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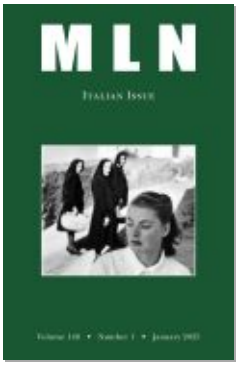

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The Flux and the Fragment: Eleanor Clark's Rome for Wandering Intellectuals

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Abstract. This essay discusses Eleanor Clark's 1952, *Rome and a Villa* as a book that, in the immediate postwar years, promoted new interest for Italy in the U.S., successfully reaching out to both intellectual élites and larger reading groups. It shows that, by redirecting modernist narrative techniques and interpretive methodologies from textual to architectural, historical, and cultural analysis, Clark pioneered the transition from literary to cultural criticism. The essay argues that, in examining the deep history of "the idea of Rome," the author claimed as its unifying force a transhistorical poetic principle revealed in the condensation of classicism and modernism displayed in the city's architecture and expressed in its language and social life. Clark mobilized that principle to read the city against the grain of the symbolic uses of the Roman ruins in fascist propaganda and in the postwar media-driven industry of transatlantic tourism.

Keywords: Eleanor Clark, Rome, Modernism, Hadrian's villa, Close Reading, Cultural Analysis, Counter-fascist Interpretation, Transatlantic Tourism

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> "They also call it Hollywood on the Tiber;
> fake ruins get thrown up around the real
> ones; there are tremendous cocktail parties."
>
> Eleanor Clark *Rome* (19)

> "And when we fall in love with Rome, we are
> obviously in love with the past, with history."
>
> Eleanor Clark *Interview with Eleanor Clark and Robert Penn Warren* (54)

In 1953, both Ralph Ellison and Eleanor Clark competed for the National Book Award. Ellison won it with his landmark novel, *Invisible Man*, while Clark's non-fictional exploration of Roman culture from classical to contemporary times, *Rome and a Villa,* remained an unselected finalist in the Arts and Letters category. Clark's and Ellison's paths kept crossing in the course of the next decades: first in 1957, when Ellison and Clark's husband, Poet Laureate and two-time Pulitzer winner Robert Penn Warren, resided in Rome as Fellows of the American Academy, and, later, in 1964, when the National Book Award was finally awarded to Clark for her *Oysters of Locmariaquer*, this time chosen over Ralph Ellison's essay collection, *Shadow and Act.*

The fact that the Ellisons and the Warrens had become friends while in Rome testifies not only to the long-lasting relationship between the two families, but also to the popularity that, by 1957, Rome had achieved among American scholars, writers, and artists who were increasingly eager to spend sabbatical years in the proverbial Eternal City, and to the crucial role institutions such as the American Academy in Rome, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Fulbright Commission played in facilitating their stay. In the immediate postwar years, the promotion of Italy as a global intellectual destination was certainly part of the larger "soft power" strategy undertaken by the U.S. Department of State to consolidate cultural exchange and, especially, to secure American cultural influence internationally in a rapidly evolving Cold War scenario (Scott-Smith, Ellwood, Nye, Schiaffini, Iuli and Cinotto). However, reconstructing a reassuring image of the country after the disaster of fascism, and marketing it to both highbrow intellectuals and middle-class tourists was a long and complex process that required efforts from the entire spectrum of the cultural industry. An army of creative minds—artists, writers,

composers, and architects—acted on the pages of popular magazines (such as *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Vogue*), in international film productions, and in specific editorial projects, either as *witnesses* of Italy's significance in the personal and professional development of the generation of postwar American artists, or as mediators and builders of relations among different demographic groups in the two countries (Iuli and Cinotto, Iuli and Morello). The process was so steady that, in his 1958 essay, "Americans in Italy," Otto Wittman, Jr. reported: "Grantors of scholarships receive more applications for study in Italy than for study in any other foreign country" (287).[2] Interest in both the culture and the history of the ancient city was growing in parallel—as the number of books about Rome published between 1947 and 1959 in the U.S. testifies: New York State alone counted 163.[3]

Perhaps unwittingly, Eleanor Clark was one early agent in this process, as her *Rome and a Villa* became the ultimate reading about Rome for the American intellectual élite, a cultivated readership eager to re-familiarize itself with Italy while toying with the idea of spending extended periods of time in a city with a glorious artistic and architectural past, yet literally in ruins, and hence financially very affordable (Morello 159n12). Yet, as Robert McG. Thomas put it in his obituary for Clark: "the most telling tributes [to her writings] came from the generations of American and other tourists who followed her steps—page by dog-eared page—through the city, marveling at each architectural feature that triggered her soaring ruminations on everything from ancient history and early Roman poetry to modern social conditions" (B5).

But beyond the platitudes of newspapers penmen and penwomen—"A brilliant piece of traveler's impressionism written with verbal polish" was the definition of the anonymous reviewer of *Time* ("Ecco Roma!"), and "Travel Business Has Turned Eternal City into Tour Bus" was the title chosen by the reviewer of *The Rochester Time-Union* in 1975, when a new edition of *Rome and a Villa* went to print—Clark's book was not a guide for tourists. It was a self-reflexive, meta-critical, erudite excavation into Rome's deep time in search of its specific, asynchronous

[2]Wittman reports that between 1946 and 1956, the largest number of American art students applying for a Fulbright grant applied to study in Italy: "121 painters and sculptors are reported going to Italy as against 83 to France, 12 to the United Kingdom, and lesser numbers to other countries." And among the architectural students, 53 were reported in Italy, 29 in the UK, and 26 in France (287n5).

[3]The number was determined by querying the term "Rome" in the Library of Congress Catalog, then filtering the results by language, state of publication, print format, and date range.

modernity, the abstract element on which the city's unique, incongruous aesthetics—whereby "the old can never really look dilapidated as perpetual newness always does, and modernity is never out of place" ("Modernization" 131)—could be re-scaled in time and projected against the conceptual and cognitive failure experienced by "the tourist or student or wandering intellectual" (Clark *Rome and a Villa* 17) who entered the city "like a wisp of fog in a fog bank," without any help other than a few words—"history, surrealism, faith"—to support his "foggy modern eye" in the navigation of "the mess, and the blazing sun, the incongruities, the too-muchness of everything" (ibid.).

This essay traces the ways in which—under Clark's modernist scrutiny—the multiple and polymorphous stratifications of Rome, its heterogeneous culture, and its "impossible compounding of time, in which no century has respect for any other and all hit you in a jumble at every turn" (ibid.), became the testing ground and provided the evidence for an original reading of modernity as an asynchronous and paradoxical experience, enfolding monuments and individuals—the bandit Salvatore Giuliano, the Emperor Hadrian (and his villa in Tivoli), the Roman poet Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli—in narratives that simultaneously situate characters in history and eternalize them, turning ancient personalities, popular media characters, and obscure poets into modern myths paradoxically constituted not "by the loss of [their] historical quality," as Roland Barthes put it (142), but by the recuperation of some aspects of their historicity by means of a literary discourse capable of resignifying their lives and works over against either monumentalization by political propaganda or mass-culture-produced invisibility.

Similarly, in the book, the technological conduits of ancient architecture (aqueducts and fountains especially, but also the Coliseum and the Fori Imperiali) that shaped social life and molded character in Ancient Rome, their remaking or resurfacing in the Baroque and in the modern city (bells, churches, palaces made out of the stones of the Coliseum or other ruins), and their resignification in fascist propaganda are incorporated in the symbolic and material infrastructure of the city's present, and used to magnify Rome's unique capacity for connectivity across time and space. The quotidian presence of material fragments from ancient times, alongside the persistence of both history and myths in social habits, popular anecdotes, poetic language, and architectural details, explains Clark's description of Rome as the place "where life at every instant is a meeting-point of all time past and future" (313).

Equally distant from what Fredric Jameson called "the pain of a properly modernist nostalgia for a past beyond all but aesthetic retrieval" (19) and the postmodernist appropriation of the "the past as 'referent'" by the cultural industry and in "commercial art and taste" (ibid.), Clark's lyrical, creative analysis of Rome, its cultures, and Hadrian's Villa should be seen as a thoroughly modernist, mythopoetic effort to ground in a poetic principle what she perceived as the transhistorical modernity of the city, on which, as she made explicit in the preface to the second edition of the book, "the idea of Rome" (*Rome and a Villa* 1974, 5) feeds. Contextually, *Rome and a Villa* exemplifies a new way to practice literary knowledge, criticism, and erudition against the reactionary politics Clark contested in the instrumental appropriation of ancient Roman culture, first by the fascist regime and then by commercial interests. The alternative understanding of modernity Clark tried to elaborate is consistent with the idea of modernity as a constellation of plural and asynchronous phenomena explored in the late 1990s by sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt—although Clark grounds her analysis not in institutional history, but in the paradoxical blend of ancient *and* modern and in the equally paradoxical retrieval of modernity *in* antiquity. This synchretism is achieved by the aesthetic and cultural history of the city, a view she synthesized in a 1954 essay for *Architectural Forum*: "Architecture, as we have known it there [in Rome], is the tangible, visible equivalent of myth, casting off and taking on continually but still keeping all the human time of a place alive in one organism […] Life rubs off on it differently, and requires for it another concept of unity, backward and forward in time" (131).

What was the concept of unity Clark was after? In the preface to the 1974 edition of *Rome and a Villa,* she identified what held together the idea of Rome that survived even after the "wilderness of instant slums" (5) prompted by the Italian economic boom: "people, Time, and what the Romantic poets called Beauty," resurfacing in fragments even after having been repeatedly obscured by time, politics, and misuse. *Rome and a Villa* is Clark's attempt to use myth-making as "poetical heuristic" (quoted in Connor 251) to reinject history and imagination into the rewriting of an affective historical and cultural map of Rome in the effort to find an answer to the *historical* problem of the compression and expansion of time at work in the "idea of Rome." Familiarity with modernist writing and with T. S. Eliot's theorization of "the mythical method" as a post-linear poetics, so central to several early modernist writers, is a likely background to Clark's reliance on poiesis and on other modernist literary techniques (such

as the use of a non-linear structure, an allusive style, a fragmentary, episodic organization, and journal-like series of annotations) to convey a sense of aesthetic unity out of the fragmentation of experience. Clark's intimacy with the modernist critical canon suggests that *Rome and a Villa* should also be considered a late modernist, self-conscious meditation on the relationship between literature as a medium and knowledge production, one that emphasizes the value of literature in memory-making and in countering mythological narratives designed to serve political propaganda.

Ecco Roma!

Written between 1948 and 1951 and published first in leading literary magazines (such as *The Kenyon Review* and *The Sewanee Review*) and political journals such as *Commentary,* and only then issued as a stand-alone publication by Doubleday & Co. in 1952, *Rome and A Villa* was Clark's first nonfiction book. It unfolds as an episodic journey into the structure and sediments of Rome and its culture in order to reveal a complex set of relations—obscure to most visitors, but dense with possibilities of meaning to a writer uncommonly knowledgeable in Greek, Latin, French, and Italian; in Roman art, architecture, literature and history; and with a sharp understanding of Italian postwar culture and politics. Clark was not only a highly respected member of the circles rotating around the writers' colony at Yaddo, at *The Partisan Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The Sewanee Review* and, eventually, *The New Yorker* and *Vogue*; nor was she just the published author of the novel *Bitter Box* (1947), and the founder—together with her sister Eunice and fellow Vassarites Mary McCarthy and Elizabeth Bishop—of the Vassar little magazine *Con Brio*. She was also a committed, international intellectual who, among other things, had worked as one of the translators of documents related to Leon Trotsky's 1937 trials, and, by 1950, she had already received two Guggenheim Fellowships for fiction (1947; 1949) that had brought her to Rome to complete the novel that eventually became the strange object *Rome and a Villa*.

The book takes up the trope of Rome as the Eternal City and turns it into an unconventional, lyrical, erudite, detailed, and immensely informative cultural history of Rome, with chapters and sections that mix philological accounts of language use and poetics—both Italian and Romanesque—with cultural histories of Roman personalities, artists, popular characters, architecture, and the ruins across the centuries. Organized into seven chapters and three sections, the book's opening

chapters—"The Campidoglio," "Fountains," and "The Bandit Salvatore Giuliano"—may, at first sight, seem an odd combination, but together they frame the logical infrastructure of the narrative on the dynamics of stones and water, structure and fluidity, fragment and flux, past and present, myth and history, medium and form, in relation to which the textual fabric is woven. The thematic chapters that follow, entitled, respectively, "Jubilee" and "G.G. Belli: Roman Poet" (the latter closing the book) are separated by two sections entitled "Roman Journal I" and "Roman Journal II," organized as journal entries simultaneously *of* the city and *about* the city, in which the narrator alternates detailed cultural descriptions of monuments and ruins, fictionalized stories about Roman popular and historical figures (Beatrice Cenci, Cola di Rienzo, and others) and artists (Raffaello, Michelangelo, Bernini, Borromini, etc.), and her own impressions of the city. The central chapter is entirely dedicated to Hadrian's Roman villa in Tivoli, its importance highlighted by the very title of the book as well as by the length of the section.

A long tradition of Anglophone writings about Rome (and Italy and Italians) had discussed Roman art, architecture, politics, history, and mythology. Clark explicitly engages that tradition by positioning her own text along the literary trajectory plowed by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and D. H. Lawrence. As she puts it in a 1952 interview for *The New York Times:* "There has been a whole tradition of writing about Rome by foreigners […] This book of mine is in the tradition of D. H. Lawrence, and let's say Hawthorne. I don't want to sound pompous, but the general feeling that motivated it is in the literary tradition" (Breit 19). Yet, Clark also changes that tradition in several ways. Contrary to more conventional renditions of the trope of the ruins and the Eternal City, her personal narrative of the Roman experience is infused with an explicit yet "governed" sense of displacement and disorientation that structures a fresh vantage point on Rome, inscribing from the start a conceptual cleavage between the hangover/afterimage of nineteenth-century expectations about the Italian scenery and its ruinology, and the realities of a postwar Roman environment that was offering no guidance to American visitors:

> There are painters again now too, lots of them, mostly Americans, and writers. For a whole generation, practically speaking from 1914 to 1945, Rome ceased to exist for them; some foreign scholars could stand the fascist dictatorship, or profit from it, but for artists it was not inviting, nor a good idea; […]. Then suddenly the gates were open again and they came

> flocking back in with love and gratitude and pent-up need of this above all cities, and it was all brand-new, as if it had never been heard of before, but it is not like a hundred years ago nor even like the beginning of this century. There is no international picnic, and not much painting or writing either, at least for the first two or three years. (8)

Clark's lyrical voice departs sharply from the classics of American travel writing in Italy in order to engage with the intellectual and emotional fatigue of coming to terms with a material and object of knowledge that was at the same time no longer classical and yet not modern, and that the recent history of war and fascism had made even more obscure to a foreigner's eye. At the same time, she brings unconventional objects of cultural history to the center of her investigation—"the blazing sun, the incongruities, the too-muchness of everything" (17).

The book is written in a style simultaneously personal and "objective," pivoting on the use of the second pronominal position as both a universal, impersonal pronoun and as the addressing point of enunciation, resonating with the pronoun "you" as if to invite the reader to share in a spatial and temporal dislocation that binds the narrative voice and its addressee into an emotional and experiential intimacy. This strategy dominates the rhetoric of the journal chapters: at once abstract and deeply personal, the introspective "you," nudging the reader to identify with the enunciative instance, takes an explicit political direction in "Journal I" and "Journal II," in the memorable pages Clark dedicates to the analysis of the ideological uses of the city, its monuments, and popular language under fascism. "Roman Journal I," for instance, connects the 1930 renaming/remaking of the central area of ancient ruins as "Via dei Fori Imperiali" to the coeval, massive, monumental construction erected to meet the particular propaganda needs of fascism: the "Foro Italico"—once called "Foro Mussolini"—dedicated to the conquest of Abyssinia and defined by Clark as "a hallucinating image of imperial Rome" (117). The sharp awareness of the ironies of history and culture surfaces in the writer's honed blend of irony and sarcasm, here coaxing the reader to side with the subtle critique expressed by her choice of cultural references available in the *longue durée* of the city's history, but clearly evoking the chronologically and affectively closer fall of the Duce, hanging by the heels in Piazzale Loreto in Milan: "it [the Foro] calls on all Italians to raise their weapons, flags, and hearts to salute after fifteen centuries the reappearance of empire on the 'fateful hills of Rome,' the same language Cola di Rienzo used before he was decapitated and strung up by his heels on the Corso" (ibid.).

But the presence of history as ubiquitous and immanent in the experience of the city is not confined to the passages in which the author explicitly reflects on the past, which, "like love, was never so precarious and abused and useless" (94) as under "the age of platitude" epitomized by fascist architecture—"it being of the nature of fascist architecture to obscure any difference between a church and a gas company" (ibid.). One of the great sins of fascism, Clark points out, is that under its rule, "Imagination had been killed" (ibid.). On the contrary, the author's awareness of the incongruous sedimentations and eruptions of history, as well as its continuities and discontinuities, grounds the sense of cultural displacement and disorientation that runs through the book. Rome, Clark claims, is "an expansion in time, such as you experience also in the petrified forests of America, only here it is more intimate and so more dangerous" (19). The destabilizing effect of time compression and expansion, and the centrality of life, sexuality, and passion in Roman culture —elements that Clark sees as binding Roman character across time, social classes, and personalities ("sexuality is general in Rome" (62))—foreground *Rome and a Villa*. The exploration of their interconnections makes the book, at the same time: 1) a reflection on how the relation between past and present is mediated in modernity through the technical (aesthetic, narrative, emotional, and cognitive) conditions of experience and memory created by the city; 2) an *ante-litteram* anthropological study of Rome, of its culture, its social complexity, and its "structure of feeling" (Williams 1958), performed with the tools of a literary writer and critic[4]; and, finally, 3) a deep, self-reflective meditation on the nature of literary knowledge, its limits and possibilities as a technology for generating, storing, distributing, and reproducing experience in a context increasingly determined by media competition.

In this respect, *Rome and a Villa* is both an example of modernist epistemology and a performative act of aesthetic resistance, an example of what literature is and does as a technology of knowledge, *especially* evolved for creating, storing, and reproducing the historical and cultural significance of beauty and poetry in the face of the escalation of mass entertainment and commercial tourism that so dramatically marked the transatlantic postwar years. The nine drawings by Eugene Berman, complementing without any practical, illustrative use some of the Roman "scenes" described by Clark, further reinforce the idea that literature and art are technologies of knowledge different from—and

[4]I am using Raymond William's fortunate expression precisely in its ambiguous, evocative sense in order to highlight the nexus of affective and structural dimensions of the concept of unity in historical dispersion that Clark was pursuing.

superior to—other general media for understanding history, politics, and human passions. They are superior not because they represent "reality" in greater detail than the photographic reproductions of Roman corners and vistas flooding the tourism market, or newspaper accounts of the city, but for the opposite reason: because in their own forms—a statue, a drawing, a story (of an Emperor's Dream), a poem (the language of Belli's Romanesco sonnets is compared to that of *Finnegan's Wake*)—they make the difference between historical experience and immanent expression into something that can be contemplated by others, into what sociologist Niklas Luhmann calls "quasi-objects" (47) that can be used *ad infinitum* to understand (and make again, each in its own medium) that difference.

This is the opposite of ideological appropriation for political or commercial purposes that so offended Clark. Through their form, works of art, architecture, and literature make sense of some of their historical, cultural, emotional, and material complexity ("expansion in time" in Clark's language) and make it available to viewers, readers (and even tourists!) for further contemplation, elaboration, and sense-making. This difference is clearly evoked by Clark when she sharply juxtaposes the ruins hidden in the debris of history and the postwar arrangement of ancient Roman "attractions" for the tourism industry, whose operations she aligns with the earlier "systematization" of the ruins for propaganda under fascism:

> But on Empire Street the fascist operation is combined now with the others, which would have come anyway. The tourist buses are rolling along it; the Temple of Castor and Pollux, the beautiful twins, is on the travel and perfume ads; the Basilica of Maxentius is an outdoor concert hall and at night the Forum and the whole area are lit up like a movie set. The job is done by experts; […] It is all undeniably handsome, in the way of surfaces, but *the real thing* is precarious; you wonder, as in other matters, if there is such a thing; certainly the ruins are more shrouded in these publicities than they ever were by their vines, so much that at moments it seems they might as well be a genuine fake. They would be as decorative, and their old "awful grandeur" is gone in any case. (95)

At the opposite end of the fake authenticity wrapped for tourists, stands, in Clark's account, the non-mimetic, imaginative, even surrealistic capacity of literature and art to re-create in their own media forms the system of sensations that Roman architecture and cultural life provoke in the visitor, and to make such forms the pivot for a notion of expanded temporality *felt* or *evoked*, if not directly experienced, and in any case understandable—as understandable as the

complex temporalities invented by Proust, Joyce, Wolfe, and other modernist writers and theorists as diverse as Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and Sigmund Freud. This specific philosophical statement, attributing to the special media of literature and art the function of meaning simultaneously in an aesthetic, cognitive, and communicational sense and, at the same time, of being subject to the possibility of further interpretation and meaning-making processes, is what makes *Rome and a Villa* a quintessentially modernist work and its writer an irredeemably modernist observer. So, in spite of the exposure and capitalization of the ruins, we are reminded that "the stones are real" (95) and magnified under the night lighting, which "only exaggerates what is true" (96). It is through such literary, surrealistic framing that Clark justifies and renews her image of the Forum as "that lovely lake of time," recalling the uncertain lights in Giorgio de Chirico's paintings, revealing the continuous strength of the beauty of Rome, its persistence across time and in spite of looting, destruction, and the horror of the "age of platitudes":

> The depression lifts; memory returns.—There is a peculiar power in stones, which makes this little hollow, when one has begun to care about it at all, much more like a lake than the only real or real-artificial lake in the city, and Empire Street Rome's lakeside esplanade; and it is perhaps because one feels that power and experience in general most threatened just here that one comes to love the neighborhood more than most, and more than one would have perhaps in its old romantic look. (96)

The chapter "Fountains" makes a similar point by focusing on the medium of water to trace how Rome's modern social and architectural forms, its past and present, are bound by the fluidity of water that connects fragments, lives, stories, and stones across the city's deep time:

> Their settings are apt to be extravagant; they can have sprung up anywhere, be tacked anywhere on the sides of buildings or are themselves a whole house wall; and their details have the candid, smiling sadism of dreams. But the worst is the life around them, and their part in it. They are not only memory, or the living singleness of time, though they are that too and the city would have fallen apart under the weight of its past a long time ago without them; this is easy to see; you notice at once when there is a drought and the fountains become quiet and stale, or empty, how old everything begins to look. But there is another unity or community within every single moment to which they are essential, and that is where the real outrage comes.

> […] They are not *objets d'art* held off from life and treated with respect as they would be anywhere else; there is a closeness, an imminence of touch around them that nothing in our life has except dreams and sex, whence the awful burden on those. (36)

The overlapping of different temporalities converges around the architectural site of each fountain, here functioning as a communicational device, a channel by means of which the past enters the present and is projected into the future, and in relation to which the fluidity of water as a medium is not metaphorical but a conduit that transmits and connects life from the past into the present: "continuity is all in water" (40). In Rome, water is not only conceived as fundamental to the social and architectural history of the city: being in the city means partaking in a "generic fountain feeling" (61) and being engulfed in the city's watery "vast subconscious," always at work; it means becoming "a moving figure in it" (ibid.). Fountains are not presented as single works of architecture or engineering but as a system making music in the medium of water, either in the city or in the gardens of Hadrian's villa, where "there must have been a sound of it almost everywhere" (149), and where Clark's prose waxes most lyrical:

> You have to imagine two things first: water and marble. Water was a prime element in architecture, here as in Rome, an element to be given shape, form, like other materials, subject to conceptions as varied—left flat and still or used in the other simple ways on occasion, but probably more often elaborate in its faces and kinds of motion. It is the element of distance and the undefinable, a co-medium of light, serving purposes of luxury that later, when indoors was really indoors and glass was better, were taken over by wall-length mirrors and crystal chandeliers. (148)

A poetic, unifying principle seems to be at work in the convergence of material forces, intellectual determinations, and aesthetic dispositions underlying the metamorphic and resilient quality of Roman culture in time. No ready-made term is available to describe the mixture of poiesis and materiality that Clark is after, hence her choice of a literary, oneiric, near-surrealistic register that climaxes in her descriptions of the poem-like and dream-like structure of the city magnified in Hadrian's villa: "Aside from the glory of it, what a pensiveness there must have been around the house from all this water: […] Nothing else permits such voyages of the spirit, nothing gives such largesse of suggestion and of time present and past" (151).

Each Epoch Dreams the One to Follow…

But what was special about Rome to inspire such a long love letter to the city? Evoked as "everybody's memory" (20) and as a city of such beauty that hordes of invaders spared some of it and adored it, "not having known that a city could be so beautiful" (16), the city figures in Clark at times as a poem and at other times as a dream, both expressive formations whose manifest content requires decoding, interpretation, and erudition; "Ecco Roma! […] a vast untidiness peopled with characters and symbols so profound they join the imagery of your own dreams, whose grandeur also is of dreams." A place "secret, sensuous, oblique," Rome is "a poem […] to be known as a poem" (22–23). As a poem, "the city has its own language in time, its own vocabulary for the eye, for which nothing else was any preparation" (19). The idea of a city as a poem implies that education in reading and technique are prerequisites for experiencing it properly. Hence, nobody would be better suited to understand its secret language than a highly educated writer, a professional critic well-versed in the technique of close reading.

Clark's choice of closing *Rome and a Villa* with a chapter dedicated to the close reading of the sonnets of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli, a poet who wrote in Romanesco and was still largely obscure when the book was written, is not only her most *virtuoso* performance as a literary critic in this book, but also her most explicit statement about the value of literary knowledge (and training) for cultural understanding. From the beginning, the closing chapter declares its interest in claiming the relation between the language of poetry, the language of the Roman people, and the strength of its culture across the centuries by referencing the inscription placed on Belli's statue in Trastevere: "TO THEIR POET/ G. G. BELLI/ THE PEOPLE OF ROME" (279). Clark's precise philological, formal, and cultural analysis of Belli's language in the sonnet form is oriented toward clarifying why his large body of poems is a portrait of the people of Rome, "not only of the plebs, *noialtri*, but of a whole society," told "from the mouth of the people [...] but no less vivid for the rest of the structure, from the pope down" (280). Such a collective portrait, she claims, "is a record, in sweep and intimacy comparable to the great European novels of the century, of the tormented period of 1830–48 in the Rome of the papal state, also known at the time as the city of the 6 P's: *papa*, *preti*, *principi*, *puttane*, *pulci* e *poveri*—pope, priests, princes, whores, fleas, and the poor" (280).

Clark's convincing parallels between Belli and Joyce (whom, we are reminded, together with Gogol, was one of his few European admirers) and between Belli and Piranesi (justified by examples) concur to establish in Belli's sonnets the example of that poetic principle that unified Roman culture across time, cultural strata, and media forms. At the same time, such a celebration of poetry as revelatory of the "idea of Rome," carried on by means of close reading and historical documentation in the final chapter of the book, is nothing if not Clark's self-conscious, meta-critical methodological statement about her *Rome and a Villa* as a work of literature that should itself be read as a poem.

But part of the fascination of Rome as a subject of poetic meditation was due to what the poet Wystan Auden, in his review of the book, keenly described as a reaction-formation against the massification of culture shared by intellectuals of his generation: "for us, I believe, in the middle of the twentieth century, the Roman Empire is like a mirror in which we see reflected the brutal, vulgar, powerful yet despairing image of our own technological civilization, an imperium which now covers the entire globe, for all nations, capitalist, socialist and communist, are united in their worship of mass, technique and temporal power" (3).

In Clark's account, it was especially tourism, its global organization and logic, that displayed "the despairing image of our own technological civilization," and it was through tourism that the "too-muchness" of the city was registered, revealing the cognitive failure of the modern desire to grasp it all and the "Protestant malaise" of knowing it all—as she called such an omnivorous attitude toward knowledge by pointing to Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Hawthorne, and Stendhal, writers who inhabited a more positivist century and a less competitive, less reifying media environment. Rome may have been "everybody's memory, as it was a hundred or a thousand years ago" (20), but by the early Fifties, it was clear that fascism and the mass media exemplified the "worship of mass, technique and temporal power" Auden had criticized: fascism had refashioned the past in order to serve its political needs, and in the postwar global media culture, "memories" of Rome were not what they used to be but had been transformed in their essence by the newer reproductive media, which in turn changed "the idea of Rome" in the visitors' unconscious.

To the figure of the tourist, Clark thus juxtaposed that of the poet, the bearer of a different kind of knowledge. Like the poet in T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," she wrote about

Rome's paradoxical modernity with the consciousness "not of what is dead, but of what is already living" in the future, of "what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past" (22). Tourists may have been searching for the city's rich presence of the past in its monumental landscape, but, stepping through the *stones* of Rome, Clark found evidence of a singular modernity manifested by the condensation of classicism and modernism in the city's architecture, and turned to modernist literary techniques to incorporate and make sense of such apparent incongruities. This is clear in her assessment of Hadrian's villa, where the enumeration of the architectural details evokes formal choices that could also be transcoded and extended to describe some modernist literary techniques:

> There is a good deal that is not classic here: the reminder of mosques in the aggregation of domes of various heights and sizes; the flamboyant use of upper stories, especially in this court, almost as though the great upflung tower building were meant to be seen against particular cloud formations; even the general layout, which is on several axes, always an invitation to disorder. (170)

If, as Hal Foster argued, the question of identity is central to the discourse of modernity, specifically in its relation to and construction of the cultural, the psychological, and the technical Other (208), then what we see at work in the chapter dedicated to Hadrian's villa is Clark's original articulation of that discourse through the construction of the narrative of Hadrian—"one of the richest as well as brightest men in the empire" (170)—as a proto-modern subject, "a character more complex than any in Proust" (143), and through the casting of his villa as a nodal point in the manifestation and documentation of the problem of subjectivity as it speaks to—her own—modern condition and modernist taste:

> The whole sense of the place is individual, violently so; it is the expression of a single artist, straining away from the standard so far that with the least slip of taste it could fall into freakishness or vulgarity but achieves greatness instead: a tour de force, certainly, like a Turner or Tiepolo sky, but convincing, through sheer personal brilliance. (170)
>
> […]
>
> Nevertheless there is a *sound* in the place that leads you past the forms of art, and like a mosquito in your ear *drowns out the visceral struggle of centuries that came forward for a moment in the big baths. It is a very modern sound: the scream of the I;* the geometry of these vast courts is all a dialogue with self; they are not public at all but private as a dream and whatever company

> moves in them will also be a projection of the dreamer's mind. (171; emphasis added)

The endless medium of water, resonating through the several theaters of the Villa, connects and guides the paths designed by Hadrian, running from one stage to the next as if along the steps of his life. It becomes a metaphor for history itself, connecting the past to the present and converging through "the visceral struggle of centuries" in the emergent—modernist—figure of the subject. Water operates in *Rome and a Villa* alternatively as a medium and a metaphor through which the poetic structure of the city and the poetic essence of Hadrian's life (encrypted in the Villa) are actualized and re-actualized in time, through water and marble. Their decoding presupposes an equally poetic sensibility in the present and the consciousness of "the present moment in the past" (Eliot 22) in order to reveal the continuity of poetry and the imagination across centuries. Hence, the many textual references to the Villa *as a poem* that should be *approached as a poem*, almost tracing an interpretive methodology that extends back to and discloses alternative, more imaginative, and not entirely reified meanings in the "idea of Rome." For instance, the Villa has seriousness "only as a poem" (181); it is a space "you" enter "slowly, as you would enter a long poem" (142); Hadrian's dream masterpiece is a place "never meant to be lived in: it was always a poem, as anything he built must be" (185), and its narrowest and most obscure passages are also "a fantasy of dread […], normal enough in the general poem of Rome" (191), while in the chambers, the statues, and the fountains dedicated to Antinous, "the wonderful private poem goes on growing, in marble and water and gold" (179), potentially endless as "it seems the imagination was as inexhaustible as the medium; it needed only more space, more time to produce still other poems in water" (150).

Besides evoking Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous poem, "Kubla Khan," Clark's description of the Villa as the actualization of Hadrian's fantasy to create there his "pleasure dome" (144), conceived in his "intellectual plateau" (ibid.), a place where he would collect, preserve, and showcase "the spots that had most attracted him on his Eastern travels," (143), and perhaps also to re-enact some actions from his personal drama, suggests the figure of the pleasure dome as a diorama of the Empire and its geopolitical order right before its historical end. At the same time, the polytheatrical structure of the Villa implies a logic of performativity that strengthens the projection of Hadrian as a figure and a parallel for modernist subjectivity. The Villa is described as organized into a multiplicity of spaces for Hadrian's performance

and projection of versions of himself—at different stages and on a different stage—as if he were a character in a classical (i.e., antique) version of Luigi Pirandello's modernist drama *Uno, nessuno e centomila*. In this respect, the Villa is a structure that can be seen in analogy with modern media as a premodern device for recording, storing, and replaying the protagonist's past experience:[5]

> Certainly the gesture is theatrical too: to have literally built the island, actually played out the game; but what in the villa is not? This staginess is of his deepest nature, the very stuff of his genius. Everything in him, the grand and the tawdry, the terror and the boredom, requires to be turned into a visible object; if he does not express his perceptions in architecture, they will grow to madness […] if he is not on a stage, he is nothing, he will lose all belief in himself. (181–82)

Going back to the villa in the 1970s, Clark concluded that the assault of the masses had not spared Hadrian's pleasure dome—"the saddest place in the world, gaunt as an old abandoned graveyard, only what is buried there is the Roman Empire" (142)—and yet there is no nostalgia in her assessment of the place, which, just like the city, "has been through worse, well, maybe worse, so many times before" (12).

… And in so Doing it Renews the Older

Rome and a Villa is permeated by the idea—now consolidated among scholars of modernism (Murphet, Trotter, Danius, Jaffe)—that between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the innovations of technical media that made mass culture possible also changed the human sensorium and the unconscious structures of Western experience, causing epistemological breaks that were incorporated and aesthetically reflected upon in modernist works. This notion circulates in Clark's prose as the invisible structure to which her subtle narrative reacts and responds. If, as we have seen, in 1952 she alluded to that structure mainly through references to the tourism industry ("They swirl in herds through the Vatican Museums, around the Colosseum—you would not think, as Dante said, that there could be so many" [18]), in the second edition of the book (published in 1974),

[5]Hadrian designed the complex of Tivoli (built around A.D. 120) to be a masterpiece of architecture and an artwork of artworks, casting, storing, and displaying the masterpieces he had admired the most, acquired, and ordered to be copied during his lifetime campaigns in the East. Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli is the most complex and extensive Roman villa known.

the nexus between tourism, cultural industry, and media system only became more explicit:[6]

> When this book was written Piazza Barberini was about as ugly with billboards, the most vulgar hotel edifice in town and other money-motivated blight as it is now, yet it was still possible to think the Triton had a place and function there. It was a fragment of the long grace of memory, a small point of rest in the turmoil, for the soul's health. No longer. The insult and brutality of its surroundings have killed it at last; perhaps just that many more cars, that much more dirt and noise; and perhaps the billboards, mostly movie ads, have really gotten twice as big—they must have, there couldn't be any others that big in the world. ("Return" 7)

The preface to the 1974 edition of *Rome and a Villa* highlighted the critical edge of the book in ways that most critics and reviewers had failed to see when it was first published in 1952. The preface introduced readers to see how, by bringing her skill as a writer and literary critic to the study of culture, Clark had brought forth an original book of cultural history/culture studies writing before the term had any critical currency. That she set the bar high for similar kinds of writings can be inferred from the number of positive reviews it received, the considerable discussion it sparked in newspapers and magazines, and the fact that it went into new editions in 1974 and 2013. The appreciation of the book among the Anglo-American intelligentsia is evidenced not only by the quantity of reviews it received, but also by the literary prestige of the reviewers, among whom stood out the English poet W. H. Auden ("Our Italy"), the American writer Katherine Anne Porter ("The Grand and the Tragic"), and the Poet Laureate and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Penn Warren. Warren even wrote a letter to Clark's editor at Doubleday calling *Rome and a Villa* a book "original and beautiful […] a book that I am sure I shall often return to" (Smith 30). Indeed, that Warren—himself another Italophile (although rooted in a very different intellectual background from Clark's)—would permanently return to the book

[6]"The key words for the differences since 1950 are automobile, air travel, TV, overpopulation, pollution and runaway capitalism; throw in some thirty-six governments since World War II, and a burst of national prosperity from the early 50's for some twenty years, putting many millions of native-owned cars on the streets and roads around, and you have a degree of speed, noise, chicanery and confusion that can make one nostalgic for an old-time sack or barbarian invasion. This is a sack from within. From without too, of course. Tourist buses stream in endlessly over or under the Alps, elephants unopposed; outlying churches of great age shudder under air traffic bringing and taking mainly tourists all day every day. These transients, legitimately or not, to be served or preyed upon, are the big industry" (Return 3).

and its author is a historical fact, as he and Clark met in 1952 and married in 1954, starting a lifetime of companionship and interest for Italy. The success of *Rome and a Villa* as an exemplum can also be detected in the admired words of other writers and intellectuals, and by the fact that it inaugurated a mixed-genre kind of writing that, by 1965, found at least one prestigious imitator—if we may superficially call Elizabeth Bowen's *A Time in Rome* an imitation.

While the lyrical structure of the book was praised by the Anglophone intellectual élite, who appreciated the sensuality and quality of the prose, the singularity of the book's style, and the erudition of the writer, its critical, methodological, and epistemological points remained undiscussed, and so did its status as an innovative work of cultural criticism. For instance, the reviewer of *The Washington Post* defined it as "A Poetic Study of Eternal Rome," emphasizing its singularity and difference from travel literature, memoir, fiction, and cultural anthropology, unknowingly substantiating Clark's claim that "the three non-fiction books [I have written] wouldn't be what they are if I hadn't spent a fierce amount of time doing fiction. […] They are full of living figures" (Clark and Warren, "Interview" 66). This innovative approach to bringing historical figures to life through literary imagination was not unique to Clark's work. Two years after *Rome and a Villa*, in 1954, another book that reimagined the relation between modernity and pastness through the "full living figure" of an ancient hero, Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian*, was on its way to becoming a global bestseller.

At the root of the book's lasting success was not only Clark's singular training in the Classics and in modern French and Italian, but also her experience as a translator and a literary critic, a background that equipped her with the technique and competence necessary to access and decrypt ancient cultural codes, illuminate their persistence among contemporary ruins, and contextualize their function in a culture radically transformed by the media system. What contemporary reviewers failed to see was that Clark's mastery of close reading—the modernist technique *par excellence* for interpreting literary texts—combined with her sharp literary knowledge and writing craftsmanship, which allowed her to pioneer something remarkable: she redirected the practice of "examining closely the language of a literary text" (Culler 20) toward decoding the complex signs of Roman and Italian culture. Drawing on her expert knowledge, vivid imagination, and what one critic called her "youthful audacity" (Bell 16), she blazed a trail from literary to cultural criticism.

Redirected to the interpretation of urban structure, ancient and Baroque monuments, and linguistic, cultural, and social signs, the hermeneutical training of a writer-critic well served the purpose of investigating the details of individual stories and artifacts as expressions of a social and symbolic system. Out of the stratified cultural traces and material histories embedded in the Roman rubble, Clark wrote explanatory stories that reshaped factual information into entertaining, personal, anecdotal, and fictional narratives. In so doing, she experimented with a method of cultural inquiry that anticipated what anthropology theorized two decades later, when Clifford Geertz, in his *The Interpretation of Culture*, wrote: "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical" (5).

How was one to read social expressions that were enigmatic on their surface, such as Hadrian, Hadrian's Villa, the sonnets of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli, a media phenomenon like the Bandit Giuliano? Augustus, Christ, Nero: "the psychological triad of all Rome"— how to explain their power "as images"? (99). Under Clark's observation, cultural enigmas were approached as social expressions, "Complex: but perhaps not, after all, so 'enigmatic'" (143). And, as one reviewer put it, she "[got] it all down: the real ruins, the fake ruins, the urinals […], the litter in the fountains, the homosexual boys of Trastevere, the paper-woman, the waiters, the beggars, the cat colony, the unofficial satirists, the pregnant women, the splendor and the ignobility—shady deals in via Veneto, the Borghese Gardens strewn with contraceptives every morning, the phallic obelisks [etc.]" (O'Faolain 6–7).

Culture as a "web of significance that connects social life and its expressions across time" is a concept that Clark distills—as we have seen—out of her analysis of Rome, in search of its "structure of feeling," that most elusive of conceptual infrastructures that weaves together distant space and time in the social experience of belonging. The subject of *Rome and a Villa* involved, for her, questioning how the idea of Rome was shaped in Classical, Baroque, fascist, and contemporary uses of the city in both high and popular culture, where it was grounded, and how it survived in spite of such uses. Like an uncommonly talented anthropologist, Clark composed her book as a collection of notes on her *détours* in Roman space-time—as the reviewers did not fail to remark. Part travelogue, part anthropological essay, part work of literary criticism, part architectural glossary, and part autobiography

and self-reflective journal, *Rome and a Villa* displayed a hybrid style of composition in which many questions and strategies explored by modernist writers found a home. References to modernist writers appear throughout the text, as if to remind her readers that she was not unaware of the time and conditions of her writing.

At times, and seen in retrospect, Clark's elusive, tactful approach to the cultural material she is investigating recalls the style that the great anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss adopted in his 1955 *Tristes Tropiques*, which remains one of the foundational texts of twentieth-century cultural anthropology. In this respect, the very choice of including note-taking—by definition a less assertive writing mode than argumentation—confirms Clark's encompassing of modernist stylistic markers in her writing, suggesting fragmentation, syncopation, non-definitiveness by way of allusion, analogy, synecdoche. At other times, irony and subtle sarcasm dominate her exposure of cultural or political contradictions. As a modernist intellectual, Clark was following both in the long trajectory of Ezra Pound's imperative to "make it new" in the sense of *reading it anew*, by shifting the focus between the monument, the poem, the ritual, the event, and the *web*—to keep Geertz' term—and in the lasting reverberations of Eliot's commitment to shoring up the edifice of a classical culture that had become lost and inaccessible to modern scholars using the fragments of history and erudition.

The fact that *Rome and a Villa* was new and stayed new, going through three editions, means that it was successful at positioning itself, simultaneously, in two distinct areas of the cultural field where it was read and appreciated: on the emergent segment of global mass tourism, and on the more traditional and increasingly rarefied segment occupied by the intellectual élite. In the media ecology of postwar communication, this double positioning is itself symptomatic of the condition of mass-mediality to which *Rome and a Villa* responded. The book countered the second "age of platitudes" of global consumerism by displaying a deliberately literary, witty, sharp, and "difficult" writing that reflects and distances itself from coeval and competing technologies for managing memory and governing the past: advertisements, films, billboards, and other forms of entertainment referred to in the text. In this way, Clark's text both internalized what Julian Murphet calls a "sedimented trace-history of the competing media institutions" and asserted literature's superiority as a medium and a technique for retrieving, affirming, and making new the poetic principle that she saw at work in all that contributed to generating "the idea of Rome" in time—and, as a side effect, for modernizing it.

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