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Travel literature and Travelling Irishness: An Italian Case Study

Anne O'Connor

Studies of Irish travel literature have been dominated by travel *to* Ireland. Apart from some groundbreaking studies by scholars such as Joachim Fischer on German travel, [and recent publications by Raphaël Ingelbien](#), Irish interactions with Europe through travel literature have largely been ignored.¹ The importance of travel literature for the study of intercultural interactions is evident, and yet it is surprising how little attention has been paid to Irish travelers on the Continent in the nineteenth century.² Recently, a rising interest in transnational Irish studies has increased the scholarly attention to Irish connections with other countries, but this development has been dominated by studies on interactions between Ireland and Anglophone countries.³ This chapter will address these gaps by studying the outward travel of Irish writers to a non-Anglophone country, namely Italy. Using the case study of Julia Kavanagh's travel book on Italy, *A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies* (1858), the chapter will examine some of the most important trends in Irish travel to Italy in the nineteenth century, namely nationalism, religion, politics, and alterity.

Irishness?

It must be acknowledged from the outset that 'Irishness' is generally a very muted presence in Irish travel literature in the nineteenth century. In the early decades of the century, Irish writers of travel books [did not](#) generally mention being Irish and [frequently](#) made no reference to Ireland in their works. This changed [somewhat](#) from the 1830s, with the re-emergence of an Irish publishing industry in Dublin and Belfast. On the publication of George Downes' *Letters from Continental Countries* in 1832, for example, a reviewer commented: "There is one peculiar point which ought to be pleasing to his countrymen in

particular, as it is to us; his comparisons are drawn from Ireland” (Anon 1832, 249).⁴

Although more [travel](#) books [containing greater references to Ireland](#) emerged from this time onwards, works published in London still bore few traces of Irishness. The absence of Irishness in travel accounts on Italy may be due to the nature of the publishing trade in nineteenth-century Ireland, but it is also attributable to the profile of the travelers who went to the continent in this period and wrote travel accounts of their journeys. In the nineteenth century, travel from Ireland to Italy represented a major undertaking that involved considerable expense and, at times, risk. On her return to Ireland from Italy in 1820, Lady Morgan said: “We were particularly fortunate in such a long journey as we have made throughout Italy, not to have met with an accident, and in a country too, part of which is infested with banditti; but the fatigue was killing, accommodation wretched, and expense tremendous”.⁵ Due to the expense and time involved in travelling to Italy, this form of voyage was only open initially to the upper classes in society, and, as the century progressed, the wealthy middle classes. The nature of society in Ireland meant that many of those who could afford a trip to Italy were part of an Anglo-Irish minority; their works contain but few references to Ireland, and their comparisons are generally drawn between Europe and England.

In the late 1840s, the writer Julia Kavanagh wrote to Charles Gavan Duffy, the editor of the *Nation* newspaper, saying: “I am Irish by origin, birth and feeling, though not by education; but if I have lived far from Ireland, she has still been as that faith and religion of my youth. I have ever been taught to love her with my whole soul”.⁶ Offering Duffy help with his patriotic *Nation* newspaper, Kavanagh’s allegiance to Ireland cannot be doubted. However, her travel book on Italy, *A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies*, [which was](#) published in London in 1858, [however,](#) offers very few hints of her Irishness, and although she does not hide her nationality, Ireland makes [only](#) sporadic appearances in her travel

account. Kavanagh, like many other nineteenth-century Irish writers of travel literature, had lived for a large part of her life outside of Ireland: she was born in Thurles, Co. Tipperary in 1824, and in her early childhood she left with her parents for London. She spent much time in France and England but nevertheless, the *Dublin University Magazine* identified her in its review of her travel book as “our accomplished countrywoman” and spoke of her “inquiring, intelligent Irish eyes”.⁷ Kavanagh perceived herself as Irish, and in her travel work, overt references to Ireland ~~are~~ rare but noteworthy. The first reference of interest is when Kavanagh remarks that she gained special access to circles of Italian society which might otherwise not have been possible, were it not for her nationality:

It is difficult indeed to express strongly enough the inveterate reserve of the Italian character, for to let lodgings to you is by no means to admit you even remotely onto a sort of intimacy. And when Baron _____, without solicitation, and through pure, gratuitous kindness and courtesy, opened his private chapel to us, the act created great astonishment in the person who gave us the news. It was, he assures us, quite an infraction of the family habits of strict privacy. I believe the motive of the distinction was simply that we were Irish. (1.75)⁸

As Ingelbien has discussed, travel to Europe offered Irish men and women the opportunity to differentiate themselves from English travelers.⁹ For Kavanagh, her Irish nationality marked her out from other travellers and gave her special access to places that were not open to other nationalities.

A common feature of travel literature is the insertion of comparative frameworks that help the reader to understand an otherwise foreign environment. Although Kavanagh generally refers to English society for her comparisons, at one point when describing the poor state of the Italian economy and society she says:

“A tragic spectacle” indeed; yet not really as tragic as an Irish famine and an English workhouse. Political enslavement is degrading, but starvation is a step lower down to “the nether pit”. (1.119)

The fact that Kavanagh in this quotation is discussing poverty makes the choice of an Irish comparison understandable. When discussing poverty in Italy, it was normal for Irish writers to draw on their witnessing of deprivation in Ireland. Lady Morgan, who similarly did not include many Irish references in her travel books,² nonetheless mentions Irish poverty, and the Irish writer Mrs. T. Mitchell,³ when discussing Italian poverty,⁴ references the situation in Ireland.¹⁰ When Kavanagh refers to Irish poverty, however, she also uses an English workhouse as a comparative framework for Italian poverty. The English and the Irish references could sit side by side in Kavanagh’s texts, due to her own hybrid cultural background. Indeed, Kavanagh’s ability to contrast different cultures and traditions points to her own transnational experiences; in one situation when describing an Italian religious festival she says:

In England they drink, and beat their wives; in France they drink rather less but they dance and whilst they dance the police must look on. Here they pray and make merry; and, thrice happy in this, they do not separate joy from worship. (1.73)

Comparative transnationalism allowed Kavanagh to make multicultural references,⁵ and later in her book she blends Irish, English, French,⁶ and Italian references when discussing the combativeness of various nationalities (2.177). Kavanagh did not hide her Irishness even though her readership was mainly English;⁷ rather, the Irishness was but one element of her transnational identity. The travel literature which Irish writers such as Lady Morgan, Countess Blessington and Julia Kavanagh generated in this period reflected their hybrid

identities as people who moved between many cultures and who were able to draw on experiences in Ireland, England, and continental Europe as part of their travel writing.

Religion

In common with other writers, Irish authors were happy to discuss the beauty, the history, and the heritage of Italy, but they also paid particular attention to the religion of the country as they had a special interest in this [area](#). Protestant writers were fascinated with the rituals and customs of the Catholic religion and also with the powerful position of Catholicism in Italy.¹¹

As they travelled through the country, accounts of religious practices were regular occurrences and often the religion of the majority of Italians was viewed with scorn and distrust.¹² Nineteenth-century Ireland experienced much religious division and sectarianism, and differing views on Catholicism seeped into travel narratives. [Travel to the continent became increasingly open to middle-class travellers](#) in the nineteenth century, and this expansion from upper- to middle-class travel meant that many more Irish Catholics could go to Italy. Irish Catholic priests had for years travelled to Rome for training and in pilgrimage, and it was not uncommon for these priests to write travel accounts of their time in Italy. In fact, one of the most popular travel guides to Italy in the early nineteenth century was written by an Irish priest, John Chetwode Eustace, although this aspect of his biography does not feature in the book.¹³ As the century progressed, more books on Italy were published by Irish Catholic writers, exemplified by the works of Donovan, Miley and Maguire; and these were obviously much more sympathetic in their description of the Catholic religion in Italy.¹⁴

Julia Kavanagh, a Catholic, published her book as part of this rising tide of Catholic writing on Italy that aimed to counteract some of the very negative views of the religion encountered in the travel literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Due to increasing pilgrimage to Italy and travel by Catholic leisure tourists, the narrative of Italian

travel was no longer dominated by the Grand Tour account, which was generally informed by Protestant sentiments. By 1858 and the publication of Kavanagh's work on Italy, a Catholic view of Italy had formed a counter-narrative to the negativity found in previous Protestant accounts. In Italy, Kavanagh recounts attending mass and hints that her nationality (and probably her religion) gave her special access in Italian society. She dedicates much space to discussions of popular devotion and festivals, but unlike other accounts, there is no element of scorn in this. She describes in reverend terms her visit to a *presepio* (crib) and the procession and ceremony of the people in bringing the baby Jesus to the crib. Throughout her book, the Irish woman mentions the good that religion has done in society, particularly in helping the poor and in education. To the amazement of the Protestant-leaning *Athenaeum*, she found the Neapolitan church-music at *festas* generally excellent.¹⁵ Where Protestant writers found local religious celebrations gaudy, she admired the popular devotion and was extremely positive towards local expressions of religious attachment. Her religious leanings can be gleaned from her choice of Italian texts to read; she says that in Italy she has but two books by her: Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*, [an historical novel](#) deeply informed by [the author's](#) Catholicism. The combination of these two Italian works points to an immersion in Catholic Italy and an engagement with the religion of the people.

Nonetheless, like Dante, Kavanagh was not slow to criticize elements of the church whenever she perceived shortcomings. She provides a lengthy account of priests and their position in society and claims that many young men become priests for their own pleasure and for the gratification of their families. Kavanagh is not overly critical of the shortcomings of priests themselves and instead situates them in the context of the society in which they live and the limitations to which they are subject. She recounts that in the Kingdom of Naples, priests have to be careful not to be too learned as they will arouse the suspicions of the authorities: "Woe be to the priest who reads too much, who would educate the people, who is

suspected of the most moderate liberality.” (1.83-4) Kavanagh’s Catholicism and Irishness are evident when she recounts meeting a priest during a visit to Vesuvius who:

[...] spoke fast and in perfect Italian, but there was nevertheless something in his tone, something too in the fiery sparkle of his blue eyes, that reminded me of another speech and another race than the Italian. I could not help asking him if he was not a foreigner. “Sono Irlandese,” he replied. He was an Irishman. [...] Dr. Mac E___ was the friend of some of our esteemed friends in Rome, a perfect gentleman, an intellectual man too, without a particle of pedantry, which was a great blessing in a learned man. He was also what Irishmen, clerical or not, are apt to be, delightful company. He was then on an excursion tour in the Kingdom of Naples, and he enjoyed himself with himself with the vivacity and the freshness of a schoolboy.

(1.185)

Kavanagh’s obvious delight at meeting an Irish priest is in stark contrast to the attitude of the Irish Protestant writer James Whiteside who, during his time in Rome, complained about the inconvenience of the many Italian religious orders, especially those near his residence who were permitted “to disturb their unoffending neighbours, morning, noon and night, by the everlasting ringing of their bells. Many a sleepless night have they caused me”.¹⁶ In contrast, Kavanagh proclaims that it is impossible to hear without emotion the “Ave Maria” proclaimed three times a day or the bell tolling at “Vent’un ore” (1.13). Kavanagh shows a keen interest in the religion of the people and in how their rituals and beliefs are manifested, an interest which was shared by many other Irish travel writers.

Travel writing allowed for differing Irish narratives on religion to emerge: whereas in Protestant travel accounts we find superstitions and church processions ridiculed, in Kavanagh they are treated as genuine and profound. This religious sentiment was appreciated

by her Catholic readers, and in a review of her travel book in the Catholic periodical, *The Dublin Review*, her depiction of religion in Italy is praised.¹⁷ In Kavanagh's obituary published in the Jesuit publication, *The Irish Monthly*, she is remembered as "Gentle, charitable, and meek, [...] a true and pious Christian, as well as an intellectual and clever woman, giving thus a bright example to her Catholic sisters and proving that a sincere and practical piety can be allied to the judicious use of an ardent and lively imagination".¹⁸ In her travel writing, Kavanagh's Catholicism influenced her depiction of religion in Italy and, in contrast to Irish Protestant travel writers of the time, she narrates the religion of the place as an insider and not as a curious and sceptical outsider.

View of the South

The issues of prejudice, stereotypes, and national representation are very topical in travel literature, which necessarily deals with alterity, and these issues are particularly to the fore in a region such as the South of Italy (also known as the Mezzogiorno). Kavanagh's book deals with her sojourn in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, an area which encompassed much of the south of Italy. She spent most of her time in Sorrento but also made trips to Naples and Palermo. Although one might surmise that Irish travellers would have greater sensitivity to racial stereotyping and negative portrayals of "poorer" or "backward" regions, in fact, Irish writers frequently fell into the common tropes of travel literature when describing the south of Italy.¹⁹ Take for example the following description by Kavanagh of a group of fishermen: "The screams of his companions, their dramatic gestures, dark faces and black limbs, were more African than Italian" (1.209) or her observation, "we were struck by the Saracen cast of their faces, so different from the Greek heads that we see in Sorrento" (1.196). Although Kavanagh's book is a generally positive account of the Mezzogiorno, it nevertheless bears the traces of contemporary racial discourses. The regular use of the description 'Moorish' or 'African' to describe the inhabitants of the south of Italy is typical of this form of discourse.

The gaze of the tourist constructed and transmitted images of a backward, indolent region of Italy which were propagated through travel literature, and common areas of discussion included bandits, strange superstitions, and racial profiling. Travel narratives that transmitted these cultural messages back to other countries influenced and determined future encounters with the Italian south.²⁰ Kavanagh makes many comments on life in the Mezzogiorno such as

Ignorance is deep in Italy, and doubly deep in the Southern States. It embraces everything – ancient knowledge, modern inventions – and it displays itself in a form that is both painful and amusing. [...] This ignorance – intellectual, not Pagan – is the happiness and the bane of the southern states – it keeps the people what they are, and makes them happy as they are. (1.137)

These forms of proclamations contributed to the north-south binary which was so influential in propagating a view of the south as backwards and static compared to a dynamic and progressive north. Such narrative strategies were particularly prevalent in travel accounts, and they ultimately helped to create an imagery of a north that was complex and detailed and a south that was one-dimensional and distant.²¹ Accounts of the south of Italy also incorporated the romantic narrative of wild beauty, spectacular scenery, and untamed nature. The land was further distanced from a perceived mainland with discussions of temporal difference, describing places where time seems to have stood still and where tradition reigns; Kavanagh comments:

The middle ages are still strong in Italy. Her nineteenth century is yet in the womb of time. She still has the vices, and the virtues of an era which we buried long ago. Feudalism has perished and railroads are beginning, but the relics of the past are too strong to be denied. (1.135)

——Although slipping into common tropes in her presentation of the Mezzogiorno, Kavanagh nonetheless attempts to veer away from some of the more negative forms of representation of the Italian south. In the first instance, she shows awareness of the issue and claims, “If I were an Italian and had heard half of what is said in flourishing and prosperous countries concerning Italy’s *far niente*, I should give up all idea of justice in despair” (1.113). She then proceeds to provide many examples which prove these opinions to be false, and furthermore, she attempts to situate attitudes and activities within the social and political context of the times. Travel literature in the nineteenth century was replete with accusations of Italian indolence and degeneration, particularly in descriptions of the south.²² There was a well-established norm of southern hedonism which was typified in discussions of the Southern *lazzarone* who idled through his days in search of life’s pleasures.²³ Kavanagh was very aware of these accusations of laziness (made by contrastingly industrious northerners) and in her travel account attempts to counter these claims with many examples of Italian industry.²⁴ She describes the local families working all day at agricultural pursuits:

This house and garden keep the whole family in constant occupation; the men dig the earth, and in every available spot sow potatoes, beans, peas and pumpkins for home consumption. The women mind the house, the cows, the hens and rear the silk-worms. (1.24)

Of Italian shopkeepers, farmers, day-labourers, fishermen and boatmen she says:

Their vices are known at once. They cheat, they lie, they flatter and all most impudently. To know their virtues, one must live amongst them. Their sobriety is proverbial. They get less credit for their industry, which is amazing. There must be wonderful virtue in the constant repetition of an untruth, or Italian laziness would not have become a by-word – shameless and untrue. When the Italians do not work, it is

for the very sad and excellent reason – that they have nothing to do. [...] Where an Italian has a chance of earning, he works with the hardest will I ever saw. (1.112-113)

In giving these examples and in laying bare contradictions, Kavanagh deliberately attempts to counteract the prejudices and stereotypes of Italians and therefore give a more nuanced picture of the Italian reality that she witnessed:

Ignorant, oppressed, inferior are the Italians, if you like, but not exactly nor certainly so much as people are pleased to say. It is a pity, before they are condemned, that we are not first informed in what the education, liberty, civilization of a people consist. Let the law be laid before the judgment is pronounced – the standard fixed before the comparison is made. (1.134)

Kavanagh goes to considerable lengths in these pages to present what she considers to be a balanced picture of Italians and to lay bare prejudices and contradictions that she perceives in the accounts of other travel writers on Italy. In the nineteenth century, the repetition of the tourists' descriptions of the Italian south had become so entrenched that they became part of the representational framework for the region.²⁵ The Irish tourists who ventured as far as the south of Italy perpetuated these images and motifs²⁶, but some, like Kavanagh, attempted to be fair in their judgement and to identify when Italy's faults were not her own but perhaps the results of the actions of other nations who now perceived themselves to be superior:

Poor plundered Italy! Barbarous nations have robbed thee of thy laws and of thy civilization, of thy songs and thy pictures, thy statues and thy music, then turned on thee with pride, and with scorn, and boasted of their superiority!(1.19)

As I have shown elsewhere, the Irish background of Irish travel writers did not impact on their perceptions of a region located on the fringes of the European mainland; familiarity with

prejudices about Ireland did not generally lead to greater sensitivity towards issues of racial profiling and accusations of national indolence.²⁷ Julia Kavanagh evokes many of the common tropes about the south of Italy in her work, but she did attempt to be nuanced in her approach and offer, as she saw it, a balanced picture of the people and their circumstances. It was an attitude which was welcomed by an Irish review of her work which stated:

The warmth and generosity, and indeed the shrewdness, wherewith she defends the Italian, or, more strictly speaking, the southern Italian character, from aspersions too often careless and inconsiderate, command much of our sympathy.²⁸

Politics

The year of publication of Julia Kavanagh's work on Italy (1858) would lead one to deduce that she was in Italy in very interesting times. Between 1859 and 1861, Italy changed from a collection of divided regions into a unified country. Only three years after Kavanagh's visit to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, that Kingdom ceased to exist, and the ruling Bourbon monarchy was overthrown by the forces of Garibaldi. Ireland watched the developments of Italian unification with huge-great interest; it was one of the most divisive issues of the day and led to bitter disputes over the role of the Papacy in the temporal domain.²⁹ Irish Catholics rejected the Risorgimento, once it became clear that the Papal States were threatened by the forces of unification, and Irish Protestants welcomed the undermining of papal power and the creation of a united Italy. Kavanagh was present in Italy in a crucial time leading up to this major change in Italian society. Her assessment of the political situation in the south of Italy is, however, surprising:

[...] political opinions the people here have none. Of a united Italy, republican or monarchical, they do not dream. Northern Italy is to them a remote, unknown land – they neither like it nor dislike it – they know nothing about it. Their patriotism

scarcely goes beyond the limits of their birth-place, and rarely passes the frontier of the state. Question them and their complaints will never rise higher than the weight of the taxes, if they are rich enough to pay taxes, the disagreeable necessity of bribing the law, corruption is exacted and practised most shamelessly, and the price of provisions if they are poor. Political rights are to them words devoid of meaning. Panem et Circenses, give them bread and festas; let the food be cheap and holydays frequent, they ask for no more. (1.140)

Kavanagh maintains that Italian unification was not an issue for the people who were more interested in the day-to-day realities of survival than any political plotting.

She also presents Sorrento and the Kingdom of Naples at domestic peace under the Bourbons, and says that politics in the area are a distant concern. This assessment seems at odds with a country on the brink of tremendous change, but some of what Kavanagh depicts does however tally with the subsequent emergence of the sense that unification was foisted on the South without their consent or interest.³⁰ Although her observations may seem very odd when seen in the light of rapid political change and revolution shortly after her visit to Italy, it might be the case that Kavanagh witnessed an estrangement of Southern Italians from the processes of unification, an estrangement which was to cause much many problems in subsequent years. She says:

Whilst the people here are ignorant, physically happy and socially free, they will not care for political dignity and liberty. From them no revolution will come; mad should they be, indeed to make one for the benefit of the middle class, whose dominion would probably prove far more oppressive to them than that of a government whose policy it is to keep them in good humour; and revolutions are the children of great

wrongs or keen sufferings; declamations, theories, books, pamphlets, may fan the flame, they cannot kindle it in the hearts of a people. (1.143)

It is also possible, however, to view Kavanagh's assessment as disingenuous and little connected to the Italian political realities of the time. This was certainly the opinion of the reviewer of her book in the *Dublin University Magazine* who ridicules her interpretation and [her](#) "rash assertion" that in the beautiful, squalid, and misgoverned south of Italy, social freedom compensates for the absence of political liberty.³¹ The review instead mentions the many instances of restricted freedom in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, a position which was to obtain much currency in British debate in ~~the~~ subsequent years, when negative descriptions of the conditions in the south of Italy became part of the propaganda which justified the invasion of the Kingdom and the 'liberation' of the people.³²

The only book-length study of Kavanagh is entitled *The Politics of Writing*, [suggesting the centrality of politics to Kavanagh's career.](#)³³ [Yet](#) in her travel book she seems disinclined to discuss politics, [saying](#):

I have no wish to speak of Italian politics – I leave it to those whose inclination leads them to such things to reveal to the world a future that depends on a hundred accidents human wisdom can scarcely foresee, and which, above all, still lies closed and hidden within the Almighty's hand. (1.139)

Kavanagh's disengagement from politics seems curious, [given](#) her previous interest in this area: in 1850 she had written an appeal on behalf of Roman refugees in London.³⁴ Such a background would normally have led to descriptions of misrule in the Papal States and in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. In fact, most travel accounts by British writers highlighted the economic status of the inhabitants of the south of Italy. These debates were particularly heated between Catholics and Protestants in the nineteenth century, [with](#) the former arguing

that conditions in the Papal States were favourable, and the latter that the people were deprived and misgoverned. For Irish writers entering these discussions, their religious affiliations were certainly important, but their experience of poverty in Ireland was also a reference point. If Italians were portrayed as destitute and misgoverned in travel literature, this view might stem from a desire to see change in the governance in the south of Italy or from a wish to undermine the temporal power of the papacy. The most damning comments on conditions in the Papal States came not from Irish Catholics but rather from wealthy Protestants whose views were not based on an identification with the dire conditions in which Italian peasants found themselves, but rather from an ideological belief that the Pope could not possibly be a temporal ruler. Comments were thus not always a precise economic assessment of the situation but rather stemmed from the background as well as the political and religious leanings of the author. Julia Kavanagh's observations on the south of Italy might therefore have had more ideological than economic foundations, but it could also be argued that she was but recounting life as she viewed it from her privileged position as a tourist, who was not necessarily in touch with the everyday realities of life. The Italian Risorgimento took many by surprise, and certainly Kavanagh must have mulled over the "hundred accidents" which led to the complete overhaul of the society she described only three years after she visited the area.

Irish women in Italy

The strong female presence in Irish travel writing on Italy in the nineteenth century is striking: Lady Morgan, Catherine Wilmot, Lady Blessington, and Anna Jameson were among the Irish women who, along with Julia Kavanagh, wrote about their travels to Italy in this period.³⁵ The travel writing genre offered these women many opportunities. For Lady Morgan, for example, travel writing was a genre that allowed her to write extensively on politics and society, a realm which might otherwise have been considered out of bounds for a

female writer. Indeed, another Irish woman, Anna Jameson, in her own travel book refers to Morgan's "peculiar and unfeminine way of thinking."³⁶ Maria Frawley observes that travel writing "was a politically expedient choice for a woman writer interested in moving into "high prestige" and "male specialty" genres of non-fiction.³⁷ By the time Kavanagh penned her work, many Irish women had written controversial travel books ~~which~~ that strayed across generic boundaries, and in her publication Kavanagh blends the domestic realm with societal observations. Her blended approach came in for criticism, and the review in the *Dublin University Magazine* complained about Kavanagh's inclusion of historical information and classical learning, stating that it would have been preferable if the "authoress" gave "the genuine fruits of her own observations and experience, of things and persons under Neapolitan and Sicilian skies."³⁸ The reviewer would have preferred the writer to be more descriptive than judgmental. For Kavanagh, however, these learned passages served to establish her credentials as a writer who could comment on more than just the domestic realm. Her discussion of Italian literature, history, art, and occasionally politics added to the multidimensional aspect of Irish travel writing in this period. This hybrid approach allowed her to follow in the illustrious footsteps of Lady Morgan, who in her 1821 book on Italy directly discussed Italian society, history, and politics even though many of these topics were considered out of bounds for female writers at the times.³⁹

Indeed, in reviewing Lady Morgan's work at the time, the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* said that an angry woman in politics is like a bull in a china shop and that by addressing political concerns, Lady Morgan "oversteps the bounds of that retiring grace, which is the chief ornament of her sex."⁴⁰ Before 1821, relatively few women had written travel books on Italy, and often their publications stemmed from private letters and diaries. Those who did write about Italy were generally concerned with the aesthetic and the beautiful; their travel accounts detailed the attractions of Italian art, landscape and culture.

Even in later years, the dilettantism dominated the form and as one review of Kavanagh's travel book wrote, "most travels of the present day are simply records of personal feelings, sketchy scene-paintings of nature, reminiscences, dialogues, picturesque groupings, and a few telling illustrations of national character and manners".⁴¹

As an established writer, Kavanagh wrote from a position of experience, and her assertions were, in the words of the above review, "cautious and discriminating" (502). By the time Kavanagh wrote her travel account, much had changed in the world of letters, and women regularly used travel literature as an outlet for social and political commentary. Many female writers had moved away from the model of an aristocratic woman travelling to Italy with her husband and entourage and penning diaries and anecdotes of her experiences. From the 1820s, women pushed the boundaries of what was possible in travel writing on Europe and the Irishwoman Lady Morgan was to the fore in redefining the genre for women. The travel market had become saturated with personal diaries and so writers such as Morgan and Kavanagh attempted to provide an alternative form of writing which would differentiate their publication from the many others in the market. Kavanagh, for example, provided a blend of personal impressions and judgements on society, combined with some historical information and local detail. She includes very few personal details and we learn next to nothing of Kavanagh's mother who was with her throughout her time in the Two Sicilies.

This lack of self-revelation points to a decision to move away from a confessional form of writing to a more analytical mode. The position of women in society was a dominant concern for Kavanagh, and so her travel book contains much information on women's occupations, domestic habits, their rearing of silk worms, and their marriage prospects. Through her travel writing, Kavanagh could enter discussion about gender and society and she was able to compare her position in British society with that of women in Italy. Travel literature as a genre could accommodate such diversity and the hybridity of the form enabled

authors such as Kavanagh to address issues that were deemed pertinent to their lives in Ireland and Britain, as well as making comments on Italy.

Conclusion

The case study of Julia Kavanagh's *Summer and a Winter in the Two Sicilies* shows a variety of features of Irish travel writing in this period. Kavanagh's willingness to identify herself as Irish in her work is indicative of the emergence of Irish publishing confidence from the 1830s where writers could openly reference Ireland without worrying about the reaction of a mainly English audience. Kavanagh's work also underlines the importance of viewing this "Irishness" as part of a hybrid cultural background of many "Irish" travel writers whose experiences spanned national and linguistic borders. During the nineteenth century, more women, more Catholics and more members of the middle classes were able to travel from Ireland to Italy, and Julia Kavanagh's work is representative of these developments. Her travel writing which stemmed from her experiences in Italy, shows the emergence of Catholicism and female interests as significant strands in Irish travel writing. Travel writing by Irish Catholic authors in this period provided a platform for differing religious interpretations of contemporary affairs in Italy which were sending such shockwaves across Europe and gave Irish people the opportunity to project their religious preoccupations onto another country. As a hybrid genre, travel writing also gave women such as Kavanagh the opportunity to write on historical and political themes and to compare the position of women in British society with that of women in other countries. For all of these reasons, it is important to consider travel to non-Anglophone countries as an important aspect of how travelling Irishness was defined in the nineteenth century through travel and interactions with alternative cultural experiences.

¹ Fischer, Joachim. 2000. "Nineteenth-Century Irish Travellers to Germany and their Tales." In *Das schwierige neunzehnte Jahrhundert*, edited by Gilbert Carr and Roger Paulin Jürgen Barkhoff, (Tübingen: Max Niermeyer

Verlag), 535-546. Tübingen: Max Niermeyer Verlag. Raphaël Ingelbien, *Irish Cultures of Travel: Writing on the Continent 1829-1914* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

² Hooper, Glenn. 2005. *Travel writing and Ireland, 1760-1860 : culture, history, politics*. Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

³ Whelehan, Niall. 2015. *Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history, Routledge studies in modern history*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge.

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