

The Phenomenon of Italomania in the Nineteenth Century

Andrew Brayley

The tradition of Anglo-Italian literary and cultural relations goes back to the time of Chaucer and continues to the present day but there is one period in particular – we refer to the years following the Battle of Waterloo until about 1830 – in which the links between the two countries become extremely close and which is characterised by what has been called Italomania. Professor C.P. Brand in his well-known book – *Italy and the English Romantics* – analyses this phenomenon, while Franco Venturi has spoken of “quella straordinaria passione per l’Italia che sboccherà, caduto ormai Napoleone, nel romanticismo britannico e durerà, violenta e multiforme, per tutti gli anni venti e ancora negli anni trenta”.¹

This is the period made famous by Byron, Shelley, his wife Mary, her half-sister Claire Clairmont, Keats, his friend the painter Joseph Severn, Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, Samuel Rogers, Walter Savage Landor, Lady Morgan and Robert Gray, to name but some of the protagonists, and the aim of this paper will be to explore the phenomenon of Italomania through the eyes of a number of them. It was at this time that “Inglese” and

1. Venturi F., *Storia d’Italia*, 6 volumi, Torino, Einaudi, 1973, vol. III, p. 1188.

“viaggiatore” became synonym² while Piazza di Spagna in Rome was virtually an English colony.³ It has been calculated that in Rome in 1818 at the height of the season there were 2000 English people⁴ while according to Leigh Hunt “In the year 1825, two hundred English families were said to be resident in Florence”.⁵

It is important to remember that the period we are considering was marked by the decisions of the Congress of Vienna: Italy was once again ruled by the Habsburgs and the Bourbons together with the Papacy, in the person, until 1823, of Pius VII. In 1820 and 1821 the Restoration led to the unsuccessful revolutions in Naples and Piedmont.

As is well known, travel to Italy had been almost impossible for the best part of twenty years because of the Napoleonic wars and so the fall of Napoleon unleashed a torrent of foreign visitors, in particular of Englishmen whom Mary Shelley, writing after her return to England, compared to Norwegian rats which, travelling upstream, formed a bridge of corpses over which others would pass.⁶ The meaning of this simile was that the first travellers had to endure far greater inconvenience and discomfort than later ones. In a sense travellers were already prepared for their journey to Italy because the country had been described in innumerable guide books and J.R. Hale has written that the pleasure of the tour “consisted not in discovery but in recognition”.⁷ This is confirmed, for example, by Byron who wrote of Venice: “It is one of those places which I know before I see them.”⁸

Many travellers, for example Byron, Shelley and Leigh Hunt, had received a classical education and so saw Italy as the land of

2. Gay, H.N., “John Keats e gli Inglesi a Roma”, *Antologia*, 1° Luglio 1912, p. 1 – 2.

3. Morgan, Lady, *Italy*, 3 vols., London, Henry Colburn, 1824, vol. II, p. 248.

4. Matthews, H., *The Diary of an Invalid*, 2d. edition, London, John Murray, 1820, p. 163. Quoted by GAY, H.N., *op. cit.*, p. 3.

5. Hunt, L., *Autobiography*, 2 vols., Westminster, Archibald Constable, 1903, vol. II, p. 155.

6. Shelley, M., *Review of the English in Italy in The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. by Marion Kingston Stocking, Cambridge (Mass.) Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 441.

7. Hale, J.R., *The Italian Journal of Samuel Rogers*, London, Faber and Faber, 1961, p. 94.

8. Byron Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, ed. by L.A. Marchand, 12 vols., London, 1973 – 1982, vol. 5, p. 132.

classical antiquity. At the same time it was the land of the Tuscan literary giants, of Tasso and Ariosto, and of countless painters such as Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian and Guido. Then of course such cities as Verona and Venice had powerful Shakespearean associations. Italy was also attractive because of the climate and, compared to England, of the low cost of living. Finally, for travellers brought up as Protestants, Italy was the seat of the Catholic Church, popularly known as the Scarlet Woman or the Whore of Babylon. Popery was to be seen in its native habitat.

It is important to realise that in the case of some travellers, such as Byron and Shelley, it was not only the positive attractions of Italy that made them visit the country but also certain negative aspects of life in England: even by the lax Regency standards their conduct and opinions were deemed to be scandalous and they chose the country that Shelley was later to describe as "the Paradise of Exiles".⁹ Byron, for instance, praised Italian and in particular Venetian sexual *mores* in order to condemn what he saw as the cant and hypocrisy of the English as England became more prudish. And of course his masterpiece *Don Juan*, while not making many explicit references to Italy, was written in that country and implicitly affirms, speaking for example of the hero's affair with Donna Julia, the superiority and sincerity of Italy in this field.

In addition, Byron generally despised the English who visited Italy (he scoffed at Lady Morgan for instance), and in connection with those residing in Rome spoke of "a parcel of staring boobies, who go about gaping and wishing to be at once cheap and magnificent".¹⁰

While Byron went out of his way to avoid English people he was proud to boast that few, if any, of them had mixed and lived with the native population as he had done. Speaking of this population he declared: "I have lived among the natives, and in parts of the country where Englishmen never resided before."¹¹ And his support for Italian liberals in their struggle against

9. Shelley P.B., *Julian and Maddalo*, 57.

10. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 5, p. 187.

11. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 42.

Austrian and Papal domination was not merely verbal: through his mistress Teresa Guiccioli's family, the Gambas, he actively supported the *carbonari*.

Whereas in the days of the Grand Tour aristocratic Englishmen mixed with members of the Italian nobility, the post-Waterloo generation of travellers, who tended, with some notable exceptions like Byron, Shelley and others, to be of middle-class origin, had far fewer contacts with the local population.¹² Shelley and his wife, for example, met few Italians apart from shopkeepers and servants, one of whom in particular, a certain Paolo Foggi, did not, by his dishonest behaviour, endear them to the native population. Comparing the letters of the two poets it is interesting to note that while Byron writes at length on the *mores* of the Italians, having lived among them, and in particular of the "institution" of the *cavalier servente*, Shelley has little to say on this subject but spends much time, especially in his letters to Peacock, describing the landscape and the monuments, in far greater detail than Byron does in *his* letters.

In connection with the people we may say that the travellers of the period had inherited the tradition according to which Italians were generally to be considered a degenerate race while the landscape was characterised by outstanding natural beauty. Keats and Severn were soon to discover this for themselves on their arrival in Naples in 1820. The latter describes the view of Naples and the surrounding countryside in glowing terms and emphasises how much his friend (who in a sonnet had spoken of "a languishment/For skies Italian")¹³ looked forward to exploring the city but when they actually landed "we were quite taken aback by the dirt, the noise and the smell".¹⁴ The inhabitants had in effect transformed the city into "one great kitchen".¹⁵ But what disturbed them much more was what Severn, apropos of the political servility of the population, described as "the debasement of the Neapolitan national character".¹⁶

12. This point is made, for example, by Olive Hamilton (Hamilton O., *Paradise of Exiles*, London, André Deutsch, 1974, p. 78).

13. Keats J., *Happy is England! I could be content*, 5-6.

14. Sharp, W., *The Life and Letters of Joseph Severn*, London, Marston and Company, 1892, p. 61.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

This contrast between the misery of the people and the beauty of the landscape looms large in Shelley's letters although he later came to admire the inhabitants whom he went so far as to describe as "citizens and men"¹⁷ who were perhaps capable of revolutionary action (he was referring to the imminent Austrian attack on Naples in 1821). His wife also emphasises this dichotomy when, also in connection with Naples, she quotes the famous adage *È un Paradiso abitato dai diavoli*.¹⁸ And however much she may have supported what later came to be known as the *Risorgimento* her opinion of individual Italians is decidedly negative: her letters are peppered with references to cheating and dishonest behaviour generally, not to speak of her lack of faith in Italian doctors.¹⁹

Their friend Leigh Hunt speaks in very much the same strain: "... received Italian virtues, under their present governments, consist in being Catholics (that is to say, in going to confession), in not being "taken in" by others, and in taking in everybody else".²⁰ As is clear from the quotation Hunt, like so many Protestants, equates dishonest behaviour with Catholicism and speaking of a famous passage in the preface to Shelley's *Cenci* (which was dedicated to him) about religious truth and moral guilt uses the phrase "the religious profanation of truth".²¹ (I shall discuss the question of Catholicism in greater detail presently.)

We mentioned earlier on Byron's claim that he knew the Italians as few other foreigners did, for the simple reason that he lived with them. It is therefore not surprising that as time went on he seems to have been even less inclined to pass judgement on the people; rather he made a serious effort to understand the

17. Shelley, P.B., *Letters*, ed. by Roger Ingpen, in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by R. Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols., London/New York, The Julian Editions, 1926-1930, vol. X, p. 240. Henceforth, in the references to Shelley's letters (e.g. SHELLEY, P.B., *Letters*, vol. X, p. 14) the volume number refers to the *Complete Works*.

18. Shelley, M., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, 2 vols., Baltimore/London, the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, vol. I, p. 130.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 98, p. 137 and p. 235, for example.

20. Hunt, L., *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 176.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Italian character. While in a letter to his half-sister Augusta he admits that Teresa Guiccioli had "some of the drawbacks of the Italian character now corrupted for ages"²² in a subsequent letter to his publisher John Murray he probes deeper and describes the people as "at once temperate and profligate, serious in their character and buffoons in their amusements, capable of impressions and passions, which are at once *sudden* and *durable* (what you find in no other nation...)"²³.

And speaking of marriage he points out that it is not surprising that marital fidelity is more honoured in the breach than in the observance in a society in which marriages are arranged by the parents (his mistress Teresa was married to a man forty years her senior!). In connection with the women he writes: "they transfer marriage to adultery, and strike the *not* out of that commandment. The reason is, that they marry for their parents and love for themselves. They exact fidelity from a lover as a debt of honour, while they pay the husband as a tradesman, that is not at all"²⁴ Byron is saying in effect that they do not reject the ethic of fidelity as such; rather they transfer it to a relationship which has not been imposed on them and which, unlike marriage, is not a question of rank and fortune.²⁵

He may have scoffed at Lady Morgan and considered her a very superficial observer and asked what Englishmen knew of Italians "beyond their museums and saloons",²⁶ but it is only fair to say

22. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 6, p. 248-9.

23. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 42-3.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

25. In this connection it is interesting to read the words of an anonymous writer and traveller of this period. He or she speaks of "the almost total disregard of matrimonial fidelity" and points out that most Italian wives have a *cavalier servente*. The writer, while evidently shocked, admits at the same time that the practice of keeping young girls in a convent until they can be married to some one whom they may not even know may be considered an extenuation. And, echoing Byron, the author declares: "Yet, by a strange contradiction, it is deemed, as I understand, honourable, and commendatory to be constant to a *Cavaliere*, however little faith may be kept to a *Marito*." *Mementoes, Historical and Classical, of a Tour*, 2 vols., London, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824, vol. II, p. 221-2.

26. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 7, p. 170. His jibe at Lady Morgan is expressed in the following terms: "I suspect I know a thing or two of Italy - more than Lady Morgan has picked up in her posting" (*ibid.*, p. 170).

that she too, while criticising the Italians for their superstition, not only tries to understand them but also goes out of her way to appreciate their qualities. This is particularly evident when she, like Byron, writes about the Italians during Carnival which they pass "more in frailty than in crime, more in folly than licentiousness."²⁷ This is a proof of "the inherent tendency towards good – the gentle, genial organization of that amiable and much – traduced people".²⁸ And she adds: "Love is no sin in Italy".²⁹ It seems to us that these judgements, in particular the last one, are in complete harmony with Byron's, despise her as he might.

Having spoken of the question of the degeneracy of the Italians we come to the related question of Italy as the land of decadence and decay, not to speak of death. It is of course well known that for many of the Romantics Italy's charm and beauty were inextricably linked with their consciousness of her past glory which was in marked contrast to the misery of the early nineteenth century. Shelley, for instance, speaks of "beauty and decay"³⁰ while for Byron "thy decay/is still impregnate with divinity"³¹ meaning that Italy, though in a state of decay, carried in her the seeds of her own rebirth, of which an example was the sculptor Canova. But for a number of Romantic writers it is not just a question of decay but of death: Shelley's reference to beauty and decay is made in connection with kingly death and his court while "Rome is a city ... of the dead, or rather of those who cannot die".³² For Lady Morgan too Rome is a city of the dead.³³ At the same time Samuel Rogers in his poem *Italy* seems to be both attracted and repelled by the prevailing sense of death: he speaks of a gloom and a sadness but adds that he would not want to lose them and then describes Italy as

".. this land of shadows, where we live
More in past time than present, where the ground,

27. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 87.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

30. Shelley, P.B., *Adonais*, 56.

31. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, LV.

32. Shelley, P.B., *Letters*, vol. X, p. 14.

33. Morgan, Lady, *op.cit.*, vol. III, p. 88.

League beyond league, like one great cemetery,
Is covered o'er with mouldering monuments".³⁴

Rogers' reference to *mouldering* monuments chimes in with Lady Morgan's descriptions: it is a word she uses frequently.³⁵ At the same time, in connection with the Forum, she speaks of "the majesty of desolation".³⁶

This concept however, has an important corollary: the works of Man are destined to perish but not Nature. Rather, Nature can be considered the undying witness of the rise and fall of human monuments. Sooner or later, they will succumb to her. Thus Shelley in a fragment entitled "Rome and Nature", writes:

"Rome has fallen, ye see it lying
Heaped in undistinguished ruin:
Nature is alone undying",³⁷

while Byron, speaking of Venice, says that "States fall, arts fade-but Nature doth not die".³⁸ Claire Clairmont, in connection with the Coliseum, says that "on the nodding ruins grew the wall-flowers in abundance",³⁹ while Lady Morgan, apropos of the same monument speaks of "mouldering matter or living vegetation".⁴⁰ Finally, Rogers has this to say of the Greek temples at Paestum:

"All, all within
Proclaims that Nature has resumed her right
And taken to herself what man renounced".⁴¹

One might add, in passing, that as far as Byron is concerned the triumph of Nature over the works of Man is not to be found only

34. Rogers, S., *Italy*, London, Edward Moxon, 1842, p. 154.

35. Cf., for example, note 40.

36. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 349.

37. "Rome and Nature" in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, London, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 588.

38. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, III.

39. Clairmont C., *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, quoted, p. 100.

40. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 356.

41. Rogers, S., *op. cit.*, p. 216.

in Italy: it is mentioned in the first canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in connection with Portugal and in the second canto in connection with Greece.⁴²

It is interesting, however, that Leigh Hunt in his autobiography seems to emphasise the opposite tendency, namely that of perennial youth. He points out that houses built centuries ago still look new because the Italian atmosphere is particularly dry, and observes: "Antiquity refuses to look ancient in Italy".⁴³ It may be that Hunt said this because he never went further south than Tuscany, limiting his travels to Leghorn, Pisa, Florence and Genoa, and so had a somewhat incomplete view of the country but it remains nonetheless a striking and interesting testimony.

The theme of ancient monuments, especially Roman ones, brings us to the question of what those monuments often represented: imperial tyranny together with slavery and degradation. This idea is found in several of the writers we are discussing. Shelley, for instance, admired the Roman Republic but had little, if anything, to say in favour of the Empire which he described as "that vast and successful scheme for the enslaving of the most civilised portion of mankind".⁴⁴ As to the Emperors, his pet hate seems to have been Constantine and while admiring and praising the artistic qualities of the arch dedicated to him, he fulminated against him for having given official recognition to the Christian religion. In addition he emphasised the "slavery and humiliation"⁴⁵ that the scenes on the arch depicted.

This dichotomy between the beauty of a monument, on the one hand, and the moral degradation that it symbolises, on the other, is also brought out by Byron in connection with the Coliseum. Like many others he rhapsodises over it by moonlight but only after stigmatising the brutality of the spectators and the "imperial pleasure".⁴⁶ His immortal lines on the gladiator who dies in the arena "Butchered to make a Roman holiday"⁴⁷ may be read as a

42. Cf. XXII/III of Canto I and LXXXV/VIII of Canto II.

43. Hunt, L., *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 108.

44. Shelley, P.B., *A Philosophical View of Reform*, in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, quoted, vol. VII, p. 5.

45. Shelley, P.B., *Letters*, vol. X, p. 40.

46. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, CXXXIX.

47. *Ibid.*, CXLI.

condemnation of the Roman Empire and the poet's satisfaction at its fall as he immediately afterwards invokes the coming of the Goths.

Lady Morgan also emphasises this dichotomy: speaking of the ruins of a temple she says: "The three beautiful columns ... preserve the wreck of a monument of the bigotry or duplicity of Augustus Caesar".⁴⁸ Similarly, the Coliseum is praised for its beauty but is also described as "the last and noblest monument of Roman grandeur and Roman crime".⁴⁹

It is interesting to note, in passing, that the Arch of Constantine provokes in Shelley and Lady Morgan brief reflections which, while couched in different terms, seem to express basically similar concepts: Shelley writes that monuments express "that mixture of energy and error which is called a triumph"⁵⁰ while Lady Morgan says that they "commemorate the faults or the follies of men, their wars or their errors".⁵¹

The theme of tyranny leads us to the theme of rebellion and revolution of which we have an example during the period under consideration: the unsuccessful risings in Naples and Piedmont in 1820 and 1821. Both Byron and Lady Morgan invoke a latter-day Cola di Rienzo⁵² while not only they but also Shelley and his wife comment on the unsuccessful revolt. Shelley indeed was full of hope and enthusiasm at first and wrote his *Ode to Naples* in August 1820 as a result. On the eve of the Austrian attack on Naples in 1821, as we said earlier on, he referred to the people as "citizens and men"⁵³ who might after all be capable of revolutionary action and it is interesting that Byron, who spoke of "the very *poetry* of politics",⁵⁴ also thought the Neapolitans had a good chance of winning: "It is probable that Italy will be delivered from the Barbarians if the Neapolitans will but stand firm, and are united among themselves".⁵⁵ In the event,

48. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 352.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

50. Shelley, P.B., *Letters*, vol. X, p. 40.

51. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 354.

52. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 33; Byron, Lord, G.G., *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, CXIV.

53. Cf. note 17.

54. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 8, p. 47.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

according to Byron, it was precisely because of their lack of union that they lost and he stigmatised them for their "treachery and desertion".⁵⁶

Lady Morgan's analysis of the question perhaps goes deeper: she too mentions their lack of firmness but in the context of the lack of a concrete, physical ideal: "Had they been given a Madonna to defend, or any sensible image to rally under, they might have been found more firm in the hour of danger"⁵⁷ and adds that they could not be expected to fight for independence when, thanks to their masters, they did not even know what the word meant. They were "corrupted, debased, bigoted and brutally ignorant".⁵⁸ (We may note once again, in passing, how unfair Byron was towards Lady Morgan).

Keats and Severn were in Naples at the time of the revolution but not when it was put down. Severn mentions the "fine martial appearance" of the Neapolitan troops but adds that "Keats would not allow that they had any backbone in them, and ere long events proved how right he was".⁵⁹

For Byron Italy carried in her the seeds of her own rebirth, of which Canova was an example. Before the revolution – in 1819 – he had written *The Prophecy of Dante* in which he made the author of the *Divina Commedia* foretell Italy's future. This prophecy included the vision of a united Italy. At the same time, Mary Shelley, who attributed the failure of the revolution to "political despair"⁶⁰ deriving from fear of the Austrians, expresses a similar idea: anticipating the *Risorgimento* she prophetically sees beyond the present and declares of the country and its people that "Italy possesses in hew own bosom the germs of regeneration, which, in spite of their late overthrow, will in the end give birth to their emancipation".⁶¹

We come now to the question of Catholicism which we mentioned briefly in connection with Leigh Hunt. Needless to say, the travellers of this period had inherited an anticatholic

56. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

57. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 248.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

59. Sharp, W., *op. cit.*, p. 62.

60. Shelley, M., *Review of the English in Italy*, quoted, p. 445.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

tradition of which such travellers as Ascham, Sidney and Milton had been exponents. What then was the reaction of the writers we are discussing? Was it one of unmitigated condemnation or was it more ambivalent?

I shall begin with Lady Morgan who in her *Journal – Italy –* devotes a long section to the subject, including a historical sketch. Much of what she says would not appear to be very original: she makes the usual remarks about the contrast between the splendour and brilliance of Papal ceremonies and the simplicity of Apostolic times, the ignorance and superstition of the faithful, business and devotion, the Popes having taken over from the Caesars etc. What in our view is more striking is that at a time when ecumenism, or the movement towards Christian unity, was no more than a word, if that, she goes out of her way to emphasise the similarities rather than the differences between the Catholic and Protestant forms of Christianity. She declares for example that “The ceremonies of the Church of Rome ... startle the English Protestant spectators by their resemblance to the rites of his own more sober church”⁶² and that “The book of common prayer attentively perused proves how little has been changed”.⁶³ The former statement is surprising if only because in those days Latin was the language of the liturgy while the latter is indeed astonishing when one considers that one of the 39 articles contained in the Book of Common Prayer describes Masses as “blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits”⁶⁴ and another stigmatises the doctrine of Transubstantiation as “repugnant to the plain words of Scripture”.⁶⁵

Lady Morgan’s attitude, it seems to me, is not one of relentless hostility but rather of gentle and detached irony: not only is the Pope of the time, Pius VII, personally old and feeble but his power is a mere shadow of what it had been: “The Papal power is over. The spiritual influence of the Bishops of Rome has fled,

62. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 69.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

64. *The Book of Common Prayer*, Articles of Religion, n. 31.

65. *Ibid.*, Articles of Religion, n. 28.

with the faith in their infallibility upon which it was founded".⁶⁶ She is perhaps more severe when she speaks of the Popes of the past, but as far as the contemporary Papacy is concerned, for her it is not necessary to be too severe with an institution which will disintegrate as it is exposed to the light of progress. *Magna est veritas et praevaleret* perhaps sums up her attitude.

We may mention in passing that at a time when the Church of Rome was frequently accused of lack of toleration, she praises the Pope's Secretary of State, Cardinal Consalvi, for his policy of religious toleration and its benefits.⁶⁷

The ceremonies of the Church were for most visitors their main contact with Catholicism and in many cases it was probably the music that made the greatest impression. Byron, for example, was moved by the music of the organ in churches⁶⁸ while both Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont speak enthusiastically about it.⁶⁹ Mary, writing in 1819, also points out "how gracefully the old venerable Pope fulfilled the Church ceremonies".⁷⁰ (It is interesting to note, in passing, that Claire at the end of her life became a Catholic.)

Samuel Rogers' attitude to Italian Catholics is one of pity rather than hate: he feels they should not be blamed if they "are in an earlier stage of society".⁷¹ As for his attitude to the Popes he shows himself to be typically Protestant when he describes them as "subduing, chaining down/The free immortal spirit"⁷².

Shelley's anticatholicism is well known and is particularly evident in *The Cenci* but also in such other works as *The Triumph of Life*. On the other hand he was fascinated by Milan Cathedral, going there to read Dante. On another occasion⁷³ we spoke of

66. Morgan, Lady, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 24.

67. She writes: "While the Conclave complain of Gonsalvi's (*sic*) sang-froid in the cause of Mother Church, and the Carbonari accuse him of favouring Austria, one thing is certain, that his religious toleration has spared much suffering to Italy ... The cardinal, gracious to all strangers, is particularly so to the English ..." *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 402-3 (note).

68. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 5, p. 208.

69. Shelley, M., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 89; Clairmont C., *op. cit.*, p. 100.

70. Shelley, M., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 95.

71. Rogers, S., *op. cit.*, p. 158.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

73. Brayley, A., "Shelley, Italy and Christianity" ("Shelley, L'Italia e il Cristianesimo"), Liguori Editore, forthcoming.

the evolution of Shelley's attitude to Christianity during his four years in Italy and argued that towards the end of his life he came to have a great reverence for the figure of Christ and that he even began to move in the direction of some sort of belief in God. Here we will point out that Shelley, though not a Christian in the orthodox sense of the word, nevertheless still had a Protestant mentality and that this is particularly evident in the preface to *The Cenci* in which he expresses his horror at what he sees as the unholy union of religious fervour and criminal behaviour.⁷⁴ Another example of his attitude to Catholicism is proved by a man whose dress was evidently a sign that he was a Penitent. This for Shelley was "a striking instance of the power of the Catholic superstition over the human mind".⁷⁵

We come now to Byron. I noted earlier on, speaking of the question of the inhabitants, that he rises above the usual prejudices and commonplaces because he lived with the Italians; similarly his attitude towards Catholicism seems, on the whole, to be remarkably positive and marks a break with the English anticatholic tradition. This is clear not only from a reading of the 4th canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* but also from his letters. In the poem Italy is referred to as "Parent of our Religion"⁷⁶ and St Peter's is described as "Christ's mighty shrine above his martyr's tomb"⁷⁷, while in one of his letters he describes Catholicism as "the best religion, as it is assuredly the oldest of the various branches of Christianity"⁷⁸ and in another letter he

74. *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, quoted, p. 277.

75. Shelley, P.B., *Letters*, vol. IX, p. 341.

76. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto, IV, XLVII.

77. *Ibid.*, CLII.

78. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 8, p. 98. Quoting these words, Christopher Derrick has written: "In quel Milord depravato che forse vendeva il Demonio, c'era un qualcosa che lo attirava potentemente verso la Chiesa cattolica ..." Derrick, C., "Un Byron cattolico? Forse sì". *Avvenire*, 22 gennaio 1988, p. 13 (translated by Carlo Cavicchioli). At the same time we must not forget his Calvinist upbringing with its emphasis on the doctrine of predestination which is hinted at in *Childe Harold*: he speaks of demons who "seek their prey/In melancholy bosoms" prone to "Deeming themselves predestined to a doom/Which is not of the pangs that pass away." (*Childe*

declares that "I incline, myself, very much to the Catholic doctrines".⁷⁹ In the same letter he praises Shelley as a man but disowns his speculative opinions. We might also mention the fact that he insisted that his natural daughter Allegra, the fruit of an affair with Claire Clairmont, be brought up as a Catholic.

At the same time, however, we also find in his works typically Protestant jibes about religion and moral laxity: at the beginning of *Beppo*, for instance, he says that during Carnival:

"The people take their fill of recreation,
And buy repentance, ere they grow devout".⁸⁰

Professor Brand, in the book mentioned at the beginning of this paper, wrote: "As a result of their journey to Italy the majority of English travellers were confirmed in their anticatholic beliefs"⁸¹ and quotes Hazlitt as a typical example. However, we would suggest that Byron, at any rate, belongs to the minority who were not influenced negatively by what they saw of Catholicism in Italy.

78. (contd) Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV, XXXIV). In connection with Byron's Calvinist streak Maurois has written: "He thought himself predestined to lead an ardent and guilty life. Nor did it matter that later, under the influence of his irreligious Cambridge friends and the eighteenth-century French sceptics, he was to become a Voltairian deist, then a cynic. Always in his secret heart there lurked a Calvinist who was to judge Don Juan, hope to lead a better life, and despise the too easy women who fell in love with Childe Harold" (MAUROIS, A., *Letters of Lord Byron*, London, J.M. Dent, 1936, p. VIII).

79. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Letters and Journals*, vol. 9, p. 119.

80. Byron, Lord, G.G., *Beppo*, I.

81. Brand, C.P., *Italy and the English Romantics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, p. 218-9.