

# Promising Monsters: Imagining Medieval Space at the Ottocento Villa Torlonia

Acknowledgements: Research for this paper began at John Cabot University in Rome under the supervision and support of Karen Georgi and Lila Yawn. It was workshopped at *Middle Ages in the Modern World* (Rome, 2018), *Absent Presences: Shifting the Core and Peripheries of the Gothic Mode* (Manchester, 2019), and *San Paolo Infiamma: La Basilica prima e dopo l'incendio del 1823* (Rome, 2023).

**Mostri promettenti:  
immaginare lo spazio medievale  
nell'ottocentesca Villa Torlonia**

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<sup>(1)</sup> Michael Camille, "Rethinking the Canon: Prophets, Canons, and Promising Monsters", *The Art Bulletin*, 78, 2 (1996): 198.

<sup>(2)</sup> Camille, "Rethinking the Canon", 199-200.

<sup>(3)</sup> The term Neoclassical-Gothic is used by Peter Lindfield to describe "a third type of Georgian Gothic" in reference to late 18th century furniture and decor, as well as projects by Robert Adam for Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, see: Peter Lindfield, *Georgian Gothic: Medievalist Architecture, Furniture and Interiors, 1730-1840, of Medievalism, Vol. VIII* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016), 171-179. It is also referenced concerning the work of Robert Adam for the Northumberland by Adriano Aymonino: "Adamesque combination of Gothic and classical elements", Adriano Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design of the 1st Duke and Duchess of Northumberland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 231.

<sup>(4)</sup> The state of disrepair is noted widely when discussing or mentioning the site, especially in earlier publications, with the invocation of a possible *damnatio memoriae* following Mussolini's twenty-year use of the complex noted in: Maria Vitiello, "Roma: Il Cantiere di Villa Torlonia, Residenza di Mussolini", *Anagkē*, 54 (2008), 50-67: 51.

<sup>(5)</sup> Silvia Silvestri notes in her chapter "Roma neogotica" that the Torlonia spaces, both at the Villa and the Palazzo in piazza Venezia are the first known examples of gothic revival in Rome. Silvia Silvestri, "Roma neogotica", *Vetrare Italiane dell'Ottocento: Storia del gusto e relazioni artistiche fra Italia e Francia, 1820-1870* (Firenze: SPES, 2006), 141-164. The depiction of medieval space does predate neo-gothic building in Rome by many decades, the exception being a handful of aristocratic projects from the period, including the Chiesa del Sacro Cuore di Gesù a Villa Lante (1841-1843) and the gothic façade of Villa Mills on the Palatine (c. 1818).

<sup>(6)</sup> Giuseppe Checchetelli, *Una Giornata di Osservazione nel Palazzo e nella Villa di Il Sig. Principe D. Alessandro Torlonia* (Roma: C. Puccinelli, 1842). Written following their simultaneous renovations, the publication is a description of his visit to both sites, including illustrations of the *capanna svizzera*, the *serra e torre moresca*, and a double-page veduta of the Casino Nobile and various false ruins on the north side of the property, as seen from the Via Nomentana (VIII-IX). For a description of the gothic *cappella* see 56-59; for the *sala*, 13-14.

## Introduction

In "Prophets, Canons, and Promising Monsters", a 1996 essay for *Art Bulletin*, Michael Camille discusses the types of works that often fail to achieve canonical status, taking as his example a late 12th century monster: a Romanesque creature – "a superbly ambiguous thing [...] part reptile, part bird, and all stone" – perching on a quintessential 'Early Gothic' portal<sup>(1)</sup>. In addition to a weathered snout, the stylistic discontinuity between the Romanesque spirit of the creature and the early gothic style of its surroundings, makes it "temporally as well as spatially marginal, out of place, so to speak, in its place"<sup>(2)</sup>. I begin here with Camille to introduce a similarly liminal but nonetheless promising monster: the early 19th century decorative program of the Villa Torlonia on the Via Nomentana in Rome, as carried out during the 1830s by painter and architect Giovanni Battista Caretti (1808-1878) under the patronage of Alessandro Torlonia. The *Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani* – the *Room of the Italian Poets and Artists* – will be taken up as a central case study: a neo-gothic space perching in a quintessentially neo-classical building [Fig. 6.1, 6.2]. While this Neoclassical-Gothic configuration of gothic interiors within a classical framework and sensibility can be seen in Georgian interiors from the previous century<sup>(3)</sup>, in Rome it is quite marginal, both within the wider cultural landscape, as well as temporally and spatially on the Villa grounds: uncomfortably nestled between the 'cleaner' neoclassicism of Valadier and Canova who worked on the properties for Alessandro's father, and the following generations' addition of Post-Unification medieval revival buildings.

The *Camera dei poeti* is one in a series of small historicist spaces in the Villa Torlonia's Casino Nobile; other surviving rooms at the Villa Torlonia include the *Camera gotica* and *Camera egizia* in the upstairs apartments [Fig. 6.3, 6.4, 6.5], as well as a small 'Renaissance' bathroom and 'Pompeiiian' sitting room on the piano nobile. The site has benefited from preservation-by-neglect, but the

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the early 19th century decorative program of the Villa Torlonia on the Via Nomentana in Rome, in particular the historicist rooms by painter-architect Giovanni Battista Caretti that were completed during the 1830s under the patronage of Alessandro Torlonia. Taking the *Camera dei poeti e degli artisti italiani* as a central case study in articulating the nature and context of Rome's neo-gothic projects, this paper proposes that Caretti's creation of small, interior gothic spaces as part of a collection of historicist rooms – a diminutive, enclosed 'capsule gothic' housed in a neoclassical shell – is a decorative phenomenon that was developed and implemented across the Villa, as well as in the since-demolished Palazzo Torlonia in Piazza Venezia. Considering both sites together elucidates how Caretti's visual vocabulary draws from both international and local sources, namely a cosmopolitan Neoclassical-Gothic aesthetic alongside extant elements of the medieval Roman landscape.

**Keywords:** Rome, Neo-gothic, Neoclassical, Historicism, 19th Century

degree of neglect was indeed severe, perhaps due in part to a passive erasure following the two decades that the villa served as Mussolini's family residence, from 1925 until his arrest in 1943<sup>(4)</sup>. While the *Camera gotica* and *Camera dei poeti* are notable for being the first instance of gothic revival interiors in Rome<sup>(5)</sup> – a city in which gothic elements are tacitly anomalous – the rooms as a whole are of interest for the ways in which they contribute to an understanding of historicism at the time and especially its implementation within the Roman decorative context. The singularity of this decorative approach is made all the more stark by the fact that its sister site, the Palazzo Torlonia in piazza Venezia, which also contained a *cappella* and a *sala* in the gothic style, was demolished in 1902 as part of the systemization of the piazza for the monument to Vittorio Emanuele; lawyer-turned-playwright Giuseppe Checchetelli (1823-1879) described both sites together in his 1842 Torlonia-commissioned volume, *Una Giornata di Osservazione nel Palazzo e nella Villa di Il Sig. Principe D. Alessandro Torlonia*<sup>(6)</sup>. While Checchetelli's account described the Palazzo and Villa Torlonia together, the two sites have been treated individually in more recent reproductions and annotations of his text<sup>(7)</sup>. The palazzo also received individual treatment in two publications at the time of its destruction in 1902, one volume documenting its owners, visitors, and artists, and another announcing works for auction<sup>(8)</sup>. While certainly understandable given the focus of each project, these examples give a sense of the ways in which the palazzo and villa have been historically and historiographically separated in the years since the palazzo's demolition, and by extension a fracturing and minimization of Caretti's innovative visual vocabulary as it was implemented across the two properties simultaneously throughout the 1830s<sup>(9)</sup>.

Very little is known about the early career of Giovanni Battista Caretti; recent biographical findings from 2003 are robust but focus primarily on his later career and family life, after his period of work for Alessandro Torlonia<sup>(10)</sup>. Caretti trained

<sup>(7)</sup> The half of Checchetelli's *Giornata di Osservazione* that describes the villa was reprinted and extensively annotated for the 1987 *Villa Torlonia: L'ultima impresa del mecenatismo romano* volume, and similarly but inversely, the half that describes the palazzo was reprinted in Barbara Steindl's 1993 volume on the Torlonia Family, *Mazenatentum im Rom des 19. Jahrhunderts*. The latter might have been in the interest of avoiding redundancy, given that Steindl worked on the 1987 volume as well. Marco Fabio Apolloni, Alberta Campitelli, Antonio Pinelli, and Barbara Steindl, "Villa Torlonia: L'ultima impresa del mecenatismo romano: La Villa di Alessandro Torlonia", *Ricerche di Storia dell'arte*, 28-29 (1986); Barbara Steindl, *Mazenatentum im Rom des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Familie Torlonia*, Studien Zur Kunstgeschichte, Bd. 65 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1993).

<sup>(8)</sup> Oliviero Iozzi, *Il Palazzo Torlonia in Piazza Venezia* (Roma: Forzani E C, 1902); Francesco Tancredi, *Grande Vendita di tutti i fregi, candelliere, stucchi dorati e diversi marmi del Principe-scio Palazzo Torlonia, ora demolito, a Piazza Venezia* (Roma: Tipografia del Corriere della provincia, 1902).

<sup>(9)</sup> Caretti carried out the majority of architectural designs alongside painting and stucco decoration, and directed a large team of other artists on everything from figural panels to chandeliers; for compiled portraits and biographies of the artists who worked on Palazzo Torlonia, many of which overlapped with the Villa Torlonia, see: Iozzi, *Il Palazzo Torlonia in Piazza Venezia*.

<sup>(10)</sup> Massimiliano Del Moro, "Vicende biografiche, nuovi documenti, inediti e notizie su Giovan Battista Caretti (1808-1878)", *Neoclassico*, 23/24 (2003), 120-138; Luisa Chiumentì, "Caretto Giovan Battista", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Volume 20 (1977). Chiumentì states that Caretti was born in 1803; later proposed instead to be 1808 by Del Moro (2003). Caretti's living situation in Rome is documented in detail by Del Moro: during the Torlonia projects he was located at via delle Botteghe Oscure no. 43 (1832-1837); then via degli Angeli Custodi no. 30 (1839-1855); via di Ripetta al civico no. 226 (1855-1859); via di S. Nicola in Arcione no. 73 (1860-1878).



6.1

Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, view of the NE corner of the *Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani*, with the *Sala da ballo* visible through the door in the background (photo by the author).

6.2

Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, view looking west in the *Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani* (photo by the author).

6.4

Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, set of doors in the south wall of the *Camera gotica* (photo by the author).

6.3

Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, view looking west in the *Camera gotica* (photo by the author).





6.5

Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, set of doors in the south wall of the Camera egizia (photo by the author).

in Milan at the Accademia di Brera, then at the Accademia delle Belle Arti di Bologna, and possibly later the Accademia di San Luca a Roma as well; the Milan-based neoclassical painter and decorator Giocondo Albertolli (1742-1839) is credited with being his most influential tutor<sup>(11)</sup>. Before arriving in Rome and working on the Torlonia projects, Caretti worked as a *malarz-dekorator* (painter-decorator)<sup>(12)</sup> in Poland for three years (October 4, 1823 – September 3, 1826), between Warsaw and Dowspuda; this period of artistic output is particularly important to the present discussion given that at least two of the properties that he worked on incorporated interior or exterior neo-gothic elements<sup>(13)</sup>.

Within the Villa Torlonia complex as a whole, the modern medieval aesthetic is active in three distinct but overlapping paradigms: the neoclassical, the romantic, and the nationalist, or as they will also be referred to here: capsule gothic, garden gothic, and wholesome medieval<sup>(14)</sup>. This division and nomenclature is a formulation of the present author and while the latter two – the romantic and the nationalist – will be briefly addressed, the focus of this article will be the first: the capsule gothic of Caretti as one of many chronological ‘others’ collected in the neoclassical shell of the villa’s Casino Nobile.

### Medieval revival on the grounds of the Villa Torlonia: the Neoclassical, the Romantic, and the Nationalist

As part of a sprawling and heterogeneous complex – from landscape garden elements to other historicist interiors within the Casino Nobile and Casino dei

<sup>(11)</sup> Albertolli [Albertollego] is also mentioned in Caretti’s biography in the 1971 dictionary edition of artists working in Poland: Janina Zielińska, *Instytut Sztuki. Słownik Artystów Polskich i Obcych W Polsce Działających: Malarze, Rzeźbiarze, Graficy*. Tom. 1, A-C (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1971), 292.

<sup>(12)</sup> Giovanni Battista Caretti is commonly referred to as a *malarz-dekorator* in Polish sources, where he is also known by the name “Carelli”, “J. Ch. Charelli”, and “Jan Chrzyciel Carelli” as cited here: Władysław Paszkowski. “Problemy Konserwatorskie Pałacu W Dowspudzie” (Conservational problems in the reconstructing of the Dowspuda palace), Muzeum Okręgowe W Białymstoku, *Rocznik Białostocki*, Tom XIII (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1976), 439. Another article from the same volume elaborates: “...the painter-decorator Giovanni Battista Carelli or Caretti (in Poland 1823-1826) was brought in, painting frescoes with floral and geometric motifs in both Pac palaces and the church in Raczkzi.” [“...sprowadzony został malarz-dekorator Giovanni Battista Carelli czy Caretti (w Polsce 1823-1826), malujący freski o motywach roślinno-geometrycznych w obu pałacach Paca oraz w kościele w Raczkach”], Andrzej Ryszkiewicz, “Ludwika Paca Stosunek Do Sztuki.” (Ludwik Pac and his approach to art), Muzeum Okręgowe W Białymstoku, *Rocznik Białostocki*, Tom XIII (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1976), 408. Many thanks to Dr. Wojciech Szymański and the University of Warsaw Libraries staff for their guidance in navigating these sources.

<sup>(13)</sup> Sebastiano Ciampi, *Viaggio in polonia nella state del 1830, con la breve descrizione di Varsavia e con altre notizie di lettere arti commercio e particolarità di quel regno con un’appendice de’ medici musici architetti scultori e pittori italiani in Polonia che serve d’aggiunta al libro stampato in Lucca dallo stesso autore su questo proposito* (Firenze: Giuseppe Galerti, 1831), 143-148. The precise dates of Caretti’s time in Poland are noted by Sebastiano Ciampi in his 1831 volume, *Viaggi in Polonia* as part of his description of the work of Roman artist Enrico Marconi (143-150). They are referenced more vaguely by Checchetelli ten years later: Caretti “...consultando gli antichi monumenti e facendo continui studi nell’applicare le teorie alla pratica, giunse a vedere addentro nell’arte di fabbricare, e tanto da potersene chiamare Maestro. Al quale esercizio giovarongli assai bene quei quattro anni che diresse in Varsavia le fabbriche del Conte Gen. Pax, primo Sig. della Lituania, lasciando colà desiderio di se stesso e di nuove sue opere.” Checchetelli, *Una Giornata di Osservazione*, 63.

<sup>(14)</sup> Apolloni discusses the dueling modes of Neoclassicism and Romanticism within the early 19th century landscape design but the different phases of neo-medieval building projects across the two-hundred year history of the site are generally not treated or conceptualized together. Apolloni et al., “Il Programma, L’Iconografia, Lo Stile”, in *Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa*, 26-31.

Principi – contextualizing the ‘promising monster’ of the *Camera dei poeti* within the history and terrain of medieval revival at the Villa Torlonia on the Via Nomentana is a rich endeavor. Publications that address the buildings and grounds of the villa have been primarily produced within the context of the development of its museums over the past forty years. The earliest comprehensive volume, *Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa del mecenatismo romano*, was produced in 1987 in preparation for conservation work on the property that began in 1993<sup>(15)</sup>. It is one of four such texts that address the two-century history of the entire villa complex, published by a central group of scholars across a twenty-year span, in 1987, 1989, 1997, and 2007, respectively<sup>(16)</sup>.

Of the three modes of medieval revival that operate on the villa grounds – capsule gothic, garden gothic, and wholesome medieval – the latter two can be seen in the English style landscaping and garden structures of the 1840s and the Romanesque revival buildings of the early 20th century, and will be accounted for briefly here for their contrast with the *Camera dei poeti*. Giuseppe Jappelli’s *Capanna svizzera* (1840), that expanded into the *Villaggio Medioevale* (1908-1913) and later the *Casina delle Civette* (1916-1939) is a perfect object lesson in the common physical overlap of these two modalities. There is also often a conflation between idealizations of ‘medieval’ and ‘rural’ in early novecento Rome, and the building projects under Giovanni Torlonia from the early twentieth century are at home in this milieu, including the *Villino Medioevale* constructed in 1906, and, in the following decade, the *Villino Rosso* and other gatehouses around the perimeter<sup>(17)</sup>. These twentieth century medieval inspired buildings and re-buildings tend to overshadow, not only the neo-gothic rooms within the Casino Nobile, but also the original landscape garden elements created by Caretti and Giuseppe Jappelli in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In addition to Caretti’s own gothic addition to *le Scuderie*, unfortunately destroyed since, a number of English-Veneto style garden elements were carried out by Jappelli, including the *Capanna svizzera* and *Serra moresca*, a medieval tournament ground (*Cortile chiuso*), a secret grotto complete with fake stalagmites (*la Grotta*), and a medieval ruin; the *Capanna svizzera* has been open to the public since 1997 as the *Casina delle Civette* and the *Serra moresca* was recently restored and reopened in 2023, but the rest remain lost or in poor repair<sup>(18)</sup>.

Regarding the ‘import’ of English-Veneto landscape garden elements, the most direct known link is through the work of Giuseppe Jappelli, who was based in Padova and had traveled to England in the years immediately prior; however Caretti’s work inside the Casino Nobile predates Jappelli’s arrival on the villa grounds at the end of the 1830s. For the interiors, while there are other early

<sup>(15)</sup> Apolloni et al., “Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa”.

<sup>(16)</sup> *Ibidem*; Alberta Campitelli, *Villa Torlonia: Storia ed Architettura, Itinerari Didattici d’arte e di cultura*, vol. 9 (Roma: F.lli Palombi, 1989); Marco Fabio Apolloni and Alberta Campitelli, *Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa del mecenatismo romano* (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria Dello Stato, 1997); Maria Grazia Massafra, Alberta Campitelli, and Annapaola Agati, *Villa Torlonia: Guida* (Milano: Electa, 2007).

<sup>(17)</sup> Apolloni and Campitelli, *Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa*, 167-170; 251-256. The treatment of medieval and vernacular rural architecture remains of interest well into the 20th century, including exhibitions at the Triennale di Milano: *Rural Italian Architecture: Functionality of the Rural House* (1936) and *Spontaneous Architecture Exhibition* (1951). See: Michelangelo Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty: Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). For medieval revival in festivals and cinema in the 20th century, see: Tommaso Di Carpegna Falconieri and Lila Yawn, “Forging ‘medieval’ Identities: Fortini’s Calendimaggio and Pasolini’s Trilogy of Life”, *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-First Century Perspectives*, Proceedings of the British Academy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>(18)</sup> The *Casina delle Civette* was in fact the first building on the grounds to be musealized; I would hypothesize that this is due at least in part to the fact that it was the only building never inhabited by Mussolini or his family during their twenty year stay.



6.6

Rome, Palazzo Torlonia in piazza Venezia (demolished 1902), Giovanni Battista Caretti, wall detail of the Alcova Torlonia installed at Palazzo Braschi, Camera da ricevere, da letto, da toilette e spogliatoio, started c.1837 (photo by the author).

examples of standalone gothic rooms in the Veneto, as found in the Foresteria of the Villa Valmarana ai Nani in Vicenza (Giandomenico Tiepolo, 1757), in this iteration by Caretti, the gothic elements are more explicitly part of a visual game of references than a scenographic experience, echoing instead the “antiquarian spirit of citation” and multi-medium, textured “decorative exuberance” of Robert Adam’s projects, especially for the Northumberland, in the second half of the eighteenth-century<sup>(19)</sup>. Most of Caretti’s historicist rooms in the Villa Torlonia are predominantly decorated with wall painting, but an example of his more Adam-esque polychrome stucco work can be seen in the *Alcova Torlonia*, a surviving room from the palazzo that was once one-fourth of a bedroom suite and is now housed alone on the *secondo piano* of the Museo di Roma at Palazzo Braschi<sup>(20)</sup> [Fig. 6.6]. While Jappelli’s garden gothic is an illustration to be admired from afar, Caretti’s capsule gothic is a jewelry box to be studied and consumed visually in its seemingly infinite details.

The *Camera dei poeti* within the Casino Nobile is part of a series of rooms that forms an overall “aesthetics of juxtaposition” – an eclectic group that includes Pompeian, Egyptian, and Cinquecento historicist rooms<sup>(21)</sup>. However, the façade, floor plan, and interstitial spaces – entryway, vestibules, ballroom – are all neo-classical in décor, from classical plasterwork details to symmetrical layout, including a meticulous mirroring of the floor and ceiling designs [Fig. 6.7], as seen in Adam’s entrance Hall at Syon House outside London<sup>(22)</sup>. The floor plan for both the *piano nobile* and the *primo piano* is based on an enfilade of small rooms that

<sup>(19)</sup> Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*, 220; 217. For this type of decoration by Adam, see especially the Glass Drawing Room (c. 1775) at Northumberland House, including the chimney piece, 80-86.

<sup>(20)</sup> In photographs of the room before it was dismantled, it is evident that some decorative elements have been lost; the room as it stands today in Palazzo Braschi, despite its ‘decorative exuberance’, contains white space that wasn’t part of the original floor-to-ceiling installation. See: Maria Elisa Tittoni, “L’alcova Torlonia al Museo di Roma: un felice recupero”, *Bollettino dei Musei Comunali di Roma* (2002), 104-117.

<sup>(21)</sup> Many thanks to Reviewer 1 for the apt phrase, “aesthetics of juxtaposition”.

<sup>(22)</sup> Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*, 144-157. This is an interesting point of comparison (or perhaps a loose circular citation) as Syon House and other projects like it outside of London evoked the Roman suburban villa as part of a multi-building repertoire: “...orchestrated campaigns of patronage such as that of the Northumberland are reminiscent of the function assigned to the urban palace, suburban villa, ancestral estate and lavish funerary monument in the different context of papal Rome, a social environment well known to most 18th century British patrons”, 3.

6.7

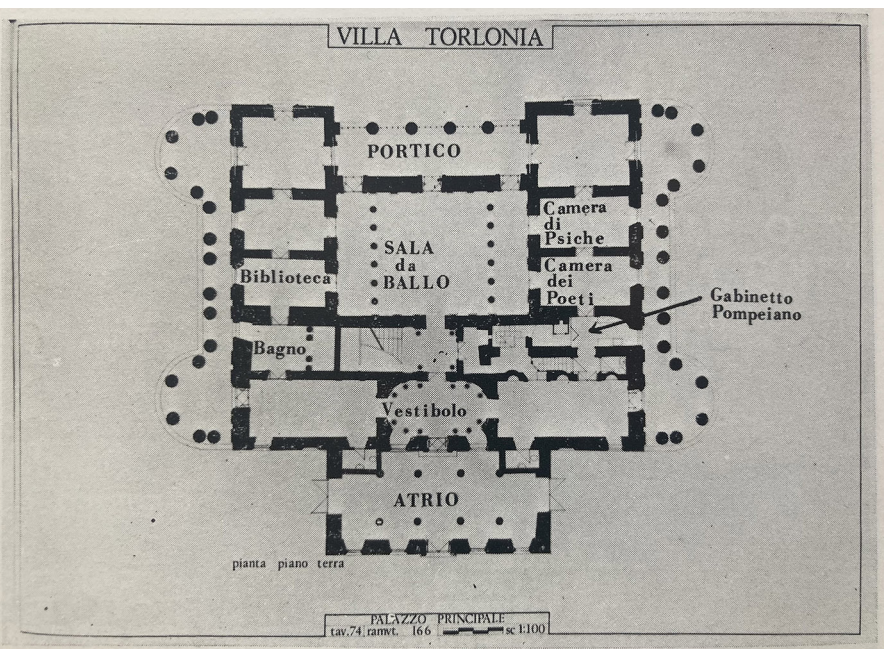
Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, view from the Sala da ballo of the columns supporting the orchestra mezzanine with a view into the *Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani* in the background; see figure 1 for reverse view (photo by the author).



run the length of the east and west walls of the building [Fig. 6.8]. On the *primo piano* the rooms lead to two south-facing bedrooms, and on the *piano nobile* the rooms flank a central ballroom that extends vertically across both floors in an ornamental neoclassical style, with pink marmoridea walls, white Corinthian capitals on fluted pilasters and columns supporting a mezzanine with white, gold, and pink trimming throughout [Fig. 6.7]. With the ceiling vault and lunettes painted in the Raphael-esque style of the time, the ballroom is an ahistorically cohesive space, while the rooms that lead off of it take the opposite approach.

### La Camera dei poeti

The small rectangular *Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani* opens out onto the *Ballroom* with a west facing window on the opposite wall, and was flanked by a 'Pompeian' wardrobe on one side and the *Camera di Psiche* with Farnesina-esque ancient painting on the other. The room itself is intricately and illusionistically painted throughout, depicting a ceiling full of tracery with colorful inlay and cosmatesque colonettes on all four walls, interrupted only by doorways and a window, all of which are incorporated into the 'architectural' design – both in each door or window's small vestibule and in the surrounding frames of the room itself [Figg. 6.1, 6.2]. While the majority of the paired colonettes rest below rounded arches,



6.8

Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, floor plan of the ground floor, from: Marco Fabio Apolloni, Alberta Campitelli, Antonio Pinelli, and Barbara Steindl, "Villa Torlonia: L'ultima impresa del mecenatismo romano", *Ricerche di Storia dell'arte*, 28-29 (Rome, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1987), 92, fig. 42. "Pianta del pianterreno del Casino Nobile", restoration directed by Alberta Campitelli.

the doorways are punctuated by smaller pointed arches on each side. The overall depiction is of a life-sized cloister, with the arches hovering a bit above standing height and the chair rail and dado (noticeably the only plain portion of the wall) corresponding to the low cloister wall. Despite the cosmatesque treatment of the column decorations, they are, along with the tracery of the frieze and the entire ceiling, depicted in a soft grey-brown color, making it unclear whether they might be intended to represent wood or stone<sup>(23)</sup>. Regardless of the intended medium, the overwhelming effect is of an intricate and colorful space with infinite details to inspect and absorb. In addition to the architectural articulations, there are roundels interspersed on the frieze and on the ceiling with Raphael-esq portraits by Pietro Paoletti of Italian artists and poets, for which the room is named.

In her essay, "Il tema degli 'uomini illustri' a Villa Torlonia", Barbara Steindl provides a thorough account of the figures that are depicted in the roundels, as well as the theme of 'great men' (*uomini illustri*) that recurs across three different rooms of the *piano nobile*: the *Camera dei poeti*, the *Biblioteca* that mirrors its position across the *Ballroom*, and a frescoed lunette on the wall of the *Ballroom* that connects the two<sup>(24)</sup>. The playfulness and self-reference of the decorative program is seen here expressed thematically, in addition to the formal details to be discussed later in this section. It is also worth noting the thematic symmetry that echoes the mirrored floorplan and adds a sense of cohesion and completion among the small juxtaposing rooms. Within the *Camera dei poeti* specifically, Steindl points out that the overall message of the collection of portraits is a bit undefined, showing a broad range of genres and figures but without a strict thesis about the development or progression of artistic practice<sup>(25)</sup>. She concludes that the selection of figures depicted was left largely to the preference of the artists who were working on the room, which in this case resulted in an over-representation of painters from the Veneto – "la predominanza di pittori veneti" especially in the frieze, likely due to Paoletti's origins in Belluno<sup>(26)</sup>.

The rest of this section considers formal elements of the *Camera dei poeti* that have been described in the literature as a "pastiche"<sup>(27)</sup>. The term is not disputed here, but to be a pastiche does not make the space neutral and its

<sup>(23)</sup> This same illusionistic tracery effect is implemented monochromatically on the ceiling of the upstairs *Camera gotica* and in Caretti's gothic hall at The Villa Ferrajoli in Albano; it is possible that it was applied in the ceiling of the *Cappella* of the demolished Palazzo Torlonia as well (fig. 6.14). These iterations of trompe l'oeil work in rooms by Caretti echo the painted ceiling tracery of the Duomo di Milano ambulatories but more research is needed to determine any concrete vectors of influence.

<sup>(24)</sup> Barbara Steindl, "Il tema degli 'uomini illustri' a Villa Torlonia" in Apolloni et al., "Villa Torlonia: L'ultima impresa", 169. "Nel palazzo della Villa troviamo rappresentati gli uomini illustri tre volte: 1) Nella Biblioteca, dove Paoletti dipinge Dante fra Virgilio, Omero, Orazio, Ovidio e Lucano, come 'sesto fra cotanto senno' (Divina Commedia, Inf. IV, verso 102); 2) nella Sala da ballo nell'affresco di Coggetti con gli Uomini illustri sul Parnaso; 3) nella Sala dei poeti ed artisti italiani, con ritratti degli stessi ad opera di Pietro Paoletti." It is worth noting also that the 'uomini illustri' portraits were a well established decorative theme for libraries from at least the 18th-century, from the frieze at the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana (Pietro Piazza and Giovanni Domenico, Palazzo Corsini, Rome) to the portraits interspersed across the Gallery-Library at Syon House, see: Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*, 185-200.

<sup>(25)</sup> Barbara Steindl, "Il tema degli 'uomini illustri'", 178. "La scelta, nella Sala dei poeti ed artisti italiani, sembra invece un po' dovuta al caso; compaiono rappresentanti di tutti i generi, ma non sembra che ciò dipenda da una qualche stringata concezione, come per esempio di riprodurre uno sviluppo dell'arte attraverso i suoi più significativi esponenti".

<sup>(26)</sup> Barbara Steindl, "Il tema degli 'uomini illustri'", 178. Paoletti also attended the Accademia a Venezia, and subsequently worked as a painter in Padova. "Per la scelta degli artisti nei medaglioni del fregio salta agli occhi la predominanza di pittori veneti: Giorgione, Andrea Schiavone, il Padovano, Antonio Vivarini, Guariento da Padova, Tintoretto, Pordenone, Vittore Carpaccio, Paris Bordone, Paolo Veronese, Giovanni Bellini".

<sup>(27)</sup> From the annotation of Checchetelli's passages on the Villa Torlonia, as printed in the 1987 volume: "L'architettura dipinta di questa stanza non si basa su modelli precisi di architettura gotica ma è piuttosto un pastiche di vari stili e fantasia".



Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, c. 1205-1240, detail of cloister exterior (photo by the author).



<sup>(28)</sup> “[...] ogni parte qui si collega per formare un bel tutto: nuovo e bene immaginato sembra lo scomparto della volta; bello il guaioco della prospettiva. Gli archi e le colonne ornate a finto mosaico, le lontane vedute di paesi e castelli, i vetri colorati dal Valente prof. Bertini milanese, unico in tale maniera di dipingere, il bel mosaico del pavimento, concorrono a produrre un lodevole effetto.” Checchetelli, *Una Giornata di Osservazione*, 76.

<sup>(29)</sup> “Sia le vedute, che i vetri, che il mosaico del pavimento sono andati perduti. Lo spazio tra le arcate del portichetto finto oggi è dipinto di azzurro, e l’effetto originale della stanza, che era forse di un belvedere, è completamente distrutto. Dalla perizia Agricola (104) si sa, che negli intercolunni erano dipinti ‘Vedute di marina in distanza’. Apolloni et al., “Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa”, 50.

<sup>(30)</sup> “Camera de’ poeti ed artisti italiani: Seguita a questa una camera di architettura gotica del secolo XIV”. Checchetelli, *Una Giornata di Osservazione*, 76.

<sup>(31)</sup> “Le colonne del portichetto p. es. s’ispirano ai chiostri cosmateschi romani...”. Apolloni et al., “Villa Torlonia: L’ultima impresa”, 50.

<sup>(32)</sup> Steindl, *Die Familie Torlonia*, 130-150; 262-284.

<sup>(33)</sup> For information on the destruction and rebuilding of San Paolo fuori le mura, see: Elisabetta Pallottino, “La ricostruzione della basilica di San Paolo fuori le mura (1823-1854)”, *Maestà di Roma: da Napoleone all’unità d’Italia*, a cura di Stefano Susinno, Sandra Pinto, Liliana Barroero, Fernando Mazzocca, Giovanna Capitelli, Matteo Lafranconi (Milano: Electa, 2003), 484-509; Ilaria Fiumi Sermattei, “1823, L’incendio della Basilica di San Paolo: Leone XII e l’avvio della Ricostruzione”, *Quaderni del Consiglio Regionale delle Marche*, 128 (2013); Nicola Camerlenghi, *St. Paul’s Outside the Walls, A Roman Basilica from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Richard Wittman, *Ricostruire la Chiesa: San Paolo fuori le mura nella Roma dell’Ottocento* (Roma: Viella, 2023).

<sup>(34)</sup> Marina Docci, “La ‘metamorfosi’ del chiostro paolino: Giovenale contro Calderini”, in *Architettura: processualità e trasformazione*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Roma, Castel Sant’Angelo, 24-27 novembre 1999, *Quaderni dell’Istituto di storia dell’architettura*, a cura di Maurizio Caperna and Gianfranco Spagnesi (Roma: Bonsignori, 2002), 517-524.

visual sources, however creatively interpreted, can help to understand how the room might have been conceived and intended. To begin, a number of elements that were reported by Giuseppe Checchetelli are now missing: the room would have been outfitted with matching furniture, the floor would have been mosaicked and the windows stained glass, the side entrances would have had double doors, possibly similar to those that survive in the upstairs *Camera gotica*<sup>(28)</sup> [Fig. 6.4]. Perhaps most cognitively different is the fact that in the space between the columns, where there is now painted an inconspicuous sky-blue, would have been instead *vedute*, showing far off country estates and views of the sea, as seen in many other rooms painted by Caretti, including the *sala da pranzo* next door in the Casino dei Principi<sup>(29)</sup>.

The depiction of the cloister itself, giving the impression of “a room of 14th century gothic architecture”<sup>(30)</sup>, contains more specific references to medieval Rome than any of the room’s figural elements. In an annotation of Checchetelli’s account, Apolloni mentions that the colonnade resembles that of a Roman cloister<sup>(31)</sup>, an affinity that can be seen readily in those of San Giovanni in Laterano and San Paolo fuori le mura [Fig. 6.9]. In addition to being formally similar to the *Camera dei poeti*, both of these cloisters might have held historical or familial significance at the time. The Torlonia family commissioned a funerary chapel in San Giovanni in Laterano during this period so the historicist rooms and the chapel might have been worked on contemporarily or, at the very least, the funerary chapel would have been a nascent project; in either case, it is likely that the significance of the basilica to the Torlonia family was known to Caretti<sup>(32)</sup>. On the other hand, the cloister of San Paolo fuori le mura had an increased cultural presence across Rome in the 1830s, having survived the devastating 1823 fire that destroyed the basilica, and which was being rebuilt during this time amid ongoing debate about the appropriate style for the new-old basilica<sup>(33)</sup>. Furthermore, the porticos of the cloister of San Paolo originally had vaulted gothic ceilings – like the ones that still remain at San Giovanni in Laterano – which would have also been visible in Caretti’s time since they were not removed until the early 20th century, after 1907<sup>(34)</sup> [Fig. 6.10]. In fact, in the first monograph of the basilica by Nicola Maria Nicolai in 1815, the covered portion of the cloister is referred to twice in the floor plan index as the “portico gotico” and the pointed vaults are visible in an elevation view from the same volume<sup>(35)</sup>. Regarding the



cosmatesque mosaics, unfortunately it is not possible to speak definitively on the difference in color palette between Caretti's colonnettes – which have prevalent blue and green elements – and the predominately red, gold, and black mosaics of the colonnettes at San Paolo today [Fig. 6.11] since the latter were without their tesserae from at least 1907 [Fig. 6.10] until the current mosaics were inserted, likely in the mid 20th century, raising doubts about their state – perhaps still with previous tesserae in tact or perhaps already entirely without – more than a century earlier when Caretti might have seen them<sup>(36)</sup>. Lastly, between the serpentine, mosaiced colonnettes of San Paolo are small well-worn lions, not unlike the ones painted by Caretti in the *Camera dei poeti* [Fig. 6.11, 6.13]. Whatever the historical or familial links, Caretti's incorporation of hyper-specific Roman medieval elements runs counter to the idea that 19th-century neo-gothic existed in Rome only as a wholesale international import.

While specifically Roman, Caretti's work is not a direct quotation but an co-invented visual vocabulary that was implemented across a variety of scales and mediums. In a prime example, the Romanesque colonnettes in such cloisters are often presented in twinned pairs, scattered around a courtyard in varying degrees of repetition or symmetry, but Caretti created a more even effect, with painted cosmati polychrome throughout, as well as all 'interior' colonnettes depicted as octagonal shafts and those on the 'exterior' as cylinders with a ribboned overlay [Fig. 6.12]. In San Paolo we see a handful of this type of miss-matched pairing [Fig. 6.11], but here the linear and spiral pieces are treated quite differently. Nowhere in the *Camera dei poeti* is the type of torqued serpentine treatment seen at San Paolo, and nowhere at San Paolo is this particular consolidation – a spiraling ribbon overlaid on an otherwise linear cosmatesque column. In fact, the only place this particular treatment is found is not in a Roman cloister, but in a photograph of Caretti's *Cappella*, a gothic chapel from the since-destroyed Palazzo Torlonia [Fig. 6.14].

6.10

Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, c. 1205-1240, photograph of the cloister interior by G. Massiot sometime before 1907, before demolition of the vaulted ceilings, "San Paolo fuori le Mura: Interior of the cloister with varied columns", lantern slide (photo courtesy of University Archives, Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN. Collection: Architectural Lantern Slides of Italy, <https://marble.nd.edu/item/hm50tq60h16>).

6.11

Rome, San Paolo fuori le mura, c. 1205-1240, detail of cloister colonnettes (photo by the author).

<sup>(35)</sup> "58. Porto d'ingresso al portico gotico; 59. Portico gotico con Colonne" from the Index of Plate I: *Pianta della Basilica di S. Paolo sulla Via Ostiense*. Gothic vaults visible in Plate IV: *Spaccato della Basilica Ostiense sulla linea C*. Nicola Maria Nicolai, *Della Basilica di San Paolo: con piante, e disegni incisi* (Roma: Romanis, 1815).

<sup>(36)</sup> A photo of the 'naked' colonnettes with the gothic vaults over the northern abulatory is reproduced in: Marina Docci, *La 'metamorfosi' del chiostro paolino*, 518, fig. 3. The caption reads: "L'ambulacro settentrionale prima della demolizione delle volte a crociera. In primo piano si osservano le colonnine prive delle tessere di mosaico, presumibilmente inserite negli anni '60 di questo secolo (Roma, ICCD, Neg. E 27504)".



6.12  
Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, colonnette detail from the Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani (photo by the author).

6.13  
Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, colonnette detail from the Camera dei poeti ed artisti italiani (photo by the author).

<sup>(37)</sup> See respectively: Eileen Harris, *The genius of Robert Adam: his interiors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*; Matthew M. Reeve and Peter N. Lindfield, "A Child of Strawberry": Thomas Barrett and Lee Priory, Kent", *The Burlington Magazine*, 157, 1353 (December 2015), 836-842.

<sup>(38)</sup> For gothic Saloon illustrations specifically, see: Charlotte Florentia Percy, Duchess of Northumberland, *Castles of Alnwick, and Warkworth, etc., from Sketches, by C.F. Duchess of Northumberland, 1823* (London: Printed by W. Nicol, 1824); and John Buckler and John Chessell Buckler, *Views of Eaton Hall in Cheshire: The Seat of the Right Honourable Earl Grosvenor* (London: William Clarke, 1826). An earlier influential volume to be considered as well is Walpole's for Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole, *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole: Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orford, at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex. with an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, &c.* (Twickenham: Strawberry-Hill, 2nd edition, 1784), 32.

For Caretti to depict in wall paintings his own three-dimensional interpretations of an amalgamated Romanesque colonnette speaks to the fluidity of medium employed in his "capsule gothic" and his historicist mode more broadly. More practically, it also points to the ways in which the villa and the palazzo can be mutually informative. While the extant *Camera dei poeti* gives some idea of a possible color scheme to the *Cappella* which has only been preserved in black and white, this photograph in turn gives a context for a number of otherwise mysterious aspects of the former: the alternating round and pointed arches painted across all four walls, the densely wrought, circle-dominated tracery used throughout the ceiling, the paisley gothic shapes seen on the surviving doors upstairs, and lastly, the ogee arch treatment over the chapel window, a curvilinear shape not otherwise used in the space [Fig. 6.1, 6.2]. Painted versions of this window treatment appear above doorways in the villa, suggesting that those doorways might have been understood to represent windows as well, especially in the upstairs *Camera gotica* where the panel doors that survive are carved and painted in a pseudo-stained glass manner [Fig. 6.4]. Lastly, while the original mosaicked floor in the *Camera dei poeti* is lost, we have a sense of the possibilities when we consider together the photograph, the extant *Camera gotica*, and a fragment from the polychrome mosaicked floor of the lost chapel on the villa grounds [Fig. 6.15]. With these details, we have a small glimpse into how differently the rooms of the villa might be understood if they still had a physical counterpart in piazza Venezia.

The aforementioned assembly of illusionistically painted architectural elements in the villa – especially the ceiling tracery and ornamentation around the windows found both in the *Camera gotica* and *Camera dei poeti* – echoes

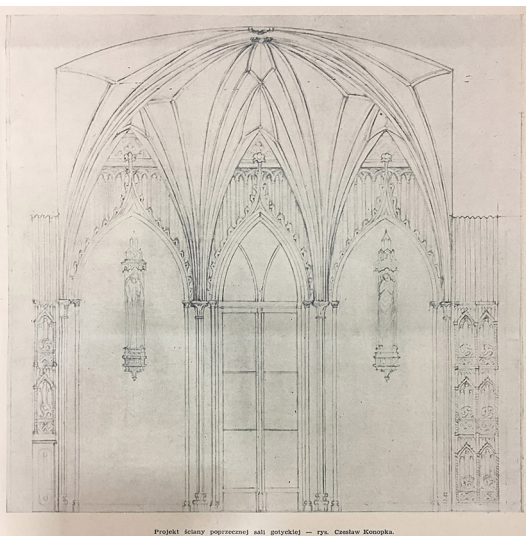


6.14  
 Rome, Palazzo Torlonia in piazza Venezia (demolished 1902), Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, photograph by Anderson of the gothic chapel on the *terzo piano*, "Cappella di Palazzo Bolognetti Torlonia; adesso l'opera è conservata al Museo di Roma, a Roma", c. 1890, glass plate, ADA-F-002991-0000. (Photo courtesy of Archivi Alinari, Firenze)



6.15  
 Rome, Villa Torlonia on the via Nomentana, Giovanni Battista Caretti, c. 1832-1839, fragment of the mosaicked floor of La Cappella (demolished) formerly on the Villa Torlonia's grounds and now housed in the anticamera adjacent to the Camera egizia on the secondo piano. Museum label: "Frammenti di pavimento cosmatesco, autore ignoto (Inizio XIX sec.), Marmi policromi e tessere di mosaico, Provenienti dalla Cappella (oggi scomparsa) di Villa Torlonia, rinvenuti nel 1997 nei sotterranei del Teatro" (photo by the author).

the gothic Saloon and Library room types from the Georgian context, especially window recesses as seen at Arbury Hall, Alnwick Castle, and Lee Priory<sup>(37)</sup>. While direct references to these sites are not known, illustrations of such rooms would have been circulating in publications from the 1820s and before<sup>(38)</sup>. Considering the Saloon window recesses gives a bit of context to the imaginative spatial logic of Caretti's missing *vedute* in the *Camera dei poeti*, which on their own are puzzling given that, by definition, a cloister has



6.16

Warsaw, Pac Palace, "Design of the transverse wall of the Gothic hall, drawn by Czesław Konopka", detail c.1948-1950, printed in: "Odbudowa Pałacu Paca" (Reconstruction of Pac Palace), *Stolica Warszawski Tygodnik Ilustrowany, Warszawa*, 17 Września 1950, Nr. 37 (200), 7. (Photo courtesy of University of Warsaw Libraries)

<sup>(39)</sup> The 1987 annotation touches on this characteristic: "priva di ogni logica statica." Apolloni et al., "Villa Torlonia: L'ultima impresa", 50.

<sup>(40)</sup> Michael McCarthy, "Soane's 'Saxon' Room at Stowe," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 44 (1985), 129-146; Peter Inskip, "Soane and the Grenvilles: Peter Inskip traces the story of Sir John Soane's work at Stowe, Buckingham House, Brasenose College, and Wotton House," *Apollo*, 159, 506 (April 2004), 17-24.

<sup>(41)</sup> Checchetelli, *Una Giornata di Osservazione*, 13-14. The passage continues: "Quale magnificenza non è in questo salone? avvi quanto mai lusso possa spiegare un principe. Sopra pilastri situati negli angoli e nel mezzo delle pareti s'appoggia la volta, il cui scomparto è bizzarramente immaginato e distribuito secondo il gotico stile: in mezzo ai principali pilastri, in quattro finte nicchie stanno quattro figure di eroi, sopra ciascuna delle quali in piccoli tabernacoli vedi in molte figure gli emblemi delle loro virtù."

<sup>(42)</sup> Henryk Białobrzeski and Czesław Konopka, "Odbudowa Pałacu Paca", *Stolica Warszawski Tygodnik Ilustrowany, Warszawa*, Dnia 17 Września 1950 R., Rok V. Nr. 37 (200), 5. "Na jednym końcu galerii znajduje się salka gotycka, która odtworzono całkowicie. Sklepienie w charakterze gotyku angielskiego z profilowanymi żebrami, ściany pokryte laskowaniami, fryzami i ornamentacją roślinną, okna, drzwi i wnęki ostrolukowe".

<sup>(43)</sup> Białobrzeski and Konopka, "Odbudowa Pałacu Paca", 1950, 5. "Przy projektowaniu architektury zewnętrznej i wewnątrz posilkowano się bądź zachowanym szczupłym materiałem historycznym, jak fotografie i częściowo plany Tylmana i Marconiego, bądź też na podstawie śladów w konstrukcji murów, względnie pozostałych fragmentów dekoracji".

views only of the encompassing cloister itself, rather than *vedute* of far away land- and sea-scapes<sup>(39)</sup>. The accumulation of stylistic references being given priority over spatial logic is seen also upstairs in the *Camera gotica*, where illusionistic painted bottle glass windows appear beyond porticos that recede into the distance, while the door panels interspersed among them are painted to look like stained glass [Fig. 6.3, 6.4]. This is not to argue that Caretti's rooms are a logically-sound depiction of space, but rather to suggest that they may be working to reference a modern cosmopolitan-aristocratic room-type rather than to accurately depict civic or ecclesiastical medieval spaces. Their diminutive status plays into this as well, as they are functionally more a 'window recess' than a full Hall or Saloon or Library.

Sir John Soane's gothic Library for Stowe House (1805-1807) is also an important point of stylistic comparison for the wall and ceiling decoration, as well as for its location on the ground floor alongside a gothic lobby and staircase<sup>(40)</sup> – the same configuration that was used for the gothic *sala* in the Palazzo Torlonia, which had a matching anticamera and was situated near the staircase, again as described by Checchetelli: "...prima di ascendere la grande scala che mette ad essi, una sala che è qui sul ripiano m'invita ad entrarvi. L'architettura n'è gotica, e un'anticamera è dipinta in modo che ne forma il vestibolo"<sup>(41)</sup>. There is also the possibility that the gothic hall at Pac Palace in Warsaw (c.1824-1828) might be considered a part of this typology, with its similar situation within a broader neoclassical program and characteristic English gothic vaulting (*sklepienie w charakterze gotyku angielskiego*), as seen in reconstructive drawings from 1948-1950<sup>(42)</sup> [Fig. 6.16]. The designs from this period are not fully reliable as they were based on decorative fragments that survived the room's destruction in 1944 or on "scarce historical material that had been preserved"<sup>(43)</sup>, but even in conjecture the Pac iteration of English gothic provides an important insight since Caretti's was employed on site there before directing the Torlonia projects<sup>(44)</sup>. Floriated ogee arches and fluted paneling can be seen also on the surviving portico of Pac Palace in Dowspuda (c.1820-1827), another of Caretti's worksites and one of the first neo-gothic building projects in Poland, but further research is needed to determine any possible links to the style of its interior spaces. It is worth mentioning that Dowspuda "was a neo-Gothic seat in the English spirit", while the palace in Warsaw "became Pac's main metropolitan residence, with [...] a collection of ancient and contemporary classicist art"<sup>(45)</sup>, echoing the rural-ancestral-gothic and urban-cosmopolitan-classical division of the Northumberland's building projects<sup>(46)</sup>. In assembling the international context and building conventions for Caretti's capsule gothic, just as

important are the more subtle affinities – the easy movement between two and three dimensions that he employs, as well as the fluidity between mediums and scales in this decorative use of historicism: a very conscientious specificity that is in turn creatively and liberally applied.

### Collecting at the Villa Torlonia

Marcello Fagiolo has drawn the connection between the Villa Torlonia and Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli based on a joint spirit of collecting moments in history by collecting building styles from said moments<sup>(47)</sup>. Along those lines, the 1987 publication that described the Villa as “two-faced” characterizes the overall effect of its grounds as “a kind of display window for the Souvenirs of Rome” – and not for the better, saying that “despite the claims of monumentality, the Rome evoked by Caretti is a Rome in miniature, a *Rometta*”<sup>(48)</sup>. In this section we carry these ideas inside: considering not only the garden buildings as a scattered collection of figurines, but the historicist rooms inside the villa through this collecting mode as well, acknowledging how for Caretti's rooms, like his *Rometta*, operating ‘in miniature’ is not incidental but rather fundamental to their interpretation. The theoretical framework laid out in Susan Stewart's 1996 *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*<sup>(49)</sup> is quite pertinent here, even though she works primarily from literary examples and never discusses the Villa Torlonia directly. The notion of the miniature and the collection – both historically and theoretically, especially as defined and explored by Stewart, are key in processing how these rooms function cognitively and spatially. The miniature is defined in part by contrast to its opposite: “Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural”<sup>(50)</sup>; to pare it down even more: “the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container”<sup>(51)</sup>.

The rooms benefit from being read as miniatures that form a larger collection, not of only taste and knowledge, but of history, with the collection defined by Stewart as “the place where history is transformed into space, into property”<sup>(52)</sup>. For Stewart, these narratives reach a crescendo in the 19th century, wrapped up as they are in cultural reactions to industrialization and capitalism. Particularly relevant to the hyper-detailed decoration of Caretti's historicist rooms is the idea that the miniature connotes above all the cultural in its promised connection to an artisanal past:

[...] while the miniature object often speaks to the past, it encapsulates the time of production. Miniature objects are most often exaggerations

<sup>(44)</sup> Caretti was based in Poland from October 4, 1823 – September 3, 1826. Sebastiano Ciampi, *Viaggio in Polonia*, 146-148; Checchetelli, *Una Giornata di Osservazione*, 63.

<sup>(45)</sup> Anna Sylwia Czyż, “The Decor of the Room with Painted Views in Ludwik Michał Pac's Palace in Warsaw”, *Kauno Istorijos Metraštis*, 20 (2022), 238, n. 5.

<sup>(46)</sup> See notes 22 and 55; Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*, 217.

<sup>(47)</sup> Marcello Fagiolo, “Villa Borghese e Villa Torlonia: Il Modello di Villa Adriana ovvero il Panorama della Storia”, in *Il Giardino Italiano dell'Ottocento: nelle Immagini, nella Letteratura, nelle Memorie*, a cura di Alessandro Tagliolini (Milano: Guerini, 1990), 207-214.

<sup>(48)</sup> The dismissiveness of the “Rometta” diagnosis is mirrored in the equal but opposite issue of ‘oversized’ commissions for the landscape garden; the problem being miniature on the one hand and gigantic on the other. “A guardar bene, però, questa «doppiezza» è solo apparente, giacché le due «faccie» del parco hanno un connotato che le fa rassomigliare: sul davanti, nonostante le pretese di monumentalità, la Roma rievocata da Caretti è una Roma in miniatura, una Rometta; sul retro, invece, – ed è proprio Jappelli il primo a lamentarsene – la tipologia del giardino all'inglese è snaturata dalla megalomania del proprietario. Come se Torlonia, committente dalle risorse illimitate, difettasse di una sola cosa: la misura.” Apolloni et al., “Villa Torlonia: L'ultima impresa”, 31.

<sup>(49)</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>(50)</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 70.

<sup>(51)</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 71.

<sup>(52)</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 138.

<sup>(53)</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 144.

<sup>(54)</sup> Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*, 217.

<sup>(55)</sup> Again, Aymonino notes that the same picturesque effect is present in Adam's work at Syon House where there is stark contrast between each room (as opposed to the continuous gothic decor present at Alnwick Castle). Aymonino, *Enlightened Eclecticism: the Grand Design*, 217.

<sup>(56)</sup> Vittorio Casale, "Liborio Coccetti e la grottesca ai tempi di papa Braschi", *Labyrinthos*, 4, 7/8 (1985), 73-118.

<sup>(57)</sup> Rossella Leone, "Cultura dell'abitare e gusto decorativo a Palazzo Braschi, II", *Bollettino dei Musei Comunali di Roma / Associazione Amici dei Musei di Roma*, XII (1999), 72.

<sup>(58)</sup> While the *Teatro* has been restored, it is currently closed to the public, and the current state of the rooms at Palazzo Braschi also complicates their inquiry since they are primarily white washed, but future archival research might yield more photographs from the years before the palace was converted for use by the Museo di Roma.

<sup>(59)</sup> "Salendo dallo scalone principale, si incontra, in primo luogo, la piccola sala etrusca, con funzioni di spogliatoio. Si susseguono poi, la sala greca, ottagonale, affrescata dal Demin con "L'Accademia di Platone," la saletta rotonda, istoriata dal Caffi con temi cari al "rovinismo," ancora imperante in ambiente romano (la Mole Adriana, la Colonna Traiana, il tempio di Minerva), la sala delle armi, destinata a gabinetto di lettura dei giornali, la sala del Rinascimento con il soffitto affrescato dal Gazzotto, con la "Civiltà e il Tempo," la sala ercolana con otto affreschi del Paoletti. Da questa si accede alla grande sala da ballo dedicata a G. Rossini, decorate in stile impero e che presenta una semiparete ellittica, destinata ad ospitare l'orchestra. Il gusto moresco è presente con la stanza di toilette per le signore, forse con interventi del Demin, e quello egizio con la sala stellate, prospiciente la terrazza della loggetta nord e la galleria corinzia". Giuliana Baldan Zenoni-Politeo, "Caffè Pedrocchi, Padova", *Il Giardino dei Sentimenti: Giuseppe Jappelli Architetto del Paesaggio* (Milano: Guerini E Associati, 1997), 67-74. See also: Maria Luisa Frongia, "Le Opere Pittoriche delle Sale Superiori del Caffè Pedrocchi", *Giuseppe Jappelli e il suo Tempo*, 2 (1982), 599-616; Bertrand Jaeger, "Giuseppe Jappelli e la Sala Egizia del Caffè Pedrocchi", *Bollettino del Museo Civico di Padova / Museo Civico*, 85 (1998), 233-266.

<sup>(60)</sup> Camille, "Rethinking the Canon", 200. "Faced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history—any appearance of monstrosity in this domain allows an analysis of the history of the norms [...] The monster is also that which appears for the first time and, consequently is not yet recognized. A monster is a species for which we do not have a name [...]" Jacques Derrida, *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994* (Stanford, 1995), 386.

of the attention to detail, precision, and balance that is characteristic of artisanal culture—a culture which... is considered to have been lost at the dawn of industrial production.<sup>(53)</sup>

With Stewart's words in mind, the importance of this "ornamental and intricate" overall effect – the "decorative exuberance" that characterizes both Robert Adam's work and Caretti's work after him – helps explain why a room of any size, but especially a small one, might be read conceptually as a miniature<sup>(54)</sup>.

In thinking of these rooms as a collection of miniatures, each one of which represents a different time and place, it is significant that they are housed together, forming a series of discrete compartments in a kind of grand neoclassical cabinet. The minituration associated with the site is central to these spaces and to the modern conceptualizing of history that they embody: a history of discrete, self contained fragments in which the present is no longer in unbroken continuity with the past. As seen in the upstairs *Camera egizia* and *Camera gotica*, the individualized floor designs as well as the facing door panels within each room supports their visual containment and completeness: they are not loosely themed, but thoroughly contained, complete spaces<sup>(55)</sup> [Fig. 6.4, 6.5]. In Caretti's rooms the dollhouse and the *Kunstkammer* merge even more explicitly than usual.

This kind of architectural neoclassical cabinet, holding together rooms that represent disparate times and places, is also visible on the villa grounds in the Teatro Torlonia that was begun in 1840, where the small *Sala gotica* and *Sala moresca* are a mirrored pair within a larger program of historically and geographically themed rooms that encompass the performance hall. The Teatro is not as illusionistic or evocative in its details, in part due to a less diminutive scale, but the framework of gathering (and in doing so, flattening and rationalizing) various juxtaposing elements within a symmetrical floorplan remains the same. Another Roman 'eclectic' approach is evident in the Palazzo Braschi, where medieval, Chinese, and Egyptian themed rooms in the second floor apartment were painted during the mid-1800s, following an earlier Etruscan study (1790-1805)<sup>(56)</sup>. A crucial difference in this example is the layout, in addition to the scale, as the rooms are relatively large and are interspersed in a trapezoidal meander, following an enfilade along the footprint of the building, rather than symmetrically around a central, classically-styled room. It has been suggested by Rossella Leone that the 'exotic' themes completed a "chronological-philological" repertoire that would have been familiar at the time, and perhaps were chosen specifically for the irregular shaped rooms in order to serve as a source of surprise or variety

for the visitor<sup>(57)</sup>. What remains visible of the 19th century decorations suggests that these historicist rooms operated in a more generally scenographic mode than the hyper-detailed, hyper-referential work of Caretti<sup>(58)</sup>.

Lastly, there are other buildings from the period outside of Rome that help to define this historicist collection as neoclassical cabinet type, in particular Giuseppe Jappelli's Caffé Pedrocchi in Padova (c. 1831-1842), whose decorative program was completed concurrently with Caretti's work in the Palazzo Torlonia and Villa Torlonia, as well as Jappelli's own work on the Villa grounds in Rome. In order from the main staircase of the Pedrocchi, there is a small Etruscan dressing room, an octagonal Greek hall, a small round room with *vedute* of Roman ruins, a Renaissance room, and a Herculaneum room; on the other side of the ballroom are a 'Moorish' bathroom and 'Egyptian' hall overlooking the north loggia terrace<sup>(59)</sup>. While the scale and level of detail is closer to Palazzo Braschi than to the Villa Torlonia, the historicist rooms are still relatively small and organized around a much larger room that is decorated in a neoclassical style, or in this case, "stile impero", in addition to being arranged in a building with a neoclassical exterior. Considering again Stewart's definition of the collection as "the place where history is transformed into space", these collected rooms echo the false ruins of Hadrian's Villa and the Villa Torlonia in their specialized history, a cohesion assembled from disparate and juxtaposing parts.

## Epilogue

Footnoted in Michael Camille's essay is a passage from an interview with Jacques Derrida that brings us back to his promising monsters: "Faced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is... [and so] any appearance of monstrosity... allows an analysis of the norms and their history"<sup>(60)</sup>. For the most part, this paper has dwelled on the monstrous, and further study might elucidate the norms that it in turn highlights: the use of miniatures in Rome's nineteenth century souvenir market<sup>(61)</sup>, the long tradition of illusionism and *vedute* in Roman domestic wall painting<sup>(62)</sup>, and the taste in Rome for the geographic and chronological other, as exemplified in the Egyptian and Etruscan museums established by the Vatican during the 1830s<sup>(63)</sup>. Perhaps the *Camera dei poeti* comes closest to the medieval somewhat by accident, not in visual representation but in methodology and in spirit; as Michael Camille claims, "a medieval art historian is far more likely to want to construct a canon, not of objects, but of places"<sup>(64)</sup>. Tied up in the meaning of the *Room of the Poets* and other rooms in the Villa Torlonia are their condition and use since the 19th century: what has survived, what has been worn away, and what has been

<sup>(61)</sup> The micro-mosaic is especially prevalent as incorporated into objects of all scales, for example, the monuments of Rome as seen decorating a parure (c. 1800-1825, Cooper Hewitt Design Museum) and a round table top (c. 1825-1875, Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection, Victor & Albert Museum). See also: Antonio Pinelli, *Souvenir: l'Industria dell'antico e il Grand Tour a Roma* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2010). For a relevant discussion of ephemeral souvenirs from mid-nineteenth century International Expositions, see: Amy Ogata, "Viewing Souvenirs: Peepshows and the International Expositions", *Journal of Design History*, 15, 2 (2002), 69-82.

<sup>(62)</sup> While this tradition dates back to at least the second century BCE, examples since the early modern period that belong to an imagined stylistic genealogy for Caretti include Giovanni Antonio Bazzi's Sala delle Prospettive at the Villa Farnesina (c. 1519) and Liborio Cocetti's *Vedute di Narni on the terzo piano of Palazzo Braschi* (c. 1815).

<sup>(63)</sup> Before the Museo Gregoriano Etrusco (1836) and the Museo Gregoriano Egiziano (1839) were established by Pope Gregory XVI, Etruscan and Egyptian themed rooms had been painted in private buildings in Rome, including Villa Borghese (Sala Egizia, 1786) and Palazzo Braschi (Studio Etrusco, 1790-1805). See: Richard Wittman, "Imprinting Patriotism: Etruria and Egypt in Papal Rome (1834-41)", *The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture, and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Mari Hvattum and Anne Hultsch (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 97-119. For the Villa Borghese, see: Luciana Ferrara, "Attività delle Soprintendenze: Roma, Galleria Borghese; Decorazione della volta della Sala Egizia", *Bollettino d'arte*, 5, 50 (1965). For Palazzo Braschi, see: Casale, "Liborio Cocetti e la grottesca", 73-118; Rossella Leone, "Cultura dell'abitare e gusto decorativo a Palazzo Braschi, I", *Bollettino dei Musei Comunali di Roma / Associazione Amici dei Musei di Roma*, XI (1998), 67-92.

<sup>(64)</sup> Camille, "Rethinking the Canon", 199.



<sup>(65)</sup> Anna Paola Agati, "Una Finta Tomba Etrusca a Villa Torlonia", *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*, 87 (2005), 85-98.

<sup>(66)</sup> He continues with: "I am afraid I have ended up sounding very medieval. Ultimately medieval paintings and sculptures, like all objects from the past, have to be understood as encrypted, as intimately linked with death." Camille, "Rethinking the Canon", 201.

destroyed. As recently as 2004, Anna Paola Agati and her team at the Museum of the Villa Torlonia discovered a 'fake' Etruscan tomb on the grounds, so a complete view of Caretti's historicist project may still be many years in the making<sup>(65)</sup>. This essay will conclude as it began, with Michael Camille, who warns that "the danger we face as art historians is distance, losing the sensations that tie us to the material world of objects, constructing canons that would deny not only the nervous system, but also the decay of all things"<sup>(66)</sup>.

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