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Rachel Busk is best known today for *The Folk-Lore of Rome* (1874), one of the most important contributions to urban folklore made in the nineteenth century and one of few studies from that period that paid attention to the contexts in which tales and legends were told. Busk wrote several other books on the folklore of European countries which, though inspired by her travels, were more assemblages of material previously published by others. Only *The Folk-Lore of Rome* was the result of her own fieldwork.

Women Folklorists in Victorian and Edwardian Britain

Rachel Busk is an example of what was, in the British publishing market, a well-established type, that is the female travel writer. Like many other upper and middle-class women in nineteenth-century Britain, she had received a relatively good if haphazard education, including modern foreign languages (whereas male siblings were destined to learn classical Latin and Greek). That education included travel: in the eighteenth century the 'Grand Tour' which took British aristocrats to visit the most important cultural sites in Europe was largely restricted to men, but in the nineteenth century, as travel become easier, this was no longer the case. In Britain, even those contemporary commentators who believed that men and women should operate in very different spheres did not object to women writing, nor to them earning a living from their writing. There was a well established tradition of women writers of both fiction (Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot…) and non-fiction (Catherine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, Fanny Trollope…). Specifically, women's travel writing was a recognized genre in its own right in the second half of the nineteenth century, feeding the demand created by mid-nineteenth-century explosion of monthly magazines providing political, cultural, and scientific commentary to the expanding middle classes: readers who might soon become tourists themselves, seeking guidance. By Victorian standards, the mores and customs of other societies - particularly the more domestic and intimate observances, fell within women's purlieu. Women were better able than men to penetrate the interior of the home, to enter into discussions of daily routines and social practices. Busk's elder sister, the author Julia Byrne, had already contributed several volumes to this abundant literature with titles such as *A Glance Behind the Grilles* (1855), *Flemish Interiors* (1856), *Realities of Paris Life* (1859), *Pictures of Hungarian Life* (1869) and many more.

This kind of social investigation and commentary on both the quotidian and regionally or nationally distinctive traditions clearly borders on folklore. Several of these Victorian and Edwardian women travel writers were early activists in the institutions dedicated to the study of folklore and contributed significantly to the discipline's expanding scholarship. They include Flora Annie Steel (1847-1929) on India, Lucy Garnett (1849-1934) on Greece and

Turkey, Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) on West Africa, Edith Durham (1863-1944) on Albania; all, like Busk, were contributors to the journal of the London Folklore Society. Rachel Busk was far from unusual either in her background, her interests, and her publishing record.

A Turbulent Background

Rachel Busk had a privileged background. The Busk family had arrived in England from Sweden via Russia in the early eighteenth century. They were merchants in the City of London, then lawyers, and then, as was so often the way, the family bought land and became gentry, though without ever giving up their merchant and legal connections. Rachel's father, Hans Busk, was a country squire first in Wales, then in Sussex. Rachel was the youngest of his six surviving children. Several of her siblings achieved some degree of fame in the Victorian era (and so are listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). His only son, also Hans Busk, was a leading promoter of the Volunteer movement, a patriot militia cum army reserve that grew up in response to fears about Napoleon III's intentions. One sister, Maria Georgina, married Robert Loder, a conservative MP and descendant of another Baltic trading family turned Sussex gentry. Another sister, Julia Clara, married William Pitt Byrne, the editor of the ultra-conservative newspaper *The Morning Post.* Julia Byrne became well-known as a travel writer and memoirist, and Rachel accompanied her on some of her trips across Europe. However, a very different sort of fame attached to a third sister, Frances Rosalie. In 1845 she married Charles Vansittart, the younger son of the Berkshire landowner and Tory MP Colonel Arthur Vansittart. (The Vansittart family were Dutch merchants in Russia who also settled in England in the early eighteenth century, becoming gentry.) Charles Vansittart was a Church of England clergyman, and an enthusiast for The Oxford Movement, a trend in the Anglican Church towards liturgy, ritual, and an emphasis on the role of the priest as celebrant of the sacraments. The Oxford Movement saw Anglicanism as a branch of the Catholic Communion, and several of its leading members would convert to Roman Catholicism. Apparently Charles Vansittart encouraged his wife and her sisters in a ritualist direction, and so started a process that would lead to all five of them going over to Rome - much to Vansittart's horror.

Rosalie Vansittart's conversion fed an estrangement between the couple, but there is also evidence that Charles Vansittart was an unstable and violent character. He threatened and abused his wife, emotionally, verbally, and physically. He introduced other women into their house, and finally he threw his wife out and went abroad taking their children (as was his right in law at the time). All of this became public knowledge in an unusual way. Mrs Vansittart took lodgings with a Mr Hay, who, in 1856, brought an action against Charles Vansittart for recovery of the rent. As the Busk family undoubtedly could have supported Rosalie, the action was really a ploy engineered by the Busks to bring the details of Vansittart's behaviour towards his wife into the public arena. And the ploy worked: the national and regional papers all reported the facts of the case, pouring abuse on the wife-beater Vansittart. Rachel Busk was one of the people called as a witness (Hay v. Vansittart, Guildford Assizes, 6 August 1858). The case was significant because it helped establish a precedent in law that a husband was responsible for the maintenance of his wife, even after they were separated. This was one of that series of mid/late Victorian legal developments which enabled women to take an active part in public life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Charles Vansittart became a leading anti-Catholic campaigner in the 1860s (Paz 1992, 293-94).

The Vansittart story is relevant because it explains how Rachel Busk came to Italy. She shared a house with her sister Mrs Vansittart, who had moved to Rome (along with her children, whom she had recovered as part of the separation settlement with her husband). Rachel Busk became a correspondent for British newspapers on Italian and Papal affairs, in which she revealed herself a fervent defender of Catholicism and the Papal State. The latter was challenged by the process of Italian Unification which would culminate with the occupation of Rome and the deposition of the Pope as its sovereign in 1870. Not just Rachel, but the wider Busk-Vansittart family were active opponents of Italian unification. One of the Vansittart sons, Arthur, became a Papal Zouave who fought against Garibaldi's volunteers at Mentana in 1867 in an earlier, unofficial attempt by Italian patriots to capture the city; another, Cyril, was Chamberlain to Pius IX (the Pope who instituted Papal Infallibility as a dogma of the Catholic Church). [1] In the aftermath of the conquest of Rome, the Busks and Vansittarts were involved in several violent encounters with Italian policemen and troops. Seemingly they deliberately engineered these confrontations in order to try and create an international incident and a newspaper outcry against the mistreatment of British citizens by the Italian state. However, they were unsuccessful in this attempt: the British papers were too well aware that the individuals concerned were known partisans of Papal government. [2]

'No Italian Grimm had yet arisen': Busk's Quest of Popular Mythology in Rome and Italy

Rachel Busk had long been enthusiast for folklore. Before the foundation of The Folklore Society she had been a regular contributor to the de facto folkloric journal in Britain, *Notes and Queries*, to which she continued to write on folklore through the 1880s and 1890s. She was a faithful member of the Folklore Society in the 1880s despite the materialist and anticlerical reputation of the 'anthropological interpretation of folklore associated with leading figures such as Andrew Lang, George Gomme, Alfred Nutt, Sydney Hartland and Edward Clodd (British Prime Minister Gladstone resigned his membership over Clodd's overtly anti-Christian Presidential address of 1896 [Dorson 1951, 8]). But throughout this period the Society was also home to a number of Catholic propagandists, such as Gertrude M. Godden, an expert on the Nagas of Assam but who later also wrote panegyrics to Mussolini and Franco published by the Catholic Truth Society in the 1930s (Pasi 2014, 124-26).

Despite this interest, Busk's books inspired by her travels in Spain and the Tyrol did not depend on collecting in the field. She introduced a putative oral storyteller, a travelling Andalusian player, in *Patrañas* (1870) but the stories that follow mostly derive from existing printed sources. The same is true of her first book on the Tyrol, *Household Tales from the Land of Hofer* (1871). A second book on *The Valleys of the Tirol* (1874a) was really a guidebook, though it contains a fair amount of local folklore garnered from guides, hotel-keepers, and coach-drivers encountered along the way. It also offered Busk an opportunity to display her religious and political sentiments; for instance, in her defence of the expulsion of Tyrolese Protestants, and her criticism of Garibaldi who had led another band of volunteers into the southern Tyrol during the Third War of Italian Independence in 1866. Her book on *The Folk-Songs of Italy* (1887), which includes a long chapter by Giuseppe Pitrè, remains a useful introduction, but likewise relies almost entirely on the work of other song collectors active in Italy. Her most valuable work, as a folklorist, is *The Folk-lore of Rome* (1874b).

In the introduction Busk explains that she had set out to follow her usual method, translating from existing materials. It was the absence of an 'Italian Grimm' which obliged her to undertake her own collecting project. Through her philanthropic works, Busk established connections with the poor women in her parish (Eriksen and Selberg 2014, 301-16). Busk often introduced the stories with elements of the conversation that had led up to the narration, so that one gets a much stronger feel for the occasion when stories would be told, and how. Although many of these texts belong to the international canon of folktales, others are more anecdotal and reflect the imaginative life of an urban neighbourhood: for example, a series of stories about a rich Englishman marrying a beautiful but poor Roman girl and 'carrying her off to that unknown land bright with gold but devoid of sun', and in the end fogs and Protestantism lead to the girl's death. Busk explains that for most of her Roman informants, it was a natural assumption that all Englishmen were rich: '*io pensava che in Ingliterra tutti erano ricchi - tutti ricchi*' ('I thought that in England all were rich—all rich'), says one of her female acquaintances (1874, 308). Richard Dorson, in his history of British folklore, dedicated several pages to praising this volume for 'the scope and variety, the colour and accuracy of its firsthand texts, the informativeness of preface and notes, the perceptiveness of its divisions and the intelligent construction of the whole' (Dorson 1968, p 381-387).

Rachel Busk had strong political views, and those views in part inspired her engagement with folklore. However, that does not mean that we should now dismiss her work as partisan. Risorgimento and post-Risorgimento Italy was the context in which she wrote, but she was a responsible and thorough scholar, who did not let her own aspirations dictate her findings. She was familiar with, and a participant in, the developing 'science of folklore'; she read the works of scholars in many languages and contributed to folklore journals. She corresponded with, and was acknowledged as an authority by, leading figures in the field in Italy, in Britain and further afield, such as Giuseppe Pitrè, even though his politics were of a very different stripe (Zipes 2009, 2).

A question raised in recent studies of travel literature is whether women's experiences of being abroad, and the themes they chose to address in their writings, were fundamentally distinct from those of their male counterparts. One could certainly make a case that it would have been difficult for a man to write a book like *The Folk-Lore of Rome*, which depended entirely on Busk's ability to form relationships with poor women. Nonetheless, Busk's near contemporaries in other parts of Europe, such as Wentworth Webster (1877) in Saint-Jean-de-Luz or James Bruyn Andrews (1892) in Menton, both of whom, like Busk, were well connected with the Folklore Society in London, compiled collections of Basque and Ligurian folktales which they obtained from women in equivalent social situations. What is different about their books is that neither Webster nor Andrews told the reader anything about their narrators; Busk's work, on the other hand, might be described as a reflexive ethnography, in which the investigator is present alongside the informant. That is also true of the works of other British women writers on folklore working in Italy, such as Isabella Anderton (1905) which likewise documents the relationship between the writer/observer and her Italian informants. The fact that Busk and Anderton were writing about societies different from their own, forced them to reflect on cultural difference, but because they had stepped out of the obligations of the British class system, they felt enabled to enjoy associations with peasants

and workers that they would never even have encountered at home, except with servants. They entered into the life of the village or neighbourhood, participating in its jealousies and altercations as eagerly as they joined in with its collective celebrations.

This ethnographical approach, encouraged by the European context, is not necessarily incompatible with the type of grand theorizing that characterized the British anthropological school of folklore, with its enormous intellectual leaps connecting fragments of evidence across time and space, but in general these women ethnographers relegated theory below experience. Busk, although as well versed in European folkloristics as any of their male peers, displayed a certain scepticism towards all-encompassing and speculative hypothesizing about folklore.

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[1] 'Obituary: Frances Rosalie Busk', *Tablet*, 10 June 1899, 903.

[2] 'Outrages in Rome', *London Evening Standard*, 16 March 1871, 6; 'Disturbances at Rome', *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 18 March 1871, 1; 'Disturbances in Rome', *Kings County Chronicle*, 22 March 1871, 4; 'The Case of Mr Vansittart', *London Daily News*, 10 May 1873, 3; 'The Attack on Mr Vansittart', *London Evening Standard*, 26 May 1873, 3.