



*“And the landscape possesses every
beauty and variety”:
Narrating the Marche through Margaret
Collier’s Unconventional Gaze*

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ABSTRACT: *Our Home by the Adriatic* (1886) by Margaret Collier is a travel book which provides historical, social and cultural knowledge about the people, spaces and places of the Italian region of the Marche. Collier’s marriage to a former Garibaldian officer was the occasion for her move to Italy, where her need to write developed as something different from that of a tourist. Indeed, her topographical writing was spurred by her desire to prove that women were capable of traveling and writing (Mangani), and to undermine the stereotype of the woman who “[...] could not write so well; [if she did] it was her brother’s, no doubt” (Battestin 380-381). Beyond the gender dimension, the essay will survey how Collier’s travel writing depicts through its anthropological approach both the lights and the shadows of the Marche, and how the portrayal of the region itself proves to be crucial to her understanding of place and perception of space.

KEY WORDS: Margaret Collier; *Our Home by the Adriatic*; the Marche; unknown Italian landscapes; Victorian women’s writing; travel writing



INTRODUCTION: A LITTLE-KNOWN VICTORIAN WRITER WITH A HOME BY THE ADRIATIC

In a collection of essays, *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy* (2003), Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler end their introduction by soliciting more interest in the task of “unfolding” the writings of other women travel writers. In doing so, they join the appeal to collect the still unheard “stories of women’s passions for Italy” (Chapman and Stabler 14) that Susan Cahill had already previously launched in her *Desiring Italy* (1997).

When Margaret Collier’s *Our Home by the Adriatic* was published by R. Bentley and Son in 1886, Great Britain was the centre of the British Empire. However, at the time Collier did not find herself in Victorian London, for she had left her home country and moved to Italy—in a small village in the Marche region called Torre San Patrizio—after her marriage to the Garibaldian officer Arturo Galletti on April 19, 1873.

Yet, her relocation to Italy neither extinguished nor diminished her passion for writing, and in *Our Home by the Adriatic* (1886), she recounts her life in the Italian province during the years following the unification of Italy. Drafted between 1873 and 1885, her diary provides historical, social and cultural knowledge about the people, spaces and places of the Italian region of the Marche, where her need to write developed as something different from that of a tourist (Mangani). Indeed, as a fervid supporter of women’s right to write and publish, her topographical writing was spurred by her desire to prove that women were capable of travelling and writing, and to undermine the male chauvinist stereotype of the woman who “[...] could not write so well; [if she did] it was her brother’s, no doubt” (Battestin 380-381).

During the Victorian era women started to travel more independently, and, as a result, there arose the new stereotype of the “woman traveller”—far distant from the image of sheltered female domesticity. Ladies who enjoyed the privilege of travelling belonged to the upper class, since it was only they who could afford such trips (McKenzie Stearns). Indeed, this was the case of Margaret Collier. Her father was Sir Robert Collier, a high magistrate and Counsellor of the Admiralty of the “Grand Cabinet,” and her family belonged to the non-conformist sector of the British people. Her family was used to hosting events within the space of their living room, thus gathering intellectuals and progressive politicians—such as Thomas Huxley, Sir Mountstuart Great Duff, a Scottish gentleman in the service of the Queen, Bertrand Russel and Virginia Woolf. Indeed, Margaret grew up in a liberal, anticlerical and feminist cultural environment; but, most of all, she grew up in a family that used to travel for both work and pleasure.

However, her occasion for writing *Our Home by the Adriatic* was not a pleasure trip or the typical ideological Grand Tour. She went to Italy as Arthur Galletti’s wife: she crossed the margins of the British Empire, but did not consider herself either a guest or a tourist in the new country. Indeed, the title of the book brings forth significant information, for the use of the plural possessive adjective “our” has at least two



different meanings. On the one hand, by indicating ownership, it shows how Collier considers the new “marchiggiana” reality as her new life. On the other hand, it indicates the beginning of a detailed account of her cosmopolitan self-identification that reflects the course of her life and her remarkable career by mirroring a necessary intellectual journey.

ITALY: A SPACE OF ANCIENT HISTORY, A PLACE FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

According to Bernard McGrane, “to travel is to see—travel is essentially a way of seeing, a mode of seeing: it is grounded in the eye, in our visual capacity” (McGrane 116). Historically, distant places, landscapes, foreign people, animals and objects mainly acquire consistency once they are seen. The gaze is then transferred onto the text, be it in a written or visual form. Viewed as a way for writers to “put the world on paper” (Sherman 19), travel accounts have always played a crucial role in the act of travelling itself. As far as the gazes and points of view of Victorian women travel writers are concerned, one must bear in mind that writing and travelling remained among the most prohibited activities for young ladies.

Things started to change because of the visual interest women had in recording the impressions of their travels in letters, diaries and nonfiction works (Robinson). Indeed, they began to exhibit a multiplicity of gazes, all mirroring their struggle to find a narrative language that could allow both the representation of their cultural subjectivity and the definition of their literary dimension. In doing so, their works acquired a two-fold importance: they displayed some of the important ideological shifts that took place at the end of the nineteenth century in terms of women’s travelling policies, and they showed women’s involvement in contemporary debates and discourses revolving around the description, mapping and landscaping of Italy. Similarly, by reading *Our Home by the Adriatic*, we can trace changes referring to the travel genre. In particular, one can notice the transition from information-based travel books to more personal and narrative forms of travel writing—which are now familiar to nineteenth-century modern readers. In women’s writing, these developments had at least three possible reasons.

Firstly, they were driven by the increasingly dominant discourses on gender that separated the public and private spheres. Secondly, they were the result of broader generic expectations and of Britain’s changing attitude towards Italy (Stabler). As regards the first reason, among many texts that deal with women travellers and travel-writing in the Age of Empire (Mills; Birkett and Kingsley; Mabro and Veiled Half-Truths; Melman; Pratt), Shirley Foster argues that certain literary manners were more feminine than others and claims that in their travel’s accounts women used to choose the journal or letter form to emphasise their ‘private and domestic orientation’ (Foster 19). More significantly, while Jacqueline Pearson, finds it surprising that travel writing regularly seems to be regarded, and recommended, as acceptable reading for women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, alongside genres like history (Pearson 56), Sarah Richardson states that “women employed genre as unlikely as



travel writing and domestic economy to engage their readership with the key political, economic and social issues of the time” (Richardson 8).

Thirdly, another factor helps to explain how during the Victorian era Italy was one of the most attractive and inspiring destinations for writers in that fascinating phenomenon in European cultural as well as social history and in the mentality of modern times known as *Grand Tour*. Both the young English aristocracy and intellectuals and artists of France, Germany and other countries of the continent - among which Russia, Spain, Holland, Denmark and the Scandinavian countries - this journey takes on a growing importance and diffusion as an indispensable experience of knowledge and training (Black). However, in the eighteenth century, Italy already held a special place in the British cultural imagination (O'Connor), and in the nineteenth century, the Italian peninsula became considered one of the cradles of civilization. Indeed, although the geographical limits placed on the *Grand Tour* by tourists and critics has varied across the years, it has most frequently been associated with a trip to Paris and the principal cities of Italy, with Rome called the 'unequivocal climax' (Naddeo 183). Geoffrey Trease, among others (De Seta; Brilli; Brilli & Federici; Hornsby; Sweet), by the same token asserted the primacy of Italy because "whatever path you chose, you could hardly consider yourself a Grand Tourist unless you somehow reached Italy" (Trease 2).

As regards women's writing in this field, Rebecca Butler explains how the way in which women travel writers depicted Italy and Italians resembled older eighteenth-century models of representing that place and its people. On this matter, she argues, "Where these later travellers adopt proto-feminist postures, they typically set them against (rather than in symbiosis with) a political Italy, thereby marking a departure from the *Corinne* model of representing Risorgimento Italy as a woman's country" (Butler 188). Butler's emphasis on the *Corinne* model offers particular insights into what Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler had already observed in their work. Scholars offer a new vision of Anglo-Italian cultural relations in the late Romantic and Victorian eras by casting doubt on any "sentimental reading of Italy as a tableau vivant of suffering womanhood" (Chapman and Stabler 222), and by providing an explanation as to how, in the mid-nineteenth century, this sentimentalism was replaced by something else. The changing aspect was the growing recognition of Italy as a "political place," a "new-reality to be." As a matter of fact, the politics of the Italian Risorgimento found an "eager audience in Victorian England" (Chapman and Stabler 222). However, the struggle for the Italian independence took on a different character under the leadership of the Royalist Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, and was pursued through diplomatic efforts rather than the Garibaldian terrorist tactics. This shift was mirrored by a shift in British attitudes, and the Italian cause gained widespread and open support among the British public (Pemble 137-8). Indeed, Owain Wright states that after unification "Victorian observers looked to Italian political life for the first signs of resurgence. British politicians believed that the key to greatness for any state rested in its capability to manage its affairs through orderly and moderate representative government" (Wright 151). While Pemble's and Wright's conclusions to some extent deal only with social and political aspects, there are other reasons not of



that character. According to Nick Carter, in order to fully comprehend British passion for Italian nationalism, one must grasp both religion and the “triangular relationship” between Britain, Ireland, and Italy because “the Risorgimento in Britain was above all (as in Ireland) a Protestant cause, one that was intimately bound up with not only deep-rooted popular anti-Catholicism but also the so-called ‘Irish question’ and popular British anti-Irish sentiment.” (Carter 20)

Among the many writings by British women writers who focused their attention on Italian politics there were for example - just to mention a few - Lady Morgan’s *Italy* and Mary Shelley’s *Valperga* (Cove). In fact, despite the prevalent gender ideology that politics was beyond their purview, British middle-class women were vocal supporters of the Risorgimento. In this regard Pamela Gerrish Nunn contends that Victorian women’s discourses on the Italian question provide an indicator of their shifting role and representation in British society in the decades preceding the suffrage campaigns (Nunn). However, if the majority of British middle-class women travel writers focused on exploring Tuscany, Campania or Lazio, and then writing about them—because of their artistically and archaeologically inspiring local environments and landscapes, and because of their easy reachability and accessibility via various forms of transportation—the transgressive feature pertaining to the experiences of women writers was that of describing places and spaces that were far from the classic itineraries of the Grand Tour. From 1861, Italy as a nation extended itself from Milan to Palermo, from Turin to Lecce, and its railways were the most important means of connection for those “newly born Italians” who had long been kept separated by centuries of local and foreign domination. For all these reasons, shortly after the Unification of Italy in 1861, the report to the first bill on railways denounced the strong need for the nation to bring the various provinces together as soon as possible (Parks 2013). It is no coincidence that in her introduction to the Italian translation of *Our Home by the Adriatic*, Collier’s granddaughter Gladys Salvadori—an Italian writer, translator and partisan, better known as Joyce Lussu—informs readers that her grandmother had already been to Italy with her mother, Isabelle Rose. With the intention of distracting Margaret from the pains of a recently ended relationship, her parents offered her a trip: “in quella Italia di freschissima unità, le cui lotte contro i dispotismi erano state così romanticamente esaltate da Gladstone e Russel; e la madre la condusse a Roma, con le prime ansimanti ferrovie del Regno” (Collier 11).

Commissioned by King Ferdinand II, the first Italian railway line was built in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and it was inaugurated on October 3, 1839: it was the famous Naples–Portici line. So, regions such as Abruzzo, Molise, the Marche and the lesser-known areas of Lazio and Umbria were connected by a good railway network only towards the end of the nineteenth century (Maggi).

However, Collier’s account focuses on the rural reality of a province in the Marche, and this helps the reader of *Our Home by the Adriatic* to fill in the blanks of those too-often neglected and underestimated Italian realities. Unsurprisingly, the text was thus welcomed by critics, and, while in a review of *Our Home by the Adriatic* Joint Butt describes it as “[a] very charming book about a part of Italy little frequented by English tourists,” *The World* compared it instead to Lady Duff Gordon’s *Letters from*



Egypt and the Cape and stressed the importance of describing an unknown region through “an uncommonly entertaining book” (Whitaker 23).

In this respect, by mentioning Margaret Collier, Claudia Capancioni argues that Victorian women who travelled to the lesser urbanised areas of central Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were to be viewed as more than mere tourists because of their:

[...] engagement with Italian political actuality, and the emergence of Italian identity as a nation after the country’s unification, and the ways in which some lesser-known writers, such as Margaret Collier (1856–1928) and Janet Ross (1842–1927), continued their commitment to Italy’s quest for liberty, equality, and progress by turning their attention to the “true” Italians and their local, regional identities. (Capancioni 109)

The idea Capancioni had of Collier’s engagement with the regional dimension of the Marche—where she arrived in 1873 after her marriage to Arturo Galletti di Cadilhac (1843-1912)—with its spaces, places, local cultural identity and people proves that, at the time, a different and more neutral British gaze was possible. She further notes that the empirical observation of the local traditions, customs and people of Torre San Patrizio allows a deconstruction that reaches beyond the products of invention, and therefore has different symbolic meanings for the reader who wants to “inhabit those landscapes.” Indeed, Collier’s experiences of her stay are:

[...] concerned with the contemporary historical and social contexts of a country traditionally represented, in ideal Romantic and Renaissance terms, as the space of artistic freedom, the place for a possible paradise. [She] constructed a political portrait of Italy as an emergent modern nation [...] in which the image of an authentic, unified Italy contrasts with romanticised portrayals of Italian country life. [...] In the late nineteenth century, Collier [...] adapt[s] the “national-patriotic discourse” developed by the Risorgimento-leading inspirer Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72), and turn rural regional communities into representatives of the brotherhood of Italians. (Capancioni 110-111)

Hence, far from being an account of a foreign space or a representation of landscapes by a writer with an attitude of cultural superiority, *Our Home by the Adriatic* is quite transgressive in its approach to a cultural identity that is indeed “other.” The book achieves this because it establishes an authentic connection with a people who possesses a noticeably different lifestyle and belief system. Moreover, considering that cultural identity is not just constructed in relation to people, but is also deeply affected by a sense of place (Said 2-3), Collier’s writing represents a way of distancing women travel writers from the common vision of them as mere portrayers and describers of art and antiquity. Indeed, it places women travel writers in the position of observers and narrators who, by collecting data, are literally, socially and politically connected to the new world surrounding them (Youngs).



AN UNCONVENTIONAL ENGLISH GAZE UPON "THE MARCHIGGIANO SIDE OF ITALY"

Once known as Casa San Venanzo, Villa Zara is located in Torre San Patrizio, in the province of Fermo. Arturo Galletti (1843-1912) bought the house from the Italian Government in 1873, alongside two hundred hectares of land, thanks to Margaret Collier's dowry. Originally a chantry with an annexed lodging for a priest, the house was confiscated from the clergy and acquired by the Government. Villa Zara rises on a hilltop and offers a spectacular view: from the Sibillini Mountains to the Adriatic Sea, from the Conero to the Gran Sasso, the house is in the middle of a park and is surrounded by thriving vegetation (centuries-old laurels, locusts, privets, elms, oaks, etc.).

After her marriage to Arturo, Margaret Collier moved to Casa San Venanzo, and, through her restless yet anthropological gaze, she uses her book *Our Home by the Adriatic* to guide the reader into a land unknown to most. As Fabio Dei notes, literature has always been a "resource" for anthropology, since it provides it with the tools to critically analyse ethnography as a literary genre and to reorganise its compositional techniques (Dei 60-63). Yet, literature has also always been an important "source" for studies in anthropology especially as far as folklore, studies in popular traditions and populations are concerned. The use of narrative texts as social and cultural documents has become an actual sub-discipline called literary anthropology, and this is precisely the approach Collier uses in writing her work.

From an anthropological perspective, which considers all social actors taking part in the literary communication, *Our Home by the Adriatic* appears as a system based on the author's desire to come into contact with others and, most of all, with "others that are different from the self." Indeed, Collier creates a narrative that shifts away from the typical tendency to classify, explain and name, and instead strives to make the other more transparent. It is a gaze which, as Ian Chambers would say, erases "the real distance of location and difference, and the subsequent 'measure of silence'" (Chambers 29), and also changes until it becomes the expression of a wish for alterity. It is a narrative skill specifically created in order to overcome the limits of identity. The reformulation of an interior dialogue takes place through the eyes of an exceedingly wealthy middle-class English woman—immediately labelled by the inhabitants of the Marche as "Inglesina" (Collier 59), "Signora Marchesa" or "Principessa" (Collier 57) in order to stress in a non-negative way her Englishness and her social status—which shifts her centre of gravity and opens her up to understanding an unknown world. This new reality is depicted with precision, starting from the very index of the book. After the first chapter "Installation in my new home," the reader begins a journey to discover the "Cittadini," "Contadini," "Religion and Superstition" and even the "Courtship" of a place that initially appears to be her first experience in the "'other side of Italy,' that land of mysterious interest to [her]" (Collier 7). The appearance of the Marche land, mysterious at first glance, proves the idea of literary works as a source for anthropology, as an ethnographical document, in that "costituendo essa stessa



l'espressione di una cultura, l'opera letteraria incorpora forme di vita e rappresentazioni tipicamente 'culturali' - tanto realistiche quanto fantastiche - che hanno per destinatari coloro che di quella 'cultura' fanno parte e che possono essere da loro intese" (Fabietti, Malighetti and Matera 198). And the story of her "favourite spot" (Collier 55) is set precisely between the mysterious and the fantastic. Indeed, the landscape around "Fonte delle Goscie, or the Well of the Drops" (Collier 55) where the author enjoys strolling in spring is "delicious" (54) and, in comparison with the English landscape, it is described as such:

Then, the corn is a lovely green, contrasting with patches of deep red trifolium, against which the soft blue of the flax flower produces a charming effect; and there are none of those harsh lines of partition into so many squares by hedges which offend so in an English landscape. Crimson gladiolas, growing a yard high, are plentiful as daisies in the month of May, and many other flowers quite as beautiful, and to me as rare, but of which I have not been able to discover any but the local names, make a garden of all the country at this enchanting time of the year, when the air still comes fresh and cool from across the unmelted snow of the mountains, the foliage is green and tender, and the landscape possesses every beauty and variety. (53-54)

According to Margaret Collier, while the Italian landscape—with its thriving planes and shiny colours that command splendid perspectives—opens the mind of the beholder, the English landscape—with the verticality of its dividing flowerbeds—disturbs the view and general harmony of the scenery. Amongst all of these details, the marvellous and fantastic features appear in a small garden, that almost resembles an oasis: "[...] amongst rows of tomatoes and water melons, a little straw hut, inhabited by a tiny old woman, who might well have come straight from fairyland, and who hobbled towards me with a shrill demand that I should buy her wares" (Collier 55). That of the fairylike old woman who offers the fruits of her labours is only one of the images which exemplifies the generosity of the local inhabitants of the Marche. Indeed, the way in which Margaret is greeted confirms the warmth that surrounds her:

My welcome by these peasants was of a warmth which rather overwhelmed. The women flew at me, and embraced me in their stalwart arms, kissing me on both cheeks; one old man also kissed me — that being, as I was informed, his mode of saluting the mother superior of a convent, whose tenant he had been. Then offerings, in the shape of eggs, were poured into my lap, and live fowls tied together by the legs were deposited at my feet. Various compliments, of which I did not fully understand the import, were shouted into my ears — it being evidently supposed that the dialect, if spoken loud enough, must be intelligible even to a foreigner. (Collier 13-14)

The greeting described in the previous passage is a welcome message, and it fills with hope a young English woman who is trying to acquaint herself with all of the social strata of San Venanzo. Capancioni confirms this by comparing Collier to a reporter capable of analysing all of the social realities of the Marche, but, most of all, the realities of peasant life:



The interaction with the *contadini* is at the centre of Collier's eye-opening learning process. This relationship is represented through anecdotal sketches that, as in *Italian Sketches*, are a narrative strategy to expand on an individual's story and circumstances, to include historical events, cultural traditions, and social customs, and also to reproduce exchanges of ideas and opinions on current affairs. Collier depicts herself as a keen listener and an accurate reporter with whom "the peasants [are] ready enough to enter into conversation". Her description of local costumes, dances, such as the *salterello*, and farming activities, such as harvesting and *vintaging*, are detailed. (Capancioni 118)

The dialogical and cultural interaction stemming from Capancioni's analysis offers interesting food for thought concerning the author's ability to socialise with the local population. Her demeanour "break[s] a wall of superiority constructed by her Victorian imperial attitude and acknowledges [that] she, too, is 'the object of unrestrained curiosity' and positions herself as the subject of interest of the *contadini*" (Capancioni 119). Moreover, this open mind also puts her in a particularly interactive mood, enabling her to embrace the "other" and to let go of her own predetermined customs and beliefs in a dialogue with the different agents and the different places she encounters along the road. The main advantages of Collier's approach is that the places, traditions and inhabitants of the Marche are described with such mastery as to seem captured by a camera: just like those typical elements of visual anthropology (Banks and Jay) that allow an independent and detailed study of all cultural phenomena. Only, in this case, the author possesses no camera nor does she provide sketches as explorers would do when reporting about the customs and traditions of other European regions or other continents. The tools Collier possesses are words and their descriptive power.

Interestingly, the value of the topographical analysis which emerges from the places surrounding her is priceless for readers who retrace the narrated itinerary. If we follow Collier's narrative representations through the trips she undertakes with her husband (see Fig. 1), we experience the magnificence of the Sibillini Mountains, the old town of Servigliano "now called Castel Clementino in honour of the last Pope Clemente" (Collier 15); Santa Vittoria, "founded by the Benedictines" (Collier 15); Force, inhabited "by the gipsies" (15). We also take a stroll through Arquata del Tronto and its Fortress¹ which "rose dark and bold against the sky" (Collier 238), whose mountain landscape is "wild, but with a tempered wildness; grand, with mild grandeur" (230). These are places full of wheat and vineyards that "flourish around the scattered rocks in the meadow" (Collier 230), touched by a sun so unique that it is described as "the bright Italian sun [which] makes all gay and warm" (230-231). We are then taken to

¹ Collier refers to a fortress now known as the Rocca. The Rocca was built for defensive purposes during the 1200s, and is an example of military architecture in the Marche Apennines. It was built on the border between the regions of Marche, Umbria, Lazio and Abruzzo. It is located south of the Vettore Mountain and holds a strategic position over the town of Arquata del Tronto, since it overlooks Strada Consolare Salaria, a road that connects the Tyrrhenian to the Adriatic Sea and was very important during the Roman Empire.



Pietrara,² where local dwellers dance “in the little piazza, for it was *fiesta*” (Collier 237), until we reach Macerata. With its university and school of agriculture, the city appears to Collier as more modern than Fermo, which is defined as “a curious relic of the Middle Ages (the ancient Firmum), situated on such a perpendicular hill-slope that it is next to impossible for a carriage to get about its streets” (Collier 153), yet less historical than Pesaro, which is both “Rossini’s birthplace” (244) and a witness to the fights for freedom, since the bullet holes in certain buildings are the result of “a skirmish between the Papal troops and those of Victor Emmanuel, in the year 1860, when the Piedmontese possessed themselves of Umbria and the Marches” (Collier 245).

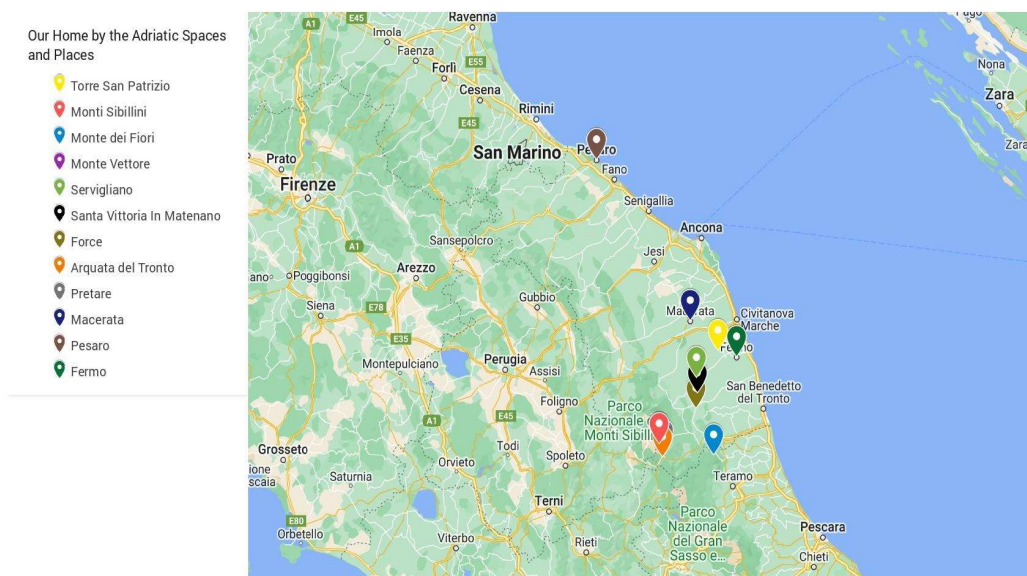


Fig. 1. Map of the places in which Margaret Collier takes us (via Google My Maps).

Readers are taken from the description of places to a careful observation, as if reflective of reality, of moments of socialisation. For instance, the ancient rite of the pig slaughter, typical of peasant culture, becomes a joyful feast, as well as a way of honouring the author herself: “The killing of the pig was considered such a pleasing and enlivening spectacle, that it took place—I suppose out of compliment to me—opposite the front door” (Collier 16). The memory of the pig slaughter touches Collier deeply, and pushes her to later make sure animals are not plucked while still alive: “I have thought it my duty to super intend the killing of the chickens, in order to be sure that they are not plucked alive [...]” (Collier 32).

Regarding this matter, in his work *Contadini delle Marche centrali nel primo Ottocento* (1985), Sergio Anselmi states that killing animals was not just driven by the need for survival, but also became a celebration in itself, pagan in its traits, where slaughter was not just a necessity, but a moment of socialisation and aggregation that

² An ancient hamlet, now known as Petrare, located in the town of Arquata del Tronto, and precisely on the southern slopes of the Vettore Mountain in the province of Ascoli Piceno.



brought together members of the family and the neighbourhood, and where everyone had a specific task to perform while following millennium-old rituals and techniques (Anselmi). Likewise, the grape harvest that took place after the summer follows a ritual just as enchanting as the abundant vineyards and fields of wheat covering the land which are depicted in the initial pages of the diary: “Between the Adriatic and the Sibylline range of the Apennines lies a fertile undulating country, rich in corn, wine, and oil. Patches of wheat, of maize, of red clover, of flax, of beans, cover the valleys and the hill-sides. Maples and poplars, garlanded with vines, rise from amidst the corn” (Collier 1). From the abundance of raw materials, not unusual in England, the transformation of grapes can be thus read:

In the autumn, the country is again picturesque with its vine-festooned trees bearing magnificent clusters of purple grapes, and beneath, the groups of gaily dressed *contadine* guarding their property. On the approach of October, waggon loads of grapes, some as fine as any grown in hothouses, are to be seen drawn by huge white oxen along the roads, on their way to be deposited in a vat with a hole in the bottom (Collier 56).

The picturesque moment of grape processing particularly intrigues Collier since it is not as crude as that of animal slaughter. Furthermore, society had other means of enjoying itself: going to the theatre or dancing at folklore events. The inhabitants of San Patrizio used to go to the theatre “during carnival” (Collier 137), and these are the words of praise addressed to amateur actors and actresses:

Italian amateur actors are infinitely better than English. To simulate emotion, to speak distinctly, to suit the action to the word—all this comes naturally to them. A great many of them are born actors and actresses, and display their talents freely off the stage; for the exhibition of feeling is thought so proper and becoming that they feign it where they have it not. (137)

The spontaneity of the performers made the representations even more performative than the English ones. Yet, it must be clarified that the theatre was used as “a ballroom. But these balls are not select; even the peasants are included, and the price of admission is but one sou. There is every variety of class and costume” (Collier 138). This shows the link between the theatre and community and, even better, between the theatre and its inclusive aspect, given that its low prices allowed all of the social strata to participate. The fact that it was a form of art available to the entire community gave the theatre a special social weight. In “The Condition of the Italian Theatre in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Laura Richards talks about “collective exhibitions” (Richards 426) and notes how, through theatrical representations, the Italian community offered its own self through performance, by revealing its strength, cohesion and hierarchies; yet, even more, it seized the opportunity of a collective emotional expression, where the entire citizen assembly communicated on the basis of a shared set of social and religious values.

By considering a broader and more performative view of theatrical practices (Schechner), one that includes games, celebrations, local demonstrations in public spaces and at public events, the links between the arts or performative practices and



the community described by Collier increase, involving its actors in different ways and developing processes and results in social and artistic-cultural terms, from dances, jacks and dinners serving *scarafusi*³ to marching bands performing during public processions in honour of the saints, or on the day of the Epiphany, at christenings and on the occasion of election victories (Collier 140-142). May 1, in particular, was a day of deeply felt festivity:

It is the custom, also, to inaugurate the entrance of the month of May by wandering from house to house and singing appropriate ditties under the windows of friends and sweet hearts, to the accompaniment of the *sebecone* and the violin. This proceeding is called in local dialect "Prender Maggio," and the music is prelyded by the following salutation: "Prima saluto a voi, rosa incarnata, Poi padre e madre in tutta la casa. (First greetings to you, incarnate rose, then father and mother and all the house) (Collier 143).

This way of describing habits and traditions finds its highest application in a collective object that becomes the choral main character, the very symbol of a "Collieran" memory. The male and female farmers portrayed by Collier are the emblem and conscience of a world in flux—that of the Unification of Italy. Therefore, one sees the recovery of old peasant traditions with an awareness that these are part of a pre-existing reality that is constantly changing after the process of Unification. Indeed, many are the fallen noblemen who, lacking education and working skills, find themselves starving,

[...] people bearing grand names and retaining considerable pride in their ancient lineage, whom generations of idleness and unthriftiness have reduced to extreme poverty. They are not educated for any profession, indeed they have often no education at all, and when starvation stares them in the face, they have no resource but to earn their bread by manual labour. (Collier 98)

Many of the fallen noblemen, atrociously resentful against those peers who had managed to keep their status, constituted the least productive part of society. Instead, the middle class "that is, shopkeepers and skilled workpeople" (Collier 98), are defined as "artisti" (98) because they are capable of surviving and earning a living through the productivity of their art as, for example, "the manufacture of the smart stays and embroidered chemises which [the *contadine*] wear on feast-days" (98). Indeed, Colliers exalts the male and female farmers "picturesque in dress, pleasing in manner, accommodating up to a certain point, willing to express sympathy or to fall in with your moods by their ready smiles and tears" (Collier 127) more than she does the middle class. Their "purely unsophisticated outdoor life" is far more preferable than those of "the richest and most important dweller in one of these puny cities" (Collier 110). The reason is perfectly explained and is due to the fact that many farmers, having

³ The "scarafusi" are known today as the "scroccafusi." The Marche *scroccafusi* are typical Carnival sweets made with eggs, flour and little sugar. As often happens, the name of this fritter changes from town to town; yet, it is thought that their name comes from the sound one produces whilst eating them.



managed to better their conditions and ways “[...] have learned to be clean, dexterous, even refined and courteous in their speech and manners [...],” becoming throughout the pages of *Our Home by the Adriatic* “much less innately coarse and dirty than the cittadini” (Collier 20). The comparisons persist and are presented even in relation to the English people. The chapter called “Occupations and Amusements” describes how they used to enjoy themselves with very little:

It is a more hearty fashion than ours, and far more economical; for eating and drinking are not that necessary element in amusement with Italians that it is with us. A glass of lemonade, cold in summer and hot in winter, is always prepared for a visitor. “Merenda”, the word for a very light lunch, is sometimes offered if visitors come from a distance; but the amount of refreshment thought necessary in England for the proper enjoyment of a ball or garden-party would astonish our villagers. (Collier 136-137)

This passage exemplifies the happy features of the rural life of the peasants of the Marche compared to the English one. This is a simplicity that, as one reads, becomes hospitality not just towards those who inhabit the Marche but also towards temporary visitors. Indeed, even the reader—as the visitor—who dives into the landscapes, the people and the traditions described by Collier experiences the joy of discovery, attracted by the tales of those who have preceded him/her and in which the description of places lacks the stereotypical and descriptive features that characterize the accounts of the various stages of the *Grand Tour*. For this reason, as can be noted, Margaret Collier’s personality dramatically diverges from that of the wealthy and elitist “Grand Tourist,” constantly performing as a reporter to become interpreter herself. Indeed, it is no coincidence that in relation to peasant life she writes that the “outdoor life of the peasant is, [...] very much to be preferred to that of the richest and most important dweller in one of these puny cities” (Collier 110). Her descriptions provide us with the beauty of uncontaminated landscapes, analysed in all its morphological and anthropological aspects, a landscape which remains distinctive to this very day for its high environmental values, and which remains—to some extent—still intact.

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