique models, Roderick fails."[212] When Mary Garland asks Rowland Mallet, who is acting as her *cicerone*, what are the most beautiful things in Rome, he replies, "I should say the antique sculpture". Together they make frequent visits to St. Peter's and:

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[212] Adeline R. Tintner, "*Roderick Hudson*: a Centennial Reading." *Henry James Review*, vol. II, no. 3, (Spring 1981), p. 179. On the sculpture of Rome and its pagan and sexual significance in James's fiction, see John Carlos Rowe, "Hawthorne's Ghost in Henry James's Italy: Sculptural Form, Romantic Narrative, and the Function of Sexuality." *Henry James Review* 20, no. 2 (1999), pp. 107-134.

> often found themselves for half an hour at a time in sole and tranquil possession of the beautiful Braccio Nuovo ... Mary's evident preference was to linger amongst the statues. Once when they were standing before that noblest of sculptured portraits, the so-called Demosthenes, ... she made the only spontaneous allusion to her plighted faith that had yet fallen from her lips. "I am so glad", she said, "that Roderick is a sculptor and not a painter." (271)

But Roderick himself, well practised in self-exoneration, declares:

> "If I had only been a painter – a little, quiet, docile, matter-of-fact painter like our friend Singleton – I should only have to open my Ariosto here to find a subject, to find colour and attitudes, stuffs and composition; I should only have to look up at that cypress alley wandering away like a procession of priests in couples, at the crags and hollows of the Sabine hills, to find myself grasping my brush ... But a sculptor now! ... You can't model the serge-coated cypresses, nor those mouldering old Tritons and all the sunny sadness of that dried-up fountain; you can't put the light into marble – the lovely, caressing, consenting Italian light that you get so much of for nothing." (195)

With Rowland, we watch as Roderick unravels. James wrote in his Preface to the novel: "Roderick's disintegration ... *is* gradual and occasional, and thereby traceable and watchable."[213] In a rare moment of despondency, Rowland writes to his cousin Cecilia a "long burst of confidence" about his fear that Roderick will squander his talent. A few days later, however, his confidence is restored, and he adds a postscript:

> I am half ashamed of my letter, for I have a faith in my friend that is deeper than my doubts. He was here last evening, talking about the Naples Museum, the Aristides, the bronzes, the Pompeian frescoes, with such a beautiful intelligence that doubt of the ultimate future seemed blasphemy ... He has that ineffable something that charms and convinces; my last word about him shall not be a harsh one. (239-40)

Symbolically, a little later Roderick begins work on the figure of a *lazzarone* "lounging in the sun; an image of serene, irresponsible, sensuous life" (240). Gregory Woods has rightly drawn attention to the irony in the next part of the passage, Roderick's reported thoughts: "The real

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[213] *Roderick Hudson*, Preface to the New York Edition, Penguin Classics edition, p. 43.

lazzarone, he had admitted was a vile fellow; but the ideal lazzarone – and his own had been subtly idealised – was the flower of a perfect civilisation" (240). The *lazzarone* is not merely an image of decadence, but also supposedly represents the balanced pleasures of civilisation at its peak. Woods points out: "This is how so many northern Europeans and Americans had come to see the southern Europeans, idealised through the perspective of their classical history."[214] Whatever the unnamed pleasures Roderick enjoyed in the morally dangerous south – "a city where 'pleasure' is actively cultivated" (238) – they have combined with his deeper experience of the art of antiquity at the Naples Museum (some of the most famous examples in all Italy), to reinvigorate his imagination.[215]

Even during the eclipse of his genius, and in the midst of a hopelessly idle life, Italian art has the power to animate Roderick: "Before Michael Angelo's statues and the pictures of the early Tuscans he quite forgot his own infelicities and picked up the thread of his old aesthetic loquacity" (335). Yet "an essential spring had dried up within him" (334), and Roderick's behaviour begins to resemble the "divine moods" and sublimely confident, metaphysical ramblings of the rhapsodist Theobald, in which: "Everything was a pretext for some wildly idealistic rhapsody or revery [*sic*]. Nothing could be said that did not end in a glowing discourse on the true, the beautiful and the good."[216] Finally, bewitched and betrayed by Christina's and Italy's sensuous beauty, unwilling to compromise with reality in his quest for aesthetic perfection and unable, therefore, to produce any true and lasting form of art, Roderick's destruction rapidly follows. His last, defeated cry is: "Take me out of this terrible Italy … where everything mocks and reproaches and torments and eludes me! Take me out of this land of impossible beauty" (344).[217]

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[214] Gregory Woods, "The Art of Friendship in *Roderick Hudson*." *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, ed. John R. Bradley (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 69-77. This reference p. 76. Woods's is a 'gay' reading of *Roderick Hudson*, and his main point about the *lazzarone* is that: "Although he has visited the artistic highlights of the Naples region – among them the Museo Nazionale, with its incomparable collection of classical sculptures, and the frescoes at Pompeii – it is the physique of a living man that most directly inspired him." (76) Woods's is a valid but not essential reading of the text.

[215] James seems troubled and ambivalent about Naples. Edel writes of a visit made in 1879-80 that: "What happened at Posilippo, in the Naples environs, we can only guess … He has found the Naples museum more interesting than … the 'fantastic immorality and aesthetics of the circle I had left in Naples'." "A Neapolitan Episode." Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, 2 volumes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition, 1977), vol. i., pp. 601-2.

[216] "The Madonna of the Future." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, p. 24.

[217] Kenneth Graham suggests that James shared the nineteenth-century fear of hypertrophy (the drying up of feeling) which was expressed in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry and, Graham believes, formed the moral view of Dickens and George Eliot. "So when Roderick Hudson cries out in tragic outrage against the dulling of his perceptions and aspirations … he is expressing for James not only the great romantic theme of frustrated energy but the subsequent Victorian terror of emotional atrophy. And … this is the same private devil, the same death, that Rowland and Winterbourne … and their successors have to fight against, for all the reasonableness,

The negative power of Italian art, like the negative power of the Romantic imagination, was as much in James's mind as its beauty and transforming power. Italy could destroy with its *excess* of beauty and art. Although his essays necessarily emphasise the ennobling virtue of Italian art, in the fiction (with the possible exception of "Travelling Companions") James warns of the seductive and narcotic nature of Italian art, the temptation particularly for the artist to indulge in aesthetic emotion without engaging in the production of art. Equally dangerous is an excessive preoccupation with the ideal. Roderick's combination of aestheticism and romanticism has led him fatally to idealise Christina, Beauty, Art, the Artist, and Italy.

As a contrast to Roderick, James offers Gloriani, an "apostle of corruption" (125), the cynical opportunist who has compromised with perfection in order to succeed as an artist. It is Gloriani who at Rowland's dinner advises Roderick against "[making] over in cold blood those poor old exploded Apollos and Thebes" (124). A similar type to Serafina's sculptor-lover, but more complex and attractive, Gloriani is a successful sculptor who "drove a very pretty trade in sculpture of the ornamental and fantastical sort". Having spent his inheritance recklessly and scandalously, Gloriani survives in Rome by making capital of his talent, which "was quite inimitable, and fifteen years of indefatigable exercise had brought it to perfection." Rowland (whose judgement we trust) relishes the "vivacity and frankness" of his opinions:

> He had a definite, practical scheme of art, and he knew at least what he meant. In this sense he was solid and complete. There were so many of the aesthetic fraternity who were floundering in unknown seas, without a notion of which way their noses were turned, and Gloriani, conscious and compact, unlimitedly intelligent, and consummately clever, dogmatic only as to his own duties and at once gracefully deferential and profoundly indifferent to those of others. (117)

Gloriani's eloquent defence of his aesthetic practice is a blend of cynicism and pragmatism which is strangely affecting, because honest and strongly felt. His theory of art is that:

> "there is no essential difference between beauty and ugliness; that they overlap and intermingle in a quite inextricable manner; that there is no saying where one begins and

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the normality of their unheroic selves." *Henry James: A Literary Life*, p. 40. Graham, I think, makes too much of James's fear and its manifestation in his characters, but the issue *is* present in the Jamesian subtext, and is raised in my section on E.M. Forster.

> the other ends; that hideousness grimaces at you suddenly from out of the very bosom of loveliness, and beauty blooms before your eyes in the lap of vileness; that it is a waste of wit to nurse metaphysical distinctions and a sadly meagre entertainment to caress imaginary lines; that the thing to aim at is the expressive and the way to reach it is by ingenuity; that for this purpose everything may serve and that a consummate work is a sort of hotch-potch of the pure and impure, the graceful and the grotesque. Its prime duty is to amuse, to puzzle, to fascinate, to savour of a complex imagination." (117-8)

Gloriani is closer to James's idea of the proper relationship between reality and the artistic life. With the two characters James is opposing a materialistic theory of art against an idealistic theory, but Gloriani is no more the complete man than Roderick. Edel somewhat overstates Gloriani's importance when, in his discussion of the Roman-American sources of the characters in the novel, he observes: "James places before us the inspired, the clever, the persistent and the plodding creators. Roderick's candle will burn out in one night. Singleton's goals are too modest: quiet industry satisfies him. Augusta is sincere, but unprofessional. Only Gloriani, the European, will outlive his superficiality. And it is when, in the fullness of time, he gains large insight into life, above 'the mere base maximum of cleverness', that he will be saluted as Master."[218] Edel is referring here to Gloriani's reappearance in *The Ambassadors* in 1901, where he represents a consummate, complex, coherent and whole aesthetic sensibility. Edel appears to hint at James's imaginative identification with Gloriani, and Carl Maves takes up the hint when he writes: "Gloriani, a human and accommodating ... fusion of experience and imagination ... perhaps ultimately represents the sort of artist James himself aspired to be."[219]

Richard Ellmann has recently argued most compellingly that the central theme of *Roderick Hudson* is "a counter-statement to Pater."[220] Ellmann speculates on James's opinion of Pater (since James himself nowhere states it unequivocally), and claims that James's first novel was "the result of James's indignation with Pater's formulas. In Roderick he had now created a new character, the aesthete *gloriosus*, who would be the target of his satire, parody and moral reproach" (30). Ellmann is right to see in Rowland's description of Roderick's first "high aesthetic revel" in Rome something of James's disfavour and a sign that Roderick has "fallen into the unheroics of dilettantism" (29). Rowland seems to speak for James when he judges as a

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[218] Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, vol. i., p. 348.
[219] Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism*, p. 106.
[220] Richard Ellmann, "James Amongst the Aesthetes." *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, ed. John R. Bradley (London: Macmillan & New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 25-44. This reference p. 28.

"pernicious illusion" the "unlimited experimentation" in which Roderick indulges and proposes as a theory of art."[221] But Ellmann is too harsh. The character for whom James reserves his anti-Paterian scorn is not Roderick, but Gilbert Osmond, in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Ellmann overlooks the strong element of ambivalent admiration in James's portrayal of the artist. James condemns Roderick's "insolence of egotism" (374), but envies his passion and "simple, sensuous, confident relish of pleasure" (58). Singleton, an admirable character with sound judgement and commonsense, declares Roderick "the sort of man one makes one's hero of" (316). "He was a beautiful fellow!" Singleton says (386), after Roderick's death. However, Ellmann usefully reminds us that Pater had praised Michelangelo's *Adam* because of its incompleteness, as Rowland says pityingly of Roderick that "the poor fellow is incomplete."[222] Edel interprets the theme of *Roderick Hudson* very simply, emphasising the question which seems to lie at the heart of the work, concerning the co-existence of passion and art. It would be possible to extend Edel's summary (from the biography) into a Paterian analysis, but it stands well as it is:

> Rowland's observation of Roderick is that 'the poor fellow is incomplete.' This is true, and it is Rowland who, in a sense, completes him. He possesses the cool measuring mind, the dispassionate heart, which Roderick needs – but also rejects. There is something chilly in Rowland; and in contemplating the two men, so romantically named and so involved in a kind of emotional duel – Rowland the rational, with no real sense of what it means to be an artist, and Roderick the impulsive, with no sense of how to curb his artist's ego – it seems as if James has abstracted the incandescence of his genius and placed it beside his decorous, cautious, restrained self.[223]

Edel's interpretation at this point parallels Kenneth Graham's Romantic reading of the text. Graham writes: "*Roderick Hudson* ... bears everywhere in its pages the burden of ... Keats's irreconcilable desires for the heat of human passion and for the cool unchangingness of art."[224] In his introduction to the 1961 edition of the novel, Edel refers to the "dialogue" between America and Europe, "whether it is better to cultivate an art than to cultivate a passion ... how to observe life minutely, yet stand back from it, in order to take its measure."[225] Edel's summation acknowledges the interrelatedness of place, past and art: "How to reconcile the artist's need for

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[221] *Roderick Hudson*, pp. 192-3.
[222] Richard Ellmann, "James Amongst the Aesthetes." *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, p. 29.
[223] Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, vol. i., p. 412.
[224] Graham, *Henry James: A Literary Life*, p. 35.

Europe, and its centuries of created culture, its manners, traditions, customs ... with the United States, where culture was yet to come? If *Roderick Hudson* could not provide all the answers, it could at least show James the avenue he should take" (6). The opposition of art and passion (foreshadowed in "Travelling Companions" and allegorised in "Benvolio"), is at the heart of the novel, alongside the other conflict, between America and Europe: the "complex fate." In its representation of restless inner debate, *Roderick Hudson* is at the same time a drama of James's consciousness, a romance, and a critique of romanticism. And in its use of the artist in Italy, and Italian art, to express the idea that life is at once so desirable and so betraying, it follows firmly in the Italianate tradition.

In *William Wetmore Story and his Friends* (1903), James delivers his final, retrospective judgement on the effect of the Italian experience upon American artists. Rome may have been "the aesthetic antidote to the ugliness of the rest of the world – that is, of Anglo-Saxondom in especial"[226], but it was folly to believe that because "art hung round in clusters and could be eaten from the tree" no effort was required of the artist. The "golden Roman air" produced "a sense of the sterner realities as sweetened and drugged, as if, at the perpetual banquet, it had been some Borgia cup concocted for the strenuous mind" (329). Rare artists were able merely to taste of "the insidious liquor", but:

> the sensitive soul in general drained it, and, for the most part, at first, in innocent delight, without a misgiving or a reserve. Moreover, as most of those who sickened or died of it never knew they were ill or dead, the feast had never the funeral air, and the guests sat at table to the end. (333)

Story himself James saw as "the prey of mere beguilement", a man whose career was "a sort of beautiful sacrifice to a noble mistake". Of what he calls "the artist-life" in "The Roman Spell", "The Roman Air" and "The Borgia Cup" in *William Wetmore Story and his Friends*, James concludes that: "The facility for dryness and dreariness peculiar to our race could never be quite the same after ... the medium was one in which [concentration] was apt richly to dissolve ... the result remained a delightful ambiguity" (331). James's own response to Rome and the art of Rome was to recognise and delight in the Italian ambiguity. His obsessive search, in Italy, was for art, perfection, and self-fulfilment; they are the *desiderata* for which Italy came to stand.

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[225] *Roderick Hudson*, ed. Leon Edel (1961), Introduction, pp. 5-17. This reference p. 6.
[226] *William Wetmore Story*. "The Roman Air." vol. i, p. 331.

Italian art itself promised perfection and self-fulfilment, representing and reconciling complex sets of opposites: spirituality and sensuality; the real and the ideal; pure and impure; sacred and profane; all the perpetual doubleness of life's impulses. Viewed in this way, Italian art is a Romantic symbol of the Jamesian consciousness. James's Italian work represents his complex negotiation of the tension between life and art. At the same time, one is aware of the continual, hard tension of the representation of Italy, and the difficulty of finding the words to capture the Italian genius for art.

James's Italy is increasingly a construct of language, an invention of the imagination in which much of the 'reality' of Italy (daily life, politics, class distinctions) is omitted or slanted towards the necessity of aesthetic form. *The Portrait of a Lady* is an early experiment in the technique, refined in *The Wings of the Dove* and later, obliquely Italian tales such as "The Chaperon" (1891), "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie" (1900) and "The Velvet Glove" (1909), in which Italy is attenuated. In *The Golden Bowl*, Italy is etherealised, and represented by a single, ornate work of Italian art, and an ornamental Italian prince. The illusions, paradoxes, and doubleness which James's characters engage with, in Italy, are those of art. In *The Aspern Papers*, *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Wings of the Dove*, Venice represents the perfect coincidence of place and destiny, and the form and substance of art. James draws Venice as the symbol of perfect form and beauty, harmony, even joy; at the same time revealing its ephemeral, illusory, untrue nature. These qualities render Venice/Italy an allegory for the creative enterprise, the art/act of writing

In *The Golden Bowl* (1904), as in *The Wings of a Dove*, James uses the conceit of a felt artistic 'presence' arranging characters and destinies. In the latter, it is Milly Theale who gathers together the elements of the visual and symbolic 'Veronese' which is her grand party. In *The Golden Bowl* there is a similar sense of an abstract, heightened, metaphorical arrangement, as Maggie Verver brings the couples in the story into a harmonious whole. The narrative is a graceful, rounded passage in and out of the personalities of these isolated, fragile individuals as they move towards a flawed substantiality of which Maggie is creatively in control. The final arrangement of relationships is symbolised by the golden bowl, itself an ornately Italianate work of art, an ideal form. In *The Golden Bowl*, where there is no real Italy – no description of place either real or symbolic – there is finally order, harmony and fusion. In this perfect Jamesian fictional world, the most rarefied and abstract of his novels, a world of beauty and art, the identification of Italy with the act of creation and the human condition is complete. Life and art,

and Italy, are serene, whole and perfect only in the imagination. In *The Golden Bowl*, Italy is "the transcendent and perfect *idea* alone"[227] and James's image of Italian art and what it represents is embodied within exceedingly baroque and labyrinthine prose. The novel presents two essential ideas of art: art as perfection, and the Italians themselves as art. The fusion of substance and style which James considered the supreme virtue of the novel[228] is like "the fusion of [the Italians'] presence with the decorative elements [which was] complete and admirable."[229] We long to understand the "incomparable wrought fusion" (one of James's expressions for Italy)[230] brought about by Maggie's subtle manipulation, and the harmony within Maggie herself. But although it represents harmony and completeness, Italy, like the union of Amerigo and Maggie, is mystical and finally unknowable. Yet Maggie's and Amerigo's final embrace reconciles some of the paradoxes of Italian art. Their embrace is an emblem of the synthesis Maggie and the Prince achieve. Maggie learns from Amerigo an appreciation of surfaces and how much may be hidden beneath them. Amerigo acquires a sense of morality, without which, as Maggie teaches him, the aesthetic sense is not only inadequate, but dangerous. Their embrace is a complex refinement and fulfilment of the union of Brooke and Miss Evans in James's first fiction, "Travelling Companions." Contemplating Tintoretto's *Bacchus and Ariadne,* Miss Evans poses the question: "What do you think ... of the painter of that tragedy at San Cassiano being also the painter of this dazzling idyll; of the great painter of darkness being also the great painter of light?"[231] This is, of course, one of the great questions posed by Italy. It is probably true that James never came to terms with the contradictions of the country, except in his attempts to represent and resolve them through the writing of fiction, where Italy becomes itself "the grand style of composition and effect", "the transcendent and perfect *idea* alone", "the incomparable wrought *fusion*."[232] There is a sense that James's ideas and images of Italian art have been brought together with great and artificial deliberation into an aesthetics of fiction.

2.5 Henry James and the Italians

Henry James inherited an Anglo-Saxon ambivalence towards the Italian people. According to English tradition, the Italians were the acknowledged inheritors of the riches and glories of

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[227] "The Saint's Afternoon." *Italian Hours*, p. 316.
[228] "The Art of Fiction." *Longman's Magazine*, September 1884. Reprinted in *Henry James, The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, pp. 186-206.
[229] *The Golden Bowl*, first published 1904 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition, 1987), p. 574.
[230] "The Saint's Afternoon." *Italian Hours*, p. 318.
[231] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii, p. 207.
[232] "The Saint's Afternoon." *Italian Hours*, pp. 316, 318.

classical antiquity, an *Imperium*, and the Italian Renaissance. On the other hand, they were thought of as a fallen people unworthy of their legacy. The English conception of the Italian 'character' was a contradictory set of stereotypes including cunning and devious Machiavellians; priest-ridden superstitious pagans; hedonistic hot-blooded Latins; and simple-minded, spontaneous, easily-contented Mediterraneans. Luigi Barzini in *The Italians* (still a reliable measure of the Anglo-Saxon image of the Italians and the Italians' self-image) cites James, who: "suspected that the pleasure of Italy was inseparably tied to the human element, the people who had created the landscape almost with their own hands in the course of so many centuries."[233] As Barzini reminds us, Italy was, for James, a "fusion of *human* history and *moral passion* with the elements of earth, and air, of colour, composition, and form" (55-6). [my emphases.] The Italians were "false and beautiful" James wrote in 1869.[234] From his first fictional Italian to his last, they were threatening or seductive, and often both. However, the people of Italy receive altogether less attention in James's fiction and travel essays than the landscape, art and architecture. Certainly he had scarce contact with them, as his much-quoted remark in a letter to Grace Norton in 1874 reveals:

> I have been nearly a year in Italy and have hardly spoken to an Italian creature save washerwomen and waiters ... even a creature addicted as much to sentimentalizing as I am over the whole *mise en scene* of Italian life, doesn't find an easy initiation into what lies behind it. (428)

Agostino Lombardo comments on the "almost complete lack, in [James's] fiction, of Italian characters that are not conventional, 'literary', or indeed operatic".[235] Lombardo's assertion is only superficially true. Prince Amerigo from *The Golden Bowl* is a significant exception: a typical fallen, modern Roman, the Prince is yet one of James's most complex characters.[236] This chapter demonstrates that even in his conventional Italians James transcends crude stereotyping. Giovanelli, in *Daisy Miller*, is a comic Italian dandy and opportunist who is capable of real insight and compassion; the avaricious, ingratiating manservant Eugenio, in *The Wings of the Dove*, is credibly loyal and protective towards Milly Theale. Furthermore, some of James's very

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[233] Luigi Barzini, *The Italians*, pp. 55-6. Barzini goes on to quote W.D. Howells as another foreigner who "felt this undeniable link between the people and the attraction of the place, between the people's moods, habits, looks, approach to life and the pleasure of Italy."

[234] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i, p. 153.

[235] Agostino Lombardo, "Italy and the Artist in Henry James." *The Sweetest Impression of Life*, p. 230.

[236] *The Golden Bowl*, Penguin Classics, p. 43.

minor Italians – Giacosa in *Roderick Hudson*, Angelo Beati in "Adina" – are deftly drawn to reveal the contradictions within the Italian character.

In general, what the Italians represented for James was otherness: they belonged to the South, were not English, and above all, as his first narrative makes clear, they were not German. It is not merely their otherness, but the beauty and physicality of the Italians which are so apparent and make such an overwhelming first impression. The first Italians to appear in James's fiction are the Milanese in "Travelling Companions", his rapturous account of his/his narrator's Italian initiation:

> The common life of the street was beginning to stir and murmur again, with the subsiding heat and approaching night ... At the little balconies of the windows, beneath the sloping awnings, with their feet among the crowded flower-pots and their plump bare arms on the iron rails, lazy, dowdy Italian beauties would appear, still drowsy with the broken *siestas*. Beautiful slim young officers had begun to dot the pavement, glorious with their clanking swords, their brown moustaches and their legs of azure. In gentle harmony with these, various ladies of Milan were issuing forth to enjoy the cool; elegant, romantic, provoking, in short black dresses and lace mantillas ... with a little cloud of powder artfully enhancing the darkness of their hair and eyes. How it all wasn't Germany! ... "It's the South, the South", I kept repeating, — "the South in nature, in man, and manners."[237]

Later in the same tale, in Venice: "there was a group of young Venetian gentlemen, splendid in dress, after the manner of their kind, and glorious with the wondrous physical glory of the Italian race ... They sat back rolling their dark eyes and kissing their white hands at passing friends, with smiles that were like moon-flashes on the Adriatic" (195). But the narrator's ambivalence is suddenly exposed when he notices at a table close to the Italian men who are "the most beautiful creatures in the world" a young Anglo-Saxon whose face, Brooke notes, "is full of decision and spirit", whose figure is "moulded by action, tempered by effort" (196). Brooke supposes him to be an American, as he proves to be, providing a salutary contrast to the "softness of the South", the laxity and "gayety" in the Italians. Further on in the Italian journey, in Vicenza, the narrator encounters a family of Italians who elicit another mixed emotional response. They have "a

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[237] "Travelling Companions." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii, p. 181.

touching, hungry, unsatisfied grace" (189); they are "so beautiful ... so civil, so charming, and yet so mendacious and miserable" (191).

The Italians simultaneously attract and repel. The narrator of "Travelling Companions" finds them sensuously, opulently beautiful, graceful and charming, excelling at the "unapplied spontaneous moral life of society" (185), but compared to the "keen, upright downright" American, and the "strength, freedom and joy" he discovers in Miss Evans, they are found wanting. They are too passive, and lack real moral force. Mental indolence and frivolity had been attributes of the Italian stereotype at least since the 1700s, and the English placed more emphasis on this perceived flaw in the national character after the failure of the Risorgimento in the mid-1800s. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote of that episode in Italian history: "Poor Rome! Poor Italy! Here there are men only fit for the Goldoni Theatre, the coffee houses, and the sunny side of the Arno when the wind's in the north."[238] Her affectionate tone does not altogether disguise the element of contempt in the rebuke.

James's ambivalences and prejudices are exemplified by other characters in some of the early tales. The narrator of James's second Italian story, "At Isella" (1871), arrives at the border town ripe for romance and drama, all nerve-ends and expectations excited by a combination of literature and the 'being-there' sensation:

> I felt indefinably curious, expectant, impatient. Here was Italy at last; but what next? Was I to eat my supper and go contentedly to bed? Was there nothing I could see, or do, or feel? I had been deeply moved, but I was primed for a deeper emotion still.[239]

The narrator goes for a walk, and encounters a stage Italian, "a young officer strolling along the road in sky-blue trousers, with a moustache *a la* Victor Emanuel, puffing a cigarette, and yawning with the sensuous *ennui* of Isella" (318). He hears "for the first time the music of an Italian throat vibrate upon Italian air" (319), and glimpses a mysterious female figure leaning alone against a parapet. Returning to his hotel he finds, as if it were a stage-set, "a small table set *en tete a tete* for two", and is joined for dinner by this mysterious, voluptuous woman. As the

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[238] Cited in Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion*, p. 138.

[239] "At Isella." *The Complete Tales*, vol. ii., p. 320. Forster describes the expectant, impatient mood of the tourist's first night on Italian soil in his account of Lucy Honeychurch's first day in Florence: "This afternoon she was peculiarly restive. She would really like to do something of which her well-wishers disapproved ... 'Nothing ever happens to me', she reflected, as she entered the Piazza Signoria." *A Room with a View*, p. 61.

Signora tells her story, he is spellbound: "I had heard, I had read, of the gracious loquacity of the Italian race and their sweet familiarities of discourse" (321). As she talks:

> [his] mind was flooded by the memory of the rich capacity of the historic womanhood of Italy. I thought of Lucrezia Borgia, of Bianca Capello, of the heroines of Stendhal. My fair friend seemed invested with an atmosphere of candid passion, which placed her quite apart from the ladies of my own land. (325)

The reference to Stendhal reflects James's admiration for the writer and particularly *The Charterhouse of Parma*; both the heroine and plot of "At Isella" reveal the extent of Stendhal's influence.[240] The Signora, "a bright example of the eloquent genius of her race ... sat idly pressing with her fork the crimson substance out of a plateful of figs." In relating the story and its denouement, the narrator, like James, is aware that he is "part and parcel of a romance" (336). The Signora represents James's hopes and desires for his Italian experience: that it will fulfil the promises of Italy, depicted in literature. The Signora is mysterious, passionate, impetuous, and as voluptuous as the inevitable figs. At the same time the story highlights the paradoxical power of convention in Italian society. Women in America, the narrator tells the Signora, "live more in the broad daylight of life. They make their own law." She replies that in Italy, "we are not all romance, I assure you."[241] And later: "'The Charm of Italy!' cried the Signora, with a slightly cynical laugh. 'Foreigners have a great deal to say about it'" (326).

The story ends with a confrontation between the hot-blooded, betrayed and vengeful *sposi*, and the smiling, obsequious, lying landlord; in spite of its surface simplicity and stereotypical Italians, the tale dissolves in ambiguity. The narrator is not certain, nor does James tell us, whether he has been deceived, and cheated of his money: "her tale, in a measure, might be untrue or imperfect". But if the Signora's tale is a fabrication, the narrator is a more than willing victim. He is now "for the first time in the enchanted air in which love and faith and art and knowledge are warranted to become deeper passions than in my own chilly clime" (328). "I had entered Italy", he says at the end (338): a Stendhalian place where romance and reality are inseparable, a

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[240] Stendhal's biographer writes of Gina, the beautiful widow in *The Charterhouse of Parma* who is adored by the novel's hero: "She is one of the great belles of Milan, a ravishing creature, all fire and wit and gaiety; but she can also *will* greatly, and exhibit a boldness in action that is reckless of moral consequences. In short, a composite of the Italian woman of destiny, with something in her of Lucrezia Borgia and Vanozze Farnese as well as that later *femme fatale* of Milan, Gina Pietragrua, whom Stendhal once loved and lost." Matthew Josephson, *Stendhal, or The Pursuit of Happiness*, p. 425.

theatrical world where he has been privileged to play a part in a real-life drama. This Italianate romance, whether real or invented, confirms the American's preconceptions of the melodramatic and passionate nature of Italian life, and the sensuality and theatricality of the Italians. And it strengthens his conviction that these *real* Italians are so true to literature, and seem to be made from and *for* literature.

The two Italians in "The Madonna of the Future" confirm other Italian stereotypes, while serving James's emerging theme of the American-artist-failure-in-Italy. Theobald's model for his Madonna, like her lover (the vulgarly cynical creator of clay cats and monkeys), are Italian pragmatists. They elevate the carnal and commercial over the spiritual, in art and human experience. Their acquaintance with the realities and harshness of nature and commerce is a foil to Theobald's romanticism and idealism. Serafina and her lover are like Barzini's Italians who "have explored short cuts, a few of which are a trifle shabby and questionable, but useful to avoid life's roughest spots".[242] Carl Maves writes of this story that:

> Theobald is not solely responsible for his delusion. Serafina herself has tacitly fostered it with the ultimate excuse that if his life was a dream, at least his dream was a life. In this she is akin to the Vicenza family of "Travelling Companions" and the Signora of "At Isella": they are all part of the Italy that, with the utmost good-natured calculation, furnishes romance to order. If the *forestieri* from America want illusion, these indigenes are perfectly willing and more than able to provide it – for a price. They can see, furthermore, no compelling reason, moral or otherwise, for drawing a strict line between the real and the fabricated; in a land of flamboyant theatricalism such distinctions are often impossible to make anyway.[243]

Maves's *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Works of Henry James* is an engaging though not very complex theory about Henry James and Italy. His main ideas are that James's Italy was a picturesque, highly theatrical place where Americans could take a "holiday" from morality, and that James's notion of the Italians was that they were beautiful, sensuous, pagan, pragmatic and fatalistic. Although Maves resists coming to any real theoretical conclusion, his study is a useful survey of some Jamesian themes. But the idea of Italy and the 'moral holiday' is not new. James

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[241] Here, again, the Signora foreshadows one of Forster's heroines. Lilia, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) discovers that, contrary to her expectations, women in Italy lead unromantic lives dictated by masculine (Latin) double-standards.

[242] Barzini, *The Italians*, p. 57.

Russell Lowell wrote in *Leaves from my Journal in Italy and Elsewhere* (1851-52): "Italy gives us antiquity with good roads, cheap living, and, above all, a sense of freedom from responsibility."[244] In *The Italians*, Luigi Barzini writes: "The Italian way of life down the centuries attracted people who wanted to take a holiday from their national virtues."[245]

There are only two Italian characters in *Daisy Miller*, and they serve James's emerging 'international' theme. Eugenio, the courier, is a minor character who reappears as a still minor but more strongly-drawn, sinister figure in *The Wings of the Dove*. He is a typical "hired" Italian, of the kind familiar from nineteenth-century accounts of travel in Italy: common but condescending, officious, supercilious, opportunistic and mercenary.[246] Giovanelli is more complicated. Insinuating, imperturbably urbane, he is described by one of the Roman Americans as "a gentleman with a good deal of manner and a wonderful moustache."[247] One of Rome's "third-rate Italians" (171), Giovanelli on the surface is something of a caricature: he is oily, handsome, obsessed with his appearance, has "well-shaped eyebrows and brilliant teeth" (203), and wears "an artfully posed hat, a glass in one eye, and a nosegay in his button-hole" (180). At one of the American *conversaziones*, he "bore himself gallantly. 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" (189). This "obsequious", this "polished little Roman" (193) is the stereotypical Italian fortune-hunter, yet there is more to him than this. Our final impression of Giovanelli is unsettling; his last conversation with Winterbourne seems sincere. As Daniel Mark Fogel comments: "It is of course a great, oft-noted, irony that the one character who appreciates and attests to Daisy's unsullied innocence is the "subtle Roman" [206] Giovanelli."[248] Giovanelli, and his real feelings and motives, are in the end a mystery, his opacity seemingly a reflection of James's perplexed sense of the Italians' moral ambiguity. One has as much sympathy for him and the same respect as for the Cavaliere Giacosa in *Roderick Hudson*, another "extremely reduced gentleman"[249] who manages to maintain dignity in impoverished circumstances. There is about Giovanelli a generosity of spirit, azthe Roman beauty James admired, and an odd tenderness, but he is idle and opportunistic. His

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[243] Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism*, p. 30.
[244] Quoted by Nathalia Wright in *American Novelists in Italy*, Frontispiece.
[245] Barzini, *The Italians*, p. 337.
[246] It is possible that Giovanelli has his origins in the *cicisbeo* (the hired lover/companion). It was a particular kind of Italian and Italian practice entirely mysterious to English travellers. See Andrew M. Canepa, "From Degenerate Scoundrel to Noble Savage", p. 128.
[247] "Daisy Miller." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iv., p. 172.
[248] Daniel Mark Fogel, "Henry James's American Girls in Darkest Rome." *The Sweetest Impression of Life*, pp. 89-106. This reference p. 96.
[249] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 168.

style is impressive, but as with Gilbert Osmond, cultivated to deceive. Yet, it is not so much Giovanelli's complexity that troubles us, as his excess of superficiality. That itself, James thought, was characteristically Italian.

The Italians in the two Roman tales James wrote in 1874 embody the pagan, primitive, superstitious side of the Italian character. Camillo, the Conte Valerio in "The Last of the Valerii" is James's first detailed portrayal of an Italian. The first two pages of the tale extol his beauty. As described by the narrator (the uncle of the American heiress who marries the Count), he has: "a head and throat like some of the busts in the Vatican ... a head as massively round as that of the familiar bust of the Emperor Caracolla and covered with the same dense sculptural crop of curls."[250] The image of Caracolla [*sic*] is nicely chosen. The sculptor whom scholars call the "Caracalla master" unfailingly depicted the Roman emperor with uniquely tightly-wound, closely-cropped curls. He also always sculpted a sneer on the lips and an, again unique, V-shaped frown, to denote a cruel and suspicious man. Gibbon records Caracalla's "wild cruelties and excesses".[251] The busts capture both the physical appearance Camillo's nose and mouth are "powerful, shapely, manly. His complexion was of a deep, glowing brown ... his eyes like a pair of polished agates" (90) and his voice "had the massive sonority with which civil speeches must have been uttered in the age of Augustus" (90). The Count is characteristic of the Jamesian view of the Italians' classical beauty. As Rowland Mallet says, in *Roderick Hudson*, recommending Rome to the sculptor: "That ... is one of the reasons for studying in Rome. It's a handsome race, you know, and you find very well-made people."[252] Yet for all his beauty and nobility, beneath the "antique simplicity" Camillo was "perhaps a little stupid" (89) and "fundamentally unfurnished with 'ideas'":

> He had no beliefs, nor hopes nor fears, – nothing but senses, appetites, and serenely luxurious tastes. As I watched him strolling about looking at his finger-nails, I often wondered whether he had anything that could properly be termed a soul, and whether good health and good nature were not the sum of his advantages. (95)

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[250] "The Last of the Valerii." *The Complete Tales 1873-1875*, vol. iii., p. 90., 1985).
[251] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics edition abridged and edited by Dero. A. Saunders, 1985), p. 129. See Diana E.E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 322-25, or the web site of the University of Munster: www.uni-muenster.de/Rektorat/museum/am-054.htm.
[252] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 87.

"He's the natural man!" the narrator declares. "Camillo is a pagan!" (116) and "absolutely superstitious". Camillo is indeed a Hawthornean kind of Italian, and Leon Edel calls him "a kind of sleepy, dreamy, well-fed Donatello."[253] The Count falls in love with a disinterred Juno, neglecting his wife and withdrawing from reality and sanity:

> the Count became ... a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which history had implanted in his line ... Was not cruelty a tradition in his race, and crime an example? What a heavy heritage it seemed to me ... the Count's interminable ancestry! Back to the profligate revival of arts and vices, – back to the bloody medley of mediaeval wars, – back through the long, fitfully glaring dusk of the early ages to its ponderous origin in the solid Roman state, – back through all the darkness of history it seemed to stretch. (107)

C.P. Brand's study on Italy and the Romantics explains the view of the dark side of the Italians which dominates James's two Roman tales. In *Italy and the English Romantics: the Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth Century England*, Brand observes that there was "something" in the history of Italy that particularly appealed to the generation of Byron and Shelley. Between 1815 and 1840, Shelley wrote *The Cenci*, Byron *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari*, Landor his trilogy of plays on Joanna of Naples, Bulwer Lytton *Rienzi*, Browning *Sordello*, and Mary Shelley *Valperga*. Certain periods and certain subjects had special appeal, and the violence and unrestraint of passion in Italy were a popular theme. Brand adduces the historian George Perceval:

> If, as it was said, this [the Romantic Age] was an age which delighted in 'laying bare the blackest passions of the soul', it must have enjoyed such works as Perceval's *History*. The passions were nowhere so strong and so ungovernable as in Italy: that was the keystone of the English conception of the Italian character:
>
> > Unhappily the energy and violence which marked their national character was often directed to evil purpose by such dark and vindictive passions as, in these more temperate times, we find it difficult to account for or excuse. It is hard for us to credit the strength of the stormy passions in southern climes ... The emotions of hatred and jealousy which in our colder climate occasionally ruffle

[253] Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, vol. i., p. 353. James himself wrote in his study of Nathaniel Hawthorne (1896) that Hawthorne's Donatello was "one of those creations of the story-teller who give us a name for a type. There is a kind of young man whom we have now only to call a Donatello, to feel that we sufficiently classify him." *Henry James. Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, p. 466.

> our bosoms, and are mastered by steady principle and placid temperament, there burn with an intensity which makes their unhappy victims the objects of our pity no less than reproach.[254]

As the narrator of "The Last of the Valerii" meditates on "the strange ineffaceability of race characteristics"[255], the little antiquarian who excavates the site tells him: "'I've fumbled so long in the monstrous heritage of antiquity, that I have learned that ... there's a pagan element in all of us, – I don't speak for you, *illustrissimi forestieri*, – and the old gods still have their worshippers'" (115). The story has a happy ending in which the atavistic Italian nobleman is rescued from the power of the past and brought back into the present by his "incomparable wife", a young American who solves the problem with decisive action. Edel comments: "The young daughter of the Puritans has exorcised pagan evil – and triumphed."[256] Edel sees the moral of the story as "the past is best left buried", and he is correct in reading it as a warning about the hazards of excavating in the unconscious. However, Suzi Naiburg's "Archaic Depths in Henry James's 'The Last of the Valerii'" provides an alternative, Jungian interpretation. Naiburg believes that "critics who read this tale as one of James's treatments of the theme of 'art versus life' stop short of exploring what lies behind Juno's 'witchery of beauty' [Edel, 354]" and that "James provides a number of important clues."[257] The clues mostly lie, Naiburg claims, in the significant fact that James makes the statue a Juno, and not the Venus she is in his source tale, Merimee's "The Venus of Ille" (1837). Although in places overly dependent upon Jungian analytical psychology, Naiburg's study valuably suggests another aspect of the Count's character, in addition to his obvious sexuality. As she points out:

> James's association of the Count with Dionysus, Hermes and Pan connects him to a wide range of their attributes: not just longing and passion, but also depth, complexity, paradox, confusion, and disruption *in service of the soul*. The gods the Count associates with his wife and the narrator appropriately represent forms of order, restraint and balance. (156)

Undeniably, complexity and paradox are part of James's picture of the Italians. But it is the "dark efflorescence of the evil ... in [the Count's] race" – the dangerous elements in the Italian

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[254] C.P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics*, pp. 189-90.
[255] "The Last of the Valerii." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii., p. 111.
[256] Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, vol. i., p. 353.

character – which James stresses in his pagan tale and which reappear in his last Italian, Prince Amerigo, in *The Golden Bowl*, another noble, superstitious Italian with a "monstrous heritage".

"Adina" takes as its theme "the mouldering underworld of the Roman past"[258] and relates the story of a Roman topaz carrying a vague, Hawthornean curse which corrupts an American, Sam Scrope. The Italian in this tale, to whom the topaz belongs, is another Italian, like Camillo and Prince Amerigo, treated as an artefact by Americans and prized exclusively for his decorative qualities. Looking like "an irresponsible lounger in Arcady" (242), the "statuesque" Angelo Beati possesses "a careless, youthful grace", and "the frame of a young Hercules" (215). But like the Count, he seems "simple, – a trifle silly", although the narrator revises his opinion to state later: "he was not such a simpleton after all; or rather he was a puzzling mixture of simplicity and sense" (218). It might be possible from hints such as these to detect in Valerio and Angelo an almost Ovidian combination of Roman classical reason and the characteristics (including the silliness) of a fallen Roman world. Carl Maves considers Angelo James's first attempt to portray character development in an Italian[259], and certainly, when the narrator meets Angelo some weeks after the loss of the topaz, he is "greatly altered", "graver, manlier, and very much less rustic". He has "lost flesh and gained expression", "lost his boyish ignorance, that pastoral piece [sic] of mind"[260] and seems, to the narrator, "picturesquely tragic". Angelo threatens to avenge the theft of the topaz, but the "cloaked assassin" the narrator is expecting never appears, and he surmises that "that saving grain of discretion which mingles with all Italian passion had whispered to the young man to postpone his revenge" (235), and wonders "whether our brooding friend had already spent the sinister force of a nature formed to be so lazily contented" (236-7). The laziness is part of the stereotype of the bored, indolent Italian, carrying connotations of moral weakness, another characteristic of the 'lapsed Roman'. Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* both mocks and embodies the stereotype and represents the perversion of its more benign aspect, the merely lounging Italian.

The central concern of the plot of "Adina" is the elopement of Angelo and the narrator's niece, an event that puzzles the elderly unmarried narrator, though it is clear to the reader that the attraction is sexual. After the marriage, the narrator comments on Angelo's "serene contentment", observing him "basking in a sort of primitive natural, sensual delight in being

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[257] Suzi Naiburg, "Archaic Depths in Henry James's 'The Last of the Valerii.' *The Henry James Review* 14, 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 151-165.
[258] "Adina." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, p. 257.
[259] Maves, *Sensuous Pessimism*, p. 42.

adored. It was like the warm sunshine, or like plenty of good wine" (255). James's Angelo is a bundle of stereotypes: all sensuous beauty and carnal appetites, passive, indolent, superstitious, vengeful, pragmatic and pagan. Yet as the narrator confesses: "he was a mystery, – his character was as great an enigma as the method of his courtship" (255). Interesting though Angelo Beati is, a more interesting character is the American, Sam Scrope, James's first corrupt, expatriate American. The contrast between them is significant. Scrope, the narrator tells us, is so ugly that: "the picturesque of Italy, both in man and in nature, fretted him, distressed him strangely; ... everything seemed to say to him "Don't you wish you were as easy, as loveable, as carelessly beautiful as we?" (212-3). In those days, the narrator continues, "in the infancy of modern aesthetics, he could not have passed for even a bizarre form of ornament" (213) and "everything in Italy seemed to reproach him with his meagre capacity for pleasing; the indefinable gracefulness of nature and man murmured forever in his ears" (221). The point of this morality tale, however, is not only the contrast between the American's and the Italian's natures, nor the warning about the seductive power and beauty in Italy's pagan past. James's concern is to present different ways of viewing the story of the topaz, which reveal different attitudes to life. James's narrator looks back on this episode and commends the "action" for favouring spontaneity over caution:

> it seemed ... really superb, and in judging of human nature I often weighed it mentally against the perpetual spectacle of strong impulses frittered in weakness and perverted by prudence. There has been no prudence here, certainly, but there has been ardent, full-blown, positive passion. (253)

James's narrator's idea of a splendid [Italian] life again reflects James's admiration for Stendhal, whose "ruling notion", James wrote, was: "that *passion*, the power to surrender oneself sincerely and consistently to the feeling of the hour, was the finest thing in the world, and it seemed to him that he had discovered a mine of it in the old Italian character."[261] Thus James champions passion and shuns prudence in his two Roman tales. The stories also demonstrate James's continuing fondness for Romantic stereotypes of Italians: their darkness, treachery, revengefulness, subtlety and cunning; their air of mystery and almost supernatural power.

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[260] "Adina." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, p. 230.

[261] *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, p. 817.

James extends to his Italian characters his American apprehension of Italian places as places "in which things have happened"[262] – places with pasts and histories. James's Italian princes, especially, are seen to represent and embody all the pasts, and all the evil in the pasts, of their ancestors and race. (It has often been remarked that provenance is an American obsession. James partly shares this obsession and partly wants to examine its roots. His princes are a manifestation of the obsession.) The first of James's Italian princes is Casamassima, in *Roderick Hudson*. The provincial nobleman harbours "a real Italian passion" for Christina Light, and although "stupid", "vacuous" and "a young man without many ideas", there is yet:

> a lurking delicacy in his face which seemed to tell you that nature had been making Casamassimas for a great many centuries ... and though she adapted her mould to circumstances, had learned to mix her material to an extraordinary finesse and to perform the whole operation with extreme smoothness.[263]

Like Camillo and Amerigo, the Prince Casamassima is the product of a long, complex and evil line: "Rowland read in the young man's elastic Italian mask ... a record of other curious things – of pride, of temper, of bigotry, of an immense heritage of more or less aggressive traditions" (366). Casamassima is another of James's proud, passive Italians, and Rowland "divined that, like other princes before him, he had made the acquaintance of the thing called compromise" (363). The Cavaliere Giacosa, in *Roderick Hudson*, from the same need to compromise, shares the Prince's pragmatism. In addition, he has the cunning and insinuating nature of the impoverished family of Italians in "Travelling Companions". The Cavaliere is a minor character, sketched with swift, minimal strokes, but even he has "his own fine ambiguities" (300), and in a way, Giacosa's motives and intents are as much a puzzle as Giovanelli's, in *Daisy Miller*. One of the Italian mysteries in the text, as with Giovanelli, is the source of the Cavaliere's pathos and dignity. He is "inscrutable" (298).

Two of the most interesting characters in *Roderick Hudson* are of that curious type that so interested James: the Anglo-Italian (or Italian-American), whose exact origins are almost always a mystery. Both Christina Light and the sculptor Gloriani embody qualities James only ever associated with Italians. Christina, whose father (the Cavaliere) is Italian, has the impetuosity, the charismatic, hypnotic beauty and the sexuality and immorality of James's Italians. She is

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[262] *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 81.
[263] *Roderick Hudson*, pp. 202-3.

simultaneously dangerous and desirable. She is Roderick's "vision ... of transcendent perfection ... beauty itself ... a revelation ... a phantasm, a vapour, an illusion!" (110). She embodies the romantic conception of Ideal Beauty, as well as much of the meaning of Italian art. Revealingly, Roderick says: "If beauty is immoral, as people think at Northampton ... she is the incarnation of evil" (110). Gloriani ("of French extraction or remotely perhaps of Italian") possesses the Italian "vivacity and frankness" and is both "consummately clever" and "very corrupt" (117). Gloriani's "definite, practical scheme of art" (117) represents the debasement of the aesthetic sensibility and creative impulse, suggesting a deeper moral debasement which foreshadows James's complex 'Roman', Gilbert Osmond.

With Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* James depicts an altogether darker world of Italianicity. The rigid conventions of Roman society that are Daisy Miller's undoing, the obsession with Roman art and civilisation that corrupts Camillo, the cynicism of Gloriani and Christina Light's immorality are all brought together in the plot of this novel, which concerns the romantic illusions held about Italy, and the deceptions these illusions invite. In its essence, Isabel Archer's story echoes the story of the innocent American and the Signora in "At Isella". James again depicts the betrayal of love and trust for mercenary gain which was to prove one of his great themes. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Aspern Papers*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, James explores different aspects of the treachery and deceit he associated with the Italians.

There are no native Italians in *The Portrait of a Lady*, except the legendary and brutal Count Gemini, and even he remains off-stage. Yet the deception and betrayal of Isabel Archer are perpetrated by two consummate Italianate Americans, Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle. From his first appearance, Osmond, the embodiment of the proverb *un inglese italianato e un diavolo incarnato*, is identified with his chosen country, and archetypal historic figures from Italian history. The Countess Gemini (his sister) lists Osmond's "favourite subjects" as Machiavelli, Vittoria Colonna, and Metastasio.[264] She accuses Madame Merle in the same terms: "'You yourself are Machiavelli – you yourself are Vittoria Colonna!'"(310). Madame Merle is an implicit Jamesian Italian by virtue of "her nature ... too much overlaid by custom ... her angles rubbed away. She had become too flexible ... too ripe, too final" (244). Osmond tells Isabel when they first meet that "'you'll discover what a worship I have for propriety.'" When she asks "'You're not conventional?'" he responds "'I am not conventional. I am convention itself'"

[264] *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 310.

(362). Osmond is the very essence of decadent Italian smoothness and civilisation: *over*-civilised, all polished surfaces, and over-ripe.[265] James's first description of him reveals the obsession with appearances: his "foreign, traditionary look ... suggested that he was a gentleman who studied style" (280). His face is "extremely modelled and composed", and he "was dressed as a man dresses who takes little other trouble about it than to have no vulgar things" (280). Osmond himself tells Isabel that "'one ought to make one's life a work of art'" (358). The excessive mannerism and preoccupation with surfaces are both Italianate, and the antithesis of the true ideals of perfection and beauty which James otherwise associated with Italian art and Italians. With his "languid-looking figure" Osmond affects – and it is an immaculately studied affectation – the idleness and sensual contentment of the Italians, their passive nature and languid insouciance. He claims to take people and things as they come, but this is far from true: his calculation and ambition are without limit. Even Isabel, willing though she is to be deceived, wonders: "It was hard to see what he meant for instance by speaking of his provincial side ... Was it a harmless paradox? ... or was it the last refinement of high culture?" (312). Osmond's own summary of his situation is that:

> Italy ... had spoiled a great many people; he was even fatuous enough to believe at times that he himself might have been a better man if he had spent less of his life there. It made one idle and dilettantish and second-rate; it had not discipline for the character. (308)

Indolence and dilettantism are the themes of *Roderick Hudson* and *William Wetmore Story*, and as in those books, in *The Portrait of a Lady* the flaws are more serious for being transatlantic adoptions. James's Italianate Americans possess all the worst and only the worst qualities of native Italians, perhaps because a large part of James's Italian fiction is about transgression. In Italy, transgression is attractive and possible for Americans, but the Puritan streak is strong, and as Roderick tells Rowland Mallet, when the gradual process of his disintegration is already well advanced: "To reconcile Northampton and Rome is rather a problem."[266]

None of the considerable amount of lying, cheating, fury, lust and betrayal to be found within the pages of *The Wings of the Dove* is perpetrated by Italians, although it all takes place *in* Italy. There are only two native Italians in the novel, and the reappearance of Eugenio is significant. The courier from *Daisy Miller* has become "the great Eugenio, recommended by grand-dukes

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[265] John Malkovich's mannered, lugubrious interpretation of Osmond in Jane Campion's 1997 film of *The Portrait of a Lady* captures perfectly the sinister self-obsession and sterile aestheticism of the character.
[266] *Roderick Hudson*, p. 160.

and Americans."[267] He is condescending, cunning, conniving, but by placing these Italian vices at the service of the American heroine, Milly Theale, he establishes them as virtues. Milly is indebted to him for the "masterly acquisition" of her palazzo in Venice, and for the way he "so admirably, so perfectly established her" (335). Eugenio is "probably but a swindler finished to the fingertips; for he is forever carrying one well-kept Italian hand to his heart and plunging the other straight into her pocket, which, as she had instantly observed him to recognise, fitted it like a glove" (335).[268] Eugenio is good-looking, vain and flamboyant, with "his thick neat white hair, smooth fat face and black professional, almost theatrical eyes, as of some tenor grown too old to make love, but with an art still to make money" (335-6). He is dishonest and very dark, in character as in appearance, but he becomes, to Milly, "very dear and very deep". He "understood" her, "had got hold", and the things they both understand, their common consciousness, gather into "an indestructible link, form[ed] the ground of a happy relation" (335).

James almost always endows his Italians with intuitive understanding, and as Giovanelli intuited Daisy Miller's innocence, so Eugenio is the only one in Milly's circle who understands her situation immediately and fully.[269] There is between them, on both sides, complete honesty: "It passed between them every time they conversed; he was abysmal, but this intimacy lived on the surface" (336). Merton Densher also comes to know Eugenio's depths, and has occasion, after Milly refuses to admit him to the palazzo, to regret the fact that "one very acute person ... whom he couldn't dispose of as an interested scoundrel, enjoyed an opinion of him that there was no attacking, no disproving" (415). In that confrontation between Eugenio and Densher at the doors of the palazzo, in a reversal of stereotypes, the Italian becomes an embodied rebuke to Densher's treachery and duplicity. Eugenio is "gracefully, respectfully, consummately enough" for Milly (335), and if he is exploiting her, he is doing so with true Italian "frankness". Like the mixture of politeness and insolence in his demeanour, his avarice is tempered with openness. In the contrasts between the characters of Eugenio, and Densher and Kate Croy, James twists the topos of the evil Italian, and adds another dimension to that of *Inglese italianato e un diavolo incarnato*.

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[267] *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 335.

[268] In her essay on "Rococo Venice, Pietro Longhi, and Henry James", Adeline Tintner writes that the portrait of Eugenio: "the Venetian upper servant, so intimate and knowing, is modelled on the servants of Goldoni and Longhi." *The Sweetest Impression of Life*, pp. 107-127. This reference p. 120.

[269] E.M. Forster endows his Italians with a similar, though characteristically more comic, intuition: "Italians are born knowing the way", Forster comments, in the Fiesole picnic episode in *A Room with a View*, and "the finding of people is a gift from God." (Penguin edition, p. 88).

The one other memorable native in *The Wings of the Dove* is Milly's gondolier, Pasquale, another of James's "deep" Italians. It is Pasquale who meets Densher waiting for Milly to admit him to the palace. He evades Densher's requests for information, and: "would have been blank, Densher mentally noted, if the term could ever apply to members of a race in whom vacancy was but a nest of darkness – not a vain surface, but a place of withdrawal in which something obscure, something always ominous, indistinguishably lived" (413). Pasquale demonstrates James's skill in evoking evil in his characters, as in landscapes, without naming it, suggesting the sinister without depicting it. Pasquale is important for what he represents: it is the depth, complexity and evil beneath the Italian mask which prefigure James's last Italian, Prince Amerigo from *The Golden Bowl*.

Prince Amerigo, the only Italian in *The Golden Bowl*, is the only Italian in any of James's works whose consciousness we are allowed to enter. We see things as Amerigo sees them.[270] The Prince is a consummate character study and the consummate expression in fiction of what the Italians represent for James. *The Golden Bowl* demonstrates James's increasing commitment to abstraction and the symbolic mode, which seems to release him from the obligation to adduce 'realistic' Italian characteristics in Amerigo. James has made a pure invention of the Prince: he is a combination of the character's consciousness and abstract Italianicity. This is not to say that Amerigo does not convince us of his human complexity nor move us, for he does both. But this other order of emotional reality is not dependent upon realistic character delineation. The abstract suggestiveness of the following passage conveys the idea of Amerigo as the generalisation and epitome of James's Italians, the quintessence of Italianness:

> he was somehow full of his race. Its presence in him was like the consciousness of some inexpungable scent in which his clothes, his whole person, his hands and the hair of his head, might have been steeped as in some chemical bath; the effect was nowhere in particular, yet he constantly felt himself at the mercy of the cause.[271]

The essence of Italianness is that "one is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless *betises* of other people" (47). Maggie admits that she is attracted by "the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste"

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[270] Carl Maves describes Amerigo as "the only ... European in the entire Jamesian canon who is depicted from the inside." *Sensuous Pessimism*, p. 125.
[271] *The Golden Bowl*, p. 52.

and asks Amerigo: "[where] without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?" (47). James adds: "It showed for that matter how little one of his race could escape after all from history" (48). The comments underline the "interminable ancestry" and "heavy heritage" already noted in Camillo Valerio's history[272] but seem also to suggest the complicity of acquisitive, even predatory Americans.

The Prince is very beautiful indeed, his "dark blue eyes were of the finest", like "the high windows of a Roman palace" (69), his look at times suggesting "an image". He is, as Adam Verver, Maggie's father and one of James's acquisitive Americans, observes, "one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price" (49). What Maggie considers "princely" in him, moreover, was "his large and beautiful ease, his genius for charm, for intercourse, for expression, for life" (364). He is thus, in "the perfection of his outward show" (532), the embodiment of *la bella figura*. In his comeliness and manliness, he is the epitome of the Jamesian Italian.

Amerigo recognises the "arrogance and greed" of his race, and though "personally, ... he hadn't the vices in question ... his sense of this last danger was strong" (51). He is extremely superstitious: "I go, as you know, by my superstitions" (292), which he acknowledges as "too much the consequence, or at least the exhalation, of archives" (52). If he embodies *la bella figura*, he also exemplifies the principle *dolce far niente*, for he is a truly passive Italian, neither initiating nor directing events, simply taking people and things as they "come to him". In Adam Verver's idiosyncratic geometry of types, Amerigo is "variously and inexhaustively round, ... inveterately round" (137). Verver believes that abrasiveness is "the fact for which angularity stood", and these qualities of "all sharp corners and hard edges, all stony pointedness" (317), are not desirable "in a near relation". The Prince is admirably pliable, Verver thinks, and "well accustomed by this time to taking" (138); passionate beneath, on the surface he is cool and impassive, flexible, fatalistic, and serenely content: all the "golden drops" of his easy existence "evenly flowed over his surface", "they caught in no interstice; they gathered in no concavity" (138). The words Verver uses to describe the prince illuminate the character of Verver. James contrasts materialistic progressive America with cultured decaying Europe.

Amerigo is, clearly, an adulterer and a liar, yet shocked, in his earliest exchanges with Maggie, at "the English, the American sign that duplicity, like 'love', had to be joked about" (51). He

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[272] "The Last of the Valerii." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii., p. 107.

regrets that Maggie will not "go into" questions of "veracity" and "loyalty". He is a *galantuomo*, and it is a paradox and the point upon which the plot of the novel turns, that it is only when Amerigo feels his status as a *galantuomo* devalued, threatened and implicitly ridiculed by Maggie and Adam, that the Prince is driven to exert his manhood, assert his masculine dignity, in adultery with Charlotte.[273] Amerigo's supreme, his gloriously, profoundly Italian characteristic is his sensuality. "So munificent a lover" (364), he is the distillation of carnality, the "plenitude of his presence" producing the mystery at the end of the novel. It is the Jamesian mystery (foreshadowing Lawrence) of carnal union, the concluding fact, which is "only beautiful and strange" (568). James often uses the words "strange" and "deep" in connection with his Italians: Prince Amerigo is, curiously, associated with the word "vague" (43, 54, 102, 156). The choice of words is part of a strategy of mystification which allows James to problematise the Italians' ambivalence and encode his own. The words reflect James's struggle to define the essence of his Italians, so 'subtle' in both the Elizabethan sense of the word, with its Machiavellian connotations, and in all its present usages. The Italians were like Italian art, one of "those things with which men attempt to ornament life", and it was a "great want of tact" James thought (writing of Ruskin), "to talk about them as if they were obedient to some law or system or theory."[274] Beneath their exquisite behaviour, perfect manners, mastery of social conventions, their supreme command of experience, beneath all those things which constitute what we might call Italian 'style', there are darker, unknown and unknowable things. Beneath the surface simplicity and the Italian "mask" there are vast complexities and powerful contradictions. For James, the paradoxical and perplexing aspect of the manners and morals of the Italians, embodied in characters such as Eugenio and Amerigo, Christina Light and Gloriani, was the edgy, nuanced tension between opposites. The Italians represented ambiguity and doubleness; the Italian character was an impenetrable enigma: an opposing duality seems mysteriously constant.

The Italians seemed to James so enviably and naturally to define, understand and accept themselves, but the same felt sense of self-fullness and rightness in the world was, for him, forever chimerical.[275] He wrote: "This Italian tone of things lies richly on my soul and gathers increasing weight, but it lies as a cold and foreign mass — never to be absorbed and appropriated ... I feel I shall never look at Italy — at Venice, for instance — but from without

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[273] James keeps the word in Italian, not translating it as "gentleman". The English word is less complex and less precise and does not necessarily carry connotations of "gallant". In Italian the word implies formality, chivalry, courtliness, and especially manliness.

[274] "Italy Revisited." *Italian Hours*, p. 117.

... I only feel more and more my inexorable Yankeehood."[276] For James's Italians, identity is a matter of improvisation, contingency, contradiction and ambiguity; and writing about Italians and Italy was a way of finding an identity, a way to keep a sense of displacement or dislocation at bay. This is a paradox, because Italy is a place where, for Anglo-Saxons, a sense of displacement is common. James's Italians were part of the consolation of Italy and art, bringing him to terms with what he would not be, with his not-myself. James describes the enigma in the Italian nature and in it recognises, expresses, even allegorises himself. Kenneth Churchill concludes his short section on James in *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930* with the suggestion that for James and the characters in his fiction Italy was ultimately a destructive influence. Churchill contends that: "the fatal inability of the Anglo-Saxons to attain a fruitful relationship with the potential wealth of the Italian atmosphere has become one of the most poignant and central images of [James's fiction] ... he challenges the superficiality and futility of any attempt ... to relate Anglo-Saxon life creatively to one or another aspect of Italian life and culture."[277] But Churchill's emphasis is wrong. For most of James's fictional characters, certainly those in the later works, the Italian experience, while it has power to destroy, ultimately transforms and redeems. The beauty of Italy's art and its hedonistic culture destroy Roderick Hudson, but their beneficent, civilising effects are seen in Roderick's opposite character, Rowland Mallet, and Sam Singleton, Roderick's shadow artist self. Daisy Miller's rebellious Italian quest ends in defeat, but there is the suggestion that she has the final moral triumph. At the end of Isabel Archer's ordeal in Rome, she achieves her long desired self-knowledge, and recognition that self-fulfilment will come through duty. In *The Wings of the Dove*, after death in Venice, there is Milly's, and more importantly Densher's transfiguration. Maggie Verver, having come close to destruction by European sophistication and duplicity, now has possession and power, both sexual and aesthetic, through her union with the Prince. She has wrought a synthesis of innocence and experience, America and Europe. The Italians, like Italy, represent desire, renunciation, redemption. Thus they are a Romantic Image, at the same time as a device and symbol for the self's reinvention.

2.6 Conclusion to Henry James's Italy

James's engagement with Italy was an on-going response of nearly half a century in duration. Inevitably, in his prose, there were reversals of attitude, refinements of perception, and changing

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[275] Barzini observes: "Italians ... seem to understand things which still perplex other people." *The Italians*, p. 57.
[276] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i. 1843-1875, p. 137.
[277] Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930*, pp. 160-161.

nuances of style. The shift from the moral realism of his early writing to the symbolism of his major phase demonstrates an increasing awareness of the elusiveness of Italy, the subject which had promised to illuminate the world. The late Italian works display an intensification of his concern not simply with 'seeing' (with visual impressions), but with 'perception', patterning, and the relation of consciousness to the material world. James came to Italy from the New World, like Theobald and the narrators of "Travelling Companions" and "At Isella" searching for aesthetic and moral certainties, but as exile, writer and in it prose, he passes from engaged attachment through increasing awareness of ambiguities to an intense, hyper-artistic, half-alienated self-consciousness.

In her study of Henry James, Bonney MacDonald refers to Thoreau's perception of the need artists have, for a mysterious and unexplorable territory, to put their own efforts into proper perspective: a place "unfathomed by us because unfathomable."[278] The use of Italy as a place not only against which to define oneself but also as a place of indefinability is characteristically Jamesian. Italy is a symbol of undefined promise and the unattainable. The paradoxes and contradictions of Italy, even its ineffability, are the other which the writer must confront, with the novelist's power to imagine alternative worlds. James's Italian fiction derives from an inner urgency, the novelist's addiction to seeing parallels and making connections, and an impulse towards inexpressibility, towards things which resist being spoken of.

The border town at Isella, in the early tale, is a symbolic border, where disparate things pass into each other, and co-existence depends on living with the tension of moving between two worlds. The image of Isella, and the Italy for which the town is a synecdoche, is of the mysterious terrain of the mind where the conscious and unconscious meet and, however briefly, make incursions into each other's realm. The Italian world of beauty and passion, history and art, is a place between dream and reality; between intention and realisation, desire and fulfilment. Italy is a liminal place, ethereal and earthly. It is a world of adornment that is plain underneath. Chaotic and supremely orderly, it is a world both of appearances and essences; a place whose plenitude is equalled by its emptiness.

Throughout a lifetime, James sought an elusive, subtle, complex Italy, to penetrate, possess and know. He struggled for the words with which to describe and define it, finally to realise that Italy could be captured only by the act of writing itself. In "The Saint's Afternoon", his 1909

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[278] Bonney MacDonald, *Henry James's* Italian Hours*: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, p. 110.

conclusion to *Italian Hours*, he acknowledges that "the charm was, as always in Italy, in the tone and the air and the happy hazard of things, which made any pretension or claimed importance a comparatively trifling question". In James's last essay about Italy, he writes:

> [we] "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.[279]

Thus James's Italy — the Jamesian aesthetic — is a refined delineation of intimacy and impasse. In the end there is something mysterious and obsessive about his relationship with Italy. "There is an ambiguity about it all that constantly haunts and beguiles", James wrote,[280] and it represented possibilities he could never fully accept or define. It was the other place, and merely to 'name' it was not necessarily to know it. The intimacy was learned and practised, but Italy was impenetrable. "The written word" he wrote in 1877, "stands for something that eternally tricks us."[281] The "infirm side" of the "felicity" of Italy, was, as he stated in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*:

> the sense, in the whole element, of things too numerous, too deep, too obscure, too strange, or even simply too beautiful, for any ease of intellectual relation. One must pay oneself largely with words, I think, one must induce almost any "Italian subject" to *make believe* it gives up its secret, in order to keep at all on working –or call them perhaps rather playing – terms with the general impression.[282]

James's descriptions and evocations finally transcend 'place' and any simple notion of the Italians to use Italy and the Italians as complex literary devices for self-questioning and symbols for exploring and reconciling his self-divisions and personal conflicts. He accepts the mystical emblems of Italian cultural identity – its architecture, art, mythologies, landscapes, the Italians themselves — that is, *Italianicity* – as, rather than the fund of stereotypes they so commonly are, the integral means by which Italy so admirably makes sense of itself. What James wanted from Italy was passion and otherness, and elusiveness was part of it. He had written to William in

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[279] "The Saint's Afternoon and Others." (1900-1909) *Italian Hours*, p. 320.
[280] "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women." (1899) *Italian Hours*, p. 62.
[281] "Italy Revisited." *Italian Hours*, p. 101.
[282] Preface to *The Aspern Papers*, New York Edition, p. 28.

1869: "I can't for my life frankly surrender myself to the Genius of Italy, or the Spirit of the South — or whatever one may call the confounded thing; but I nevertheless feel it in all my pulses."[283]

James sought to 'explain' Italy and simultaneously explain himself[284] — a deconstruction of the self that uses the imaginative terms and tropes of Italianness. These complexly interrelated tropes were congenial to the traditions of Romanticism and expressed so well the Jamesian verities of fluidity of life (past and present), art, selfhood and Italy. The artist Theobald, in "The Madonna of the Future" observes that "the ineffable ... is one of the eternal needs of man's heart."[285] Susan Sontag's comment that "a sensibility is almost, but not quite, ineffable"[286] should also be noted, since in Jamesian studies and the literary tradition it has always been possible to speak of the 'Italianate sensibility'. But, *pace* Thoreau, surrender to the ineffable will not do as an engagement with a contemporary contradictory world. The 'Italian' enigma, and the notion of an impossible unity of experience, are simplifications which dissolve a densely textured reality and past into a present-tense abstraction. They are aesthetic strategies for evading Italy's meaning, not for comprehending it, and James's work is an effort to overcome simplification and attempt real knowledge of place, even if only to discover that such knowledge is beyond reach. The representation of ambiguity is a more proper order of discourse than the ineffable, and James's prose seeks always to capture or constitute the ambiguous conflicting feelings aroused by the spectacle, the phenomenon, the experience and idea of 'Italy'. The "Italian intensity" and Italy's "mute eloquence" are synonymous with the "written word". James's Italian narratives are about writing, vocation, and confronting desire and death. He intuited that to possess was to lose; that beauty and loss are one; and both past and present Italian worlds are transient. Perhaps it is this loss/absence which is the unknowable/unsayable, a loss which is finally for James both a paradigm of language, and which language — "the difficulty for the right and grateful expression

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[283] Edel, *Letters*, vol. i. 1843-1875, p. 136. Here again James prefigures Lawrence, especially the mystical Sicilian story "Sun" (1926).

[284] Note James's complaint, in his review of Hawthorne's *Italian Notebooks*, that: "[Hawthorne] was the last man to have attempted to explain himself, and these pages offer no adequate explanation of him." *Italian Hours*, Appendix II, p. 332.

[285] "The Madonna of the Future." *The Complete Tales*, vol. iii, p. 22.

[286] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp.'" *Against Interpretation* (1966), Vintage 1994 edition, p. 276.

…" — cannot express. Yet James defines fiction, Italy, sensibility, and the limits of language in a manner that both perpetuates the tradition and foreshadows Forster, Lawrence, and postmodernism.

PART THREE

E.M. FORSTER AND ITALY

People talk of the mysterious East, but the West also is mysterious. It has depths that do not reveal themselves at first gaze.

E.M. Forster
Notes on the English Character.[1]

How easily we metaphorize concepts such as East and West ... It is so easy to make geography symbolic.

Yuri M. Lotman
Universe of the Mind.[2]

[1] E.M. Forster, "Notes on the English Character." (1920) *Abinger Harvest* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1936), p. 8.
[2] Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: a Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (London: I. B.Taurus & Co., 1990), p. 177.

3.1 Introduction

Vision and Italian Art

Forster uses 'Italy' — the discourse of Italy — to convey the complexities of people's responses to life, the ways they interpret what they see, and the ways they make sense of the world and themselves. Like James's Italian fiction, Forster's is intensely concerned with ways of seeing (or not-seeing), vision (or anti-vision), and image-making. His English tourists use the landscape of Italy, and its art, and their encounters with Italians, to fashion new selves. But transfigured lives depend upon submission to the [self] transcendental experience of Italy; submission must be unconditional, and it has to be learned. Lucy Honeychurch, for example, is in retreat from "self-knowledge and ... that king of terrors — Light."[3] Light represents life for Forster, and the images of light that pervade his Italian fiction suggest that the right way of viewing the world (and the correct response to life) is the Italian way. The perception of the transcendent in art and nature and the very light in Italy relates to the Pre-Raphaelite belief (which Forster shared) in self-transcendence through Art and Nature. Light is part of true vision in English writings about Italy. It is both a physical and a metaphorical quality, and it illuminates enlarged possibilities. Florentine radiance and a special kind of Florentine lucid seeing are well established tropes. Elizabeth Barrett Browning exploited the connection between them in her verse narrative *Aurora Leigh* (1857). The radiant vista from Aurora Leigh's villa at Bellosguardo is re-imaged in the vista which opens out to Isabel Archer from Osmond's Tuscan hilltop in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and again in the view from Lucy's window in the morning of her first day in Florence in *A Room with a View*. The other side of the Arcadian sunlight is its shadow: *chiaroscuro* is another ageless symbol of Italy, a pattern of light/dark (seeing/not-seeing) imagery used by George Eliot for the Florentine world of *Romola* (1863), and by Henry James in his story of Isabel Archer's movement both towards light and back into darkness, in her Italian journey to self-fulfilment.

The "gaze" Forster refers to in "Notes on the English Character"[4] is related to the light, and is a crucial concept in his fiction, nowhere more than in *A Room with a View*. Of Lucy

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[3] E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*. First published in London by Edward Arnold, 1908. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Twentieth-century Classics edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, 1978), p. 195.

[4] "Notes on the English Character." *Abinger Harvest*, p. 8. In *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), William McNeill explores the "glance of the eye" in Heidegger's thought and its relation to the primacy of seeing in Aristotle and in the philosophical tradition of Western thought. The idea is pervasive – explicitly and implicitly – in all of Forster's work, and in James and Lawrence.

Honeychurch's first long rapturous look at Florence on her first morning in Italy, Forster comments:

> Over such trivialities as these many a valuable hour may slip away, and the traveller who has gone to Italy to study the tactile values of Giotto, or the corruption of the papacy, may return remembering nothing but the blue sky and the men and women under it.[5]

A Room with a View is about views, but mostly about ways of seeing, an issue which is part of the proper relation between art and life at the heart of Forster's *oeuvre* as well as his Italy.[6] The kind of English people for whom Forster reserves his profoundest contempt are those, like Mr Eager and Miss Lavish in *A Room with a View*, for whom a limited discourse controls ways of thinking and seeing. Ruskin, Baedeker, and the tradition of romantic Italianate fiction, have blinded these characters not merely to Italy but to life, and for Forster Italy always represents life.[7] The theme of *A Room with a View* is Lucy's reticent yet triumphant response to the call of life, and the victory of the intuitive and impulsive over rational and repressive ways of viewing experience. Italy and its art bring about an unmediated miracle in Lucy: they make her aware of her craving for sympathy and love, and demonstrate their power to evoke passion and bring it to fulfilment. When Lucy is lost, in Santa Croce without her Baedeker and without her chaperone to act as *cicerone*, she undergoes a transformation in 'seeing' which is one of the novel's key passages:

> There was no one even to tell her which, of all the sepulchral slabs that paved the naves and transepts, was the one that was really beautiful, the one that had been most praised by Mr Ruskin ... Then the pernicious charm of Italy worked on her, and, instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy. (40-1)

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[5] *A Room with a View*, p. 36.

[6] In his recent study of Forster, Nicholas Royle notes that *A Room with a View* [the 1986 film directed by James Ivory and produced by Ismail Merchant] is the most successful and admired of all the cinematic renditions of Forster's novels, because "it is an intensely visual novel ... of the pleasures of the look and the gaze, of what it is 'to have a view'." Nicholas Royle: *E.M. Forster* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1999), p. 35.

[7] Note Brian Jarvis's comment (in his essay on Thomas Pynchon's version of 'America'): "Baedeker discourses infiltrate ways of seeing and responding to place." *Postmodern Cartographies* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 59. Jarvis does not seem overly familiar with Foucault (he mentions him only four times), but his study of the "geographical imagination" in postmodern American culture and fiction gives valuable insights into an esoteric variation of the tradition under discussion in this thesis.

Forster's 'Italian' discourse is also partly a discourse of art.[8] While the Italian experience is about seeing truly and completely, Italy's art is a synecdoche for Italy. We see not merely with our eyes but also with our hearts and understanding. The secular masterpiece that initiates Lucy's sensual appraisal of Italian art, her true appreciation of Italy, and the sexual awakening which is her salvation, is Luca Della Robbia's frieze for the portico of the Spedale degli Innocenti:

> For one ravishing moment Italy appeared. She stood in the Square of the Annunziata and saw in the living terracotta those divine babies whom no cheap reproduction can ever stale. There they stood, with their shining limbs bursting from the garments of charity, and their strong white arms extended against circlets of heaven. Lucy thought she had never seen anything more beautiful. (30)

Lucy's "moment" embodies Forster's belief, animating all his Italian fiction, that the visual world is a means to secular salvation. Della Robbia's medallions quintessentially embody values that Forster associates with the Florentine Renaissance and that persist into the Florentine present of *A Room with a View*: youth, vigour, and joyous vitality. The "living terracotta" of the foundling babies represents the sensuality, fleshliness and naturalism which for Forster is truth in art. The babies are presented, in the comic encounter in Chapter Two between rival schools of art theory, as the antithesis of the medieval religious frescoes praised by the cleric art historian Cuthbert Eager and his Anglo-Florentine acolytes. As Jeffrey Meyers argues:

> Forster contrasts two distinct approaches to art: the expert and sterile, sanctified by the German's [Baedeker's] guidebooks, and the emotional and intuitive, employed by those liberated English who have abandoned themselves to the experience of the exquisite peninsula.[9]

Lucy Honeychurch returns from Italy to Sussex "with new eyes" and "senses expanded" (130). Mr Emerson has "shown her the holiness of direct desire" and "it was as if he had made her see

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[8] P.N. Furbank shows how Forster's ideas about art developed and changed in Italy, and he discusses the influence of Forster's circle of friends (which included Roger Fry) in London. Chapter 5: "Italy." *E.M. Forster: a Life*, 2 volumes. *The Growth of the Novelist (1879-1914)*, vol i. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), pp. 81-96. Furbank's is still the richest and most fascinating biography of Forster, but other recent illuminating accounts include those by Nicola Beauman and Mary Lago. (See bibliography).

[9] Jeffrey Meyers, *Painting and the Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p. 31. This is a useful, if hyperbolic study. The relevant chapter is Chapter 3: "Ghirlandaio and *Where Angels Fear to Tread*; Giotto and *A Room with a View*." pp. 31-45.

the whole of everything at once" (225). Lucy's new vision is in marked contrast to what happens to Philip Herriton in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* after his first Italian visit. Philip's "sense of beauty" had "caused him at the age of twenty ... to catch art from Burne-Jones to Praxiteles. At twenty-two he went to Italy with some cousins, and there he absorbed into one aesthetic whole olive trees, blue sky, frescoes, country inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars."[10] Later, in England, Philip directs his energies and enthusiasms towards "the championship of beauty", but "in a short time it was over" (70). Philip represents the failure of aestheticism, the failure – in spite of Italy's influence – to 'connect' (Forster's term) between art and life.

The Genius Loci

Forster's theses about 'nature' and 'civilisation' and 'north' and 'south' proceed by way of antithetical presentations of Italian and English perceptions of landscape and 'place'. Lilia's preconceptions in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* were her undoing. She found the countryside in Italy:

> stranger still [than the "strange little town"] – vast slopes of olives and vineyards, with chalk-white farms, and in the distance other slopes, with more olives and more farms, and more little towns outlined against the cloudless sky. "I don't call this the country", she would say. "Why, it's not as wild as Sawston Park!" And, indeed, there was scarcely a touch of wildness in it – some of these slopes had been under cultivation for two thousand years. But it was terrible and mysterious all the same, and its continued presence made Lilia so uncomfortable that she forgot her nature and began to reflect.[11]

These contrasts reflect national character and social milieu: England's restrained and restraining, suburban, 'civilised' 'wilderness', against the ancient, cultivated and more truly civilised ambience of Italy. Forster is drawing attention to the contradictions in the perception of a place as 'wild' or 'cultivated'. It is not so much the landscape Lilia finds mysterious and terrible, but the sense that, as Caroline Abbott says later in the novel, "so many things have happened here – people have lived so hard and so splendidly" (92). At the heart of Monteriano is its piazza, which symbolises "the complexity of life" (104), "with its three great attractions – the Palazzo Pubblico, the Collegiate Church, and the Caffe Garibaldi: the intellect, the soul, the body" (130);

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[10] E.M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. First published in London by Edward Arnold, 1905. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Twentieth-century Classics edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, 1976), p. 70.

and Philip stands in its centre "thinking how wonderful it must feel to belong to a city, however mean". The city is the novel's image of a complete society and its symbol of the complete self. Philip sees that one of Monteriano's famous towers, radiant in the sun, reaches up to heaven, "and down to the other place ... Is it to be a symbol of the town?" (104) The tower's summit is in the sun, its base in shadow, and it is pasted all over with advertisements: this is indeed the Italy – both radiant and vulgar – glimpsed fleetingly by Caroline Abbott three paragraphs earlier: "beauty, evil, charm, vulgarity, mystery – she also acknowledged this tangle, in spite of herself" (104).

The most powerfully symbolic of the settings in *A Room with a View* is the Piazza Signoria in Florence, where Lucy witnesses the murder. The Piazza's atmosphere is evoked in terms which make it seem both troubling and transcendent, rendering it an image for all Italy as a locus of troubling and transcendent phenomena. The ambiguity of the Italian scene contributes to the visitor's unease and apprehension. There will be violence here, but also love. Meanwhile, there is doubt, in Lucy's mind:

> The great square was in shadow; the sunshine had come too late to strike it. Neptune was already unsubstantial in the twilight, half god, half ghost, and his fountain plashed dreamily to the men and satyrs who idled together on its marge. The Loggia showed as the triple entrance of a cave, wherein dwelt many a deity, shadowy but immortal, looking forth upon the arrivals and departures of mankind. It was the hour of unreality – the hour, that is, when unfamiliar things are real. An older person at such an hour and in such a place might think that sufficient was happening to him, and rest content. Lucy desired more.[12]

"Unsubstantial ... twilight ... half god, half ghost ... the air of unreality" ... everything is ambiguous. There are the fountains and plashing water that Forster consistently identifies with Italy; the play of sunshine and shadow; the satyrs of the short stories; and the deities' cave of "The Story of a Siren." There is time confusion; the confusion of reality and unreality; the mingling of the possible and the impossible. Lucy herself is moving from the safety of sunshine into the uncertainty of the shadow, and: "Lucy desired more". Her restlessness in the pension, and her longing to "transgress" (61) the touristic proprieties, lead her into the adventure in the Piazza which provides an escape not just from Baedeker's Florence but from the confines and

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[11] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 60.

conventions of her English life, initiating the process of transformation leading to her *vita nuova* of love and passion, naturalness, truth and "greatness". This transformation is the desired outcome, for Forster's tourists, of a visit to Italy, but the change in vision and identity only happens to those who abandon the behavioural beaten track.[13]

The atmospherics of place interest Forster: the delicate interactions in Italy of light and shadow, water, architecture and atmosphere are shifting, and suggestive to the imagination. Forster's Italian places embody instability and the liminal, as instanced by the description of the Piazza Signoria at the end of Chapter Five in *A Room with a View*:

> The Piazza Signoria is too stony to be brilliant. It has no grass, no flowers, no frescoes, no glittering walls of marble or comforting patches of ruddy brick. By an odd chance – unless we believe in a presiding genius of place – the statues that relieve its severity suggest, not the innocence of childhood nor the glorious bewilderment of youth, but the conscious achievements of maturity. Perseus and Judith, Hercules and Thusnelda, they have done or suffered something. And, though they are immortal, immortality has come to them after experience, not before. Here, not only in the solitude of Nature, might a hero meet a goddess, or a heroine a god. (78)

This is a critical passage, because it suggests one of the paradoxes of Italy – the power to bring about a synthesis of opposites, that it can contain, for example, within the landscape itself, the contradictions of art and nature. Italy is both 'nature' and 'civilisation'; one might meet a god or goddess not only in the Fiesole hills, but in the Piazza della Signoria – that is to say, not only in Arcadia, but also in Italian artifice. "Immortality" attends upon this "experience" of the harmonies of Italy, and as Forster wrote in his essay on D'Annunzio, it is an "earthly immortality."[14]

The English and Italians

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote, in reference to Stendhal's Italian work, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, that "the ambience of a conflict … is only in small part composed of landscapes and

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[12] *A Room with a View*, p. 62.
[13] James Buzard gives an interesting 'tourism studies' reading of *A Room with a View*, in "Forster's Trespasses: Tourism and Cultural Politics." *The Beaten Track.*
[14] "A Whiff of D'Annunzio"(1938). *Two Cheers for Democracy*, pp. 242-5.

buildings. It principally consists of people, institutions and customs."[15] Or, as Mrs Herriton in Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, observes: "[Italy] may be full of beautiful pictures and churches, but we cannot judge a country by anything but its men."[16] In his study of the English 'nature' novel, John Alcorn observes of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* that it is about "the effects of geography upon character; it is built around a dialogue between proper England and pagan Italy."[17] Alcorn's study recognises that in fiction the spirit of place is conjured from descriptions of landscape and weather, art and architecture and traces of histories, which all relate strongly to character, states of mind, and ways of life. It is not merely through the landscapes of Italy, nor the idea of Italy as an architectural artefact, that Forster works out the themes of his Italian fictions. He is interested in figures in landscapes, figures in frescoes; in views from rooms certainly, but even more, the people looking at the views and *in* the views. Like his mother, Philip Herriton can see that the essence of Italy is in its people not its artefacts. The beautiful and mysterious art of Italy is the distinct achievement of the Italians. So Philip instructs Lilia as she departs for Italy on the first page of the novel:

> 'And don't, let me beg you, 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.'(19)

The statement reveals Forster's irony as well as the absence of any trace of it in Philip, his lack of any real understanding either of the Italians or himself. We are aware that Philip's is a pompous, priggish speech, but we also know that the sentiments themselves are commendable, and the desired true end of travel to foreign places. In the nuanced series of reversals which comprise the story that follows, Forster explains how to "love and understand" the Italians. In doing so he suggests the fantasies, fears, and manipulations, the prejudices and illusions, that underlie human behaviour and are crystallised when we confront people who are other than we are. Yet the narrative is not structured to incarnate moral lessons so much as to present complex and contradictory characters moving through corridors of surprise and reversal. In all of Forster's Italian fiction, the power lies not in what is revealed about Italy but what unfolds there.

The first clue to understanding the Italians, the first principle of Forster's *vade mecum* for Italy, his emotional Baekeker, is to acknowledge that they are children of nature. If Italy supremely

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[15] Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Siren and Selected Writings* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), p. 175.
[16] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 73.
[17] John Alcorn, *The Nature Novel from Lawrence to Hardy* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), p. 61.

represents nature, for Forster, the principle is most clearly demonstrated in the people of Italy themselves. The Italians are at one with nature, combining thought and feeling, while the Englishman (the educated, middle-class Edwardian) can only seek or aspire to nature, worshipping or elegising what he does not possess. Gino is Forster's representative Italian, and as Caroline Abbott observes of him: "The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature" (125). There are two visions of nature in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. At this point, Gino is literally part of the view: "sitting astride the parapet, with one foot in the loggia and the other dangling into the view. His face was in profile, and its beautiful contours drove artfully against the misty green of the opposing view" (118). This idea of Italian Nature is an English idealisation of "vast slopes of olives and vineyards ... [which] had been under cultivation for two thousand years" (60). The other conceptual 'nature' stands for an ancient, simple innocence and absence of self-consciousness, which the English have lost. Throughout Forster's writing, and not only in the Italian novels, England and the English are opposed to 'nature'. In the stories the literal quality of 'naturalness' is to be found both in nature itself – in wild places – and in the symbol of Pan who inhabits these antique, unruly landscapes. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, where the qualities representing 'nature' are evinced by and focused upon Gino Carella, the English *self* must confront *him*, and he is the central device and conceit of the novel's narrative and metaphysics.

In *A Room with a View*, 'nature' is represented not by an encounter with a single Italian, but by the journey to Italy and the whole experience of 'Italianness' (of which the murder in the piazza in Florence and the picnic in the Fiesole hills are emblems). In addition, in *A Room with a View*, 'nature' is embodied by George Emerson and his *non*-English qualities. Both Emersons evince that most un-English of characteristics, an eclectic and frontierless engagement with the world. That is, the confrontation in fiction between the English and the otherness of the Italian enables Forster to interrogate (his) Englishness, identifying and giving expression to what is being repressed. From this point of view, Forster's use of the Italians, like his use of Italy, might be seen as a reassertion of English values and Englishness, and it might be possible to argue that the Forsterian text is a *retreat* from otherness rather than an embrace of it. What is clearly important to Forster is the 'reality' the English characters find within themselves, and not excepting even Gino, the non-English act primarily as catalysts to the English in the process of self-discovery.

Thus the real issue in Forster's texts is not simply the image and presentation of the Italians themselves. There are after all very few Italians in his books. It is the effect of the Italians on the

English that matters: Forster challenges Englishness by having his characters change or resist change when they come into contact with the Italians. He complicates things by giving Italian attributes to some of his non-Italians, as with the Emersons, so that in working out his themes through his characters, it is not as straightforward as the differences between the Italian characters and the English, but rather the opposition of the *essences* of Italianicity and Englishness. Forster values his characters according to their willingness to be changed by what they encounter when they travel to Italy. It is through their interpretation of this Other that he judges their chances and expectations of happiness and fulfilment, and their innate worth. In "Notes on the English Character", he condemns the insensitiveness of the middle-class Englishman who "with a smile on his clean-shaven lips, is engaged in admiring himself and ignoring the rest of mankind"; the sort who "can understand nothing that does not resemble himself."[18] Before he can love and understand the Italians, Forster's Englishman must recognise the Italians' difference; and in confronting it, seeing them as both other and *only then* as one with himself, he might learn to love and understand himself.

3.2 Forster and the spirit of Pan: the stories

Forster was seeking some sort of organising fantasy or symbol which would embrace the harmony and chaos of life. The figure of Pan seemed to serve this purpose, being, like Italy itself, a powerful metaphor for liberating experience and personal release from repression. As Wilfred Stone comments in his analysis of Forster's relationship with Italy: "Italy is the unconscious avenging itself on the repressive conscious."[19] For Forster the rigid separation of 'nature' and 'culture' inevitably produces anxiety both within cultures and within individuals, a fact well illustrated in the Pan stories. Forster's theme consorts with themes in Lawrence, whose "Pan-consciousness" defined an absolute physical awareness, an exaltation of the senses so complete that it precluded any spiritual or mental activity. It was this aspect of Neo-Platonism – that is, Neo-Platonism's less cerebral interpretation of Platonism, and its emphasis on self-transcendence in and through Nature, even the desire to be engulfed by Nature – that partly formed neo-paganism. Forster's and Lawrence's shared fascination with Pan was characteristic of a wider nineteenth-century interest in neo-pagan mysticism which, nothing so definite as a 'movement', was an intellectual milieu advocating a new 'religion' which would unite priest and artist (one of

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[18] "Notes on the English Character." *Abinger Harvest*, p. 9.

[19] Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: a study of E M Forster* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p 172. Although dated, and somewhat flawed by its Freudian glosses, Stone's is still one of the most comprehensive and valuable studies of Forster available.

Lawrence's great themes), and supplant and destroy our present commercial age.[20] Pan was seen as the embodiment of a refined and beautiful countryside, pastoral and even mystical, a new Arcadia, and as Sir John Boardman writes: "Edwardians met Pan on their country rambles."[21] Kenneth Grahame wrote *Pagan Papers* (1904), and in *The Wind and the Willows* (1908) inserts a comically earnest, surprisingly erotic scene in which Mole and Rat have a vision of the god. The "Vision" is described at length, in prose very like that of Forster's Pan stories:

> Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror – indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy – but it was an awe ... he knew could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near ... and then, in the utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature ... seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper; saw the backward sweep of the curved horns; saw the stern, hooked nose between the kindly eyes ...; saw the rippling muscles on the arm that lay across the broad chest ...; saw the splendid curves of the shaggy limbs.[22]

Oscar Wilde also thought society was in need of the goat-footed god: "Oh goat-foot god of Arcady!/The modern world hath need of thee!"[23] To the writers and artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Pan represented a creative, pagan life force; an antidote to the dreariness of the modern world; a symbol of the primitive, the wild; the sacred (because he was a god) and the profane. Pan was also undeniably sexual: in Greek myth, he was a persistent but usually unsuccessful lover of nymphs, boys, and sometimes animals.[24] The envisaged new order would be all artistic and intellectual harmony but, paradoxically, embrace the liberating, licentious chaos represented by the libidinous figure of Pan. Pan, like Italy, is multifaceted and ambiguous, and as Martin Jay has pointed out: "A frank admiration for the fleshly delights of

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[20] Neo-paganism had its beginnings in Germany, in the visual arts, but the same impulse, in literature, enjoyed a great vogue in England. Martin Jay's chapter "Modern and Postmodern Paganism" in his *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), pp. 181-196, traces this development, and he notes: "Whether optimistically vitalist or pessimistically entropic – the Decadent imagination was often fuelled by languid images of a pagan world in delicious, indolent decay – paganism had shown itself to be an especially buoyant floating signifier with remarkable staying power, but *no settled meaning*." p. 185 [Emphasis added: 'no settled meaning' is part of the 'meaning' of Italy.]

[21] John Boardman, *The Great God Pan: the Survival of an Image* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

[22] Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 129-30.

[23] Quoted in the chapter "Paganism Reaffirmed." Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, eds., *A History of Pagan Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 214. Jones & Pennick's comprehensive history provides a good summary of this period.

[24] For an account of the sexuality of Pan, see John Boardman's *The Great God Pan: the Survival of an Image*.

pagan sensuality, sometimes understood as a model of naïve innocence, sometimes as a symptom of overripe decay often accompanied this excitement."[25]

Forster (like Lawrence) was attracted by the idea of a primitive, pagan life force which would destroy his known, materialistic society. Most of his stories and particularly "The Story of a Siren" embody this wish. Like many of his English contemporaries, Forster associated this reinvigorating principle with Greece, Italy and other Mediterranean places, partly because the belief persisted, from the age of the Grand Tour and even earlier, that these places and their people were already half-pagan. Lawrence stated his belief very often.[26] Within this tradition, the Mediterranean way of life seemed to represent a *natural* disorder embraced by a *natural* harmony. Forster's 'Pan' stories are not merely fantasies of otherness which assist in the construction of identity, they are a way of reorganising the world: and with Forster's use of Italy and his Italians, it is the act of incorporation and the act of pagan transcendence towards which his work strives.

Forster's 'Italian' Pan stories are Forsterian riffs on Forsterian themes. They are Anglo-Saxon parables which embroider in different ways the same Mediterranean fantasy. Like the 'Italian' novels, although with less moral and psychological complexity, they contrast the two worlds of 'nature' and 'society', innocence and experience, and the presence or absence of 'vision'. They are fantasies in the truest sense of trafficking between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, the actual and the impossible. Pan represents Forster's quest for some sort of existential epiphany, a moment of being which, like Philip Herriton's "access of joy" at the opera in Monteriano, "promised to be permanent" (130). Forster's experiment with Pan is emblematic of his search for a person or place, an experience, state of mind or existential principle, which will show him how to live. Pan is a symbolic, surrogate being capable of touching the transcendent and suprarational without altogether dissolving the quotidian. The confrontation with otherness in the stories is thus a confrontation with *something outside the self*, a mystical experience of identity with this other-than-self, which has an absolute and transcendent existence. An encounter with the contradictory 'reality' of this being is the 'divine moment' which transcends and accommodates the real world of social and cultural imperatives,

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[25] Martin Jay, "Modern and Postmodern Paganism." *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time*, p. 185.

[26] In *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) Lawrence wrote: "This is what is so attractive about the remote places, the Abruzzi for example. Life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half savage." *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, ed. Anthony Burgess (Harmondsworth: Penguin Travel Library, 1985), p. 123. Norman Douglas's novel *South Wind* (1917) and his travel work *Siren Land* (1911) are expressions of the same belief. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun* (1860) is an earlier example of the tradition.

the Edwardian everyday. It is uncertain, of course, whether this 'real world' is capable of assimilating the notion of Pan-within. As Furbank points out, Forster's Pan stories ended "curiously and suddenly" in 1910, when, in *Howards End*, he "bid a kind of farewell to his stories":

> To speak against London is no longer fashionable. The Earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town ... Of Pan and the elemental forces, the public has heard a little too much – they seem Victorian, while London is Georgian.[27]

And in *The Longest Journey*, Forster slyly lampooned one of his own tales, and by implication the whole school of Edwardian fantasy to which it belonged. Interestingly, as Furbank notes, "during the long interval between *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, [Forster] took to writing frivolous stories on homosexual themes ... [and] in these late stories the artistic impulse is in a kind of competition with the erotic impulse."[28] Pan himself is sexual, alien and terrifying, but promises – if that aspect of him which is within is acknowledged and embraced – a *new self*. What this requires of Forster's English characters is a movement towards the dark side of their natures, an exploration of what Lawrence calls "the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond man's conscious mind."[29] Forster's Pan has a very Lawrentian face, representing as he does a search for the sources of vitality in nature and mankind. But Pan is something Forster's English characters can neither control nor embrace, and it is not certain that any of them, in the stories or novels, emerge from their encounters as fully new beings.[30] Real change involves "direct connection with the divine", and "few Englishmen", Forster believed, "have succeeded in doing this." Their 'spirituality' is incomplete:

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[27] Quoted by P.N. Furbank in his Introduction to *The New Collected Short Stories* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Limited, 1985), p. 7.

[28] *The New Collected Stories*, Introduction, pp. 7-11.

[29] *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, edited & introduced by Aldous Huxley (London: Heinemann, 1956), Introduction, p. xi.

[30] While it does not include any of the Italian work, Brian May's recent study of Forster has interesting things to say about Forster's characters and the Pan experience, in the context of Freudian panic: "Forster's prepared characters seem to fear vacuity, an absence within of any solid foundation of desires that might shore up themselves ... but they are not anxious about emptiness, ostensibly, but about the panic – the concrete psychic *presence* – such emptiness evokes ... the self's incipient and obliterating disorder. To be sure, Forsterian panic is capable of embracing the subject, suffusing it with Pan-pleasure ... however, one should remember that the Forsterian character is as likely to sink into an abyss." *The Modernist as Pragmatist: E.M. Forster and the Fate of Liberalism* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp. 82-3.

> An incomplete expression, if you like. … The argument underlying these scattered notes [on the English character] is that the Englishman is an incomplete person. Not a cold nor an unspiritual one. But undeveloped, incomplete.[31]

The Pan vision, like Italian art, represents Forster's notion of secular salvation: 'sacred' and 'religion' for Forster had very little to do with Christianity. One of the tenets of Neo-Platonism and the neo-paganism to which it was related (which were important elements of the Pre-Raphaelite movement which influenced Forster) was the strong belief both in Nature as an expression of the divine, and the divine (or self-transcending) potential of the human personality.[32] The Pan stories emphasise the failure of most, although not all, Englishmen to engage with Pan and thus with their own divinity. And Forster uses the same argument to reveal the Englishman's inability to engage with the Italians' – and his own – sensuality. He believed that the desirable but elusive state of mind gained from an encounter with the Pan-self could be bestowed also by Italy, Italians, or the Italian experience. The ineffability of the Pan experience and the inconclusiveness of some of the stories may be the result of the unknowableness Forster was to discover in the Italians themselves.

The Story of a Panic (1902)

In "The Story of a Panic", the earliest story Forster wrote, a group of English tourists is staying in a small hotel at Ravello: there is Eustace, a fourteen-year-old boy; his aunts; a curate; and a would-be artist. Together with the "nice landlady" and the two waiters, Emmanuele and Gennaro, these conventional, pious, pompous middle-class Englishmen-abroad comprise a cast of characters very similar to that of *A Room with a View*, the first part of which, according to his biographer, Forster was working on at about the same time.[33] The narrator, Mr Tytler, exemplifies the stereotypical English attitude to Italy and Italians. He is a caricature of the narrow-minded, vulgar English tourist, at once slandering and patronising the Italians. The story relates the appearance of Pan to this party, as they picnic in a valley near the hotel. All panic, except Eustace, who is found at the end of the deity's visitation, plainly possessed, with a disquieting smile on his face. (With the image of that mysterious smile, Forster invokes –

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[31] "Notes on the English Character", p. 10.

[32] Much of the poetry and many of the paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82) were haunted by contact with some uncanny and perhaps forbidden presence they sought to access. See Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and poet* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999).

[33] Furbank, *E.M. Forster: a Life*, vol. i., "Italy. 1902." pp. 91-99.

possibly intentionally – the Giaconda, the supremely enigmatic symbol of the Italian Renaissance, to suggest the renascence at the centre of his story.) After the terror, the English recover and reassemble, once more conventional, restrained, unchanged.[34] Eustace alone is transformed by the revelation. No longer sulky and sickly, he begins to race about energetically "like a real boy", "like a goat", to kiss a passing Italian peasant woman and the waiter Gennaro, who has "been in the woods and understood things too." Gennaro responds to Eustace's embraces with '*Ho capito*' ('I have understood'),[35] implying that between those who know Pan there is a mysterious affinity. Eustace, Gennaro says, is saved: "'Now, instead of dying, he will live!'" (39). Eustace's behaviour becomes wilder and his "promiscuous intimacy" with Gennaro more open and shameless, until finally, rejecting confinement by his guardians, he escapes into the distant landscape. Pan leads Eustace back into himself and into nature, and salvation seems synonymous with immersion in the spirit of the South, and communion with the Italian psyche. Lawrence wrote to Forster: "I have just read 'The Story of a Panic'. You with your 'Only Connect' motto, I must say that you reach the limit of splitness here."[36] There has, indeed, been a violent disintegration of personality in Forster's first attempt to represent the divided self, the double nature of existence and the division between the worlds of nature and culture. But there has also been a kind of reintegration, and a vision of the possibility of wholeness: "the transformation of chaos into cosmos."[37] This new possibility, however, cannot be absorbed by the world Forster knows, which remains unchanged, and Eustace's salvation involves leaving the world behind. Furthermore, while Eustace gains freedom and is saved, Gennaro has assumed the role of surrogate, and his death emphasises the power of a self-righteous and spiritually dead society. There is no permanent escape from the solid world of the Edwardians, but the fantasy of simply disappearing into the scenery has a powerful reality of its own.

Albergo Empedocle (1903)

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[34] A *Spectator* columnist observed recently: "The English, it seems to me, are subject to two moral moods: complacency and panic. Of the two, I prefer ... the latter. At least panic encourages us to examine the important questions." *The Spectator*. London, 4 January 1997, p 13. The purpose of Forster's panic in this story is precisely to highlight English complacency, and provoke self-questioning.

[35] "The Story of a Panic." (1902) *The New Collected Short Stories*, p. 29.

[36] Quoted by John Beer, "'The Last Englishman': Lawrence's appreciation of Forster." *E M Forster: a Human Exploration. Centenary Essays*, eds. G.K. Das & John Beer (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 254-268. This reference p. 254. I think it probable that what Lawrence is referring to here is the theme of fragmentation and identity, and the relationship between writing, fragmentation and identity. Beer gives an excellent account in his essay of Lawrence's particular Pan-worship, and Lawrence's reservations about Forster's.

[37] This apt expression is used by Mircea Eliade, in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 10.

came upon a figure asleep on the grass ... a young man lay there, all unconscious, with his head upon a pile of weed-smothered stones."[41] The narrator of James's tale, too, senses "pagan memories" (229) in the landscape. Similarly, the "little blue iris" and "the little blue flower"[42] in Forster's story recall the blue flower gathered by Adina[43], and James's obsession with the Romanticism of Novalis. Mildred, watching Harold, thinks that he looks picturesque (one of James's expressions), and that "she herself, sitting on the stone watching him, must look picturesque, too" (47). Mildred is one of Forster's English spectators, like Philip Herriton and Lucy Honeychurch, removed from the sensual experience of life: "She knew that there was no one to look at her, but from her mind the idea of a spectator was never absent for a moment. It was the price she had paid for becoming cultivated" (47). Meanwhile, "Harold's limbs lay in utter relaxation, but he was tingling with life, glorying in the bounty of the earth and the warmth of the sun ... he slept on, and the lines faded out of his face as he grasped the greatest gift that the animal life can offer" (48). And "Mildred watched him, thinking what a picture might be made of the scene" (48). When Harold wakes, he babbles unintelligibly about a past life as an ancient Greek. He is sent to see an English doctor in Palermo, then to an asylum in England, where he remains. Tommy comments at the end of the story that he rejoices for Harold, "for the greater has replaced the less, and he is living the life he knew to be greater than the life he lived with us" (62). Harold, in the unconsciousness of sleep, experiences identity with nature and an ideal past. The "far mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean"[44], as Lawrence was to call them, have brought forth their consciousness in this place and given consciousness its expression in Harold. Lawrence again: "Strange and wonderful chords awake in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness" (123). Harold's is a vision of the primitive power and joy that accompanies the experience of identity and lies at the root of being. The vision *is* difficult to describe, but is at once 'other' and self, and arises from the self-abandonment which is part of the experience of, and the proper response to, Italy. There is a price, and for Harold it is abandonment by his friends and isolation from the 'real' world.

The Story of a Siren (1904)

"The Story of a Siren" is another story in which vision is set alongside and tested by social reality. It also deals with the mystery of knowing all things and the consequences of possessing

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[41] "Adina." *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, vol. iii, p. 214.
[42] "Albergo Empedocle." *The Life to Come and Other Stories*, pp. 47, 48, 49.
[43] "Adina." *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, vol. iii, p. 237.
[44] D.H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia.* (1921) *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, p. 123.

such knowledge. George Thomson claims that "The Story of a Siren" "may fairly be given the central place in Forster's created world as the archetype of all his fictions."[45] This is quite right, for Forster's world here is a place of silence, loneliness, sadness and death; equally, the story illustrates Foster's belief that from the desolation of a vision of such a world, there arises the recognition of the need for renewal. Renewal is spiritual and sensual, and does not deny the inevitability of death. The narrator of "The Story of a Siren" is another priggish young Englishman who meets a beautiful Italian boy who tells him the story of his brother, who has seen a Siren. Meeting the Sicilian and hearing the story of the Siren takes the young man through a process of metaphorical 'mediterraneanisation' (to extend Norman Douglas's expression).[46] On a boating outing, the narrator accidentally drops the theological notebook he is studying (on "the Deist controversy") into the water, where it sinks, symbolically, away. The young man's English companions then leave him alone with the Italian guide to explore a cave, where the two are "apart from all the commonplaces that are called reality." The young Sicilian:

> for a moment ... stood there naked in the brilliant sun, looking down at the spot where the book lay. Then he crossed himself, raised his hands above his head, and dived ... the man is past all description. His effect was that of a silver statue, alive beneath the sea, through whom life throbbed in blue and green.[47]

The diver then tells the narrator the story of his brother Giuseppe, who had seen a Siren, and been filled with wisdom and *super*natural knowledge of the natural world, but not being understood by ordinary mortals, became desperately unhappy. Giuseppe marries a woman who has also seen the Siren, but his unhappiness continues, because "love is not happiness." Giuseppe and Maria are cut off from the world, since only those who have seen the Siren can know the truth, and the world is disbelieving. Maria is murdered by priests, who imagine her unborn child to be the Antichrist. Hope lies in the child, who some day "will fetch up the Siren from the sea, and destroy silence and loneliness and save the world." The narrator comments that "the story of Giuseppe, for all its absurdity and superstition, came nearer to reality than anything I had known before" (174). At the end of the story it is the English approaching in their boat (literally and metaphorically darkening the cave) who come to destroy the fantastical world, and the hope of

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[45] George H. Thomson, *The Fiction of E M Forster*, p. 88.

[46] "Many of us would do well to *mediterraneanize* ourselves for a season, to quicken those ethic roots from which has sprung so much of what is best in our natures." Norman Douglas, *Siren Land & Fountains in the Sun* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957), p. 28.

[47] E.M. Forster, "The Story of a Siren." First published by Hogarth Press in 1920. *The New Collected Short Stories*, p. 77.

life and happiness the fantasy holds out to the narrator. The last lines in the story are "I would have asked him more, but at that moment the whole cave darkened, and there rode in through its narrow entrance the returning boat" (176). The young Englishman, we imagine, returns to his life amongst those enemies of promise and abandon, his maiden aunts and chaperones: "The spiritually dead, the middle-class enemies of poetry, youth, imagination, and beauty, rise up against those who see and believe in Sirens."[48] This is the world of "mediocrity and dullness and spitefulness and society" described by Caroline Abbott in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*.[49] Like those who have been in the woods in "The Story of a Panic", only those who have seen the Siren can "destroy silence and loneliness and save the world." But the victory is hypothetical; the world is not yet ready to receive the spiritual rescuer.

Forster greatly admired Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's "The Siren." The pervasive Sicilian fatalism of Lampedusa's story resonates through Forster's, and the stories have much in common in style and theme. Both evoke the wild beauty of the sea and seacoast, the enchantment of archaic landscapes; the image of people lying at night with "the body tense and alert, fearing the approach of demons."[50] There is the same theme of the corruption by modernity of (Mediterranean) society and the ideals of the classical world. And there is the Siren, whose truth lies deeper than the sea, "in the blind mute palace of formless waters, eternal, without a gleam, without a whisper" (82). Lampedusa's Siren states:

> I am everything because I am simply the current of life ... I am immortal because in me every death meets, from that of the fish just now to that of Zeus, and conjoined in me they turn again into a life that is no longer individual and determined but Pan's and so free. (81)

That is the Siren's appeal to Forster, and the passage quoted supports George Thompson's opinion of her importance in Forster's work. Forster predicts that one day the Siren or her spiritual representative will rise to the surface, sing, destroy silence and cruelty (and even pettiness and primness), and save the world. Forster's allegory of the revelation of the Siren is a pagan version of the Fall, in which knowledge, sorrow and death are intertwined. In the present

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[48] Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain*, p. 160.
[49] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 77.
[50] Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Siren & Selected Writings* (London: The Harvill Press edition, 1995), pp. 59-84. This reference p. 65. Forster admired Lampedusa generally. His preface to *The Leopard* praises it, tellingly, for its combination of 'the feudal and the erotic.' This preface is reprinted in E.M. Forster, *The Prince's Tale and Other Uncollected Writings*, ed. P.N. Furbank (London: Andre Deutsch, 1998).

world, the Siren connotes the dark side of existence: she brings death, and Forster is unable with conviction to reconcile Siren and society. Forster's paganism is tempered by congenital caution. On the other hand, it must be said that apart from the reworking of Greek myth, and its implications for the search for society's saviour, the story's qualified affirmation lies in the effect upon the young Englishman of the pagan spirit of Sicilian place, people and stories. Finally, the story reveals Forster's awareness of the contradictions in the available myths of 'Italy'.

The Eternal Moment (1905)

"The Eternal Moment" is more naturalistic, with no Pan or Siren.[51] Generally considered to be Forster's most technically successful story, it is probably his most complex. It represents his attempt to reconcile the reality of a confrontation with otherness with an imagined ideal. He lays bare his characters' desire for the exotic and their hopes that an encounter with it will be a transforming experience; and he reveals the limits of their understanding. The main character is Miss Raby (a variant on Miss Lavish from *A Room with a View*), a successful novelist returning to a small Italian town she has made famous through her romances, and where, it transpires, she experienced her one true moment of love. Miss Raby is a self-declared 'Radical' (186), but like Miss Lavish, Mr Eager in *A Room with a View*, the would-be artist in "The Story of a Panic" (who espouses modish opinions about Pan), and so many of Forster's surface nonconformists, she is deeply conventional. While craving "infinities of passion" (185), Miss Raby is totally lacking in passion. She represents the two worlds of the other stories, not as discrete, polar entities but as different, though coexistent, levels of her own mind. Within Miss Raby there are elements of both Eustace and Pan, and the true battle is not between Miss Raby and the Italian, Feo, nor is it a matter of Colonel Leyland (her companion) and the English *versus* Vorta. The true struggle is between the forces within: Miss Raby *versus* Miss Raby. This reading is supported by the ambiguity and uncertainty at the heart of the story and its resolution.

Miss Raby has never acknowledged the importance of her youthful encounter with Feo, but she recognises now that it "had been one of the great moments of her life" (202), her most intense and unexpected moment of being, from which she has drawn power, inspiration and love as from a "subterranean spring" (202). It has influenced the whole of her life, spent trying to realise in fiction what she failed to consummate in her past. Miss Raby has been living in what Rilke terms,

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[51] E.M. Forster, "The Eternal Moment." First published in the *Independent Review*, 1905. *The New Collected Short Stories* (1985).

in the *Duino Elegies*, "the interpreted world" – 'interpreted' because language, or writing, comes between reality and the senses.[52] Her frustration brings her back to Vorta, where she encounters once more the passionate Italian, and relives the moment on the Italian mountainside when he kissed her and offered marriage. Since Miss Raby's first visit, Vorta and its people have been corrupted by the fame her novels have brought it:

> Vorta had taken to the tourist trade. A village must have some trade; and this village had always been full of virility and power. Obscure and happy, its splendid energies had found employment in wresting a livelihood out of the earth, whence had come a certain dignity and kindliness, and love for other men. Civilisation did not relax these energies, but it had diverted them; and all the previous qualities, which might have helped to heal the world, had been destroyed.[53]

Not only Vorta, but Feo himself has changed beyond recognition. Once, like Vorta, obscure but happy, he must have possessed "virility and power", "manliness and simplicity" (205). Now all his naturalness has gone. Feo is fat, oily and rapacious, representing (in Miss Raby's fictional universe) not only the passionate earthiness but also the dullness, vulgarity and conventionality of the Italians. Vorta indeed, this "debatable valley" (191) as Forster calls it, part Teutonic and part Latin, is a symbolic reflection of Miss Raby's ambivalence. But she determines now, putting respectability aside, to undo the past, opening herself to Feo as he had once been so open with her. She has never forgotten him, she says, and always loved him. At this public avowal, Feo first, out of politeness, feigns remembrance; then truly remembering, embarrassed and afraid of scandal (he is respectably married), loudly protests his innocence. Colonel Leyland feels compromised – "she had discovered their nakedness to the alien" (206) – and is torn between defending Miss Raby's honour to the gathered English hotel guests and distancing himself from her indiscretion. With his odious, conspiratorial wink, Leyland behaves as badly as anyone else in the story, which ends in confusion. Miss Raby walks away from Feo, Leyland, and Vorta, clutching her Baedeker but "with no tragic gesture." And in that "final failure … she was conscious of a triumph over experience and earthly facts, a triumph magnificent, cold, hardly human" (206). She does indeed have her second eternal moment, which allows her to look at the

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[52] In Stephen Cohn's translation of the *Elegies*, the forty-third, forty-fourth and forty-fifth lines of The Ninth Elegy are rendered: "More than ever before,/things once open for us to experience/are replaced, thrust aside by action that lacks any image;" the translator explaining that "action that lacks any image" means "words with not enough behind them." Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (1923), translated by Stephen Cohn (Manchester: Carcenet Press, 1989), pp. 71, 99. The burden of The Ninth Elegy especially is that all experience is ours; the world's touch is fleeting; we must submit, accept, transcend.

valley, to see its "perishing and perishable beauty" and to know that, although she herself may have been responsible for its decline, she is "infinitely distant" (206) from it.

As Baudrillard suggests, a culture of indifference and sameness creates in its people a longing for passion and otherness, leading them to idealise artificial others whom they then can hate or care for.[54] Miss Raby has falsely and romantically interpreted the Other, and although she succeeds in abandoning her youthful set of stereotypes and cliches (as Philip Herriton does, in the presence of a 'real' Italian), she is constructing another set out of her second 'eternal moment'. For Feo becomes a symbol, not a real man or a real Italian at all, and she succumbs to the English predilection for aestheticising experience; her chief failure (like Philip Herriton's) being to aestheticise the Italians themselves. She is one to whom experience is simply the gathering of impressions (to be turned into fiction); one who almost certainly will remain, detached and frigid, in an interpreted world. Finally resigned to losing her last opportunity to abandon herself, she continues to hold on to an image of romance, whose existence and nature "no one but herself would ever surmise." Miss Raby humiliates herself, Colonel Leyland and Feo; and although "in that moment of final failure, there had been vouchsafed to her a vision of herself, and she saw that she had lived worthily" (206), it is a "triumph ... cold, hardly human." While it must sustain Miss Raby for the rest of her life, it is hardly the sort of ecstasy considered, by Forster and the late Victorian aesthetic movement which influenced him, as success in life. Forster must have known the much-quoted dithyramb with which Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) ends, which advocates a fusion of psychic, moral and sensuous ecstasy, and became a kind of manifesto of the aesthetic movement: "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."[55] And A.J. Symons is relevant here. His work is a synthesis of Forster's eternal moment and Lawrence's symbolic sensuousness, at the same time as sharing James's nineteenth-century sensibilities. A passage from Symons's essay on Browning's *Ferishtah's Fancies* provides a parallel to Forster's 'eternal moment':

> It is as if one caught a wave at its poise, and held it for a moment, motionless with all its suspended thrill and fury of movement. In an eloquent pause and silence, when life lived to the fullest culminates in one crisis of joy, pain, passion or disgust.[56]

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[53] "The Eternal Moment." *The New Collected Short Stories*, p 192.
[54] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (London & New York: Verso, 1996).
[55] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. The 1893 text, edited by Donald L. Hill (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 189.
[56] A.J. Symons, "Three Contemporary Poets." *London Quarterly Review*, January 1880, p. 243.

Symons's was an aesthetic of the significant moment – an event, or landscape, or what Ezra Pound called a "luminous detail" – which fuses with Pater's "hard, gem-like flame" to attain symbolic status. Symons's is minor work, but the comparisons with Forster (and James and Lawrence) are helpful to an understanding of the cult of art and Italy and the aesthetic movement, and their place in Forster's fiction. Miss Raby's ecstasy is less Paterian, and more like the ecstasy of despair and resignation.

It is not in the guise of Pan that the 'divine' intercepts Miss Raby's life, but as an ordinary Italian (though idealised by her, and god-like in her memory); and it is the power of emotion that transfigures everyday experience. Her Italian encounter brings into her life a divine 'moment', an intense moment of sexuality and passion whose transforming power – the transforming power of strong emotion – might have had the same liberating effect as Pan. Feo is a Pan-like presence on the mountainside, and there is ambiguity and uncertainty at the end of Miss Raby's story, as at the end of the panic-stricken picnic, before Eustace goes off into the wild. But the relationship between Feo and Miss Raby is problematic. Her outrageous attempt to bring about a marriage of English 'civility' and Italian 'nature' by adopting one of Feo's sons is a moment of despicable self-deception. Can she truly be convinced that she has "lived worthily" (206)? Does Forster think so? Surely, she is as mercenary as Feo. The Italians in the story are as bad as the English, and the author's relationship with his characters is ambivalent. Yet it is to an Italian that Miss Raby owes her one vivid, meaningful and defining moment of existence, and perverse though it is, her final humiliation in Vorta provides another romantic vision – of *dis*engagement – to live by. The ideal of intensity of experience is finally inseparable from the Italians and her Italian experience: "A presumptuous boy had taken her to the gates of heaven; and, though she would not enter with him, the eternal remembrance of the vision had made life seem endurable and good" (202). Similarly, Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott at the end of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* make a rational decision to hold on to the memory of their times, at the gates of heaven, with Gino, to make their lives in England "endurable and good".

"The Eternal Moment" is full of that sense of a world in flux which is to be found at the end of the two Italian novels. There is ambiguity because the English and the Italians have failed to *connect*, or even to reach an understanding. Miss Raby has neither rectified her past failure to connect, nor reached a compensating, authentic state of self-awareness. She has not reconciled the divisions within, nor found a satisfactory solution to the disorder without. She has "taken up her *Baedeker* and left them" (206), as symbolic and ironic a scene as Lucy Honeychurch "In

Santa Croce with no Baedeker." Enlightenment is not available to those who cannot abandon themselves. Miss Raby's is a story of compromise, and the reader is asked to accept the incompleteness of the story's end. Miss Raby achieves a victory, but also suffers a defeat. Her "final failure" (206) may in fact be her "vision of herself" (206), that she has "lived worthily" (206). Like Lucy Honeychurch, and the heroines of some earlier novels about the English in Italy, her experience of Italy is sufficient to liberate her from her narrowest prejudices, but remains superficial. There is a close parallel with the heroine of George Gissing's 1890 novel, *The Emancipated*.[57] Miriam Baske, brought up in an atmosphere of English Puritanism, is introduced to a form of paganism in Naples, through the art of the South. She finds fulfilment in marriage there (to an Englishman), but there is no sense of any real or profound contact with Italy or Italians. Gissing subjects Miriam only to those influences which will educate her out of her Englishness; he protects her from the full force of an engagement with Italy which would test the validity of her 'conversion'. One does not feel as optimistic at the end of *The Emancipated* as one does, for example, in spite of its ambiguity, at the ending of *The Portrait of a Lady*, because Miriam has not been tested and strengthened by the kinds of difficulties that beset Isabel Archer. For Miriam, Lucy Honeychurch, and Miss Raby, the change brought about by Italy is an almost mystical, Pan-like affair, based on occasional privileged moments of insight, and not on any real or lasting contact with Italian life. Perhaps there was no alternative for these writers and their characters (and Miss Raby, significantly, is both a character and a writer), to whom Italy was an idyll, an illusion, an image and an ideal.

Conclusion to the Pan Stories

In the Pan stories we are invited to ridicule the typical Anglo-Saxon attitude to Italians, embodied in characters like Tytler and the Peaslakes. On another level, the stories, characters and Forster himself are taking part in the construction of yet *another* myth of Italy – a pagan, redemptive Italy. In this myth, the Italians are a wild, natural and abandoned people. Clearly, in Forster's work, the spirit of Pan is liberating, and a kind of disorder is required for life to triumph. Alan Wilde observes that Pan is "variously a symbol, an emblem, presence or force, Pan

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[57] George Gissing, *The Emancipated* (1890). New edition introduced by John Halperin (London: Hogarth, 1985). In much of Gissing's work, including *By the Ionian Sea* (Paternoster Square, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), there is a deep sense of loss. In that work, he is especially disappointed by the "squalid little town" of Cotrone (ancient Croton) – "squalid" is the commonest epithet in *By the Ionian Sea* – and comments that the "strength and beauty" that once distinguished the city's inhabitants has left them entirely. (pp. 79-89). It is not difficult to see the reflection of Cotrone in Vorta.

is ... above all, an *idea*." In all of Forster's work, Wilde suggests, Pan is "not simply figured ... but ... submerged throughout, visible in his effects."[58] Pan's role is to *re*figure reality. Forster's fiction may be seen in this light as one continuous attempt to reconcile the very English need for order with the desire for *dis*order and its prevalence in the world. The celebration of direct, sensual and intuitive experience which characterises the Pan stories reappears in *A Room with a View*, but equally powerful is the urge to integrate this universal element of disorder into Forster's familiar world. In his fiction, such attempts at integration are mostly unsuccessful.

The English in Forster's stories who *do* engage with Italy and are changed are consequently cut off from their own society. Thus the 'Italian' short stories celebrate various kinds of liberating encounter, but intimate a sense that extinction (as in "The Story of a Panic" and "The Story of the Siren"), or at best separation from others (as in "Albergo Empedocle"), may be the price to be paid for freedom and knowledge.[59] Engagement implies self-abandon and abandonment. The message is ambiguous, the search for some kind of supreme transfiguring *and* transcending event or relationship is inconclusive. Miss Raby's position is more complex than the simple allegories of Eustace and Harold, yet Forster had still to resolve the problem of creating a life-enhancing and not destructive relationship between the civilised and pagan, in these symbolic encounters between the English and the Italians. A mood of serene extinction suffuses his Italian stories, which, considered together, represent the idea of Italy as a place both of plenitude and loss.

In each of his short Italian fictions, Forster's English characters are seen to be in an engagement with *their* idea – and to a certain extent it is *his* idea – of the Italians. From the varying impact of Pan on the people in "The Story of a Panic", to Miss Raby's confrontation with Feo, the characters seek an authentic encounter with real Italians who, like the real Italy, repeatedly elude them. These Italians represent chaos, confusion and confrontation (often subliminal) with the sexual. Contact with Italians takes the form of some kind of projected, liberating sexual act, which Forster's characters both fear and desire; towards which they hesitatingly move, from which they inevitably withdraw. Most of Forster's characters fail in their attempts to engage with Italians. In "The Eternal Moment", Miss Raby and Feo fail to connect (twice), and the English tourists at the hotel have removed themselves from any authentic encounter with Italians. Tourists have corrupted the entire valley of Vorta – thanks to its appropriation by Miss Raby. Between Colonel Leyland and Miss Raby Italy precipitates a crisis of relationship and

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[58] Alan Wilde, "The Naturalisation of Eden." *E.M. Forster: a Human Exploration*, eds. Das and Beer, p. 196.
[59] Forster wrote in his order/*dis*order essay that "the artist will tend to be an outsider in the society to which he has been born." "Art for Art's Sake." *Two Cheers for Democracy* pp. 98-104. This reference p. 101.

understanding. Laurence Brander perceptively remarks that Colonel Leyland, like Philip Herriton, "was an Edwardian gentleman who could not make love to a lady who was or had been in love with an Italian peasant."[60] The main duality in this story of Anglo-Italian relationships is between the Italian's desire, and the Englishwoman's repudiation of his desire and suppression of her own. The stories present a double message: on the one hand, there is terror and confusion, the dark, double bewilderments of being and nothingness; on the other hand, there is Italy, or Pan, offering an escape from confusion and nothingness.

In the Pan stories, and in more complex ways in the two Italian novels, Forster's English characters search, desiring, for what they are not; and if they are in love with the spirit of Pan it is because he is, above all, Other. Confrontations and released passions between characters represent the projections and sublimations of the characters and their creator. Writing, for Forster, became a way of constructing a safe world in which 'other' worlds are imaginable, in which the division between selves, like the division between past and present in Italy, is fluid, reversible. That the stories are homoerotic fantasies of wish-fulfilment is plain: plain to Forster's biographer, Furbank; probably to Forster; and to his late twentieth-century readers.[61] The elaborate homoerotic code was necessary for the stories published in his lifetime. The stories he wrote for private pleasure are more explicit. These, however, like *Arctic Summer*, he considered "uncompletable" and (like *Maurice*) "unpublishable".[62]

In the stories, the Pans and Sirens represent a chaotic and usually violent irruption into everyday life, and the English must be away from England (and in Italy) for it to happen. In the novels, however, when Pan appears, it is "not the great god Pan, who has been buried these two thousand years, but the little god Pan, who presides over social contretemps and unsuccessful picnics."[63] This more domesticated Pan creates the kindly disorder which is needed for the triumph of life; the successful disorderliness of Italy represents the possibility of the integration

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[60] Laurence Brander, *E.M. Forster: a Critical Study* (London: Rupert Hart-David, 1968), p. 100.

[61] As Oliver Stallybrass usefully points out in his notes to "Albergo Empedocle": "It is interesting, and possibly significant, that the two 'fallen columns' of the ruined Temple of Zeus between which Harold falls asleep and dreams of a previous life when he 'lived better ... loved better' are clearly the legs of a gigantic male figure, one of a series of *Atlantes* ... which originally supported the entablature; during the nineteenth century one of these was reconstructed, recumbent, and would have been seen by Forster during his visit to Girgenti in 1902." *The Life to Come and Other Stories*, p. 276.

[62] One of the few, and the most recent, studies of Forster's homoeroticism is Arthur Martland's *E.M. Forster: Passion and Prose* (Swaffham: Gay Men's Press, 1999). The publisher asserts that it "reclaims Forster for the gay tradition." Martland's premiss is that Forster's homosexuality lies beneath the surface even of his most popular novels, "sometimes with, sometimes without, the author's awareness".

of Pan-qualities into the self, and the self-transcendence that follows. The Italians are seen to live enviably harmonic lives, accepting chaos as a force that unifies, at least intermittently, although it is an elusive state, for the English, and perhaps unattainable. In the novels, the spirit of Pan chiefly resides in Gino, Forster's representative Italian, to reveal to the other characters in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* a vision of what they are *not*. Gino is nature – wise and free – and George, in *A Room with a View*, as more than one critic has noted, is another "demon boy" come to free Lucy from herself, her inhibitions and the conventions of her society. Furbank identifies this recurring, archetypal figure in Forster's fiction as "the figure of the spiritual rescuer": "Again, there is the panic scene: some sudden irruption of disorder or scandal, which may be beneficent (as in 'The Story of a Panic') or maleficent (as in 'The Eternal Moment') but is at all events an irresistible necessity, imposing its own laws." [64] The pattern of the stories is repeated in the plots of the two Italian novels.

3.3 Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905)

> No one realised that more than strong personalities were engaged; that the struggle was national; that generations of ancestors, good, bad, or indifferent, forbad the Latin man to be chivalrous to the northern woman, the northern woman to forgive the Latin man.[65]

The *gravitas* of this comment on Gino's and Lilia's doomed marriage is to a certain extent subverted by Forster's sly following remark: "All this might have been foreseen; Mrs Herriton foresaw it from the first." Nevertheless, the observation places the relationship between the English and the Italian characters of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* within social and cultural traditions as well as psychological and sexual contexts. It both universalises and particularises this cross-cultural marriage. Rose Macaulay wrote an astute study of Forster in 1972, and although dated, it is, as the editor of *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage* opines, "the base of the pyramid of the critical books."[66] Macaulay's comments on Forster's characterisation in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* are worth quoting at length because, as well as providing a very fair

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[63] *A Room with a* View, p. 90. Note that Lawrence, too, distinguished between Pans: his Il Duro (*Twilight in Italy*) represented only the decadent, goat-footed faun, the god of sensual excess, not the Great God Pan. The Great God was the All, the original Pan Lawrence described in *St. Mawr* (1925) as "the God that is hidden in everything."
[64] Furbank, *The New Collected Short Stories*, Introduction, p. 9.
[65] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 67.
[66] Philip Gardner, ed., *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), Introduction, p. 2.

summary of the character of Gino Carella, they reflect Forster's own Anglo-Saxon, post-Romantic attitudes:

> Mr Forster, residing for a time in Italy in more felicitous days than these, fell deeply in love with it and with its denizens, with this enchanting, unaffected, cynical, callous, gay and somewhat barbaric Latin people, whose very humbug is emitted with a glorious gesture of eloquent absurdity, so different from the stiff, stilted, half-muted humbug of the fog-bound and inhibited British ... It [*Where Angels Fear to Tread*] is the novel of a young man deeply, though not uncritically, in love with the Italian race, Italian civilization, the Italian angle of life. The young Italian, Gino, is a vulgar and mercenary youth who ill treats his wife; he is a barbarian. His creator modifies nothing of this, conceals nothing. Gino is, in many of his aspects, disgusting. He would probably today be a brutal young Fascist. But Mr. Forster, his antithesis, the product of a sensitive and humane liberal and Cambridge culture, loves Gino, the tough, flashy, extrovert Latin youth, the kind of youth whom one meets now and then in Juvenal or Petronius, handsome, avaricious, greedy and stupid, something of a smart Alec, something of a crook, more of a spoilt child, his black hair oiled, his body poised magnificently against the magnificent Tuscan landscape, against the magnificent, brutal centuries of Roman culture. What English creatures can help loving Gino ? Not Mr Forster, not his readers, not the prigs from Sawston who had come out to hate him. For this is the story of the conquest of commonplace suburban English respectability by Italian charm, by cheerful, graceful and rather brutal paganism.[67]

Macaulay's examples are well chosen, especially Juvenal. The splendour, squalor and complexity of the Roman world is vividly evoked by Juvenal in *The Sixteen Satires*. His portraits of Romans include those too idle and proud to work; the coarse, clever thrusting *parvenu*; and the legacy-hunter; in all of whom Forster may have seen something of Gino. Underlying Macaulay's commentary is the assumption that educated Englishmen of Forster's generation were intimately acquainted with classical Roman texts. The Italians of Forster's imagination were formed by his reading of Juvenal, Petronius and Ovid: those writers' characters were urbane, worldly, arrogant, promiscuous yet compellingly attractive seducers of men and women. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* – Forster's "first odd and pleasant invention", as Rose Macaulay writes – is about:

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[67] Rose Macaulay, *The Writings of E. M. Forster* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), pp 36-37.

> lives he could scarcely have known except remotely ... such beings as Gino and his friends one sees talking together in the piazza outside the farmacia; one does not really know them ... such as Lilia one may see ... sprawling about a morning-coffee shop, laughing and chaffing at a cinema, gaping cheerfully and vacantly at shop windows, but one does not really know Lilia either ... Mr Forster cannot really have known well either of these merry and touching extroverts from an uncultivated stratum of alien social life. (39)

Indeed, it is the 'alien' in Gino and the misfit in Lilia, that has given Forster his theme and illustrated it. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is about Italians as real (or unreal) to Forster as his gods, fauns and sirens: and yet, as Macaulay has said, "they assault the senses like a rank, full-flavoured, common wine, ... a jigging Naples tune" (39). Like Henry James (who met only "waiters and washerwomen") Forster met very few 'real' Italians and knew even fewer. Furbank notes, of Forster's Italian initiation, that: "indeed neither he nor his mother had made any Italian friends, nor had they once entered an Italian home; at most they had struck up acquaintance with an occasional Italian hotel guest or kindly museum-attendant or stationmaster."[68] *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is in essence about a transforming encounter with the exotic, and the 'exotic' by definition is more powerful for not being familiar. Yet the novel is also about the limits of vision of Forster's characters.

The relationship between Philip Herriton and Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is one of the most important in Forster's fictional treatment of the English and the Italians. Philip represents three principal Forsterian doctrines: the failure of aestheticism as a way of life; the 'undeveloped heart'; and the futility and falseness of the spectatorial attitude to life. Philip, like Cecil Vyse in *A Room with a View*, has reduced life's meaning to aesthetics, impoverishing his emotional life as a result. As Wilfred Stone observes, Philip is like James's John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle": "the man ... to whom nothing on earth was to have happened."[69] Again like Cecil Vyse, who cultivates boredom so as to increase his lifespan, Philip exemplifies the type Ortega y Gasset identifies as one whose life is "prolonged in proportion as it is not used", gaining "extension at the cost of vitality."[70] Forster's contemporary, the Italianist aesthete Arthur Symons, is

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[68] Furbank, *E.M. Forster: a Life*, vol. i., p. 96.

[69] Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain*, p. 179.

[70] For this insightful comparison with Ortega y Gasset, see *The Cave and the Mountain*, p. 180. Stone himself is probably indebted to Trilling, who first compared Philip Herriton to the hero of James's "The Beast in the Jungle", the man to whom nothing can happen. And "that is his tragedy", Lionel Trilling comments, in *E.M. Forster: a Study* (1944), new and revised edition (London: The Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 65.

mentioned earlier, and one of many, although superficial, resemblances between his work and Forster's is pertinent here. A story in Symons's *Spiritual Adventures* is about a traveller, Daniel Roserra, to whom: "life was a matter of careful cultivation ... He tended his soul as one might tend some rare plant; careful about most things of the earth it was to take root in."[71] As Philip says of himself, he is "fated to pass through the world without colliding with it or moving it." Lacking the vital force, Philip is a non-participant, one of life's observers; a sort of masculine Lucy Honeychurch, a sexually uninitiated, even maladjusted individual, a virgin and voyeur who must learn in Italy how fully to live. Forster's narrative clearly implies that active participation in life, even if it involves mistakes, is preferable to observation. As Caroline says to Philip: "'There's never any knowing ... which of our actions, which of our idlenesses, won't have things hanging on it forever'" (136). Forster might have had Philip in mind when he wrote in "Notes on the English Character":

> [Englishmen] go forth into a world that is not entirely composed of public-school men or even of Anglo-Saxons, but of men who are as various as the sands of the sea; into a world of whose richness and subtlety they have no conception. They go forth into it with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts. And it is this undeveloped heart that is largely responsible for the difficulties of Englishmen abroad. An undeveloped heart – not a cold one. The difference is important.[72]

Philip is more complicated than he might appear. As Forster writes in that essay:

> The trouble is that the English nature is not at all easy to understand. It has the great air of simplicity, it advertises itself as simple, but the more we consider it, the greater the problems we shall encounter. (8)

Philip embodies many of the qualities of the English character in addition to the undeveloped heart: repression, inhibition, dandyism, the stiff-upper-lip, a faintly endearing decency and solidity. "Solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency" but also "lack of imagination, hypocrisy", as Forster puts it, in "Notes on the English Character" (3). Philip also has a very large capacity for self-deception and, as Glen Cavaliero notes, "that self-protective irony which is the middle-class Englishman's defence against reality [and which] Forster was one of the first people to analyse

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[71] Arthur Symons, "An Autumn City." *Spiritual Adventures* (London: Archibald Constable & Company, 1905), pp. 177-197. This reference p. 177.
[72] "Notes on the English Character." *Abinger Harvest*, p. 5.

and portray."[73] Philip, in short, is the quintessential Forsterian hero: intellectual, over-civilized, self-conscious and repressed. He is also both a self-portrait and a literary experimental self. Writers who find themselves in uneasy, conflictual relationships with their own cultures frequently invent fictional surrogates. Life in Forster's novels is indeed not a public-school playground. It is a battleground of conflicting impulses, where freedom, love, truth and "greatness" are won by the right choices or lost by the wrong ones. Forster has chosen Italy as his symbolic battleground on which in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* the Herritons wage war against Gino Carella, and in *A Room with a View* the atypical Emersons represent Italy, and George particularly is party to "the eternal league of Italy with youth".[74]

While Philip is the central English male of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Mrs Herriton, though she plays a minor role, represents English values. It is Mrs Herriton who opposes Gino (her *real* antagonist, of course, being Italy and everything it represents). Mrs Herriton and Gino are the only two characters who stay fixed and draw their nourishment from their native soils; the other characters move between England and Italy. Lilia is problematic in the symbolic scheme. It might be possible to view her as an "ungoverned heart", but she receives so much satirical treatment from Forster, even as he asks us to pity her, that it is difficult to say she was so important to him. Lilia is, however, ruled by her heart, and as a young widow seeking a new life in Italy, briefly she seems to have found one. She falls in love with Italy's cliches: its art and architecture, the relaxed and easy lifestyle, and finally with Gino, one of its "charming" and "unspoiled" people. Gino, the Italian male, the archetypal hot-blooded Latin, is the embodiment of all that the reader imagines (knowing the Herritons) to have been lacking in Lilia's relationship with Philip's brother. Philip has encouraged Lilia's ambition to find a new life in Italy, finding her situation "full of whimsical romance: there was something half attractive, half repellent in the thought of this vulgar woman journeying to places he loved and revered. Why should she not be transfigured ? The same had happened to the Goths" (22-3). Mrs Herriton, on the contrary, "did not believe in romance, nor in transfiguration, nor in parallels from history, nor in anything else that may disturb domestic life" (23). Forster condemns both attitudes. Lilia, though rejected by Sawston and herself critical of Sawstonian values, does not make a success of life in Italy. She displays Italian characteristics in Sawston, but is excessively English in Monteriano (imposing tea-parties onto village society). She *has* a heart, not entirely undeveloped nor cold, but lacks intelligence, will-power and taste. Essentially, Lilia thinks and believes in cliches, and misunderstands the Italians. She is defeated by Italian patriarchal convention – "in the most

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[73] Glen Cavaliero, *A Reading of E.M. Forster* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 70.

gentle way, which Mrs Herriton might have envied, Gino made her do what he wanted" (61-2) – and finally by Gino's infidelity:

> Of course, had Lilia been different, had she asserted herself and got a grip on his character, he might possibly – though not probably – have made a better husband as well as a better man, and at all events he could have adopted the attitude of the Englishman, whose standard is higher even when his practice is the same. But had Lilia been different she might not have married him. (63)

And so, "the Social ideals of North and South had had their brief contention, and this time the South had won" (63). Although Lilia had sincerely sought to embrace Italy, after her defeat and in her final crisis, Sawston appears as a sweet vision. She is humiliated, yet even in her humiliation superior to the average Sawstonian, because she "had somehow kept the power of enjoying herself with sincerity" (76).

In his curiously anthropological study of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Nigel Rapport proposes a "spectrum" of the English characters' positions with respect to the Italians, to suggest how "the cultural and the natural" are related.[75] Rapport's spectrum ranges from *Divorce* (Mrs Herriton, most thoroughly divorced from the Italians, Harriet marginally less detached) to *Conflate* (a position occupied by Lilia); with Caroline *Wed* on the mid-level of integratedness; Philip close to her, a little further up towards the other Herritons. This is an interesting method of criticism; certainly there are many levels of engagement in the text, and many overlap in this way. Forster presents two sides to everything; he is a fair if not always impartial commentator on character and national types, hinting at the virtues in his flawed characters and revealing the flaws in his heroes. But Forster is not an anthropologist, and in his fiction at least, his ideas on the nature/nurture question are equivocal. What is strongly suggested and even self-evident in Forster's texts is the socially constructed character of the Englishman's Italy and Italians. Philip Herriton is exemplary. Herriton, Forster says, at twenty-two had come back intoxicated from his first visit to Italy:

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[74] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 72.

[75] Nigel Rapport, *The Prose and the Passion: Anthropology, literature and the writing of E M Forster* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). This is a strange, hybrid study (literary criticism in the terminology of anthropology and graphs), but mostly useful, yielding some new perspectives in its plain exposition and unusual pragmatic approach to the text.

> He came back with the air of a prophet who would either remodel Sawston or reject it. All the energies and enthusiasms of a rather friendless life had passed into the championship of beauty ... [but] ... in a short time it was over. Nothing had happened either in Sawston or within himself ... [and] he concluded that nothing could happen, not knowing that human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails.[76] (70-1)

Forster's ironic phrase "championship of beauty" reveals his sense of the limitations of traditional aesthetics and the consolations of aestheticism: displacement and evasion are Philip's only resort. In an early exchange between Philip and Caroline, Caroline confesses that she herself came back from Monteriano hating "mediocrity and dullness and spitefulness and society", but came to see "that all these things are invincible, and that if we go against them they will break us to pieces" (77). Philip counsels that:

> Society *is* invincible – to a certain degree. But your real life is your own, and nothing can touch it. There is no power on earth that can prevent your criticising and despising mediocrity – nothing that can stop you retreating into splendour and beauty – into the thoughts and beliefs that make the real life – the real you. (77)

The sense of life's dividedness, the idea of self-protective solitude and inner integrity bring to mind earlier Forsterian encounters with Pans and Sirens, particularly Miss Raby's eternal moment. In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, they are symptoms of Philip's exaggerated aestheticism. Forster's implication is that those who search in Italy for a fuller articulation of their interior lives should at the same time arrive at a fuller understanding of the world and their place in it. When Philip is sent off to Monteriano to prevent Lilia's marriage, he is "aesthetically intact", departing for Italy "reluctantly, as for something commonplace and dull" (31). "He was in a painful position. For three years he had sung the praises of the Italians, but he had never contemplated having one as a relative ... in his heart of hearts he agreed with [Mrs Herriton] when she said: 'The man may be a duke or he may be an organ-grinder. That is not the point. If Lilia marries him she insults the memory of Charles, ... she insults us'" (31). So this peculiarly modern, non-partisan non-hero sets off, "in the spirit of the cultivated tourist", and in Monteriano ("in the enemy's country") is met by Caroline Abbot, who informs him that Gino Carella is not an aristocrat, as the Herritons believe him to be, but the son of a dentist. Philip's

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[76] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. 70-1.

response to the news reveals one of his worst failings, his propensity to appropriate Italy to give authority to his aesthetic sensibilities:

> He gave a cry of personal disgust and pain. A dentist ! A dentist at Monteriano. A dentist in fairyland ! False teeth and laughing gas and the tilting chair at a place which knew the Etruscan League and the Pax Romana, and Alaric himself ... He thought of Lilia no longer. He was anxious for himself: he feared that Romance might die. (11)

Philip's exclamation reveals that he is clinging to a worn set of stereotypes about the Italians which he is unable to reconcile with reality. The revelation of Gino's origins, which might occasion mild class-anxiety at home in England, troubles Philip on a more philosophical level. The presence of dentists means the absence of Romance; confronted with evidence discordant with the 'Italy' by means of which he defines *himself*, Philip is in peril of losing his epistemological footing: "he was anxious for himself". Thus in spite of being admitted "with an air of gracious welcome" to Monteriano, greeted by "that mixture of curiosity and kindness which makes each Italian arrival so wonderful" (39), Philip is out of countenance when he finally confronts Lilia and is told that she and Gino are married. Philip's reaction to Gino on their first meeting at dinner exposes the shallowness of his self-declared unconventionality, and his tendency to distance reality by aestheticising it:

> Philip had seen that face before in Italy a hundred times – seen it and loved it, for it was not merely beautiful, but had the charm which is the rightful heritage of all who are born on that soil. But he did not want to see it opposite him at dinner. It was not the face of a gentleman. (40-1)

The novel's focus shifts to Gino. And as Glen Cavaliero notes, in his gender-oriented reading of Forster (one of the few to emphasise the significance of gender in the antithesis of Italy and England):

> If Italy is a masculine world, in Sawston the women dominate. And in a masculine world Philip is at a loss: he is no match for Gino. ... With his spontaneity, his mercurialism and successful masculinity he is everything that Philip is not, and is potentially the ideal brother who can bring fulfilment. But he is also conventional, covetous and violent. His

> twisting of Philip's broken arm may be symbolically appropriate; but it is in character, and indicates the dangerous side of the Pan element that lurks in Gino.[77]

Gino, being Italian, not only represents nature but, as noted earlier, is himself a *part* of nature, literally part of the view where he sits when Caroline comes upon him, in the loggia of his house (118). Later, after Caroline has watched him with his baby, she thinks again that "the man was ... part of Nature", and reflects that "this was something too remote from the prettiness of the nursery" (125).[78] The mystical scene in which the child is bathed is one of the central scenes in the novel. It is significant first of all because it brings about a change in Caroline; secondly, because it contributes to the pattern of religious iconography and sacramental imagery (Forster's idea of the Italian 'secular sacred') which is so important in the novel; and thirdly, because in it the three major characters are grouped as if in a triptych, crystallising the essence of the three personalities – Philip's intellect, Caroline's spirituality, and Gino's physicality. The formal arrangement suggests their individual incompleteness as well as their fundamental incompatibility, since the positive quality in each character has been developed at the expense of the underdevelopment of other qualities. Wholeness was Forster's ideal. It is interesting to see how he does this with his *characters*, to reinforce the three central symbols of his *landscape*.

In his essay "Cosmos, Chaos, and Contingency", Alan Wilde argues that Forster is presenting as the basis for his attacks on the complacency and dishonesty of the English middle-class characters "a comprehensive and coherent world, embodied in the symbolically central figure of Gino." Wilde believes:

> Gino is the image of nature in the novel, and despite his occasional brutality (or because of it), a symbol of cosmos, or order. But his order is not Sawston's, and his function is not only to articulate the human limits of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* but to give its world a sense of dimension.[79]

Wilde is right to recognise the centrality of Gino and his importance as a symbol of nature, but he errs in seeing Gino and Gino's world as entirely "comprehensive and coherent". Gino's "mysterious and terrible" world offers an alternative, but not a solution: there are inconsistencies

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[77] Glen Cavaliero, *A Reading of E M Forster*, p 66.
[78] Miriam says of Donatello in *The Marble Faun*: "'How close he stands to Nature!'" *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, volume IV, p. 83.

and incongruities even in Italy's natural order. Gino is an incomplete and sometimes incoherent individual. Wilde has, in fact, suggested these contradictions in Gino's character in an earlier study: "frankness and camaraderie with men, his elemental passion for his child and his tenderness with it, his masterfulness with his wife, his good looks, his exuberance, even his brutality ... He is in part Pan made human, in part Italy embodied."[80] But Wilde does not sufficiently stress the unattractive aspects of Gino's character, and Gino is not "the whole and integral man" (20). Forster paints a picture of an incomplete man who embodies the disparities and dualities he discerned within the Italian national character. Gino is brutal as well as tender; sensuous, sociable, vital and charming, but superficial, hedonistic and shiftless; he is insolent, abusive, even stupid, and all he cares about is "idleness and pocket-money" (53). There is a calculating, materialistic side to him, and an obsession with appearances that fails to disguise a lack of morality. Forster describes Gino as a cad,[81] a very Edwardian word for men who, as *The Spectator* writes (distinguishing between cads and bounders): "love money, are hedonistic and exude a *joie de vivre* which makes them more likely to have friends than bounders ... They may be dishonourable and untrustworthy but there is often something disturbingly likeable about them."[82]

Contemporary reviews of Forster's novel describe Gino as "the impossible Italian" and "the courteous, shallow, and discreditable Italian"[83]; a "picturesque but disreputable Italian"[84]; and a "handsome, child-like ruffian."[85] A review in the *Guardian* in 1905 reveals the condescension in the Englishman's image of the Italian, in Forster's era:

> In 'Gino' we have a real Italian type, a nature easygoing and amiable, affectionate and unfaithful, swept by gusts of sudden temper. His love for his son is true to the half-womanly tenderness, half-animal passion of the average Italian towards his child.[86]

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[79] "Cosmos, Chaos, and Contingency." *Critical Essays on E M Forster*, ed. Alan Wilde (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), pp. 69-74. This reference pp. 69-70.
[80] Alan Wilde, *Art and Order: a Study of E.M. Forster* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 20-1.
[81] See Forster's essay on D'Annunzio in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, pp. 242-245: He writes: "Poet, hero and cad, D'Annunzio presents a test problem to the Englishman."
[82] Ewa Lewis, "A Cad by any other Name." *The Spectator*, 25 January 1997, pp 13-14.
[83] Unsigned review in *Manchester Guardian* 4 October 1905, p. 5, quoted in *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage*, p. 45.
[84] Unsigned notice (1905), *Pall Mall Gazette*. *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage*, p. 46.
[85] Unsigned notice (1905), *Glasgow Herald*. *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage*, p. 46.
[86] Unsigned notice (1905), *Guardian*. *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage*, p. 49.

Similarly, the writer of an "unsigned notice" in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1905 believes that the characters in the novel are so convincing that "we should be surprised if every character ... has not been copied with fair exactitude from an actual original". The same writer's plot summary is itself a fair summation of Forster's contemporaries' view of Italians:

> The brother-in-law returns to England, leaving his sister-in-law to discover by degrees the remarkable difference between the submissive, hen-pecked, de-sexed husband of England, and the easygoing, cynical, coolly-tyrannical, decidedly and blatantly masculine specimens that unspoiled Italy can still boast of.[87]

These accounts are part of an enduring literary tradition. We have seen just this combination of qualities appear and reappear in Italianate literature before — one thinks of Iago's combination of nihilism and good spirits, and of Volpone. Gino is a *type*, and types are important in Italianate literature.

If Gino's qualities are not always commendable, they are always *attractive* to Forster and his English characters. Gino is consistently described in physical terms: we are told he served in the *Bersaglieri* and is a proficient player at *pallone*, "that entrancing combination of lawn-tennis and fives" which Philip loves to watch. His mesmerising decadence, his equally mesmerising mixture of innocence and brutishness, his childlike qualities, the indolence, the warmth of his human responses are all seductive to the English. Forster tells us that Gino "had the southern knack of friendship" (153) and he is incandescently *simpatico* – "nothing will translate that word" (56). The fact that he is "not a gentleman" but "a cad" is not a great disadvantage in Forster's Italy, and the symbol of the suit – his dress-up suit, "the English check" – which does not fit him – is well chosen; when he leaves it off he can act naturally and become "beautiful." As Caroline discovers, this "cruel, vicious fellow knew of strange refinements" (122), and she feels that she is "in the presence of something greater than right or wrong." Caroline's recognition of Gino's love for his child and his tenderness towards the baby, especially in the bathing scene, brings her to this realisation. Forster pictures the scene as a Renaissance painting of the Madonna and Child – a Bellini, he suggests, a Signorelli or Lorenzo di Credi (126) – and when Philip enters, he "saw, to all intents and purposes, the Virgin and Child, with Donor" (126). When Gino feeds Philip with milk he adds to his almost Christ-like status, and the sacramental gesture is another instance of the text's religious iconography. The gospels do not record that Christ fed his

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[87] Unsigned notice (1905), *Glasgow Herald*. *E.M. Forster: the Critical Heritage*, p. 46.

disciples with milk, but milk's connotations of gentleness, meekness, nurturing and healing, are well established. The gesture is reinforced by Gino's forgiveness of the Herritons for the death of his son. But there is irony in the fact that Gino is a pagan, and Forster is reworking Christian iconography to suggest the merits of present-day Italian paganism.

Gino's violence and cruelty after the death of the baby are "natural", the spontaneous expression of feeling in action, and preferable to English indifference, the suppression of natural feelings by Mrs Herriton, for instance, in her lack of love for Irma and "soulless diplomacy" in the matter of the baby. The expedition to regain the child is mounted without love, and the Herritons are unable to understand (nor does Caroline, at the beginning) that Gino may truly love his son, that such passion is elemental. This violent Gino, who "inherited the skill of his ancestors – the childlike ruffians who flung each other from the towers" (150), this "foul devil" as Philip calls him in his pain, "seemed to understand", forgives, and feeds Philip with milk. The healing scene, like the scene in which the baby is bathed, sounds like Lawrence, Gino being a man "who comprehends that physical and spiritual love may stream out of him forever" (123).[88] The description might be regarded as simply a manifestation of a mystic belief, an expression of the Edwardian mind, as Laurence Brander has argued.[89] But it is neither this, nor merely a prefiguring of Lawrentian ideas. Gino is a uniquely Forsterian Italian. He has all the Italian attributes, but represents something further, in Forster's fictional world, where he holds the *key* to the complete man (though he is not that) and the full life.

As Gino, as a flawed character, does not provide a model for the well-balanced individual, so Italy, which he represents, is not the simple solution to the good life. Extravagance, superstition, theatricality, violence, coarse democracy among men and ruthless oppression of women – none of these Italian characteristics are 'virtues' for Forster, but they help to complete the limited picture of reality available at Sawston. To acknowledge their right to existence is to loosen the grip of Sawston's provinciality, and, in Forster's view, to be 'saved'. The rejection of Sawston does not involve a total acceptance of its opposite, because the alternative is not an absolute. Italy, too, has its codes, conventions, and its injustices, as Lilia found:

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[88] Lionel Trilling comments that "D.H. Lawrence, who played the old game of antagonistic principles for all it was worth — and it was worth something in his hands — gave us many characters like Forster's Gino Carella." *E.M. Forster: a Study*, pp. 115-16.

[89] Brander, *E.M. Forster: a Critical Study*, p. 99.

> Italy is such a delightful place to live if you happen to be a man. There one may enjoy that exquisite luxury of Socialism – that true Socialism which is based not on equality of income or character, but on the equality of manners. In the democracy of the *caffe* or the street the great question of our life has been solved, and the brotherhood of man is a reality. But it is accomplished at the expense of the sisterhood of women. (53)

Lionel Trilling long ago pinpointed the essence of the plot of this novel: "The theme of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is the violent opposition between British respectability and a kind of masculine and pagan integration."[90] This is exactly the kind of opposition found in the stories. The rapprochement between the two worlds has been more successful in the novel, but still compromised. Trilling sees the antagonistic principles in the novel as the life of self-complacency (the British) and the life of self (Gino), and concludes that: "the invigoration of the book comes from two ideas meeting and one of them being modified. Nothing important has changed, but in the struggle things have assumed their right names and true meanings" (66). Equally persuasive is Peter J. Hutchings's argument that "connection is found through the acquiescence in a certain kind of bourgeois culture and world view, after a firstly estranging and finally enriching detour through the exotic."[91] Sawston's bourgeois complacencies are "ironised but finally accepted, albeit with some deformation. A classically English, liberal middle ground is espied" (216). Trilling and Hutchings rightly identify opposition and compromise as the main theme of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, but their optimism about the outcome seems a denial of the profound unease at the heart, and the ending, of the novel.

The night at the opera is where the two cultures clash. The episode marks the turning point in the Italian development of the two main English characters in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. The opera in Monteriano is a synecdoche for that culture of uninhibited joy which is Italy, especially as the performance is followed by Caroline Abbott's terrible vision of the joylessness of Sawston.[92] As exemplified by the opera, and in contrast to the ordinariness of life at Sawston, Monteriano embraces and unifies, absorbing and accepting the melodramatic moments that are part of the texture of its life. The opera's setting is so garish and "so appalling the effect" that:

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[90] Trilling, *E.M. Forster: a Study*, p. 15.

[91] Peter J. Hutchings, "Forster, Modernity and Film." *New Casebooks E.M. Forster*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 213-221. This reference p. 216.

[92] This English conception of Italian opera did not arise with Forster, nor did it die with him. In a recent article about La Fenice, an English journalist comments on and perpetuates the stereotype: "Opera in Italy is all too often like that nowadays – the highlight of your evening being an episode of unintentional comedy resulting from a muddle of red tape, incompetence, viciousness and greed, all puffed up with the vague idea that 'the Italians are wonderful at opera'." *The Spectator*, 10 February 1996, p. 38.

> Philip could scarcely suppress a cry. There is something majestic in the bad taste of Italy; it is not the bad taste of a country which knows no better; it has not the nervous vulgarity of England, or the blinded vulgarity of Germany. It observes beauty, and chooses to pass it by. But it attains to beauty's confidence. This tiny theatre of Monteriano spraddled and swaggered with the best of them. (107-8)

In this wonderful scene, which captures all the vibrancy of the South, the two attitudes to life are vividly contrasted. The Italians "murmured like a hive of happy bees", gave shouts of "universal joy", "chatted and laughed and applauded and encored, and rejoiced in the existence of beauty" (109). Miss Abbott "fell into the spirit of the thing", and indeed, "this stiff suburban woman was unbending before the shrine" (108). The opera brings Philip an "access of joy" that "promised to be permanent". Only Harriet, "coughing ominously at the drop-scene", was "fretful and insular." "The audience accompanied with tappings and drummings, swaying in the melody like corn in the wind. Harriet, though she did not care for music, knew how to listen to it. She uttered an acid 'Shish!'" (108). At the opera, in Italy, people *participate* – actors with audience, the audience with each other. This exuberant, egalitarian version of operatic art has the power to break down barriers between people, and the Englishman relates to the Italian. At the opera Caroline sees Gino "mixed up with music and light", and Caroline and Philip awaken both to the charm of Italy and the natural sexuality of Gino. Families greet each other across the theatre and "violent waves of excitement ... went sweeping round"; Philip "forgot himself", and felt "he had been in this place always. It was his home." He is pulled into the crowd of young men – "tradesmen's sons perhaps they were, or medical students, or solicitors' clerks, or sons of other dentists. There is no knowing who is who in Italy" (111) – where Gino "presided, courteous, but delightfully familiar." Gino shouts to Philip, saturninely: "You can't escape me now." Forster writes:

> Philip would have a spasm of horror at the muddle he had made ... the spasm would pass, and again he would be enchanted by the kind, cheerful voices, the laughter that was never vapid, and the light caress of the arm across his back. (111-2)

In Forster's description of the night, and in that glancing phrase "the light caress of the arm across his back" there is the suggestion that Philip's real sexual attraction is not the intellectual passion he later develops for Caroline ("reached ... by the spiritual path") (154), but the

physical passion he feels for Gino. Neither the author nor his hero seems conscious of it, but the homoerotic subtext of the passage, while oblique, is unmistakable, and critical to an understanding of the novel's conclusion.[93] At places in the novel, and this is one of them, there seems to be an 'agenda' controlling the text which appears to be outside the intention of the writer, and in fact not knowable or nameable by him.[94] If the text is indeed motivated by a desire it cannot name, that un-nameable is strongly associated with Italians and the spirit of Italy, the spirit of Pan.

Like Lucy Honeychurch in Florence in *A Room with a View* opening her window after her first, unsettling evening in the Pension Bertolini, Miss Abbott, returning to her hotel after the opera, opens her window. She is "bathed in beauty within and without" (112), but remembering that "she was here to champion morality and purity" and undo the "evil" of Gino's and Lilia's marriage, she gives "a sudden cry of shame", and "began to beat down her happiness, knowing it to be sinful" (113). But there is "magic in the encircling air", and she falls asleep to dream of Sawston as "a joyless, straggling place, full of people who pretended" (113). Next morning she travels out, still "prepared to do battle with the powers of evil", to confront Gino at his house, where she finds "a shocking mess. Food, bedclothes, patent-leather boots, dirty plates and knives ... but it was the mess that comes of life, not of desolation" (116). A mess deriving from life, not desolation, is very close to a definition of Italy's meaning for Forster. Caroline hears Gino "singing fearlessly from his expanded lungs, like a professional. Herein he differed from Englishmen, who always have a little feeling against music, and sing only from the throat, apologetically" (115). She prepares to speak to him about the baby, and "tried to remember that he was really a child still – a child with the strength and passions of a disreputable man." The comment reminds us that there has almost always been an element of infantilisation in the English view of the Italian. The prejudice appears and disappears continuously in the tradition, and Andrew Canepa has traced its development in "From Degenerate Scoundrel to Noble Savage: the Italian Stereotype in 18th Century British Travel Literature."[95] Several important things

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[93] Tom Paulin comments on Lawrence and homoeroticism in his study of Hopkins and Whitman. Especially apt to an understanding of Forster's (even more perhaps than of Lawrence's) homoerotic sensibility is Paulin's observation that what Whitman represented for Hopkins was "danger – lovely danger – savagery, democracy, wildness, and hugely attractive working men." The homoerotic "promises a whole new liberated consciousness which both fascinates and terrifies." "The Phallic Thumb of Love." *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays* (London: Faber, 1996), p. 184.

[94] See Arthur Martland's gay study, *E.M. Forster: Passion and Prose*, which comments on Forster's un/awareness of the homoeroticism in his texts.

[95] Andrew M. Canepa, "From Degenerate Scoundrel to Noble Savage", pp. 142-3. John Alcorn also has some interesting points to make on the English tendency to infantilise the Italians, in *The Nature Novel from Lawrence to Hardy* (1976), p. 49.

happen to Caroline in this scene: she discovers that Gino plans to remarry; she makes her offer for the baby; recognises Gino's immense love for his son; and bathes the little boy. At the conclusion of the bathing, Philip enters and Caroline leaves, "weeping bitterly" and dismissing Philip's "'What is it?'" Caroline has realised the source and strength of her love for Gino, and her motives in coming back to Monteriano. Philip asks again, "'What is it?'' but "somehow he did not want an answer. Some strange thing had happened which he could not presume to understand" (126). Philip reflects, a little later: "For the second time, Monteriano must have turned her head" (130).

The growth of Caroline's love for Gino throughout the terrible events that then take place in Monteriano leads her to a truer understanding of herself and the nature of her desire. She does not exchange an English way of life and Anglo-Saxon attitudes for an Italian set, nor does she intend repeating Lilia's mistakes. She seems to have travelled beyond these national boundaries, beyond "refinement or unrefinement" (160). She has learnt to love and understand the Italians, and herself, by assimilating "pain and sorrow ... [and] wonderful things: that tower in the sunlight ... the theatre ... and the next day – in the church; and our times with Gino" (156). She will go on living because she has loved, acknowledged her love to herself and spoken of it to another. She retains her Englishness, but an Italian has shown her what lies within her; and she has seen and not denied it. Caroline's and Philip's last conversation about Gino is to wonder about the nature of his feelings. Caroline judges Gino for having "'no heart ... he does not really mind about the child at all.'" Philip believes she is wrong, that Gino does feel, but that:

> "He is unhappy, like the rest of us, but he doesn't try to keep up appearances as we do. He knows that the things that have made him happy once will probably make him happy again."
> "He said he would never be happy again."
> "In his passion. Not when he was calm. We English say it when we are calm –when we do not really believe it any longer. Gino is not ashamed of his inconsistency ..."
> "He's much more honest with himself than I am." (154)

Both Caroline and Philip seem destined for a form of self-exile back in England. Having confessed herself to Philip, Caroline becomes cheerful, chirpy and English, and it seems probable she will return to a life of good works in Sawston. She has the image of everything: the theatre and church; Gino, sunlight and the tower; and the image of *herself* in the imaginary painting

Virgin and Child with Donor. At the last, she sees "unimaginable tracts, beyond"; telling Philip her secret "has made her life endurable" and she looks at him "with great friendliness" as they return to England. Yet there is a necessary improbability about such an easy reconciliation that adds to one's sense of the compromised rapprochement identified by Trilling and Hutchings, and the ambiguity at the heart of the novel. What is most important here is that we understand what Forster has been suggesting all along, that Caroline has real desires, and knows about them, while Philip does not know exactly what he has, and perhaps only the feeling, now, that he is entitled to desires. But neither Caroline nor Philip deals properly with their intuitions. The sense of unenacted desires is the main unresolved conflict in the text, and the bewildering indirectness of the final dialogue reinforces the novel's preoccupation with implied anxieties the senses cannot hope to apprehend.

Philip has seen the changes in Caroline, but remains *civilised*. He is still "without passion", looking on life "as a spectacle" (158), finding things only either "funny or beautiful". But he has glimpsed the reality of physical love, that it is neither "sordid" nor "degrading"; and what is revealed to him – "something which she, who had given it, could never take away" – is "indestructible". He has seen the transforming power of physical love and passion, though he cannot attain to it. He loved Gino, he knows, but cannot admit this passion between men. He is lifted to such a height by this "supremely beautiful" episode that: "He could even be glad that she had once held the beloved in her arms" (160). He worships Caroline now, as a goddess[96], falling back into the habit of aestheticism, his thoughts now again of art (his eyes "fixed on the Campanile of Airolo"); idealising both Caroline and his love for her, as he once idealised his love for Italy. "He would try henceforward to be worthy of the things she had revealed" (152). The redemptive love of Philip's life has been an aesthetic idealisation.

Caroline and Philip have been through the nightmare of death and desolation, sacrifice and shame. In this journey into Italy and the self, the Italian Gino has embodied desire and transgression. To the limits of her sensual imagination, Caroline surrenders to the seduction of Gino and the South. Philip observes her transformation and worships her for it; knowing that he

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[96] In this last chapter where all the talk is of erotic passion, and on the last page of the novel, when Caroline is telling Philip that "all through [Gino] took me for a superior being – a goddess"; and as Philip is saying to himself: "This woman was a goddess to the end", Rose Macaulay's comments about Forster's classical learning come to mind, and it seems plain that Forster must have had the myths of Ovid in mind. Above all, Ovid was interested in passion. "Or rather," as Ted Hughes points out in his new translation, "in what a passion feels like to the one possessed by it. Not just ordinary passion either, but human passion *in extremis* ... [and especially] the story of hopelessly besotted and doomed love in the most intense form imaginable – as suffered by the love-

has not achieved anything like it, but that the vision – even the possibility – of it, cannot be taken away from him. Life is indeed greater, more complex, than he had supposed, and less complete. He had hoped that "the greatest of things ...[was] possible ... that the South had brought them together in the end. That laughter in the theatre, those silver stars in the purple sky ... all had helped, and sorrow had helped also, and so had tenderness to others" (157). But Caroline loves Gino, and Gino rejects Caroline. Once Philip absorbs this truth, he can see that "the thing was even greater than ... imagined. Nobody but himself would ever see round it now. And to see round it he was standing at an immense distance" (160). He begins again to *distance* himself from reality. While Caroline is brought to a truer understanding of the nature of her desire, we sense an enigmatic obstacle to Philip's true understanding of the nature of *his* desire. He seems to undergo some sort of psychoanalytic transference, which itself might be viewed as a form of secular idolatry.

The Italians are still an image, and stand for the possibility of something that cannot be represented. It belongs in *this* text to Forster's unconscious. For Philip Italy is a place of homoerotic acceptance, but for Caroline, salvation lies in escaping the place and the passions she has felt there. She will never return to Italy, she says, "because I understand the place. There is no need" (154). Her fantasy has found its own perfect image, and is indelibly part of her past. Philip has his still-romanticised images of Italy, and in addition now the image of Caroline transfigured by her Italian passion; and because of that, an image of the *possibility* of completeness. Congenitally without passion, Philip is left with his sense of humour and sense of beauty. This time, however, unlike the time after his visit to Italy at the age of twenty-two, Philip's "championship" of beauty in England will include the knowledge that "human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails" (71). Probably this reflects Forster's own self-exile in England, where he learned to endure with his sense of beauty and sense of humour; with the solace of art, conjuring fiction from his observations of life, travel in Italy, and encounters with Italians. It may well be that the unacknowledged truth of the novel is not love but sex, and that the fact that neither Philip nor Caroline finds fulfilment in a sexual relationship with Gino nor with each other reflects not just the complexity of life but, more problematically, Forster's own notion of human relations. Forster's biographer, P.N. Furbank explains Forster's sexual life in these terms:

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goddess herself." Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid: Twenty-four Passages from the* Metamorphoses (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), Introduction, pp. ix-xi.

> He achieved physical sex very late and found it easier with people outside his own social class, and it remained a kind of private magic for him – an almost unobtainable blessing, for which another person was merely a pretext ... and by romanticizing them he managed to keep them at a distance.

Whatever barriers separated Forster from other individuals, and regardless of the "private magic", always constant is the vision of connectedness between people. Gino represents the possibility of a transcending harmony, but the narrative points towards Philip's and Caroline's final failure to attain that vision. Certainly, Caroline now is more honest with herself and knows herself better, and Philip can see the larger truth, as the text suggests. But they do not find real love, and there is therefore no joy because they are not complete. There is no miraculous conversion. Such reconciliations might be possible in Italy, but more difficult in England and for the English. Trilling, presciently postmodern, notes: "the novel ends with an almost intentional weakness, petering out in sad discourse."[97] The novel offers a brief transcendent vision of what life might be, like Philip's moment of joy at the opera in Monteriano. Yet if there has not quite been 'connection' in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, there has at least been an end to obstruction. A sort of truce is reached, a rapprochement between two worlds, a balance between them; a fragile, tenuous balance which undoubtedly reflects the Edwardians' – and Forster's – sense of a world in flux. Forster's private world, Italy itself, and modernism are 'places' of continuing contradictions. For Forster, Italy's complex mysteries, seductions and terrors embodied profound sexual and aesthetic uncertainties. In Italy it was impossible to deny the realities – the sometimes conflicting realities – and interconnectedness of art and beauty (art and beauty's flesh and paganism), sexuality, and death. Forster's engagement with Italy provided subjects and images to explore these themes in his mind and fiction, giving him his sense of self and sexuality, and his 'theory' of art — that is, his sense of himself as a writer, and a particular kind of writer in a particular kind of world.

3.4 A Room with a View (1908)

An average English reader who inclines more towards right and wrong than towards good and evil, will find Forster's Italian novels more to their liking than his Pan stories, and *A Room with a View* more sympathetic than *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Most of Forster's work, and certainly all his Italian work, is an attempt to persuade us of human unworthiness and the need for

redemption, not so much from conventional sin as from the suppressions and distortions to our nature that result from Anglo-Saxon attitudes and influences. *A Room with a View* combines a very Edwardian social comedy with a visionary strain which together define the novel as an epiphany of the natural and instinctive within a context that acknowledges the power of convention and repression. What is natural and instinctive to the Italians (that combination of honesty and sensuality which results in truth-to-self and completeness) challenges Edwardian anxieties and constraints – class and background, and the manners, clothes and idioms of the era and social milieu.

Like many another Edwardian writer, Forster sent his characters to Italy because what they could experience there, and could experience precisely in that way nowhere else, would change the way they viewed England, themselves and their English lives. *A Room with a View* embodies the conflict between 'civilisation' (Edwardian society and its artifice) and the 'naturalness' of Italian experience, dramatising the struggle between these two worlds and sets of values for Lucy Honeychurch's soul. While in Italy Lucy observes a murder and is kissed amongst a cataract of violets on a hillside in view of Florence. These two events change her forever. The Italians involved in both episodes act with passion and love; the English, with the exception of George Emerson, react frigidly and with fear. The commitment of Italians to love and people rather than ideas and things is offered as a model for the English, who shelter themselves from experience and each other within the safer strictures of customary behaviour.[98]

Probably no scene in all of Forster's fiction so clearly emblematises the opposing sides as the first scene – set in the Pension Bertolini in Florence – in *A Room with a View*. On one side are Lucy Honeychurch herself; her chaperone Miss Charlotte Bartlett; the Reverend Cuthbert Eager (represented in the pension by a notice for his English church); the genteel Misses Alan; and Miss Lavish, the writer of pulp Italianate fiction. On the side of light, and in the spirit of the South, are the Emersons; the ambiguous Mr Beebe (reticent, celibate, tolerant, and — queer?), and the Cockney Signora. Miss Bartlett, having all her life denied her own desires, exists in a permanent state of fermenting obliquity. Old Mr Emerson, the "spokesman for Italy, love and truth" (as Rose Macaulay calls him[99]), represents and preaches the "holiness of direct desire";[100] and young

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[97] Trilling, *E.M. Forster: a Study*, p. 66.
[98] For an analysis of literary representations of cultural difference in this period, see Simon Gatrell, ed., *English Literature and the Wider World. Volume 4 (1876-1918): The Ends of the Earth* (London: The Ashfield Press, 1992).
[99] Macaulay, *The Writings of E.M. Forster*, p. 78.
[100] *A Room with a View*, p. 225.

George Emerson is part of "that eternal league of Italy with youth" (78). Mr Eager, a caricature like Mr Tytler in "The Story of a Panic", is conventional, priggish, snobbish and narrow-minded, and will, appropriately enough, be out-witted and defeated by Italy. After the *imbroglio* of the exchanged rooms on this first night at the Bertolini, the characters go to bed. Lucy's bewildered loyalties are divided now between Charlotte, whose goodnight embrace gives her "the sensation of a fog", and the Emersons, whose kindness, commonsense and perception "enabled her to see the lights dancing in the Arno" (34). Rose Macaulay praises "the wit" and the "gay brilliance" of *A Room with a View*:

> that belongs, perhaps, to Mr Forster's notion of Italy. *The Longest Journey* is partly mist-bound, and mostly unhappy. *A Room with a View*, though more than half of it occurs in Surrey, is dominated by the first, the Italian section; the English drama is played against this background, before an audience who know that *Italiam petimus*, and that, until we return there we shall be living in a foolish mental fog, in, as the spokesman for Italy, love and truth, old Mr Emerson ... puts it to the groping and erring Lucy, a muddle.[101]

It needs to be said, though Macaulay does not say it, that in his fiction Forster consistently makes the distinction between a mess and a muddle. A mess is thoroughly Italian – a *fiasco*, a *farrago*, which arises out of the easygoing nature of the people. In Glen Cavaliero's words, Italy represents "that happy chaos which, in Forster's imaginative terminology, is the state of grace."[102] The chaos of Italy anticipates Forster's great celebration of cosmic mess in *A Passage to India*.[103] A muddle, on the other hand, is very English and arises out of the characters' blindness to their own true natures, the sensual world and the reality of the emotions. Lucy is not the only one: Philip Herriton, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, is "muddled".[104]

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[101] Macaulay, *The Writings of E M Forster*, p 78.

[102] Cavaliero, *A Reading of E.M. Forster*, p. 99.

[103] In *A Passage to India* (1924) – another allegory of distance and desire – Fielding says: "A mystery is a muddle." *A Passage to India* (London: Edward Arnold, 1924); Abinger edition 1979; ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics, 1985), p. 62. But in that work (and in that country) the muddle is cosmic, metaphysical and nihilistic. Forster uses the philosophical and religious dimensions of India to heighten his own sense of futility and despair ("panic and emptiness"). What happens in Forster's fictional India is more unsettling than any of the events in Forster's fictional Italy. What happens in the Marabar Caves is beyond or outside all order.

[104] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 99. Fictional muddles are frequently discerned amongst the English in Italy. See Jonathan Keates's characters in "La Dolce Prospettiva"(1997); Janice Elliot's in *The Italian Lesson* (1986); and William Trevor's in "After Rain"(1996).

Lucy's first encounter with real Italians is in the Piazza Signoria, where she comes upon two men by the Loggia "bickering about a debt" of *cinque lire*. The victim – this "extraordinary man" – dies at her feet, blood trickling out of his mouth "as if he had an important message for her." Lucy faints, George Emerson appears and, reviving, she prattles on about:

> the murder ... She spoke of the Italian character ... 'and the murderer tried to kiss him, you say – how very odd Italians are! – and gave himself up to the police! Mr Beebe was saying that Italians know everything, but I think they are rather childish.' (24)

Forster presents in this scene some common English conceptions about the Italians' character: their violent, impetuous nature; their heat and passion; their eternal and instinctive knowingness. The sexual implications of the scene are undeniable: the penetration of the Italian with a knife, the sudden appearance of George, the tower swaying above Lucy and falling upon her, then the swoon. Lucy's souvenir postcards have been spoiled by bloodstains, and George throws them into the Arno. Recovering herself then, Lucy says: "'Well, thank you so much' ... 'How quickly these accidents happen, and then one returns to the old life!'" To which George replies: "'I don't ... I shall want to live'" (66) — a Baudrillardian affirmation of the primacy of immediate experience over artistic representation, of the belief that the world of simulacra is a world of self-alienation.[105] Forster adds: "It was not exactly that a man had died; something had happened to the living: they had come to a situation where character tells" (66). That is frequently the effect of the Italians upon the English.

Lucy's first solitary Italian excursion is thus an exotic, erotically charged, disorienting experience: an initiation into Italy; an equally risky questioning of 'character'; and the beginning of her Italianate process of transformation. Diana Knight's recent study of the latent eroticism in the social encounters of tourists is apt here.[106] The combination of exhilaration and dislocation in Forster's description of Lucy's situation is powerful. The behaviour of these two Italians was "marvellous", and curiously innocent: there was murder but not malice; bloodshed, but forgiveness and reconciliation. These contradictory, paradoxical people, like Gino, demonstrate both murderous rage and gentleness. In this vertiginously exhilarating piazza, its tower "no

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[105] Here again note William McNeill's work on the primacy of seeing in the tradition of Western thought, in *The Glance of the Eye* (1998).

[106] Diana Knight, *Barthes and Utopia: Space, travel, writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Knight addresses the complex ties between sexuality and the risks of Orientalism in Barthes, and their connection with Barthes' project of writing. Knight's study is relevant to Forster, and to contemporary fiction, such as Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*, discussed in the final section of the thesis.

longer a tower ... but some unattainable treasure throbbing in the tranquil sky" (62), all of life's dangerous undeniables – violence, death and sexuality – are invoked and fleetingly confronted. The swiftness and confusion, the association of death and sex, evoke the Pan stories. Further, Forster is suggesting that hidden, scarcely admitted desires are apt to raise dark and perilous storms even in the purest, most transparent souls. Italian chaos and mess are potentially transforming.

Forster reproduces in this scene the stereotypical image of the Italian male, but also, in his use of that image, sets up for us parallel but opposite readings of the scene. The episode advances the novel's conventionally romantic plot (Lucy's-fulfilment-in-Italy) by initiating Lucy's sexual awakening, and introducing the hero and husband-to-be who arrives to rescue her. This narrative has its culmination in the union of Lucy and George. But the dark turbulence of the episode and the immediate suppression of these sexual energies suggest Lucy's repressed desires, and conceal a homoerotic subtext. Italy's dark and dangerous passions, the mysteries and terrors associated with the Latin male, are too quickly dismissed. The body itself is symbolically, silently carried away: "That was all" (62). Although the action foreshadows the novel's conventional happy ending, the sense of displacement and suppressed sexuality is very strong, and for a moment the narrative loses conviction. It reads, as James Buzard observes, like "a marriage plot written by a homosexual man seeking some sanctioned vehicle for his own desires."[107] This alternative allegorical reading is very attractive. Certainly, in this scene, as in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Italy stands for the possibility of something that cannot be represented, and the text itself is motivated by what Jameson called, in another context, a desire that it cannot name.[108]

The next episode involving Italians, playfully portrayed in it to the discredit of the Anglo-Florentines, is the excursion to the hills above Florence. At Fiesole, as in the Pan stories, fantasy impinges upon reality, the ordinary and everyday are suffused with mythology. Forster wrote that he: "like[d] that idea of fantasy, of muddling up the actual and the impossible until the reader isn't sure which is which." [109] The Fiesole outing is another instance of the shifting and ambiguous relationship between appearance and reality which is part of the English image of

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[107] James Buzard, "Forster's Trespasses: Tourism and Cultural Politics." *The Beaten Track*, p. 298. And, writing on 'queer theory' in *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and modernist literature* (eds. Carola M. Kaplan & Anne B. Simpson. London: Macmillan, 1997), Margaret Goscilo offers an excellent account of how Forster's latent homosexual romances shadow the overt heterosexual ones, and how this doubling has been represented on film.

[108] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 35.

[109] *Two Cheers for Democracy*, p. 227.

Italy: "It was Phaeton who drove them to Fiesole that memorable day ... and it was Persephone whom he asked leave to pick up on the way" (79). Phaeton and Persephone leap back not just beyond the present day in Forster's Florence, but beyond the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, and further back into mythology – into the realm of the Pan stories, to evoke primal, pagan and Edenic pasts. "Neither the Ages of Faith nor the Age of Doubt" had touched Phaeton, Forster observes. He was "a youth all irresponsibility and fire" (79). In Greek mythology, Phaeton was the son of the sun god, and Forster's description of his character as "scorched black by the sun" (87) is resonant. In Greek myth, the sun was a burning chariot that drove round the earth. Phaeton once took charge of the chariot, but lost control of the horses. Persephone was the daughter of the corn goddess Demeter, and is the goddess of spring.[110] The two figures on the box in *A Room with a View* "were sporting with each other disgracefully. Lucy had a spasm of envy ... They were probably the only people enjoying the expedition" (82). The embarrassment of the young couple's misbehaviour leads to the point-scoring *Non fate guerra al Maggio* impasse of an exchange between the English chaplain and Mr Emerson: "Do you suppose there's any difference between spring in nature and spring in man?" the latter asks. The listless ensemble divides up, and Lucy wanders off in search of Mr Beebe and Mr Eager. She addresses herself to the drivers "who were sprawling in the carriages, perfuming the cushions with cigars. The miscreant, a bony young man scorched black by the sun, rose to greet her with the courtesy of a host and the assurance of a relative" (87). The enviable natural grace of these people!

There follows the *buoni uomini* misunderstanding, and the young man offers to lead Lucy to the men/the man: "Italians are born knowing the way," Forster comments. "It would seem that the whole earth lay before them, not as a map, but as a chessboard, whereon they continually behold the changing pieces as well as the squares" (88). Henry James almost always endows his Italians with the same kind of intuitive understanding. In *The Wings of the Dove*, for example, Eugenio is the only one to understand Milly's situation immediately and fully: "It passed between them every time they conversed."[111] And in *Daisy Miller* Giovanelli intuits Daisy's innocence from the start. Here in Fiesole, "Phaeton" stops to pick Lucy some violets, and she finds that "in the company of this common man the world was beautiful and direct. For the first time she felt the influence of Spring" (88). He leads her into the woods to George ("the good man") where "light and beauty enveloped her", in contrast to the fog of Miss Bartlett's embrace. But after the kiss,

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[110] In Greek myth, Hades carries Persephone off while she is gathering flowers, and Demeter goes in search of her, as the earth grows barren. Forster borrows details from the myth but shifts them slightly in interesting ways. Lucy herself wanders off in search of George, to find him amongst violets. The young man who goes with her to show the way stops, to pick violets. The meeting of Phaeton and Persephone is Forster's fanciful projection.

A Room with a View enacts the aesthetic, moral, and theological battle between the medieval and classical; asceticism and paganism. For Forster, the Middle Ages, with its ascetic philosophy and feudal pattern of relationships, represents a life that prevents individuals from knowing themselves and others; a way of life separating them artificially from other people and from nature. As an aesthete, Cecil rivals Philip Herriton, and like Herriton he is in love with the *idea* and Romance of Italy. This neurasthenic anti-hero, espousing a fashionable "decadence", declares:

> "Such romance as I have is that of the Inglese Italianato".
>
> " Inglese Italianato ?" [Lucy asks]
>
> "E un diavolo incarnato! You know the proverb?"
>
> She did not. Nor did it seem applicable to a young man who had spent a quiet winter in Rome with his mother. But Cecil, since his engagement, had taken to affect a cosmopolitan naughtiness which he was far from possessing. (116)

Cecil does indeed, as Mrs Honeychurch remarks, have "beautiful manners" (as well as being rich and well-connected), but these perfect manners rest on the flawed foundation of self-satisfaction. Like many of the minor English characters in Forster's stories, Cecil is an insufferable prig, the type who has learned everything and understood nothing; who lives a neat, supercilious life without ever being curious or adventurous enough to discover the purpose of travelling and living. "You may understand beautiful things," Lucy rebukes him: "but you don't know how to use them; and you wrap yourself up in art and books and music, and would try to wrap up me. I won't be stifled, not by the most glorious music, *for people are more glorious*" [my italics] (192). Her comment echoes Philip's injunction to Lilia in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*: "love and understand the Italians, *for the people are more marvellous than the land.*"

For Lucy, Italy is a place where "the senses expanded." She has seen that in Italy, as the characters in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* discover at Monteriano's opera, "anyone who chooses may warm himself in equality, as in the sun" (130). Now at home, Lucy feels "there was no one whom she might not get to like, that social barriers were irremovable, doubtless, but not particularly high. You jump over them as you might jump into a peasant's olive-yard in the Apennines, and he is glad to see you" (130). Cecil's Italy, on the other hand, like peevish Harriet Herriton's, "quickened [him], not to tolerance, but to irritation" (130). Instead of seeing his own society "with new eyes" as Lucy does, tenderly, recognising its defects all the same, in his heart

he despises it. Lucy has learned in Italy not necessarily to desire an entirely new society, but "equality beside the man she loved." Cecil, of course, is *not* the man Lucy loves, and while she continues to "cloak [her] personal desire" (161), and despise her body, 'the Garden of Eden" (145) and true fulfilment elude her. In Mr Emerson's words of advice to Lucy, Forster presents a secular version of the story of Genesis. Moreover, it is not Christ who offers redemption from the Fall: "For Italy was offering her the most priceless of all possessions – her own soul" (130). But for a while, as Cecil rebukes *her*, Lucy has been "forgetting [her] Italy."

In Part II, Forster reassembles most of the characters from the Pension Bertolini in Lucy's Sussex village, where she comes to a slow realisation of what George Emerson and Italy have so simply offered her. She remembers what she dimly surmised in Florence, that "men might suffer from unexplained desires, and need help" (172), and meeting George again she recalls how he had sighed in Santa Croce, and leaning over the parapet by the Arno had said to her "I shall want to live." She can suddenly see "how beautiful the Weald looked, how the hills stood out above its radiance, as Fiesole stands above the Tuscan plain, and the South Downs, if one chose, were the mountains of Carrara." Indeed, "one could play a new game with the view, and try to find in its innumerable folds some town or village that would do for Florence" (175). But Cecil "would not sympathise with exaltation." His love for Lucy is passionless, and what he actually feels is "a profound uneasiness": Forster's telling phrase echoes his description of Philip's spiritual love for Caroline. Cecil continues to regard Lucy exclusively in aesthetic terms: "She was like a woman of Leonardo da Vinci's ... [and] no woman of Leonardo's could have anything so vulgar as a 'story'" (107-8), and it is not until he is about to lose her that he observes: "from a Leonardo she had become a living woman, with mysteries and forces of her own, with qualities that even eluded art" (191).

Again, Forster is opposing two different responses to life. Making the distinction between what is natural and authentic and what is perverse and superficial, he exposes the dangers of an aesthetic view of life. There is no single emblematic Italian in this work, but the qualities Gino represents in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* are all present and woven together into the Italian fabric of the narrative. The threat of false aestheticism is now external, rather than, as with Philip Herriton, something inside the self; and it is the false aesthetes who influence and threaten to overwhelm Lucy. In *A Room with a View* the minor characters, not the heroes, live vicariously, as spectators. The post-cards of Italian art – reproductions which symbolise a life of representation – are thrown away in favour of the life of 'lived' experience into which Lucy

tentatively enters, first through the violence of murder (of Italians by Italians), then by the impetuous and symbolic act of that honorary Italian, George Emerson.

In his lecture on Dante, read to the Working Men's College Literary Society in 1907, Forster criticises Dante for attempting to "draw a distinct line between the body and soul" and praises modern thinkers (especially Goethe and Whitman) for attempting to harmonise this unfortunate duality.[112] Accordingly, in *A Room with a View* Forster shows his characters erecting different kinds of barriers to stop them thinking about the life which is the body, and about sex. Mr Eager looks at life through the stained-glass of Italian art, religion and history. His Italy is neither classical nor pagan, but the Italy of the church; his Florence is a museum, not a place for life. Miss Lavish veils life with a romantic mist and recognises only the "quaintness" of Italians and their potential as fictional characters, not their physicality. Charlotte, self-deluding like Miss Lavish, denies the emotions, to adhere strictly to the conventions of her society. Cecil aestheticises experience as a substitute for authentic encounter. At the beginning of her Italian adventure, Lucy, like her chaperone Charlotte, is keeping life at a distance.

Mr Beebe has always been problematic: "Mr Beebe was, from rather profound reasons, somewhat chilly in his attitude to the other sex, and preferred to be interested rather than enthralled" (53-4). A convert to the spirit of the South, but only a partial convert, he is tinged with some of the mediaeval asceticism Forster disliked so intensely. It is Mr Beebe who recognises Cecil's essentially celibate nature and recommends that he is "better detached" from Lucy and any sexual relationship. Mostly, however, and certainly in Italy, Beebe is on the side of the Italians, as his gentle mockery of the maiden ladies in the Bertolini reveals:

> Mr Beebe was not able to tell the ladies of his adventure at Modena, where the chambermaid burst in upon him in his bath, exclaiming cheerfully, *Fa niente, sono vecchia*. He contented himself with saying: 'I quite agree with you, Miss Alan. The Italians are a most unpleasant people. They pry everywhere, they see everything, and they know what we want before we know it ourselves. We are at their mercy. They read our thoughts, they foretell our desires. From the cab-driver down to — to Giotto, they turn us inside out, and I resent it. Yet in their heart of hearts they are — how superficial ! They have no conception of the intellectual life. (54)

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[112] Quoted by John Sayre Martin in *E.M. Forster: the Endless Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp 22-23.

The implicit *self*-mockery in this passage indicates that Forster intends Beebe to represent the best of the English national character – he is tolerant, sympathetic, and has a wry sense of humour. He represents those absolutes of decency and clean living emblematised by England, but he also "sat back complacently" after this speech, and it seems clear that Forster intends us to see his limitations, as well as his repression.[113] Beebe is a puzzle and a disappointment to the reader. He seems to be on the side of life, but becomes "suddenly inhuman" (224) in his distaste for Lucy's and George's marriage, coolly losing interest in the couple, and influencing Windy Corner against them. Beebe's "belief in celibacy, so reticent, so carefully concealed beneath his tolerance and humour ... alone explains his action subsequently, and his influence on the action of others" (207).

Thus all the English characters in *A Room with a View* are cherishing their own flawed or partial image of Italy, responding to the reality in different ways. Images of Italy are related to responses to life, because life is what Italy represents. Forster's English characters, with the exception of the Emersons, either do not recognise desire (like Mr Beebe), deny it (like Lucy), or become vaporous (like Cecil) or immobilised (like Philip) in the face of it. Forster's Italians, on the other hand (*pace* his lecture on Dante – Forster is not always consistent) are adept at harmonising the dualities of body/soul. In Forster's eyes, the folly of the Italians in the theatricality of their lives (at operas, picnics, or in a murderous act) is preferable to the ineffectuality of English lives. Mr Emerson, as spokesman for Italy in this story, is opposed to the division of body and soul and an advocate for passion, life and true love; his greatest virtues are the Italian ones of honesty and simplicity. He is, as E.K. Brown calls him, the chief "redemptive character" in the book.[114] Emerson holds that: "The Garden of Eden ... which you place in the past, is really yet to come. We shall enter it when we no longer despise our bodies" (145). Quite the reverse of conventional wisdom, the Eden of sexual fulfilment is in the future, and Lucy learns from Mr Emerson no longer to despise her body; to "discover Nature"; "attain simplicity"; and acknowledge the attraction of George's "physical beauty". When Lucy and George are together, married, in the pension again by the Arno, the plot's philosophical resolution is expressed in the incantatory salutation of the Florentine cabman below the window – "the song of Phaeton [which] announced passion requited, love attained" (230) – and it is

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[113] Mr Beebe's speech is facetious, but these were all opinions expressed solemnly by D.H. Lawrence, especially in some of the travel pieces when he is at his crankiest and most English.

[114] E.K. Brown, "The Revival of E M Forster." *Forms of Modern Fiction: essays collected in honour of Joseph Warren Beach*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), p. 165.

Emerson who has shown Lucy "the holiness of direct desire", who had "robbed the body of its taint", and given her "a sense of deities reconciled" (225). Emerson has been tutor to, and Italy and George the instruments of, Lucy's pleasure and enlightenment.

Notwithstanding the assiduously constructed plausibility of Lucy's sensual fulfilment, most readers and critics express dissatisfaction with the ending of *A Room with a View*, not simply because it seems contrived but because in spite of the triumph of love, truth and goodness, and the exaltation of the physical and instinctive, one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that the problems of living and the quest for meaning have merely been suspended, or even suppressed. Partly this is because the 'happily ever after' resolution has been too rushed and rests on precarious plans for the future. But the uneasy sensation of evasion is associated mostly with the enigmatic person of George, and may have much to do with the homoerotic subtext of the novel, an interpretation which accords with Forster's private and literary reserve.[115] The limits of disclosure are so finely judged; the hinted homosexual resonance is an enrichment but not essential (to this novel or any of Forster's Italian narratives). Perhaps the only conclusion possible (on a textual level, to the story on the surface) is that symbolically the snows of winter *are* melting into the Mediterranean, and Italy is where such a truce, uneasy though it is, can be made. As at the conclusion of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Forster presents an *artistic* resolution to the metaphysical questions the novel has been pursuing; the celebrated balance and poise of the writing draws our attention to and then away from the unresolvable paradox which is at the heart of the novel (of both novels) and towards the surface of the artefact.[116] Forster transforms the moral and spiritual problematics of his novel into aesthetic form, into a formal perfection that arrests, at the same time as it reveals, the novel's tensions and contradictory impulses.

3.5 Conclusion to Forster's Italy

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[115] This interpretation is supported by a great deal of Forster's writing, even apart from his specifically homosexual fictions. In *Howard's End* for example, as in *A Room with a View*, homoerotic desire is displaced on to the plane of marriage and heterosexual relations. In *A Passage to India* (as in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, but more emphatically), homoerotic desire remains an elusive ideal which is projected onto an Other who is finally left behind.

[116] The opacity at the end of *A Room with a View* and at the heart of the Pan stories reflects the literature of fantasy and desire – concurring in the body's delights – of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the late Pre-Raphaelites who exerted a powerful influence on Forster. Yet Forster's inner stance and style are the reverse of Rossetti's, the latter preferring not to 'manage' his artistic practice but to be engulfed by it. In the Pan stories, Forster entertains the possibility of being engulfed, but it was a temptation he resisted finally, in favour of orderliness, formal control, poise and balance in life and art.

If the world depicted in Forster's Pan stories and at the end of his Italian novels is a shifting, unstable place, it is so precisely because of the unsettling effects of contact with Italy, and what Italy represents. If these fictional encounters result in equivocal or confusing conclusions, that is all part of the English experience of Italy. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* resists closure ("petering out in sad discourse") probably because of Philip's/Forster's ambivalent sexuality. The false closure of *A Room with a View* stems from the same concealment on Forster's part. In these works, ambivalent sexuality produces a textual ambiguity which presents a complex enrichment for the reader, but also disappointment. The obscurity of the disappointment is partly a result of the intermingling of parable with realism in Forster's Italian narrative technique. Forster's fiction represents the imaginative ordering of his own conflicting personal insights and experiences, the effort to stabilise tensions and contradictions – within himself and within society – into a balanced and comprehensive mode of perception.

The construction of identity in Forster as in Henry James has everything to do with questions of literary form. The projects of self-fashioning and reinventing social values for the world are at the heart of the project of writing. Forster was to find in his fiction as it developed out of his Italian experience that fusion with art and life in *form* which Henry James achieved aesthetically with the union of Maggie and Amerigo, symbolised by the golden bowl. Like that marriage, the real nature of this harmony and fusion – like the Italians themselves and the Other which they represent – is impenetrable and, finally, unfathomable. The meaning of Forster's work may, therefore, lie not in its unstable resolutions, but in the search for 'connection'. Its significance may lie in the way it brings together the contradictions of Forster's world – ambivalent sexuality, a divided self, the anxieties of the artist – into an aesthetic form which is the reflection and embodiment of these interior tensions. This is a very Jamesian use of Italy both as travelled-to reality and writerly image. Art was always important to Forster because, as he wrote in "Art for Art's Sake", it possesses "internal harmony" and presents a vision of order to "a permanently disarranged planet ... Form of some kind is imperative. It is the surface crust of the internal harmony, it is the outward evidence of order."[117] Yet, in the same essay, Forster admits that "there have been some advantageous *dis*orders in the past ... for instance, in Renaissance Italy" (99-100), and his qualification allows for his philosophy of Pan. Perhaps, after all, the reconciliation of the two worlds and the divided self is possible in art, in fiction, and a particular style. For Forster, as for James, the moral, social and spiritual complexities of the world are

[117] "Art for Art's Sake." *Two Cheers for Democracy*, pp. 102-3.

imaginatively represented, explored and reconciled by Italy and conveyed within *prosa d'arte* — the art of prose, a poetics of fiction. Italy, in a sense, *written about*, provides a solution for "a soul wearied and nauseated by its own thoughts."[118] Italy presents an aesthetic solution to the bewildering paradoxes of life which, paradoxically, the Italians themselves represent.

Forster had begun a novel about Form (provoked by his friendship with the artist and critic Roger Fry and Fry's ideas about 'significant form') called *Arctic Summer*, which he never finished. One of the two main characters is on holiday in Italy, where he tells himself that hope for the future and his own approaching middle-age lies in Form:

> Youth demands colour and blue sky, but Martin, turned thirty, longed for Form. Perhaps it is a cold desire, but it can save a man from cynicism; it is a worker's religion, and Italy is one of its shrines ... Martin had entered her [Italy] often before, but never with such sensations; he saw a quality that he would have despised ten years ago.[119]

The apotheosis of Forster's search for meaning and wholeness, for meaning and 'style', is the epiphany experienced in Venice by the character Fielding, in *A Passage to India.* Perhaps the finest moment in that novel encompasses this knowing. It comes in a dazzling juxtaposition occurring in the brief and beautiful chapter (32) that concludes "Caves" and returns Fielding to a Western, Ruskinian vision of form, in Venice:

> As he landed on the piazzetta a cup of beauty was lifted to his lips, and he drank with a sense of disloyalty. The buildings of Venice ... stood in the right place, whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong. He had forgotten the beauty of form among idol temples and lumpy hills; indeed, without form, how can there be beauty? Form stammered here and there in a mosque, became rigid through nervousness even, but oh, these Italian churches! ... In the old undergraduate days he had wrapped himself up in the many-coloured blanket of St Marks; but something more precious than mosaics and marble was offered to him now: the harmony between the works of man and the earth

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[118] This apt expression occurs in Cardarelli's definition of *prosa d'arte* ("total delight, a ... *divertimento* for a soul wearied and nauseated by its own thoughts"). The style was favoured by the *rondisti*, a group of poets writing in Italy from 1919 to 1922 who exemplified *lo bello scrivere*. For an account of the movement see Joseph Cary's, *Three Modern Italian Poets*, first published 1969, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), Chapter 1, "Twilight, and the Conditions of New Day", pp. 1-29. *Prosa d'arte* is an attractive model for an understanding of Forster's aesthetics.

> that upholds them, the civilisation that has escaped muddle, the spirit in a reasonable form, with flesh and blood subsisting.[120]

As Forster always intuited, the separation of nature and culture produces a complex anxiety. The experiments with Pan and the flirtation with India lost meaning and power for the mature Forster. A truer spirit in "reasonable form" is to be found in Italy. "The Mediterranean is the human norm. When men leave that exquisite lake ... they approach the monstrous and extraordinary" (271). The real hope for survival and endurance lies somewhere beyond the social scene of the novels, and probably more in the settings of the stories, though Forster never got them quite 'right'. It is seen in the glimpse of a 'somewhere' more fundamental, more elemental, to be found in Italy and in nature, a place midway between Pan's dark chaos and the happy chaos of Monteriano's opera, where some new existential contact between the world and the individual can occur, where the integrity of place and event confront some newly-acquired and equal integrity of self.

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[119] Quoted in Furbank, *E.M. Forster: a Life*, vol. i., p. 207 Forster explained in an interview with Furbank in 1955 that: "I had got my antithesis all right ... [But] I had not settled what is going to happen." (209). Perhaps this is another Italian contradiction which would not resolve itself even in fiction, even Italian *meta*fiction.

[120] *A Passage to India*, p. 278.

PART FOUR

D.H. LAWRENCE AND ITALY

"Romantic, poetic, cypress-and-orange-tree Italy is gone."
D.H. Lawrence
Sea and Sardinia

"It's a rum do, Lawrence criticism."
Tom Paulin
"Lawrence and Decency"
Writing to the Moment

4.1 Introduction

Tom Paulin writes of "the lost world of Lawrence studies"[1], and it is true that both Lawrence and his version of Italy have suffered a critical eclipse in the last three decades. The patristic earnestness and mysticism of unreconstructed Lawrence, his discourse of intransigent doctrines, and his Italy, can appear dated. Lawrence's place in the Italianate literary tradition is problematic because, in addition to 'Italian' contradictions, his work displays self-contradictions which have little to do with Italy. He shares some of the Anglo-Saxon attitudes of James and Forster, yet however easy they may be to trace, as John Alcorn does in his study of the "Nature novel"[2], there is an unmistakably Lawrentian Italy whose characteristic inconsistencies, contradictions and confusions represent the continual conflict of elements within the Lawrentian self and outside it.

Lawrence's vision of Italy is essentially post-Romantic, symbolist and modernist. Yet much of his writing is highly Romantic, and most of his 'Italian' works exhibit the figurative patterns and tropes of the Romantic *peregrinatio vitae* (*Bildungsreise*, educational journey, or journey of self-discovery), notably in Aaron Sisson's journey from England to Italy in *Aaron's Rod*. Notwithstanding, Lawrence unites the Romantic quest with a distinctly post-Romantic disillusion, and there is no doubt he was on the cusp of a new age, and the literary modernism that would make possible the pluralistic interpretations of Italy found, for instance, in Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and such disparate postmodern texts as Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* (1991) and Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* (1996).[3]

The most immediately impressive quality of Lawrence's 'Italian' essays and fiction is their opulent, feverish intensity. A similar fecundity characterises his poetry and passionate

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[1] Tom Paulin, "Lawrence and Decency." *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays* (London: Faber, 1996), pp. 196-207.

[2] In *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence*, John Alcorn describes *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *Aaron's Rod* as "pastoral tales about the effects of geography upon character" (p. 60). The resemblances Alcorn traces are mostly within plots: *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Lost Girl* both describe an uninhibited Englishwoman's sexual attraction to an Italian, and the difficulty of a marriage which tries to reconcile Italian and English conventions. But in his eagerness to illustrate his notion of the "naturist novel", Alcorn misconstrues and oversimplifies plots. He over-emphasises the physical details of travel as sources of fiction ("The plot and setting of the naturist novel was [sic] born out of the travel book." p. 59), leading him to place too much importance on descriptions of climate in these novels. Alcorn's terminology and exposition are clumsy and frequently unclear: as in "retirement tale" and "*Aaron's Rod* is ... concerned with education-by-tourism."

[3] Fredric Jameson goes so far as to use the example of "Lawrentian nature imagery punctuated by testy colloquialism" to support his belief that the parodic form characteristic of postmodernism had already "found a fertile area in the idiosyncrasies of the moderns and their 'inimitable' styles". *Postmodernism*, p. 19.

translations of Verga, as well as his lengthy introduction to *Maurice Magnus* which, according to Catherine Carswell, Lawrence considered "the best single piece of writing, as *writing*, that he had ever done."[4] The intensity and flux of the travel writing are parallelled in the novels, and the doctrine of the dark mysteries of experience the novels preach. The difficulty of disentangling the travel writing from the fiction adds to the contradictoriness and complexity of Lawrence's Italy.[5] The two kinds of writing function in similar ways, to refine and enhance Lawrence's characteristic ideas and obsessions: recycling and transforming, altering emphases, tending in places towards mannerism and strangeness, elsewhere towards clarity and precision, in pursuit of an expressive, formal intensity with all the continuities and discontinuities we might term the Lawrentian tradition.

4.2 Lawrence and Englishness

Lawrence has always been easy to mythologise, and there are many, antithetical Lawrences in the available myth: puritan and libertarian; prophet, visionary, and cynic; intellectual and sentimentalist; and the most English of Englishmen who is nowhere at home. Anthony Burgess notes Lawrence's "ineradicable Englishness", but states: "more important is the kind of Englishman he was ... Lawrence never worries about being *simpatico* (was Dante *simpatico*?)."[6] Tom Paulin observes of the Englishness that:

> [Lawrence's] assertion of Englishness must be taken at face value and its distinctive oddity noted ... [Lawrence] belongs to the England which dreams of itself as the territory of fierce, passionate and authentic feeling, the England of mines and factories ... He sought parallels for it in other countries, other cultures, different ways of feeling. In

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[4] Catherine Carswell, *The Savage Pilgrimage*, first published by Chatto & Windus in 1932 (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), p. 117.

[5] Many critics prefer to leave them entangled: notably Billy T. Tracy in "D.H. Lawrence and the Travel Book Tradition" in *The D.H. Lawrence Review* (vol.11, no. 3, 1978), pp. 272-293, revised as *D.H. Lawrence and the Literature of Travel* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983). In both studies Tracy argues that the Italian novels *The Lost Girl* and *Aaron's Rod* (as well as *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*) are at their best when they approach the quality of the travel writing. More reasonably, George Bahlke, reviewing Tracy's book in *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, writes: "Granted that these novels are problematical, they do not gain in stature if reduced to a mingling of acceptable travel vignettes and unacceptable drama."

[6] *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, edited and introduced by Anthony Burgess, first published in the USA by Viking in 1972. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Travel Library, 1985), Introduction, xii. Burgess's biography, *Flame into Being: the Life and Work of D.H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1985) is a fascinating work for being written by someone who "admire[s] Lawrence as the sort of good Englishman I can never myself be, I admire his intransigence, and I sympathise with his sufferings ... In old age I find myself in the situation Lawrence chose in his youth – namely, that of a British writer in exile (married, incidentally, to a foreign aristocrat), who feels more at home by the Mediterranean than by the Thames ... trying to hear English and see the English the more clearly for not living with them." (Preface, x).

> doing so, he obviously had to adapt a received concept of Englishness, and he did this by offending, deliberately and often, against one of the central tenets of Englishness ... which is invoked in that mystic phrase 'you're going too far.' This admonition not to go too far is linked with the notion of decency and with the idea that there is a version of experience which is indecent and which lies 'beyond the pale.'[7]

Lawrence, fundamentally opposed to decorum and convention, always went too far, but he did so in contradictory ways. While he resolutely rejected the *idea* of reserve, in Italy his behaviour was inhibited and inflexible, and closer to Burgess's picture than the self-styled "Lorenzo" (we can only guess at the degree of self-irony in the appellation[8]) who sought to obey the "fluid gods of experience". Lawrence is famously inconsistent in denouncing and praising the Italians. Englishmen, he writes, are: "swathed in restraint and puritanism and anti-emotion ... the flesh has been starved, denied, and impoverished, till it *is* weary, stiff, moribund." But: "I am a bit bored by the Latins, there is a sort of inner helplessness and lack of courage in them."[9] In Lawrence's lifelong *laus et vituperatio*, his passion for Italy and Italians is part of his contempt for England and the English, a contempt itself subject to various moods and encounters with people and places.

Lawrence attributes the main differences between Italians and the English to the fact that the Italians did not absorb the cultural and spiritual changes of the Renaissance, and that, therefore, the contemporary Italian remains confined within the values of the pre-Christian and pagan.[10] Lawrence believes the Northern races have gone too far in their search for God in the spirit, and their subjection and reduction of the physical self. They have "found great treasures" which, however, they are "impotent to use" because they lack the power which comes only from the depths of the sensual being. Lawrence's argument, expounded in "The Lemon Gardens" (1912-13), throws retrospective light on Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 1905), and other Forsterian characters who so typically deny their sensual nature in favour of the spiritual, to create new but useless selves. A similar philosophy underlies Henry

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[7] Paulin, *Writing to the Moment*, p. 196.

[8] "Lorenzo" seems to have been a pet name of affection between Lawrence and Frieda. See for example his letter to her from Lucca, 24 June 1929, signed "Lorenzo non santo." ["not saintly"] *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, eds. Keith Sagar & James T. Boulton, 7 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979-1993), vol. xii (1993), p. 347.

[9] Letters quoted by John Worthen in *D.H. Lawrence: the Early Years 1885-1912*, vol. i. *The Cambridge Biography: D.H. Lawrence, 1885-1930*, eds. Mark Kinkead-Weekes & John Worthen, 3 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 439-40.

[10] See Barbara Bates Bonadeo's exegesis of this doctrine in "D.H. Lawrence's View of the Italians." *English Miscellany 24* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1973-1974), pp. 271-297.

James's Roman tales "Adina" and "The Last of the Valerii" (both 1874), in which the power of the pagan past exerts itself. According to Lawrence, Italy's magnetism for the Englishman derives from an awareness of what he has lost since the Renaissance. In *Sea and Sardinia*, Lawrence describes a "nostalgia ... a heart yearning for something I have known and which I want back again", and states:

> Wherever one is ... [in Italy] the place has its conscious genus. Man has lived there and brought forth his consciousness ... given it its expression, and, really, finished it ... So that for us to go to Italy and to *penetrate* into Italy is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery ... Strange and wonderful chords awake in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness.[11]

The emphasis on *penetrate* is Lawrence's, echoing James's use of the word in connection with Italy, and exposing the English desire for appropriation. But James recognises that in the "golden air" and "before the great historic complexity" of Italy, "penetration fails".[12] He is inexorably a "Yankee", as Lawrence remains incorrigibly an Englishman.[13]

4.3 Lawrence's travel writing

There are as many Lawrences as Lawrentian Italies. For Lawrence, Italy is a many-metaphored place of infinite interpretations. Yet it is a *real* place, and his descriptions of Italy in *Twilight in Italy* (1916), *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) and *Etruscan Places* (1932) are among the best travel literature in English.[14] Notwithstanding, a central critical debate has concerned the relationship between 'reality' and the imagined in Lawrence's representation of Italy, and the world. That issue itself raises questions about vision, perception and authenticity, which are continuing preoccupations in the tradition of writing about Italy. One of the myths surrounding Lawrence concerns the speed with which he would judge a place and record his observations. Rebecca

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[11] *Sea and Sardinia. D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, p. 123.

[12] James, *The Aspern Papers*, Preface to the New York Edition, Penguin Classics edition, p. 28.

[13] "My Englishness is my very vision", Lawrence stated, but also: "The Englishman, *per se*, is not enough." See John Beer's essay, "The Last Englishman", in *E.M. Forster: a Human Exploration. Centenary Essays* ed. G.K. Das & John Beer, pp. 245-268, this reference p. 268. For an altogether different perspective, see Ian Buruma, *Voltaire's Coconuts: Anglomania in Europe* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), "The Last Englishman", pp. 297-306. The England Lawrence loved when absent from it was both liberal and bourgeois, centred round the ideals of reason, tolerance and stylish free-thinking, and a culture of rebellion. "It was absurd, and yet there is a certain poetry in British pomp." Buruma, p. 7.

West's account of coming upon Lawrence in a hotel room in Florence in 1922, only hours after his arrival typing out an article about the city, has been highly influential in the formation of Lawrence's reputation as a particular kind of travel writer:

> I know now that he was writing about the state of his own soul at that moment, which, since our self-consciousness is incomplete, and since in consequence our vocabulary is also incomplete, he could render only in symbolic terms; and the city of Florence was as good a symbol as any other. If he was foolish in taking the material universe and making allegations about it which were only true of the universe within his own soul, then Rimbaud was a great fool also ... so too was Dante, who made a new Heaven and Hell and Purgatory for the geography within his own breast ... Lawrence in fact was no different from any other great artist who has felt the urgency to describe the unseen so keenly that he has rifled the seen of its vocabulary and diverted it to that purpose.[15]

Lawrence says something similar in *Kangaroo*. Richard Lovat Somers (generally considered one of Lawrence's fictional selves) "wearied himself to death struggling with the problem of himself and calling it Australia."[16] Jeffrey Meyers believes: "Lawrence's greatest contribution to the travel writing tradition was to shift the centre of interest from the external world to the self."[17] In a sense, Meyers is right. Lawrence suffers greatly from self-consciousness. He is always looking into his 'soul', and even some of his finest travel writing only emphasises the perturbing isolation of his inner world. Yet self-enclosure symbolises death, for Lawrence, as the bleak metaphysical parable "Smile" makes plain, and the interpretation of his travel writing as solipsism is incomplete. How Lawrence renders landscape depends on his prevailing mood, but landscape is never immaterial. His contemporaries held the travel pieces in high esteem, rarely considering the 'self', or the symbols, as intrusions. Critics wanted more, not less, personal revelation. Francis Hackett's view, expressed in *New Republic* in 1922, is typical:

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[14] Lawrence himself gathered his essays into the three works, published in 1916, 1921 and 1932. The books were first published as the collection *D.H. Lawrence and Italy* in 1972 in the USA (with an introduction by Anthony Burgess), and in the UK in the Penguin Travel Library in 1985.

[15] "Elegy: D.H. Lawrence." *The Essential Rebecca West* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 383-395. The passage is quoted in *D.H. Lawrence: a Composite Biography*, ed. Edward Nehls (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958) II, 66; by Billy Tracy; and in many other studies of Lawrence.

[16] D.H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (1922), Cambridge Edition edited by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 28.

[17] Jeffrey Meyers, *D.H. Lawrence and the Experience of Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 12. A condensed and revised version of Meyers's study appears as "Lawrence and Travel Writers." *The Legacy of D.H. Lawrence: New Essays* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

> Being the kind of susceptible man to whom personal contacts present an enormous problem, and consequently the kind of man who is often thrown out of delicate adjustment into exasperation and annoyance and resentment, it is natural for him to seek recompense in the sights and scenes around him, and in erotic daydreams possibly, and in a voluptuous imagining as to history and as to the meaning of symbols and the shape and stamp and ring of lovely words themselves. So, when he leaves out or lifts us over his grinding account of his own temperament and exhibits the attunements of that temperament in wintry but coloured Sardinia, we have a superb chance to enjoy Sardinia. For D.H.Lawrence is so susceptible, so saturable, that what one receives (outside his *agacement* and his human judgements) is as keen a sense of actual experience as any traveller ever gave ...
>
> Because what D.H. Lawrence communicates is his own feeling. He gives us the stone-damp houses, the inn-keeper with a wine-dripped shirt-front, the nerve-drained bus driver ... the kid roasted in front of a roaring oak-root fire ... Whatever Lawrence experiences he experiences with full savour, and he has retrieved an astounding number of his experiences in this book on Sardinia.
>
> Yet it is the book of an aesthetic *parvenu* ... What I feel is that Mr. Lawrence owes me rather a better understanding of himself.[18]

On the other hand, Edward Nehls misses the point when he states: "those readers who feel themselves alienated by Lawrence the prophet may still find a vast pleasure in Lawrence the traveller."[19] Lawrence the prophet, polemicist and diarist, and the writer who dashed off travel pieces, are one. And out of the confusion of Lawrences arises a confusion of Italies. The only constant is the quest. In one of the most poignant and memorable passages in his oeuvre, Lawrence observes:

> We do not travel in order to go from one hotel to another, and see a few side-shows. We travel, perhaps, with a secret and absurd hope of setting foot on the Hesperides, of running our boat up a little creek and landing in the Garden of Eden ... This hope is always defeated. There is no Garden of Eden, and the Hesperides never were. Yet, in our

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[18] Francis Hackett, *New Republic* 11 January 1922, pp. 184-5. *D.H. Lawrence: the Critical Heritage*, edited by R.P. Draper (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 173-6. Lawrence's contemporaries did not question the sharpness or sensuality of his travel impressions, nor their faithfulness to reality. His critics differed in the value they placed on the authenticity of his portraits of people and places, but they never disputed its presence.

> very search for them, we touch the coasts of illusion, and come into contact with other worlds.[20]

Lawrence's "secret and absurd hope" and the unknowableness of the quest are the source of his restlessness. His desire is very modern. He seeks a reunification of sensibility to impose an ordered flow on the chaotic flux of intellect, emotion, and social realities. His primitivism, the search for "blood contact" with people and places, is a conscious linking of observation, thought and feeling. The primitivism in Lawrence's writing about Italy is near to animism: art, landscape, inanimate objects and overheard conversations are instinct with portents and symbols, and aspirations. He knows that while travel provides momentary opportunities for self-renewal, it never delivers one into the permanently good place beyond spiritual complications. Yet the trope of travel is a way of arriving at an *imagined* fulfilment of desire, if not in the paradise of the moment promised by the post-Romantic imagination, then in the aesthetic expression of the moment and desire. Paul Fussell, in *Abroad*, oversimplifies Lawrence when he states that the three works of travel reflect the stages of Lawrence's life: "*Twilight in Italy*, with its fervors about 'reconciliation', is about youth; *Sea and Sardinia*, devoted to social comedy, is about young adulthood ... *Etruscan Places*, about dying happily."[21] Although attractively epigrammatic, Fussell's reading is naively optimistic. The main concern of *Twilight in Italy* is not reconciliation, but the polarities and oppositions that can *lead* to reconciliation, but in that text do not. *Sea and Sardinia*, in spite of the mainly comic tone, is full of bitter irony. And *Etruscan Places* represents, in Clive James's phrase, the work of "a strong man dying"[22], but not dying happily. The work contemplates the vitality and carelessness of the *after*life.

"Italians in Exile" and "The Return Journey" in *Twilight in Italy* exhibit a simultaneously euphoric and painful awareness of place and belonging. Places are both strange and familiar; and Lawrence's mood elegiac, panicky or bored. Like "Italians in Exile" and "The Return Journey", *The Lost Girl* (1920) and *Aaron's Rod* (1921) depict journeys away from England towards regeneration and renewal in Italy. But the endings of the two novels are as inconclusive as the final paragraphs of *Twilight in Italy*. The new life in Italy is elusive. Only in *Sea and Sardinia*,

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[19] Edward Nehls, *D.H. Lawrence: a Composite Biography*, 3 volumes (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957-1959), p. 271.

[20] From Lawrence's review of H.M. Tomlinson's *Gifts of Fortune* (1926). *Phoenix: the posthumous papers of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), pp. 342-5.

[21] Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 164.

[22] Clive James, "D.H. Lawrence in Transit." *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet*, edited by Stephen Spender (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), pp. 159-169.

which comes between *The Lost Girl* and *Aaron's Rod*, does Lawrence's belief in living in the moment, and the idea of the soul in transit, emerge. Yet even *Sea and Sardinia* reveals his restlessness, fascination with distance, and the conviction that places are to be fled from into other places that might hold the secret of being. The opening words of *Sea and Sardina* ("Comes over one an absolute necessity to move") and the closing words ("I was sorry to leave them") affirm a dedication to the quest. Nevertheless, the elements of the quest in *Sea and Sardinia* form a prose pattern, where the rhythms of dreaming, escaping, and imagining interweave and surreptitiously lead back to the perpetual, untransformed stage of Sardinia. Sardinia, which is "like nowhere" and "lies outside"[23] time and history, represents Lawrence's attempt to escape the disordered present. But his "world-consciousness" (91) is inescapable, and he returns from Sardinia to confront the implacable, fragmented self:

> Once more we knew ourselves in the real active world, where the air seems like a lively wine dissolving the pearl of the old order ... I cannot forbear repeating how strongly one is sensible of the solvent property of the atmosphere, suddenly arriving on the mainland again. And in an hour one changes one's psyche. The human being ... thinks he has got one soul, and he has got dozens. I felt my sound Sardinian soul melting off me, I felt myself evaporating into the real Italian uncertainty and momentaneity.[24]

This is a central Lawrentian passage: "active ... solvent ... uncertainty ... momentaneity". *Sea and Sardinia* represents neither a rejection of Europe nor a rebound from primitivism to civilisation, but the rhythm of flight itself. Lawrence's strategy differs from James's opposition of Rome and Northampton in *Roderick Hudson* and Forster's use of Monteriano and Sawston in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Lawrence emphasises the transient space between polarities. He writes: "Life was not only a process of rediscovering backwards. It is that, intensely ... But apart from the great rediscovery backwards, which one *must* make before one can be whole at all, there is a move forwards ... [to] unknown, unworked lands" (123). His comments underline his desire that "life itself would be in the flight, the tremble of space" (45), and suggest the psychological source of his conception of travel and place. He writes with the double consciousness of hope and disillusion, and resurgence of desire. The travel writing is full of failed escapes, but as a collection the pieces affirm Lawrence's curious resilience; his English irony (like Forster's, in many respects so disabling) giving way to recurrent yearning; his longing for earthly paradise (which is above all the image of an unreachable peace of mind) perpetually

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[23] *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, p. 3.

renewing itself in lyric helplessness. He was slivered in dualistic sub-division till the end, and throughout his life continued to split both the 'real' world of his travels and the imaginary world of his novels into an unassuageable search for significance. Clive James sums up Lawrence's soul-condition, questing and the travel writing in his reverential but demythologising essay, probably still the best single essay on Lawrence:

> Lawrence ... could get no lasting peace from his surroundings, and as time went by felt bound to look upon them as an impoverished outwardness implying a symbolic centre – and this despite an unrivalled ability to reflect the fullness of physical reality undiminished onto the page.[25]

James expertly exposes Lawrence's self-contradictions, particularly in the Italian work, drawing attention to the inconsistencies in his symbolic scheme. But James's accusation of "incantatory phrase-making" and his comment that "between the incandescent set-pieces there are impenetrable thickets of un-meaning" (168) are overly harsh, showing he has not recognised that Lawrence's work is as remarkable for its formal beauty and conscious, ceremonial, operatic irony as for its inchoate intensity. Lawrence's Italian work might be viewed as an exaggerated display of the Romantic contradictions nourished in English writers by Italy. The Italian intensity and confusion, the ironic opposition of order and disorder, and the striving for a resolution in form are present in James and Forster.

4.4 Existingness

John Fowles (a writer who resembles Lawrence in many ways) identifies a key Lawrentian quality and finds a new word for it: 'existingness'. In the appreciation he wrote for the 1992 edition of *The Man who Died*, Fowles states:

> What he intensely prized was this acute awareness of being, a sensitivity like that of a Geiger counter aroused or evoked by and in all that existed, though most strongly in

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[24] *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 181.

[25] Clive James, "D.H. Lawrence in Transit." *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist, Poet, Prophet*, pp. 159-169. Written in 1972, James's sensuous, sharp and funny appreciation of Lawrence anticipates Geoff Dyer's iconoclastic work, *Out of Sheer Rage* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1997). Dyer's work of parody and self-parody captures the contours of Lawrence's sinuous soul, his texts, and his Italy. For a recent, theoretical study, see Paul Eggert, "Discourse versus Authorship: The Baedeker Travel Guide and D.H. Lawrence's *Twilight in Italy*." *Texts and*

> simple nature and the primitive worlds remotest from high culture – that is (we lack an exact word for it), the ability to feel and venerate the *existingness* of things. It isn't quite the same as Duns Scotus's medieval 'haecceity' (Gerard Manly Hopkins's 'thisness'), the separate individuality in all things; but much more a fundamental intuitive sense of their being.[26]

Lawrence's hatred for the people from the overcivilised north (and Christianity and materialism) seems to stem from his belief that northerners lack a true appreciation of the quality of 'existingness'. Fowles suggests that Lawrence's "hyperawareness, his existingness, his soul-energy" gave him his almost supranatural energy: "It was not merely egotistical vanity. It was his essence" (236). Lawrence's passion, 'thirst for intensity' and instinct for 'existingness' are part of the Lawrence myth, and the Italian fiction and travel writing display the qualities. Yet he comes closest to a definition of 'existingness' in his criticism. In "Morality and the Novel" (1925), he writes that Van Gogh's sunflower exemplifies the "living moment" of perception, which he considers the supreme value in life and art: "It has the fourth-dimensional quality of eternity and perfection. Yet it is momentaneous."[27] Forster's "eternal moment" is a strong intertextual presence in the passage.

The 'existingness' in the travel prose derives from a peculiarly Lawrentian responsiveness and suggestiveness, encompassing immediacy, evocativeness and something more, found in some of the pieces when everything comes together uncannily, as in this passage from *Sea and Sardinia*:

> In we roll, into Orosei, a dilapidated, sun-smitten, god-forsaken little town not far from the sea. We descend to the piazza. There is a great, false baroque *facade* to a church, up a wavering vast mass of steps: and at the side a wonderful jumble of roundness with a jumble of round tiled roofs, peaked in the centre ... that pallid, big baroque face ... and the very curious dark building at the side of it, with its several dark-tiled round roofs, like pointed hats ... The whole space has a strange Spanish look, neglected, arid, yet with a

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Textuality: Textual Instability, Theory, and Interpretation, ed. Philip Cohen (New York: Garland Press, 1997), pp. 207-34.

[26] John Fowles, "*The Man Who Died*: a Commentary." *Wormholes: Essays and Occasional Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), pp. 228-240. This reference p. 234.

[27] "Morality and the Novel." *Phoenix: the Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, pp. 527-32. This reference p. 527.

> bigness and a dilapidated dignity and a stoniness which carry one back to the Middle Ages, when life was violent and Orosei was no doubt a port and a considerable place.[28]

In Orosei, Lawrence inhabits the Italian present and past. He vividly describes the features of the piazza, investing them with feelings, and some of the attributes (in his view) of the Sardinian character: the church has a "big baroque face"; the building beside it wears pointed hats, like penitents; the place has an alienating "stoniness", an aura of violence, and seems "false". Like Henry James, he 'sees' the landscape with his eyes, imagination and sensibility, but never as separate from himself.[29] The contest between the 'known world' and 'something more' lies at the heart of Lawrence's writing, and the 'something more' tends to prevail.

There are many illustrations of 'existingness' in Lawrence's fiction. The short story "Sun" (1926), set in a mystical, dark-light place of regenerative paganism, selfhood and sexuality, is saturated in an unspeakable Sicilian sadness, and full of what Ezra Pound calls 'luminous details': fallen lemons like the sun; "the scent of mimosa, and beyond, the snow of the volcano"; "the flame in the southern blue eyes" of the Sicilian peasant; and Juliet's white, business-suited, Anglo-Saxon husband, with his "grey monastic face" and "suppressed nervous soul". The Lawrentian neologism "sun-substance" demonstrates his unsurpassed ability to distinguish unknown, un-nameable notions. "Sun" is a northerner's paean to sun-bathing, sun-healing, and an undefined kind of sun-sex:

> She knew the sun in heaven, blue-molten with his white fire edges, throwing off fire ... when she lay unclothed he focussed on her ... With her knowledge of the sun, and her conviction that the sun *knew* her, in the cosmic carnal sense of the word, came over her a feeling of detachment from people, and a certain contempt for human beings altogether. They were so un-elemental, so unsunned.[30]

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[28] *Sea and Sardinia*, pp. 154-5. Note the repetition of "dark" in the passage. Clive James observes of *Twilight in Italy*: "the thing to grasp is that word 'dark'. Not only (as is well known) is it the key adjective in all of Lawrence, but Lawrence's travels can usefully be summarised as an interminable search for a noun it could be firmly attached to." "D.H. Lawrence in Transit." *Novelist, Poet, Prophet*, p. 163.

[29] Forster is a more dispassionate observer, but he too projects feelings onto Italian scenes, as in his description of the square in Florence: "The Piazza Signoria is too stony to be brilliant ... its severity suggests, not the innocence of childhood nor the glorious bewilderment of youth, but the conscious achievements of maturity." E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, Penguin Classics edition, p. 78.

[30] "Sun." *The Collected Short Stories of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp. 493-508. This passage p. 497.

When a ruddy, smouldering Sicilian makes love to Juliet: "Something deep inside her unfolded and relaxed, and she was given. By some mysterious power inside her, deeper than her known consciousness and will, she was put into connection with the sun, and the stream flowed of itself, from her womb. She herself, her conscious self, was secondary ... The true Juliet was this dark flow from her deep body to the sun" (500). In spite of the groping repetitiveness of some of the ideas and sentences, and portentous Freudian symbolism, "Sun" is one of Lawrence's most powerful stories, precisely because it strives for intensity and clarity, a difficult combination to bring off. "Sun" represents a heightened English vision of clear, redemptive Italian light. "Smile" (1926) is a more minimalist, momentaneous and darkly suggestive piece, where a Mother Superior has "a dark Ligurian face" and a smile which is "the Etruscan smile, subtle and unabashed and unanswerable."[31] This woman is like Henry James's dark Italian gondolier Pasquale, in *The Wings of the Dove*; a sinister presence, dark, silent and inscrutable. For Lawrence's Englishman in the *wagon-lit* going south, "the night in the train was like an inferno: nothing was real ... Not capable of much feeling any more, he had only a twinge of aversion as he saw the olives and the sea. A sort of poetic swindle" (542). Like the Englishwomen opposite him, the Englishman "of course, was dead himself" (542). Here the 'Italian' intertext is Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, towards the end of that novel, when Philip Herriton is returning from Italy on a train to England. Philip, Juliet's husband, and the Englishman in "Smile" are northerners who are incapable of feeling. Unlike Juliet, they have lost their sense of 'existingness'.

4.5 Etruscan Places

Lawrence's writings about the Etruscans represent his fullest expression of existingness. He imagines the Etruscans as possessing responsiveness, suggestiveness, it-ness, and now-ness. Similar qualities characterise his Etruscan prose. In *Etruscan Places* (1932), he writes of: "the poignancy of perfect things long forgotten"; "the peculiar weighty richness" of Etruscan stones; and the "peculiar, almost ominous, poignancy of places where life has once been intense".[32] In a prolepsis of Lawrence, Henry James had written of "places of a heavily charged historic consciousness ... the general after-taste of experience, experience at large, the fine distilled essence of the matter, [which] seems to breathe ... from the very stones and to make a strong, thick liquor of the very air ... [which was] the indestructible mixture of lived things, with its

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[31] "Smile." *The Collected Short Stories*, pp. 542-6. This reference p. 544.
[32] *Etruscan Places* (1932). *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, pp. 87, 101, 92.

concentrated lingering odour."[33] Lawrence is "instinctively attracted" to "Etruscan things" and the civilisation they represent. The stony landscape seems "living" and the tombs themselves "feel so easy and friendly ... one does not feel oppressed [because] death, to the Etruscan, was a pleasant continuance of life ... neither an ecstasy of bliss, a heaven, nor a purgatory of torment. It was just a natural continuance of the fullness of life. Everything was in terms of life, of living" (12).

Etruscan Places is a fine sequence of travel pieces, a theory of art, and the culmination of Lawrence's 'Italian' thinking and philosophising. Anthony Burgess observes:

> For – in *Etruscan Places* most, but in the other books too at one level or another – Lawrence brings to the pageant of Mediterranean life an eye that is not wholly innocent. He has what he calls a philosophy, meaning a highly emotional conviction about the location of human values, and he tends to impose this ... on what he observes ... Everywhere he goes he finds symbols ... Lawrence was more a symbol-seeker than a thinker (indeed, he disapproved of thinking, except with the loins or instincts).[34]

Lawrence's visible world is shadowed by hints of an invisible reality. In the Italian writing, his conjoining of the here-and-now with this invisible reality creates a world animated by symbols, which in the end seems *all* symbols, as Burgess suggests.[35] His apprehension of symbols in the remains of the Etruscan world gives rise to his notions of "Etruscan consciousness" and "symbolic consciousness". According to Lawrence, the Etruscans' "symbolic consciousness" enabled them to interpret the "cosmos", reconcile opposites, and fully respond to life and death. For Lawrence, Etruscan civilisation constitutes a kind of grand narrative that attempts a reconciliation of opposites and consciousnesses: sensual, pagan primitivism with mind and spirit; Renaissance flesh with Mediaeval spirituality; north with south; God and the Not-Me; self, non-self, and transcendence. The doubleness of Lawrence's visible/invisible world comes out as a doubleness in the prose, going deep down beneath narrative and doctrine into thought and language. The shifting luminosity of *Etruscan Places* reflects the paradoxes of his thought.

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[33] James, "Siena Early and Late."(1909) *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard, p. 234.

[34] Burgess, *D. H. Lawrence and Italy*, Introduction, pp. x-xi.

[35] On the other hand, Rebecca West's view was that Lawrence was disadvantaged by "his lack of a vocabulary of symbolic terms such as was given [to the patristic writers] by theology." She thought he could not write the story of *Women in Love* except by "clumsy creation of images" which would not give up their meaning. "But even these struggles are of value", she writes, "since they recall to one the symbolic nature of all thought." "Elegy." *The Essential Rebecca West*, p. 394.

The Etruscans' art possesses what they themselves possessed: "the real Etruscan carelessness ... ease ... and an abundance of life" (11-12). Etruscan art, Lawrence believes, combines the natural proportions of the "phallic consciousness" with the more formal proportions of northern, intellectual and spiritual consciousness. The "true Etruscan quality" of their art resides in "simplicity" combined with "a most peculiar naturalness and spontaneity ... that at once reassures the spirit" (12).

> This sense of vigorous, strong-bodied liveliness is characteristic of the Etruscans, and is somehow beyond art. You cannot think of art, but only of life itself, as if this were the very life of the Etruscans, dancing in their coloured wraps with massive yet exuberant naked limbs, ruddy from the air and the sea-light, dancing and fluting along through the little olive trees, out in the fresh day. (39)

In a short piece on "body language" published with other fragments in *Writing to the Moment*, Tom Paulin discusses Amit Chaudhuri's unpublished thesis on criticism and D.H. Lawrence (1993). Chaudhuri holds that Western critics talk only of "seeing" and "learning", refusing "sensation, collision, eroticism and the surface".[36] Western appreciation of art, Chaudhuri argues, is governed by "distancing clarity, logic, perspective and the ideal". In this way, they banish the body and exclude desire. Whereas, in Indian art, for example:

> the person who responds to a work of art would inevitably taste its 'juice', or 'flavour.' Taste, in this context, has less relation to the upper-class British usage of the word, than to appetite; here, then, is a theory of aesthetics that admits of desire. (285)

Paulin quotes the passage from *Etruscan Places*, above, and concludes: "Perhaps this is the dream of criticism – to go beyond art into the dance of life itself" (287). For Lawrence, the Etruscans' art was "somehow beyond art", and his apprehension of it, far from "distancing clarity, logic", in Chaudhuri's phrase, is *all* "sensation, collision, eroticism and the surface". *Etruscan Places* constitutes a "theory of aesthetics that admits of desire"; the possibility of a balance between the romantic imperative of 'experience' and the necessity of artifice. The exultant tone of the prose itself is a kind of concordat.

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[36] Paulin, "The Critic at the Breakfast Table." *Writing to the Moment*, pp. 286-8.

Lawrence's struggle to impose order on experience, and his desire to reconcile art and life are familiar concerns in the English tradition of writing about Italy, where images of Italy are used to express existential and artistic ideas. Henry James's Italian prose reaches for an aesthetics, like Lawrence's, founded on sensation and desire; Forster's Pan stories seek release into the confusion of the senses; for James, Forster and Lawrence the desideratum and challenge of 'Italy' is transformation, and reformation into a new self or artistic form.

One of Lawrence's contemporaries wrote of Lawrence's and art's dualities:

> There is in all artists of a certain emotional vigour the intoxication of self-annihilation balanced against the intoxication of self-assertion: the deathly, intensive expression of pure art, always being tempted to become extensive and romantic ... the romantic individual brings forth his realised self ... to take the answer to life as his art gives it, in terms of other-worldliness ... an initiation into the soul of chaos.[37]

James, Forster and Lawrence as artists, and their fictional characters, strive for the wholeness that results from annihilation of the ego and confrontation with this soul of chaos, the sensuous self, other-worldliness and otherness. Italy embodies coming-into-being: Etruria represents death and transfiguration for Lawrence, as Venice does for James, and the Piazza della Signoria for Forster.

Lawrence's vision of the Etruscans both sustains and eradicates the identity of the human subject itself, leading to what is most slippery and challenging in his Etruscan work: the attack on realism for its complicity with the *status quo* of the world it seeks to render, a world in which all phenomena seem linked.

Finally, Lawrence's Etruscan work provides Kenneth Churchill with an eloquent conclusion to his survey of Italy and English literature:

> *Etruscan Places* is a quiet book. It is a personal book in a way that most English writing about Italy in the two centuries preceding it had not been ... In describing the qualities of

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[37] Evelyn Scott, *Dial* April 1921, lxx, 458-61. *D. H. Lawrence: the Critical Heritage*, pp. 161-4. And note the terms John Fowles uses in his essay on Lawrence: "He may conceive of an afterlife in oblivion ... he may invite the annihilation of his own ego, yet somehow, so strong is his personality, his own residual self, that his eager self-immolation is never wholly credible." "*The Man who Died*: a Commentary." *Wormholes*, pp. 236-7.

> what he conceives to be the finest flowering of the human spirit, in an age when it could flourish unimpeded by the weight of civilisation, Lawrence seems to be returning to a fountain-head of wisdom; and from it he drinks a draught of serenity. No longer seeking to relate two apparently irreconcilable ways of life, he is content to work out his own personal redemption from the modern world by following the model of the graceful and joyful Etruscans.[38]

Churchill strikes the right note of redemption, but errs in detecting serenity in *Etruscan Places*, since the essence of Lawrence's life and writing goes against the notion of achieving any permanent peace. Tony Tanner, reviewing the final volume of the John Worthen biography, offers a useful corrective to Churchill's view:

> It is one thing to travel in quest of new experiences and impressions; it is another to search for curative or restorative places. But Lawrence's motives for his own perpetual, erratic wanderings were a mystery even to himself ... and you begin to feel that the restlessness is soul-deep – a profound irritant beyond assuaging, an unappeasable discontent ... [yet] no writer can evoke the spirit of place like Lawrence ... those extraordinary antennae of his show undiminished sensitivity ... the life-struggle, the consciousness-struggle, the struggle of the soul into fullness, the savage mysteries ... nevertheless, he remains incomparable in transmitting his sensory responses to what he frequently calls the "circumambient universe."[39]

Thus, as Henry James's travel writings are about James and, say Venice, or rather, are the locus at which James and Venice merge into a single identity, so Lawrence's travel writings are epistemological; that is, Lawrence's travel writings are concerned with his apprehension of reality, rather than with verisimilitude. This is not to say that the facts of his travel are not precisely rendered. But his abandonment to the 'spirit of place' is essentially a literary means of probing into non-conceptual, instinctive areas of human experience. Paradoxically, if Lawrence's Italy is 'about' anything, it is about the representation of 'concepts': Pan-consciousness, blood-consciousness, phallic-consciousness, world-consciousness, symbol-consciousness, self-consciousness and, in places, common 'consciousness'. There is great irony in the fact that

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[38] Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930* (1980), p. 197.
[39] *Times Literary Supplement* January 9, 1998, pp. 3-4.

Lawrence perceives these qualities within a people whose most noble and enviable characteristic he holds to be their "*un*consciousness".[40]

4.6 *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and "the life-exhaustion feeling"[41]

Venice did not impress or excite Lawrence, and from his letters it seems his experience of the city was generally unhappy. While the name of Italy is not immediately associated with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the idea of Italy, and Venice in particular, is important to the novel.[42] Venice serves a similar, indispensable thematic purpose in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to the equally brief interlude in James's *The Princess Casamassima*, where Hyacinth Robinson's epiphanic moment of self-realisation, and the defining moment in the narrative, take place in Venice. The difference is that Lawrence's Venice is not James's splendid allegory of civilisation, representing "the great achievements of which man has been capable."[43] To Lawrence, Venice is a repellent place which elicits some of his most puritanical prose. He acknowledges some traditional Venetian pleasures: "warm evenings on the piazza, having got a table at Florian's"; the theatre and Goldoni's plays; and lovely summer sunshine rippling across the lagoon, which was "pleasant in a way"; but there are "dark side-canals with the horrible, slimy green walls [and] a strong odour of sewage."[44] More striking than Lawrence's standard English apprehension of Venetian squalor is his subversive vision of Venice as a place, not of sensual renewal, which is a traditional Venetian trope, but sensual exhaustion and satiation:

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[40] Stated in a letter from Italy, to Ernest Collings, January 1913. Quoted by John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence: the Early Years 1885-1912*, vol. i. *The Cambridge Biography*, p. 439. On consciousness: the *Guardian*'s theatre critic Michael Billington describes the essence of theatre as residing in its "potential to rearrange one's *consciousness*." Gilbert Adair, "On the theatre." *Surfing the Zeitgeist* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 43. The expression is apt for Lawrence's Italy (for *all* Italies), which is by definition theatrical. See the plays in *Twilight in Italy*, and the Paladins in *Sea and Sardinia*, and Lawrence *passim*. For an exegesis of the theatricalism of Lawrence's Italy, see Margery Sabin, "The Spectacle of Reality in *Sea and Sardinia*." *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing*, ed. Philip Dodd (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1982), pp. 85-103.

[41] The "life-exhaustion feeling" is Lawrence's expression. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, eds. James Boulton & Keith Sagar (1979-1993), vol. iv, eds.Warren Roberts, James Boulton & Elizabeth Mansfield (1987), p. 189. Paradoxically, the life-exhaustion feeling is inseparable from the life-affirming quality – the passion, intensity and energy – for which Lawrence is usually admired. Without the things that exhausted him – like the "too-muchness" of Venice – there would not be the same passion and intensity in the prose.

[42] *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was written and published in Tuscany. Assiduously seeking to make Italian connections in *D.H. Lawrence: the Early Years*, John Worthen observes of *Sons and Lovers* that "the way in which Italy *failed* to influence this novel is striking." (pp. 439-441. Worthen claims that although Lawrence was writing *Sons and Lovers* there, Italy did not enter his consciousness because he was preoccupied with writing out his Midlands past into the novel. Yet Worthen quotes a letter from Garda: "Everything outside is Italian and weird and tumble-down, and seems to belong to the past." (440) Possibly Lawrence needed the presence of *another*, more remote past to free him to write about his own.

[43] James, *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), vol. ii., p. 130.

[44] D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), edited and introduced by Michael Squires (Harmondsworth: Penguin Twentieth-century Classics edition, 1994), pp. 256-8.

> This was a holiday-place of all holiday-places ... Too many people in the piazza, too many limbs and trunks of humanity on the Lido, too many gondolas, too many motor-launches, too many steamers, too many pigeons, too many ices, too many cocktails, too many manservants wanting tips, too many languages rattling, too much, too much sun, too much smell of Venice, too many cargoes of strawberries, too many silk shawls, too many huge, raw-beef slices of watermelon on stalls: too much enjoyment, altogether far too much enjoyment! (258-9)

Lawrence's description is a reprise of the northern distrust of Italian sensual pleasures, their decadence and power to corrupt. The combination of excess, the Lido and strawberries, for contemporary readers invokes the Visconti film of *Death in Venice*, and the image of Dirk Bogarde on the Lido, in addition to Thomas Mann's novel.

A great deal happens in the Venice section of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and Connie's relations with the people in her life are changed. Venice brings her under the liberating influence of her father; provides a trial separation from Clifford; a test of love for Mellors; and a glimpse of what life would be like with Michaelis. While in Venice, Connie realises she is pregnant, and hears of the scandal caused by Mellors's wife, and the accusation against him that he liked "to use his wife, as Benvenuto Cellini says, 'in the Italian way'" (267). Mellors, as Jeffrey Meyers observes, "is the essence of the Italian spirit, transposed to and expressed in England."[45] Connie's journey to Venice allows her to view England from an Italian perspective, and (like Hyacinth's Venetian vision in *The Princess Casamassima*) provides a contrast to the industrial ugliness of England, while provoking anger and revulsion against her own class, and arousing her longing for Mellors: "Not all the sunshine of Venice had given her this inward expansion and warmth" (274). And like Hyacinth Robinson, Lady Chatterley writes a letter ("Dear Clifford, I am afraid what you foresaw has happened ..." 288) from Venice.

4.7 *The Lost Girl* and "an inscrutable Italian with yellow eyes"[46]

While Lawrence's Italian travel pieces (except when fury dominates) resemble Henry James's, his Italian fiction is much closer to Forster.[47] In Ciccio particularly, in *The Lost Girl* (begun in

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[45] Meyers, *D.H. Lawrence and the Experience of Italy*, p. 156.
[46] From Francis Hackett's review in *New Republic* 16 March 1921. *D.H. Lawrence: the Critical Heritage*, p. 153

1913 in Gargnano, completed in Sicily in 1920), Lawrence portrays the archetypal Italian male, and it is Ciccio's physicality to which the repressed English woman Alvina Houghton surrenders. He is muscular, graceful, sensual, passionate, but (like Forster's Gino) crude, loutish, stupid and brutal. He is a despised foreigner amongst Lawrence's northern industrial people; and, like Gino, cheap, overdressed and strange. But Alvina rejects her other suitors, marries Ciccio, and escapes with him to his home in the Abruzzi mountains. Lawrence writes, in *Sea and Sardinia*: "This is what is so attractive about the remote places ... about the Abruzzi, for example ... life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half-savage."[48] But the Abruzzi, as a real, not imagined or symbolic place, are more difficult than either Ciccio or Alvina imagined. Lawrence makes the same point in his later, more cynical novel, *Women in Love*, where at the end, Gudren remarks to Ursula: "'Isn't it really an illusion to think you can get out of it? After all, a cottage in the Abruzzi, or wherever it may be, isn't a new world.'"[49] The Abruzzi alone do not make a new self. Alvina's story represents Lawrence's idea of self-completion as the result of a process of coming into or leaving the self. In *The Lost Girl*, as in *Aaron's Rod*, he advocates journeying into the unknown (primitive, or inner place, or the dark mystery of sex), losing oneself, to emerge a more vital lover and person; that is, to complete and fulfil one's self. In the literary tradition, the English in Italy find and/or lose themselves. Alvina yields in her "acquiescent passion" for the Italian Ciccio: she is "extinguished" and "suffocated"[50]; a "slave" and "victim"; and Lawrence insists this gives her "sweetness of perfection" as a woman. Ciccio rescues Alvina from the stultifying Midlands, and domination by the "mechanical" and "mediocre". But he renders her "powerless, soul-less ... with a new, awful submission as if she had lost her soul" (180). Her loss of self is incomplete, and of dubious value: her acquiescence may be a failure, like the Abruzzi, or a victory. There is the sense of hesitation or holding-back; a loss of conviction in Lawrence. Nevertheless, in this novel, as Alvina's boat leaves England, Lawrence's infamous simile occurs:

> For there behind, behind all the sunshine, was England. England, beyond the water, rising with ash-grey, corpse-grey cliffs, and streaks of snow on the downs above. England, like a long, ash-grey coffin slowly submerging. She watched it, fascinated and terrified. It

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[47] However, at least one contemporary critic saw clearer parallels in James. Edward Garnett, in the *Manchester Guardian* (December 1920, p. 5) writes: "Mr. Lawrence has an intimate understanding of the fine shades of the Latin temperament and of the aesthetic basis of its emotional valuations, and the story of Alvina's hypnotised surrender to Cicio's [sic] physical charm is quite as fine, and more direct in its psychological truth than Henry James's masterly studies of the clash between French and Anglo-Saxon standards of morals." *D.H. Lawrence: the Critical Heritage*, pp. 161-4.

[48] *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 123.

[49] D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, 1921 (London: Heinemann Phoenix edition 1954), p. 429.

> seemed to repudiate the sunshine, to remain unilluminated, long and ash-grey and dead, with streaks of snow like cerements. (303)[51]

The extravagant personification and hypnotic repetition of "grey" give the description the quality of allegory. The simile represents an allegorical summation of Lawrence's repudiation of the ideals and values of the north, and embrace of those of the south.

4.8 *Aaron's Rod:* "David, the lily-flame, the Florentine."[52]

The Lost Girl, for all its metaphysical muddle and melodramatic plot, contains some of Lawrence's most lyrical evocations of the Italian landscape. In *Aaron's Rod*, his most 'Italian' novel, many more of the travel impressions are worked in. He wrote *Aaron's Rod* in England between 1917 and 1919, rewriting it entirely in Sicily in 1920-1, to incorporate his Italian experiences. He called *Aaron's Rod* "the last of my serious English novels", and the work defines three key meanings of Italy for Aaron Sisson and Lawrence: existential intensity; the search for self; and that conflict which is the necessary existential condition for the creation of a new self. The Novara scenes are brilliantly suffused with Italian light (significantly, the English scenes take place at night, in the dark); but the central descriptions are of Florence:

> [Aaron] felt that here he was in one of the world's living centres, here, in the Piazza della Signoria. The sense of having arrived – of having reached a perfect centre of the human world ... here men had been at their intensest, most naked pitch, here, at the end of the old world and the beginning of the new.[53]

In Milan, on his way to Florence, Aaron feels "a curious emptiness ... a tension" in the place and within him (180-1); but in Florence: "Aaron felt a new self, a new life-urge rising inside himself. Florence seemed to start a new man in him. It was a town of men" (212). Aaron is fascinated by the statuary in the Piazza della Signoria, returning again and again, and "never passed through it without satisfaction." They are "male and physical and melodramatic":

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[50] D.H. Lawrence, *The Lost Girl*, 1920 (London: Heinemann Phoenix edition, 1955), p. 209.

[51] The traveller H.M. Tomlinson evoked a similar deadness and dullness: "the science-ridden, art-ridden, culture-ridden, afternoon-tea-ridden cliffs of Old England rise upon the horizon." Quoted by John Alcorn in *The Nature Novel from Lawrence to Hardy*, p. 53.

[52] The expression is from "David." *Phoenix: the Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*, p. 62.

[53] D.H. Lawrence, *Aaron's Rod* (1922), edited and introduced by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 212.

> The great, naked men in the rain ... in the dark, strong, inviolable square! ... The physical, self-conscious adolescent Michelangelo's David, shrinking and exposing himself, with his white slack limbs! Florence, passionate, fearless Florence had spoken herself out. (212)

But Lawrence is aware of the effeminacy of the sculptured men: Benvenuto Cellini's "dark hero" for example, "with his plump hips and his waist". The repetition of "men"; "city of men"; "male"; seems to cloak a repugnance, with an effect like that of the "too much" passage in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But the repugnance, in turn, does not quite disguise relish. One morning Aaron goes out early, and sees "the Piazza della Signoria packed with men: but all, all men." They are Tuscan farmers and land-workers, "men who would neither justify themselves nor apologise for themselves", and Aaron/Lawrence exults in their "dangerous, subtle, never-dying fearlessness ... the one manly quality, undying fearlessness" (213). Florence is finally: "A town of men, in spite of everything." And Lawrence's ambivalence is uppermost. Anthony Burgess comments: "it was to what he thought of as the masculine strength of the town that he responded ... Lawrence rejoiced in the male nude statues, which he saw as embodying the self-assertiveness of unspoilt pre-industrial man. That they might be homoerotic did not occur to him."[54] The erotic imagery in *Aaron's Rod* is distinctively, if subliminally, homoerotic; a homoeroticism both classical and modern. The sculptures and farmers together represent danger, barbarous beauty, democracy, and the promise of a new liberated consciousness which mesmerises and terrifies Aaron. Jeffrey Meyers contends: "Though Lawrence is usually praised for the triumphant expression of heterosexual love in his fiction, this love depends on male dominance and is seriously qualified by an ambivalent longing for homosexuality."[55] Lawrence's essay, "David" is instructive. Lawrence states, mystifyingly: "A world of women has brought us to it."[56] David [the Michelangelo statue in Florence] is "the perfect soul erect, holding the eternal elements consummate in itself." But he considers the sculptural pose submissive and passive. David is "all overcome" with "mist and surrender of the soul"; "quenching of all flame." "Yet", Lawrence writes, "no final surrender." And the fire in David "surges recurrent. Never to be quenched." The essay is full of Lawrentian contradictions. The facts of Lawrence's life and his

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[54] Anthony Burgess, *Flame into Being*. Commenting on Lawrence's, Burgess gives us his own view of the masculine strength of Florence: "It seems to some of us a soft enough place with a mediocre cuisine redeemed only by the size of its beefsteaks, provincial, self-regarding, living on its past, and the aesthetes who call themselves Anglo-Florentines affirm the heresy that art is best when it is dead." p. 103

[55] Meyers, *D.H. Lawrence and the Experience of Italy*, Notes, p. 173.

[56] "David." *Phoenix: the Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*, pp. 60-4.

philosophy of the struggle for power between men and women are well established, so that the intense, powerful ambiguity in these descriptions seems natural. Two expressions, from the novel and essay — "The eternal challenge of the unquenched human soul"[57] and "dreams, brilliant consciousness, vivid self-revelation"[58] — together sum up Aaron's journey and Lawrence's Italy.

The city Lawrence depicts in *Aaron's Rod* still holds the "contamination of war", and the tension he feels between "perfection" and "contamination" further accounts for the contradictory moods of what one critic describes as "that strange bristling book".[59] The novel's lasting impression is of the passion, confusion, mythologising and anarchy of the climactic scenes in Florence. In Chapter XX, "The Broken Rod", there is a strong sense of unease even before the bomb explodes in the café: "Aaron felt his blood stir. There was something dark and mysterious, stealthy, in the little scene" (275).[60] Yet among the dramas of conflict and ambivalence in *Aaron's Rod*, a strong sense of reinvigoration prevails.

4.9 Lawrentian Carnivalesque

Like other English writers in Italy, Lawrence is struck by the Italian gift and passion for rhetoric: "the *conversazione* is the affair of affairs ... life seems to be one long and animated conversation – the Italian word is better."[61] The concept of the "theatricality" of the Italian national character is equally pervasive. Lawrence noted both qualities most vividly in the Sardinians; he thought their bravura of "style" gave them their characteristic "self-transcendence". In her essay on "The Spectacle of Reality in *Sea and Sardinia*", while recognising the conventionality of much of Lawrence's writing in this period, Margery Sabin draws out a near Bakhtinian meaning in his notion of theatricality:

> Lawrence was not of course the first northern traveller to enjoy the theatricality of the Mediterranean character ... To James, the theatrical charm of foreign life is an illusion of "the middle distance", while it is Lawrence's originality to see greater rather than less intensity of flourish the nearer and closer his attention moves. ... In a paradoxical

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[57] *Aaron's Rod*, p. 213.
[58] "David." *Phoenix*, p. 62.
[59] Leo Hamalian, *D.H. Lawrence in Italy* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1982), p. 65.
[60] Sensations of menace felt by Englishmen in Florence are common in fiction about the city (as in William Trevor's "Cocktails at Doney's"), and often associated with a literary memory of Savonarola (as in George Eliot's *Romola* and Forster's *A Room with a View*.)
[61] *Sea and Sardinia*, p. 11.

> reversal of the famous Lawrentian demand that art be as earnest as real life, in *Sea and Sardinia* the drama of real life becomes exhilarating just at the point where it assumes some of the unreality of art.[62]

Sabin adduces the last sketch in *Sea and Sardinia*, Lawrence's account of the three-night long performance of the Paladins, to suggest that he conceived a "sharper, tougher, more modern definition of the right aesthetic spirit in which to take reality: not the sublime spirit of high Romanticism, but the more playful, rude, indecorous spirit of carnival, parade and melodrama" (101). For soul-restless Lawrence, Sabin believes, "the art of *Sea and Sardinia* proposes imaginative play itself as purpose" (103).[63] Her analysis of the episode is astute, but making such confident suppositions about "purpose" in Lawrence, even precarious and contingent purpose, is a risky enterprise.

One of the most interesting recent studies of Lawrence argues more persuasively for a Bakhtinian interpretation. In "Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin: Lawrence and dialogic fiction"[64], David Lodge's Bakhtinian approach illuminates some of the Italian writing, although Lodge concentrates on a small sample of Lawrence's fiction, and a Rabelaisian vein that is somewhat attenuated in the rest of his work. Lodge is right in suggesting that Lawrence, like Dostoevsky, places the "adventure plot" at the service of the idea, using it to explore profound spiritual and metaphysical questions, and crossing it with "apparently incongruous genres like the confession and the saint's life". Lodge's theory accommodates much of Lawrence's work, particularly his 'Italian' novels (*Aaron's Rod*, *The Lost Girl*, and the later stages of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*), which are philosophical adventure stories whose chief characters, like Lawrence himself, are questing with religious fervour for some new, ultimately satisfying way of life. Otherwise it does not seem legitimate to place Lawrence within the Bakhtinian tradition of carnivalesque writing, except perhaps for *Mr Noon* and *Sea and Sardinia*, in which ambivalent laughter and carnivalisation do fulfil their function, as Bakhtin would see it, of artistically organising and illuminating the world. An odd, minor, unfinished work, *Mr Noon* was begun immediately after *The Lost Girl*, and in some ways resembles the earlier work, both having an elopement to Italy as

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[62] Margery Sabin, "The Spectacle of Reality in *Sea and Sardinia*." pp. 97-9.

[63] For the carnivalesque, see also Mara Kalnins, "Play and Carnival in *Sea and Sardinia*." *D.H. Lawrence in Italy and England*, eds. George Donaldson & Mara Kalnins (Houndmills: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 135-53.

[64] David Lodge, "Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin: Lawrence and dialogic fiction." *Rethinking Lawrence*, ed. Keith Brown (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), pp 92-108.

the narrative's climax. Lawrence himself, according to Worthen, thought *Mr Noon* "a rather comic novel".[65]

The late story "Things" (1927) presents possibly the best argument for a Bakhtinian approach to Lawrence. This short, bitter, deceptively slight story merely glances at Italy, but represents the essence of the country and the response of a new materialistic generation of English travellers. "Things" is a profoundly ironic quest-story, a piece of parodic *skaz* whose two characters speak 'directly' to us in a kind of dual interior monologue upon which a third, narrator's voice comments, 'indirectly' (their own words already condemn them). The story brilliantly sustains a bleakly comic disillusion. Erasmus and Valerie have turned away from France, they say: "France is lovely — quite lovely. But *to us*, though we love it, it doesn't say a great deal."[66] "So when the war came", the narrator says, "the idealists moved to Italy." But Italy, too, disappoints:

> And though they had had a wonderful time in Europe, and though they still loved Italy — dear Italy — yet: they were disappointed. They had got a lot out of it: oh, a very great deal indeed! Still, it hadn't given them quite, not *quite*, what they had expected. Europe was lovely, but it was dead. Living in Europe, you were living on the past. And Europeans, with their superficial charm, were not *really* charming. They were materialistic, they had no *real* soul. (786)

The tale reflects Lawrence's satiated disillusion with Italy, even the Renaissance art of Florence; and his sadness and anger with what he believed was happening to Italian society and Italians. In *Sea and Sardinia*:

> Romantic, poetic, cypress-and-orange-tree Italy is gone. Remains an Italy smothered in the filthy smother of innumerable lira notes: ragged, unsavoury paper money so thick upon the air that one breathes it like some greasy fog. Behind this greasy fog some people may still see the Italian sun. I find it hard work ... For heavy around you is Italy's after-the-war atmosphere.[67]

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[65] Worthen's preface to *The Lost Girl* (Cambridge, 1981) xxix. It is often noted (see "Critical Reception 1984-1988, in *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 1989) that the two-part structure of *Mr Noon* is similar to that of both *The Lost Girl* and *Aaron's Rod*. In all three novels, a protagonist escapes from meanness and hypocrisy in the English Midlands to a new life in Italy, becoming "unEnglished" (*Mr Noon*, p. 107) as he/she travels into Europe. There are obvious parallels with Lawrence's life.

[66] "Things." *The Collected Short Stories of D.H. Lawrence*, pp. 783-791.

[67] *Sea and Sardinia*, pp. 28-9.

Increasingly bitter, further on in the Sardinian memoir Lawrence declares: "Life is life and things are things. I am sick of gaping at *things* [Lawrence's italics], even Peruginos. I have had my thrills from Carpaccio and Botticelli. But now I've had enough ... I am sick of "things", even Perugino" (150). Some of the "things" distorting the lives of Valerie and Erasmus and preventing them from authentic living are representationally Italian: a Venetian book-case, Bologna cupboard and Ravenna bishop's chair. Possibly, Lawrence took the title for his story from the passage in *Sea and Sardinia*.

Lawrence's writings, with their basis in complex ideological confusions, stutter towards the apocalypse. He exemplifies what Umberto Eco famously labelled the apocalyptic intellectual, and as Rebecca West wrote: "Lawrence travelled, it seemed, to get a certain Apocalyptic vision of mankind that he registered again and again and again, always rising to a pitch of ecstatic agony."[68] These qualities make for works of political and literary power, as illustrated by *Aaron's Rod*, his driven, most resonantly Italian fiction. Much of *Aaron's Rod* is overwritten, in parts oddly flat and *under*written, and the sermonising of some sections recalls the crankiest, although most 'felt' travel pieces. But intermittently, in its narrative power and grim jeremiads on Italy's late modernity, the novel is a work of vision, and prescience. Reviewing the translation into English of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Petrolio*, Robert Gordon writes in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

> Sometime between the 1950s and the 70s, something changed, an anthropological shift occurred, when according to Pier Paolo Pasolini a genocide was visited on Italian society by the insidious power of the corrupt, consumerist global first world. As a result, a grey conformity spread like an epidemic, wiping out not only the meagre vitality of a traditional bourgeois society, but also, and far more dangerously, the intense vitality of the suppressed and oppressed underclasses.[69]

The resemblance to the Lawrentian tone, and echo of *The Lost Girl* simile are striking in this English account of Pasolini. Like the characters in "Things", Lawrence turns in the end from an Italy he feels has lost its vitality, towards more primitive places and people; similarly, James turns at the last away from Rome and Venice, towards Naples and the south. In *Twilight in Italy* Lawrence rages against Italy's increasing mechanisation and greed, like Aaron Sisson lamenting

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[68] "Elegy." *The Essential Rebecca West*, p. 389.

"the horrible sameness that was spreading like a disease over Italy from England and the north."[70]

4.10 Conclusion to Lawrence's Italy

The key to what Italy represents for Lawrence lies in one of his least studied, least translucent texts, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1923): "Men live and see according to some gradually developing and gradually withering vision. This vision exists also as a dynamic idea or metaphysics – exists first as such. Then it is unfolded into life and art."[71] Reality and art merge, in his vision of the world. If 'Italy' and the 'vision' are one and the same, the question of whether his Italy is 'real' or merely a reflection of himself is less vexed. For Lawrence, as for Henry James, the Italian writings are, in Jeffrey Meyers's description: "a stream of reflections, where images intertwine with dark thoughts and obscure emotion, and the whole life flows on turbulent and deep and transitory. It is reflection, thinking back on travel and on life, and in the mirror sense, throwing back snatches of image."[72] Geoff Dyer makes a similar observation, of *Sea and Sardinia*:

> Impressions are experienced as ideas, ideas are glimpsed like fields through a train window, one after another. Opinions erupt into ideas, argument is conveyed as sensation, sensations are felt as argument. This immediacy is inscribed in the writing of the book.[73]

Dyer's observations echo Howard Mills's concluding words to his study of *Twilight in Italy*, which invoke *Etruscan Places*:

> [*Twilight in Italy*] may hanker intermittently after transcendence, worlds elsewhere, flesh thawing and resolving itself into a dew, but its prevailing current is identical with the

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[69] "A last grand folly." *Times Literary Supplement*, May 30 1997, p. 24.
[70] *Aaron's Rod*, p. 153.
[71] D.H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), Foreword, p. 15.
[72] Meyers, *D.H. Lawrence and the Experience of Italy*, p. 12.
[73] Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage*, p. 118. Dyer is generally astute on Lawrence's perception and personality, but incorrect in stating: "Lawrence is at his best when he is recording his fleeting moods and impressions without trying to fit them into any kind of design, even the artistic one of a novel." (137) Although flawed, Lawrence's fiction represents all the beginnings, false starts and dissolutions of the travel ephemera, recollected; reflecting and reflected in a more unified, enduring form.

famous end of Lawrence's *Apocalypse*: "the magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is ours ... in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos."[74]

Lawrence's art is interior and visionary. His vision of art, even when it takes on the contrivances of fiction or theory, relates to the self. The tension evident in all the Italian work represents a movement from the prose artifice itself back towards the circumstances of its composition, the writer and his sense impressions. It is almost impossible to separate Lawrence's personality, thought, travels, art, and his Italy. In his last years, his engagement with place represented a multiplicity of longings and changing intentions towards place, all places, un-place, Utopia. He lived life with Romantic intensity and a dual sense of the potentiality of existence. In his life and work, desire and fulfilment are opposites whose true significance lies in the conflict between them. In *Twilight in Italy* he asks: "Where, then, is the meeting point: where in mankind is the ecstasy of light and dark together? ... Where is the transcendent knowledge in our hearts, uniting sun and darkness, day and night, spirit and senses?"[75] In his notes for *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, he states: "in the tension of opposites all things have their being."[76] He develops the antithesis in most of his works, and writes within its constraints. The contradictions, ambiguities, decidings and undecidings, reversals of intent and opinion, the alternate embrace and repudiation of England and Italy, his constant quarrel with Italy and Self, and incessant theorising all contribute to the complexity of Lawrence's Italy. The inherently unstable and paradoxical nature of his language and style perfectly embody his multiplicity. His Italy is part of his mysticism; the difficulty of disentanglement one of the pleasures of reading Lawrence. He seems an isolated figure, in the end: Romantic, high English Modernist, and proto-postmodernist. His "hyperawareness" and instinct for "existingness" in particular foreshadow the postmodern condition. Robert Dessaix imagines similar desirable, indefinable, ineffable, concepts in *Night Letters* (1996), calling them "now-ness" and "it-ness".[77] The essence of Lawrence's Italy is his need to know and name it, and its persistence in eluding him. And this makes him appear both Jamesian and postmodern. Lawrence's Italian prose is haunted by the fear of never truly knowing anything except the need to be free; the longing for a lost domain; the perpetual search for some redemptive genius for saying the impossible.

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[74] "'Full of philosophising and struggling to show things real': *Twilight in Italy*." *D.H. Lawrence's Non-Fiction: Art, thought and genre*, eds. David Ellis and Howard Mills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 40-66.

[75] "The Spinner and the Monks." *Twilight in Italy*, p. 31.

[76] "Notes for *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*." *Phoenix*, pp. 65-8. This reference p. 67.

[77] "Experience, eros, 'it-ness' ... has to be re-imagined, not named." (Robert Dessaix, speaking at Gleebooks, Glebe, 23 November 1998).

Present Lawrence studies, *pace* Tom Paulin, evince the complex intertextuality, transtextuality and hypertextuality characteristic of postmodernism.[78] But Lawrence's style does not translate easily into a more concise and lucid form. Like his personality, the style seems to resist summary; and can only be repeated or, in some way, re-performed. This may explain why some critics, like Elaine Feinstein and Geoff Dyer, have written criticism taking the form of parody. There have been at least two previous 'sequels' to Lawrence's novel, but Elaine Feinstein, the acclaimed biographer of Lawrence, wrote a more ambitious work in *Lady Chatterley's Confession* (1995). The novel is 'written' by Connie in 1940, shortly after Mellors has died at their home in Italy, where, like Lawrence, he glimpses some small hope for the working classes in Mussolini, but finally despairs for the country's increasing mechanisation. Feinstein's lyrical descriptions of the Italian landscape evoke an English ideal, a John Mortimerish image of a picturesque but backward place with ravishing food and wine. *Lady Chatterley's Confession* is a highly sensuous work, a beguiling act of imaginative creation in addition to a critique of Lawrence and English misperceptions. Feinstein's work thus displays the simultaneous representation and ironisation of the Italianate literary tradition that is characteristic of postmodern 'Italianism'. In *Out of Sheer Rage: in the Shadow of D.H. Lawrence* (1997), the critic and novelist Geoff Dyer has written a book about *not* writing a book about Lawrence. Parody and self-parody, Dyer's novel is a fine exercise in Italianate metafiction which, inevitably, fails to reach a conclusion. He despatches the scholars, conferences and literary pilgrimages involved in the Lawrence 'heritage industry'; and deals with travel; the English character; the contradictory nature of the Italians; and Lawrence in Italy, with his own inconsistencies and contrarieties. But the novel's principal concern is Dyer himself; reading, writing and failing to write about Lawrence and Italy. Dyer is an exponent of the postmodern art of exceptions, imaginary solutions, equivalence and imperturbability. The uncertainty and irony provide the energy and sustain the pathos of Lawrence's yearnings, incompleteness and failure. Dyer's insinuatingly, finely measured delineations of soul-sadness and sensual celebration produce what could not be a more Lawrentian, nor more Italian work.

As for Lawrence's literary legacy, most critics agree it is prodigious. Regarding the Italian travel writing, Jeffrey Meyers asserts: "Lawrence's letters, novels and travel books imposed the image of Italy on the modern imagination as Conrad did for Africa, Forster for India and Hemingway

[78] This is not to mention Lawrence's poem about figs that found its way into the film of *Women in Love* as a monologue by Alan Bates. For many cineastes and sensualists, this twentieth-century Italianate image rivals the image of Dirk Bogarde dying on the Lido, in Visconti's *Death in Venice*.

Spain. Lawrence did not follow a specific literary tradition, he created one."[79] Billy Tracy offers the similar but curiously diminishing opinion that: "Other travel writers may be more esteemed by scholars, but no one has had a greater influence on the way non-specialist readers think of Italy."[80] Regarding Lawrence's contribution to the novel form, John Bayley holds that Lawrence's influence on English fiction has been "relatively slight."[81] Yet he believes that Lawrence has entered the bloodstream of English fiction to such a degree that it can never be the same again, and that since he was unique he cannot be imitated except badly — all of which indicates a very large influence indeed. Finally, Anthony Burgess's study is a personal summing up, a meditation on Lawrence as a truth-telling subversive, and Lawrence's art as the primary medium of subverting fixed views about human consciousness and sexuality. Indeed, Lawrence's art has been the medium of subverting fixed views about Italy and art itself. Burgess states this clearly: "We need his paganism tempered by puritanism. We need his perpetual reminder that all literature is subversive. And, whatever life is, we need the eloquence of his allegiance to it."[82]

While Lawrence can seem *sui generis*, as Meyers proposes, in reference to the travel writing, his insistent insertion of self and symbols into the Italian landscape, and the element of quest in his Italian narratives place him firmly in the tradition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. In addition, his exploration of consciousness through the metaphors of Italy is modelled on James's technique, particularly in *The Portrait of a Lady*; and his examination of relationships between Italians and the English develops James's 'international' theme. Furthermore, Lawrence's preoccupation with cultural differences, class guilt, conscience, and moral disorder reflect the preoccupations of Forster's Italian fiction. Yet, as noted earlier, he might be considered, as Fredric Jameson seems to regard him, a proto-postmodernist.

There is no doubt that Lawrence changed the traditional 'Italian' poetic sensibility into a more raw and immediate connection with the otherness of the world. The 'otherness' he confronts in his travels and fiction differs both in kind and degree from the 'otherness' in James and Forster. The difference lies not merely in the disorientations of Italy or the Italian character. As Aldous Huxley suggests: "He never found a society to which he could belong. In a kind of despair, he

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[79] Meyers, *D.H. Lawrence and the Experience of Italy*, p. 28.

[80] Billy Tracy, "The Travel Book Tradition." *The D.H. Lawrence Review*, vol. 11, Fall 1978, p. 291. Anthony Burgess says something similar in his introduction to *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*.

[81] John Bayley, "Lawrence and the Modern English Novel." *The Legacy of D.H. Lawrence: New Essays* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 14-29. John Bayley has written his own Italian novel, *Alice*. It is significant that he chose Italy, because *Alice* is only his second novel in a long lifetime of criticism. The settings are powerful and strange: Venice is festering and oily, Naples Fellini-esque, Vesuvius implacable. *Alice* (London: Duckworth, 1994) is essentially a Jamesian story, of innocents abroad.

plunged yet deeper into the surrounding mystery, into the dark night of that otherness whose essence and symbol is the sexual experience. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Lawrence wrote the epilogue to his travels."[83] The Italian fiction mirrors the psychological dichotomies that fractured Lawrence's sensibilities and shaped his work. He remains an influence, an alteration in our consciousness, an alteration in our 'Italy'.

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[82] Burgess, *Flame into Being*, p. 209.

[83] Quoted by L.D. Clark in *The Minoan Distance: the Symbolism of Travel in D.H. Lawrence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, c.1980), p. 5.

PART FIVE
POSTMODERN ITALIANISM

"What if all the cliched oddities of Italian life were true?"[1]

[1] William Palmer, "Venice Declined." *Four Last Things* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1996), p. 116.

5.1 Introduction

While postmodernity is perceived as a period, postmodernism is not a unified phenomenon, cannot be restricted to a number of stylistic tendencies, and should be conceived as something shapeless, ambivalent and contradictory. With these characteristics, postmodernism has much in common with Italianism, and each can accommodate the other. Postmodern Italianate literature captures and expresses the art of equivalence and imperturbability. Postmodernism reflects and absorbs the 'Italian' metanarrative, but challenges and questions the discourses of which it is constructed, to reinvent the tradition, and create new forms for it. The narrative challenge of 'Italy' in the postmodernist English literary imagination lies in its deconstructive role. Contemporary Italianate works are distinguished by their simultaneous embrace and overthrow of traditional modes, metaphors and images. Italianate postmodernists may even choose traditional forms (such as the epistolary novel, romance or detective fiction) because the freedom they offer is the freedom to mutate. While the tendency is to subvert or transcend traditional forms, to re-imagine imagination, certain myths persist, illustrating what Ihab Hassan describes as postmodernist writers' "complex desire to dissolve the world – or at least recognise its dissolution – and to remake it as an absurd or decaying or parodic or private – *and still imaginative* – construct."[2] English myths and images of Italy are perpetuated in postmodern fiction, embedded in the textual strategies of self-reference and parody. There are subtle, ingenious and subtextual clues to past discourses of Italy in present discourses. Acknowledging the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, postmodernists relate to tradition through a special kind of irony. Postmodernism's characteristic 'double coding', in Charles Jencks's term[3], is defined as the simultaneous representation and ironisation of a quality. In postmodern Italianism, the quality is 'Italy'.

In *The Postmodern Turn* (1987), Ihab Hassan describes how postmodernism relates to earlier modes of change. He observes: "history ... moves in measures both continuous and discontinuous. Thus the prevalence of postmodernism today, if indeed it prevails, does not suggest that ideas or institutions of the past cease to shape the present. Rather, traditions

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[2] Ihab Hassan, "The New Gnosticism: Speculations on an Aspect of the Postmodern Mind." Patricia Waugh, ed., *Postmodernism: a Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 74.

[3] Charles Jencks's 1985 (Illinois) conference paper, published as *What is Postmodernism?* (London: Academy Editions, New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), p. 16. While the expression is most often associated with Jencks, Jencks himself is quoting Umberto Eco's Postscript to *The Name of the Rose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), pp. 67-8.

develop, and even types suffer a seachange."[4] Literary history is a palimpsest, and "must be perceived in terms *both* of continuity *and* discontinuity" (88). The ambiguities and discontinuities which pervade English writing about Italy in the Renaissance persist into the present. Paradox, doubleness and duplicity are familiar and pervasive terms in the Italianate tradition and the work of James, Forster and Lawrence. The image of Italy in the English literary tradition is of a place that entices and repels; a place that embraces the "vital principle of grace" as James puts it, and decadence and corruption. Italy represents the warmth, passion and hedonism of the South, as well as betrayal, immorality and effeminate allure; the mysteries of desire, the danger and seduction of transgression. In this tradition, the Italians themselves are guileless, open, avaricious, deceitful: "false and beguiling", as James says of them. At once innocent and experienced, Italians embody knowingness and unknowingness. Sexuality and the self are intertwined in imaginative Italy, where eros and death are inseparable. Italy represents the impossible communion of self and other; and the contradictory longing for permanence and impermanence. The contradictions of postmodern 'Italy' differ from these traditional Italian contradictions and doublenesses, through their self-undermining subversiveness. Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), describes this distinguishing feature of postmodernist works as their "wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity."[5]

In "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (1982), Hassan lists thirty-four characteristics of postmodernism, noting that his list is "insecure, equivocal" and each characteristic "contains its own contradictions".[6] In two later essays, Hassan offers "a catena of postmodern features, a paratactic list" comprising: "Indeterminacy; fragmentation; decanonization; self-less-ness, depth-less-ness; the unpresentable, unrepresentable; irony; hybridization; carnivalization; performance, participation; constructionism; immanence."[7] The eleven "definiens" of postmodernism identified by Hassan are similar to the properties of Italianness in the English literary tradition, and contemporary literary Italianism. "Sameness and difference", Hassan writes of postmodernism[8], adding that "despite its fanatic will to unmaking, it also contains the need to discover a 'unitary

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[4] Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus, Oh.: Ohio State University Press, 1987), pp. 84-96. This reference p. 84.
[5] Linda Hutcheon, "Representing the postmodern." *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 1.
[6] Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 84.
[7] Ihab Hassan, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective." (1986). *The Postmodern Turn*, pp. 167-87. This list appears between pp. 168-173. "Beyond Postmodernism? Theory, Sense, and Pragmatism." (1989, revised 1995) *Rumors of Change: Essays of Five Decades* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995), pp. 126-138
[8] Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 88.

sensibility'" (89).[9] Hassan's idea of postmodernism, and the literary image of Italy, are "equivocal concepts"[10] which embrace "ambiguities ... incompleteness ... self-revision ... extension of our senses" (167-9), and "open up vertiginous possibilities"[11] of interpretation.

While Hassan's eloquent argument provides a convenient set of terms for a consideration of contemporary Italianism, there are other versions of postmodernity (and the term itself is contested), alternative theories and models, and explanations for the present. In *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), Terry Eagleton writes about contemporary culture, and judges the "culture or milieu or even sensibility" of postmodernism, from a socialist perspective. He asserts that:

> Marx's praise for capitalism is surely well-justified. Capitalism, as he never tires of arguing ... melts away barriers, deconstructs oppositions, pitches diverse life-forms promiscuously together and unleashes an infinity of desire. Typified by surplus and excess, constantly overriding the measure, it is a mode of production which breeds a hitherto undreamt-of wealth of human energies, bringing the individual to a peak of subtle complexity.[12]

These characteristics of capitalism, in Eagleton's provocative ironic version, are very close to those of postmodernism, as Hassan describes them. One of Eagleton's arguments is that postmodernism is not new, or original. Lyotard himself states in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) that postmodernism is not a movement beyond modernism, but "is undoubtedly a part of the modern."[13] Furthermore, Lyotard held that any definition of postmodernism should include a representation of limitlessness. This may mean, among other things, that postmodernism does not have a single set of determinate features, or a limited range of aesthetic possibilities.

As Alex Callinicos reminds us, in *Against Postmodernism* (1989), Baudelaire defined modernity as "ephemeral, fugitive and contingent on occasion".[14] The expressions describe not only modernism, but postmodernism, and the traditional image of Italianicity. Furthermore, as

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[9] Hassan cites Susan Sontag's use of the term "unitary sensibility" in her essay "One Culture and the New Sensibility", in *Against Interpretation* (1966), pp. 293-304.
[10] Ihab Hassan, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective." *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 173.
[11] Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 93.
[12] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford & Malden, Ma.: Blackwell, 1996), p. 61.
[13] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, p. 79.
[14] Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: a Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), reprinted 1999, p. 29.

Callinicos points out, the context of Baudelaire's definition ("The painter of modern life") makes it clear Baudelaire was concerned to characterise an art that discovers eternity in the transitory, as opposed to any abstract notion of timeless beauty. This conception of modernist art is epitomised by Robert Coover's postmodernist novel *Pinocchio in Venice* (whose art historian protagonist discovers eternity in the transitory in Venice), and the record of Henry James's creative experience of Italy.

In 1990, Fredric Jameson wrote a new introduction to the reprint of his 1984 *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. He concludes, in a passage worth quoting in full:

> As for *postmodernism* itself, I have not tried to systematize a usage or to impose any conveniently coherent thumbnail meaning, for the concept is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory. I will argue that, for good or ill, we cannot *not* use it. But my argument should also be taken to imply that every time it is used, we are under the obligation to rehearse those inner contradictions and to stage those representational inconsistencies and dilemmas; we have to work all that through every time around. *Postmodernism* is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience. The concept, if there is one, has to come at the end, and not at the beginning, of our discussion of it.[15]

The contradictions of traditional literary Italianism contribute to the contradictions of postmodernism in contemporary works about Italy. While the contradictions of each new text, each new fiction about Italy, need to be rehearsed, there is an enduring metanarrative of Italianism which captures the presence of Italy in English literature of the past few centuries. Postmodernism's double view, of continuity and discontinuity, is already present in traditional literary Italianism, showing that Italianism, like postmodernism, is both a diachronic and synchronic construct; and that images of 'Italy' are supple and resilient.

Intertextuality

[15] Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism*, Introduction, xxii.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of postmodernism is intertextuality, the presence in a text of another text.[16] Postmodern Italianate narratives are charged with intertextual traces of the past. All of imaginative 'Italy' potentially contains all the literary Italies of the past. Umberto Eco writes: "books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told."[17] Eco is describing here the parodically doubled discourse of postmodernist intertextuality, of which the discourse of fiction about Italy – overwritten, hyperdescribed Italy – is supremely representative. The protagonist of Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* realises that: "in that fractional moment, somewhere between the first stroke of the bell and the second ... the Piazza appeared to him as an open book, a book he'd read a thousand times before, or perhaps a thousand books he'd read before compressed to one, its text dizzyingly complex yet awesomely simple, readable at a glance, yet somehow illegible."[18] This epiphany instances Eco's definition of intertextuality, and uses Venice itself as a metaphor for intertextuality, reading, writing, and texts themselves. There are insistent, covert intertextual insertions in Coover's text, which reveal an author constantly quoting, without attribution. For example, Coover writes of the palazzo in which Professor Pinenut is lodged, that it has "an air not so much of decay as of quiet discouragement, as if it had rather missed its career" (26-7). There are no quotation marks, but the description is taken, in full, from *The Aspern Papers*.[19] Both Napoleon and James are *mis*quoted in Coover's reference to "the most scrumptious drawing room in Venice" (274, 281). Eugenio is named for the sinister fixer in *The Wings of the Dove*": "very dear and very deep" Coover writes (182), without quotation marks, although they are James's words for Eugenio. Coover twice refers to Venice as an ark: "the ark of his own personal deluge" (187, no quotation marks) is directly borrowed from *The Wings of the Dove*.[20] Elsewhere, "vast and sumptuous pile" (Napoleon) and "paradise of exiles" (Byron) occur in the same sentence, *with* quotation marks, but without attribution (40). There is a congeries of Venetian quotations on one page (102), and Ruskin, Pater and James are invoked in one passage (115). Coover's 'quotations' sound familiar but not quite right. As Derrida says: "I am always citing ... but always rearranging too. Guess the number of false citations in my text."[21] If all texts are inevitably

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[16] The standard text is Judith Still & Michael Worton, *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). For a more recent study, see Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

[17] Umberto Eco, *Reflections on "The Name of the Rose."* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), pp. 19-20.

[18] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 195.

[19] James, *The Aspern Papers*, p. 49.

[20] James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 342.

[21] Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale* (1980), translated by Alan Bass as *The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

quoting and quotable, this is perhaps especially true of the tradition of writing about Italy.[22] Every text is under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose their own worlds upon it. There is a sense in which all contemporary writing about Italy is in essence a series of footnotes to Proust, Ruskin and James, Stendhal, and Thomas Mann. But postmodernism is a special condition of belatedness, of being *after*. Postmodernism "decanonizes" and, as Hassan contends, "deconstruct[s] the languages of ... desire and deceit".[23] Italianate texts of postmodernism refer to and rewrite the Italianate tradition's 'language' of metaphors and images, the meanings of words, including 'desire' and 'deceit'. Barthes writes poetically that: "The intertext is not necessarily a field of influences: rather it is a music of figures, metaphors, thought-words; it is the signifier as *siren*."[24] Barthes himself uses the term "Italianicity" to illustrate the rhetoric of the image, in his essay "Rhetoric of the Image".[25] Some of the thought-words associated with Italy in English fiction are grace, redemption, transcendence, love, desire, death, even 'Venice'; and thought-symbols like figs, plums, sun, and secrets. The seductiveness of the language of Italian tropes explains the enduring seductiveness of the texts about Italy in which this 'language' is read.

The Australian Rod Jones's Venetian novella *Nightpictures* (1997) refers implicitly throughout to James; the work is saturated (the right word, since watery images are so pervasive) with James. There is the "voyeurism ... literary activities ... and obsession"[26] of *The Aspern Papers*; Milly Theale's mausoleum city; the redemption, betrayal and death, and paradigmatic triangular relationship of *The Wings of the Dove*: "A hidden reality had revealed itself. And now it had become part of our knowledge. Perhaps that was the moment death crept into our friendship" (190). The publisher of *Nightpictures* describes Jones's Venice as a place where "a sexual relationship plays itself out amid the crumbling walls of a shabby apartment, where the verbal and sexual collide ... a Venice of secrets and loss and of obsession"; and this is exactly Kate's and Densher's Venice, even to the shabby apartment. In *Nightpictures* there is a "predestined" death; the narrator "tricked, in some subtle, devious way" by a Venetian couple, the man "keeping her sick ... their secret is his sickness" (218). These are all important elements in Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), which Jones may be covertly quoting. And in

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[22] The comment applies equally to the tradition of writing about travel. In a recent study of the genre, Joanne Sharp employs the conceit "sights/sites/cites" to suggest the intimate relationship between travel and the reading and writing of travel literature. (James Duncan & Derek Gregory, eds. *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, Routledge, 1999).

[23] Ihab Hassan, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective." *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 169.

[24] *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (Paris: 1975), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 145.

[25] "Rhetoric of the Image." *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1997).

Nightpictures, the reference to "*Tadzios*" (224) invokes not Mann, but the tabloid appropriation of Mann's text.

Robert Girardi's *Vaporetto 13* (1998) is another recent text with 'references' to the tradition. Girardi's minor work is nourished by the literary associations of Venice, and they are what provide the interest in his modest thriller. For example, the well-established tradition of Venetian gambling is a large part of Girardi's theme; there are secrets; and Hemingway's *Across the River and into the Trees* is invoked in the American hero's gift to the Venetian noblewoman of a necklace of precious jewels. But it is a Jamesian image, rather than Girardi's more oblique nods to recent tradition, that is most resonant. A three word sentence: "The weather cooled" is the metaphorical aftermath of the lovers' quarrel, which changes dramatically the mood of the city, and marks a change in the characters' relationship and a turning point in the plot of the novel.[27] It is a small successful echo of that great moment in *The Wings of the Dove* when Milly's and Densher's relationship begins to go bad, and the weather in Venice turns.

Stephen Carroll's *Venetian Cousins* (1995)[28] is a highly self-conscious, intertextually 'Italian' literary construct, engaging in postmodern play with writing, influence and identity. In a plot drawing on Goldoni's *I due gemelli veneziani*, with close allusion to Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Baron Corvo, and *The Charterhouse of Parma*, Carroll's cunning novel constitutes a complex commentary on inherited literary tradition. The cynicism and self-conscious literariness of the text's apparent infatuation (an exemplary double discourse) with Venetian tropes leads to the conclusion that the traditional Venetian quest for the 'self' is hollow, all stories and theories of fiction equally unconvincing.

Such works of Italianate intertextuality are exercises in appropriation, and examples of the art of homage. What distinguishes them is the irony in their appropriation and homage. The texts simultaneously refer to, perpetuate, and critique the tradition. They maintain their distance, even when 'quoting', from the traditional forms. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon observes: "When Eliot recalled Dante or Virgil in *The Waste Land*, one sensed a kind of wishful call to continuity beneath the fragmented echoing. It is precisely this that is contested [in postmodernism] where it is often ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of

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[26] Rod Jones, *Nightpictures* (Sydney: Alfred A Knopf, 1997), p. 172.
[27] Robert Girardi, *Vaporetto 13* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), p. 89.
[28] Stephen Carroll, *Venetian Cousins* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1995).

continuity."[29] The discontinuity within seeming continuity, the difference at the heart of similarity, is characteristic of Italianate postmodern intertextuality.

Italy and Sicily: tropes for textuality and the postmodern condition

A singular instance of the phenomenon of text transcendence is Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. The *mafiosi*, *la famiglia* and Italian organised crime in America provide plots for Puzo's novels, in the tradition of poisoning and stabbing Italian assassins in the work of the Elizabethan dramatists. The *New York Times* October 1996 bestseller list describes how the eponymous *mafioso* in *The Last Don* leads his family to "the very heights of power", using the instruments of "a Borgia-like cruelty and a Machiavellian subtleness, plus solid American business know-how."[30] Puzo portrays the Clericuzio in *The Last Don* as the equivalent of Renaissance princes. Puzo's plots and characters were appropriated by American cinema and indelibly glamourised by Marlon Brando's charismatic, iconic performance. The English critic Michael Wood writes of the first two *Godfather* movies that:

> [they] look wonderful: interiors full of gold and brown, shady characters caught in the half-light, murmuring in corridors; glittering exteriors, all sunlight and celebration, songs, christenings, weddings, crowds. The dialogue would be portentous and dull if it were not all delivered with such persuasive sorrow: no Jacobean murderers were ever as reluctant as this ... [the actors] make you feel not that this is the world of the Mafia, but that a dark world of family values, of murder and jollity and food and sentiment, can only be like this.[31]

Wood's description invokes Vernon Lee's account of Elizabethan Italianate dramatic conventions: the "darkened Italian palace, with its wrought-iron bars preventing escape; its embroidered carpets muffling the footsteps; its hidden, suddenly yawning trap-doors; its arras-hangings concealing masked ruffians; its garlands of poisoned flowers."[32] Mario Puzo's images have been re-appropriated, chillingly, by the Italians themselves, and the Mafia. Peter Robb

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[29] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), p. 11.

[30] See the *New York Times* Expanded Bestseller Lists, www.nytimes.com/books. At the same site, see Christopher Lehmann-Haupt's review of *The Last Don*, "Back on Familiar Territory: Noisy Flows the Don." Note that in Camille Paglia's review of 8 May 1997, Puzo calls himself "a romantic."

[31] Michael Wood, "Family Values." *London Review of Books*, 17 October 1996, pp. 8-9.

[32] Vernon Lee's essay, "The Italy of Elizabethan Dramatists" is included in her *Euphorion* (London, 1884) and quoted by Mario Praz in "Machiavelli and the Elizabethans." *The Flaming Heart*, p. 117.

writes, in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, of "the colour, the liturgy, the monumental dignity of Marlon Brando", and observes that Puzo: "used to be popular with the actual killers of the Sicilian mafia. Police raids in the '80s often turned up videos of *The Godfather*, and once a boss was surprised with Puzo's actual *book* in his hands."[33]

There seems to be no simple explanation for the plethora of recent documentary and other books about the Mafia: for example Alexander Stille's scholarly but inescapably sensationalist *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Fall of the First Italian Republic* (1995)[34], and *Midnight in Sicily* (1996), Peter Robb's unclassifiable work of 'faction' mostly about the Andreotti case. These works exhibit Machiavellian themes: power and abuse of power; ruthlessness; conspiracies and intrigues; the web of trust, loyalty and betrayal; the 'new' Renaissance princes; the Italian family and family values; and the Sicilians, stereotypically heroic and diabolical. What we are witnessing is the development of a new stereotype and genre. The Mafia as a strongly felt, present menace is the equivalent of Machiavelli and his Prince, who were a strongly perceived menace to the Elizabethans. The melancholic immutability described by Lampedusa, the 'feeling of death' and unspeakable Sicilian sadness, have cast a spell over English writers. Furthermore, the Sicilian Mafia – chaotic, ritualistic, mysterious, written about, romanticised – may be another example of the way in which Italy can represent the formation of texts. Luigi Barzini writes:

> Sicily is the schoolroom model of Italy for beginners, with every Italian quality and defect magnified, exasperated and brightly coloured. Sicilians, for example, have a genius for *sistemazione* or giving order to chaos: how many of them were law-givers, how many were the first in history to indicate a new mode of expression, a new vision of reality, a new conception of the world and man? Archimedes ... Empedocles and Theocritus in the remote past, and, more recently, Bellini, Verga, Pirandello and Lampedusa.[35]

These perceived Sicilian qualities (which give order to chaos, a new mode of expression, a new vision of reality) and the literary associations make of the 'Mafia' a metaphor, intertext, and metafiction. In *Midnight in Sicily* Peter Robb quotes the novelist Sciascia – "Sicily is a metaphor for the modern world" – and notes that the first book Sciascia wrote was "*Pirandello and Sicily*

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[33] Peter Robb, "A sagging family saga of killer size." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October, 1996, p. 11.
[34] Alexander Stille, *Excellent Cadavers: the Mafia and the Fall of the First Italian Republic* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995). ['Excellent cadavers' is the Italian name for those of high birth or calling who have been killed by the Mafia].
[35] Barzini, *The Italians*, Chapter 14.

... [about] the metaphysician of uncertain identity, the social mask, appearance and reality."[36] The images are both 'Italian' and postmodern. The idea of a "metaphysician of uncertainty" belongs to the same poetic myth as Coover's phrase for the Venetian masters – "these magicians of the transitional."[37]

Gender, sexuality and the text in postmodern Italianism

In a period in which Italy is more than ever a theatre for narratives of desire, concepts of sexuality have been challenged. The idea of difference is a traditional element in the idea of Italy, but in current interrogations of Italy, 'difference' has come to serve a wider purpose than before. Kristeva connects the word and the body, seeing the body *as* word: "all plenitude turns out to be inscribed upon a 'void' which is simply what remains when the overabundance of meaning, desire, violence, and anguish is drained by means of language."[38] Kristeva's theory accommodates remarkably well the meaning of 'Venice' in the novels of Jeanette Winterson and Michele Roberts, which represent recent feminist writing about Italy. In Winterson's *The Passion* and Roberts's *The Book of Mrs Noah*, Venice is a synonym both for the word and body.

In the novels of Winterson and Roberts, Venice is a bewildering, ambivalent place where questions about ambivalent selves and writing arise. Venice is the site of deconstruction of the myths, power relations and ideologies which were precisely articulated and codified in earlier Italies. For Winterson and Roberts, Italy is an even more resistant Other, and represents the female body, the female writer's construction of self, and the female text itself. Venice is a self-reflexive site for the reconstructive readings of gender and human violence undertaken by these feminist writers. Ian McEwan, a writer with declared feminist sympathies, in *The Comfort of Strangers* describes a Venice of violence, power struggles, male myths and male dominance. In William Riviere's *A Venetian Theory of Heaven*, while the novel is not immediately concerned with gender (rather it is about renunciation and the death of love), the androgynous, unconfinable Venetian heroine is in flight from her English husband Guy, and motherhood, endlessly rowing the canals and lagoon, which are female and fluid like those of *The Passion*.[39] The topography of Venice, at once contained and enclosed by water and penetrated by it,

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[36] Peter Robb, *Midnight in Sicily* (Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 1996), p. 314, 290.
[37] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, pp. 115-6.
[38] From Kristeva's *Psychoanalysis and Faith*, quoted by Worton and Still, *Intertextuality*, p. 18.
[39] William Riviere, *A Venetian Theory of Heaven* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992).

renders the city an ideal vehicle for the historical and cultural burden of ambivalence that inheres in the female body.

The Kristevan theory of the connection between word, body, excess and emptiness is not exclusively a feminist notion. Robert Coover's protagonist, in Venice, "fears now that this metaphor he has come all this distance to find is to be one not of encapsulation but of erasure, not of summation but of irony and absence."[40] For Henry James, Venice represented the excess of words, and their potential erasure. When James first visited Venice, as Tony Tanner observes, in "Proust, Ruskin, and *Le desir de Venice*", the city was already "a site of semantic excess, over-filled with desires, anticipations, dreams, expectations, experiential appropriations."[41] At the same time, Venice was "a site of semantic evacuations, disillusion, loss, deprivation, decline and declinations, experiential expropriations" (65). Harold Brodkey's novel *Profane Friendship*, like Venice, where it is set, is self-enclosed and self-exploratory, revelatory and narcissistic in the Lawrentian manner. But Venice is a place where meaning, desire, violence, and anguish are drained by means of explicitly sexual language. Italy is "*stimulating*. Erectile and responsive."[42] The narrator of *Profane Friendship* is "violable—like Venice" (157). Brodkey's Venice is pearly, white, and awash with sperm; and "dark" (Brodkey uses the word as obsessively as Lawrence), although, perversely, it is "not a city in which black has much meaning" (54). Yet the writer's "unemptiness" in Venice goes against the lovers' repeated, indefatigable effluences: "The darkness of sexual terror shutters the light. A little horror and doubt and the moral misuse of the self and the other is like childhood love. Pleasure is the past rectified. Friendship and love, *after all*, form a profane friendship in Venice." Brodkey's verbless sentences, long dashes, ellipses, and mysterious emphases hold up what little narrative there is, and imitate the sexual drives that go nowhere, the lost urges towards creation which are this novel's main concern.[43] In Brodkey (as in Gail Jones's recent allegory, *Resuscitating Proust*[44]), there is the overwhelmingly Proustian impression of the narrator drowning in his own excessive creation, as much as in the canals of Venice, or his body fluids. Proust, of course, was a proto-metafictionist in love with the metaphors of Venice.

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[40] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 19.
[41] Tony Tanner, "Proust, Ruskin, and *Le desir de Venice*." *Henry James e Venezia*, p. 65.
[42] Harold Brodkey, *Profane Friendship* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 113.
[43] The conflation of Venice and the body intensifies, understandably, in Brodkey's death-from-AIDS-in-Venice memoir, *This Wild Darkness* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996): "I am dying ... Venice is dying ... the century is dying ..." (131). Here, Brodkey suggests that narrative, too, is moribund.
[44] Gail Jones, "Resuscitating Proust." *Fetish Lives* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997).

The 'Italian' mysteries and secrets invoked in earlier fictions about Italy, and the implication and indirection of these works, are fruitful issues for queer theory. Recent studies of James and Forster have read 'Italy', sex, and representations of the body in ways that reveal the homoerotic possibilities, gaps, dissonances and resonances in these texts. Susan Sontag's well-known essay, "Notes on 'Camp" (1964), provides theoretical insights for a consideration of homoeroticism in the Italianate literary tradition:

> A sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about; ... for no one who wholeheartedly shares in a given sensibility can analyse it; he can only, whatever his intention, exhibit it. To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion.[45]

The homoerotic sensibility is so oblique in so many English works about Italy precisely because "a sensibility (as distinct from an idea), is one of the hardest things to talk about." Whenever the homosexual theme *is* 'named' or suggested, there is often a *sub*-text of revulsion. Sontag proposes, further, that camp's "metaphor of life as theatre is peculiarly suited as a justification and projection of a certain aspect of the situation of homosexuals" (290). The traditional metaphor of Italy as theatre consorts with the traditional literary association of Italy and gayness.[46] Sontag's assertion that camp "is esoteric – something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques" (275) fits the group of notorious English homosexuals living and writing in Florence and Capri in the twenties and thirties. And her description is apt for a later generation of gay, Italophile, romantic aesthetes writing a similar sort of fiction: Jonathan Keates and Francis King, David Leavitt, Edmund White and Robert Dessaix. Jeanette Winterson, in *The Passion*, has made the language and imagery of this gay tradition sassier, more direct, fluid and feminist. While, in his Romanness, Gore Vidal departs from the English tradition of homoerotic writing about Italy, in many ways he is a very Jamesian figure. From Vidal's memoirs (*Palimpsest*, 1995), we come to understand how divided a self he is: between literature and politics, America and the world, ancient and modern, sacred and profane. The connection between gay fiction and the cult of Romanness seems to be peculiarly American, and Vidal is one of its chief exponents. In "The *Romanitas* of Gore Vidal", James Tatum comments on Vidal's propensity to identify Rome with America, "the Second Rome":

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[45] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'." *Against Interpretation*, first published in the USA by Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1966. (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 275-292. This reference pp. 275-6.

> That same game of reading American political life as a re-enactment of Roman experience enables Vidal to explore sexuality and private morality in ways that no American politician ever could ... *Duluth* and the historical novels demonstrate with Roman clarity the connections between American notions of sexuality and American political practice. In the United States, gay sensibilities – Vidal's preferred term would be "homosexualist" – are subversive to those who have ambitions of ruling this Second Rome ... This aspect of Vidal's *Romanitas*, linking the political and the erotic, is what lies behind his disposition to pull apart and re-examine American sexuality and American political power.[47]

Jay Parini observes that: "*Julian* was the magnificent first fruit of Vidal's reinvention of himself as a Roman" (16). And *Julian* – "a 'metaphysical costume drama' as *Newsweek* called it" – is an example, like much of Vidal's work, of the camp trivialisation of homosexual issues. It might be noted, as an instance of Sontag's idea of camp, that the image of gayness in Italy is indelibly that of Dirk Bogarde as Aschenbach, in Luchino Visconti's 1971 film of Mann's *Death in Venice*. The image – this gay 'icon' or code – is one of the supreme images of contemporary culture, the discourse of homosexuality, and the discourse of 'Italy'. No longer is it a mere cinematic image: with postmodern irony the image has been returned to literature. In Anthony Burgess's epic verse novella *Byrne* (1995), when one of the characters announces his departure for Venice to his sister, Burgess invokes the Visconti film:

> ... His libido
> Seemed to await redemption on the Lido.
>
> Dorothy too caught swiftly the similitude:
> She knew at least Visconti's masterwork.
> 'This will not make you change your nature, will it? You'd
> Better not turn into a sort of Dirk
> Bogarde. Disgusting. And the silly billy chewed

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[46] Real as well as literary Italy suited the situation of English homosexuals in the past, both in terms of the law, and the Mediterranean/classical ideal of maleness. See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[47] *Gore Vidal: Writer Against the Grain*, ed. Jay Parini (London: Andre Deutsch, 1992), pp.199-220. The critique of contemporary America through a critique of the state of Rome parallels the Elizabethan dramatists' indirect commentary on the state of England in their 'Italian' plays.

Infected strawberries. Some folk go berserk
In Italy, especially old men.
It's AIDS now, but it was the Black Death then.'[48]

Concerning homosexuality or gayness, writing about Italy in the past contained fear and silence as well as abandon and outrageousness.[49] Italianate fictions were full of half-hidden, barely-hidden, and sometimes clear longings, and to detect the gay subtext in earlier writing is partly to understand the sense of bewilderment and loss, as well as guilt and dispossession. Some of the strongest images are of brokenness or death in Italy; and much of the sense of elegy in so many of these works, as with James and Forster, is attributable to the sadness of concealment. The preoccupation with concealment underlies the obsessive references, in writing about Italy, to secrets, forbidden territory, and the hidden profane. In the 'Italian' discourse of male homosexuality, English homosexuals share their most distinctive trait with the stereotypical image of the Italians themselves: that is, the simultaneous instinct for secrecy and flamboyance; the mixture of evasion and candour Forster discerned in the Italian national character. This proposition acknowledges the cultural and literary constructedness of Italianicity and national character, and the constructedness, in English literature, of 'English homosexual'.

A comparison of Thomas Mann and Henry James is inevitable in the present context. The atmosphere of sexual ambiguity in both writers' works (centred on Aschenbach, in Mann; *passim*, in James) represents a profound ambivalence in the writers themselves. In Mann and James, the inner conflict between sensualist and puritan is expressed, in their work, in the metaphorical Italian contradictions of flesh and spirit, sacred and profane. Mann said that in *Death in Venice*: "What I was trying to achieve was an equilibrium of sensuality and morality, such as I found ideally realised in ... Goethe."[50] A comparison between Mann and Forster is not as common, but Mann wrote, in 1906, that in *Tristan* he meant his hero to represent "an undesirable element in *myself*, that lifeless preciosity of the aesthete ... an intellectual and a weakling, a fanatical devotee of beauty and a humanly impoverished person."[51] Mann's words

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[48] Anthony Burgess, *Byrne* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), p. 76. And Roger Fox, the Eng. Lit. academic in William Palmer's self-reflective fragment, "Venice Declined", sets out dressed like Dirk Bogarde, in a linen suit, to explore 'unknown Venice'.

[49] This is true of the history of the gay text as well as gay history. See Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1998). The best account of the subject is Robert Aldrich's *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[50] From a letter to Carl Maria Weber (1902), quoted by David Luke in his Introduction to *Death in Venice & Other Stories* (London: Reed Books, 1996), xl.

[51] Quoted by Luke, *Death in Venice & Other Stories*, xxii.

might describe Philip Herriton, considered even by Forster himself to be Forster's *alter ego*. What Mann, James, and Forster have in common, and what perhaps, as some critics argue, Lawrence shared, is their projection onto 'Italy' of their homosexuality *and* their puritan repudiation of homosexuality. Mann wanted to discredit even that part of himself that enjoyed Mediterranean scenery: beauty, he says in a letter to his brother, has always been something for Italians and "tricksters of the intellect ... fundamentally it has nothing German in it."[52] John Pemble analyses a similar self-division in John Addington Symonds: "[his] rejection of the sybaritic South and the retreat to the barren reaches of the Alps ... [satisfied] a religious urge to rebuke the senses and mortify the passions. Symonds interpreted his divided life as an alternation between incrimination and atonement; as an expiation in the Alps of guilt incurred in Italy. 'Italy', he wrote, 'devours the body and soul of me.'"[53]

Mann and James sublimated their sexuality into aestheticism. Aschenbach, at the end of *Death in Venice*, and Mann and James themselves in their late writing, turned even the beauty of form into moral affirmation, and art itself into circumspect dignity. The lack of resolution in their Italian works reflects the elusiveness of the quest for form, beauty, and moral and sensual harmony. Marcel Proust's most recent biographer, Edmund White, in the first 'gay' biography of Proust, says of his subject that finally he rejected "wounded, rustling life in favour of frozen, immobile art."[54] That might almost be said of James, except that James's art is represented by James's Italy, which teems with life.

James almost always withheld his homoerotic sensibility from his work. But in two of his slightest 'Italian' tales, "The Author of Beltraffio" and "The Pupil"[55], he chooses to be more direct. It seems significant that his control on Italy is equally tenuous in these works. Critics mostly find these stories fey and incomplete, but it is in their obliqueness that the homoeroticism is to be felt. In "The Author of Beltraffio", it is only from a series of hints about Rome, Florence and Greece that the reader surmises that Mark Ambient deals with gay subjects in his masterpiece; and it is around this possibility that the narrative circles. James's John Marcher, in "The Beast in the Jungle", is defined in the sad lines: "No passion had ever touched him for this was what passion meant. He had seen outside of his life, not learned it from within." John

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[52] *Letters of Heinrich and Thomas Mann, 1900-1949*, ed. Hans Wysling, trans. Don Reneau (University of California Press, 1997).
[53] Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion*, p. 254.
[54] Edmund White, *Proust* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 140.
[55] The stories are not dealt with in the James chapters of the thesis, because their connection with Italy is so slight. Essentially, the Italian references are shorthand, or code, for homosexuality.

Marcher is a very Forsterian hero. In Forster's and James's work, there is secrecy; there are ineffectual, solitary, cold men; and denial that the secret has a meaning. The implicit assertion that the secret's content is precisely a lack is a formal, very Jamesian literary gesture. The fiction of the contemporary Italianist, Jonathan Keates, makes similar gestures. Keates's short story "La Dolce Prospettiva"[56] is about a gay man whose secret sexuality has left him frozen. The character's frigidity is emphasised by the contrast with Italy's warmth and over-ripeness; the passion of his American acolyte; and the lacquered, mannered elegance with which the aesthete's life is related. Venice makes its "subversive assault on his composure, iron-willed, selfish, stiffened by the unassailable rightness of an aesthetic judgement" (96); he is disturbed by "half-effaced longings", and "confused" and "muddled" by "the place's fatal gift for corroding every smallest attendant faculty of self-control" (97). There is troubled denial, silence, disquietude and self-absorption; the "inchoate terror solitude occasioned, stealing up on him as it had done so assiduously here in Venice" (102); and regret and vulnerability.

Keates's mysterious early novel, *The Strangers' Gallery*, is at once a realistic historical novel; a bildungsroman written in and *about* a "language of subterfuge and vanity and self-love"[57]; and a richly suggestive fable about homosexuality, intransigent loneliness, and writing. Among the many Italian secrets and enigmas in the English narrator's world, those that involve sexuality have a special prestige. They are more resistant to the young man's powers of decipherment than other mysteries of Italian social life, and solutions to them, once discovered, are more likely to falter: "Villafranca was suddenly his own city, he possessed it, ... grasped its syntax ... so seedy, so venal, so hopeless, [it] had become the territory of imagination and desire. He knew this was what he had always wanted" (61). "Yet, as always in Villafranca, there was the sense of something missing or held back, a tremendous unmade gesture which was wanted to finish the occasion" (89). At the end of *The Strangers' Gallery*, after an absurd romantic denouement[58], there is a "moment of baffled grace and reconciliation" (182).

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[56] Jonathan Keates, "La Dolce Prospettiva." *Soon to be a Major Motion Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), pp. 84-103. Keates's aesthete hero evinces the same complicated puritanical desire and repudiation of desire concerning Italy, art and homoeroticism that John Pemble detects in Frederick Faber, who in Pisa in 1843 "'mused and mused and mused' until all his senses were 'wrapped in a delicious dream of art and history' – and then sharply rebuked himself: 'This voluptuous silent poetry ... which Italy engenders in so many, is just what I have been arming myself against beforehand as effeminate, sensual, literary.'" *The Mediterranean Passion*, p. 267.

[57] Keates, *The Strangers' Gallery*, p. 150.

[58] The love story of Edward and Mariclo in Keates's narrative lacks conviction, rather like the love story of Lucy and George in *A Room with a View*, which, as James Buzard remarks, reads like a straight romance written by a homosexual. Edward's friendship with Guido is far more passionate and real. The novel's conventional love story, as in Proust, may be in homosexual 'code'.

Edmund White's more recent novel, *The Farewell Symphony*[59], is a quest narrative set in a saturnine, sordid Rome, and an AIDS-Death-in-Venice Venice which reflects the narrator's obsession with his own body's deliquescence, rot and decay. *The Farewell Symphony* is a Proustian meditation on time, and a gay re-working of James's transatlantic theme of the meeting between European and American cultures. The novel questions some of the most prevalent assumptions about selfhood, fiction and literary form. White subverts the forward momentum of his story into timeless instants (almost like Forsterian eternal moments) of visual and emotional epiphany. Narrative and characters are discontinuous. Selves, like the loves in this book, are multiple, and people adopt and change identities throughout. White gathers his characters' contradictory identities into a complete but precarious piece of self-fashioning. *The Farewell Symphony* is a characteristic gay, Italianate fiction; and it is a representative Italianate *meta*fiction, because the novelist's strategies of masking, projecting and self dramatisation are similar to the subterfuges involved in being gay and closeted. White's novel is propelled by doubts and silences as much as narrative, circling around a secretive emptiness which concerns homosexual love and bereavement, and fictional Italy as a place of projected coming out.

Postmodern Italianist metafiction

Metafiction is 'about' the *question* of fiction. Metafictions are fictions about fiction, works that comment on their own construction.[60] The practice of metafiction refines and embellishes the longstanding relationship between Italy and the act of imaginative creation. Italianate metafiction reveals the interrelatedness of the desires for Italy, stories, and meaning. In Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*, Italy represents narrative; the letters from Venice lay bare the fabric of fiction: "I needed a story, probably because the story of my own life is in danger of petering out in a series of incomplete sentences, the main thread well and truly frayed."[61] 'Italy' gives imaginative access to ways and patterns of understanding and value. Like metafictions generally, contemporary metafictions about Italy provide a better understanding of the structures of narratives, and the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, a complex web of interconnecting social, physical and semiotic realities. Robert Coover is fascinated by the power of fiction to create connections, causal relationships and *stories* when most observers can find no *meaning* at all. In *Pinocchio in Venice*, he questions the possibility of separating individual experience – the

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[59] Edmund White, *The Farewell Symphony* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998).
[60] The standard work is Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 1984).
[61] Robert Dessaix, *Night Letters* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1996), p. 152.

experience of one's self – from history, art, ideology and language. These doubts underlie his mock-heroic Venetian allegory.[62] For many characters in English fiction (Isabel Archer, Lucy Honeychurch, Aaron Sisson), the Italian experience represents a new experience of the self, leading to self-awareness and self-realisation. In many traditional and contemporary texts, Italy is the site of dissolution of the self, and selfhood's reconstruction; and this is a fruitful ambiguity for the theory of fiction, where Italy can represent the assembling and dismantling of texts. Italy can represent the self's experience of the world, even if language were the only reality, the only world the self can know. In Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* and Michele Roberts's *The Book of Mrs Noah*, Italy represents the patterning of words and meanings, and the labyrinth of language itself. Contemporary Italianate texts evince what Ihab Hassan describes as postmodernism's will to unmake, on the one hand, and its will to discover or create a unified sensibility. The impulse to make and unmake is the paradox of Italianate metafictions. The texts break the spell of image and narrative but make us intensely aware of the power and seduction exercised by both.

The aesthetic uncertainties and dissolutions of postmodern metafiction are paralleled by the perceived improvisations and contingencies of emblematic everyday Italian life. Metafiction magnifies the competing complexities of chaos and order in Italy.[63] Palladio's San Giorgio Maggiore in *Pinocchio in Venice* "sits gravely at anchor like an ordered thought within a confused sensuous dream."[64] Metaphysical and metalingual chaos, as well as the ordering possibilities of art and language, are represented by Italy. In addition, the need to distinguish authentic and true art from false representations is crystallised by Italianate metafiction. The principle is demonstrated in William Trevor's Italian novella, *My House in Umbria*, where he parodies the processes of novel writing, to inquire into the nature of truth and representation. We learn to distinguish between the authentic parody of real art, which is what Trevor is doing with the genre of the Italian romance, and false representations of inauthentic art. Mrs Delahunty, the romance writer, is appropriating Italy. Yet if it is an inappropriate appropriation, Trevor does not unequivocally say so. He stresses, as he does in "After Rain", the healing power of Italian art, and the consolation of narrative. Mrs Delahunty is engaged upon a literary project

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[62] In Burgess's mock epic *Byrne* (1995), Venice performs a similar allegorical purpose, to comment on selfhood, history, art, ideology, and the Italianate literary tradition.

[63] In *In the Skin of a Lion*, Michael Ondaatje's self-reflexive novel partly set (like *The English Patient*) in Italy, he writes: "Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become ... The chaos and tumble of events. The first sentence of every novel should be: 'Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.'" (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1987), p. 146.

[64] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 175.

which is a response to something beyond narrative, a violence and sadness (the terrorist attack, and her own life) beyond imagining. Like other narrators in William Trevor's fiction, she is driven to tell stories out of a sense of loss and confusion, and a need to overcome pain. Trevor weaves metaphysical consolation, and the healing properties of Italian art, into a narrative which is a narrative about narrative. The metafictional tension between Mrs Delahunty's Italian romance and Trevor's adds to the sense that in the fragmentation of Mrs Delahunty's thoughts and fictions we have what amounts to a pastiche of postmodernism itself.

Robert Coover's carnivalesque metafiction

Robert Coover is a specialist in confusion and evasion, and one of America's boldest metafictional fabulists. Many of his early works are radical deconstructions of folklore and fairytale, which affirm the primitive power of storytelling. *The Public Burning* (1977) depicts a landscape of history, myth, and the uncertain territory between. These preoccupations persist in his recent work. In *Pinocchio in Venice*, a strange and understudied work, Coover's ludic sense of the difficulty of representation is both 'Italian' and postmodern. He appropriates Venetian myths and tropes as icons of a kind of nominally sophisticated cultural stance which is no different from the things it mocks, and by mocking pays homage to. Yet in this anxiously influenced, cynical and ingenuous critique of the cliches of Italianness, there are traces of the ultimate elegiac city of Proust and James. Notwithstanding, the perplexities exercising the elderly scholar's mind in Coover's baroque allegory are recent ones. The question 'who am I?' keeps being displaced into the conundrum 'where is here?' Pinenut's/Coover's Venice embodies a Walter Benjamin-like reflection about a world where the work of art has its primary meaning and purpose in reproduction.[65] So 'the world', or 'Venice' (and all the art of Venice) as an idealisation which must be seen turns into a received idea, and every novelty proffered is already monumentalised as culture with the inescapable face of cliché. Thus, as the Professor discovers, we inhabit an imaginary museum.[66] The world embodied by Venice in *Pinocchio in Venice* is a mausoleum of postmodern expectations, and the narrative's excesses are intended to fulfil the sense of the grand tour as a let-down. The tendency to see every tourist spot as a mausoleum of desire is part of the desire to recapture the mesmerizing lost reality (in Jameson's phrase) of the Grand Tour. Pilgrimages as literary settings are definitionally fluid. This one of Professor Pinenut's – to find his roots, to re-live his first encounter in Venice with the Blue Haired Fairy,

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[65] See Walter Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 217-51.

and then to find his fabled manuscript (his "conclusive and definitive work, his *capolavoro*") lost in the opening scene – reaches no other epiphany than the Zen of its own absurdity. Venice and the treasures of Venice turn into a garbage dump, as the characters cross canals of excreta (248), turds and genitals, in the procession of the Fourteen Urinals of the Cross.

At the heart of Coover's quest story is the Professor's sensual and intellectual struggle between what Bluebell and the Blue Haired Fairy represent. In Venice, a place famously accommodating to the unconscious, the two are increasingly allowed to blur in a hallucinatory play of desire. Coover's refusal to deny options to his questing protagonist, the determination to keep various forking paths in sight, is not a diminishing of Jamesian solidity of specification, but, rather, an attempt to be true to the present conditions of reading and desire. Coover's examination of the entrapment by forms through intense formalism is a modernist accomplishment. At the same time, he parodies the attempt to find an all-encompassing truth in language (such as the discourse of art, folktales, or traditional Venetian metaphors) by showing his hapless protagonist caught up in a maze of the myriad possibilities of 'meaning', while all the possible functions of language (and theory) – emotive, referential, poetic, conative, phatic and metalingual – whirl around him. Pinenut's search for his *capolavoro* and his own "synthesising metaphor" ("that dream of an ultimate life-defining metaphor") in Venice is Coover's metaphor for the problematic relationship between physical and semiotic realities.

Pinocchio in Venice frustrates desire at the same time as thwarting narrative expectation and the momentum of story telling. Disappointed expectations are common to both protagonist and reader. Snags, discrepancies, prematurities, belatednesses, misrecognitions and blocked or incongruous memories are all part of Coover's vast fictional contrivance. The opening movement is strategically brilliant, with every parodist and self-parodist trick, and the text displays the hallucinatory exhilaration which is another of Jameson's expressions for the postmodern.[67] Overtly experimental and disorienting, *Pinocchio in Venice* begins in nightmarish confusion, yet for a chapter or two it is a nightmare which reflects the reality of travel in modern Italy.[68] The realism is a lure, and the story-teller lapses into it frequently, to arouse our hopes, because there is another presence lurking behind the arras of Coover's archetypes. Beneath the familiar tale of Pinocchio, through all its farcical turns and endless farragoes, the fever-dream

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[66] The expression "imaginary museum" is from Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 18.
[67] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 33.
[68] Very like R.'s Dantesque train journey through the surreal hell and reality of modern Italy, in Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*.

misadventures of the Professor, *Pinocchio in Venice* is a novel about the indignities and uncertainties of aging. This theme embodies the trope of Venetian decay, and at times the Professor resembles Mann's Aschenbach – frail, and foolish with desire. The obvious 'flatness' of Coover's characters (they are, after all, puppets, fairies and dogs) makes it the more incongruous and disconcerting when they are shown in some moment of intimacy, some epiphany of reflection or desire, as when Pinocchio/Pinenut falls in love with Bluebell, or is disappointed in his friends, or weeps with nostalgia and fatigue. When he sees the Blue-Haired Fairy again for the first time since childhood, he is overwhelmed with memories of "suppers of bread, cauliflower, and liquor-filled sweets in exchange for carrying a jug of water home for her ... Whereupon, he threw himself at her feet and, sobbing uncontrollably, hugged her shoes" (116).

Parody is a definitive postmodern form because it both incorporates and challenges what it parodies; and contemporary culture strengthens and complicates the possibilities for parodic irony and ambiguity. In *Pinocchio in Venice*, the seeming nostalgia for the Italianate tradition and traditional forms is not nostalgia at all, but ironic distance. Fragmented echoes in the text of other forms and discourses (Henry James amongst them) are not evidence of a desire for continuity, but an expression of discontinuity. Venice reveals "truth's restless fluidity" (31) to Pinenut; "the floating ambiguities fade" (324); Pinenut has "a glimpse of something beyond mere rhetorical flourish" (325); and "the mysterious shimmering *light* of Venice ... paradoxically seemed permanently to fix before the eye the very flux that excluded all fixity, patterns and archetypes emerging from the watery atmosphere like Platonic ideas" (114). These remnants of the Venetian tradition should be interpreted ironically. Yet, Coover leaves room for an interpretation which incorporates the traditional consolations of Venice into the knowingness of the postmodern condition. A film is being made in Venice: "But what is it he remembers? His own life or the film of it, the legends?" (45). Finally, images of Venice "speak to his condition or else perhaps mock it. An illusion, of course. Nothing is being said" (195).

Some examples of 'time' in postmodern Italianist metafiction

In the English tradition, Italy provides a metaphysics of time. Postmodernism takes the most fundamental narrative convention, the representation of time, and displaces, reverses, or otherwise subverts it. Postmodern Italian metafictions take the disorienting experience of 'Italian' time, to comment on reality and unreality in 'reality' and narrative. Robert Coover's

protagonist rejects the theatricality of Venetian life and art; "narrative, indeed *all* arts with concepts of time other than eternity" (175); and "that traditional Venetian notion of art as speech, as a discourse with time ... a kind of on-going dialogue between form and history" (176). Yet in St Mark's Square, Pinenut hears in the echo of the clock mechanism off the waters of the lagoon "a single clamorous voice, ... a voice which seems to insist on the dominion of the present. Above him ... the great revolving face of the zodiacal clock celebrates eternity with its serene turnings even as it intransigently mills away the passing moment, turning history into a kind of painting on the wall" (177). The simplicities and complexities of ordinary time accompany Pinenut/Pinocchio to the end, when he discerns a magical exit – through recovered, mythical memory – from loss and waste, in Coover's re-invention of the Venetian narrative of redeemed time.

In Rose Tremain's experimental short fiction *Evangelista's Fan*, Italy is a strange, sharply imagined setting for an allegory about time and memory. Italian and English conceptions of time are contrasted in ways that reflect upon both theories of time and national character. Piedmont is "a place in which time can be annulled and events denied and history rewritten", but "a stopped clock ... is a thing no Englishman can endure."[69] Similarly, Naim Attallah's *A Timeless Passion* (1995)[70] is preoccupied with time and national types. *A Timeless Passion* is Attallah's first novel in a lifetime of writing, and it is significant that Italy is his chosen setting. The novel's half English, half Italian protagonist returns from London to Southern Italy for his mother's funeral, an experience which releases powerful memories. Carlo is portrayed as a man who strives to impose order on the chaos of everyday life, assiduously cultivating the cooler, English side of his nature. His rediscovery of his Italianness is a narrative of seduction of the senses by memory and the South, and might be read as a writer's discovery of ways to reconcile order and disorder in his art. In Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*, narrative linearity is quite straightforward, except for the separate digressions: R. leaves Melbourne, travels to Venice, takes a few side-trips, then leaves Venice for Melbourne. 'Time' in Dessaix's text has to do with the 'sense' of time, the feeling for its passing, its preciousness; *Night Letters* in essence is *all* about time. There are references to the clock tower in St. Mark's Square in Venice, the zodiac and the winged lion, but more mysteriously there is Professor Eschenbaum's watch, which has "a completely blank, black face ... No numerals, no date window, nothing."[71] In Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*, narrative expectations are unsettled because there is no *real* time, the characters are not in real

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[69] Rose Tremain, *Evangelista's Fan* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p. 5, p. 10.
[70] Naim Attallah, *A Timeless Passion* (London: Quartet Books, 1995).
[71] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, p. 268.

history, and the Napoleonic Wars are merely a dramatic conceit which licenses a meditation on time through nuanced, repetitive play on the word itself: "What time is it?", "What time *might it be*? [Winterson's emphasis]" and so on. In both traditional and contemporary Venetian narratives, allusions to the clock tower in St Mark's Square provoke 'Venetian' reflections on time (timelessness, eternity). Winterson gives the trope an uneasy, queer, poetic, edge:

> In this enchanted city all things seem possible. Time stops. Hearts beat. The laws of the real world are suspended ... The Moors on the great clock swing back their hammers and strike in turn ... In between freezing and melting. In between love and despair. In between fear and sex, passion is.[72]

Postmodern metafiction accommodates precisely this state of knowing in-betweenness. It is the knowingness these writers cultivate in their readers that gives their narratives the power to arrest, reverse or suspend time; to compel, prolong or withhold endings. For all their propinquity to the touchstones of the Italianate tradition, these are fictions of the here and now. Contemporaneity is underwritten by transience — change, dislocation, and unease. In *Pinocchio in Venice*:

> the clamorous sounds of the city ... [are] echoing and rebounding off the glittering waters of the lagoon like a single clamorous voice ... which seems to insist upon the dominion of the present. Above, the two bronze 'Moors' hammer out the hours, while the great revolving face of the zodiacal clock celebrates eternity with its serene turnings even as it intransigently mills away the passing moment, turning history into a painting on the wall.[73]

In the late modern period (or, in Jameson's expression, the period of "late capitalism"), perceptions of self and time are altered.[74] The contemporary discourse of Italianism reflects contemporary ideas about temporality: fragmentation; a sense of the world shrunken and time accelerated, and time and space fusing; the crumbling of moral certitudes; and the human individual as fractured, estranged, and disoriented.

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[72] Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 76.

[73] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 177.

[74] Terry Eagleton writes: "Modernity ... sees itself not just as one more phase of time, but as a phase of time which re-evaluates the very notion of temporality, and thus as in and out of time simultaneously. What strikes it as most typical about itself is the dazzling, dismaying experience of time." Terry Eagleton, "Newsreel History." *London Review of Books*, vol. 20, no. 22, 12 November 1998.

Postmodern and metafictional Italianism: conclusion

Recent Italian metafictions draw attention to their status as constructs. *Pinocchio in Venice* is a dense text and a long, parodic, practical joke, with Coover the omnipresent, omniscient joke teller. In *The Passion*, Jeanette Winterson is present as a symbolist poet and theorist, winking epigrammatically at the reader. In *Night Letters*, the character "R." is the highly self-conscious letter writer, and Dessaix the artificer who puts together the collection of pastiches, carnivalesque digressions, meditations and scholarly footnotes. These texts all share the narrative loops, fantastical histories, highly developed sense of irony and self-mocking tendencies of postmodernism. The reader must read between the lines, to unscramble the codes, gestures, masks, and images of alter egos and doubleness.

Italy is an apt metaphor for our understanding of the world as a tangled artifice, since it is perceived as a place where illusions and deceptions are prevalent; a place which deals in double versions of the truth, and traffics in daydreams, where reality and artifice are one. Italianate metafictions demonstrate the erotics of story telling, the teller's power to withhold secrets, and compel an ending. But as Coover writes: "There are always endings, but there are not always conclusions"[75], and Italy slips just beyond our capacity to understand and represent it. Yet while these narratives resist closure, they do not refuse epiphany, and in their epiphanies the texts strive for a secular religiosity. The similarity between Forster's notion of secular salvation through Pan and Italy, and the co-existence in contemporary texts of secular religiosity and incredulity towards grand narratives, affirms the 'sameness' and 'difference' of recent fiction. Similarly, James's aesthetic of secular grace is simultaneously invoked and profaned by Harold Brodkey. "I have come to Venice to write a little book", Brodkey announces at the beginning of *Profane Friendship*, and at the end: "This little book is not meant to memorialise losses or to portray grandeur ... I did not dare attempt a serious representation of Venice but tried only to hint at only a small experience of love in this setting ... Instead, I drew on the city's centuries-old indulgence in the profane and its invention of secular grace."[76] Venice/the text is a "rouged and polychromed allegory, truly strenuous, a realism without reality." Brodkey's novel, like *The*

[75] Coover, *Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 45.
[76] Brodkey, *Profane Friendship*, p. 387.

Passion, *The Book of Mrs Noah*, and Gail Jones's fragment *Resuscitating Proust*, ends with a text being written. Italy represents the 'word', the construction of a text, and the text itself.[77]

Robert Coover's beleaguered protagonist decides finally not to attempt a reconstruction of his magnum opus lost in Venice. Purified by the impurity of his physical decay, he regains a miraculous detachment and the ingenuous but contemplative state of mind from which creativity flows. Pinocchio/Pinenut's quest, as he realises, has been a quest for abiding forms within life's ceaseless mutations; he finds repose in capricious turbulence, and freedom from *story*. At the end, he lets his gaze drift out upon the Venetian lagoon, surrendering for a moment to his ancient appetite for "the absolute anarchy of the eternal emptiness, that incommunicable but ineradicable truth of his pagan heart" (218). The "incommunicable but ineradicable truth of his pagan heart" suggests James, Forster and Lawrence, but "anarchy" and "eternal emptiness" are constituents of the postmodern condition. Similar desiring emptiness and doubts about 'story' are expressed by other recent, self-conscious artificers in Italy. Michael Dibdin's *Cosi Fan Tutti* is in some respects a requiem for the classic detective story; William Trevor's *My House in Umbria* is an elegy for the Italian romance; and in *The Comfort of Strangers*, Ian McEwan demonstrates the failure of "explanations" and theory.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard asks: "What, then, is the postmodern? What place does it or does it not occupy in the vertiginous work of the questions hurled at the rules of image and narration?"[78] A similar question might be asked about contemporary Italianism. The 'already written', 'already said' and 'already read' threaten to turn contemporary Italianate narratives into repetitions of previous texts and utterances. While the loss of innocence in our epoch requires that writers distance or ironise their representations or utterances, contemporary Italianists acknowledge traditional representations of Italy. Their texts are constructed from references to the tradition: echoes, quotations, codes, images, allusions and 'languages'; demonstrating the double-coded practice of representation and ironisation. Contemporary theory acknowledges the inevitability of earlier literary representations at the same time as recognising the need to submit them to parody and ironical disruption. The literary past is inescapable, but represented and re-employed in a non-innocent, ironic or parodic fashion. Postmodern Italianate metafictions construct intertextual webs from past forms and representations in the Italian tradition (the

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[77] As noted in the section on Michele Roberts, Linda Hutcheon observes, in her study of metafiction, that: "self-reflective narrative often presents the story of its own coming to life, its own creative process." *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London & New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 86.

[78] Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 79.

already said, already written, already read), employing them with characteristic irony. These radically double-coded texts exploit the tension between fact and fiction, the constructed and the real, the *doxa* of 'real' Italy and the para-doxical assertion of that realism's impossibility. The reader is referred both to the world (Italy) outside the novel and to other *texts* (of Italy), other representations of the world being represented in the text itself. All of 'Italy' is a text open to interpretation. Postmodernists alter the world they are looking at by their own self-consciousness, and this alters our way of looking at 'Italy'. In turn, the exhaustion and replenishment of postmodern literature have parallels in the traditional 'Italian' themes of decadence and renewal. Italy's ambivalent role in postmodern literature in English is to represent and interpret the postmodern condition.

The following studies of particular authors and works illustrate some of the ways the tradition of 'Italy' is used to comment on aspects of postmodernity, including the complexities of literary creation, the nature of fiction, and the Italianate tradition itself. The writers chosen re-imagine the tradition, and transform its forms in self-reflexive texts: William Trevor simultaneously constructs and critiques the Italian romance; Ian McEwan in *The Comfort of Strangers* offers an ideological version of *Death in Venice*; Michael Dibdin employs a cynical Venetian detective to re-invent the crime fiction genre; Jeanette Winterson and Michele Roberts write novels about feminism, gender and gayness which negotiate Italian settings as sites of difference; and Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* is both a perpetuation and pastiche of the coded, queer tradition of writing about Italy.

5.2 William Trevor and the metafictional Italian romance

William Trevor is an Irish writer whose work flirts with the idea and reality of Italy. In Trevor's fictional universe, Italy is a place of great beauty and art, consolation, redemption, and evil; the sinister lies just below the surface. The Italian settings are sketched with economy, but convey a vivid sense of place: "Imagine a yellowish building at the end of a track that is in places like a riverbed."[79] Italy's landscape is often an extension of his subfusc, crepuscular English and Irish landscapes, which are a kind of universal landscape of bereavement. Reality and romance collide, and the outcome is loss. His stories describe the experience of being an outsider, and the revelation of truth that can result from the disorientation of travel, and Italy. The wider resonances of the stories are fleeting and unstated. But the reader begins to see the same pattern of corrupted ideals and disappointments as in Henry James. Italy is unfamiliar, mysterious, and redemptively strange.

Trevor places himself knowingly within the modernist, Italianate literary tradition of dislocation, unease and betrayal, in order to analyse similar conditions in the human personality and society. His project relates to one of the main characteristics of modernism, which is the application of elaborately formal methods to chaotic, inexpressible experience. This juxtaposition of form and chaos, order and disorder, parallels the traditional, contradictory image and aesthetic purpose of Italy. Chaotic passion is transformed, as in Proust and James, into the stillness of artifice. But Trevor's self-conscious appropriation of the modernist, Italianate tradition for metafictional speculation represents a new refinement of literary 'Italy'. Like those of James and Forster, his unsettling stories are about connection, or failure to connect, in Italy; finding or losing oneself; and constructing 'narratives' to make sense of the experience. He knowingly departs from the tradition with his ironic distance from the characters and their narratives; making his Italian metafictions the context for an inquiry into the nature of fiction itself, through the strategies of self-reference and parody.

Trevor explores the relationship between fictional truth and reality in an early story, "Cocktails at Doney's"[80], which comments, through the writer/narrator, on the essential constructedness of 'Italy'. He proposes the existence of an 'Italy' which is purely the invention of foreigners,

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[79] William Trevor, *My House in Umbria* (London: Viking, 1991). Parenthetical numbers refer to the 1992 Penguin edition. This reference p. 229.

[80] William Trevor, "Cocktails at Doney's." *The Collected Stories* (London: Viking, 1992), pp. 979-91. Parenthetical numbers refer to the Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1993.

particularly foreign writers. "Cocktails at Doney's" concerns the disappearance of an American woman in Florence. Saturated in macabre sadness, with undertones of modernist cynicism, the story is narrated very plainly, by an English travel guide writer who makes the acquaintance of a travelling American. Mrs Faraday asks him, when they first meet: "what do you plan to write in your guidebooks about Florence?" (982). He replies: "Banalities mostly."

> He liked to lay down the law. He liked to take chances with the facts, and wait for letters of contradiction. *At the height of the season there are twelve times as many strangers as natives in this dusty, littered city. Cascades of graffiti welcome them - the male sexual organ stylized to a Florentine simplicity, belligerent swastikas, hammers and sickles in the streets of gentle Fra Angelico.* (980)

The element of pastiche and oblique metafictional embellishment encourage us to view Trevor's story as a postmodern parody of the guide book tradition, and a comment on constructions of Italianness. The text, and the texts within the text, describe a familiar Italy of contradictions. Guide-book Florence is an art lover's paradise, but the city has a harsher reality: the violence reported in *Nazione*, and the blood-stained history of the city and its art. When they first meet, Mrs Faraday questions the narrator about the painters of the Florentine Renaissance, their patrons, and Florentine aristocrats: "She asked him why Savonarola had been burnt" (984). Mrs Faraday surrenders herself, in Florence: "'I'd like this city to devour me', she had said. She was naïve for an American, and she was careless. She wasn't fearful of strangers and foolishly she let her riches show. Vulnerability was an enticement" (989). The narrator implies that foreigners in Italy are complicit in their ill fortune. His comments bring to mind the fates of two earlier American heroines in Italy, Isabel Archer and Daisy Miller, and suggest Forster's Italian themes of the innocent, immature heart pitted against the forces of insensibility and misunderstanding. Mrs Faraday has been "confusing love with sensuality", the narrator thinks. Like James's heroines, her Yankee credulity and sexual innocence are tested and exploited in 'experienced' Italy. She belongs in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of going to Italy for romantic and sexual adventure.

"Cocktails at Doney's" is a complex meditation on identity, in which the characters lose and invent themselves in Italy. Trevor shows how being a foreigner erases the difference between self and other, and that this erasure (as he demonstrates more completely in *My House in Umbria)* can be expressed in art. The unnamed narrator himself does not understand or acknowledge his

homosexuality. His thoughts wander over the male and female lovers in his past, and he remembers one of them observing that he: "wrote about Italian cities so that he could always be a stranger." The comment echoes Elizabeth Bowen's remark that: "Anywhere, at any time, with anyone, one may be seized by the suspicion of being alien – ease is therefore to be found in a place which nominally *is* foreign: this shifts the weight."[81] "Cocktails at Doney's" is a story about loneliness, isolation, and incomplete lives. Trevor's description of the official at the American consulate, where the narrator goes to report Mrs Faraday's disappearance, illustrates his theme: "Diplomacy was like oil in Mr Humber. It eased his movements and his words; his detachment floated in it, perfectly in place" (990). At the end of the story, the narrator reflects on Mrs Faraday's probable fate, and his failure to respond to her with love, friendship, or warmth:

> She'd been blind to the icy coldness that answered her naivete. Inept and academic, words he had written about the city which had claimed her slipped through his mind. *In the church of Santa Croce you walk on tombs, searching for Giotto's* Life of St Francis. *In Savonarola's own piazza the grey stone features do not forgive the tumbling hair of pretty police girls or the tourist's easy ways.* Injustice and harsh ambition had made her city what it was, the violence of greed for centuries had been in its bloodstream; beneath its tinsel skin there was an iron heart. *The Florentines, like true provincials, put work and money first. In the Piazza Signoria the pigeons breakfast off the excrement of the hackney horses: in Florence nothing is wasted.* (990)

The passage echoes *A Room with a View* and *Romola*, as well as referring to the Italian proverb: "Where one horse shits, a thousand sparrows feed."[82] Forster and Eliot acknowledge the traditional, ambiguous image of Florence as a city of exquisite cultivation and mercenary ruthlessness. The suggestions of repressed sexuality and violence in Trevor's story are extensions of the traditional image of ambiguity. In ambience, "Cocktails at Doney's" is similar to Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), another story of violence when strangers meet in a deceptively beautiful Italian city. McEwan's English characters share Mrs Faraday's trust in strangers, absence of fear, willingness to be seduced, and inexplicable apathy. In *The*

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[81] Elizabeth Bowen, *A Time in Rome* (London: Longmans, 1960), p. 19.

[82] The proverb is quoted in Penelope Fitzgerald's *Innocence*, which presents Florence in a similar light: "[Chiara Ridolfi's] half-eager, half-diffident approach to whatever came along hadn't the ruthlessness of the ancient money-making city which in its former days had questioned the bills of the world's greatest artists … [she] suffered from attacks of conscience of no use at all in the streets of Florence." (London: William Collins, 1986), p. 26.

Comfort of Strangers, as in Trevor's story, physical violence or the threat of physical violence plays an important part. The second to last scene in Trevor's story, in which the narrator reports Mrs Faraday's disappearance to the American officials in Florence, eerily resembles the final scene in *The Comfort of Strangers*, when Mary goes to report Colin's murder to the Venetian police. McEwan's scene in turn echoes the closing scenes of Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*, when, again in an Italian city, there is a motiveless murder and an official report. In *The Driver's Seat*, the officials' stance is "devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear."[83] In each of these endings, a 'narrative' is constructed, an 'official' report prepared, to provide a formal closure which is incomplete because nothing is resolved. At the end of "Cocktails at Doney's", the writer/narrator is in bed, imagining alternative developments in his relationship with Mrs Faraday, inventing alternative conclusions to the story. The diplomat in "Cocktails at Doney's" informs the narrator: "The Italian view ... is that she went off on a sexual excursion and found it so much to her liking that she stayed where she was" (988). The diplomat represents one Englishman's view of Italians; and there are many versions of 'Italy' and a plurality of truths in Trevor's story, which mingles banalities, generalities and darker realities. But there is no comfort from a sense of an ending. Trevor's final metafictional gesture is a gesture of incompleteness.

In *My House in Umbria* (1991), Trevor's only full-length Italian fiction, Italy is clearly identified with the creative enterprise and the process and meaning of writing fiction. Through both the narrative and narrator of *My House in Umbria*, Trevor questions the relationship between fictional and non-fictional truths, stressing the plurality of 'truth' in fiction. What is 'reality' in this story, and what is artifice? Plainly, both the narrator and several of the characters are liars. How much of the story and its enclosed stories can the reader believe? There are secrets, mysteries and lies in the lives of the characters as well as the narrator. No-one seems to be in control of the novel. Trevor shows the romance writer Mrs Delahunty slowly and painfully losing faith in the ordering possibilities of art and language, increasingly to place her faith in dreams. Her endless dreams endlessly recounted create and re-create reality, which as Ihab Hassan has suggested, may itself be the final version of dream.[84]

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[83] For an analysis of the Italian settings in Muriel Spark's fiction, see Malcolm Bradbury, "Muriel Spark's Fingernails." *Critical Quarterly 14* (Autumn 1972): 241-50; Joseph Hynes, "Taking and Making: The Page as Looking-Glass." *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*, ed. Joseph Hynes (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992), pp. 221-263; and John Updike, "Topnotch Witcheries." *New Yorker*, 6 January 1975: 76-78.

[84] Ihab Hassan, "The New Gnosticism", p. 75.

My House in Umbria deals with loss, loneliness, healing and redemption – the themes of much of Trevor's work. For the wounded people in the story, the house in Umbria promises healing. In different ways, all the characters are incomplete, and searching, in Italy, for love and community. The victims of the terrorist attack, naturally, are damaged, but so are the others, including Mr Riversmith, the child's uncle.[85] Riversmith is a well-intentioned, good man, but his obsession with the taxonomy of insects prevents any understanding of human needs and motivations. Lacking feelings of his own, he is insensitive to those of others, and does not recognise his niece's hunger for love. But *My House in Umbria* is principally an allegory whose essential concern is the nature of narrative itself. The story is narrated by Mrs Delahunty, a delusional, drunken writer of fictional romances:

> I ... did not ever presume to intrude myself into the world of literature – though, in fairness to veracity, I must allow that my modest works dissect with some success the tangled emotions of which they treat ... I can honestly state that I intended no more, and I believe you'll find I am an honest woman. (226-7)

Trevor establishes the narrator's unreliability: while there is no doubt of the reality of the central actions of the story, neither is there any doubt that much of it is fabricated. Mrs Delahunty's narrative is a confusion of scenes and characters from her romances. Episodes from her real and invented pasts merge with her dreams; letters from admirers of her novels tell the stories of their lives, and are interspersed with elaborately imagined lives for her guests; her relationship with the wretched Riversmith takes place entirely in her imagination. Mrs Delahunty's vast fictional contrivance has the hallucinatory quality of surrealism. Like many characters in William Trevor's fictions, she has a great capacity for creating and sustaining illusions.[86] In caricaturing Mrs Delahunty, her version of Italy, and wilful distance from reality, Trevor comments on the image of 'Italy' in literature, the nature of illusion, and literary representation. On one hand, Mrs Delahunty (and Riversmith's disdain for her) embodies George Eliot's dismissal of romance as a silly female pursuit, an opinion expressed in her often quoted essay, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists."[87] Romance, as Mrs Delahunty demonstrates, can seem a form of ideological social control, keeping female desire in the realm of the unreal. On the other hand, the persistent

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[85] Robert Hellenga's novel *The Fall of a Sparrow* (London: Viking, 1998) is partly set in Italy and deals with the Bologna train terrorist attack. Like Trevor's, Hellenga's is an orderly narrative, with lacunae; dense realism punctuated by bizarre, unexplained events; a narrative about chaos, order and Italy which comments on the meaning and art of fiction.

[86] See Julian Gitzen's "The Truth-Tellers of William Trevor." *Critique* 21 (1979), pp. 59-72.

disruption of the identity of the 'speaking subject' suggests Derrida. For Derrida, it is the insistence of apparently direct, interpolated, autobiographical material that marks the inability of the writer to be herself, to achieve an identity.[88] But Trevor is not a literary theorist, nor unsympathetic to human frailties. Mrs Delahunty's escapist romances are silly but necessary. Her account of things is byzantine, but she has a good understanding of complicated concepts, like *colpa* (guilt), that are well understood, Trevor implies, by Latins. One of her many inconsequential conversations with Mr Riversmith suggests that Trevor, like Forster, considers it better to be romantic than frigid:

> All I wished to make clear was that when, today, he observed his niece and Otmar and the old Englishman he was observing a skin drawn over human debris. Mr Riversmith said he wouldn't put it quite like that, but didn't offer an alternative form of words. (313)

Both Mrs Delahunty, the artificer, and William Trevor proceed by fragment, innuendo and ambiguity. The narrative is difficult to follow and believe in. Yet the characters, these damaged heroes of selfhood, are resonantly *there* in Umbria. The Italian Dr Innocenti (the only Italian, aside from a maid), is serene, pragmatic and whole. The excursion to Siena is Dr Innocenti's idea, and it fails only because of the inwardness and self-obsessions of the characters.[89] Trevor heightens our sense of these wounded people moving through an alien world by rendering that world (Italy) as beautiful, and instinct with the promise of healing. The Siena excursion is a poignant episode, and the ill-assorted group's faith in their guide-book (lent by Dr Innocenti) is touching and heroic. The *Annuncio ai pastori* in Siena is "miraculous", and has a miraculous effect on the child, whose "face was radiant" (319). The abbey at Monte Oliveto Maggiore is "really beautiful" and "as close to heaven on earth as you will ever find" (328). The Christian symbolism of the Mount of Olives – the idea that resurrection and rebirth redeem evil and suffering – is understated but powerful. And there is "redemption in a child's forgiveness" (369).

The garden, which is the idea of Otmar and the general, is an image of renewal. We are meant to question Mrs Delahunty's philosophy that "when evil was made good it was as though the evil

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[87] George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1990), pp. 140-163.

[88] Derrida's interest in the multiple and contradictory nature of linguistic identity is evident in the "polylogue" for "n+1 female voices" entitled "Restitutions" in *The Truth in Painting* (1978), where the nonfinite series of n+1 refuses even the wholeness of an infinite dispersion. *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. 256. See also *The Post Card* (1987).

had never existed" (361), but there is no doubt the garden exists: that it was conceived, planned and brought to fruition as a thanksgiving. When the others leave, and Mrs Delahunty once again opens up her home as a hotel, the garden becomes parched and withers, but the image at the end is comic: "The Germans shake their heads in disapproval, the French say it's typical, the English get the hose going and water the azalea urns" (369). There is even a suggestion, in the English with their hose, that there is another world, of action not words, away from Umbria. Mrs Delahunty is in retreat from reality and truth. Mr Riversmith's dismissal of her narrative strategy for making sense of the terrorist attack – "It's preposterous to invent all this just in order to make a fantasy of the facts" (369) – she interprets as a rejection of herself. "I did not speak again" (371), she says. "I have never since sat down at my black Olympia, and never shall again" (374). Her guests depart together: "I wish a photograph had been taken because just for a moment everything was of a piece and everyone was there. Ten figures stood on the gravel in front of my house, each shadowed by other people, although the camera would not have caught that subtlety" (371). The moment, when things fall into place, is typical William Trevor. The moment is a fiction, but consoling and sustaining. Mrs Delahunty's is like the "eternal moment" of Miss Raby, Forster's similarly self-deluding romantic novelist. In Miss Raby's "final failure ... she was conscious of a triumph over experience and earthly facts"; she sees the "perishing and perishable beauty" of the valley in Vorta, and is "infinitely distant" from it.[90] Trevor suggests there is something to be said for living in the moment: one of the traditional lessons of Italy in the English literary imagination. In Italy, happiness and truth are provisional. Henry James's most successful Italians, passive fatalists like Prince Amerigo for example, are in complex negotiation with the truth. The final mood of Trevor's fiction is resigned rather than expectant: "Perhaps I'll become old, perhaps not. Perhaps something else will happen in my life, but I doubt it. When the season's over I walk among the shrubs myself, making the most of the colours while they last and the fountain while it flows" (275). At times, the characters in *My House in Umbria* appear curiously sealed off from one another, as if each belonged in a different book. But through this awkwardness, which constitutes a *meta*narrative, the novel touches the longing for life to be more than a work in progress, contriving to make sense. *My House in Umbria* is a distinctively postmodern romance in the way that it exposes the constructednes of realism and the arbitrariness of remembering and forgetting. The novel resists a nostalgic coming to terms with the past: a nostalgia that would falsely dismiss the past through the supposed 'accuracy' of

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[89] The resemblance of this episode to the Fiesole picnic in *A Room with a View* is doubtless intended. Like Phaeton, the promiscuous reprobate Quinty is asked to drive the party, and smuggles aboard his girlfriend Rosa, the maid.

[90] Forster, "The Eternal Moment." *The New Collected Short Stories*, p. 216.

representation. Trevor both celebrates and elegises the English fantasy of Italy and the genre of Italian romance itself.

William Trevor's most recent evocation of Italy, "After Rain" (1996), is a highly self-reflexive fiction about an Englishwoman, Harriet, who comes to a pensione in Italy where she spent holidays as a child. She comes seeking clues to the failure of her love affair, and her parents' marriage. Italy is expected to exorcise memories; and "After Rain" is another story about loss, belatedness, renewal and healing. The story belongs to the literary tradition that associates Italy with consolation, stressing the revelatory, redemptive power of Italian art. In addition, "After Rain" is a narrative about the sustaining and redeeming power of narrative itself, how telling stories makes patterns, and sense of things. Unusually for William Trevor, in this late work there is no suggestion of the dark side of Italy. Yet the mood is one of regret. He captures the sadness of Italian places, showing himself a master of irony and implication in the Forsterian tradition. The opening scene in the dining-room of the Pensione Cesarina recalls the opening of *A Room with a View*, in the Bertolini. The embedded reference to Forster adds to our sense of the comic pathos of Italian pensiones and the English tourists who stay in them, placing Harriet within the tradition of the disappointed-in-love Englishwoman abroad. Harriet is aware, contemplating her reasons for being here, that Italy is where people like herself go, to find love, the self, and healing. She seeks "solitude ... [which] offers a quality that is hard to define; much more like the cliché of getting to know yourself."[91] If the affair had not ended, Harriet would have been holidaying with her lover at the new-age resort on Skyros, which offers therapies to "discover the undiscovered self." Instead, she undertakes a different kind of self-examination in Italy. Her holiday is more like a ritual of grief: "Coming back has been done, a private journey that chance suggested" (95). In a self-reflexive gesture, Trevor notes that Harriet has brought a novel with her, a romance she reads during her solitary meals. Her book offers no consolation.

Trevor incorporates into his story all the constituents of the English fantasy of an Italian holiday: grappa, Giotto, Germans, the heat of August, needle pines and umbrella pines, a piazza in a small town, cappuccinos at a pavement café, risotto, a church with incense cloying on the air, church bells, candles, tombs, and relics. The cumulative effect of the familiar images is to conjure the magic of the English experience of Italian hill towns; an example of the simultaneous representation and ironisation of things which is characteristic of postmodernism. The painterliness of "After Rain" is double-coded, like Trevor's evocation of place. Trevor's

technique is very painterly, in its references (the clouds in the sky are "as decoration by Raphael or Perugino"), and the rhythm, texture and colour of the prose: new clouds arrive, "grey as lead, a sombre panoply pegged out against a blue that's almost lost" (90). The painterliness is reminiscent of James, and even more contrived: the difference lies in Trevor's ironic (but non-parodic) distance from what he describes, and tacit appeal to the knowing reader (including the reader of James). Barry Unsworth's descriptions of Umbrian art and Englishmen in *After Hannibal* (1996) display a similar mixture of reverence and parody with respect to Italy, and English images of Italy. John Mortimer's *A Summer's Lease* (1988), a novel about an English holiday in Tuscany, is an exemplar of postmodern Italianism in its cynicism, and the way Mortimer simultaneously employs and undermines the literary tradition of 'Italy'. Frederic Raphael's self-referential pastiche of classicist fiction, "The Latin Lover" (*The Latin Lover and Other Stories*, 1994) exhibits the knowingness which characterises postmodern's re-invention of the Italian hill town novel.

Notwithstanding the inescapably 'already-said', 'already-written' nature of Trevor's Italy, his descriptions possess the clarity and marked absence of hyperbole of a *Michelin Green Guide*, which might itself be viewed as an intertext in "After Rain". Trevor's story is aware of its belatedness with respect to Forster, and elicits a nostalgia for place and period (which is not mocking) reminiscent of Merchant-Ivory's recreations of Forster's novels.[92] The most significant intertext in "After Rain" is *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Trevor describes the town square, with its church, bank, trattoria and gelateria, and Harriet's recollection: "'Yes, they're all one', her father said" (90). Trevor is invoking Forster's notion of the Italian piazza as a metaphor for the integratedness of life, and wholeness: Monteriano's town square, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, with "its three great attractions – the Palazzo Pubblico, the Collegiate Church, and the Caffe Garibaldi: the intellect, the soul, and the body."[93]

The narrative of *After Rain* is arranged around Harriet's mystical experience of Italian art. During her stay in the Italian hill town she moves from a sense of absence and loss; undergoes a transformation effected by the unfathomable genius of Renaissance art, and symbolised by the blessing of rain; to grasp a consolatory "truth". Inner consorts with outer weather: Harriet's

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[91] "After Rain." *After Rain* (London: Viking, 1996), pp. 80-96. Parenthetical numbers refer to the Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1997. This reference p. 87.

[92] The contemporary literary image of Italy owes a lot to the Merchant-Ivory films of E.M. Forster's novels. See Peter J. Hutchings, "A Disconnected View: Forster, Modernity and Film." *E.M. Forster: New Casebooks*, pp. 213-28.

[93] Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 130.

suffocating pain is intensified by oppressive heat; longing and dissatisfaction build up within her as rain clouds gather; and the low season itself, a time of suspension, is like Harriet ("a month ago passed out of her twenties"), poised between regret and expectation. Rain sends Harriet from a pavement café into a church, where she is transfixed by the image of the angel in an *Annunciation*. The prose is very still, and Harriet thinks: "In another moment there'll be serenity." After the storm, the town emerges, cleansed and re-beautified. The dust on the paving stones is washed away, a symbolic erasure of memories; and Harriet's bitterness starts to sweeten, as "rain has sweetened the breathless air". The moment of serenity comes, as an epiphany:

> While she stands there alone among the dripping vines she cannot make a connection that she knows is there. There is a blankness in her thoughts, a density that feels like muddle also, until she realises: the Annunciation was painted after rain. Its distant landscape, glimpsed through arches, has the temporary look that she is seeing now. It was after rain that the angel came: those first cool moments were a chosen time. (94)

Harriet's muddle is in the tradition of English muddles (including Lucy Honeychurch's) experienced in Italy. After muddle, ordinary things develop a revelatory shimmer, and clarity, as after rain. The visitation Harriet receives is the gift of insight into her failed affair and need for love: "Too slick and glib, to use her love affairs to restore her faith in love: that thought is there mysteriously. She has cheated in her love affairs: that comes from nowhere too. Harriet stands a moment longer ... on the steps of the church, bewildered by this personal revelation, aware instinctively of its truth" (92). Further, she reflects: "she has been the victim of herself: with vivid clarity she knows that now and wonders why she does and why she didn't before" (95). Her parents' marriage, she realises, was "unreal and artificial ... Retrospect insisted that reality was elsewhere; that reality was ... afternoon rooms and guile; that reality was a web of lies" (87).

Trevor's narratives resist moral judgements. In the world they describe, so much that is spoken and unspoken goes sadly wrong for the fragile characters, who have difficulty distinguishing between miracles and delusions, beliefs and lies. As "Cocktails at Doney's" demonstrates, people form different impressions and hold different memories of places and each other. People like the narrator of "Cocktails at Doney's" and Mr Riversmith deal with life's realities with facts and cynicism. Truth is only their version of the truth. Women like Mrs Delahunty find the sordid events of their lives (prostitution, absence of love) unendurable, and seek comfort in romantic

make-believe. Others, like Harriet, discover an aesthetic 'truth', or mystery, which rescues them from vacancy and ruin. Trevor seems to suggest that the essential loneliness and exhaustion of the human spirit are too deep for ordinary words. His characters want that which lives beyond words: a miraculous restitution.

During her last evening in the Cesarina, Harriet reviews the events of her holiday in Italy, telling them to herself like a story or film script, with dream-like repetition of "she sees"; "she sees herself" (the expression occurs three times); "she hears"; "she knows"; and "she senses":

> She sees herself walking in the morning heat ... She sees herself seeking the shade of the chestnut trees in the park, and crossing the piazza to the trattoria when the first raindrops fell. She hears the swish of the cleaner's mop in the church of Santa Fabiola, she hears the tourists' whispers. The fingers of the praying woman flutter on her beads, the candles flare. The story of Santa Fabiola is lost in the shadows that were once the people of her life, the family tomb reeks odourlessly of death. (95)

'Seeing' and 'not seeing' are obsessive preoccupations in fiction about Italy. And the surrealistic "tomb reeking odourlessly" invokes the image of death and transfiguration, central to the meaning of 'Italy' and the Italian text. Like James, Trevor suggests that nothing is transformed until it is re-imagined. The text mediates feeling through memory and recreates it in art, offering restitution through writing's retexturing of experience. Art and life, representation and act are conceded something of a resolution. At the same time, Trevor's Italian work possesses the inconclusive and self-conscious artistry characteristic of recent metafiction. The 'real' events in his Italian narratives are the narratives themselves, which question the possibility of narrating 'events' at all. In this way, the stories meditate on their own limits, their perpetual incompletion, suggesting the indeterminacy and fragmentation of the contemporary world, reflected in contemporary texts. Harriet's last thoughts are a metafictional gesture: she "sees", as a character in James or Forster might see, but we have the feeling that only the story itself, the detachment and vertiginous sense of fleetingness it endows, preserves her vision. In Trevor's Italian fictions there are epiphanies, but resistance to closure. His Italy is a poetic stay of dislocation and decay. For his English characters, Italy is a site of lyricism, literary gestures, and transcendentalism: a necessary fiction, an indispensable metaphor for the contemporary world.

5.3 Postmodernism, place, and the thriller

a. Postmodern play with terror: Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*

In *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), Ian McEwan combines the conventions of the thriller genre with traditional literary tropes and images of Venice. The combination produces a work of moral, sexual and textual equivocation. McEwan's commentary on constructions of place, self and fiction connect him to the English tradition of writing about Italy, while his subversive, ironic awareness of genre and tradition place him *outside* genre and tradition. Furthermore, *The Comfort of Strangers* is reminiscent of Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as something which: "puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies solace ... [and which] searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable."[94] The "comfort" in McEwan's title is ironic: his novella denies even the traditional solace of Italy and narrative. The ambition and achievement of his work reside principally in the search for new forms for presenting the unpresentable.

The Comfort of Strangers is an evasive text, about an encounter in an unnamed Italian city between a young, nearly androgynous English couple on holidays, and another couple – a sado-masochistic 'other'. It is significant that McEwan chooses his epigraph from Cesare Pavese: *Travelling is a brutality. It forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends. You are constantly off balance. Nothing is yours except the essential things - air, sleep, dreams, the sea, the sky - all things tending towards the eternal or what we imagine of it.* McEwan explores the disorientations of travel, and how being a stranger in a foreign place forces people to examine themselves and their relationships with others. Colin and Mary have come to Venice, it is suggested, purposefully to repair their disintegrating relationship. In Roberto Rossellini's 1953 film *Viaggio in Italia*, the camera stalks an English couple whose marriage is splintering: the confusion of Naples is the confusion of a marriage coming apart. This masterpiece of Italian cinema has had a lasting influence on English film makers and writers, perhaps even on Ian McEwan. But *The Comfort of Strangers* complexifies the Italianate tradition, including ideas about renewal and eroticised desire for altered states. McEwan's cynicism about foreign travel places him at a distance from James, Forster and Lawrence and their English characters who come to Italy to learn how to 'live.' There is a great irony in the English couple's situation. They are experienced and worldly, but compared to the

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[94] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 81.

Italian Robert, they are innocent; and the murder, like the murder in Florence in *A Room with a View*, is committed by a native.

McEwan does not name the city in which his story is set, but it is unmistakably Venice. He describes the city with Ruskinian precision and formality and the combination of abstract strangeness and familiarity which occurs in dreams:

> To reach the hotel, it was necessary to walk across one of the great tourist attractions of the world, an immense wedge-shaped expanse of paving, enclosed on three sides by dignified arcaded buildings and dominated at its open end by a redbrick clock tower, and beyond that a celebrated cathedral of white domes and glittering facade, a triumphant accretion, so it had often been described, of many centuries of civilisation. Assembled on the two longer sides of the square, facing across the paving stones like opposing armies, were the tightly packed ranks of chairs and round tables belonging to the long established cafes; adjacent orchestras, staffed and conducted ... Tourists surged across the brilliantly-lit open ground, or wheeled off in small groups and dissolved into the monochrome patchwork of light and shade within the delicately colonnaded arcades. Two-thirds, perhaps, of the adult males carried cameras.[95]

The haunting Ruskinian, Jamesian quality of McEwan's Venetian evocation is very marked and seems deliberate. He is writing in the tradition of the sinister sublime. 'Sublime' is understood here in the Kantian sense of a radical disjunction both within and between reason and the imagination. The sublime transcends the grounds of sense and understanding. McEwan's sublime is both Kantian and postmodern. Lyotard writes in his analysis of Kant's notion of the sublime: "Sublime violence is like lightning. It short-circuits thinking within itself."[96] In *The Comfort of Strangers* the sublime is provided by, in, and as the text. Venice itself is semiotised, made significant, by a textual process that could be described as an effect of the sublime imagination. The 'sublime' of McEwan's novella belongs to the history of romanticism but departs from romanticism by means of the text's indifference.[97] There is threat in the flat, procedural description of the famous square, and special menace in the last sentence. The fact that McEwan

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[95] Ian McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981). Parenthetical numbering refers to the Picador 1982 edition. This reference, p. 47.

[96] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. E. Gottenberg (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 54.

[97] See "Simulation and the Sublime." Niall Lucy, *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford & Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 35-9.

never writes "Venice" or names the city's celebrated landmarks heightens the impression of Colin and Mary being adrift in the blurred ambience of a dream. The city's anonymity increases the sense of an enclosed world and the couple's isolation within it: "they would continue to explore the twisting alleyways and sudden squares in silence, and with each step the city would recede as they locked tighter into each other's presence." (15)[98] McEwan's technique is reminiscent of Robbe-Grillet. In Robbe-Grillet's sadomasochistic stories, obscurely sensed monsters of self and the world hide behind flat scenery and abstract backgrounds. Robbe-Grillet generates discomfort and distance from his settings. In *Topologie d'une cite fantome* (1976), against the background of a cell's bare white walls, what Robbe-Grillet calls "the immobile ceremonial of violence and abstraction"[99] unfolds. Within and without the cell, as in Venice in *The Comfort of Strangers*, there are zones of ambiguous shadows.

There are many instances of McEwan's studied geographical amnesia in the text: "They made plans to catch the boat across the lagoon the next day to the popular strip of land whose beaches faced the open sea."[100] To write "Lido" here would be too obvious an invocation of Mann and Visconti. The intertextuality is more powerful for the name being unsaid. No less disquieting is the absence of surnames, which inflicts upon the reader the discomfort of being lured into an unknowing intimacy with strangers, into a meeting place which is fiercely lit and surrounded by shadows. The effect creates a densely claustrophobic atmosphere of controlled panic, and endows the city with, in Coleridge's expression for Iago, a "motiveless malignity".[101] Attributing dark human qualities to Venice is part of the literary tradition: Henry James describes the city in *The Wings of a Dove* as "hot and almost vindictive."[102] In his 1990 film of the book, rescripted by Harold Pinter, Paul Schrader captures the sense of anonymity and foreign menace very effectively, censoring familiar sites and playing up the exotic Moorish aspects of the city.

McEwan's Venice is at once visceral and metaphorical, instinct with the treachery of artifice. Alien and alienating, yet undeniably seductive, like Thomas Mann's Venice, McEwan's city is a place of sexual and moral ambiguity. Venice is a real landscape of mazes and sensory confusion, and a literary landscape where mazes are symbols of deception. 'Real' history, and political and

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[98] Very much like the unnamed Italian city (which is Rome) in Muriel Spark's thriller, *The Driver's Seat* (1970), the sinister anonymity of McEwan's Venice allows the city to represent all foreign and strange locations.
[99] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Topologie d'une cite fantome* (*Topology of a Phantom City*), Paris, 1978, trans. J.A. Underwood (New York: Grove Press, 1997), p. 43.
[100] McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, p. 84.
[101] Iago is relevant in this context. "Super-subtle Venetian" is Iago's epithet for Desdemona, but the expression is more apt for Iago.
[102] James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 437.

personal truths are revealed as fabrications; secrets and memories are of dubious veracity. McEwan's Venice is like James's: "supremely the refuge of endless strange secrets, broken fortunes and wounded hearts."[103] And the threat and possibility of violence are constantly present. Colin and Mary's first night in Venice is reminiscent of a scene from Muriel Spark's Venetian novella, *Territorial Rights* (1979):

> After dinner they walked briskly through the chilly lane and squares, where the side-canals were ill-lit and the future beyond every few steps was murky. 'Easy ...' said Curran, as practically every visitor to Venice says, sooner or later, 'very easy wouldn't it be? – to slither a knife into someone, push him into the canal and just walk on.'[104]

Like *The Comfort of Strangers*, Spark's story shares some of the preoccupations of the thriller, but ultimately both novelists are more interested in evil than crime, which is where their fiction differs from Michael Dibdin's. The point is made in *Territorial Rights* that a certain sort of human delights in evil, and one of the many possible readings of McEwan's novel, largely through the character of Robert, is as a study in evil. McEwan is working consciously within an established literary tradition, which includes James's portrait, in *The Wings of the Dove*, of the gondolier Pasquale, who was: "blank ... if the term could ever apply to members of a race in whom vacancy was but a nest of darkness – not a vain surface, but a place of withdrawal in which something obscure, something always ominous, indistinguishably lived."[105] McEwan exploits, even embellishes the tradition to produce his 'literature of shock'. In *The Comfort of Strangers* Venice is a conventionally "glittering" city, "incandescent with afternoon sunlight" (116), but the authentic Venetian shimmer has something of the iridescence of decay, that other element in the Venetian literary tradition perpetuated by Henry James in the characters of Juliana and Tita Bordereau in *The Aspern Papers*; and by Thomas Mann, in Aschenbach, in *Death in Venice*. McEwan startlingly juxtaposes images of great loveliness with images of revulsion, as in the following passage:

> Colin followed Mary's gaze to a nearby family whose baby ... stood on the [café] table ... among the ashtrays and empty cups ... From the corner of its mouth a snail's trail of drool gathered in the deep fold of its chin and overflowed in a bright pendant. [The baby's] head wobbled quizzically ... The wild eyes, round and pure, blazed across the

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[103] James, "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women." *Italian Hours*, p. 65.
[104] Muriel Spark, *Territorial Rights* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1979), p. 26.
[105] James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 413.

> sunlight square and fixed in seeming astonishment and anger on the roofline of the cathedral where, it had once been written, the crests of the arches, as if in ecstasy, broke into marble foam and tossed themselves far into the blue sky on flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray, as if breakers on a shore had been frost-bound before they fell. The baby emitted a thick, guttural vowel sound and its arms twitched in the direction of the building. (49)

John Ruskin is the person by whom "it had once been written" that "the crests of the arches, as if in ecstasy, broke into marble foam and tossed themselves far into the blue sky on flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray, as if breakers on a shore had been frost-bound before they fell."[106] McEwan's characteristic obliquity, by hinting at the derivative nature of the couple's Venetian experience seems to impoverish it further. The passage demonstrates the Ruskin-hauntedness of McEwan's text. The intensity of McEwan's feeling for Venice and the angularities of his prose emulate Ruskin. Moreover, McEwan invokes Ruskin's problematic idea of sexual relationships, Ruskin's understanding of the imagination's preoccupation with terror, and his own awareness of the connections between death and the modern novel.

The shimmering sensuality of a Venetian summer is conveyed in the impressionist quality of McEwan's prose. The monotonous, narcotic rhythms and mesmeric fluidity reflect the languid mood of the floating city. Reading McEwan is like lucid dreaming. He captures the ritualistic aspect of Venetian life: "Since their arrival, they had established a well-ordered ritual of sleep, preceded on only one occasion by sex, and now the calm, self-obsessed interlude during which they carefully groomed themselves before their dinner-time stroll through the city."[107] The couple's conversation, their ideas and feelings, intentions and desires drift inconclusively. Lassitude descends upon them, like the heat of Venice. They are always falling asleep, meaning to do things, but barely able to move. "Mesmerised" by Robert, they do not resist his invitations and final act. The irony of Mary's "interminable sleep" has been prefigured from the beginning, when she "sleepwalked from moment to moment" (19). In the heat, the characters are transients, veiled behind screens which protect them from the sun. Light is seen through shutters, gold and pink, casting angles like bars. Images and patterns of imprisonment or captivity recur in the narrative (50, 76, 91). Behind shutters, Caroline tries desperately to hold on to her secret,

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[106] The passage is from John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1886), edited by J.G. Links (St James's Place, London: Collins, 1960), p. 149.

[107] McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, p. 13. References to Italian rituals frequently occur in English fiction about Italy, possibly because of the great attraction rituals hold for a ritual-less society. Venetian rituals are central, for instance, to the narrative and symbolic patterns in Riviere's novella, *A Venetian Theory of Heaven*.

and behind shutters secrets are disclosed. Like the city's infamous prisons, secrets are an enduring Venetian trope. McEwan combines the familiar trope with the conventions of the crime thriller, and, perhaps subliminally, some of the themes, metaphors and images of Robbe-Grillet's subversive 'detective' fiction. In Robbe-Grillet's novels, the detective/reader/writer searches for evidence of the unspeakable Id in stories and texts, questioning what Bruce Morrissette sees as postmodernist "isolation" that "leads always back to the text".[108] *The Comfort of Strangers* describes Colin and Mary's isolation in the hotel in Venice, Caroline's in the palazzo, and, at the police station at the end of the story, the isolation of the reader/writer in the text. McEwan is suggesting that Colin and Mary, as much as Robert and Caroline, are prisoners of conventional discourse. In common with Robbe-Grillet, McEwan examines the nature of sadomasochism and, in the character of Robert, obsession. In "Postmodernism and the Monstrous Criminal", Raylene Ramsay writes: "The slats of venetian blinds and the geometrical mazes that proliferate as metaphors ... in Robbe-Grillet's early novels come to serve as metaphors of limitation and obsession. The prison bars ... conceal the monsters of indeterminacy and the aleatory."[109] In Chapter Five of *The Comfort of Strangers*: "Through the half-open shutters the setting sun cast a rhomboid of orange bars against the bedroom wall ... The room was high-ceilinged, white-walled, uncluttered."[110] Colin and Mary, Robert's randomly chosen, partly complicit victims, leave this cell/room to walk through Venice to the prison of Robert's palazzo.

In the deserted, de Chirico-like streets and blank *campi* of McEwan's Venice, the prospect of confusion is very real and present from the beginning. McEwan notes the possibility of getting lost and the characters' need, their desire for it: "It was the total absence of traffic in the city that allowed visitors the *freedom* to become so easily lost" (21). [My italics] There is a lot of almost comic 'business' about maps (20, 21, 42), and losing the way, which is another commonplace of fictional Venice. The English come to Italy, innocent and metaphorically mapless, to experience Italy's complexities for themselves, and learn how to live 'authentic' lives. They come to 'lose' themselves in order to 'find' themselves as new people, or else to lose themselves forever. Forster's Lucy Honeychurch, in Santa Croce, in *A Room with a View* (1908), begins her movement towards the transforming light of Italy only after she loses her Badeker. James's Roderick Hudson, with the most willing and well-intentioned *cicerone* in Rowland, still destroys

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[108] Bruce Morrissette, "Postmodern Generative Fiction." *Novel and Film: Essays in Two Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985), pp. 1-11. This reference p. 10.
[109] Raylene Ramsay, "Postmodernism and the Monstrous Criminal." *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story From Poe to Postmodernism*, eds. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 199-214. This reference p. 203.
[110] McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers*, p. 55.

himself. Mrs Faraday, in the story by William Trevor referred to earlier, disappears – possibly intentionally – in Florence, while the guidebook writer himself stays in Italy in a life determined and impoverished by the cliches of tourism. In Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1986), maps of Venice are available only to Venetians, and the city withholds its secrets. When Henri asks Villanelle for a map, she explains she cannot provide one because Venice is a living, shifting, thing.[111] Villanelle herself is a Venetian shape-shifter, as familiar with the city as with her body, with no need for maps. At the end of Rod Jones's Venetian novella, *Nightpictures* (1997), he writes: "I trace the map of my mind like a map of Venice, the labyrinths of memory, the grand canal of desire snaking through the city ... I have my habitual itinerary ... and so I live inside my map of photographic recall ... And each night, lying here motionless in the dark, I begin my journey again. I follow the *calles* of memory, the *calles* of pain."[112] In a very different, metaphysical but altogether more upbeat work of fiction, the heroine of Penelope Lively's *Perfect Happiness* undergoes the quintessential Venetian experience and finds that:

> The city ensnared her like a web, a maze. When she tried to match her position to the lines and names on the map there seemed to be no possible relationship. What was, and what was said to be, were not the same. The crumbling fading landscape of arches and pillars and snatches of water and curving bridges and ever-shifting skylines was a stage set, a tricksy deceptive palimpsest ... Alleys furtively opened in walls that appeared blank; streets swung round corners into concealed squares; canals blocked her passage. She abandoned the map and simply wandered, digested by the city.[113]

The Italian novels of James and Forster demonstrate their authors' conviction that the discourses of Baedeker influence ways of seeing and responding to place. In the 'cartography' of postmodern fiction, adherence to the discourse of tourism is a way of responding to place which emphasises depthlessness. Depthlessness is indicated in these fictions by a systematic flattening out of space, and the reduction of place to monochromatic, anonymous picturesqueness, like Venice in *The Comfort of Strangers*. The flatness of the fictional landscape mirrors the existential texture of urban character, the pervasive sense of what Edward Relph identifies, in his 1976 text named for the phrase, as the *placelessness of place* across the postmodern landscape.[114] In this way, McEwan's descriptions subvert the traditional notion of the 'plenitude'

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[111] Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 113.
[112] Rod Jones, *Nightpictures*, p. 249.
[113] Penelope Lively, *Perfect Happiness* (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 49-50.
[114] Edward C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

of Venice. Similarly, the walking and watching in *The Comfort of Strangers* (Colin and Mary walk, Robert watches) overturns romantic and modern 'cartographic' traditions to establish postmodernism's conceptual distance from Baudelairean *flaneurie*[115]. Baudelaire's *flaneur*, the model for James and his characters (Mr Brook, Rowland Mallett), is one who idly strolls, understanding the fleetingness of his experiences of places while extracting eternal significance from them. Walking is an intellectual pleasure and aesthetic pursuit of the past. Cities give sustenance to the *flaneur*, and represent the site of possible expansion of consciousness; places reveal themselves and their secret meanings. Colin's and Mary's aimlessness is distinct from idle strolling. To the postmodern *flaneur*, the urban landscape is defined as an immense social experience of *lacking* a place. Cities *withhold* secrets, often vindictively, menacingly. The world McEwan depicts in *The Comfort of Strangers* is a world without attachments, loyalties or stable relationships. Colin and Mary are transients, whose only contacts are with waiters, maids and hotel clerks. They move through a contingent and macabre universe, as if through a dream-scape, to their inevitable end.

Postmodern fiction challenges the traditional notion of 'maps'.[116] Ideas like Robbe-Grillet's, about indeterminacy, chance, and maplessness, are the themes of much recent English fiction about Italy, where traditional Venetian metaphors of mazes and labyrinths are subverted by postmodern irony. Venetian maps are metaphorical maps of self, and in *The Comfort of Strangers*, the seemingly intentional maplessness of Colin and Mary contributes to their destruction. The confusion about maps is part of the novel's atmosphere of confusion and evasion.[117] There are strong sexual overtones to Venetian confusion in *The Comfort of Strangers*: Robert's homosexual homophobia; Colin's ambivalent sexuality; the ambiguity in Colin's and Mary's platonic/passionate relationship; and the problematic sexual politics of Venice and McEwan's novel. In his father's and grandfather's day, Robert says: ""There was no confusion"" (72). The ambiguities and contradictions of Venice are manifest in the Venetians themselves. There is gender confusion even in the kiosks of Venice: "It was possible to buy cigarettes here and not know whether it was a man or a woman who sold them. The customer saw only the native deep brown eyes, a pale hand" (20). The detail, the menace in its anonymous

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[115] See Baudelaire, Charles, "The Painter of Modern Life." *My Heart Laid Bare and Other Prose Writings* (London: Soho Books, 1986).

[116] See J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map." *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, eds. Trevor Barnes & James Duncan (London: Routledge, 1992). See also Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1998). Chapter Six of Jarvis's book is a study of the significance of maps and geography in postmodern fiction, represented by the novels of Thomas Pynchon.

intimacy, is a synecdoche for Italy and what happens there, in the novel. Although Robert's exaggerations and vanity are considered to be archetypal Venetian qualities, his effeminacy is remarkable even in this place where "it was customary for men to walk hand in hand, or arm in arm" (100). He wears "high tapering heels", touches Colin constantly, flirts, boasts in public that they are lovers, and in the end kisses Colin "deeply" on the mouth. The overtones of decadence are compelling, and Robert's sexual ambivalence implicates the others. Colin, asleep in the palazzo, is described in feminine terms: his "slender, hairless legs" ... "Colin's narrow waist" ... "His buttocks were small and firm"... his face "exquisitely made" and his hair "fell in curls on to his slender, womanly neck" (56). Colin seems unaware of his effeminate allure, and although Caroline and Mary both describe him as beautiful and angelic, McEwan does not make his effeminacy plain. Schrader's film is much more explicit.

The Comfort of Strangers is a present-tense narrative in which prolepsis and recognition reinforce a sense of inevitability. Robert's photographs are an obvious instance. Mary notices a photograph on the first visit to the palazzo, without recognising Colin in it. Later, she has a troubling intimation when, from a certain angle on the pontoon, she observes Colin on the balcony of their room, in the half-remembered pose of the photograph. Later still, she wakes from a nightmare, finally realising the photograph was of Colin. Hints and references to cameras occur throughout the novel. Until the denouement, these details seem merely to contribute to the authenticity of McEwan's description of tourist Venice, and the Venetian atmosphere of amorphous threat; whereas all the while, Robert has been photographing Colin. Another instance of McEwan's proleptic technique is the chilling account of the "time of preparation" (13) in the hotel, in the first chapter, when Colin and Mary "used expensive, duty-free colognes and powders on their bodies, they chose their clothes meticulously and without consulting the other, as though somewhere among the thousands they were soon to join, there waited someone who cared deeply how they appeared" (13). More startling, at the end of the novel, is the echo of the description of the baby quoted earlier ("its head wobbled quizzically ... the wild eyes, round and pure, blazed across the sunlit square"). The description is not merely a striking image of revulsion (the more striking for the juxtaposition with Ruskin), but a prolepsis of Colin, with his artery cut, sitting twitching in a pool of blood: "His head swayed upon his shoulders, but his eyes were steady and pure, and blazed across the room at her in disbelief" (121). The collision of "round and pure" and "steady and pure" is characteristic of McEwan's irony and well-crafted prose.

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[117] In *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin writes of the "confusion of delight" in St Marks Square. The phrase occurs on

McEwan teases out the tangled connections between desire, passion, violence and control, and relates them to the trope of sensual renewal in Venice. It is not until the night Colin and Mary spend with Caroline and Robert – not, that is, until they are (subliminally) acquainted with that couple's sadomasochism – that their sexual ardour is renewed: "Their love-making surprised them, the great, enveloping pleasure, the sharp, almost painful thrills were sensations ... they remembered from seven years before, when they had first met" (77). Colin's and Mary's desire for each other is infused with a new kind of excitement after their visit to the palazzo. Their passion is intense and real, but surprisingly, because of their opinions about sex and power, their fantasies are of bondage and sexual brutality.[118] The couple will not acknowledge the cause and meaning of these inventions, which is a double irony, since they consider themselves so rational and undeceived: "They agreed that while this idyll rejuvenated them, they were not deluded; they agreed they were growing older and one day would die, and these mature reflections, they thought, gave that passion an added profundity" (80). Ominously, "for all this discussion, this analysis which extended to the very means of discussion itself, they could not talk about the cause of their renewal." As in the novels of Robbe-Grillet, the censors of consciousness are "morality, reason, logic, respect for the established order."[119] Unconscious sexual fantasies and violence lurk beneath the narrative masks.

Colin's and Mary's indolence and desire, stories, and attempts to rationalise and control passion lead to madness and violence. McEwan seems to suggest that Mary and Colin have in some way invited their doom, by being unnaturally passive in their dealings with the others. The suggestion accords with Raylene Ramsay's argument, in "Postmodernism and the Monstrous Criminal", that a lingering sense of complicity is characteristic of the postmodern era. The question of complicity is part of the subtext of sexual politics in *The Comfort of Strangers*: the connection between sexuality, violence and power. Further, McEwan suggests that patriarchal societies endorse domination and brutality. One interpretation of his 'mapping' of Venice is, as Edward Soja puts it in *Postmodern Geographies*, of: "how relations of power and discipline are inscribed

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page 149, close to the passage McEwan borrows for his St Marks description.

[118] In McEwan's portrayal of Colin and Mary, and the fantasies described on page 81 (Mary's idea of amputating Colin's limbs, to keep his torso captive and use it "exclusively for sex"; "the large intricate machine" Colin invents, which will fuck Mary forever), it is possible to detect the influence of Deleuze and Guattari's theories of desire, language and politics. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophenia* (1977), where the authors take the concepts 'desire', 'production' and 'machine' from Freud and Marx, to form a theory of the 'desiring machine'. For a recent, clear survey of the subject, see Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

[119] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Angelique ou l'enchantement* (Paris: Minuit, 1987), p. 182. Privately translated by Peter McNiece, Humanities Librarian, Sydney University.

into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies are filled with politics and ideologies."[120] Robert's history, the dummies on display in the department store window (22), and the feminist and 'far Left' posters (and Mary's comments on them) in the streets of Venice support a political reading of the novel. But those issues are only part of McEwan's meaning, and to make too much of them, as Jack Slay does, is to err.[121] *The Comfort of Strangers* is a political novel which raises questions about patriarchy, sexual politics and feminism. But McEwan's real concerns are evil, and human nature. He depicts the seduction of the monsters of the unconscious, the dissolution of the boundaries of self, and the new 'self' constituted by relation to the Other. Robert, and his captive, Caroline, are not only the dangerous, seductive Venetian Other, to be controlled or suppressed, but another side of Colin and Mary themselves.

Yet McEwan moralises against narratives of authority, and when he states a theory, as he does through Mary at the end of the novel, it is to invite argument: " [her] theory, tentative at this stage, of course, ... explained how the imagination, the sexual imagination, men's ancient dreams of hurting, and women's of being hurt, embodied and declared a powerful single organising principle, which distorted all relations, all truth" (125). In *The Comfort of Strangers*, McEwan suggests that it is only when people admit to what excites and pleases them, rather than rationalising their preferences, that the relationships between men and women, sex and power might begin to be clear. "'Want isn't a very good word'", Robert says to Colin, as he is about to kill him. "'Nor is need'", Caroline laughs, "delightedly" (120). McEwan's aesthetic and moral stance is one of seeming indifference. He does not state that Colin and Mary come to Venice for renewal, passion, and death. Harold Pinter's screenplay unequivocably asserts that they do. "Theories" (80), McEwan seems to suggest, about character, renewal, and determinism itself, are partial and untrustworthy.

In the English literary imagination, Venice is the archetypal city of dreams, memories, stories and lies. Two Venetian narratives-within-the-narrative of *The Comfort of Strangers* are central: Robert's account of an episode in his childhood; and the account of the four days Colin and

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[120] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 25. Note Gillian Rose's counter-argument, in her review of *Postmodern Geographies*: "feminist projects too have been organised over geographical networks, have used institutional spaces in which to try and create women's culture, and have struggled against the patriarchal spatial imagery of the public/private division." (*Journal of Historical Geography* 1991, vol. 17, no. 1), p. 118. See also Rose's *Feminism and Geography* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993).

[121] Jack Slay, Jnr., *Ian McEwan* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

Mary spend in their hotel room after the evening with Caroline and Robert. In this interval, Colin and Mary talk incessantly, about themselves:

> all speculation, all anxieties and memories were marshalled into the service of theories about their own and each other's character as if, finding themselves reborn through an unexpected passion, they had to invent themselves anew, name themselves as a newborn child, or a new character, a sudden intruder in a novel, is named. (80)

One obvious and attractive interpretation of the passage, and the story-telling interlude, is the allure of narrative itself. In this view, the real subject of *The Comfort of Strangers* would be the inescapability of plot; and the crime may be seen as a metaphor of reading and writing. Possible influences on McEwan at this point are Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, and Marguerite Duras. In *Histoire de l'oeil*, Bataille's notorious text of 1928, the narrative moves in a series of unstoppable and almost psychotic moments towards a point where obscenity is proposed as a revelation.[122] In *Glas* (1974), Derrida goes so far as to see crime as a cut in the body of the text. The text of *Glas* itself is dismembered, by what Derrida calls a "violent decipherment".[123] Similarly, Marguerite Duras's texts aestheticise the criminal act as an illustration of the limits of narrativity, and the unrepresentable or unsayable origins of desire. In the story of the two couples, McEwan delineates the impulse toward what Duras would call 'ravishing': that is, the impulse to both dominate and submit to the sexual and textual Other; losing oneself in the otherness that narrative, or language, reflects. *The Comfort of Strangers* moves carefully and logically to its annihilating narrative shock and conclusion of unknowing. At the end, in the police station, talking to Colin's dead body: "[Mary] was in the mood for explanation ... But she explained nothing" (125). Like Mary, the reader is a complicit, uncomprehending, lucid dreamer in the text. In *The Comfort of Strangers*, the desire for theory confronts the theory of desire.

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[122] See Patrick ffrench, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's "Histoire de l'oeil"*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
[123] Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Paris, 1974, trans. Richard Rand and John Leavey (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

5.3 Postmodernism, place, and the thriller

b. Michael Dibdin's postmodernist, existentialist Venetian detective

The metaphysical detective story began with Edgar Allan Poe's self-reflexive, philosophical, consciously literary detective stories in the 1840s. In *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Modernism*, Patricia Merivale and Susan Sweeney state that the term 'metaphysical detection' is preferred because it indicates how "late modernist (sometimes proto-postmodernist) and postmodernist writers have altered the detective story ... to address unfathomable epistemological and ontological questions ... to indicate that 'reality' is ultimately unknowable or at least ineffable."[124] The adjectives "unfathomable" and "ineffable" bring Henry James and James's Italy to mind. James's Italian work in general addresses "epistomological and ontological questions"; and *The Aspern Papers*, in particular, resembles a metaphysical, metafictional detective story in the way the narrator confronts Venice as a labyrinthine literary text. *The Aspern Papers*, like a metaphysical detective story, is itself designed in the form of a textual labyrinth. In addition, James's novella shares the genre's preoccupation with perplexing, purloined, missing and abysmal texts. Furthermore, *The Aspern Papers* is instinct with the lingering sense of complicity which, as Raylene Ramsay suggests in "Postmodernism and the Monstrous Criminal", is characteristic of the postmodern era.[125]

In *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Linda Hutcheon isolates the three major characteristics of detective fiction as: "the self-consciousness of the form itself, its strong conventions, and the important textual function of the hermeneutic act of reading."[126]
In the six books in the Aurelio Zen series, Michael Dibdin deconstructs and reinvents the crime novel. His texts build implicitly upon the assumption that the detective story is by definition intensely self-aware, and they conform to the order and logic typical of detective fiction. Dibdin acknowledges, exploits and recontextualises the store of reworkable formulae that comprise detective fiction. In addition, he draws upon the conventions, images and metaphors of the tradition of English fiction about Italy. The combination produces a new, near-genre of English metafictional detective fiction about Italy.

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[124] Merivale & Sweeney, eds., *Detecting Texts*, p. 4.
[125] Raylene Ramsay, "Postmodernism and the Monstrous Criminal." *Detecting Texts*, pp. 199-214.
[126] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, p. 71.

In *America's Rome*, a survey of the literary relations between Rome and America, William Vance suggests that the well-established "duality" of Rome, the city's combination of ambiguous signs and solidly particularised images, "perhaps emerges in the most perfect balance in detective and mystery novels." Vance contends: "No writer achieves a better balance between the exactitude of familiar named streets and the sense of a desperate need to locate oneself within a bewildering maze than Ralph McInerny in *Romanesque* (1978) ... Topological verisimilitude rendered in an atmosphere of possibly delusory surfaces is equally effective in Oliver Banks's *The Caravaggio Obsession* (1984)."[127] Vance's points are valid, but his chosen examples seem very old-fashioned, and he fails to recognise the emerging element of parody and genre subversion. The ambiguity of Roman "signs" and the possibility of non-signification in the novels Vance cites relates them to other kinds of contemporary Italianate fiction such as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Malamud's *Pictures of Fidelman*, and Edmund White's *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*. But Dibdin and recent metafictionists attempt something still more complex.

In *Dead Lagoon* (1994), Dibdin's most highly acclaimed novel, he drops a detective into a romance with political edges, providing Dibdin with a laconic hero, and the chance of sending up the very idea of genre. Dibdin's crime fiction effects a double-subversion, subverting both the crime fiction genre, and the Italianate tradition in English fiction. His novels celebrate the contingency which is the essence of 'Italy', crime, and crime's detection. Ideas about order and disorder, truth and illusion, and quests for identity are traditional Italianate themes pertinent to fictional investigations of crime. Equally congenial to the genre are the perceived corruption and cunning of the Italians, their superstitious nature, and the theatricality of Italian life. The contest between order and disorder is significant. In her study of metafiction, Patricia Waugh suggests that the thriller's quality of delight is mixed, representing "the exhilaration of freedom combined with fear and dizziness before the potential loss of self altogether."[128] Waugh's definition of the thriller is a fair summary of the traditional imagined movement of the English towards self-recognition in Italy. In *A Room with a View*, Forster's Lucy Honeychurch swoons in Florence, losing herself in the murder, to find herself in George's arms. In *The Lost Girl*, Lawrence describes Alvina Houghton as "extinguished" and "suffocated" in her surrender to Ciccio.

In his Italian novels, Dibdin forges an almost subterranean life of restless movement and secret conviction. He is a substantial literary stylist, smuggling his subversive poetic into the 'ragbag' of genre fiction without being bound by the conventions of the form or its market. Yet the ragbag

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[127] William L. Vance, *America's Rome*, Volume 2, "Contemporary Rome", p. 416.

of genre dreams of a secret ordering, parallelling the tendency of English writers to search for order amongst Italy's surface chaos, which mirrors their own interior disorder. In *Cosi Fan Tutti*, the streets of Naples are " a continually shifting envelope of ordered chaos."[129] Dibdin reinvents a popular literary form traditionally considered escapist and simplistic, to express profound anxieties and reflect personal, moral and political uncertainties. Dibdin's novels and his Italy are palimpsests of literary echoes and gestures, which refer subliminally to the English 'fiction' of Italy. While subversive, his novels are based on shared cultural assumptions, attitudes, and collective fantasies. Their self-referentiality appeals to readers' experience of popular detective fiction, as much as to their experience of 'real' Italy and the 'real' world. In this way, Dibdin constructs ideologically powerful and intensely literary worlds.

In her analysis of the metafictional use of popular forms, Linda Hutcheon argues: "The thriller is based not upon the same faith in human reason as the detective story but much more upon the fear of anomie, of disorder, of the insecurity of human life. It is much closer to what appears to be the experience of living in the contemporary world."[130] Hutcheon's distinction between thriller and detective/crime fiction seems arbitrary, and unnecessary in Dibdin's case. Her observations about the thriller suit his fiction very well. There is a resemblance between Dibdin's self-declared crime fiction, Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*, with its atmospheric of unease, and Muriel Spark's dark Italian novellas. The patterns, conventions, and intimations of terror underpinning McEwan's and Spark's texts contribute to their charged poetic of desire and violence, which Dibdin's novels share. Dibdin uses the detective form to express not order, but the irrationality and absurdity of the surface world and its underlying structures. His narratives neither advance nor conclude as expected. The enigma, or 'mystery', is sustained within a narrative that is meditative and interior. The crime fiction 'code' is translated into the terms of metaphysical inquiry and an investigation of (the detective's) identity. The apartness and cool of the texts reflect the distance of the narrator from self. Yet we sense the writer as private detective struggling through the labyrinth of his own consciousness. Zen is enigmatic, and the cumulative effect of Dibdin's sequential portraits of Zen's enigmatic personality is theatrical and confessional: masks reveal masks. Zen is morally ambiguous, and his un-Italianness, almost Englishness, is strange and provocative. In modern Italy, everyone around him is on the take, and for Zen not to be is a kind of false pride. But he is devious, unscrupulous, impulsive, irrational, even unstable; and self-division torments him. There is a sense of unfillable absence in

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[128] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Selfconscious Fiction*, p. 85.
[129] Michael Dibdin, *Cosi Fan Tutti* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p. 119.
[130] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 84.

the detective's life. We are sometimes allowed to know what he is thinking, but we are rarely told what he knows about the case in hand, since it is a characteristic of Aurelio Zen to be slightly out of phase with the resolution of the plot. The 'storyteller' gains our trust because we know he doesn't know the truth, that he is only groping towards it, improvising, shifting between modes, working the changes. Michael Gorra observes: "A good Italian, Zen knows that he should never trust anything that resembles a simple explanation."[131] Dibdin's idea of time is measured by urban anxiety. The neat, linear progression of the normal detective fiction is absent; Dibdin backtracks and flashes forward, both between the books in the series, and within them. The past is up for permanent revision, and Zen devours time like an existentialist — drifting, dreaming, thinking; drinking, not drinking; smoking, not smoking.

Like most metafictions, detective or crime fiction deals with questions of identity.[132] In 'classic' crime, the identity of the criminal is the writer's and reader's concern, and the detective triumphs over disorder in the end. In metafictional crime, the detective's 'identity' is more important. Zen creates himself from the particulars of a city of the mind, especially in the Venice and Rome novels *Ratking* (1988), *Vendetta* (1990), *Cabal* (1992) and *Dead Lagoon* (1994), where images of the cities' pasts connect him to his own past. The Neapolitan and Lombardo books, *Cosi Fan Tutti* (1996) and *A Long Finish* (1998) are less freighted with English literary images of the past, and *Cosi Fan Tutti* is more like a fictional representation of a national psychosis. Zen is energised by each new location, but always ready to move on, to a new investigation in a new locale. For Zen, place is unimportant – it's where you live.[133] A journalist in Australia asked Michael Dibdin:

> *The question of identity is central to* Dead Lagoon. *You seem to have an interest in developing the theme of Italians dealing with Europe. You use this to form a certain parallel between a political and a personal identity crisis for Zen and the other Venetians.*

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[131] Michael Gorra, "Show us the night." *London Review of Books,* 26 November 1998, p. 27.

[132] The essays in Merivale and Sweeney are the best available. For a shorter, although inevitably perfunctory, analysis of "the detective and the modern self", see Scott McCracken, *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 50-74.

[133] One source of the distinctive power of Dibdin's fiction is Dibdin's restive biography. He is an Englishman brought up in Northern Ireland whose self-imposed 'exile' took him from academic life in Canada to academic life in Perugia. One suspects that the rootlessness of his life gives him his sense of place as a writer. Note Brian Jarvis's phrase "the *noir* charisma of placelessness", in *Postmodern Cartographies* (140). Jarvis's study of Paul Auster's fiction in Chapter 7 examines postmodern representations of cities, and the "politics" of watching and walking, as encoded in the recurring figures of the *flaneur*, the voyeur and the detective.

> Yes. I think in this particular book it was an important theme. Zen is going back to his home supposedly to his roots and so the question of identity is bound to be raised. I mean, what does it mean to him to be going home, what does home mean, where is home, would you recognise it when you saw it, and would it recognise you? What does it mean to be a Venetian, what does it mean to be an Italian or a European? ... All these questions are raised by the book and on a personal level but also on a political level because at the moment the Italians are going through a period of being attracted to the idea of regionalist separation. They've always been, of course, regionalists sentimentally.[134]

The Zen novels might all be viewed as quest stories. Zen is a mythical figure, and the Dibdin myth, like most myths (including the Lawrentian myth which, curiously, it closely resembles), is driven by a desire to find an identity, define national character, and provide answers to the insoluble paradoxes of human existence — love, evil, pain and endurance. The images and metaphors of the English literary tradition of 'Italy' combine with the conventions of the metaphysical detective story to provide a framework for Dibdin's existential quest.

Dibdin's descriptions of place are poetically charged but exhibit that careful, enigmatic ordinariness that Graham Greene does so well. His prose imparts the idea of aesthetic selectivity, a dramatic chosenness of details which avoids literary and verbal impedimenta on the way to the pondered essence. Memory and the past haunt Zen and the Zen texts, but sight, smell and taste restore dead landscapes to a fragmented, present tense. Dibdin's Venice, in *Dead Lagoon*, is a menacing, crepuscular, dying city, and he captures the place in just a few words. For instance, Zen realises he "had forgotten even the most obvious things about the place, like the pervasive risky odour of the sea."[135] Dibdin sets his Venetian story in February, when there is snow, slush and bitter winds, and sewage tanks in the *campi* are being emptied into red tanker barges. There are few tourists, just an ageing population, angry and frustrated and not sure what to do about it. With settings ranging from Rome to Venice, Naples and, in Dibdin's most recent book, *A Long Finish*, the wine and truffle country of the Piemonte, the six tragicomic adventures of Dibdin's Venetian-born detective offer many of the uncomplicated pleasures of travel literature. Yet instead of Italy's landscapes, art and architecture, Dibdin concentrates on Italian kidnappings,

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[134] "Walking the Venetian Beat." Dibdin interviewed by Anthony May, *Editions*, March 1995, pp. 17-18.
[135] Michael Dibdin, *Dead Lagoon* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 16.

financial scams, and wiretapping and wirepulling, to chart the country's systemic circles of corruption.

Dibdin is devoted to detail and alert to current events and preoccupations. Pertinent to his aims and the calibre of his writing are the themes of violence and the engagement of the individual in modern society. There is something very up-to-the-minute about the choices he makes and his playful attitudes towards coincidence, using locations as an opportunity for narrative collision. His novels gain much of their strength from his depiction of the new Italy: the disappearance of the old networks of privilege and corruption, and the simultaneous rise of regional political movements with pronounced fascist tendencies. Parallels to Dibdin's fictional world are found in recent English accounts of the state of Italy, for example in Matt Frei's *Italy: The Unfinished Revolution*. As Frei explains: "Most of us have been caressed by Italian culture at one time or another but few of us have been initiated into the heady pleasures of Italian politics ... This is an idiosyncratic portrait of a very eccentric economy in one of its greatest periods of upheaval and revelation."[136] Dibdin's own metaphor for the Italian system of corruption is contained in the title of the first Zen novel, *Ratking* (1988). Dibdin identifies the ratking's presence in the bitter symbiosis of the Italian family, in the separatist politics of the North, and even – or especially – in the Vatican. In such a society, a crime can be solved either by accident or because the system has decided to sacrifice one of its members. Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily* (1996) and Alexander Stille's *Excellent Cadavers* (1996) supply documentary evidence for the principle. The city of Naples, in *Cosi Fan Tutti*, may have been scrubbed up for the G7 conference and made safe again for tourism, but cleaning the streets, Dibdin suggests, is a way of doing business as usual. The murder in the first chapter of the novel, presented as the first act in an opera, is committed by murderers disguised as street cleaners. Nothing basic has changed and nobody – the police, criminals, and prostitutes – is exactly what they seem. In addition, Dibdin's novels, taken as a series, communicate his understanding of the *problema del mezzogiorno*, the ancient, puzzling and profound difference between the two Italies, the North and South. Dibdin imparts his knowledge of the Italian conundrum through the atmosphere and tension in his stories. The political motivation of Dibdin's novels make them very 'realist' ones, a quality for which they have been praised. 'Real life' is what Zen engages, a real interaction between politics and police work, resulting in accommodation, compromise, dishonesty and deceit. These are standard conditions in Italy and fiction about Italy. Alexander Stille's history of the mafia, *Excellent Cadavers*, endorses the enduring literary image: "Sicily is a place where almost nothing is what it

seems ... Death is the only certain truth. It lifts the disguise—if only briefly—from the Pirandellian world of Sicilian politics, where appearance and reality are easily confused and where the face of the mafia may hide behind the respectable mask of lawyer, judge, businessman, priest or politician."[137] In *Midnight in Sicily*, Peter Robb refers to Pirandello as "the metaphysician of uncertain identity, the social mask, appearance and reality."[138]

Reflections, and forms of the double, have always been important in detective fiction. The association of Venice with doubleness helps explain the recent success of Venice as a setting for crime novels, and the appeal of the 'thriller' form to the Elizabethans. But Dibdin removes his novel about doubling away from Venice to Naples, where he reinvents *Cosi Fan Tutte* as a crime story. *Cosi Fan Tutti* is a novel about a play about an opera, based, as Dibdin explains in his Author's Note, on Da Ponte's libretto for the opera *Cosi Fan Tutte*, referred to as *The School for Lovers*. The adaptation reveals Dibdin's English fascination with imitation and Italian theatricality. There are many layers of possibility and dimensions of reality in Dibdin's narrative, including the surface pantomime – the *commedia dell'arte*, "which of course", he reminds us, "originated in this city"[139]; the romance plot, a "duet of seduction and surrender" (1); and the gritty work of detection, itself a form of artifice. Dibdin elicits a surreal suspension of disbelief: "'We're in Naples, *dutto*. Everything is improbable, but nothing is impossible'" (122).

> How was it that everything became so complicated here? A week earlier, his life had been as he had always wanted it: calm, pleasant and predictable. And now even the smallest details seemed uncertain, as though subjected to the same bradyism as parts of the city itself, an imperceptible but continual seismic motion which undermined the strongest foundations and rendered every structure unstable. (169)[140]

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[136] Matt Frei, *Italy: The Unfinished Revolution* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), Author's Note, xi.
[137] Stille, *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*, p. 5.
[138] Robb, *Midnight in Sicily*, p. 314.
[139] Dibdin, *Cosi Fan Tutti*, p. 1.
[140] Dibdin's observation echoes D.H. Lawrence's speculation: "There must be something curious about the proximity of a volcano. Naples and Catania alike ...[and] the Sicilians ... are wildly exuberant and fat and all over one another ... They never leave off being amorously friendly with almost everybody, emitting a relentless physical familiarity that is quite bewildering to one not brought up near a volcano." *Sea & Sardinia* (8-9). Geoff Dyer, in a corresponding Sicilian passage in his work 'about' Lawrence, writes: "We were in one of those touchy 'respect' cultures where the smallest action can cause enormous offence, where people are relaxed to the point of torpor and, at the same time, ferociously uptight. They slumber and slumber and then, suddenly, they erupt. It probably has something to do with living in close proximity to a volcano." *Out of Sheer Rage* (49). The fascination with volcanoes and the character traits of people living near them is an enduring tradition in English fiction. See Richard Davenport-Hines [below].

Dibdin's Naples is the place of which Malaparte observed that it represented "the very spirit of Europe, that *other*, secret Europe of which Naples is the mysterious image."[141] Naples, so excessive and surreal, is not always congenial to realist fiction. Henry James, perhaps wisely, left the city, in his fiction, as an imaginary construct.[142] But Naples, and Da Ponte's Neapolitan libretto, are highly suitable to postmodern metafiction: fabulous symbols, elaborate ironies, labyrinthine structures, and *doppelgangers*. Dibdin recognises that Neapolitan mythologies and the mystical emblems of Neapolitan culture – including wizards, *mafiosi*, and the Neapolitan celebration of hybridity – are the means by which Naples makes sense of itself:

> For, much to his amazement, he found himself liking Naples ... for its own sake, not for what it could do for him but for what it was. He was enchanted by every aspect of the city which he had expected to drive him mad. He loved the noise. The crowds, the traffic, the chaos, the pushiness and resilience of the people, their innate sense of tolerance, negotiation and endurance. (46)

Like the opera, Dibdin's story is built entirely on deception, disguises, and contests of reality and illusion, morality and immorality. The ridiculous disguises become even more ridiculous in the novel. But they are plausible because illusion is often more comforting and sometimes, as the opera reminds us, more real, than reality. Dibdin's interpretation of the libretto emphasises the Italianness of the preoccupation with the way things seem. His 'Author's Note' at the end of the novel is enigmatic, suggesting that we view *Cosi Fan Tutti* as we do *Cosi Fan Tutte*, that is, as an artifice of words and images. The elaborate riffs on identity, multiple perceptions, language, the duplicity of artefacts, and the trickiness of 'Italy' are postmodern games Dibdin is playing, with great skill. After the formal closure of the last chapter of the novel, when Zen has completed his work of detection and reunited the lovers, he gives a speech, which is lost amongst the exuberance and noise of the streets, the "sea-gulls and sirens", and "ambient harmony" of Naples:

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[141] Malaparte's well-known remarks are quoted by Richard Davenport-Hines in his recent work on the Gothic. Davenport-Hines suggests that Naples, especially Vesuvius, has retained its symbolic power right up to the present: "Naples in the last half of the twentieth century has delivered its insistent message." *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), pp. 34-5.

[142] In James's *Roderick Hudson* (1875), Naples is alluded to. Rowland reports that Roderick: "has taken to riotous living and has just been spending a month at Naples – a city where 'pleasure' is actively cultivated – in very bad company"(238). Prince Casamassima in *Roderick Hudson* is famously a Neapolitan. In James's time, and in the literary tradition, to say that someone is a Neapolitan is almost to make a moral judgement.

> as though the whole city were joining in a final chorus expressing the conventional banalities: always look on the bright side, let reason be your guide, every cloud has a silver lining, laughter is the best medicine ...
>
> Only for some reason – the intoxicated dusk, the musky air, the good company, the wine – they don't seem at all banal, but resound like eternal verities, a profound reverberation of all the horrors and miseries which have taken place here, and which might yet teach us, if we cared to learn, how to live. (247)[143]

The dusky, musky air, the vein of elegy and Arcadian nostalgia suggest Henry James's late Italian essay, "The Saint's Afternoon" (1909). The passage exemplifies the double-coded practice of representation and ironisation which is characteristic of postmodernism. As Ihab Hassan has pointed out: "'Nostalgia'—crushing exprobation in the current idiom—may also convey active desires, a principle of futurity and hope."[144] If the ending of William Trevor's *My House in Umbia* is an elegy for the genre of Italian romance, the sadness and dissolution of Dibdin's detective is at the same time the sadness and dissolution of the classic detective novel. Yet Dibdin, like Trevor, offers an ordered imaginative vision as consolation for living in a world whose order is experienced only as chaos. The traditional literary image of Italy can encompass chaos, order and consolation. Dibdin re-employs the intertextual traces of the past in a non-innocent, parodic but still consolatory fashion. In this way, his novels exemplify the postmodern desire to dissolve the world, or at least recognise its dissolution, and to remake it as an absurd, decaying or parodic imaginative construct.

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[143] In John Berger's strange new novel, *King* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), he suggests that Naples, in its increasing decadence, may prove unwittingly to be the catalyst for human renewal. Renewal will come about through stories, which are a means of sustenance for Neapolitan street-dwellers. The stories Berger's characters tell about their pasts help root them even as they are deracinated by the city.

[143] Ihab Hassan, "The New Gnosticism, p. 74.

[144] Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 223.

5.4 Intertextuality and Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*

In Robert Dessaix's 1996 novella, *Night Letters*[145], intertextuality is a deliberate feature of the aesthetic effect. *Night Letters* conforms to Fredric Jameson's definition of the text as postmodern artefact; according to Jameson, intertextuality is "the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history."[146] The literary tradition of 'Italy' is a constitutive and essential part of the structure of Dessaix's novella, in which many earlier Italianate forms, representations and utterances appear. Dessaix's text displays the qualities Bakhtin celebrated as belonging to the dialogic novel, and which Kristeva later termed "intertextuality": that is, serious truth-seeking through a plurality of voices in a specific narrative context and an ironic mode.[147] *Night Letters* is essentially a parodic meditation on the various paradises and purgatories of the Italianate grand tour, and an ironic dramatisation of the sense of quest. It takes the form of twenty letters, written in Venice, to his friend or lover, by a man ("R") who has been told he has an incurable disease. The disease is unnamed, but from hints in the text, we infer it is AIDS. R.'s intimations of mortality have sent him to Italy, in a hedonistic resolution to "make every precious moment of consciousness count" and search for "paradise"; to find "wisdom" and an answer to the newly urgent question of how to live fully. Along the way, Dessaix deals with other moral and metaphysical questions traditionally provoked by travel in Italy, and expressed in traditional 'Italian' literary tropes and metaphors. Dessaix poses these questions within the framework of *The Divine Comedy*, and the parallels with Dante place that 'divine' work within a human, contemporary, profane aesthetic.

The epistolary form was itself a Grand Tour commonplace. The form is distancing in its effect, and Dessaix's ironising, postmodern pastiche serves further to distance the reader, who is put on guard against identifying too readily with the narrator/author and his feelings, against confusing sincerity with truth. The Grand Tour diary-in-letters is only one of a plurality of intertexts in *Night Letters*. The novel is richly allusive and, flaunting its artifice, draws on the large available fund of Italian literary stereotypes. *The Divine Comedy* and the works of Sterne and Casanova are the most obvious presences; but the arguments of *Orientalism* are pervasive; references to Forster and James are subtle and embedded; and Lawrence, Mann, Winckelmann, Corvo and, less predictably perhaps, Simon Schama, Bruce Chatwin and Salman Rushdie are present. The

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[145] Robert Dessaix, *Night Letters* (Sydney; Macmillan, 1996).
[146] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 20. Jameson gives this definition in the context of his description of a film.
[147] See Still & Worton, *Intertextuality*, p. 3. See also Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

ironic effect of the 'quotations' from other discourses is reinforced by the comic device of the scholarly editor Igor Miazmov. Miazmov's mock-pedantic presence is an example of the metafictional self-reflexivity induced by the postmodern footnote, a symbol of represented yet resisted authority. Through the footnote, the 'real' world becomes a text to be interpreted. The promiscuous array of citations from author/narrator and editor in *Night Letters* is frequently ambiguous. Yet, while we disbelieve the stories and notes, we believe entirely in R.'s physical situation and existential frustration.

Night Letters is a meandering, inconclusive narrative characterised by digressions which are sometimes sombre, mostly playful, and in places savagely satirical. As in *Pinocchio in Venice*, Robert Coover's parody of the Venetian quest, there is a persistent sense of plot aborted, journeys on circular tracks, and aspiration engaged in and mocked. Diversion, detour, drift and discontinuity, all the untidy syncopations of lived time, lead, in *Night Letters*, towards a tentative conclusion of Venetian timeliness/timelessness which reaches for the sublime. Yet the text evinces the prevalent postmodern anxiety of influence induced by *Death in Venice*, and the author/narrator disclaims the tragic status of Mann/Aschenbach by resisting the noble and sublime in his style and language. The 'death in Venice' theme and sense of leave-taking are intentionally interwoven with the parodistic and carnivalesque episodes.

The distinction between reality and what is imagined is very fine, in *Night Letters*. In places, what appears to be a straightforward piece of travel writing suddenly conjures Dante, or some other text: "I felt I'd entered the Doleful City that night in Vicenza, make no mistake. When you emerge from the passageway under the railway tracks, you find yourself in a drafty vestibule linking the street and the first platform."[148] The narrator makes a further five references to "vestibule" (181, 184, 186, twice on 187), alluding to the Third Canto, which is about the vestibule of hell. Dante is pervasive because, Dessaix writes elsewhere, he wants to "let a love of *The Divine Comedy* give vital meaning to how my narrator experienced the world, to his sense of what it meant to find something *worthwhile*."[149] In all of Dessaix's work there is a strong relation between the writing and his private project of self-fashioning. This is most apparent in the memoir *A Mother's Disgrace*, but the parallel is integral to Dessaix's idea and use of Italy in other works, and central to *Night Letters*. He follows in the long English tradition, dating from the Renaissance, of using Italy and writing about it for private (and cultural and national)

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[148] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, pp. 179-80.
[149] In "Loitering with Intent: Reflections on the demise of the *dilettante*." *Australian Book Review*, February/March 1997, pp. 36-40.

projects of self-fashioning. In Dessaix's novella, the persona of the writer is a strong presence, both as a distinctive voice and an 'artefact'. In Italy, where both art and nature are comely, or shaped, the character 'R.' is formed, and brought to terms with his mortality. After a digression describing the gym activity at the AIDS clinic at Melbourne, which strikes him now as futile, or purposeless, the narrator reflects:

> It's hard to steer a course amongst all the different ways of living. Now I drift this way, now that ... It has to do, not with expanding, but with deepening moments ... I do things these days much more for the intensity of being there *now*, I pay attention, I am present ... 'Seizing the day' seems infantile to me all of a sudden ... It's not the *number* of things, surely, but the quality. It's the subtlety of your vision that casts a spell on time. (196-7)

In the process, Italy disorients and disenchants him, which are other traditional effects of Italian travel. Dessaix's narrator is an enigmatic, self-conscious man. Literary, proudly gay and dilettantish,[150] his meditations on the world are examinations of the self and conscience. He finds, he says, "a kind of pleasure [in travel] which may be unwholesomely effete, in the way the different currents of feeling you experience work together and against each other to produce a whole – an emotional self, if you like" (243). He speaks to the reader familiarly, as to other *cognoscenti*: "Can I tell you, by the way, which of the [Giotto] paintings I liked best? ... I find these paintings almost divinely erotic, if you know what I mean" (212). Or: "Over and over again I think of something I once heard Paul Bowles say" (214). But, while "menaced and disgusted" by the vile people in Vicenza, he reflects:

> Was I so very different? Is there any difference at all between us? Of course, we behave differently in public: my desires and fantasies are decently clothed and well-spoken, I side-track them constantly, dressing them up and sending them out into the world as a passion for theatre or travel or Sanskrit poetry – sociable, life-enhancing, well-behaved.[151]

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[150] "Loitering with Intent: Reflections on the demise of the *dilettante*" reveals some of Dessaix's feelings about Italy, and justifies identifying him with the narrator of *Night Letters*: "I fell to contemplating the fate of that intriguing foreign borrowing *dilettante*, with its faint aura of frivolous dabbling, ridiculous passion and moral failing – of Italy, in other words." Dessaix's learnedly jocular essay sketches the origin and development of the term *dilettante* and refers to its use in the Italian work of Dickens, Ruskin, George Eliot and Henry James.

[151] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, p. 186.

R. is not so much re-inventing himself as undergoing the more complex, painful process of dismantling and re-assembling the self. He is one of those self-unravellers in Italy who are the typical heroes of postmodern Italianate fiction. Ultimately, Dessaix draws back from Romantic conceptions of the traveller and the imagination, self, writer, and any real relationship to literature or the past. The emphasis falls on the self as a fluid succession of 'presents' joined together through the agent of possibility and the transformative, interactive power of art. This power is exerted in Dessaix's Italian letters as a conjunction between his personal nightmare (the disease), and the textual ripostes of the novel's restlessness. The letters' mixture of casual artifice and obsessive elegance is reflected in the way the narrator follows his own logic, refusing to surrender to the impressive intertexts out of which the work is constructed. *Night Letters* is an artefact fashioned out of restlessness, an existential hunger, and the epiphanies of Italy. "I didn't go to Murano today", he writes on 13 April:

> I didn't really go anywhere. I caught the *vaporetto* down to the Accademia meaning to spend the morning looking at Great Paintings, but when I got there I found all desire to look at things had vanished ... It wasn't depression, I think ... so much as that feeling of rudderlessness that comes over me sometimes. (191)

Shortly after his Vicenza ordeal, he writes: "I made my peace with Vicenza ... It was on about the fourth day I felt I had at last reached an understanding with Vicenza, [and] ... drove off to Padua [which] ... I thought might soothe my soul. I'm not sure Padua actually did soothe my soul. What it did is something I'm still coming to terms with" (201).

The fictional record of Dessaix's travels affirms a commitment to individuality, and a recognition of multiple, local potentials through which he is undergoing a fluid, continual process of realisation. Like Forster and Lawrence in Italy, Dessaix puts his faith in an aesthetic of regeneration, and art's power of metaphor and myth. In the quest for self-realisation the writer must engage with, even as he is in flight from, the strictures of inherited literary identity. Dessaix's text comes back to the inconclusiveness of Italy, particularly Venice, and Dessaix's antipodean, postmodern, gay perspective.

After Dante, Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* is the dominant intertext: in particular the themes of the conjunction of eros and death in Venice; longing, homosexuality and the South. Dessaix's novella exhibits a similar fabric of coincidences and chance impressions which are magical, and

indefinably disturbing. Mann writes of his "personal lyrical travel-experience which moved me to make it all still more pointed by introducing the motif of 'forbidden love'".[152] Like Mann, Dessaix transmutes his personal and psychological substance into art. He does so with much more self-conscious irony than Mann: an irony which, while maintaining a postmodern distance, includes Mann: "Looking back over the past few weeks, I realise how essentially eventless they've been –a bit like Aschenbach's holiday in Venice: apart from some difficulties with his luggage, nothing really happened to him that wasn't pure fantasy" (261). But he is not engaged merely in fashionable literary games. His novella is a process of self-discovery through fictional experimentation with actual and potential selves and attitudes. Dessaix's quest, like Mann's, is for balance or wholeness, and human values that might (through that balance) be personally sustaining and intellectually satisfying, "in ways useful to society" (187).

One of the text's characteristically postmodern devices is to be self-conscious, self-doubting, self-contradictory and self-mocking. Natural loquacity competes with literary ruse, intimacy with artistry. Certain tensions disturb both thought and prose: those between detachment and involvement; passion and dispassion; the scholar with his texts and theories and the seeker after wisdom; and the peculiarly 'Italian' tension between evasion and candour. *Night Letters* is poised between mysticism and rationalism, suggesting an analogy with the art of the Renaissance for which Dessaix has elsewhere professed an admiration.[153] In the absence of the *truly* "miraculous", Dessaix's commentaries on various stories within the text indicate, "a touch of legerdemain" might stand in, and both might co-exist with "rational conjectures" (178).

Dessaix's prose is mannered and ornate, with an edge of sinister disquiet: qualities which reflect the novel's Italian settings. Venice, in *Night Letters*, like James's Venice in *The Wings of the Dove*, is at once shabbily real and mythical. Fleeting and mundane details co-exist with a sense of timelessness and the invocations of Dante. Dessaix's themes include sensuality and sexuality, the ugliness of modern Italy, and the true pleasures of travel. But death and eros, and the synapses between them, are central to the narrative. The first letter from Venice borrows James's Venetian trope of perished or perishing female beauty: "blue-veined Venice, with her glassy sky and blotched facades recalling old brocade. I can smell her rotting in the night outside my window."[154] The idea of frail beauty and false hope, as in James, Ruskin and Proust, is associated

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[152] From a letter to Carl Maria Weber, 4 July 1902, quoted by David Luke in his introduction to *Death in Venice and Other Stories* (1996), p. xli.
[153] In the essays in *(and so forth)* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1998).
[154] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, p. 3.

with the traditional image of Venice as feminine. There is a similar fastidious tone in Dessaix, of a man not fond of women. The palaces are "lined up like a bevy of venal, decrepit duchesses at a ball" (191), and R. quotes an Elizabethan traveller's description of Venice as a place "miraculously clean", then comments: "she's become quite squalid in her old age" (113). The image of deterioration is reinforced by details such as the "fresh bread and coffee" breakfast smell of Venice which, R. notices, is "always mixed with the sickly stink of garbage" (112). The "slow decay" (9) of Venice reflects the waste and slow ruin of AIDS. Notwithstanding, Dessaix's/R.'s impressions of Venice and St Mark's Square incorporate a Jamesian sense of consoling embrace. He writes: "No other city gathers you up to itself, to its very heart, quite so abruptly, surely" (4), an echo of James's description of Venice as representing "all Europe as having at one time or another revelled or rested, asked for pleasure or patience there; the place supremely as the refuge of broken fortunes and wounded hearts."[155]

In the character of R.'s fellow tourist, the homosexual Professor Eschenbaum, Dessaix explores another obsessive theme: the meaning of the "South" in the literary imagination. Eschenbaum is an Aschenbach, or Winckelmann, like them a northerner come south in search of sexual licence. "Why do people like the Professor come south?" the narrator asks himself when he first observes the Professor in the hotel dining room. The Professor's lofty presence is a foil to the narrator's self-deprecation, but his real purpose in the text is to confront the fabled South with the hollowness of its promises. Further, the character of Eschenbaum enables Dessaix to interrogate the meaning of 'decadence' and 'degenerate'. The Professor's perpetual theorising is not to be trusted, but he remains a potent source of doubt, unsettling R., and the reader. The narrator/author's attitude to Eschenbaum and the Teutonic quest for pleasure in Italy is ambivalent. Passing through Zurich on his way to Venice, R. notes: "I doubt anything can happen to you in Zurich, anything spontaneous that is, anything rash or instinctual. And I've never been anywhere so *clothed* in my life."[156] "Where is their passion?" asks an Indian with whom R. strikes up an acquaintance: "They only have passion for banknotes, and even that's not passion, it's lust." R. writes that he "began to feel that it would very shortly be time to head further south" (20). Even so, his sense of the doubtful moral basis of the Professor's sentiments is established:

> As a cultural historian, the Professor doesn't believe in truth, apparently, or doesn't believe it's knowable, or doesn't believe it's important … and that, he told me, is

[155] James, "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women." *Italian Hours*, pp. 61-71.

> precisely why he likes to holiday in the South ... 'Here,' he said, ... they have no doubts about the truth at all ... Here my laws do not apply ... are all null and void, truth exists, the body is not a book to be written in, explained and argued over, but a self to be lived out, experienced. That's why I come here. It's my redemption.' (150-1)[157]

The narrative, following R. as he travels by train through Italy, becomes a kind of symbolic dialectical excursus on paradise, or different ideas of paradise. Thomas Nashe's Italy, "the paradise of the earth and the epicure's heaven"[158] is invoked (although, unusually, there is no footnote), as the narrator travels through Bologna. Locarno is "almost paradise. Not exactly Eden – at least not innocent ... but an earthly, human paradise ... a little contrived, perhaps, as is Dante's."[159] R.'s visit to the Padua Botanical Garden towards the end of the novel inspires another expatiation on "Edenic visions or regained innocence". There are echoes here of Mr Emerson's Edenic philosophy, in Forster's *A Room with a View*, and Brooke's and Miss Evans's Padua excursion in James's "Travelling Companions". Between Locarno and Venice, Dessaix inserts a lengthy, Scheherazade-like digression, a piece of exoticism attracting a note from the editor, who comments that the story is "best construed as a sad mishmash of Orientalist stereotyping, primitive moralizing and mysticism of the most banal kind" (99). The note is Dessaix's nod to Edward Said, and possibly intended to pre-empt similar accusations against *Night Letters*. The suspicion that Dessaix is double coding in his footnotes, increases with Miazmov's comments on the narrator's first response to Venice. R. writes: "It's so easy to believe in magic here in Venice. When you first see the city from the train, it's like a mirage, like a vision of wild splendour some sorcerer has conjured up far out to sea" (55). Miazmov notes:

> *Sorcerer has conjured up*: hardly an original response: c.f. Byron's oft-quoted lines from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV:
>
> > I saw from out the wave her structure rise
> > As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand.
>
> This now rather hackneyed Romantic reaction to Venice has been reinforced by Turner's dreamlike evocation of Venice ... In fact, in the late twentieth century Venice appears to

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[156] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, p. 16.
[157] The idea is reminiscent of what Carl Maves calls Henry James's "moral holiday" in the South, an observation Maves borrows from Barzini's *The Italians*.
[158] Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller and other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 345.
[159] Dessaix, *Night Letters*, p. 33.

> be precisely what it is: a messy conglomeration of dilapidated buildings and port facilities in the shadow of massive petrochemical installations. (99)[160]

With this footnote, Dessaix satisfies the need of the Venice lover to record the 'first sight of Venice' epiphanic moment, at the same time flaunting his familiarity with Byron and the intertextual artifice of his text. Romanticism, and faux-romanticism, are simultaneously employed and undermined.[161] Dessaix's treatment of towers is similar. He mentions their phallic symbolism; discusses Barthes' theory that the tower is the city-dweller's belvedere, "turning the cityscape back into nature" (117, 203); and leads towards a definition of the "civilised society". Dessaix's theories resemble Forster's notion, in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, of the topographical and spiritual significance of towers in civilised (Italian) society; and recall the subliminal phallicism in Forster's text. In Dessaix, as in Forster and Lawrence (in *Aarons's Rod* and "David"), the vision of Italy is instinct with an erotics of Italian maleness.

The Nature *versus* Civilisation argument provoked by the towers continues through R.'s narration of the novel's central purgatory, his Dantesque descent by train into the hell of modern Italy. Dessaix's description of the journey is followed by a lengthy exposition (119-121) of the North *versus* South division to which the Nature *versus* Civilisation argument is related. The narrator examines the baffling prejudices, theories and "discourses" of history and literary tradition, from the Romans to the Romantics and the present. Central to the discussion is the idea of the Alps (Dessaix's deliberately crude over-exaggeration) as "brute Nature's domain, a land of aurochs and elks and wildhaired Germans wearing nothing but pelts and bark"; and of the South, in contrast, as a place where Nature has been tamed and "civilisation had taken root and subtle minds wrote verse and philosophised" (119). On the other hand: "it's the North, surely, which stands for civilisation triumphant, for the regulation of human behaviour and the environment in such a way as to banish untamed nature from human experience entirely".[162] And it is in the South that:

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[160] Similarly, the protagonist of Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* arrives in "the most magical city in the world." It is probable this is textual amnesia, part of what Barthes calls the circular memory of reading; but it is more likely to signify Coover's postmodern, knowing intertextuality. It's even possible that Dessaix's narrator's footnote and his editor's note are unacknowledged references to Coover's novel.

[161] There is a further dimension to Dessaix's Venetian magic. He writes: "there is still a kind of magic for the *antipodean* traveller."

[162] Terry Eagleton writes about the "hinge between Nature and Culture" in *The Illusions of Postmodernity*, commenting: "It is remarkable how the epoch of postmodernity has been characterised at once by a veering away from Nature and a sharp swing towards it. On the one hand everything is now cultural; on the other hand we must redeem a damaged Nature from the hubris of civilisation. These apparently opposed cases are in fact secretly at one" (70).

> people are at least supposed to be more in tune with their instincts and passions, letting them flower for good or evil, refining their animality but only to heighten the pleasure of being human, not to extinguish it. The cult of death, the obsession with food and the savouring of sexual passion – at least in these ways the South keeps the memory of Nature alive. (120)

Yet even this vestige of Southness is debased: "That's not the myth any more, though, is it?" Modern Italy, R. discovers, falsifies *all* myths: "Our heads swim with images of sublimely terraced gardens. Mossy balustrades, domed churches, palaces, ornate fountains, streets of severe Palladian town-houses, sunny *piazze*" (120). Reality is the Lombardy Plain: industrial parks, high-rise buildings, abandoned wrecks and stinking rivers.[163] The letter from Venice, 9th April, records a series of incidents in which Italian stereotypes are reversed. From Milan, all traces of both 'civilisation' and 'Nature' have been erased, in a "scene of devastation". In Bologna, the epicurean's city ("*Bologna la Grassa* – the fleshy city, the plump and fleshly city, the city of goose-fat and greasy juices, of fatty cheeses and sausages stuffed into pigs' trotters"), R. can find no food to buy for his journey, and the city is a nightmare of Italian indifference. Theatrical, Palladian Vicenza is merely a *trompe-l'oeil*. In Verona, city of romance, youthful innocence and *Romeo and Juliet*, there are only painted whores, pimps, and perversions of the flesh. And R. despairs at the absence of spirituality and crass commercialism of the pilgrims' church of Saint Anthony, at Padua. There is everywhere an air of "vacant menace" and urban desperation. The dedication to appetite merely exaggerates the emptiness of desire. Italian disappointments accumulate, and R.'s resolution to "make every precious moment of consciousness count" dissolves; his conviction that time is "for beguiling, not spending profitably", and his "equipoise" dissipate. This Hades of an Italy underlines R.'s existential panic. He is an outsider, "ground down by the obvious pointlessness of what I was doing", feeling that "nothingness" is infinite. He is "definitely alive to the *forsaken* air of the place ... I'm not sure what it seemed forsaken *by* exactly, but in my Dantesque mood this evening I'd probably say by hope ... Little torment, just sightlessness in the broadest sense, and vague feelings of desire" (119). The train journey ends, but there are other philosophical reversals in Venice, where, R. writes, "there's a paradox I've been mulling over":

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[163] Parts of Dessaix's argument are derived from Simon Schama's influential *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), and Schama is invoked in an editor's note on page 203.

> "all civilisations have their culminations here", you're being told, "this is the centre of the civilised world." Yet sunk deep in the heart of this centre of the world is a prison … the *Pozzi* … and the *Piombi* … However many Norwegian tourists in primary colours tramp through them, the smell of death and hopelessness will never be eradicated. (129-130)

R. warms to his metaphor of the prison, his: "thoughts about opening and closing, expansion and contraction, as contradictory impulses in Venetian life" (131). In R.'s mind, the Venetian trope stands for the open or closed life. Images of prisons lead to Casanova, and seduction and transgression in Venice.[164] Dessaix's theories of seduction (espoused by the scholarly Eschenbaum) attempt to explain the English proclivity, intense desire and need to surrender to erotic seduction in Venice. But there is '"a more dangerous kind of seduction … that takes a hold on the affections and leads to betrayal … seduction [by] the cultures, the religions, the secrets, the ways of living'" (133) of the Other. Venice herself, "trembling on the brink of ravishment" knew this kind of seduction; Venice's Others were the Jews, Turks, and Orientals. The conclusion to the *Orientalism*-influenced discussion emphasises the erotic: "'the outsider is *always* in the final analysis a sexual threat *because* he is so *desirable*'" (134). [Dessaix's italics] There are two distinct yet inextricable ideas of the Other in *Night Letters*, and the English literary imagination: the Englishman's Other which is Venice, and the Venetian Other which is the Orient. The connotative conflation of Venice and the East has a long history of suggestiveness, and for a long time, Venice *was* the East, for the English, scattered as it was from the Adriatic in the west to Cyprus in the east.[165]

Next, the Professor and R. enter into a long discussion about Casanova and Marco Polo, an important duality in *Night Letters* because, as Eschenbaum explains, "'the two most famous Venetians of all time … became symbols of something much larger than themselves … [of] *Mentalities*.'" Each traveller represents "'one important type of journey. Almost opposite kinds,

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[164] "I knew the word 'transgressive' would come up eventually", R. comments, when the simultaneously dated and fashionable word does eventually come up, on page 251.

[165] Still the best work on the subject is Jan Morris's *The Venetian Empire: a Sea Voyage* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980). Morris quotes Wordsworth's sonnet *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic*, which begins: "Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee." Morris notes: "I call the Venetian Empire an entity, but it often feels more like an abstraction … It was never, so to speak, definitive. It had no moment of completion. It was changing all the time." She points out that "[Venice's] relationship with Islam was always ambiguous … [and] these islands, capes and cities of the sea were distant reflections of a much greater image." (Introduction, pp. 6 - 11) Of equal merit is John Julius Norwich's scholarly *A History of Venice*, 2 volumes (London: Allen and Lane, 1982). The most recent text on the subject is Deborah Howard's *Venice & The East* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Not yet available in Australia, the book is reviewed by William Packer in *Literary Review*, November 2000, pp. 43-4, and Michael Mallett in *TLS*, December 29, 2000, p. 17].

in fact. And journeying is, after all, so fundamental to the way we humans think of ourselves and assign our lives a meaning'" (241). Then another lengthy digression, a lurid pastiche of a Renaissance tale of sexual intrigue and cruelty, introduces the traditional trope of the vengeful Italian, and violent sexual revenge in particular. The social historian then ties together some of the book's themes in a passage worth quoting at length because, aside from its importance in *Night Letters*, it rephrases Forster's "eternal moment":

> "Marco Polo and Casanova represent ... different types of traveller, ... different mentalities. Polo discovered paradise *over there*, you see, he travelled there and then came back. Casanova discovered paradise *in the travelling*, if you see what I mean ... Polo flew with the arrow of time, he pointed forward and simply lived one day after the next. As we all do, at least most of the time ... He experiences life as a sequence of events, episodically. Casanova, by way of contrast, I think experienced life quite differently ... he zigzagged through time in search of timeless moments, blissful instants when the past and future ceased to exist for him – the only kind of spiritual perfection he could conceive of. His lust for another moment ... was his way of trying to blur these timeless points into continuous, amorphous rapture." (253-254)

"'And more than that'", the Professor continues, "'I would maintain that the difference between the two men was connected with their sexuality.'" Furthermore, he asserts, Casanova was almost certainly a homosexual:

> "Because one of the first things you notice about Casanova is the lack of any idea of consequence or responsibility – and, as I say, this is connected with his sexual identity. At each seduction he seemed to draw a magic circle around himself, a circle of rapture and voluptuous pleasure, with no links to anyone or anything outside it." (255)

The Professor mocks R.'s belief that one travels "to whet your appetite, to pique your hunger, not to satisfy it"; that in travelling one seeks (he is quoting Paul Bowles) "wisdom and ecstasy", or, "understanding plus bliss" (215). Eschenbaum himself, he freely admits, travels to slake his sexual thirst. In Venice he seeks "re-enchantment ... or, to put it differently, ... balm for my disenchantment". He accuses R. of the more dangerous search for mysticism, which he considers a form of narcissism: '"Actually, in your fashion, I think you're more dissolute than I am. You whore after mystical moments, while I ... buy enchantments, of a more basic, adult

kind. The spell may not last as long, it's true, … but whoring is whoring. I don't think you should feel superior'" (217).[166]

In these exchanges, Dessaix presents different ways of experiencing travel and life. He comments on the eroticism and sentimentality of travel; seeing, time, and timeless seeing; and the distinction between happiness and bliss. Dessaix affirms the need simply to "just be" (199), starting with one's sexuality and, more broadly, sensuality. As Dessaix has remarked, the word "now" occurs hundreds of times in the book[167], which is, finally, about being willing to experience with the senses rather than the intellect. And it is characteristic of the text's postmodern irony that these conclusions are reached only through many abstractions, theories and rationalisations.

The Dantesque connection between the senses and Italy, and the complex subtleties of perception, are obsessive themes in James, Forster and Lawrence; and 'seeing' and 'not seeing' are recurrent images in recent fiction about Italy. Joseph Brodsky's novella-like essay, *Watermark*, is a meditation on the aesthetic impulses which stem from the use of the visual sense in Venice. All Venice, Brodsky writes, whispers: "Depict it."[168] When R. finishes reading Dante's *Paradise*, he concludes that: "in some ways, the book is *about* gradually suffusing mere human knowing with timeless seeing (until you see as you are seen …) [and] "*seeing* is the source of bliss in Dante's Paradise" (262-3). [Dessaix's emphases] The metaphysical conclusion paraphrases Dante's definition of equipoise ("Wonderful word, 'equipoise'", Dessaix/R. notes in parenthesis): "In other words … desire and reason work in unison once you've caught some glimpse of the Reality that is seeing you. And this is wisdom" (263).

R. is thinking now "with clearer focus" about hope, and hope's relation to faith and love: "What, then, should I hope for? What (to paraphrase Dante's notion of faith) is realistic?" (267). 'Reality' – time, death, or AIDS – is related to "Hoping with a capital H … not hoping saps you of all will and dulls your joy in what's happening now." R. admits to hoping for "some new

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[166] On narcissism and homosexual whoring in Venice, see Brodkey's *Profane Friendship* (1994). Brodkey's last work, *This Wild Darkness* (1996), his existential, death-in-Venice-from-AIDS-memoir, is a meditation on mortality, Venice, and other themes in common with *Night Letters*.

[167] In an interview with David Marr. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August, 1996, p. 9.

[168] Dessaix seems familiar with Brodsky's work, for example Brodsky writes: "one's notion of after-life in this city appears to be well taken care of by its clearly paradisaical visual texture. Sickness alone, no matter how grave it may be, won't avail you here of an infernal vision. You'd need an extraordinary neurosis, or a comparable accumulation of sins, or both, to fall prey to nightmares on these premises." *Watermark* (New York: The Noonday Press, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), p. 33. Compare the attitudes of R. and Eschenbaum; and R.'s recurring "hellish dream" which he experiences in Melbourne but not in Venice.

treatment … a stay of execution", but insists nothing will change his determination to live in the "now". Nor does he intend to become selfless. As he intuited in Padua, Saint Anthony's error lay in resisting the temptation of Self: "his self-denunciation … [was], if you like, his denial of life" (230). The Saint's error is similar to the one made by Forster's characters: Lucy Honeychurch and Caroline Abbott both repress their will to happiness by perpetual good works. For Forster, and in the English literary imagination, 'Italy' is against self-denial, and on the side of Life. But, "I'm in a bit of a muddle about it all", R. notes. R.'s is a Forsterian, Anglo-Saxon muddle. The word persists, in fictional descriptions of the English in Italy.[169] Truth, as Forster suggests, might ultimately reside in the distinction between an Italian mess and an English muddle; might indeed result from the English *finding* themselves in a muddle in Italy. R. decides "neither to hope nor to despair, but to be alive to good now. To see, perhaps Dante would have said. Now." Dante vouchsafes a "vision of the River of Time turning into an eternal circle" which R. fervently envies (267-8).[170] His new perspective on time, eternity, and the present "roots me in the world with an intensity I've never felt before" (267-8). Dessaix is describing something like James's *Italian* intensity, and Jamesian *lived* experience. Related to the concept of "now-ness" is "It-ness". The expression does not occur in *Night Letters*, but in a public talk given in Sydney in 1999. Dessaix, speaking of this "desirable indefinable ineffable elusive 'It'", said: "Experience, eros, 'it-ness' … has to be re-imagined, not named."[171]

In the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice, R. is strangely drawn to the Flemish painting, *Portrait of a Young Man*, for its "Protestant aloneness" and "unassuming realism". He realises he is satiated with "Tintorettos and Bellinis and Venezianos and death"; and has his "first inkling that the time to go home was drawing near":

> I was conscious of feeling tired of … not Europe, exactly, but the accumulation of stories, battles, treaties, families, duchies, paintings, churches, palaces – all the things the antipodean finds so exciting on arrival. And 'tired' is the wrong word as well – perhaps *saturated* is a better word. (269-70) [Dessaix's emphasis]

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[169] See for instance the "muddle" in Janice Elliott's *The Italian Lesson* (1985), p. 57; and the English "muddle" in Jonathan Keates's knowing "La Dolce Prospettiva." *Soon to be a Major Motion Picture* (1997), p. 97.

[170] Terry Eagleton expresses the notion well, writing about modernity, in his review of Peter Conrad's *Modern Times, Modern Places*: "To seize the time is to find that nothing is more eternal than nowness." "Newsreel History." *London Review of Books*, 12 November 1998, p. 8.

[171] At Gleebooks, Glebe, 23 November 1998. Coover's Professor, searching for an ultimate life-defining metaphor in Venice, for "abiding forms within life's ceaseless mutations" and "persistence of vision", comes to a similar conclusion, using the same curious word (parodying Sartre and the French theorists): "'It-ness', he declared (this was the first time he was to use the concept later to be made world-famous … 'contains I-ness!' The victory was his." (*Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 116).

The Jamesian echo is almost certainly deliberate. The sense of an accumulation of experience in Europe, expressed in the essays in *Italian Hours*, is the common response of most of James's New World travellers. Maggie's idea of Amerigo's past and princeliness, in *The Golden Bowl*, is of an "exhalation of archives". "Saturated" is a word favoured by James himself and associated with him. Leon Edel calls the second chapter of the selected letters *Saturations 1870-1880*; and *The Years of Saturation* is Edel's title for Book Three of the second volume of his biography. Edel quotes James for his epigraph: "The great thing is to be *saturated* with something—that is, in one way or another, with life; and I chose the form of my saturation." [James's emphasis]

R.'s last Venetian image is of its shape-shifting insubstantiality. The sounds of Venice are "water-borne, fugitive", and "people floated by like puffs of smoke". As he is struck by the *realism* of the Memling portrait, he recognises the unreality of Venice, for him, "Now". He gazes at "one of the world's greatest sights: the extravagant pink confection of the Doges' Palace ... the soaring red bulk on the *campanile* on St Mark's Square – bordering on the sublime, like an hallucination or bubble of memory, but curiously lifeless" (265), and his thoughts turn towards home. Having decided to quit Europe and "move on", R. reflects that: "Love, passion, creativity, intelligence, knowledge – all terribly important of course. By comparison, kindness (like hope) seems a trifle dull, a very second-rate, suburban sort of virtue, I suppose. Well, think it's undervalued. I don't want to live without it" (269).

Much of what Forster and Lawrence write about Italy concerns definitions of Englishness. Similarly, much of Dessaix's Venetian journal is about definitions of Australianness. Forster's Italian novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, serve to assert, in complicated ways, the value of duller English virtues like kindness. At the end of *Night Letters*, after experiencing the passion and vibrancy of the South, R. feels the pull towards a place: "where people are a little kinder to one another ... a place where I think I can live more diversely than here, if I use my imagination, where I can be more "civilised" (define myself against nature) in more enriching and dangerous ways" (270). In his Italian works, Forster comes to similar conclusions about civilisation and nature. His Pan fantasies assume certain permissions and afford imaginative enlargement, but, unlike Dessaix, he was not free even in fiction to pursue "dangerous ways". In addition to the traditional Italianate theme of living in the present, Dessaix's fable suggests the undesirability of trying to change one's true self. While the

theme of decadence is present, the implicit conclusion is that the overcoming of decadence may reveal itself merely as decadence in another form. This moral truth is illustrated by R.'s ambivalence; the Italian uncertainties and equivocations of his Italian journey; and the character of R.'s *alter ego*, Professor Eschenbaum.

The Venetian narrative of *Night Letters* closes, formally, with an image from a dream, in which R. leaps onto the back of the winged lion, the symbol of St Mark and the Republic. The image reflects an earlier dream, in which R. is pursued by another lion (representing diagnosis/death) he is powerless to "fight or flee" (79). Riding off into the future on the back of the lion gives a sense of "exultation" (272) and the "hallucinatory exhilaration" which is one of Jameson's terms for the postmodern condition. There is a postscript, written on a postcard from the Peggy Guggenheim, Venice, 20th April, which says: "I'm on the way. R." Dessaix has written elsewhere that he refused to craft a neat ending to his narrative, as if it were "some minor short story."[172] He considers the loose ends appropriate, death being "a blank for each of us to fill in secret, as he or she sees fit." Postmodern fiction, like death, is particularly unsuited to crafted closures. There are several endings at the end of *Night Letters*. "I've quite decided to move on", the letter Venice, 19th April begins, an echo of Lawrence's famous opening to *Sea and Sardinia*: "Comes over one an absolute desire to move." While the Lawrentian echo may be unintended, it is apt: the Italian works of both writers embody restlessness, existential hunger, and sudden changes of mood and vision. Lawrence and Dessaix live with the uncertainty/certainty of death, the theatricality of illness, and *carpe diem* philosophies.

Notwithstanding the promiscuous, postmodern, intertextual self-reflexivity of the text, *Night Letters* reaches for a near Romantic synthesis, in which opposites embodied by the Romantic quest for experience, in Italy, are woven into an aesthetic whole, represented by Italy. In spirit, the work *Night Letters* most resembles is Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. At the end of Mann's work, mythically and poetically Aschenbach is beckoned out to sea, into "an immensity rich with unutterable expectation."[173] The final pursuit of his vision raises Aschenbach into a mysterious apotheosis, into the indefinable reconciliation in which tragedy ends, and which is frequently the end of stories set in Venice.[174] At the end of *Night Letters*, the narrator mythically

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[172] In an interview with John Nieuwenhuizen, *The Australian Weekend Review*, August 3-4, 1996, p. 8.
[173] Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice. Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. David Luke, p. 267.
[174] Exemplary contemporary texts are Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* and Muriel Spark's *Territorial Rights*, which move relentlessly to inevitably tragic, cathartic conclusions. Hemingway's *Across the River and into the Trees* is another dark Venetian tale with a mysterious, redemptive Venetian apotheosis; and more recently William Riviere's Venetian allegory *A Venetian Theory of Heaven* (1992) exhibits the essential properties of tragedy.

and poetically mounts a winged lion to head off into the future, which in R.'s eyes, after his Italian interlude, is "an immensity rich with unutterable expectation". But Dessaix's postmodernity leads him to resist a tragic in favour of an ironic ending: a tentative reconciliation more like the ending of one of Shakespeare's 'Italian' romances, and more consistent with Dessaix's parodic treatment of homoerotic romantic passion. Dessaix's sense of the transience and ephemerality of things, a postmodern unwillingness to take even one's death too seriously, lead him to avoid both the death scene, and the grandeur, of Mann's conclusion. At the end of *Death in Venice*, the formal poetic closure is followed by the few lines prosaically narrating Aschenbach's physical collapse and death. The 'closure' of *Night Letters* is immediately followed by the postcard's necessary, naturalistic postscript which brings the story back from the mythic and poetic to the reality of Melbourne. Dessaix's few final lines are an affirmation of life and the will to live. The replenishing, vitalising otherness of Italy has the traditional, transcendent effect.

5.5 Two Italian metafictional feminist fables

Jeanette Winterson and Michele Roberts have each written a subversive, feminist, metafictional fable set in Italy. Winterson's *The Passion*[175] and Roberts's *The Book of Mrs Noah*[176] merge the fantastic and the real, rearranging reality to disclose the new possibilities inherent in it. The new possibilities are at once magical, and new versions of the real. *The Passion* and *The Book of Mrs Noah* display the boldness, inventiveness and concern with storytelling which are characteristic of metafiction. The novels are based on a sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion and the laying bare of that illusion. In this way, Roberts and Winterson simultaneously create a fiction and make a statement about the creation of that fiction. Italy/Venice has ceased to be a world of eternal verities and has become, in *The Passion*, a series of artificial, impermanent constructions; in *The Book of Mrs Noah*, a web of contradictory and perplexing "mysteries".

Venice is an appropriate setting for metafiction because in the English tradition of writing about Italy, descriptions of the city insistently raise questions about reality and illusion, truth, and story telling. Venice's 'female' topography, at once contained and enclosed by water and penetrated by it, renders it a fitting metaphor for the feminist text. Venice is a traditional poetic emblem of the desirable woman, and Winterson and Roberts subvert the trope to re-make Venice as a desiring woman; a web and tangle of desiring pathways. Both *The Book of Mrs Noah* and *The Passion* are quest narratives: the former a kind of trial by landscape, the latter a journey "along the blood".[177] They emphasise the obsessiveness of creativity, and the erotics of storytelling, the teller's power to withhold secrets, and compel an ending. In every respect, the novels are narratives of desire. In these desire-driven female quests, language, and Venice as a metaphor for language, are used for camouflage, provocation and storytelling. They advertise the dangerous, teasing incitements of the text, its syntax of flirtatious postponement. To adapt Proust's maxim on lying, storytelling "plays as large a part perhaps as the quest for pleasure, and is moreover governed by that quest."[178] The narrator of *The Book of Mrs Noah* writes: "Too much pleasure makes you want more", and "I decide that the pleasures of sex are like those of

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[175] Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987). Parenthetical numbers refer to Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (London: Vintage, 1996).
[176] Michele Roberts, *The Book of Mrs Noah* (London: Methuen, 1987). Parenthetical numbers refer to Michele Roberts, *The Book of Mrs Noah* (London: Minerva, 1993).
[177] Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 68.
[178] Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*), Paris: Gallimard, Bibliotheque de la Pleide, 1954. Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin 1981, 6 volumes, revised by D.J. Enright, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), vol. III, p. 698.

reading: you hunger, you yearn, you open up, you swallow, you take it in. The body, the book."[179] In the moment of reading, in the unfolding textual fabric, the reader experiences other pasts and potentialities. As in Robert Dessaix's Italian journey in *Night Letters*, the plurality and plenitude of Italy are experienced as multiple potentialities of the self. Thinking, feeling, acting, and writing are equal modes of the single, encompassing, transformational experience which is Italy, and the creation of the text. The Italianate prose of Winterson and Roberts teems with inner voices and fluent transformations. Their narratives are many-centred, fragmented and repetitive, using words and images almost fetishistically to evoke their narrators' blocked and tormented desires. The women want to reconcile sexual self-divisions, reveal and heal memories, and become creative. Their desire is for desire itself, which is a traditional 'Venetian' desire.[180] In both fables, 'Italy' represents words, language, the creation of texts, and the text itself. Within this overarching image there are other Italian images to express specifically feminist concerns about the body, love, desire, obsession, fertility, food, and chaos and control.

The Passion and *The Book of Mrs Noah* take the most fundamental narrative convention, the representation of time, and place it in disarray. Linear narrative is subverted, and the concept of 'time' is a recurring and troubling motif. A clock strikes at the end of "The Queen of Spades" in *The Passion*, as that magical-realist escapade comes to an end. A clock strikes at the end of *The Book of Mrs Noah*, as Mrs. Noah wakes in Venice from her dream. The same clock in St Mark's Square strikes at the end of Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice* and at the end of Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*. There is a discernible metaphysics of time, and it is part of these novels' plot and their 'theory'. The 'time' these stories inhabit is the 'time' of female desire, and in the time-patterning that holds them together, they illustrate a Venetian, Proustian paradox of time-desire.

In these kinds of self-conscious texts, non-realistic settings work only if the writer has a non-realistic, or fabulist purpose. The reader does not accuse the text of lacking realism. The metaphorical leap has been made before: in the English literary tradition, readers of 'Venice' are accustomed to suspending ordinary standards of reality. "The reality of art is not the reality of experience … The reality of art is the reality of the imagination", Winterson states and re-states in *Art Objects*.[181] The real, as Henry James wrote in his preface to *The American*, "represents

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[179] Roberts, *The Book of Mrs Noah*, p. 244.
[180] See Tony Tanner, "Proust, Ruskin, James and "Le Desir de Venise." *Henry James e Venezia*, pp. 65-94.
[181] Winterson, *Art Objects*, p. 148 and *passim*.

the things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later, in one way or another." The romantic, on the other hand, is inevitably obscure and poetic; it stands for the things "we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire."[182]

The Passion

Jeanette Winterson writes in a Romantic tradition which, as David Lodge noted in a review of *The Passion* in 1988, "deals with the unfamiliar, transgresses known limits, and transports the reader into new imaginative territory."[183] Lodge's remarks consort with James's conception of the Romantic and more recent interpretations. Anita Brookner proposes that Romanticism was about forms of behaviour and "the change of stability to flux"; that it was also a loss of certainty and a breaking of rules, and that Romantics were people who believe "it is better to travel than to arrive."[184] Winterson's novel evinces most of the characteristics of Romanticism. The operatic play of light and dark, the *chiaroscuro* in *The Passion*, and the unmannerly moods of excess and fantasy, reflect the imagined Italies of the Romantics. In *Romancing the Postmodern*, Diane Elam proposes that excess is what marks romance as a genre, that romance's ability to go beyond itself is also a capacity to go beyond realism. Furthermore, and particularly apt to Winterson's work, Elam asserts that: "the relationship between romance and postmodernism comes about as the result of a common excess."[185] Winterson's Venice, like the romance she fashions from it, is a dreamlike composition of magic and violence, monstrosities, orientalist splendours, and mystical and erotic separation from the world. In Venice, where everything contributes to the unashamed arousal and satisfaction of desire, meanings and values drain away. Mysterious beauty and illicit love co-exist with revulsion, guilt and punishment. *The Passion* is another work of the imagination concerned not with the reality but with the romance of Italy, and this concern reveals the kinds of stories we desire. In postmodernism, Venice is more than ever in the literary imagination a setting for narratives of death, fragmentation, and decay, and a metaphor for the past as lost object of desire. But at the same time, as concepts of reality, truth, and meaning are challenged by the idea of *difference*, the idea of Venice has come to serve a wider purpose than it did for the Romantics. What is most notable about *The Passion* is the persistence of romantic tropes in what might otherwise be considered, *pace* Lodge, an

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[182] James, Preface to *The American*, xix-xx, *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, p. 473.
[183] David Lodge. "Outrageous Things: *The Passion*, by Jeanette Winterson." *New York Review of Books* 29 September 1988: 25-26.
[184] Anita Brookner, *Romanticism and its Discontents* (London: Viking, 2000), pp. 1, 3.

anti-romantic feminist polemic, an attempt to deconstruct the myth of the Romance writer. Winterson uses the sexual, topographical metaphor of *The Passion* in an inverted form, in a later work, *Art & Lies* (1994). *Art & Lies* is her book about the Book, in which most of the themes of her earlier novels are brought together into a text which both is and is *about* a feminist, neo-Romantic literary reconstruction of the world. In *Art & Lies*, a priest and his castrato lover discover themselves, the world and the text in Venice:

> We were happy, I cannot recall being happier, safe in the invented city, purposeful in our pleasure. Canals of pleasure that flowed out to a limitless sea. There was no other place in the world. This was the world and it was ours. Romantic? Yes, I suppose so, blame the Brownings for that, but honest too.[186]

The Passion is a short novel, divided into four short parts set within the period of the Napoleonic Wars. The facts of history are treated freely, inventively and with theatrical obliqueness in the story of a love affair between Napoleon's waiter, Henri, and Villanelle, the cross-dressing, androgynous, gambling daughter of a Venetian boatman. The novel's second part, "The Queen of Spades" is narrated by Villanelle and tells the story of her love affair with a beautiful female Venetian aristocrat. The novel, particularly this section, uses Venice to explore the conflicts of androgyny and the shifting, relative nature of sexual identity. Winterson's depiction of a carnival, masquerade city owes a great deal to Angela Carter and Italo Calvino. Calvino's Italian fairy/folktales (John Updike called them "perfect dreams") have similar themes of love and loss, change and impermanence, illusion and reality.[187] Angela Carter's fairytales and their preoccupation with storytelling and the Gothic are an obvious influence on Winterson, together with Carter's image of Venice, which she described in her Venetian essay as "a perpetual bizarre carnival", noting that "improbable cities attract improbable lovers."[188] Richard Davenport-Hines's comment that "Goths choose to stand on the giddy edge of things" is pertinent here, both to Villanelle's character and Winterson's style.[189] Venice is the city of masks, behind which meanings, selves and genders hide and cross and where, as Winterson

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[185] Diane Elam, *Romancing the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 7, 8, 12.
[186] Jeanette Winterson, *Art & Lies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), pp 199-200.
[187] The structure of *The Passion* resembles the complex interplay of dream and reality, fiction and fact, in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. Moreover, the influence of the metaphysical topography of *Invisible Cities* is apparent in Winterson's text. "Cities are made of desires and fears," Marco Polo tells the emperor in Calvino's narrative. *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanocivh, 1974), p. 44.
[188] Angela Carter, "Wet Dream City." First published in *New Society* 1977, reprinted in *Shaking a Leg: journalism and writings 1940-1992* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997) pp. 211-15.
[189] Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin*, Prologue.

writes: "What you are one day will not constrain you on the next. You may explore yourself freely and, if you have wit or wealth, no-one will stand in your way."[190]

The Passion operates on three levels. First, there is Henri's and Villanelle's story of passion, sexual intrigue and betrayal. Secondly, there is the exploration of identity this 'realistic' narrative makes possible. Thirdly, there is the metafictional comment on the text, *The Passion*, which embodies alternative selves and worlds, a text which is itself an alternative reality. Like Venice, the text is an 'other' that provides the erotic fantasy through which the self is re-invented. Winterson's fantasy is not merely passive and escapist, but an impulse towards the construction of alternative realities and selves. Yet these other worlds are always, tantalisingly, just out of reach. Venice seems to withhold what it had seemed to offer, and the narrative's structure as a kind of conundrum reflects this. Each of the four parts of *The Passion* is complete in itself yet holds haunting suggestions of incompleteness. Venice is not an ordinary city; it conceals as much as it leads and points the way.

The fictional world of *The Passion* is a reality-resisting universe full of magical gestures and poetical, emblematic characters: a shape-shifting place, in which shape-shifting travellers seek to re-invent themselves. In Winterson's Venice, passion makes all things possible; her story tells of the madness and fleetingness of love, and surrender to it. *The Passion* is an unstable fantasy set in an unstable place of dreams, fantasies, and vertiginous excess. Motifs of memory and desire, return and flight are sounded and sustained throughout. Time is an eternal, present moment: "All time is eternally present and so all time is ours" (62).[191] The play on time is a traditional 'Venetian' notion, one of many traditional representations and myths of Venice that form the heart of Winterson's textual labyrinth. In her palimpsestic city and text, memory, time and reality are fluid and shifting.

At the same time as declaring itself a romance, *The Passion* satisfies most definitions of myth. Like a myth, it consists of a series of interrelated stories; its parts are recycled fragments, similar

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[190] Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 150.

[191] The line is one of many versions of the opening lines of "Burnt Norton" which occur in *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* (1989). In his essay on Winterson, "The Nightmare of Narrative", Michael Wood suggests that all the quotations from Eliot in Winterson's work show "she offers us a very different notion of what postmodernism may be. Her idea ... is to retain the high modernist hostility to time and plot and to get story to function pretty much as if it wasn't a story at all. Yet story, as she says again and again, and as the beautiful refrain of *The Passion* ["I'm telling you stories. Trust me."] keeps telling us, is what she has to work with." *Children of Silence: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp. 183-195. This reference p. 187.

to what Claude Levi-Strauss called mythemes,[192] which Winterson shuffles and reassembles through a process of bricolage. Like a myth, *The Passion* is ritualistic, and patterned. Certain phrases – poetic, epigrammatic, aphoristic – and patterns of thought appear and reappear throughout the text. Recapitulation and recurrence provide the narrative with a number of refrains whose nuanced, mantric repetition effects an impressive mythic resonance. Many of the incantations emphasise the metafictionality of the text. "You play, you win, you play, you lose" reinforces the idea of risk: risk in Venice; Winterson's risky text; the risks involved in literary creation. "The cities of the interior are vast and do not lie on any map" connects place and self-definition. The injunction: "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" appears on pages 5, 13, 40, 69 and 160, and Winterson repeats it in *Art Objects.*[193] In an intertextual gesture, Robert Dessaix quotes Winterson in his prefatory note to *(and so forth)*, and titles the first section of this volume of stories and essays "I'm telling you stories. Trust me."[194]

Is *The Passion* a romance, myth, or feminist tract? In *Postmodern Literary Theory*, Niall Lucy writes: "For romanticism … the world as experienced through the faculty of the imagination is full of wondrous enigmatic things that can in no way be reduced to objects but which are what they are, like a poem or some other work of literature, only as the sublime *question* of what they are."[195] Winterson's text problematises, subverts and finally resists easy categorisation with its metafictional subtext:

> … here, in this mercurial city, it is required you do awake your faith.
>
> With faith, all things are possible.
>
> Rumour has it that the inhabitants of this city walk on water. That, more bizarre still, their feet are webbed. Not all feet, but the feet of the boatmen whose trade is hereditary.
>
> This is the legend. (49)

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[192] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 1958, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). For a summary of Levi-Strauss's idea of mythemes, see Niall Lucy, *Postmodern Literary Theory*, "Mind and Myth", pp. 7-12.

[193] Jeanette Winterson, "Imagination and Reality." *Art Objects* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), pp. 133-151.

[194] Robert Dessaix, *(and so forth)*, (Sydney: Macmillan, 1998)

[195] Lucy, *Postmodern Literary Theory*, p. 37. Lucy's chapter on "Simulation and the Sublime" is relevant to Winterson's fictional project. For an account of the connections between romanticism, realism, symbolism, the sublime, and postmodernism, see pp. 36-39.

"Faithful recording", Winterson wrote in an earlier work, *Boating for Beginners*: "was not their [the Bible writers] business; faith was."[196] In *The Passion* she enjoins us to trust not the tale [of the webbed-footed boatmen], nor the teller, but the power of storytelling and the creative force of narrative. Her metafictive asides to the reader of *The Passion* suggest that Winterson's stories – any stories – are lies, but that if we suspend disbelief and "trust" her (the writer), the "lies" (of fiction) will have a powerful effect:

> "Could I walk on that water?
>
> Could I?
>
> I faltered at the slippery steps ...
>
> I stepped out and in the morning they say a beggar was running round the Rialto talking about a young man who'd walked across the canal like it was solid.
>
> I'm telling you stories. Trust me."[197]

Winterson implies that while there are as many dangers in adhering to cultural myths as in conforming to society's gendered expectations, if you don't "believe", you will not "walk on water". In *Boating for Beginners*, Winterson explores the sorts of paradoxes that interest her in the fictional enterprise, and which are central to *The Passion*:

> Myths hook and bind the mind because at the same time they set the mind free: they explain the universe while allowing the universe to go on being unexplained; and we seem to need this even now, in our twentieth century grandeur.[198]

In *Boating for Beginners*, Winterson was concerned with biblical myths, but Venetian myths are useful in a similar way: the many and various representations of *La Serenissima*, in its own 'official' histories, legends and folktales, and in the 'histories' of outsiders, the images and poetic myths of other literatures. Many Italian stereotypes are peculiar to the Venetians – their mercenariness, the effeminacy of the men, their cynicism and decadence:

> Since Bonaparte captured our city of mazes in 1797, we've more or less abandoned ourselves to pleasure. What else is there to do when you've lived a proud and free life and suddenly you're not proud and free anymore? We became an enchanted island for

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[196] Jeanette Winterson, *Boating for Beginners* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 66.
[197] Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 69.
[198] Winterson, *Boating for Beginners*, p. 66.

> the mad, the rich, the bored, the perverted. Our glory days were behind us but our excess was just beginning.[199]

There are echoes in that passage of James's Venice which was "the drawing-room of Europe, profaned and bewildered by some reverse of fortune"[200]; and "which represents all Europe as having at one time or another revelled or rested, asked for pleasure or patience there; which gives you the place supremely as the refuge of endless strange secrets, broken fortunes and wounded hearts."[201] Winterson exploits other, much older myths, about the Venetians: "We are a philosophical people, conversant with the nature of greed and desire, holding hands with the Devil and God. We would not wish to let go of either. This living bridge is tempting to all and you may lose your soul or find it here" (57). She evokes the darkness and doubleness of the city's traditional image, and how, in Venice's disguises and deceptions, desires are unleashed:

> I love the night. In Venice ... we began our days at night. What use was the sun to us when our trade and our secrets and our diplomacy depended on darkness? In the dark you are in disguise and this is the city of disguises ... The night seems more temporary than the day, especially to lovers, and it also seems more uncertain. In this way it sums up our lives, which are uncertain and temporary ... This is the city of uncertainty, where routes and faces look alike are not. (56-58)

At the heart of *The Passion* is the vertiginous uncertainty and risk of Venice, and the notion of dis/order. Winterson's text plays with the idea of controlling desire while letting go of reason and consciousness. The desire and need for disorder is characteristic of Forster's Italian writing (alongside his fear of existential "mess"), and the possibility is always present in Lawrence. Winterson describes the tension between order and disorder:

> How is it that one day life is orderly and you are content, a little cynical perhaps but on the whole just so, and then without warning you find the solid floor is a trapdoor and you are now in another place whose geography is uncertain and whose customs are strange? (68)

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[199] Winterson, *The Passion*, p. 52.
[200] James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 416.
[201] James, "Two Old Houses and Three Young Women", *Italian Hours*, p. 65.

In *The Passion*, Winterson uses fantasy to control her characters' desire and relation to the world. Michele Roberts comments on this aspect of the novel, writing that it has "the cool beauty of an unanalysed dream, with its repression of messy feeling."[202] The nightmarish chaos of repressed desire is singularly present.[203] The novel weaves together ideas about control and risk and negotiates the fine line between passion and obsession. The text is a kind of theatre of desire, with 'Venice' an experimental stage on which passions and obsessions appear *en travesti*, and sensuality and ambiguity are heightened and manipulated by the artful indirections of speech. The tension between control and desire in the characters is reflected in the tension between artfulness and chaos in Winterson's prose, which is at once dishevelled and uncannily precise. The line between fantasy and reality, in life as in literature, borders on the surreal. The novel displays that peculiar mixture of fantasy, realism and surrealism that characterises magic realism. There are Venetian oarsmen/women with webbed feet, and young men/women who walk on water; a heart that beats outside its body, and a defrocked priest with a voyeuristic telescopic eye. These contested territories and parallel universes dissolve into each other, and the instability of the word reflects the instability of the world. Winterson conflates place, language and passion:

> Travellers at least have a choice. Those who set sail know that things will not be the same as at home. Explorers are prepared. But for us, who travel along the blood vessels, who come to the cities of the interior by chance, there is no preparation. We who were fluent find life is a foreign language. Somewhere between the swamp and the mountains. Somewhere between fear and sex. Somewhere between God and the Devil passion is. (68)

In this place, famously neither land nor sea, sexual and metaphysical boundaries are as unstable as the topography. The confusions of Venice are threatening and seductive because they blur the

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[202] Michele Roberts, *Food, Sex & God* (London: Virago, 1998), pp. 100-101. Niall Lucy is useful on psychoanalysis and the text. His study is more balanced than Judith Seaboyer's, mentioned below. Lucy writes: "It is possible to see this literary work of the imagination as a macro-category that produces the sub-orders of the psychoanalytic work of the unconscious and the structuralist work of language. Hence the romantic 'poem' becomes the psychoanalytic 'dream' and the structuralist 'text'. *Postmodern Literary Theory*, p. 36.

[203] Judith Seaboyer's article, "Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*" is useful without being revelatory. She places too much emphasis on the Freudian implications of Winterson's "psychoanalytic narrative in Venice". When her arguments are expressed in more general terms, they are persuasive: "The centrality of death to the Venetian narrative and to psychoanalysis makes them a perfect fit. The effect of the incorporation of psychoanalysis into the Venetian narrative has been that Venice as city-in-crisis is more than ever before read as an allegory for the world-in-crisis and for the subject-in-crisis, each on the verge of a catastrophic collapse." (*Contemporary Literature* 38, 3, 1997), pp. 483-509. This reference p. 507.

distinction between self and world, self and other.[204] Like the amphibious city, Villanelle's fluid, gendered identity resists definition. Winterson is concerned with ambiguous marginal states, interiors which lie beyond, and invasions from within. The selves she describes, like the fragments of the text, are poised indecisively between dispersal and coherence. The story moves contrapuntally, in imagistic, spare prose, across time-space, with gathering intensity towards the borders of collapse.

In *The Passion*, the ambivalent city represents the difficulty of fixing place, states of mind, and words and language. For Winterson, Venice is an ideal metaphor for the unreliability of the written word. Yet out of the watery chaos the writer creates order. In her preface to the 1996 Vintage edition of her 1986 novel, Winterson said that:

> My own cities were invented; cities of language, cities of connection, words as gang-ways and bridges to the cities of the interior ... I wanted to write a separate world, not as an escape, as a mirror ... that would sharpen and multiply the possibilities of the actual world. Hold it up and your own face is there, disguised in time and place, disguised into another chance?

Winterson's retrospective remarks illuminate *The Passion*. The bridges of Venice are a prevailing metaphor. They are bridges of uncertainty, possibility, and language: "For lovers, a bridge is a possibility, a metaphor of their chances" (57). And it is Henri, in his tower in the madhouse at San Servelo [*sic*][205] who says "The cities of the interior are vast and do not lie on any map" (152). Henri, writing and reading his own novel, is engaged upon an enterprise that is both an inventing and a remembering. While Winterson suggests that myths "hook and bind the

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[204] In his study of the image of the city in modern literature, Burton Pike comments: "We individualise, and evoke, cities by referring to their shapes, or ... to characteristic boundary shapes, like water edges. (Boundary edges of and within cities are basic to the orientation of their inhabitants.) Recognition of shape is vital to the identification of cities. This might explain why cities built on islands, or by rivers, lakes or oceans have special appeal to the imagination ... such cities have dramatic boundaries as points of orientation." Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 129.

[205] Towers are plainly phallic, and Henri loses Villanelle to Venice's (female) canals and lagoons. But towers have a deeper Romantic resonance, of madness, romantic love and imprisonment. For towers and Italianness, see Italo Calvino's essay about Stendhal, Italy, towers, and Barthes: "Guide to Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*." (*La Repubblica*, 1982) Italo Calvino, *The Uses of Literature*, trans. Patrick Creagh (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 256-265. Calvino writes: "This Farnese tower, which never existed either in Parma or in Modena, has a particular shape ... It is one of the enchanted places in the novel ... [and] recalls Ariosto ... and Tasso. Without doubt, it is a symbol, so much so that, as is the case with all true symbols, it is hard to decide what on earth it symbolises. Isolation within oneself, that goes without saying; but also, and even more, getting outside oneself and communicating love." (262) In *The View from the Tower: Origins of an Antimodernist Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), Theodore Ziolkowski locates modern "turriphilia"– exemplified by Yeats, Robinson Jeffers, Rilke and Jung – in its cultural context.

mind because ... they set the mind free"[206], she warns against obsessive self-enclosure in fantasy. There has to be an encounter with the real, a point of interaction between real and imaginary, between fictional art and the world it represents. These relationships are the source of the tension in *The Passion*. For Winterson, Venice represents the reconciling, potentially fruitful tension between reality and desire, and her narrative illustrates the power of the collision of opposites left unreconciled. She writes, in the novel's last lines:

> In this enchanted city all things seem possible. Time stops. Hearts beat. The laws of the real world are suspended ... It has always been so. They say the boatmen have webbed feet and a beggar says he saw a young man walk on water ...
> The Moors on the great clock swing back their hammers and strike in turn. Soon the Square will be a rush of bodies, their warm breath ascending and shaping little clouds above their heads ... In between freezing and melting. In between love and despair. In between fear and sex, passion is. (76)

Ensnaring possibilities reside within the sublime extremities and enigmas of Venice, its place in history, and existence *outside* of time. The novel's conclusion is inconclusive, and questions the distinctions between passion and obsession, and obsession and madness. One might find the self in fantasy, or lose the self in madness. Henri's end is problematic. Love and language frequently mean the same thing in *The Passion*, and Henri allegorises his love for Villanelle as the act of writing/reading his book. His love, he says: "means I review my future and my past in the light of this feeling. It is as though I wrote in a foreign language that I am suddenly able to read" (159). One possible interpretation of the novel's conclusion is that fantasy and reality are reconciled, in a magical-realist gesture, at the moment of writing and reading. Love, Winterson suggests, has its purest and only realisation in the written word.[207]

The Book of Mrs Noah

"A strange and interesting book", a critic from the *Independent* wrote, "pouring the subject matter of Virginia Woolf into a form designed by Boccaccio."[208] While Michele Roberts's *The Book of Mrs Noah* is discomfortingly difficult to define, the novel might be described as a kind

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[206] Winterson, *Boating for Beginners*, p. 66.
[207] Winterson's conclusion invokes Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* (103-142). In Dante's account of the adulterous passion of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini, the consummation of their love is celebrated in the reading of a book.
[208] Quoted on the dustjacket of the Minerva 1993 edition.

of feminist fairy story.[209] It is about a woman staying in Venice who dreams, or fantasises, about being on board an Ark with five writing, story-telling Sibyls. In a narrative of dream-like disconnections, the stories of the Sibyls' lives are interspersed with the narrator's adventures, away from the Ark, in various Italian cities. Like *The Passion*, *The Book of Mrs Noah* shares many of the characteristics of magical realism. Memories, fantasies, dreams and visions intrude on waking realities, collapsing the divisions between inner and outer worlds. The story is one of claustrophobia and entrapment, within and without the Ark and the female, writing self. The Ark is the central metaphor, and the centre of a landscape of sometimes desolating brutality. Roberts's imagined Italy, evoked with visionary and poetic power, is at once astonishingly beautiful and frighteningly ungenial. As in Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters*, slums, nuclear power stations and industrial waste sit alongside Renaissance palaces and churches. Venice is unnamed, but unmistakably Venice. The first description of the city occurs when the Ark is seven days out to sea, but has circled back, in a way deliberately vague that seems to signal that the voyage represents the non-linear narrative itself. Venice is summoned in precise, architectural, Ruskinian prose eerily reminiscent of the description of Venice with which Ian McEwann's *The Comfort of Strangers* begins: "On one side [of the piazza] is a basilica, a Renaissance stone veil thrown around a medieval building and pierced by a double tier of *loggie*, a pattern of white arches and columns."[210] But when Mrs Noah moves "out of the white dazzle of the sun into the cool darkness of a colonnade", and unfurls a discarded Italian newspaper, she is suddenly aware of an Italy of ugliness and violence, a country which exemplifies "the spiralling greed of the great empires for money, profit and power" (99). As with the depiction of dystopic Italies in *Night Letters*, there is a subliminal suggestion of the dissolution of the Grand Tour; the degradation of the cities of that great, flawed enterprise; the ruined ideals of Classicism and Romanticism.

Roberts's story begins with a realistic, lyrical evocation of the train journey from Verona to Venice, then Venice itself. Venice is "a city of carved pink islands", with "streets of yellow and rose facades, glittering churches", and air of "milky blue". But it "smells of cats' piss, yeast, rotting rubbish, coffee, fried fish, blossom" (10). Roberts's method is Proustian. She takes a detail as small as a *vaporetto* ticket, an airmail envelope voluptuously described as "the surreal poetry of addresses" (32-3), or an aubergine, and evokes an existence larger than the detail, linking it to another, then another, throughout her episodic narrative. Her prose possesses a rich

[209] Note that Roberts, in *Food, Sex & God*, describes *The Passion* as a "fairy story".
[210] Roberts, *The Book of Mrs Noah*, p. 98.

particularity, yet is always poised to take off into some other realm altogether, somewhere fantastic and surreal:

> Walking on the water. I stand on the deck of the *vaporetto*, packed in amongst Venetians serenely going about their business with briefcases and shopping bags as though immune to this miracle, and I laugh and laugh, staring unbelieving at the facades of palaces gliding by like theatre sets on the greeny-blue waters of the Grand Canal. (10)

Mrs Noah is accompanying her husband on a business trip. There is tension in the relationship: "The air between us bristles with outrage." But in the hotel, in the heat of the sensual city, they form "a truce":

> Our bed is a four-poster sailing along the canals through the afternoon, and we on it are lulled by the rocking of the water, the swinging and clanging of the church bells, sweaty and hot and languid, our bodies taking and taking their holidays. (10)

Again, the description is oddly reminiscent of Ian McEwan's description of Colin and Mary in Venice, in *The Comfort of Strangers*. Here are familiar Venices: the sublimities of the Serene Republic; the tourist's postcard Venice; the city where ordinary Italians lead everyday lives oblivious of tourists; and the potently sensual, arousing city. Abruptly, Roberts's text departs from realism, to conjure the place considered a miracle itself – "the city that floats" (10). In Venice, miracles can happen, and a woman like Mrs Noah (or Villanelle) walks on water. The city is a place of possibilities and confusions. Like tourists in a realistic fiction, the narrator and Noah are sitting in a café in a Venetian *campo*, when the narrator's grandmother 'appears'. The hallucinatory old lady disappears, and Mrs Noah sets off in pursuit:

> Ignoring [Noah's] protests, I run across the *campo* into the shadows under the plane trees. There are seven exits; I counted them when we sat down. The *campo* is a kaleidoscope, shifting, turning, offering seven times seven ways of experiencing it, seven ways in and seven ways out, a crystal constantly changing, linked to all the other crystals that make up Venice. (12)

The apparition leads Mrs Noah through the city of mazes to the Grand Canal and the Ark, where, disregarding her husband, she boards and is launched on her voyage of self-discovery.

She imagines the grandmother giving her blessing, saying: "You've got to invent your own life" (14). In Harold Brodkey's *Profane Friendship*, his Venetian text about self-exploration, there is a similar moment, when the narrator feels that: "Here are the surfaces of the world and here is the point of embarcation for a voyage into the mind, abandoning real *calli* and *fondamente* for the Asias and Venices and seas in the skull." In the same passage, Brodkey's narrator meditates on time and vision in his own Venetian narrative, and, like Winterson, writes: "An art, a mind without a strong tie to continuous time … can't deal in actual feelings or living characters or tell you convincing stories, only seductive ones, only symbols and dreams, wishes, constructs of the mind and parables."

In Venice, a second grandmother is conjured from Mrs Noah's imagination, another 'voice' who says, with a metafictional wink: "It could also happen like this." The narrative that follows – "This is the way I imagine it." – is constructed around the alternating concentration and dispersal of the narrator's sense of selfhood in a self-transforming landscape. Roberts's prose, like Winterson's, now takes risks and now plays safe, reflecting the forward thrusts and pulling back that represents the processes of self-construction, finding a 'voice', and literary creation.

"My story begins in Venice" (9). The subject of *The Book of Mrs Noah* is writing, the female writing self, and the nature of artistic creation. The novel is a complex story of stories within stories, which examines the storytelling process itself. The Ark is the inside of the narrator's mind, and with the voyage, it is a metaphor for self-exploration and the act of fictional creation. The voyage is an odyssey of consciousness, the Ark a shape-shifting construct of the imagination. A long list of the possible metaphoric forms of the Ark appears on pages 17 and 18. One of its forms is a vast, water-borne library which holds all the knowledge of the world. The notion of the Ark as a library echoes Jorge Luis Borges, who goes so far as to equate the library with the universe. There is the suggestion of an analogy between Roberts's image and Borges's obsessive metaphor of "circular labyrinths".[211] The Ark, labyrinthine like Venice, is Venice itself, as the novel's epigraph from John Donne's *Elegies* proposes: "That floating Colledge, that swimming Hospitall—." Roberts's Venice is, like Henry James's, a metaphor for art, art's epiphanies, and the pain implicit in the production of art:

> Ark. Imagination. Body. Home. Book.
> Creation starts here, in the Ark. (274)

While the 'world' of the text is, like the Ark, and the ambient Italy of the narrator, demonstrably unreal, its unreality does not preclude interaction with 'stories' that circulate in the real world. Although the truth of the Sibyls' narratives is insistently questioned, and their telling always allusive, the sensual realism of the details of the women's lives before and away from the Ark allows the novel to work as a pertinent analysis of gendered politics in the 'real' world. Roberts comments on the difficulties of women writing in a patriarchal world. She is rehearsing the historically relevant myths of sex and gender as well as those which concern 'the writer'. She deals, like Winterson in *The Passion*, with obsessions and excesses, and what is hidden, dark and repressed. Venice is right as the setting because the city is claustrophobic and, like women's lives, circumscribed. Yet for the women trapped on the Ark and in their real lives, Venice represents a retreat and the freedom to be creative and write. Henry James describes Milly Theale's Venetian palazzo, as "the ark of her deluge", and how: "It wasn't, therefore, within such walls, confinement, it was the freedom of all the centuries."[212] Venice offers women and artists an escape from confinement, a "separate world" which represents "another chance" (as Winterson wrote). The second chance is presented as a liberating 'moment', epiphanic, eternal and creative. The moment resembles Forster's "eternal moment" and there is a Forsterian interplay in *The Book of Mrs Noah* between orderliness and disorderliness – between the security of the Ark, and the exciting or violent irruptions of Italy. The theme of order/disorder is reflected in the rhythmic movement of the text, from one narrative episode to the next.

Mrs Noah is a female voyager. Kristeva writes of the female voyager, whose "ruse … lies in not having a 'chez-soi', in considering every home a place … of the Other, and irritated by its fixity, refusing it."[213] For Kristeva, the woman who travels through places, discourses and texts occupies a privileged space because she refuses to domesticate the structures that surround her. Every potential home becomes an estranging place, a site of dissolving identities and structures in motion.

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[211] Jorge Luis Borges, "The library of Babel." *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, eds. Donald Yates & James Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Modern Classics, 1970).

[212] James, *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 342, 361. Note Coover's Professor in Venice: "here in this ark of his own personal deluge." (*Pinocchio in Venice*, p. 187).

[213] "From Ithaca to New York." First published in *Promesse*, nos. 36-7 (Spring, 1974); republished in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), pp. 495-515. This reference p. 495. See Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), Chapter 2, "The Space of Travel: Reading and the Female Voyager." pp. 57-71.

Like Winterson, Roberts connects sexuality, language and desire. Unlike Winterson, but like Kristeva, she writes of fertility, motherhood, childlessness and birth. She writes of food, and describes the interconnectedness of food and femininity, sex and creativity, and food and the oppression of women: "Language is as changeable and delicious as food, coming from outside her to inside" (127). *The Book of Mrs Noah* is a novel about longing for a child, food, and language; and yearning for escape from confinement:

> The Ark ... hums with desire. Desire off the leash and given its head.
> I decide that the pleasures of sex are like those of reading: ... The body, the book. (244)

Michele Roberts's imaginative Italy expresses and satisfies longings. It is a place of appetites and desires; hunger for love, food and words. The Italian meals prepared by the Sibyls are obsessively and sensually described. There is voluptuous pleasure and power merely in *naming* these unfamiliar foods: "Naming is power" (109). Roberts exploits the peculiarly Italian phenomena of child and Madonna-worship. Images of mother and child confront Mrs Noah in every church:

> The Madonna in this church feeds her baby from a tiny white breast pointed like a pear. The sixteenth-century artist is in no doubt that the new birth which will save the world is that of Christ.
>
> But perhaps renewal has to be achieved repeatedly, by each of us ...
>
> I sit and look at the Madonna and her bambino and feel doubt rise in me, as green and bitter as bile. (101) [214]

The narrator's concern with food and femininity is related to her feelings about childlessness, childbirth, and literary creation: "This is how I practise Italian: conjugating all the verbs meaning: to produce pain" (133).[215] Noah is dismissive of his wife's longings, which have become obsessions. The gains in self-knowledge and self-confidence she makes on the Ark and in Italy give her a new serenity, an acceptance of the way things are and a determination to survive. Her Venetian fantasy of self-exploration, when she "wakes" from it, results in a new feeling of strength; she acknowledges that writing is transient but real, like "dusting, or

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[214] For the ubiquity and symbolic power of the *presepio* in Italy, see Tim Parks, *Italian Neighbours: an Englishman in Verona* (London: Mandarin, 1993).

[215] Christina Rossetti is a possible influence. In her writing there are links between motherhood, Italy and sexual love. See Alison Chapman, *The Afterlife of Christina Rossetti* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

dreaming." She decides to stay with Noah: "Marriage means compromise, my mother said to me once: and one of you compromises more than the other" (288).

> How does a woman survive?
> I pick up my pen and open my diary. (288)

The evanescent multitude of the narrator's selves finally finds anchorage. Bafflement gives rise to understanding; concentration and self-knowledge follow from dispersal. After the promiscuous slippages of the text, there is substantiality, shape and form. New, risk-filled lives are on offer to the Sibyls. In the hotel in Venice, after the voyage, the narrator/Mrs Noah begins to write the story that began in Venice. The last words of the novel are: "*My story*, I write: *begins in Venice*" (288). The moment is Proustian: the book Mrs Noah is about to write is the one the reader has just finished reading. The book is about itself being about to be written.[216] The narrator is both an author and an author on the make, and her self-realisation is transmitted through art. The novel is *about* self-realisation, a process which moves towards, and is afforded only by, the objectified, alienated self. That self is located within an alien place: and the place is Venice, which is associated, in the English literary tradition, with art and artistic self-realisation.

Two feminist fables: conclusion

Both *The Book of Mrs Noah* and *The Passion* end with a book being written. In *The Passion*, an absent presence (Villanelle's) haunts Henri's end. His artistic isolation, and his text, are relentlessly phallic and inward. His book is a consolation, but only to himself.[217] There is despair and madness, not redemption, in Venice. In contrast, Mrs Noah's accommodation to Italy's disorder, like her notional surrender to Noah's will, is a decision to live with imperfection which heightens her existential joy in the present. Surrender to imperfection, and the peace and joy that result, are some of the traditional blessings and epiphanies of Italy, as Robert Desaix's R. discovers, in *Night Letters*. Winterson does not allow Italy or fictional art such an easy redemptive role. The text's end is restless and unsubdued. *The Book of Mrs Noah* has, in a sense, *pace* Kristeva, domesticated the myths. Notwithstanding, the ideals which are

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[216] Linda Hutcheon observes: "self-reflective narrative often presents the story of its own coming to life, its own creative process … making the act of reading into one of active 'production', of imagining, interpreting, decoding, ordering, in short of constructing the literary universe through the fictive referent of the words. Reader and writer both share the process of fiction-making in *language*." *Narcissistic Narrative*, p. 86.

[217] This is to argue against Judith Seaboyer, who asserts in "Second Death in Venice: Romanticism and the Compulsion to Repeat in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*" (p. 507) that Henri's text is "potentially communicative and therefore potentially productive".

being compromised are carefully undefined. They have become one with the universal losses and confusions of Venice. Yet, myths and fairy tales demand closure, and in *The Passion* and *The Book of Mrs Noah*, as in parables, symbols and narratives tie up in the end together. This deepens and problematises Winterson's fictional project, which is to demonstrate that the ragged edges between reality and ideality, like the raggedness between fact and fiction, are as significant as their synthesis. Failure to realise this leads to madness. 'Italy', which represents synthesis in life and art, embraces the ragged edges. The experience of Italy in *The Passion* and *The Book of Mrs Noah* suggests something unknown and evasive, at the origin and heart of things. A similar unknown is at the centre of the self and the text. For this reason, the Italian fiction of Jeanette Winterson and Michele Roberts might be described as Kristevan. Kristeva writes of the upheaval the text undergoes when its subject begins to write. One of the compelling things about her work is precisely this linkage between writing, the unnameable, and the most fundamental of human processes. The Kristevan space of travel is enigmatic, its boundaries unfamiliar, elusive. Kristeva's work represents the need to understand women and creativity, and the search for meaning and desire in language.[218]

Energy and repose are held against each other in equipoise. There is a balance between completion and a necessary provisionality, and closure is most to be resisted. Yet the texts seek stability and finality, and celebrate those qualities in their final cadences which, like the last cadence of Robert Dessaix's *Night Letters* (his work in which the word "equipoise" recurs), are a vision of a place of potentiality from which writing is possible. At the end of Winterson's *Art & Lies*, Venetian light, like a "marvellous fabric", wraps the "quattrocento angel" Handel, who begins to sing, from "the book, his body, his heart." The world where he stands, in light and "infinite space": "was not the world, nor its likeness, but a strange equivalence, where what was thought to be known was re-cast, and where what was unknown began to be revealed, and where what could not be known, kept its mystery but lost its terror."[219] The passage is a resume of the visionary and revelatory elements in Winterson's Italian fiction; and Hegelian in essence, as when Hegel writes: "The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world."[220] The illumination of which Hegel conceives saturates vision and perceptions of the world with a sense of the unknown. It

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[218] See Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement*, "Reading Strangely." pp. 71-82.
[219] Winterson, *Art & Lies*, p. 206.
[220] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 6-7.

represents a transforming movement from darkness to light, and joy and terror are common responses.

The mystery and terror, encounter with strangeness and the unknown, the flash that illuminates the world (initiating a *vita nuova*), and the unsettling of the established order are reminiscent of the visitations of Pan in Forster's Italian short stories, and the "mysterious and terrible" Italy of his two Italian novels (the phrase occurs in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*). The "transforming movement from darkness to light" is undertaken by Forster's characters in Italy, particularly Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*. Henry James experiences the saturation of vision and perception by Italian luminousness, and desires for his characters the transforming movement from darkness to light. But sometimes the process is reversed, as in Isabel Archer's story, in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Lawrence's Italian fiction, in addition to attempting to unsettle the established order, is pervaded by a sense of the unknown, approaching change, and strange equivalence. And *Etruscan Places*, of all his works, illustrates powerfully the belief that what cannot be known might keep its mystery but lose its terror.

In modern literature the classic account of epiphanic perception is given by Proust, and the fact that the archetypal Proustian moment occurs in Venice is germane to the English tradition. Proust describes how he trips on a cobblestone in Venice, and is saturated in radiant memory: "a profound azure intoxicated my eyes, impressions of coolness, of dazzling light, swirled round me."[221] The incident is a prolepsis of Handel's mysterious transformation by the radiance of light, sound and space in Venice, in *Art & Lies*. The moment, "as if by magic"[222] renders Proust indifferent to death and the passing of time. Proust's "magic" echoes Byron and the Romantics, and foreshadows the postmodern Venetian metaphysics of time/death/desire exemplified by Roberts, Winterson, and Robert Dessaix, in addition to the visionary mystification of the Italian experience emphasised by William Trevor, and other contemporary writers. The complexification of traditional themes in recent texts is a result of the special kind of irony with which these writers relate to the tradition, through the inevitable textuality of their knowledge of the past.

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[221] Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*), trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, vol. III, pp. 899-90.
[222] Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, p. 899.

CONCLUSION

Henry James, E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence have given three incomplete accounts of Italy that continue to preoccupy recent writers of fiction about Italy and the Italians. James, Forster, Lawrence and contemporary writers map an ambiguous, imagined 'Italy' which is sustained in being by textual artifice. The English literary tradition of imaginative 'Italy' is part of the larger myth of 'Italy' perpetuated in cultural criticism, political journalism, travel writing, the flourishing new genre of books about living in Italy, and letters pages of English newspapers. The literary impulse co-exists with others, beginning with the tendency of northerners to seek pleasure, consolation and renewal under bright Italian skies. The English desire to represent and 'explain' Italy continues to illuminate English preoccupations, which include Englishness, and its opposite, Italianicity.

The encounter between north and south has been one of English literature's defining misprisions, possessing a continuity-in-mutability over centuries. The split between reason and passion, embodied by Italy in the Elizabethan drama, is an obsessive theme in James's work, particularly *Roderick Hudson*, and finds fresh expression in Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*. Sixteenth-century Italy is a persistent presence in recent fiction: in novels by James Cowan, Rodney Hall, Alan Isler and Caryl Phillips, sixteenth-century Venice represents dislocation, the formation of identities, and the concept of civilisations's margins and centres.[1] Postmodern Italianate fictions, such as Robert Dessaix's, reveal the way the twentieth-century imaginary is permeated by the fantastic. At the same time, they are part of the dialectic of seeing and not-seeing central to earlier texts about Italy. In English literature, Italy is simultaneously self and other. The inconclusive nature of the modern text (exemplified by *Night Letters*) suggests the difficulty of ever 'seeing' oneself, while also suggesting 'otherness', indicating that a sense of identity is not to be found in the physical self, the Anglo-Saxon heritage or even Italianness, but in the locus of the imaginary.

In the literary tradition, Italy is a liminal place, between imagination and reality. In its liminality, Italy can represent both the interstice between imagination and reality, and the fusion of imagination and reality in language and fiction. In James's late Italian work, where Italy is real and imagined, Italy represents fusion and literature. Correspondingly, in contemporary Italianate fictions, which reflect the new interest in narration and storytelling, Italy represents metafiction,

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[1] James Cowan, *A Mapmaker's Dream* (Sydney: Vintage, 1997); Rodney Hall, *The Island in the Mind* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1997); Alan Isler, *Op. Non Cit.* (London: Cape, 1997); Caryl Phillips, *The Nature of Blood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997).

as in Michele Roberts's *The Book of Mrs Noah*. In each new text, reality, imagination and Italy are renegotiated. Traditional images of Italy continue to be exploited, seemingly ingenuously, in recent, more conventional fictions, where Italy is a place of voluptuous menace; and the phrase 'sacred and profane' is frequently invoked, within narratives and publishers' descriptions. At the same time, there is a new, self-consciously literary Italianist fiction. The new writing can resemble Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, where there is no narrative reality, and Italy and traditional images of Italy are pretexts for satire and language games. A different version of the new Italian fiction is exemplified by David Leavitt's novels, in which, as with James, American characters experience love and desire, reinventing desire and themselves, under a southern sun. While Leavitt's novels are characteristically postmodern in their self-regarding ironisation of the literary tradition, in places his plots, characters and language games seem contrived as an excuse to evoke Italy.[2]

Our epoch is sceptical of classical notions of truth, reason, the givenness of natures, coherence of identities, single frameworks, grand narratives and ultimate grounds of explanation. Italy, in the literary tradition, has come to stand for these qualities now held in suspicion. Yet, as the best writers absorb and transform the work of their precursors, in recent fiction 'Italy' (its ambiguities, contradictions, contingency, exuberance, hybridity, unrepresentability, love of performance, extension of the senses) can now also represent contemporary culture and the style of thought we call postmodernity. Postmodern art, as Terry Eagleton has written: "may be allergic to absolute meanings, but it cannot rid itself of a dream of depth, plagued as it is by a nostalgia for the days when truth, reality and redemption were still notions to be reckoned with."[3] Contemporary fiction about Italy is riven with nostalgia for traditional literary Italy. Barry Unsworth's novel *After Hannibal* (1996) is exemplary; a character in Unsworth's allegory of 'Italian' narrative expresses the idea, through the Italianate literary trope of Italian light: "this light ... he had seen nowhere else but in Umbria. It came suddenly, shortly before the onset of darkness, like a gentle assertion of some value in danger of being forgotten."[4]

Postmodern works can perform acts of legerdemain which transform earlier Italies into contemporary ones, so that sometimes a Renaissance text appears prophetic, or a contemporary text more like a precursor. In *Night Letters*, Robert Dessaix's combination of the picaresque, confessional, allegorical and travelogue resembles Sterne's early, idiosyncratic Italian texts

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[2] The suspicion is supported by the reappearance in Leavitt's *Arkansas* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1997), in amongst the Forster pastiche, of material from his earlier work of Italian travel, *Italian Pleasures*.
[3] Terry Eagleton, "Newsreel History." *London Review of Books*, 12 November 1998, pp. 8-10.

which, as Dessaix himself notes, are modern, nervy and self-mocking. The wayward excesses of Robert Coover's alternate praise and damnation for Venice in *Pinocchio in Venice* invoke Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* or Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster*, and in places recall Lawrence. Similarly, Forster's Pan stories anticipate the subversive epiphanies of William Trevor's and Jonathan Keates's Italian stories; and the inconsistencies and self-divisions of Lawrence's Italian prose prefigure the fragmentations of postmodern existence and literature, as Geoff Dyer shows, in his definitive work of postmodern Lawrentian pastiche, *Out of Sheer Rage*. Notwithstanding, imagined Italies reflect their times. The 'Italian' works of James, Forster and Lawrence reflect modernism's dominant note of vital hesitation and ironic idealism — all making is an unmaking, in the end. Postmodern 'Italian' texts reflect the more recent mood of dissolution and ironic self-reflexivity — all unmaking a making, in the end. What persists in the English literary imagination is a sense of the incommensurability of Italy, and the pertinence of Italy as a rich and spacious alternative world.

[4] Barry Unsworth, *After Hannibal* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p. 99.

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