

# **WANDERING IN ROME: A WRITER'S PARADISE**

**A Collective Storytelling Project**

**ENG 0701 | FALL 2023 | PROF. WARD**

**TEMPLE UNIVERSITY – ROME CAMPUS**



© Mary Ward, 2023, Rome's Ponte Sisto seen from Via Dei Pettinari at dusk.

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# **PREFACE: WHY A COLLECTIVE STORYTELLING PROJECT?**

**During** the fall semester of 2023 at the Temple University Rome campus, students shuffled into Prof. Ward's early morning ENG 0701, a.k.a Introduction to Academic Discourse. This sounds serious, so, to introduce some levity, Prof. Ward suggested writing a collective storytelling project gathering our impressions of life in Rome. With a varied and enthusiastic group of individuals, some of whom grew up in Rome, some who have lived here for many years, and others whose first time it is in Rome, we are convinced these eight reflections will intrigue and delight readers.

**“If there is a book you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, you must write it.” – Toni Morrison**

## INTRODUCTION

### ROME'S ETERNAL PULL

-Mary Ward

How many miles or kilometers have I tread wandering these ancient and worn streets of Rome? How many individuals have soaked in the city's aromas, vistas, and pleasant surprises as one rounds the corner? Smells of food abound, to be sure. But has the smell of history ever been considered a tourist attraction? By visiting majestic monuments, such as the Palatine hill, Coliseum Park, or the awe-inspiring Pantheon, I marvel in the thought that humans breathed in, perhaps in a gasp of wonderment at the architecture, those same notes of history.

My eyes are soothed by the expanse of light that arrives and allows vistas, colors, and angles to shape shift. At dawn, or shortly thereafter, the sky in Piazza del Popolo is a shade of blue unseen before then and as deep as a summer dive in the Mediterranean Sea. Soon after lunch, on a sunny day, the sky seems to expand even further, and I remember a Milanese friend commenting on how those who live in Rome are spoiled with all this light. Perhaps my favorite time of day in the city is at dusk when people are still flitting around with goings on to and from, crisscrossing this and that piazza, hanging around on one of the many bridges that cross the Tiber, all while chatting, laughing or, even, texting. Whatever the activity, we are embracing the city, literally and figuratively, with our wanderings.

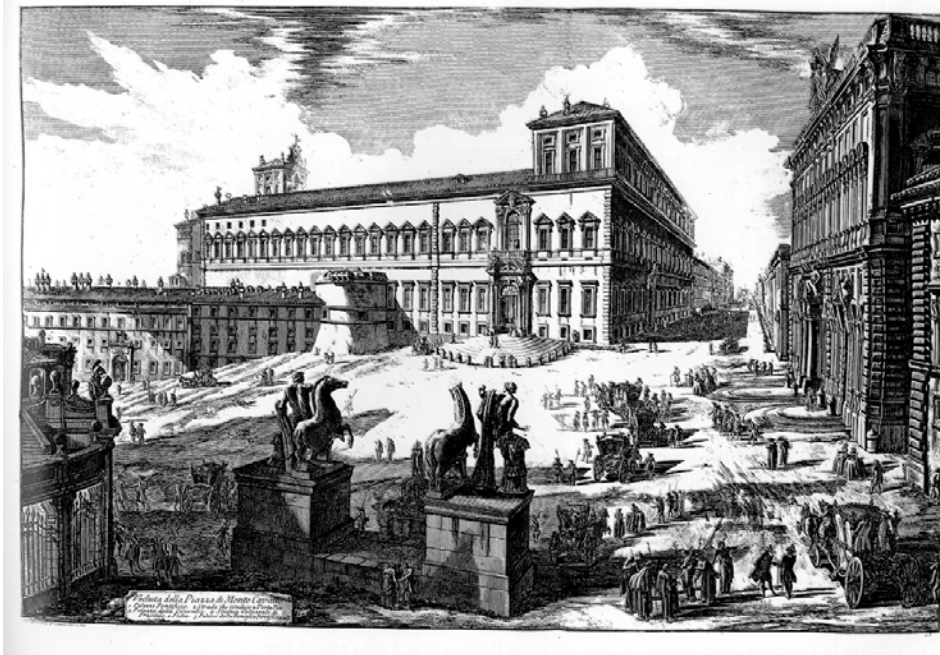
### WANDER, YOUNG MEN. WANDER!

-Alex Ramirez & Jack McKown

Tradition tells us Rome was founded on April 21, 753 BC, meaning Rome is almost three thousand years old and has grown to be vastly different from the hills inhabited by the Etruscan civilization so many centuries ago. One of the most historical areas I have had the pleasure to explore is the Quirinal Hill, the highest of the seven hills of Rome, where popes, kings and queens, emperors, and presidents

have all resided. It has one of the greatest views in the entire city of Rome and surrounding it are all places of extreme historical significance. Places where the great city matured to influence the Western world. As I walk in Piazza del Quirinale, I think about all those who came before me, saw the same views, heard the same sounds, and felt the same feelings. I often wonder about the people who I share commonalities with who viewed the same landmarks I see today, eat under the trees I eat under, and walk along the Tiber just as I do today. The streets here often remind me of the streets in my home in Catania. They share bustling bars, markets full of fish caught that morning, vendors selling the freshest vegetables and fruits, ancient cobblestone streets, and people enjoying late-night dinners with friends and family.

Being a tourist is uncanny, you leave as quickly as you arrive, so you live not as a native but as a passerby. The first time I visited Rome I was a child awe-struck by the beauty and history not only in museums, but also in the streets, café, piazzas, and the whole city. As you walk the city streets, there is a feeling of grandeur with each step you take, as the same roads that Caesars and armies of ancient people from around the Mediterranean. As a tourist, you can feel this everywhere you go from the markets to ancient cathedrals. However, as an inhabitant you have the same feeling, but it can be felt in their core and the history and culture runs through their blood. The caveat to being a tourist is that even though you can experience the same feelings as a native, it is not the real city as the rose-tinted glasses that tourists view it through. The real feeling of Rome is not just the ancient history, but instead the duality of the city as being the eternal city with its storied past and the innovations of the modern day. The same streets that chariots once rode down are now driven on by cars and street cleaners at night. Furthermore, there is a busy McDonalds next to one of the oldest piazzas in Rome! Even though I am not too dissimilar to the tourists, and even though I have lived here for months, I understand that this is just temporary, and I will leave to complete my round-trip home. Even though I will never be Roman, the beauty and life of the city will stick with me forever.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 18<sup>th</sup> century, Etching of the Palazzo del Quirinale, Wikipedia.

## PIAZZA O' PIAZZA!

- Amelia Ritrievi and Alexis Frederickson

One day I will never forget is my first-time walking to the metro station from school. As the auburn hues of the setting sun, bathed the timeless streets of Rome, I found myself irresistibly drawn to the enchanting Piazza Del Popolo. The air was heavy with anticipation, as if centuries of history were whispering their stories just across the way. With every step, my senses came alive, embracing the symphony of life that unfolded around me. Vibrant colors danced before my eyes, as locals and travelers alike weaved through the bustling square, their animated conversations in a plethora of languages filling the evening air with melodic echoes. The aroma of freshly baked pastries from Crystal Cafe, mingled with the tantalizing scent of Italian coffee, filled my nose, and struck the feeling of a newfound home.





© Alexis Frederickson, 2023, Piazza del Popolo, Roma

Any urgency I felt to get back to my apartment faded instantly, and I made my way to the renowned Piazza del Popolo. As I got closer, I could feel the grandeur of the piazzas' timeless beauty casting a spell upon anyone that wandered by. Lost in this labyrinth of history, I marveled at the whispers of the past that still rang within the square. I knew I would be a fool to stop exploring, and I continued up the stairs of the Piazza to Villa Borghese. With each turn, my heart swelled, as the delicate embrace of Rome's charm enveloped me, carrying me through a tempest of emotions that told me I was exactly where I needed to be. I watched as the sky morphed into a tapestry of deep indigo, the glow of the streetlights evoking a sense of magic, illuminating the countless arches and hidden corners that adorned the ancient city.

I knew then that this intoxicating dance with Rome's secrets would forever be etched into the fabric of my being, and my soul longed to discover all the magic

that the captivating city had to offer. Since then, I have continued to satisfy that longing by letting my feet wander to whatever enchanting places I see as I pass by.

## IT'S GOLDEN HOUR

-Marissa Carofano

The one thing most do not mention when coming to Rome is the power of the windows, little did I know this was something I would come to learn quickly. Every evening from around five to seven, I open my windows and let my long sheer white curtains dance with the wind as I embrace the outstanding scenery of the beautiful pink, purple, or golden sky. It is the simplest thing, yet something that touches my heart every night. The air flows through, and the peace fills my body with a sense of happiness. There is not a single night in Rome I have not felt this feeling, the windows, and doors here are meant to be open. Back in my hometown of Pennsylvania, we had nice sunsets, but I never liked to open my window or doors. It always felt weird, there was no sensation or feeling of the crisp air flowing in, it was extremely basic. In Rome it is different; I never want to close them, the air feels refreshing, and the sky feels like something I have never experienced before. There is not a single day in Rome that the sky does not have me in a trance, trust me you will be doing the most random thing, and you will catch a glimpse of the sky and you will no doubt say every single night that the sky is the prettiest thing you have ever seen.



© Marissa Carofano, 2023, Via Damiano Chiesa Roma

# AN ODE TO THE ANCIENT CITY

-Clara Pagel

Often, Rome has been described to me as the kind of city that can be visited in a day. With its ancient and world-famous landmarks all within walking distance of each other, it is easy to gather pictures in front of places such as the coliseum or the Trevi fountain, and treasure them forever as mementos of time and money well spent. But due to a trifecta of factors (the length of my stay, my meagre funds, and my tendency to daydream) **I am lucky to have found something here in Rome** far more precious to me than any historical site -- I have found beauty in the steady longevity of the moon flowers which bloom for months on end, and beauty in the rain which rages onto the pavement below a 4 am streetlight and turns into glittering droplets which hover in the air for a moment, priceless, before disappearing forever. I find Rome in quiet back staircases shrouded in vines and the places they lead, and bright flocks of emerald canaries which flit across the sky.

Small moments in time exist adjacent to the behemoth structures which bear witness to countless reiterations of these patterns. Rome is a city built on layers of past lives and ancient victories. Getting lost within its walls, it is easy to see a physical representation of this entanglement of past and present in the monuments and architecture that still stand today. But the thing that ties the past to me most tightly is the thought that, even in ancient times, people have been noticing the little infinities that exist here, and everywhere. How many have walked these paths before me and chosen to take the detour? Chosen to look past the soaring heights of the colosseum walls to see a sunset? Lost in history, these people walk beside me on the cobblestones of Rome.

These tiny moments of infinite beauty will not make it into any history book, and they will not make it onto this year's list of Top Ten Places To see while in Rome. The sights I have seen here are not only unique to Rome, but unique to me. The *Crown Jewels of Rome* will not go down in sagas or sculptures- they exist only for those who care to see, and that is what makes them beautiful --because what is

more valuable than something rare, and special, and one of a kind? And what better place to be gifted with these tiny moments than Rome? This city where all roads lead is also by that logic a nexus of infinite trails to continue when I leave and venture into this world.

And I like to imagine that when I leave, I will carry the souls of a few brave noticers from throughout history on my shoulders, and the spirit of Rome will live on in the form of tiny priceless infinities I will forever hold close to my heart.

## TWO PLACES WE CALL HOME

- Amaia Abad Oviedo, Maria Kariuki, Jaime Duran

**Maria:** "How would you compare the place you grew up in, to the city of Rome?"

**Amaia:** "Having grown up in two different places, one in Puerto Rico and the other in a small town in New Jersey, Rome is an entirely different environment. But I suppose I am used to the change and can adapt quite easily to a new place. Puerto Rico is a place full of culture, full of colors that illustrate life. With foods that taste like a rainbow of flavor and music that wakes your spirit coercing it to dance. Then there's New Providence, a 3-mile town where all the main roads meet in the center of the town. There I learned English and to drive. Sometimes I miss its tall green trees, and traditional colonial homes, or its proximity to everything. As for Rome, I feel like a whole new person when I walk through its ancient streets. Its richness in history and life wires me through the day. I have fallen in love with its warm sunsets and its lively nights full of laughter. Though I must say, I do not treasure its drivers and crazy traffic. Or how much pasta one can consume here. Not to mention how you must carry a lucky charm or touch on your faith to be on time if

you take any type of public transportation. There is still a lot I must discover in Rome as I must discover in myself."

**Jaime:** "I know what you mean, I grew up in a small town of a small province of Spain, La Fresneda, in Asturias. My life here in Rome is completely different to my life there; Rome is one of the biggest cities in Europe, there are a lot of people in the streets, cars... I am used to a life out of the city, where I can go everywhere walking or to the city just taking a 10-minute bus or 5-minute car-- I cannot drive here, for my safety, people in Rome drive like there are no rules, and traffic is crazy. Here in Rome, I must take the metro or the bus to go everywhere because taxis inside the city are so expensive and not worth it. I love the food in Rome, but I am tired of always eating pasta or pizza. What about you maria?"

**Maria:** "Growing up in the heart of a capital city, Nairobi, relocating to Rome marked a significant shift for me. Besides the change in scenery, with its awe-inspiring sunsets, enormous churches, and remarkable monuments, as well as the aroma of coffee that hits you as you walk by the street, the atmosphere in Rome feels refreshing. Contrasting the leisurely pace of life in Rome with the extremely active and fast-paced city I come from, characterized by thousands of fuel-consuming cars roaming the streets, it results in excessive pollution. Taking a breath in Rome feels refreshing, may I say!"

# LO VEDO ANCH'IO - I SEE IT, TOO.

Belinda Kesewaah Kotey & Rapheal Nii Adjabeng Ankrah

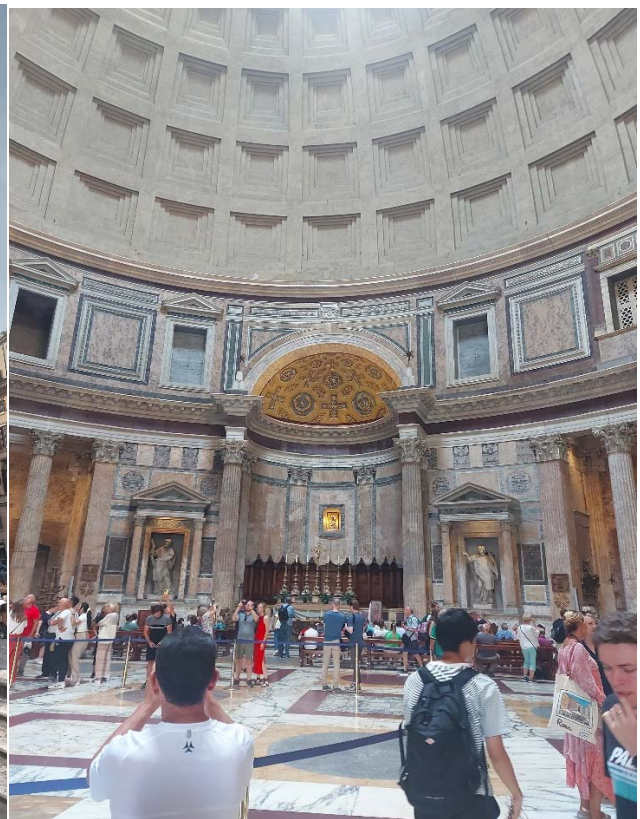
Rome is defined as the Eternal City, and that is because through infrastructure, arts, museums, and history, it communicates its culture. Everyone can agree with this idea by just walking down any street in Rome where modern innovations and ancient aspects of the city meet. However, like any other city, it has its difficulties. One might think with it being the capital of Italy, it is particularly advanced and "perfect" in comparison with other cities, which is what I also thought. Thus, this was not the case. We could consider, for example, the bad transportation system. Having to wait 30 minutes to one hour for a bus that is never coming, or a train that is always late has had an impact on my experience here in Rome, obviously in a negative way. Although I have lived in Italy for many years, these little aspects quite shocked me – but, through these, I am learning so many things.

Rome has some interesting and beautiful features that reveal much more than richness. Part of it may feel like it was forged. Besides, you need no one to tell you that Rome is full of history. It displays beautiful architectural buildings and pleasant culture dating back to antiquity. I say this from the experience I have had since I took a history class, which every week takes us on an on-site lesson to learn about the various historical places we have been talking about during class sessions. I recall one experience, when we visited Tivoli, and I was amazed by the place and started wondering if this place was ever real. I remember, I asked my prof, "How did these people come up with such an awesome plan for a place like this?" and he said 'Rapheal, it is because they used their head.'

Another place to visit is the Pantheon at Piazza della Rotonda, which was originally a temple but presently a Christian Basilica. This is where, Raphael Sanzio, an Italian painter and architect, among the most famous of the Renaissance is buried. Undoubtedly, that is another way to say Rome is full of surprises.



© Rapheal Nii Adjabeng Ankrah, September 15, 2023, Tivoli.



© Rapheal Nii Adjabeng Ankrah, September 13, 2023. Pantheon



# LOVE, FOUND IN ROME

-Youssef El-Grady

While I do believe that Rome is mostly about the historical monuments, people, food, and other things that mark its status as a tourist destination, sometimes, however, the local places which are not well known are the best places to go for tourists -- or **even locals**.

Living here for six years has allowed me to discover local places which I believe are gems to visit during a person's visit to Rome, or even during their time living abroad in Rome. One of these magical places is Ponte Milvio, which is mostly a local place that not a lot of people know about. Ponte Milvio translates to "Lovers' Bridge", and while that is not the direct translation in Italian, it still is meaningful and tells us a lot. Ponte Milvio does not only include the bridge with the flowing of the Tiber River under it, but it also has the countless number of restaurants and bars and the atmosphere present within that place, especially during the night. While it is not as lively in the morning, it is packed with people at night. People can go there, grab a drink with friends, have dinner or go with a partner to the actual bridge and get closer and closer to each other as you see and read the writings in black markers of other couples on the bridge.

I remember a few **fond memories** of being with my old friends from school in Ponte Milvio, especially after graduation. I do not know why, but it looked so appealing right after my graduation ceremony, and I went with five of my friends to walk across the long bridge that felt so short, while we watched the Roman sunset and observed the countless number of couples there. We stared aimlessly into the statues there, yet that is not what grabbed my attention. What pulled me more into my love for the bridge is the sense of being there that made me feel like I belonged there. It is true that the place is called "Lovers' Bridge", and my love was present during that day. But that was not a love for a partner or a significant other; yet, it was rather the love for my friends and the friendships we made, and my love for the sunset during that specific day, or my love for the sense of belonging there or even the silence during the night and simply listening to the tides of the Tiber

River. It truly did live up to its name, and I am sure that I am not the only one who was inspired by or even fell in love with the place or with someone or something during my visits to the bridge.

In the end, I would like to reiterate that if you are a tourist visiting Rome or are living abroad, going to Ponte Milvio is necessary, whether with your partner, a significant other, friends or even all by yourself, you will truly fall in love with the "Lovers' Bridge"



Ponte Milvio and the Torretta Valadier, Turismo Roma.

# STEPPING FOOT IN ROME

-Red Boles

Deciding to start college in another country was a bold move, one that I knew would be a large **adjustment**. Graduating high school and the following summer felt like a carefree youthful time. I thought the summer would last a lot longer than it did and I felt nowhere near ready to be so **far away** from home. However, arriving in Rome made me realize I am not so young anymore. I realized just how different the city is from Philadelphia. Stepping outside of the Rome airport, the first thing I smelled was cigarette smoke and I saw my first palm tree. Arriving at Adagio was a **struggle** after the long plane ride, and, after not sleeping for a day, I felt like I was going to throw up in the car. Crammed in tighter than the eight-hour plane ride, I knew that if I threw up, I would be starting my time in Rome with quite a low point.

Luckily, I kept my dignity and arrived at the hotel without vomiting. Standing in the hotel lobby I was so ready to sleep, I might implode from my tired bones. I took a nap for two hours and then went to a meeting where all the freshman students got to know each other. I confused some people with others since I was not wearing my glasses.

Walking around Rome for the first time was a surreal experience. The architecture blew my mind with how intricate it was, and the drivers scared me because they do not seem to care if they hit you. My first night walking around Rome I was quite tired -- I did not know where anything was and that always gets me stressed out. I was wandering the winding streets, running on two hours of sleep in the last 36 hours. I wanted nothing more than to go to sleep in my own bed and see my dogs, but I knew that **would not happen** because I was 4,000 miles away. And that's how I first stepped foot in Rome.