

A LIFE AS A WORK OF ART: LITERARY TOURISTS' MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES AT IL VITTORIALE DEGLI ITALIANI

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ABSTRACT: Literary tourism is a complex cultural phenomenon which presents in a variety of forms, showing its lively connections with past and contemporary culture and its capacity to create experiences for different audiences. The aim of this paper that is based on a qualitative study is to investigate literary tourists' motivations and experiences at Il Vittoriale degli Italiani (the Italian author Gabriele D'Annunzio's last home). To achieve this aim, an evocative autoethnographic method has been used, which allows an emphatically, emotional relationship between writers and readers. The findings suggest that literary tourism promotes an interactive relationship between readers, authors, and places, besides contributing to the popularisation of high culture and, in a sense, the aestheticisation of everyday life. Additionally, this paper challenges the idea that the act of reading implies a temporal and ontological asymmetry between readers and writers, as well as the link between the aestheticisation of life and art. It also provides a further definition of literary tourism, which emphasises the ability of this type of tourism to merge words and images, thus turning language into spectacle and making the ordinary beautiful. **Keywords:** literary tourism; Vittoriale degli Italiani; tourist motivation; tourist experience; evocative autoethnography.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and tourism dates back at least to Roman times and is believed to have been revived by Petrarch (Hendrix, 2009). Notwithstanding this long history, it appears that it was not until the end of the last century that literary tourism attracted scholarly interest (O'Connor and Kim, 2014), which, moreover, has been steadily increasing ever since, as the number of publications now available

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on this subject shows. These publications seem to have this in common: they show that literature creates dreams while tourism actualises those dreams. Thus a laborious process of transcoding of actual or imaginary events into emotions and memories underlies the concept of literary tourism (Drabble, 2009).

The numerous definitions of literary tourism available suggest that this concept has not been formalised yet (Smith, 2012); therefore, it presently appears as a set of more intuitive ideas advanced by different researchers. Squire (1991, 1993), for example, initially described literary tourism in terms of travelling to destinations linked to writers and their works. A later redefinition highlights the interactive nature of literary sites and their being ideal vehicles for the transmission of ideas, customs, beliefs, and traditions of both bygone and contemporary ages (Squire, 1994). This implies that those sites are construed as social creations earmarked for tourists.

Squire's definitions, however, do not seem to provide an exhaustive explanation of literary tourism as they leave aside the connection, peculiar to this kind of tourism, between real venues and fictitious spaces (Herbert, 1995b, 2001; Smith, 2003) as well as the relationship that literary tourism establishes between authors, texts, and visitors. The centrality of this relationship, on the contrary, has been stressed especially by Robinson and Andersen (2002b) while Stiebel (2004) runs through the link among texts, readers, and places, maintaining that the activity of reading catalyses the visit and appreciation of literary sites.

The essential role played by literature and its products in prompting literary tourism has also been emphasised by Müller (2006), who contends that literature is the *sine qua non* for arousing interest among tourists and for imparting meaning to places. Westover (2008), on the other hand, found that the *trait d'union* between sites, authors' works, and readers — apart from typifying a secular form of pilgrimage to places of literary worship — is somewhat ambiguous. This is because while the act of reading links writers and their audience, it simultaneously emphasises their mutual remoteness, especially when their ontological conditions are different; i.e., the former are dead. This temporal distance, widening a gap between different orders of reality, *de facto* triggers a desire for intimacy that eventually prompts increasing numbers of tourist-readers to travel to dead authors' places. Here they expect to “see” literature in the material world” (*ibid*, p. 67), which basically implies the translation of intangible ideas into visible representations.

Despite the foregoing ambiguity identified by Westover, Watson's (2009) definition of literary tourism foregrounds the close interconnection among sites, authors, and visitors, whereas Mintel (2011) highlights the multifarious nature of this kind of tourism. A more exhaustive conceptualisation of literary tourism is attempted by Smith (2012),

who noted that most of the definitions of this type of tourism usually neglect events, which, in addition to “literary depictions and the writing of creative literature” (p. 9), should be considered as integral parts of literary tourism.

The analysis of the above definitions — which are probably among the most representative of literary tourism — illustrates a lack of an explicit focus on the powerful, iconic language of literary tourism, resulting from its ability to merge words and images, and turning language into spectacle and making literature and art more accessible to wider audiences. We contend that the tremendous educational potential of literary tourism should be addressed and, therefore, propose to further define this type of tourism as a set of activities aiming at the popularisation of literature and other forms of art through intertwining display with discourse in order to link more intimately art with ordinary life.

Based on the first author’s experience at Il Vittoriale degli Italiani — the last home of the well-known Italian writer Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938) — this paper investigates individual motivations to visit literary sites. As it seems that little research has been conducted on this particular topic, it is the authors’ contention that exploring the above motivations can facilitate a better understanding of the dynamics of literary tourism as a whole. Furthermore, this paper argues that there is a knowledge gap concerning the role of literary tourism in enhancing the power of literature and arts to make education more attractive and to foster mutual dialogue between high and popular culture with a view to stimulating new approaches to our cultural traditions.

TYPOLOGIES OF LITERARY TOURISM

As many authors (such as Squire, 1991; Robinson and Andersen, 2002a; Carson *et al.*, 2013) have observed, literary tourism has been generally, and maybe generically, regarded as a type of the broader phenomenon of cultural tourism. Conversely, other researchers have more specifically thought about literary tourism as a sector overlapping cultural tourism (MacLeod *et al.*, 2010), or as a “micro-niche” (Mintel, 2011; Hoffmann, 2013) which, despite potential growth, is likely to remain as it is in the near future (Mintel, 2011). This challenges the supposed massification of literary tourism (Busby and Sketliffe, 2013) that Hoppen *et al.* (2014), however, regard as one of the most important drivers of change in this tourism field.

If literary tourism traditionally falls under the umbrella of cultural tourism — a neglected and under-researched area (see Robinson and Andersen, 2002b; and Squire 1994), this might explain the conspicuous lack of statistics. As a consequence, literary tourism can self-evidently

be understood through the analysis of cultural tourism statistical data whose heterogeneity makes any comparison, especially among European countries, difficult. This is mainly due to the current non-existence of a coordinated system that can produce unified and accurate cultural data in Europe as well as to the fact that culture is generally judged to be an indeterminate concept. Its boundaries, in fact, are often blurred as well as constantly movable (ESSnet Culture, 2012).

The above observations, and the fact that literary tourism encompasses both tangible and intangible elements (Timothy and Boyd, 2011), suggest that literary tourism is a complex phenomenon. It actually consists of different types, which show the multifarious relationship between literature and tourism.

Table 1. Typologies of literary tourism

	Aspects of homage to an actual location
	Places of significance in the work of fiction
Butler (1986)	Appeal of areas because they were appealing to literary and other figures
	The literature gains popularity in a sense that the area becomes a tourist destination in its own right
Busby and Klug (2001)	Travel writing
	Film-induced tourism
Mintel (2011)	Literary festivals
	Bookshop tourism

Source: adapted from Busby and Klug (2001, pp. 319, 321) and Mintel (2011)

Writer's birthplaces

Birthplaces, in Smith's (2003) opinion, play a significant role in introducing tourists to an author's early life and social status prior to fame, as well as in giving visitors an idea of the familial and external environments that have influenced a writer (Smith, 2012). The link between writers and their birthplace is also underlined by Lowe (2012), who argues that these locations can be regarded as original sources of inspiration, often heralding the authors' literary vision and destiny. Consequently, writers' birthplaces may be seen as focal points for tourists and literary pilgrims.

Writers' graves

Visiting authors' tombs suggest "a distinctive affective investment" (Matthews, 2004, p. 10) in a writer's demise, an intense pathetic (in its etymological meaning) experience allowing a singular form of spiritual communication between the visitors-readers and famous dead au-

thors. Furthermore, graves and the idea of physical annihilation associated with them are instrumental in transfiguring writers into heroic and symbolic figures whose tombs sometimes become an integral part of the country's landscape (Watson, 2006).

The transformation of writers into mythical icons implies their institutionalisation and commercialisation (Crowley, 2000), that is, their private lives and properties are turned into tourist curiosities (Smith, 2012; Robinson and Andersen, 2002b) and, ultimately, into "powerful brands" (*ibid.*, p. 19). This entails that dead authors and their works can be thought of as artifacts; meanwhile, their special link calls attention to the role of literary tourism, which attempts to imbue reality with literature and fantasy, but also imagination with sensory experience, thus allowing the simultaneous practices of reading and feeling (Westover, 2008). These practices may help explain why destinations associated with writers, and artists in general, are so popular.

Writers' homes

Death often turns writers' homes into tourist attractions as they are both eloquent expressions of a permanent absence and secular sanctuaries. For this reason, writers' homes tend to reflect the otherness of the author, which cannot be detached from their celebrity and, as in D'Annunzio's case, scandalous life (Robinson, 2002). Additionally, because of the symbiotic relationship between writers and their houses, the latter can be defined as *memoriae loci*, places of remembrance resulting from the transformation of life into literature and vice versa. They are projections of the author's identity and vehicles for his talent and ideals (Hendrix, 2008). Even the interiors of literary homes are suggestive of the close relationship between life and art, besides being enlivened by objects which generally function as texts in that they evoke a vision of beauty and produce aesthetic emotion (Weber, 2011).

Fiction-related tourism

A further type of literary tourism is fiction-related tourism, which is concerned with places imbued with a writer's imagination (Herbert, 1995b); they are thus suspended between "realistic geography" (Crane, 2012, p. 67) and its representation. This implies that the hybrid nature of literary sites, resulting from "the amalgamation of fake and authentic" (Eco, 1998, p. 36), allows fictional events to be absorbed into the very structure of real life (Connor, 1997). These places, emerging from the emotional world of either characters or authors, however, then undergo appropriation by tourism and global culture (Robinson, 2002; Crawshaw and Urry, 1997) that ultimately increasingly blur the aforementioned nebulous distinction between reality and fantasy.

Film-induced tourism

The inextricable blending of reality and imagination also characterises a particular type of literary tourism that is undergirded by the transformation of “cinematic geographies” (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 117) into tourist destinations: film-induced tourism. This is concerned, in Riley and Van Doren’s view (1992), with indirect consumption and promotion of tourist destinations related to film-making or setting, meaning that, by transferring real places into fictional plots, films can provide viewers with vicarious emotional experiences and, at the same time, advertise a particular place more extensively (Riley, 1994).

A broader perspective on film-induced tourism is offered by Busby and Klug (2001) who argue that this kind of tourism includes not only films and television programmes, but also books: in fact, any media that can contribute to the transformation of places into tourist or literary sites. As a result, film-tourism can be regarded as instrumental in disseminating culture and in conferring value and distinctiveness to national cultural heritage.

A less comprehensive definition of film-induced tourism is proposed by Beeton (2005), who relates it to famous film locations alongside tours of movie studios and theme parks. The latter, Beeton also contends, are to be seen as more closely tied to the notion of hyper-reality — due to their being intrinsically signs or second-degree representations — as well as to the issue of authenticity, as Buchman *et al.* (2010) observe too.

The growing importance of film-induced tourism — loosely encompassed in the broader field of cultural tourism — is stressed by Hudson and Ritchie (2006). Connell (2012) argues that the label ‘film-induced tourism’ is not broad enough, however, because it excludes other varieties of this kind of tourism. Moreover, Connell describes film-induced tourism as specialist and identifies some similarities with literary tourism, namely their ability to stir their audiences’ emotions; an ability that travel writers possess too.

Travel writing

Travel writing, which has a long literary tradition (Zilcoski, 2008) and owes a great debt to other literary genres (Youngs, 2006), has garnered considerable interest from academics. They have focused their attention on the problematic definition of travel writing, which ranges from factual travel narratives (Zilcoski, 2008), to heterogeneous collections of both actual and fictional accounts where travel is the *sine qua non* for their production (Rubiés and Bacon, 2000), to personal, ideological, and sometimes biased recounting of the writer’s journeys (Youngs, 2006).

A further problem posed by travel writing is concerned with the difficulty of defining it as a genre (Zilcoski, 2008; Dann, 1999; Fus-

sel, 1980). In fact, some scholars argue that travel writing can be seen as a long-standing, evolving, and umbrella genre (Hulme and Youngs, 2002), an overlapping literary form which, therefore, “resists neat categorization and isolation” (Melton, 2002, p. 23); a “genre of genres” (Rubiés and Bacon, 2000), an overarching concept, and a sort of subcategory of autobiography (Fussel, 1980).

A distinctive feature of travel writing is that it allows the exploration and representation of the exotic (Venkovits, 2011) and the Other (Hester, 2008) in the attempt to capture the meaning and spirit of a place (Jeans, 1979). This spirit can also be seized and expressed if travel books present each journey as “the unfolding of a poetic” (Minh-ha, 1994, p. 21), namely narratives of personal experiences, and if they intentionally manipulate the tourist gaze in order to meet the reader’s expectations (Heynders and van Nuenen, 2014). This may help to explain why travel books are instrumental in promoting destinations and their continued success; they rely on the power of words in a world where visual means of communication predominate (Thompson, 2011).

Bookshop tourism

A more sophisticated approach to literary sites is sought by bookshop tourists, whose main reason for travelling is to tour the bookshops of a particular destination in order to track down especially local authors’ works and other literature inspired items (Mintel, 2011; Edinburgh Tourism Action Group, 2012). These book-hunting trips entail the creation of a niche aimed at writers and experts in literature, but they also serve to advertise and endorse independent bookshops through presenting them as tourist destinations (Portzline, 2012). Hence, bookshop tourism can help to boost local economies and transform bookshops into social hubs, besides fostering reading and literacy through using digital media (*ibid*). This may help big and small bookstores to remain competitive, despite the exponential e-book growth, and be instrumental in enriching tourist experiences too (Mintel, 2011).

Literary festivals

A more traditional way of getting involved with literary tourism is through literary festivals: long-standing and well-established cultural phenomena — not always deeply researched and thus often superficially understood. Their meaning is chiefly involved with reaffirming national identity and reliving tradition (Quinn, 2003), whilst their focus has gradually changed over time: from highbrow to more popular culture (Mintel, 2011). Furthermore, they serve to revamp and promote a destination’s image (Hughes, 2000), and help tourists interact with the local communities that host literary festivals (Busby and Hambly, 2000).

MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Motivation has been described as a continuous process of interaction between biological drives as well as social and spiritual needs (Längle, 2012). This implies that motivation involves the whole personality of an individual (Parrinello, 1993); hence it may also help illuminate tourist behaviour.

Literary tourists' motivations are typically concerned with an interest in both the biography of artists and the places related to or immortalised in their works (Herbert, 1996). Moreover, spiritual and cultural enhancement, escape, emotional connection and engagement with history and heritage (Poria *et al.*, 2006), the search for aesthetic pleasure (Gabriel and Lang, 2006), memories of the past, and nostalgia are other push factors that can explain why tourists visit literary destinations.

Nostalgia plays a crucial role in appreciating literary tourism as it implies the existence of extra-textual meanings (Busby and George, 2004), the idealisation of the past (Laenen, 1989), and its dramatic discordance with the present (Belk *et al.*, 2003): factors which ultimately contribute to the attractiveness of literary places (Herbert, 1995a). The past presented in these sites may, however, be contaminated by the present and adapted to contemporary consumers (Hollinshead, 1997). Nevertheless, a modernised version of the past allows an ideal connection with "our predecessors' transcendence" (Adam, 1990, p. 142). This is fostered through making provocative use of imagination that may function as a key to the past (Craig, 1989). This may help literary tourists to connect places with memory and memory with stories (Malpas, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on data collected using autoethnography: a recent, "popular form of qualitative research" (Anderson, 2006, p. 373) that may be described as a "lyric inquiry" (Neilsen, 2008, p. 94) in which the aesthetic underpins the phenomenological. This allows an emotional approach to knowledge that attempts to translate data into extraordinary experiences as well as to see a reflection of the particular in the universal (*ibid*; Quinney, 1998). Autoethnography is a fluid approach that is not reducible to the distinction — particularly criticised by Burnier (2006) — that Anderson (2006) has made between analytic and evocative autoethnography. These two forms of autoethnography, however, should not be regarded as the only ways of giving voice to the self.

Analytic autoethnography is seen as closer to traditional ethnography because the observation of broad socio-cultural phenomena has pre-eminence over the analysis of the self (Burnier, 2006). Evocative

autoethnography, conversely, has been described as a personalised form of narrative resulting from the synthesis of the highly subjective with the cultural (Richardson, 2000). Considering this distinction, it was decided to opt for evocative autoethnography because it is a process of self-discovery through self-reflection and involves the combination of psychological and social forces (Ellis, 1991) and language. Evocative autoethnography expresses a personal “desire to write from the heart” (Pelias, 2004, p. 1), and represents an attempt to bring readers into the writer’s inner world in order to share it (Holman Jones, 2002) and give truth to the writer’s voice (Wall, 2006).

Consistent with the aforementioned research method, the main step in writing an autoethnographic account of the first author’s visit to Il Vittoriale degli Italiani in November 2011 involved the compilation of a thirty-page diary over a two-month period. The diary was conceived as a place of critical exploration of personal observations, emotions, and recollections, but also as a descriptive narrative recording information about the different rooms of D’Annunzio’s house and the curious objects around it that caught the first author’s attention. Moreover, the diary was imagined as an organising tool for engaging with her creative side and identifying a few significant themes that, emergent from data analysis, provided a focus for her autoethnographic narrative.

Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data collected and to identify themes. This allowed the shift from the textual to the hermeneutic level (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis generated 20 codes, such as culture, secret feelings, personal transformation, and led to the creation of four themes placed into two overarching categories. They are: 1) Love for culture, including the themes of “encountering D’Annunzio” and “a passion for the past”, and 2) Inner motivation, including the themes “why I found myself there” and “life as a work of art”. The use of thematic analysis is underpinned by the theoretical assumption that each text can transcend its literal sense and show an extra-textual reality (Alaszewski, 2006). The relationship between writers and readers may be built through an alternative type of knowledge that, originating from inner excavation (Fleming and Fullagar, 2007), may lead to emotional resonance. This is one of the criteria for establishing validity in autoethnography. The first author attempted to achieve this resonance through dipping beneath the surface of the events narrated in her autoethnographic account.

With respect to research ethics, and particularly to confidentiality, it was decided not to mention any third party due to the inability to obtain informed consent. Meanwhile, no precaution to protect the authors’ identity was taken as transparency is essential in research, and being able to bear public scrutiny and criticism can be seen as a way of creating and maintaining an open relationship with one’s audience.

The main limitations of using this research method are fundamentally connected to the epistemological status of autoethnography and to the nature of reflexive writing, which are associated with a subjective, and therefore partial, narrative inquiry. Particularly, the option of a poetic style of writing could be criticised for its deviating from denotative meaning as well as, by extension, from objectivity, which explains why autoethnographies escape “prescribed formulas” of evaluation (Buchanan, 1992, p. 133). A further limitation of this research method may be related to the necessarily fragmentary account of the first author’s literary experience, which is not portrayed exactly as it was lived, but, consistent with the evocative form of autoethnography chosen, it is presented from an emotional perspective in order to extract different, deeper meanings (Bochner, 2000).

IL VITTORIALE DEGLI ITALIANI

The evocative autoethnography presented in this paper cannot be fully appreciated without some considerations of Il Vittoriale degli Italiani, an estate located in the town of Gardone Riviera, not far from the city of Brescia in Northern Italy. It is regarded as “one of the most fantastic monuments of the 20th century” (Licht, 1982, p. 318) and its ostentatious interiors may be seen as the direct “projection of D’Annunzio’s personality” (Ballabio, 2003, p.61).

The site that bears testimony to D’Annunzio’s inimitable life is a complex covering nine hectares and consisting of buildings, streets, squares, theatres, gardens alongside watercourses that show how nature and history are closely interwoven (Fondazione Il Vittoriale degli Italiani, 2014). The historical and cultural significance of D’Annunzio’s last residence — where the author lived from 1921 to 1938 — is premised on the relationship between the production of collective meanings and how they are constantly reconstructed and conveyed to contemporary visitors. In the light of this, literary tourism can be regarded as a vehicle for the cultural transmission of values across generations and from one place to another. Furthermore, literary tourism can be seen as a means of giving broader meaning to exceptional individual experiences so as to integrate them into ordinary life and thus turn them into “lived culture” (Squire, 1994, p. 107).

An evocative autoethnography of a visit to D’Annunzio’s home

In this autoethnographic account, a poetic language is used, as it appears to be the most appropriate way to express feelings and emotions. The above-mentioned four themes are introduced through the

use of resonant headings and are presented through fragments of an experience at Gabriele D'Annunzio's house. Additionally, images are included to help capture atmosphere, memories, and emotions. The first person is used, as this is considered to make the autoethnographic account more evocative: it refers to the experiences of the first author.

I first met him in the midst of my soul

My first encounter with Gabriele D'Annunzio occurred many years ago, when I was attending college and imagined life as a winged fairy bringing beauty and mystery. Everything seemed to draw my attention in all different ways: in everything I attempted to find secret connections with my own soul that, as I then realised, was constantly bent towards the spiritual side of life. Hence, I soon developed such a keen interest in literature that reading became my favourite pastime, especially during the summer holidays when days endlessly stretched in front of me. I remember increasingly taking refuge in poems and novels, which I thought of as magic worlds whose perfect remoteness from the monotony of ordinary life was like a promise of great adventure and meaningful experiences.

It happened during a class in Italian literature, when the teacher was introducing an artistic movement called Decadentism, that I heard his name for the first time: Gabriele D'Annunzio. The name sounded solemn: the poet himself associated his name with the name of the angel of the Annunciation. Meanwhile D'Annunzio's life recalled gripping stories of literary heroes accomplishing bold deeds, or of great minds that could be elevated by deep thoughts.

I started to read his novels and gradually became aware of the psychological complexity and vitality of the characters that D'Annunzio skilfully depicted. I began to grasp the great potential that literature may display in shedding light on the deepest recesses of the human mind and soul as well as unearthing the metaphysical essence of knowledge.

My emotional and intellectual involvement with D'Annunzio deepened further when I read his poems, which brought me into his inner world wherein, in a sense, I could catch a glimpse of mine. I sought some resemblance between his unquiet soul and my restless spirit, and I was always attempting to empathise with his world. I strained to retain every single impression that his verses made on me until my imagination became enveloped in his poetry. The words he used appeared to me like coloured butterflies lifting reality in the air and then shrouding it in mystery, but they also helped me to appreciate the innumerable, subtle nuances of the Italian language and it gradually uncovered my passion for writing.

On reflection, I can see that D'Annunzio exerted a strong influence upon my academic and personal life, especially because he made

me realise that literature can shape our way of living, letting our souls sparkle in ordinary objects and, speaking the words of beauty, make echoes of sublimity ring in this worldly life.

There I was in quest of my novel self

As my acquaintance with D'Annunzio's works and Italian literature grew more intimate, the idea of seeing the place where my favourite Italian author had spent the last years of his life, refined his art, and died, began to take shape in my mind. I was indeed convinced that I would have remained on the margins of D'Annunzio's world if I had not paid a visit to his magnificent residence. Hence, on a cold and misty day in November, I sallied forth to the small town of Gardone Riviera, a peaceful lake resort which invokes visions of a splendid past.

I was flushed with excitement at the thought of approaching the Vittoriale, this famous shrine of military and literary victories whose solitary grandeur appeared to me as a rarefied vision of Italy's ancient greatness and of those gifted spirits that had once lived, loved, and died therein. While immersed in the silent contemplation of the building and its awe-inspiring surroundings, I could almost hear my thoughts whispering and, slowly, the profound reasons why I had irresistibly been drawn there emerged into bright consciousness. I aspired to partake in D'Annunzio's artistic world, to inhale his creativity, and thus accomplish a spiritual alchemy between myself and the place where his life had slowly faded away. A mood of melancholy descended upon me as my mind lingered on the motives for my visit to D'Annunzio's house. I felt an intense pang of nostalgia for days gone by and at the same time, an impatience to absorb the essence of a life shaped by art rose to the surface.

And then, when time transformed my experience at Il Vittoriale degli Italiani into a vivid memory, I grasped that my pilgrimage had been precious because my new self had blossomed there. The unforeseen result of my visit to D'Annunzio's house made my old world creak under the weight of a different vision of life, consciously imbued with aesthetic wisdom and enriched with the incessant search for meaning and immortal beauty.

An ardent longing for a touch of the past

The keen sense of nostalgia that had struck me while admiring the exterior of Il Vittoriale degli Italiani grew more acute when I entered this imposing building. That palpable feeling emanated from the great respect I felt for the splendid, opulent past that was engulfing me in its mysterious charm and which appeared to me as a sensuous rhyme, breaking up the dull pace of the present.

The past was so vividly present in each room where D'Annunzio had lived that I could almost see it floating gently in the air and breathe it. It spoke the language of D'Annunzio's poetry, which was imprinted on the innumerable objects that with their eccentric elegance seemed to instil life into the house. Their stillness and mystery suddenly flowed over me in the Music Room.

Here, I stood in contemplation of two stupendous pianos accompanied by a symphony of sculptures, fruit-bowl lamps, and little tables inlaid with ivory and other precious materials. The exquisite drapery covering the walls of this room, the precious carpets languidly layered upon its floor, and the superb alabaster windows that feebly illuminated the room created a muffled, rarefied atmosphere which made a strong impression on me as the room looked like a silent poem poignantly recalling the irreversibility of time.

Nostalgia seized me more strongly as I stepped into the poet's *Officina*, the office where D'Annunzio used to retire to create his works. While I was walking through its little, low door, which forced me to bow down before art, the room immediately appeared to me as a treasure chest of knowledge, replete with rare books. Their tranquil presence moved me as I saw them as gloomy relics of busy, old days already buried by time whose fragrance they seemed still to give off.

In the quiet solemnity of the *Officina* that inspired deep reverence for the poet's art, my attention was drawn to a sculpted head covered with a veil. It portrayed Eleonora Duse, one of the great loves of D'Annunzio's life, which reminded me of the powerful bond between love and art. I knew it had lit up the poet's personal and artistic world. This led me to meditate upon D'Annunzio's existence, which stimulated both nostalgic admiration and a sense of estrangement from the desolation of the present.

Experiencing the extraordinary in ordinary life

I remember that during my visit to his house, D'Annunzio's relentless imagination had often come as a pleasant surprise, but turned into utter astonishment when I beheld the Blue Bathroom. My eyes could not take in the hundreds of artistic items of various shapes and colours that thronged this eccentric room, which appeared to me as the perfect synthesis of art with ordinary life. I noticed that the banal appearance of each object had simply disappeared just as a bright flower withers in the warm sun. Because of its magical power, art had transfigured those objects into things of beauty, which I could see sparkling in the room and I could feel shining in my eyes.

I was lost in contemplation of that blue place where I imagined that the poet's mind had embraced the universal through his senses and

tinged reality with his most secluded dreams. Again, I gazed pensively at that marvellous room and for a brief moment, I felt detached from reality while the wonderful vision I had just evaporated.

Three years have passed since I last visited D'Annunzio's home and now I know without a shadow of a doubt that this experience helped me to penetrate the real significance of a life lived as a work of art. At a personal level, it requires a total identification with one's own ideas, passions, and dreams, as well as a constant contemplation of the movements of one's soul. Only in this way will an artist be able to shape the unknown into images of beauty and transform them into ordinary life, just like a master potter working his clay into an exquisite vase.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to examine literary tourism and tourists' motivations and experiences through the lens of an experience at Il Vittoriale degli Italiani. The tourism literature was interrogated to clarify the concept of literary tourism, which has been found to be problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, because the large number of definitions of literary tourism available shows that the latter seems not to have been given formal status yet; secondly, because its identity appears to be uncertain, as this kind of tourism is still considered as an offshoot of cultural tourism.

A subsequent examination of the typologies of literary tourism showed a diversity which is indicative of contemporary cultural diversification. It also points to the widening scope of literary tourism, its arguable transition from niche to mass tourism, and its attempt to link high and popular culture — e.g., literary festivals. This diversity is a sign of the capacity of literary tourism to create a variety of myths — e.g., writers' birthplaces, homes, and graves — and emphasises the contribution of the arts towards creating a sense of place for tourists. The role of the imagination, on the other hand, is noted to play an important role in fiction-related tourism and travel writing. The latter, however, poses a number of problems that have been connected with its theoretical foundations, the narrator's subjective and sometimes one-sided view, and the awkward relationship between travel writers and the exotic cultures they come into contact with. A relatively new form of connecting literary tourists with their favourite authors has then been found to be central to bookshop tourism. This, moreover, raises the issues of the link between literary tourism and the traditional book publishing industry, alongside the potential of digital devices, to make literature more interactive and present in readers' lives.

An analysis of literary tourists' motivations detected that they are strongly influenced by push factors such as nostalgia and escape, which are essentially emotional in nature as they entail a close relationship with authors' biographies and places. Qualitative research was chosen as the research approach for the study of literary tourist motivations and experiences. This is because it is predicated upon subjectivity and because it adopts an interpretive approach to culture and society. Within this research approach, the new method of evocative autoethnography — hinged on self-reflection and the expression of personal feelings through a poetic style of writing — was chosen to present a personal literary tourist account. The use of poetic language to discuss the analysis serves to add originality to the discourse on literary tourism, as it may open the floor for alternative approaches to addressing literary tourism issues.

Analysis led to the establishment of four themes. The first theme was concerned with the emotional and intellectual relationship between authors and readers and the powerful influence that biographies and literary works may exert upon the latter's lives. The second theme focused on literary tourists' motivations to visit literary sites, namely a desire for identification with the writers' art and the places where they lived and worked, nostalgia, and the search for a new identity. Nostalgia, which constituted the third theme, was linked to an emotional involvement with the past, the evocative power of objects, and the need to escape a less meaningful present. Finally, the fourth theme was centred on the aestheticisation of life entailing the transfiguring power of art and the transformation of art into a lifestyle.

The findings confirm an emphasis in the literature on the rhetorical and emotional dimension of literary tourism aesthetics, which implies an interactive relationship between the individual and culture as well as among art, history, and everyday life. Furthermore, the notion that literary sites may help to redefine self-identity and to incorporate fictional elements into realistic settings, besides creating a dialectic between the past and the present is also supported. On the other hand, the paper challenges the idea that the act of reading implies a temporal and ontological asymmetry between readers and writers. In fact, this distance is irrelevant to the emotional experience of reading that, on the contrary, can be seen as an act of spiritual communion with the author's art in a timeless and undifferentiated dimension of intimacy. Likewise, the paper challenges the association between the aestheticisation of life and artifice: indeed, the former may instead contribute to a more authentic life, provided that art is assimilated into one's own soul.

Furthermore, this paper, despite its limitations that are concerned with lack of exhaustivity and specificity, contributes to the field of literary tourism research by highlighting the lively interaction of literary

tourism with past and contemporary culture alongside its potential to mediate between high and popular cultural practices whose traditional distinction could therefore be called into question. Additionally, the attempt to decipher literary tourist motivations from an evocative autoethnographic perspective is a further contribution to literary tourism research. This is because this qualitative method allows us to gain a deeper insight into the emotional world of tourists: one that underpins the idea of literary tourism and that, however, tends to be underutilised. Moreover, the authors have attempted a new definition of literary tourism, which is as follows: literary tourism is a set of activities aiming at the popularisation of literature and other forms of art through intertwining display with discourse in order to link more intimately art with ordinary life. It is our contention that this way of looking at literary tourism emphasises its power to promote and disseminate a “popular aesthetic” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 24). Clearly, the definition points to the role of the supplier of literary tourist attractions in shaping experience.

Possible avenues for future research may include: a more in-depth investigation of travel writing with respect to the role that the literary conventions it uses play in shaping literary tourists' motivations and their relationship with places; a wider exploration of the close link between commodification and the aestheticisation of life alongside its implications for literary tourism; a broader understanding of autoethnography as a research method, considering its capacity to penetrate the meaning of literary tourists' experience and thus grasp more thoroughly how culture is incorporated into ordinary life. Finally, as Hoppen *et al.* (2014) have already suggested, research on literary tourism in Asia should be encouraged in order to make this type of tourism a global rather than just an European or North American cultural phenomenon.

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