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Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

Eternal City or the Stuff of Nightmares? The Characterisation of Rome in *Portrait of a Lady* and *Middlemarch*

Hannah Hunt
p. 187-198

Résumé

Both Henry James and George Eliot make graphic use of realistic locations within their novels. This practice provides a plausible socio-historical context for their characters and contributes to the development of the genre of “realisms” in the nineteenth century novel. The use of specific identifiable locations also indicates, through their character’s engagement with their geographical setting, how place and time help construct the identity of the characters themselves. My paper addresses this aspect of the realist novel of the nineteenth century, through the pens of two diverse authors. It explores how the differing narrative strategies of

Eliot and James, broadly delineated as a blend of overt and covert narrative voice, are expressed through the response of two young brides to Rome. It notes the recurring use in both novels of a metaphor of marriage as constituting a confining cul de sac, in which the idealism of both Dorothea and Isabel is crushed and their autonomy suppressed. This is contextualised by the physical labyrinths, antique artefacts and material culture of the classical city which both young women visit and come to know while they come to know their husbands. Their disillusionment and increasing insight about the nature of their marriages is ironically juxtaposed to their sightseeing of a classical civilisation which teaches them how their predecessors in the city lived, through their own eyes and those of various guides. It notes how within Rome, Casaubon and Osborne view their wives as extensions to their collections of classical urban artefacts/provider of secretarial skills rather than as women in their own right. The paper suggests that the physical and emotional journeys of these two young women are experienced in tandem, and that their response to the foreign material world to which their husbands transplant them echoes their own sense of alienation from their husbands. Their temporal distance from the ancient Roman culture mimics their sense of emotional dislocation.

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Entrées d’index

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Casaubon, Dorothea Brooke, Eliot (George), husbands and wives, Isabel Archer, James (Henry), marriage, Osborne, realism, Rome
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Texte intégral

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- 1 Levine bases his argument on Henry James’ “*Daniel Deronda*: A Conversation,” appended to F.R. Leavis (...)
- 2 As noted above, where James comments on Eliot’s handling of Rome in *Middlemarch*, he suggests that I (...)

1Whether or not we agree that Dorothea and Casaubon act as models for Isabel and Gilbert (Levine 244),[1] the choice of Rome as the location for disappointed

romance in both *Middlemarch* and *The Portrait of a Lady* is striking. George Landow, viewing Rome through Victorian paintings of the city, comments that the city "cast a longer shadow than did the Bible on the British upper and upper-middle classes, for whom Latin was a second language and Roman history a second past" (Landow 29). More specifically, Levine sees our two novels taking Rome as "a stage against which the sufferings of their heroines can be objectified and given a kind of universality" being a city "rich with the history of individual suffering, symbolized by the awesome ruins upon which both Isabel and Dorothea gaze" (Levine 251). But their responses to Rome vary considerably. For Dorothea, the visual impression of Rome, semiotically denoted by St Peter's, is vividly imprinted "like a disease of the retina" (*M* 182) which recurs like a nightmare after she returns home; the basilica becomes for Dorothea a synecdoche for the sense of threat and carnality represented by the sightseeing in Rome (Michie 239). By contrast, Henry James depicts Isabel as not "one of the superior tourists who are "disappointed" in Saint Peter's" and unlike her English, Puritan counterpart who recoils from the extravagance of catholic ostentation, "the first time [Isabel] found herself beneath the far-arching dome and saw the light drizzle down through the air thickened with incense and with the reflections of marble and gilt, or mosaic and bronze, her conception of greatness rose and dizzily rose" (*PL* 319–20).2 Isabel enjoys the sensation of being "an atom" in "the greatest of human temples" (*PL* 321), a far cry from Dorothea's anxious introspection. The young American is equally at home with the classical antiquities; her appreciation of the "noble quietude . . . the large white mantels of peace . . . the exquisite Roman air . . . their motionless grace" is juxtaposed to Osmond's frank appraisal of her as "one who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects" by refusing Warburton (*PL* 327–8). Where Casaubon prefers the books of the Vatican library to the company of his new bride, Osmond (operating at an aesthetic and visual rather than intellectual level) is provoked by viewing Isabel amidst great art into seeking to add her to his own collection.

- 3 Helena Michie's work on the transformative function of Victorian honeymoons is illuminating on this (...)
- 4 Romantic art frequently "employs the destruction of Pompeii as a paradigm for political, personal, (...)
- 5 Casaubon, however, sees it as the "key to all mythologies", a typical aggrandising view. Levine not (...)

2Dorothea's frustrated marital hopes and awakening to a new sexual and psychological maturity are firmly placed in the "eternal city," where her new husband buried himself in books while she realises with increasing horror that rather than enlarging her outlook, marriage has rendered her even more confined.3 Whilst we may agree with Michie that it is over-simplistic to give a teleological reading to a "bad" honeymoon (Michie 234),4 Dorothea's experience of Rome does not augur well. Faced at his death with her husband's insistence that she continue his literary ambitions, Dorothea despairs of "the days, and months, and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called

shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins" (*M* 449–50). Returning to her husband's papers after his death, she sees his literary legacy as "a tomb with his name on it" (*M* 463).5

- 6 These include Cicero, Sappho, Pegasus, Niobe, Adonis, Diana, Dido, Antigone. Casaubon's presentatio (...)
- 7 Joseph Wiesenfarth reads this differently, with Ladislaw also as Theseus and Dorothea as an Ariadne (...)
- 8 I find his suggestion that Casaubon's death is like waiting for the pagan boatman on the banks of t (...)
- 9 Rischin explores the parallels to the Ariadne myth in detail in her article, and notes how their us (...)
- 10 In an ironic allusion to the barrenness of the marriage, Eliot notes that "he had not yet succeeded (...)
- 11 Hardy describes this scene as "delicate and innocent," noting also a "very subdued" use of Persepho (...)

3As Michie points out, for middleclass men of the time the European honeymoon may revisit tourist (and possibly sexual) experiences associated with the Grand Tour, such that Europe becomes a metonymy for sex (Michie 236, 250); for their brides, however, it was likely to prove their first major cultural and erotic exploration. On this journey, the husband was expected to act as guide (Michie 238), a role assimilated into Eliot's many allusions to classical myths.6 The dominant metaphor of labyrinth associated with Casaubon, and the placing of Dorothea next to a statue of Ariadne, posits Ladislaw as a rescuer, with Casaubon as the Theseus figure who has abandoned Dorothea in Rome, as he predicted he would before the wedding7, and again in death (see Wiesenfarth 196).8 The fact that Ariadne is asleep denotes Dorothea's unawakened sexual and romantic side, the encounter with Ladislaw, like some phosphorescent Bacchus, providing the first nudge towards arousal.9 Rischin draws attention to the fact that the following chapter commences with a verse epigraph composed by Eliot herself, suggesting Dorothea as an innocent child, awaking afraid, which one could read as fear of sexual wakening (Rischin 1131). It is ironic that the author of the never to be completed "Key to all Mythologies" (see *M* 22 and 449)10 is himself a mythic figure of unheroic proportions; what Hardy calls "the winter-worn husband, the Minotaur" (Hardy 29). Of other mythical figures, Eliot is reticent, only hinting at Cupid in the touching scene where the widowed Dorothea cradles to her face the miniature of Will's grandmother (*M* 514–5).11 Casaubon's dismissal of the Cupid and Psyche frescoes in the Farnesina as "probably the romantic invention of a literary period" rather than "a genuine mythical product," reminds us that he himself was lacking in mythic stature (*M* 185).

4The significance of Naumann's identification with the Nazarenes is fully discussed by Witemeyer, who explores how Dorothea integrates her ideas about classical and renaissance art, but this is beyond the scope of this brief paper, likewise the illuminating detail on Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic and the psychological

development of not only Dorothea but other characters in the novel, expounded by Andrew Leng.

- 12 Anigail S. Rischin's stimulating study of the interplay between visual and verbal focuses on the pa (...)

5Both in Rome and at Lowick, narrow labyrinths and small-windowed rooms act as ekphrasis,12 expressing the female protagonists' (and narrators') evaluation of their husbands as intellectually stunted, emotionally dried up and socially constrained. Casaubon's ideas are in a "dark closet," his emotions are "fenced in" and he attempted to "annex happiness with a lovely young bride" (*M* 263). The interconnecting rooms in Osmond's Palazzo Roccanera suggest a similar labyrinthine claustrophobia for Isabel (*PL* 395). It is in this enclosed space that Isabel observes the incriminating intimacy of her husband and his former mistress (*PL* 438). In the same house shortly afterward is set the key chapter in which Isabel muses in front of the dying fire; like Dorothea she "suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness . . . it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression." Her experience of enclosure is articulated through a sense of gathering gloom and darkness which "at first was vague and thin . . . But it steadily deepened" (*PL* 456). The confinement is multiple; her sense of incarceration becomes externalised, and is presented as almost that of an anchorite: "It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air" (*PL* 461). Focalised through the eyes of Pansy's suitor Ned Rosier, the house becomes "a dungeon . . . a domestic fortress . . . which smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence . . ." which it combines with "quite the grand air" and "Mrs Osmond's warm, rich-looking reception rooms" (*PL* 392, 393) reflecting the sense of enclosure and constraint experienced by Isabel during her marriage as well as Pansy, whose marital hopes are continually controlled by her father.

- 13 This perhaps reflects Eliot's own school day Calvinism and Puritanism, discussed in detail in chapt (...)
- 14 Catholicism is generally depicted as alien; note Dorothea's "strange whims of fasting like a Papist (...)
- 15 Michie draws on biographical as well as fictional honeymoons to show the positioning of the male ab (...)
- 16 The suggestion that Casaubon is impotent, infertile or possibly suffers from premature ejaculation (...)

6The different social contexts and previous experience of Dorothea and Isabel mediate their response to Rome. Dorothea has had a diet of "English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meagre Protestant histories;" her "Puritan conceptions" are disturbed by the (presumably nude) classical statues collected by her uncle (*M* 68)13 and exposure to "the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from

reverence . . . first jarred her as with an electric shock" (*M* 181).14 Ladislaw and Naumann view her in Rome "clad in Quakerish grey drapery" (*M* 177). Dorothea is transplanted from protestant rural security, she was little consulted about the decision to travel to Rome.15 In referring to the "brokenness of their intercourse" when discussing the location of the honeymoon, Dorothea perhaps proleptically comments on unsatisfactory sexual intercourse.16 From the outset it is clear that Casaubon's choice was "to inspect some documents in the Vatican" (*M* 184) and his only concern for Dorothea was that she should take the right female companion to entertain her whiles he was thus engaged, expecting himself to be "constrained" by his studies, as perhaps his sexual prowess was likewise constrained (*M* 80).

- 17 Cf. "the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand" (*M* 78). A dominant contrast in the novel (...)

7Both Dorothea and Isabel seek to embrace "the larger life" (Levine 246, 247). However, physical travel does not achieve this for either of them; they find their lives shrunken by marriage, their inner selves submerged and confined. Lowick is introduced as having a "sunk fence", being "more confined" and having "sombre yews," with the house itself "small-windowed and melancholy" (*M* 67). Dorothea's maiden life is depicted as circumscribed — when she meets Casaubon she "looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of Mr Casaubon's mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought" (*M* 22). On the verge of yoking herself with him, she portrays her existence as "struggling in the bonds of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither" (*M* 26). At this stage, she absorbs Casaubon's pamphlet "as eagerly as she might have taken in the scent of a fresh bouquet after a dry, hot, dreary walk" (*M* 35). Ironically even then Dorothea sees Casaubon as a museum piece, his speech "like a specimen from a mine, or the inscription on the door of a museum which might open on the treasures of past ages" (*M* 30). In a laboured attempt at humour perhaps, he acknowledges in his opening speech that "I live too much with the dead. My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and confusing changes;" he likes to keep his papers in pigeon holes (*M* 16–17) and with reference to the "stream of feeling" that might be expected as a response to his proposal of marriage, he found "that sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him" (*M* 58). The parentheses around the meaningless circumlocutions of his proposal suggest confinement of emotion and sexuality (*M* 39–40). Later, Dorothea realises that it is *Casaubon's* life which is labyrinthine, his intellectual endeavour reaching nothing but desiccated cul de sacs; his legacy to his young bride contains only instructions for the Key, and his papers are "empty of personal words for her" (*M* 464). Through the customary compassionate but slightly patronising tone of the narrative voice that dominates the novel, we are told: "Poor Mr Casaubon himself was lost among small closets and winding stairs . . . With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of

windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men's notions about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight" (*M* 185).17 The charm of his scholarship is speedily eroded for Dorothea; in Rome Dorothea undergoes the painful recognition that the man she idolized far from having a mind of "large vistas and wide fresh air" was in fact rather denoted by "anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither" (*M* 183). Her awakening to this sorrowful realisation exactly mirrors her words about her own life before she married, suggesting a stagnation and futility to her self-sacrifice which everyone else has already observed.

- 18 See, for example, his 1884 essay, *The Art of Fiction*.
- 19 Berkman points out that both heroines subsequently endure an all night vigil, wrestling with the im (...)
- 20 Michie's comment that "Europe figures in much Victorian fiction . . . as a metonymy for sexualised, (...)
- 21 Her removal from Rome would fragment Osmond's collection of objets d'art.

8Dorothea's response to "the eternal city," both its classical antiquities and the human antiquity with whom she shares a marital bed, is "profoundly expressive of her consciousness" (Da Sousa Correa 127). Her wedding journey forms a crucial stage in her self-development and growth in awareness. James portrays Isabel's more favourable engagement with Rome as a corrective to Eliot's version—and reflects James' much vaunted emphasis on character delineation forming the very stuff of the novel's plot.18 Berkman finds in both Roman scenes "the parallel use of similar settings and metaphors" which "underscores the similar richness of imagination each brings to her growing self-awareness, and how internal states of mind are influenced by external circumstances.19" However, for me this is not the point at which we learn most about Isabel. For Dorothea, Rome is the place of awakening to a sad realisation of the desiccated nature of her husband and the emotional barrenness of her marriage, with only embryonic glimpses of an option in the person of the phosphorescent Will. For both women, perhaps, Europe is a metonymy for sexual awakening.20 Isabel's Rome is a highly complex venue. As an unmarried woman, visiting the city for the first time, it acts as a lodestar for the men flitting across the stage of her life. In addition to its magnetic attraction for Isabel's suitors, Rome is also where the Machiavellian Mme Merle has "a little *pied-à-terre* with some rather good old damask" (*PL* 219). It also becomes emblematic of Osmond's control of his wife: her expressed wish to leave Rome, temporarily (to pay a final visit to Ralph) is treated by Osmond as an act of "the most deliberate the most calculated, opposition," tantamount to desertion (*PL* 570).21 The ambiguous denouement of the novel is articulated by Henrietta's report to Isabel's would-be saviour that she "this morning started for Rome" (*PL* 628).

- 22 Warburton explains to Isabel that the idea of reaching Rome gave him strength in his final illness (...)

9Ralph is the emotional anchor for Isabel among her admirers, arriving in Rome ostensibly to convalesce but in fact to begin the process of dying.22 There, Ralph desires to "watch over her" (*PL* 323). Rome fulfils a symbolic role as the gathering place for various characters: Isabel plans that her cousin will be escorted home to die by her former lover: "Lord Warburton had brought Ralph to Rome and Mr Goodwood should take him away. There seemed a happy symmetry in this" (*PL* 529). Within a short period, all his rivals visit Rome, drawn by the presence of Isabel. From the outset we are "told", even instructed, that Isabel (unlike Dorothea) will appreciate Rome: "There were ten days left of the beautiful month of May—the most precious month of all to the true Rome-lover. Isabel would become a Rome-lover; that was a foregone conclusion. She was provided with a trusty companion of her own sex . . ." Even after his disillusion with Osmond is well established, Rome in Isabel's eyes remains a place of solace and tranquillity, being presented as akin to a character in its own right:

> She had long before this taken old Rome into her confidence, for in a world of ruins the ruin of her happiness seemed a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet were still upright . . . She had become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion. But she had grown to think of it chiefly as the place where people had suffered. This was what had come to her in the starved churches, where the marble columns, transferred from pagan ruins, seemed to offer her a companionship in endurance. (*PL* 551–2)

- 23 Osmond presents this as "encouragement" by Isabel that he should go to Rome, and only questions wha (...)

10Isabel's courtship by Osmond is conspicuously set in Rome. Whilst apparently finding Rome "vulgar" (*PL* 273) Osmond takes a fancy for seeing how Isabel can refine the city by her presence: "I should like to be in Rome with you . . . I should like to see you on that wonderful ground" (*PL* 308–9).23 Like Warburton who appears unexpectedly, Osmond almost magically appears in St Peter's (*PL* 320). An urbane traveller who uses Rome on this occasion as a foil or test of Isabel's worthiness, he writes a sonnet on "Rome revisited," his mannered way of "commemorating the occasions of life by a tribute to the muse" (*PL* 330–331). Ralph's repeated visit to Rome prompt Osmond's jealous and petulant tyranny, effecting the split between himself and his wife. Made aware of Isabel's unhappiness, would-be protectors travel to Rome. Caspar Goodwood assumes what in Eliot's novel might have been a mythic role as protector and rescuer of his fair lady; here, James' discretion and reserve simply portray him as the energetic American engaging with alien European culture (*PL* 493). We are not told anything of Goodwood's response to the beauties of Rome because his focus is not tourism but heroism. He protests about Isabel's proposed return to Rome, appalled to think that she will "sink back into that misery" and "open your mouth to that poisoned air" (*PL* 626).

- 24 As Warburton leaves the gallery of the Capitol, Osmond "entered the first and finest of the rooms" (...)
- 25 After a period in London she stays a further couple of weeks in Rome before making a "little pilgri (...)

11A sophisticated and well travelled young woman, Isabel is less impressionable than Dorothea, and, unencumbered by her English counterpart's devotion to her needy husband, she relishes the beauty and classical culture: "I may not attempt to report in its fullness our young woman's response to the deep appeal of Rome . . . It is enough to say that her impression was such as might have been expected of a person of her freshness and her eagerness" (*PL* 312). With the freedom to digest her impressions, she allows her imagination to move from the classical antiquities "to regions and objects charged with a more active appeal . . . From the Roman past to Isabel Archer's future was a long stride, but her imagination had taken it in a single flight" (*PL* 313). Warburton's arrival at this juncture reinforces Isabel's synthesis of part and future (*PL* 317). He meets Isabel outdoors; Osmond on the other hand is associated with interiors and confinement, surrounded by elegance and opulence.24 In a borrowed interior, which he finds "ugly to distress," he proposes elliptically to Isabel, as if to secure her for his collection (*PL* 332, 335). In Rome, Osmond declares his love; the following day, she leaves the city. Repeated visits to Rome punctuate the next stage of Isabel's travels,25 where Osmond follows her.

12For Dorothea, Rome is a lonely, and temporary, staging post on a honeymoon engineered by a husband keener to read manuscripts than his new wife's devoted glance. Her enforced solitude allows her to reflect on what she suspects will be an incomplete if not actually fatally flawed marriage; it is the locus of Ladislaw's deepening interest in her. There the claustrophobic and futile nature of Casaubon's mind is revealed to her, as she attempts to offer herself as amanuensis to the author of the "Key to all mythologies." For Isabel, a more worldly and sophisticated version of her English model, Rome is a rich source of many encounters which enable her to work through the prospect of her own and ultimately her step-daughter's marriages. For the two Americans who make it their home, Rome is one of many staging posts in an artistic and emotional journey of some breadth and vision. It frames the beginning and end of her love for Osmond; sets the scene for the articulation of his regard and desire for her and the locus for Isabel's other admirers to watch her progress. Her return to Rome to a man she knows she no longer loves, in order to care for his child, is an act of self-sacrifice akin to Dorothea's, when "she saw clearly enough the whole situation, yet she was fettered: she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers" (*PL* 452). Dorothea's intended intellectual and emotional martyrdom is rapidly cancelled out by her husband's death; James' novel, however, leaves much more open the extent to which Isabel must still serve a tyrannical man.

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Notes

[1] Levine bases his argument on Henry James' "*Daniel Deronda*: A Conversation," appended to F.R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (New York, 1954). James also acknowledges his debt to Eliot in his Preface to *Portrait of a Lady* and in his 1873 review of *Middlemarch*. James Berkman overstates the case, I believe, in asserting that "James rewrote Eliot's Middlemarch almost in its entirety in plot and characters" although I do admit there is a degree of "paralleling two crucial scenes, with an eye to curing its singular (in his estimation) defect." Q.D. Leavis also explored some of the Roman scenes in the two novels, attributing them to Dickens's use of Rome in *Little Dorrit*. Leon Edel's 5-volume biography of James explores this too.

[2] As noted above, where James comments on Eliot's handling of Rome in *Middlemarch*, he suggests that Isabel's greater receptiveness and appreciation for Rome is a corrective to Dorothea's caution. However, the personalities and contexts of the two women as much as anything militate for quite divergent responses, and James' belief that character not plot underlies the framework of a novel should also be taken into account.

[3] Helena Michie's work on the transformative function of Victorian honeymoons is illuminating on this, although for the purposes of this paper I have confined myself to specific references to my chosen novels. Other actual and fictional honeymoon such as that of Virginia Woolf, and that depicted in *On Chesil Beach* would provide many other sources for the enduring fascination of the topic.

[4] Romantic art frequently "employs the destruction of Pompeii as a paradigm for political, personal, and metaphysical crisis" (Landow n.8, 42).

[5] Casaubon, however, sees it as the "key to all mythologies", a typical aggrandising view. Levine notes that it is specifically his ambition to provide the Key to all Mythologies that entices her to "succumb" to him (Levine 248).

[6] These include Cicero, Sappho, Pegasus, Niobe, Adonis, Diana, Dido, Antigone. Casaubon's presentation as Aquinas, along with the attempts to see Dorothea as saintly "borders on the mock-heroic" (Witemeyer 87).

[7] Joseph Wiesenfarth reads this differently, with Ladislaw also as Theseus and Dorothea as an Ariadne leading him back to Middlemarch. For an extensive account of different readings of the mythical allusions, see *George Eliot's Mythmaking* (Heidelberg, 1977).

[8] I find his suggestion that Casaubon's death is like waiting for the pagan boatman on the banks of the Styx fanciful, however (Wiesenfarth 206.). Berkman's insistence on a conscious parallel between this scene and the one in which Isabel is disturbed by Warburton is not, I think, entirely justified, and no echoes of the mythic allusions are present in the Henry James 'version' of the Roman scene.

9 Rischin explores the parallels to the Ariadne myth in detail in her article, and notes how their use in Victorian literature enables an exploration of erotics not permitted overtly. This perhaps responds to Hardy's earlier suggestion that the association of Dorothea with Ariadne, "forsaken after all her efforts in her maze", is as relevant as the sensual association with Cleopatra noted by Naumann, who reads into this juxtaposition of living and marble women an ambiguous sexualisation (Hardy 21).

10 In an ironic allusion to the barrenness of the marriage, Eliot notes that "he had not yet succeeded in issuing copies of his mythological key" either (261, 262).

11 Hardy describes this scene as "delicate and innocent," noting also a "very subdued" use of Persephone motifs in the novel (Hardy 34).

12 Anigail S. Rischin's stimulating study of the interplay between visual and verbal focuses on the passage in Chapter 19, where Dorothea is placed near a statue of Ariadne. Rischin makes much of the use of language which was used to describe both visual art and the human form. See especially 1124 and n.6 on 1130.

13 This perhaps reflects Eliot's own school day Calvinism and Puritanism, discussed in detail in chapter one and two of U.C.Knoepflmacher's *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1965).

14 Catholicism is generally depicted as alien; note Dorothea's "strange whims of fasting like a Papist" (*M* 9). However among the plethora of intertextual and mythical allusions there are several which connect her to Saint Theresa (the Preface is not explicit but it is clear this refers to Dorothea) and Saint Barbara (M 81), and Naumann poses her as Santa Clara (*M* 202). See Landow's comment that Middlemarch presents Rome "as the embodiment of cultural traditions that threaten and disorient one brought up solely on the culture of the Bible" (Landow 30).

15 Michie draws on biographical as well as fictional honeymoons to show the positioning of the male above the female (prefiguring their sexual congress) in Ruskin's "honeymoon fantasy" which casts Effie in a similarly subordinate secretarial role to that played by Dorothea. The relative lack of choice experienced by Victorian women, whether fictional or actual, is graphically illustrated in her article (Michie 237).

16 The suggestion that Casaubon is impotent, infertile or possibly suffers from premature ejaculation or other sexual dysfunction is repeated throughout the novel; he lives in "Lowick"; his spirits frequently "fail to rise" (*M* 78–9) in connection with Dorothea's youthful ardour. As Barbara Hardy notes, his [imputed] impotence is "part of a larger incapacity for life" as in the case of Clifford Chatterley. She makes it clear that Eliot is "reticent" though not "silent" about this matter. She refers her reader to other studies of Casaubon's sexual

failings (Hardy 20, 17, 26–28).

17 Cf. “the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand” (*M* 78). A dominant contrast in the novel is between the darkness associated with Casuabon and Will Ladislaw’s light-bearing quality. The shaft of sunlight falling on Dorothea as she stands by the statue of Ariadne is emblematic of this, connecting her to Will through the symbolism as well as forming an object of aesthetic interest for Naumann.

18 See, for example, his 1884 essay, *The Art of Fiction*.

19 Berkman points out that both heroines subsequently endure an all night vigil, wrestling with the implications of what they perhaps subconsciously came to realise in their reflection in Rome, in which they “weigh their husband’s flawed characters, and vacillate about whether or not to honor such unreasonable demands.” However, Dorothea’s crisis is not only more personal (relating to how she spend her widowed life, compared to Isabel’s decision whether or not she encourage Warburton to propose to Pansy) but more directly related to the Roman incident than Isabel’s nuit blanche in Chapter 42. I would also argue that Isabel’s reflection is more broad-ranging and externalised than Dorothea’s, minimising the parallelism Berkman insists on.

20 Michie’s comment that “Europe figures in much Victorian fiction . . . as a metonymy for sexualised, if not sexual, experience” invites a sense that the journey is potentially erotic as well as geographical (Michie 236).

21 Her removal from Rome would fragment Osmond’s collection of objets d’art.

22 Warburton explains to Isabel that the idea of reaching Rome gave him strength in his final illness (*PL* 412).

23 Osmond presents this as “encouragement” by Isabel that he should go to Rome, and only questions what he should do with Pansy while he is there (*PL* 310–11). From the outset, Osmond’s choice of Italy as a home provides whatever depth of character is possible. Mme Merle introduces him in this context; “He’s exceedingly clever, a man made to be distinguished; but, as I tell you, you exhaust the description when you say he’s Mr Osmond who lives tout bêtement in Italy” (*PL* 218). He lives in Florence, where his house’s front is described forebodingly as “the mask, not the face of the house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes” (*PL* 251). This becomes almost a synecdoche for the man.

24 As Warburton leaves the gallery of the Capitol, Osmond “entered the first and finest of the rooms” (*PL* 326).

25 After a period in London she stays a further couple of weeks in Rome before making a “little pilgrimage to the East” (*PL* 349).

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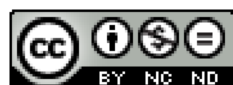

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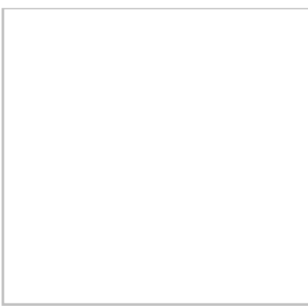
- 
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