

Jessica Murdoch (English)— Italy, Summer 2018

In September 2018 I traveled to Italy for ten days to further develop my knowledge and appreciation of the country's literary history and influence. I spent four days in both Salerno and Florence, and ended my trip with two days in Rome.

My trip began in Salerno, where I had the chance to explore its medieval history. Several beautiful medieval villas and castles are still standing, and I particularly enjoyed visiting the Giardino della Minerva, a botanical garden where students of medicine grew and studied various herbs and flowers. It was fascinating to find out more about four humours (hot, cold, wet, dry) which were the foundations of all medicine of the period, and see the way in which the plants were divided into these categories. This information shed light on the science explored in Chaucer's work, such as his descriptions of gaunt lovers' suffering from the 'melancholic humor' in *The Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Next, I moved to Florence where I made the most of having some of the world's finest artwork on my doorstep. I visited the Boboli Gardens, which showcases some incredible 16-18C sculptures, such as Stoldo Lorenzi's *Neptune*, and grottos, most notably that of Bernardo Buontalenti. As well as more ancient pieces, a collection of modern sculptures by Fritz Koenig were also on display. I also visited the Uffizzi gallery, which also exhibited the work of Fritz Koenig in a temporary exhibition as well as some of the most famous paintings in history, not least impressively Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, as well as works of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo to name a few. It was fascinating to work from across the centuries side-by-side, and trace how the development of artistic styles correlate with evolution of thought and cultures of the times. On the final day I visited the Accademia Gallery, which famously houses the original David by Michelangelo. As well as marvelling at the statue up close, it was interesting to discover the history of its creation.

When in Rome, I revisited the major religious landmarks, such as the Pantheon and various Cathedrals, as well as the Vatican museums and the Sistine Chapel. I paid particular attention to the way the artists exploited the architecture of the buildings, using levels to depict mortal and divine hierarchies, and using depth and perspective to create the impression of heavens stretching beyond sight. As in Florence and Salerno, it was incredible to recognise the of incredible influence and significance of Catholicism depicted in the detail, scope and beauty of the devotional artwork and buildings.

I must finish with a great than you to the BM Rowes trust fund for providing me with funding for this trip; the experience has been hugely enjoyable and illuminating, and it would not have been possible for me to undertake this research without this financial help and generosity.