

'Nothing seems to have escaped her': British Women Travellers as Art Critics and Connoisseurs (1775–1825)

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Recent research has highlighted the participation of British women in the grand tour and the rise of female travel writers, while also stressing the relatively small number of travel narratives authored by women.¹ Despite their limited presence, British women's travel narratives of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did contain discussions of artistic matters. Written in order to account for a trip — the grand tour — that unfolded along a set itinerary, both female- and male-authored travel narratives, published between the 1770s and the 1820s, featured the same landmarks. Since Continental tours were undertaken in order to follow beaten tracks, the primary aim of travel writing was to put one's name on the map. True to its aristocratic origins, the grand tour was still a male rite of passage and its accounts powerful tools of social distinction used by upper-class male writers to give expression to their identity as men of taste. From the mid-eighteenth century however, new participants from the lesser elite and leisured middle classes had followed in the grand tourists' footsteps. With travel literature becoming one of the most popular forms of reading in Britain at the time, travellers were encouraged to put together written accounts of their voyages intended for publication. Quite remarkably, women, who ever more frequently joined travelling parties, did not remain the silent witnesses of their brothers', fathers', or husbands' travels.² They certainly did not publish travelogues as often as men did, but considering they were taught to avoid both travelling and publishing — two activities

¹ See Carl Thompson, 'Journeys to Authority: Reassessing Women's Early Travel Writing, 1763–1862', *Women's Writing*, 24 (2017), 131–50. Drawing on the database founded by Benjamin Colbert in 2014, *Women's Travel Writing, 1780–1840* <www.wlv.ac.uk/btw> [accessed 18 March 2019], Thompson estimates that there are around forty female-authored travel narratives out of a total of about 1,400 during the period 1690 to 1800 (p. 147, n. 14). The quotation in the title of my article is taken from a review of Marianne Baillie, *First Impressions on a Tour upon the Continent*, *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 31 July 1819, pp. 162–65 (p. 162).

² The significant increase in the number of women travellers has led authors to describe a feminization of the grand tour. See *Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, ed. by Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassyng Roworth, and Catherine M. Sama (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

deemed potentially detrimental to their reputation — the very fact that they became regular contributors to the growing market of travel literature is of historical significance.

Women, however, did not burst onto the British travel literature scene but rather resorted to rhetorical strategies in order to stage their apologetic presence. Following Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's posthumous publication of her *Letters* in 1763, women increasingly published their travel accounts during their lifetime, and the vast majority did so immediately on returning from their travels. If a few opted for anonymous publication, all were careful not to go public without the close protection provided by friends and family, who were profusely thanked in dedications and prefaces, and whose encouragement was presented as the sole motivation for their boldness. More encouraging still was the innate flexibility of travel literature as a genre. Being adapted from private notes, letters, or memoirs, travelogues straddled literary genres and borrowed from novels, published correspondence, and biographies. The very hybridity that characterized this burgeoning literature, and the absence of tight generic constraints, offered new possibilities of expression regardless of gender. Unhampered by strict literary rules, women were able to recount their journeys once they had apologized in their prefaces, provided that they complied with what Philippe Lejeune has called the 'autobiographical pact'.³ Indeed, all travellers supposedly laid before the public the whole truth of their travels, accurately retracing their trips, and recalling everything they had seen for the pleasure and instruction of those who could not see it.

Far from confining women to a limited number of subjects (such as manners, customs, or dress for which they were said to have a natural inclination), the pact required that travellers write about everything they had seen with their own eyes. This opened up unprecedented opportunities for women to articulate opinions on art and to give them to the public in their accounts. Since travelling women did see the masterpieces of France and Italy, their travel narratives abounded with competent accounts and records of connoisseurship, thereby demonstrating a command of artistic knowledge that women were supposed to lack. These pages bring to light the curiosity and longing for artistic knowledge that lay buried under many accomplished girls' and women's 'learned helplessness'.⁴

This study, based on a corpus of travel narratives published by Lady Anna Miller, Lady Elizabeth Craven, Hester Piozzi, Louise Albanis Beaumont, Anne Plumptre, Marianne Baillie, Jane Waldie, Marianne

³ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary, *Theory and History of Literature*, 52 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 12, 18.

⁴ I borrow this expression from Pierre Bourdieu. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. by Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 61.

Colston, and Frances Jane Carey between the 1770s and the 1820s, aims at documenting how travel narratives facilitated women's intervention in the artistic field and their involvement in nascent art criticism. While women found many barriers in their way to practising painting professionally, these authors defied gendered expectations when discussing the old masters, history painting, and aesthetic canons within the pages of their travel narratives. In order to substantiate further the well-established idea that travelling women felt empowered by the crossing of many actual and symbolic borders, this work draws on an additional corpus of reviews published in British periodicals, and posits that public response to the publication of women's travel narratives helped assert and shape their authority in the artistic field.⁵ Whereas private appreciation often remains a matter of conjecture, reviews lay out the general reception framework and show the mixed response to growing female artistic expertise while acknowledging their specific contribution.

Knowledge and experience of the old masters

At the turn of the nineteenth century, any participation in the artistic field was predicated upon one's ability to articulate comments on old master painting. This drew heavily on Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses*, extolling the merits of the grand style. The travel narratives examined in this article provide ample evidence of British women's engagement with the most renowned and sophisticated visual artworks. Despite the absence of any information on their authors' artistic background, such extensive comments show that women knew about the different pictorial genres and used traditional art historical vocabulary, writing fluently about the 'invention', 'expression', 'composition', 'colouring', or 'shading' in paintings. Anna Miller's command of art historical categories stands out as she systematically draws on the criteria of the sixteenth-century Italian critic Giorgio Vasari when examining paintings in terms of design or drawing, colouring, and grace;⁶ she is also the only one to dedicate systematic attention to

⁵ See, for instance, Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture 1665–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 90–91; or Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 22.

⁶ [Lady Anna Riggs Miller], *Letters from Italy, Describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Paintings, &c. of that Country, in the Years MDCCLXX and MDCCLXXI*, 3 vols (Dublin: Watson and others, 1776). In their introduction to Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, Julia and Peter Bondanella stress the consistency of Vasari's terminology with his focus on *disegno* (meaning design, drawing, and draughtsmanship) and emphasis on *grazia* (grace), the precise terms Anna Miller makes extensive use of. See 'Introduction', in Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. by Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998),

chiaroscuro effects.⁷ Detailed accounts of galleries, churches, and palaces not only offer comprehensive lists of painters' names, or comprehensive catalogues of painted works, but also glimpses into women's artistic culture. They tell us that women had read previous travellers' accounts and studied prints. Although very little is known about their artistic education, their expectations, and sometimes frustrated hopes, their accounts reveal how much they looked forward to seeing the most celebrated Continental artworks. On her way to Geneva, where her Swiss-born husband had planned for the couple to relocate, Louise Albanis Beaumont spent a fortnight in Paris. In her letters detailing the monuments she visited and the works she saw, she also wrote: 'I have inquired, but have not as yet been able to learn, where the famous gallery of *Rubens*, which contained the allegorical paintings of the life of Queen Mary of Medicis, has been removed.'⁸ Expressing, in the first person singular, her disappointment at failing to locate this emblematic masterpiece, she reveals that she had planned to see Rubens's series of monumental canvases. She aptly mentions the series's allegorical subject matter, a point also made by Marianne Colston, which echoed aesthetic debates first articulated in Jonathan Richardson's 1715 *Essay on the Theory of Painting* and heard in Reynolds's seventh discourse.⁹

British women travellers' precise vocabulary demonstrates their assimilation of the hierarchies of Continental art. With her characteristic use of foreign words, Miller employs the French word '*chef-d'œuvre*' only in conjunction with ancient sculptures and the greatest masters, that is, Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio, Titian, and Veronese.¹⁰ In her wake, all authors prefer the French translation over the English word 'masterpiece', and use it to signify the particular distinction of painters that had been placed at the apex of the artistic pyramid by generations of Continental authors. Other passages show British female authors' familiarity with old master paintings and their appropriation of this learned visual culture. From Hester Piozzi to Marianne Baillie, women travellers appear to have been attentive to the quality of their visual environment. Both recalled enjoying the prints hung on the walls of their Italian lodgings: Piozzi appreciated 'the exceeding good copies of the finest pictures here

pp. vii–xiv (pp. xi, xii). For a more recent discussion of Vasari's vocabulary, see Douglas Biow, *Vasari's Words: The 'Lives of the Artists' as a History of Ideas in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁷ Instead of the Italian word, Miller uses the French '*clair obscur*' (I, 86, 88, 94, 102, 297, 326; II, 9, 14, 197; and III, 152).

⁸ [Louise Albanis Beaumont], *A Sketch of Modern France, in a Series of Letters to a Lady of Fashion, Written in the Years 1796 and 1797*, ed. by C. L. Moody (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), p. 153, emphasis in original.

⁹ Marianne Colston, *Journal of a Tour in France, Switzerland, and Italy, during the Years 1819, 20, and 21*, 2 vols (Paris: Galignani, 1822), II, 237.

¹⁰ [Miller], III, 64, 108, 142; I, 227, 295; II, 12; III, 187.

at Rome'; Baillie enjoyed her Turin apartment being hung with 'exquisite and well chosen prints, from the designs of Poussin and other old masters', and compared them favourably to the genre paintings, or hunting scenes, found in English inns.¹¹ Women travellers readily drew on references to old master paintings in order to account for experiences outside spaces dedicated to the arts: Baillie compares her Savoyard guides to Salvator Rosa's *banditti* (p. 111); writing about her trip to the Colosseum by moonlight, Piozzi exclaims: 'I thought how like a sky of Guercino's it was; other painters remind one of nature, but nature when most lovely makes one think of Guercino and his works' (p. 289). Over time, the ability of female authors to navigate the culture of classical painting increasingly led them to pictorialize their perception of landscapes. Baillie's comparison of the Valais, southern Switzerland, with a composition by Rosa highlights her belonging to a new generation of scenic tourists (p. 227). Indeed, in Piozzi's wake, Baillie, Colston, and Jane Waldie travelled in pursuit of picturesque scenery and, influenced by William Gilpin's writings, all three complemented note-taking with sketching. They interpreted the views they saw through the template of an idealized landscape imagery British connoisseurs had learned from one of their most cherished old masters, the artist they simply called 'Claude'. In her account of Tivoli, Colston wrote a passage echoing the words of Reynolds's thirteenth discourse, in which he had explained that Claude conducted viewers 'to the tranquillity of Arcadian scenes and fairy land':

I never enjoyed any excursion more, if so much; and think, that in these three or four miles, I saw more beautiful scenery than my whole life had before presented to me. This is, indeed, the country of Claude Lorraine, and of Poussin.¹²

Such travel accounts thus demonstrate British women travellers' assimilation of the visual culture and knowledge surrounding the old masters, and this explains how female authors rewarded their readers with fulsome comments on canonical masterpieces. At the time when Queen Charlotte had dispatched Johan Zoffany to Florence with the mission to paint the

¹¹ Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (Dublin: Chamberlaine and others, 1789), p. 395; Marianne Baillie, *First Impressions on a Tour upon the Continent in the Summer of 1818* (London: Murray, 1819), p. 142.

¹² Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. by Pat Rogers (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 291; Colston, I, 205. See also [Jane Waldie], *Sketches Descriptive of Italy in 1816 and 17, with a Brief Account of Travels in Various Parts of France and Switzerland*, 4 vols (London: Murray, 1820), where Waldie marvels at the views from the Pincian Hill, imagining 'that it was from hence Claude Lorraine witnessed those glowing sunsets which illumine his scenes, and learned to transfer to canvass the brilliant hues of Italy' (II, 328–29).

Tribuna of the Uffizi, amateur poet Anna Miller gave to the British public a comprehensive description of the jewels of the Grand Duke's collections exhibited in this room, including a two-and-a-half-page discussion of the *Medici Venus* (II, 79–92). Likewise, Piozzi, in her own lengthy description of the Florentine landmark, dealt with both sculptures and paintings, criticizing the expression of St Catherine in a composition then attributed to Titian, comparing both Guido's *Madonna* and Raphael's *St John the Baptist* to other representations of the same subjects she had seen, underlining the latter's sublimity (pp. 211–12). Visits to the Vatican gave women travellers similar opportunities to produce well-informed comments: Waldie's (II, 287–92) and Colston's (I, 188–92) accounts include remarks on the famous Belvedere statues, on the Raphael Rooms, and on Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. Both young women had studied drawing and painting privately, and their expertise is clear from their assessment of the pitiful state of the frescoes (blackened and damaged), and from their admiration for *The Liberation of Saint Peter* as well. Waldie sets it above all the other painted decorations by Raphael and elaborates on the treatment of light, with the different renditions of moonlight and torchlight which she particularly admires (II, 290); Colston seems to have been more sensitive to the narrative quality of Raphael's overdoor — the arrangement of paintings into a series which British eyes had been taught to appreciate — emphasizing the 'threefold' structure of the composition and its expressive qualities (I, 191).

Negotiating Roman Catholic iconography

Showing that they had assimilated the visual culture surrounding Continental art without losing their Britishness was the challenge all British travel writers had to address. Anxious to show their expertise and proclaim their admiration for Continental — often Catholic — artworks, they had to reassure their readers that they remained strong in their Protestant identity. To do so, they repeatedly stressed the inappropriate nature of any anthropomorphic representation of God. Being conversant with Continental religious paintings, women travellers were careful to distance themselves from Catholic otherness, expressing at every opportunity their unequivocal rejection of such depictions. Keen to remind her readers that neither her travels nor her second marriage to a Florentine-born music master had Italianized her, Piozzi declares that Guercino's portrayal of God the Father in the church of Cento 'shocks every protestant traveller by its profaneness, while the Romanists admire his invention, and applaud his piety' (p. 439). Miller obviously relies on the universal revulsion aroused by the subject among her readers when, in her description of the church of the Girolamini in Naples, she alludes to the glory at the top of the cupola, 'with

a blasphemous representation, but all too common in Italian churches' (II, 266).¹³ Besides her admiration, Jane Waldie, who had been privately taught art by Scottish painter Alexander Nasmyth, reports her uneasiness even at the contemplation of Michelangelo's ceiling, confessing, 'to me there is something sacrilegious in an attempt to embody the Almighty' (II, 291). The writer and acclaimed translator Anne Plumptre is even more specific in her condemnation. Dealing with the Royal Chapel at Versailles, she wrote:

It appears extraordinary, that in catholic countries it should be permitted to give in painting representations of the eternal God, as they are called; a thing which among protestants is strictly prohibited, and considered as the height of profaneness. Such representations are by no means uncommon; I have even seen hung up in print shops an engraving of an old man with a very long beard, and underneath written, *Le Pere Eternel*.¹⁴

For unmarried women, such as Plumptre or Waldie, it was all the more important to show that they were not easily seduced or dazzled by illusionistic artworks, for this could be read as a sign of their susceptibility to the many temptations lurking along Continental roads. In line with such gendered stereotypes, women travellers systematically expressed their shock and horror at the sight of other typically Catholic representations, such as the martyrdom of saints. From both religious and moral perspectives, pictures showing naked male figures being tortured, such as St Sebastian or St Bartholomew, were not considered appropriate for female eyes. Throughout our corpus, from Miller to Colston, women regularly remind their readers of their inability to bear the sight of graphic scenes of torture, rarely finding reasons to justify their appreciation of such paintings.¹⁵ Expressing their horror, with the adjective 'shocking' recurring in texts, they go on to portray themselves looking away in disgust ([Miller], I, 89; III, 229; Colston, I, 189). This is exactly how Frances Jane Carey felt when seeing many pictures in the Louvre dedicated to 'the last struggles of mortality' by contemporary French painters. To distance herself more forcefully, she contrasts them with Reynolds's 'transcendent genius' in his

¹³ This is not the only instance in which she condemns such representations: elsewhere she adds '[it] disgraces the whole picture' (I, 200).

¹⁴ Anne Plumptre, *A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in France, Principally in the Southern Departments, from the Year 1802 to 1805*, 3 vols (London: Mawman and others, 1810), I, 213.

¹⁵ Interestingly, Marianne Baillie explains that she was delighted by Guido's *St Sebastian* in the Louvre because she had already been acquainted with the canvas thanks to 'an exquisite miniature copy of it' painted by a friend in England (p. 37).

restrained depiction of the *Death of Cardinal Beaufort*, thus displaying her artistic culture while championing the highest kind of British painting.¹⁶

Conversely, women travellers were prompt to declare their admiration for the portraits of female archetypes of virtue. They marvelled at Madonnas and Magdalens and stressed their exemplary roles as paragons of motherly love or of penitence. Carlo Dolci or Guido Reni, with their refined, smooth styles, are the favourite interpreters of the alliance of beauty and modesty, meekness or repentance, sought after in those female figures. An uninterrupted chorus of praise distinguishes Guido's *Madonna*, in the Tribuna of the Uffizi, or his *Penitent Magdalen*, in the Palazzo Barberini. Piozzi evokes 'Guido's meek *Madonna* so divinely contrasted to the other women in the room' (only regretting the 'affected position of her thumbs'), and his *Magdalen* 'effacing every beauty, of softness mingled with distress' (pp. 212, 292). Acknowledging that the canvas is in high esteem with amateurs, Miller adds her personal touch of criticism on Guido's Barberini *Magdalen*, wishing it conveyed more 'repentance, remorse, [and] devotion' (III, 61). Miller also expresses reservations on the choice of clothing and furniture in Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia* (or *della Seggiola*). Her remarks that the Virgin's clothes resemble those of an 'Eastern princess', and that the chair seems taken from 'a cardinal's palace', add spontaneity to her narrative without undermining or diminishing her admiration for Raphael's masterpiece, which she deems 'a capital picture', 'finished to the last perfection' (II, 121, 120). Miller's emphasis on the 'modest countenance' (II, 120) of the Virgin is echoed by Piozzi, who pays special tribute to the canvas, to the 'softness in the female character, and meek humility of countenance', before leaving Florence (p. 228). In her wake, both Colston and Waldie single out the painting, the former giving it her preference over Raphael's *Holy Family* (I, 108), and the latter insisting on the lasting mark it left on her memory despite it being well known through prints and copies (I, 294; IV, 39).

Although most female travellers had probably spent time studying and working creatively with prints, they are careful to display their awareness of the superior merits of originals over copies. Furthermore, from Craven to Colston, female authors use the first person to share their certainty about the authenticity, or otherwise, of pictures.¹⁷ Praising Robert Strange, and celebrating his work as engraver of Italian masterpieces, Miller condemns 'the infinite injury to the world of artists' done by 'base and laborious copyists' (III, 124). When faced with a copy, she compares it to the original, carefully reminding readers of its precise location. Such

¹⁶ Frances Jane Carey, *Journal of a Tour in France in the Years 1816 and 1817* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823), p. 453.

¹⁷ Elizabeth, Lady Craven, *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople* (Dublin: Chamberlaine and others, 1789), p. 24; Colston I, 111.

details, found throughout the publications by women writers under review here, contribute to textual performances of artistic expertise by female authors who are not ashamed to give their opinions.¹⁸ Commenting on artworks leads them to introduce references to other authors they had read, hence to quote them, but also to qualify and correct them. As stated in the ‘Advertisement to the Reader’, and repeated throughout her *Letters*, Miller’s intention was to revise previous travel accounts, and she does so again and again over her three volumes. Her frequent references to Joseph Addison, Johann Georg Keyssler, and especially to Charles-Nicolas Cochin and Joseph Jérôme Lalande clearly indicate that she had read those narratives.¹⁹ An interesting anecdote, in which she recounts having drawn the ridge line of the Northern Apennines on a blank page in Lalande’s book, because she intended to consult it along the route from Bologna, also confirms that she had taken the actual volumes with her (II, 55). While she can express her occasional agreement with them and share their appreciation, she mostly voices her disagreement, especially with Cochin and Lalande, stressing that she varies extremely from them (I, 331). She corrects their attributions, exposes their ‘gross mistakes’ but, above all, challenges their taste (I, 195–96; II, 69). On the one hand, she calls ‘wretched daubs’ the pictures by Jan Miel at the Royal Palace of Venaria, held in high esteem by both French travellers (I, 120); and considers that Cochin’s admiration of Corrado Giaquinto’s frescoes, at the Villa della Regina in Turin, was misplaced (I, 145). On the other, she points to both Cochin’s and Lalande’s failure to mention the splendid painted ceiling of the Carignano Palace, also in Turin (I, 112); and derides Lalande’s poor judgement, explaining that he presents a ‘perfect’ sketch by Correggio, from his *Jupiter and Io*, ‘universally admired by connoisseurs’, as a ‘bad copy’ (I, 101). Crucially, she hints on several occasions that the French travellers had not seen the canvases or monuments they had written about, therefore positioning herself as a typical British traveller with superior observational skills (I, 123; II, 16; III, 213). Not as disputatious as Miller, later travellers continued to quote and qualify the popular travel writers of their times, namely John Moore, John Chetwode Eustace, and Joseph Forsyth, while still referring to Addison.²⁰

¹⁸ See [Miller], I, 206, 325–26; II, 23, 255; Piozzi, pp. 270, 463; Baillie, p. 259; [Waldie], I, 293; II, 274; Colston, I, 103, 109, 310.

¹⁹ See Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London: Tonson, 1705); Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Voyage d’Italie; ou, Recueil de notes sur les ouvrages de peinture & de sculpture*, 2 vols (Paris: Jombert, 1758); Johann Georg Keyssler, *Travels through Germany, Bohemia, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, and Lorrain*, 4 vols (London: Linde, 1756); and Joseph Jérôme Le Français de Lalande, *Voyage d’un françois en Italie, fait dans les années 1765 & 1766*, 8 vols (Venice: Desaint, 1769).

²⁰ See John Chetwode Eustace, *A Tour through Italy*, 2 vols (London: Mawman, 1813); Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters during an Excursion in Italy, in the Years 1802 and 1803* (London: Cadell, 1813); and John Moore, *A View of*

Revisionary interventions

Building upon Miller's pioneering claim to artistic expertise, women authors went on to write longer and more particular and personal accounts of paintings, and to issue cautious revisions of male authors' judgements.²¹ Moreover, female authors recounted anecdotes in order to assert their newly acquired aesthetic proficiency. Picturing herself unfazed by her local guide's partial presentation of Mantua's ducal palace, Piozzi relies on her travelling experience to justify her critical distance: 'The gentleman who shewed us the Ducal palace, seemed himself much struck with its convenience and splendour; but I had seen Versailles, Turin and Genoa' (p. 84). Aware of the benefits she has drawn from her greater familiarity with Continental art, Piozzi daringly argues against the widespread view that amateurs should declare their 'utter incapacity of understanding pictures' (p. 174). Stressing that she is taking liberties with the *ut pictura poesis* principle, she nonetheless embarks on a comparison between the old masters she saw at Bologna (Albano, Domenichino, and Reni) and classic English poets (Waller, Otway, and Rowe). Making the unfamiliar familiar for her readers, she encourages them to transfer their knowledge of English literature onto the field of Italian painting. Similarly, when trying to characterize Caravaggio's peculiar inspiration, Waldie compares the painter's talent at depicting 'the strong but not dignified passions of every-day life' with Fielding's novels (II, 302–03). Waldie's remarkably pedagogical style, as well as both her recourse to enlightening connections and correspondences and that of other female authors, show that women were keen to assert their claim to artistic expertise and to offer guidance to the public.²²

Despite their growing empowerment, women travellers nonetheless lacked the knowledge that would have allowed them to question traditional assumptions regarding artistic norms and to overturn the gendered hierarchies of art history. The need to communicate their experience, however, the very wording of their opinions, led some to highlight women's artistic achievements. On her way to Paris, Carey stopped off at Bayeux but failed to see the city's major tourist attraction. When telling her readers about this missed opportunity, she refers to the 'Bayeux tapestry' as 'this rare piece of *workwomanship*' (p. 11, emphasis in original). She thus forges a neologism that points at the inadequacy of language to account for the female identity of the authoress(es) of this particular work of art.

Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany, 2 vols (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1779). Jane Waldie points out inaccuracies in Eustace, hinting that she was carrying both his and Forsyth's travel accounts with her (IV, 2).

²¹ See, for instance, the accounts of Guido's *Aurora* fresco by Piozzi (p. 289), and Waldie (II, 334–36).

²² See Waldie's clarifications of painters' names and nicknames or of work titles (for instance *Madonna della Scudella* or *Madonna di Foligno*) (I, 231–32; IV, 16).

Elsewhere, unaware of the careers of Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, or Élisabeth-Sophie Chéron, female travellers did not consider the existence of female counterparts to the old masters. Elisabetta Sirani and Lavinia Fontana are alluded to, but in such a way as to diminish them, mostly as followers of Guido and Domenichino.²³ However, both Colston and Waldie lament Sirani's untimely death, and state that she was poisoned by (male) rivals. Waldie continues regretting a loss that deprived the world of a major talent (I, 260), while Colston outlines a genealogy with a contemporary Bolognese painter, Anna Mignani Grilli, whose talent she praises highly (I, 240). Unable to discuss the merits of old mistresses extensively, women travellers proved nonetheless inspired by examples of female artistic mastery in the present. This is the case with Piozzi, who pays tribute to Angelica Kauffman, reminding her readers of her contribution to British art: 'I must not quit Rome however without a word of Angelica Kauffman, who, though neither English nor Italian, has contrived to charm both nations and shew her superior talents both here and there' (p. 410).

Showcasing their knowledge of old master paintings for a British audience, women travellers laid claim to the language of taste and connoisseurship. The numerous and substantial reviews of their accounts published in British periodicals further established their position within the dialogue of the select group of Continental travellers. This was first and foremost grounded in the systematic acknowledgement of their authorship in unambiguous terms, with the feminine form 'authoress' — or the more patronizing variant 'fair author' — being widely used to refer to them in the press. Even when women had taken the precaution of publishing anonymously, their contemporaries never dared doubt — let alone dare deny — ownership of their writings in the press. Even reviewers who insisted that female authors were incapable of tackling certain subjects retraced journeys and reproduced extensive excerpts that established women as travel authors in their own right, as true providers of valuable information on Continental travels. Despite disparaging remarks about women's alleged educational deficiencies and constitutional frailty, despite the priggish correction of their spelling mistakes, the very publication of verbatim transcripts of female-authored travel narratives celebrated their individual contributions.²⁴ If open acknowledgements of female proficiency in artistic matters

²³ [Miller], II, 15, 26; III, 79; Piozzi, p. 228.

²⁴ See, for instance, Miller's account of the Tribuna in 'Mrs. Miller's Letters from Italy', *Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1776, pp. 471–73; Baillie's and Colston's depictions of the Milan Duomo in the review of Baillie, *First Impressions, Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 31 July 1819, pp. 164–65, and *Literary Gazette*, 4 January 1823, p. 2; Colston's Louvre visit in the review of *Journal of a Tour, Monthly Review*, November 1823, pp. 305–15 (pp. 306–07); and Waldie's description of what was then thought to be Raphael's house in Rome in the review of *Sketches Descriptive of Italy, Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 5 August 1820, pp. 497–500 (pp. 499–500).

remained rare, women authors were not ridiculed for their pretension to taste, but rather universally — albeit reluctantly — praised for the quality of their observations.²⁵ Their legitimacy is rooted in the fact that the truth of what they saw, and about which they wrote, could not be denied. From that perspective, it proved particularly difficult to ignore the value and interest of their accounts, given that they brought new contributions to the knowledge of historical and contemporary art.²⁶

In the British intellectual landscape of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, travel narratives had a significant impact on the acquisition of various forms of knowledge. Art history was comparatively less institutionalized in Britain; art criticism gradually ‘matured into a diversified field with a wide range of contributors writing with various degrees of critical sophistication in a number of formats’.²⁷ The emergence of this field relied much on contributions by travel writers. The joint scrutiny of female-authored travel narratives and of reviews in the periodical press carried out in this article throws light upon the specific contributions of women travellers to the art historical field and belies the notion that the grand tour was both physically and intellectually unsuited to women. For the female authors discussed here, travel narratives created a discursive space where they were able to account for their experiences of physical mobility and cultural awakening, and to engage in artistic self-fashioning. Writing from the margins, accounting for what had been seen over the course of Continental journeys, was women’s specific mode of portraying artistic (as well as historical or political) content.

Voicing comments and expressing opinions on Continental masterpieces, women travellers were able to showcase their competence and growing proficiency in artistic matters, thus opening up the way for female participation in the artistic field. Pieced together, the many pages dedicated to art penned by female travellers provided inspiration for more comprehensive writings on art. In their narratives, women travellers laid the foundations for female interest in the arts, and thus paved the way for the more substantial and personal works of Anna Brownell Jameson and Maria Graham.

²⁵ See, for instance, Craven’s ‘proficiency in painting and music’ acknowledged in the review of *A Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, *English Review*, March 1789, pp. 161–69 (p. 168); and praises of Miller’s ‘very exact and scientific account of the pictures’ in the review of *Letters from Italy*, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, September 1776, pp. 417–20 (p. 418).

²⁶ Waldie’s encounter with Antonio Canova in his studio (11, 319–27) was highly rated in the *Literary Chronicle*, 5 August 1820, p. 499.

²⁷ Holger Hoock, *The King’s Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture 1760–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 132.