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Gendering Art History in the Victorian Age: Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and George Eliot in Florence

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GENDERING ART HISTORY IN THE VICTORIAN AGE:
ANNA JAMESON, ELIZABETH EASTLAKE, AND GEORGE ELIOT IN FLORENCE

by

Antje Anderson

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
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Major: Art History

Under the Supervision of Professor Wendy Katz

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GENDERING ART HISTORY IN THE VICTORIAN AGE:
ANNA JAMESON, ELIZABETH EASTLAKE, AND GEORGE ELIOT IN FLORENCE

Antje Anderson, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2020

Advisor: Professor Wendy Katz

This thesis investigates how three professional Victorian women writers, Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and George Eliot, wrote about Renaissance art in Florence. As nineteenth-century women, they were excluded from certain realms of knowledge, agency, and influence. This exclusion (complicated by their privilege in terms of class, nationality, and education) influenced the way they experienced and wrote about art. The introduction addresses how changing modes of travel, broader access to publication, and art history's gradual emergence as an academic discipline helped shape their careers as women art writers—the well-known “Mrs. Jameson” as a popularizer of art history for a broad readership; Lady Elizabeth Eastlake as an art connoisseur who mostly published anonymously, best known as the wife of the director of the National Gallery in London, and George Eliot as a novelist who used her historical novel *Romola* to convey challenging ideas about women and art against the backdrop of Renaissance Florence.

Each of the chapters following the introduction focuses on a representative art site in Florence—one public, one museal, one sacred—and traces how the three writers' gender and their status as professional authors shaped how they wrote about these sites. Chapter 1 discusses how the British reaction to the Italian Renaissance and to the nationalist Risorgimento movement impacted their writing about public art in the politicized male space of the Piazza della Signoria, using Michelangelo's *David* as a major example; Chapter 2 shows how the emergence of national museums in the 19th century shaped their approach to seeing canonical masterpieces in

the Palazzo Pitti, especially the *Madonna della Seggiola* by Raphael; lastly, Chapter 3 addresses how the shift in Victorian taste towards the Quattrocento affected the way they experienced the frescoes of Fra Angelico in the Monastery of San Marco, only partly accessible to women, with special focus on their discussions of his *Crucifixion* in the monastery's chapterhouse. The conclusion addresses the afterlife of these responses in feminist art history.

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I dedicate this work to all readers, academics and otherwise,
who have ever been inspired and encouraged to write by reading George Eliot.

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

I ... have worked under impeding discouragement. I have a distrust in myself, in my work, in others' loving acceptance of it which robs my otherwise happy life of all joy. I ask myself, without being able to answer, whether I have ever before felt so chilled and oppressed... . I have written now about 60 pages of my romance. Will it ever be finished? – ever be worth anything?

George Eliot, journal entry while writing *Romola*, February 26, 1862.

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I am grateful to the academic mentors and thesis advisors that came before Wendy Katz, and who encouraged my scholarly pursuits: Dr. Helena Michie at Rice University, Dr. Peter Hühn, professor emeritus at the Universität Hamburg, and my high-school German teacher from grades 11-13, Irmgard "Momo" Monecke, who shaped my academic career by making me aware of "Literaturwissenschaft" as a field and by arranging for me to have coffee with a *real* professor. It is one of the great joys in my life that I am still in touch with these mentors.

I am grateful to my friends and family, who always indulged my passion for arcane academic pursuits—to my artist friends, who helped me think through my ideas about art in space, especially Andrea Uphaus, my favorite artist of them all; to Uschi Leising and Dorothee Neumann, who have talked art and taken me along to museums and exhibits for the past 40 years; to my mother, Imke, who read George Eliot for the first time this year to find out what I was going on about; to my daughter, Kati, who generously accepted that I often neglected my grandmotherly duties to work on my thesis, and to my son, Kai, who started undergrad at the same time as I went back to school, and who has been extraordinarily tolerant of his mother yammering on about her classes.

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INTRODUCTION

“Lady Travellers:” Three Victorian Women Travel to Write About Renaissance Art

This study argues that from the mid-1840s to roughly 1870, three British women—Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and George Eliot—wrote about Renaissance art in ways that were intended to get them acknowledged as authorities without overstepping gender boundaries. White, upper-middle-class, and educated, they were among the first women to participate in the emerging discipline of art history. None of them would have been considered “art historians” (and I will address what that actually means) and none of them claimed to make original contributions to the scholarship on the Renaissance art they admired and wrote about. They operated in genres not considered scholarly—the guidebook, the review article, the novel—and adopted strategies of writing about art that strove to strike the tricky balance between demonstrating expertise and meeting expectations for women writers. Although they all wrote for a lay audience, they had slightly different aims: Jameson wrote to provide access to basic art education, while Eastlake sought to convey her connoisseurship and expertise, and Eliot used her fiction to convey her complex ideas about art (and women’s response to it) to a broad readership.

A popularizer of art, an art connoisseur, and a novelist with a passion for art, the three women often wrote about Renaissance art, by far the most prestigious art-historical period for Victorians. Much of this art writing focused on Florence, not only because of its rich store of Renaissance art and architecture, but because the compact city made artworks easily accessible to British and American women travelers, in a period when the encounter with original masterpieces was becoming crucial for signaling true expertise for those who wrote about art. By comparing what these women had to say about three different representative “art spaces” they

visited in Florence, I will show how they navigated gender restrictions pertaining to art and how their experience with these restrictions shaped the way they wrote about it. Each site is associated with an artist who represented an important aspect of the Victorian construction of Renaissance art: the Piazza della Signoria, with Michelangelo's *David*, represents Florence's public and politically charged space specifically associated with the male sphere; the picture gallery of the Palazzo Pitti, with several Madonnas by Raphael, stands for the semi-public space of the museum, where women felt most empowered as art viewers and potential experts; and the Monastery of San Marco, with its frescoes by Fra Angelico, exemplifies sacred space—in this particular case, largely off limits to women far into the 19th century.

*

The combined careers of Anna Jameson (1794-1860), Elizabeth Eastlake (1809-1892), and George Eliot (1819-1880) as art writers span 65 years, beginning with Jameson's earliest book, the *Diary of an Ennuyée* of 1826, and ending with Eastlake's obituary of the Italian connoisseur Giovanni Morelli, in 1891. In the years from ca. 1845 to 1870, their writing is most directly connected to their field research on art in Italy and in Florence in particular, so the focus of this study is, with some exceptions, their writing at mid-century. As professional writers—not academics—they wrote about art in many genres and venues: in book reviews, impressionistic travelogues, gallery handbooks, novels, introductions and prefaces to other author's books, and even by way of book-length translations of other people's work. Since the early 1980s, feminist scholars have highlighted the importance of first Eliot, then Jameson, and last but not least Eastlake, as 19th-century career writers, but what each woman has to say about art has not received enough attention, even though it constituted a key facet of their widely-read work and was importantly inflected by their gender.

Focusing on such fairly well-known British middle-class writers runs the risk of reinforcing the traditional bias among Victorianist scholars towards the views of certain privileged classes (and ethnicities). But the writings of these three women deserve further study and their voices further amplification: in spite of their relative privilege they were dismissed, in their time, as “non-experts,” mere disseminators of male critics’ ideas. The biggest challenge for feminist scholars has been to account for the complicated role that gender plays in their art writing. The boundaries between the Victorian separate spheres for men and women were not hard and fast, and topics women could write about were not restricted or “regulated,” so they had quite a bit of leeway. At the same time, the barriers to women speaking in public were very real: they could not claim legal, political, clerical, or academic authority, all territories from which they were formally and unambiguously excluded.

Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot were highly aware of such barriers, but they also knew that through their writing, they could contribute to the intellectual discourse of their time in a way that was socially acceptable. None of them were at the hub of mid-century proto-feminism, but they were friends with more outspoken activists, and at times contributed to the discussions of the “Woman Question”—that is, the ongoing debate on women’s legal rights, education, entry into the professions, and suffrage. That said, their writing about art did not typically address gender, and that is why it is especially important to tease out how this writing intersects with and accommodates their awareness of the gender script that they at times followed, at times managed to circumvent, and sometimes even helped shape.¹

¹ A note on names and frequently used biographical sources: All three women were known under different names at different times. Unless a particular context requires it, I will refer to them uniformly as Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot. I shall omit both the Eastlakes’ title for simplicity’s sake and will refer to her spouse as “Charles Eastlake” (he was knighted in 1850). I have consulted letters and journals as far as they have been published (sources noted on first use), and the following biographies: Judith Johnston’s *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters* (Aldershot: Scolar Press; Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997) and Clara Thomas, “Love and Work Enough”: *The Life of Anna Jameson* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Susan Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *Art for the Nation: The*

Who were these three women, and what role did art and writing about art play in their lives and careers? As well-known career writers, Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and George Eliot were unusual, given that the vast majority of women—including the majority of the much smaller cohort of educated, middle-class white women to which they belonged—did not have professional careers. Jameson and Eliot both supported themselves and their families largely through their writing, with Eliot (though not Jameson) eventually becoming quite wealthy. Even the more affluent Elizabeth Eastlake depended somewhat on her author's honoraria before her late-in-life marriage. In other words, they are not a representative sample of Victorian women or of women interested in art. Nor are they feminist trailblazers; they were circumspect in their engagement with women's rights, aligning themselves with the mostly mainstream publications they wrote for and rarely expressing more radical views publicly. While Eliot is sometimes seen as politically radical, Jameson as the moderate Whig populist, and Eastlake, a staunch Tory, as the most conservative, such labels oversimplify. Although all three at certain points expressed progressive ideas when it came to women's status, they also tended to shy away from political activism. But they were writers whose popularity meant that they influenced public opinion, and whose writing about art, while not considered original, were widely read.

Anna Jameson, the oldest of the three women, was born in 1794 as the first child of an Anglo-Protestant Irish miniature painter, Denis Brownell Murphy, and his English wife. Her father may have given her some art training, since she later produced many tracings and drawings for the wood engravings in her books on art, but we know little about her early life.

Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World (London: National Gallery, 2011), and Marion Lochhead, *Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake* (London: Murray, 1961); Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), Timothy Hands, *A George Eliot Chronology* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989). More recent Eliot biographies seek to rectify Haight's sexist view of Eliot and her dependence on her partner George Henry Lewes, but his biography remains the most detailed regarding dates and details of Eliot's movements during her trips abroad.



Figure 1. Anna Jameson at 16. Engraving after a miniature by her father, Denis Brownell Murphy, ca. 1810. Libraries and Archives Canada, On-line MIKAN.



Figure 2. Anna Jameson at 50. Salted paper print of an 1844 photograph by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. Wikimedia Commons.

The family moved to England in 1798, but her father's career as an artist never quite took off, and the young Anna Murphy supported herself as a governess from age 16 to 20, and after several undocumented years at home, in 1820-21, at the age of 25, she got the opportunity to accompany an affluent family on their extended trip to France and Italy, again as a governess. She recorded her impressions in letters to her family and in journals, which became the basis for *Diary of an Ennuyée*, first published anonymously in 1826. Even in this early work, a mediocre love story with a hefty dose of travel descriptions in loose imitation of the wildly popular 1807 novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* by Madame de Staël, discussions of art are prominent and have

intrigued a number of scholars interested in capturing the gender roles and travel culture of the early 19th century, so that it is perhaps Jameson's most-widely discussed work today.²

Jameson must have realized that her strength lay in travel descriptions rather than romance, because she turned next to travelogues, a genre in which many women established themselves at the time. After getting married in 1825 to Robert Jameson, with whom she only lived for a short time, she began to travel in Europe, often for long stretches. Her trips abroad in the 1820s and 1830s were undertaken in an attempt to save money (as living on the Continent was relatively cheap for Britons) and to gather material for her writing. In the resulting travelogues and essays, Jameson often included commentary on art. For example, 1834's *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad* features chapters on the galleries, museums, and artists' studios that Jameson visited when she and her father accompanied the affluent Sir Gerard Noel through Germany and the Low Countries. In the 1830s, Jameson also wrote several books about famous women in history and in Shakespeare's plays, directed specifically at female readers, but she gradually abandoned this concept—nothing came of a planned volume on famous women in the fine arts. In 1836 she attempted to reunite with her estranged husband in Canada but returned in 1838. After that, her agreed-upon annual alimony of £300 arrived irregularly until her husband died (and left her nothing) in Canada in 1854. This meant that throughout her life, Jameson depended on her writing for an income, especially since she generously supported her mother, sisters, and niece after her father's death in 1842. Her experience with financial instability may well have affected her views on women and work, which tend to be her most progressive. Her

² Thomas, *Love and Work Enough*, 3-38, Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, 23. The *Diary* is extensively discussed in James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), in Judith Johnston, "Fracturing Perspectives on Italy in Anna Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyée*," *Women's Writing* 11 (2004), 11-24, and Kathryn Walchester's *Our Own Fair Italy: Nineteenth-Century Women's Travel Writing and Italy 1800-1844* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 171-202.

letters regularly reference financial concerns and are dotted with references to finding cheap lodgings. She felt that this was a constraint on her writing; when wealthier friends put together a small annuity for her after her husband's death, she said it had "taken out that slavery to booksellers and bookmakers which I so hated and feared."³

Her focus on writing about art for a broad audience of both sexes began in the 1840s with two handbooks on public and private British galleries. Her career as a popularizer of art took off with a series of biographical essays on Renaissance painters in the *Penny Magazine*, which were turned into an often-reprinted book in 1845, entitled *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*. These sketches, written in a "light" mode suitable for family reading, were followed by an 1846 collection of essays on art and on women's professions, and by several minor works on art (as well as two books on women's work). Around this time, she also began to publish her most ambitious undertaking in the arts, a 6-volume series on *Sacred and Legendary Art*. After publication in article form in 1846-47 in the *Athenaeum*, the first two volumes of the series in book form appeared in 1848 and earned her a solid reputation and readership as an art critic. The on-site research necessary for this project, continued through the 1850s, prompted her to travel to Italy multiple times. Jameson could not, however, complete the series; she died in March of 1860, in the midst of her work on the sixth volume, *The History of Our Lord*, after catching a cold on her daily walks to the British Museum for her research during a bitter winter.⁴

³ Jameson, *Visits and Sketches at Home and Abroad*. 2nd ed. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), 2 vols., esp. vol.1, and *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada with Tales and Miscellanies Now First Collected and a New Edition of the Diary of an Ennuyée* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838). See also Thomas, *Love and Work Enough*, 21-28, 98-144, 194-206, and Gerardine Macpherson, *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878), 46-48, 283-286. The remark about her "slavery" is from a May 25, 1855 letter, quoted in Macpherson, 287. Macpherson was Jameson's niece and sometime travel companion as well as her first biographer. Only a portion of Jameson's letters have been published (often in excerpts): in Macpherson, in Beatrice (Mrs. Steuart) Erskine, *Anna Jameson: Letters and Friendships (1812-1860)* (London: Fisher and Unwin, 1915), and in G.H. Needler, ed., *Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939). I have not had recourse to her unpublished letters.

⁴ Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, 19-73. On Jameson's planned "Biography of female Artists, and their social position philosophically and morally considered," see two letters from 1840, reprinted in Needler, *Letters*, 125, 131, and

It was Jameson's acquaintance and fellow art expert Elizabeth Eastlake who was asked to complete the work on *The History of Our Lord*. This posthumous connection was their only "collaboration," even though they knew each other and shared acquaintances as well as an abiding interest in Renaissance art. Eastlake had known Anna Jameson at least since 1846, when both women were dinner guests at the Murrays. John Murray II (followed by John Murray III) had long been Eastlake's publisher, and they also had relatives in common. Murray also published several of Jameson's books, including editions of the *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* and her handbooks to English galleries. Eastlake seems to have appreciated Jameson's hard work and expertise; she also recommended the *Diary of an Ennuyée* as an "established favourite" as late as 1845, nearly twenty years after its publication. Shortly after Jameson's death, Eastlake wrote to a friend:

I shall miss her sorely. She was ever kind to me—excellent in judgment and advice, a very strong woman, though never approaching the man—profound and conscientious in all she did, and devoted to such good works as the world knew nothing of. We shall not see her like again.

But although their social circles overlapped—they shared a number of mutual friends beyond the Murrays, including the American sculptor Harriet Hosmer and the writer Harriet Martineau—they were not close friends and did not correspond. Eastlake, at least after her marriage and certainly after her husband was knighted (in 1850) and made director of the National Gallery (in 1855), was socially clearly superior to Jameson, whose financial situation remained somewhat precarious all her life.⁵

Hilary Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking Like a Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 107-10. Jameson's art writing of the early 1840s includes essays for the *Athenaeum*, the *Art-Journal*, *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in or Near London* (London: Murray, 1842); *Companion to the Private Galleries of Art in London* (London: Murray, 1844); *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters and of the Progress of Painting in Italy. From Cimabue to Bassano*, 2 vols (London: Knight & Co., 1845); *Memoirs and Essays, Illustrative of Art, Literature, and Social Morals* (London: Bentley, 1846). On her death, see Macpherson, *Memoirs*, 311-13, and Thomas, *Anna Jameson*, 215.

⁵ Charles Eastlake Smith, ed. *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake* (London: Murray, 1895), 1: 187, 239, 249; 2:91, quotes from letters mentioning get-togethers with Jameson in May 1846, July 1849, and May 1850, and a



Figure 3. Elizabeth Eastlake (then Rigby) before her marriage, ca. 1847. Calotype photograph by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. Wikimedia Commons.

Before Eastlake's 1849 marriage to Sir Charles Eastlake, her financial status had been less stable, even though her family was better connected than Jameson's. She was born in 1809 as Elizabeth Rigby, the fifth child of Edward Rigby, a well-known obstetrician in Norwich, and his second wife, Anne Palgrave, who had many famous relatives. Doctor Rigby was affluent enough to own a model farm on the outskirts of the Norwich, and his daughters received an expensive education in the feminine "accomplishments." After his death in 1821, his widow and her four unmarried daughters moved to Heidelberg, very likely to reduce their expenses, just as

letter in 1858 praising her for her hard work ("this is the side I admire in her"). On the *Diary* recommendation, see Eastlake, "Lady Travelers," 1845. See C.E. Smith, *Journals*, 2:137, for the letter on Jameson's death, written March 21, 1860, to Jane Gifford. Eastlake wrote the biographical entry on Jameson for the 1880 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1880), 13: 562-63. On the connections between the two writers, see Caroline Palmer, "'A Fountain of the Richest Poetry': Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake and the Rediscovery of Early Christian Art," *Visual Resources* 33, no. 1-2 (March-June 2017): 48-73, doi: 10.1080/01973762.2017.1276715.

Jameson was to do in the 1830s. The need for extra money may also have prompted the young Elizabeth Rigby to take up translating and travel writing.

Like Jameson, Elizabeth received an unusual degree of art instruction, and showed some promise as an artist, but according to biographers Julie Sheldon and Susan Avery-Quash, knew that this was not a realistic or “genteel” way for a woman to make a living. Instead, she translated the German painter and art critic Johann David Passavant’s *Tour of a German Artist in England*, which was published in 1836. Then, like Jameson, she tried travel writing, taking advantage of the fact that she had been to the rather exotic Baltic states, where three of her sisters lived after they married East Prussian landed gentlemen. *A Residence on the Shores of the Baltic, Described in a Series of Letters* was published by John Murray in 1841, and went into several editions very quickly; by 1883, over 4,000 copies of the book had been printed. The success of her travelogue also launched her career as a regular (anonymous) contributor to Murray’s *Quarterly Review*, where she gradually moved from human-interest stories to art-related reviews, beginning with the description of an exhibit of “Modern German Painting” in 1846. In other words, much like Jameson, and around the same time, in the mid-1840s, Eastlake became increasingly interested in more specialized writing about art.⁶

But it was not until after her marriage that Eastlake educated herself systematically about art, especially Renaissance art, and became an expert on it. Charles Eastlake, who was born in 1793 and was roughly Jameson’s age (in other words, fifteen years older than his wife Elizabeth) was a semi-successful British painter and member of the Royal Academy. He had written and

⁶ Avery Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 54, 56-58, 65, 67, 72-76. Both Jameson and Eastlake were acquainted with Passavant, who stayed with the Eastlakes in 1850; see C.E. Smith, *Journals*, 246-247. See also Neil MacGregor, “Passavant and Lady Eastlake: Art History, Friendship and Romance,” in *Correspondances: Festschrift für Margret Stöffmann zum 24. November 1996*, eds. H. Bauereisen and M. Sonnabend (Mainz: H. Schmidt, 1996), 166-174. “Modern German Painting.” *Quarterly Review* 77 (March 1846): 323-348.

edited several works on painting technique, and in his 50s was gradually moving into a series of positions on committees and boards of emerging art institutions. When they first met in 1843, Charles Eastlake was keeper of the fledgling National Gallery (1843-1848), and when he became first a trustee and then director of the National Gallery (1855), his wife took it upon herself to become an art expert, too. Accompanying him on his annual two- to three-month trips to Europe to evaluate and purchase art works for the National Gallery, she read about and studied Italian art on site. She became a connoisseur who often pronounced her opinions in private with great confidence, but most of her published work was published anonymously until after Charles's death in 1865. He died on their last trip to Italy, and Eastlake became the self-styled "Keeper of the Flame" for her husband's work on behalf of the National Gallery.⁷

Throughout her marriage and widowhood, Eastlake wrote anonymous reviews of art criticism and translated books on art being written by German scholars. Her anonymous translation ("by a lady") of a new edition of Franz Kugler's *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*, was a joint venture with her husband, who had edited the 1842 version of this widely used guidebook. Translations of German scholar Gustav Waagen's catalogues of art in Great Britain from 1854 and 1857 followed, also anonymous. Her first foray into credited authorship as Lady Elizabeth Eastlake came only when she completed Jameson's *History of Our Lord* in 1864. After Charles Eastlake's death in 1865, she continued to publish (now more frequently under her own name). But she no longer traveled much, and for the last ten years of her life was wheelchair-bound. Staunchly conservative, she continued to try to influence the institutional

⁷ Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, and Adele M. Ernstom, "'Equally Lenders and Borrowers in Turn': The Working and Married Lives of the Eastlakes," *Art History* 15 (1992): 470-485 and Ernstom, "Elizabeth Eastlake's *History of Our Lord As Exemplified in Works of Art*: Theology, Art, and Aesthetic Reaction," *Art History* 35 (2012): 750-78. See also Susanna Avery-Quash, ed., *The Travel Notebooks of Sir Charles Eastlake* (London: Walpole Society, 2011), 2 vols, issued as vol.73 of the *Publications of the Walpole Society*, especially the section entitled "Itineraries of Eastlake's Foreign Travel," 1:51-76.

politics of the National Gallery and championed late 19th-century connoisseurs (rather than academy-based scholars) as her and her husband's intellectual successors.⁸

By the time Eastlake died, at age 83, Jameson had been dead for over thirty years, and George Eliot for thirteen. Eliot, although the youngest of the three writers (born in 1819), had died in 1880, at age 61, after only seven months of marriage to the much younger John Cross. Prior to this, she had lived for twenty-four years with her companion George Henry Lewes until his death in 1878. Her unmarried relationship to Lewes shaped her social position and makes clear how unconventional her life was. George Eliot was the pseudonym chosen when the woman baptized Mary Anne Evans began her career as a fiction writer. Mary Anne had professed an early interest in art, as did Jameson and Eastlake, but in eleven years in boarding school, from age 5 to 16, she did not receive much training beyond the usual “feminine accomplishments.” She was fiercely determined to get an education: On her own, in her teens, she began to study German, French, and Italian; in her 20s, she also learned Latin, Greek, and later in life Spanish and Hebrew. She also became a free-thinking agnostic in her twenties.

After the death of her father in 1849 and a liberating stay abroad in Geneva, with the painter François D’Albert-Durade and his wife, she moved to London on her own and became the *de facto* editor of the *Westminster Review*, a progressive journal published by John Chapman. Like Eastlake, Eliot had begun as a badly-paid translator of highly specialized writing from the German (in her case, theology and philosophy—she translated David Friedrich Strauss and Anselm Feuerbach). Now, also like Eastlake, she began to write book reviews, including a

⁸ Gustav Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain* (London: Murray, 1854), 3 vols., and *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain* (London: Murray, 1857). In the years after 1870, her writings also included a memoir of her husband appended to his uncollected works, an edited (and bowdlerized) the autobiography of her late friend, the sculptor John Gibson, and a laborious new 4th edition of Kugler’s *Handbook* for Murray, see below. See Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 194 on Eastlake’s conservatism.



Figure 4. George Eliot, ca. 1858. Albumen print from the Photograph by John Mayall, 1858. Wikimedia Commons, altered from an oval crop at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Figure 5. Frederic Burton, Portrait of George Eliot, ca. 1865. Chalk and pencil. George Eliot Archive. georgeeliotarchive.org/

handful on art criticism, but for progressive (a.k.a. “radical”) magazines that were politically the diametrical opposite of the Tory *Quarterly Review*. Most importantly, she reviewed *Modern Painters* (Parts III and IV) by John Ruskin, who was well on his way to becoming the most famous Victorian art critic, proposing new views of Renaissance art and defending the Pre-Raphaelite painters. In these early reviews Eliot developed her ideas about realism and the relationship of history and art to “life,” adopting an expertise-oriented style that she transformed radically when she began to write fiction in 1856. This fiction was to bring her tremendous literary fame during her lifetime and also made her quite wealthy by the early 1860s.⁹

⁹ Hands, *Chronology*, passim, and Haight, *George Eliot*, esp. 148-210. Eliot had a modest annual income after her father, an estate manager, died in 1849, supplemented with honoraria for translations and reviews. In 1855, she

Eliot's early successes as a fiction writer coincided with the beginning of her relationship with George Henry Lewes. She and Lewes did not marry because he could not (or would not) divorce his estranged wife Agnes, but her cohabitation with him meant that she never had direct contact with the socially conservative Jameson and Eastlake, who would not have considered visiting a woman "living in sin," or receiving her into their home. Unlike Eastlake, whose marriage elevated her social status, and unlike Jameson, whose absent husband mostly provided her with the respectability of being a married author, "Mrs. Jameson," Eliot's decision to live unmarried with Lewes effectively made her a social outcast, even as her fame as a novelist grew. Ironically, this made traveling abroad especially important; the couple found the social climate on the continent more tolerant, and when it was not, they could typically pass, unrecognized, as husband and wife. Their many trips gave Eliot key opportunities to see art all across Europe, beginning with some of Northern Europe's most famous galleries, museums, and churches when they "eloped" in 1854-55 and during another extended stay in Germany in 1858. Mary Anne (now spelling her name Marian) used the male pseudonym George Eliot for her fiction starting in 1856, and even after she revealed her identity in 1859, she continued to use it. Late in life, her world-wide fame trumped her tarnished reputation, and she and Lewes held regular "Sundays" with male and female friends and fans at her home. Even then, though, the women in attendance tended to be either long-standing friends or part of a younger cadre of unconventional proto-

earned just under £120, and her economic situation was similar to Jameson's, except that she did not support other family members. But the enthusiastic reception of the *Scenes of Clerical Life* (begun in 1856) and *Adam Bede* (1858) meant that publishers began to pay her impressive honoraria. For publishing her 1862 novel *Romola* in serial form in the *Cornhill Magazine*, she received an unprecedented £7,000. See Eliot, *Journals*, 58 and 111. By comparison, Eastlake, when still Elizabeth Rigby, received £100 for her 1841 Baltic travelogue, while Jameson, already well-known, was paid £300 for the 1842 *Handbook to the Public Galleries*; see Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 64-65.

feminists, including the founders of the *Englishwoman's Journal* and the future art historian Emilia Pattison (later Lady Dilke).¹⁰

Eliot and Jameson never became friends, although they had a number of friends in common, including Bessie Raynor Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, co-founders of the *Englishwoman's Journal*. They met a few times between 1852 and 1854. But in 1856, Jameson wrote to her friend Otilie von Goethe regarding Lewes, who had just published the first English-language biography of Otilie's father-in-law, the famous German writer:

The story of Lewes and his Wife is true, I fear. The lady who is with him I have seen before her (known) liaison with him. She is first-rate in point of intellect and science and attainments of every kind, but considered also as very *free* in all her opinions as to morals and religion.... I do not well understand how a good and conscientious woman can run away with another woman's husband.

The lack of contact between these two women is almost certainly due to this rejection of Eliot's "morals and religion," given how many friends, correspondents, and interests they had in common. This was unfortunate, because Eliot admired Jameson greatly and took extensive notes when she read various volumes of the *Sacred and Legendary Arts* while working on *Romola*, the novel in which she drew most extensively on art history.¹¹

¹⁰ On the legal questions regarding the marriage to Agnes, see Nancy Henry, *The Life of George Eliot: A Critical Biography* (Chichester, Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 80-87. On Eliot's and Lewes' time in Weimar and Berlin, Gerlinde Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot in Germany, 1854-55: 'Cherished Memories,'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Eliot's regular journal from 1854 and 1855, her "Recollections of Weimar 1854" and "Recollections of Berlin 1854-1855" and her travel essays on Munich and Dresden in 1858 provide further details on their early trips; see *Journals*, 215-258, 306-236. For Eliot's famous salons, see Kathleen McCormack, *George Eliot in Society: Travels Abroad and Sundays at the Priory* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013). Both Eliot and Eastlake supported *Englishwoman's Journal*, founded by Parkes, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, and Matilda Hays, published from 1858 to 1864, written, edited, and printed by women. Eastlake contributed an article to its successor, *The Englishwoman's Review*, in 1886. Fraser, *Women Writing Art History*, esp. 27-30, 126-135, details Emilia Pattison / Lady Dilke's contribution to art history, but only briefly mentions her connection to Eliot's circle of friends, which goes back to 1870 (see Haight, *George Eliot*, 426-8 et passim).

¹¹ Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, 7, lists several encounters but without attribution; see also Eliot's letter to Sara Hennell, June 25, 1853, about a missed visit, Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 2:105. Jameson's letter to Otilie from March 15, 1856, Needler, *Letters*, 184. One of the last novels Jameson refers to reading is Eliot's *Adam Bede* when its author was yet unknown; see letter to Otilie, April 1 [1859] in Needler, *Letters*, 225. Eliot owned vols. 1-4 of *Sacred and Legendary Art*; see William Baker, *The Libraries of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes* (Victoria, BC: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 1981), 81. She was reading Jameson in 1861 (Eliot, *Journals*, 100 and 107); Joseph Wiesenfarth, *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879, and Uncollected Writings* (Charlottesville:

Eastlake and Eliot never crossed paths except in large social settings (for example, when they were both at the reception for the Italian nationalist hero Garibaldi at the Crystal Palace in 1864, see Chapter 1). There are no references to Eliot in Eastlake's letters, but Eliot and Lewes did regularly consult Kugler's *Handbook of Painting* after 1854, presumably in the most current (second) edition, which had been translated by Eastlake. And when Eliot recommended an essay in the *Quarterly Review* on "Physiognomy" to a friend in 1852, she knew full well that the anonymous author was actually "Lady Eastlake—Miss Rigby that was."¹²

Even though the three women's lives only touched occasionally, two areas of overlap visible in their work and life mark them as Victorian art writers: their travel to Italy in search of cultural enrichment and of famous masterpieces, and their writings about Italian Renaissance art. The two are, of course, connected: while all three writers read avidly about art and regularly visited art museums at home, traveling to Italy enabled them to study this art on site and allowed them to write about it in genres that projected a new kind of authority, quite different from the impressionistic travelogues in which most women's art writing can be found in the first half of the century.

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University of Virginia Press, 1981) reproduces her reading notes on Jameson, see 58, 61-75. The influence of Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Arts* on Eliot is also visible in *Middlemarch*, see Hilary Fraser, "St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in *Middlemarch*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40, no. 4 (March 1986): 400-411, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044729>; Adele Ernststrom, "Anna Jameson and George Eliot," *RACAR: Revue d'Art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 20, no. 1/2 (1993): 72-82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42630520>, Kimberly Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism*, and Carole Slade, "The Meaning of St. Teresa's Work in Four Victorian Women," in *Santa Teresa: Critical Insights, Filiations, Responses*, eds. Martina Bengert and Iris Roebling-Grau (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempo, 2019), 149-176.

¹² Eliot's letter to Charles Bray, Jan 22, 1852, in Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 2: 7. See Patricia Rubin, "George Eliot, Lady Eastlake, and the Humbug of Old Masters," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 28 (2019): 1-19, doi:10.16995/ntn.830, and John Paul M. Kanwit, *Victorian Art Criticism and the Woman Writer* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2013).



Figure 6. Albert Bierstadt, *Roman Fish Market, Arch of Octavius*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 27 5/8" by 37 3/8." Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. Wikimedia Commons.

By the time the male tourist in Albert Bierstadt's *Roman Fish Market, Arch of Octavius* (1858), clutched his guidebook, with its tell-tale red cover identifying it as Murray's *Handbook for Travellers*, it was already enough of a cliché to become a joke (fig. 6). Starting in the 1840s, Murray's many guides were a must for every 19th-century Anglophone tourist visiting Italy; here, it presumably helps the conspicuously clean couple find the monuments of classical antiquity, but it also sets them apart from their contemporary foreign environment. In Bierstadt's painting, the bright red handbook functions almost like a miniature shield, as the man's protection from the messy, chaotic "otherness" of the Roman slum. Even so, the tourist's wife is too timid to look ahead, at the scene in front of the arch, where men sprawl loose-limbed, and looks behind her instead. While this kind of "looking away" is only one of numerous responses available to the female traveler, Bierstadt captures (and makes gentle fun of) three emblematic aspects of Anglo-

American tourism in Italy: reliance on Murray's guides, detachment from their contemporary surroundings as they look for the "high art" of the past and ignore the present, and a gender script that involves women accompanying and deferring to men.¹³

Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and George Eliot generally followed this script (even though they all at times traveled independently). As they went to see and research art, they all used and referenced Murray's *Handbooks*, often supplemented with more specialized texts on art that the *Handbooks* recommended. Eastlake off-handedly advised a friend who was about to visit Florence in 1858: "You are not likely, with Murray's 'Handbook' and 'Kugler,' to omit anything of importance." George Eliot and Henry Lewes took Murray's *Handbooks* on their various trips to Italy, and likely relied on Murray's recommendation of the Pension Suisse, where they stayed on their first trip to Florence in 1860. (They also owned and mention reading the Eastlakes' edition of Kugler's *Handbook of Painting*).¹⁴

Despite their Victorian verbosity, paucity of maps and lack of images (aside from a few floor plans), Murray's *Handbooks* are conceptually not very different from today's *Blue Guides*, *Fromm's* or *DK Eyewitness* guides—including the fact that they single out a limited number of famous sights without typically explaining why they are famous. That makes it all the more

¹³ Melissa Dabakis, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 94-95, points out that Bierstadt's urban scene from his 1856-57 visit to Italy highlights the "racial superiority held by American tourists in Rome." His contrast between the "superior" tourist and the decaying environment has many literary equivalents in the complaints about savage Italians and their inability to prevent the decay of Roman and Renaissance art and architecture, including in Eastlake's and Jameson's private writing, but also in contemporary Victorian travel writing and satire—see Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 80-154.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Eastlake's advice to H. Jane Gifford in July of 1858, C.E. Smith *Journals and Correspondence*, 2:89. (Given that Eastlake almost exclusively published with Murray's, her recommendation of *Murray's* and Kugler's *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*, which she had translated and her husband had edited, is a bit self-serving). The edition of Kugler used by Eliot, first mentioned by Eliot in January 1855, is likely the 1851 edition translated by Eastlake, see

Journals 42. For Eliot and Lewes' use of the *Handbooks*, see Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston's introductory material to Eliot's *Journals*, 328, 371 and 381; Eliot notes in letters and in her "Recollections of Italy, 1860" that they stayed at the Pension Suisse, first singled out in vol. 2 of the 1854 *Handbook for Northern Italy* as "a good second-rate house" in a central location near Piazza Santa Trinita (442).

important to recall how new the concept of such a guide was in the 1840s. They were not even “invented” until the mid-1830s, by the young John Murray III. His father’s (and grandfather’s) firm was already well-known for publishing famous literary figures (Byron among them) and experts on art and archaeology, including Henry Austin Layard and Heinrich Schliemann as well as the Eastlakes. John Murray III, an avid traveler before he, too, was roped into the day-to-day publishing business, saw the need for a practical guide and wrote the first edition of the first *Handbook for Travelers on the Continent* himself in 1836. Others followed, written mostly by anonymous authors hired by the Murrays. British (as well as some American) travelers used it to orient themselves wherever they went, implicitly accepting Murray’s principle of focusing on “what *ought to be seen*” rather than everything that “*may be seen*.”¹⁵

Handbooks on the various regions of Italy followed soon after. Northern Italy (which included Florence) and Central Italy came first (in 1842 and 1843, respectively), but later editions were not simply updates. They reflected the massive and constant changes in Italy’s political geography in the turbulent years of the Risorgimento (i.e. the fight to unite Italy) and the subsequent unification of Italy, though political events are barely mentioned in passing in the *Handbooks*. Even the decision as to which *Handbook* should contain Florence was affected; in 1860, after the Kingdom of Italy was founded, Tuscany became part of Central Italy, while Rome, which did not become part the Kingdom of Italy until 1870, temporarily had its own volume. For the six years during which Florence was the provisional capital of the united Italy

¹⁵ See Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook’s Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750-1915* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 69-73, Buzard, *Beaten Track*, and John R. Gretton’s “Introduction” to William Lister, *A Bibliography of Murray’s Handbooks for Travelers and Biographies of Authors, Editors, Revisers, and Principal Contributors* (Dereham: Dereham Books, 1993), i-xxv. See also Humphrey Carpenter’s *The Seven Lives of John Murray: The Story of a Publishing Dynasty, 1768-2002*, edited by Candida Brazil and James Hamilton (London: John Murray, 2008). Murray, “Preface,” *Handbook for Travellers to the Continent* (London: Murray, 1836), iii.

(1864-1870), Murray's even created a short-lived Florence-only guide by culling the relevant pages from the 5th (1861) edition of the *Handbook* for Central Italy.¹⁶

The ubiquitous Murray's *Handbooks* in the hands of male and female British tourists are both a sign of and a contribution to the massive changes in Victorian conventions of travel and travel writing. These new conventions, essential to the mode of modern tourism, affected female travelers in particular. Abandoning the courtly, aristocratic and male modes of traveling of the 18th century came with the creation of a genre of concise, practical, and "objective" guides to art, architecture, et al, and this enabled middle class women to participate. Technology also contributed. In heavily industrial Britain, the number of people who were able to afford travel increased, while the first railroad lines connecting major cities in Britain and on the continent were built. Steamships along various key waterways, and improved mail coach routes all made travel cheaper and less arduous. That said, continental travel was still unaffordable for the working class, so that the sentiments surrounding the experience of seeing original art in person remained a hallmark of middle-class status—even as this newly included women.¹⁷

What women experienced when they traveled—and how they wrote about it—was directly impacted by the way that traveling abroad functioned in middle-class culture. Rather

¹⁶ See Lister, 23-38. The question of authorship of specific editions is vexed; even if an author is listed, anonymous editors were making changes in virtually all editions. The earliest edition of the *Handbook* for Northern Italy from 1842-1843 was authored by Eastlake's uncle, Sir Francis Palgrave, but the second edition in 1846 was completely overhauled by G. B. Maule; see Lister, *Bibliography*, 23. The author of the earliest *Handbook for Central Italy* was Octavian Blewitt. But later editors were not listed on the title pages, even though they are known from the Murray archive. Joseph Barclay Pentland (1797-1873) is responsible for most of the edits of the *Handbooks* for Northern and Central Italy in the 1850s and 1860s; see Lister's brief biography, 159-160. In what follows, I will be referring to multiple handbooks by year only: to 2nd volume of the fifth AND seventh edition of the *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy* in two vols. (London: John Murray, 1854 and 1858), and when revisions are especially important, to the fifth edition of the *Handbook for Travellers in Central Italy* of 1861. The *Handbooks* were again substantially revised after Italy's unification was complete and Rome became the capital in 1870.

¹⁷ See Withey, *Grand Tours*, xi. On the rise of middle-class tourism before 1820, see Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), and Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). On Cook's tours, see Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 31-65, and Withey, *Grand Tours*, 96-103, 135-166, who show that Cook's model for enabling "the masses" to travel was most successful for more affordable British destinations.

than a display of aristocratic leisure, it was a way to educate oneself (albeit still a display of leisure). Education, even if associated with leisure and pleasure, was, as Kathryn Walchester points out, already a key element of earlier 19th-century travel for women and their travel writing. But the Victorian hunger for and promotion of education as a class marker, and the emphasis on a “proper” use of one’s free time encouraged women’s involvement. As mentioned, education and a professional occupation for women were central to the proto-feminist discussion of women’s rights, but they could also be embraced by less radical thinkers who thought of women as needing an education to make them a better civilizing and domesticating influence—a crucial component of the Victorian “angel in the house” ideology. This is why women across the political spectrum, from the “conservative” Eastlake to the “moderate” Jameson and the “radical” Eliot, all supported women’s access to better education, including art education. Travel enabled middle- or upper-class women to have a leisurely, class-appropriate education in the arts, history, geography, etc., typically in conjunction with an intense course of reading, at a time when universities were inaccessible and girls’ finishing schools deficient in rigor.¹⁸

Women traveled most often in the company of husbands, fathers, or brothers, now that “family tours” had replaced the traditional Grand Tour. But they might also travel as employees (like Jameson had as a governess) and could occasionally go on their own—as all three writers did at times. Together, Jameson, Eastlake and Eliot represent virtually the entire range of travel modes for women, even though they were admittedly unusual in terms of their professional ambition. Eastlake and Eliot traveled extensively in their male partners’ company, while Jameson chaperoned her niece Gerardine on their 1847 trip to Italy; the Eastlakes traveled with servants. All three were also rather typical in terms of destinations: Germany and Italy, with a

¹⁸ See Walchester, *Our Own Fair Italy*, 15-16.

routine stay in Paris on the way. Paris is also the only location where any of them ever crossed paths: Jameson reports in a letter in May of 1849 that she has run into Lady Eastlake in Paris.¹⁹

Beginning in the 1840s, Italy became a regular destination first for Jameson, and then also for Eastlake and Eliot. Jameson was able to return to Italy, nearly 25 years after her visit as a governess, in 1845, for an extended trip, the highlight being Venice, where she ran into the young Ruskin (fig.7). When she returned in 1846, to spend a year training her niece as her assistant in researching and drawing art, the two women spent several months in Florence. Jameson's travels in the 1850s included three further trips to Italy (in 1855, 1857-1858, and

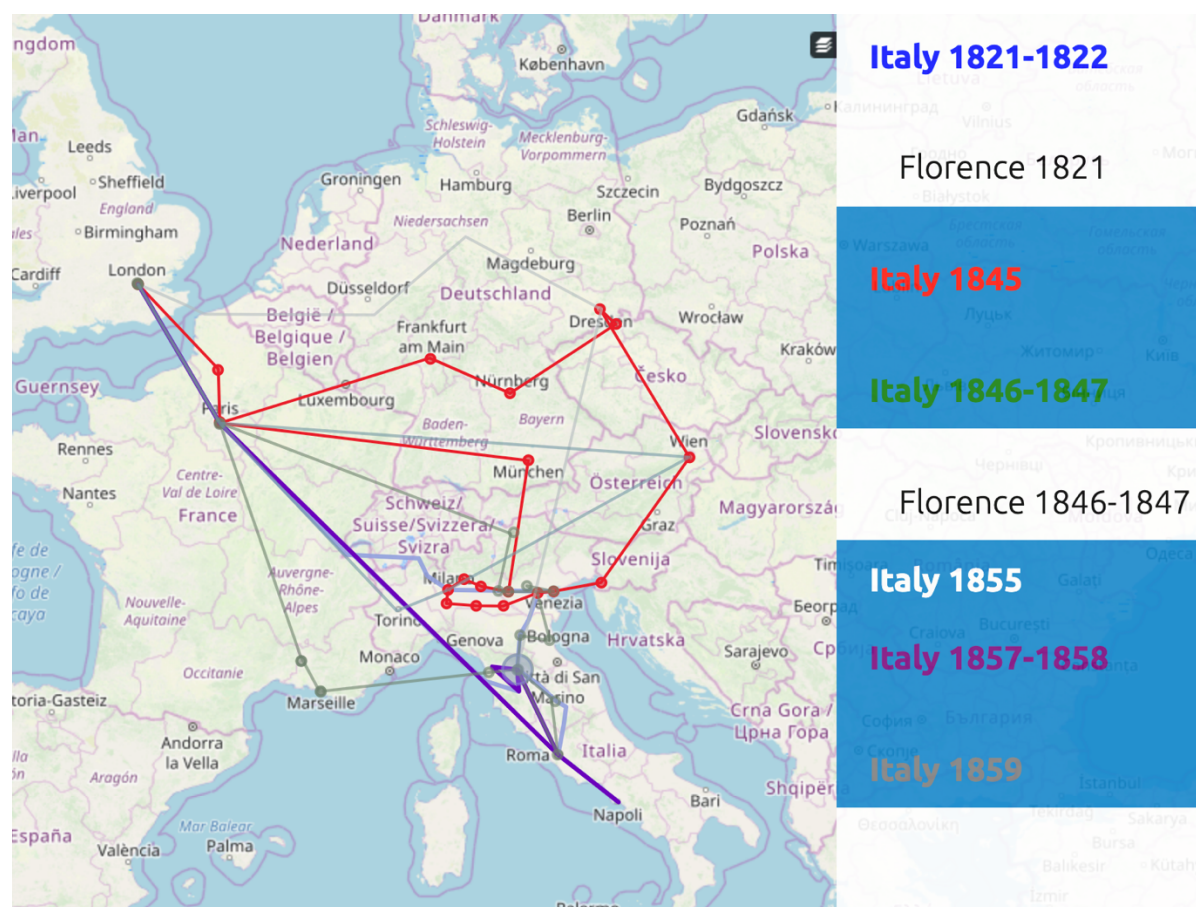


Figure 7. Anna Jameson's trips to Italy, 1845-1859, with 1845 and 1857-58 trips highlighted. Interactive digital map created by the author. On-line at georgeeliotartworld.com.

¹⁹ Erskine, *Letters and Friendship*, 263, 265, quotes two letters to this effect. The Eastlakes married that April, so this visit to Paris was presumably their honeymoon, but there seems to be no record of such a trip.

1859). These, even more than the Italian journeys of the 1840s, were trips to research works on site for the *Sacred and Legendary Arts* series, although she also visited family and friends, since her niece had married an expatriate British painter, Robert Macpherson, and settled in Rome. As usual, she stayed in cheap rooms to save resources.

Eastlake began to accompany Charles on his annual fall trips to the continent in 1852, three years into their marriage. These almost always included Italy and continued until Sir Charles' death in 1865. By that time, she had accompanied him on 13 trips, and visited Florence on over half of these. But while their travel style was that of the affluent gentry, neither their pace nor their focus was typical. For Sir Charles, these journeys were part of his work for the National Gallery. And even before Lady Eastlake was engaged in the intensive research necessary to complete the *History of Our Lord* in the early 1860s, she was heavily involved in her husband's careful inspection of art throughout Italy, and in the resulting purchases of Italian paintings for the National Gallery (as well as for their growing private collection).²⁰

Eliot did not travel abroad until she was almost thirty, when she accompanied her friends Charles and Cara Bray on a European tour in 1849. This summer tour had Genoa as its only Italian stop (just prior to her stay in Geneva), but the records for this time are sparse and do not include information about the art she saw. But when Eliot "eloped" to Germany with George Henry Lewes from July 1854 to March 1855 and returned for another trip in 1858, she systematically visited many museums, churches, artists' studios, and other culturally important sites wherever they went. Her dream of seeing Italy and its art was not realized until her novels provided the couple with a larger income. Of Eliot's four trips to Italy with Lewes in the 1860s, three led her

²⁰ Eastlake went to Florence in 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858, 1862, 1864, and 1865 (on this last trip, only after the death of her husband in Pisa in December). Because her Italian trips were so frequent, the interactive map representing her these 13 trips is difficult to reproduce in print; see www.georgeeliotartworld.com. See Avery-Quash, *Notebooks*, for itineraries and activities of the couple, Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 84, for their financial situation.

to Florence (1860, 1861, and 1869, fig.8), with a month in 1861 specifically set aside to do research on Renaissance Florence for *Romola*. A fourth, in the company of their friend, the painter Frederic Burton, in 1864, only took them to northern Italy, even though they pursued an especially intense art itinerary in his company. Typically, the couple stayed in pensions or rented apartments, and occasionally with friends (for example, with Thomas Adolphus Trollope and his wife in Florence), so they were still traveling in typical middle-class mode, not the almost-aristocratic traveling style of the Eastlakes.²¹

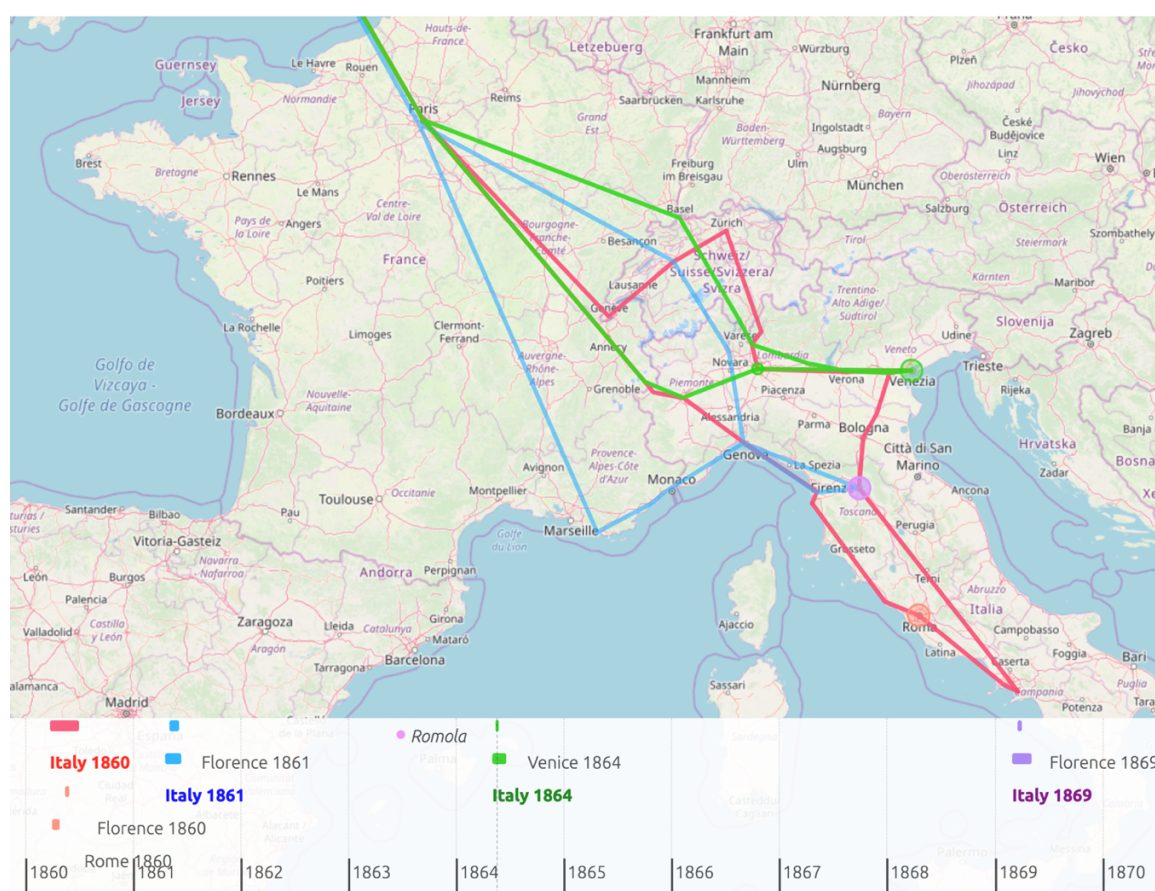


Figure 8. George Eliot's trips to Italy, 1860, 1861, 1864, and 1869. Interactive digital map created by the author. On-line at georgeeliotartworld.com.

²¹ Haight, *George Eliot*, Eliot's *Journals*, and correspondence from all four trips in *George Eliot Letters* (see esp. vol. 3 for the 1860 and 1861 trips and vol. 5 for 1869). See also Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy: Literary, Cultural and Political Influences from Dante to the Risorgimento* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

The Italian cities where all three women spent the most time—Florence, Rome, and Venice—were conventional destinations for art tourists. Throughout the 19th century, travel to Italy was the way British travelers signaled that they aimed to educate themselves, perhaps even more so than travel to Germany (which was also repeatedly visited by Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot, all of whom had a better command of German than of Italian). Italy had been the most popular destination of the Grand Tour, as the cradle of Roman civilization and its rebirth in the Renaissance. Because of its compact and intact Renaissance city center, Florence was a favorite among tourists, at times even surpassing Rome and Venice, partly because travelers perceived it in its coherence and pristine state of preservation as an embodiment of all things Renaissance. They often preferred Florence to the vast and historically confusing multi-layered city of Rome, and at times also to Venice, typically seen as a city that *had* been beautiful but was now in decay. The mystique of Florence as a (however short-lived) republic around 1500, for which British travelers often expressed a special admiration, and which Eliot sought to explore in *Romola*, may also have played a role. Beginning in the 1830s, a sizable number of British expats had settled in Florence, with the mild winters attracting additional British travelers, so that, as Lynne Withey points out, “by the 1840s, the annual British invasion had become so massive that Florence supported an English church, newspaper, and reading room,” and felt altogether familiar and comfortingly “English.” For many British tourists, and even for the expatriate artists and writers who settled there, it became a sort of giant indoor/outdoor art museum; many English and some American authors wrote extensively about Florence in this vein.²²

²² For the Anglicization of Florence, see Withey, *Grand Tour*, 88. Among the most famous British expatriates in Florence at mid-century are Frances Trollope and later her son (and friend of Eliot and Lewes) Thomas Adolphus, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, and for a short time also Margaret Oliphant. Justine A. Maldon, “Escaping ‘the Fetters of Custom’: Victorian Women in Florence 1825-1875” (PhD dissertation, University of Western Australia, 2005), <https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/>, provides an excellent overview of how women writers, including Jameson and Eliot as well as Barrett-Browning and Oliphant, responded to Florence as a city.

Florence was thus already familiar tourist ground and considered safe, even for women who traveled without male companions. However, this was also the era when the critique of the “beaten track” emerged, with visits to famous attractions disdained by those who claimed to be “real travelers” as opposed to “tourists.” But “beaten track” rhetoric, as much as it aimed to distinguish the cultured tourist from the masses using Cook’s travel coupon booklets, was difficult to apply to Florence. There was so much “high culture” in the form of Renaissance artefacts—i.e. objects associated with erudition and cultural prestige—that the paths of conventional tourists and more adventurous travelers were hard to distinguish, especially in Florence’s city center, with dozens of “must-see” Renaissance sites and ways to demonstrate one’s sophistication within less than two square miles. Nor were women as insistent as men on avoiding being labeled as tourists. James Buzard has shown that there was an implicit male bias to the disdain for the “beaten track,” with men routinely troped as independent travelers, exploring both feminized landscapes and availing themselves of the sexualized “native women,” while their female companions often figured as obstacles to such independent, more sophisticated travel. By the same logic, I would argue that women travelers tended to be more anxiously conventional handbook-followers, since they risked being thought of as unfeminine or improper if they strayed from the tourist norm. If they wanted to project that they were especially cultured and sophisticated, and rose above the ordinary tourist, they needed to signal that they took the instruction provided to them by their guidebooks especially seriously—in the case of Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot, their journals and letters certainly convey their dedication to serious travel in search of art and culture, including specific research projects.” This kind of

attention to the art tourist “script” will become especially apparent in the discussion of the women’s visits to the Palazzo Pitti in Chapter 2.²³

In this context, it is not surprising that Jameson in 1845 stressed that her trip to Italy was undertaken in such a serious vein, “for purposes connected with my intended book.” When she returned in 1847, she and her niece were constantly busy with their art-historical work, according to Gerardine’s recollections: “Outlines were drawn, tracings made, careful drawings put on the wood and sent home to be engraved for the illustrations. Every day had some new delight in the way of exploring old churches, or visiting art collections or modern studios.” Even on her last trip in 1859, when her health was failing, she was determined to continue her “steady work” in Rome and in Florence, considering this trip, like prior ones, a kind of working vacation, as she visited friends and occasionally allowed herself to “lionised.”²⁴

Eastlake similarly wrote from Florence in September 1858 that “it is very delightful to have time also to mature one’s impressions of certain masters” on site, while she also has “all Vasari too with me & pore[s] over him of even[ing]s” and again on October 1, 1858: “I shall ever look back on my time here with the purest pleasure, for no cares were pressing, and my occupations were of the most improving and lasting kind, as well as entirely to my taste.” Busy completing Jameson’s unfinished *History of Our Lord* in 1862, she emphasized her satisfaction with her work and study in Florence, as well as with her own connoisseurship and expertise:

We have been passing our time comfortably here. I get some drawing of a morning, first in one place then in another either perched up behind an altar, or shut up in a convent, or surrounded by chattering men in a sacristy, and generally find great civility and kindness. My object is to get what will help my work, and other people don't copy a picture so much to my liking as I do myself, though I say it, that shouldn't.

²³ Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 113-153, on the gender implications of the tourist/traveler divide.

²⁴ See Macpherson, *Memoirs*, 212 (no date is given), 235 (Letter from November 10, 1847), 236, and 302. Many letters to Otilie collected in Needler, *Letters*, and in Erskine, *Letters and Friendship*, contain the same insistence on how studious and busy Jameson was on these trips to Italy, while visits in Vienna, Dresden, and in the Bohemian countryside were primarily about socializing with friends.

The fact that Eastlake drew attention to inappropriate self-praise speaks volumes about both the pride she took in her own accomplishments (here, copying, an important part of acquainting oneself with art, and in this case also preparation for *Our Lord*, which featured engravings and woodcuts based on Eastlake's copies and tracings) and her awareness that, as a woman, she should be modest about them (and "shouldn't" say that she likes her own work best).²⁵

George Eliot too set herself above ordinary tourists by being more informed about high culture, even as she sees the must-see sites of Italy. Just as Eastlake would have recommended (as to her friend Jane Gifford above) Eliot undertook her 1860 journey with Murray's *Handbooks* and Kugler's *Handbook of Painting in Italy* in tow. She and Lewes also purchased a "small library" of additional relevant books *en route*. She began her private "Recollections from Italy, 1860" by reflecting: "we have finished our journey to Italy—the journey I had looked forward to for years, rather with the hope of the new elements it would bring to my culture, than with the hope of immediate pleasure." This goal of bringing "new elements" to her "culture" became an even more specific research agenda when she returns to Italy to prepare for writing *Romola* in the spring of 1861. She summed up in her daily journal: "thirty-four days of precious time spent there.... Our morning hours were spent in looking at streets, building and pictures, in hunting up old books at shops or stalls, or in reading at the Magliabecchian library."²⁶

But importantly, these accounts are restricted to the women's private writings. Neither Eliot nor the other two women described their Italian journeys, or the specific, ambitious art-research projects connected to so many of them, in their published writing. They wanted to

²⁵ See Sheldon, *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake* (Liverpool: Liverpool University, Press, 2009), J-Stor Open Access, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvt6rj9d>, 184; C.E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 103, 171.

²⁶ Eliot, *Journals* 328, 336, 89. A joint letter to Lewes' son Charles also detailed the couple's daily routine in 1861, and Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, 3:414-416, sums up that they "had great satisfaction in finding our impressions of admiration more than renewed in returning to Florence: the things we cared about when we were here before, seem even more worthy than they did in our memories."

distance themselves from the impressionistic travel writing of the earlier part of the century, even though both Jameson and Eastlake had participated in it in the 1820s and 1830s. At its height, in the first half of the century, such travel writing had allowed women to discuss their experiences and ideas relating to foreign cultures and customs (including art) with a new degree of authority. Between 1800 and the 1840s, it was a crucial “stepping stone to wider recognition as intellectuals, ‘women of letters’ and cultural commentators,” as Carl Thompson puts it—but the next step up for ambitious women writers, at mid-century, was the more specialized, non-impressionistic art writing that Jameson and Eastlake pursued. It would be an overstatement to claim that the era of impressionistic travel writing was over, because travelogues continued to be published throughout the century. But these narrative accounts became less prestigious as guidebooks became more popular, often bought by readers capable of traveling themselves rather than only reading about the sights. And while few women actually authored any Murray’s *Handbooks*, a number of women, Jameson and Eastlake among them, began to specialize in producing art guides and catalogues for those who needed more information to improve their “culture” by visiting museums and other art sites. Impressionistic travel writing had begun to be seen as too subjective and too “feminine;” it was not practical enough for travelers, and too “fluffy” to be educational, and by that token ceased to be a vehicle for women to establish their authority as writers.²⁷

²⁷ See Carl Thompson, “Journeys to Authority: Reassessing Women’s Early Travel Writing, 1763-1862,” *Women’s Writing* 24, no. 2 (2016): 131-150, 10.1080/09699082.2016.1207915, here 134, 133, and Walchester’s introduction, *Our Own Fair Italy*, 7-36. For women travel writers before 1800, see Katherine Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe: Authorship, Gender, and National Identity 1750-1800*, 127-182 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Even though the house of Murray took a certain pride in publishing and providing employment to women writers and editors (including Eastlake and Jameson), a count of Murray’s *Handbooks* authors in Lister shows that only thirteen out of circa 200 authors who worked on the *Handbooks* were women, most of them late in the century. A typical example of women continuing to be engaged in practical but very “dry” handbook writing beyond Jameson and Eastlake is Kate Thompson, *A Handbook to the Public Galleries of Europe. With a Brief Sketch of the History of the Various Schools of Painting, from the 13th Century to the 18th Inclusive* (London: Macmillan, 1877). I have consulted the 3rd edition, with 200 new illustrations, from 1880.

Accordingly, Jameson and Eastlake stopped framing their observations on art in terms of travel writing, while Eliot, whose rather different case I will discuss below, gave up on the genre early on after a very brief foray. Jameson, whose first fame had come because of her attempt at this kind of “feminine” travel writing in *Diary of an Ennuyée*, completely turned away from the genre in the 1840s to write more specialized art history. Her last essay on art with a descriptive narrative frame is her 1846 “The House of Titian” (discussed in Chapter 1), and even this constitutes an exception in her work after 1840. Eastlake did not write about her travels after her books on the Baltic and was keenly aware of the decreasing importance of the genre. In an 1845 review of recent books by “Lady Travellers,” she observed that it was difficult for women to provide anything new in this genre, because “most of the central European countries have been too completely examined and described for a passing tourist to offer any novelty, while the excellent *Handbooks* of the day leave no room for contributions of mere roadside information.” Although Eastlake still praised women who can avoid the “dull and matter-of-fact” and “slap-dash” accounts that male travelers provide, she warned them to not overstep their boundaries. They must not express uninformed opinions “upon subjects of the highest classical, biblical, and historical importance,” which they should leave to erudite male scholars. And in a brief review of another such travelogue, *Art and Nature under an Italian Sky*, Eastlake called out its author in particular for errors on art: “In treating of pictures tourists would do well to acquaint themselves a little with the usual phraseology. ‘The Madonna Seggiola’ has no meaning whatever, and ‘The Ascension of Mary,’ instead of ‘The Assumption of the Virgin,’ is a needless novelty.” This nod to her own secure knowledge of the proper terminology of art history signals, of course, that such

expertise can be “admirably condensed and arranged” as it is in Murray’s guides, or in Kugler’s *Handbook of Painting*, which she had just finished translating.²⁸

Unlike Jameson and Eastlake, Eliot, who started writing after impressionistic travel writing had already lost its prestige, only briefly tried out the travelogue as genre in two essays based on her stay in Weimar, published in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1855, before moving on to fiction. These essays were based on informal, unpublished travel diaries or “Recollections” in her journals, but by the 1860s, even these personal diaries get re-purposed as a sort of personalized Murray’s, an aide-memoire, “for the sake of making clear to myself the impressions I have brought away from our three months’ travel.” This greatly disappointed readers of the “Recollections of Italy, 1860” (Henry James included) when they were published posthumously in 1885 as part of John Cross’s *Life of George Eliot*, since these readers expected more than an annotated catalogue of sites Eliot visited and artworks she had seen.²⁹

Unlike Jameson and Eastlake, then, Eliot moved on to fiction rather than specialized art writing. But she too sought to distance itself from the feminine style associated not only with impressionistic travel writing but with the “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” as Eliot notoriously phrased it in a damning review of a number of these. Her intellectual ambitions expressed themselves later in her use of a narrative voice that was “gender-neutral” (or “gender-ambiguous,” as some critics see it) and enabled her to convey complex and meticulously researched cultural and historical processes in her fiction. By the time Eliot turned her

²⁸ Jameson, “House of Titian” *Memoirs and Essays, Illustrative of Art, Literature, and Social Morals* (London: Bentley, 1846), 1-66. Eastlake, “Lady Travellers,” *Quarterly Review* 76 (June 1845): 53-57, here 56, 53, 65. See also Walchester, *Our Own Fair Italy*, 7-39. Eastlake reviewed *Art and Nature Under an Italian Sky*, by “M.J.M.D” (Margaret Juliana Maria Dunbar), *Quarterly Review* 91 (June 1852): 1-11, here 1 and 11.

²⁹ Eliot’s two travel essays, “The Months in Weimar,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 51 (1855), 699-706, and “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 52 (1855): 48-62, are loosely based on Eliot’s travel journals from 1854-1855, “Recollections of Weimar 1854;” see Eliot, *Journals*, 215-242, including Harris and Johnston’s note on the transformation, 215. For the early reviews of “Recollections of Italy, 1860,” see Harris and Johnston, 327-335, 337.

“Recollections of Italy, 1860” and her copious research notes into her historical novel *Romola*, she had succeeded in ensuring that her style of fiction could convey intellectual authority. Ironically, her work was probably less vulnerable than Jameson’s and Eastlake’s art criticism to being dismissed as lightweight or derivative. As a professional novelist, she encountered different genre expectations as well as different expectations for expertise among her readers, a fact that she could turn to her advantage as she could write more freely and with fewer “modesty tropes” about art.

*



Figure 9: George John Pinwell, *The Connoisseurs*. Ca. 1870. Ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. Tate Gallery. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/pinwell-the-connoisseurs-n04085>.

How could Victorian women be experts on art and write about it? As Meaghan Clarke points out, traditionally it was men who were said to “possess the accoutrements of connoisseurship,” even as women were thought to have emotional, “moral and spiritual” access

to art. But in the 1870 *The Connoisseurs* by George John Pinwell (1842-1875), women are represented as experts who investigate a work of art intently, complete with lorgnette and book (fig.9). In contradistinction to many cartoons at the time, which mock women in museums as interested in self-display, in the fashion they see in the artwork, or as consumers and collectors of precious trinkets, Pinwell seems to take the women's absorption seriously, implying that they have "visual agency," in Clarke's optimistic reading. But *The Connoisseurs* also still associates women firmly with the decorative function of art, as the fabrics of their fashionable dresses harmonize with the tapestry behind them and the art objects that surround them. And even though he does acknowledge unironically that the women have avid interest in art and its technical details, Pinwell leaves open whether their close study will lead to other forms of agency, such as expert writing on art (or even art purchases, another goal of the traditional male connoisseur). In other words, nothing about this depiction implies that the book the woman on the left is holding—or the many books and brochures featured in images of women in museums or exhibitions—could have been written by a woman, even though such books often were.³⁰

It is important to remember that no woman, writing about art in the nineteenth century, however knowledgeable, would have been thought of as an "art critic," as Patricia Gerrish Nunn has noted. To be clear: denying them this status went beyond saying that writers like Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot are not "art historians" in the modern sense, since art history as an academic

³⁰ See Meaghan Clarke, "On Tempera and Temperament: Women, Art, and Feeling at the Fin de Siècle," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 23 (2016): 8-10, doi: 10.16995/ntn.767. An earlier representation of a female connoisseur, a lithograph from 1830 by G. Spratt, in a series of caricatures of professionals, also shows a woman with a lorgnette, but she is dressed Archimboldo-style in the paintings she is allegedly studying. Here, the suggestion that women treat art as fashionable ornament even as they project a connoisseur's interest in its close study is much blunter than in Pinwell. Image at Minneapolis Institute of Art: The Minnich Collection, <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/77469/the-connoisseur-g-spratt>. For a discussion of illustrations of women (with brochures) in museums and exhibits, see esp. Joyce Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 21-45.

discipline did not as yet exist in the British academy; even connoisseurship in the vein of Giovanni Morelli did not have a firm hold in the art world until the last two decades of the century. Rather, it means that women were not taken seriously as contributors within the more broadly conceived discourse of “art criticism,” and that their ideas were at worst considered mere imitations and summaries and at best minor elaborations on those of the big “taste-makers and opinion-formers,” like John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, or Walter Pater.³¹

In making this argument, I am actually returning to an older argument by feminist art historians from the 1980s and 1990s, which has been importantly qualified in recent years. What feminist art historians have more recently drawn attention to is that the thriving British publishing industry actually gave British women more of a voice than they typically had elsewhere in Europe, since writing on art was not academic specialty writing (as for example in Germany), but instead disseminated in many genres, including in the periodical press, to a broad spectrum of readers. These Victorian readers ranged from university-educated men who considered themselves part of an intellectually sophisticated bourgeois (and later, bohemian) elite to middle- and lower-middle class as well as some working-class people looking for entertaining family reading with some educational content. The publishing industry that responded to this large audience and its generous interest in fiction and non-fiction of many stripes invited women in and had a liberating effect on their writing. It did not differentiate between the amateur and professional, and even in more specialized fields, which did not

³¹ See Pamela Gerrish Nunn, “Critically Speaking,” in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 109, and Meaghan Clarke and Francesco Ventrella, “Women’s Expertise and the Culture of Connoisseurship,” *Visual Resources* 33, no. 1-2 (March-June 2017): 1-10, doi: 10.1080/01973762.2017.1308623. The feminist recuperation of women in the Victorian art world began with Griselda Pollock, see especially *Vision and Difference* (London: Routledge and New York: Methuen, 1987); Linda Nochlin, see *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), Claire Richter Sherman and Adele Holcomb, eds., *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts, 1820-1979* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981). See also Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

necessarily welcome women writers outright, it allowed for anonymous publications in which women could discuss their ideas about art without overtly challenging male authority. By the end of the nineteenth century, this openness of multi-genre art writing was leading to the specialized scholarly articles and books by women art critics like Emilia Dilke, Julia Cartwright Ady, and Vernon Lee. These women, working in a range of genres, participated in an emergent field, document-driven and with close ties to connoisseurship.³²

For the last two decades of the century, this liberating effect is indeed visible. That said, earlier feminist critics were right to point to the fact that the freedom of these early art historians was both relative and hard-won. In the early period between 1840 and 1870 that I am most interested in, women, their access to publishers notwithstanding, were not seen as “art critics,” and worked under severe limitations, typically summarizing, translating, or otherwise popularizing the work of male experts. Women like Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot (and even most women of the next generation) could not attend a university and thus have the imprimatur of “a graduate of Oxford,” as John Ruskin, the most famous Victorian art critic, identified himself on the title page of the first and second parts of *Modern Painters*; their access to formal education was limited, even for someone as unusual in her schooling as George Eliot. They were also unlikely to evolve from being artists to being art critics, as many men writing about art did, because of the institutional barriers to becoming professional artists to begin with—for example, except for a brief period from 1860-63, female students were not admitted as students at the Royal Academy. Nor were institutional careers in museums (like that of Charles Eastlake) open

³² See Hilary Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking Like a Woman* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Temma Balducci and Heather Belknap Jensen’s introduction to *Women, Femininity, and European Visual Culture, 1789-1914* (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 1-15, and Caroline Palmer, “Fountain.” Importantly, anonymity enabled both Eastlake and Eliot to write more freely about art in their reviews; Jameson published almost all of her work, including contributions to periodicals, under her name, but it already carried quite a bit of prestige by the 1840s.

to them—women could not become museum curators or otherwise be employed by the state in these new institutions. Most associations and clubs for artists, collectors, and art enthusiasts were closed to them, and alternative organizations for women, like the Society of Female Artists, founded in 1855, had little impact on the wider art world. Wielding influence as collectors and patrons, a role that women did occasionally occupy, required the kind of wealth that even Elizabeth Eastlake, who married into affluence and shared her husband's interest in creating a private collection alongside expanding that of the National Gallery, did not have.³³

Anna Jameson is the prime example of a writer who fully embraced the role of female popularizer and disseminator. Her magazine pieces for the *Monthly Chronicle*, the *Athenaeum*, and the *Penny Magazine* (with its especially wide distribution) were geared toward a broad audience, and her gallery handbooks were addressed to the “uninitiated,” as she calls them in her introduction to the March 1849 issue of the *Art-Journal*. In it, she specifically welcomes the magazine's attempt to make art more broadly accessible through their prints and emphasizes how this enhances the art education of young women in particular. In the prefaces to her works, she often denies that she aspires to make any original contribution, drawing on the well-worn “modesty trope” that both male and female writers of informative non-fiction often trotted out, but that women in particular relied on. Jameson's intent was to enhance knowledge and appreciation of art by appealing to a broad non-specialist audience—even as her research became increasingly meticulous and more specialized in the 1850s. The 1845 *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* are a good example for this populist and democratizing agenda, and also drive

³³ See Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 101-103, on the equivocal role of Charles Eastlake in admitting the first female probationary student into the Academy, and on Elizabeth Eastlake's and Jameson's stance on art schools and societies for women; their mutual friend Harriet Grote had helped start the Society of Female Artists in 1855. Eastlake's attitude towards women artists was mixed, as her occasional reviews of the Society's annual exhibitions show. She sold off most of her husband's collection after his death, possibly to “guard herself from the impecuniousness that women in her family had obviously encountered;” see Avery-Quash and Sheldon, 202-204.

home how central the Renaissance was to this endeavor, as the most prestigious art-historical period (as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 1). A simple collection of biographical sketches based on Vasari with a bit of art-historical appreciation of each artist's style ("early" here meaning the entire Renaissance), it first took the form of articles in the *Penny Magazine* by populist publisher John Knight. The introduction she wrote for a later edition published by John Murray spells out that the "little book" was and is meant "as a companion for the young" (and presumably "uninitiated"). She acknowledges that now, in 1859, "the taste for art has been much extended" and "reviews, and essays, and guidebooks, from the pens of accomplished critics and artists" have raised expectations for expert commentary. In her effort to make the revised edition match this increased interest, "the author has profited by two recent visits to Italy" (i.e. her trips in 1855 and 1857-58) and by a new edition of Vasari published (albeit in French) between 1846-1857 by Le Monnier. And yet, although the biographical sketches were corrected and annotated, she stresses that they retain "their comprehensive and popular form."³⁴

But if *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* was relatively easy to keep in the realm of popular biography, Jameson's most widely-read work on art was an ambitious scholarly project, still today her most widely-discussed work, both by art historians and by religious studies and cultural studies scholars. But even this series, which according to Holcomb established her as the "first professional English art historian," began with a set of popular articles in the *Athenaeum* published between January 1845 and February 1846, and were then turned into a two-volume book first titled *The Poetry of Sacred and Legendary Art*. Its success encouraged Jameson and her publisher to extend the series beyond representations of the angels, archangels, evangelists,

³⁴ Jameson, "Some Thoughts on Art, Addressed to the Uninitiated," *Art-Journal* (March 1849): 69-71, 103-105. Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, x. This preface was clearly written by Jameson herself (it is dated May 1859), but this undated edition (which Hathi Trust dates to 1868) must have been edited after her death, since some of the corrections refer to the 1864-66 edition of Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *New History of Painting in Italy*.

apostles, patron saints, and other early Christian figures, to more volumes on the art of various religious orders and their patron saints (*Legends of the Monastic Orders*, 1850), the Virgin Mary (*Legends of the Madonna*, 1852), and eventually Christ, in the *History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art*. All six volumes went into multiple editions throughout the second half of the 19th century, and Jameson had a number of imitators, beginning with her protegee Louisa Twining. This series became the reason Jameson was appreciated during her lifetime and for the rest of the 19th century as the main source for accessible writing on sacred art.³⁵

Jameson's interest in sacred art aligned her with her male contemporaries who wrote about what was known at the time as "Christian art," i.e. the sacred art of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. But by discussing the history of particular motifs, she actually pursued a different approach from them, one closer to academic developments in the tradition of German scholarship at the time. Even though she tends not to articulate her methodology very clearly, she was well aware that it differed from other writers. When it came to Lord Lindsay's 1847 *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, for example, she told her sister in March 1847 (as she was working on the first volume of *Sacred and Legendary*

³⁵ The later titles of the first two volumes of *Sacred and Legendary Art* were: Vol. 1: *Containing Legends of the Angels and Archangels, the Evangelists, the Apostles, The Doctors of the Church, and St. Mary Magdalene, as Represented in the Fine Arts* and Vol. 2: *Containing the Patron Saints, the Martyrs, the Early Bishops, the Hermits, and the Warrior Saints of Christendom, as Represented in the Fine Arts*. The titles of the following volumes, discussed in more detail in future chapters, did not change over time; all were published in London by Longman's and various co-publishers, and reprinted in many editions. On Twining, see *Symbols and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art* (London: Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852) and *Types and Figures of the Bible* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1855). Holcomb, "Anna Jameson: The First Professional English Art Historian," *Art History* 6 (June 1983): 171. On the importance of the series, see also Johnston, *Anna Jameson*, 154-179, Palmer, "Fountain," Ainslie Robinson, "The History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art: Anna Jameson's Coup de Grâce," *Women's Writing* 10, no. 1 (2003): 187-200, Elizabeth Hayes Alvarez, *The Valiant Woman: The Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 82-113; Gail Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God* (Ohio State University Press, 2013); Kimberly Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2001); Sheridan Gilley, "Victorian Feminism and Catholic Art: The Case of Mrs. Jameson," in *The Church and the Arts. Studies in Church History* 28, ed. Diana Wood, (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 381-391; and Cordelia Warr, "Anna Jameson," in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) 25-36.

Art in book form) that at first she “was frightened by the publication of Lord Lindsay’s book, but I have seen a copy, and now I do not mind him; he takes a different ground from mine.” This “ground” was a systematic iconographic approach, which took various religious figures and motifs one by one and discussed how they were represented across time, highlighting variations while explaining the significance of certain objects, poses, and figure combinations. Jameson addressed the larger goal of this method in the preface to the first volume of *Sacred and Legendary Arts*. Here, she claimed that she seeks “the aesthetic and not the religious view” of sacred art, as long as the works “are informed with true and earnest feeling, and steeped in that beauty which emanated from genius inspired by faith.” This emphasis on the aesthetic dimension allowed her to identify broader stylistic and thematic developments in artworks representing specific motifs across time in ways that were tied directly to visual detail. At times, these developments were placed in a historical as well as scriptural context, although I agree with Hilary Fraser that Jameson’s emphasis on history is not as consistent or ground-breaking as Adele Holcomb (Ernstrom) claims.³⁶

Despite the increasingly specialized knowledge that she developed as she worked on her series, Jameson always wrote with the general reader in mind. The systematic motif-by-motif approach made it easy to use her books as handbooks and look up, say, the Annunciation or the Crucifixion, or a particular saint or biblical figure—as well as to read them straight through, with few interfering footnotes. She continued to cloak her growing expertise and accomplishments; modest disclaimers in the prefaces to the various volumes of the *Sacred and Legendary Arts* reassured readers that she was not a specialist whose writing would go over their heads; at the

³⁶ See Macpherson, *Memoirs*, 238-239, for the remark on Lord Lindsay’s book. “Preface” to *Sacred and Legendary Arts*, 1: xxx, xi-xii. For Holcomb, see “First Professional Art Historian” and elsewhere; for Fraser, see *Women Writing Art History*, 31, and her earlier *The Victorian and the Renaissance* (Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1992), 83-84.

same time signaled that she was not overstepping her boundaries as a woman writer. The illustrations in the series also served to make her work accessible, and Jameson was clearly aware that this would work only if she kept these cheap and thereby ensured that the books remained affordable. She did so by including mostly cheap-to-produce wood engravings in her *Sacred and Legendary Arts*, one of the earliest writers on art to take advantage of the fact that technological advances in stereotyping and electrotyping made this kind of easily-integrated relief print one of the cheapest ways to include images in books. Many of the wood engravings were based on her own line-drawings (some of them produced by her niece Geraldine).³⁷

But this classic strategy was always a double bind: it may have made her contributions acceptable, but it also meant her books could be “trivialised” and dismissed as unoriginal—not by everyone, as Palmer and Fraser emphasize, but often by the most influential critics and putative male rivals. Ruskin was certainly dismissive of Jameson as utterly dependent on male precedent. When he met her in 1845 in Venice, he wrote to his parents that she reminded him of the family servant, Ann (“just what Ann would have been with a good education”), and that she “knows as much of art as the cat.” Even Beatrice Erskine, her early biographer, reflecting the connoisseurship doctrines prevalent by 1915, said that “we must admit that she was badly equipped as a critic and cared little for the technique of art,” and that Jameson “belonged to no

³⁷ Jameson, Introduction to *Legends of the Domestic Orders*, xvi. In *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* (1868 edition), 121, Jameson points to the *Penny Magazine*’s ability to “place a print after Mantegna at once before the eyes of fifty thousand readers” because of its cheap wood engravings. She frequently refers to reproductions of works in other scholars’ books (e.g. *Memoirs* 1845: 121; *Memoirs* 1868: 76; *Madonna*, 17; *Orders*, xxx). On wood engravings and their use in 19th-century art history, especially by women art writers, see Amy Van Lintel, “Wood Engravings, ‘The Marvellous Spread of Illustrated Publications,’ and the History of Art,” *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 3 (2012): 515-42, doi:10.1353/mod.2012.0062, and “Excessive Industry: Female Art Historians, Popular Publishing, and Professional Access,” in Balducci and Jensen, *Women, Femininity, and European Visual Culture*, 115-130. Van Lintel, “Wood Engravings,” 516, points out that wood engravings provided “finely detailed images that could be printed on the most advanced steam-powered presses simultaneously with relief type,” often reused across multiple books and even traded among publishers, and thus became key to the way 19th-century art handbooks were illustrated. Jameson also suggested that readers assemble their own “little portfolio of engravings” to go with her books; see *Monastic Orders*, xvi; see also *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 1:xiii.

school of criticism.” And until her feminist recuperation, Jameson still appeared to art historians as “rather a compiler than a thinker.”³⁸

Although Elizabeth Eastlake’s work also involved making art accessible to a fairly broad readership—through her handbook and catalogue translations, her editing, her reviews, and in particular her completion of Jameson’s *History of our Lord*—she avoided being dismissed in this fashion. The cost was, however, that she was not (at least not officially) recognized as the author of most of her work, and since she worked mostly anonymously, her contributions were evaluated very differently from Jameson’s. Her expertise, interest, and aim at a general audience were overall similar to Jameson’s, and by completing *The History of Our Lord* she acted directly as Jameson’s successor. But there are some marked differences from Jameson in her approach to the book. They are, at first sight, primarily theological rather than art-historical: Eastlake, as per her 1864 preface to the completed 2 volumes, worked with Jameson’s outline (or “programme”) and “a portion of the manuscript in a completed state, though without the indication of a single illustration.” She clearly distinguished her own contributions from Jameson by marking her portions with her initials, making clear which parts she wrote and which parts were Jameson’s (only ca. 145 out of 800 pages). She also rearranged the material to reflect a typological approach that included Old Testament prefigurations of Christ, rather than exclusively Christ’s

³⁸ For the question of “trivialising” women’s contributions, see Nunn, “Critically Speaking,” 111, vs. the more recent qualifications by Palmer, “Fountain,” 60, and Fraser, *Women Writing Art History*, 31-33. Ruskin, letter from September 28, 1845; the next letter, from September 30, repeats the comparison to the servant. In Harold Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 215-216. Later in life, in his memoirs, Ruskin’s phrasing is tempered, but his condescension intact: “Mrs. Jameson was absolutely without knowledge or instinct of painting (and had no sharpness of insight even for anything else); but she was candid and industrious, with a pleasant disposition to make the best of all she saw, and to say, compliantly, that a picture was good, if anybody had ever said so before. Her peace of mind was restored in a little while, by observing that the three of us, however separate in our reasons for liking a picture, always fastened on the same pictures to like; and that she was safe, therefore, in saying that, for whatever other reason might be assigned, other people should like them also.” *Praeterita, Works of Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1908), 35: 374; Erskine, introduction to *Letters and Friendships*, 9-10; John Steegman, *Consort of Taste 1830-1870* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1950), 187.

own life, as Jameson intended. Her insistence on making arguments about this art on the basis of religious doctrine (derived from her own strictly Anglican theology) and not on aesthetic grounds made the last part of the *Sacred and Legendary Art* series deviate significantly from Jameson's emphasis on "poetic," not "religious" meaning, as well as from her more tolerant, historicizing approach to Catholic theology, which she thought the (presumably Protestant) viewer needed to grasp in order to understand much of the sacred art under discussion.³⁹

Adele Ernstom has shown that this emphasis on the theological ultimately made Eastlake contradict herself constantly about art, since her connoisseur-style admiration of technical achievements and aesthetic effects was ultimately incompatible with her theology. *History of Our Lord* is certainly striking in its emphasis on theology over art-historical periodization and technical detail, which is otherwise the focus of much of Eastlake's work. It is pure speculation to argue that she shifted her emphasis from art expertise to a theological focus in an attempt to project a more conventional and gender-appropriate persona now that she was not anonymous. But the fact remains *History of Our Lord* was her first book about art that prominently advertised her name, alongside Jameson's, whereas her earlier reviews and translations had been anonymous, making her gender invisible for the first half of her career.

That anonymity had had the effect of freeing Eastlake from having to be conventionally feminine. Granted, sometimes a woman's anonymity was limited or symbolic—Eliot was not the only one who knew which reviews in the *Quarterly Review* were by Eastlake. But a broader public would not have known Eastlake was the author of her reviews. This let her express her opinions frankly, not concerned about being accused of lacking proper feminine tact or

³⁹ Eastlake, Preface, *History of our Lord* (dated March 26, 1864), v-vii; Macpherson, *Memoirs*, 310. For the differences between Jameson and Eastlake, see Caroline Palmer, "Fountain," Ainslie Robinson, "Coup de Grâce," and especially Adele M. Ernstom, "Elizabeth Eastlake's *History of Our Lord* as Exemplified in Works of Art: Theology, Art and Aesthetic Reaction," *Art History* 35 (2012): 750-78, especially 763-4.

deference—something she took advantage of in her hostile review of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, Volumes I-III, in 1856. She criticized Ruskin harshly, starting with an ad hominem attack likely motivated by personal animosity, but she also engaged with what she thinks of his flawed assumption that painting was a kind of language in analogy to poetry. Even in less aggressively critical pieces, her confidence is noticeable, and Eastlake is not above using this male disguise to dismiss other women or ascribe limited talents to them. Her “Lady Travellers” damns several women writers with faint praise, and as noted above, the review of *Nature and Art Under an Italian Sky* attacks the writer specifically for her lack of expertise in art.⁴⁰

Eastlake’s anonymity also meant that she did not have to defend what distinguishes her most clearly from Anna Jameson: a kind of elitism that ultimately privileged connoisseurship and the proper appraisal and preservation of art above accessibility of both artworks themselves and (to a lesser extent) to the art criticism she was writing. As her letters make clear, this more expertise-driven approach to art relates directly to her exposure to her husband’s circle of colleagues—of scholars, curators, art dealers and connoisseurs—and their specialized knowledge. Eastlake’s elitism affects the books she reviews (including several prohibitively expensive ones) and also her choice to translate and disseminate some rather specialized and

⁴⁰ Eastlake, review of *Modern Painters (Part III)*, *Quarterly Review* 98 (March 1856): 384-433, especially 388-402. Eastlake was close friends with Effie Ruskin, whose marriage with Ruskin had ended in a famous scandal. See Clarissa Campbell Orr, “The Corinne Complex: Gender, Genius, and National Character,” in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, 102-3. By 1861, if not before, Ruskin seems to have known that Eastlake was the author, Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 88, 130-131. On the actual argument against Ruskin that Eastlake develops, rather than her personal reasons to attack him, see Ernststrom, “‘Elizabeth Eastlake v. John Ruskin: The Content of Idea and the Claims of Art.’” *RACAR* 37, no. 2: Idea in Art/ L’Idée dans l’art (2012): 37-46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42630869>, and “Equally Lenders and Borrowers in Turn’: The Working and Married Lives of the Eastlakes,” *Art History* 15 (1992): 477-8. Eastlake’s tendency to criticize women for insufficient expertise or qualifications emerges in other essays on women: “Biographies of German Ladies,” *Quarterly Review* 73 (Dec 1843):142-187, “Exhibition of the Society of Female Artists,” *Art-Journal*, 1 March 1869, 82-83, “The Female School of Art,” *The Englishwoman’s Review*, n.s. 155 (15 March 1886): 102-104. “Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre,” *Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1848): 153-185. On this, her most notoriously hostile review, see Julie Sheldon, “‘In Her Own Metier’: The *Quarterly Review* of *Jane Eyre*,” *Women’s History Review* 18, no. 5 (November 2009): 839-851.

academic German art history. That she was not primarily aiming at Jameson's "uninitiated" (an audience understood to include women) is evident, too, in what she emphasized in her early championship of quattrocento "Primitives," as I discuss in Chapter 3 with respect to Fra Angelico. This was even more apparent when it came to the barely known Sandro Botticelli, whose work the Eastlakes began to promote in the 1860s, when this was still a sign of elite trendsetter taste, as well as to their early adoption of the practices, predilections, and interest in market value of the connoisseurs they befriended in the 1860s. One of these friends was the famous Italian connoisseur Giovanni Morelli. When he died in 1891, her (again anonymous) obituary became a vehicle to explain, with many examples, what such connoisseurship takes (and what she admired about it): intuition, combined with "knowledge of the technical process" of each artist, of archival documents, and of the tradition in which a work is produced. Morelli, "the ablest connoisseur of art of his time," had this expertise in abundance, together with the famed ability to spot similarities in stylistic details—"in the hands and the ears"—that resulted in so many reattributions. In her letters, she suggested that the new connoisseurs were her and her husband's rightful successors; she was very pleased when Morelli's younger American collaborator Bernard Berenson and his companion Mary Costelloe came to visit her in 1891.⁴¹

Eastlake's specialized approach to art, and her affinity to the connoisseurs with whom she and her husband had begun to work, became more visible in the 1870s and 1880s, even

⁴¹ On the Eastlakes and Botticelli, see Adrian Hoch, "The Art of the Alessandro Botticelli through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes," in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, eds. John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 55-85, and Jeremy Howard, "Renaissance Florence: Inventing the 1470s in the Britain of the 1870s," *British Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 75-7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41615356>. Eastlake, "Giovanni Morelli: Patriot and Critic," *Quarterly Review* 143 (July 1891): 255-52, here 239, 235, 242. On Eastlake's praise in private, see Sheldon, *Letters*, 607-8, and also 540, and Fraser, *Women Writing Art History*, 24-5. On the visit by Berenson and Costelloe, see Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 190. One of Eastlake's last letters, from June 29, 1893, is on behalf of Berenson, "one of a young band, much educated by Morelli," whose work on Lorenzo Lotto she thinks Murray should consider publishing; Sheldon, *Letters*, 639-640.

occasionally in association with her own name. By then a widow, still with an avid interest in the National Gallery, she began to insist more frequently on her own expertise, especially when she began her “revised and remodeled” edition of Kugler’s *Handbook of Painting*. It was supposed to be updated on the basis of new information first provided by J.A. Crowe and G.B.

Cavalcaselle’s recent, groundbreaking work on Italian painting, but she often disagreed with them. Her confidence in her own connoisseurship culminated in her demand that she be credited as the main or sole author of Kugler when the book was finally published in 1874:

it will be obvious to all who care about it that this edition can only have proceeded from me, for no other person could either have been imbued with his teaching, or had possession of his notes. But you have never requested my name as editor. You once alluded to a possible wish on my part to insert it, but you assured me that it was superfluous. Still, there can be no doubt that my name is, in every sense, the right one for this work, and that it also would increase its mercantile value.

And yet, even at the time when this (unsuccessful) bid to be acknowledged as an authority happened behind the scenes, outwardly, Eastlake did not want to appear as having excessive expertise. With one notable exception—an 1884 letter to the *Times* about the impending purchase of Raphael’s *Madonna del Ansidei* by the National Gallery—she asserted her own judgment only under the guise of translator, editor, or anonymous reviewer, or when speaking privately (and in turn risking that some would see her as unfeminine—a “termagant” who wrote “surly ill-tempered letters”).⁴²

⁴² The 1874 edition, “revised and remodeled by Lady Eastlake” drew extensively on J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *New History of Painting in Italy* (London: Murray, 1864-66), 3 vols. On Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s historic cooperation, see Cathleen Hoeniger, *Afterlife of Raphael’s Paintings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 294-298. Eastlake’s frank and confident assessment of her own expertise is visible throughout her correspondence from 1868 to 1874, during which she worked on the Kugler edition; see Sheldon, *Letters*, 288-289; Eastlake’s request to be given sole author credit came in a letter on June 22, 1874, Sheldon, *Letters*, 396. Eastlake, “Madonna del Ansidei.” *The Times*, 14 October 1884, p. 2, col. E, *The Times Digital Archive*, <http://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/BzX6T2>. On Eastlake’s expertise, 128-132; “termagant” is Thomas Carlyle’s phrase, quoted in Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 69; “surly, ill-tempered letters” is the label of a file in the Murray Archive containing her letters regarding the 1874 Kugler edition; mentioned in Sheldon, *Letters*, 314.

George Eliot similarly used her male persona to speak more freely in her reviews and in her earliest fiction (after which her identity became widely known). Most of Eliot's art-related reviews, like Eastlake's, address (and seek to "translate" for a broader audience) male authors associated with expertise and erudition in the field. Using the same hallmark royal "we" that Eastlake uses to cloak her gender in her review, Eliot praises Ruskin and Rio, as well as the German classicist Adolf Stahr. Her reviews show that she read eminent authorities on art, like Winckelmann and Lessing, as well as emerging scholars (she mentions Richard Duppa on Michelangelo and Quatremère de Quincy on Raphael), but also prove that she could write about the work of these men as an equal—as long as she did not draw attention to her gender.

In that respect, she and Eastlake used their anonymity for the same rhetorical purpose, even though their opinions are often diametrically opposed—certainly when it comes to Ruskin. In fact, it seems very likely that when Eliot made the case that the merits of *Modern Painters, Vol III* far outweigh the faults that had "irritated" "antagonistic critics," she was thinking of Eastlake's harsh review in the *Quarterly*, just published the previous month. These merits, to her mind, were Ruskin's large ideas, especially regarding "*realism*—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature." Here, Eliot appropriated Ruskin's argument to pursue her own interest in the concept of realism (although Ruskin himself would not have extended them to fiction, as Eliot did), and was especially intrigued by the very analogy between painting and poetry as two languages that Eastlake had attacked in her review. As George Witemeyer first pointed out in the late 1970s, these were questions that Eliot asked about fiction (in her essays, but also later in her novels), and her review essays on Ruskin show her beginning to engage with the analogy *ut pictura poesis* ("as in poetry, so also in painting," an idea going back to Horace) that she took as aesthetic gospel. Much of the exploration of Eliot's

idea of visual art has thus foregrounded her relationship to Ruskin, but scholars who look more closely at Eliot's interest in Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Arts* (see above), and her readings in art criticism beyond Ruskin, also point to other facets of Eliot's art expertise (and its limits).⁴³

As Patricia Rubin has pointed out, despite being socially and politically almost diametrical opposites, Eastlake and Eliot both “played expressively on the sliding scale of gendered intonation in their writing.” That is, they were able to write in gender-ambiguous or masculine voices and also, she argues, in “hyper-feminized” mode—and both were willing to weaponize their masculine “reviewer voices” to attack other women writers under the guise of anonymity. Where Eastlake had critiqued women for their fluffy, passé travelogues, Eliot picked on badly written novels in her infamous “Silly Ladies by Lady Novelists,” her version of the more sarcastic segments of Eastlake's “Lady Travellers.” The essay's misogynist attack on novels “intended to expound the writer's religious, philosophical, or moral theories” based on “a smattering of philosophy and literature chopped small” resembles Eastlake's complaint about female travel writers who use the genre to pontificate. Eliot warns that such novels will “confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid education of women” since they showcase women making terrible use of the knowledge they acquire: Of the generic “lady novelist,” she says “Her knowledge remains acquisition, instead of passing into culture”—which is why it is the “chivalrous duty” of a critic “to deprive the mere fact of feminine authorship of any false

⁴³ Eliot, “Art and Belles Lettres,” *Westminster Review* 65 (April 1856): 343-356, here 343. Apart from Ruskin's *Modern Painters, Volume III*, she addresses Stahr's *Torso*, which she also reviewed in “The Art of the Ancients,” *The Leader* 6 (17 March 1855): 257-258 and “The Art and Artists of Greece,” *Saturday Review* (May 31, 1856): 109-110. “Belles Lettres,” *Westminster Review* 65 (January 1856): 160-172, reviews Rio's *Leonard de Vinci et son École* and Edmond About's *Voyage à Travers L'Exposition des Beaux Arts (Peinture et Sculpture)*. “Belles Lettres and Art,” *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 257-278, mentioned above, also includes her remarks on Ruskin's *Modern Painters, Volume IV* as well as on recent work on Thorvaldsen. All at <https://georgeeliotreview.org>. On Eliot's general knowledge of art see George Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 9-33; Leonee Ormond, “Mines of Misinformation: George Eliot and Old Master Paintings: Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and Dresden, 1854-5 and 1858,” *George Eliot Review* 33 (2002): 33-50, <https://georgeeliotreview.org>, and Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot in Germany*, esp. 29-35, as well as Harris and Johnston's introductory notes to the various “Recollections” in Eliot, *Journals*.

prestige” (162). Evoking chivalry in particular signals that Eliot is here posturing as male, and of course, like Eastlake in “Lady Travellers,” she especially criticizes women for lack of expertise, and for using their genre of choice to express unqualified and gratuitous opinions. That said, “Silly Novels” is an exception for Eliot, who typically praised and highlighted women writers and their merits, especially progressive intellectuals whose views overlapped with hers, like the American feminist and promoter of Italian nationalism Margaret Fuller.⁴⁴

By moving to fiction in the 1850s, Eliot seemed to signal that she was not a “critic” or an intellectual authority (a strategic feint if there ever was one), while Jameson and Eastlake were by then known for their specialized art writing, editing, and translating. But Eliot’s knowledge of art was the root of her desire to express her ideas about art in her novels. While art is pertinent to all her novels in some form, her third novel, *Romola* (1862-63) is most relevant to her engagement with Italian Renaissance art, and so to her research in Florence in 1860 and 1861. It is this historical novel, set in Florence during the time of Savonarola, that allowed Eliot to draw on her considerable expertise, but also hide her more daring and original ideas inside her fiction, avoiding the familiar accusation of being too much of an expert for a woman. At the same time, she made sure that no one could accuse her of being *not enough* of an expert, of being an uninformed and shallow “lady novelist”: Eliot researched the cultural and art-historical background for this novel meticulously, both on site in Florence and by reading a large number of primary and secondary sources. Paradoxically, that made it very hard for her to integrate what she had learned into the novel in such a way that would still make for good fiction. It is not clear

⁴⁴ “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856): 442-461, here 449, 454, 460-61. Patricia Rubin, “George Eliot, Lady Eastlake, and the Humbug of Old Masters,” *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 28 (2019): 1-19; 4. Eliot’s most important reviews of women writers are “Woman in France: Madame de Sablé,” *Westminster Review* 62 (October 1854): 448-73, “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,” *The Leader* 6 (13 Oct 1855): 988-989, and “Belles Lettres and Art” *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 257-278, which also addresses Fuller. (All articles at <https://georgeeliotarchive.org>.)

that she altogether succeeded in doing so: her journals show that she was racked by doubt throughout the arduous writing process whether she could accomplish her ambitious goals, and she was not wrong: Despite the enormous honorarium she received, *Romola* was her least successful novel, often criticized for its erudition, and still her least popular today. When it comes to art, she is arguably both more selective and more successful in integrating it functionally in her later fiction, especially in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, but she never again attempted to write encyclopedically about art and an art-historical period, as she did in *Romola*.⁴⁵

Part of Eliot's difficulty was that she wanted to prove that a historical novel could evoke the past in a way that was both sufficiently "dramatic" (an acknowledged challenge for her) and also accurate, at a time when the emerging field of art history was raising the stakes for accuracy. This is why *Romola*, with its enormous underbelly of historical research, is important to the larger question of how, and how freely, a woman could discuss her ideas on art in a genre other than the handbook or review article. The novel is studded with art-historical references (which every modern edition annotates dutifully, if reductively), but the responses to art that Eliot ascribes to her Renaissance heroine, Romola, are a transparent critique of both Victorian ideas of female agency and female access to art. As a historical novel, *Romola* allows Eliot to obliquely discuss present-day restrictions on women's spatial movements and intellectual aspirations. This means that in some ways her writing was as "specialized" as Jameson's and Eastlake's—another

⁴⁵ Beyond the entries in her *Journals* on the laborious process of writing the novel, Eliot's reading notes on her research for *Romola* have been transcribed and published. See *A Writer's Notebook*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth, Vol. 2 of William Baker, *Some George Eliot Notebooks: An Edition of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library's George Eliot Holograph Notebooks* (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1976), and the three *Romola* notebooks edited by Andrew Thompson for *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 50-51 (Sept. 2006): 1-109, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42827963>; *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 66, no. 12 (2014): 5-99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/georelioghstud.66.1-2.0005>; *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 70, no. 1 (2018): 1-86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/georelioghstud.70.1.0001>.

way for a woman writer to carve out space for women to write expertly about art history. As she translated her ideas about Renaissance art (and women's experience of this art) into fiction, Eliot could bring her considerable expertise into her work without being either mocked as a bluestocking connoisseur or dismissed as a mere popularizer.

Although they both began by writing about art in their reviews, by the late 1850s, Eastlake and Eliot were writing very differently about it. Eastlake's commitment to detailed, catalogue-oriented connoisseurship, and Eliot's more sweeping, culturally ambitious take on women and art could not be further apart. But it is worth noting that Jameson, whose last and most important books on art appeared during that same decade, set them both on their path—Eastlake when she completed Jameson's *History of our Lord*, Eliot as she read Jameson's series on *Sacred and Legendary Arts*. This is why Jameson's old-fashioned populist outlook on continues to occupy an important third position in Victorian women's art writing far beyond her own death in 1860. Deliberately working as a simplifier of art-historical knowledge, she is remarkable in that she wrote openly as a woman, accepting for better or for worse what it meant to be read as "Mrs. Jameson" rather than as an anonymous or pseudonymous voice, as Eastlake and Eliot did. What all three had in common, though, was their dedication to researching art and their reverence for the Victorian canon of Old Masters—especially for the Renaissance, including Michelangelo, Raphael, and Fra Angelico, who will each provide a different vector in the Victorian fascination with Renaissance Florence in the following three chapters. As I discuss what the three women thought about three representative art spaces, their taste in art will at times seem utterly conventional—and not noticeably shaped by gender. At first sight, it may appear as unoriginal and generic to us today as it often did to those who dismissed their comments on art. And yet, their identity as Victorian women writers did inflect the way they looked at art in

Florence. What they came to see there and what they wrote about it can tell us how they experienced gendered protocols for viewing art in specific spatial contexts—the piazza della Signoria, the Palazzo Pitti, and the Monastery of San Marco—and show how these protocols sometimes amplify and sometimes undercut the expected response of a Victorian traveler to the masterpieces of Florence.

CHAPTER 1:

Women's Silence on Public Art: The Piazza della Signoria

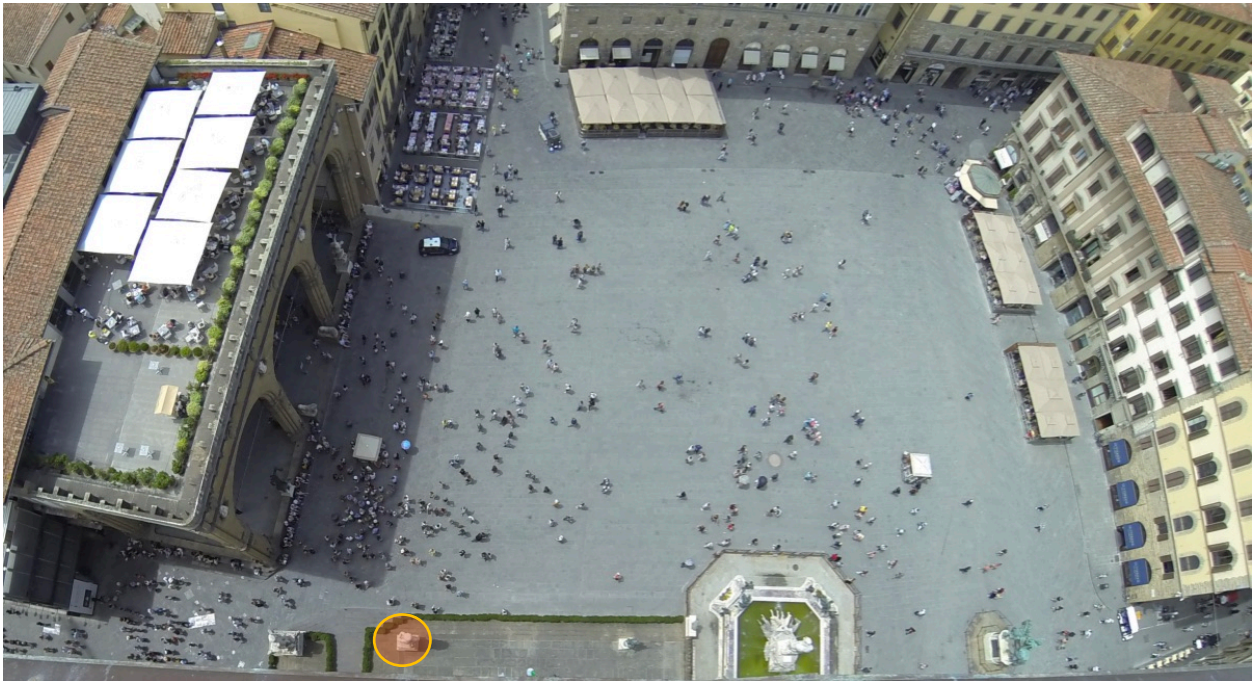


Figure 10. Bird's eye view of the Piazza della Signoria, with the Loggia dei Lanzi on the left. The location of the replica of the *David* is marked with a circle. Photograph by Mark Bauer, with permission, June 2019.

Florence's Piazza della Signoria, known to 19th-century tourists as the Piazza Gran Duca until the last "grand dukes" were ousted in 1859, is typically swarming with tourists, as in a modern view from the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio (fig. 1). The piazza is the politically most significant public space in Florence, and has been ever since the Palazzo was commissioned, in 1299, to house the Florence Senate (i.e. the *signoria*). Among Florence's outdoor art spaces, it is also the one with the highest density of famous sculptures, all with their own political history and significance. Most well-known today is Michelangelo's *David*, which was placed there in 1504; the original marble stood in the piazza until it was removed in 1873, and subsequently displayed in the newly-built rotunda of the Accademia dell'Arte in 1882.

Compared to Anna Jameson's, Elizabeth Eastlake's, and George Eliot's response to museums (Chapter 2) and monasteries (Chapter 3), their comments on the piazza and its public

art are sparse. But that itself is telling—their relative silence and the things they *do* say about the piazza and its sculptural “program,” especially Michelangelo’s *David*, shed light on how their response as tourists and writers is inflected by expectations about what seeing art meant for any traveler “in art,” but also by a powerful gender script that suggested that public, political space was male space. Since it was difficult to separate the art in the Piazza della Signoria from this masculinized politicized setting, they tended to say little about either—except, as I will show, in fiction, which allowed both Jameson and Eliot to address space in ways that the art-critical discourse of their time did not. Although the gender script did not absolutely dictate women’s experience of public space and public art, it had an important impact. It amplified the silence regarding current events typically kept by many foreign tourists, who came to see the Florence of the glorified Renaissance past, but did not engage with the political concerns of the Florentines of their own time. These concerns were both urgent and widely visible when Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot took their trips—namely, during the politically charged years of the Risorgimento (ca. 1848-1870), when Italy was in the process of becoming a unified nation. This chapter is thus about absence in many ways: not just about the piazza’s “empty space” that surrounds its sculptures or about the scarcity of commentary on the piazza by the three women, but also about the conspicuous absence of their opinion on the current political situation in Florence from their public writing (even as they express them in private). Even the *David*—Michelangelo’s fame notwithstanding—was affected by this silence, brushed aside as a not-so-great work by the great master precisely because its political message was literally out in the open in the Piazza della Signoria, even as it changed over time.

*

The Piazza della Signoria consists of two large, uneven rectangles on two sides of what was at first called the Palazzo del Popolo or the Palazzo dei Priori, where the Florentine Elders (the *priori*) or Senate (the *signoria*) began to meet in the early 14th century, to represent the people (or *popolo*) (fig.10). The palazzo became known as the Palazzo Vecchio (i.e. “The Old Palace”) after the Medici, who had briefly used it as their ducal residence in the mid-16th century, moved on to the Palazzo Pitti, their new palace (see chapter 2). Ever since, the Palazzo Vecchio has served continuously as a government building (including during the Risorgimento, when various provisional governments met there). It is still the seat of the municipal government of Florence today. The piazza evolved alongside the palazzo, and was expanded multiple times across several centuries, until by the late 16th century it had taken on the L shape it still has today, wrapping around the west and north side of the Palazzo Vecchio.

From its beginning, the piazza was associated with the political and civic activities of Florence: it was a space for official speeches, and daily comings and goings around the Senate building, the city-state’s main government building; it was on the route of frequent (and politically highly significant) religious processions; and it was also the site of coups, demonstrations of popular unrest, and revolution. Given this political and representative function, the Piazza della Signoria was also an important space for displaying Florence’s public art. Its sculptures were significant political symbols, with meanings that could shift radically over time. Some of this art was originally placed in or meant for other spaces, but other works were commissioned for the piazza—by Florentine public institutions such as the guilds (the *arti*), the building commission responsible for the Cathedral and other edifices in Florence (the *opera del duomo*), or the senate (the *signoria*) itself. Beginning in the 16th century, works were also commissioned by various Medici dukes. The sculptures that were accumulated over time were

displayed both in the open plaza and also in the roofed open space of the Loggia dei Lanzi (built 1376-82) throughout the Renaissance, from Donatello's *Marzocco* in the mid-15th century and his *Judith* in the 1490s to the equestrian monument to Cosimo I erected in the 1590s. More works were added (or traded out for others) in the 17th and 18th century. Virtually every sculpture placed on the piazza or under the roof of the loggia during the Renaissance has had historically specific, changing, and even conflicting political connotations—including, of course, Michelangelo's *David*. Many were sculpted by artists who were already considered part of the canon by the end of the Renaissance, which guaranteed that they were kept around and on the itinerary of travelers who came to admire Florence's art as early as the late 16th century.¹

The Piazza della Signoria and Loggia dei Lanzi, along with the Palazzo Vecchio, are typically still featured first in guidebooks to Florence today, from the *Blue Guide* to Eve Borsook's more scholarly *Companion Guide to Florence*. In the nineteenth century, the various editions of Murray's *Handbooks for Travelers* that covered Florence included the "Piazza Granduca" right after the Duomo as the must-see even for "the traveler who is making but a hasty visit." Travelers would then have found additional information on the piazza on the Handbook's densely-printed two-column pages. The *Handbook* provided them with a list of ten sculptures visible on the piazza, in addition to a longer section on the exterior and interior of the Palazzo Vecchio; however, it did not draw attention to the piazza itself as a space—implying that it was the objects in it and the buildings adjacent to it that make the "Piazza Granduca" worth visiting. Unsurprisingly, in the art criticism of the time, this is even more noticeable—whether it

¹ For a good summary of the significance of open spaces in Florentine political life during the Renaissance, see Sharon T. Strocchia, "Theaters of Everyday Life," *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, eds. Roger Crum and John Paoletti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 55-80. For an overview that focuses specifically on the architectural development and logic of the piazza in the 14th and 15th centuries, see Marvin Trachtenberg, "What Brunelleschi Saw: Monument and Site at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 47 (March 1988): 14-44.

is in handbooks and overviews of the history of sculpture (or of architecture), or in more detailed studies, which tended to focus on individual artists, it is the individual work, not the spatial context, that the writers drew attention to, whether they are male or female. For example, Richard Westmacott's 1864 *Handbook of Sculpture, Ancient and Modern*, addressed each of the works separately when he discussed the most famous sculptors to have made art for the piazza (Michelangelo, Cellini, and Giambologna), but never as a sculptural ensemble that results over time as these are displayed together.²

George Eliot's "Recollections of Italy, 1860," her private travelogue, which drew so heavily on the abbreviated handbook style derived from *Murray's*, exemplifies this focus on the architecture and the sculptures, rather than on the piazza as a site. Eliot wrote about her visit to the Palazzo Vecchio and the adjacent "Council Hall" (the *Salone dei Cinquecento*) and acknowledged several sculptures that were housed in the Loggia dei Lanzi, but not the ones displayed in the open plaza—as if the open-air display made them less worthy of notice. Even for the sculptures in the Loggia, she merely noted that "there is not one I could admire, unless it were the dead body of Ajax with the Greek soldier supporting it." She called Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of the Medusa*, the most famous of the sculptures under the loggia, "fantastic" (in the 19th-century negative sense of bordering on the grotesque). Only in *Romola* could she deviate from this focus and discuss the piazza as space, as I will discuss below. But even in her novel, she sought to show the piazza by way of a "high art" masterpiece. Since the piazza did not

² Eve Borsook, *Companion Guide to Florence*, 4th ed. (London: Collins, 1979), 41, and Alta Macadam, *Blue Guide to Florence* (London: Somerset Books, 2011), 33, both feature the Palazzo Vecchio first in their description of Florence. The *Blue Guides* are technically the successors to Murray's *Handbooks*; see John R. Gretton's "Introduction" to William Lister, *Bibliography of Murray's Handbooks*, xxii. For the *Handbooks'* full description of the art in the piazza, including the Loggia, see *Murray's*, 1854:492-493; 1858:573-574. Richard Westmacott, *Handbook of Sculpture, Ancient and Modern. Adapted from the Essay Contributed to the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1864), 293, 300, 308. 298-299 also mentions the much-derided *Hercules and Cacus* by Bandinelli in passing.

feature much art before the 1490s (in 1495, Donatello's *Judith* was the first work to be displayed in the Loggia dei Lanzi), it is Donatello's version of the *Marzocco*, the Lion of Florence, documented to have stood there long before any other statuary, that fills this function.³

The piazza as a space thus fades from view behind the individual sculpture and the imposing presence of the Palazzo Vecchio in Eliot's "Recollections," while only her fiction can foreground it. This also holds true for Anna Jameson—even though her only work of fiction, that "combined novel and Baedeker," the *Diary of an Ennuyée*, predated Eliot's novel by almost 40 years and was written before there was such a thing as a *Murray's Handbook* or a *Baedeker*. *Ennuyée* shows the freedom that the (fictionalized) travelogue as genre gave Jameson to describe the experience of the piazza. Her diarist-narrator described an adventurous unaccompanied nighttime walk in Florence. After she has watched men fishing in the moonlight at the banks of the Arno, standing "in various picturesque attitudes," and notes "their dark figures between me and the moonlight" looking "like colossal statues," she is primed (even setting aside the phallicism of the fishermen's "long poles") to see the sculptures in the piazza erotically, too:

I strayed into the piazza del Gran Duca. Here the rich moonlight, streaming through the arcade of the gallery, fell directly upon the fine Perseus of Benvenuto Cellini, and illuminating the green bronze, touched it with a spectral and supernatural beauty. Thence I walked round the equestrian statue of Cosmo [i.e. Duke Cosimo I], and so home over the Ponte alle Carrajo.

³ Eliot's "Recollections of Italy, 1860," in *Journals*, 355. The "Ajax" in question is a version of the Pasquino Group. This particular version with major restorations in the 17th and 19th centuries was put in the Loggia in 1838, according to Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 295. Eliot's interpretation of the "Greek soldier" as Ajax follows Murray's *Handbook* (see 1854:493; 1858:574); the assumption today is that he is Achilles. The Palazzo Vecchio, and in particular the tower, which can be seen from a distance, is mentioned twice in the "Recollections" (*Journals* 354, 355). Later journals do not mention the piazza or the Palazzo Vecchio. For Eliot's frequent mention of the *Marzocco*, see *Romola* 123, 384, 619, 654 and 669. *Romola*, 141, features Donatello's *Judith* when a character refers to it as standing in an unspecified public location in June 1492—presumably the Medici residence. The sculpture had been commissioned by the Medici in the 1450s and stood in front of the Palazzo Medici (today's Medici-Ricardo) along with Donatello's *David* until the ousting of the Medici in the 1790s.

Her fascination with the “spectral and supernatural” beauty of the *Perseus* in the moonlight, after having already turned real men into statues with her own (Medusa-like?) female gaze, does seem to imply a woman’s erotic gaze at a nude male sculpture, but also, ironically, a contemplation (and appreciation of) of the aestheticizing of violence that Cellini’s sculpture entails.⁴

But this kind of adventurous and independent wandering in public in search of interesting (possibly erotically attractive, but also dangerous) art is unusual for a woman even in the potentially less restrictive 1820s, as becomes clear when Jameson’s diarist later remembers a second visit to the piazza, where she again visited the Loggia, this time to study another work with eroticized violence as its theme, *The Rape of the Sabines* by Giambologna, attracting the attention of a group of Florentines who watch her being a tourist:

I was standing one evening in the Piazza del Gran Duca, looking at the group of the Rape of the Sabines: in a few minutes a dozen people gathered round me, gaping at the statue, and staring at that and at me alternately, either to enjoy my admiration, or find out the cause of it: the people came out of the neighbouring shops, and the crowd continued to increase, till at length, though infinitely amused, I was glad to make my escape.

The fact that the narrator feels it is necessary to make her “escape” makes clear that the ability to be a female *flâneur* (or *flâneuse*, a word not in use in the 19th century), and to explore public spaces, even as a tourist, has limits—unless a woman is willing to become a spectacle herself, a role the diarist finds uncomfortable. What is visible here, already in Jameson’s *Ennuyée* in 1826, is a tension between greater freedom for 19th-century female tourists, who often experienced fewer limitations abroad than at home and speak about how safe and free they felt, and the real limitations imposed on the movement of women in public space without risk to their reputation. This tension continued to exist far beyond the 1820s. Even as there were a few intrepid women

⁴ “Baedeker,” see Holcomb in Sherman and Holcomb, *Women as Interpreters*, 96. Jameson, *Ennuyée*, 95-96. Like most critics, I treat the diarist as Jameson’s alter ego here; see my introduction. Ironically, Jameson later vehemently criticizes the representation of violence in art. She claims that women viewers naturally loathe it, and highlights in particular how abhorred she is by the fact that the *Judith and Holofernes* in the Palazzo Pitti was painted by a female (i.e. Artemisia Gentileschi, not mentioned by name); *Ennuyée*, 333-336, esp. 335.

who traveled everywhere, women travelers were generally rather cautious and, as discussed in the previous chapter, often had a male protector or at least an older female chaperone.⁵

More importantly, however, if women did explore public spaces on their own, they would not have drawn attention to this fact in the context of art exploration; Jameson, who after all traveled both independently and as the chaperone of her niece, stopped mentioning this after she turned from fiction and travel narratives to handbook writing. This is not surprising, since they had long distanced themselves from impressionistic travel writing by the time they visited Florence (again: Jameson in 1846, 1857-58, and 1859; Eastlake in 1855, 1856, 1857, and 1858, and then in 1862, 1864, and 1865). In other words, not mentioning the piazza may be dictated more by genre than by gender, but has important consequences for what Jameson and Eastlake do and do not address. Public spaces in Florence in general, and the Piazza della Signoria specifically, are not mentioned in Jameson's later works or anywhere in Eastlake's writing.

It may seem trivial to observe that Eliot, Eastlake, Jameson, and their mid-nineteenth-century fellow-travelers do not "see" (and thus do not comment on) the piazza but only the art objects in it. Art travel today is after all often still based on going to see specific objects of art and architecture rather than on the seemingly empty space around them. But 20th- and 21st-century discussions of the spatial experience of art—most pertinently for Renaissance Florence

⁵ In Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyée*, 329. For the feminist debate about the possibility of a 19th-century *flâneuse*, see Balducci and Jensen, "Introduction" to *Women, Femininity, and European Visual Culture*, 3-4, and Meaghan Clarke, "On Tempera and Temperament: Women, Art, and Feeling at the Fin de Siècle." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 23 (2016): 6-8. Jameson herself traveled independently, including a dangerous hike to the top of mount Vesuvius in the 1820s. Margaret Fuller famously pointed out how safe she felt in Italy in particular, incensed that fearmongers made Italy in 1849 look much more dangerous than it was: "they dare not for their lives stay in Rome, where I, a woman, walk everywhere alone." See Dispatch 32, "Things and Thoughts in Europe, No. XXXII" to the *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 July 1849, in "*These Sad But Glorious Days*": *Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850*, edited Larry J. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 294. Fuller also spent a month in Florence in the summer of 1847 and visited the studios of several American sculptors (Dispatch 15, *Sad But Glorious*, 142); she was deeply suspicious of Leopold II and his Austrian family allies, keeping track of the Austrian troop movements around Florence in 1849 (Dispatch 31, 285). But as discussed in my introduction, the freedom for women travelers was restricted in comparison to most men, and that would have been true for the all three women, and even for Fuller.

by John Shearman, and for 19th-century sculpture by Albert Boime—have amply shown that this erasure of the spatial context of a given artwork is problematic, and that we get a more complete and often very different idea of the meaning of a work when we pay attention to the viewer’s spatial experience (and, as has only more recently been added, by also taking into account the gendered dimension of that experience). In particular the political meaning of public art, explicitly created to be viewed in public, is constituted in the interplay with the space for which it is commissioned, where it is erected and inaugurated, and where it might also undergo changes over time, from being repositioned or censored (as in the case of Michelangelo’s *David* and its fig leaf and earlier bronze garland) to being vandalized.⁶

This means that mid-19th-century travelers tended to focus so intently on individual objects and structures not only if they were females who did not want to draw attention to their presence in “male” public space. Tourists in general fragmented and decontextualized art, a strategy that helped them to depoliticize this art, as far as the present was concerned—even if they were perfectly willing to acknowledge the political dimension of the Renaissance past. For the Piazza della Signoria, which had never ceased to be a politically significant space, this strategy is apparent in much textual and visual material for tourists—not only in traveler’s guides like *Murray’s*, but likewise in the art handbooks (like Westmacott’s *Handbook of Sculpture* or Jacob Burckhardt’s *Cicerone*) and, importantly, in their visual correlates: the etchings, prints, and photographs bought as souvenirs. Although these technologies of reproduction all co-existed in the mid-19th century, and similar points could be made about the prints of Florence sites that tourists were buying, a photograph will serve as my example here, because the early photographs

⁶ John Shearman, *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), especially the discussion of the Piazza della Signoria, 10-58. Albert Boime, *Hollow Icons: The Politics of Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 1-15. Most discussions of the gendered experience of art space address museums and exhibitions and will be discussed in Chapter 2.

for tourist printed by the famous Alinari brothers (individually and in album form) epitomize this kind of decontextualization. These were among the earliest photographs for tourists that were taken of Florence and appeared right at the moment when travel and art guidebooks became popular. The brothers' first catalogue of fifty-four images for sale dates from April 1856, and as early as 1858, Murray's *Handbook* promoted the Alinari photographs as "the best views of Florence," available at the print shop of Edward Goodban in the via de Legnaioli.⁷

This catalogue (as well as later Alinari albums) includes images of the Palazzo Vecchio, its court, the Loggia dei Lanzi, and close-ups of many individual sculptures, but no view of the Piazza della Signoria itself. The 1856 photograph of the Palazzo Vecchio makes this very clear: the iconic west side of the Palazzo with the tower at full height is at the center, but only a small triangular portion of the large piazza is visible (fig.11). In the middle ground, the emphasis is on the three colossal sculptures that parallel the west façade of the Palazzo: the *Neptune* fountain, Michelangelo's *David* (still the original marble, protected by a small baldachin at this time) and Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus* flanking the main entrance, all in brilliant sunlight. The loggia with its additional sculptures is obscured by shadows.⁸

⁷ On the Alinari photographs from 1856, see Smith "Florence, Photography and the Victorians," 21-28. The Goodban recommendation can be found in Murray's *Handbooks*, 1858:519, and 1861:81. On the importance of 19th-century reproduction beyond photography, see Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) and specifically about the reproduction of art prints, Bann, *Distinguished Images: Prints in the Visual Economy of Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013). – The important exception to the erasure of empty space (which I cannot discuss fully here) involves "the view" of the cityscape or landscape from afar, where the empty space between the viewer and the panoramic view creates the distance necessary to convey that the sight is picturesque. This picturesque landscape continues to play a crucial role in the script for travelers throughout the 19th century, and the *Handbooks* as well as impressionistic travelogues invariably include descriptions of Florence as seen from either San Miniato al Monte or Bellosguardo in the south or Fiesole in the North, as an obligatory textual or visual "expository shot" prior to entering the city. Since this far view again gave the visitor a way to keep current political reality at a distance (literally), it was compatible with the tourists' need to depoliticize their surroundings and insist on focusing exclusively on the past.

⁸ A later Alinari album with 100 images from Florence and environs from ca. 1870 features nine photographs in and around the piazza. Apart from the exterior view of the Palazzo and its courtyard and a view along the Loggia dei Lanzi, it features five close-ups of sculptures (not including the *David*, then no longer on the piazza) and a view down the piazzale degli Uffizi looking toward the west façade of the Palazzo. This last image potentially shows a



Figure 11. Fratelli Alinari. *Palazzo Vecchio*, ca. 1856. Digitized photograph (from an albumen print). New York Public Library Digital Collections (digitalcollections.nypl.org).

The composition of the Alinari photograph signals that what is being photographed is the art and architecture, rather than its spatial context—the imposing palazzo, with the statues that are visually aligned with it, not the piazza itself. The photographers also reinforce the erasure of this public space by the absence of any human beings, making it as empty as it can be. Only the street cleaner's cart serves as a reminder that it would usually have been a busy public space,

large part of the street and the piazza itself, but they are obscured by shadows cast by the buildings. See Fratelli Alinari, *Ricordi de Firenze Fotografie dei Fratelli Alinari* (n.p. [ca. 1870]). *Nineteenth-Century Collections Online*.

teeming with people (as in the modern bird's eye photograph introducing the chapter, an attempt to photograph the *piazza* and not the art and architecture in and around it, fig. 10). Urban photography in the mid-19th century often staged city scenes as empty of people—importantly, not because of technological limitations. George Fardon's photographs of San Francisco, for example, stressed “business, stability, orderliness” in the new urban spaces of the US west coast, as part of a conservative cultural “programming” intended to align these new spaces with “older models of perception,” as Peter Hales explains. In the context of the historic sites of Europe that were photographed in this way for the tourists, the conservatism of this kind of photography could lock on to the existing veneration for the Renaissance and its most famous cities.⁹

In the Alinari photographs of Florence, the conspicuous absence of people—be they Florentine residents or tourists—suggests the unchanging character of the site since the Renaissance and its availability to visitors in that pristine state, untainted by the present. Photographs in this style (and the sketches and prints for travelers that preceded them) emphasize both the individual object over the context and the past over the present, effectively obscuring the site as a lived-in space—as if some mythical, literally monumental past itself could be photographed, stripped of human activity past and present. This results in a “Pompeification” of tourist sites, as Graham Smith puts it—a frozen-in-time effect which emphasizes both the spatial *and* the temporal distance from the viewer, which goes hand in hand with the segmenting of art spaces into discreet and disconnected works. Visual souvenirs like these are directly aligned with the way handbooks, brochures and catalogues discuss the art and architecture in places like Florence—and, as Smith points out, even with an ostensibly more cohesive art-flâneur's “guide” like Ruskin's *Mornings in Florence*. Florence's art appears as discreet, pristine objects of “high

⁹ On Fardon and 19th-century urban photographs of US cities, see Peter Hales, *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), here 55 and 4-5.

culture” that belong to the past, outside of their current political function and significance. This creates a paradoxical double vision that is apparent in the representation of the Piazza della Signoria in guide books, art books and photographs alike: while the political context of the past, as important (and interpretable) “history” of the Renaissance, is described as having a significant impact on its art, assumed to be of great interest to the traveler, the politics of the present and its impact on art and its interpretation are completely sidestepped.¹⁰

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Ruskin’s *Mornings in Florence* is a good example of the powerful the script for all travelers (men and women alike) to ignore the present and its political implications. Written in 1875, just a bit later than the material this study focuses on, it is a combination of a work of a walking tour of Florence with a discussion of sacred art, conversational in tone and frequently referencing (and correcting) the *Murray’s* that the reader presumably has at the ready. Despite the fact that its starting point are the perambulations and physical motions of the tourist walking through Florence (on seven consecutive mornings), Ruskin’s focus on art in sacred settings means that he writes almost exclusively about exploring indoor spaces (Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, and the Duomo in particular); the sole exception is the Piazza del Duomo as a way to contemplate Giotto’s Campanile. This approach necessarily entails ignoring the Piazza della Signoria and the Palazzo Vecchio and other spaces with immediate political significance. In other words, even though Ruskin here takes full advantage of his male prerogative to be a

¹⁰ For “Pompeification,” see Smith, “Florence, Photography and the Victorians,” 27. For both the US and for Florence, there is also the opposite style of photography—Hales, 57-61, points to Edward Anthony’s “instantaneous” views and their integration of crowds; Smith, 29-30, discusses early stereographic views of Florence by the photographer Anton Hautmann, which “teem with activity.”

flâneur and go everywhere, he still abides by the visitor's script of avoiding the political spaces and staying where he can stay solidly in the Renaissance past.¹¹

When Ruskin does discuss the Palazzo Vecchio and its environment in another text on Tuscany and on Florence, his 1873 *Val d'Arno*, it becomes clear that its *past* political significance is significant to him—he points to the palazzo's tower as the monument to the 13th-century beginning of “commerce,” just as Giotto's Campanile is the monument to the “Religion of Europe.” Ruskin, here as almost everywhere else in his writings, differs from a great many historians of the time by privileging the pre-Renaissance (here, the late 13th century) and thinks of the 16th century as a period of great decline. But highlighting “commerce” implies that it is a 13th-century Italian invention with analogues in 18th- and 19th-century Britain, the self-described “nation of shopkeepers,” still associated with the global commercial enterprise that first emerged in the Italian city states. For Ruskin, as for so many European historians and cultural critics of the 19th century, the fascination with the Italian Renaissance is ultimately about its relevance to his own moment in history: its cultural and political significance points to the present state of affairs in the visitor's own country—but by that same token, it is not seen as connected to the current events in Italy itself, which are seen as not particularly relevant.¹²

¹¹ Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence: Being Studies of Christian Art for English Travellers*, orig. pub. 1875-1877), in *Works of John Ruskin*, 23: 280-461. For Ruskin's habit in *Mornings in Florence* of referring directly to Murray's *Handbooks* as the text that Ruskin can “correct” for his readers, see Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 289-290.

¹² Ruskin, *Val d'Arno: Ten Lectures on Tuscan Art Directly Antecedent to the Florentine Year of Victories*, a series of lectures given in Oxford in 1873, in *Works of John Ruskin*, 23:1-188. Elsewhere in his works, the piazza is even more indirectly present, when Ruskin discusses a particular art work, without explicit reference to its spatial context; e.g. Cellini's critique of Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus* in *Modern Painters*, Part III (*Works of Ruskin*, 4:279); or the “perfection” of Cellini's *Perseus* in a lecture on Michelangelo and Tintoretto (*Works of Ruskin*, 20:312). For a brief overview of Ruskin's take on the Renaissance, see J.E. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 123-155. Law and Ostermark, in their Introduction to *Victorian and Edwardian Responses*, 1-2, point out that he did revise his opinions on the “Renaissance spirit” in the 1870s and 1880s, especially in the Slade lectures. My present work is not intended to do justice to the intricacies of Ruskin's views on art, which have been widely discussed, often at the expense of attention devoted to the vast majority of less prominent voices in Victorian art criticism.

Indeed, what some scholars see as the invention of the Renaissance by 19th-century historians (including the invention of the term itself) is driven by the search for parallels and connections between this newly-named period and the political present in the historians' own national context—be it British, French, or German. The overall British fascination with the Renaissance, in particular the Italian Renaissance, was not new in the 19th century—it was already in full swing in the 18th century: 16th-century art was glorified during the heyday of Neoclassicism and of the Grand Tour to Italy as the only “modern” (post-antiquity) art worth studying because of the admiration and emulation of classical antiquity that characterizes the art of both the 16th and the 18th century. But the Renaissance became newly relevant in the 19th century when the first cultural historians, in particular Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt, offered new, sweeping and holistic interpretations of the Renaissance as a “collective intellectual and artistic movement” that they saw as giving birth of modern Europe. This view became influential precisely because such grand, teleological master-narratives promised to explain the origins of deeply-held nineteenth-century values, like individualism and nationalism, and of much-discussed social conflicts, like the tension between secularism and religion. The British appropriation of the Italian Renaissance as a period in which they could look for the cultural origins of Victorian society occurs in this larger context, ranging from Ruskin in the 1840s to the later Victorian reinterpretations of the period in the work of Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, and John Addington Symonds.¹³

¹³ See Bullen, *Myth of the Renaissance*, and the older seminal study by J.R. Hale, *England and the Renaissance: The Growth of Interest in its History and Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954); Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, UK, and Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell 1992); and Lynne Walhout Hinojosa, *The Renaissance, English Cultural Nationalism, and Modernism, 1860-1920* (New York and Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009). The term ‘renaissance’ was technically coined by an 18th-century historian, Seroux d’Angincourt, but his work did not get widely disseminated until the early 19th century; see Bullen, 25-37, esp. 29.

The important role of developments in art and literature for cultural historians like Michelet and Burckhardt meant that studying Renaissance art in particular was integral to the preoccupation with the Renaissance past of Italy. Burckhardt in particular shaped the British interpretation of the Italian Renaissance, even though his 1860 *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (*Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*), now seen as his most influential work, was not well known in Britain until the late 1870s, and does not specifically foreground art. But his ideas on Renaissance art were already circulating long before *Civilization* became more widely read. He had been Franz Kugler's student and edited the second German edition of his *Handbook* in 1847 (i.e. the edition that Elizabeth Eastlake translated) along with a general art survey by Kugler; he also wrote an extensive art guide for travelers to Italian sculpture, architecture, and painting, the *Cicerone*, in 1855. When it came to Renaissance art, Burckhardt, like many others, still drew on a Vasarian line-up of famous artists to discuss, but saw these in terms of larger historical developments, in terms of a "Hegelian movement of the spirit" of the age rather than in terms of individual genius. Like the earlier French and Swiss historians that set the stage for this attention to slowly evolving cultural processes, Burckhardt stressed that the Renaissance emerged from the late Middle Ages, more so than from an abrupt new turn towards Graeco-Roman civilization. It was this new, more capacious, holistic, and organic view of the Renaissance that allowed many historians and art critics, Ruskin included, to re-evaluate and celebrate the cultural developments of the 14th and 15th centuries, discuss in more detail in Chapter 3.¹⁴

¹⁴ On Burckhardt, his views on art, and his wider influence, see Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 331-346, here esp. 345 for his Hegelian approach; for his impact on German culture and especially on Nietzsche, see Martin Ruehl, *The Italian Renaissance in the German Historical Imagination, 1860-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-104. Bullen, 15-16, points to the relative lack of Burckhardt's importance for British writers before *Civilization of the Renaissance* was published in translation in 1878. *Der Cicerone: Eine Anleitung zum Genuss der Kunstwerke Italiens* (Basel: Schweighauser'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1855) was also not available in English until 1873, when Murray's published a translation of vol. 3 of the revised German edition from 1869 as *The Cicerone, or: Art Guide to Painting in Italy. For the Use of Travellers*, translated by Mrs. A.H. Clough (London: Murray, 1873).

But no matter how capacious the Victorian view of the Italian Renaissance was, and how interested the Victorians were in it in terms of the perceived connections between their own society and that of the various Italian cities that captured their interest—Florence, Venice, or post-antiquity Rome—this very interest typically led to an appropriation of the Italian culture of the past that often completely ignored nineteenth-century Italy. The British visitors, and even those who formed colonies of expats in Italy, tended to “colonize Italy’s past” and sidestep the lives of their Italian contemporaries altogether. Not all writers go as far as Ruskin, who told his father in 1845 that he wished he “could wash the whole population of Florence down ... into the sewer” since they kept replacing old Florentine streets with new shop-lined avenues, and still complained about the annoying omnibus stop on the piazza del Duomo in *Mornings in Florence*. But when it comes to writing for and by tourists, who can easily sidestep the interaction with the present by zeroing in on individual monuments and masterpieces of the past, the willful depoliticization of the current situation of Italy is almost universal.¹⁵

In this context, it is not surprising that the Piazza della Signoria gets short shrift in the guidebooks and handbooks on Florence. I began this chapter by calling it one of the most politically significant spaces in all of Florence, but the descriptions geared towards tourists strip the space of all political importance when it comes to the 1800s; any political commentary is lodged safely in the past, made in reference to Renaissance history. This sidestepping of modern politics is, again, so naturalized as an approach to tourist travel that it can be hard to remember that for mid-century Italy, it bordered on the ridiculous to ignore current events. The Italian nationalist movement, the Risorgimento, may have been invisible to tourists in its early years immediately after the Napoleonic Wars, but by the late 1840s, it had entered a turbulent,

¹⁵ Fraser, *Victorians*, 3. Ruskin, letter from May 30, 1845, *Works of Ruskin*, 4:39, Footnote 2; *Mornings in Florence*, *Works of Ruskin*: 23:413-414; see also Smith “Victorians, Photography,” 28.

dramatic, and heated phase that involved two Wars of Independence (1848-1849, 1859-1860). Rapid changes in the political landscape continued until Rome was declared the capital of a united Italy in the fall of 1870.¹⁶

Importantly, this absence of politics in the literature on art and travel often contrasts sharply with news reporting. British journalists, British politicians, and “extraparliamentary” political activists at home in Britain (and in the expat colonies) followed events quite closely. British interest in the Risorgimento had become widespread by the 1840s. The early Italian revolutionary Guiseppe Mazzini, for many years in English exile, had fervent supporters, especially among the British who supported nationalist movements in Germany and in Ireland; at the same time, British career politicians and diplomats kept a very close eye on the Italian peninsula after 1848, especially during the Second War of Independence, partly to make sure that republican, anti-monarchy factions in Italy did not gain the upper hand and colluded with the Young Ireland movement. After the Second War, Guiseppe Garibaldi came to be widely admired by the British. When he handed the territories he conquered over to the Victor Emmanuel, who became king of Italy in 1860, he bridged the gap between the conservative supporters of the king, who liked Garibaldi because cooperated with the monarchy, and radical nationalists who had hoped for a republic, but took Garibaldi’s cue and compromised. His 1864 visit to England was a news sensation, welcomed by moderates and radicals alike—both George Eliot and Elizabeth Eastlake were present when he was honored at the Crystal Palace on April 18, 1864.¹⁷

¹⁶ See John Gooch’s concise *Unification of Italy* (London: Methuen, 1986), and the first four chapters of Denis Mack Smith’s *Modern Italy: A Political History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 3-120, which updates and integrates his earlier work on the Risorgimento. On the Second War of Independence, see Arnold Blumberg, *A Carefully Planned Accident: The Italian War of 1859* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990). Albert Boime, *The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) discusses the art that emerged in the context of the Risorgimento, including developments in Florence.

¹⁷ For the “official” British response by heads of states and diplomats to the key events of 1859-1860, see Derek Beales, *England and Italy 1859-1860* (London etc.: Nelson and Sons, 1961). Eastlake’s excerpted letters and C.E.

This enthusiasm for Italian nationalism also included women, who were not shy about their support. Renowned poet Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, who was close friends with Jameson, and whose work Eliot admired greatly, lived in Florence during the key events of the Risorgimento and was well-known for her poems in support of Italian nationalism throughout the 1850s (but also criticized for her preoccupation with Italy by her readers and friends). Likewise, Frances Trollope and her daughter-in-law, Theodosia, née Garrow (along with Frances' son Thomas Adolphus) lived in Florence at mid-century and wrote extensively about contemporary Italy. In other words, the most politically knowledgeable and vocal British writers of both genders tended to be expatriates with an ear on the ground—although there were women among the writers and activists with Italian connections in Britain as well, especially the fervent nationalist Jessie White Mario, for a time held in an Italian prison for her involvement in a failed insurrection spearheaded by Mazzini.¹⁸

In other words, for the guidebooks to be silent about current events in Italy was a willful omission that directly related to the focus on art and on the cultural history of the Renaissance, and the need to keep art and politics separate. At times, this emphasis clearly shows the overall conservative bias of a particular publisher (John Murray II and his son were staunch Tories, after all). But the silence on politics in the *Handbooks* seems extreme, if one remembers that they had to actually be *rewritten* (to the point of being reorganized) because of the changing political

Smith's commentary, *Journals and Correspondence*, 179-180, and Eliot's journal entry for April 18, 1864, *Journals* 120. Eastlake was personally introduced to Garibaldi at a party hosted in his honor by Prime Minister Gladstone on April 20, and pointedly noted, with a hefty dose of classism, that he dined in his "heavy grey cloth cloak" and looked "like a working-man" (C. E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 181).

¹⁸ For an overview of the British interest in the Risorgimento that takes gender questions into account, see Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Elizabeth Barrett-Browning wrote a series of famous poems, *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851). On Jessie White Mario and other women activists in England, see O'Connor, *Romance of Italy*, 93-116; The politics of Barrett-Browning, Theodosia Trollope and several other women writing on Italy are discussed in the essays collected in Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler, eds, *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003).

status of certain regions between 1860 and 1870. Political opinions are mentioned only when they relate to the past—for example, the segment on the sculptures on the Piazza della Signoria in Murray's *Handbook* introduces the 1595 equestrian sculpture of Duke Cosimo, commissioned by his son Ferdinando from the sculptor Giambologna, and praised as one of his "finest works," by condemning the dukes of the Medici because under them "liberty ceased to exist, and commerce, agriculture, industry and the fine arts declined." At the same time, it remains unclear how the traveler is supposed to think about the existence of "liberty" in Florence in 1854 or 1858, which, following the revocation of the short-lived republican constitution in 1849, was still under the rulership of the house of Habsburg-Lorraines (and hence under the indirect control of the Austrian empire). Travelers with their Murray's guides were apparently expected to traipse around Italy as if nothing were happening—even when Florence momentarily became the center of the Second War of Independence in April 1859.¹⁹

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Since travelers were instructed by their guidebooks to ignore the urgent political concerns of the local population, they would have been unable to see the Piazza della Signoria in the way Enrico Fanfani represented it (fig. 12). His 1860 painting *27 Aprile 1859* commemorates the most dramatic political event in Florence during the Risorgimento—the bloodless coup in which Duke Leopold II Hapsburg-Lorraine was ousted, just one day after the war between the Piedmont and Austria began. Fanfani (1824-1885) was a minor painter in the nationalist Macchiaioli movement, active in Florence from 1847 to 1861, and this genre painting shows the

¹⁹ For the comment on the Medici, see the *Handbooks* of 1854:492 and 1858:573. Not even the general information on Florence in Murray's *Handbooks* provides information on the political landscape (such as the current system of government or name of the ruling house), and a note on the (changing) financial situation of Tuscany, including tax burden the Austrians imposed on Tuscany is the only reference to political changes (1854:373; 1858:441). Even the 1861/1862 edition of Murray's *Handbook for Travelers in Central Italy*, revised to accommodate a completely different political geography, only allude to events in a brief prefatory note and some scattered updates on the annexation of Tuscany which had occurred in March of 1860 (e.g. *Handbook* 1861:v, 1, and 162).



Figure 12: Enrico Fanfani, *27 Aprile 1859*, 1860, oil on canvas. Palazzo Pitti.

Piazza della Signoria on that tumultuous day, teeming with people in the background who witness the tricolor (Italian) flag being raised below the balcony of the Palazzo Vecchio. The viewer would be standing against the back wall of a relatively empty Loggia dei' Lanzi, looking out onto the piazza, and at first it seems as if, like foreign tourists, we are looking at the famous sculptures and the imposing west façade of the Palazzo Vecchio, which takes up almost the entire right half of the painting. But we are not at a great distance, and we do not see a depopulated piazza; instead, we see contemporary Italians—civilians and soldiers, well-dressed middle-class citizens and working men, men and women—filling the piazza, moving in many

directions, creating a busy, active scene, in sharp contrast to the empty space in the Alinari brothers' photograph taken in the same decade.

In fact, Fanfani puts the sculptures in the Piazza della Signoria to direct political use by associating them with the contemporary Italians and the coup that they are staging. Cellini's *Perseus with the Head of the Medusa* is literally the central figure, standing on the central vertical axis of the composition, at the base of a triangle of bright sunlight that extends from behind the *Perseus* into the piazza. When Jameson and Eliot mentioned the *Perseus*, be it as mysterious (Jameson's "spectral and supernatural") or grotesque (Eliot's "fantastic"), they showed no awareness that the sculpture had an explicit political context. The *Perseus* had originally been commissioned by Duke Cosimo I and was erected in the Loggia dei Lanzi in 1554 to show Cosimo's triumph over his enemies, in particular the Florentine citizens who had chased out his family, the Medici, in the 1490s. It achieved this partly by showing the triumph of Cellini's virtuosity over the previous works erected in the piazza and their political symbolism—as John Shearman has shown, its Renaissance spectators already got the literary joke: The marble statues already in the piazza, Michelangelo's *David* and Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*, are now both "turned to stone" by the gaze of the beheaded Medusa. Fanfani, in a composition that emphasizes the triangulation of the three sculptures, reinterprets this political context and repurposes the sculpture. The slain monster now stands for the dukes of Habsburg-Lorraine, about to be ousted that very day. As Albert Boime points out, the *Perseus* here "makes the point about despots overturned and the resurgence of Renaissance glory," a glory that many Italians wanted to attach to the Risorgimento.²⁰

²⁰ For the triangulation of the *Perseus*, the *David*, and *Hercules and Cacus*, see Shearman, *Only Connect*, 44-58. Enrico Fanfani is not one of the inner circle of Macchiaioli, but Boime, *Art of the Macchiaioli*, 190-191, discusses this particular work briefly in the context of the politically-themed paintings at the first Italian National Exposition.

Our point of view elevates the illuminated Perseus, but as we are looking up at the sculpture with its new political significance, we also symbolically stand “behind him” in support. In the wedge of light in the foreground, a working man with outstretched arms both guides our admiring look at the sculpture, and reinforces the triumphant mood by raising his hat in parallel pose to that of the bronze *Perseus* holding up the head of the Medusa (showing the fall of the deposed government). By contrast, the two marble sculptures that flank the entrance to the Palazzo—*David* and *Hercules and Cacus*—have faded into the imposing shadow of the Palazzo, not much more important than the unlit street lamps that we see in front of each, possibly indicating the lack of industrial modernity in the Italy before the coup. Given the angle of the sun at this point (in the southeast, i.e. before noon), the light that illuminates the *Perseus* and a fraction of the loggia and the piazza behind it will later fill the entire piazza and the façade of the Palazzo Vecchio; here, Fanfani suggests, not-too-subtly, that the coup will end successfully and that Tuscany will be free from the “shadow” of Austrian control over its people (the piazza) and its government (the palazzo) by the end of the 27th of April.

None of this politically overt approach to the Piazza della Signoria—not the repurposed political symbolism of the *Perseus*, not the deliberate emphasis on crowds of Italians in the piazza, and, lastly, not the left upper quadrant of the canvas given over to “empty” blue sky and its association with freedom and open space—had a correlate in the guidebooks and the souvenir pictures. It is possible that the well-dressed couple closest to us in the foreground of his painting is Fanfani’s sly allusion to this. Although it is not clear that they are tourists, the man—like Albert Bierstadt’s tourist on the fishmarket in Rome—holds a pocket-size book that could be a guide, and uses an opera glass to study the *Perseus*—or perhaps the men who have climbed the ladder leaning against the Palazzo Vecchio to unfurl the tricolor flag of Italy. The opera glass

signals both his preparedness to inspect carefully what he sees (the sights of Florence, if a tourist and/or connoisseur)—and his intent to keep a distance (since only such distance would necessitate a telescopic device). His female companion is not even looking at the piazza; instead, she is facing us and the back of the loggia, turned away from the political fray behind her—again quite a bit like the female tourist in Bierstadt’s *Roman Fish Market*, and by that token even more clearly removed from the action. As they stand in the shade inside the loggia, they are literally and figuratively in the dark, unenlightened in contrast to the more simply dressed working man in the sunlight next to them, who jubilantly moves towards the *Perseus*.

Fanfani’s patriotic painting did not fit into British concepts of what was culturally important about Florence—that is, its Renaissance past, which “spoke to” the British present in politically reassuring ways, while the nationalist uprisings of the present might have evoked the specters of democratizing movements like Chartism, the call for election reform and household suffrage, and anti-Monarchist republicanism. It is not surprising that nineteenth-century British art tourists paid almost no attention to contemporary Italian painting like his; they showed no interest in the nationalism of Italian painters, while British painters who took the Florentine Renaissance as their subject matter for historical genre paintings, like Frederic Leighton and Jane Benham Hay, were becoming rather popular. By contrast, the Macchiaioli with their pronounced political alliance with the republic went completely unnoticed, even as they were prominently showcased in the first Italian National Exposition of 1861.²¹

²¹ Leighton illustrated *Romola* in 1862 and became a good friend of Eliot’s; his Italian Renaissance scenes were already famous at this time. See Witemeyer, *Visual Arts*, 155-170, and Mark Turner, “George Eliot vs. Frederic Leighton: Whose Text is it Anyway?” *From Author to Text: Re-Reading George Eliot’s Romola*, eds. by Caroline Levine and Mark W. Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 17-35. Leighton’s *Cimabue’s Celebrated Madonna is Carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence* from 1855 very likely influenced Eliot. I have not found any discussions on the possible mutual influence of Jane Benham Hay and Eliot, but Eliot spoke highly of two of her genre paintings in a letter to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, March 11, 1861 and met her in Florence in May of 1861; Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 3:388 and 414. On the Macchiaioli, see Boime, *Art of the Macchia*, and Norma Broude, *The Macchiaioli: Italian Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University

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The foregoing discussion of what tourists saw and did not see (or did not describe) in the Piazza della Signoria has strayed rather far from the question of whether gender played a role in women's response to the piazza and its art. That was the intent: it should now be clear that emptying of the piazza of its 19th-century social and political significance was not in and of itself a gendered facet of art travel. But the ideology of the separate spheres, in suggesting that women transgressed when they commented on the public and emphatically male "sphere" of politics, government, and war, amplified this effect. Admittedly, as the scholarship on the Victorian attitudes toward gender and women's roles suggests, there was no blanket prohibition that prevented women from being present at, getting involved in, or commenting on political events, though individual women activists were sometimes condemned for speaking out publicly. Some Victorian women were writing publicly about the political situation in Italy, as already mentioned. And even Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot, who did not, did weigh in on other political issues, especially women's education and women's professional opportunities.

All three women actually addressed the Risorgimento in their private writing, directly responding to current events, and in that context express their opinions on the nationalist movement very clearly. Eliot in particular had actively followed the development of Italian nationalism since the late 1840s, but Jameson and Eastlake were informed as well. She helped commission Mazzini to write an editorial for the *Westminster Review* on "Freedom v.

Press, 1987). They were completely ignored by the Anglophone art tourists of the 19th century, even more so than early Impressionism in France around the same time. Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot rarely mentioned Italian contemporary art, even though all three women visited expatriate British and American sculptors and painters in their studios in Italy (Eliot also saw the studios of German painters Frey, Riedel, and Overbeck in Rome, see *Journals* 346). Eliot noted seeing "some modern pictures worth notice" in 1864 in Brescia, but only mentions Francesco Hayez and Francesco Podesti by name, indicating that "modern" to her would have still meant a Romantically inflected academician (Eliot, *Journals*, 377). Given that all three spoke Italian and knew about Italian studios from Murray's *Handbooks*, this again seems like willful ignorance.

Despotism,” and was excited to catch a glimpse Risorgimento leader Camillo Cavour on her 1860 trip. Two years earlier, in 1858, Jameson had observed to a friend that in England, regardless of party, “all are for liberation of Italy,” and tried to convince her friend Otilie, who lived in Vienna and supported the Habsburgs, that the Austrian presence in Italy had to end. And Eastlake, on her annual trip to Italy in 1859, wrote that “Milan is resplendent with the two tricolors, the red white and green being the Piedmontese, and that floats alone from the top-most pinnacle of the lovely Cathedral.” However, many of her comments are negative; she was worried how the changing political landscape would affect the way Italian art was treated, with some works *in situ* in churches endangered by “folly and ignorance” and “ill will against the fine work,” which she was always ready to ascribe to corrupt Italian government officials and Catholic institutions.²²

But as they write about art in Italy (Eastlake and Jameson publicly, and Eliot in her private “Recollections”), they omit all references to Italian politics, setting aside their knowledge of current events. Jameson’s publications on art in the 1840s and 1850s reveal none of her political interest in the liberation of Italy, or, for that matter, in the lives of Italian women. Such concerns would seem irrelevant to her *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* and *Sacred and Legendary Arts* series, with their near-exclusive focus on the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Both Jameson and Eastlake generally adopted the strategies of handbooks and catalogs of isolating and compartmentalizing artworks and artists to depoliticize them. Ironically, stressing the iconographic connections between artworks across time periods often led to a

²² For a summary of Eliot’s interest in Italian nationalism, see Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy*, 30-49. Eliot’s letters to Sara Hennell, Jan 21, 1852, and Mrs Peter Alfred Taylor, March 27, 1852, in Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 2:5 and 15; Guiseppe Mazzini, “Europe: Its Conditions and Prospects,” *Westminster Review* 57 (April 1862): 442-467. In April 1852, Eliot also went to hear him speak. Letter to Mrs. Richard Congreve from Rome, April 4-6, 1860; Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 3:287. Jameson, letter to Otilie von Goethe, 20 May 1858, in Needler, *Letters*, 222-3; also 225-227 and 230. Charles Eastlake Smith, editor, *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake* (London: Murray, 1895), 115-119, 146-7.

further de-historicizing and de-politicizing of the art they discuss. In one of her last essays to contrast past and present in the way her early travel writing had done, “The House of Titian” in 1846, Jameson still juxtaposed contemporary Venice (complete with references to a planned railroad bridge across the lagoon and a hot-air balloon launch) with late-Renaissance Venice. Here too, however, Jameson (like Ruskin with his complaint about the omnibus stop on the piazza del Duomo in Florence) commented on “the intrusive vulgarity of the present” in a city filled with monuments from the past. Similarly, Eastlake made no reference to the current political situation in her articles on Italian art in the 1850s—not even in her review of travel literature—or even as a result of her additional trips to Italy in 1860-1863, as she conducted field research for her portion of *The History of Our Lord*.²³

Eliot’s focus on the goal of her first Italian trip on exploring the culture of the Renaissance is, as mentioned, representative of the classic attitude of the British tourist. In the very same letter from 1860 in which she wrote that “Tuscany is in the highest political spirits for the moment, and of course Victor Emanuel stares at us at every turn here, with the most loyal exaggeration of moustache and intelligent meaning,” she makes clear that she is determined to turn away from the current political situation to the high art of the past: “But we are selfishly careless about dynasties just now, caring more for the doings of Giotto and Brunelleschi, than for those of Count Cavour. On a first journey to the greatest centres of art, one must be excused for letting one’s public spirit go to sleep a little.” This intentional neglect of “one’s public spirit” when exploring the “greatest centres of art” like Florence sets the tone for her “Recollections,”

²³ In “The House of Titian,” *Memoirs and Essays, Illustrative of Art, Literature, and Social Morals* (London: Bentley, 1846), 1-66, an impressionistic travelogue frames the artist’s biography. The essay was based on research conducted during her 1845 trip to Italy, when she spent September in Venice (see Macpherson 212-213). On the art-historical importance of Jameson’s “House of Titian,” see Adele Ernstom, “‘Why Should We Be Always Looking Back?’ ‘Christian Art’ in Nineteenth-Century Historiography in Britain.” *Art History* 22, no. 3 (September 1999): 421-435, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8365.2012.00913.x

which, after an early mention of the encounter with Cavour in Turin, restricts itself to listing the cultural highlights of art that she saw in Italy, interspersed with route descriptions. When she writes about Florence, it is thus solidly the Florence of “venerable historical glory”—of churches and palaces, galleries and excursions to Fiesole and Bellosguardo, as recommended in Murray’s *Handbooks*. It is only in the repurposing of her experience in *Romola* that she reintegrates political content, in ways that evoke parallels between the intricate Renaissance politics at the center of the plot, and the present day—however vaguely and cautiously evoked.²⁴

The three women’s silence on Italian politics, including on the Piazza della Signoria as a key site associated with the Risorgimento, is thus first of all motivated by their role as travelers in search of art, and their sense of themselves as students of and experts on Renaissance art. But this silence is reinforced by the gender script about the separate spheres, even if it is contingent on the women’s attempt to write within the conventions of art criticism. The desire to be taken seriously as an authority on art as a woman (or, in Eliot’s case, as a knowledgeable historical novelist who soars above the “silly lady novelists”) likely made them refrain from publicly voicing their opinions on or showing their keen awareness of, the male public sphere of politics and its spaces. Because they wanted to write in a way that was “gender-neutral,” in the sense that it was not meant only for women readers and did not draw attention to their own femininity, they had to be careful not to stray into territory that was explicitly troped as male. The genres of art criticism and (with a slightly longer history) of the historical novel were technically open to

²⁴ Eliot, letter to her publisher John Blackwood, May 18, 1860, Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 3:294. “Recollections,” *Journals*, 354-360. Remarks on current events in Italy in 1861 became sparser over time; see the brief journal of her 1864 trip in the company of Lewes and their friend Frederic Burton, the painter and later director of the National Gallery (May 4 to June 20, 1864). Eliot lists visited art works, along with their travel routes, and only mentions one political event, “a military procession to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Italian freedom” on June 5, 1864, in Milan, *Journals* 377. For the 1869 trip, there are no references at all to the political situation in Eliot’s letters or in her brief journal entries. The Proem to *Romola*, 45, 50, imagines the spirit of Lorenzo de’ Medici looking down on present-day Florence from San Miniato al Monte, tourist-style, and includes vague references modern Florence.

women; writing authoritatively about art was not in and of itself a transgression. Renaissance art in particular may not necessarily have been seen as male territory—a fact that I will return to when I discuss women’s expected response to its sacred art. Some argue that by the end of the century, it had acquired a reputation for being a “soft subject” for “girls, queers, and effeminate men”—despite the fact that 19th-century *historians* of the Renaissance were definitely still an all-male club. But writing about current politics was another matter. In other words, Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot opted not to comment on the Piazza della Signoria when writing about art because drawing attention to it as a political space would have interfered with their ability to make a bid for authority in writing about Renaissance art as women.²⁵

Even when Eliot converted her initial experience of Florence and her extensive, two-year research project on its art and the history in the quattrocento into a historical novel, *Romola*, she ostensibly addresses only Florence’s past, not its present. Today’s Eliot scholars who discuss *Romola*’s importance as a text about 19th-century Italy—as well as about the restrictions imposed on Victorian women—find it unlikely (as do I) that Eliot really wished to sidestep contemporary politics. Choosing to write about Savonarola and about the Florentine Republic of the 1490s and the 1500s in historiography and in fiction was, even in the 19th century, recognized as a way to invite readers to draw parallels to the Risorgimento. In Italy, the link between Savonarola and the nationalists was taken as a given; British and American readers also made the connection. But Eliot’s insistence on staying with the political past gives her plausible deniability, should anyone accuse her of making an inappropriately topical statement about the present-day political situation in Italy—or in England for that matter.²⁶

²⁵ See Østermark-Johansen, “Introduction,” Law and Østermark-Johansen, *Victorian and Edwardian Responses*, 3.

²⁶ On *Romola* and 19th-century Italy, see Andrew Thompson, *George Eliot and Italy*, 68-83, and Nicola Trott, “The Difficulty of Italy: Translation and Transmission in George Eliot’s *Romola*,” in Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler, eds, *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy* (Manchester: Manchester

This results in a strange double vision of public spaces in *Romola*. Unlike in Murray's *Handbooks*, in her own "Recollections," and in the Alinari photographs, the Piazza della Signoria in the novel is not a stage for monumental art, emptied of people, but instead a busy, crowded space in which Florentines participate in and witness important political events. It is teeming with people, and several dramatic political moments in the life of the city are described in ways that resemble Fanfani's *27 Aprile 1859*. But of course, the events in *Romola* lie in the remote past, the 1490s, and Eliot simultaneously emphasizes *and* bridges this temporal distance. In the manner of many historical novels in the 19th-century realist tradition, Eliot's narrator seeks to create verbal equivalents of historical genre paintings of each of these moments to them come alive for the reader, beginning with Chapter 8, which describes the beginning of a S. Giovanni feast day procession in the piazza. But even as these scenes are crowded and dramatic, *Romola*, when present (as she is *not* in Chapter 8) is increasingly portrayed as a passive onlooker in these public, politically significant scenes, watching from the sidelines, and, in the most dramatic and traumatic public moments, looking away—a bit like the female spectator in Fanfani's painting, who also doesn't look at the uprising on the piazza.²⁷

A series of carefully interconnected scenes in the Piazza della Signoria show clearly that *Romola*'s position as a woman in these public scenes is complicated, as is Eliot's political message about politically charged crowded spaces. Each gathering is orchestrated by public officials (steering our attention to the repressive power of a regime, not to the danger of a

University Press, 2003), 137-159. Reviews during Eliot's lifetime did not dwell on the relevance of her novel regarding the Risorgimento or contemporary British politics, but tend to address either the historical Renaissance setting or the novel's universal lessons about human nature.

²⁷ *Romola*, 130-143. Importantly, *Romola*'s sideline position is more about her gender than about her class status, and about staying away from the politically charged plaza rather than from "the people in the streets," given that she is increasingly depicted going out into the streets as the situation in Florence becomes more dramatic—in order to help the poor and the sick, Victorian-philanthropy style. This culminates in her becoming the caring Madonna figure to villagers struck by a plague during her time away from Florence (*Romola*, 640-653).

popular riot), but they move from being instigated by Savonarola in the name of his Republic of God to being turned against him. In these scenes (as well as in a several others set in the piazza) Romola is increasingly put in the position of reluctant witness from afar, even though she initially had still moved freely across public space. In Chapters 49 and 50, she witnesses the Bonfire of the Vanities orchestrated by Savonarola in the piazza from a window in one of the buildings facing the front of the Palazzo Vecchio—but before the bonfire begins, she still joins the people in the plaza and discusses the impending destruction of “pictures and sculptures held too likely to incite to vice” with the painter Piero di Cosimo. Later, in Chapter 60, when her godfather Bernardo del Nero is executed in a packed piazza where “not a hand’s breath of pavement was to be seen, but only the heads of an eager struggling multitude,” Romola looks on from inside the Loggia dei Lanzi in the company of Bernardo’s confessor, but does not witness the execution to the end—seeing “no more” after Bernardo cast a last look at her from the scaffold before being hanged. The novel dramatically culminates with another execution on the Piazza della Signoria--Savonarola’s on May 23, 1498. Again, the narrator emphasizes the crowd, as the piazza “thronged with expectant faces.” But this last and most dramatic scene in the piazza again has Romola in a position suited to a respectable female (in the Renaissance and in the 19th century alike), namely “at a window on the north side of the Piazza,” and “far away from the marble terrace where the tribunals stood.” As before, she is ready to cover her eyes, again so as to not be an eyewitness to the actual execution. Directed by a male companion, who offers to tell her when Savonarola is led into the plaza, since he knows “what you would see” (and not want to see), Romola looks down into the piazza only briefly and then covers her face again, until

“eternal silence” (the last words of the novel save the epilogue) descends, ending the life and the era of Savonarola.²⁸

Romola’s distance from these public scenes is deliberate and clearly gendered. As a woman, she can only be an eyewitness who cannot participate or have a direct impact on the political events that unfold in front of her, but who instead looks away at the most politically charged and most violent moments. This behavior, ostensibly anchored in the distant past of the 1490s, is directly associated with the political sphere of the Piazza della Signoria—in other public, but less specifically political spaces, Romola importantly does have an impact, and she also tries to influence the course of history several times behind the scenes. But here in the piazza, Eliot positions her as a silent observer, and it is hard to overlook that she put herself into the same position when it came to political activism or commentary, both at home and abroad, throughout most of her career. The historical novel does become a vehicle to describe—and arguably critique—the position that Eliot thought women occupied in the male political sphere. But if her description amounts to a critique (which is less clearly the case than regarding women’s limited access to education and ability to find a vocation), she does not admit any alternative possibilities for women either here or elsewhere in her fiction, and certainly not with respect to Italy. In other words, the fact that there were female political activists in her own time is not acknowledged anywhere, even though she was acquainted with a number of them, and had read Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s *Casa Guidi Windows* on the liberation of Florence several times, most recently “with great delight” in 1862 (because she thought it portrayed “the true relation of the religious mind to the Past”).²⁹

²⁸ Romola crosses the piazza several times, e.g. 487, 535. Passages from *Romola* 497; 579, 585. Chapter 70 is indeed called the “The Last Silence;” *Romola* 668-71, here 670, 671.

²⁹ Eliot, *Journals*, 109.

This importantly also meant that despite the fact that Eliot could, in *Romola*, address the limitations that women experienced in the public sphere in an Italian setting, Italian women and their role in the Risorgimento are not mentioned at all. Eliot followed political events in Italy that she chose not to mention in her public writing, and she empathized with some of her British proto-feminist friends, but like any good tourist (including Eastlake and Jameson as well) she completely ignored the happenings during the Risorgimento beneath the level of the Great Men—the Cavours and Garibaldis, and the crowned heads of Europe—and knew nothing of the hopes and challenges of the Italian women who were participating in the nationalist movement.³⁰

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My argument thus far has focused on the fact that, as Florence's most public of public spaces, the Piazza della Signoria in its entirety as a plaza—as a site where political events and political upheavals could literally occur out in the open—seemed especially inappropriate for women to comment on. But the silence of the three women even extends to the artworks to be seen there, and that seems striking, given that most guidebook and handbook manage to separate these from their spatial and political context and comment on them as individual masterpieces. The most striking case—and the one that I focus on here—is Michelangelo's *David*. For all three women, their lack of commentary on the *David* is in marked contrast to the role Michelangelo's other works play in their writing. In Eliot's *Romola*, the *David* is of course literally absent from the Piazza della Signoria, because, aside from the 1509 epilogue, the novel ends in 1498, with

³⁰ All three women were at the most interested in German and French women writers and activists; I have found no evidence that they read up on, corresponded with, or otherwise informed themselves about Italian women. Anglophone discussions of Italian women and their role in the Risorgimento and in the early years of unified Italy are still few and far between, but see Lucia Re, "Passion and Sexual Difference: The Risorgimento and the Gendering of Writing in Nineteenth-Century Italian Culture," in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), 155-200; Boime, *The Art of the Macchia*, 255-71, and the brief essays in the exhibition catalogue *Female Perspectives: Women of Talent and Commitment, 1861-1926* (Livorno: Sillabe, 2019).



Figure 13. Albumen print of Michelangelo's *David* on display in the Accademia dell'Arte. Photograph, late 19th century. Victoria and Albert Museum (collections. vam.ac.uk). The fig-leaf is visible in the Alinari brothers' photograph of the Palazzo Vecchio from 1856 (fig. 11) as well.

Savonarola's execution, whereas the *David* was not placed in the Piazza della Signoria until 1504. But Eliot never mentions the sculpture in any of her other writings, even though she admired Michelangelo and noted multiple other works by him in Florence.³¹

³¹ Eliot's admiration for Michelangelo is revealed in a reference to a "young faun playing the flute, modelled by a promising youth named Michelangelo Buonarroti" that graces Romola's living room table; *Romola*, 258. The reference is vaguely inspired by Vasari's account of Michelangelo's introduction to Lorenzo de' Medici (see Vasari's *Lives*, transl. de Vere, 9:8). In the "Recollections of Italy, 1860," Eliot noted seeing the late *Pietà* with Joseph of Arimathea, then in the Duomo, and the allegorical figures in the Medici Chapel of San Lorenzo, as well as the *Doni Tondo* in the Uffizi (see *Journals* 355, 356, 358, and 359). She also visited the Casa Buonarroti, as did Jameson and Eastlake. In Rome, she saw the *Pietà* and the *Moses*, alongside the Sistine Chapel ceiling ("the most wonderful fresco in the world") as well as its *Last Judgment* (see *Journals* 344-46).

Similarly, the David is entirely missing from Jameson's work. It is not mentioned in the *Ennuyée*, and even though Jameson dedicates a lengthy chapter to Michelangelo in her 1845 *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* (slightly expanded for the revised edition that was published in 1868), she merely notes that he produced "several public works" for Florence between 1502 and 1506, skipping from the early *Bacchus* and the 1498 *Pietà*, created while still in Rome, to the Battle of Cascina cartoon for the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Vecchio. Later sculptures, including *Moses* and the allegorical figures in the Medici Chapel in San Lorenzo in Florence, are also discussed at length, even though Michelangelo is mostly featured as a painter, since that is the book's focus. Jameson does not mention the *David* in the *Sacred and Legendary Arts* series, either, although Michelangelo's art is regularly featured.³²

Representations of David (as a prefiguration of Christ in the Old Testament) are discussed in the *History of our Lord* in a segment by Eastlake, so the conspicuous omission of Michelangelo's *David* was probably her choice rather than Jameson's. Eastlake actually mentions Michelangelo's fresco of David located "in one of the angles of the Sistine chapel," but not the colossal sculpture. The sculpture is, however, mentioned in Eastlake's 1858 review of John S. Harford's book on Michelangelo. Here, she is dismissive: she claims that although "the figure is grandly formed and modelled," it does not represent "the idea of a tender and youthful shepherd" and argues that even if we "reduce this statue as we please in scale, it remains the sturdy, full-grown, colossal man, far too equal a match for Goliath [sic] to illustrate the miraculous narrative of Scripture." Again, this limited attention to the *David* stands in sharp

³² In *Diary of an Ennuyée*, 346, 213, and 107-108, Jameson mentions the *Pietà*, the *Moses*, and prominently the *Doni Tondo*, which she intensely dislikes "in spite of Messieurs les Connoisseurs, and Michel Angelo's fame" Jameson, *Memoirs* (2nd ed., 1868), 181-211; 188. Michelangelo features prominently in the index of all volumes of the *Sacred and Legendary Arts*.

contrast with her lengthy discussion of works like the *Pietà*, the *Moses* and the two “so-called Slaves.”³³

Again, what is gendered about this absence is difficult to disentangle from the overall reception of the *David* in mid-nineteenth-century art criticism, which greatly influences all three women. Ironically, what seems most literally masculine about the *David*—i.e. his full-frontal nudity—is not a major factor in the women’s silence. First of all, the *David* they saw was in fact not fully nude. Throughout the 19th century, his genitalia were covered with a rather large fig leaf, not removed until 1890 (fig.13). Secondly, the idea that classical nudity was inappropriate for female viewers was not one that Jameson, Eastlake, or Eliot were particularly concerned with. In fact, Jameson reassures her readers in the introduction to her *Handbook to the Courts of Modern Sculpture*, written for visitors to the Crystal Palace exhibitions, that “undraped” classical figures are read allegorically by “the educated man, the classical scholar,” and that when it comes to “Scripture subjects,” nude representations of David or of the Prodigal Son are appropriate to show “the beautiful and the noble in the human form which is the province of sculpture.” Although this is not a direct reference, she likely had the *David* in mind here, since Michelangelo’s fascination with the classical nude and his insistence on portraying even sacred figures in the nude was typically exempt from criticism. From Vasari forward, the perfection of Michelangelo’s nudes were seen as an expression of his technical prowess as an artist, so that even Eastlake, who much preferred quattrocento art to Michelangelo, can say with admiration that “he could draw the nude better than anything, and, therefore, he was reluctant to cover any

³³ Eastlake and Jameson, *History of Our Lord*, 206, and “Michel Angelo,” *Quarterly Review*, 103 (April 1858): 436-83; 465. In her 1876 review of the “Letters and Works of Michael Angelo” in *Five Great Painters: Essays Reprinted from the Edinburgh and Quarterly Review* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1883), 1:188, Eastlake is highly critical of the *David*, claiming Michelangelo has no “individualising power,” so that one cannot “identify his ‘David’ without the sling.”

portion of it.” There is also no indication that it was the fact that the work was a sculpture, or even that it was a colossal sculpture, had any direct impact on their reluctance to comment on the work. While Eastlake and Jameson in particular were more interested in painting, women were both writing about (and also creating) sculptural work, and Jameson herself had discussed the importance of sculpture in her handbook for the Crystal Palace.³⁴

But even if it was not literal (and bare) masculinity that made the women refrain from commenting on the *David*, the sculpture’s status as a political symbol might have had an influence on the women’s decision to refrain from discussing it. All three women, and practically everyone with an interest in Michelangelo’s work, would have been aware of the political significance of the statue from their thorough study of Vasari’s *Lives*. Vasari set the tone in 1558, reporting Michelangelo was asked to complete the long-neglected marble block by the city (represented by Piero Soderini, Florence’s Gonfaloniere, the head of Florence’s senate) and the wardens of the Opera dell’ Duomo. He famously described how the sculptor first made a wax model: “fashioning in it, as a device for the Palace, a young David with a sling in his hand, to the end that, *even as he had defended his people and governed them with justice, so those governing that city [Florence] might defend her.*” This association of the *David* with the short-lived

³⁴ On the original nudity of the sculpture, already hidden by the famous bronze garland in 1504, see John Paoletti and Rolf Bagemihl, *Michelangelo’s David: Florentine History and Civic Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 175-198, and 52. John Addington Symonds wrote in a letter to Edmund Gosse in 1890, in coy “jargonized” Latin, about his delight in seeing the “plenum juvenis et testiculus,” quoted in Lene Østermark-Johansen, *Sweetness and Strength: The Reception of Michelangelo in Late Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998) 228, 292, translated as the “youth’s penis and testicles.” A. Victor Coonin, *From Marble to Flesh: The Biography of Michelangelo’s David* (Prato: Florentine Press, 2014), 182-3, 147-8, notes that even after the fig-leaf was removed, photographs of the sculpture were often retouched to include it, and the 1847 plaster cast by Clemente Papi that came to the South Kensington Museum (now the V & A) in 1857 had a removable fig leaf used sporadically to protect tender eyes. Jameson, *Handbook to the Courts of Modern Sculpture* (London: Crystal Palace Library and Bradbury and Evans, 1854), 8. Eastlake, “Michelangelo” (1858), 464. In her *Diary of an Ennuyée*, 96-98, 108, Jameson’s diarist-alter ego objected to nudity in sacred contexts in Michelangelo’s *Doni Tondo*, but had no general objection and appreciated what she thought of as the best classical nudes, like the *Venus de’ Medici*, and Renaissance variants like Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*. On Victorian women’s relationship to sculpture, see Hilary Fraser, “Women and the Modelling of Victorian Sculptural Discourse,” *Visual Resources* 33, no. 1-2 (2017): 74-93, doi:10.1080/01973762.2017.1279877 (special issue ed. by Clarke and Ventrella).

Republic of Florence was to become a major factor in the sculpture's restoration, new placement, and rise to fame beginning in the 1860s, after the unification of Italy.

Vasari does not draw attention to the fact that the *David* was erected specifically as a symbol of *republican* Florence, and that “those governing that city” had, however briefly, ousted the Medici family and reinstituted the powers of the City Council, prior to the return of the Dukes of the Medici—they were after all Vasari's employers. But he does make it clear that this *David* functions less a sacred than a secular political figure. Vasari himself did not see this as grounds to ignore or critique the work, but praised the sculpture highly, claiming that there had never “been seen a pose so easy, or any grace to equal that” of the *David*, so that “whoever has seen this work need not trouble to see any other work executed in sculpture, either in our own time or in other times.” But despite this praise, the Medici arguably managed to marginalize the political force of this work, for centuries to come by the way they counteracted it. They commissioned Bandinelli to complete the *Hercules and Cacus* Michelangelo had left unfinished) and then, more successfully, Cellini's *Perseus*, in order to put sculptures on the piazza that would overshadow the colossal *David*. And it was ranked as a lesser, flawed work of Michelangelo's far into the 19th century, while Cellini's *Perseus* was still seen as the more noteworthy masterpiece by Jameson and Eliot when they visited the plaza.³⁵

It is hard to gauge how much Medici's skillful manipulation of the discourse on public art through their commissions of work and the juxtaposition of competing political statements via

³⁵ Vasari's *Lives*, translation by de Vere, 9:16-17, my emphasis. I have used Gaston deVere's standard translation here, because it is clearer than Mrs. Jonathan Forster's, but the latter, first published between 1850 and 1852, would have been the standard edition at mid-century, consulted by all three women unless they read it in the original or in the popular French translation. Even though Vasari's account is a distortion and simplification (the *David* was initially intended as part of the Duomo's sculptural decoration), his *Lives* were the go-to for all Victorians interested in Renaissance art. Jameson and Eastlake, who both frequently correct Vasari's claims in their work as more documentary evidence came to light in the 19th century, clearly knew Vasari inside out, and Eliot also read his *Lives* with great attention; she based *Romola*'s fictionalized version of Piero di Cosimo on his biographical sketch of Piero.

the other sculptures impacted the 19th century view of the *David*. But placed outdoors, easily accessible and not sanctified by placement in or on a church, princely collection, or public museum, it was clearly seen as less valuable than many other works by Michelangelo. As John Paoletti points out, the *David* was “barely mentioned in guides to Florence and certainly did not have the visibility in the history of Florentine art that it has today.” This is definitely true for Murray’s *Handbooks*, in which the *David* is just one minor sculpture among the ten works in the two columns devoted to the sculptures on the piazza and under the loggia. While the *Handbooks* provide at least minimal political background information for the equestrian sculpture of Cosimo I, as mentioned above, the *David* is primarily evaluated in terms of its quality. The 1854 *Handbook* sums up that this is not one of Michelangelo’s “finest works” and refers to Westmacott, who had explained the often-criticized lack of proportion of the figures via Vasari’s claim that the block had already been worked on and abandoned by a previous sculptor.³⁶

This judgment of the *David* as inferior was typical for the emerging academic art history on the sculpture as well, its verdicts typically close to that of Westmacott and the travel guides. Jakob Burckhardt wrote in his 1855 *Cicerone* that the *David* does not “please” at first sight. Beyond the problem with the marble block and disproportionate head, he argues that Michelangelo’s error was to use an adolescent model and then try to render his body in colossal size, something that the viewer has to correct for in thought (or, he says, by using binoculars backwards!) in order to see the figure’s actual beauty—exactly the kind of correction that Eastlake had thought impossible in her 1858 essay on Michelangelo. Even the early 20th-century

³⁶ Paoletti and Bagemihl, *Michelangelo’s David*, 1-2. Murray’s *Handbook*, 1854: 492. In later editions (1861: 136), the Westmacott quotation had been blended into the handbook writer’s prose, but more political information from Vasari is added (i.e. that Soderini had commissioned Michelangelo to work on the *David*), but the marble block is again faulted for flawed proportions. For Westmacott’s brief remarks on the *David* that get paraphrased here, see *Handbook of Sculpture*, 293.

art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (one of Burckhardt's students) still calls the *David* “a gigantic hobbledehoy,” caught in adolescence “when the size of the limbs does not appear to match the enormous hands and feet.”³⁷

But at this point in the reception history of the *David*, the tide had turned. In 1882, the sculpture was given a new prime spot in the tribune that had been constructed specially to house it in the Accademia dell'Arte, signaling that it had been elevated from public art to “high art.” Paoletti points to the emphatically political beginnings of the revaluation of the sculpture in the late 1860s, when it looked like Florence might become the capital of the united Italy. As the 16th-century “symbol for republican Florentines,” it could now be repurposed as the symbol of the new Italy. The political reasons for the surge in interest were inseparable from the rising interest in its virtuosity, and both together resulted in its transition from an outdoor sculpture to a “museum piece.” It had become clear around mid-century that the marble sculpture was at risk of damage from the elements—in 1856, as seen in the Alinari photograph of the Palazzo Vecchio, the sculpture was already under a protective baldachin (fig. 11). Plans were made to move the sculpture, and its placement in the newly-built tribune in the Accademia in the 1880s confirmed its status as art of special importance. The *David*'s new museum context signaled its new status as quintessential Italian art—once again a powerful political symbol of the new Italian nation. It is in this form that it finally becomes a centerpiece of souvenir photography as well, with the Alinari brothers being among the first to produce images of the sculpture in its new indoor environment (fig. 13). This meant that at the end of the 19th century, at the very same time that Michelangelo himself was being re-evaluated—as a poet, a draughtsman, a more secular artist, and also as an “invert” (i.e. homosexual)—the *David* was gaining a new prominence in his

³⁷ Jakob Burckhardt, *Cicerone*, 669-70; Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Art of the Italian Renaissance: A Handbook for Students and Travelers* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 54-56.

oeuvre. (This new prominence was reinforced in 1910, when a marble replica by Arrighetti was placed in the original location on the Piazza della Signoria, where it still stands today.)³⁸

None of the three women could have anticipated this radical shift in the 1880s at mid-19th century, and they are entirely of their time in ignoring the *David*, with its political impetus, its public placement, and its status as a lesser work by Michelangelo. Again, gender scripts are here entwined with the conventional reaction to the *David*. In their minimizing of this colossal public sculpture, we can see both a gendered response to art that was too directly associated with the male public sphere and the near-complete alignment with the approved, mainstream assessment of this work by critics. Where these two elements meet is in the perception that the more appropriate art for women to study is found indoors and “away from politics,” i.e. not in public monuments, but in the semi-public sphere of collections, galleries, and museums, and in the sacred art found in churches and monasteries. These are the sites where the true masterpieces can be found. The following two chapters explore how differently women approached the art they saw and wrote about in such semi-public and less obviously masculinized and politicized spaces.

³⁸ Paoletti, *David*, 2-3, and Coonin, *From Marble to Flesh*, 133-178.

CHAPTER 2:

Women in Search of Masterpieces: The *Galleria Palatina* at the Palazzo Pitti



Figure 14. 21st-century tourists in the Sala di Saturno, Palazzo Pitti Gallery of Paintings, in front of Raphael's *Madonna della Seggiola*. June 2019. Photograph by Mark Bauer.

When Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake and George Eliot visited the Palazzo Pitti in the mid-19th century to see the Gallery of Paintings (the *Galleria Palatina*), they entered an art space that was already a public museum, open to the general public since 1834, while the palazzo still served as the residence of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. The process by which the Palazzo Pitti was gradually made into a museum was fairly typical of the conversion of existing princely collections to public institutions, although quite different from the Uffizi Gallery, which was a public museum by some standards as early as the 1580s. Always ranked behind the Uffizi in

fame and importance, the Palazzo Pitti never quite shed its ambiance as a sumptuous residence, and in its gallery of paintings, new ideas about the functions of national art museums coexisted uneasily with older ideas about the role of precious art for the rulers who had amassed it. Much of this is still true today—the Pitti is still “the other art museum,” trumped by the Uffizi, and its display of paintings, with their elaborate golden frames, symmetrically hung in rooms where they compete with marble floors and doorframes, harkens back to princely collections. And as in the 19th century, tourists gather in front of masterpieces singled out by guidebooks and red cordons as especially worthy of contemplating, copying, and now also photographing, as per our own 2019 photograph of Raphael’s *Madonna della Seggiola* in the Sala di Saturno (fig.14).

Nineteenth-century female visitors to the Galleria Palatina negotiated a complicated semi-public space: public but indoors, widely accessible but also highly circumscribed. Jameson’s, Eastlake’s and Eliot’s comments on museums, and on the Palazzo Pitti specifically, show that they approved of, followed, and also contributed to the ways that travel guides and gallery handbooks taught women to signal that they were “good citizens” of the museums, which included de-emphasizing the luxury and comfort that such palatial spaces afforded. Instead, the women focused on vetted masterpieces, in this case, Raphael’s Madonna paintings, the main attraction of the gallery in the 19th century (as they still are today). Their evaluation of Raphael emphasizes how, in writing about Renaissance art, all three adhered to an established Victorian canon, but it also suggests how they each responded to the idea that women had a special affinity to Raphael’s style and sacred subject matter.

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The architectural core of the Palazzo Pitti, designed and built as a residence for the Florentine banker Luca Pitti, dates to circa 1457-1466. Its location on the south side of the Arno

initially marginalized it. But when Eleonora of Toledo, wife of Duke Cosimo I, bought it in 1549 as a private residence for the Medici (now the Grand Dukes of Tuscany), the Palazzo became a politically and dynastically important site. Before the Medici moved in, the palazzo was remodeled and enlarged, the open piazza in the front was added, and the Boboli Gardens were begun, although much of their design dates to the 17th century. During that time, the most famous part of the interior redecoration of the palace was also undertaken: in 1637, Ferdinand II commissioned the painter Pietro da Cortona (ca. 1596-1669) to design various palatial apartments, including the lavish ceiling frescoes and stucco decorations of the five so-called Planetary Rooms—formal reception rooms where many of the most prized paintings owned by the Medici were hung on the walls in elaborate gilded frames. Additional significant alterations followed in the 18th and early 19th centuries, under the dukes of Habsburg-Lorraine (the successors of the Medici) and under Napoleonic rule between 1799 and 1814. But the façade and the large piazza remained unchanged, and still look today as they did in the 19th century, again often photographed without people to stress its pristine Renaissance state (fig. 15)¹

Until 1919, when it became state property, the Palazzo Pitti still functioned as ducal and then royal residence (parts were still used by the royal family of Italy as late as 1945). The complex was also a space for storing or displaying the enormous and diverse ducal and royal family collections (paintings, sculptures, *objets d'art*, books, scientific instruments, *naturalia*, and jewelry). However, until the 18th century, only invited guests could see the displayed art, and much of the collection was exclusively accessible to the family itself in the “rabbit-warren” of

¹ See Marco Chiarini, “Von der Residenz zur Gallerie: Geschichte der Florentiner Sammlungen,” in Mina Gregori, *Uffizien und Palazzo Pitti: Die Gemäldesammlungen von Florenz*, trans. Ulrike Bauer-Eberhardt and Eva Bitzinger (München: Hirmer Verlag, 1994), 10-18; Marilena Mosco, *La Galleria Palatina: Storia di una quadreria* (Florence: Centro Di, 1982), and the essays collected in *Apollo 106* (September 1977): 170-240, special issue on the Palazzo Pitti, ed. Denys Sutton. On Cortona, see Malcolm Campbell, *Pietro da Cortona at the Pitti Palace: A Study of the Planetary Rooms and Related Projects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).



Figure 15: *Palazzo Pitti*, ca. 1900. Digitized Photograph from Julia de Wolf Gibbs, *The Art of the Pitti Palace* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1903). Wikimedia Commons.

their many private apartments. The Medici, who ruled until 1737, considered the collections in the Palazzo Pitti, including over 500 paintings, their private possessions. The works they wanted to show off publicly were placed in the Uffizi, which became a treasury or “Schatzkammer,” where the most famous pieces could be seen by select visitors and at times the larger public. This public-private division between the Uffizi and the Palazzo Vecchio on the one hand and the Palazzo Pitti on the other was maintained into the mid-1700s, and continued to have an impact on the way the two spaces were seen far beyond the end of Medici rule.²

But the momentous dynastic change away from the Medici family in the mid-18th century proved an important turning point. Anna Maria Luisa, the last surviving Medici, made the state

² Kirsten Piacenti, “The Summer Apartment of the Grand Dukes,” *Apollo* special issue, 197. Mosco, *Storia*, 57, notes that the first curator for the Pitti still had trouble accessing the collections in the 1790s. Marco Chiarini, “The Formation of the Palazzo Pitti,” *Apollo* special issue, 210. See also Henk T. Van Veen, *Cosimo I de’ Medici and His Self-Representation in Florentine Art and Culture*, translated by Andrew P. McCormick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 90.

of Tuscany the heir to the Medici collections, preventing later Grand Dukes from selling off any of the collections. She also secured Florence's important role in the Grand Tour, specifying that the collections were to stay together in the city "as the ornament of the state," for "the use of the public," and to "attract the curiosity of Foreigners." Because they were now state-owned, the vast Medici collections, plus a few choice additions (and trade-ins) by the Habsburg-Lorraines, survived virtually intact, and are today spread out over dozens of museums in Florence.³

Grand Duke Peter Leopold, who ruled Tuscany from 1765 to 1790, arranged for the Medici collections to be catalogued and systematized. He intended the Uffizi (*uffizi* simply meaning "offices") to be a full-fledged public art museum; its display rooms were rearranged accordingly in the late 1700s. By 1782, the Uffizi showed classical sculpture separate from Renaissance sculpture, as well as Renaissance paintings from Tuscany in a roughly Vasarian order, in twenty rooms. One exception to this new order was the Tribuna, a hexagonal showcase room built in the 1590s, which now housed only the Uffizi's "most celebrated statues and paintings." At the same time, 14th- and 15th-century altarpieces from suppressed Tuscan churches and monasteries were newly gathered in the Accademia dell'Arte, as important forerunners of the Tuscan masterpieces of the High Renaissance. In this context, the Palazzo Pitti, still considered primarily a private residence, was seen as a "grand magazine," or storage space, from which art to be showcased at the Uffizi was pulled when needed. This is why the Uffizi was

³ The most notorious sale was over 100 paintings by the d'Este family to Augustus III, the Elector of Saxony, in 1745, for his Dresden Gallery. See Tristan Weddigen, "The Picture Galleries of Dresden, Düsseldorf, and Kassel: Princely Collections in Eighteenth-Century Germany," in *The First Modern Museums of Art. The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early 19th-Century Europe*, ed. Carole Paul (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012) 147-152; Elena Ciletti, "The Extinction and Survival of the Medici: Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici and the Family Pact of 1737," *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, ed. Cynthia Laurence (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 226-236, here 234. For the original text in facsimile and transcription, see Anita Valentini and Veronica Vestri, *Il Testamento di Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici* (Florence: Polistampa, 2006). Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour*, 65-98; Maria Strocchi, "Impressioni di viaggiatori stranieri tra la fine del XVI e la metà del XIX secolo," in Mosco, *Storia*, 92-100.

widely visited and commented on by visitors on their Grand Tour long before the Palazzo Pitti became accessible for any but the most elite visitors. But Peter Leopold's son and successor, Ferdinand III of Habsburg-Lorraine, clearly had plans to open the Pitti's gallery of paintings more formally to the public as well. By 1793, Pietro da Cortona's planetary rooms with the most famous Renaissance works were featured in early guidebooks and could be visited by more determined tourists. But the Napoleonic occupation slowed down the process of creating such a museum, so that it took until 1834 for the Galleria Palatina to open to the public. Consisting of the five Planetary Rooms and an additional ten rooms, became a major tourist attraction that stayed open daily from 10 am to 3 pm throughout the Risorgimento and the fall of the Habsburg-Lorraines in 1859. Murray's *Handbook* merely revised its 1858 description as a "splendid palace, now the residence of the sovereign," to in 1861 "*until recently* the residence of the sovereign."⁴

This gradual transformation of a princely collection into a public museum is fairly typical of 19th-century nationalism, reflecting the impulse to create institutions that would shape the cultural identity of a given country's citizenry. Enlightenment political culture had led to the idea that such collections could show off not only the power and prestige, but also the benevolence and wisdom of a ruler to the public. This was something that Peter Leopold and his descendants, who thought of themselves as liberal rulers, were eager to emphasize during the so-called "Tuscan Enlightenment." These ideas that a museum could represent "the state" rather than (or at

⁴ Paula Findlen, "Uffizi Gallery, Florence: The Rebirth of a Museum in the Eighteenth Century," in Paul, *The First Modern Museums*, 73-111; Antonio Paolucci, "Das System der florentinischen Museen," in Gregori, *Uffizien*, 8-9, and Chiarini, "The Formation of the Galleria Palatina," *Apollo* special issue, 208-19. See also the reconstructed architectural plans for the city's "museum complex" in Michael Dennis, "The Uffizi: Museum as Urban Design," *Perspecta* 16 (1980) 62-72, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1567024>. Chiarini, "Von der Residenz zur Gallerie," 16 (my translation); Findlen, 97, notes that over 1,300 artworks were moved from the Pitti to the Uffizi, "significantly increasing the latter's stature as a paintings gallery." Mosco, "La Galleria Palatina all'epoca di Leopoldo II," in *Storia*, 74, on the rooms and the date of the opening, sometimes listed as 1828; a document called the *Regolamento* from 1833 specifies the rooms and sets the fixed hours for the museum. Murray's *Handbook*, 1858:598 and 1861:162, 164, my emphasis.

least alongside) the individual ruler and indoctrinate its visitors to become model citizens by educating them about their past, was key to the formation of the *Galleria Palatina*. Part of instructing visitors in being citizens of a given nation and “citizens of the world” meant disciplining their behavior, teaching them how to respond properly to the (new) experience. Together, the new arrangement of the Uffizi and the new gallery of early Renaissance altarpieces at the Accademia dell’Arte placed a brand-new emphasis on regional and national Italian schools. Given this institutional ideology, it is not so surprising that there was virtually no disruption in visitor traffic in Florence during the Risorgimento: The new Italian nation was equally eager to show itself as the heir to world-famous art from the Renaissance, which would signal its international cultural and political importance.⁵

But the Palazzo Pitti was emphatically *not* part of this agenda. While the Uffizi and the Accademia presented “a didactic series requiring a greater level of scrutiny from its visitors,” the Galleria Palatina was still a princely collection, “constructed around the aesthetic enjoyment of its objects.” Even after the Galleria Palatina was opened to the public in the 1830s, the paintings were displayed in sumptuous rooms, whether they were formal reception areas or private apartments of the ducal family of Tuscany. The furnished rooms contained prized smaller objects from the Grand Dukes’ private collection and the paintings were displayed without much consideration of national school or historical arrangement, with multiple and symmetrical tiers of paintings in lavish frames that emphasized the art’s decorative purpose. In other words, the Palazzo Pitti gallery basically functioned as the classic princely collection until at least the 1790s and retained the look of such a collection far into the 19th and even the 20th century. It impressed

⁵ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum,” *Art History* 3 (1980): 448–69, Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 17–88, and the contributions to Carole Paul, ed. *The First Modern Museums of Art. The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early 19th-Century Europe* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012).

by splendor rather than by educating the citizenry as per the mission of the new state museums. The transfer of the gallery to the state and the addition of a sizeable curatorial bureaucracy made no particular difference in the overall aesthetic of the display, although more of the formerly private (and thus again lavishly decorated) rooms were gradually opened to the public.⁶

The Galleria Palatina was not atypical for 19th-century museums in this respect. Even the most progressive museums hung art in tightly packed rows, since the goal was to show the museum's "value," financially and educationally, by displaying as many pieces as possible. But in the Florentine context of the Uffizi and the Accademia, the princely character of the Palazzo Pitti was especially apparent. This made for a major contradiction. On the one hand, the Pitti was invariably ranked behind the Uffizi, which was the showcase, the proto-national museum—first of Tuscany, and later to some extent of Italy as a whole. On the other hand, it was a very pleasant space to visit, more so than the austere Uffizi. But if the splendor made the museum attractive—if visiting the palace became all about the glorious surroundings, not about the art—this risked reducing the museum to a hedonistic entertainment space that foregrounded aesthetic pleasures, losing the modern nationalist ethos of civic education. Murray's *Handbook* reflected this contradiction: it stressed the level of comfort that the Galleria Palatina afforded, while at the same time reassuring visitors that they were not missing out on educating themselves about art:

the rooms are not only most comfortably but magnificently fitted up with chairs and ottomans, and well heated in winter; each room contains several hand catalogues of the pictures in it, in Italian and French.... No difficulties are raised, if permission be sought to copy the paintings.

⁶ Callum Reid, "'Twenty Magnificent Temples of the Arts': Geographic Schools in the Uffizi Gallery," *Florence after the Medici: Tuscan Enlightenment 1737-1790*, eds. Corey Tazzara, Paula Findlen, and Jacob Soll (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 289-316, here 308; see also Marilena Mosco, "Gli albori della Galleria Palatina all'epoca di Pietro Leopoldo (1765-1790)" in Mosco, *Storia*, 57.

The Galleria Palatina was thus caught in the tension between comfort (chairs, heat in winter) and splendor (magnificence) and the emphasis on art education by way of the “hand catalogues” (which still exist today in the form of laminated sheets in every room in the gallery) on the other. The Palazzo Pitti’s old-fashioned ambiance of a princely collection complicated the response of visitors, especially female visitors: was their visit about their education or their pleasure? Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot agreed on this: they saw getting an art education as the only “correct” motivation for coming to a museum, properly aligned with the newest 19th-century standards of what a museum ought to be. But at the Pitti, the challenge was how to signal that the splendor of their surroundings was, if not attractive, at least immaterial to them.⁷

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How does a 19th-century woman figure out how to behave in a museum? Several scholars have suggested that the many illustrated exhibition pamphlets and cartoons showing women looking at art in museums, temporary exhibitions, and churches not only reflected, but also shaped and guided the response of women to these art spaces, reinforcing the cultural lessons that such spaces were supposed to convey, and suggesting their special emotional connection with certain kinds of art. Paintings of such scenes serve a similar function; but to tease out what behavior is the norm can be trickier without the context of a caption or an exhibition pamphlet. Odoardo Borrani’s *At the Galleria dell’Accademia*, painted between 1860 and 1870, provides a fascinating glimpse into how difficult it is to extract the “script” for women in museums from their representation (fig. 16). Like Enrico Fanfani, whose painting of the Piazza della Signoria, *27 Aprile 1859*, was discussed in Chapter 1, Borrani (1832-1905) was a Macchiaioli painter active in Florence throughout the 1860s. His work, better known than Fanfani’s today, frequently

⁷ Murray’s *Handbooks* 1858:164, 1861:599.



Figure 16. Odoardo Borrani, *At the Galleria dell'Accademia*, ca. 1860-1870, oil on canvas. Accademia dell'Arte, Florence. Wikimedia Commons.

featured women in the interstices between public and private, between traditional female roles and a new sense of agency and participation. Most famously, Borrani's *26 Aprile 1859* shows a seamstress at an open window, sewing an Italian flag for the following day's attack on the Palazzo Vecchio. The seemingly domestic task, performed in support of the new Italian nation, constituted a form of political activism that remained within the confines of proper femininity.⁸

⁸ Clarke, "On Tempera and Temperament;" Kasson, *Marble Queens*, 21-45; Eugenia Afinoguénova, *The Prado: Spanish Culture and Leisure, 1819-1939* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2018), 88-100 and 162-

In Borrani's *At the Galleria dell'Accademia*, the tension between traditional feminine activity and new freedoms is much less pronounced, but the painting points to the contradictions that women faced as they interacted with the realm of art and art history in the space of the museum. As viewers, we look across the Hall of Large Paintings towards the Gallery of Sculptures, where plaster replicas of classical statues were displayed to be drawn by copyists, especially the (then exclusively male) students of the Accademia. Borrani depicts two well-dressed women visitors, in fashionable black; one is emerging from the sculpture room, with her back to the nude figures, while the other stands in front of the wall of famous early Renaissance altarpieces. The painting is ambiguous about what women do in museums and how they approach the art. The assumption is that they are invested in experiencing the "high art" on display in the museum. The woman depicted as reading, as are many women in 19th-century representations of museum visitors, is presumably gleaned further information about the artworks in the room. In that respect, she models proper feminine interest in art and behavior in a museum. But neither woman is actually looking at art: the woman with the brochure or catalogue is looking down; the other woman is looking across the room in the direction of the viewer, who is standing roughly where the tribune with the *David* is now (not added until the late 19th century, as discussed in Chapter 1). Only we viewers of Borrani's painting see the well-known Tuscan artworks—the two *Maestàs* by Giotto and Cimabue and the polyptych of the *Blessed Humility* by Pietro Lorenzetti (now all in the Uffizi), and among the plaster casts, a marble work by Ulisse Cambi, a neoclassical 19th-century sculptor who taught at the Accademia.⁹

175, specifically on cartoons relating to the newly-public Prado. Boime, *Art of the Macchia*, 255-271, 188-189, on Borrani's representation of women. Among the Macchiaioli, Borrani seems to be unusual in his interest in depicting women contemplating sacred art (see his *Estasi di Santa Teresa*, ca. 1883, also on display in the collection of Macchiaioli paintings at the Palazzo Pitti).

⁹ See Caldini, R. *Scheda Completa: Odoardo Borrani, Alla Galleria dell'Accademia*. PDF. 2011. Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali. http://www.catalogo.beniculturali.it/sigecSSU_FE. 2011.

This means that the viewer (and the artist, who perhaps wished to draw attention to his own background as a former student at the Accademia) can literally and metaphorically see more than these women—including the dramatic contrast between classical (and neoclassical) and Gothic art. But the fact that the women are much closer to the artwork might also suggest that they are on more intimate terms with the sacred art than the Academicians. And since the viewer of Borrani's painting does not have to be male (as the painting itself reminds us by featuring female museum visitors), a hypothetical female viewer "in the know" is possible. George Eliot, who always read her guidebooks very carefully, did in fact note the placement of the Cimabue and the Giotto "on the same wall" in the Accademia and thought the juxtaposition was "not only a demonstration that he [Giotto] surpassed his master, but that he had a clear vision of the noble in art." But would this knowledgeable female viewer assume that the women in the painting shared this knowledge about art history, or would she see them as inattentive?¹⁰

Borrani lets this ambiguity stand. Rather than providing a clear template for "women viewing art," the multiple possibilities inherent in his painting replicate the ambivalence surrounding the question how Victorian women should relate to museums as places of education and culture (as opposed to entertainment or the kind of self-display that women were expected to practice at the theater or opera house). Museums were unproblematically compatible with the most conservative Victorian ideas about "woman's place," as highly regulated indoor spaces that resembled the domestic sphere, perhaps especially when they had been residences. But as public state institutions, associated with national identity, civil service, and art academies, with directors increasingly recruited from the ranks of art historians, librarians, and other university-educated men, museums were also part of the male public sphere. A 19th-century museum is thus best

¹⁰ Eliot, "Recollections of Italy, 1860," *Journals*, 358-359.

described as a “semi-public space,” and as such, an ambivalent one for women, where the private and the public realm were only tenuously separated. Women could move around freely and without a chaperone to see the art (and get permission to copy it). But the museum also exposed them to (or afforded them) enhanced visibility as members of the public, and Borrani and other artists amplify this visibility, reinforcing the expectation of their presence. This meant that visiting museums did not trigger the kind of misgivings women might have about traversing political spaces like the Piazza della Signoria, but they still needed to be circumspect about how they represented themselves.¹¹

Proper middle-class feminine behavior in a museum prominently included signaling that one was there to be educated—interested in the art, not in the decorative space in which it was displayed, and in the “right” art, which presumed knowing what the “right” (already canonical, already approved) art was. Walking around with brochures that provided information, looking at the works highlighted in guidebooks, and even copying the most famous paintings could demonstrate her expectation that the museum would bring “new elements” to her “culture,” as Eliot had put it. Again, finding the greatest hits in a given museum with the help of guidebooks is not in and of itself a gendered (or even Victorian) strategy; male visitors also took their cues from Murray’s *Handbooks* or from the guides available for particular museums. But for a female visitor, zeroing in on the best of the best not only conveyed that she was educating herself, but that approached the museum in accordance with its civilizing mission—and in turn could pass this knowledge on to others. Picking up on the Enlightenment’s idea of republican motherhood, in which virtuous women raised virtuous future (male) citizens, the Victorian notion of women’s

¹¹ Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850-1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 9; Sheila Barker, “The Female Artist in the Public Eye: Women Copyists at the Uffizi, 1770-1859,” *Women, Femininity, and European Visual Culture*, eds. Balducci and Jensen, 115-130. On female copyists at the Prado and their civilizing influence, see Afinoguénova, *Prado*, 209-216.

civilizing influence meant that, if done in a properly feminine fashion that did not infringe on men's expertise, they could disseminate the "high culture" of the museum to others.

Museums accordingly typically welcomed female visitors, and in that respect differed markedly from public institutions like courts, universities, or government organizations, but also from more informal cultural dissemination sites like "coffee houses, academies, and literary and debating societies," which were typically still off limits to women. But women's direct influence, in the form of participation on museum boards or as employees, was minimal—a striking difference in comparison with their ascendancy in teaching, as mandatory public education became more common, and in the emerging public libraries. In that respect, many museums of fine art, given their direct association with disciplinary knowledge and with connoisseurship, remained firmly linked to all-male institutions of formally and informally disseminated expertise that were notoriously resistant to admitting women. Writing about museums and collections—in impressionistic travel writing, in fiction, and especially in handbooks and guidebooks—was one approved way in which women could go beyond the role of visitor and weigh in even on the specialized discourse around art. Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot, as avid museum-goers, publicly commented in varying contexts about their experience: Jameson in *Ennuyée* and in her early travel writing and later, more formally, in her guides to painting galleries and exhibitions; Eastlake in her early travel writing, in reviews of German exhibitions, and her translations of Passavant's and Waagen's guides to English galleries; and Eliot when she included real and metaphorical museums in her fiction—even, as I will argue, in *Romola*, where the 1490s setting means that "real museums" did not as yet exist.¹²

¹² Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 31. Hill, *Women and Museums*, 1-3, points out that in British museums between 1850 and 1914, women did make some inroads, especially in smaller public museums as patrons and donors, but were only "partly successful" in becoming experts and curators; see also 103-124, on women's partial subversion of gender scripts for museum visits. Museums with a broader focus on art and science like the South Kensington

Despite their public (and also private) comments on museums as spaces, the three women have little to say about the Palazzo Pitti, though; if they do mention it, they quickly focus in on the famous art they are seeing, in particular Raphael. This was most likely necessary strategy to signal their academic seriousness in potentially distracting, aristocratically luxurious surroundings. The palace resembled a private, domestic, and thus feminized space, but its antecedents and furnishings (ottomans!) also evoked hedonistic enjoyment of leisure and abundance of beauty, rather than fitting neatly into the middle-class educational program of studying individual masters. This aristocratic realm was particularly dangerous for women—despite its associations with connoisseurship’s demand for personal acquaintance with original artworks. Because they were excluded from the academic institutions that provided men the qualifications enabling them to compete with wealthy connoisseurs on different, i.e. cultural, grounds, women had to find a different way to signal that they were distancing themselves from aristocratic license and hedonism; otherwise, they could risk their sexual and social respectability. Focusing exclusively on the educational and “civilizing” aspects of even a more palatial museum was one way to do so.

Jameson modeled the cultured woman exploring the masters in museums as early as the 1820s, in the years before the Palazzo Pitti, although regularly shown to visitors upon request, became an official museum. Her fictional alter ego in the *Diary of an Ennuyée* reported that “the imagination dazzled and bewildered by excellence can scarcely make a choice,” but then manages the overload by constructing the gallery as “not a collection so much as a selection of the most invaluable gems and masterpieces of art,” and singled out just four such masterpieces, starting with Raphael’s celebrated *Madonna della Seggiola*. Eastlake, who never mentioned the

Museum (now The Victoria and Albert) under its first director, Henry Cole, were less elitist and more oriented towards attracting a broad public, but they were the exception rather than the rule.

Pitti in her published work except as a receptacle for specific canonical works she wished to discuss, also sidestepped it as a museum space. Even when she advised a friend in a letter to use her Murray and Kugler to orient herself in Florence, she simply instructed her to go see Raphael first and foremost, both in the Uffizi and the Pitti. She echoed Jameson's concern about overload, telling her friend that she has not "so far forgotten my early days of art-worship as not to know how puzzled one becomes with the very embarrassment of riches." This strategy of singling out only the most renowned art and sidestepping the palatial environment altogether is clearly employed by Eliot on her first visit to Florence, too. She noted that "for pictures... the Pitti Palace surpasses the Uffizi" because its paintings are "more choice and not less numerous." She then produced a list of masterpieces she saw there, starting with Raphael, followed by Andrea del Sarto, Fra Bartolomeo, and Titian, but ending a bit despairingly, in "&c., &c."¹³

But while they remained silent about the Palazzo Pitti, they made clear in their private and, in Jameson's and Eastlake's case, also their public writing that they greatly preferred museums that used the state-of-the art historical arrangement by national school. Jameson specifically critiqued other styles of display as old-fashioned and not visitor-friendly, at least on her home turf. Jameson's 1842 *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and Near London* covered the National Gallery and the Royal Galleries then at Hampton Court and at Windsor Castle, along with several smaller ones. Jameson introduced each with a historical overview that shows her awareness of how various British collections, including those accumulated by the royal family since the Renaissance, became publicly accessible. Each overview ended with a frank discussion of the problems with the arrangements of the works. In particular, she criticized

¹³ Jameson, *Ennuyée*, 114. The other three works she mentions here are Cristofano Allori's *Judith*, Guido Reni's *Cleopatra*, and Salvator Rosa's *Catiline*. Eastlake, letter to Jane Gifford, July 1858, in C.E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondences*, 89. Eastlake does mention the Palazzo in her 1858 "Michel Angelo" essay, 446, merely calling it one of "those stupendous rough-hewn piles" typical of Tuscany in the 15th century. Eliot, *Journals*, 358.

the chaotic and disorienting royal collections at Hampton and Windsor, making clear that she expressed “not a hundredth part of what I felt and thought, and have heard expressed by others,” and she hopes the arrangement will soon be updated.

Jameson’s criticism of decorative, haphazard display at Windsor Castle makes clear that the Pitti’s overwrought splendor would not have met with her approval:

The choice of the decorations and hangings, on which, as everybody knows, so much of the effect of the pictures must depend, appears to have been abandoned to chance and the pleasure of the royal upholsterers. What shall we say of a room hung with pale blue glossy satin, and frames part silver and part gold, enclosing some of the richest and deepest-toned pictures? Such an instance of unpardonable carelessness, of utter bad taste, of total discrepancy between the means employed and the end in view, one might seek in vain anywhere else; neither is it possible to guess upon what principle the selection has been made of the pictures to be hu[n]g in these royal apartments.

Similarly, Jameson claimed that the collection at the State Apartments at Hampton Court made it extremely difficult for her to create her catalogue of 754 works because of the “heterogeneous medley of pictures” “all jumbled together” with bad lighting,

not interesting and instructive to the people, who now with vacant, weary, and perplexed looks, wander through the rooms, not knowing where to find what they seek, not knowing where to direct their attention, not knowing what relation exists between the various objects and personages represented, nor how far they might be made to illustrate each other.

Jameson’s demand for information on the “relation” of works reflects the new museum principles of historical and national arrangement, based on the template of the Louvre and the galleries in Dresden and Berlin, all of which Jameson had visited (and was to visit several more times) in the 1840s and 1850s. This included uniformly designed rooms with neutral background colors (olive green was the wide-spread Louvre precedent, while red was used in Berlin and Dresden) and natural lighting via skylights. Jameson’s ideal directly reflects her investment in art education. Ever the popularizer and disseminator, Jameson stresses that a national and historically coherent narrative is necessary for preventing the audience from becoming “vacant,

weary, and perplexed,” and while her gallery guide cannot “carry order into the midst of this chaos,” it provides on-the-spot help by highlighting the most noteworthy works.¹⁴

The National Gallery, founded in 1824 with a collection of only 177 paintings, comes under similar scrutiny in Jameson’s *Handbook to the Public Galleries*. She admits that its rooms, overcrowded with paintings and suffering from “the utter want of all arrangement and classification” do not live up to her ideal of a museum. But here, Jameson defends what she sees as a fledgling institution “in its very infancy,” yet to be properly organized and classified. She is confident the future will make it a true national art museum “for the pleasure and civilization of our people, but also for their instruction in the value and significance of art,” with a historical arrangement that can enable “a study of comparative style in art”—the kind of art history that became the centerpiece of her series on *Sacred and Legendary Art*. Again, not only her ideas on how art should be assembled and displayed but the larger idea of a competitive national collection were in line with 19th-century ideas of showing art practiced in Berlin, in the Louvre, and, with respect to primarily Tuscan art, in the Uffizi and the Accademia dell’Arte.¹⁵

Elizabeth Eastlake was a direct witness of the effort to grow the National Gallery into a state-of-the-art museum, given her husband’s central role, first as keeper (1844-1847), then trustee (beginning in 1850), and finally also director (1855-1865), as discussed in my introduction. As noted, the Eastlakes did not marry until 1849, but her reviews and translations from the 1850s attest to the fact that she was not only becoming an expert on art, but also on museums. Unlike Jameson, she did not write any gallery guides, but she translated those of

¹⁴ Jameson, *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and Near London*, 1:viii, 222, 283-285. The two-volume handbook also included Dulwich Gallery, Soane’s Museum, and the series of six paintings by James Barry in the Adelphi. The handbook was followed by one on London’s private galleries in 1844, including those of Buckingham Palace, Bridgewater, Sutherland, Grosvenor, Lansdowne, as well as Sir Robert Peel’s and Samuel Rogers’ galleries.

¹⁵ Jameson, *Handbook*, 10, 12-13, 14, 16. Hill, *Women and Museums*, 133-134.

Gustav Waagen, a German art historian and curator whose work all three writers knew and respected. Waagen, the director of the royal gallery of paintings in Berlin from 1832 until his death in 1868, and also the first “professor of Modern Art History” at the university in Berlin, was a friend and trusted colleague of the Eastlakes and had written his German-language guide to the British museums partly based on his stay with them in the early 1850s.

Eastlake may not always have agreed with his observations; she expressed her own views on British collections when she reviewed (anonymously, as always) her very own translation (also anonymous) of his *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*. In a conservatively tinged historical overview, she defends the British government against Waagen’s criticism that it was too laissez-faire about both the acquisition and sale of valuable art. She argues that this strategy is less autocratic than that of “Governments who ostentatiously supply their subjects with... intellectual food” and leaves room for private enterprise to play a role in museums. Her example of the latter is, unsurprisingly, the National Gallery, “founded by the purchase of one private collection, and the bequest of two others,” and thereby demonstrating a public-private collaboration that she takes pride in as a specifically British practice.¹⁶

But aside from these comments on the unique (and of course superior) British approach to creating national museums, Eastlake, unlike Jameson, rarely commented on specific museum arrangements in her public writing—a review on the Louvre and on the British Museum are the

¹⁶ See Sheldon, *Letters*, 97 and Avery-Quash and Eastlake, *Art for the Nation*, 74. On Waagen and the Eastlakes, see Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, esp. 112-113 and 128-129; and Fraser, *Victorians*, 61-68. Waagen had also written the catalogue for the famous Manchester Exhibition of 1856, one of the first historically arranged exhibitions of paintings, which brought together masterpieces from many private British collections to a broad public for the first time. Eastlake anonymously translated his *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1854) and *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain* (London: John Murray, 1857). Eastlake reviewed the former in the *Quarterly Review* 94 (March 1854): 467-508, here 480. Self-review was apparently not frowned upon if anonymous: Eastlake and Harriet Grote also reviewed *History of Our Lord* in “Christian Art,” *Quarterly Review* 116 (July 1864): 143-176. Jameson, *Galleries*, 10, also proudly noted that of the 177 paintings at the National Gallery, 118 were “presented or bequeathed” by private individuals.

exception. This was clearly not for lack of interest or opinion, as her letters show. But it is possible that she did not want to be perceived to be meddling publicly in her husband's professional affairs, or as participating in controversies about his at times harshly criticized curatorial decisions. Scholars disagree on whether Eastlake was her husband's active collaborator (as Holcomb/ Ernstrom maintained) or whether she had limited influence on his decisions (as Avery-Quash and Sheldon have more recently argued). But there is no doubt that she took great interest in her husband's work (including after his death), and that she was very much aware of his efforts to improve the arrangement of paintings at the National Gallery; for the most part, she seems to have agreed with his curatorial principles wholeheartedly.¹⁷

In other words, Eastlake would have been familiar with her husband's goals for a historical arrangement and a less crowded hanging style in the National Gallery. These were based partly on what he saw in the galleries in Berlin and Dresden, but also on his own progressive ideas. Spatial and budgetary restrictions limited what he could do, but his influence was at least partly visible in the New Room, a miniature version of the Louvre's Grand Gallery, which opened to the public in 1861. He eventually implemented labeling (engraved on the picture frames), ensuring that the museum's didactic goals were better met. But when it came to creature comforts for visitors, and even to their access to the art, Charles Eastlake was much less interested, since his priorities were the preservation, conservation and value of the paintings. If they were displayed, but not widely accessible, that was not a major concern for him. During his tenure, the hours of the National Gallery were limited to daytime Monday–Thursday, which

¹⁷ See Ernstrom, "Equally Borrowers and Lenders," in contrast to Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, esp. 146-9, and especially Julie Sheldon, "'His Best Successor': Lady Eastlake and the National Gallery," *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. Kate Hill (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 61-74. Eastlake, "Galleries of the Louvre," *Quarterly Review* 117 (April 1865): 287-323, and Eastlake and Harriet Grote, "The British Museum," *Quarterly Review* 124 (1868): 147-79. Hill, *Women and Museums*, 131-33, argues that Eastlake was motivated by concern for educating visitors, but her connoisseur's emphasis on better classification is also clear.

meant that they did not accommodate working-class visitors, who could only come on Sundays. There were also no toilets, no café, and notoriously few places to sit down. Elizabeth Eastlake shared her husband's priorities; the conservation about art is the primary function of museums for her, and she never expressed Jameson's concern for broader public access and convenience, blithely unaware of her own privileged position, which enabled her to tour the National Gallery even after becoming wheelchair-bound in the 1880s.¹⁸

With her husband, Eastlake visited galleries and museums across Europe on their annual purchasing and research trips, including the Pitti, the Uffizi, and the Accademia dell'Arte. While these trips (and the copious notes Charles Eastlake took while on the road) revolved around individual paintings—their composition, their facture, their state of preservation, and sometimes the possibility of purchasing them—the couple clearly paid attention to the newest developments in museum design and display. In 1852, on their first extended European trip, Eastlake, in a letter to John Murray, compares the galleries in Berlin and Dresden, which disappointed her after having been shown around the Berlin museum by Waagen: “It is worth coming from Berlin [to Dresden] to prove how much the best pictures depend on good lighting, arrangement, and care to please,” and she spells out that they both hope that Berlin's “screens and sidelights” will be used in “our future Nat: Gallery.” In 1859, on their return to Dresden after the royal gallery had moved into its new location, the Semperbau, Charles took extensive notes on the hanging, color, and lighting, signaling that the new display space was of special interest to him. By comparison, his notes on works in the Palazzo Pitti are sparse, with no specific reference to the space.¹⁹

¹⁸ Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 169-174; Charlotte Klonk, “Mounting Vision: Charles Eastlake and the National Gallery of London,” *Art Bulletin* 82: 2 (June 2000): 331-47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3051380>; and Sheldon, *Letters*, 575. Charles Eastlake's ideas about visiting house were the diametrical opposite of Henry Cole's at the Kensington, who tried very hard to institute Sunday hours and specifically appeal to working-class visitors.

¹⁹ Eastlake, letter to John Murray, September 4, 1852, in Sheldon, *Letters*, 127-128; see Avery-Quash, *Travel Notebooks of Sir Charles Eastlake*, 1:113-143, and 1:489 on the new Dresden gallery, August 31, 1859 entry of

Given their immersion in the newest, most advanced ideas about the historical and comparatively pared-down display of art, combined with their lack of interest in visitor comforts, it is not surprising that neither of the Eastlakes has anything to say about the Palazzo Pitti. The luxurious atmosphere would have been of little importance for Elizabeth Eastlake's public persona, though she might not have dismissed its splendor outright. She certainly expressed her enjoyment of private collections in opulent surroundings, like the one that she and her husband were assembling, or that of her friend Austin Layard in his palazzo in Venice. But she never discussed the pleasures of such splendor publicly; instead, like Jameson, she focused on specific masters and their masterpieces in their historical context.²⁰

As should be clear from the foregoing, for Jameson and Eastlake, the ideal museum space was organized by didactic principles, and they would have also known from experience that few museums (certainly not the Palazzo Pitti) lived up to this ideal. But in most of their art criticism aside from Jameson's museum guides, they sidestepped discussing the museum environment as a context for the works. In particular, the *Sacred and Legendary Art* series only briefly identifies the current location of any given artwork in marginal glosses. This makes sense because Jameson's comparative methodology takes the given artwork entirely out of its spatial context (especially if it is no longer *in situ* in a church), in a way that does not correspond to any 19th-century museum arrangement. Interestingly enough, though, this approach seems to originate in her experience in the museums of Florence in the 1820s, when she wished that there could be a

notebook no. 22, 9v and 10r. Elizabeth Eastlake used the notebooks and arranged for extracts from them to be copied after her husband's death. See Avery-Quash, "The Happy Tour," *Notebooks*, 1:37-9, and index entry, 2:174.

²⁰ Eastlake rented Ca' Capello, Austin Layard's Venetian palazzo, for an extended stay with her family in 1876-1877. Eastlake, letter to Layard, Sheldon, *Letters*, 357, about the collection of the Meyer-Rothschilds: "What a palace it is! And filled like a museum with every form of art & virt. The furniture alone fit for an exhibition, & I wonder your beloved Mr. Cole doesn't get hold of it. I don't believe the Medici in all their glory were so grandly lodged as these people. While it is very probable that some of the minute & precious objects which filled cabinets in Baron Meyer's own room may have played the same part with the Medici. I have not seen such exquisite work, in crystal & jewelry since I saw the collection in the small room at the Uffizi."

thematically organized museum or exhibit—an idea way ahead of its the time. Her *Ennuyée*, contemplating her favorite works, wished there could be a gallery dedicated to the motif of the Virgin, “selecting one specimen from among the works of every painter,” which would produce “a comparative index to their different styles.” She even lists some of the works that would be in it, notably beginning with Raphael’s *Madonna della Seggiola* in the Pitti.²¹

George Eliot, even though she did not produce formal art criticism, had similar ideas and strategies to Jameson and Eliot when it came to her own museum visits. Her journals and letters convey a clear idea of her notion of a good museum. If she and Lewes stayed in a particular city for longer periods of time (as in Berlin in 1855, Dresden in 1858, and Florence, especially in 1861), they liked to pay frequent, sometimes daily, visits to museums. In Dresden, they went “three mornings a week to the Picture gallery from 12 till 1,” and in Florence, they visited “a church or two, or a picture gallery” every day, followed by library research. Like Eastlake’s and Jameson’s, Eliot’s standard were the state-of-the-art museums in Germany. In 1855, she compared the Old Museum and New Museum in Berlin when the latter was still under construction, the interior “far from complete.” She praised how the displays were arranged in the New Museum by national school, especially admiring the Hall of Northern Antiquities, and she specifically noted Waagen’s impact on the Old Museum’s painting gallery: “under his direction the arrangement of the pictures has been made historical so that the collection though not rich is instructive.” Conversely, she was unhappy with museums that did not use such a method. In 1860, after her visit to the Museo Pio-Clementino in the Vatican, she complained: “there is no historical arrangement and no catalogue. The system of classification is based on the history of their collection by the different Popes, so that for every other purpose but that of securing to each

²¹ Jameson, *Ennuyée*, 337-8.

Pope his share of glory, it is a system of helter-skelter.” But like Jameson and Eastlake, she primarily noted the masterpieces that were present in a given museum, and not the space in which they were displayed. In other words, as a regular and well-versed visitor at home and abroad, Eliot knew what she was looking for—like Jameson and Eastlake, she came to galleries, museums, studios, and private collections to see the most famous works, well-prepared to appreciate them by preparatory reading.²²

Nothing about Eliot’s attitude—or about Jameson’s and Eastlake’s, for that matter—seems specifically gendered, but this is not surprising, since their goal is to erase concerns about gender and posit that all visitors alike visit museums to see prized masterpieces, and that women are good at this. But Eliot’s fiction shows her very much aware that her ability to identify and appreciate famous artworks was not a given for all women—that it required an education and preparation that women did not necessarily have access to. The most famous example of this occurs in *Middlemarch*, when the heroine, Dorothea, is utterly confused by the classical and “Christian” art she sees in the Vatican museums. But in her earlier *Romola*, Eliot also reflects on museums in a way that sheds light on women’s experience in the Palazzo Pitti. The historical setting in the 1490s may make that seem anachronistic, but here as in her other novels (only one of which is set in the present), Eliot invites her readers to draw parallels between the limitations experienced by women of the past and the lack of access to education and vocation in her own time. She constructs art experiences for her heroine that are analogous to the decontextualized

²² Eliot, “Recollections of our Journey from Munich to Dresden,” *Journals*, 325; Lewes, letter from May 1861, in Haight, *George Eliot Letters* 3: 414; “Recollections of Berlin 1854-1855,” *Journals*, 251-254. Vatican, “Recollections of Italy, 1860,” *Journals*, 344. For other German museums Eliot commented on, see, “Germany,” *Journals*, 310-17, and for British museums, see Witemeyer, *Visual Arts*, 10-11.

viewing of art in museums (and to responding to art in a sacred space, as I discuss in chapter 3), which can be disorienting for women without necessary preparation.²³

Two spaces in Romola's home represent two different and opposing ideas of the art museum: a site of conservation and scholarly knowledge (a bit like the Uffizi of Eliot's day) versus a pleasurable, semi-aristocratic space of aesthetic enjoyment (reminiscent of the Pitti). Eliot deliberately sets these up as incompatible—and as equally problematic for Romola, who is not fully granted access to either scholarship or aesthetic pleasure. Eliot first introduces Romola in an early Renaissance equivalent of the museum as the site for the display of erudition, but not for “public” education. Romola is with her father, Bardo de' Bardi, in a room that houses his prized collection of ancient art, manuscripts, and early books, imagined as the humanist scholar's miniature *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*:

a long, spacious room, surrounded with shelves, on which books and antiquities were arranged in scrupulous order. Here and there, on separate stands in front of the shelves, were placed a beautiful feminine torso; a headless statue, with an uplifted muscular arm wielding a bladeless sword; rounded, dimpled, infantine limbs severed from the trunk, inviting the lips to kiss the cold marble; some well-preserved Roman busts; and two or three vases of Magna Grecia. A large table in the centre was covered with antique bronze lamps and small vessels in dark pottery. The colour of these objects was chiefly pale or sombre: the vellum bindings, with their deep-ridged backs, gave little relief to the marble, livid with long burial; the once splendid patch of carpet at the farther end of the room had long been worn to dimness; the dark bronzes wanted sunlight upon them to bring out their tinge of green.

The miscellaneous nature of his collection would have been entirely typical for its time, as Eliot would have known from her extensive research on the Medici and the lesser humanist scholar-collectors of Florence. But the emphasis on antiquities from Greece and Rome marks Bardo as a secular humanist and collector of rare artefacts, while the “scrupulous order” of the items on the

²³ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 176-206. For discussions of the chapter that takes art history (but importantly not museum history) into account, see Witemeyer, *Visual Arts*, 73-89, Fraser, *Women Writing Art History*, 40-61, and Kanwit, *Victorian Art Criticism*, 111-125. My own work on this important context for *Middlemarch* is in progress.

shelves speaks of his learning and proto-curatorial attention to preserving and displaying his collection. He dreams of leaving his treasures to Florence, “for an everlasting possession to my fellow-citizens,” insisting like many a scholarly or princely collector that his compendium “should always bear my name and never be sold.” But the objects on display are fragmented and disjointed (a torso; statues that are “headless” and swords that are “bladeless;” limbs without bodies), as well as faded and colorless in a dark room (“pale or somber,” “worn to dimness”). Not only does this foreshadow that Bardo’s prized collection will be scattered, divided up among the highest bidders when Romola’s husband Tito sells it without her knowledge after her father’s death. It also makes clear that to Romola, these fragments, however valuable, are not meaningful “art” or “culture”—despite the fact that she is unusually educated, which Eliot justifies by setting her up to be her father’s assistant.²⁴

Bardo has trained Romola to know as much as a humanist scholar, encouraging her to keep “aloof from the debasing influence of [her] own sex, with their sparrow-like frivolity and their enslaving superstition,” as he puts it. She knows the collection, can find any book in it, and reads to her father in Latin. But he also implies that she has a woman’s flawed memory, “which grasps certain objects with tenacity, and lets fall all those minutiae wheron [sic] depends accuracy, the very soul of scholarship;” to his mind, she inappropriately craves “repose and variety, and so begets a wandering imagination.” For Bardo, Romola’s gender (her “woman’s delicate frame”) prevents her from attaining the kind of expertise and erudition that would allow her to truly understand his prized collection. Instead, the treasures that surround her ultimately remain meaningless fragments to her, despite their value to the (male) humanist scholars of her father’s circle: “she looked with a sad dreariness in her young face at the lifeless objects around

²⁴ Eliot, *Romola*, 93, 99.

her—the parchment backs, the unchanging mutilated marble, the bits of obsolete bronze and clay.” Isolated and uncomprehending, she leads a “self-repressing colourless young life” among objects supposedly beyond her intellectual reach.²⁵

But once Romola is engaged to Tito, the house of the Bardi is rearranged to feature a quasi-luxurious, pleasurable *salotto* or small salon, “fitted up in the utmost contrast with the half-pallid, half-sombre tints of the library,” with another similar room adjacent to it. This is a space for the art worthy of a wealthy, aristocratic collector—luxurious, bright, and cheerful:

The walls were brightly frescoed with ‘caprices’ of nymphs and loves sporting under the blue among flowers and birds. The only furniture besides the red leather seats and the central table were the two tall white vases, and a young faun playing the flute, modelled by a promising youth named Michelangelo Buonarotti.

In the second room, which again combines “brightly painted” walls with “birds and flowers” and old furniture, Romola seems to have set up her own Pitti-esque museum of pleasures and comforts, with “faded objects for feminine use or ornament, arranged in an open cabinet between two narrow windows.” Tito adds additional aristocratic flavor to this particular display by bringing in the secular “tabernacle” he commissioned from Piero di Cosimo for his bride, showing Tito as Bacchus and Romola as Ariadne. The space is not only feminized (when Romola enters the *salotto*, “all white and gold” and dressed for her wedding day, she fits in perfectly as if part of the décor), but it is associated with the new secular art, classicizing but not antique: with the faun that Eliot invents for the young Michelangelo, but also with Piero’s equally fictional painting of the marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne. Importantly, Piero’s secular “tabernacle,” representing this new art, literally and symbolically hides a sacred Christian object, namely the crucifix which belonged to Romola’s brother, and which Tito locks up in the “dainty

²⁵ Eliot, *Romola*, 100-1, 110, 116, 98, 182. See also John Rignall, *George Eliot, European Novelist*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 160-1, for a discussion of the library scene’s “critique of antiquarianism.”

device” in a deliberate attempt to hide it behind “images of youth and joy,” “pretty symbols of our life together” in which all troubles are “quelled” and everything is beautiful and amusing.²⁶

But given that Tito turns out to be a traitorous Theseus rather than a divine Bacchus to Romola’s Ariadne, this secular, aristocratic, feminized art space is treacherous and deceptive in its bright beauty—while Bardo’s library, even before it is literally dismantled, cannot offer true learning to Romola. Neither the library nor the salon, encapsulating the modern museum and the princely collection, are here seen as spaces in which women can thrive. (As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the novel’s ending offers a third, convent-like space, but it is equally problematic.)

My interpretation of Bardo’s library and Romola’s *salotto* as analogies to the types of museums that Eliot and her readers would have encountered in Florence and elsewhere does not negate an older argument that *Romola* also constitutes a kind of imaginary outdoor museum of Renaissance Florence—a suggestion first made to explain why *Romola* (allegedly) fails so badly as a novel. With her scrupulously accurate historical figures, architecture and artworks, and her carefully mapped-out geography, Eliot did seek to enable the reader to come as close as possible to imagine walking around in 1490s Florence. In fact, 19th-century tourists occasionally bought *Romola* for this purpose, which in a strange twist turns Eliot’s novel into the very museum guide she never wrote. But if the novel as museum seemed to some readers too much like a stuffy, dusty archive, it is because Eliot treats the novel like Berlin’s New Museum, not the Palazzo Pitti: insisting on educating rather than on entertaining, even at the considerable risk of losing an audience less invested in learning about Renaissance art than in being swept along by a dramatic story.²⁷

²⁶ Eliot, *Romola*, 258-59; 260-61.

²⁷ See Ann Ronald, “George Eliot’s Florentine Museum,” *Papers on Language and Literature*, 13 (1977): 260-69. Ronald counts 145 allusions to artworks. On *Romola* as a sort of Murray’s *Handbook* to Florence, see Robert Bonfiglio, “The Painful Pleasures of Travel: George Eliot’s Proximate Cosmopolitanism,” in *Imagining Italy*:



Figure 17. Raphael, *Madonna della Seggiola*. Ca. 1513. Oil on Canvas. Palazzo Pitti. Photography: Mark Bauer.

*

In their hunt for masterpieces while visiting the Palazzo Pitti, Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot would have been prompted by every guide and virtually all art criticism until at least 1860 to look for and at the works by Raphael (Titian would have been a distant second). The Raphaels were by far the most famous and sought-out works in the Pitti, and they were prominently displayed, mostly in the Planetary Rooms, where there was no attempt at historical arrangement.

Victorian Writers and Travellers, eds. Catherine Waters, Michael Hollington, and John Jordan (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 138, 147. Margaret Oliphant, in an 1874 review of the novel, reported that it was still regularly sold in Florentine bookshops because it could function as such a guide, providing historic walking tours. "Two Cities—Two Books," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 116 (July 1874): 72-91, here 72-73.

According to the old principle of showcasing the best of the best in Florentine art in the Uffizi, Raphael's most prized works—the *Madonna del Cardellino* along with several portraits—were placed there. But the *Galleria Palatina* featured many more Raphael paintings (to this day, it displays more of Raphael's works on panel and canvas than any other single museum). These included four of his Madonnas: the unfinished *Madonna del Baldacchino*, the *Madonna dell'Impannata*, the *Madonna del Granduca*, and the “celebrated” *Madonna della Seggiola* (or *della Sedia*—“of the chair” or “of the seat,” respectively; see fig. 17). The Madonnas were invariably mentioned by the guidebooks, highlighted even in the densely packed lists of noteworthy works in the Pitti found in Murray's *Handbooks*.²⁸

Raphael had been famous for so long that seeking his work at the Palazzo Pitti was definitely a “beaten path” for all three women. His place in the canon was secure, unlike that of the second-most-famous painters they mention seeing in the Pitti, in respect to which the three women's taste varies quite a bit. They all held Raphael in high regard, and Jameson and Eastlake discuss him extensively. In Jameson's *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, he gets the longest biographical sketch; Kugler's *Handbook*, as translated by Eastlake, features him prominently, and both Jameson and Eastlake mention him regularly in *Sacred and Legendary Arts*, especially in *Legends of the Madonna*. Jameson routinely insists on his unquestioned greatness in all contexts; in *Monastic Orders*, an impassioned footnote reads: “Not long ago, I heard a distinguished writer of the present day—an artist, too—express his opinion, that ‘Raphael had

²⁸ While most of Raphael's works in the gallery were already in Medici collections before the 18th century, three Raphaels (the *Madonna del Granduca* and the two Doni Portraits) were purchased by the Habsburg-Lorraines; see Gregori, *Uffizien und Palazzo Pitti* 166, 168. *Madonna della Seggiola* description in Murray's *Handbook*, 1854:518; 1858:600. The *Madonna del Granduca* had only been purchased in 1800; after the fall of Napoleon, it hung in the Grand Duke's private apartments and was only shown when the ducal family was absent until the fall of the Habsburg-Lorraines in 1859. Jameson did see it in the 1820s because the family was absent (*Ennuyée* 125-6), but Eastlake noted as late as 1858 that she knew it only from engravings (letter to Jane Gifford, in C.E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 2:89). By 1861, it was displayed in the Hall of the Education of Jupiter and mentioned in Murray's for the first time, Murray's *Handbook*, 1861:167; Gregori, *Uffizien und Pitti*, 166.

been overrated.’ One might as well say that Shakespeare had been overrated.” Eastlake is of the same mind; she wrote as late as 1883 that “the true rank of his art has remained unquestioned” despite Ruskin’s attacks, and when the National Gallery was considering purchasing the *Ansidei Madonna* from the Duke of Marlborough’s collection in 1884, she wrote to the *Times* to urge “the cultivated portion of the English public” to take an interest in this early work.²⁹

This hyper-canonical status of Raphael had not fundamentally changed ever since Vasari in the mid-16th century had declared him the stylistically and socially most graceful of the High Renaissance masters. Granted, Michelangelo and Leonardo were sometimes thought of as bolder or more original in the 19th century, more clearly manifesting what the Romantics and the Victorians thought of as “genius” (including both eccentric personal habits and stylistic daring). But Raphael’s much-touted grace, his technical accomplishment and his talent for emulating and then surpassing various teachers and fellow artists continued to be celebrated into the 19th century, especially by the art academies and the academicians. This was true despite the fact that the reason for admiring him changed drastically over time. During the Enlightenment, Raphael’s reliance on classical forms had been especially admired, both by the influential art historian Johann Winckelmann and by his friend, the artist and art-academy director Adolph Mengs, as well as by the major 18th-century neo-classical art critics in England, Jonathan Richardson Sr. and Jr. and Joshua Reynolds. In the Romantic era, Raphael began to be described in terms of his

²⁹ Jameson, *Ennuyée*, 114, see above, lists Cristofano Allori, Reni, and Rosa as her other favorites, reflecting an earlier taste for Mannerism and the Baroque. Eastlake, already much more intrigued by “primitive” pre- than by “corrupt” post-Raphaelite art recommends quattrocento artists Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Fra Filippo Lippi, and his son Filippino (to Jane Gifford; C.E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 89). Eliot, “Recollections of Italy, 1860,” *Journals* 358, highlights both Raphael’s contemporaries Andrea del Sarto and Fra Bartolomeo and Renaissance Venetian painters Titian and Veronese. On Raphael, see Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* (1868 ed.) 216-262; Kugler, *Handbook*, 324-393. Jameson, *Monastic Orders*, 131. *Legends of the Madonna* refers to Raphael throughout, see for example the discussion of the “Mater Amabilis,” 117-118. Eastlake, “The Life and Works of Raphael,” *Edinburgh Review* 157 (January 1883): 168-204, reprinted in *Five Great Painters*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1883), here 2:99, and “Madonna del Ansidei.” The *Ansidei Madonna* (aka *Blenheim Madonna*) was purchased by the National Gallery at the controversial price of about £70,000 in 1885.

emotional impact on viewers, and his art begun to be seen as transcendent because it triggered powerful spiritual and emotional responses. And with the growth of connoisseurship, a new generation of art critics who studied his original works (rather than working with reproductions as was common before) also drew attention to the details of the paintings themselves, including their facture, and their state of preservation. But none of these changes in taste removed Raphael from his prestigious position—not even the growing interest in the literally “pre-Raphaelite” 14th- and 15th-century Italian painters (see Chapter 3). When Ruskin, starting in the late 1840s, began to criticize Raphael as too invested in perfect classical form, in naturalism, and in facture and technique at the expense of the expression of “authentic” faith, the ensuing debates nevertheless confirmed his place as the Victorian “standard of perfection in art against which all other artists, whether post- or pre-Raphaelite, were measured.”³⁰

This universal admiration makes it problematic to argue that Raphael, his style, and particularly his Madonna paintings, specifically appealed to women, since he clearly appealed to everyone. His style, however, is often described in terms of feminine connotations, like “sweet,” “agreeable,” and “graceful.” In this context, Raphael’s soft, feminine, and graceful female figures are sometimes juxtaposed with Michelangelo’s aggressively masculine ones, especially his masculine women, for which Victorian women (like Jameson and Eliot regarding the *Doni Tondo*) at times expressed emphatic dislike. But while this speaks to a gendered response with view to Michelangelo, it does not extend to Raphael, at least not stylistically—everyone, men and women alike, professed to like this feminine sweetness as an aesthetically admirable way of

³⁰ Vasari, “Raffaello da Urbino,” *Lives*, 4:461-566. See Hoeniger, *Afterlife*, 162-315, 54-60; Martin Rosenberg, *Raphael and France: The Artist as Paradigm and Symbol* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 119-133; Fraser, *Victorians and the Renaissance*, 43-90, 66. Among the Raphael scholars who newly drew attention to facture was Johann David Passavant, whose earlier work Elizabeth Eastlake had translated, and whom Eastlake and Jameson both knew well; his *Rafael von Urbino* was published in 1839 with a supplement in 1858, and the expanded 1860 edition was translated into English in 1872; Hoeniger, *Afterlife*, 291-293.

representing women. However, the case that women were especially drawn to Raphael is more often made in Victorian discourse on art in terms of motifs and themes than style—and in that case, directly associated with his Madonnas, based on the assumption that women “naturally” admired the Virgin Mary, as the (impossible-to-reach) ideal of both sexual purity and motherhood that fit in so well with Victorian notions of femininity. In this context, sacred art (always understood as Christian sacred art) in general was sometimes thought of as easily accessible and especially important to women, who were construed as more morally virtuous and pure and more conventionally pious than men. Art representing the Virgin Mary thus became both a mirror and a model for appropriate female behavior—giving women visual correlates for the perfect “angel in the house”—and Raphael’s Madonnas were touted as the most perfect representations of this ideal model of womanhood.

Since women were also expected and encouraged to raise their children according to this model (and possibly even influence less pious husbands), this interest in this sacred art was often encouraged, while writing about sacred art could easily be seen as an appropriate extension and dissemination of such familial moral education. Writing about sacred art could therefore give woman an avenue for writing about religion without violating the boundaries that largely prevented them from participating in the public discussions of theological questions—given that public preaching was frowned upon for women and that virtually no denomination considered female clergy or lay ministry at any level. Jameson and Eastlake obviously participated in this kind of writing with the series on *Sacred and Legendary Art*, which garnered great praise and was seen as an entirely appropriate work for a woman to undertake. The question raised in 20th- and 21st-century scholarship, however, is whether writing about sacred art could go beyond theological conventions—in the British context, those of Anglican Protestantism. A number of

feminist critics have argued that participating in the discourse about the Madonna gave women room to develop a subversive, proto-feminist theology, partly based on the fact that these women were at times criticized for the views they expressed: Sometimes Protestant women writing about the Virgin Mary were accused of indulging in Catholic “Mariolatry,” especially in the years when the doctrine of Mary’s immaculate conception was hotly debated in Catholic theology before it became dogma in 1854. At other times, their ideas would be seen as a violation of Christian theology more generally because they came close to suggesting that Mary herself was divine—an argument that points forward to certain strands in 20th-century feminist theology that violated both Catholic and Protestant notions of the Virgin Mary. But hints of such a feminocentric, matriarchal theology that makes the Virgin Mary into a powerful Goddess rather than a model of Victorian femininity are very tentative in all three women’s writings.³¹

Admittedly, Elizabeth Eastlake is never truly a contender as a proto-feminist theologian for modern scholars, because of her thoroughly conventional, conservative Anglicanism. But when it comes to Jameson’s discussion of the Madonna in general, and Raphael’s Madonnas and their divinity in particular, feminist scholars often emphasize the subversive details of her argument. Likewise, they draw attention to Eliot’s use of the Madonna to give spiritual and moral power to her female protagonists, including Romola as well as her 19th-century heroines Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* and Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*—despite the fact that Eliot wrote from a secular, non-Christian point of view. But Eliot’s and Jameson’s relationship to the Victorian “cult of the Madonna” was complicated and not unambiguously feminist. True to the essentialist ideas about gender at the time, they both emphasized that the roots of this power lay in women’s biology, in particular in what Jameson called “the maternal organisation” of all

³¹ See Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism*; Houston, *Radical Grandmothers*; Robinson, “Coup de Grâce;” and Alvarez, *Valiant Woman*, especially 82-113 on Jameson.

women, mothers or not. Jameson's and Eliot's belief in an essential, maternal femininity as the source of female power, along with an uncritical embrace of female self-sacrifice, was a far stretch from the egalitarian ideas about women's rights for which some of their younger friends advocated. Jameson and Eliot (and to a much lesser extent, Eastlake) granted women a certain autonomy, power, and influence, but only within the parameters of a separate-but-equal approach that saw women as essentially different from men, even if not relegated to a separate sphere.³²

This is why I share the skepticism about the argument that Eliot's, Jameson's and—to a much lesser degree—Eastlake's interest in the Madonna is part of their proto-feminism (which is contradictory and uneven at best). The idea of their subversive or rebellious approach in terms of theology is undermined by their unquestioned admiration of the Madonna as a work of art, especially of Raphael's Madonna paintings. The conventional endorsement of representations of the Madonna makes their attitude towards the Virgin Mary not only seem theologically more conventional; it is also hard to separate it as theological from an aesthetic admiration of pre-approved masterpieces that is so capacious and generic that it can be linked to any theology (or none at all).³³

The *Sistine Madonna*, the most celebrated of Raphael's Madonnas, is a case in point (fig.18). All three saw the painting in Dresden multiple times, and their responses to it are very similar, regardless of completely different theological underpinnings, precisely because it came pre-approved as the most famous Raphael Madonna of them all. The *Sistine Madonna* had been

³² For Eastlake's doctrinaire Anglican approach, see Ernststrom, "Eastlake's *History of Our Lord*," and Palmer, "Fountain," who also addresses Jameson's feminism. Of the three women, only Jameson expressed her separate-but-equal ideas about the sexes in a sort of manifesto or credo, shared privately with her friend Ottilie, insisting on "both sexes being *equally* rational beings with improvable faculties" but also on the mentioned "maternal organization" of women; Needler, *Letters of Anna Jameson*, 233-4, and Jameson, "Woman's Mission, and Woman's Position" in *Memoirs and Essays*, 209-48, esp. 216-7.

³³ For a representative summary of this skeptical view (re: Jameson specifically), see Fraser, *Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, 81-87.



Fig 18: Raphael. *Sistine Madonna*. Ca. 1512-13. Oil on canvas. Staatliche Gemäldegalerie Dresden. Wikimedia Commons.

highlighted as the measure of Raphael's perfection at least since Winckelmann in the 1750s, and by the mid-1800s, a response to this world-famous work was always partly a response to it *as* a world-famous work, which came with prescriptions about how to perceive it. It can even be argued that its status as the most celebrated of Raphael's Madonnas was not only about its being vetted by eminent art historians (like Vasari, Winckelmann and, in the 19th century, Passavant) or by guidebooks, but also about its literal value as a treasure. The story of Augustus III, the Elector

of Saxony, buying the prized painting from the monks of San Sisto in Piacenza in 1743 was well known and often told; in 1848, in *Monastic Orders*, Jameson had noted the famous sale for “the largest sum which up to that time had ever been given for a single picture.” In other words, she was well aware of its monetary value when she called it a “treasure” in *Legends*.³⁴

Unsurprisingly, the *Sistine Madonna* serves as Jameson’s prime example in her introduction to *Legends of the Madonna*, where it represents her “own ideal” of what the Madonna should look like. In an often-quoted passage, she writes:

For there she stands—the transfigured woman, at once completely human and completely divine, an abstraction of power, purity, and love, poised on the empurpled air, and requiring no other support ; looking out, with her melancholy, loving mouth, her slightly dilated, sibylline eyes, quite through the universe, to the end and consummation of all things;— sad, as if she beheld afar off the visionary sword that was to reach her heart through Him, now resting as enthroned on that heart; yet already exalted through the homage of the redeemed generations who were to salute her as Blessed.

What critics in search of Jameson’s theology usually draw attention to here is her emphasis on a “completely divine” as well as a “completely human” Mary, because it seems to indicate that Jameson sees the Virgin as a female Christ. But this very divinity is immediately questioned by Jameson herself—not in terms of theology, but because she is aware that as a masterpiece and artistic “treasure,” its luster can make the *Sistine Madonna* be more spiritual than it is:

Six times have I visited the city made glorious by the possession of this treasure, and as often, when again at a distance, with recollections disturbed by feeble copies and prints, I have begun to think, “Is it so indeed ? is she indeed so divine ? or does not rather the imagination encircle her with a halo of religion and poetry, and lend a grace which is not really there ?”

Admittedly, she proceeds to dispel this doubt, returning to the idea of the *Sistine Madonna* as representing her own, personal “ideal,” and adding that it transcends “the language of critics” that would require her to talk about the painting as a work of art, in terms of facture,

³⁴ On Winckelmann, see Rosenberg, *Raphael and France*, 120-1, and for the purchase of the *Sistine Madonna*, Cathleen Hoeniger, *Afterlife*, 232-6.

composition, and other formal characteristics. She concludes instead that all facets of the Virgin Mary, human and divine, are uniquely present in Raphael's painting. But her very own question whether "the imagination encircle[s] her with a halo of religion and poetry"—or, put differently, whether the painting has its spiritual impact because it is seen as a masterpiece, which in turn sanctifies Mary—gets at the heart of the arguments about Jameson's proto-feminist theology, that is, her fealty to the art-historical canon.³⁵

Eastlake and Eliot may not have been as explicit about the impact of the work's canonical status on their response to the *Sistine Madonna* as Jameson was, but their views—theologically very different but aesthetically basically identical—reflect this impact just as much. Eastlake's assessment of the painting's content seems nearly the diametrical opposite of Jameson's idea of the "divine" Madonna. When Eastlake first saw the painting in Dresden, in 1852, on her first trip with her husband, she specifically admired it because Raphael did not (like the engravers who copied the painting badly) attempt to make Mary "the Queen of Heaven" but merely "the first of women," which aligns her firmly with Anglican theology. But she agreed with Jameson on its status as a work of art: it was "perfect": "Every portion of it is faultless, and yet no one beauty can be separated from another—all are subordinate to the intensely devout purpose of the picture." She reiterates this assessment of the painting as "utmost perfection" when she uses it in her review of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* to argue that such a perfect piece does not need "thought," i.e., does not need to be intellectually coherent, but can be perfect despite the incongruities of a celestial scene framed by worldly curtains. By 1883, Eastlake still called the *Sistine Madonna* "probably the most perfect picture in the world" in her essay on Raphael, and

³⁵ Jameson, *Madonna*, xlii, *Monastic Orders*, xliii.

repeated the well-known story of the sale, stressing its status as a valuable object in noting that it still “forms the chief boast and ornament of the Dresden Gallery.”³⁶

Eliot also famously loved the *Sistine Madonna*—although unlike Eastlake, she changed her mind about Raphael in the late 1860s, and likely influenced by Ruskin’s by-then virulent critique, found him too “academic” (see Chapter 3). But in the 1850s, when she first saw the painting, she was completely captivated by it, despite her religious skepticism. The *Sistine Madonna* triggered a strong emotional response (later, some of Fra Angelico’s Madonnas would have a similar effect) and made her return to the gallery in Dresden every day during the month she spent there in 1858. Her reaction to first seeing the *Sistine Madonna* is often highlighted by literary critics as unusual, because it is the most powerful response recorded to any work of art in her private writing. She noted both the emotional and spatial experience of first seeing the work:

The first day we went was a Sunday when there is always a crowd in the Madonna Cabinet. I sat down on the sofa opposite the picture for an instant, but a sort of awe, as if I were suddenly in the living presence of some glorious being, made my heart swell too much for me to remain comfortably, and we hurried out of the room. On subsequent mornings we always came in the last minutes of our stay to look at this sublimest picture and [it] became harder and harder to leave.

In other words, even though Eliot did not think of the encounter with this painting necessarily as a spiritual experience, she was so emotionally overwhelmed that she could not remain in its presence. But this response is actually anything but unique; it is an often-described—perhaps by this time *prescribed*—reaction to this work. The idea that art could have such power over one’s emotions is in essence the Romantic idea of the Sublime. The *Sistine Madonna* was said to have had such an emotional impact on viewers as early as the 1790s, at the beginning of the Romantic era. Visitors to the Dresden gallery would stand transfixed for hours in front of the painting.

³⁶ Eastlake, journal entry from September 2, 1852, in C.E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 1:285-286. Eastlake, “Modern Painters,” 392; Eastlake, “The Life and Works of Raphael,” Originally published in *Edinburgh Review* 157 (January 1883): 168-204, here quoted from the reprint in Eastlake, *Five Great Painters*, 2:252-253.

When the new gallery was opened in 1855, it was “deliberately placed on its own, to enable a peaceful viewing experience”—namely in the very “Madonna Cabinet” where Eliot saw it and was so predictably overwhelmed by it.³⁷

There was thus nothing particularly subversive about Eliot’s secular Victorian worship—which was not so much worship of the Madonna as of a masterpiece, a Madonna *by Raphael*. On the contrary, admiring Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*, or his various Madonnas in the Galleria Palatina, for Eliot, Eastlake, and Jameson alike, was a safe way to signal one’s proper attitude towards both art and religion. In this context, all three writers mention the Pitti’s Madonnas—in particular the *Madonna della Seggiola* and the *Madonna del Granduca*—even though they would have thought the *Sistine Madonna* superior. Jameson had praised both the *Madonna della Seggiola* and the *Madonna del Granduca* as early as her *Ennuyée*, as mentioned, but at the time, she had not developed the vocabulary that later allowed her to distinguish their more naturalistic treatment of Mary with the infant Christ in a recognizable worldly environment, say in the *Madonna della Seggiola*, from the *Sistine Madonna* as a “devotional” image, emphasizing the symbolic aspect of the representation.

Eastlake, in her review of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, clearly makes that distinction: she stresses that the *Madonna della Seggiola* is more naturalistic and therefore “sweeter” than the *Sistine Madonna*, although it conveys less “supernatural grandeur.” Her praise is directed against Ruskin’s critique, expressed in *Modern Painters II* in 1846. He saw the “fall” of Raphael from more ethereal representations of his early Madonnas (his example is the *Madonna del Cardellino* in the Uffizi) into a naturalism that shows “the chamber-wall of the Madonna della Seggiola and

³⁷ Eliot, “Munich to Dresden,” *Journals*, 325. On the sublime, see Hoeniger, *Afterlife*, 237-8. Jameson, who according to a letter to her friend Otilie attended the opening or “commencement” of the new gallery (presumably in 1855) would have been among the first to see the celebrated *Sistine Madonna* by Raphael in its new surroundings. Letter from February 17, 1860, Ersine, *Letters and Friendship*, 339.

the brown wainscoat of the Baldacchino” rather than the “radiant sky” that evokes the supernatural and ethereal. In his diary from his 1845 trip to Florence, he called the *Madonna della Seggiola* “a clever, well-finished, vulgar, piece of maternity,” which made even clearer that the naturalism he faults Raphael for is at least partly about a representation of Mary that implicitly degrades her because it emphasizes her human nature, instead of her celestial elevation.³⁸

Eliot, although very much influenced by Ruskin, was never quite that critical of Raphael. When she went to Italy in 1860, the *Sistine Madonna*, which she had first seen two years earlier, was her ideal; but she had seen several other Madonnas by Raphael and, like Eastlake, makes feminine qualities like “sweetness” and “grace” the standard:

the “Madonna della Sedia” leaves me, with all its beauty, impressed only by the grave gaze of the Infant; but besides this there is another Madonna of Raphael—perhaps the most beautiful of all his earlier ones—the “Madonna del Granduca,” which has the sweet grace and gentleness of its sisters without their sheep-like look.³⁹

But her description of the “sheep-like look” of so many Raphael Madonnas suggests that there can be too much gentleness and docility (effectively reducing women to domestic animals) and that, with so many Raphael Madonnas to choose from, it becomes harder (and perhaps also more important) to come up with a ranking and figure out which Madonna is “the most beautiful.” Such a ranking was handily provided to Eliot by Murray’s *Handbooks*, which called the

³⁸ Jameson, *Ennuyée*, 125-126. Eastlake, “Modern Painters,” 397. See Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Volume II* in *Works of Ruskin*, 4:84-5, including footnote on 85. The Ruskinian emphasis on the divine Mary, with its concurrent predilection for her virginal purity makes the idea of the proto-feminist divine Mary even more precarious. Even a nuanced discussion of Ruskin’s complicated attitude toward gender cannot but acknowledge his problematic, often anti-feminist attitude towards women, including his dismissive, even destructive, comments about Jameson and several women artists including Anna Maria Howitt; see Orr, “Introduction,” 19, and “Corinne Complex,” 102-103. On a kinder take on Ruskin, see Dinah Birch and Francis O’Gorman, editors, *Ruskin and Gender* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2002), especially Linda Peterson, “The Feminist Origins of ‘Of Queens’ Gardens,” 86-106.

³⁹ Eliot, “Recollections of Italy, 1860,” *Journals*, 358. This passage also mentions Raphael’s *Portrait of Tommaso Fedro Inghirami* in the Pitti, as well as the *Madonna del Cardellino* and also “the portrait falsely called the Fornarina” in the Uffizi (i.e. *La Donna Velata*, now in the Pitti).

Madonna della Seggiola “the sweetest of all his Madonnas, if not the grandest” (the grandest being presumably the *Sistine Madonna*). But when the *Handbook* claims that “nature, unsophisticated nature, reigns triumphant through this work, highly sought for, highly felt, and most agreeably rendered,” this drives home how circular the logic of admiring masterpieces truly is: The *Madonna della Seggiola* is an admirable painting not only because it conveys “unsophisticated nature” that Eastlake had also approved as is pleasing to the eye (“most agreeably rendered”), but also simply because it is already famous (i.e. “highly sought for”).⁴⁰

If Eliot’s description of the Madonnas in the Galleria Palatina still echoes the feminine hallmarks of Raphaelite beauty—sweetness, grace, and gentleness—her quip about their generic “sheep-like look” perhaps anticipates her Raphael fatigue of the late 1860, at a time when she was becoming more interested in the artists who preceded him in the 15th century. Seen in that context, it was possibly a relief to Eliot that she did not have to integrate Raphael when she was working on *Romola* in the early 1860s—not even in the minor ways in which both Michelangelo and Leonardo are mentioned in the novel. Since he did not come to Florence until about 1504 and would only have been a child during the 1490s, when *Romola* is set. Instead, the novel allowed her to focus exclusively on her—and many of her contemporaries’—increasing interest in the quattrocento artists “before Raphael,” who had already begun to intrigue Jameson in the 1840s and Eastlake in the 1850s. *Romola* is undoubtedly troped as a Madonna figure many times

⁴⁰ Murray’s *Handbooks*, 1854:518, 1858:600. In 1858, the discussion of the *Madonna della Seggiola* is longer and marked as a quotation from “T.P.” that I have been unable to trace. The cultural value of *Madonna della Seggiola* was significantly enhanced by 1820, due to the fact that it had just been returned from France after the defeat of Napoleon, along with six other Raphaels that had been taken from the Palazzo Pitti to the Musée Napoléon in Paris (as well as ca. 500 other paintings from around Italy). See Hoeniger, *Afterlife*, 179, Rosenberg, *Raphael and France*, 188, and Andrew McClellan, “Musée du Louvre, Paris: Palace of the People, Art for All,” in *First Modern Museums*, ed. Carole Paul, 232-233. In her review of new books on the “Galleries at the Louvre,” 308, Eastlake pointedly noted the presence of the *Madonna della Seggiola* in the Louvre exhibit of 1801 as a result of Napoleon’s art looting.

throughout the novel; however, she is not so much associated with Raphael's Madonnas as with Fra Angelico's in the Monastery of San Marco, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

It is hard to say whether the aristocratic, palatial setting in which Eliot, Jameson, and Eastlake saw Raphael's many "lesser" Madonnas at the Palazzo Pitti played a role in their turning from Raphael to the earlier, literally pre-Raphaelite artists—like most of their contemporaries, they never completely renounced their Raphael worship even as Fra Angelico became increasingly important to them. But given what kind of museums they liked best, they might well have found that the plenitude of rather similar Raphaels and the sheer mass of paintings displayed in their lavish frames under Baroque ceilings in the Galleria Palatina, distracted from the aesthetic value that they wished to attach to Raphael, and that the "Madonna Cabinet" in the Dresden Gallery captured so well for them. Looking at religious art in the quiet, contemplative environment of a monastery would have struck them as a more appropriate way to appreciate a given work as a unique masterpiece. But unlike museums, spaces where sacred art could be seen in situ were not always accessible to women. Parts of the Monastery of San Marco, famous for its frescoes by Fra Angelico, were not, as the next chapter will address.

CHAPTER 3:

“Ladies Are Not Permitted to Enter”: The Monastery of San Marco



Figure 19. The view of the main cloister of at the Monastery of San Marco, from the north corridor on the upper floor (off limits to women until 1869). June 2019. Photograph by Mark Bauer.

The Monastery of San Marco in Florence has long been presented to travelers as a beautiful and serene place for contemplating sacred art, especially the tranquil cloister, here seen from a former monk’s cell on the upper floor (fig.19). In the 19th century, visitors were entranced by the way Fra Angelico’s famous frescoes were still used for their sacred purpose in the cells, corridors, cloisters, and meeting rooms of the monastery. John Ruskin, perhaps the most famous of these visitors, felt drawn to the quiet of San Marco when he visited Florence in 1845, in his mid-twenties. In a letter to his parents, he wrote:

The only place here where one can be comfortable is St. Mark's. They value their pictures there & take care of them, & yet let one get at them in peace, & I have had many a quiet, resting walk through their corridors, where no one ever comes & where the work of Fra Angelico gives religion to every corner, & makes a temple of it.

But when Ruskin reveled in the quiet of San Marco in 1845, women could not have taken that “resting walk through [the] corridors”—or looked out the windows of the upper floor, as I did when I visited last summer (fig.19). As Murray's *Handbooks* would have informed female visitors, “ladies are not permitted to enter, excepting the chapter house, which is in the outer cloister.” This meant that women were not able to see “the finest works of Fra Beato Angelico da Fiesole” in the second story, including the *Annunciation* that Ruskin thought of as “exquisite” in its “exceeding loveliness.” They only gained regular access after San Marco was turned into a state-owned museum in 1869.¹

Although this kind of prohibition was in line with traditional rules for visiting monastic communities (women were off limits at monasteries, and men typically had restricted access to convents), it also put women interested in sacred art in a paradoxical position. As discussed in Chapter 2, women were often especially interested—in fact scripted to be interested—in sacred art, but there were sacred spaces like San Marco that barred them, and interfered with the idea of their privileged women's access to its spiritual and emotional content. In this case, the art that women could not see was the newly “discovered” and newly prestigious early Renaissance art of the *quattrocento*, i.e. the 15th century. They could see altarpieces by Fra Angelico elsewhere; for example, Eliot admired the *Madonna of the Stars* in the sacristy of Santa Maria Novella and the *Linaioli Tabernacle* in the Uffizi. But Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot all visited San Marco

¹ See William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Ruskin's letter, September 27, 1845, quoted in Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy*, 131. Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Part III*, in *Works of Ruskin*, 4:264. Murray's *Handbook* 1854:421-422; the description of San Marco repeats the warning that “Ladies are allowed to enter the Spezeria, though even more strictly excluded (unless by special permission) from other portions of the convent than from Sta. Maria.”

specifically to see his famous frescoes, the largest surviving group of works by the painter—each found a way around the prohibition. In their public writing, however, they did not disclose this; instead, they focused on a universally accessible fresco at San Marco, the large *Crucifixion* in the chapterhouse. This created a familiar tension: their public commentary on art focused on what all visitors, including women, could see, while their behind-the-scene insistence on getting access to the entire monastery for their own purposes implied that women were missing out on important masterpieces of sacred art. Eliot used fiction—that is, *Romola*—to address the problem of access in a roundabout way, but Jameson and Eastlake simply refrained from highlighting the art women could not see. Because all three were so intent on studying Fra Angelico’s art, especially the frescoes at San Marco, the site is a powerful example of how spatial restrictions could inform and shape their viewing of sacred art.²

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Appreciation of the pre-Renaissance “Primitives,” including the artists of the 15th century (or quattrocento), began around the mid-19th century. Its roots lay in the Romantic fascination with medieval (or “Gothic”) art and architecture. Then, in the early Victorian period, in the 1830s and 1840s, the art that preceded the High Renaissance became the focus of the writings of art critics like Alexis-François Rio, John Ruskin, and Lord Lindsay, as well as a number of German scholars who were less well-known to a non-specialist British audience. This revaluation notably influenced Eliot, Jameson, and Eastlake, who were all reading Rio and Ruskin at this time. The interest in the literal “pre-Raphaelites” never fully displaced the Victorian fascination with the High Renaissance (as discussed in Chapter 2)—it is better seen as a parallel “countertradition,” as Hilary Fraser puts it. But this interest essentially changed the

² Eliot, “Recollections of Italy. 1860,” in *Journals*, 357. These are both in the Museo di San Marco now. *Journals*, 359, also mentions seeing a *Pietà* by Fra Angelico at the Accademia dell’Arte that I have not been able to identify.

view of the Renaissance, by shifting the emphasis to the origin point of the long arc of the master narrative that new cultural historians like Burckhardt and Michelet were telling (see Chapter 1). In this context, artists such as Masaccio, Gentile da Fabriano, and Fra Angelico in the first half of the 15th century and Ghirlandaio and Botticelli in the 1480s and 1490s came to be seen as aesthetically and historically important in their own right. Most of these artists' works (Botticelli's secular paintings excluded) were religious in theme and function, and much of the 1840s discourse of "Christian Art" in the 19th century theorized the impact that the artists' faith had on the aesthetics and even the facture of their work. Fra Angelico (ca. 1390-1455), a painter who became a Dominican friar and lived in the Dominican monastery between Fiesole and Florence, played a key role in this context. The information about his biography was at this point almost exclusively derived from Vasari, who consistently emphasized the saintliness of the painter. The 19th-century art critics tended to see the lack of modeling and naturalism characteristic of his style, which seemed to harken back to the 14th century and to Giotto, as the direct result of his pure and pious life as a monk. Fra Angelico's art was thus seen as a prime example for the purer, more naïve, or "Primitive" style of painting in the early Renaissance, thought to express a more authentic Christian faith before the secularizing impact of the classical tradition came into full force in the 16th century. In this view, the High Renaissance is no longer the pinnacle of artistic and intellectual achievement, but the "corruption" of this pure and simple style and faith.³

Jameson is very much part of this trend in mid-19th-century art criticism, even though she is never as dismissive of the High Renaissance and of Raphael as Ruskin or Riegl were. In the

³ Fraser, *Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, 91-133; 10. Vasari, *Lives* 3:59-86. New documentary evidence relating to Fra Angelico began to be unearthed in the late 19th century, most notably by Crowe and Cavalcaselle for the *New History of Painting in Italy*.

1820s, in her *Diary of an Ennuyée*, she had clearly not been interested in this early art sacred art, but only in the high and late Renaissance; however, by the 1840s, the sacred art of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance had come into focus for her. She was “enchanted” in 1841 when she read Rio’s 1836 *De la poésie chrétienne*, one of the earliest works to focus on such “Christian art,” before it was translated into English (1854). She met Rio and his wife several times in Paris that year, including for a joint visit to the Louvre, and became an early promoter and disseminator of his ideas in England. Some of Rio’s ideas are already visible in the biographical sketches for the *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, although she does not mention him by name (her primary source is Vasari throughout). But that was because in this early survey, she was covering the entire Renaissance (as mentioned, “early” in Jameson’s title encompasses the entire Renaissance from its medieval beginnings with Cimabue to the late Renaissance in Venice). Her chapter on Fra Angelico simply draws on a contrast recycled from Vasari that pitches him as the morally “good” and pure monk-painter versus the morally “bad” one, Fra Filippo Lippi.⁴

But when, following the broad sweep and storytelling approach *Early Italian Painters*, meant for a projected audience of “young travellers, young students in art, young people generally,” Jameson began to specialize in sacred art, she became very much interested in the trecento and quattrocento. Rio was an explicit influence as she began to publish her 1845-46

⁴ The first English translation of the 1836 original is Alexis-François Rio, *The Poetry of Christian Art* (London: T. Bosworth, 1854). John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Volume II, Containing Part III, Sections I and II: Of the Imaginative and Theoretic Faculties*, vol. 4 of *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903). Sir Coutts Lindsay, *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, 3 vols (London: Murray, 1847). For the meetings with Rio, see letters from October 15, 1841 to Otilie von Goethe, in Needler, *Letters of Anna Jameson*, 132, and to her sister Charlotte in Erskine, *Letters and Friendship*, 204. Macpherson, *Memoirs*, 178, quotes a third letter with reference to contact with Rio at this time. Jameson, *Painters* (1845), 110-123. In Jameson’s 1868 edition of *Painters*, 67, 72, some important inaccuracies regarding both Fra Lippo Lippi and Fra Angelico from Vasari have been corrected. Based on her remarks in her introduction, x, I believe Jameson herself made these corrections, but they could have been made by a posthumous editor.

essays in the *Athenaeum* that became the basis for her *Sacred and Legendary Art* series. Her dissemination of Rio's idea of "Christian Art" and of the pre-Renaissance painters predated both Ruskin's (in the second volume of *Modern Painters* in 1846), and Lord Lindsay's, whose *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* did not come out until 1847. But even though she initially borrowed even the title of the series from Rio, calling it *The Poetry of Sacred and Legendary Art*, her approach differed from his, and reflected important theological differences. As a Protestant woman conveying Catholic iconography to other mostly Protestant readers, she needed to demarcate her own approach from Rio's pronounced Catholicism. She did so by insisting that she was interpreting the artworks in terms of their "artistic and aesthetic, not religious" importance (see my introduction), partly in an attempt to keep her own (Protestant) faith out of her discussion of the art.⁵

As Holcomb (Ernstrom) has pointed out, her approach not only differed from Rio's (and Lord Lindsay's), but it was importantly "utterly divergent" from Ruskin's, whose ecstatic response to Fra Angelico in *Modern Painters, Volume II* is usually credited for bringing the taste for the sacred art of the quattrocento to England (even as he later became much less enamored of Fra Angelico). Although Jameson (like Eliot, and unlike Eastlake) respected Ruskin, she refrains from expressing sweeping Ruskinian ideas on early Renaissance style, from his enthusiastic language, and from his focus on painting technique and facture. Instead, her iconographic approach revolves around patiently glossing the historical and theological context of specific motifs and drawing connections across time between different representations of these motifs. Because of her methodological framework, Fra Angelico comes up frequently in all volumes of *Sacred and Legendary Art*, in terms of representations of biblical scenes, angels, saints, and

⁵ Jameson, "Introduction," *Painters* (1868), ix. Jameson, "Preface," *Legends of the Monastic Orders*, xiv.

church fathers; all four volumes that list her as sole author contain wood engravings of some of his work. Unsurprisingly, *Legends of the Monastic Orders* refers to Fra Angelico frequently as representing the art of the Dominican order, including prominently the *Crucifixion* in the chapterhouse, as discussed below.⁶

When Eastlake completed the *History of our Lord* after Jameson's death, she naturally continued this emphasis on the painter. Fra Angelico is also regularly highlighted in Eastlake's other work and in her private correspondence. Ironically, despite Eastlake's vehement disagreement with Ruskin, expressed in her review of *Modern Painters*, she actually admired the quattrocento artists as much as Ruskin did, although she would have credited this to the influence of the German scholars she was translating in the 1850s, Franz Kugler and Gustav Waagen.. In translating the revised edition of Kugler's *Handbook of Painting*, she would have become familiar with the art-historical placement of Fra Angelico that both Kugler and his student Burckhardt subscribed to. They were still beholden to Vasari's idea of the first half of the 16th century as the peak of "modern art," but were interested in the evolution and thus the pre-16th century beginnings of the High Renaissance aesthetic. Kugler's second edition of the *Handbook* (with its revisions by Burckhardt) places Fra Angelico in his "the Second Stage of Development" in Italian painting, as still showing the earlier influence of Giotto and the 14th century, while other 15th-century artists, especially Gentile and Masaccio, are already part of his "Third Stage."⁷

⁶ See Holcomb in Sherman and Holcomb, *Women*, 111; Richard Dellamora, "The Revaluation of 'Christian' Art: Ruskin's Appreciation of Fra Angelico 1845-60," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1974): 143-50. In *Monastic Orders*, three woodcuts and one etching are based on works by Fra Angelico, but none of these are from San Marco.

⁷ Fra Angelico is prominent in *The History of Our Lord*, with over forty entries in the index. In vol.1 of *Lord*, two wood engravings represent his work; in vol. 2, nine additional wood engravings as well as two etchings are included. See Kugler, *Handbook* (1851), 2:163-168. In her 1874 edition of Kugler's *Handbook*, 179-187, Eastlake supplemented the section on Fra Angelico (including San Marco) based on Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *New History of Painting in Italy*. Burckhardt repeats his points from Kugler's *Handbook* in his 1855 *Cicerone*, 787-792. Except for a reference to the soon-to-open Museo di San Marco, Burckhardt's remarks on Fra Angelico are virtually unchanged in the 1869 edition that was the basis of the 1873 English-language *Cicerone*; see 52-56.

Given the iconographic approach Eastlake inherited from Jameson, and her arrangement of the material in *The History of our Lord* in terms of Biblical rather than art-historical chronology, her own writing does not emphasize Kugler's developmental framework. But she retains his point that Fra Angelico's stylistic conservatism as well as his piety makes his art distinctive and noteworthy, and the claim his art is purest and most beautiful when he follows the medieval tradition most closely. For example, Eastlake claims for a series of thirty-five images of the Passion of Christ by Fra Angelico (from the *Doors of the Silver Cabinet* created for S.S. Annunziata) that "some of these are unsurpassed in beauty and piety of conception," but "others are not free from the corruption of Christian Art which had even then obtained."⁸

What Jameson and Eastlake highlight about Fra Angelico is thus standard fare for the art criticism of the time: from Rio to Ruskin, and Kugler to Burckhardt, no art critic of the 19th century seems to have been able to write about Fra Angelico without drawing attention to Vasari's account of the painter's practice of praying before he began working on a painting, or without finding stylistic correlates of his pure faith in his works. Similarly common is the idea that he "fails" (i.e. is not convincingly naturalistic) when he represents human rather than divine figures, in particular when they are evil, while his angels and other creatures associated with the "superhuman" world, as Ruskin would have called it, are exceptionally beautiful and ethereal—traits that appealed to Victorian cultural critics (and artists) longing for simpler times and a simpler faith in a transcendental world.⁹

⁸ Eastlake, *Lord*, 2:3. She ties this observation to Rio's praise for regional schools that retained the "purer spirituality" of the earlier painters into the 15th century.

⁹ Throughout this thesis, I have deliberately sidestepped both the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin's defense of them (not to mention what Eliot, Eastlake, and even Jameson had to say about them, but their artwork and manifestoes, as well as the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold among the "Victorian sages" are important manifestations of this longing as a wider cultural trend.

George Eliot was also well-primed to admire the quattrocento and especially Fra Angelico; after all, she had not only read and reviewed Rio and Ruskin, but also Eastlake's translation of Kugler and Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art*. Importantly, she never completely lost interest in the High Renaissance canon and later, in the mid-1870s, became increasingly interested in Titian and the late Renaissance. But in 1869, her friend Emily Davies reported that Eliot told her that

She has come to the conclusion that the Pre-Raphael's are right, and that the time of really high, noble art, was before Rafael. She thinks his great picture of the Transfiguration detestable & went from it with delight to Fra Angelico; and to Ghirlandaio, whom she seemed to care for almost as much. It is Rafael's academical-ness that she dislikes so much: the want of effort after noble Nature.

Although she admired many "early Florentine paintings," Fra Angelico was clearly a major figure for her, even before the interest in San Marco as a location for *Romola* made his frescoes there especially important. Like Eastlake and Jameson, she saw works by him in the Louvre and the National Gallery, as well as elsewhere in Italy beyond Florence.¹⁰

Again, the question is what, if anything, is gendered about the three writers' fascination with Fra Angelico. First of all, it needs to be clear that his status in the canon was already well-established, and that the women did not discover him, but, as with Raphael, followed precedent. But just as we saw with the long-standing insistence on the masterpiece status of Raphael's Madonnas (in Chapter 2), their canon-worship was intertwined with the idea that women were supposed to be especially interested in sacred art. Granted, Ruskin's negative view of the mature Raphael had an uneven influence and never led to Raphael being ousted from the Victorian

¹⁰ See "Recollections from Italy, 1860," *Journals*, 358-9; 357. Emily Davies' letter to Anna Richardson, June 4, 1869, in Ann B. Murphy and Deirdre Rafferty, eds. *Emily Davies: Collected Letters, 1861-1875* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 316. I am grateful to Dr. Beverly Rilett of the George Eliot Archive (georgeeliotarchive.org) for pointing me to this passage. See Leonee Ormond, "Angels and Archangels: *Romola* and the Paintings of Florence," in Levine and Turner, *From Author to Text*, 184.

canon, as discussed. But his argument that Raphael was not sincere in his religious work, but betrayed a secular fascination with technique and formal perfection (or “academical-ness,” as Emily Davies summed up Eliot’s critique) may have sent a particularly strong signal to women that Fra Angelico, an artist praised for his purity and his otherworldliness by all, was a more appropriate object of admiration. Such admiration could again signal a woman’s own pious, pure, or uncorrupted state of mind, and demonstrate the emotional and spiritual access that women were supposed to have to sacred art. This admiration could transcend denominations (and even traditional Christian faith, in the case of Eliot), via a feminine instinct for sacred art which, as per Jameson, is characterized by “true and earnest feeling and steeped in that beauty which emanates from genius inspired by faith” that women in particular were supposed to be able to intuit and even convey to others.¹¹

Fra Angelico may even have represented something more: with its androgynous angels and its de-emphasizing of the sculpted and modeled body associated with the high Renaissance, his art does not insist strongly on gender, perhaps a reprieve for someone like Jameson, who had strongly objected to the “harsh unfeminine features, and muscular, masculine arms” of the virgin in Michelangelo’s *Doni Tondo* in earlier years. At the same time, it was not associated with Raphaelite feminine sweetness and grace, either. It may have allowed for the idea of sacred art as genderless, associated with the gender-neutral contemplative, monastic space which may have appealed more to the women than explicitly feminized spaces like the lavishly decorated and secular Palazzo Pitti or masculine, politicized outdoor space of the Piazza della Signoria. But ironically, Fra Angelico’s work in this space was off limits to women.¹²

¹¹ Jameson, “Preface,” *Legends of Sacred and Legendary Art*, 1:xi-xii.

¹² Ruskin’s fascination with Fra Angelico and his androgynous angels may also have been motivated by a desire for gender-neutral art and art spaces, as he was grappling with his own tenuous relationship to Victorian constructions of masculinity. See *Ruskin and Gender*, eds. Dinah Birch and Francis O’Gorman, and Catherine Robson, *Men in*

The impact of gender on their perception of Angelico's work is difficult to prove based on the conventional views that Jameson, Eliot and Eastlake express. But at the very least, the assumption that women had a special connection to sacred art through the purity of their own faith seems to have given Jameson and Eliot permission to express an emotional response to Fra Angelico's art, while the fact that Ruskin was also expressing this admiration in enthusiastic and emotional terms could have lowered the risk of them being accused of responding "like a woman." While Kugler (with Burckhardt as editor) had tried to explain away the imperfections of Fra Angelico's work, noting that his otherworldly focus led to representations of humans, especially evil ones, that were "unsatisfactory, frequently unworthy," and "deficient in correctness of drawing," Ruskin drew attention to the beauty of his angels' wings instead. *Modern Painters, Volume II* famously culminates in a rhapsodic rhetorical question in which he uses the *Linaioli Tabernacle* (fig. 20 and 21) to encapsulate what he appreciates about the Christian art of the early Renaissance:

With what [shall we compare] the angel choirs of Angelico, with the flames on their white foreheads waving brighter as they move, and the sparkles streaming from their purple wings like the glitter of many suns upon a sounding sea, listening in the pauses of alternate song, for the prolonging of the trumpet blast, and the answering of psaltery and cymbal, throughout the endless deep, and from all the star shores of heaven?¹³

True to the descriptive approach of the *Sacred and Legendary Arts*, Jameson did not wax this poetic when discussing Fra Angelico's art (Eastlake, who despised Ruskin and his view of art, was even more reluctant). But Ruskin's ecstatic response, in presumed analogy to the painters'

Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001). Jameson, *Ennuyée*, 102. Eliot refers to the Doni Tondo's "ugly Holy Family," and calls his sculptures in Medici Chapel at San Lorenzo "affected and exaggerated," but does not address the masculine features that are so often noted in either case; "Recollections of Italy, 1860," *Journals*, 358, 356.

¹³ Kugler, *Handbook of Painting*, 165, 167. See *Works of John Ruskin* 5:332. Ruskin's rhapsody emerged from letters written to his father on June 5 and 6, 1845, about Angelico's angels and their wings, complete with a little sketch of the representation of feathers, which enabled Harold Shapiro to identify the angels as those of the *Linaioli Tabernacle*, then at the Uffizi. Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy*, 52-54.



Figure 20. Fra Angelico, *Linaoli Tabernacle (Madonna and Child Enthroned)*. Before 1433. Tempera on Panel. Museo di San Marco. Photograph by Mark Bauer.



Figure 21. Detail, Fra Angelico, *Linaoli Tabernacle*, Museo di San Marco. Photograph by Mark Bauer.

ecstatic and enlightened state when he painted his sacred works, perhaps gave Jameson leeway to become unusually emotional in Volume 1 of *Sacred and Legendary Art*:

Angelico's angels are unearthly, not so much in form as in sentiment, and superhuman, not in power but in purity. In other hands, any imitation of his soft ethereal grace would become feeble and insipid. With their long robes falling round their feet, and drooping many coloured wings, they seem not to fly or to walk, but to float along “smooth sliding without step.” Blessed, blessed creatures! Love us, only love us—for we dare not task your soft serene Beatitude, by asking you to *help* us!

The term “superhuman,” which Ruskin employs to discuss sacred art, is a cue that Jameson is drawing on Ruskin in this unusual outburst. Likewise, Eliot seems to have Ruskin on her mind

when she writes of the “unspeakably lovely angels” surrounding the enthroned Madonna and child of the *Linaioli Tabernacle*. Ruskin’s interest in and his rhapsodic language about Fra Angelico here served to legitimize an emotional response to the painters’ work, signaling that such a response was not a sign of feminine weakness or lack of art-historical expertise, but a way to participate in the discussion of sacred art.¹⁴

All three women were thus deeply invested in Fra Angelico’s art and his “Primitive” style. They had seen a range of his works on wood panels both in Florence and elsewhere, but knew to pay special attention to his frescoes at San Marco. Because of the relatively secluded environment of San Marco, the frescoes had remained mostly unknown and unseen until Napoleonic times. Well-versed in “Christian art” as they were, all three women knew these works were extremely well preserved, still used for devotional purposes, and therefore a rarity, since so few of Fra Angelico’s other frescoes had survived into the 19th century. Given that they were scripted to be especially connected to this sacred art, it was thus a paradox (not to mention a frustration) that they did not have access to his work in the monastery, where women were barred from the upstairs, including all cell and corridor frescoes (as well as the library), from the very beginnings of the site as a Dominican monastery until 1869, when it was secularized and turned into a state museum.

*

From its founding in 1299, San Marco had been entangled with the church and city politics of Florence. Begun as an urban mendicant monastery by Vallebrosans and Silvestrines (offshoots of the Benedictine order), by 1437 the cloisters and dormitories, now in disrepair,

¹⁴ Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 1:42. See also Jameson, *Monastic Orders*, 417: “before those ethereal beings power itself would be powerless: such are his angels, resistless in their soft serenity; such his virgins, pure from all earthly stain; such his redeemed spirits, gliding into paradise; such his sainted martyrs and confessors, absorbed in devout rapture.” Eliot, “Recollections of Italy, 1860,” *Journals*, 357.

were turned over to the Dominicans. This order's most prominent Florentine patron, Cosimo de' Medici (Cosimo the Elder), commissioned the architect Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (1396-1472) to supervise the rebuilding of the monastery and add a library. The building project, including ground floor cloister walk and second-floor monastic cells (with a double cell occasionally used by Cosimo himself as a sort of retreat), as well as the library and the gardens, was completed between 1438 and 1444 (figs. 22 and 23); Fra Angelico completed the frescoes with members of his workshop between 1438 and 1446. In addition to the large *Crucifixion* with saints in the chapterhouse (* in fig 22), there are frescoes in the main cloister and on the second floor, both in the corridors and in forty-three different monks' cells. Almost all feature scenes from the life of Christ, mostly from the Passion of Christ. The most well-known of the frescoes upstairs today is a large *Annunciation*, visible immediately on the ascent to the upper floor, across from the staircase (* in fig 23).¹⁵

Cosimo de' Medici's financial support for the monastery was only the beginning of its entanglement with Florentine politics. In the 1490s, the historical figure that intrigued Eliot and many of her contemporaries so much as a forefather of the Italian nationalists, the Dominican priest and reformer Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) became prior of San Marco, where he had a double cell (# 12 in fig. 23). After the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492 and the subsequent ousting of the Medici, Savonarola attempted to shape the Republic of Florence into a religious state, a Republic of God; he also famously preached against idolatrous use of art and orchestrated the famous "bonfire of the vanities," where his followers burned their luxury goods, including artworks. Savonarola's ideas initially aligned with the more secular promoters of a new republic,

¹⁵ On the frescoes, see Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*; Giovanna Damiani. *San Marco: Florence: The Museum and its Art* (London: Philip Wilson, 1997) and Magnolia Scudieri, "The Frescoes by Fra Angelico at San Marco," in *Fra Angelico*, ed. Laurence Kanter and Pia Palladino (New York and New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2005), 177-89.

to be led by a Great Council rather than a smaller senate or Signoria, which had proved so vulnerable to the dominance of one family (i.e. the Medici). But his intentions and prophetic visions were increasingly distrusted, and he was excommunicated in 1497 and executed in May 1498 as a traitor. Savonarola's and the Great Council's rule was brief: the Medici temporarily

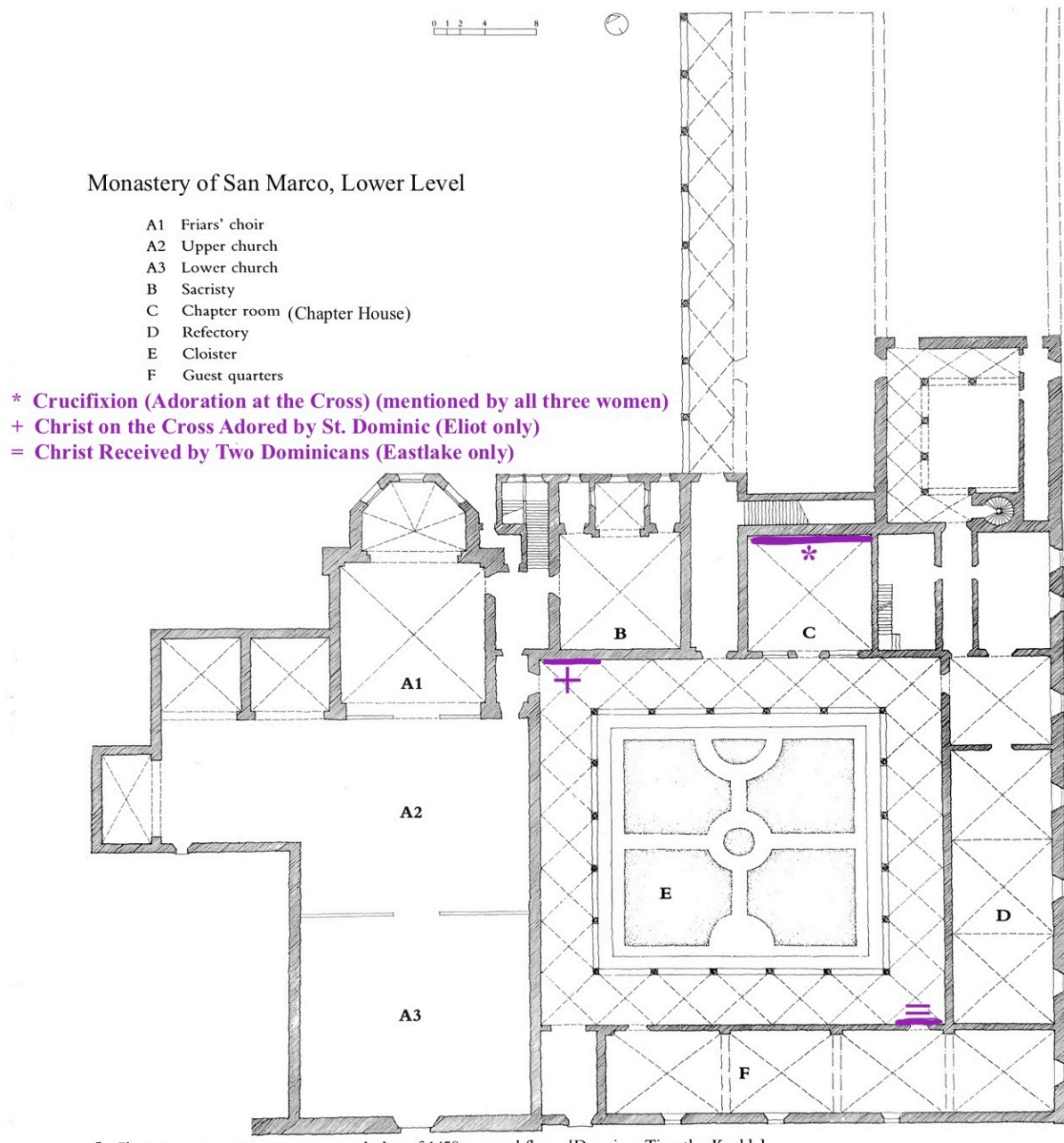


Figure 22: Plan of San Marco, ground floor, ca. 1450. Reconstructed plan of 1450 with relevant frescoes marked. Original drawing by Timothy Koehle for Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, 3.

Monastery of San Marco, Upper Level

Frescoes mentioned by Lewes' notes

- * The Annunciation
- = The Crucifixion with St. Dominic
- Cell 1: Noli Me Tangere
- Cell 8: The Mary's at the Sepulchre
- Cell 9: Coronation of the Virgin
- + Madonna and Child Enthroned
- [Cell 12 Madonna and Child, Fra Bartolomeo (transferred to Cell in 1707)]

Frescoes mentioned by Jameson

- Cell 3: Small Annunciation
- Cell 6: Transfiguration
- Cell 35: Communion of the Apostles (Last Supper)

Frescoes mentioned by Eastlake

- Cell 28: Christ Carrying the Cross

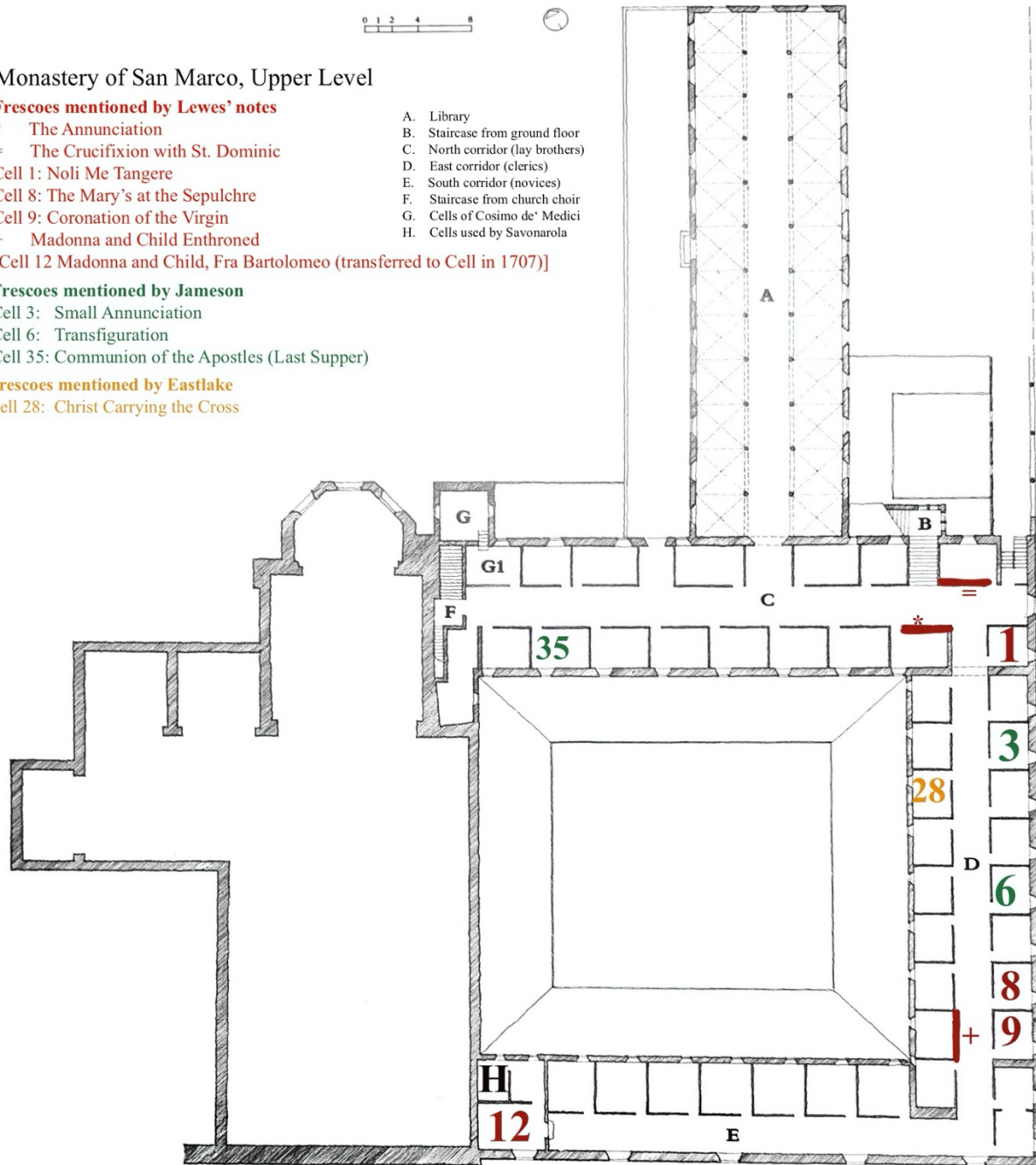


Figure 23. Plan of San Marco, first floor, ca. 1450. Reconstructed plan of 1450 with relevant frescoes mentioned by Jameson, Eastlake, and Lewes (taking notes for Eliot) marked. Original drawing by Timothy Koehle for Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, 4.

returned to power 1513 and then took over as rulers the city in 1528 as the newly-minted Dukes of Florence and later Grand Dukes of Tuscany. But because it was seen as a sort of prefiguration of the Risorgimento, this republican interlude was of special interest to 19th century Italians; the

fascination with Savonarola as an analog to the nationalists of the 19th century (such as Mazzini) also inspired Eliot, to write *Romola*, which meant that alongside the Piazza della Signoria and Romola's home, San Marco became a key location in the novel.

After 1513, San Marco continued to be important to the Medici, although never as prominent as before. Its world-famous and publicly accessible library of illuminated manuscripts, as well as Vasari's reverence for both Fra Angelico and Fra Bartolomeo (who lived there until his death in 1517) meant that it continued to attract attention for its art. The church and the monastery underwent various alterations between 1500 and 1780, but the frescoes were left untouched, even after Napoleon ordered the first suppression of the monasteries in 1810. The monks returned after the fall of Napoleon and were allowed to stay, even beyond the 1866 suppression of the monasteries by the Italian state. (The Dominican order to this day has use of the back cloister and surrounding buildings, which remain partly off-limits to museum visitors.) After Tuscany had become part of the kingdom of Italy, San Marco was partially turned into a museum that opened in 1869. The initial impulse for creating the museum had been to highlight Savonarola's presence, so his cells were changed into a kind of shrine to the Florentine Republic that included memorabilia and Fra Bartolomeo's famous portrait of Savonarola. Later, in the early 20th century, Fra Angelico's art became the main focus of the museum.¹⁶

Only with the opening of the museum in 1869 were women able to see all the frescoes and cells. Before 1869, the monastery had apparently been willing to make occasional exceptions to their rule about the "ladies," but most female tourists respected the prohibition regarding

¹⁶ The library was accessible to (male!) readers for a fee as early as the Renaissance; see Berthold Louis Ullman, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici and the Library of San Marco* (Padua: Antenore, 1972). In the 20th century, the library was restored to Michelozzo's original design and color scheme, including the removal of bookshelves added in the 18th and 19th centuries. For a brief history of San Marco as a museum, including the 18th-century discussion of creating a museum dedicated to Fra Bartolomeo specifically, see Damiani, *San Marco*, 10-14.

access to monasteries. In fact, Eastlake had bluntly criticized the author of *Art and Nature under an Italian Sky* for intruding into the off-limits area of a church in Genoa by mistake, to the great alarm of the monk that spotted her. Eastlake quoted the episode at length, and then castigated all female British tourists along with the writer: “We should like to know *what* place is sacred from the innocent audacity of an exploring Englishwoman!” She also disapproves of “another most charming Englishwoman driven out of a garden, where of course she had no business,” by monks who justifiably complained about the intrusion. And in an 1858 letter, where she highly recommends Fra Angelico to her friend Jane Gifford, Eastlake warns her: “Ladies can not [sic] see everything by him at S. Marco, his convent; but they can see his great ‘Crucifixion,’ which made a deep impression on me.”¹⁷

In other words, Eastlake was rather insistent on having ordinary “lady travellers” abide by the rules made by the Catholic hierarchy of which she was typically very critical, as a strict Anglican with a strong anti-Catholic bias. But she had no problem with being the exception: she and Jameson both asked for and received special permission to enter San Marco. Jameson had likely not toured the monastery before 1845; she got the location of Fra Angelico’s frescoes in Florence wrong in the *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters*, claiming that “many large frescoes with numerous figures nearly life size, as full of grandeur as of beauty,” were located “in the churches of Florence.” This was corrected in the 1868 edition, which now noted that these frescoes were exclusively to be found “in his own convent of San Marco.” But her description of the *Crucifixion* in the 1850 *Legends of the Monastic Orders*, discussed below, suggests that she

¹⁷ Georgina Sarah Godkin (an Irish expatriate in Florence who died there in 1927) in *The Monastery of San Marco* (Florence: G. Barbera, 1885) positively revels in the access to the entire monastery. The author quotes George Eliot on not being allowed in, and concludes her book with a multi-page walkthrough that includes the second floor. Godkin, 22, 86-8. Eastlake, “Sky,” 3, and letter to Jane Gifford, July 1858, quoted in C. E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 89.

visited the chapterhouse on her 1847 trip, probably not for the last time. Then, during her extended stay in Florence in 1857-58, she applied for access to the off-limits areas. In December 1857, she told her friend Ottilie that “a Marchesa Bartolommei ... procured me admission (from Rome) to see the Certosa, and San Marco.” Jameson went to the Certosa (right outside of Florence) in January; it stands to reason that she also went to San Marco around the same time to pursue her research for *History of our Lord*.¹⁸

Eastlake, too, may have initially stuck to the chapterhouse *Crucifixion*, which she had so highly recommended to Jane Gifford, in her early visits to San Marco, but while she was completing the work on *History of our Lord* during the 1860s, she also negotiated special access. As it had for Jameson, a clear research agenda may have provided her with a sense of legitimacy that overrode gender conventions. A journal entry from September 1862 shows her confidence:

On Monday, I was at the convent of S. Marco in order to copy a miniature in one of the choral books. I had a letter from the head of the Academy to the ‘Padre Priore,’ a fine Dominican monk, by no means advanced in years, who was rather short at first, saying that there was no where [sic] for a lady to draw, as the convent admits no women, and that he was afraid of my not turning over the leaves carefully enough. I assured him that, if everyone had the same respect for works of art as I, the choral books of Florence would be in better condition. In short, I talked him over till he grinned from ear to ear; and I got my big book, and a comfortable place in a kind of refectory.

Although Eastlake did not elaborate on what she saw in San Marco (apart from the miniature in the choral book), she discussed several of the cell frescoes as well as the chapterhouse *Crucifixion* in *The History of Our Lord*. It is not clear whether any of the included illustrations are based on her drawings, on which she worked throughout Florence, “perched behind an altar, or shut up in a convent, or surrounded by chattering men in a sacristy.” But she obviously had no

¹⁸ Jameson, *Painters*, 1845:119, *Painters* 1868:73. Letter to Ottilie, dated Christmas 1857, in Needler, *Letters*, 221. Jameson’s letter to her sisters from January 25, 1858, described the Certosa, but a visit to San Marco is not explicitly mentioned; see Erskine, *Letters and Friendship*, 316-317.

qualms getting special breaks to work in the sacred inner sanctum of monastic spaces from which women were typically excluded.¹⁹

George Eliot, by contrast, was at least on the surface a humbler and more obedient female traveler, fully aware of the monastery's restrictions on "ladies" in Murray's *Handbook*. In her "Recollections of Italy, 1860," she noted that "the frescoes I cared for most in Florence were the few of Fra Angelico's that *a donna was allowed to see* in the Convent of San Marco" (my emphasis). She then describes seeing the *Crucifixion* "in the Chapter-house, now used as a guard room." But on the day of that visit (May 22, 1860), she had also just begun to consider writing her novel about Savonarola, and so she sent George Henry Lewes to tour the rest of the complex on her behalf and take notes in her journal, while she remained in the chapter room, where the "great" *Crucifixion* "may be seen by the ladies," as he noted in his journal. In particular, Lewes recorded for her that in the fresco of the *Coronation of the Virgin* in Cell 9, Mary is "more graceful in attitude and in flow of drapery than anything I remember" (see #9 in fig. 23), showing the emphasis on graceful and "lovely" femininity that the couple had also praised in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*. In 1861, when they returned, Lewes took additional notes on the upstairs area, which Eliot later copied into her writer's notebook for use in *Romola*. Here, Lewes notes the spatial layout and the location several frescoes along the corridors and in the cells specifically, which were to become important for Eliot's descriptions of the interior San Marco in her novel.²⁰

¹⁹ Eastlake, Journal entry, September 30, 1862, in C.E. Smith, *Journals and Correspondence*, 2:171-172.

²⁰ Eliot, *Journals*, 356-57. Eliot was similarly compliant when she visited the monastery of Camaldoli in June of 1861 with Lewes and their friend Thomas Adolphus Trollope; Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, 3:423-424. Eliot and Lewes had arrived in Florence on May 17, 1860; on May 21, Lewes noted in his journal that he suggested that Eliot write a historical novel about Savonarola, and that she "caught the idea with enthusiasm." Haight first noted that Eliot did not visit San Marco until 1869 in *George Eliot: A Life*, 326 and 345; he further documented Lewes' assistance in the *Letters*. See Haight, *George Eliot Letters*, 3: 295-296 for Lewes' journal entry for May 22, 1860. Eliot's own notes based on Lewes' notes in her reading notebook from 1861, pages 12r and 13r, were transcribed by Andrew Thompson, "George Eliot's Florentine Notes," *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 70 (2018): 19,

Eliot's employment of Lewes's eyes where her own could not take in Fra Angelico's art implies that she was just as curious about them and just as inconvenienced by not having access to the monastery as Jameson and Eastlake were—and, in her own way, as determined to circumvent the prohibition. In addition, she pointedly built her lack of access to San Marco into *Romola*. In the novel, Romola is summoned to San Marco by her dying brother, Dino, who years before had run away to become a Dominican monk. He has now returned to Florence to die in the monastery. As the relevant chapter opens, the omniscient narrator tells us:

When Romola arrived at the entrance of San Marco she found one of the Frati waiting there in expectation of her arrival [and] was conducted to the door of the chapterhouse in the outer cloister, whither the invalid had been conveyed; *no woman being allowed admission beyond this precinct*. (My emphasis)

That a woman would not be allowed to go into the monastery's inner sanctum in Renaissance Florence is in itself unremarkable, but Romola's experience is deliberately constructed as a parallel to Eliot's own. This is more than a little in-joke, however; it is the culmination of the critique of the lack of women's access to art that Eliot formulates in her novel—a critique that I have already partly traced in the previous chapter.²¹

Romola's exclusion is reinforced by the fact that several of Eliot's male characters repeatedly move in and out of the inner sanctum of San Marco (including Romola's husband, Tito), but—even more importantly—by the access that Eliot's omniscient narrator has and passes on to the readers. Eliot scholars have written extensively about the way that Eliot's disembodied, omniscient narrative voice deliberately crosses gender boundaries, impossible to pin down as “male” or “female.” In *Romola*, her omniscient narrator goes where women cannot go—along

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/georelioghstud.70.1.0001>. The notes specifically mention three corridor and four cell frescoes by Fra Angelico, as well as a fresco by Fra Bartolomeo of the *Madonna and Child* that was transferred to Savonarola's cell in the 18th century (see fig. 23 and also footnote 23 below).

²¹ George Eliot, *Romola*, 209. See Sanders on the parallel; *Romola*, endnotes, 708 and 732.

the corridors and into the cells of San Marco. Most strikingly, when Romola's husband Tito visits Savonarola in secret, catching a glimpse of the frescoes in the corridor, the narrator reports:

Tito's visit to San Marco had been announced beforehand, and he was at once conducted... up the spiral staircase into the long corridors lined with cells—corridors where Fra Angelico's frescoes, delicate as the rainbow on the melting cloud, startled the unaccustomed eye here and there, as if they had been sudden reflections from an ethereal world, where the Madonna sat crowned in her radiant glory, and the Divine infant looked forth with perpetual promise.

It is possible to argue that Eliot's narrator is here simply thought of as male—like Tito, who is perhaps the “startled” owner of the “unaccustomed eye.” But the content and in particular the language suggests an ambiguously gendered voice that invites male but also female readers (who could not have accessed these “long corridors”) to contemplate the crowned Madonna. On the basis of Lewes' notes, as transcribed by Eliot, the narrator is referring to the fresco at the end of the East corridor, the *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (+ in fig.5), which Lewes had described prosaically as “Mother + Bambino + four saints on each side.”²²

But the passage departs from Lewes' dry itemization for a more spiritually infused language. Stylistically, Eliot directly evokes Ruskin—not only the rhapsody on the altarpiece angels in *Modern Painters, Volume II* quoted above, but also his word choice in the descriptions of Fra Angelico's tempera altarpieces and frescoes, as well as of a visit to the upper level of San Marco, where he has passed “many a Sabbath evening of bright summer... in that lonely corridor” described by Eliot's narrator, and referred to by Ruskin in a review of Lord Lindsay's *History of Christian Art* in 1847. In this review, Ruskin described Fra Angelico's colors in terms of their “delicacy” and the blended “hues of the rainbow”, “wrought to radiance beyond that of the ruby” (claiming that Lord Lindsay does not properly appreciate them). Eliot's reference to the “delicate rainbow” and the “radiant glory” of Fra Angelico's painting in the passage in

²² Eliot, *Romola*, 610. Lewes in Thompson, “Florentine Notes,” 19.

Romola powerfully echoes Ruskin's language and mood. But Ruskin's focus in his review is on the large *Annunciation* (* in fig. 23), precisely because the Virgin Mary is not ethereal here in his view, but "set before us in the verity of life," not enthroned, but in the "shadow of a lowly loggia"—whereas Eliot's draws attention to the "ethereal world" of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, evoking the fascination with the devotional image of the Madonna on her heavenly throne (which Eliot shared with Jameson). As an image that can highlight female power (but not necessarily divinity, given the reservations I express about this interpretation in Chapter 2) without violating the norms of proper, maternal Victorian femininity, the enthroned Madonna is of more interest to Eliot than Ruskin's innocent, virginal and altogether human Mary. In *Romola*, the association of women with the heavenly Madonna is especially significant because the heroine is often compared to her (even though she herself is childless), a powerful figure capable of helping others rather worshipped for her simplicity and "meekness," as Ruskin describes her for the *Annunciation*. Eliot's half-Ruskinian, half-Jamesonian approach to Fra Angelico's Madonnas signals that the painter's sacred art is of importance to all viewers, regardless of gender. Here and elsewhere, the novel's descriptions of the inner sanctum of San Marco that Eliot (and *Romola*) could *not* see strongly suggests that Eliot refuses to be excluded. With the help of Lewes, she was determined to gain imaginary access for her omniscient narrator who could open the monastery to her readers, male and female alike.²³

²³ Ruskin, "Lord Lindsay on the History of Christian Art," Originally published in *Quarterly Review* 81 (1847): 1-57, *Works of Ruskin*, 12:166-248, here 237-240. In his praise of the human Mary in the large *Annunciation*, Ruskin directly contradicts his critique of Raphael's human Madonnas and their excessive naturalism (see Chapter 2); I am leaving it to the Ruskin critics to sort out Ruskin's inconsistencies in the 1840s. For other moments in the off-limits area of San Marco, see esp. *Romola*, 298, with its reference to Fra Bartolomeo's fresco "of the divine child" in Savonarola's "bare cell," a work seen only by Lewes in San Marco. Ormond, "Angels and Archangels," 185, points out that this fresco was not only painted after Savonarola's death, but was transferred to the cell from elsewhere. To complicate things even more, the fresco Lewes saw in 1860 is *not* what is in Cell 12 today: Damiani, *San Marco*, 73, notes that the current fresco of Fra Bartolomeo's *Madonna and Child* actually came to San Marco in 1867, while one "with an analogous subject" (which Lewes would have seen) had been transferred to the cell in 1707. Both detached frescoes were supposedly painted by Fra Bartolomeo in 1514. See # 12 in fig. 23.

Unlike Eliot's narrator, though, the novel's heroine cannot access these corridors, and that is perhaps a more immediate sign of Eliot's willingness to protest, however subtly, that women do not have access to meaningful contact with art *or* with its spiritual significance. By having Romola experience being kept out of the monastery's inner sanctum in the 1490s, just like Eliot in 1860, becomes an integral part of her critique of women's constricted existence across more than 350 years. Again, Eliot's heroine is never just of her time, but also a stand-in for Victorian women—as a Renaissance woman with a profound humanist education, she has no outlet for her ideas and aspirations, and runs into very real physical and intellectual limitations. When she attempts to escape the confines of a woman's narrow life by running away to find a famous female humanist (Cassandra Fedelev), Savonarola personally intervenes. Just outside the walls of the city, he commands her to return to Florence and to her estranged husband Tito in the name of her duty to her community (and her husband), and she obeys. This renunciation of her ambition in the name of female self-sacrifice fits both Victorian and Renaissance scripts for women. Romola's failure to break out of her literal, spatial as well as out of her intellectual confinement closely resembles that of other Eliot heroines. But here, these restrictions are explicitly linked to her inability to access sacred art—not just physically, but also emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. This will become even more apparent below, in my discussion of Romola's response to the chapterhouse *Crucifixion*, to which she cannot relate because she is lacking the religious education to understand this art, as well as the opportunity to discuss it.²⁴

Unlike her heroine, Eliot *did* ultimately see the upstairs frescoes in 1869, on her last trip to Italy with Lewes, in the very year that the Museo di San Marco opened. Lewes noted in his diary on April 24, 1869: "Delight in the old pictures. Ghirlandaio & Giotto not lost their hold

²⁴ For an approach to the novel that reads gender restrictions in spatial terms, see Shona Elizabeth Simpson, "Mapping Romola: Physical Space, Women's Place," in *From Author to Text*, ed. Levine and Turner, 53-66.

over us! Went to Bankers & to San Marco the interior of which Polly had never seen. Fra Angelico.” But Eliot not only went to San Marco the moment she finally could; she saw her visit in a larger political context, as her friend Emily Davies makes clear. In the letter that also described Eliot’s turn away from Raphael and his “academical-ness,” Davies reported that Eliot

talked a great deal about Italy. ... She has seen *now*, the frescoes at San Marco. She began talking about them before I had time to ask her....
On the whole, her impressions of Italy were sadder this visit than before. She thought the voices of the people harsh & and that they seemed ill-tempered in their intercourse with each other, but the North she thought... more hopeful than the south. She thinks the dissolution of the monasteries right, but that the present monks ought not to have been expelled & that the confiscation is an example of the mean things government, like private people, will do when they are pressed for money.²⁵

In other words, the two women’s conversation about Fra Angelico vs. Raphael turned into one about her disappointment that the new, secular government of Italy expelled the monastic communities and confiscated their sacred art. This is deeply ironic, since it is this very takeover of church-owned art that, in the case of San Marco, enabled Eliot finally to see Fra Angelico’s frescoes in what was now a state-owned museum. But despite her own secular and skeptical attitude toward Christian religion, she felt enough of a connection to the sacred content of Fra Angelico’s art, which moved her deeply and “delighted” her (as per Davies) that she was willing to have the Catholic institutions that prompted and commissioned the initial creation of “Christian Art” retain some of their power in the new Italian nation state.

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Since all three women were not only able to visit San Marco’s chapterhouse, but could also assume that other women affluent enough to travel would be able to go there (if not to the second

²⁵ Lewes’s 1869 diary in the transcription by Michelle Eisenberg, “George Henry Lewes’s 1869 Diary and Journal: A Transcription and Annotation of Unpublished Holographs Held at the Beineke Library of Yale University,” *George Eliot - George Henry Lewes Studies* 67, no. 2 (2015): 93-226, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/georelioghstud.67.2.0093>, here 117 and also 118 for a second visit. Davies, *Collected Letters*, 316.

floor of the monastery), it is not surprising that Fra Angelico's *Crucifixion*, the largest and most famous of the publicly accessible frescoes on site, plays a key role in their writing. In highlighting this famous work, they again follow the cues of existing guidebooks, which all mention it prominently, but Jameson and Eastlake expand greatly on the existing explanations of the depicted scene in those guidebooks—while Eliot takes the diametrically opposite approach in *Romola*, since it serves her purpose to be especially vague in her references to the *Crucifixion*.²⁶

Beyond its status in the quattrocento canon, the fact that the *Crucifixion* was one of the few frescoes accessible to their female readers at San Marco (a fact only mentioned in Murray's *Handbook*, not by the writers of art handbooks) would have been important to Eastlake and especially Jameson in terms of connecting with their female readership. Even if they could not assume that all their readers would travel to Italy, focusing on a more public work that was also more readily available in the form of etchings was characteristic of Jameson in *Sacred and Legendary Arts*. Finally, there was a real need to explain the large group of saints and church fathers in the fresco, since they would have been unfamiliar to a mostly Protestant British audience. Glossing such figures was an explicit goal of the *Sacred and Legendary Art* series. And it is in terms of this pedestrian, pedantic, but useful explanation of religious content that both Jameson and Eastlake go noticeably beyond other handbooks.²⁷

²⁶ While not an issue for the exceptionally well-preserved frescoes at San Marco, the preservation and conservation of frescoes in particular was a major concern of British art critics (including Ruskin and the Eastlakes), which led to the founding of the Arundel Society, dedicated to art preservation and the dissemination of hard-to-see work in print. When it came to Italian art *in situ*, and especially to frescoes, a pervasive patronizing attitude towards the Italians assumed that British experts were better suited to preserving (and, in many cases, purchasing and exporting) these works. See Donata Levi, "'Let Agents Be Sent to All the Cities of Italy': British Public Museums and the Italian Art Market in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Law and Østermark-Johansen, *Victorian and Edwardian Responses*, 33-53, and Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 117-8.

²⁷ Murray's *Handbook* 1854:481-482; 1858:559. Kugler, *Handbook of Painting* (1851), 167; Burckhardt, *Cicerone* 1873:54; and German original, 1855:789-790; Rio, *Christian Art*, 149. Rio and Burckhardt are not illustrated; Murray and Kugler do not illustrate any frescoes. Brief explanations of the saints and church fathers are given by Murray's *Handbook* and by Burckhardt; Kugler only refers to them as "a number of saints" worshipping under the cross.

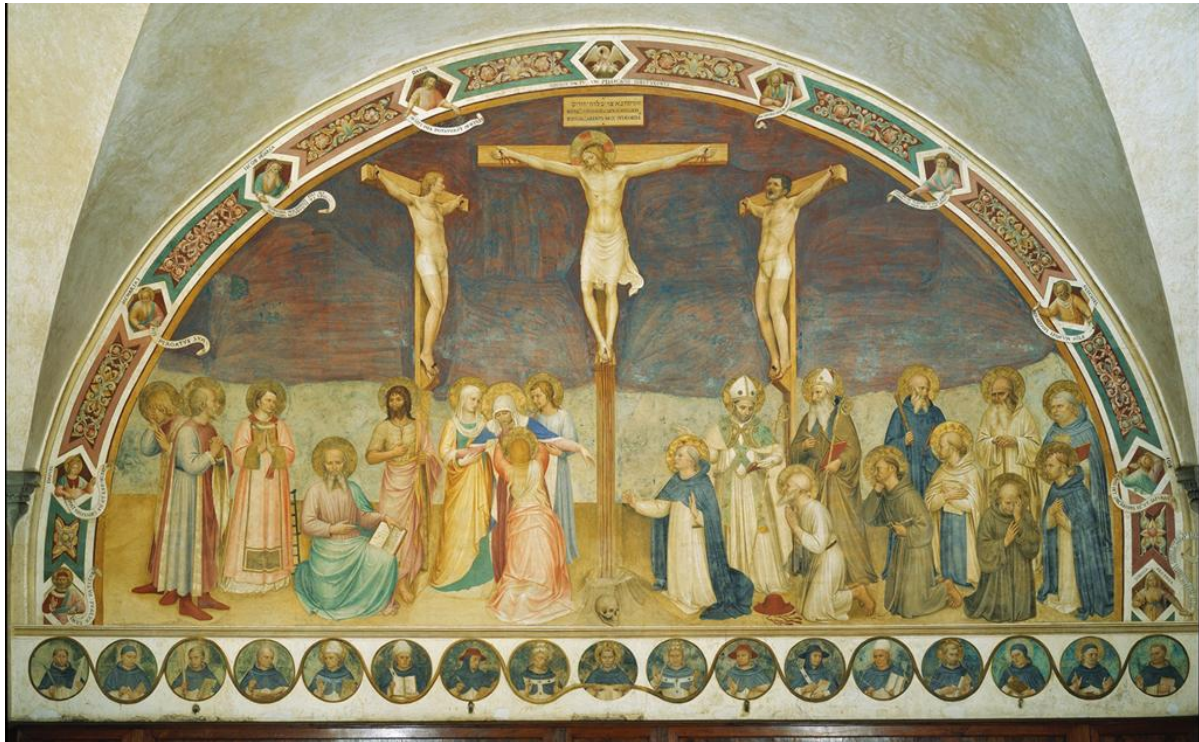


Figure 24. Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion with Saints and Church Fathers*. 1442. Chapterhouse of San Marco, Florence. Photograph by Mark Bauer.

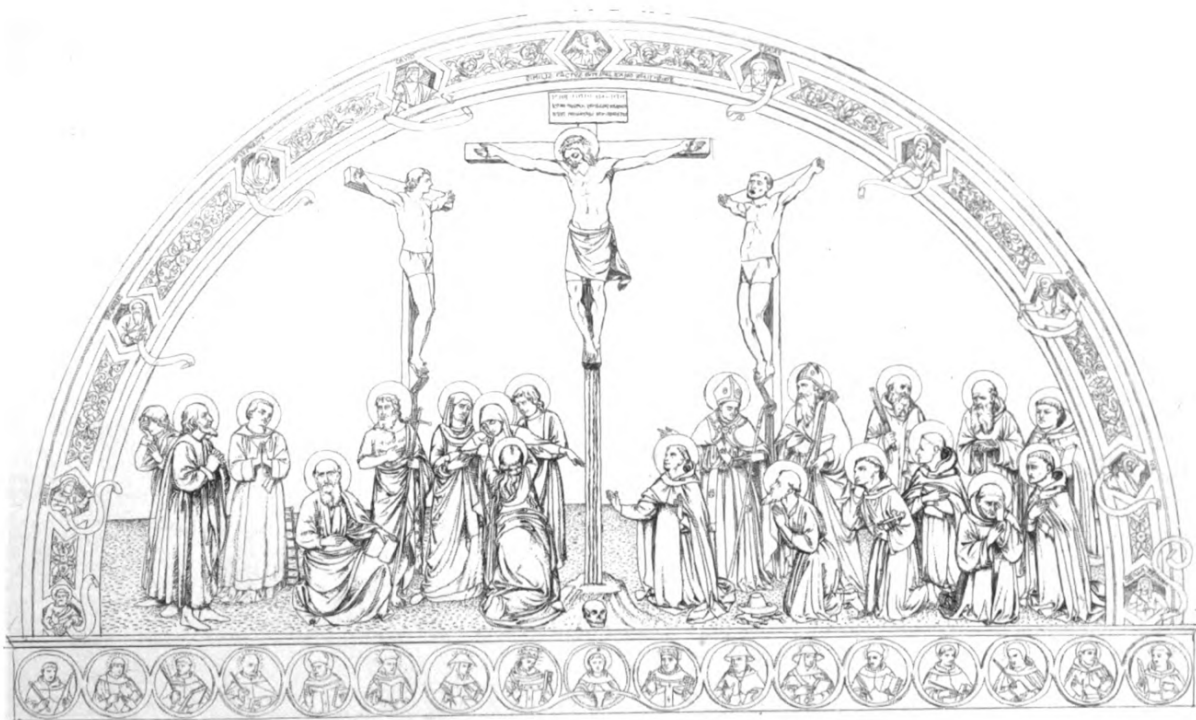


Figure 25: Edward Poynter (Attr.). Etching, entitled *Adoration of the Cross*, based on Fra Angelico's *Crucifixion*. 1864. In Jameson and Eastlake, *The History of Our Lord*, interleaf facing page 188.

Jameson did so, logically enough, in her 1850 *The Legends of the Monastic Orders*. Here, in a book explicitly concerned with what was most alien to Protestants about Catholicism, namely monasticism and the saints associated with various orders of monks and nuns, the *Crucifixion* served her as a prime example. She used it to exemplify “devotional” rather than “historical” sacred art—a distinction she made throughout the entire series, with Fra Angelico always firmly on the side of “devotional,” that is, the ahistorical and symbolic treatment of religious themes rather than the more naturalistic representation that adheres literally to biblical accounts. She stressed that such a “devotional” image, in which saints and church fathers from many centuries join the figures mentioned in the Gospels, needed to be understood in terms of its spatial and sociopolitical context.

In the case of the *Crucifixion* “on the wall of the Chapter House of St. Mark in Florence,” this context entailed that it “was painted in a convent dedicated to St. Mark; in the city of Florence; in the days of the first and greatest of the Medici, Cosmo and Lorenzo, and that it was the work of a Dominican friar, for the glory of the Dominican order.” This contextualization was followed by a detailed description of the line-up of saints, including “the patrons of the Medici family,” i.e. St. Damian, St. Cosmo, and St. Laurence; St. Mark for the monastery, and St. John the Baptist as patron saint of Florence, as well as various monastic founders on the other side of the cross. Jameson actually skipped the central group with the fainting virgin, St. John the Evangelist and two Marys, simply calling it “the usual group,” presuming her readers’ familiarity from previous discussions. As she moved from the left of the spectator to the right, past St. Dominic and other saints related to different orders, she concluded with the last two saints who

“close this sublime and wonderful composition” on the very right: St. Peter Martyr and behind him St. Thomas Aquinas, representing “the *sanctity* and the *learning* of the Dominican order.”²⁸

Jameson claimed for the *Crucifixion* that “thus considered, we may read it like a sacred poem, and every separate figure is a study of character,” but her pedestrian description was not trying to be a “sacred poem”—quite unlike her Ruskinian outburst about the angel’s wings discussed earlier. Only at the very end did she allow herself a muted evaluation: “I hardly know any thing [sic] in painting finer than the pathetic beauty of the head of the penitent thief, and the mingled fervour and intellectual refinement in the head of St. Bernard.” Her analysis embodies the kind of prosaic and practical parsing suitable for a handbook. Someone viewing the original, book in hand, would have been able to identify specific saints and church fathers, while the reader at home could still understand it as a key generic example, even without an illustration. Here as elsewhere in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, Jameson tried to strike a balance between making her books affordable and providing images: *Monastic Orders* does not feature an etching of the *Crucifixion* (and the details and size would have prevented her from tracing a line drawing for the very simple wood engravings the series contained). But she could refer her readers to a recent reproduction that is “likely to be in the hands of many;” in a book published by the Arundel Society, whose mission included widely disseminating affordable reproductions.²⁹

²⁸ Jameson, “Preface” and “Introduction,” *Monastic Orders*, xiv-xv and xxx-xxxii.

²⁹ The book in question was a slim text, illustrating the relevant Vasari Life: *The Life of Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole*, trans. Giovanni Aubrey Bezzi (London: Arundel Society, 1850), and would have been fairly widely available. Plate 1 (of 20) is the *Crucifixion* from the chapterhouse; only one other illustration, Plate 2, is from San Marco—a detail from the *Coronation of the Virgin* in Cell 9 (Christ crowning the Virgin, without the hemicycle of six saints below). The engraver George Scharf (1820-1895) was a noted draughtsman who served as the “secretary” (later renamed director) of the National Portrait Gallery from 1857 to his death. He contributed the engravings to the 1851 Kugler *Handbook*, viii, and is thanked by Eastlake for unspecified help in the preface of *Lord*. See Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 120-121, and Helena Michie and Robyn Warhol, *Love Among the Archives: Writing the Lives of Sir George Scharf, Victorian Bachelor* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). On the Arundel Society’s stand-alone reproductions and books, see Victoria Button, “The Arundel Society: Techniques in the Art of Copying,” *V&A Conservation Journal* 23 (April 1997), n.p., <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-23/the-arundel-society-techniques-in-the-art-of-copying/>.

Jameson used this detached and simple descriptive style throughout the *Sacred and Legendary Art* series, but it is especially prevalent in the *Monastic Orders*, where she stressed from the beginning that many of the works discussed are of historical rather than aesthetic interest. The underlying subtext of this detachment is that the uniquely Catholic emphasis on saints and monasteries required Jameson to strike a carefully neutral pose, so as to neither be accused of being too Catholic by her Protestant readers, or biased against Catholic practice to such an extent that she would be accused of distorting the function of Catholic sacred art. This restraint meant that while she occasionally praised a specific pose or expression for its emotional content (like the “pathetic beauty of the penitent thief”), Jameson typically refrained from making the grand connections Ruskin did between the stylistic details of Fra Angelico’s work and the purity of his divine inspiration. She seemed especially reticent about emotionally stirring content in the case of the *Crucifixion*, where, as noted, she did not even draw attention to the Virgin Mary’s response to Christ’s death (part “of the usual group”), even though the variations on this motif were discussed at length in a very engaged language in *Legends of the Madonna*.³⁰

Elizabeth Eastlake in turn expanded on Jameson’s gloss in the *History of Our Lord*, in which Fra Angelico again (and again unsurprisingly) plays a major role. As noted in the introduction, she wrote over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the text, including almost all of the second volume. She also chose the illustrators for it, two of whom were women, and of the over forty references to Fra Angelico’s work throughout, most are Eastlake’s rather than Jameson’s. The frescoes at San Marco beyond the chapterhouse are occasionally mentioned in Volume 2, which covers the

³⁰ Jameson, *Madonna*, 305-318; *Madonna* 189 and 300 refers to three additional cell frescoes briefly, the first with a wood engraving: the small *Annunciation with St. Peter Martyr* (Cell 3), the *Transfiguration* (Cell 6), and *The Last Supper* (Cell 35), although whether these are based on seeing these on site or not is impossible to say. The famous large *Annunciation* in the corridor of San Marco is not discussed, possibly because it was boarded up in the 1850s, when part of the monastery was used as barracks (see Murray’s 1854:482; 1858:599; Burekhardt, Cicerone, 1855:790)—but as his review of Lindsay made clear, Ruskin had studied it carefully it in the mid-1840s.

Passion of Christ: Eastlake made a brief reference to the fresco from Cell 28 in her discussion of scenes of Christ carrying the cross (numbered in fig.23), and also included a wood engraving the overdoor fresco in the cloister, *Christ Received by Two Dominicans* (= in fig. 22) Here, Eastlake is very specific about the spatial context of the monastery that transforms the motif of the risen Christ with the disciples at Emmaus by giving it a new devotional (and ahistorical) context: “Fra Angelico painted this subject in the Convent of S. Marco, over the door by which travellers were admitted to entertainment; pointing the beautiful moral further, for his particular purpose, by transforming the disciples into pious Dominican monks.”³¹

But beyond these minor references, Eastlake’s text showcased an extensive description of the *Crucifixion* or *Adoration of the Cross* and a full-page interleaf etching (fig. 25). The fresco even received a special mention in the table of contents as the “Doctrinal Crucifixion, by Fra Angelico,” making him the only artist mentioned here by name. Eastlake, like Jameson, argued that this kind of “devotional Crucifixion” “requires a general explanation,” and devoted several pages to delivering it—again starting with San Marco’s history, but then stressing the division between the public frescoes and those meant for private religious devotion:

This newly-erected convent had been bestowed in 1436 on the Order of the Dominicans, who migrated from Fiesole here, by Cosmo de’Medici. In gratitude for the gift, the pious hand of Fra Beato gave it a further consecration by works which breathe the airs of heaven, and which can never find a higher development upon this earth. The cells, the cloisters, the refectory, were all hallowed by scenes from the life of our Lord, conceived in that abstract form in which holy men living in seclusion and self-abasement, and devoted to their Order, might be supposed to view them; while the hall of the chapter-house gave room for that great event to which all others converge as the centre of the Christian system.

³¹ Lord, “Preface,” (dated March 26, 1864), v, vii. The artists were Clara Lane (drawings on wood), two wood engravers (a Miss Mateaux and a Mr. Cooper, both unidentified) and, for all but two etchings, Edward Poynter. Ernstrom, “Eastlake’s *History of Our Lord*,” 754-5, 776. For the overdoor fresco, see Lord, 2:289-90, with engraving; Cell 28, see Lord, 2:104, with engraving.

Here, Eastlake could pinpoint the chapterhouse fresco as the thematic and social center of both the monastery and of the religious “system” of Christian religion. It makes sense that her focus was the art in the communal space, somewhat more like a church, rather than the secluded monks’ cells, given that Eastlake, doctrinally a strict Anglican, was even more intent than Jameson at providing a description of monastic life that kept this exclusively Catholic practice at a distance. This focus also reinforced that the *Crucifixion* functions as the “great event” in which not only the story of Christ and the assembled members of the monastic community, but Christians of all denominations ecumenically “converge” for her, enabling her to signal to her readers that this fresco is recognizable and reassuringly “Christian” beyond an exclusively Catholic practice.

In that same context, Eastlake ensured that her explanation of the figures was not just a line-up of the unfamiliar saints, by beginning with the three more familiar crucified figures at the top and a more detailed explanation of Jameson’s “usual group” of the fainting Madonna, supported by St. John and a Mary, with Mary Magdalen kneeling before her. Eastlake noted specifically that the figures surrounding the Virgin Mary are the only ones who see “the falling mother” while all others are “in the wrapt [sic] contemplation of the dead Lord of souls.” Eastlake then walked her readers through the church fathers and saints to the (viewer’s) right of the cross (briefly highlighting a doubt about the identity of the Franciscan who kneels facing the viewer). She then explained the entire “semi-circular framework” of prophets around the top of the fresco, complete with translations of the Latin inscriptions, as well as the horizontal row of important Dominicans at the bottom, which she actually called “the pious *esprit de corps* which, next to religion, animated the painter,” a glimpse of Protestant irreverence for the sanctity of

religious brotherhood (here demoted to a secular sense of solidarity among soldiers) that might not have sat well with the more denominationally tolerant Jameson.³²

The expansion from Jameson's brief two pages in *Monastic Orders* to this detailed six-page description demonstrates that Eastlake (at least for an iconographic handbook) borders on the excessive in her attention to detail. Even if it is not detail of facture, this precision is the hallmark of a connoisseur who has closely inspected the original fresco, perhaps taking her cue from the level of detail she would have seen in her husband's notebooks. But while this attention to detail is evidence of her growing investment in scholarly expertise, her overall reading and evaluation was still in line with the didactic aim of providing basic information about important canonical art. Like Jameson, Eastlake was cautious with her aesthetic judgments, certainly not venturing into Ruskin territory with any effusive language. But she did go beyond the generic descriptors she had translated for Kugler's handbook, who had simply said that the *Crucifixion* was "one of the most beautiful works of art existing... a *chef d'oeuvre* of the master."³³

Eastlake drew attention to the religious dimension that Kugler had little interest in: She equated style with faith in calling the fresco equally "unique in beauty, fervour of thought and piety" and therefore a great "head and model of all this class" of devotional or doctrinal crucifixions. But as she sums up, she again draws attention to the central figure of the fainting Madonna, "an exception to this class" precisely because it highlighted the "historical" (i.e. Biblical) group at the center in spite of this devotional focus. This "historical" element is, in turn, more easily aligned with a more Protestant and literal as opposed to a doctrinally Catholic

³²*History of Our Lord*, 2:188-193. The Franciscan facing the viewer is "supposed to be St. Gualbertus, while some have suggested that the painter's own humility and grief, though not his own figure, are meant to be depicted." Jameson in *Monastic Orders* simply identified him as St. John Gualberto, as did Murray's *Handbook*.

³³ Kugler, *Handbook*, 167.

focus. In other words, for Eastlake, more than for Jameson, the *Crucifixion* aligned with her Anglican notions about the best kind of Christian art.³⁴

Although Eliot had little interest in this doctrinaire Anglicanism, the group around the Madonna also struck her most powerfully when she first visited San Marco, only able to see the *Crucifixion* and the cloister frescoes, where the *Christ on the Cross Adored by St. Dominic* on the north wall (+ in fig. 22) also caught her attention. In “Recollections of Italy, 1860” she noted:

In the Chapter-house, now used as a guard room, is a large crucifixion, with the inimitable group of the fainting mother, upheld by St John and the younger Mary, and clasped round by the kneeling Magdalen. The group of adoring, sorrowing Saints on the right hand are admirable for earnest truthfulness of representation. The Christ in this fresco is not good, but there is a deeply impressive original Crucified Christ outside in the Cloisters: St. Dominick is clasping the cross and looking upward at the agonized Saviour, whose real pale, calmly enduring face is quite unlike any other Christ I have seen.

Eliot shows no particular interest in the identity of the many saints and church fathers, their political context, or the overall composition, all of which were so important to Jameson and Eastlake in their handbooks. Instead, she is intrigued by what she thinks of as the realism of emotional expression, even as her language, as so often in the “Recollections,” echoes that of the guidebooks—here, specifically Kugler’s appraisal of the saints, since he speaks about their “wonder, sorrow, and ecstasy ... as they gaze upwards at the crucified Saviour.”³⁵

The “earnest *truthfulness* of representation” of such “sorrow” in the *Crucifixion* and also the “real” face of Christ in *Christ on the Cross Adored by St. Dominic* are terms that are of the utmost importance for Eliot, given her intense engagement with literary realism and its links to the visual arts. The paradox of attaching the concept of “realism” to primitive Christian art and especially Fra Angelico is clearly present here. The term is obviously not used to denote

³⁴ Eastlake, *Lord*, 188, 193. On Eastlake’s more dogmatic Protestantism, see Ernstrom, “Eastlake’s *Lord*,” and Palmer, “Fountain.”

³⁵ Eliot, “Recollections of Italy, 1860,” *Journals*, 356-7, Kugler, *Handbook* (1851), 167.

naturalism in terms of painterly technique or historical accuracy, but instead gets at the idea that the artist conveys grief to the viewer with an emotional accuracy that triggers an empathetic reaction. Eliot would have known from her readings that it is the very lack of realism in Fra Angelico—the “devotional” treatment of sacred subjects—that art critics tended to praise for expressing the “true” and “real” grief of humanity at the death of Christ. But for her, this is not a spiritual (certainly not a doctrinally Christian) but an emotional “truth,” transferred to the viewer by empathy (which the Victorians would have called “sympathy”) with an image. This kind of powerful emotional impact intrigued Eliot in the visual arts as much as in literary texts. Art criticism that sought to construct a spiritual connection between the modern viewer and alien “Christian art,” most notably Ruskin’s effusive praise of Fra Angelico, enabled her to appreciate quattrocento art as possessing an emotional realism that sidestepped the conventional markers of naturalistic representation. While Eliot, both in her essays and in her novel, was deeply invested in the 19th-century discussion of literary realism in terms of both historical accuracy and verisimilitude (i.e. naturalism in the art-historical sense), the art that she builds into *Romola* enabled her to explore the emotional “truth” that she saw expressed in the visual art of the quattrocento.³⁶

Eliot did not simply set *Romola* in the 1490s in order to draw attention to pre-Raphaelite art, of course. First and foremost, she wanted to write a historical novel about Savonarola (including the political parallels to modern Italy) and in doing so still construct a plot that was plausible for this time and place. She also wanted a heroine who could suggest parallels between Renaissance and Victorian women. But the time frame and setting of her novel did enable her to

³⁶ See Witemeyer, *Eliot and the Visual Arts*, esp. 33-43; on Eliot, empathy, and sympathy, see Rebecca Mitchell, *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2011) and Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, “George Eliot’s Conception of Sympathy,” *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 40:1(1985): 23-42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044834>. The role of visual art for Eliot’s idea of sympathy remains underdiscussed.

integrate references to quattrocento art that she admired greatly and had studied carefully, and she was ready to provide her readers with cultural history lessons on the art of the period. Many of the art references in the novel are made by the narrator with hindsight knowledge, and they are typically anchored in the famous names of masters that were recognizable to her readers from the guidebooks. But her references tend to stress the familiar rather than alienating Catholic images, especially when it came to religious imagery. The most pertinent example for San Marco is the references to Fra Angelico's fresco of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, as seen by Tito in the upstairs corridor on his way to Savonarola's cell. In her description of this painting, quoted above, Eliot had sidestepped the devotional setting with the surrounding saints, thus not emphasizing the distance of her Protestant, British readers from an alien Catholic past, but instead directing their focus to the Madonna in the "ethereal world" of Heaven, a figure that can speak to a contemporary 19th-century audience. Sidestepping the doctrinal details enabled her to focus on what she could assume a reader might appreciate as universally moving (in Jameson's terms, as "poetic" or "aesthetic") in the newly revered early Christian art—accessible not only to 15th century "Catholics" but also to 19th century Protestants and even agnostics like herself.³⁷

But when Eliot attempts to show how Renaissance art is perceived in the Renaissance, rather than having her narrator provide a modern perspective, she depicts it rather pointedly as mostly seen by and commented on by men. It is the men in the novel who refer to art—for example when Tito and the "barber poet" Nello discuss Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise* (the East doors of the baptistery in Florence), or when Nello remarks to Tito that Romola looks

³⁷ The allusions run the gamut from Giotto's campanile, Brunelleschi's dome, and Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel frescoes to a few forward-looking (but very rarely absolutely anachronistic) references to Leonardo and Michelangelo. The one and only Raphael reference comes with respect to a character, Bernardo Dovizi, who will later be portrayed by Raphael as "the keen-eyed Cardinal da Bibbiena" (*Romola*, 254). Fra Lippo Lippi and some very young future masters (Andrea del Sarto, Ghirlandaio, and Fra Bartolomeo) are also mentioned. Eliot's goal is almost always to create an overall atmosphere, and as with her allusions to literary figures and humanist scholars, she typically does not gloss or explain them further. Eliot, *Romola*, 610.

as pale as “that fainting Madonna of Fra Giovanni’s,” a direct reference to the Virgin Mary in the *Crucifixion* in San Marco’s chapterhouse. Romola, with her unusual education, is the only female who is seen responding directly to art, but even for her, Eliot emphasizes how hard it is for her as a woman to see, interpret and understand art. Romola’s physical, emotional and intellectual struggle to understand art, especially sacred art, extends beyond being denied physical access to San Marco’s inner sanctum, since Romola does not even really take in (much less interpret) the art she *could* theoretically see at San Marco,. She is emphatically described as not even noticing the huge fresco of the *Crucifixion* (5,50m x 9,50m) when she first enters the room. As she approaches her dying brother there, she is only “*just* conscious” that “in the background there was a crucified form *rising high and pale* on the frescoed wall, and *pale faces of sorrow looking out* from it below” (my emphasis). The language about sorrow, pallor, and a looming Christ on the cross echoes that of Eliot’s notes in her “Recollections” (and in Kugler). But whereas Eliot observed the painting carefully, Romola is put in no position to pay attention to the art in the room. Instead, she focuses on her brother Dino, who tells her of the frightening visions he has had about her impending marriage. Even as the narrator later comments on the work once more, telling us that the “pale faces of sorrow in the fresco on the opposite wall seemed to have come nearer, and to make one company with the pale face on the bed,” Romola does not see it, but devotes all her attention to Dino, as he speaks his last words, not realizing that her grief parallels that of the sorrowing saints and, in particular, exactly the “fainting Madonna of Fra Giovanni’s” that Nello later recognizes in Romola.³⁸

Romola’s inability to comprehend, or even clearly see, the fresco in the Chapterhouse leaves the role of knowledgeable interpreter of art to the reader, and unsurprisingly, a number of

³⁸ Eliot, *Romola*, 76-77, 470 (with note on 723), 209, 216. Eliot repeatedly emphasizes the frequently-noted pallor of the frescoes, which distinguish them so from Fra Angelico’s brilliantly-colored altarpieces on wood panel.

astute readers, including Leonee Ormond and Hilary Fraser, have suggested important ways in which the *Crucifixion* underscores important motifs in the novel. But Romola herself, perhaps like modern secular viewers who lack the Christian context, cannot see or interpret this art—partly because of her “pagan” upbringing, since she was raised by a humanist scholar and skeptic to disregard Christian religion as superstition. When she later returns to the chapterhouse in order to plead with Savonarola for the life of her godfather, who is about to be executed, the fact that Romola cannot see the art is reinforced, because even then, “the intense occupation of her mind with the present” prevents her from remembering the night of her brother’s death clearly. Importantly, Romola is again not looking at the fresco in this scene—quite the contrary, *she* is the one “once more *looked at* by those sad frescoed figures which had seemed to be mourning with her at the death of her brother Dino” (my emphasis).³⁹

While Romola cannot access, see, or interpret the *Crucifixion*, she *is* able to both look at and comment on secular art—specifically, in several discussions with the painter Piero di Cosimo on his works and on Savonarola’s call to destroy art in the bonfire of the vanities. In stark contrast to being denied access to Savonarola’s cell in San Marco, Romola, “by special favor, was allowed to intrude upon the painter without previous notice” in his studio or workshop. In a memorable scene that takes place in his workshop (accompanied by one of the illustrations to *Romola* by Frederic Leighton, fig. 26), Romola looks at a portrait he has painted

³⁹ Ormond, “Angels and Archangels,” 180-90, claims that the *Crucifixion* fresco forcefully “strikes” Romola when she first sees it, and when she sees it again, “recognizes a parallel.” But it is the readers, not Romola herself, who recognize that “one death scene with a sorrowing woman mirrors another,” and Ormond obliquely admits this when she points out that the reference to the *Crucifixion* is “straightforward enough for a *reader* who looks at the work or at a reproduction to see the point immediately.” Romola is not that kind of reader. Fraser’s interpretation of the scene in *Women Writing Art History*, 81, makes even more explicit that it is the reader who is being asked to draw a parallel between the “pale faces” in the fresco and Romola’s own pale face. Eliot’s technique “gestures back to early Italian fresco series that tell biblical stories in panels that the viewer must put together”—the very thing Romola cannot do, although Eliot’s readers might be expected to. See Eliot, *Romola*, 570-1; also 238, where Romola recalls the *Crucifixion* but is immediately distracted by Tito’s voice and their surroundings—the loggia at the top of her father’s house—and reflects on the “strange, bewildering transition from those pale images of sorrow and death to this bright youthfulness.”

of her father Bardo as the blinded Oedipus. An attentive spectator, she gives this artwork “her whole attention,” “standing in long silence before it,” and tells Piero, like a consummate patron, “you have done what I wanted. You have given it more of the listening look.” She adds with tears in her eyes that she is very grateful. This, however, triggers a misogynist temper tantrum from Piero, who says “that’s what I can’t bear in you women... you are always pouring out



Fig. 26. Frederic Leighton. *The Painted Record*. 1862. Wood Engraving. To accompany Chapter 28 in the serialized publication of *Romola* in *Cornhill Magazine*. The Victorian Web.

feelings where there’s no call for them.” He argues that she commissioned the painting and paid for it—why should she be grateful for his work on top of that? This outburst is typically read as

Piero's curmudgeonly attempt to cover for inadvertently letting Romola see a disturbing oil-sketch of Tito—it depicts a mythological motif with symbolic significance for the novel, with Tito as Sinon betraying Priam during the Trojan War, based on a scene from the *Aeneid*. But the implicit misogyny is clearly directed at women “pouring out feelings” in response to art—the very response that Eliot would have considered both legitimate and important, given her own reaction to works of art like the *Sistine Madonna* or Fra Angelico's *Crucifixion*, her preoccupation with empathy, and her admiration of Ruskin's rapturous appreciation of the art her endorsed. But as Piero dismisses this response as too emotional, he undermines Romola's confidence in herself as a naïve, but also attentive, intuitive, and ultimately independent interpreter of his (secular) work.⁴⁰

But—and this is an important “but”—while Fra Angelico's frescoes in San Marco are real, the paintings Romola finds meaningful and understandable are not just secular; they are fiction, just as Piero's “studio” was invented by Eliot, loosely based on Vasari's account of the painter's habits. Only one painting by Piero mentioned in *Romola* (*Venus, Mars and Cupid*) actually exists, while she invented four paintings for him that suited her purpose in the novel. All of them notably feature themes from Graeco-Roman mythology, and thus emphasize the tension between Fra Angelico's “medieval” orientation towards Giotto's sacred art, and the neoclassical interests of the artists, writers, and humanist scholars of the 1490s that point forward to the High Renaissance. Even though the real Piero produced sacred as well as mythologically-themed paintings, Eliot chooses him to represent the new secular, neoclassical trend, which serves to

⁴⁰ Eliot, *Romola*, 320, 322-3. Eliot's fictionalized portrait of Piero is loosely based on Vasari, *Lives*, trans. du Vere, 4:250-269; like Vasari, Eliot often stresses his eccentricities, but they are reinterpreted Romantically as signs of (crabby) genius; as in many 19th-century novels, “the artist in his studio” at times serves Eliot as a spokesperson for “the artist” (including herself as author); Piero thus often voices highly anachronistic ideas. His debate with Romola about Savonarola's bonfire is particularly important in this context; *Romola* 500-502.

give Romola, who lacks a Christian upbringing, access to his art—she understands at a glance that she is Antigone to her father’s Oedipus and Ariadne to Tito’s Bacchus (even though she lacks the context to understand that Piero has long recognized Tito as the traitorous Sinon).⁴¹

These fictional paintings enable Romola, however briefly, to voice her opinion about art. One might argue that Eliot plays it safe here, in that Romola’s interpretation of fictional works cannot possibly undermine conventional assessments. And yet, at least momentarily, a woman viewer and buyer, in a studio that is both a commercial and an aesthetic space, is given the freedom to see art with fresh eyes and react to works based on her own ideas rather than on instructions provided by her father, by the artist, or—to jump forward to the Victorian woman traveler—by the author of a handbook. In creating fictional paintings, Eliot takes that same freedom, creating motifs that she did not see represented in existing painting. I make so much of Romola’s unscripted response, however naïve and momentary, because it is so exceptional in a novel that otherwise emphasizes that the heroine cannot see and understand art, and that especially sacred art is incomprehensible to her.

Ultimately, however, Eliot takes back the idea that emerges from the scene in the studio—that Romola could be free to “read” any work of art independently and with confidence. The scenes with Piero in the studio and also during the Bonfire of the Vanities are directly undermined by Romola’s self-sacrificing retreat into a culture (a cult) of feminine usefulness. The novel’s epilogue, set in 1509, shows Romola in convent-like confinement in a new home far

⁴¹ *Romola*, 245. It is not clear whether Eliot saw *Venus, Mars and Cupid*, housed in Berlin’s Gemäldegalerie, but she could have done so in 1855 or 1858 (Piero is never mentioned in her journals). Piero wants Tito to be his model for Sinon the first time he sees him, which highlights his ability to see through Tito because he is an artist with superior instincts; *Romola*, 87. Witemeyer, *Visual Arts*, 166, takes for granted that Romola is inspecting the portrait of Tito as Sinon in Leighton’s wood engraving, but does not offer any evidence. On the fictional paintings, see Witemeyer, *Visual Arts* 56-60; Leonee Ormond, “Romola’s Artists,” *George Eliot Review: Journal of the George Eliot Fellowship* 44 (Jan 2012): 16-23, <https://georgeeliotreview.org>, and “Angels and Archangels;” and Houston, *Radical Grandmothers*, 132-137.

from the city center, just inside the city walls. She is taking care of her (deceased) husband's mistress and her children, leading a life of ideal sacrifice, but also one in which there is little room for a woman to explore art (or scholarship). In her later fiction, this contrast between Eliot's own ability to access and judge art and her heroines' inability to do the same only becomes more pronounced. As Eliot herself becomes more confident in the way she builds references to art into her fiction, characters like Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* and Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* are completely denied the ability or privilege to judge art on their own terms. This raises crucial questions about Eliot's double-edged attitude towards women's experience and interpretation of art. On the one hand, her refusal to grant them an autonomous response can be read as a realistically pessimistic view of the obstacles women experienced, and as an implied call for better education and better access to art—the kind of call that Jameson repeatedly made. But on the other hand, Eliot herself did find ways to access visual art and its history, and to disseminate her ideas about them through her fiction—which has made many readers wonder why she consistently denied her heroines that same ability.⁴²

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Their approach to the Monastery of San Marco demonstrates how determined Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot were to find routes to access Fra Angelico's art, drawing on social or political connections (Jameson's marchioness), peddling art historical credentials (Eastlake with the *Padre Priore*), or relying on a male proxy (Eliot's companion, Lewes). That they were so keen to

⁴² Some scholars, for example Adams, *Our Lady*, 177-184, see Romola's nun-like existence as a kind of matriarchal utopia, in the context of feminist interpretations of convent life as a form of empowerment and independence for women—one that certainly fascinated Jameson, among others. But Simpson, "Mapping Romola," takes a more pessimistic view, reinforced by Eliot's addition of one more fictional painting, *Romola*, 675-6: a "small full-length portrait" of Savonarola above a sort of altar, which literally enshrines both his position (as the fatherly advisor who made Romola take on the Madonna-like role of dutiful mother-of-all) and as art made for the altar, for sacred purposes circumscribed by men. It is not an accident that the last to bring flowers for decorating Savonarola's portrait is Piero di Cosimo, who as a male can give an artist's imprimatur even to the man who encouraged his followers to destroy art and literature.

see Fra Angelico's frescoes demonstrates their awareness of recent art criticism, which had newly begun to value the quattrocento and also begun to prize seeing originals and understanding their period context as crucial to their meaning. How their experience manifested itself in their respective writing also makes clear that discussing Fra Angelico's art was a complicated negotiation for women, especially when it came to writing about a space for contemplating art like San Marco—one that officially barred women. All three sidestepped this problem to some extent by foregrounding the chapterhouse *Crucifixion*, which did not raise questions of access, and which could be appropriated by all three women by focusing on its non-Catholic, non-doctrinal qualities—be it its non-denominational piety (for Jameson), its legibility as Protestant literalism (for Eastlake) or its emotional expressiveness (for Eliot). As was the case with public plazas and museums, Eliot turned to fiction to critique women's lack of access to sacred art, and in doing so drew attention to the ways women (even in the present) might be barred both physically and intellectually from art that they desired to see. Even though Jameson and Eastlake did not articulate such a critique, together, the three writers' responses epitomize the complex and manifold ways in which Victorian women writers maneuvered an art world in which they were encouraged to view and like the visual arts—especially sacred art—while they were also expected to accept being excluded from qualifying as expert interpreters of this art because they were women.

CONCLUSION

A Backward Glance

When I set out to research what art Anna Jameson, Elizabeth Eastlake, and George Eliot saw on their trips to see Renaissance art in Florence, and what they wrote about this art, I already knew a lot about Victorian gender scripts, but very little about how they affected the viewing and writing about art. The premises of the study were as follows: first, that as nineteenth-century women, Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot were excluded from certain realms of knowledge, agency, and influence; second, that their exclusion would be partial and complicated, given their privilege in terms of class, nationality, and education; and third, that this made a difference in how they experienced art and how they wrote about it. My goal was to figure out what exactly this difference was, and what cultural and political contexts were most relevant to the way this difference manifested.

I began by showing how changing modes of travel, new avenues for publication, and the beginnings of art history as an academic discipline provided the framework for the three women's careers as art writers. Then, by taking a close look at how they experienced Renaissance art in three representative (public, semi-public, sacred) sites in Florence, I traced how their gender and their status as professional authors shaped what they wrote. I factored in contexts specific to each of these spaces: how the British response to the Italian Risorgimento and to the Italian Renaissance impacted their response to public art in the Piazza della Signoria; how the emergence of national museums shaped their approach to seeing canonical masterpieces in the Palazzo Pitti; and how the shift in Victorian taste to the Quattrocento or "pre-Raphaelite" art affected the way they looked at sacred art at the Monastery of San Marco.

These intertwined contexts have made clear how difficult it can be to isolate gender as a factor when there are so many complicating parameters. This is especially true because following the Victorian gender script meant, at least in part, that women were *not* supposed to draw attention to gender limitations as such, and had to be circumspect about expressing unconventional or controversial opinions. I should have expected that Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot would not typically address the fact that they were traveling and writing as women. But it still took me by surprise that all three opted to repeat or at best amplify already-established opinions, and that they rarely protested the limitations they were under—even when they were forced to notice them, for example at the monastery of San Marco. I had hoped to find the occasional passage that would spell out what it meant to see the art of Florence as a woman, or that seeing this art for themselves on site resulted in a new discovery—say, of a work they were not already familiar with, an artist not already celebrated and vetted, maybe even a female artist. Instead, I learned that, at least in their public writing, they rarely did so.

Their private writing did occasionally provide a glimpse of less prefabricated and preapproved opinions on art, publishing, politics, and sometimes also on gender. But even their private writing indicates that they were generally interested in already-famous, canonical art. But it does demonstrate that they were each engaged in an intense, serious, quasi-academic research program of their own making when they investigated the art of Florence, even though in their published work they downplayed and disguised their expertise, hiding it behind modesty tropes. Seeing art *in situ* or in the famous museums and conducting research in libraries and archives was important to them. But the genres in which women writers were published restricted what they could say about what they saw and found. Handbooks were “only” meant to summarize the most pertinent information; translating was “only” conveying the expert knowledge of others;

fiction was “only” telling a story. Everyone thought Michelangelo surpassed the *David* in his later work; everyone liked Raphael’s Madonnas for their sweet perfection; everyone believed Fra Angelico was inspired by a pure faith. Their conventionality meant that I needed to revise my preconceptions and reevaluate how 19th-century women and specifically these three writers, operating in different social circles and different genres, approached art. In the course of doing so, I developed new questions about the role of originality, individual taste, and the canon in these women’s writing.

For Jameson, who was so intent on reaching a broad readership, originality didn’t matter. The scholars who insist on her trailblazer status and others who dwell on her conventional, derivative methods are alike in prioritizing originality in a way that Jameson simply did not. She wanted to express what was urgently important to her mission of making art understandable, be it biography or technique, iconography, or the ideal, whether that information came from her research or someone else’s. She matter-of-factly insisted that she, as a woman, always writing as “Mrs. Jameson,” was uniquely prepared and ready to pursue this mission of educator. She helped many, including many women, to maneuver museums, galleries, churches, and exhibitions, without patronizing them. And she was receptive to the ideas of many women who were more progressive and unconventional in a number of ways—like her friend Otilie von Goethe in Germany, Bessie Rayner Parkes and the other women behind the *English Woman’s Journal* in Britain, or Harriet Hosmer, the expat American sculptor who lived and worked in Rome. It was thus disheartening to see that, despite her confidence in her expertise and her ability to convey it to a broad public, in her later and better-researched work, she seemed increasingly cautious in her pronouncements. In comparing the naïve but self-possessed remarks in her earliest work, the *Diary of an Ennuyée*, to the ubiquitous hedging phrases and modesty tropes in *Sacred and*

Legendary Art, I saw an outspoken, energetic woman deliberately fit herself into the small space she could inhabit as a woman writing on art. I cannot help but see this as a product of gender pressure—not just the difference between a twenty-something writing fiction in the Romantic era and a middle-aged career author who carefully integrates art-historical scholarship into her nonfiction guides. Still, her determined and democratizing populism and her fierce determination to make her living by writing about art made me admire and respect her.

It was easy, by contrast, to dislike Elizabeth Eastlake for her classism and growing elitism—for the condescending tone of the expert and at times the outright misogyny of the anonymous reviews she wrote. As the most privileged and most conservative of the three writers, she was not a likable figure, and it is easy (but also anachronistic) to fault her for wholeheartedly adopting all her husband's ideas about connoisseurship and his curatorial priorities. But I came to appreciate her real state-of-the-art expertise, acquired on their joint trips and in intellectual exchange with many important figures of the art world. I also came to sympathize with how limited she was when it came to putting her impressive knowledge to use. It is deeply ironic that the most socially powerful of the three women was also the one who was most hampered by gender restrictions, barely visible as an expert in her own right. Like so many women, she chose work behind the scenes—writing anonymous reviews, translating and editing modern German scholarship, weighing in on the curatorial practices of the National Gallery. I came to respect that she was adept at working the system—she was using the backchannels that were open to ambitious upper-class women to weigh in on art history and art institutions.

Eliot could be said to have gamed an entirely different system. While her early writing about art had resembled Eastlake's in taking advantage of reviewer anonymity to say clever, erudite things under male guise, she turned from away from this strategy to express her views

about art to writing novels. A genre long open to women and even seen as “feminine,” it enabled her to package highly sophisticated, potentially critical ideas about women and art in ways that were palatable to a large audience. Part of her intent—at least in her most “art-historical” novel, *Romola*, with its Florentine setting—was didactic, aligned with Jameson. But her fiction was much more explicit about the limitations that women experienced when it came to being granted intellectual and even physical access to art than anything Jameson or Eastlake ever wrote. And yet, in regard to the art itself, Eliot’s taste and what she had to say about art shows her beholden to a received and unquestioned canon of masterpieces that was no different than the one endorsed by Jameson and Eastlake. Eliot only deviates from this canon worship when it comes to the fictional artworks she creates in *Romola*. For her 1872 novel *Middlemarch*, where she uses the Vatican’s *Sleeping Ariadne* to critique women’s lack of access to meaningful art education, it is possible to argue that Eliot sees museums and perhaps even the masterpieces themselves as shutting out women viewers. But in *Romola*, this suggestion is still very tentative: even as the beginnings of her critique of the museum as a space that is potentially hostile to women are visible, Renaissance art is clearly an object of veneration throughout.

This conventional admiration of masterpieces and the great men who created them, generated by the state-of-the-art cultural history and art criticism they were reading, unites all three writers and makes them seem equally imitative. This makes me skeptical about a central claim in the current scholarship on 19th-century women art writers. If writing across many genres gave women new opportunities to develop original claims about art, as feminist scholars of the last decade have argued, it is difficult to see how these three women took advantage of this freedom. They may have paved the way for other women, who wrote more original and methodologically innovative art history in the 1880s and 1890s. But it is difficult to argue that

Emilia Dilke and Julia Cartwright Ady consciously looked to these earlier writers for inspiration. I would love to think these *fin de siècle* art historians did find a model in their mid-Victorian predecessors' dedication to researching art, but it is more likely that the value of this older generation to them was merely that they wrote about art *at all* in forms beyond translations and travelogues.

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I want to end on a more positive note, though, because I do think that Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot deserve the attention that scholars have given them. However timid they were at times in voicing original ideas (much less controversial or subversive ones), they are nevertheless the foremothers of future women scholars in art history. Feminists have long insisted that the personal is the political even when, and perhaps especially when, it comes to scholarly projects. As someone who has loved art museums and seeing famous art since she was a teenager, but who only embarked on formal training in art history in her fifties, I identify across time and space with these women who were trying so intently to absorb, appreciate, and appropriate the scholarship that they read in the effort to better understand the art they saw. Always in awe and truly impressed when I stand in front of a famous work that I have been taught to appreciate by art historians and museum curators, I also know that my canon-worship and my eagerness to embrace the lessons I was taught have made it hard to find (and embrace!) what lies beyond the canon (in particular when it comes to women artists, but also in terms of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and disability).

But unlike Jameson, Eastlake, and Eliot, I have been trained to push back and question—to look for gaps and missing links in the existing research and for arguments that have not yet been made, to ask who is being marginalized and underrepresented, and to believe that

challenging and arguing against received opinion advances knowledge in the field. This form of academic discourse, second nature to me, was not available to these women in the mid-nineteenth century, writing as they did outside of the scholarly and university circles where this method was slowly being developed among men (engaged in what we now think of as the ridiculously acerbic, self-important, and bombastic academic controversies of the 18th and 19th century). Even if women occasionally participated in such debates in the periodical press (as Eastlake and Eliot did in some of their anonymous reviews), they knew very well that they could not do so as women, without risking being seen and ridiculed as unfeminine, as know-it-all bluestockings overstepping their boundaries, and ultimately easily delegitimized because they could not possibly have acquired the academic “discipline” at a university, and thus could always be told that they had no right to participate in this discourse.

But I also know to be cautious about claiming to be all that different from them. The much-vaunted advancing of knowledge through critical thinking and academic dialogue has in many ways turned into just another convention, given the fossilizing power of academic institutions. As an academic, across two fields, I have played by the old rules of canon-worship-- I have both learned and taught the canon; taken and given exams that ask for canonical knowledge, long past the point at which I had begun to question its worth politically and pedagogically. I have also dutifully written papers within the framework of the rhetorical conventions of academic discourse—pointing to the underdiscussed thing that needs to be more fully addressed as a legitimizing move necessary to get to what truly interests me. In this respect, I am no less conventional in my writing than these women were in theirs.

Being a woman in academia is still a tightrope walk in which we constantly strike a precarious balance between contradictory demands and gender scripts. I did not write “the book”

that I was expected to write after I completed my dissertation. Instead, I had baby # 2 (following a different script than the masculine academic one) and took a position at a liberal-arts school where I would spend nearly 20 years prioritizing teaching over scholarship, while also raising two children as a single mother. I chose this path willingly, but also knew very well that although I had intellectual ability and original ideas, I was limiting my academic career by not publishing my work. With this masters' thesis, I have arguably written "the book," but will very likely not try to publish it. If my work instead turns into a public-facing website, a series of blogs, maps, and images, does that mean I am a mere popularizer like Jameson? Is this a method of hiding my expertise like Eastlake did—in my case, behind easily accessible visualizations, in the back pages of the website where no one ever goes to follow the trail of scholarly footnotes into the metadata? Will I have switched genres, like Eliot, from peer-edited article or monograph to a more palatable, but also fluffier format—the personal website? Does all this constitute a lowering of the stakes and standards—for originality, for scholarly rigor, for daring and sweeping pronouncements sometimes prized in humanities scholarship?

That is to say: Since I am a woman in academia, did gender influence my choices and circumstances, all the way back to choosing English and art history over neuropsychology and computer science? I think so, and yet, I have no way of "proving" this—unless I undertake the kinds of research into much broader patterns some of the new digital-humanities methodologies based on data-mining and -crunching affords me. But without these, I cannot pinpoint the limitations that I encountered, because I see them as individual choices that I do not regret—and that makes it a bit absurd for me to expect these 19th-century women to chafe under a yoke that they may not have felt to be a yoke. I have pointed several times to the trend in twenty-first century scholarship to stress the liberating rather than the repressive elements of Victorian

society when it came to women writers, including the relative openness of the publishing industry with its many avenues for publishing on art in various genres. In our own moment in 2020, the many alternatives to traditional scholarship, from alt-ac to digital, from public-facing to crowd-sourced, might feel freeing in a similar way; these new forms have a tremendous potential to transform intellectual discourse and even the academy. In both instances, scholars are overly optimistic, because if women give up on traditional scholarship in the academy, we might also give up our only recently established position as intellectual authorities.

Digital research seems a long way from my starting point, which was to ask how three women from the nineteenth century looked at and wrote about art, and how that writing relates to the creation of art history. But for the better part of the 20th century, there were few “eminent” women art historians who were widely read for their big ideas and their original arguments. The recuperation of the women who have been doing art history and archaeology since the beginning of the century only began with the feminist scholars of the late 1970s, who showed us how these women had been unjustly seen as second-rank scholars for decades. Today, the decreasing importance of the humanities in the academic “marketplace,” the scarcity of tenure-track and even living-wage positions in fields like art history, continues to make it hard for women to keep their foothold in academia. Given the ways in which women are still disproportionately hampered in their access to the few places where art-historical scholarship is well-established and highly valued—i.e. in prestigious museums and renowned art history programs at R1 institutions—it is not such a stretch to see the connection of the situation of present-day scholars to three women who wanted to write professionally about art in the mid-19th century, but found such limited paths to being taken seriously.

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