

Jessica Murdoch (English)— Italy, Summer 2017

In July 2017 three of my colleagues and I spent ten days in Italy where we underwent research into the rich cultural literary history of the country. Our trip included four days in Rome, then three days in both Florence and Venice.

Our trip began in Rome: on the first day, we visited the Roman Colosseum, the Forum and Palatine Hill. It was incredible to see these landmarks which feature so prominently in literary works of Italian and English authors alike, such as Plutarch's works which Shakespeare used as his primary sources of inspiration writing *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Titus Andronicus*. During the following two days, we spent an afternoon in the Galleria Borghese, looking at various artistic representations of classical figures, such as David (1623), Apollo and Daphne (1622-25), as well as depictions of famous scenes such as the Rape of Proserpine (1621-22), which are referenced in many literary works. We also visited the Vatican museums and the Sistine Chapel, along with other religious sites landmarks, most notably the Pantheon along with several other churches and cathedrals. The level of detail in regards to the architecture of these buildings and the religious artwork which adorned the walls and ceilings reflected the huge significance of religion in society during the periods in which many of the most famous Italian writers were composing. This helped me to appreciate the importance of religion to the writers we have studied and will go on to study and understand why concepts surrounding Christianity and faith are so prominent in their works.

We next travelled to Florence, where we visited the Firenze Museum and the Florence Cathedral. As we found in Rome, the extent and detail of the artwork devoted to Christianity and classical legends was astounding; there seemed to be endless sculptures and paintings depicting the Madonna and Child and such scenes as The Rape of Lucrece. It was also interesting to see the number of sculptures of famous Italian authors such as Boccaccio and Ovid; the devotion to and proud representation of these writers reflects the extent of their influence and the appreciation of their work. Furthermore, something new I learned from visiting the city was that Pinocchio was written in Florence; there were long-nosed puppets absolutely everywhere!

Our final destination was Venice. We walked through what used to be the Jewish Ghetto, an area which famously inspired Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. It was fascinating to get a real sense of the atmosphere which Shakespeare establishes in the play. As well as learning more about the history of Italian drama by visiting the Teatro La Fenice, it was fascinating to see the broad influence of Commedia dell'arte across the city: on every street there was a shop selling the kind of fantastic stock-characters masks and posters of theatrical scenes.

The trip has been massively successful in helping to consolidate the learning I have done over my first year studying English and enriching my understanding of Italian literary influences. I would like to say a massive thank you to the B M Rowe fund the financial support they have provided me and my group; the knowledge and experience I have gained through the trip is invaluable, and it would not have been possible without the help and generosity they have provided.