

Journey Into The Renaissance

By Angela Floratos

A Crack at Travel Writing as a Genre:

If there was one piece of advice I gave myself before landing in Florence, the city where classical learning blossomed after a millennium of darkness, it was to avoid being a tourist. I came here to feel, to explore, and to learn. The aspirations for my journey were clear-cut, leave the selfie stick in New York and bring an open mind to Europe. Florence deserves a person's full attention, although there is not much to sidetrack from its artistic genius and elegance. The city itself is one large, expertly planned distraction. In Pisa you pose next to the Leaning Tower and in Rome you hike the Colosseum, but what single relic does one marvel over in Florence? You are in the Renaissance by simply walking through the streets and gazing at the beauty, the attention to detail, and sense the history of those who resurrected the modern spirit of life, an essence that still conditions our souls today and around the globe.

There is one specific landmark, however, which revealed itself to me on a crisp, February walk my first night in town. I was not looking for the Duomo in particular because I knew that spending four months in Italy would allow me plenty of time to visit the building. Making my way through the small shops and narrow streets, I was a bit lost without a GPS. There was nothing but cafés and high-end stores in every direction... curiously becoming more expensive. Tired and incredibly cranky, I began to rethink my semester abroad. How was I, a typical American student with Greek heritage planning to live in a country I so heavily undermined for years? I always believed that Italy was just a photocopy of Greece, a secondhand attempt to recreate what my ancestors developed from nothing. I studied the art, literature, and theater... in my eyes Italian history is beautiful but not authentic. I came here searching for something original, something that would send me over the edge with awe and appreciation for a new country, a dissimilar culture than my own. I remember the open mind I had packed before leaving New York and attempt to put it in use.

Turning the corner I looked up from my hopeless map and somehow stood at the northwestern side of the Duomo, standing between the baptistery and the tower. I dropped my jaw and watched it roll down the cobble stone streets, my open mind was on overdrive. You can imagine the Stendhal symptoms I must have felt when, without warning or preparation, this massive architectural masterpiece of a church inserted itself into my line of vision.

As a child of the Renaissance I stood wide-eyed and full of amazement, in the same way an infant peers up at his mother for the first time, I almost teared at the sight. Art, in all of its beauty and symbolism, has never hit me as hard as it did on that day. There is no questioning the authenticity of this Duomo, for I have never seen its equal. I have stood inside of the pantheon in Rome, the Acropolis in Athens, and why this particular church brought on the water works, I am awfully perplexed. I have seen much older works of art and even more complex architecture. Looking back, it may have been the sensation of a million different points to look at on one facade working perfectly in unison. The multitude of triangles and rectangles, statues and arches, and this unexpectedly striking green accent collaborate effortlessly.

A few days later I went back to the spot that took my breath away in order to examine the church and all of its wonder. The more I looked at its massive structure and the circumstances of its placement encircled by tiny side streets, the more I began to observe the Duomo as a local rather than a gawking tourist chasing her jaw down the street. It really is quite big for its location and awkwardly so. Il Duomo is the oversized cruise ship docked in the marina, honking its horn for all to hear. The church further boasts its incredible exterior in a way a church should not boast, like a humble priest decked in Versace. Then I remember that I am in Florence, a city filled with prideful [and highly fashionable] citizens. Those whose Italian dialect became the Italian language, whose people enlightened the rest of Europe, have an unavoidable birthright to show off. The dome above is as swollen as their heads.

I did, however, find “Il Duomo” extremely moving in the sense that it is still a magnificent piece of art. What I found in this structure as well as nearly every piece of art thereafter was a common element in aesthetics as well as symbolism. The green paint accenting the walls of the building

reminds me of the pride this city holds and smeared on for the world to envy. A literal green-eyed monster put on display to ward off competitors of its excellence.

Walking through the city I notice this slight accent of green stands out more in person than the fiery red I have seen in pictures. It is subtle, used for windows or borders and other hidden nooks and crannies. Of course, the red-orange coloring on top of most houses and buildings is evident and unmistakable, but a characteristic that is common in most Mediterranean towns and cities. This green, which I have never seen used as a color scheme before Florence, is what gives this city the edge of uniqueness I have been longing for. Even if I do associate the shade with envy, it is not the deadliest of sins.

I am dabbling in the genre of Travel Writing, something I feel I should take advantage of in the next few months. This is part one of a series of post I will make specifically on Florence, the city that I am proudly studying abroad in for this spring semester. Let me know what you think, what I can improve on, and all the rest.

Share this: