

# “The Niobe of Nations”

Lord Byron: *Childe Harold*

## A Romantic View of Italy, 1815–1840

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From the end of the seventeenth century Italy was visited by nearly every British writer of note. Some, like Walter Scott, spent only a few months there, other like Byron, the Shelleys, Leigh Hunt and Browning lived there for several years. John Keats went there to die. With the exception of the last they left the record of their experience in poetry and prose. They were all classically educated, they all came to visit a land which they acknowledged as one of the principal sources of their culture, and their principal object was to bask in the sunlit glory of its past. They were visiting a land called “Italia”, home of classical ruins, great art, literature and landscape, a land with no present or future, a land without people. Its inhabitants, when they obtruded on their notice, were treated dismissively. It was as if they were being punished for the betrayal of their glorious Roman and Renaissance past. Italy, as such, was, in Metternich’s patronising phrase, a geographical expression. Napoleon Bonaparte had called himself, for a time, King of Italy, implying that there was such a nation to be king of, but by Italy he meant the land between the Alps and Volturno. The Holy Alliance, after his fall, was

determined to restore "Italia" to its patchwork of "signorie" and to keep it that way.

For a hundred years, young men came to Italy for the Grand Tour, with a tutor to ensure that they understood what they saw and to help them spend their abundant money wisely. By the end of the eighteenth century, it had begun to acquire a bad name. In 1816, John Polidori, an Edinburgh graduate from Soho, expert at the age of 19 in somnambulism and mesmerism, and parent of *The Vampyre* that has never been far, in one form or another, from our television screens, makes Aubrey, the hero of his gothic novel, wishing to accompany Lord Ruthven abroad, inform his guardians that "it was time for him to perform the tour, which for many generations had been thought necessary to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice". For Lord Ruthven, read Lord Byron. Polidori could only fulfil his desire to travel by attaching himself to the poet as his medical adviser, and his comment on the Grand Tour may have had a whiff of sour grapes.<sup>1</sup>

With the end of the Napoleonic wars, the British, denied the pleasures of continental travel for so many years, began once more to pour across the channel, but the Grand Tour, as such, was over. The shuffling of works of art to and from Paris, Rome, Milan and Florence at the hands of Bonaparte's cultural commissars had alerted governments to the value of their art treasures.<sup>2</sup> If one now hoped to furnish his dwelling with relics from the classical past, he might be lucky enough to pick up a shard or a misappropriated limb, but he did better to commission a classical copy from the spawn of Canova's studio. Among these was the Liverpoolian John Gibson, who specialised in androgynous males and blushing maidens, carved from rosy marble, with one of whom, *La Venere Tinta*, he fell in love. With the first stirrings of the Hellenic resistance to Turkish rule,

1. The quotation comes from the first pages of *The Vampyre*, that entertainment written in 1816, which Byron disliked, and which started the competition in the Villa Diodati for a spine-chiller, the genesis of *Frankenstein*.

2. That latter day Louis XIV, Napoleon Bonaparte had tried to fulfil Colbert's wish that the French "devons faire en sorte d'avoir . . . tout ce qu'il y a de beau en Italie." The pillaging of Italian museums was so thorough that in 1798 a popular canzonetta assured the world that "Rome n'est plus dans Rome, / Elle est tout a Paris." F. Haskell & N. Penny, *L'Antico nella Storia del Gusto*, Turin, 1984, pp. 46, 132.

moreover, a whole new quarry of pure Greek sculpture, not decadent late imperial copies, began to divert serious collectors to Greece. Treasure-hunting in Italy was now frowned upon by the authorities.

The wars, too, had provided occupation for the foot-loose and over-endowed sprigs of landed families, who had undertaken the Grand Tour so that they could learn how to convert their rolling acres into a landscape out of Poussin in the heart of darkest Yorkshire. In the 22 years since 1793, they had sailed before the mast from Rio de Janeiro to Canton, they had cleared Egypt and Syria of the French, fought every inch from Torres Vedras to Toulouse, they had subdued Mysoreans and Marathas, and chased bandits round the heart of ancient India, they had carried the British flag beyond the capital of the Great Mughal to the five rivers of the Panjab. They had even had a crack at the impossible task of providing Sicily with good government.<sup>3</sup> The Grand Tour, with a tutor, a sort of academic field trip to round off an education stuffed with studies of Livy, Horace and Virgil, was rather *vieux jeu*.

The tourists, too, had changed. In 1818 Mary Shelley found the English at Bagni di Lucca "crowded here to the almost entire exclusion (of) Italians", adding with a frisson of disgust, "the walks are filled with English nurserymaids".<sup>4</sup> Dr Johnson may have held in 1776 that "a man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority",<sup>5</sup> but now it included his wife, children and nurserymaid. Twenty years later, the tourists were still out in force. "Rome is full of English", Macaulay wrote to Lord Lansdowne on 19 December 1838. "We could furnish exceedingly respectable Houses of Lords and Commons. There are at present twice as many coroneted carriages in Piazza di Spagna as in St James's parish".<sup>6</sup>

3. The second son of the Duke of Portland, former governor of Madras and future governor-general of India had been appointed envoy to King Ferdinand and commander-in-chief of British forces in Sicily and was effectively governor of that island from 1811-1818. He was recalled by Castlereagh when after the fall of Napoleon he recommended liberal constitutions for a Genoese republic, Milan and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. J. Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: the Making of a Liberal Imperialist, 1774-1839*, Brighton, 1974.

4. Mary Shelley to Maria Gisborne, 2 July 1818, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, "A Part of the Elect"*, vol. 1, ed. Betty Bennett, Baltimore, 1980, p. 74.

5. Boswell, *Life*, Oxford 1933, vol. 2, p. 24.

6. G.O. Trevelyan, *The Life & Letters of Lord Macaulay*, World's Classics, Oxford, 1932 ed., vol. 1, p. 466.

Grand Tourists had not taken their wives and children on the Grand Tour, much less their nurserymaids. Post-bellum families, especially wives and sisters, now wished to share the experience of travel. Ned Williams, Shelley's sailing friend, knew a naval captain who spent £1100 worth of prize money showing his two sisters Italy . . . "a rough English sailor who while the young ladies say – What a charming picture – really that statue if one knew what it meant would be very pretty – stands with one of them on each arm with his thumbs in his pockets whistling and looking another way".<sup>7</sup> The brothels round the Piazza di Spagna, the foreign quarter of Rome, with their Venuses all licensed for business by the Cardinal Vicar, lost the valuable custom that single men and their tutors used to bring them.

In the preceding century, most British residents in Europe, unless artists, scholars or diplomatists, were fleeing from the debtor's prison or religious intolerance. Now they were fleeing a wide variety of things. Byron was a refugee from a starchy wife and the intolerable stuffiness of London society, the Shelleys were fleeing a devouring parent and poverty. Leigh Hunt fled from poverty and prison. Browning from the Barretts. Though the new vogue for sojourning in Italy owed something to the novels of Ann Radcliffe, whose heroines experienced such delicious terrors in Italy, more often families were escaping from the fogs and rain of an English winter, the terrible increase in pulmonary tuberculosis from industrialisation causing something like panic among the parents of delicate children.<sup>8</sup>

High domestic costs at a time of depression in England also made Italy a cheaper place in which to live. Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley were able to live in Italy for four years on an exiguous income, with servants, dependants, and, latterly a boat. Byron could contemplate putting up both Leigh Hunt and parents and seven children in the ground floor of his Pisan palazzo without a dent in his expenditure. The Blessington-D'Orsay caravan could occupy one of the finest palazzi in Vomero, Naples, its owner decamping

7. Mary Shelley to Claire Clairmont, *Letters*, vol. i, p. 180. The naval officer was Captain Bowen.

8. In 1851 when reasonable records began sufferers of pulmonary tuberculosis in England numbered 2579 per million lives. The onset of the industrial revolution began to create conditions out of which those who could choose, chose to spend the winter.

to a much inferior one, for the rent of a cottage in England. Mass tourism may have begun, but the attraction was not just cheap hotels (or palazzi) in the sun, the mindless browning of the legs that has vulgarised, when it has not ruined, the coastline of the Mediterranean. The visitors were still drawn to see *qu'est qu'il y a de beau en Italie*.

Let us, briefly, compare the changing attitudes to visitors to "Italia", separated by decades from each other. In 1701, whereso'ever Joseph Addison turned his ravished eyes

Gay gilded scenes and shining prospects rise,  
Poetic fields still encompass me around  
And still I seem to tread on classic ground.<sup>9</sup>

By 1780, William Beckford remembered his classical education enough to go, "full of the spirit of Aeschylus, to the Olympic theatre (in Vicenza) and vent(ed) my evil temper in reciting some of the most tremendous verses of his furies".<sup>10</sup> Having got the classics out of his system he returned to his journal where, for page after page, he described the passing countryside as if he were annotating Richard Wilson. By December 1823, checking up on the ancients was not Marguerite Blessington's purpose in being in Italy. "When one is basking in the general warmth of this sunny clime . . . it is impossible, even in despite of patriotism, not to admit that Italy is a preferable winter residence".<sup>11</sup> Though an inveterate sight-seer she was not in Italy to improve herself. "The besetting sin of this place has taken possession of me. . . . Oh, the dolce far niente of an Italian life! Who can resist its influence. Not I – at least".<sup>12</sup>

Grand Touring had been serious business, whoring apart, and tutors tended to behave like tour guides before Thomas Cook invented them. There was a lot to fit in. Mostly, as for Addison, it was classical sites, but the opera was a draw and some made cautious anthropological forays into the Catholic church. William Beckford joined the melancholy sinners prostrate before the sanctuary of St

9. *A Letter from Italy, to the Right Honourable Lord Halifax*, London, 1703, p. 51.

10. Elizabeth Mavor: *The Grand Tour of William Beckford*, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 73, 10 September 1780.

11. Neapolitan Journals, December 1823 in Edith Clay, *Lady Blessington at Naples*, London, 1979, p. 78.

12. *Ibid.*, 12 August 1823, p. 57.

Anthony of Padua. In case his old drawing master should begin to fear for his faith, he added that it gave him a good opportunity to study the bas-reliefs by Sansovino on the saint's tomb. The Blessingtons had come to enjoy themselves in their curious *menage á trois*, but Marguerite Blessington was the only one to comment on the Italians who inhabited her "Italia", and that in a rather patronising way. Her letters home described a feckless and self-indulgent people "To live is here (Naples) so positive an enjoyment that the usual motives and incentives to study and usefulness are forgotten, in the enervating and dreamy enjoyment to which the climate gives birth".<sup>13</sup>

Italy was now to be visited for pleasure as well as for instruction. Mary Shelley, when she came to leave Italy in 1823, was heart-broken to leave a country to which, despite the loss of her husband and two of her children, she was "attached from a thousand reasons". "I love Italy – its sky canopies the tombs of my lost treasures – its sun – its vegetation – the solitude I can here enjoy – the easy life one can lead – my habits now of five years growth – all and everything endears Italy to me beyond expression. The thought of leaving it fills me with powerful tumults".<sup>14</sup> But not the people. Mary had never found the locals simpatici. "The Italians (in Naples) are so very disagreeable . . . there is no life here. They seem to act as if they had all died fifty years ago and now went about their work like the ghostly sailors of Coleridge's enchanted ship – except indeed when they cheat!"<sup>15</sup> "The people (of Pisa) were wild and hateful", if not so hateful as their neighbours at Lerici who "are like wild savages".<sup>16</sup> Italy was "un Paradiso abitato dai diavoli".

Marguerite Blessington, being of a more sanguine temperament, found the Neapolitans anything but ghostly. They abandoned themselves (to activity) with the gaiety of children broken loose from school.<sup>17</sup> At least children were a step-up from savages. But, by and large, the English, as they were universally known, did not mix much with the natives. There were now so many of them, they were no longer dependent on the cardinals' *conversazioni* in Rome, the Grand

13. *Ibid.*, 4 August 1823, p. 48.

14. To Thomas Jefferson Hogg, Albaro near Genoa, 28 February 1823, *Letters*, i, pp. 317–18.

15. To Maria Gisborne from Naples, 22 January 1819, *ibid.*, p. 85.

16. To Maria Gisborne from Pisa 15 August 1822, *ibid.*, pp. 244, 249.

17. *Neapolitan Journals*, 23 July 1823, Clay, p. 34.

Ducal soirees in Florence, or even princely open house in Naples. They had not much enjoyed them. Claire Clairmont described one *conversazione*, "where there is a Cardinal and many unfortunate Englishmen who, after having crossed their legs and said nothing the whole evening, rose all at once, made their bows and filed off".<sup>18</sup> They had enough fellow visitors to form a society of their own. Moreover, twenty years of beating Boney, of conquering India, of ruling the sea, had converted the landowner who loved his acres, palladianized his house and capability browned his estate, who rode to hounds in his farmer's rig and was a good fellow, into a remote, glacially superior pro-consul with jacket too tight and neckband too high. Squire Weston had given way to Mr Darcy. Darcys were choosy about their friends. The Italian aristocracy was poor, monoglot and often strange, while ordinary foreigners in general were still either comic or dishonest.

For what still tempted visitors were the climate, the cheapness, the beauty, the past. Its present was of little interest to those who flocked to Italy in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Its past was still strongly identified with the average reader's stock of fictional villains, like Ann Radcliffe's Schedoni and Montoni, but to that stock, in the years from 1816, were added some real-life Italians, like Francesca da Rimini, Torquato Tasso, the Cenci, the two Foscari, Marino Faliero, Cola da Rienzo, and Joanna of Naples. Their stories had first appeared in the spate of works on Italy which followed Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and, though some of them are only known today to operamanes, they were at the time hot items from the pens of James Leigh Hunt, Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Bulwar Lytton and Walter Savage Landor.<sup>19</sup>

18. *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. M.K. Stocking, 27 March 1819, p. 103.

19. C.P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics*, Cambridge, 1957, pp. 189-90. The published dates were: *Rimini* by James Leigh Hunt 1816, *The Lament for Tasso* by Byron 1817, *The Cenci*, 1819, *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari* 1821, Mary Shelley, *Valperga*, 1823, *Rienzi* by Bulwer Lytton 1835, *Giovanna of Naples* by Walter Savage Landor, 1839. It is strange that Scott did not join his galere. Perhaps his Scotland was an "Italia" in itself. Scott certainly belonged to the "stiletto school". Compare: "But in Italy the secret stiletto was the weapon of revenge and the murder of one was avenged by the assassination of another until the list of expiatory murders ran high," (Mary Shelley, *Valperga*, 1923 edition, London, vol. 1, p. 86) with "Like a cowardly Italian, he had recourse to his fatal stiletto to murder the man whom he dared not meet in manly encounter." W. Scott, *The Two Drovers*, in *Chronicles of the Canongate*, 1827, Oxford World's Classics ed. 1934, p. 155.

For their readers, as they trundled across Europe in their high sided carriages, coming to roost in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome or the Riviera di Chiaia in Naples, they were required reading. To that list we can add Masaniello, the subject of no less than two plays in London, before Auber's *La Muette de Portici* was sung in London in 1829 and provided the largest repertoire of drawing room numbers. Felicia Hemans, known today by one line of her most famous poem, *The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck*, wrote a play, *The Vespers of Palermo*, which was produced in Edinburgh in 1824, with the surprising assistance of Sir Walter Scott, who liked the ageing blue-stocking. Significantly, the subject matter of all these works was tyranny and revolt against tyranny, – family, clerical, sexual and political.

After her unexpected success with *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley decided to write her next novel about an historical Italian. The Shelley's crossed the Mont Cenis pass into Italy on 30 March 1818. Mary was 21, already something of a celebrity. As they intended to stay in Italy for some time they embarked on a reading programme which would leave most contemporary students gasping. To obtain command of the language, Mary started to read Richardson's *Pamela* in an Italian translation, following it by *Clarissa*. Those who have read both these prolix novels in English will recognise the Himalayan task. In addition, in the course of the year, she polished off Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Alfieri's tragedies and autobiography, Dante's *Inferno*, the tragedies of Monti, not to mention *Tristram Shandy*, Gibbon's *Decline & Fall*, 2 volumes of Montaigne, Pope's Homer, the plays of Moliere, Corneille and Ben Johnson and the Aeneid in Latin. In 1819 she had polished off *The Decameron*, the rest of the *Divine Comedy*, Sismondi's *Italian Republics* as well as a punishing programme of other English and European classics. Sismondi introduced her to Niccolo Tegrini's *Life of Castruccio Castracano*, written in 1496, the mine from which she was to hew *Valperga*.<sup>20</sup>

Castruccio Castracano was a Lucchese, one of the ambitious and unprincipled adventurers who kept the Guelph-Ghibelline wars alive in the 14th century. The novel traces the rise of a warlord, a

20. Mery Shelley, *Journals, 1814–1844*, ed. P.R. Frelldman & D. Scott-Kilvert, vol. i, pp. 266, 347.



consummate field commander, as unprincipled as he was skilful, who brought down the Bavarian elector, Lewis, to collect his iron crown from Milan and have himself crowned in the Vatican, despite Papal anathemas, by schismatic bishops. Castracano's price for this bit of imperial meddling was to be the tyranny of Tuscany but in 1328 he died suddenly, and Florence was saved.

Mary Shelley's Castruccio rejects the prospect of happiness as lord of Valperga, in consort with the suggestively named Euthanasia, for the lure of power. His character so deteriorates as the novel develops that even the besotted Euthanasia renounces him and joins in a conspiracy to remove him. The plot is betrayed, Euthanasia is exiled and drowns. No happy ending here. Mary had suffered too much in the writing of it, for she had lost everything but her one surviving son. Today it is forgotten, though Muriel Spark compares *Valperga* favourably with George Eliot's *Romola*.<sup>21</sup>

*Valperga*, however, though it has many of the features of a Radcliffean Gothic novel, recognises for the first time that Italy is peopled by Italians who have an agenda for their own future. Euthanasia's "young thoughts darted into futurity, to the hopes of freedom for Italy, of revived learning and the right of peace for all the world".<sup>22</sup> On another occasion, one of her characters despises the Florentines, whose "watchword is that echo of fools and laughing stock of the wise – liberty".<sup>23</sup> Liberty, freedom. The Radcliffean image that John Keats characterised as one of caverns, grottos, waterfalls, woods, immense rocks, tremendous sounds and solitude, a caricature of "Italia", began to give way to one of Italy, a land reduced to servitude by its fatal gift of beauty, unable to "awe the robbers back, who press / To shed (her) blood, and drink the tears of (her) distress".<sup>24</sup> From the onset of the dark ages Italy had been trampled over by foreigners, Germans, Normans, Angevins, French and Spaniards, its republics had fallen into the hands of despots, doges, popes and Bourbons. Now the Germans, or rather Metternich's Austrians, were back in strength. Austrians held the Milanese and Veneto, Habsburg princes ruled Tuscany and Parma,

21. M. Spark, *Mary Shelley*, London 1993, p. 150.

22. *Valperga*, London 1823, vol. 1, p. 30.

23. *Ibid.* vol. 1, p. 119.

24. Preface to Canto IV.

the republic of Genoa was in the iron grip of the King of Sardinia, the Bourbons of Naples had seen off William Bentinck with his talk of constitutions and Rome, and Rome, the Niobe of Nations, was still ruled by an ancient hierarch.

Canto iv of *Childe Harold* which appeared in 1818 had started the change. "My dear Hobhouse", Byron wrote on 2 January in that year, "that man must be wilfully blind or ignorantly heedless, who is not struck with the extraordinary capacity of this people, . . . the facility of their acquisitions, the fire of their genius, their sense of beauty, and amidst all the disadvantages of repeated revolutions, the desolation of battles and the despair of ages, their still unquenched "longing after immortality" – the immortality of independence".<sup>25</sup>

The diapason of that rolling sentence echoed Lord William Bentinck's clarion call to the Sicilians: "Warriors of Italy, you are asked to assert your rights and your liberty".<sup>26</sup> It recalled Wordsworth's unforgettable lament on the extinction of the Venetian republic (1802) and it drowned Shelley's complaint to Thomas Love Peacock, eight months later, of the avarice, cowardice, superstition, ignorance, passionless of the Italians which he observed after a few days in the city from which Byron had launched his letter to Hobhouse.<sup>27</sup> Could the image of "Italia" – the land of art – yield to that of Italy – a united nation? But in 1820, a revolution in Naples frightened King Ferdinand into giving the Neapolitans the liberal constitution of Spain which had enjoyed a brief life in 1812. Shelley, writing as if from Pompeii, the "city disinterred", symbol of resurrection, hailed this "youngest giant birth, . . . arrayed in Wisdom's mail" waving its lightning lance in mirth. "Nor let thy high heart fail, / Though from their hundred gates the leagued Oppressors / With hurried legions move".<sup>28</sup>

Alas the warning was in vain. The high heart of the young giant broke in terror before the disciplined legions of Austria, sent in by the Holy Alliance as a peace-keeping, revolution-busting force. In

25. To John Hamilton Reynolds, Teignmouth, 14 March 1818, *Letters*, ed. S. Colvin, London 1928, p. 83. *Childe Harold*, canto iv stanza 42.

26. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, xxix, p. 728, quoted by Brand, p. 197.

27. October 1818, quoted by Brand, p. 200.

28. P.B. Shelley, *Ode to Naples*, strophe II, 1820.

Turin, the same constitution, introduced by the regent Carlo Alberto, was snuffed out by Austrian mercenaries on the field of Novara. Lord John Russell who had, in 1819, deplored the fact that the country of Virgil and Tasso should be whipped into obedience by Bohemian corporals, now saw those whips turned to scorpions.<sup>29</sup> It did look as if "Italia, the Italy of the Shelleys, could never sustain the Italy of Byron and Bentinck. It was always going to be let down by the innate defects of meridional people, dedicated to dolce far niente when not dishonest, craven and superstitious, a subject people, very far from ready for constitutional rule, Europe's Indians. For in the far away sub-continent, British officials, who expected India one day to replace the United States as the jewel of the imperial crown, believed that its inhabitants had been too debosched by centuries of despotism and oppression by Brahmanism, to have the stamina or character for representational government."<sup>30</sup>

The growing evangelical belief that calamity occurred to those who deserved it, and that poverty was a punishment for immorality or fecklessness, was quick to attribute the defeat of constitutional zealots by advanced and disciplined armies as the deserved chastisement of an unworthy people. Mary Shelley had no doubts. Italy's oppression was all her own, partly for the sins of past generations, partly for follies of their own. She doubted whether the Italians could profit by independence, even if they won it, "being too demoralised and degenerate after years of petty tyranny".<sup>31</sup> There were Italians who thought so too. For Massimo d'Azeglio, future prime minister of the kingdom of Sardinia, the worst of Italy's enemies were not Teutons but Italians. "The Italians have wanted to make a new Italy, but themselves remain the old Italians, with all the worthlessness and moral poverty that have been their undoing for ages past".<sup>32</sup>

29. Letter to Lord Holland on Foreign Policy, 1819, quoted by Brand, p. 201.

30. Macaulay's word to describe Papal government, in his letter to Lord Lansdowne, see note 5 above.

31. *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842 and 1843*, London, 2 vols, 1844, vol. 2, pp. 260-61. See also J. Pemble: *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians & Edwardians in the South*, Oxford 1987, p. 135. Mary Shelley had, however, revised her poor opinion of Italian manners during this return visit after 20 years. *Rambles*, ii, p. 106.

32. *I Mei Ricordi*, (Things I Remember), trans. E.R. Vincent, Oxford, 1966, author's preface, p. xv.

And these failures coincided with an unexpected shift of interest in Britain away from Italy in the late thirties. The young queen had married a German prince; Coleridge, who had helped to popularise Cary's version of *La Divina Commedia* among his countrymen, had lost himself in the bye-ways of German philosophy, on which he now gave his weekly lectures, his early enthusiasm for Dante overtaken by the discovery of Schiller and Goethe. Byron and Shelley, and Felicia Hemans, were dead; Leigh Hunt was in his anecdote, writing his autobiography. Bulwer Lytton had blazed a Teutonic trail with his *Pilgrims of the Rhine* (1833) though he still had *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Zanoni* to write. Even Mary Shelley was rambling round Germany. The Rhine, Pumpernickel and the German Spas began to prove as exciting (and cleaner) to tourists than the Tiber, the Papal States and Bagni di Lucca. Germany was every bit as much a patchwork of ancient signorie as Italy, and each had its history too. Moreover the Germans were a northern people whom, the latter-day prophets believed, God had designated to rule the world. You could not say of Germany, though Thackeray tried, what Elizabeth Barrett Browning said of Italy, that "the roots of thought here . . . seem dead in the ground. It is as well that they have great memories – nothing else lives".<sup>33</sup> It was fortunate that she consented to live in Italy with Robert. The thought of Bishop Wulfram ordering his Tomb in St Adalbert's Church, and the interior monologues of Eleazar of Worms, reminds of what we could have lost.<sup>34</sup> *Paracelsus*, a.k.a. Theophrastus Philip Aurelius Bompast von Horenheim, was warning enough.

Yet, as Leigh Hunt admitted, "we have the best part of Italy in books, and this we can enjoy in England". The Italophiles had been too cerebral. Despite the presence of 200 English families in Florence, Tuscan censorship and English indifference defeated his dream of producing a digest of the best English periodicals.<sup>35</sup> Italy had suddenly gone off the intellectual boil and the British cultural eye was shifting to northern Europe. From 1837 there was only one

33. *The Letters of E. B. Browning*, ed. Kenyon, vol. 1, p. 310, quoted by Pemble, p. 229.

34. Eleazar of Worms, 1165–1238, Jewish mystic and pietist born at Mainz, who exposed the Kabbalah, the esoteric manner of theosophical contemplation, to non-Jewish readers. G. Scholem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbalah*, Cologne 1962.

35. J. Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, Oxford, World's Classics ed., 1928, pp. 448–49.

voice in England which ceaselessly tried to draw them back to political present of Italy. Giuseppe Mazzini, as a boy in Genoa, had read every volume by Walter Scott, and copied out poems by Milton, Pope and Shelley. Burns and Wordsworth he saw as liberating influences, unshackling the mind from the tyranny of classicism. Byron and Foscolo were the angel voices of a Young Italy. He was shocked on arrival in London to find that the common image of his homeland was still that of Mrs Radcliffe and of his countrymen that of Casanova.<sup>36</sup> The image of "Italia" had hardly changed.

Taken up by the Carlyles, retained to choose Italian books for the new London Library which Carlyle and Dickens had just started and to which he could never afford to belong, Mazzini kept the cause alive in London. Leigh Hunt, faithful to Byron, was still ready to profess that "Italy is a wonderful nation, always at the head of the world in some respect, great or small, and equally full of life. Division among its children is its bane; and Mazzini's was the best note that has been struck in its favour in modern times".<sup>37</sup>

In 1836 that future paladin of Italian freedom, Garibaldi,<sup>38</sup> wrote to Mazzini from Brazil, suggesting he set up a government in exile and gave him letters of marque to operate two privateers from Rio de Janeiro to prey on Austrian and Sardinian vessels in South American waters. [Some 35 Sardinian and 14 Austrian ships called at Rio de Janeiro every year.<sup>35</sup>] Soon three vessels, *Mazzini*, *Giovine Italia* and *Giovine Europa* were flying the Italian tricolore as they cruised in international waters. In 1834, Camillo Cavour was learning to appreciate real liberty in London. When the triumvirate emerged from the shadows to lead their various bids for Italian liberty, they were able to pluck at that sympathetic chord, struck by Bentinck, Byron, the Shelleys, Lytton, and, yes, even Felicia Hemans, in the years after Waterloo.

36. D. Mack Smith, *Mazzini*, Newhaven 1994, pp. 3, 25.

37. *Autobiography*, p. 474.

38. J. Ridley, *Garibaldi*, London 1994, p. 45.