



The Splendour of Decadence: The Moral Geography of the European South in Victorian Travelogues

Sebastian Kukavica

Abstract

By offering a critical discourse analysis of selected Victorian travelogues of the second half of the nineteenth century, the paper aims to demonstrate to what extent Victorian discursive representations of Italy carried in themselves a highly standardised representation of Southern Europe as both an imaginary geography and as a political culture in a perceived state of moral and political decadence. In Victorian travelogues, the European South was imagined as a counter-geography of modernity and, as such, it was ideologically utilised for legitimising the specific trajectory of Northern modernity, seen as the antipode to the perceived state of backwardness of the European South. The myth of decadence of the European South served the purpose of constituting the South as a premodern moral geography embedded in a state of decadence, while at the same time legitimising British modernity as the only proper organic trajectory of historical evolution. This paper aims to demonstrate how Victorian travelogues, as channels for dissemination of Victorian political imagination, became platforms for consolidation of a specific moral geography of the European South built upon the myth of decadence. In addition, this paper argues that the unification of Italy in 1871 signals a turning point in development of the myth of decadence of the European South in Victorian travelogues. While pre-1871 Victorian travelogues perceived signs of decadence as the ultimate proof of the country's incompatibility with Northern or Protestant modernity, post-1871 travelogues conceived decadence as the quintessence of the idealised Romantic or even Gothic nature of Italy and critiqued modernisation as desecration of Italy as a place of memorialisation of the past. The travelogues critically analysed in the paper are: T. A. Trollope's *Impressions of a Wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France and Spain* as well as his *A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches*, William Baxter's *The Tagus and the Tiber*, Frances Elliot's *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy*, and George Gissing's *By the Ionian Sea*.

Keywords

Victorian travelogue; moral geography; myth of decadence; representations of Southern Europe, T. A. Trollope, William Baxter, Frances Elliot, George Gissing

Date of Acceptance: 27 June 2023

Date of Publication: 5 July 2023

Double Blind Peer Reviewed

Recommended Citation:

Kukavica, Sebastian. 2023. "The Splendour of Decadence: The Moral Geography of the European South in Victorian Travelogues." *Victorian Popular Fictions*, 5.1: 124-41. ISSN: 2632-4253 (online) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46911/MXNR9140>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



The Splendour of Decadence: The Moral Geography of the European South in Victorian Travelogues

Sebastian Kukavica

Introduction

While travel writing encompasses texts ranging from novels and ship diaries to scientific voyage narratives, a travelogue is a literary text characterised by what Cooke calls an “inward turn” towards the traveller’s subjectivity and empiricism (2015:15). Travel writing is an all-encompassing category related to “a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (Borm 2016:13). Proposing the idea that modern travelogue is “the term used to describe the more self-consciously “literary” travelogues which begin to appear in the eighteenth century”, Thompson underlines the theoretical assumption that the travelogue, as a specifically modern form of literary text, embodies “a first-person narrative of travel which claims to be a true record of the author’s own experiences” (2011: 202, 27). In contrast to Fussell’s definition of travelogue as “a sub-species of memoir [...] in which the narrative – unlike that in a novel or a romance – claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality” (1982: 203), Thompson argues that travelogue cannot be detached from fiction, even in the case of the so-called “travel accounts” depicting scientific explorations and discoveries (2011: 27, 2019: 115).

The literariness of travelogue lies exactly in its inability to detach itself from fiction. The fictional nature of travelogue can be found not only in its turn to the narrator’s subjectivity, but also in its narrative structure. The narrator is clearly constructed as a literary character offering a subjective account of travel, while the entire structure of the travelogue relies on the development of a story about the prolonged course of the narrator’s displacement in a foreign geographical space during which the traveller discovers himself/herself: his/her (political) attitudes, (aesthetical) preferences, (moral) sentiments, and, ultimately, identity. The narrative of the traveller’s inner journey – a voyage of self-discovery which also confirms a sense of belonging to a certain culture set in opposition to the values apparent in the foreign culture – represents the core of the travelogue. An account of the backdrop journey through a foreign land follows the trajectory of the inner journey, practically serving as a subplot which has a function insofar as it moves the main plot (inner journey) incrementally

closer to its logical end (the traveller's discovery of his/her own attitudes and ideas at the end of the journey), and insofar as it makes the story of the traveller's inner journey even more dramatic and symbolic.

The modern travelogue became a highly popular and widely read form of literature during the nineteenth century. Buzard argues that the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 announced the beginning of the age of mass tourism in Italy and coincided with the increase of popular interest in various forms of travel writing, modern travelogue in particular. After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Buzard suggests, British tourists once again started to travel intensively to Italy, no longer following the common pathway of the Grand Tour, but rather embarking on a journey off the beaten tracks, in order to discover the real Italy, an Italy still deeply rooted into its premodern stationary state (2002: 49). Popularity of modern Victorian travelogues was boosted not only by the emergence of the guidebook, as a new form of travel writing (e.g. *Murray's Handbooks*), but also by an already established interest in Romantic and Gothic popular fiction set in Italy as a place of splendour of decadence (e.g. Radcliffe's *The Italian*).

Inseparable from popular fiction, the modern travelogue is a literary text which heavily relies not only on the use of literary techniques of narrative-building (e.g. building of a plot, characterisation), but also on the use of representations of foreign cultures constituted as embodiments of moral and political otherness conceived in opposition to the identity, civilisation and political culture of the traveller's nation. As Bracewell observes, in modern travelogues since the eighteenth century, "a new geography [has] emerged, in which Europe was less a matter of physical geography than a qualitative assessment", whereby "travellers regularly depicted places and peoples as more or less European, judging them according to the criteria of 'reason', 'civilization' or 'progress'" (2015: 343). In that sense, critical analysis of the narrative structures and symbolic imageries of modern travelogues emerges from recognition of the fact that the modern travelogue "however entertaining, is hardly harmless, and [...] behind its apparent innocuousness and its charmingly anecdotal observations lies a series of powerfully distorting myths about other [...] cultures" (Holland and Huggan 2000: 8). In modern travelogue, physical foreign geographies are transformed into imaginary geographies "that need to be seen [...] in ideological and mythical, rather than merely geographical, terms" (68).

Moral geography is an imaginary geography of a foreign and other geographical space which is discursively constructed for the purpose of the reinvigoration and reconsolidation of a sense of belonging to not only an imagined community but also to a morally superior culture conceived in opposition to the otherness of the foreign geography. As such, moral geography is constructed whenever a specific foreign geography is being conceived, examined and analysed from an epistemic high ground which inscribes meaning in the foreign geography. Moral geography can indeed be understood as a powerful myth about other cultures. A special characteristic of such a myth-making is its all-pervasiveness and longevity in a variety of discourses: its ability to become widely accepted as something almost self-evident.

In the case of cultural representations of Italy and Southern Europe, Baumeister and Sala clearly show how the European South was constructed not only as a moral geography but also as a powerful and all-pervasive myth about a foreign culture "which opposed the protestant North as the origin of capitalist and industrial modernity" while at the same time being the symbolic "zone of archaic immobility and backwardness" (2016: 31). The power and all-pervasiveness of such a moral geography is evident even in the context of contemporary

imageries and discourses on Southern Europe (e.g. recent discourse on PIGS¹), which demonstrates to what extent moral geography embodies a powerful and longstanding representation of cultural otherness. Travel texts have been, therefore, conceived by “counter-traditional” (Kuehn and Smethurst 2015: 1) or broadly speaking “postmodern” scholars (Zilcosky 2008: 9) as embodiments of “internal orientalism” (Bolufer 2016: 454), “inner-European Orientalism” (Pfister 1999: 25, Raponi 2014: 43) or even Southernism (Dainotto 2000), in which Southern Europe plays the role of an “indispensable internal Other” (Dainotto 2007: 2). It has been extensively demonstrated how by (re)imagining Southern Europe and Italy as an obsolete or even premodern political culture embedded in Catholicism, the travelogue can build an antipode not only to British modernity but also to British political culture founded on liberalism (Martens 2010, Barlow 2013, Gephardt 2014).

Existing scholarship on the Victorian travelogue does not systematically consider the myth of decadence which, this paper argues, sits at the core of Victorian representations of Italy and Southern Europe. It is only by offering a systematic analysis of the myth of decadence as a highly standardised discursive formation embedded in travelogues as literary texts, that it becomes possible to detect changes in the development of such a myth throughout a longer historical period. Decadence is here understood in terms of political theology, as a terminal stage in the historical development of a previously organically cohesive culture, the constitutive values of which are being transvaluated or turned into their inversions as the culture evolves. As this article will demonstrate, the myth of decadence encapsulated in pre-1871 travelogues represents something essentially different from the myth of decadence that is embedded in the structural core of post-1871 travelogues.

The paper also broadens existing research by offering an analysis of the evolution of the representations of Italy in Victorian travelogues written in the second half of the nineteenth century. The existing literature predominantly looks into representations of Italy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, examining how in the age of Grand Tour Italy became discovered and subsequently incorporated into British political imagination (O’Connor, 1998, Gephardt, 2014). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the interests of many Victorian travel writers shifted away from Southern Europe to the colonies (India and Africa especially), which were perceived as apodictically foreign spaces that required proper discovery and classification from the epistemic high ground of the imperial centre. However, as this paper explores, some British travel writers of the second half of the nineteenth century continued to represent Italy as the moral geography of the European South, imagining it not only as the antipode to the British trajectory of modernity, but also as the epitome of moral and political decadence.

While Dickens’ *Pictures of Italy*, published in 1846, remains one of the most frequently discussed examples of the modern Victorian travelogue, this paper aims to shed light on a series of Victorian travelogues written in the second half of the nineteenth century which have, so far, not been systematically analysed in the field within a broader genealogy of the myth of decadence. It considers texts by T. A. Trollope (the older brother of Anthony Trollope) and William Baxter, writers whose travelogues, although lesser-known and still not widely analysed, nonetheless embody the standardised, popular and widespread representation of Italy that was inscribed deeply in the Victorian imagination. In addition, the paper analyses the travelogues written by two writers better known as popular Victorian novelists: Frances Elliot (*The Italians*, *The Red Cardinal*) and George Gissing (*New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*).

¹ A derogatory acronym used in economics and political science to describe “economic vulnerability and risk factors common to peripheral economies of the Euro area”, Southern Europe in particular (Küsters and Garrido 2020: 477).

The first section of the paper will offer a critical discourse analysis of three examples of pre-1871 Victorian travelogues on Italy: T. A. Trollope's *Impressions of a Wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France and Spain* (1850), his *A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches* (1862), and William Baxter's *The Tagus and the Tiber* (1852). As all three travelogues were published before the unification of Italy in 1871, Italy is discursively represented in these texts as an essentially decadent moral geography unable to reach the full modernisation that had already taken root in Britain and Northern Europe, with modernisation understood primarily in terms of the construction of a modern nation-state on the basis of liberalism. These three pre-1871 travelogues suggest that the all-pervasive signs of Italy's moral and political decadence serve as the ultimate proof of the country's backwardness and underdevelopment, as well as its inability to pursue the Northern trajectory of modernisation. In both writers' travelogues, the state of Italy's decadence is conceived as caused by its inherently Southern political culture.

The second section of the paper argues that the unification of Italy initiated a significant shift in the Victorian imagination of Southern Europe. Reading Frances Elliot's *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy* (publ. 1871) alongside George Gissing's *By the Ionian Sea* (1901), this section suggests that while pre-1871 travel writers perceived signs of decadence as the ultimate proof of the country's backwardness and underdevelopment, post-1871 writers such as Elliot and Gissing conceived decadence as the quintessence of the Romantic or the Gothic nature of Italy, conceiving it as the apex of the Italian civilisation. Where pre-1871 travel writers argued that Italy's state of decadence needed to be overcome by accepting the British model of modernisation and liberalisation, post-1871 writers argued that the modernisation of Italy desecralised the splendour of its decadence.

Representations of Italy in Pre-1871 Travelogues

In James Henry Bennett's *Winter in the South of Europe* (1865), the Bennett-narrator, observing Italy's splendour of decadence from the moral high ground of the physician, comes to a conclusion that Italy is a place entrapped in its premodern stage of development:

The towns and villages now found in the south are all historical; there are no cities like the busy thriving Lancashire marts, the product of manufacturers' activity in modern times. The towns and villages are those of the middle ages, and as such circumscribed within walls and fortifications [...] just as they were hundreds of years ago. Such a style of architecture is proverbially unhealthy, especially in the south, amongst a population to whom the cleanliness and the decencies of modern civilization are as yet but little known.

(Bennett 1865:190)

Bennett's narrator, as a travel writer acknowledges that for a long time he himself was fascinated by a romanticised image of Italy: "in former days, in the days of health and strength, Italy exercised over me, as over all those whose minds are imbued with the history of the past, an indescribable fascination" (188). The Bennett-narrator is thus aware of the mechanisms of myth-making and accepts that his image of Italy has been shaped by a myth of Italy that has developed out of a fascination with Italy's preserved monuments of the past as memorial sites for the country's bygone greatness. In matter of fact, the narrator argues that in his "days of health" he "purposely threw aside the physician, in order to see nothing but ruins, battle-fields, paintings, and statues" (188). Under the influence of the myth of Italy as a spectacle of the past, the Bennett-narrator asserts that he was unable to discover the real Italy: "sickness and human decay appeared a profanation, and I strove to eliminate them from my thoughts,

and thus to bring back none but pleasurable reminiscences” (188). Having detached himself from his former fascination with Italy’s past, the narrator presents himself as a physician diagnosing Italy’s “sickness and human decay” (188) a state which he previously did not analyse due to the enchantment with the myth.

This change of perspective – from a fascination with Italy’s memorialised past to the diagnosis of Italy’s sickness and decay – introduces one of this paper’s concerns in its acknowledgement that pre-1871 Victorian travelogues on Italy were based on the myth of decadence. Rather than being imbued with the myth of Italy as a spectacle of the past, pre-1871 travelogues tend to rely on a narrator who, in the manner of a physician, diagnoses the disease that they see as keeping Italy away from modernisation. The following section demonstrates that the disease being diagnosed in such travelogues relates to Italy’s entrapment in premodern stage of development and is presented as the moral and political decadence of the Southern political culture of Italy. Travelogues by Trollope and Baxter have been selected as case studies which perfectly embody this change of perspective. Trollope and Baxter, like Bennett, both construct their narratives around the figure of the narrator who, by observing the real Italy and seeing beyond an idealised image, ultimately speculates upon the political, societal and moral sources of the true conditions of life in Italy. In these texts, observation of Italy’s sickness and decay becomes the basis not only for a theory about the reasons for such a state, but also leads to a remedy prescribed by a physician.

Representation of Italy in T. A. Trollope’s Travelogues

In the preface of his *Impressions of a Wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France, and Spain*, published in 1850, Thomas Adolphus Trollope defines his travel writing in terms of a modern travelogue, noticing that the text needs to be understood as a series of “occasional observations and speculations of a wanderer” (1850: iii). Trollope’s travelogue describes his journeys through Italian states, Switzerland, France and Spain against the historical backdrop of the Springtime of Nations in 1848. In the text, Trollope takes the role of the first-person narrator who offers his own account of the political and social turmoil of the Revolutions of 1848, while at the same time reaffirming his British identity and sense of belonging to a morally and politically superior trajectory of Northern civilisation, a civilisation which finds itself on what is seen as a stable and organic course of modernity. Thus, Trollope does not only act as an observer – a wanderer who is just describing what he observed and experienced with his own eyes – but he also acts as a travel writer developing his own speculations about the nature of what he observed.

The Trollope-narrator speculates about the observed cultural difference of a foreign space from a vehemently anti-Catholic stance, perceiving Catholic political culture as the main reason why Italian states are encapsulated in what he observes to be a state of moral and political decadence. It is important to notice that the Trollope-narrator starts his account by endorsing revolutionary activities aimed against the Papal States, perceiving them as the beginning of Italy’s late trajectory of modernisation and liberalisation. The Trollope-narrator even describes the anti-Papal rebellion in Rome and consequent proclamation of the Roman Republic as “the return of life to the shrivelled form of a mummy”, whereby Papal States are represented as an obsolete political regime not aligned with the progressive trajectory of modernity (15). In that sense, the Trollope-narrator enthusiastically portrays the displays of “instance[s] of liberalism and proof[s] of the progress of opinion” especially among young revolutionaries, perceiving them as “the young defenders of the future liberties of their country” (32). Although he endorses what he sees as instances of liberalism, the Trollope-

narrator at the same time – transforming from an observer into a speculator – develops a critique of the entire political culture of Italy and its late attempt in liberalisation, even hinting that the revolutionary spirit sweeping through Italian states in 1848 does not embody the proper pathway of historical development for a modern nation-state.

Edmund Burke argued that “a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation”, because “without such means it [state] might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve” ([1790] 1910: 19-20). Representing the English Restoration and the Glorious Revolution – in contrast to the French Revolution – as epitomes of the organic change, Burke argues that “in both cases they [principles of conservation and correction] regenerated the deficient part of the old constitution through the parts which were not impaired” having kept “these old parts exactly as they were, that the part recovered might be suited to them” (20). The same concept of the organic trajectory of British historical development can be found in Trollope’s travelogues. Trollope represents the Roman Republic as a polity poorly founded on a tarnished form of liberalism which did not concretise complete liberalisation through the creation of a secular parliamentary democracy detached from the authority of the Pope. Instead, he perceives the Roman Republic as an inherently flawed type of political regime which left the “hands” of the legislative body “tied by the ligaments” – meaning the Catholic Church (Trollope 1850: 46). In fact, Trollope uses his observations on the failures of the 1848 revolution in Italy as the basis for a critique of the political culture and temperament of Italy, perceiving them as the sources of Italy’s inability to modernise and liberalise in line with the British model. In this sense, Trollope’s discourse turns into a disavowal of what he perceives as Italy’s political culture of Southern Catholicism:

The religion practiced under this name [Catholicism] in the North of Europe is a very different thing from that of the South [...] The religion of a people, as every other portion of their social existence and moral nature, is modified by their temperament [...] I could write a column full of facts [...] all tending to prove that the Paganism of old Rome is far from extinct in its former haunts, and that peculiar dogmas of Christianity as taught at Rome tend to produce, rather than to repress, crime...

(39)

Comparing the Catholicism of the North with Southern Catholicism, Trollope constructs a moral geography of the European South which constitutes the South as an inherently flawed political culture whose political and moral corruption emerges from its religion (“Paganism of old Rome”) and “temperament” (39). This is why Trollope observes that “it might have been supposed that even Rome had by this time [1848] heard of the discovery made by civilized mankind” – this “discovery” being liberal parliamentary democracy (46). The failures of the 1848 revolution are thus perceived as outcomes of inherent deficiencies and obsolescence of the Southern Catholic political culture and temperament which Trollope views as blocking Italy from modernity. The Trollope-narrator even sarcastically notices that, following the proclamation of the Roman Republic, the masses immediately accepted the Pope’s blessing, again enchanted by premodern superstition. Trollope aims to show that true modernity and proper liberalism could not flourish in Italy in 1848, as they had in Britain in 1689, because Italy’s political culture was embedded in despotism and superstition.

In the travelogue, the Southern essence of Italy’s political culture and the narrator’s critique of Italy’s trajectory of development is confirmed especially in descriptions of Catholic ceremonies, presented by Trollope as spectacles of premodern superstition. The festival of Corpus Christi in Florence is portrayed as a relic of the bygone times of the Middle Ages and,

therefore, seen as completely incompatible with the project of modernity. For the narrator, the festival represents the ultimate proof of Italy's Southernness: its embeddedness in superstition instead of rationalism, its entrapment in a state of premodern culture, its dependency on the authority of the Church instead of the authority of the law, and ultimately the state of decadence in which it unknowingly finds itself. Perhaps for this reason, Trollope describes the ceremony as a "fragment of a former age cut bodily out of its proper framework and thrust strangely and discordantly into the midst of the nineteenth century" (88). The narrator even goes on to say that the ceremony is proof of the fact that Italy, as a Southern country, finds itself in a state of childhood, while a modern nation such as Britain had already reached adulthood:

The same causes that have gradually placed such shows and ceremonies among the things of the past in England and in France are now rapidly operating to produce a similar effect in Italy. They are, in truth, the pleasures of children, or of ages childlike in simplicity; and the people of Italy are now becoming, like their elder brothers of the European family, men.

(89)

Comparing Italy to Switzerland, Trollope again argues that there is a fundamental difference between the political culture of the Northern Catholic countries and their Southern counterparts: "it cannot be doubted by one who has observed the religious aspect of either people, that the Catholicism of the Teutonic races is not the mere idolatry which prevails in the South of Europe" (145). While Northern Catholic political cultures, according to Trollope, fully find themselves on the trajectory of modernity, Southern Catholic countries like Italy still represent premodern societies unable to successfully modernise. The Southern political culture (of Italy) relies, according to such a discourse, not on rationalism, but on idolatry. The Trollope-narrator then connects religion to race in his explanation as to why Northern Catholic states managed to fully achieve modernisation, while Southern countries, such as Italy and Spain, failed to do so:

It may be observed, that the difference in question [of religious ceremonies] is clearly one of race, and not of nation; and that the investigation of its causes would belong rather to the physiologist than to the political inquirer.

(147)

The myth of decadence embedded in Southern Catholic countries can be most clearly detected in Trollope's account of his journey through Certaldo, the resting place of Giovanni Boccaccio. In this part of the text Trollope affirms a representation of Italy as a moral geography of decadence whose current state of decay is juxtaposed to its once glorious past. Trollope portrays Certaldo simultaneously as a place of "squalid degradation" and as a symbol of "the former greatness of [this] *"paese"*" (201). While he acknowledges a popular view of the city as a monument of Italy's "former greatness", Certaldo is, from Trollope's viewpoint, also a place of decay and desolation in which monuments of bygone glory are turned into symbols of degradation: "As memorials of this departed greatness, he [*cicerone*] showed us the former prison, now a cow-shed, and the tribunal, now an asses' stall" (202). In Certaldo, the Trollope-narrator observes the full scale of Italy's decadence. The architecture of the city thus becomes confirmation of the state of organic decay in which Certaldo seems to be entrapped. Firstly, he observes that sites of "departed greatness" have been turned into "asses' stall[s]" (202), thereby consolidating the image of modern Italy as a degenerate culture emerging from a dead civilisation which once achieved greatness. Secondly, he comments that Certaldo brought itself to destruction by creating a centre of a new (modern) city which only reinforced the city's

state of decadence. The Trollope-narrator thus comes to the conclusion that the sources of Italy's decadence lie in Italy itself, in its political culture in particular. In that sense, the image that perfectly embodies the Trollope-narrator's view of Italy's self-incurred tutelage is the symbol of a new city feeding on the decaying body of the ancient town of Certaldo.

Whatever slender elements of activity and prosperity may yet remain in the place are thus drawn off from the ancient town to aliment its rival at the foot of the hill. The decadence of old Certaldo [...] is therefore complete.

(194-5)

This type of representation of Italy as a moral geography of moral and political decadence is even more evident in Trollope's *A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches*, published in 1862. In both travelogues, Italy is considered as though from the perspective of Bennett's physician, with the country's political, societal and moral decadence conceived of as a disease which characterises the entire European South, and which can be traced back to its pre-modern political culture.

A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches starts with Trollope's assertion that, although no longer prioritised by Victorian travel writers as it had been in the days of the Grand Tour, Italy still represents a widely unexplored place for British travellers. The Trollope-narrator seems to suggest that Italy still represents a geographical place that needs to be studied on account of its inherent otherness to British culture. In this sense, otherness is not a category reserved only for newly discovered objects of interest of Victorian travel writers (such as Africa or India): there are places in Europe which still, according to the Trollope-narrator, represent antipodes to British modernity. In order to discover those places, Trollope suggests, a traveller must "travel out of the beaten track" (1862: 4). As an alternative journey through Italy, a journey "out of the beaten track", Trollope therefore suggests a journey through Umbria and Marches as regions representing windows into the real, unknown, premodern Italy. In contrast to the journey following standardised tourist routes that Trollope offered in *Impressions of a Wanderer*, here the Trollope-narrator seems to be aware that only a journey "out of the beaten track" can reveal the authentic truth about the state of Italy's political, societal and moral development. Not only does *A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches* reinforce the myth of decadence, previously integrated into *Impressions of a Wanderer*, but it also gives a sense of truthfulness or authenticity to the myth. The myth of decadence is thus constructed as a confirmation of the true picture of the real, still undiscovered Italy – a view of the country observed not through the eyes of a tourist, but from the perspective of a physician.

Trollope's account of his journey in Umbria and the Marches commences with a representation of the two regions in terms of the moral geography of the European South. Transgression of the border between Tuscany and Umbria is described as a symbolic entrance into an essentially foreign and different state which can be found only if the traveller gets "out of the beaten track". The geographical border between Tuscany and Umbria becomes a symbolic border – "the moral frontier", as Trollope calls it (16) – suggesting that, already by entering Umbria, the traveller enters the South. The South is understood as an inherently different political culture which relies on what Trollope defined as the moral and political foundations of Southern Catholicism.

...the traveller may consider that from this hill-top he is taking his last view of Tuscan scenery and Tuscan life. There is no longer any frontier to pass. No loathsome Papal officials – filthy, insolent, and cringing – come out to bully you and be bribed. But the moral frontier line

between the land, which has been for so many generations poisoned by its subjection to Papal rule [...] is still [...] strongly marked and very visible.

(16-17)

Significantly, Trollope's journey through the real Italy commences not in Tuscany, but in Umbria, which is seen as a land "poisoned by its subjection to Papal rule" (17). From the very beginning Italy is framed as a political culture of Southern Catholicism and therefore constituted as a moral geography of the South. One of the first sites which Trollope sees after crossing "the moral frontier" is a scene of decay: "[the Tiber] characteristically welcomed us to Papal territory [...] by a scene of ruin" (20). It is important to notice that this "scene of ruin" does not represent an exception, but rather the rule in Trollope's narrative, as exemplified by description of Città di Castello, the first city on his travel route "out of the beaten track":

And yet this miserable mass of dilapidated, rotten-looking buildings was once the birthplace of genius, the home of art, and wealth, and splendour; the scene, on which were enacted passages of history which the world still deems among the most memorable it has recorded, one of the abiding places of a civilization, from which the comfortable Englishman, who is now revolted by its decay, was once fain to take lessons in everything that embellishes life!

(21)

By introducing the lens of "the comfortable Englishman" as the perspective through which Italy's perceived decay is observed, Trollope reinvigorates the political myth of decadence by representing Britain (equated with England) as a new empire which once "took lessons" from the civilisation of the Roman Empire, but which now finds the decaying civilisation of Italy revolting (21). He implies that Britain now embodies the true spirit of (Western) civilisation, while Italy represents only a ruin of a formerly great centre of civilisation. The reasons for this state of decadence of a formerly great empire are found in the political culture of Southern Catholicism; in the historical heritage, culture and temperament founded on religious superstition, political despotism, moral and political corruption. Trollope argues that "it was after the commencement of the comparatively regularised, and legalised, system of the Pontifical Government, that universal death and decay began" (23). As we can see, during his journey through decaying sites of Italy, Trollope – once again turning from an observer into a speculator – develops his own theoretical and historiographical explanation of the sources of Italy's "lethargy of three hundred years" (30). The episode in which Trollope speculates about the history of decline of the city of Gubbio serves as a perfect example:

...in the first half of the fourteenth century, Gubbio was still [...] an independent republic; and was at the culminating point of its prosperity. It fell towards the end of that century into the power of the lords of Urbino [...] during those centuries, the city at once began, though slowly, to enter on the course of decadence, which it may be said with general correctness to have followed ever since.

(68-9)

While the first half of the fourteenth century is still conceived as the age of city's prosperity (and its historical trajectory of rise), Trollope argues that "towards the close of the fourteenth century, the state of things in the city became so intolerable from the consequence of intramural wars, that a large party of the citizens became anxious to obtain peace even at the price of submitting themselves to a "tyrant"" (72). It is important to notice that Trollope perceives the early fourteenth-century "independent republic" of Gubbio as a polity fully aligned with what

he sees as the proper trajectory of historical evolution towards modernity (68). In that sense, the early fourteenth-century Gubbio is not conceived as an embodiment of Southernness. In fact, it is conceived as following the same pathway of development towards the triumph of liberalism as Britain of that age.

Using Gubbio as a case study, the travelogue then argues that the reason for the decadence of the formerly glorious Renaissance Italy, considered from the culturally determined lens of an Englishman, lies in Italy's submission to what the narrator sees as a non-modern, anti-liberal political culture. Post-Renaissance Italy is, thus, discursively represented as a country trapped in "the lethargy of three hundred years" (30) caused by "poisoning [of Italy] by its subjection to Papal rule" (17) as well as Italy's derailment from the course of modernity, due to its anti-liberal political culture of "Southern Catholicism" (39). Expressing once again his vehement anti-Catholic sentiment, Trollope concludes his inquiry into the causes of Italy's decadence by arguing that the real cause needs to be found in the nature of the Papal reign and its underlying political culture, arguing that the Papal regime "brought with it some element more fatally poisonous to human society than all the turbulence, lawlessness, and violence of the social system [rule of tyrants] which preceded it" (142).

Representation of Italy in William Baxter's *The Tagus and the Tiber*

William Baxter's *The Tagus and the Tiber*, published in 1852, stands as another example of a Victorian travelogue on Italy which relies on a vehement critique of the inherently Southern political culture of Catholicism. As was the case with Trollope's travelogues, the Baxter-narrator takes the role of both an observer and a speculator. As a speculator, the Baxter-narrator aims to identify a set of historical and cultural factors leading to Italy's decadence, which is understood as the crucial societal, political, spiritual, and cultural problem of Italy of that time.

Once again, the Papacy and Roman Catholicism are perceived as two crucial factors obstructing Italy's historical development towards a type of modernity which had already taken root in Britain. Describing his visit to Rome against the backdrop of the First Italian War of Independence (1848-9), Baxter observes that the city is indeed "the lone mother of dead empires" and "the decaying capital of the Caesars" (1852: 68). Consequently, Baxter speculates that the roots of Italy's decadence can be found in the late Middle Ages.

The mischief commenced by the nobles, and continued by the banditti [...] in medieval times [...] has been consummated, confirmed, legalised by avaricious priests, under whose government the Papal States seem rapidly hastening to irretrievable ruin.

(80)

Following a narrative similar to the one developed in Trollope's travelogues, Baxter implies that, in the age of Humanism and early Renaissance, Italian states underwent their ultimate stage of glory, power and prosperity. But it is important to notice that, in a similar way to the Trollope-narrator, the Baxter-narrator perceives this very same historical period of glory and prosperity as the beginning of Italy's moral and political decadence. Namely, the Baxter-narrator detects the sources of Italy's long-lasting decadence in the medieval times when the Italian states became dominated by petty sovereigns – nobles, banditti and priests – whose perceived mischief determined the trajectory of Italy's development and its ultimate alienation from the course of modernity. The emergence of these petty sovereigns is seen as the logical outcome of a decadent and inherently enfeebled civilisation.

The politically most charged parts of the travelogue are those in which Baxter, on the basis of his observations of customs and beliefs of Roman Catholicism, speculates about Italy's decadence, arguing that it is the political culture of Roman Catholicism that is to blame for Italy's entrapment in a backward and premodern stage of historical development. Firstly, Baxter observes that Rome under the Papal authority represents a premodern polity built on a set of religious beliefs "of minds darkened by superstition" (114); this is why Baxter conceives Rome under the Papal reign as a polity that "was built as if Suspicion itself had dictated the plan" (119). Secondly, Baxter argues that as long as the authority of the Pope and the model of government of the Papal State remain unchallenged and alive, Rome and Italy will never be able to achieve modernisation and liberalisation in line with the Northern European model of historical development, because the political regime of Papal States relies on "corruption [that] had so eaten into the vitals of official morality that [even] he [Pope] seldom could effect any reform" (136). Thirdly, Baxter speculates that Roman Catholicism, presented as an essentially anti-liberal political culture specific for the European South, needs to be understood as a "spell" keeping Italy and the European South in the entrapped stage of backwardness:

Every educated Englishman knows it; every traveller in Italy mourns the spectacle of wretchedness [...] all acknowledge the misery [...] "Time was, when to be a simple Roman was to be nobler than a northern king." Can the spell not then be broken?

(139)

Baxter portrays the age of Humanism and early Renaissance as the period when Italy reached the apex of its historical development towards modernity, in alignment with Trollope's imageries of the Renaissance as the culmination of the Italian civilisation. In fact, Baxter even acknowledges that in the age of Humanism and Renaissance "to be a simple Roman was to be nobler than a northern king" (139), because, as perceived by Baxter, Italian states were the centre of (Western) civilisation. One of the crucial moments in the text is when Baxter argues that, in the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Saxon world represents the new centre of (Western) civilisation, and Italian states should overcome their "spectacle of wretchedness" (139) by following the Anglo-Saxon model of development, liberalising their political regimes and de-Catholicising their culture. Although not yet formally united and transformed into a modern nation-state, Italy is presented in Baxter's travelogue in the singular, unified in its political and moral decadence. Italy is once again conceived in terms of the moral geography of the European South: its political culture, its model of government and its trajectory of development are understood not only as morally inferior to English (British) culture, but also as the utmost embodiment of otherness in opposition to which the traveller's (national) identity is reinvigorated. By calling for the liberalisation and modernisation of Italy on the basis of the Northern (Protestant) model, Baxter in fact argues that Italy needs to de-Southernise itself in order to ultimately become part of European modernity.

...time has come – a people once torn asunder by intestine contentions, have united to follow the footsteps of England, by establishing and supporting a constitutional government, under which agriculture, manufactures, and the useful arts promise to flourish, as they have never yet done south of the Alpine ranges. Once Piedmont was [...] the incarnation of bigoted cruelty; now [...] a Protestant chapel is being erected in Turin...

(182)

In line with the standardised imagery of incompatibility of Southern Catholicism with Protestant modernity, the Baxter-narrator argues that Italy, as “a degenerate son” (148), still has the historical opportunity to join the trajectory leading to the consolidation of modernity, but only if Italy becomes “ripe for the reception of Protestant truth” (191). Ultimately, the Baxter-narrator endorses the anti-Catholic Victorian assumption that “there are some of the Roman Catholic doctrines which, per se, must be deemed inconsistent with freedom of conscience and rational liberty” (216-17). Thereby, the travelogue turns into an intercession, on behalf of the European South, for its own liberation from its Southernness.

Representations of Italy in Post-1871 Victorian Travelogues

The three previously analysed modern Victorian travelogues (written in the 1850s and 1860s) represented Italy as an essentially decadent moral geography unable to reach full modernisation and liberalisation without following the model of British historical development. In the aftermath of the Unification of Italy in 1871, however, Victorian travelogues offered a radically different representation of Italy by perceiving the newly formed nation’s ongoing modernisation as a desecration of its so-called Romantic spirit. Paradoxically, following the completion of Italy’s modern nation-building process, Victorian travel writers started to romanticise its state of premodern decadence, portraying the country’s post-1871 development as desacralisation of the essence of Italy as the imagined land of romance.

For instance, Sala perceives modernisation of Italy in the aftermath of the Unification as desacralisation of the country’s true nature: “from that which was once the home of Romance everything which is Romantic is swiftly departing” (1885: 195). Moreover, Sala observes that post-1871 Italy is “becoming cleaner and more industrious, and, consequently, more prosperous” (195). On the same line, Harrison observes that the Unification transformed Italy into a country which lost both its essence and its premodern halo:

When I first saw Rome, it was not connected by any railway with Northern Italy. We had to travel by the road, and I cannot forget [...] the old-world coaches and postilions, the desolate plain broken by ruins and castles; the mediaeval absurdities of Papal officialism [...] it was as though one had passed by enchantment into the seventeenth century, with its picturesque barbarism.

(Harrison 1894: 253-254)

According to Harrison, Rome was previously an ancient city absorbed by “the air of mouldering abandonment [...] as of some corner of medieval Europe left forgotten and untouched by modern progress, with all the historic glamour, the pictorial squalor, the Turkish routine, all the magnificence of obsolete forms of civilization” (254). But following its modernisation, Harrison observes, Rome’s essence is gone and Rome “has become like any other European city, big, noisy, vulgar, overgrown” (254).

Although the myth of decadence still represents the structural core of Victorian travelogues on Italy post-1871, it is approached in a different manner to that taken in pre-1871 travelogues. Namely, in post-1871 travelogues modernisation is perceived as desacralisation of the essence of Italy as a land of Romance. Rather than calling for the overcoming of decadence by means of modernisation in line with Northern trajectory of modernity, post-1871 travelogues perceive Italy’s state of decadence as the death mask of a fallen civilisation. It is important to note the publication dates of the case studies addressed in

this section: Frances Elliot's *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy* was published in 1871, coinciding with the Unification of Italy, and George Gissing's *By the Ionian Sea* was published in 1901, the year that symbolically represents the end of the Victorian era. In selecting those two texts, the paper highlights the continuity of, and shifts in engagement with, the myth of decadence in post-1871 travelogues.

Representation of Italy in Frances Elliot's *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy*

Frances Elliot's *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy* can be taken as one of the first examples of this shift in Victorian representations of Italy. Drawing upon the imagery of Gothic fiction, Elliot's travelogue conceives Italy as the embodiment of Romantic spirit and "Gothic splendour" in which Italy's decadence is no longer seen as a sign of entrapment in state of underdevelopment, but rather as a sign of the "splendour" of a glorious past which is preserved as a monument or even a work of art (1872: 101). In Elliot's travelogue, the state of conserved decay represents not something that has to be abolished or transformed in line with the British model of historical development, but as something which memorialises the climax of the ancient and Humanist civilisation of Italy.

Post-1871 travel writers found particular beauty in the premodern nature of Italy's picturesqueness, which Elliot presents as unaffected by modern civilisation and conserved in its state of ruination. In one part of Elliot's travelogue, it is clearly stated that the Southernness ("a more southern aspect") of Italy is related to the country's picturesqueness in the terms of conserved decadence: "As we advanced, the country assumed a more southern aspect [...] above rose the hills where Hannibal and his host lay encamped, and behind which his reserve was concealed" (96). In this sense, Italy and the entire European South are represented as "romantic" spaces in harmony with their premodern past (103). What post-1871 travel writers considered to be "romantic" was, in fact, a sight of preserved monuments of the premodern ages untouched by modernity. Elliot, hence, argues that old Italian cities and preserved monuments of the past embody "the Gothic splendour" (101). Elliot pays particular attention to Perugia:

Perugia is a wonderful old place [...] all the houses look as if not a brick had been touched since the Caesars [...] The very latest fashions date back three hundred years; and one feels quite relieved while contemplating something light in the Gothic palaces, after seeing the stupendous antiquity of the Etruscan walls, which certainly must have been raised by the Titans themselves long before their disgrace...

(101)

In the text, the romantic Italy of "Gothic splendour" is imagined not as a country of the living, but as the country of the dead, a country fully entrapped in its past, turned into a monument commemorating the death of a formerly glorious civilisation:

Nothing can be more striking than the aspects of its half-ruined walls, battlements, and towers. The forsaken appearance of the streets makes it look more like a city of the dead than the living. One could easily believe the whole place had gone to sleep after the great churches were built, and never woke up again.

(117)

On the other hand, Elliot perceives Rome in terms of desecration of “the Gothic splendour”, because of the observed modern character of the city. Elliot is disgusted by modern Rome, a city which does not match her image of a romantic city whose purpose of existence is the preservation of the monuments of the city’s glorious past. In fact, she observes that “the modern Romans seemed to have proposed to themselves in their erection to wage the most determined war against any stray memories which might be evoked by the least vestige of ancient times” (131). Elliot thus argues that she prefers decaying Palatine to the modern Capitoline Mount:

There is a repulsive grandeur about the stern decay of the Palatine; and, though crumbling into dust, far more exciting to my imagination than the cheerful, sunny, modernly-built, and thickly-populated quarter of the Capitoline Mount, where the past wrestles in vain with the present, and loses all dignity in the encounter.

(137)

Ultimately, Elliot describes modern Rome as a “horrid sacrilege”: not only did Romans construct the “modernly-built” Capitoline Mount, thereby desecrating the perceived beauty of the decaying Palatine, but they also hold a cattle-market under the Palatine, and so “the ancient Forum is now only known to the degenerate modern Romans by its designation of “*Campo Vaccino*”” (138). In Elliot’s travelogue, this type of “horrid sacrilege” (138) against “the Gothic splendour” (101) of the real Italy comes as a result of the beliefs and behaviour of “modern Romans” – represented in physiological terms as “degenerates” – who “regardless of the celebrated scene of their ancestors’ greatest triumphs [...] simply consider it [the Forum] as a dirty space devoted to the sale of cattle” (143).

Representation of Italy in George Gissing’s *By the Ionian Sea*

Published in 1901, thereby coinciding with the end of the Victorian era, George Gissing’s *By the Ionian Sea* can be viewed as one of the last Victorian travelogues on Italy to rely on a standardised Victorian narrative of the country’s political and moral decadence in which Italy is presented in terms of a preconceived understanding of the moral geography of the European South.

At the very beginning of the travelogue, the Gissing-narrator asserts that the main reason for his decision to visit Italy and Southern Europe is the conceptualisation of Italy as “a land of romance” that has haunted him since he was a child: “mine [desire] is to escape life as I know it and dream myself into that old world which was the imaginative delight of my boyhood [...] world of the Greeks and Romans is my land of romance” (1901: 6). Of course, Gissing is referring to the Victorian political imagination and its standardised representation of Italy as a moral geography of the European South, fully aware, as a travel writer, that even his cultural preconceptions of Italy were shaped by the very same political imagination. In fact, the Gissing-narrator claims that he decided to embark on a journey through the European South exactly because of his life-long fascination with the imageries of the South that had become embedded in Victorian imagination.

What is fascinating about the travelogue is the fact that, although perfectly aware that the imagery of the South as a “land of romance” was nothing but a “dream” or a myth, the Gissing-narrator nevertheless accepts such a myth, “dreaming himself into that old world” in order to “escape [modern] life” and to discover something essentially “romantic”, still untouched by modernisation (6). *By the Ionian Sea* can indeed be considered the ultimate

example of the post-1871 Victorian travelogue on Italy, not only because Gissing fully accepts the fact that the European South is an invented, moral geography constituted within the Victorian political imagination, but also because he reveals that the myth of decadence lies in the very core of Victorian moral geographies of the South. What the Gissing-narrator conceives to be the real Italy is not only “the land of romance”, but also the moral geography of decadence, “a dead world” turned into a monument of its bygone glory (8).

The narrator enthusiastically describes all the sites which seem to display a particular type of decadence – conserved decadence of the fallen Southern civilisation – as embodiments of the real essence of Italy, which is found in Italy’s Southernness. For instance, the city of Paola completely delights Gissing, because it “gave him pleasure to find the place so small and primitive” (7). In fact, what gratifies the Gissing-narrator and offers him pleasure are those sights which seem to embody the very same “dream” of “the old world” untouched by modernity, a dream that has been forged and consolidated in the British imagination of the South throughout the entire Victorian era (6). On the other hand, sights of the modernisation of Italy are connoted in negative terms, in ways similar to what Elliot called “horrid sacrilege” (1872: 143).

The new age declares itself here and there at Cosenza. A squalid railway station, a hideous railway bridge, have brought the town into the European network; and the craze for building, which has disfigured and half ruined Italy, shows itself in an immense new theatre – Teatro Garibaldi – just being finished.

(Gissing 1901: 25)

“The new age” of modernisation and industrialisation is perceived as an age of desecration of “the dream” of “the old world” of conserved decadence (25). Moreover, the Gissing-narrator represents modern Italian cities such as Cosenza as abominations of the “dream” of Italy as a “land of romance”, because they do not embody what he conceives to be the essence of Italy’s culture: namely, its Southernness. This is why Gissing juxtaposes modernised cities such as Cosenza with authentic Italian cities still embodying in themselves the perceived essence of Southernness.

Let Taranto try as it will to be modern and progressive, there is a retarding force which shows little sign of being overcome – the profound superstition of the people. A striking episode of street life reminded me how near akin were the southern Italians of to-day to their predecessors in what are called the dark ages.

(41)

From Gissing’s perspective, Taranto represents the real image of Italy, because it is a city still entrapped in a stage of premodern underdevelopment, a city dominated by “a retarding force” which does not allow the city to modernise, keeping it in a state of conserved political, historical and moral decadence (41). Paradoxically, travel writers such as Gissing conceived decadence as the real image of Italy, perceiving modern Italy as nothing more than a death mask of the fallen civilisation of ancient and medieval times, presenting the people of Italy as “akin to their predecessors in the dark ages” (41). In this sense, the narrator constructs a moral geography of the European South, which represents Italy as having been in continuous decay since the fifteenth century when the Humanist-Renaissance civilisation of Italy reached its climax.

The image of the conserved decadence of Taranto serves as affirmation of the idea that Italy embodies a polity unchanged since the end of Middle Ages, and the city becomes a

monument of the preserved past. Although the travelogue presents a romanticised view of the South, the Southern areas discussed are nonetheless depicted as the reservoir of disease: “The people [of Cotrone] are all more or less unhealthy; one meets peasants horribly disfigured with life-long malaria” (71). It is, therefore, not a coincidence that the Gissing-narrator finds the ultimate confirmation of Southernness of Italy in Squillace, a city conceived as the embodiment of the country’s entrapment in premodern underdevelopment and disease:

“*C’è miseria*”– there’s nothing but poverty. The same reply would be given in towns and villages without number throughout the length of Italy. I had seen poverty enough, and squalid conditions of life, but the most ugly and repulsive collection of houses I ever came upon was the town of Squillace [...] At the moment of my visit there was in progress the only kind of cleaning which Squillace knows; down every trodden way and every intermural gully poured a flush of rain-water [...] which all but barred progress [...] life in a country called civilized cannot easily be more primitive than under these crazy roofs.

(136-7)

Although Squillace is represented as the embodiment of poverty and squalid conditions of life, it is important to note that Gissing nevertheless portrays it as the incarnation of the “dream” of “the old world” untouched by modernity (6). The Gissing-narrator, ultimately, finds the real Italy he was searching for, thereby reinvigorating the Victorian political imagination of Italy as the Southern land of romance whilst recognising some of the negative aspects of Italian life. In other words, the narrator ultimately accepts as the incarnation of the real Italy only those aspects of the country corresponding to a preconceived imagery of Italy as a moral geography of decadence. This only shows to what extent the myth of the decadence of the European South permeated Victorian political imagination until 1901.

In his pursuit of the romanticised “dream” of Italy of the past, the Gissing-narrator paradoxically reaffirms the physician’s perspective from which Italy had been observed in pre-1871 Victorian travelogues. The Bennett-narrator discussed above conceives his journey as a process of overcoming the fascination with a romanticised image Italy. To achieve this, the Bennett-narrator aims to detach himself from his former fascination with Italy’s past in order to diagnose the real Italy of disease and decay. In contrast to the earlier text, the Gissing-narrator commences his account of travel by reaffirming his fascination with Italy’s past, but while observing the wretchedness on display in this land of Romance, ultimately returns to the Bennett physician’s point of view to observe and diagnose Italy’s sickness and decay. The world of Romance thus turns into a spectacle of decadence, revealing the extent to which the myth of decadence was embedded, as a standardised narrative and discourse formation, in both pre-1871 and post-1871 travelogues.

Conclusion

Although Italy and Southern Europe dropped out of focus in British travelogues following the end of the Grand Tour, Victorian travelogues on Italy written in the second half of the nineteenth century not only accepted, but fully reinvigorated the representation of Italy and Southern Europe in terms of a moral geography of decadence in opposition to which British identity and a British trajectory of organic modernity were confirmed. In the Victorian travelogues analysed above, the European South, as a moral geography, was imagined as a counter-geography of modernity and, as such, ideologically utilised for legitimising the specific trajectory of Northern modernity, which was presented as the antipode to the perceived

state of backwardness of the European South, with South being used as a trope for a premodern space of superstition, despotism and anti-liberal political culture.

The first section of this article has shown that there is a common thread between Trollope's and Baxter's travelogues. Both narratives aim to detect the sources of Italy's perceived political, moral and social backwardness, and both conceive Italy as a country trapped in a state of decadence caused by its Southern political culture and lagging behind British (Northern) modernity. Due to the fact that all three travelogues were published before the completion of the unification of Italy in 1871, they discursively represent Italy as an essentially decadent moral geography unable to reach full modernisation that had already taken root in Britain and Northern Europe, with modernisation understood primarily in terms of the finalisation of construction of a modern nation-state on the basis of liberalism.

While Trollope's and Baxter's narrators perceived signs of decadence as the ultimate proof of the country's backwardness and underdevelopment, post-1871 writers such as Elliot and Gissing conceived decadence as the quintessence of the Romantic or Gothic nature of Italy, thereby understanding it as the apex of the Italian civilisation. Despite these differences, it is important to notice that both discourses relied on the narrative of Italy's political, historical and moral decadence. The only difference is that pre-1871 travel writers argued that this state of decadence needed to be overcome by accepting the British model of modernisation and liberalisation, while post-1871 writers argued that the modernisation of Italy desecralised its "Gothic splendour", presenting Italy as a death mask of its premodern civilisation.

Works Cited

- Barlow, Paul. 2013. "The Most Degraded of Them All: The Horrors of the Mediterranean Race." In *Southern Horrors: Northern Visions of the Mediterranean World*, edited by Gilbert Bonifas and Martine Monacelli, 65-78. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Baumeister, Martin, and Roberto Sala. 2016. "A Long Road South. Southern Europe as a Discursive Construction and Historical Region after 1945." In *Southern Europe?: Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece from the 1950s until the Present Day*, edited by Martin Baumeister and Roberto Sala, 19-50. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Baxter, William Edward. 1852. *The Tagus and the Tiber; or Notes of Travel in Portugal, Spain, and Italy, in 1850-1. Vol. II*. London: Richard Bentley.
- Bennett, James Henry. 1865. *Winter in the South of Europe: or, Mentone, The Riviera, Corsica, Sicily, and Biarritz, as Winter Climates*. London: John Churchill & Sons.
- Borm, Jan. 2016. "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology." In *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, edited by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, 13-26. London: Routledge.
- Bracewell, Wendy. 2015. "Europe." In *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, 341-50. London: Routledge.
- Bolufer, Mónica. 2016. "Orientalizing Southern Europe?: Spain Through the Eyes of Foreign Travelers." *The Eighteenth Century*, 57.4: 451-67.
- Burke, Edmund. [1790] 1910. *Reflections on the French Revolution*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons.
- Buzard, James. 2002. "The Grand Tour and After (1660-1840)." In *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 37-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooke, Simon. 2015. "Inner Journeys: Travel Writing as Life Writing." In *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, edited by Carl Thompson, 15-24. London: Routledge.

- Dainotto, Roberto. 2000. "A South with a View: Europe and Its Other." *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1.2: 375-90.
- Dainotto, Roberto. 2007. *Europe (in Theory)*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Elliot, Frances. 1872. *Diary of an Idle Woman in Italy. Vol. 1*. Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz.
- Fussell, Paul. 1982. *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gephardt, Katarina. 2014. *The Idea of Europe in British Travel Narratives, 1789-1914*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Gissing, George. 1901. *By the Ionian Sea*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Harrison, Frederic. 1894. *The Meaning of History, and Other Historical Pieces*. New York: Macmillan.
- Holland, Patrick, and Graham Huggan. 2000. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Kuehn, Julia, and Paul Smethurst. 2015. "Introduction." In *New Directions in Travel Writing*, edited by Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, 1-13. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Küsters, Anselm, and Elisa Garrido. 2020. "Mining PIGS. A structural topic model analysis of Southern Europe based on the German newspaper *Die Zeit* (1946-2009)." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 28.4: 477-93. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1784112>
- Martens, Britta. 2010. "Vatican Ceremonies and Tourist Culture in Nineteenth-Century British Travelogues." In *Imagining Italy: Victorian Writers and Travellers*, edited by Catherine Waters, Michael Hollington and John Jordan, 14-34. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- O'Connor, Maura. 1998. *The Romance of Italy and the English Imagination*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Pfister, Manfred. 1999. "The Passion from Winterson to Coryate." In *Venetian Views, Venetian Blinds: English Fantasies of Venice*, edited by Manfred Pfister and Barbara Schaff, 15-28. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Raponi, Danilo. 2014. *Religion and Politics in the Risorgimento: Britain and the New Italy, 1861-1875*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sala, George Augustus. 1885. *A Journey Due South: Travels in Search of Sunshine*. London: Vizetelly & Co.
- Thompson, Carl. 2011. *Travel Writing*. London: Routledge.
- Thompson, Carl. 2019. "Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing." In *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, edited by Nandini Das & Tim Youngs, 108-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trollope, Thomas Adolphus. 1850. *Impressions of a Wanderer in Italy, Switzerland, France, and Spain*. London: Henry Colburn Publisher.
- Trollope, Thomas Adolphus. 1862. *A Lenten Journey in Umbria and the Marches*. London: Chapman & Hall.
- Zilcosky, John. 2008. "Writing Travel." In *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey*, edited by John Zilcosky, 3-22. Toronto: Toronto University Press.