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Edited by: **Peter Vassallo**

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The *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies* is a new interdisciplinary Journal published annually by the Institute of Anglo-Italian Studies of the University of Malta. It is devoted to current research in the history of cultural relations between England and Italy from 1300 to the present.

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Editorial correspondence to be addressed to Professor Peter Vassallo, Institute of Anglo-Italian Studies, University of Malta, Malta.

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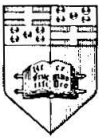

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'Absolute Milan': Two Types of Colonialism in The Tempest

Lisa Hopkins

It has very frequently been remarked that *The Tempest* is a text immediately concerned with colonialism. Sophisticated Europeans find themselves deposited on a remote island which, because its actual location is unspecified, can be taken to stand for any or all of the various territories where seventeenth-century imperialism was at work, from Ireland to America with numerous stops in between. Once there, Europeans immediately set to work to subjugate those already inhabiting the island and mercilessly to exploit them, even the virtuous Gonzalo is unable to refrain from responding to the island in thoroughgoing colonial terms, as evinced by the inherent contradictions which fissure his imagined Utopia and reveal that he is unable to think of human relationships within any framework other than a dominance/submission one, as Sebastian and Antonio point out:

Gonzalo: I'th' commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit, no name of magistrate.
Letters should not be known. Riches, poverty,
And use of service, none. Contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none.
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil.
No occupation: all men idle, all,

And women too, but innocent and pure.
No sovereignty
Sebastian: (aside to Antonio) Yet he would be king on't.
Antonio: (aside to Sebastian) The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning.[1]

The fact that Gonzalo's sentiments have derived from those of Montaigne on European encounters with the New World only adds further emphasis to the play's concern with colonialism. But while considerable critical attention has been paid to the text as representing the interface between the Old World and the New, with much commentary about what exactly Caliban represents,[2] very little has been said about the precise details of Shakespeare's representation of the culture and background of the colonisers. The assumption in general seems to have been that they are sample representatives of various aspects of European culture, seen as predominantly corrupt and degenerate but with some redeeming features in the innocence and mutual devotion of Ferdinand and Miranda.

In fact, however, what Shakespeare shows us are not random samples of generic 'Europeans' but members of two clearly labelled and highly distinctive groupings. Although they are, in the world of the play, cut off from their parent societies, this should not blind us to the fact that they originate from two very specific areas, both of which were distinguished by highly complex cultures which are directly relevant to the issues of colonialism and their depiction in the play.

The Europeans are divided into two groups: the Milanese, represented by Prospero, Duke of Milan, his daughter Miranda and his brother Antonio, and the Neapolitans, comprising Alonso, King of Naples, his son Ferdinand, his brother Sebastian, and various of his counsellors (mention is also made to the king's daughter Claribel, now Queen of Tunis). Shakespeare is often said to be lax about observing strict accuracy in his representations of

1. *The Tempest,* edited by Anne Righter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), II.i.150 – 161. All future quotations from the play will be from this edition.
2. See Alden T Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Italy: in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, notoriously, he has Proteus and Valentine sail from one land-locked city to another[3] and the names he uses for the characters in *Measure for Measure* might well lead on to suspect that he has fallen prey to the common confusion of imagining Vienna to be in Italy. In *The Tempest* however, he is surprisingly precise on a number of points. Contrary to his usual vagueness about titles – he is quite happy, for instance, to have Orsino's shift apparently at random from duke to count – he is very clear, and correct, about terming Milan a Duchy and Naples a Kingdom. Moreover, it is also notable that he draws a careful distinction in the nomenclature of the two groups: while Prospero and Antonio are clearly Italian in origin, the names of the Neapolitan characters are pointedly not so. Alonso and Ferdinand are both obviously Spanish, while Sebastian, the name of the last king of Portugal, had equally strong connections with the Iberian peninsula.

To represent the rulers of Naples as being Spanish in origin is not, however another example of Shakespeare's celebrated geographical carelessness; unlike the sea-coast of Bohemia, it has a firm foundation in fact. Naples was part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which had for centuries been a bone of contention between would-be foreign conquerors. Coveted by the French, it had eventually fallen firmly under the rule of Alfonso V of Aragon. After his death it had broken loose from the Aragonese crown, which had passed to his brother John II, and had been seized by his bastard son Ferrante, but it had still retained its strongly Aragonese feel, with its rulers being very clearly identifiable as Spanish. That this would have been a matter of reasonably common knowledge in seventeenth-century England is suggested by the fact that Webster too uses a Spanish name, Ferdinand, for the brother of the ruler of the Southern Italian duchy of Amalfi. Indeed Ferdinand is not just *any* Spanish name: it is, as Shakespeare must surely have known when he bestowed it on his hero, the name of the most celebrated Aragonese of all, Ferdinand the Catholic, who along with his wife Isabella of

3. For the inconsistencies of Shakespeare's treatment of Italian geography in this play, see *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, edited by Norman Sanders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), introduction, p 12.

Castile had united the previously separate Spanish kingdoms into one country. As the father of Catherine of Aragon, first wife of Henry VIII, Ferdinand would have enjoyed a high public profile in England (Shakespeare, who was soon to write his daughter a major role in *Henry VIII*, would certainly have known of him); and he would have been even more famous for the backing which he and his wife had given to that instigator of the colonial enterprise, Christopher Columbus. Shakespeare's Alonso and Ferdinand may, then, derive their names from the historical Alfonso and Ferrante, or the choice of Ferdinand may have been influenced by the famous king of Aragon; but in either event, a contemporary audience would have been very strongly aware of their basically Spanish identity.

As Spaniards, the characters would have been automatically associated with colonisation. The dominant aspects of Spain's public image throughout the reign of Elizabeth had been its role in the Americas, of which two aspects in particular were foremost in the general imagination: the extreme wealth which they succeeded in extracting from the Indies, mainly in the form of silver, and their equally extreme cruelty in the pursuit of it, which rapidly gave rise to what has been termed the Black Legend of Spanish savagery and rapaciousness. Nor was their brutality confined to the natives: as accounts like those of the English sailor Miles Philips, printed in Richard Hakluyt's *Voyages and Discoveries,*[4] assert, it extended also to Europeans, leading them to treat the Protestant English whom they encountered as no better than the 'heathen' indigenous inhabitants – indeed if anything rather worse, since the Indians were seen as suitable targets for evangelism, while the English, as heretics, were considered effectively beyond redemption. Spanish aggression toward other Europeans was not, however, confined to those they met in South America. Apart from the celebrated attempts to launch an Armada against England, which could in themselves be seen as a form of colonialism, and their continued occupation of the Netherlands in the face of vigorous opposition (assisted by the English), Europe afforded a glaringly obvious example of Spanish imperialism: Milan.

4. Philips' narrative can be found reprinted in Richard Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries*, edited and abridged by Jack Beeching (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; reprinted 1985).

If Naples had been fought over, Milan had been so too. Crucially situated to command the north of Italy, it had proved consistently attractive not only to the French and the Spanish, but to the Austrians and Swiss as well. When Duke Filippo Maria Visconti died in 1447, its adventures began. The Duke had no legitimate children, but he had married his bastard daughter Bianca Maria to the mercenary Francesco Sforza. With considerable help from Bianca Maria, who was a woman of spirit, Sforza took over the city, founding a dynasty which was to keep control – if somewhat precariously – for the rest of the century. But in 1494 his younger son Lodovico, known as Il Moro, was ousted by the French King Charles VIII, whom he had been foolish enough to invite into Italy to settle various factional disputes there. The French hold was consolidated by Charles' successor Louis XII, who claimed the duchy through his great-grandmother Valentina Visconti, the sister and only legitimate relative of the last Visconti duke. Despite briefly recapturing the city, Lodovico was eventually defeated and taken captive to France, where he died a prisoner in 1508. The French were, however, unable to hang on to the duchy; intervention by the Swiss and by the Emperor Maximilian I, who had married Lodovico's sister Bianca Maria, eventually succeeded in installing Lodovico's elder son Massimiliano as Duke until 1515, when Francis I of France reinvaded and expelled him; then in 1521 Massimiliano's younger brother Francesco was created Duke. This time, however, it was not by the French, Swiss or Austrians, but the Spanish, in the person of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.

Charles, who had succeeded his grandfather Maximilian at the head of the Empire, had long had designs on Milan. Accidents of birth and death had brought Charles the greatest accumulation of territory of any ruler in the history of Europe. His father, Philip the Handsome, had been the only son of Maximilian, Archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor, and of his first wife Mary of Burgundy, the heiress of the Netherlands; his mother was Juana of Castile, eldest surviving daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Juan was not the original heir of her parents' kingdoms, but death disposed of her only brother Juan, her elder sister

Isabella, and Isabella's infant son; finally, madness, brought on by the death of her husband; removed Juana herself from the succession, leaving the way clear for her elder son Charles of Ghent to take up his phenomenal inheritance of Spain, the Netherlands, and the title to America. Although it had been decided that the Austrian domains of their grandfather Maximilian should pass not to Charles but to his younger brother Ferdinand, it was nevertheless a phenomenal accumulation of lands. It was marred, however, by a fundamental problem: his two chief blocks of territory, in Spain and the Low Countries, were geographically separated by France, and the French King François I was his enemy. The only means of communication and travel between his lands was therefore the difficult and dangerous route of a long sea voyage, and the risks of this had been amply demonstrated: Charles' parents Philip and Juana, travelling from the Netherlands to Spain, had been blown off course to England and had been effectively detained by Henry VII until he had wrung from Philip agreement to a very lucrative trade deal; and his paternal aunt Margaret of Austria had narrowly escaped shipwreck while sailing from the Netherlands to Spain to become the bride of the Infante Juan. Charles, therefore, was very much aware that he urgently needed control of some form of land passage between his split dominions. Milan was the only accessible candidate. Once his backing of the military adventures of the exiled French Duke of Bourbon had guaranteed him effective control of Italy, therefore, he wasted no time in installing a puppet ruler in the Duchy to keep it firmly bound to his interest.

Shakespeare's choice of Milan and Naples as the homes of his European adventurers in *The Tempest* seems, therefore, unlikely to be accidental, and it immediately offers his audience a highly complex double perspective on the events of the play. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as making the roles of the Spanish characters much clearer: already the conquerors of Milan and Naples, they are obviously cast as hardened practitioners of imperialism. (The extent to which the control of Italy and the subjugation of South America could be perceived as analogous is interestingly suggested by a comment made by the governor of

Milan to Philip II of Spain in 1570: 'These Italians, although they are not Indians, have to be treated as such, so that they will understand that we are in charge of them and not they in charge of us').[5] The strong English awareness of Spain's Black Legend will immediately be invoked by the obviously Iberian names of the Neapolitan party, and such details as the mention of Tunis – in real life a constant preoccupation of the foreign policy of Charles V – and Argiers – a reminder of Spain's Moorish past – will only serve to confirm the strong association.

The local result of portraying the Spanish characters in this light should be to create a rush sympathy for their victims. Interestingly, however, these victims pointedly do *not* include the original inhabitants of the island, Ariel and Caliban. In the Neapolitans' dealings with Ariel, it is clearly he who is controlling them, and in Stephano's and Trinculo's dealings with Caliban there is a complexity that goes considerably beyond simple oppression. Trinculo certainly thinks in terms of exploiting him for his economic potential, commenting 'Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver' (II.2.27 – 9). And Stephano, like Cortes in Mexico, has no scruples about allowing the 'simple native' to take him for a god. He is also, however, quick to intervene to protect him from threatened ill-treatment by Trinculo, and when the three mount their plot to usurp Prospero it is Caliban who is the mastermind of the scheme. In effect, he is portrayed as collaborating in his own oppression.

The actual victims of Spanish territorial aggression and unscrupulous in *The Tempest* are other Europeans. Alone of all the characters, Prospero has a name distinctly identifiable as Italian (Antonio, fittingly enough, can also be Spanish); indeed he shares a name with the historical figures Prospero Adorno, Duke of Genoa, and Prospero Colonna, celebrated condottiere.[6] This is coupled with the information contained in the long narrative account of his earlier history offered to Miranda at the beginning

5. J.H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New 1492 – 1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; reprinted Canto, 1992), p. 82.
6. For the possible links between Prospero Adorno and the Prospero of the play, see the Arden edition of *The Tempest*, edited by Frank Kermode (London: Methuen, 1954, introduction, pp lxix – lxx).

of the play, where he is clearly labelled as the innocent victim of Spanish guile and greed. His oppressors have shown inhumanity enough to cast adrift on the waves not only him but also his three-year-old daughter, and he has been saved only through the intervention of Divine Providence (which in English eyes traditionally sided against the Spanish, as shown in the 'Protestant Wind' which dispersed the Armada). Moreover, Prospero is doubly wronged in that he and Miranda, now the inhabitants of the island, once again experience a Spanish incursion, albeit this time one that he himself has instigated. His only crimes are that, just like the historical dukes of Milan, he had possession of a piece of land that other people wanted, and that he was fond of his books. This last may serve to suggest another difference often felt to exist between the northern Italians, here represented by the Milanese, and the southern, represented by Naples; the north was generally considered to have attained the higher level of culture. This was certainly the case at the glittering court of late Sforza Milan, presided over by the glamorous and talented Duchess of Lodovico Il Moro, Beatrice d'Este, and host to that supreme creator and searcher into the secrets of nature, Leonardo da Vinci. From this point of view, it might well seem appropriate that the play presents Prospero's art pitted against the Neapolitans' superior numbers; but seen in the wider context of the colonial enterprise, it is of course most odd to find the oppressed represented as so much more highly skilled than the oppressor. The more usual situation is that seen in the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, and to a lesser extent in that between Prospero and Ariel, where it is the incomer's superior powers and abilities which allow him to achieve mastery over the existing inhabitants. But this trait of Prospero's serves significantly to reinforce the impression already created by his presentation as both civilised European and victim of Spanish land-hunger: it marks him out as effectively analogous to the English themselves.

Englishmen involved in the colonial enterprise were not only fewer in number than the Spanish, they were notably less successful. Many of them, like Drake, Hawkins and Thomas Cavendish, died making their attempts, and the whole of Sir

Walter Raleigh's ill-fated colony at Roanoke seems to have perished. It may, however, have been some consolation to them that they also suffered from far less soul-searching than the Spanish did. There was no English equivalent of Las Casas, or even of Montaigne: English writing on the colonial enterprise inevitably presents it in positive terms, and indeed as intimately linked to the expression of a fundamentally and laudably British identity, as with Dr John Dee's attempts to promote the myth of Madoc, the Welsh prince claimed to have discovered America, or Spenser's rabid fulminations against the Irish. This is at least in part because the narrative of English colonial adventures already had an unshakeable candidate for the role of villain in the Spanish, and so evinced no ambivalence about casting its own practitioners firmly in the role of heroes. This can perhaps explain some of the callousness present in accounts like those of Frobisher's voyages,[7] with their brutal indifference to the indigenous inhabitants' suffering: for the firm equation in the British mentality between oppression and the Spanish effectively precluded the perception of Britons' own acts as similarly tainted. The equation between the Milanese colonialism of *The Tempest* and historical English colonialism would, of course, be facilitated by audiences' awareness that the play was indebted to the narrative of the adventures of the English vessel The Sea Venture.

The use of Italian and Spanish characters, then, enables *The Tempest* to offer a sharply differentiated double perspective on colonialism. On the one hand, the greed and even the mind-sets of the Spanish-derived Neapolitans could be roundly condemned; but the Milanese origins of Prospero mean that it is not the indigenous inhabitants of tropical islands whom we are invited to pity – Caliban, the nearest we see to an original inhabitant, is a murderous rapist – but other Europeans. Ultimately, the narrative of the play massively privileges what happens to Prospero over what happens to Caliban; indeed, we are never in fact told the end of Caliban's story. The point will be still further driven home if we adopt the old romantic view and see Prospero as being in fact a type of Shakespeare who was retiring from his profession.

7. Reprinted in *Voyages and Discoveries*.

The Tempest, in short, can be seen as inviting its audience not to condemn colonialism, but to condemn *Spanish* colonialism, of which Europeans are seen as being the principal victims. What Prospero does – and by implication, I have tried to argue, what the English themselves do – is presented as being so fundamentally different as to be utterly immune to the strictures proper to the Spaniards' acts.

"Observation, with Extensive View"? English-Italian Travel Narratives, 1700 – 1820

Jack Lynch

Italy was central in English imaginary geography throughout the eighteenth century, whether as a mandatory stop on a routine Grand Tour or a Napoleonic-era *locus amoenus* of radical utopian escapism: the British public consumed a continuous and constantly growing diet of travel accounts about Italy throughout the century and well into the next. The catalogue of travel narratives largely or entirely about Italy stretches across the century not only chronologically but also temperamentally, comprehending those traditionally labeled both Augustan and Romantic.[1] Italian travels provide, therefore, an exceptional opportunity to explore some of the characteristic uses of travel narratives in eighteenth-century England.

Johnson's famous description of "the use of travelling" appears prominently in many accounts of the eighteenth-century travel narrative: the traveler's design, he says, is "to regulate

1. Tony Bareham writes of "foreign locations serving as correlatives of inner spiritual landscapes" in the major Romantics, but can discern "not much evidence" – only traces – of the attitude in most of the eighteenth century. See *All Before Them (English Literature and the Wider World*, vol. I, 1660 – 1780), ed. John McVeagh (London and Ashfield Highlands, N.J.: Ashfield Press, 1990), p. 247.

imagination by reality."[2] This Johnsonian ideal is throughouly Lockean; it involves the accumulation of experience on the mind's *tabula rasa*. But Johnson's devotion to empiricism, sincere though it may be, has been read into much of the work of his contemporaries, and critics of eighteenth-century travel accounts have perhaps too credulously accepted Johnson's attitudes as representative of his entire age. The result is that this bias toward the Lockean justification of travel is by now a critical commonplace for nearly all travel narratives of the period.[3] The undiminished popularity of these Italian accounts makes for a useful test case of this Lockean hypothesis, the importance of which, I suggest here, has often been overestimated.

In practice we often see not Johnson's rule but its reverse, the regulation of reality by imagination. Actual travel is a considerably more regular, even regulated, activity than the usual

2. *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992–94), II, 78. For Johnson on travel, see Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson and the Age of Travel* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1976), esp. pp. 113–46; Christopher Brooks, "Johnson's Insular Mind and the Analogy of Travel: *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*," *Essays in Literature*, 18 (1991), 21–36. McVeagh, p. 19; Alison Hickey, "'Extensive Views' in Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*," *Studies in English Literature*, 32 (1992), 537–53; Deidre Lunch, "'Beating the Track of the Alphabet': Samuel Johnson, Tourism, and the ABCs of Modern Authority," *ELH*, 57 (1990), 357–405; Paul J. Korshin, "'Extensive View': Johnson and Boswell as Travelers and Observers," in McVeagh, pp. 233–45.

3. See, for example, Paul Fussell: "Perhaps the curious awareness of travel in the eighteenth century was due in part to the unquestioned acceptance of the physiological theory of John Locke ... Travel, therefore, became something like an obligation for the person conscientious about developing the mind and accumulating knowledge ... *Observation* becomes virtually a duty" (*The Norton Book of Travel*, ed. Paul Fussell [New York: Norton, 1987], pp. 129–30). Other critics are equally convinced of the empiricist rationale: Ingrid Kuczynski suggests "any travel description [is] based on the encounter of an individual with a hitherto unknown and alien world" ("*Letters from Rome*: Two Ways of Perceiving Reality," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 264 [1989], 1084–87, p. 1084). See also McVeagh's Introduction, p. 7. Laurence Sterne himself, without invoking Locke's name, says travel's purpose is "shewing us new objects, or old ones in new lights, to reform our judgements" (Sermon V, in *Sterne*, ed. Douglas Grant [London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1950], p. 681). Jeremy Black suggests Lockeanism fell prey to "Continental culture" ("Tourism and Cultural Challenge: The Changing Scene of the Eighteenth Century," in McVeagh, p. 188).

empiricist explanation suggests. Foreign journeys of course provided opportunities to gain experience, but experience was to be accumulated only in certain ways, ways that did not threaten to upset conventional habits of perception and cognition. Travel, in fact, if we can believe the accounts of the eighteenth century was not so much the accumulation of new experience as the reinforcement of traditional means of understanding. One Englishman in Italy expresses the paradox neatly, if perhaps unconsciously, when he ends his *View of Society and Manners in Italy* (1781) with the famous verse of Horace's eleventh epistle: "Coelum [*sic*] non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt,"[4] a curious conclusion to an ostensibly Lockean pursuit.

1

The strict conventionality of the route of the Grand Tour, including its Italian leg, has often been noted.[5] One common route took the traveler across the Alps, through Turin and Milan to Venice, thence to Florence and Rome, followed by an excursus to Naples and perhaps Sicily – and even the British pride in independence of thought would admit few departures from the traditional itinerary. Nor is the route alone settled: emotional reactions themselves run in deep ruts. Hester Lynch Piozzi salutes the strict emotional orthodoxy enforced by the Alps in her *Observations and Reflections:*

> We have at length passed the Alps ... Surely the immediate sensation conveyed to the mind by the sight of such tremendous appearances must be in every traveller the same.[6]

Other travel accounts bear her out, for the sensations do seem in every traveller the same, and not only the same, but perfectly predictable *a priori.* "Italy, at last," she notes when she arrives in Florence, "is only a fine well-known academy figure, from

4. John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy: WIth Anecdotes Relating to Some Eminent Characters,* 2 vols. (London, 1781), II, 502.
5. See, for instance, McVeagh, Introduction, p. 12.
6. Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany,* ed. Herbert Barrows (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 20.

which we all sit down to make drawings" (pp. 146–47). Such set-pieces turn up throughout the travel writing of the period, and they develop their own traditions that have little to do with collecting experience and everything to do with the conventionality of art: it would never have occurred to Smollett, for instance, to liken the Uffizi palace to "the form of the Greek Π"[7] in his travel book had not Addison made exactly the same comparison sixty-one years earlier.[8]

This almost literary conventionality of route and reaction, not surprisingly, shows up in other literary ways. No one sees Italy for the first time: every traveler who sets foot on Italian soil brings with him the accumulated experience of both classical writers and previous travelers, and if the mind is to be figured as a *tabula*, it must be one already thoroughly marked up. This is to be expected among the educated classes; Addison makes explicit the literary baggage that accompanies any eighteenth-century man of learning[9] on the Grand Tour:

> I have taken care particularly to consider the several Passages of the Ancient Poets, which have any Relation to the Places or Curiosities that I met with: For before I enter'd on my Voyage I took care to refresh my Memory among the *Classic* Authors, and to make such Collections out of 'em as I might afterwards have Occasion for. (sig. $A4^{r}-A4^{v}$)

A century later John Chetwode Eustace, another classically educated Italian tourist, suggests in his advice for young travelers that "Virgil and Horace, Cicero and Livy, ought to be the inseparable companions of all travellers."[10] Addison, Smollett, and Eustace ostensibly set out to explore Italy, but instead explore their own minds. What they find there – not surprisingly, given their educations and occupations, is the very authors whose volumes fill their libraries at home.

7. Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, ed. Frank Felsenstein (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 224.
8. Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London, 1705), p. 236.
9. In spite of the importance of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Hester Thrale Piozzi, the term *man of learning* is appropriate for most of the century; until Lady Anna Riggs Miller's *Letters from Italy* in 1776, only men published their Italian travels.
10. John Chetwode Eustace, *A Classical Tour Through Italy, an. MDCCCII*, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (London, 1815), I, 4.

2

The result is that Italy is seen not *with* but *through* these writers: it is as though experience is inaccessible in raw form, and is comprehensible only when filtered through a literary lens. This literary habit comes to dominate every description, every reaction, and travel writing becomes not writing about travel, but writing about writing. Nearly every page of Lady Sydney Morgan's travel account,[11] for instance, is adorned with footnotes documenting every generalization in other literature, a curious habit in a genre ostensibly based on personal observation: observation is not enough, and experience must be referred to the text. Thus where one expects factual descriptions of landscapes, one finds quotations from Strabo; Italian manners are represented with tags from Horace or Petrarch; Italian history is mute without Dante and Ariosto. The smallest natural detail invokes a literary mood: for Eustace, "a solitary laurel" cannot fail to recall the glory of ancient poetry (I, 190). Even the visual arts are abstracted into literature: the gallery descriptions that appear in nearly every travel book are almost always accompanied by literary tags for each major work. Lady Morgan assimilates painting to drama when Michelangelo's "Three Fates" in the Pitti Palace become Shakespeare's weird sisters (II, 132). "The sweetly playful pencil of Albano," says Piozzi, "I would compare to Waller among our English poets; Domenichino to Otway, and Guido Reni to Rowe; if such liberties might be permitted on the old notion of *ut pictura poesis*" (p. 127). Piozzi is actually relying on the considerably newer notion of *ut poesis pictura,* translating painters into wordless writers.

Locke's, then, may not be the most appropriate epistemological analogue. Literary experience becomes almost a Kantian pure intuition, a means of rendering experience comprehensible, without which perception is impossible. Italy, more than any other country in Europe, is steeped in literary traditions; every city swarms with literary associations,[12] and these associations

11. Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (London, 1821).

12. F.E. Sabin, *Classical Associations of Places in Italy* (Madison, Wis.: privately published, 1921) is by now thoroughly antiquated, but useful for its encyclopedic catalogue of ancient commonplaces.

crowd out direct access to the world they presume to describe. Addison admits that

> it was not one of the least Entertainments that I met with in Travelling, to examine these several Descriptions, as it were, upon the Spot, and to compare the Natural Face of the Country with the Landskips that the Poets have given us of it. (sig. A4^{v})

But he gives us little of the comparison and much of the poets' accounts. He could almost have written the book without ever venturing abroad.

This referring of experience back to literary forerunners shows up in countless travel narratives, in which previous authors make their presence felt on nearly every page. Among the many literary influences on travel narratives, the most obvious are earlier travel writers, often from the great age of Italian travel in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[13] Addison acknowledges his literary precursors, and becomes himself a powerful influence on later writers. Piozzi's literary predecessors are legion: even among her acquaintances she could number the travel writers Johnson, Boswell, Baretti, and Charles Burney, and she refers to Brydone, Chesterfield, Hamilton, and Addison himself in her book.

But previous travel writers are often only tacit influences, while other allusions are trumpeted. The most common associations in the early eighteenth century are classical, and Addison's Italy, for instance, is a strictly classical one. His book opens with a broadside of Roman authors: the epigraph comes from Cicero; as soon as the volume starts there appear quotations from Horace, Virgil (both the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*), Lucan, Claudian, Tibullus, Ausonius, even Silius Italicus, – all within the

13. See, for example, Jonathan Haynes, *The Humanist as Traveler: George Sandy's "Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610"* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1986); *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions,* ed. Mario A. Di Cesare (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991); A. Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travellers: The Italian Influence on Englishmen in the Seventeenth Century* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1964); and, though long out of date, H. Neville Muagham, *The Book of Italian Travel (1580 – 1900)* (London: G. Richards; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1903). See also Jeremy Black, *The English Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 3 – 4, for a discussion of some of these Renaissance influences in the eighteenth century.

first ten pages. Classical quotations can run for hundreds of lines, and it is rare to turn more than a page or two without meeting at least a dozen Latin verses. Eustace's *Classical Tour* traces the same literary track: "The epithet *Classical* sufficiently points out its peculiar character, which is to trace the resemblance between Modern and Ancient Italy, and to take for guides and companions in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the writers that preceded or adorned the first" (I, vi). He uses his tour as an excuse to copy out the literature of antiquity from his commonplace book: "Citations ... may here be introduced or even lavished, without censure; they rise spontaneously from the soil we tread, and constitute one of its distinguishing beauties" (I, vii).

For these writers, travel through space is also travel through time, as modern Italy becomes a locus of Roman (and sometimes even Greek) classical ideals. This flight into the past appears particularly in those travelers disdainful of modern politics. Eustace's motivation is clear; his "horror and detestation" (I, xvii) at revolutionary French rule forces the reactionary to seek ancient refuge:

> Modern History is not *Classical* ... As for the forms of government established in many provinces by the present French rulers, they are generally passed over in silence and contempt, as shifting scenes or rather mere *figurati* in the political drama, destined to occupy the attention for a time, and to disappear when the principal character shows himself upon the stage. (I, vii – viii)

Actual observation is here actively resisted, turned into a temporary aberration, in favor of reinforcing long-standing mental habits formed through decades of English education. This distaste for the unclassical (and therefore unliterary) modern appears on every page of his guide, even in the smallest details such as his resolution, in referring to the names of cities, "to use the ancient apellation if not irrecoverably lost in the modern" (I, x).

Though the rhetoric of the travel writers suggests Italy itself creates these associations – Eustace, quoted above, would have it that quotations "rise spontaneously from the soil" – it soon becomes clear that the relationship is reversed: Italy is not the

projector but the screen, onto which English travelers project their own magic lantern shows. What Italy cannot provide will be forced onto it, for travel is not Johnson's "Observation, with extensive view," but an opportunity for introspection. Empiricist observation is often mentioned and even advertised, but it serves largely as an excuse for the educated to explore their minds already well stocked with books.

3

This literary habit demands a strictly conventional response in those who see Italy, a reaction we can predict before the travel writer even leaves for Dover. The border crossing into Italy always invokes a meditation on the ancients: the traveler pauses at the border to speculate on the antique resonances. "When for the first time the traveller beholds the beauties of an Italian prospect expanded before him," says Eustace, "he may be allowed to indulge a momentary enthusiasm, and hail Italy in the language of Virgil" (I, 127 – 28). Even the splenetic Smollett takes a break from his habitual grousing for a literary association when the crossing into Italy recalls "the very classical ground which had been the scene of so many great achievements" (p. 195).

Though "great achievements" are always on the mind of the English tourist, the only traces these deeds have left are literary, as Lady Morgan observes:

> Mutius Scaevola, and his burning hand, Quintus Curtius, and his headlong leap, Cloelia, and her aquatic venture, Virginius, and his ferocious independence, Brutus, and his patriot steel – rise on the imagination, together with the Scipios, and the Catos, Pompey, Antony, Caesar, and Cicero ... [But] of these men, ... no trace in stone or tower, not a wreck, remains. (p. 330)

History is thus transformed into poetry, for only poetry survives – and it survives in plenty. Nearly every major city on the Grand Tour has its classical poet, and a conventional literary piety demands one meditate on Pliny the Younger by the Lago di Como,[14] doff one's cap to Virgil in Mantua, and stand in mute

14. See, for instance, Lady Morgan, I, 299.

wonder at the entire literary pantheon on the approach to Rome. One would be hard pressed to find a literate eighteenth-century traveler who does not invoke the sixth book of the *Aeneid* on the shores of Avernus.

The often-noted change in sensibility in travel books after mid-century may be due in part to a change in literary models. Post-classical Italian poetry was little known in England in the early eighteenth century, a deficiency Moore notes when he points out that many parts of Italy "interest us more on account of their having been the residence of the old Romans, than from the regard we pay to what has been transacted there during the last fourteen or fifteen centuries" (I, 69). But by the early years of the nineteenth century most observers can see in the Italian landscape the imprints of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Tasso, and Ariosto. Dante made Florence a must-see stop on every Grand Tour, especially after Henry Cary's 1805 *Inferno* translation, and Susannah Dobson's 1775 *Life of Petrarch* made his haunts favorites with British tourists. Lady Morgan is eager to see Petrarch's birthplace in Arezzo and his residence in Pavia, and she finds in another Italian Renaissance poet a rival to even the ancients:

> There is a glory attached to the melancholy ruins of Reggio, greater than any which the associations of antiquity have bestowed upon it. A gentleman of Ferrara, ... having been enamoured of a beautiful girl of Reggio, ... married her. The first fruit of this marriage was Ludovico Ariosto! In Reggio, his childhood "lisped in numbers." (I, 485)

This interest in medieval and Renaissance Italy is a defining characteristic of writers later in this period. Italy never lost its classical associations – they were alive as well at least through the 1820s – but to them were added echoes of Italy's post-Roman history.

4

Addison, mostly ignorant of the Italian Renaissance, contentedly confines himself to the ancients, but others look beyond Italy to the English Renaissance for further analogues. This begins to

suggest one of the central paradoxes of Italian travel: Italy, praised for its exocitism, is thoroughly Briticized through its literary associations and transformed into a curio cabinet stocked with only the most familiar items. As reverence for Shakespeare passed from this to the other side of idolatry, for instance, the Italian landscape took on Shakespearean associations, particularly in Venice and Verona, to a degree that far overshadowed Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso. Piozzi reveals the habit of Shakespearean literary association in Venice:

> To an English traveller each place presents ideas originally suggested by Shakespear, of whom nature and truth are the perpetual mirrors: ... the scenes of life itself remind one of Shakespear. When I first looked on the Rialto, with what immediate images did it supply me? Oh, the old long-cherised images of the pensive merchant, the generous friend the gay companion, and their final triumph over the practices of a cruel Jew. (p. 115)

Shakespeare might be paired with other important figures of the English Renaissance. Lady Morgan indulges in only slight hyperbole when she insists that

> There is nothing of beautiful or sublime, in Italian scenery, that may not be found more beautiful and sublime in the scenic descriptions of the Paradise Lost! There is nothing characteristic in habit or manner, or in the natural and national physiognomy of the Italians, that is not touched off with a master's hand in the delightful Italian comedies of Shakespeare! (II, 360).

She points to Milton, whose place is second only to Shakespeare's in the English pantheon. His early verse is quoted most often – indolent Pisan peasants, for instance, remind Piozzi of *Comus* (p. 178) – but *Paradise Lost* will do for epic mood when Virgil cannot come through. Mr Piozzi caught his wife's attention when he entered into a debate with friends on whether the autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa – apparently wooded with evergreens – are really strewn thickly (p. 164). For Lady Morgan Milton is a particularly good emblem of English interests for his anti-Catholicism (as in *Lycidas*, cited on II, 384) and his commitment to republicanism.

Other English Renaissance writers such as Spenser and Browne are cited, if less often, but more recent British writers can provide their own associations. Moore thinks of Otway when he arrives in Venice, and a miniature castle on an island in a garden pond makes him think, "I no sooner entered this fort, than I wished that Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim had been of our party; it would have charmed the soul of the worthy veteran and his faithful servant" (II, 306). He likewise asserts things British over things Italian by pitting Virgil's praises of the Po against the Thames, as celebrated in panegyrics by Pope and Denham (I, 282ff). Pope is also a favorite of Lady Morgan, along with Dryden and Thomson.

Swift is a surprising but ubiquitous presence in English travel writing: even though Swift's only "travel" is fictional, Gulliver accompanies nearly every Briton abroad.[15] Swift was among the first to show the British the satirical possibilities of the travel narrative, a lesson Smollett took to heart:

> It is diverting to hear an Italian expatiate upon the greatness of modern Rome. He will tell you there are above three hundred palaces in the city; that there is scarce a Roman prince, whose revenue does not exceed two hundred thousand crowns; and that Rome produces not only the most learned men, but also the most refined politicians in the universe. To one of them talking in this strain, I replied, that instead of three hundred palaces, the number did not exceed fourscore; that ... there was not six individuals in Rome who had so much as forty thousand crowns a year, about ten thousand pounds sterling; and that to say their princes were so rich, and their politicians so refined, was, in effect, a severe satire upon them, for not employing their wealth and their talents for the advantage of their country. (p. 249)

McCarthy glosses this acutely: "This is Smollett-as-King-of-Brobdingnag, or as 'my Master Houyhnhnm,' putting to some poor local Gulliver the questions that expose his pitiable pretentions" (p. 152). Nor are the Swift references confined to Gulliver: Piozzi, noticing curious similarities to Calvinism in the

15. See William McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 150 – 52.

priests at Ferrara, observes that "Extremes do certainly meet, ... and my Lord Peter in this place is so like his fanatical brother Jack, that I know not what is come to him" (p. 129). "Some lines on the death of Laura" in the margins of a Virgil manuscript, supposedly in Petrarch's hand, recall for Lady Morgan "Swift's affecting note on the death of Stella" (I, 150).

The literary adoration bestowed on Petrarch's marginalia extends to all things bookish, concentrating on the very materiality of books themselves. Libraries are as important as art galleries and ruins for any cultured tourist; Lady Morgan's eight-page rapture on the Biblioteca Ambrosiana is perfectly typical. According to Eustace, Venice – which wants classical associations – derives its reputation largely from Aldus Manutius (I, 165), and Lady Morgan attributes Parma's fame to Bodoni, whose work is "scarcely inferior to any of the productions of modern art" (I, 482).

5

We have seen how some resolutely classical writers (such as Eustace) are able to reject empiricism in their passion for giving the book of Italy an organic unity that depends on nothing so messy as political actuality by turning to the Roman classics. But some travelers looked for empirical rationalizations for their bookishly introspective accounts, for more "natural" reasons the country seemed so thoroughly literary. One common justification for the literariness of travel narratives is the inherent and natural literacy of the Italian people themselves. Addison picks up the *topos* from Ausonius, whose verses on the Milanese he translates: "The people, bless'd by Nature's happy force,/Are eloquent and cheerful in discourse" (quoted in Piozzi, p. 39). Moore marvels at the "uncommon share of natural sagacity and acuteness" (I, 460) in the Italian character, revealed in the "practice of rehearsing the verses of Ariosto, Tasso, and other poets, in the street" (II, 189), and attributes the wonderful powers of the improvisatori to the nature of their language: "Italian is peculiarly calculated for poetry, and ... verses may be made with more facility in this than in any other language" (II, 195). It appears too in Piozzi:

> The manner of the men here are certainly pleasing to a very eminent degree, and in their conversation there is a mixture ... of classical allusions ... Yet is there no pedantry in their use of expressions: ... Roman notions here are not quite extinct. (p. 38)

"Nobody dreams of cultivating conversation at all – *as an art,*" she says. "*Here* no man lies awake in the night for vexation that he missed recollecting the last line of a Latin epigram till the moment of application was lost" (p. 92). Literary wit is always on the tip of the Italian's tongue, whether peasant or scholar: "At Venice the men of literature and fashion speak with the same accent, and I believe the same quick turns of expression as their Gondolier, and the coachman in Milan talks no broader than the Countess" (p. 161). This natural literacy permeates even the most pedestrian transactions: "They christen their boys *Fabius*, their daughters *Claudia,* very commonly. When they mention a thing known, as we say, to *Tom o'Styles and John o'Nokes*, they use the words, *Tizio and Sempronio*" (p. 38), marvels Piozzi, though why the classical Italian Fabius and Claudia should be more impressive than the biblical English David and Susan, she does not say. In Venice, she recalls the rumors "that the Venetian gondoliers sing Tasso and Ariosto's verses in the streets at night" (p. 89), but is skeptical.

> But hark! while I am writing this peevish reflection in my room, I hear some voices under my window answering each other upon the Grand Canal. It is, it *is* the gondolieri sure enough; they are at this moment singing to an odd sort of tune, but in no unmusical manner, the flight of Erminia from Tasso's Jerusalem. Oh, how pretty! how pleasing! (pp. 89 – 90)

6

Even the most introspective accounts must reckon with great events in the larger world. Given a literary people in a literary land it is not surprising to see the treatment of politics subsumed under literary rubrics. Lady Morgan gets into the spirit when she begins her volume with a history of Italy, culminating with "the crash of distant thunders, such as the Capitoline Jupiter ... had never fulminated," a crash "heard bursting over the eternal

summits of the guardian Alps" – the fanfare announces in mythological and dramatic terms the glorious entrance of Napoleon onto the European stage.

Piozzi, writing in 1789, before the Napoleonic wars, provides a different sort of example:

Chatting freely one day before dinner with some literary friends on the subject of coat armour, we had talked about the Visconti serpent, which is the arms of Milan; and the spread eagle of Austria: ... when the conversation insensibly turned on the oppressions of the present hour; and I, to put all away with a joke, proposed the *sortes Homericae* to decide on their future destiny. Somebody in company insisted that *I* should open the book – I did so, at the omen in the twelfth book of the Iliad, and read these words:

> Jove's bird on sounding pinions beat the skies:
> A bleeding serpent of enormous size
> His talons trussed; alive and curling round
> She stung the bird, whose throat receiv'd the wound
> Mad with the smart he drops the fatal prey,
> In airy circles wings his painful way,
> Floats on the winds, and rends the heavens with cries:
> Amid the hosts the fallen serpent lies:
> They, pale with terror, mark its spires unroll'd,
> And Jove's portent with beating hearts behold. (pp. 44 – 45)

We can be justly skeptical of the the truth of her account and unimpressed with the subtlety of the allegory; the simultaneous politicization of the text and the textualization of politics remain striking. The *sortes Vergilianae* and *sortes Biblicae* refer the lived world to the text, and provide a fitting emblem of the literary means of seeing the world. The world of observation is interpreted in terms of only the most familiar models.

Lady Morgan, a republican partisan, imagines liberty itself in literary terms. Even when she was writing, in 1820, she laments that "no Italian press dare give vent to a production, in which beautiful poetry is made the vehicle of liberal sentiments" (I, 180). This has been the case throughout Italian history, since the downfall of republican Rome: political oppression renders literature impossible.

> The domestic history of Italy is a perpetual struggle of the people against the feudal tyrants, the Popes, and the Emperors: what story then, in the middle ages, could a poet have taken for his theme, and pleased his patron Princes? (I, 176)

Tragic poetry becomes lifeless and unoriginal, and is forced to resort to metaphoric encryptions of history into literary commonplace: "Woe to the muse that wept the wrongs of Italy!" – For 'Sophonisba,' or 'Orestes', she might drop tears of blood; but for Italy she dared not utter an apostrophe" (I, 178). Thus Milton's unique symbolic power arises from his political situation: the greatest ancient works of art, she says, "were produced under the influence of liberty, and .... the artists of Greece and Italy, like the Miltons and Lockes of England, belonged to the highest state of political freedom that the world was then acquainted with" (II, 171).

This political turmoil shows off a tension that emerges in the nineteenth century. The literary habit, so unconscious in Addison as to seem natural and inevitable, becomes threatened over time.[16] The conventionality of literary description becomes exposed, and the upheavals in Italy render Eustace's flight into antiquity impossible for most travel writers.

Lady Morgan's treatment of the conventional material is unusual in its self-consciousness, in full view even at the opening of her voyage. "The passage of the Alps," she notes, "from Hannibal to Napoleon, has always been described as awful and terrific; as something worse 'Than fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceived' " (p.33). Milton provides the mood for her description of the foothills of the Alps, "which appear to the morbid perceptions of exhausted nature – 'An universe of death, which God by curse/Created evil, for evil only good'" (p.32). These are the literary echoes in her mind as she prepares for her crossing: "Impressed with all this perilous imagery, which the last book of travels, looked into over night, had revived in my memory, it was a dreary thing to rise with the dawn ... Beaver swathings! reeling porters! frozen precipices! young wolves! and dislocated carriages on mules' backs, were predominating ideas" (pp. 35 – 36).

16. Black suggests the same trend, and notes increasing interest in the Italian countryside: "It was no longer necessary for a mountain, waterfall, or lake to have been mentioned by Virgil or Livy for it to attract tourists" (in McVeagh, p. 200).

At this point we are thoroughly set up for a literary journey straight out of romance. But Morgan uncharacteristically and surprisingly regulates imagination by reality:

> Descending to the inn-yard to begin our journey, we found our carriage undisturbed, with four post-horses, and two smart póstillions ... A post-horse, or a barrack, disputed the site with the bears and wolves; and the rapidity of the whole passage rendered beaver swathings, or any other extraordinary precautions against cold, unneccessary. All that had been danger, difficulty, and suffering, but twenty years back, was now safe, facile, and enjoyable; secure beyond the reach of thought. (pp. 36 – 37).

This ironic deflation of literary expectation becomes characteristic of some nineteenth-century travel accounts, as the conventions are exposed and actuality begins to intrude upon the literary imagination – the very imagination that renders travel bearable. Some were able to stave off this intrusive reality. The debate over whether the Pisatello (in Cesenate) or the Lusa (in Rimini) is "the true Rubicon", for example, is a concern of Moore (I, 314); the citizens of Cesenate hold the traditional title, but "the people of Rimini have had the malice to endeavour to deprive them of this satisfaction." "I have considered this controversy with all the attention it merits," says Moore, who manages to keep his literary credulity intact: "It is a matter of no importance to me which of the rivers is the real Rubicon, for we had the honour of passing *both* in our way to Rimini" (I, 314 – 15). But others were not so fortunate. Thinking of the Virgil manuscript supposedly by Petrarch, Lady Morgan laments that

> In this age of literary scepticism, when it is doubted if Pope was a poet, and Petrarch a lover, the learned and disputatious refuse to admit *this* Virgil as being Petrarch's; ... sentimental credulity is thus deprived of one of those gratifications for which it travels so far, and pays so much to enjoy. (I, 150)

Equally painful is to see the authenticity of the Venus de Medicis challenged:

> It belongs to this age of anti-beau-idealism, that even the Venus which has been eulogized, from Pliny to Byron, in an unbroken series of raptures, should fall ... into the unsparing hands of science.
>
> (II, 173 – 74)

Those unsparing hands are turning up evidence that the statue is a gallimaufry of miscellaneous pieces of statuary, and threaten to break the series of raptures into shattered marble ruins.

This enforced modern skepticism troubles Lady Morgan on her approach to Rome:

> Happy are they, who, undisturbed by historic doubts, unseduced by novel views, remain fixed in the orthodoxy of history, as of religion; and ... tread the beaten track with self-complacent pride, heedless of that scepticism. (II, 328)

Only through such orthodoxy can the intellectual benefits of travel be preserved. But for Lady Morgan this is no longer possible, and her self-consciousness is sometimes not far from the anxiety of influence, as is evident on the very title page; the book's epigraph comes from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and reads,

> We travellers are in very hard circumstances. If we say nothing but what has been said before us, we are dull, and have observed nothing. If we tell any thing new, we are laughed at as a fabulous and romantic. (t.p.)

A century after Addison it has become nearly impossible to maintain the conventions in good faith. Lady Morgan shows a characteristically modern disgust with what has since become a universal experience of travelers on her quest for Petrarch's birthplace:

> When we arrived at the spot where we were assured the *Casa Petrarca* still stood, we found instead of its venerable and antiquated walls, a spick and span new pert-looking building, which very much resembled a Brighton lodging-house. We scarcely waited to read the inscription over the door, which indicated that there had stood the *Casa Petrarca*, &c. &c. (ii, 286)

But the deflation of literary expectation, though it constitutes a powerful and threatening undercurrent to several Italian travel accounts, is really only an exception that proves the literary rule. Such scenes stand out precisely because they violate the patterns of literary conventionality established not only within a work but between works, in the entire genre of travelogue itself. Far from being Johnson's Lockean means of accumulating experience, Italian travels are literary journeys that struggle against any attempted regulation of imagination by reality – not exploration but tenaciously maintained introspection. "Caelum non animum mutant," we might say, "qui fabulas viarum legunt" – They change climates but not their minds who read travel narratives.

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 sboccerà, 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 synonym[2] 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 people[4] 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,* I° 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 recommendatory 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 Rienzo[52] 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 praevalebit* 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 churches[68] 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 occasion[73] 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.

Linking England to Italy: The Brownings' Poetry of the Risorgimento

Matthew Reynolds

Italy seemed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning a nation of minor poets. She wrote of the Florentines during the 1848 revolution:

> They are an amiable, refined, graceful people, with much of the artistic temperament as distinguished from that of men of genius – effeminate, no, rather *feminine* in a better sense – of a fancy easily turned into an impulse, but with no strenuous and determinate strength in them. [1]

Her response to the Risorgimento was shaped by her feeling for her own verse; and both, I will suggest, were governed by the idea of a marriage between Italy and England.[2] In the above quotation the strenuous and determinate strength which must be

1. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 2 vols, ed. F.G. Kenyon (1897), i, p. 388.
2. Critics have noted that Barrett Browning found in the Risorgimento a parallel for her own poetic agenda. See Deborah Byrd, 'Combating an Alien Tyranny: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Evolution as a Feminist Poet,' *Browning Institute Studies*, vol. 15 (1987), pp. 23 – 41; and Sandra Gilbert, 'From *Patria* to *Matria*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Risorgimento,' *PMLA*, vol. 99 (1984), pp. 194 – 209.

grafted on to Italy's feminine temperament in order to make of it a genius – one capable of writing that great poem in action which would be the unification of Italy – is implicitly both masculine and Anglo-Saxon. At the end of *The Ring and the Book*, Robert Browning paid tribute to his wife's work, 'linking our England to ... Italy;' that linkage occurred not only in Barrett Browning's partisan engagement with the Italian cause, or in the union between the half-Italian Aurora and the wholly English Romney in *Aurora Leigh,* but also in the structure and versification of some of her poetry. Her husband's agreements and differences with her on the subject of Italian politics also make themselves felt in the detailed texture of his writing.

Barrett Browning's understanding of the Risorgimento echoes her own struggle for liberty and unification. In *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), written mostly during her courtship, she had imagined herself as a subject people: she calls her future husband 'king;' avows 'I love thee freely, as men strive for Right', and declares 'if *thou* invite me forth, / I rise above abasement at the word.' In *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851), her poem about the 1848 – 9 revolution in Florence, it appears that Italy too is in need of a strong husband: the country lacks 'muscular stuff,' 'Saxon souls or thews;' 'O unfound / And sovereign teacher ... we bid thee rise up from the ground,' she exclaims; and as she was later to write of Napoleon III, 'if we had had such a man in Italy, Italy would have stood upright, but no such man was sent.'[3] An inspiring leader would have given her adoptive country the power to throw off Austrian hegemony in the same way as she herself, after her wedding to Robert Browning, had managed to escape from the domestic tyranny of her father's household in Wimpole Street.

Italy needed such a leader, she felt, because its people lacked the strength of purpose to realise their ideal: in terms of the letter which I quote above, they were quick to turn 'fancy' into 'impulse,' but were incapable of developing that beginning into the coherent movement which was necessary if Austria and its

3. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford 1836 – 54,* 3 vols, eds Meredith B. Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan (Winfield 1983), iii, p. 352.

client régimes were to be defeated. In this, the country suffered from a difficulty which Barrett Browning had encountered in her own poetic endeavours. 'The great chasm between the thing I say, & the thing I would say, would be quite dispiriting to me ... if the desire did not master the despondency,' she had written in 1845. and in *Casa Guidi Windows* a similar feeling is attributed to Italy: 'a noble people who, being greatly vexed / In act, in aspiration keep undaunted.'[4] Five years later those lines were echoed by Aurora Leigh, a character who is in many ways a figure for Barrett Browning herself, as she responds to the contention that women cannot write great poetry: 'perhaps a woman's soul / Aspires, and not creates: yet we aspire, / And yet I'll try out your perhapses, sir.'[5] When Aurora begins to fulfil her creative aspiration the words which Barrett Browning wrote for her again hark back to *Casa Guidi Windows*: 'I felt My heart's life throbbing in my verse to show / It lived,' she says, her pulse echoing the rhythm which earlier had brought hope to Italy: 'life throbs in noble Piedmont!'[6]

Barrett Browning was not alone in finding such correspondences between poetry and the condition of Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* for example, was to comment in 1859 that 'the existing state of Europe, and the present aspect of civilisation, are ... undoubtedly adverse to the genius, no less than to the frailty of Italy ... Dearly bought experience has overthrown baseless and visionary theories; facts are stronger than political fiction; the enacters of plain prose have conquered the mere dreamers of poetry.'[7] *Aurora Leigh* examines precisely this opposition in its account of the relationship between Aurora and Romney. In book II, Romney accuses his cousin of being a mere dreamer: 'you play

4. *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett 1845 – 1846*, 2 vols, ed. Elvan Kintner (Cambridge, Mass. 1969), i, p. 9; *Casa Guidi Windows* (cited as *CGW* hereafter), quoted from Julia Markus's edition (New York, 1977) I, 71.

5. *Aurora Leigh* (*AL* hereafter), quoted from Margaret Reynold's editon (Athens, Ohio, 1992) II, 487 – 89.

6. *AL*, III, 338 – 340; *CGW*, II, 731.

7. [J.B. Atkinson], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 85 (March 1859), p. 361.

beside a death-bed like a child, / Yet measure to yourself a prophet's place / To teach the living;' terms which once more recall the critique of Italy in *Casa Guidi Windows*: 'ye played like children, – die like innocents.'[8] He, by contrast, is preoccupied with action: 'work man, work woman, since there's work to do / In this beleaguered earth.'[9] Their respective obsessions, the poem suggests, are typical of the countries which gave them birth: while England, Aurora finds, is 'low and positive,' Italy is 'the land of souls.'[10] When the antagonists at last discover that their opposition can breed only failure, Romney recognises that Aurora is an 'Italy of women;'[11] and her account of her experience, in its turn, recalls the description of Italy's feminine, artistic temperament in the letter which I quoted above:

> Passioned to exalt
> The artist's instinct in me at the cost
> Of putting down the woman's, I forgot
> No perfect artist is developed here
> From any imperfect woman.[12]

This realisation is presented not as the abandonment of her earlier ambitions, but as a source of optimism for the future. Her marriage to Romney will be a first step towards the earth's rejuvenation:

> the old world waits the time to be renewed,
> Toward which, new hearts in individual growth
> Must quicken, and increase to multitude
> In new dynasties of the race of men.[13]

8. *AL*, II, 180 – 82; *CGW*, II, 322. Romney's suggestion that poems are merely 'such sleek fringes ... as we sew ourselves / Upon the velvet of those baldaquins / Held 'twixt us and the sun' (II, 138 – 141) echoes the Tuscans' preoccupation with costume – 'graceful stuff ... broidered at the hem' – in *Casa Guidi Windows* (II, 224 – 25).
9. *AL*, II, 134 – 35.
10. *AL*, I, 262; VII, 467.
11. *AL*, VIII, 358.
12. *AL*, IX, 645 – 49.
13. *AL*, IX, 942 – 45.

In the sudden expansion of reference with which the work ends, the hinted correspondences between Aurora and Barrett Browning's Italy gather to point. The closing union of an Italian poet and an English philanthropist is made resonant of the newly harmonious politics which will ready the earth for the millenium. While Barrett Browning was writing this passage, a similar, if less ambitious, marriage was being engineered for Piedmont by her hero 'Milord' Cavour, as he introduced political reforms based on the English model.[14] In *Casa Guidi Windows* Barrett Browning had already associated the unification of Italy with the Last Day: in *Aurora Leigh*, too, her hope for the Risorgimento supports the closing vision.

The letters which Barrett Browning wrote as she began to think about *Aurora Leigh* show that she meant to realise a stylistic version of the marriage between Aurora and Romney in the form of the poem itself. She first mentions this plan in 1844 in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford. Referring to Miss Mitford's natural 'realism' and her own 'mysticism,' she writes 'yes, I confess that Geraldine's Courtship is "on your principle" rather than mine. And I mean to write a poem of length on your principle – a sort of novel-poem.'[15] The work is to marry the habitual mysticism of Barrett Browning's poetry to the realism characteristic both of some of Mitford's own writing (*Our Village* or *Country Stories*) and of the novels by Sand, Sue, Balzac and Stendhal that the two friends read and enthused about in their letters. It is to treat subjects that would normally be considered unsuitable for poetry, and presumably to rise above them into 'ideal apprehensions' like those which made Balzac seem to Barrett Browning the most poetical of novelists.[16] She touches on the

14. As *The Quarterly Review* commented in 1861: 'he scarcely ever made a speech or wrote a paper ... in which he does not show that he was thoroughly embued with the spirit of the English constitution' (vol. 110 no. 219 [July 1861], p. 216).

15. *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, cit.*, iii, p. 42.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 7; of Balzac she wrote: 'master as he is of conventional life, he appears to me every now and then to rise above it, and to be capable of noble ideal apprehensions ... he is a Dutch painter, but he has an Italian inspiration' (p. 69).

projected novel-poem again a week later, when her ideas about the subject matter of the work merge into considerations of its structure: 'having unity, as a work of art, – and admitting of as much philosophical dreaming and digression (which is in fact a characteristic of our age) as I like to use.'[17] The philosophical dreaming and digression are here on the 'novel' side of the equation, implicitly contrasted with the stricter unity of verse even as they are optimistically incorporated into it. The relation between subject-matter and form is again apparent when she first describes her aim to her future husband in February 1845: 'a sort of novel-poem ... running into the midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing rooms and the like "where angels fear to tread;" and so, meeting face to face and without mask the Humanity of the age, and speaking the truth as I conceive it out plainly.'[18] The work that will stretch genre-conventions will also defy the conventions of society; it will both see the real truth and have space enough, in its emancipation from traditional forms, to speak it out loud.[19]

The main reason for describing *Aurora Leigh* as a 'novel-poem' is its subject matter: the work treats in verse political issues which were usually the preserve of novelists. To this extent there is clearly a parallel between the conjunction of poetry and social comment in the work itself and the union between Aurora and Romney at its ending. But the poem is hybrid also in its narrative structure, which is such that the story appears to be interrupted and taken over by the events of the real world: here the work's form can be seem to embody Barrett Browning's aim of creating a novel-poem which breaks through conventions. In the fiction of the work, Aurora writes books one to five straight through

17. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

18. *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, cit.*, i, p. 31.

19. There is also a suggestion that in doing so it risks making Barrett Browning look silly (as she bursts uninvited into people's houses): in Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* it *'Fools'* who rush in 'where *Angels* fear to tread' (625); a fact which teases her lofty echo of St Paul: 'now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face' (I Corinthians xiii. 12). On the currency of the phrase 'face to face' in the period, see D. Rosenblum, '"Face to Face"; Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Nineteenth Century Poetry,' *Victorian Studies*, vol. 26 no. 3 (1983), pp. 321 – 338.

until she departs for Italy, ignorant of what will happen to her. Books six and seven are composed at three different times: first, when Aurora has just caught sight of Marian in Paris and immediately lost her (VI, 1 – 389); then when long weeks have passed with no more news of her (VI, 390 – 411); and lastly after she has found Marian and brought her safely to Italy, but before the final appearance of Romney (VI, 411 to the end of VII). Books eight and nine are written continuously after the end of the story.[20] This form of narration serves to dramatize Aurora's growth in self-awareness. Her understanding of her life, the shape which partly she has made for it and partly it has fallen into, is continually being altered by the eruption of new facts, which, in breaking up the poem's narrative, also run into the midst of her conceptions (to stretch Barrett Browning's own terms). When she makes mistakes, as she does most notably about the character of Lady Waldemar and about her own feelings for Romney, the poem emphasises them by badly juxtaposing her earlier and later selves.

An example of this occurs in book six. Towards the beginning of the book, Aurora claims rather proudly that she and Romney, poet and philanthropist, 'both stand face to face with men, / Contemplating the people in the rough.'[21] This recalls Barrett Browning's own ambition to meet 'face to face' with 'Humanity:'

20. C. Castan drew attention to the oddities of the work's narrative structure, and gave a slightly erroneous description of them, in 'Structural Problems and the Poetry of *Aurora Leigh*,' *Browning Society Notes*, vol. 7 no. 3 (1977), pp. 73 – 81. Margaret Reynolds tidies up Castan's account in the introduction to her edition, although she doesn't mention the second narrative moment in book VI and follows Castan in arguing that books VIII – IX transgress 'the rules of narrative order' because 'no lapse of time is included which might allow Aurora the opportunity of formally recording the events' (p. 31). That suggestion stems from a misreading of Aurora's narratorial commentary. For instance, Castan (p. 77) quotes the following lines: 'I made no answer. Had I any right / To weep with this man, that I dared to speak? / A woman stood between his soul and mine ...' (VIII, 1037 – 39), and argues (this is the foundation of her and Margaret Reynolds's scheme) that the comment demonstrates that, as she was writing it, Aurora was still unaware that Romney had not married Lady Waldemar; whereas in fact it is in *style indirect libre*, and shows only that she didn't know this at the time which is being described (it's not as though she had written 'a woman *stands*').

21. *AL*, VI, 201 – 202.

and what follows not only castigates Aurora's presumption but also stands as testimony to Barrett Browning's own wry self-awareness:

> God! what face is that?
> ...
> What face is that?
> What a face, what a look, what a likeness! Full on mine
> The sudden blow of it came down, ...[22]

A single face, Marian's, whose impact provokes in Aurora something more upsetting than mere contemplation. 'That face persists', she finds, a hundred lines later: 'in very deed a face / And not a fancy, ... / The small fair face ... 'Twas a real face ...'[23] 'Confront the truth, my soul,' she urges herself, the truth in question being that Marian, when she had glimpsed her, was carrying a child, and so is 'damned.'[24] A hasty judgement – and that is precisely what Aurora herself discovers it to have been when, a little further, on she is herself confronted by ... that face again, together with the real individual it belongs to:

> 'Marian, Marian!' – face to face –
> 'Marian! I find you. Shall I let you go?'[25]

These two lines, with their tense repetitions, the second line divided by its full-stop into syllabically equal halves, are taut with the pressure of facing up, in the rough, to one particular person, who will test and eventually overcome Aurora's preconception about the moral culpability of unmarried mothers:

> but I, convicted, broken utterly,
> With woman's passion clung about her waist
> And kissed her hair and eyes, – I have been wrong,
> Sweet Marian.'[26]

22. *AL*, VI, 226, 231 – 33.
23. *AL*, VI, 308, 311 – 13, 331.
24. *AL*, VI, 342, 366.
25. *AL*, VI, 441 – 42.
26. *AL*, VI, 778 – 781.

Aurora is not just convinced of Marian's innocence but 'convicted' of her own presumption.[27]

The narrative structure of *Aurora Leigh* derives from *Casa Guidi Windows*. That poem's two parts were written at different times; the first in 1848–9, when expectations ran high for the burgeoning liberal-nationalist movement; and the second in 1851 when all those hopes had failed. Barrett Browning comments on the form in her 'Advertisement to the First Edition:' 'the discrepancy between the two parts is a sufficient guarantee to the public of the truthfulness of the writer, ... such discrepancies we are called upon to accept at every hour by the conditions of our nature, implying the interval between aspiration and performance, between faith and dis-illusion, between hope and fact.'[28] The work, that is, embodies the 'chasm' between aspiration and act which we have seen to be a central element in Barrett Browning's perception both of her own writing and of the Risorgimento. 'Men who will not look fairly in the face and study to appreciate the facts of their position, are self-condemned to the defeat which they merit,' commented *The Edinburgh Review* on the Italian revolutions of 1848–9:[29] *Casa Guidi Windows* offers Italy a model of how to face the truth of its predicament; one which was later to be realised at least by the 'Italy of women' Aurora Leigh.

Barrett Browning's desire to bring Italy face to face with the facts of its position is manifest at the beginning of *Casa Guidi Windows,* where she criticizes the conventional laments which, as they call Italy 'Cybele, or Niobe' and drop their 'cadenced tears,' fail, as she thinks, to engage with reality, and so, by encouraging the indulgence of mournful sentiment, exacerbate the country's weakness.'[30] Of such songs enough,' she exclaims:

27. *OED* suggests that 'to convict' lost its blander sense of 'to convince' during the seventeenth century. However, its religious, mainly protestant meaning, 'to impress with the sense of sinfulness,' will have been more present to Barrett Browning than it is to most people today.
28. *CGW*, p. xli. Cf. Romney in *AL*, VIII, 797–99: 'and yet to mean so well and fail so soul, / Expresses ne'er another beast than man; / The antithesis is human.'
29. *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 93 no. 189 (Jan. 1851), p. 62.
30. *CGW*, I, 32, 35.

Too many of such complaints! behold, instead,
Void at Verona, Juliet's marble trough.
As void as that is, are all images
Men set between themselves and actual wrong,
To catch the weight of pity, meet the stress
Of conscience, – 'tis easier to gaze long
On mournful masks, and sad effigies,
Then on real, live, weak creatures crushed by strong.[31]

'The actual wrong,' which the 'void' images have avoided making plain, causes Barrett Browning a weight of pity which makes itself felt, in turn, as rhythmical stress upon her verse. There is heaviness in the repetition of 'void,' in the dull trudge of the enjambment 'meet the stress / Of conscience;' and in the build-up of emphasis which culminates in the last line of the passage: its predecessor, 'On mournful masks, and sad effigies' has only nine syllables, falling short like the doleful artifices it describes (whose very exiguity makes it easy to gaze 'long' upon them); this contrasts with the heavy strike of the last line, with its alliteration ('cr'), internal ryhme ('ea'), four successive stressed syllables and the bucking rhythm that takes off from them: 'Than on *real, live, weak, creat*ures *crushed* by *strong.*'

The bare truth of reality is imagined breaking through the political 'masks' (again on echo of the letters on the beginnings of *Aurora Leigh*) which have previously concealed it. If we look back at the images which Barrett Browning here casts off, they can be seen cracking already under the indignation with which she recounts them. Poets like Filicaja, she claims,

with pang
Fast sheathed in music, touched the heart of us
So finely, that the pity scarcely pained.[32]

The *OED* quotes this use of 'finely' as an example of the meaning 'with delicacy and nicety:' read in this way the passage describes our being moved as we might be 'touched' by a get-well card or a bunch of flowers. But 'fine' can also mean sharp, and the *OED* gives as an example from 1848 a quotation from Macaulay: 'those

31. *CGW*, I, 40 – 48.
32. *CGW*, I, 17 – 19.

exquisitely fine blades which are required for operations on the human frame.' 'To sheathe,' according to the same source, was still, at least when Barrett Browning was five, a specialist medical term meaning 'to mitigate the acridity or pungency of (a drug by the use of an emollient vechicle.' The proximity of 'sheathed,' 'heart,' 'finely' and 'pained' gives edge to Barrett Browning's sarcasm by making the bloody reality of a nineteenth century surgical operation butt more strongly against the clichéd, sentimental meanings than it otherwise would. There is a similar instance of strength breaking out of a weary expression a few lines later, in 'those cadenced tears which burn not where they touch.'[33] Tears usually burn the eyes of the person who is crying; but Barrett Browning implies that the tears we ought to be weeping for Italy are drops of acid, which will really, physically burn the dormant body of the country, and so shock it into life and national consciousness.

In its first few lines, then, *Casa Guidi Windows* disparages what it takes to be ineffectual, 'poetical' writing, and offers itself as a work which will have more direct force. Its visionary impetus is kept up throughout the work, driving its extended sentences, their clauses arranged so as to run over the line-ends, which are gathered (or perhaps rather fall) into ample verse-paragraphs of irregular length. On a more local level, the confrontational aim appears in its use of weighty rhythm, and in the vigour, or 'stress', which it imparts to its images.

The imagery throughout part one is true to the opening announcement: it does not wrap up 'woe ... in beauty,' but evidently carries the stress of Barrett Browning's conscience. Take, for instance, her description of 'the world-wide throes / Which went to make the popedom:'

> ... priests, trained to rob,
> And kings that, like encouraged nightmares, sate
> On nations' hearts most heavily distressed
> With monstrous sights and apophthegms of fate![34]

There is no attempt in these lines to give a balanced account of, or response to, the Catholic Church or the Ancien Régime; rather, they draw a caricature which is meant to provoke outrage. This

33. *CGW*, I, 35.
34. *CGW*, I, 899–900, 907–910.

is a paradigmatic example of Barrett Browning's imagery in the work, and it fits with what she says of her intention in the preface, where she disclaims impartiality, introducing instead 'a simple story of personal impressions, whose only value is in the intensity with which they were received ....[35] The 'intensity', or, one might prefer to say, forcedness of the above lines is not explicable merely as a symptom of the strength of Barrett Browning's anti-Catholic feeling; it is also designed to provoke an equivalent 'force' of emotion in its readers. Earlier, the poem had looked forward to a time when there would be 'thinkers in the place / Of fighters, each found able as a man / To strike electric influence through a race.'[36] Barrett Browning herself, as we have seen, hoped that it would have precisely that galvanic effect. But she also gives a good reason, a few lines later, for demurring at such an intention: 'if we lift the people like mere clay / It falls the same;' a successful revolution, and viable democracy, requires a 'conscious people, conscious and advised.'[37] Passages such as the one quoted above treat their readers like mere clay.

Barrett Browning had hoped to have part one published in *Blackwood's* in 1848 (it was, however, rejected); her exhortations could, then, have had a topical effect, although not immediately in Italy. Perhaps because of this fact, part one often betrays uneasiness about its relationship to its audience. The verse seems unsure whether it is really being prophetic, or just exemplifying the prophetic feelings of someone who is confined to the position of an observer: when she interjects, in a particularly vatic passage, 'what do I say? I only meant ...,' for instance, she seems, in the same comic spirit as her slight mockery of her own ambitions in *Aurora Leigh*, to be ribbing her tendency to get carried away by visionary afflatus (this self consciousness may also be an indication that in writing political poetry she thought herself to be adopting a typically masculine

35. *CGW*, p. xli.
36. *CGW*, I, 727–29. Barrett Browning's references to mesmerism and galvanism in *CGW* are uniformly positive; it is only in *AL* that she starts to distinguish between false 'galvanic life' and the real thing. This change was perhaps influenced by Aytoun's attack on what he called 'the spasmodic school of poetry' in 1854, and also by Browning's poem 'Mesmerism' (c. 1853).
37. *CGW*, I, 763.

rôle). By the time part two had been added, and the title changed from 'A Hope in Italy' to *Casa Guidi Windows* (not the country and its aspiration but the house within which Barrett Browning sheltered from the revolution and the windows from which she monitored it) the passage of events would have inclined a reader to hear the exemplifying tone rather than the seriously prophetic one: and part one, consequently, is in the published version framed between the apologetic 'Advertisement' and the more analytical considerations of part two.

Part two to some extent takes stock, and seeks to make capital, of the vehemences of part one:

> I wrote a meditation and a dream,
> Hearing a little child sing in the street.
> I leant upon his music as a theme,
> Till it gave way beneath my heart's full beat,
> Which tried at an exultant prophecy
> But dropped before the measure was complete –
> Alas, for songs and hearts!'[38]

Here, the emotive 'force' which was at first invoked and then overdone in part one is again figured as a weight: 'my heart's full beat.' The poem has itself acted like the Italians, with their 'fancy easily turned into an impulse, but with no strenuous and determine strength in them.' Part two, after the impulsiveness of part one, seeks itself to develop 'determinate strength' in the movement of its verse; to offer, in the maturing of its own personality, a model for the growth of the Italian national character.

Consider the rhythm of the Austrian occupation:

> From Casa Guidi windows, gazing, then,
> I saw and witness how the Duke came back.
> The regular tramp of horse and tread of men
> Did smite the silence like an anvil black
> And sparkless.[39]

Each of these lines pauses flatly on its last syllable in a way that Barrett Browning associates with tyranny in her essays entitled

38. *CGW*, II, 1 – 7.
39. *CGW*, II, 286 – 290.

The Book of the Poets, where she writes of Dryden: 'he established finally the reign of the literati for the reign of the poets – and the critics clapped their hands. He established finally the despotism of the final emphasis – and no-one dared, in affecting criticism, to speak any more against the tinkling cymbal. And so, in distinctive succession to poetry and inspiration, began the new system of harmony "as by law established."'[40] Her description of the 'reign of the literati' anticipates her later feeling that Italians have 'much of the artistic temperament as distinguished from that of men of genius,' although here the literary critics and writers of dull verse impose a tyranny instead of submitting to it. For her, what Dryden and nineteenth century Italians have in common is too much respect for formal conventions, whether poetic or political. When she writes of the 'despotism of the final emphasis' she mostly has in mind Dryden's use of the heroic couplet; however, what she dislikes about his versification is not simply the fact of its rhyming but the way in which rhyme and emphasis combine to sound and keep the limits of the verse form: 'among the elder poets, the rhyme was only a felicitous adjunct, a musical accompaniment, the tinkling of a cymbal through the choral harmonies ... But the new practice endeavoured to identify in all possible cases the rhyme and what may be called the sentimental emphasis; securing the latter to the tenth rhyming *syllable*. And not only by this unnatural provision did the emphasis minister to the rhyme, but the pause did it also. "Away with all pauses," – said the reformers, – "except the legitimate pause at the tenth rhyming syllable."'[41] 'I saw and witness how the Duke came back;' the line is itself a 'measured tramp,' like the marching Barrett Browning goes on to describe. It is the sound of a dead form, one which is animated by no backing chorus of popular support.

And yet, Austrian 'formalism' is not only a bad thing. The invading army may be trained out of sensibility, 'not an eye deflect / To left or right' to glimpse the beauties of Florentine women or buildings, and 'cognisant of acts, not imageries;' but

40. *Works*, vi, p. 285. 'As by law established' recalls the establishment of the Church of England.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

still it is cognisant of *acts,* it gets things done.[42] The Italians, by contrast, 'being greatly vexed / In act, in aspiration keep undaunted.' Whereas the main hope of part one was Italy would turn its 'fancy' into a strong impulse, that it would feel a shock of revolt like that which beats in the rhythm of 'real, live, weak creatures crushed by strong,' part two urges the need for this initial swell to be disciplined by hard thought and experience. In part one the formation of a civic guard at Florence was described as 'the first pulse of an even flow of blood, / To prove the level of Italian veins / Towards rights perceived and granted.'[43] In part two Italy's heart had undergone a transplant, but is still beating, for 'life throbs in noble Piedmont.'[44] Barrett Browning's verse itself feels, as it prophesies, the strengthening of this national rhythm:

> That having learnt – by no mere apophthegm –
> Not just the draping of a graceful staff
> About a statue, broidered at the hem, –
> Of 'libertà to bravos – (a fair word,
> Yet too allied to inarticulate rage
> And breathless sobs, for singing, though the chord
> Were deeper than they struck it!) but the gauge
> Of civil wants sustained, and wrongs abhorred, –
> The serious, sacred meaning and full use
> Of freedom for a nation, – then, indeed,
> Our Tuscans, underneath the bloody dews
> Of some new morning, rising up agreed
> And bold, will want no Saxon souls or thews,
> To sweep their piazzas clear of Austria's breed.[45]

The first half of this passage is rhythmically tepid: the opening four lines stop and start, and the verse in parentheses has no marked beat. With 'but,' however, as the diction becomes more exalted, the movement changes: there are stresses on *gauge, civ*il, sus*tained, wrongs,* ab*horred*, and this declamatory pulse

42. *CGW*, II, 312 – 13, 318.
43. *CGW*, I, 468 – 470.
44. *CGW*, II, 731.
45. *CGW*, II, 224 – 236.

rolls on to the end of the passage, kept from stiffening into a sclerotic clatter by the variation of mid-line pauses, until it achieves its purpose in the resounding strike of the last line.[46] The 'wrongs abhorred' which at the start of the work had provoked the momentary throb of life in 'creatures crushed by strong' here contribute to the development of a regular rhythm. The rhymes, sounding across the enjambed clauses, are, as Barrett Browning would say, like a 'cymbal through the choral harmonies,' harmonies which here, one might feel, are somewhat shouted by the weight of assonance (*eg.*, '*mea*ing ... free*d*om ... inde*ed* ... under*nea*th') and alliteration (*eg.*, '*s*ustained ... *s*erious, *s*acred ... use ... *S*axon *s*ouls ... *s*weep'). The verse here develops a forceful, nay, overwhelming pulse: it has the people's wind in its sails.[47]

This sort of vividness and gusto is perhaps what is most enduring about *Casa Guidi Windows*: it is a poem full of the revolutionary ardour of its two moments. Yet, precisely because it is so charged with the experience of 1848 – 49, it does not give careful attention to the political issues with which it engages (this does not mean that Barrett Browning did not so when she was released from the throes of composition): it is more an instance of its times and place than a representation of them. Take, for example, a phrase from the last quoted passage: 'The serious, sacred meaning and full use / Of freedom for a nation.' This is certainly resounding, but it rings so loud because it is hollow: the three adjectives might be replaced without loss to the sense by one – say, 'important' (for 'sacred' here has no religious weight) – while 'meaning' and 'use' are, in the context, interchangeable. The image of the 'bloody dews,' in the same passage, suggests that mass killing is as necessary to the unification of Italy as red sunlight is to the dawn: such a contention should give pause, not

46. Barrett Browning is taking a little private vengeance here on behalf of her spaniel Flush. Just after its occupation of Florence the Austrian army issued a fearsome decree: 'all dogs found in the street to be killed straightway lest they should interefere with the movements of the Austrian horse!' (quoted in M. Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning; A Biography* [1988], p. 235). Barrett Browning's irritation with this directive issues in the word 'breed,' which imagines the Austrians as dogs, to be swept off the streets as if by their own law.

47. Cf. *CGW*, II, 205 – 206: '... action, action, like a flame that needs / A steady breath and fuel ...'

be hurried in on the sly. The poem aims to inspire; but it seeks to do so not so much by fairly considering and defeating objections as by overwhelming them with the force of its rhetoric, by striking 'electric influence' through its readers. In its endeavour to provoke an irresistible emotional reaction in its audience one might say that it aspires to the condition of a political speech. Barrett Browning had been struck by the influence of a crowd in 1847: 'that clapping of hands is a sound so full of life and mental affirmation to me, (it isn't mere animal life) that it throbs and thrills through me.[48] But such an exhilirating surge of mass unity would, in a more perceptive work, be also a cause for unease.

During the decade after 1849 the prospects of revolution in Italy receded, and Barrett Browning's verse correspondingly subsided from the declamatory elevations of *Casa Guidi Windows*. *Aurora Leigh*, as we have seen, sought to face up to political reality in Britain, and it contains forceful descriptions of social injustice. But it does not aim to reproduce the vatic force of the earlier poem: it has no ambitions to strike electric influence through its readers, but wishes rather to move them more thoughtfully (the prophetic vision at its close is less an oration than a personal statement of faith). Romney certainly, and Aurora at least in her own opinion, both fail to carry out the grand designs which they had plotted out for themselves in their youth. One after another they withdraw to Italy, which figures in this poem as a place, not of political agitation, but of retirement (a change which echoes Barrett Browning's own feelings as, after the birth of her son, she increasingly came to think of Florence as her home).[49] Yet, despite these differences from *Casa Guidi Windows, Aurora Leigh* still imagines a union taking place in Italy; only this time it is a personal one: a marriage. The growth to harmony which in 1848 had looked as though it were going to

48. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Letters to her Sister* 1846 – 1859, ed. Leonard Huxley (1929), p. 65.

49. *Eg., Letters*, ed. Kenyon, *cit.*, ii, p. 197 (1855): 'Such a happy year I have had this last! I do love Florence so! When Penini says, "Sono Italiano, voglio essere Italiano," I agree with him perfectly.'

occur all at once for Italy now seems a universal and gradual process, the combination of innumerable small comings-together, 'Loves filial, loves fraternal, neighbour-loves / And civic:'

> ... the old world waits the time to be renewed,
> Toward which, new hearts in individual growth
> Must quicken and increase to multitude...[50]

Consequently, Barrett Browning now seems to write for individuals, rather than as though she were addressing a crowd; and her verse achieves something of the restraint which previously it had lacked. Nonetheless, the newly personal union which her writing describes is modelled on the louder ambitions of *Casa Guidi Windows*.

> An Italian landscape:
> My multitudinous mountains, sitting in
> The magic circle, with the mutual touch
> Electric, panting from their full deep hearts
> Beneath the influent heavens, and waiting for
> Communion and commission.[51]

This circle is at once a séance and a conspirators' meeting (Barrett Browning had punningly conflated the two kinds of circle in 1853: 'the *circoli* at Florence are as revolutionary as ever, only tilting tables instead of states, alas');[52] the spiritualists longing for a manifestation, and the revolutionaries for that 'soul' who in *Casa Guidi Windows* it was prophesied would run 'from God down with a message.'[53] This breathing countryside, yearning to be communed with and made one, contrasts with the English landscape:

> The ground seemed cut up from the fellowship
> Of verdure, field from field, as man from man;
> The skies themselves looked low and positive,

50. *AL*, IX, 888–89, 942–44.
51. *AL*, I, 622–26.
52. *Letters*, ed. Kenyon, *cit*, ii, p. 117.
53. *CGW*, I, 803.

> As almost you could touch them with a hand,
> And dared to do it they were so far off
> From God's celestial crystals.[54]

These lines nearly rhyme: 'fellowship' has the same rhythm and final vowel-sound as 'positive;' while 'man' sounds a clear half-rhyme with 'hand.' The weight that falls on the line-ends – natural pauses being emphasised by these virtual rhymes – is another instance of that 'despotism of the final emphasis' which characterised the Austrians in Italy. Here it cuts up the lines from one another, impeding the rhythmic flow of the verse, and collaborating with the social divisions in Britain which separate 'man from man.' The language, rhythmically hangdog and predominantly monosyllabic, is itself depressed and solid like the sky ('positive' also refers to Positivism, the materialist 'religion' developed by Auguste Comte); this contrasts with the living, circling, aspiring ('waiting for' at the line end) movement of the verse which describes the Italian landscape under its influent heaven.

Poets, like those mountains (according to Barrett Browning) have a strongly developed 'spirit sense;'[55] and they, too, long to embody the infinite. They are aided in this by the alphabet, which, particularly when it is used to form Italian words, has a spirit circle of its own:

> how the Tuscan musical
> Vowels do round themselves as if they planned
> Eternities of separate sweetness.[56]

The vowel she mostly has in mind is 'o' – the letter with which Italian words most commonly end – as one can tell from the rhymes *'how,' 'vowels,' 'round,'* which, like the elocution exercise 'how now brown cow,' urge one's mouth to form a circle (note also how the verse is itself rounded by the strong enjambment 'musical / Vowels'). This feeling was not new to Barrett Browning: in 1843, before she had heard much spoken Italian, she had written of Carlyle's prose style, 'if the consonants

54. *AL*, I, 260 – 65.
55. *AL*, VII, 844: 'we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat cleared.'
56. *CGW*, I, 1188 – 190.

were everywhere in a heap, like the "pots and pans" of Bassano, – classic or not, English or not, it was certainly a true language – a language "meropon anthropon," – the significant articulation of a living soul: God's breath was in the vowels of it.'[57] Breath, for her, meant freedom: she had difficulty with the English atmosphere, and before her marriage had had to shut herself up in a sealed room for the winter; in Italy, however, she could breathe easily; 'there's something vital in this Florentine air.'[58] (She also transferred the feeling to politics: 'newspapers breathe heavily just now, that's undeniable,' as she wrote of press censorship in France after the coup, echoing her own predicament in London's 'heavy air.')[59] Vowels are the aspiring element of the language, continually hinting at infinity; consonants are the material reality which repeatedly cuts them short. Seen in this way, Italian is, like its landscape, more aspiring than English, which is weighted down by its divisive consonants.

Towards the end of *Aurora Leigh* the verse, in its deployment of Italianate and English sounding words and rhythms, prepares for the closing union of Romney and Aurora. Weighted vowels are sometimes made significant of life and freedom. As Aurora approaches Italy, for example, she

> felt the wind soft from the land of souls;
> The old miraculous mountains heaved in sight.[60]

It is as though the spiritual breeze breathes through the circle of the virtual rhyme 'souls' and 'old.' But more often Barrett Browning's feeling for vowels modulates itself through words that sound vocalic and Italian because they have feminine – dactylic or trochaic – rhythm. She hears Italians speaking with '*issimo* and *ino* and sweet poise / Of vowels' and uses the softness of those Italian cadences in her own verse. For example when Romney appears at Aurora's villa:

57. *Works*, vi, p. 314. I have transcribed the Greek quotation. The passage recalls Genesis ii.7: 'and the LORD GOD formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul.' Cf. *Letters*, ed. Kenyon, *cit.*, ii, p. 276: 'as for me I have caught no cold – only losing my breath and my soul in the usual way, the cough not being much.'
58. *Letters*, ed. Kenyon, cit., ii, p. 192.
59. *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 108, 18.
60. *AL*, VII, 467 – 68.

> There he stood, my king!
> I felt him, rather than beheld him. Up
> I rose, as if he were my king indeed,
> And then sat down, in trouble at myself,
> And struggling for my woman's empery.
> 'Tis pitiful.[61]

The toll of monosyllables in the first line, which sounds Romney's kingship, is responded to by the isolated and emphatic 'up' of Aurora's movement, standing up as Barrett Browning had so often urged Italy to do: but this resolution fails in the dying falls of the feminine words 'trouble,' 'struggling,' 'woman's,' 'empery,' 'pitiful.' These are the sounds of that ambivalent softness, weak but spiritual, which Barrett Browning feels to be at once women's, poetry's and Italy's.[62] In book one of *Aurora Leigh*, the heroine's soul, 'at poetry's divine first finger touch,' did indeed 'let go conventions and sprang up surprised:' but it becomes apparent during the course of the work that this impetous response leads only half-way to fulfilment, and that, if Aurora is to achieve God's aim for her, she must realise her love for Romney and join with him in the convention of marriage.

One way of giving an iambic pentameter the soft character of an Italian rhythm is to have the verse pause after a dactyl or a trochee. Barrett Browning showed herself to be sensitive to this movement in *The Book of the Poets*, where she noticed in Hawes

> passages of thoughtful sweeetness and cheerful tenderness, at which we are constrained to smile and sigh, and both for 'pastyme.'
>
> Was never payne but it had joy at laste
> In the fayre morrow.
>
> There is a lovely cadence![63]

61. *AL*, VIII, 61 – 66. This echoes *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, XVI: 'because thou art more noble and like a king,' 'If *thou* invite me forth, / I rise above abasement at the word' (2, 12 – 13).
62. The passage also shows that a circumspection, new since *Casa Guidi Windows*, has tempered her thoughts about standing up in response to electric influence (cf. note 36 above).
63. *Works*, vi, p. 253.

The cadence is lovely because the verse itself rests, gently falling, in the pain of the present, and looks forward, through the silence that follows its ending, with hope and sadness, to the morrow. This melody, with the caesura placed after the fifth, unaccented syllable, sounds often in the last three books of *Aurora Leigh*. 'I am lonely in the world,' says Aurora to Marian, asking her to come with her to Italy:

> And thou art lonely, and the child is half
> An orphan. Come, – and henceforth thou and I
> Being still together will not miss a friend,
> Nor he a father, since two mothers shall
> Make that up to him.[64]

The faltering movement of Aurora's loneliness ('and thou art lonely'), the tentativeness and sadness of it, marks also her hopes for the child: 'Nor he a father' (remembering the father that she herself had lost), 'make that up to him;' can two mothers, after all, she feels, fill up the father's place? The cadence echoes with loss and disappointed hopes in this part of the work: 'than all I have failed in,' 'I thought "my father!"' and contrasts with the rarer, more resolute movement of verse that pauses after the fourth or sixth syllables ('The soul's the way;' 'Like that Aurora Leigh's').[65] Lady Waldemar, for example, in the letter Aurora receives in book nine, writes that Smith, her latest admirer, swears.

> That I'm the typic She. Away with Smith! –
> Smith smacks of Leigh.[66]

Lady Waldemar's scorn halts on the emphasised sixth and fourth syllables and makes them rhyme ('She,' 'Leigh'): no gentle sadness, or humble aspiration here. There are such things, however, in the conversation between Romney and Aurora, his 'Italy of women,' which forms most of the work's last two books.[67] Here is how they recur during the course of about a hundred lines of book eight:

64. *AL*, VII, 120–25.
65. *AL*, VIII, 544, 517.
66. *AL*, IX, 134–35.
67. *AL*, VIII, 357.

> Well, well! no matter.
> It had not hurt me.
> Which come too seldom.
> Not so far saddened.
> And what permitted.
> For what had *I*, thought, to do with *her*,
> Aurora ... Romney?[68]

There is a lovely cadence, the way the rhythm of each of their individual sadnesses repeats itself in Romney's first tentative mention of the two of them. It appears again in Aurora's declaration in book nine: 'I love you, Romney.' After the lovers' first kiss,[69] their overflow of passion is channelled into the measured exchange of ideals which brings the poem to an end. 'Calm, equal, smooth with weights of joy' Romney's voice rises, and the last lines of the poem give equal weight to aspiration and its fulfilment:

> I saw his soul saw, – 'Jasper first,' I said;
> 'And second, sapphire; third, chalcedony;
> The rest in order: last, an amethyst.'

'I saw his soul saw,' 'and second sapphire', 'the rest in order;' the completion of these Italian cadences is an apt form in which to describe the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem.[70] Here, the pattern of completion which Barrett Browning began imagining in response to the Risorgimento is first realised in a union between two individuals and then anticipated for the whole world. But always with the unification of Italy in mind: 'it was like the millenium in Florence,' she wrote of the time when her adoptive country was winning the war against Austria in 1859; 'as discoursed of by the prophets – lion & lamb lay down together – all classes of persons, and most classes of thinkers, met in one embrace.'[71]

68. *AL*, VIII, 484, 498, 505, 531, 590, 604–605.
69. *AL*, IX, 608, 714, 721–744.
70. Revelation, xxi. 18.
71. *AL*, VIII, 358; *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Letters to Mrs Ogilvy 1849–1861*, eds Peter N. Haydon & Philip Kelley (New York, 1973), p. 144.

Robert Browning's 'Old Pictures in Florence' has an offhand beginning:

> I
> The morn when first it thunders in March,
> The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say ...

but on 'this warm March day, / No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled.'[72] The stormiest March of Browning's life had occurred four years before the probable date of composition of the poem; in 1849, when he learned of his mother's death a few days after the birth of his own son – and, coincidentally, when the Italian army suffered final defeat at the battle of Novara, and Charles Albert, King of Piedmont, abdicated in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II: the event, in other words, which killed immediate hopes of Italian liberty, but which gave birth to the life which Barrett Browning celebrates in part two of *Casa Guidi Windows*; 'life throbs in noble Piedmont.'[73] 'It has been very, very painful altogether, this drawing together of life and death,' she wrote at the time; and a few years later, as she was working on *Aurora Leigh*, the shock of that coincidence returned to her in a more manageable form when she made the onset of Aurora's puberty clash with the death of her father: 'life, struck sharp on death, / Makes awful lightning.'[74] This is the March that Browning has finally got over at the beginning of 'Old Pictures in Florence.' Given the terms of Barrett Browning's later reference, it is tempting to see the death of Browning's mother in that thunder, and the birth of his child in the leaping of the eel.

This private hint of the poem's relevance to the events of 1848 – 9 is taken up 246 lines later, when Browning makes a suggestion which is uncharacteristic for him, and which recalls his wife's habitual manner: 'what if I take up my hope and prophesy?'[75] What he predicts is the same as what she had looked forward to in *Casa Guidi Windows*: the expulsion of the Grand Duke, and the unification of Italy. Next time (in contrast to 1849) things will be better managed:

72. 'Old Pictures in Florence' ('OPF' hereafter), 4 – 5.
73. *CGW*, II, 731.
74. *AL*, I, 210 – 11.
75. 'OPF,' 248.

No mere display at the stone of Dante,
But a kind of sober Witanagemot
(Ex: 'Casa Guidi,' *quod videas ante*)
Shall ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,
How Art may return that departed with her.[76]

Browning's insistence that Italy will have a representative assembly, a kind of Witanagemot, contrasts with his wife's conviction that it needed to find a demagogic leader (*quod videas ante,* itself the sort of term you might find in a government document, punningly emphasises the difference by suggesting that Browning had found in *Casa Guidi Windows* an idea which is in fact his own). In 1851 the Brownings had met the American poet Bayard Taylor, and Elizabeth had asked him about the condition of the Arts in United States: 'a republic, she thought, could hardly be favourable to them. Somewhat to Taylor's surprise Browning warmly disagreed.'[77] One reason why Barrett Browning will have been pessimistic about the Arts in America is that the political institutions of the republic approximated to the complex of restrictive verse forms, social conventions, legal practice and so-on which seemed to her to embody materialism and pussillanimity. In *Aurora Leigh*, as we have seen, she aimed to break through such customs and confront the humanity of the age face to face – in a way analogous to that in which Napoleon III (as it seemed to her) had done away with France's constitution in order to create and serve the unanimous will of the French people. Robert Browning thought differently from his wife about

76. 'OPF,' 258 – 262. 'No mere display at the stone of Dante' recalls *CGW* I, 601 – 602 ('where met they? ... On the stone / Called Dante's,' as 'none of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge)' ('OPF,' 253) echoes *CGW* II, 155 'we fired muskets up the air,' and 'nor a civic guard, all plumes and lacquer' ('OPF,' 254) *CGW* I, 745 – 752: 'to grant the "civic guard" is not to grant / The civic spirit, living and awake. / Those lappets on your shoulders, citizens, / Your eyes strain after sideways till they ache / .. are not intelligence, / Not courage even.' Browning's poem also makes formal reference to his wife's work: *CGW* is written in ABABAB rhymes, grouped in long stanzas of irregular length (numbered in the first edition), with alternate lines indented; 'OPF' is likewise printed with alternate indentations, but its numbered stanzas have 8 lines each, which rhyme ABABCDCD – a truncated version of the scheme employed by Barrett Browning.

77. W. Irvine and P. Honan, *The Book, the Ring and the Poet* (1974), p. 276.

these matters: because he thought political institutions important; because he delighted in the very stuff (old pictures, words like 'Witanagemot,' legal machinations) that Barrett Browning was always eager to cut away; and because it seemed to him impossible in this world to unmask someone – far less 'Humanity' – and look them in the face. The end of *The Ring and the Book* recalls Barrett Browning's desire to see people face to face, and distances itself from it:

> How look a brother in the face and say
> 'Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind,
> Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length,
> And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith!'[78]

Art does not set about things front-on, but instead 'may tell a truth / Obliquely.'[79] 'Old Pictures in Florence', secretive in its opening allusion to the clash of death and birth in March 1849, is similarly oblique in its approach to the Risorgimento.

'Men alive – / My business was hardly with them, I trow, / But with empty cells of the human hive;'[80] and yet the long disquisition on art which follows this remark has clear political implications. In *Casa Guidi Windows* Barrett Browning makes use of a thought which her husband had developed in *Sordello*: namely, that great works of art embody ideals which in the future will be realised in society.[81] Thus, Michelangelo's statues Night, Day, Dawn and Twilight, sculpted for the Medici, 'wait in marble scorn ... The final putting off of all such sway,' because they possess a spirit of liberty which could not work itself out in politics under the Medicean tyranny. As she describes the artistic

78. *The Ring and the Book* (*RB* hereafter), XII, 841 – 44. *RB* is quoted from Richard D.Altick's edition (Harmondsworth, 1971). Cf. the sardonic remark in 'OPF', 53 – 55: 'do their eyes to the earth's old scope, / Now that they see God face to face,/ And have all attained to be poets, I hope?'

79. *RB*, XII, 855 – 56.

80. 'OPF,' 34 – 6.

81. Cf. *Sordello*, VI, 798 – 801: 'suns waxed and waned, / And still my spirit held an upwards flight, / Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light / More and more gorgeous' and *AL*, IV, 1151 – 57: 'what is art / But life upon the larger scale, the higher, / When, graduating up in a spiral line / Of still expanding and ascending gyres, / It pushes toward the intense significance / Of all things, hungry for the infinite.'

succession from Cimabue to Giotto to Fra Angelico to Raphael, Barrett Browning evokes also the historical movement which ought to begin in absolutism and end in the world republic of the Last Day. She implies that the Risorgimento is the realisation in history of the artistic progress which culminated in the Renaissance. 'Old Pictures in Florence' draws on these ideas, but develops them differently. It contrasts the awkward shapes of early Italian painting with perfectly formed and finished Greek classical sculpture. Looking at a Greek statue,

> you saw yourself as you wished you were,
> As you might have been, as you cannot be;
> Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there:
> And grew content in your poor degree
> With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
> And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
> And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
> And your little date, by their forms that stay.[82]

These statues are absolutist rulers, monarchs by Divine Right, like the Sun King or the Holy Roman Emperor, irrevocably divided from their subjects. The division is marked by commas in the last four lines, where the misery of the people is placed against the majesty of the statues in a repeated structure of confrontation. The revolution comes a few lines later:

> Today's brief passion limits their range;
> It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
> They are perfect – how else? they shall never change:
> We are faulty – why not? we have time in store.
> The artificer's hand is not arrested
> With us; we are rough – hewn, nowise polished:
> They stand for our copy, and, once invested
> With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

82. 'OPF,' 89 – 96. Browning's opinion of Greek sculpture may have been influenced by Ruskin, who in volume ii of *The Stones of Venice* (published shortly before the probable date of composition of 'OPF') describes the Greek as being one of the three main schools of 'servile ornament,' which makes of 'the workman ... a slave.' (*The Stones of Venice*, 3 vols [1907], ii, pp. 153 – 57). It is not, however, certain that Browning had read Ruskin's work before he wrote 'OPF;' and the argument of the poem is a consistent development of ideas in his earlier poetry, notably *Sordello*.

These changeless forms, like those of absolutist monarchy, are now to be superseded. 'Invested' and 'abolished' are political terms: the people will overthrow their rulers and take the executive power upon themselves. The difference between the immutable statues and the populace – for whom the future seethes – sounds neatly in the movement of the verse in a way that makes Barrett Browning's practice seem brash: 'stand' sticks a little because of its rhyme with 'hand' two lines earlier, while the fertile but rough incompleteness of the people sounds in the slightly awkward enjambment 'not arrested / With us.' Later, the unity of Italy heralds the completion of the rough artistic beginnings of the 13th and 14th centuries:

> And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia
> The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,
> Shall soar up in gold full fifty braccia,
> Completing Florence, as Florence Italy.[83]

On the one hand, the movement of the line 'completing Florence, as Florence Italy,' with its strong central caesura, harks back within the poem to the forms of Greek perfection; but on the other it recalls the end of *Casa Guidi Windows*:

> The blank interstices
> Men take for ruins, He will build into
> With pillared marbles rare, or knit across
> With generous arches, till the fane's complete.[84]

In the last stanza Browning joins his wife – forgetting the earlier hint of disagreement with her – in looking forward to the unification of Italy as a figure of the millenium:

> Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold
> Is broken away and the long-pent fire
> Like the golden hope of the world, unbaffled
> Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire
> While 'God and the People' plain for its motto,
> Thence the new tricolour flaps at the sky?
> At least to foresee that glory of Giotto
> And Florence together, the first am I![85]

83. 'OPF,' 277 – 280.
84. *CGW*, II, 776 – 79.
85. 'OPF,' 281 – 88. 'God and the People' was the motto of Mazzini's Young Italy movement.

The phrases 'long-pent fire,' which recalls the fire of pentecost, and 'springs from its sleep' suggest the Last Judgement: the unification of Italy seemed to Browning a long way off after the failures of 1849, and here it looks as distant as the Last Day.

Browning mentions his wife's poetry again at the end of *The Ring and the Book:*

> If the rough ore be rounded to a ring,
> Render all duty which good ring should do,
> And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship, –
> Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
> Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
> Linking our England to his Italy!

The image is that of a 'guard ring', worn outside a wedding ring to make sure that it does not fall off. The work will encircle and somehow protect Barrett Browning's poetry, and strengthen the connection made by her verse (for 'linking' qualifies both rings) between Italy and England. *The Ring and the Book* is in many ways close to its author's personal life: the main event of the work resembles the Brownings' escape to Italy; Pompilia is instinct with memories of Elizabeth, as Julia Wedgwood recognised ('I felt as if it were only half yours, but indeed I do not divide the other influence from your own'), and the poem echoes comments that Browning had previously made in his letters.[86] The 'something of mine' which he says he 'mixes with the mass' of the Old Yellow Book in order to make it 'bear hammer and be firm to file' is in part his thought and feeling about his own life, and especially his life with Elizabeth.[87]

The aspect of the ring of Barrett Browning's poetry which is most present to *The Ring and the Book* is her enthusiasm for the unification of Italy. Pompilia's escape from domestic tyranny in

86. *Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: a Broken Friendship as revealed in their Letters,* ed. Richard Curle, (1937), p. 173. Guido's sarcastic comment 'Guido's love – Why not provençal roses in his shoe, / Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars / At casement,' for instance, echoes Browning on himself in a letter to Miss Wedgwood ('why wonder if he wear cap and plume and have guitar, ribbon and all, in the conception of "other people" [p. 137]). The similarity between the plot of *The Ring and the Book* and the Browning's life-story was first noted by G.K. Chesterton in his *Robert Browning* (1903).
87. *RB*, I, 462 – 63.

the company of Caponsacchi lends itself to echoes of the 1859–60 war for Italian liberation, in which the young Italy, helped by French intervention and the glamorous escapades of Garibaldi, escaped from the repressive domination of Austria and her puppet princes.[88] In his treatment of this story, Browning again makes felt the difference from his wife which had been apparent in 'Old Pictures in Florence.' He regarded her idealism and political ardour with ambivalence: on the one hand it corresponded to her moral purity and spiritual vision, but on the other it left her open to deception by people like Napoleon III and the medium Douglas Home. He wrote about this in a letter to Isa Blagden: 'as for *seeing* the truth, it seems to me such angelic natures don't – and such devilish ones *do*: it is no sign of the highest nature: on the contrary, I do believe the very highness blinds and the lowness helps to see.'[89] The political dangers of her vehement attitude to the Risorgimento had begun to realise themselves in the plebiscities of 1860, soon before he started to work on the poem: as Admiral Mundy observed of the poll at Naples, with separate ballot boxes for 'yes' and 'no', and all Garibaldi's influence thrown behind a positive result, 'it would have required strong moral courage for anyone to publicly announce himself as an enemy to the sacred watchword of "Italia Una."'[90]

One of the traits most characteristic of Barrett Browning's political fervour, as we have seen, was her desire that Italy should 'stand up.' The same idiom is used in *Aurora Leigh* to describe the growth of inspiration and resolution in Aurora's personal development – 'slowly, by degrees, / I woke, rose up ... where was I? in the world;' 'my soul, / At poetry's divine first finger touch / Let go conventions and sprang up surprised' – and it is via Aurora, that character so charged both with Italy and with Barrett Browning's own self, that the same turns of phrase become the property of Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book*.[91] When

88. Flavia Alaya, 'The Ring, the Rescue, and the Risorgimento: Reunifying the Browning's Italy,' *Browning Institute Studies*, vol. 6 (1978), pp. 1–41.
89. *Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. Edward C. McAleer (Austin 1951), p. 282.
90. Miriam Belle Urban, *British Opinion and Policy on the Unification of Italy 1856–1861* (Scottdale 1938), p. 558.
91. *AL*, I, 564, 850.

Pompilia realises that she is pregnant, 'up I sprang alive,' as she says; when she goes out on to the terrace to meet Caponsacchi, 'I started up;' and when she awakes at Castelnuovo to find Guido standing above her (in Caponsacchi's words) 'she started up, stood erect, face to face / With the husband: back he fell ...'[92]

'Face to face,' with the connotation of absolute truthfulness which it owes to I Corinthians xiii.12 ('for now we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face') was another of Barrett Browning's eager locutions, and used by her as a manifesto for her art. Browning's dissension from her poetics of confrontation, and specifically from her use of this phrase, is embodied in the whole work, which, like most of his verse, is set in the past and makes no direct political comment, although many of the issues that it treats were obliquely apposite to the period of its writing. The ten monologues are heard separately from one another, and in the court which is their centre there is 'no bringing of accuser and accused, / And whose judged both parties face to face.'[93] The being face to face with someone, in Barrett Browning's sense, is, as it appears in *The Ring and The Book*, inimical to calm judgement and often disruptive to the perception of truth. When characters meet face to face it is to act instinctively, like Pompilia when she attacks Guido at Castelnuovo. That kind of moment does have a truthfulness about it, as the Pope shows when he asks, of Guido, 'how fares he when face to face / With Caponsacchi?' and takes his cowardliness as evidence of guilt.[94] But it is only a single type of veracity – a sudden revelation of character – and one that you can be sure of only sometimes. Caponsacchi and Pompilia rely on one another's faces, as Pompilia says when, for example, she comments of the false love-letters 'the face I fronted that one first, last time: / He would belie it by such words and thoughts;'[95] but such moments are always to be always to be set within the encircling patterns of evidence; as the Pope comments, always to be tested 'by foot's feel.'[96]

92. *RB*, VII, 1223, 1407; VI, 1523 – 24. Guido's misuse, in book V, of the idiom later rightly employed by Pompilia ('then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared' – 1483) is one instance of his plausibility (he is pretending that he was suddenly provoked, or inspired, out of his patience by the birth of Gaetano).
93. *RB*, I, 1656 – 57.
94. *RB*, X, 692 – 93.
95. *RB*, VII, 1183 – 84.
96. *RB*, X, 1885.

The *Ring and the Book* shows a similar circumspection in its use of the other key idiom that it takes from Barrett Browning's verse. Pompilia rises up – the Pope says – 'at first prompting of what I call God, / And fools call Nature;' he recognises the difficulty of telling whether 'this motion' was 'a decree,' and says that the answer was apparent to Pompilia because she had 'the experienced ear / O 'the good and faithful servant.'[97] The moral danger of acting on impulse, the need to test one's urges so as to get the feel of God's decrees, bears on *The Ring and the Book* in a way that it does not on Barrett Browning's verse – where rising up and casting off restrictions often seem to be good things in themselves. Pompilia does not leap over the balcony at her first sight of Caponsacchi's face, but waits until she knows it is her duty so to do; and Caponsacchi delays for a night after she has asked him to rescue her, hesitating about his obligations (perhaps it is right for him to keep his priestly vows, since 'duty to God is duty to her'), before their next meeting decides him.[98] Browning's poem guards his wife's verse by its careful treatment of her enthusiastic turns of phrase: it defends them from the accusations of thoughtfulness to which they are subject in her work by employing them with circumspection. In *The Ring and the Book,* Browning reproduces the broad traits of his wife's romantic interpretation of the Risorgimento, but displaces it into the past, and into the lives of individuals, embedding it in material and particular circumstances of the kind which she was always eager to cut away. By taking her words into his own writing, he distanced himself from her use of them, reviving his old political and poetic differences with her as well as their agreements. These differences resolve themselves in the embrace of the poem's conclusion. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is buried in Florence; and as Robert Browning's poetry, with all its earthiness and vigour, guards the rare gold of his wife's idealistic verse, it links his England to her Italy.

97. *RB*, X, 1072 – 73, 1089 – 1091.
98. *RB*, V, 1030.

Minding their Own Business: British Diplomacy and the Conflict between Italy and the Vatican during the Pontificate of Leo XIII, 1878 – 1903.

Dominic Fenech

In different ways and for different reasons, both Britain and Italy in the period following Italian unification had to contend with a factor they both would have preferred to ignore: the Vatican. In the process of having to be dealt with, the Vatican in due course inevitably became also a factor of Anglo-Italian relations, which were normally amicable.

To united Italy, the Vatican represented a source of perpetual disquiet since the papacy would not recognise the legitimacy of the Italian state failing a restitution of the temporal power, which had been lost with the fall of Rome in 1870. The virtual state of cold war which ensued between the Vatican and Italy had serious implications to both Italy's domestic and external politics. The so-called Roman Question became such a delicate issue in Italian national politics that no state, friendly or otherwise, overlooked its importance when dealing with Italy.

The respective positions of Italy and the Vatican as regards the Roman Question were unequivocal. Italy would not give back any sovereign territory to the pope, but regarding the Roman

Question as a purely internal matter, tolerated the continued presence of the Vatican in Rome and passed the Law of Guarantees to enable the pontiff to act as a sovereign head of state. The Vatican, on the other hand, would settle for nothing less than the return of Rome, regarded the Roman Question as a dispute between two sovereign states and hence an international issue, and denounced the Law of Guarantees on the grounds that it was a unilateral act of the Italian state. The situation lasted until the Lateran Pacts of 1929.[1]

Britain's concern with the pope was the reverse of Italy's. In itself, the predicament of the papacy was a matter of irrelevance to British politics. British statesmen preferred to express their friendship to Italy by steering clear of the Roman Question, effectively maintaining a benevolent neutrality towards it. But just as Italian politics were bedevilled by the Roman Question for decades, so British politics had to contend with another problem of a para-religious nature that simply would not go away – the Irish Question. The common factor between the two questions being the Roman Catholic Church, their paths eventually met when the British explored the possibility of asking the pope's help and found out that he would only give it for a price that was implicitly anti-Italian. The price was the establishment of diplomatic relations.

In 1878, the Irish Question erupted once again following harvest failures and the inevitable consequences of evictions, famine and violence. This time, the Irish nationalist movement found an able leadership in Charles Stewart Parnell, who organised the movement to campaign for home rule and pitched the Irish political class against Britain. With its traditional grip on the hearts and minds of the Irish nation, the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland found itself in a dilemma, which only time would solve. On one hand, many Irish bishops were genuinely nationalist, while those that were not could ill afford to turn openly against the popular movement or its secular leadership. On the other hand, the Church watched with apprehension its traditional leadership passing into the hands of secular leaders, who moreover were given to violence and revolutionary action

1. Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, London 1967, pp. 55 – 59; William L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1871 – 1890*, New York 1966, pp. 32 ff.

to achieve their ends. Inasmuch as an influential section of the Irish hierarchy preferred to negotiate with the British, seeing themselves as natural leaders of the Irish people, this section shared with the British authorities an appreciation of the urgency of defeating Parnell's leadership, even if they could not express it openly, and were obliged to wait.[2]

The British on their part had their own dilemma. William Ewart Gladstone, whose Liberal Government took office in 1880 in the thick of Irish agitation came to the conclusion that the pope's help must be enlisted to discipline those members of the Irish Church that condoned violence and to prevail upon the Irish to respect law and order. However, the same reasoning which credited the pope with such power was precisely what generated the common Protestant perception that Irish Catholics were loyal to the pope before the queen. 'Home rule is Rome rule' and 'no popery' being common anti-Irish slogans, one had to be extra prudent when involving the pope in the governance of Ireland. Nor could the prime minister be personally open about it, having earlier attacked the papacy for proclaiming the dogma of infallibility in the Council of 1870.[3]

Pope Leo XIII, who came to the ponitificate in 1878, was a keen fighter for the restoration of the temporal power and meanwhile embarked on a systematic campaign of building up the international standing of the papacy.[4] Establishing diplomatic relations for the first time by a great power such as Britain entailed an obvious prestige for a papacy threatened with extinction as a political entity on account of its loss of all territory. The Vatican's request to establish diplomatic relations

2. On the relations of the Irish hierarchy with Parnell and the nationalist movement during these years, see the following works by Emmet Larkin: 'The Roman Catholic Hierarchy and the Fall of Parnell', *Victorian Studies,* iv, 1961, pp. 315 – 36; 'Mounting the Counter-Attack: the Roman Catholic Hierarchy and the Destruction of Parnellism', *Review of Politics,* xxv, 1963, pp. 157 – 82; 'Launching the Counter-Attack: Part II of the Roman Hierarchy and the Destruction of Parnellism', *Review of Politics,* xxviii, 1966, pp. 359 – 83.

3. E.R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England,* London 1968, pp. 80 – 81, 92.

4. For a detailed analysis of Leo XIII's diplomacy see Crispolto Crispolti and Guido Aureli, *La Politica di Leone XIII, da Luigi Galimberti a Mariano Rampolla,* Rome 1912.

with Britain was difficult to meet for domestic reasons. Legally, it was still unclear whether Britain could recognise the pope as a sovereign. Hard line Protestant opinion, anti-papist because of tradition and because of Ireland itself was hostile.[5] For the opposite reason, which was closer to the true reason, Catholic Irish opinion was also hostile, while the Irish hierarchy resented attempts to negotiate on Irish affairs over their heads.

Externally, the British needed to be on their guard so as not to allow themselves to get involved or be used in the conflict between the Vatican and Italy. The state of Italo-Vatican relations was such that any political point scored by the Vatican was a point lost by Italy. Vatican diplomacy, especially during the pontificate of Leo XIII, was driven by the single-minded goal of forcing Italy to capitulate to its demands. Towards this purpose the Vatican wanted to show Italy and the world that it was still an international force to be considered. Building the diplomatic prestige of the papacy, besides being a compensation for the absence of physical territory and hence a means of continued political survival, represented leverage against the Italian state.[6] On their part, Italian statesmen such as Francesco Crispi never underestimated the nuisance potential of the Roman Question and fervently believed in the existence of a 'black international' conspiracy. On the continent, Italy was flanked by a friendly neighbour, Germany, and an unfriendly neighbour, France. Both detected Italy's Achilles' heel and manipulated the Roman Question for their own ends. Only Britain, wanting from Italy neither alliance nor submission, was consistently sensitive to what sometimes seemed like an Italian paranoia. After all it was over the internal affairs of the British empire, not as part of some intricate diplomatic scheme, that they needed to open a dialogue with the Vatican. In 1881, Gladstone took note of a warning by an archbishop friend of his that the pope's eagerness to have diplomatic relations was 'purely aimed at getting some countenance from us for [his] anti-Italian pretensions'.[7]

5. See H.A. Smith, 'Diplomatic Relations with the Holy See, 1815 – 1930', *Law Quarterly Review,* xlviii, 1932, pp. 374 – 93.
6. Langer, *European Alliances,* pp. 32 ff; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism,* 1890 – 1902, New York 1960, pp. 12 – 13.
7. Agatha Ramm, ed. *The Political correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville, 1876 – 1886,* Oxford 1962, i, p. 317, Gladstone to Granville, 6 Dec. 1881.

Consequently, the British were careful to take the Italians into their confidence whenever they wanted to approach the Vatican, unofficially or officially. In contrast with their sensitivity to the Italian position, nowhere does it show that the British Government, whether Liberal or Conservative, entertained any sympathy for the Vatican's cause.

It is ironic that whereas the animosity between Vatican and Quirinal were both the reason for the Vatican's desire for diplomatic relations and a problem for the British to concede such relations, the British embassy in Rome, and sometimes even the Italian embassy in London, often served as unofficial conduits of Anglo-Vatican communication. With Britain having an embassy in Rome after 1874, the embassy became both a source of first hand reporting on Vatican affairs to London and a means of exchanging messages with the Vatican, even if of course the Vatican could not be seen to be communicating with diplomats accredited to the Quirinal. Indeed, Gladstone even contemplated the idea of having an attaché to the British embassy in Rome acting as an unofficial agent to deal with the Vatican, a proposition that for obvious reasons was unacceptable to the latter.[8]

In his determination to explore all possible means of pacifying Ireland after he assumed office in 1880, Gladstone reluctantly despatched an agent to the Vatican. The agent was George Errington, an Irish Catholic Liberal MP, who spent his time between 1881 and 1884 shuttling between London and Rome, keeping the Vatican informed of the activities of nationalist Irish bishops and priests, and lobbying in favour of loyalist candidates whenever episcopal vacancies occurred throughout Ireland.[9] The Errington affair was handled clumsily and assumed the nature of a cat and mouse game, with Errington dangling the carrot of diplomatic relations that nevertheless never materialised, and the Vatican responding with matching

8. Public Record Office, London, [F]oreign [O]ffice papers, series 800, vol. 235, Jacobini to Errington, 15 Sep. 1881.

9. Detailed accounts of Errington's secret mission to the Vatican are given by C.J. Woods, 'Ireland and Anglo-Papal Relations, 1880 – 1885', *Irish Historical Studies,* 1972, pp. 29 – 60; and by Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Creation of the Modern Irish State, 1878 – 1886,* Philadelphia 1975.

ambivalence, taking limited action in Ireland when the Church's interests were concerned and making these appear like concessions to the British. Along the way, the news that a British agent was taken into the confidence of the Vatican leaked out, creating a stir in all the opposing circles, not least the Irish hierarchy. At the end, to save appearances, the agent found himself virtually disowned by his own Government and unwelcome inside the Vatican.[10] The first phase of the Anglo-Vatican experiment at rapprochement foundered because neither side was prepared to give what the other side wanted most.

From the start of his mission in October 1881, Errington found himself impeded by the state of Italo-Vatican relations. These had reached a new low a few months before Errington's arrival. The previous July, the papacy was subjected to a particularly ugly incident, when the remains of Pope Pius IX were exhumed from St Peter's to be interned in the Church of San Lorenzo. In the course of the transfer, the procession accompanying the coffin was attacked by an anti-clerical mob attempting to throw the coffin into the Tiber. The Vatican was so alarmed by the ferocity of Italian anticlericalism, that the possibility was contemplated of the papacy leaving Rome altogether. The prospect was one of serious concern to the Italian Government, since a papal exile might provide a pretext for foreign intervention to restore him in Rome. (Although no request was made to Britain, it transpired that the British colony of Malta was seriously considered, along with Austria and Spain, as a possibility).[11]

Soon after his arrival in Rome, therefore, Errington took the precaution of getting in touch with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an assurance that the Italian Government did not resent the holding of relations between Britain and the Vatican.[12] Nevertheless, he was soon to realise how distasteful to Italy the prospect of diplomatic relations by a major power with the Vatican could be, and why Italy had good reason to be

10. Woods, p. 59; Patrick J. Walsh, *William J. Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin,* Dublin 1929, p. 172.

11. See Dominic Fenech, 'The Pope Considers Seeking Asylum in Malta, 1881 – 1889', *Journal of Maltese Studies*, University of Malta, 1984, pp. 87 – 94.

12. FO800/235, Errington to Granville, 23 Nov. 1881.

alarmed when foreign powers did business with the pope. In November 1881, a few weeks after Errington's arrival, the German Chancellor Bismarck remarked in the Reichstag on the instability of the Italian monarchy as the government of Italy progressively moved to the left. The speech was followed by a series of inspired articles in the same tone appearing in the Berlin *Post*, which went on to debate the feasibility of the restoration of Rome to the pope as part of an international settlement of the Roman Question. Bismarck evidently was aiming to kill two birds with one stone. On one hand he was extricating himself from the *Kulturkampf* and, following the weakening of his position by the October elections, courting the support of the Catholic Centre Party. On the other hand he was pre-empting the possibility of an Italian rapprochement with France and preparing the ground for recruiting Italy into the Triple Alliance.[13] Presently, Bismarck's envoy arrived in Rome to arrange for the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican.[14] Errington was forced to keep a low profile not to offend the Italians. 'The result of the negotiations between Germany and the Vatican', he observed, 'are not making things easier for us .. Already the clerical party are exalting in what they regard as the turn of the tide in their favour.[15]

Aside from the success achieved by getting Germany to establish diplomatic relations, setbacks were in store for the papacy. In March 1882, the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph felt the need to send a special emissary to Leo XIII offering him asylum should the situation in Rome become intolerable, but strongly urging him to resist and remain in Rome. Beneath this show of solidarity by the Catholic emperor, however, were the secret negotiations underway to bring Italy into the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, a fact that later bitterly disappointed the pope, since it ruled out the possibility of wholehearted support in the Vatican's grievance against Italy.[16] The news from France was equally discouraging, for

13. see Langer, *European Alliances*, pp. 232 – 34.
14. *ibid*; and Eduardo Soderini, *Il Pontificato di Leone XIII*, Verona 1933, vol. iii, p. 256.
15. FO800/235, Errington to Granville, 7 Dec. 1881.
16. Seton-Waston, pp. 215 – 17.

concurrently, information reached the pope that the ultra anticlerical republican leader, Leon Gambetta, was sounding the Italians as to the possibility of removing the monarchy and setting up a republic. Reckoning that the continuation of residence in Rome would be impossible in such a republican Italy, the pope again considered leaving. Once more, he considered Malta, on the advice of the French Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, who wanted to pre-empt the possibility of the Vatican's transfer to Austria. He even sent Lavigerie to Malta in July 1882 to secretly test the ground for him,[17] a secrecy which led the British governor there to utterly misinterpret the purpose of the visit, believing Lavigerie to be scouting, not on behalf of the pope, but on behalf of the French.[18]

In the midst of all this, Foreign Secretary Granville, who was having cold feet about his agent's protracted presence in Rome, could hardly have been more insensitive when he again instructed Errington to suggest to the Vatican that henceforth a secretary in the Rome embassy might be assigned to represent British interests at the Vatican.[19] 'The project that the minister has indicated to you', Cardinal Jacobini, the Secretary of State, wrote back, '... is not only unacceptable, but is not even discussible for reasons of which you are well aware, and which would neither escape the wisdom of the noble lord if he takes into consideration the duties and the actual condition of the Supreme Pontiff.'[20]

Errington therefore continued his activities as before. His success peaked in May 1883, when the pope issued the famous *De Parnellio* rescript instructing the Irish clergy not to support the 'Parnell Testimonial Fund'.[21] From here on, however, his popularity at the Vatican began to wane, in large part because the rescript produced a great deal of antipathy for the papacy in Ireland.[22] On top of this, instead of expressing gratitude, much

17. Paul Cambon, *Correspondence, 1870 – 1924*, Paris 1940, vol. i. p. 186, Paul Cambon to Mme. Cambon, 20 Aug. 1882.
18. Fenech. See also below.
19. FO800/236, Errington to Granville, 29 July 1882.
20. *ibid*, Jacobini to Errington, 28 Aug. 1882.
21. FO800/237, Errington to Granville, 3 May 1883; 11 May 1883.
22. Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church*, pp. 189 – 90; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and His Party, 1880 – 1889*, Oxford 1964, pp. 85 – 86.

less making concessions, Granville kept Errington away from Rome for a while so as to avoid speculation that he had anything to do with the rescript and thus 'take away [the] character of spontaneity'.[23] When Errington did return, several months later, he was made to feel awkward and unwelcome.[24]

In the beginning of 1884, an opportunity presented itself for the British Government to do something for the Vatican and recover the goodwill of the pope. In January, the Roman supreme court of cassation threw out the Vatican's appeal against the application of Italian laws of 1867 and 1873 ordering the sale of immovable property belonging to religious congregations and the conversion of the money derived into government stock, with a thirty percent tax levied on the transaction. Outraged, the Vatican accused the state of spoliation, again reviving the threat of the pope going into voluntary exile and alarming the Italian Government. Immediately, Cardinal Jacobini issued a circular note to all the papal nuncios abroad accusing Italy of placing the Vatican cogregation *de Propaganda Fide*, which handled missionary activity world-wide and owned most of the property involved, under surveillance, in violation of the state's own Law of Guarantees.[25]

In England, the court decision was picked up in parliament by an Irish MP, who asked if the Government might not use its good offices with the Italian Government on behalf of *Propaganda*, on the grounds that the congregation carried a lot of its missionary activity inside the British empire. Gladstone obliged, promising to do so at the first opportunity,[26] which pleased the Vatican.[27] However, irked by the Vatican's campaign through the nuncios, as well as by the debate in the British House of Commons, Foreign Minister Mancini addressed a circular to all ambassadors warning that the Italian Government would not tolerate any attempt at foreign interference in the administration of justice by the Italian tribunals.[28] Nonetheless, the British ambassador was instructed

23. FO800/237, Granville to Paget, 24 May 1883.
24. *ibid*, Errington to Granville, 19 Nov. 1883.
25. Soderini, vol. ii, pp. 48 – 61; Langer, *European Alliances*, pp. 231 – 34.
26. *Hansard*, 3rd series, 1884, cclxxxiv, 887 – 88.
27. FO800/238, Errington to Granville, 12 Mar. 1884.
28. FO425/168, Lumley to Granville, 25 Feb. 1884

to intercede discreetly and, should the occasion arise, join other ambassadors 'in expressing a cordial hope that some elasticity would be found possible'.[29] Errington informed the Vatican confidentially of Granville's instructions.[30] In the event, no embassy seemed prepared to be the first to intervene, although a few weeks later the British ambassador did mention the subject to Mancini, who hinted that something might be done once the issue had cooled down.[31] Since petitions continued to reach London from various parts of the empire requesting the Government to intercede, Granville left it up to the ambassador's judgement to decide whether or not to raise the subject again.[32] He did not.[33]

Errington's mission came to an end the following year. A failure, it was not entirely a worthless venture, because at least it had established communication of an intensive kind, as opposed to ad hoc contact. It also established the rules, as it were. Salisbury's Conservative Government after 1886 fully appreciated the advantages of maintaining contact with the Vatican, mainly because of Ireland; only, he was careful to have good alibis when he did so. Alibis also suited the Vatican, its fingers somewhat burned by the Errington experience on account of the Irish hierarchy's reaction.[34]

One such alibi was Malta, although it was not just that. The island was a number of times the subject of Anglo-Vatican communication earlier on in the century, usually when episcopal vacancies occurred, and was the only colony in the empire where the British secured a right to be consulted in such matters.[35] Talking with the Vatican about Malta again impinged on Anglo-

29. *ibid*, Granville to Lumley, 7 Mar. 1884.
30. FO800/238, Errington to Granville, 12 Mar. 1884
31. FO425/168, Lumley to Granville, 28 Mar. 1884; FO45/520, Lumley to Granville, 4 Apr. 1884.
32. FO45/520, Granville to Lumley, 12 July 1884, 19 July 1884.
33. *ibid*, Lumley to Granville, 29 July 1884.
34. On the conclusion and aftermath of the Errington experience see Walsh, pp. 171–72; Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church*, pp. 331–53.
35. FO45/621, 'Memorandum on the Subject of the Appointment of Roman Catholic Bishops in Malta and Course to be pursued', by A. Walmisley, 20 Sep. 1886; also Dominic Fenech, *The Making of Archbishop Gonzi*, Malta 1976, pp. 5–8.

Italian relations, not just for the usual reason of not wishing to offend the Italians by showing deference to the pope, but because historically, geographically and culturally the staunchly Catholic island was very close to Italy.

Malta was Britain's chief Mediterranean naval and military base and had been rising in strategic importance in the course of the nineteenth century in direct proportion to Britain's rise as the dominant naval power in the Mediterranean. The island's strategic value, which meant that security was the paramount consideration in running the internal affairs of the island, dictated to a large degree the relations of the British authorities with the local élites.[36] In particular, they showed the utmost consideration towards the traditional privileged position of the Catholic bishops and clergy that was tantamount to power-sharing. The otherwise straightforward internal power relationship became complicated with the rise, notably in the second half of the nineteenth century, of a political class demanding constitutional rights from Britain. Indeed this political class had much inspiration from the Italian refugees who in this British colony found a safe haven from persecution at the time of the *risorgimento*. Partly for that reason, partly because the Italian language had long been the language of the educated, many Maltese politicians equated Italianity with nationalism and liberalism. Locally, this translated itself into a chronic clash between English and Italian.[37] While it irritated the British authorities, the platform of *italianità* was tolerated so long as Italy was a friendly nation and so long as there were no signs of Italian irredentist designs on the island. Additionally, there were no serious signs of disloyalty on the part of the italianate politicians, whose programme was mainly of a constitutional and cultural nature. The British Government even moved eventually to grant further constitutional concessions, ultimately awarding a constitution in 1887 which for the first time gave Maltese representatives a majority in the Council of Government. The

36. For a study of the parallel growth of strategic importance and constitutional development in Malta, see Hilda I. Lee, *Malta 1813–1914, a Study in Constitutional and Strategic Development*, Malta 1972.

37. On the Italian aspect of Maltese nationalism, see Henry Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, Malta 1979.

award of that constitution was in itself part of a package of measures designed to consolidate the security of the island fortress by fostering the loyalty of the population and also included attempts to anglicise the Maltese and erode the strength of Italian. The Anglicisation programme failed, partly because of political resistance but perhaps more importantly because of clerical fear that Anglicisation was synonymous with Protestantisation.

In the first half of the 1880s, the British authorities began to be worried by what they regarded as an ominous alliance forming between the italianate politicians and the higher clergy. Again, there were no grounds here for suspecting sedition, since the loyalty of the Maltese Church to the pope was beyond question and it was unthinkable therefore that it would harbour Italian irredentist views. On the other hand, it was worrisome because a sound Church-State relationship was the traditional guarantee of stability inside the island. The British were quick to attribute this development to the weak leadership of the ailing archbishop and, taking advantage of the presence in Rome of Gladstone's secret agent, began sending messages to the Vatican that they desired the archbishop's resignation and his replacement by a younger man who was not tainted with local politics.[38] The pope obliged and although he did not ask for the archbishop's resignation, in 1885 sent to Malta an apostolic administrator in the person of Bishop Buhagiar.[39] Buhagiar was a Maltese prelate working in Tunisia, just recently acquired by the French. Instead of welcoming him, the British governor was alarmed that the diocese should come into the hands of a bishop who owed his advancement to none other than the French Cardinal Lavigerie.[40] If being pro-Italian was no grounds for disloyalty, on account of the friendly relations between Britain and Italy, francophilism was an altogether different matter. No sooner was Monsignor Buhagiar in Malta than Governor Lintorn Simmons began pressing for his removal.[41] Buhagiar stayed on however,

38. FO800/238, Errington to Granville, 23 Nov. 1884
39. FO800/239, Errington to Granville, 15 Jan. 1885
40. P.R.O. [C]olonial [O]ffice papers, series 158, vol. 272, file 1961, Errington to Simmons, 21 Jan. 1885.
41. CO158/272/1319, Simmons to Derby, 16 Jan. 1885.

partly because the Colonial Office regarded the governor's reaction as exaggerated,[42] and partly because the Foreign Office was warned that if the Vatican perceived that the British attached a lot of importance to this matter, they would use it to strengthen their hand in their bargaining for diplomatic relations.[43] In due course, however, Buhagiar's behaviour began causing serious concern to the British. In particular, he did not seem to appreciate, like his predecessors, the importance for both Church and State of harmonious relations. Furthermore, seeing in him a factor of resistance, the pro-Italian politicians loved him.[44]

Like all military governors of Malta, and perhaps more, Simmons believed that as a fortress and naval base the island should be in a perpetual state of alert, against the French in particular. A francophobe, he was exasparated to have a francophile prelate leading the Church in Malta. Buhagiar's unfriendly attitude towards him fuelled his fantasy about the possible role of the new bishop in any designs the French might have on the island.[45] Whereas they did not at first think much of the French peril in Malta, the Colonial Office began to be concerned about the implications of a Church-State rupture to the internal stability of the island. In 1886, therefore, the Foreign Office was prevailed upon to use its available channels to ask the Vatican to transfer Buhagiar. In September, Lord Iddesleigh, the foreign secretary, used the services of the Italian chargé d'affairs in London, Signor Catalani, who had his own private means of communicating with the Vatican, to pass on to the Vatican the request about Buhagiar's transfer.[46] Catalani had the message conveyed to the pope and brought back the reply that Buhagiar's position did not entitle him to the right of succession, and that he could be passed over once the old archbishop died.[47]

The question came up again in February 1887, when the archbishop had a seizure and his death seemed imminent.[48] Instead of using Catalani's agency, Salisbury, who had just taken

42. CO158/272/1493, C.O. minutes, 28 Jan. 1885; 29 Jan. 1885.
43. FO800/238, Errington to Granville, 23 Nov. 1884.
44. FO45/261, Simmons to Granville, 27 July 1886.
45. *ibid*, Simmons to Knutsford, 28 May 1888
46. CO/158/279/15823, C.O. to F.O. 10 Sep. 1886; FO45/261, F.O. minute, 7 Oct. 1886.
47. CO158/279/19264, F.O. to C.O., 25 Oct. 1886.
48. FO45/261, Simmons to Holland, 1 Feb. 1887.

over the Foreign Office from Iddesleigh, instructed the Rome embassy to inform the Vatican privately through the British Cardinal Howard of their desire for another prelate to succeed the archbishop. The change of channels caused some confusion and a diplomatic gaffe. For obvious reasons, Catalani had wanted to keep his earlier role in conveying messages to Vatican secret.[49] But Cardinal Howard, instead of only suggesting a successor, pressed the pope to wait no longer to transfer Buhagiar as he had earlier intimated.[50] In view of the Vatican's official policy towards Italy, the pope had as much reason as Catalani to maintain the secrecy of their contact. Cardinal Howard was therefore quite confounded to find him 'surprised and annoyed' and not seeming to know what Howard was talking about. The pope dismissed him, saying that he had no cause for complaint against Buhagiar.[51]

Anxious to clear up the misunderstanding, Salisbury instructed the ambassador to find a way of explaining to the Vatican that the Government had not intended to request Buhagiar's immediate removal.[52] Accepting the explanation, the pope offered to bargain: he would consider transferring Buhagiar if the British Government made the request *directly* to him.[53] It did not work. Salisbury was not yet ready to enter into diplomatic communication.[54] In any case, the archbishop's health recovered somewhat.

The fact remained, however, that if the British were to assert their right to be consulted in Maltese episcopal appointments they could not refuse to communicate with the Vatican, officially if the latter decided to insist on it. Moreover, the reverse side of not regarding the Maltese succession as important enough to open diplomatic communications over was that Malta was a safe subject to discuss openly, at a diplomatic level, with the Vatican. If the pope could thus be given the diplomatic recognition he so badly wanted, he might be prepared to make concessions in

49. *ibid*, Salisbury to Lumley, 12 Feb. 1887.
50. *ibid*, F.O. minute, 5 Mar. 1887.
51. *ibid*, Lumley to Salisbury, 17 Feb. 1887.
52. *ibid*, Salisbury to Lumley, 11 Mar. 1887.
53. *ibid*, Lumley to Salisbury, 15 Mar. 1887.
54. *ibid*, F.O. minutes, 7 Mar. 1887, 29 Mar. 1887.

Ireland. Slowly, both sides converged to the same view. During the next twenthy months discussions were held on and off, always unofficially and through different channels, over the Maltese succession, with the Vatican progressively becoming less subtle in its hints that the establishment of diplomatic relations would be rewarded in concessions on this and other matters as required.

In the meantime, however the ground would have to be studied carefully before the British Government could come round to take what was considered to be a delicate step. There were the usual problems of public opinion at home, not least Irish opinion. And there was the matter of how the Italians would regard the countenance shown to the Vatican by the establishment of diplomatic relations. As for the Italians, the ground was not altogether unfavourable in the first half of 1887. Italo-Vatican relations were going through a rare phase of rapprochement and for a while it seemed that conciliation might set in. Hopes ran high when in the Spring Padre Tosti, Crispi's liason with the Vatican, published his famous pamphlet *Conciliazione*. But even as optimism was highest, developments were taking place inside the Vatican that soon were to pre-empt the success of any such initiative. Presently, Secretary of State Cardinal Jacobini died. In choosing a successor, the pope effectively had to make a crucial policy choice, between two candidates representing contrasting schools of thought where Vatican relations with Italy were concerned. One was the francophile Cardinal Mariano Rampolla, of the intransigent school; the other was the germanophile Luigi Galimberti, of the conciliatory school. In choosing Rampolla, the pope chose the way of confrontation and hence effective alignment with Italy's adversaries.[55] The movement towards conciliation was soon wrecked, thanks to the efforts, among others, of Cardinal Lavigerie in collaboration with his compatriot, the French Ambassador at the Vatican Count Lefebvre.[56]

55. See Crispolti, 110 – 169; Langer, *The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890 – 1894*, Cambridge 1929, pp. 113 – 14; E.L. Woodward. 'The Diplomacy of the Vatican under Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII', *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, iii-iv, 1924, pp. 132 – 35.
56. Crispolti, p. 163.

Lavigerie's role in stalling the work of Italo-Vatican conciliation was not the reason why the British authorities in Malta were trying to get rid of that Cardinal's protégé, Bishop Buhagiar – nor were they necessarily aware of it. Nevertheless, Lavigerie's patriotism and untiring efforts to reconcile French and Vatican interests were well known. In these complex years for international relations, conspiracy theories, far fetched as they might have sounded, could not be discounted. The possibility of someone like Lavigerie using his influence in the Vatican to place the powerful Catholic Church in Britain's Mediterranean naval headquarters in the hands of a protégé of his, if true, was fraught with implications.

At this particular juncture, Salisbury was having to reckon with Britain's two traditional adversaries in the Mediterranean at once. Relations with France were badly strained, mainly over Britain's continued occupation of Egypt, while Russia was keenly distrusted for its Balkan policy. Salisbury's concern over the possibility of a Franco-Russian rapprochement in the Mediterranean was taken up by Bismarck who, active in his diplomacy of isolating France, was trying to persuade Britain to join forces with the Triple Alliance. One reason was that at this time, 1887, Italy's membership of the Triple Alliance was due for renewal, and the Italians made it clear to Bismarck that they expected more wholehearted support against France, especially in Tripoli. He was hoping that Britain could support Italy's claims while covering Italy's vulnerable coastline against the possibility of French aggression. As a substitute for full membership in Bismarck's alliance, Salisbury entered instead the Mediterranean Agreements (February and December, 1887) with the two Mediterranean members of the Triple Alliance, Italy and Austria-Hungary, committed to the maintenance of the status quo in the Mediterranean. From here on, Salisbury had to keep reminding Crispi that the Mediterranean Agreements were not a defensive alliance, while Bismarck kept encouraging both of them to regard it as such.[57]

57. see C.J. Lowe, *Salisbury and the Mediterranean, 1886 – 1896,* London 1965, pp. 1 – 53; Langer, *Franco-Russian Alliance,* pp. 92 – 97; Thomas Palamenghi-Crispi, *The Memories of Francesco Crispi,* ii, pp. 395 – 400.

Britain was carefully steering clear of commitments it did not want while entering into a loose association with her continental friends only where Britain's and her partners' interests happened to coincide. In the background of these complex diplomatic manoeuvres, the security situation in Malta assumed high priority. Neither a Church-State conflict, much less a conflict orchestrated by one who was suspected of being the agent of Cardinal Lavigerie could be tolerated, the more so if the theory could be stretched further to take into account Lavigerie's power in Rampolla's francophile Vatican. It became imperative, in Malta to have Bishop Buhagiar replaced by a collaborationist bishop, in Rome that the British be on their guard against being involved in some intricate Vatican scheme aimed aganst Italy.

Meanwhile, in the first half of 1887, Salisbury was still worried about Ireland, while the Maltese succession question was kept on ice following the archbishop's recovery in the early spring. After A.J. Balfour's appointment as Irish Secretary in March 1887, in the wake of the successful launching of the Irish 'Plan of Campaign' the previous autumn, the idea of re-opening communications with the Vatican began to be entertained again.[58] Presently, an occasion presented itself for Salisbury to make a gesture to the Vatican without incurring the outrage of his opponents, including the Irish. The occasion was Queen Victoria's jubilee of June 1887. It so happened that Pope Leo XIII was due to celebrate his own sacerdotal jubilee later in the year. When in May the pope indicated, through the agency of Cardinal Howard, that he wished to send a diplomatic envoy to London to congratulate the queen, it was clear to Salisbury that should the wish be granted, the queen would have to reciprocate with a similar embassy, so that a diplomatic exchange will have been effected.[59] The pope's offer was welcomed.

From the start the linkage between diplomatic relations and Ireland was reasserted. As his envoy, the pope chose the papal nuncio for Bavaria, Monsignor Prince Ruffo-Scilla, following the

58. L.P. Curtis, *Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, a Study in Conservative Unionism,* London 1963, p. 270.

59. *Parliamentary Papers 1890,* lxxxi, Howard to Salisbury, no date, but received 16 May 1887; Christ Church, Oxford, Salisbury Papers, class E, entry: Howard, Norfolk to Salisbury, 18 May 1887: 29 May 1887.

advice of the Catholic Duke of Norfolk that the envoy should be capable of discussing Irish affairs with Salisbury.[60] In London, after concluding his official business of congratulating the queen, the papal envoy did discuss Ireland at length with Salisbury, breaking the news that the pope had decided to send an apostolic delegate, Monsignor Persico, to Ireland to report directly to him on the activities of the Irish Church with respect to agitation.[61]

Salisbury was also concerned to know how the Italians felt about such an exchange taking place. Circumstances appeared favourable. During the first few months of Rampolla's tenure of his new office, the movement in favour of conciliation with Italy for a while maintained some of its momentum.[62] Indeed, at the end of June the British ambassador in Rome observed that this was the best time, if ever, to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican; that whereas Italian politicians had hitherto maintained that such a step would be regarded as unfriendly on the part of Britain,

> I now hear the same persons stating that the appointment of a British representative at the Vatican would be a natural step ... in view of the influence which might be exerted through the Pope on Irish affairs, and that ... a British representative would not be suspected of working for the restoration of the temporal power.[63]

Fears of anti-Italian intrigue were soon revived, however, as Rampolla asserted himself and the Vatican reaffirmed its position that the restoration of the temporal power was a *sine qua non* in any Vatican-Quirinal rapprochement.[64] In September 1887, Crispi's newspaper *Riforma* published an article which, coloured by Crispi's own fears about foreign intervention in the Roman Question, expressed disdain for the idea of an Anglo-Vatican diplomatic relationship:

60. SP/E/Howard, Norfolk to Salisbury, 29 May 1887.
61. SP/A/68, Salisbury to Ruffo-Scilla, 12 May 1888; FO45/575, Kennedy to Salisbury 30 June 1887.
62. Crispolti, p. 173.
63. FO45/575, Kennedy to Salisbury, 30 June 1887.
64. Crispolti, pp. 35, 170.

> The Vatican has frequently endeavoured to induce both Liberal and Conservative Governments to establish diplomatic relations ... The English Government have not thought fit to accede to this desire, for they have perceived that in so doing they would place themselves on an equal footing with a foreign power which could exercise an influence on the Irish people. Whereas they have naturally considered the Irish question as an entirely internal one.[65]

When the time came to return the pope's courtesy, Crispi was notified beforehand of the Government's intention.[66] In the event, the British only conceded the bare minimum to the pope. Norfolk, England's first Catholic layman, a staunch unionist and leading advocate of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, was invested with a diplomatic title, but the wording of his mission's object was carefully chosen to indicate that its purpose was to thank the pope for his earlier mission, not to congratulate him on his jubilee. This subtle distinction was important, mainly because the Vatican was clearly using the jubilee celebrations to make an ostentatious show of power which necessarily irritated the Italian Government, and adding an Englishmen to the corps of diplomats seemingly paying homage to the supreme pontiff was expected to offend the Italians.[67]

As an exhibition of the papacy's prestige and influence in the eyes of the secular as well as the Catholic world, the jubilee festivities were indeed an unwelcome occasion for the Italian Government – the mayor of Rome was later dismissed for having offered his congratulations on behalf of the City.[68] 'Nobody, I think, could be in Rome at that time', recalls Lord Selbourne, a unionist peer, who witnessed the celebrations in Rome,

> without feeling how great a moral power, with all its humiliations, the Papacy still was; to me, the new Italian monarchy, as I saw it in the Quirinal and its legislative assemblies, seemed by

65. FO45/576, enclosure in Kennedy to Salisbury, 17 Sep 1887
66. FO/45/661, Salisbury to Lumley, 16 Nov. 1887.
67. *Parl. Papers 1890*, lxxxi (761), 'Mission of the Duke of Norfolk to the Vatican', Salisbury to Howard, 10 Nov. 1887.
68. Crispolti, p. 170.

> comparison small ... it was impossible not to be struck by the wealth of the presents, from emperors, kings, queens, republics and private men, which filled the chambers of the Vatican.[69]

As for the British mission, much to the annoyance of the Foreign Office,[70] the pope chose to ignore the careful choice of language that had been used to define the object of Norfolk's mission as mere gratitude for his earlier courtesy. When Norfolk presented his credentials, the pope spoke of his great joy in receiving from him 'the same congratulations and compliments on our Sacerdotal Jubilee',[71] whereas the Vatican *Osservatore Romano* referred to the meeting as a 'sovereign audience'.[72] From the British side, to drive home their point, it was arranged for Norfolk to return to England briefly, from where he would lead a pilgrimage of Catholics back to Rome, so as not to be present on jubilee day itself, in order to avoid inevitably having to extend the queen's congratulations.[73]

Norfolk spent the rest of the winter and a part of the spring in Rome, supported by a number of aides, all busying themselves feeding the Vatican departments with information about clerical activity in Ireland and vying for influence agains the Irish bishops.[74] Meanwhile, expectations were rising in anticipation of the outcome of the Irish mission of the apostolic delegate. Ostensibly on the basis of that report – although the delegate himself denied that he had advised to that effect – the pope on April 20, 1888, issued his famous decree condemning the Irish Plan of Campaign,[75] a bombshell to the Irish nationalist clergy, a foreseen concession to the unionists.

The pattern was now established. The pope was showing his disposition to oblige the British Government in Ireland, while the British Government was conceding diplomatic recognition in

69. Roundell Palmer, *Memorials, Personal and Political, 1856 – 1895,* London 1898, vol. ii, pp. 280 – 81.
70. FO45/661, F.O. minute, undated, over Norfolk to Salisbury, 17 Dec. 1887.
71. *Parl. Papers 1890,* 'Speech of Pope Leo XIII to the Duke of Norfolk on Presenting his Credentials', 17 Dec. 1887.
72. FO45/661, F.O. minute, undated, over Norfolk to Salisbury, 17 Dec. 1887.
73. SP/A/68, Norfolk to Salisbury, 8 Nov. 1887; Barrington to Norfolk, 9 Nov. 1887; Barrington to Salisbury, 5 Dec. 1887.
74. SP/E/Howard, Norfolk to Salisbury, 3 Mar. 1888; 16 Mar. 1888
75. Shane Leslie, *Henry Edward Manning, his Life and Labours*, London 1921, pp. 426 – 28.

small doses, testing the reaction of potential objectors, including the Italian Government, as it did so. On the basis of the results achieved, Salisbury in due course was converted to wanting diplomatic relations with the Vatican.[76]

Soon after the return of Norfolk to England, unofficial communications were again resumed over the pending question of the Maltese succession. In Malta, the archbishop relapsed into ill health and suffered another seizure in May, 1888. To the alarm of the British governor, who could not bear the thought of having him in Malta 'in the event of war with France', Bishop Buhagiar travelled to Rome, where Cardinal Lavigerie was lobbying for his nomination as successor.[77] At this time, Italy's relations with France were rapidly deteriorating. The Italians were invoking the Mediterranean Agreements of the previous year, whereas the British were concerned that should the Italians be encouraged to interpret the Agreements as a defensive alliance, they might lead Britain into a war with France. Meanwhile, the signs of a Franco-Russian rapprochement again led the British to reconsider joining the Triple Alliance. Again, Salisbury did not choose that option but decided to strengthen British sea power in the Mediterranean, adopting the two-power standard. This ever growing importance attached by the British to their naval power in the Mediterranean further increased the authorities' sensitivity to any possibility, however remote, of French intrigue in Malta. Thus, before the Duke of Norfolk travelled to Rome on his mission in November 1887, Salisbury himself had asked him to 'put a spoke in Buhagiar's wheel' when in Rome.[78] Nevertheless, nothing happened to Buhagiar.

The more serious the Maltese succession question was becoming in the eyes of the British authorities, the more the Vatican equivocated. For months after the return of Norfolk to London, the succession question was the subject of intermittent exchanges through intermediaries between Britain and the Vatican. The situation became more urgent after the old archbishop finally died in July 1888[79] and no new appointment

76. SP/A/68, Salisbury to Dufferin, 28 Dec. 1888
77. FO45/621, Simmons to Knutsford, 28 May 1888.
78. SP/A/46, Barrington to Kennedy, 23 Nov. 1887.
79. FO45/621, Simmons to Knutsfhord, 12 July 1888.

was made for several months. When Count Strickland, a young Anglo-Maltese politician, went to present the British case, the pope assured him that Buhagiar's administration would not be prolonged unduly, and Cardinal Rampolla could not have been more direct when he observed to him that the question would have been resolved long ago had there been a British representative at the Vatican.[80]

Strickland found himself playing the part of the pope's messenger to Salisbury, who no longer needed persuading as to the value of instituting a working relationship with the Vatican.[81] Malta was considered important in itself as a subject for negotiation with the Vatican. The holding of diplomatic relations would appease the pope into making concessions, while negotiations over Ireland could proceed under cover of Malta. Most importantly, if a system of consultation could be estblished with the Vatican over Maltese ecclesiastical affairs, the principle might then be applied across the British empire, including Ireland of course. The idea was born of negotiating a concordat with the Vatican over Malta as a first step.[82] Before the end of the year, Cardinal Rampolla was informed that at the first opportune moment, the Government was prepared to open diplomatic relations.[83] Whereupon the Pope appointed as archbishop of Malta the British nominee, Bishop Pace[84] and assigned Buhagiar overseas to the Vatican diplomatic service.[85]

What still held Salisbury back was the turbulent political situation in Europe.[86] The current commotion in France, where General Boulanger was rocking the republic and alarming the other powers by his adventurism, was doubtless on Salisbury's mind. Salisbury went through the usual procedure of sounding

80. *ibid*, memoranda by Strickland, 27 Nov. 1888; 28 Nov. 1888.
81. SP/A/68, Salisbury to Dufferin, 28 Dec. 1888.
82. See SP/A/66, Kennedy to Barrington, 4 Dec. 1888; SP/A/68, Strickland to Barrington, 22 Jan. 1889; and 'Memorandum to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with reference to Diplomatic Relations with the Holy See and to Ecclesiastical Questions in Malta', by Strickland, 30 Jan. 1889.
83. SP/A/68, Strickland to Rampolla, 30 Dec. 1888.
84. FO45/661, Rampolla to Torrens, 10 Jan. 1889.
85. *ibid*, Torrens to Knutsford, 1 Apr. 1889.
86. SP/A/68, Strickland to Rampolla 30 Dec. 1888.

the Italian Government, informing the Italian ambassador of his intention to accredit an envoy to the Vatican, but adding that he would wait for an improvement in Italo-Vatican relations before doing so.[87] Two months later, the idea of a temporary but fully accredited diplomatic mission charged with conducting negotiations over Maltese ecclesiastical affairs was discussed and accepted by the Cabinet; an idea that Balfour, the Irish Secretary, considered as 'the best that has yet been brought forward'.[88] The ambassador in Rome was instructed to find out whether Crispi would be sorry to see the despatch of a diplomatic envoy; to which Crispi replied that he had no cause for apprehension.[89]

While the ground was thus cleared with the Italians, preparations began to be made for the first fully accredited diplomatic mission to proceed to the Vatican in the autumn of 1889. Again however, in the intervening period relations between Italy and the Vatican struck another low when in June a statue of Giordano Bruno, who had been burned for heresy in 1600, was unveiled in Rome. The commemoration of such an eminent victim of ecclesiastical repression and the fierce anticlerical outbursts that accompanied it once more raised the prospect of the pope abandoning Rome. The pope convened the cardinals and, again, seemed to prefer Malta as his refuge, although still no request was made to the British government. Alarmed, Crispi this time called the Vatican's bluff, letting it be known that the Italian Government would not attempt to stop the pope from leaving, but that once departed he would not be allowed to return.[90] The idea of a papal transfer was still being contemplated four months later when, the diplomatic mission being about to leave England, the question of offering asylum to the pope in Malta was raised for the first time by the papal nuncio in Munich. The nuncio expressed his hope to the British ambassador that the diplomatic mission 'may have something to

87. *ibid*, Salisbury to Dufferin, 28 Dec. 1888.
88. *ibid*, Strickland to Barrington, 22 Jan. 1889; SP/E/Howard, Norfolk to Salisbury, undated, February 1889.
89. SP/A/68, Salisbury to Dufferin, 15 Feb. 1889; FO/45/661, Dufferin to Salisbury, 16 Feb. 1889.
90. Fenech, 'The Pope Considers Seeking Asylum'; Langer, *European Alliances*, p. 232; Seton-Watson, p. 222.

do with the present precarious position of His Holiness in Rome' and that the queen's envoy 'may have been charged to offer the Pope an asylum in Malta, if events should prevent his remaining any longer in Rome'.[91]

The mission does not appear to have had any such ulterior aim.[92] The only ulterior aim was Ireland. As Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary, Salisbury chose Sir Lintorn Simmons,[93] the recently retired governor of Malta who had spent most of his governorship trying to oust Bishop Buhagiar. Accompanying him were the Maltese crown advocate and one Major Ross of Blandensberg,[94] who had already acted as the Duke of Norfolk's aide in 1888, handling the Irish aspect of that mission.[95] Officially the mission, which arrived in Rome in November 1889, was to deal with a number of questions relating to Church-State relations in Malta, among them the procedure of consultation to be adopted in the future with respect to episcopal appointments, mixed marriages and the education of the priesthood.[96] The plan was for the mission to conduct its business and return home without undue delay. Should the outcome be positive, and should no outcry be raised or other complications arise, Salisbury was prepared to consider making the mission permanent and extend its scope to ensure Anglo-Vatican co-operation in all the empire.[97]

However, once the mission was in Rome, the pope and his secretary of state did their best to keep it there. In particular, Cardinal Rampolla slowed down interminably the negotiations over the question of consultation in future episcopal appointments.[98] Come January 1890, Salisbury was warning his

91. CO537/7, C.O. minute, 5 Dec. 1889.
92. *ibid*, C.O. minute, 5 Dec. 1889.
93. *Parl. Papers, 1890,* xlix (515), 'Correspondence respecting Sir L Simmons' Special Mission to the Vatican relative to Religious Questions in the Island of Malta', extract from the *London Gazette* of 29 Oct. 1889.
94. FO45/661, F.O. to C.O. 28 Oct. 1889.
95. SP/E/Howard, Norfolk to Salisbury, 2 July 1888; Norfolk to Salisbury, 29 Oct. 1889.
96. See *Parl. Papers 1890,* Correspondence respecting Sir L. Simmons, etc.'
97. FO/45/661, F.O. to C.O. 7 May 1889; C.O. to F.O., 18 May 1889; SP/E/Ross, Barrington to Ross, 2 Jan 1890.
98. *Parl Papers 1890,* xlix, Rampolla to Simmons, 20 Mar. 1890; Simmons to Salisbury, 31 Mar. 1890.

envoy that 'any attempt on their part to force our hand in the matter and compel us by dawdling to make it [the mission] permanent will result in its being recalled somewhat abruptly'.[99] Exasperated, in March 1890 he instructed Simmons to wind up his mission and return at once with the excuse that he needed to consult with London.[100] He withdrew his instructions only after Simmons pleaded that an abrupt departure would be construed by the Italian anticlericals as a British rebuff to the Vatican, and thus ruin what had been achieved so far.[101] Later that month, Rampolla and Simmons finally exchanged notes to the effect that when an episcopal vacancy in Malta occurred, the pope would recieve suggestions 'whenever the Government itself may furnish him with the means and the occasion'.[102] The mission returned to England in April.

In fact, after so much build-up, the British diplomatic mission to the Vatican turned out to be an anti-climax, and diplomatic relations were not seriously contemplated again until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The Vatican's apparent attempts to force the British Government to give more than it was prepared to by dragging on the negotiations in the hope that the mission would be transformed into a permanent representation did not help. But there were other factors that militated against the eventual resumption of diplomatic relations on a more permanent basis. Salisbury's main condition had been that no outcry would be raised in parliament. In the event, all the elements with an axe to grind came down strongly on the Government. One Irish MP, Timothy M Healy, put it that 'no one who had not a very large gullet' could believe that the Government had sent a diplomatic agent to the Vatican just because of Malta.[103] It is not quite clear what the mission accomplished as regards Ireland, although Major Ross worked away at the Vatican supplying and explaining the usual

99. SP/E/Ross, Barrington to Ross, 2 Jan. 1890.
100. FO45/662, Salisbury to Simmons, 5 Mar. 1890.
101. *ibid*, Simmons to Salisbury, 6 Mar. 1890.
102. *Parl. Papers 1890,* xlix, Rampolla to Simmons, 20 Mar. 1890.
103. *Hansard,* 3rd series, 1890, cccxlviii, 557 – 86. There were several other suggestions that the mission had Ireland as an objective: cccxlvi, 1312; cccxlvii, 1365 – 66, 1386, 1911; cccxlviii, 1138 – 39.

'information', and the Vatican seemed to take some measures to enforce its earlier directives on the clergy.[104] What is clear is that developments in Ireland moved fast during the period that the British mission was in Rome, and the common aim of both the British authorities and the Vatican, that is to say, the detachment of the Bishops from Parnell and the latter's downfall, began to be achieved in this period. In November 1889, Captain O'Shea filed his petition for divorce, citing Parnell as co-respondent. It was the signal for the anti-Parnell camp, chief among which the bishops, to mount the assault that would ultmately break him.[105] Whether the endeavours of the mission had anything to do with the divorce crisis or not is hard to tell. The fact is that it was what both the British and the Vatican, each out of their respective self-interest, wanted. In terms of future diplomatic relations, evidence of British desire to continue involving the Vatican in subduing Ireland becomes rare from this point onwards. They did not need to as before.

But the bulk of the opposition that the Government had to contend with where the mission was concerned was not from Irish, but from Protestant quarters, and focused rather on an agreement reached with the Vatican whereby the British would legislate in Malta making Catholic marriages the only valid marriages under the law.[106] The subject was so hotly debated that the Government handed the case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to advice whether the proposed legislation was not unconstitutional.[107] Much later, in 1895, the Privy Council advised that it was unconstitutional, which infuriated the Vatican[108] and, more seriously, unleashed a wave of protests and agitation in Malta instigated by the Church.[109] For many

104. SP/E/Simmons, Simmons to Salisbury, 26 Nov. 1889; 1 Mar. 1890.
105. Larkin, 'The Roman Catholic Hierarchy', pp. 315 – 36; Larkin, 'Mounting the Counter-Attack', pp. 157 – 82.
106. *Hansard,* 3rd series, 1890, cccxlvii. 693 – 706; FO45/746, C.O. to F.O. 7 Sep. 1895; William H. Mackintosh, *Disestablishment and Liberation,* London 1922, pp. 315 – 20.
107. see *Hansard*, 3rd series, 1890. cccxliii – cccxlviii; 1891. cccli; 4th series, 1892. v.
108. FO/45/780, memorandum by Paris Nuncio, received 18 May 1896; memorandum by Rampolla, 24 Dec. 1897.
109. *ibid*, Fremantle to Chamberlain, 10 Mar. 1896; pastoral letter by Archbishop Pace, 3 Mar. 1896.

months, a bitter Church-State struggle raged on, which was only settled when both sides remembered that it was in their mutual interests to maintain sound relations in Malta.[110]

For a number of reasons, therefore, the notion of diplomatic relations with the Vatican lost its attraction to the British. A problematic issue in the best of circumstances, the small dose of 1889 – 1890 gave dubious results. Meanwhile, the international situation was not getting better and, although not necessarily addressed directly against British interests, Rampolla was aligning the Vatican increasingly on the side of the adverseries of Italy and its allies, with whom Britain had common interests.[111] A signal move of friendship – and solidarity, considering the turmoil created recently by Boulangism – towards France, was Cardinal Lavigerie's famous toast to the Republic in 1890.[112] From this point onwards, the Vatican's relations with the members of the Triple Alliance chilled.[113] Eventually, growing suspicious in Italy of a Vatican-French conspiracy to overthrow the Italian monarchy and establish a republic that would be subject to French influence drove the Italians after the fall of Crispi in 1896 to seek a settlement of their differences with France, an unwelcome prospect to the British. In 1898, while Italy concluded a commercial treaty with France, Foreign Minister Canevaro found it necessary to explain to the British ambassador how he was on his guard against Vatican-French intrigue to establish an Italian republic that would be hostile to both the Triple Alliance and to Britain.[114]

110. *ibid*, Fremantle to Pace, 23 Mar. 1896; 'Memorandum handed to the Marquess of Dufferin by the Papal Nuncio at Paris', received, 18 May 1896; H. Parnell (deputy governor) to Chamberlain, 3 Sep, 1896.

111. see Crispolti, pp. 173, 265 – 69, 277 – 79; Woodward, p. 315.

112. James E. Ward, 'The Algiers Toast: Lavigerie's work or Leo XIII's?' *Catholic Historical Review,* lxi, 1965, pp. 173 – 91. See also Palamenghi-Crispi, pp. 395 – 400.

113. Crispolti, pp. 279, 285; Anon., 'Pope Leo XIII and his Successor', *Quarterly Review,* cxcviii, 1903, pp. 438 – 55; Gravelle, 'The Foreign Policy of the Holy See, I – Leo XIII', *Contemporary Review,* ic. 1911, pp. 452 – 62.

114. Langer, *Diplomacy of Imperialism,* pp. 593 – 95.

Britain was uncomfortably isolated in these years. The customary understanding with the Triple Alliance was rapidly wearing off owing to Wilhelm II's new foreign policy. Italy was disgruntled by British failure to corroborate its friendship with concrete support in its colonial ambitions and other disagreements with France. Britain's traditional adversaries, France and Russia, had finally formed an alliance in 1894. In the Mediterranean as elsewhere, Britain had only its resources to fall back on. In itself, the manouevring of the Vatican within the shifting scene of European alignments was nothing to disconcert the British Foreign Office, even if the objectives of the Vatican were implicitly hostile to British interests. Until the First World War, the British were indifferent to the Vatican as an international actor and, their begrudging acknowledgement of Vatican sovereignty notwithstanding, their intermittent courting of the Holy See had recognised its power as a religious entity, harnessing this power to support British rule in its Catholic possessions. In Malta, the experiment had backfired and seriously destabilised the island, at a time when the security of this sensitive Mediterranean base was never more important. While there was no indication that such destabilisation was part of any intricate Vatican scheme of the type once imagined during the episcopal succession question, the experience was a bitter one and not conducive to further encouragement of Vatican interference in Maltese affairs.

Indeed, some degree of intrigue there seems to have been also. In the context of the old language question between Italian and English, a hard core of local 'nationalist' politicians took their *italianità* to its logical conclusion and began to regard Malta as Italian *terra irredenta*. The puzzle was that these irredentists came under the influence of Sicilian Jesuits, who in Malta regarded themselves as refugees from Italian anti-clerical persecution[115] and thus hardly typical advocates of Italian unity, let alone irredentism. The puzzle was apparently solved by the Italian Consul in Malta, who warned the Italian minister of foreign affairs that by kindling and fanning the irredentist flame

115. see *Parl. Papers 1890,* xlix, Simmons to Salisbury, 23 Dec. 1889.

in this British base, these Jesuits aimed to estrange Italy from Britain and drive her further into the arms of the French republic.[116]

Growing concern for their traditional supremacy in the Mediterranean meanwhile rendered the British authorities increasingly impatient with the ways of Maltese politicians, which they perceived as incompatible with the island's role of a naval base and fortress. First there had the marriage agitation, which the politicians had ridden with relish. When that died out because the Church dropped the issue, a section of politicians revived the language issue, in addition to impeding British initiatives to spend public money in order to improve military and civilian infrastructure. Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain's patience gave way in 1899 when he issued a decree to the effect that Italian would be phased out and replaced by English as the official language.[117]

The language decree had the immediate effect of straining further the already precarious Anglo-Italian relations, although Chamberlain was at first puzzled by the way the Italians took it.[118] This small crisis was ultimately resolved in 1902 when, in the first of a series of steps intended to restore the traditional good feeling between Britain and Italy, Chamberlain withdrew the language decree. The Vatican's *Osservatore Romano* sneered at Chamberlain's gesture and advocated further pursuit of the controversy. No heed was taken of the *Osservatore's* advice, of course, and with the conclusion of the Anglo-Italian agreement over Tripoli in the next few weeks, cordiality was restored in Anglo-Italian relations.[119]

116. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, terza serie (Roma 1973), iv. Grande to Visconti-Venosta, 18 Nov. 1900; 20 Nov. 1900.
117. On Maltese political developments during these years, see Frendo, pp. 78 – 125.
118. James L. Glanville, *Italy's Relations with England, 1896 – 1905*, Baltimore 1934, pp. 88 – 90.
119. *ibid*, pp. 112 – 14; Seton-Watson, pp. 327 – 28.

I Sonetti Di Belli e di Burgess

Alida Poeti

> *... nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata,*
> *si può dalla sua loquella in altra trasmutare*
> *senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza e armonia.*
> (Dante: *Convivio*)

Molti esperti sostengono che sia difficile, se non addirittura impossibile, fare una buona traduzione di un'opera poetica. In un'altra lingua non si può sempre raggiungere sia la fedeltà letterale che quella più profonda capace di riflettere tutta l'esperienza poetica della lingua originale. Il linguaggio poetico non esprime solo delle idee e la cultura e il grado di civiltà connessi a un idioma, ma anche infinite sfumature di significato espresse unicamente dal suono e dal tono della frase, dalla scelta di parole, fatta per il loro valore timbrico o ambivalente, e dalla loro posizione nel verso.

Per questi motivi qualsiasi poeta lirico non può che essere tradotto imperfettamente e tanto meno nel caso di un poeta dialettale come Giuseppe Gioachino Belli che gioca con le parole e usa un lessico spesso banale, ma semanticamente carico di significati conferitigli dalla plebe romana.

Quando si è saputo che Anthony Burgess, il brillante e prolifico romanziere inglese, aveva tradotto 'La bibbia blasfema del Belli', ossia quel nucleo di sonetti che riscrivono il Vecchio Testamento •

e i Vangeli, un giornalista che lo intervistò a Roma disse che sembrava egli avesse scelto 'quasi il destino del negro che in una stanza buia, a mezzanotte, si mette a dar caccia a un gatto nero che non c'è.[1] Lo stesso Burgess si rendeva perfettamente conto dell'impossibilità di quest'impresa e nell'intervista ammette che i suoi sonetti non sono che 'liberi rifacimenti' di quelli del Belli. Burgess sembra trovarsi d'accordo con Bohumil Mathésius (grande traduttore dal russo al ceco) che sostiene che:

> Un tradutore deve violare l'autore quando è necessario, deve saper togliere, aggiungere, ricomporre, l'autore. Il miglior traduttore è quello che traduce dell'autore soltanto il titolo [...]: il resto deve essere una sua personale creazione letteraria.[2]

Burgess tuttavia si autoimpone certi parametri che rendono lo stesso notevolmente difficile il suo compito.

Dato lo stretto rapporto che esiste fra forma e contenuto nei sonetti e data la poesia del Nostro, il traduttore deve tener conto di alcuni fattori fondamentali:

1. Belli, il più prolifico scrittore di *sonetti*[3], predilige questa forma e l'unico modo per rendere la concisa brevità del sonetto è di costruirne un altro, perchè la forma stessa di questo componimento trasmette in parte il suo messaggio. Burgess infatti fa dire al suo Belli, protagonista di *ABBA ABBA*[4] che

> the sonnet form must have existed *in potentia* from the beginning, but it was made flesh with such as Petrarch. Behind the thousands of sonnets in the world, in Tuscan, Roman, French, German even English, shines the one ultimate perfect sonnet. It has fourteen lines that divide into an octave of a rhyme scheme ABBA, ABBA and a sestet CDC, DCD [...] One may vary the rhymes a little but the essential shape will remain. The wordless sonnet that still rhymes, that says nothing, having no words, but yet speaks. It says: I am this, but I am also this. In my eight lines X, in my six lines Y but in my total fourteen ever the unity, the ultimate statement whose meaning is itself. (Burgess, 1977: 68 – 9)

1. Sono parole di Elio Chinol che intervistò Burgess per *L'Espresso*, (16 ottobre 1977: 105).
2. In G. Mounin, *Teoria e storia della traduzione* (Torino, Einaudi, 1965: 60).
3. Belli ha scritto oltre 3000 sonetti fra quelli in dialetto e quelli in lingua.
4. *Abba Abba*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1977).

2. Belli ha scelto di scrivere in *dialetto*, di usare un linguaggio molto limitato ma allo stesso tempo 'inesportabile', a suo agio solo nei vicoli della vecchia Roma. Belli infatti specifica che 'il parlar romanesco, non è un dialetto e neppure un vernacolo della lingua italiana, ma unicamente una sua corruzione'.[5] Però usando questo mezzo, si è prefisso di erigere un monumento che raffiguri fedelmente la plebe romana, rozza e incolta, ma sapiente per tradizione.

3. Belli va definito umorista ed il suo *umorismo*, come la parlata del suo portavoce, narratore e protagonista dei sonetti, è un impasto di elementi vari: proverbi, storpiamenti, malapropismi; latino maccheronico, slittamenti semantici, giustapposizioni per effetto di rima; parolacce, oscenità, anfibologie, *pointes finales* e epigrammi, il tutto condito di romanità.

I. Burgess si impone la forma del sonetto per riprodurre in inglese l'opera di un poeta, la cui fama è legata ai suoi sonetti. Belli aveva affermato che tutto ciò che è possibile dire si può dire col sonetto e Burgess immagina che egli abbia aggiunto: 'È venuto il momento di rifiutare la sua incoronazione petrarchesca' (*Espresso*, 1977: 105), ossia il sonetto andava liberato dai vincoli impostigli dalla tradizione. Che Belli l'abbia detto o no, poco importa perché è esattamente ciò che riuscì a fare. Burgess, proponendosi di continuare quest'opera di 'detronificazione' ovvero di laicizzazione e volgarizzazione del sonetto, ne elabora a sua volta una nuova mistica:

> Christ *pendebat* from his cross and cried ABBA ABBA. [... I knew] that this was the Aramaic for 'father father', [I] knew better that it was the rhyme scheme of a Petrarchan sonnet octave. It came to [me] thus that the sonnet form might subsist above language.
> (1977: 81 – 2)

5. Si veda la lettera del Belli al principe Gabrielli del 15 gennaio 1861 riportata in G. Orioli (ed), *Lettere, Giornali Zibaldone* (Torino, Einaudi, 1962: 377).

ABBA ABBA, il titolo del libro di Burgess, quindi allude allo schema rimico tipico nell'ottava del sonetto petrarchesco, al quale lo scrittore inglese rimane fedele nei limiti del possibile, anche perché è quello più comune nei sonetti belliani.[6]

I.1. Burgess, essendosi prefisso la forma metrica del sonetto, deve anche riprodurre versi che abbiano la stessa 'portata' di quelli italiani. Il pentametro giambico usato dai grandi sonettisti inglesi non rende il ritmo né le cadenze della frase italiana, quindi egli crea dei versi 'barbari' composti di endecasillabi e decasillabi oppure di versi di undici e di dodici sillabe che si alternano in concordanza con le diverse rime. Per esempio ORIGINAL SIN è composto di endecasillabi per la rima A e duodecasillabi per la rima B:

The sceptic beats his brain till dawn's first dápple	A/11
Lights him and all his books to slumber's ámity.	B/12
Though he's read all from Moses to Mohámet, he	B/12
Rejects the truth of temple, mosque and chápel:	A/11

mentre KNOWLEDGE alterna endecasillabi e decenari:

Before they yielded to the devil's úrging	A/11
And crunched the good-bad apple to the córe	B/10
Bare innocence was all our parents wóre	B/10
Like Jesus Christ got ready for the scóurging.	A/11

A volte Burgess fa uso unicamente di decasillabi ma, benché ognuna di queste soluzioni dimostri grande abilità tecnica, pochi di questi versi mantengono la fluidità di quelli belliani. Raramente deve ricorrere anche a dei versi di 15 sillabe, per incorporare la portata di quelli originali. Comunque lo sforzo di mantenere la rima e altri elementi formali del testo è a scapito della naturalezza e dell'autenticità dell'enunciato originale.

I.2 Sarebbe stato in parte semplificato l'arduo lavoro del traduttore se avesso creato dei versi sciolti (***blank verse***), poichè l'inglese a differenza dell'italiano ha pochissime rime.

6. Solo sei dei cento sonetti tradotti da Burgess non conformano allo schema abba, abba nell'ottava. Belli, pur attenendosi predominantemente a questo schema, aveva escogitato 23 combinazioni possibili all'interno della struttura del sonetto all'italiana opposto a quello di tipo inglese o francese.

Quest'espediente però avrebbe tradito la dedizione di Burgess al sonetto di stampo classico. Egli ammette che trovare le rime è stata una 'dura lotta'[7] ma 'dovevo farlo e l'ho fatto' (*Espresso* 1977: 105). Sacrifica in molti casi il contenuto o parte del contenuto originale per potervi riuscire. Sembra che Burgess si sia prefisso di 'piegare' la lingua inglese al ritmo e alla musicalità dell'italiano con la stessa voga con cui il Belli si impose di 'piegare' tutta la sua materia informe alla rigida forma del sonetto.

I.3. Per rimanere entro lo schema metrico prescelto, Burgess a volte deve ampliare il discorso originale mentre altre volte sorvola, sfronda o interpreta di modo che non si ha che un'idea generale del contenuto. Per esempio lo spunto per il sonetto 1374, L'IMMAGGINE E SIMILITUDINE[8], che corrisponde a IMAGE AND LIKENESS di Burgess, è tratto dal *faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram* (Gen. 1: 26). Il commentatore plebeo, che prende sempre tutto alla lettera, non può crederci perciò deduce che deve essere un'eresia solo pensarlo. A lui non interessa chi sia a volerglielo far credere perché un'eresia è pur sempre un'eresia.

Messi a confronto i due sonetti va notato quanto significato viene perso nella traduzione nonostante le aggiunte:

7. Scorrendo gli altri sonetti di Burgess si nota che per mantenere la rima, egli deve a volte ricorrere a strategie insolite come dividere le parole a fin di verso, per es.: 'Nor any of the amenities of *civil-/lsed* life, to use the advertiser's drivel' (ABOUT EVE vv. 6 – 7) oppure 'his prophetic eye was sharp / He spoke with God, he much preferred the *barp-p- / Arlour* to the coffee-shop or dairy' (DAVID 2 vv. 2 – 4). Altrove usa una serie di parole per comporre la rima, per es.: in ORIGINAL SIN 'amity' rima con 'Mohamet he' e 'damn it. He' (vv. 2 – 3, 6); in AGE 'prophet' rima con 'off it' e 'cough it' (vv. 2 – 3, 6).

8. Cfr. G.C. Belli: *I Sonetti* edizione curata da Giorgio Vigolo (Milano, Mondadori, 6a ed. 1966 [1952]). Ogni riferimento numerico ai sonetti si rifà alla numerazione in questa edizione.

Tutti a immaggine sua?! Fra Sperandio,
Avétesce un po' ffremma, io ve la sfravolo.
Me lo vienissi a ddì ppuro san Pavolo,
Je darìa der cazzaccio a ggenio mio.
Sicconno voi, ar conto che ffacc'io,
Vieressimo a sti termini der cavolo
Che inzino, attent'a mmé, cche inzino er diavolo
Sii stato fatto a immaggine de Ddio.
Eh cche vvoi Santi Padri e SSante Madre!
Che sorte de resíe, frate mio caro,
Sò rresìe puro in bocca a un Zanto Padre.
Si Iddio se presentasse co l'immagine
C'ha ddato a un ortolano o a un cicoriaro
Me parrebbe er Ddio de la bbarraggine.

* * *

Now Brother Trustgod, Godtrust (never knew
God had a rupture. Sorry), please let me
Shove in a word. I just won't have it, see.
God made us all his own image, did He? You
Are mad. If Paul himself, yes Saint Paul, flew
Down to agree with you, I'd tell him, he
Was mad. (He was mad). Why don't you decree
Old Nick was made in God's own image too?
O bleeding Christ and Christ's own bleeding mother,
Even if the sanctified three hatted sod
Says what you say, it's still, my half-arsed brother,
Mad. Is God's image in greengrocer's shops
Then, in greengrocers? God, he must be a God
Of cabbages and turnip fucking tops.

L'aggiunta dei due incisi fra parentesi (vv. 1 – 2, 7) interrompe la logica del discorso e sposta l'enfasi dall'incredulità del narratore alla follia dell'interlocutore e di chi la pensa come lui. Questo spostamento d'enfasi è reso ancor più evidente dalle due frasi simetriche: 'You / are mad' (vv. 4 – 5) e 'he / was mad' (vv. 6 – 7) che precedono l'asserzione conclusiva' (He was mad)' (v. 7).

Nel testo inglese c'è un tono minaccioso assente nell'originale: 'I just won't have it, see' (v. 3) rafforzato da 'Let me / shove a word' nei primi versi. Quest'ultima espressione traduce 'io ve la sfravolo' (v. 2) però a nostro avviso né l'una né l'altra frase

accenna minimamente al significato di 'sfravolo'. Belli in una nota indica che va inteso come 've la sciorino giù; ve la canto io', ma implica anche 've la *s-favolo*', ossia 'vi spiego io quello che in realtà significa'. L'unica ragione per la scelta di 'shove' sembra essere la somiglianza fra *sfra*v*o*lo/*sho*v*e*, ma a che serve questo accostamento fonetico se si perde la carica semantica della parola?

Altro elemento aggiunto che distoglie l'attenzione dalla serietà con cui il protagonista si accinge a spiegare la logica dell'affermazione biblica, è il gioco di parole sul nome del frate (v. 1). Partendo da 'Sperandio' Burgess produce il chiasmo 'Trustgod, God trust'. L'accento si placa sulla sillaba 'trust', che invita a leggerla 'trussed' (munito di cinto erniario) che a sua volta suggerisce la battuta 'never knew / God had a rupture' (vv. 1 – 2).

Sia la satira del testo biblico che la satira del villano, coesistenti nel sonetto belliano, perdono sottigliezza perché vengono rivelate, fra l'altro, dalle giustapposizioni contaminatorie tra termini prestigiosi ed infimi, magari in rima, (Pavolo .... cavolo ... diavolo). L'importanza che si dà il plebeo, manifestata dal frequente uso della prima persona, (*io* ve la sfravolo ... a genio *mio* .... ar conto che facc'*io* .... attent'a *me*), trova una certa corrispondenza nella traduzione ma è alterato il significato del discorso. La frase 'ar conto che facci'o', contrapposta a 'siconno voi' e seguita da 'attent'a me', equivale quasi 'correggetemi se sbaglio ma questo lo dite *voi* non *io*'; e introduce l'ipotesi che 'inzino er diavolo / sii stato fatto a immaggine de Ddio' (vv. 7 – 8). La maniera in cui è presentato il discorso sottolinea che il protagonista si sente in dovere di mostrare (a chi non l'abbia capita) la piena implicazione di ciò che spiega Fra Sperandio. Gli sembra assurdo che sia San Paolo che i Santi Padri della Chiesa e l'attuale Papa possano condividere quest'idea. Nel sonetto di Burgess invece il protagonista si ritiene l'unico savio in un mondo impazzito perciò con tono beffardo volge in barzelletta quello che per lui è l'assurda implicazione del brano: Wny don't you decree / Old Nick was made in God's own image too? (vv. 7 – 8)

La traduzione riproduce il *gradatio* ascendente di illustri teologi che il nostro plebeo sfida, ma connesso ad ognuno c'è un'irriverenza assente nell'originale dove l'unica oscenità è quel

'cazzaccio' che dall'uso tanto frequente, è reso quasi innocuo. Nel contesto equivale 'persona che ragiona male' e dimostra che il ricorso alla parolaccia supplisce all'inabilità di esprimersi del personaggio incolto a cui mancano i vocaboli adeguati ad ogni situazione. Serve quindi a rafforzare la parodia del semplice ma arrogante popolano che si ritiene all'altezza di discutere su ogni argomento.

Nella versione inglese la mancanza di rispetto per la Chiesa e i suoi rappresentanti è più marcata: 'Brother Trustgod' diventa 'my half-arsed brother' (v. 11), il Papa un 'sanctified three-hatted sod' (v. 10) e Dio, tanto per scherzare, è immaginato deturpato da un'ernia.

L'allusione ai Padri della Chiesa nell'esclamazione a sproposito, 'Santi Padri e Sante Madre' (v. 9) diventa (e qui bisogna riconoscere una certa ingegnosità da parte di Burgess) 'O bleeding Christ and Christ's own bleeding mother' (v. 9). Mentre in questa permutazione si perde la presa in giro del plebeo, che parlando rivela la sua mancanza di familiarità con termini teologici, la versione inglese guadagna in forza espressiva poiché gli elementi 'bleeding / Christ // Christ / bleeding' si organizzano in chiasmo compassionevole e lagrimoso davanti al vocabolo 'mother'.

Per riassumere, Burgess in questo sonetto cambia un'argomentazione, caotica ma candida, in un battibecco fatto di domande retoriche, di appelli irosi e scherzi di cattivo gusto. Il plebeo è cauto e il suo discorso procede a passi misurati, mentre quello di Burgess è inutilmente ripetitivo e chiama in dubbio la buona fede dell'interlocutore.

I.4 Il traduttore spesso si trova a dover fare delle aggiunte per 'riempire' i quattordici versi del sonetto. In LOT 3 Burgess segue piuttosto un suo pensiero che quello del poeta quando, avendo trasmesso il contenuto di LOTTO AR RIFRESCO (348) in undici versi, introduce, nei tre versi che gli avanzano, una sua conclusione appropriata al tono del sonetto originale:

> Not finding this unnatural or nasty;
> No fire rained down. It seems that God is rather
> Inclined to incest but hates pederasty. (vv. 12-4)

Bisogna riconoscere che la logica di quest'affermazione potrebbe essere quella del biblista incolto e ridanciano che parla nei sonetti belliani, però non sempre l'aggiunta è così intonata. Per esempio, in ANGER Burgess esaurisce il contenuto del sonetto originale in tredici versi, poi aggiunge: 'He aged with righteous rage and started greying at the *temple*' (v. 14). Suggerisce così che, dopo l'episodio in cui Cristo prese a frustate gli usurai e i mercanti nel tempio, egli invecchiò senza perdere mai più la pazienza. La frase è del tutto ridondante avendo già detto 'This is the only place in Holy Writ / Where Christ is shown as throwing a mad fit' (vv. 12 – 3). Il verso è quindi un puro virtuosismo del poeta che si diverte a far rimare la parola 'temple' con se stessa, (rima preziosa con due significati diversi: *temple*/tempio, *temple*/tempia), come si era divertito a far coesistere in un unico verso (ANGER v. 11) *preying* e *praying*, due parole omofone, ossia 'predanti' e 'preganti'.

II. Il secondo problema che Burgess affronta è quello di trovare un equivalente inglese per il linguaggio del plebeo romano. Secondo il traduttore la soluzione ideale sarebbe stata quella di riprodurlo con un dialetto del Lancashire, per esempio con quello di Manchester o di Liverpool. Se lo avesse fatto, però, non avrebbe trovato un pubblico capace di leggerlo, 'perché chi oggi in Inghilterra parla ancora un qualche dialetto non legge libri' (*Espresso*, 1977: 106). La Gran Bretagna non ha avuto né un Goldoni né un Porta né un Belli; 'la sua letteratura' dice Burgess, 'come il suo governo è disperatamente centralizzata' (*ibid*). Così si affida al buon inglese di Oxford, Cambridge e Buckingham Palace ma gli dà quelle intonazioni ritmiche che l'avvicinano ad un dialetto incolto e lo intride di oscenità blasfeme (le quali, assicura Burgess, non mancano nemmeno nell'inglese della famiglia reale).

Questo espediente linguistico non è del tutto nuovo: Verga fece la stessa cosa con la lingua italiana, dandole l'intonazione, il ritmo e le cadenze del siciliano e abbinandovi proverbi e locuzioni dialettali in modo da ottenere una parlata che potesse rappresentare il linguaggio e la mentalità del siciliano. Burgess, a nostro avviso, ci riesce meno bene. Il suo inglese colto è

volutamente volgarizzato e non riflette la spontaneità del discorso romanesco farcito di 'cazzi' e 'cojjoni', di 'mortacci' e 'fijji de na mignotta'. Nel romanesco ogni parolaccia o oscenità ha un valore semantico plurivalente ben stabilito dall'uso; spunta sulle labbra della plebagalia con la frequenza e la noncuranza di qualsiasi altro motto idiomatico; è una locuzione tanto tipica della parlata quanto i suoi modi proverbiali. Non pensiamo che si possa dire la stessa cosa per il turpiloquio dei testi inglesi. Burgess riconosce questa pecca, ma spera che nei suoi sonetti 'rimanga almeno l'impatto dei contenuti del Belli, se non quello del suo linguaggio' (*Espresso*, 1977: 106).

Scegliendo di mettere in rilievo l'impatto del contenuto linguistico piuttosto che lo spirito con cui la lingua viene usata, sia dal poeta che dai suoi personaggi, Burgess sorvola su molte sottigliezze e sfalsa, a volte anche di molto, il quadro globale: ossia spezza quel 'filo occulto' che unisce e dà organicità ai 'distinti quadretti' della 'commedia umana' del Belli.[9]

II.1 Serva ad illustrare quanto detto l'esempio de LA CREAZIONE DER MONNO (165): 'Gesucristo impastò ... un monno verde ... grosso e ritonno / all'uso d'un cocommero de tasta' (vv. 1 – 4) per gli uomini che subito dopo mandò a 'far fottere' (v. 14).[10] Nella versione di Burgess diventa:

> One day the bakers God and Son set to
> And baked, to show their pasta-master's skill,'
> This loaf the world, though the odd imbecile
> Swears it's a melon, and the thing just grew.
> They made a sun, a moon, a green and a blue
> Atlas, chucked stars like money from a till,
> Set birds high, beasts low, fishes lower still,
> Planted their plants, then yawned: 'Aye, that'll do.'

9. Belli in R. Vighi (ed.) *Belli Romanesco*: L'Introduzione, gli appunti, le prose, le poesie minori (Roma, Colombo, 1966: 22).

10. Si veda l'analisi che ne fa Pietro Gibellini nel saggio introduttivo 'La Bibbia del Belli o dell'ambiguità' in Gibellini, *La Bibba del Belli* (Milano, Adelphi, 1974: 13 – 33).

No wait. The old man baked two bits of bread
Called Folk – I quite forgot to mention it –
So he could shout: 'Don't bite that round ripe red
Pie-filling there'. Of course, the buggers bit.
Though mad at them, he turned on us instead
And said: 'Posterity, you're in the shit'.

(THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, vv. 1 – 14)

Il significato ivi trasmesso è suppergiù lo stesso, ma le implicazioni sia nell'immediato contesto che nel macrocontesto dell'opera sono molto diverse. 'Gesucristo' (v. 1) per il Padreterno è un anacronismo ricorrente nei sonetti, che dimostra la totale accettazione della trinità e quindi l'uso indiscriminato dei suoi tre nominativi. 'The bakers God and Son' invece sono due entità che collaborano *ante-diem*. Il 'cocommero', verde fuori ma rosso e maturo dentro, ha molto poco in comune con quel 'melon-loaf'[11], perciò il lettore non può farsi l'idea di un mondo concepito fin dalla sua creazione come un inferno rovente dall'apparenza ingannevole, dove infatti gli uomini 'fottono' e 'son fottuti' in tutti i sensi. Fra le cartelle del Belli si trova la sopra citata interpretazione per il termine di paragone usato per il mondo. In una pagina di manoscritto troviamo una similitudine per l'inferno che Vighi considera 'tra le più belle che siano uscite dalla mente del poeta' (1966: 280):

L'inferno è come un cocommero rosso,
Li semi l'anime addannate. (*ibid.* Ms. 690)

Un primo appunto consisteva solo della parola 'cocommeraro'; e fa supporre che Belli avesse in mente un 'Dio-cocommeraro', ovvero un Dio che fosse capace di creare un mondo-inferno. Se quest'ipotesi fosse giusta, la creazione rappresenterebbe già il destino dell'uomo, poiché il mondo sarebbe stato concepito come luogo di punizione e di tormento. Questo motivo difatti si ritrova in altri sonetti perciò va dedotto che 'cocommero' sia una parola-chiave che, se omessa, dissipa un importante livello interpretativo del testo.

11. 'Melon' in inglese non suscita immediatamente l'immagine del cocomero poiché il vocabolo è genericamente usato per indicare una varietà di meloni, mentre l'anguria è chiamata più specificamente 'watermelon'.

In questo sonetto Burgess si trova a dover risolvere anche un punto lasciato ambiguo dal nostro poeta.

> [Dio] creò ll'omo [...]
> e jje proibbì de non toccajje un pomo.
>
> Ma appena che a mmaggnà ll'ebbe viduti,
> Strillò [...]
> 'Ommini da vienì, ssete futtuti". (165 vv. 9 – 14)

Nel sonetto inglese Dio fece l'uomo 'so he *could* shout: 'Don't bite that round pipe red / pie-filling there'. (vv. 11 – 12). Ma chiediamoci se il creatore che si intravvede nei versi italiani proibì di toccare il pomo o piuttosto proibì di non toccarlo? 'Don't bite' non è affatto ambiguo, mentre nell'originale la struttura della prima terzina suggerisce che Dio creò la specie umana con l'intenzione di metterla alla prova con una proibizione; nell'inglese il *veto* diventato un'affermazione perde drammaticità e comicità.

Un'altra cosa che riduce la drammaticità della condanna universale è l'aggiunta 'he turned on us instead' (v. 13) La frase conferisce alla chiusa del sonetto un tono di commiserazione della propria sorte che altera il tono originale distaccato, obiettivo e quasi epico.

II.2 Il linguaggio romanesco tipicamente plebeo difficilmente può essere tradotto nei termini di un'altra cultura. I suoi modi di dire e suoi proverbi e soprattutto le sue metafore hanno radici profonde nella storia e nei costumi di questo popolo. Non potendo sempre tradurre tali immagini, Burgess deve '*transculturate*' (per usare una parola da noi coniata in inglese per indicare l'espediente di riprodurre una parlata di sapore locale che trasmetta usanze e tradizioni del popolo che usa la lingua in cui si traduce). Burgess introduce elementi della cultura inglese ad ogni occasione che gli si presenta; così il 'pomo', causa di tutti i nostri mali, diventa il *red pie-filling* alla stessa maniera che l'avvento dell'uomo che impone la sua volontà agli animali, diviene quello dell'uomo che sconvolge 'their *social union*' (THE BEASTLY PARADISE v. 3).

Secondo la fantasia a-temporale del plebeo i passatempi preferiti da Adamo includevano:

[...] ccan da caccia,
Caval da sella, scampaggnate, ssciali,
Pricissione coll'archi trionfali,
Musiche [...] (1204 vv. 5 – 8)

mentre secondo quella del suo sosia inglese Adamo

[...] swilled [...] gorged, but his preferred pursuit
Mixed sticking pigs and whipping hounds on chases,
Marches through arches, blown brass and tossed maces.
(MAN THE TYRANT vv. 5 – 8)

Un ottimo esempio di 'transculturizzazione' è fornito dal confronto dei due sonetti LA PRIMA ORIGGINE (1397) e ORIGINS. L'*elenchus* delle varie razze di cani nella prima quartina viene seguito nella seconda da un elenco delle razze umane distinte o per nazionalità o per religione:

Ccusì ar monno sce sò ll'ommini indiani,
L'ommini mori, l'ommini francesi:
Sce sò l'ommini ebbrei, l'ommini ingresi,
L'ommini turchi e ll'ommini cristiani.
[...]
Vedi che ddifferenza bbuggiaronà!
Cionnunostantequesto, fra Nnicola
Disce c'oggn'omo o ccane, anche er più rraro,
Viè dda una caggna e dda una donna sola!
(1397 vv. 5 – 8, 11 – 4)

Nella versione di Burgess questi versi diventano:

Now men. Irish in bogs and Dutch in clogs,
Swarthy as turds, sharp-conked as any eagle
The Jew and the Turk. Then trying to look regal,
Tea-slurping English, and French eating frogs.
[...]
Different as cheese and chalk.
In spite of this, our parish bullock yaps

About us springing from a single stalk:
One primeval bitch for pups, and one for chaps.
Did you ever hear such stupid fucking talk? (vv. 5 – 8, 10 – 4)

L'elenco originale con la monotona ripetizione in ogni emistichio della parola 'l'ommini', fortemente accentata e seguita in ogni caso da un aggettivo, mette in rilievo le numerose stirpi ma allo stesso tempo sottolinea la loro somiglianza fondamentale: sono tutti uomini, diversi ma sostanzialmente uguali: si dividono in due soli gruppi che si possono paragonare e identificare con 'un can buffetto' e 'un can da pecorraro' (1397 v. 10), ossia c'è chi se la spassa e chi deve lavorare. Ecco è la sostanziale differenza a cui si allude nell'ottavo verso, nonostante 'fra Nnicola' sostenga che tutti proveniamo da un'unica stirpe 'anche er più rraro' (v. 13), sia esso papa, re, principe, o barone. Questa interpretazione classista, ma del tutto plausibile, sia per la costruzione di questo sonetto, sia per la tendenza del romanaccio a mettere in evidenza ad ogni occasione la differenza fra 'noantri' e 'l'altro genere umano', non è affatto implicita in ORIGINS.

Il sonetto inglese finisce con la domanda retorica 'Did you ever hear such stupid fucking talk?', e dà ad intendere solo che il narratore ritiene una assurdità la presunta origine antropocentrica degli uomini e delle bestie, mentre quello romanesco amaramente sottolinea l'ingiustizia insita nella supposizione che all'origine eravamo tutti uguali. L'innuendo della frase 'anche er più rraro' (v. 12) manca del tutto nella versione inglese; non vi è una sostanziale differenza fra 'some doggy that leaps onto laps' (v. 9) e 'a prize wolfhound' (v. 10) perché il sostantivo 'prize', che funziona da aggettivo, fa intendere non un cane da fatica allevato per cacciare lupi, ma uno addestrato per vincer premi alle mostre, che può essere un esemplare curato e vezzeggiato quanto qualsiasi cagnolino da salotto. D'altronde l'omissione del chiasmo finale, che nel sonetto originale non è casuale ma ricco di ambiguità comiche a causa della suggerita identità 'cagna-donna', non è grave perché lo zeugma della frase inglese "one primeval bitch for pups, and one for chaps" ha la stessa portata comica a spese della donna.

Il sonetto non manca di originalità e di abilità tecnica anche negli ultimi quattro versi dell'ottava che riproducono l'*elenchus* delle razze umane e aggiungono una nota farsesca di gusto anglosassone, anche se sminuiscono l'effetto della giustapposizione degli elementi costitutivi italiani. Forse per

compensare il mancato coro di 'ommini ... ommini ... ommini', nei versi 5 – 7 che vi corrispondono troviamo allitterazioni e rime assonantiche: 'Swarthy as *turds*, sharp-conked as any *eagle* / The Jew and the *Turk*. Then trying to look *regal*'.

Vi troviamo anche geminazioni verbali e studiate serie sintagmatiche: [...] *Irish in bogs* [...] *Dutch in clogs* / The Jew [...] *the Turk / Tea-slurping English* [...] *French eating frogs*..

a x b b x a

In quest'ultimo *pattern* il gioco iterativo è ancora più complesso perché il diverso valore semantico dei vocaboli intorno ai due verbi a chiasmo causa una lettura anfibologica della seconda frase.

L'uso del proverbio, 'different as cheese and chalk' fa le veci dell'enfatica espressione idiomatica di stampo popolare, 'differenza bbuggiarona', ma la saggezza popolare del 'cheese and chalk' richiama un mondo di *housewives* e *dairymaids* di tutt'altra cultura. In compenso però Burgess cerca di mantenere l'esposizione logica del discorso ed il tono pseudo-dotto assunto dal narratore plebeo:

> **Belli** – 'pijjamone ... cusì ... pijjate ... cionnunostantequesto ...'
> **Burgess** – 'Let's look ... now ... compare ... In spite of this...

III. L'impatto umoristico dei sonetti belliani è evidente in quelli di Burgess, ma l'umorismo nelle versioni inglesi è o più sottile o più grossolano ma sempre meno disperato che nell'originale. Non fa trapelare che l'umorismo plebeo nasce da un pessimismo totale, e che è la disperazione a dare la forza di vivere e di rifiutare l'inutile lamento a coloro che non possono lasciarsi disarmare dell'unica arma che hanno per difendersi, *il riso*. L'occasione dell'umorismo quindi risiede spesso in eloqui di protesta o di calandrinesca stupidità da parte del plebeo. Varia dal difetto fisico di pronuncia, agli spropositi e alle ipercorrezioni in cui corre il dialettofono che cerca di elevare il proprio idioma; dalla deformazione che subisce il latino in bocca, all'incolto, alle curiose contaminazioni e agli effetti di comico equivoco cui dà luogo l'incontro tra il romanesco e la lingua antica. Burgess non offre molti esempi di questo importante aspetto dell'umorismo

belliano, ma da quei pochi esempi il lettore bilingue s'accorge che lo *humour* di Burgess manca di mordente proprio perché è stato 'transculturato'.

III.1 Un cospicuo elemento del comico in Belli è dovuto all'uso di proverbi sciornati qua e là per conferire sentenziosità al discorso. Se si eliminano o si traducono in maniera diversa, si dissipano le varie allusioni connesse ad essi e si perde gran parte del significato del testo: per esempio, il sonetto 1204 viene intitolato dal nostro CHI LA TIRA, LA STRAPPA ossia 'chi la dura la vince'. Burgess lo intitola MAN THE TYRANT che, a nostro avviso, suggerisce tutt'altra chiave di lettura, poichè sposta l'enfasi dal 'serpente' o diavolo, che infatti è colui che 'la strappa', all'uomo (nelle vesti di Adamo) che, per la sua superbia e prepotenza, provoca la stizza del serpente che promette di dargli una lezione: 'I'll get *you yet, you* fucking snob' (v. 14, corsivi nostri). Ora confrontiamo questa promessa minacciosa del diavolo con: "Mó vve bbuggero io, *creste futtute* (1204 v. 14).

Nell'originale le parole non indicano una ribellione solo all'uomo, tiranno del paradiso terrestre, ma a tutta l'umanità che è stata favorita da Dio e che, per invidia, il diavolo si ripromette di dannare. C'è inoltre un'arcana nota di cospirazione fra il demonio che pronuncia questa sentenza e l'altra intimata dal Creatore quando

> Strillò [...] con cuanta vosce aveva:
> "Ommini da vienì, *sséte futtuti*". (165 vv. 13–4)

Così nel macrotesto del commedione un significato sottinteso del sonetto è: "chi dei due (Dio o il diavolo) 'la strapperà' nell'eterna lotta per l'anima di ogni uomo?" A questo possibile andamento del sonetto 1204, se vogliamo accettare l'interpretazione di Gibellini, va aggiunto che

> il ribaltamento della prospettiva antropocentrica [che] qui divien politico e teologico insieme, autorizzando come insurrezione morale la rivolta del serpente, non più avversario o maligno, ma restitutore d'una giustizia violata.
>
> (1974: 133)

Cioè tutto il sonetto va visto come un simbolo o un'allegoria per la sorte dell'uomo: le 'povere bestie' sono 'i poveracci', le bestie umane che per forza devono far 'de la necessità [...] virtù' (1204 vv. 10 – 1). 'Adamo' è il papa-re (oppure la classe degli oppressori) che per volontà di Dio è stato fatto 'padron de l'animali' (1204 v.1) e che in seguito ha abusato i suoi poteri e ha sfruttato i suoi sudditi. In questo scenario 'er serpente' diventa il giustiziere, l'uomo 'forte e virtuoso' (in senso machiavellico) che mosso dall'odio di tante tirannie ripara all'ingiuria. Di conseguenza le 'creste futtute' sarebbero i prepotenti e superbi oppressori che un giorno si troveranno vinti da coloro che hanno avuto la forza di tirare avanti fin quando non gli fosse possibile strappare la vittoria.

Solo con un equivalente titolo proverbiale, il sonetto di Burgess si sarebbe potuto leggere in chiave allegorica anche se alla superfice la traduzione segue abbastanza da vicino il testo originale. La chiarezza dell'allegoria sarebbe comunque stata offuscata nella versione inglese da un'importante alterazione. 'Adamo' diventa 'this furred and feathered boss' (v. 1) forse per indicare giustamente lo sfarzo e l'opulenza della classe dominante o per richiamare l'idea di chi 'feathers his nest,' ovvero accumula ricchezze per se stesso nell'amministrazione di beni altrui. 'The beasts' sono 'poor wretches' che hanno 'hunted looks' e sono 'forced to make [...] the bad best of a bad job' (v. 10). (C'è dello *humour* nell'ossimoro insito nel proverbio maliziosamente mal citato, che non distoglie dalla serietà del simbolo). Ma 'The snake' viene qualificato dalla similitudine domestica, 'spitting like a kettle on a hob' (v. 12) che ne fa una creatura bellicosa che schizza veleno come un bricco che bolle sopra il fuoco. Il demonio di Burgess mantiene le caratteristiche di malignità e di ostilità comunemente attribuitegli, ma questa sua immagine iconografica impedisce di associarlo al giustiziere dei mali dell'umanità sofferente.

Infine, la minaccia finale si rivolge ad una persona superba e corrotta, e non a un sistema o un'*élite* di prepotenti. Quindi, a nostro avviso, MAN THE TYRANT perde il mordente satirico del sonetto originale e diventa semplice parodia della tendenza dell'uomo a tiranneggiare fin dalla sua creazione.

III.2 Una fonte costante di comicità nel nucleo di sonetti scelti da Burgess, è la demitizzazione di episodi biblici attraverso la parodia sconsacrante. È facile rendere questo aspetto del *comique* anche in termini di un'altra cultura e Burgess ne è maestro quanto il Belli.

Per averne un esempio basti leggere il sonetto ANNUNCIATION assieme a LA NUNZIATA (329). I due sonetti fanno la parodia a ciò che si riporta in Luca 1: 26 – 34. La familiarità della rappresentazione è affidata in tutti e due all'effetto realistico-comico della Madonna che sta mangiando un 'piattin de minestra' o 'her noonday plate of soup' (v. 2), e dell'angelo, 'curriero der Messia' o 'a heaven-hurled hoop' che entra nell'umile casa attraverso un vetro rotto. Nel testo belliano va notato come 'l'angiolo Grabbiello' si rivolge a Maria: 'Sora sposa / *siete* gravida *lei* senza sapello' (vv. 9 – 10). La sgrammaticatura imita lo sforzo di un qualsiasi servitore che deve trasmettere elegantemente il messaggio affidatogli; in questo caso il suo enunciato risulta un goffo anacoluto. Questo gioco sul 'voi' e il 'lei' non è possibile in inglese ma Burgess riesce a captare la stessa tensione comica facendo iniziare il discorso dell'angelo in modo solenne ('Ave [...] Maria. / Rejoice because the Lord's eternal love ...) e facendolo terminare in maniera confidenziale ('has made you pregnant – not by orthodox / Methods, of course) (v. 8 – 11).

Il sonetto italiano precipita verso l'inevitabile *pointe finale* di comica irriverenza, captando sia la sorpresa dell'ingenua Maria che la malizia furbesca del narratore, con il gioco sulla parola 'uccello':

> Come pò èsse mai sta simir cosa
> S'io nun zo mmanco cosa sia l'uscello? (329 vv. 13 – 4)

Burgess mantiene il doppio senso sulla stessa parola ma attribuisce quest'*ésprit* all'angelo:

> ' [...] The Pentecostal Dove
> Came when you slept and nested in your box.'
> 'A hen?' she blushed, 'for I know nothing of – – –'
> The Angel nodded, knowing she meant cocks.
> (vv. 11 – 14)

Lo scherzo diventa più artificioso in quanto l'enfasi viene spostata dall'innocenza apparente di Maria alla sua falsa modestia. Mentre Belli mantiene due livelli di consapevolezza Burgess ne aggiunge un terzo prettamente moderno: la verginella che arrossisce e lascia in sospeso la parola chiave svela la propria *non*-innocenza di giovane odierna.

In questo come negli altri sonetti che si concludono con una *boutade* finale, lo scherzo viene conservato da Burgess ma c'è spesso un che di forzato o di retorico nelle versioni. Burgess si preoccupa più di trasmettere la forma esterna e le trovate tecniche, che lo spirito della plebe romana che dovrebbe permeare i sonetti.

> If translation means a carrying across, it is nonsense to suppose that we should be satisfied with carrying across anything less than the whole.

dice Dudley Fits.[12] Queste parole esprimono egregiamente quello che un appassionato conoscitore del Belli prova leggendo i sonetti di Burgess.

Nonostante si possa apprezzare la notevole maestria di Burgess e la sua profonda conoscenza dei testi originali, le piccole o grandi violenze, i lievi abusi e grosse forzature che vengono da lui perpetrate, confermano che l'arte del traduttore è traditrice.

Le versioni di Burgess vanno valutate a sè come creazioni originali ispiratesi al Belli; vanno considerate uno scherzo abilmente orchestrato a far parte del racconto *ABBA ABBA* che Burgess elaborò intorno all'idea centrale espressa nell'epigrafe posta a premessa del suo testo:

> I would reject a petrarchal coronation – on account of my dying day, and because women have cancers.[13]

12. In R.A. Brower, *On Translation* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1966: 33).

13. Sono parole di John Keats.

Seamus Heaney's Northern Irish 'Ugolino': *An 'Original Reproduction' of the Dantean Episode*

Maria Cristina Fumagalli

I have prepared my peace with
learned Italian things
W.B. Yeats, *The Tower*

In Heaney's *Field Work*, published in 1979, Dante's presence is pervasive. Nevertheless, in the sixteen years which separate us from that collection, it has never been really studied in depth.

Field Work is a triptych: the central sequence entitled 'Glanmore Sonnets' divides the book into thirds. Heaney's following collections, *Station Island* and *The Haw Lantern*, are also neatly divided in three parts: this tripartition, then, perhaps owes something to Dante's tripartite structure of the *Commedia*.

Field Work is also characterised by a multiplication of voices within some of the poems by means of a more extended use of dialogues, the poetic device which gives shape to Dante's *Commedia*. Most of the dialogues are carried on by Heaney and 'his own' dead who, nevertheless, seem to be posthumously alive, just like the ghosts that Dante meets during his journey in the three kingdoms of death.

Death is frequently meditated upon in this collection which contains six elegies, three of which are dedicated to artists (Robert Lowell, Sean O'Riada, Francis Ledwidge) while the rest are consecrated to three victims of sectarian murders in Ulster ('Casualty', 'The Strand at Lough Beg', 'A Postcard from North Antrim') and give voice to Heaney's strong protest against the senseless brutality of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

'The Strand at Lough Beg' has been written in memory of Colum McCartney, Heaney's cousin, who was shot dead while driving through an unfamiliar part of Ireland. The poem starts with a quotation from Dante's *Purgatorio* in Dorothy Sayers' translation:

> All round this little island, on the strand
> Far down below there, where the breakers strive,
> Grow the tall rushes from the oozy sand
>
> (Quest'isoleta intorno ad imo ad imo
> la giù colà dove batte l'onda,
> porta de' giunghi sovra 'l molle limo) (I. 100 – 103)

The tall rushes are the pliant reed, symbol of humility, of which Dante's new rope-girdle is going to be made now that he has to go through Purgatory (he lost his first one in order to signal and call up the monster Fraud to cross the Great Barrier between Upper and Nether Hall in *Inferno* XVI). The first canto of *Purgatorio* ends with the image of Virgil cleansing Dante's face and girding him with a new belt:

> Quando noi fummo là 've la rugiada
> pugna col sole, e per essere in parte
> dove, adorezza, poco si dirada,
>
> ambo le mani in su l'erbetta sparte
> soavemente 'l mio maestro pose:
> ond'io, che fui accorto di sua arte,
>
> porsi ver lui le guance lacrimose:
> ivi mi fece tutto discoverto
> quel color che l'inferno mi nascose.
>
> Venimmo poi in sul lito diserto,
> che mai non vide navicar sue acque
> omo che di tornar sia poscia esperto.

Quivi mi cinse si com'altrui piacque:
oh maraviglia! ché qual elli scelse
l'umile pianta, cotal si rinacque
subitamente là onde l'avelse. (L 121 – 136)

At the end of 'The Strand at Lough Beg', Heaney sees himself as the ministering Virgil and addresses himself directly to his cousin as his Dante.

I [...]
kneel in front of you in brimming grass
And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss
Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.
I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
Green scapulars to wear over your shroud.

The quotation from *Purgatorio* has many different functions: it introduces the image that Heaney is going to convey at the end of the poem and gives it clearer connotations, revealing Heaney's attitude towards the delicate theme of the poem and telling us something about Heaney's relationship with Dante. This is in fact the first official apparition of Dante in Heaney's poetry and it is mediated by Dorothy Sayers's translation, the first he ever read and which prompted his interest in Dante.[1]

Political violence is a crucial issue in the collection, as witnessed by the choice of the translation of the passage on Ugolino from *Inferno* to conclude the book. Ugolino's meal closes *Field Work*, which is opened by another meal, the one described in the poem 'Oysters' (the first poem in the collection), where a pleasurable meal among friends unexpectedly turns into a bitter meditation on imperialism. Heaney recalls the Roman Emperor but is obliquely referring to England 'glutting' itself over Ireland:

My title derives from a passage in George Steiner's *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation,* where the author discusses the nature of interpretation. (*After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* 2nd edn, Oxford, 1992, p. 27).

1. Clara De Petris, 'La pausa per la riflessione', *Linea d'Ombra*, 42 (1989), 69 – 78.

Over the Alps, packed deep in hay and snow,
The Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome:
I saw damp panniers disgorge
The frond-lipped, brine stung
Glut of privilege

Choosing precisely Ugolino's episode to close his collection Heaney acts on a double level. He places himself in the line of tradition while succeeding in recontextualizing completely the episode connecting it to the contemporary situation of Ulster.

Ugolino's story is the Dantean passage most frequently translated into English and the first translations of the *Divina Commedia* are all of the Ugolino episode. Chaucer initiated this trend when he took inspiration from it for his *Monk's Tale*. His version is different in many details from the original: there is no mention of Hell and no archbishop Ruggieri, no reference to Ugolino's prophetic dream and Chaucer's Hugelyn has got only three children and younger than Ugolino's four.

Despite the fact that after Chaucer's version, the Ugolino episode was not translated into English until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the *Torre della Fame* in Pisa, which owes its name to the fact that Ugolino and his sons died of starvation in it, became a place of interest for English 'tourists'.

The first time it appears in an English narrative of travel dates back to 1605, when Sir Robert Dallington's *A Survey of the Great Dukes of Tuscany, in the yeare of our Lord 1596* was published:

> Not far from this place is an old ruinous Tower, called by them (*Torre di Fame*) in memory of the mercylesse crueltie of *Ruggiero* the Archbishop, who upon suspicion of treason immured therein *Conte Hugolino* [...] and his foure children, causing them to be starved: of whom *Dante* the Poet in his 33. chapter *dell'inferno*, very elegantly discourseth.[2]

In 1726, John Durrant Breval thus expresses his discontent at having found the tower of famine closed during his journey to Italy:

2. Paget Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature*, 2 vols, London, 1909, I, p. 107.

> At Pisa I was desirous to see the *Torre di Fame,* remarkable for the disastrous End of Count *Ugolin* and his four or five Sons, pathetically described by the great *Dante*, but found the Entrance of it walled up.[3]

In 1756 Joseph Warton (who, together with his brother Thomas, the Earl of Carlisle, Thomas Gray, and the eccentric virtuoso Henry Costantine Jennings, produced his own version of the Ugolino's passage) adds to his version of Ugolino's story a comment where he declares that he 'cannot recollect any passage, in any writer whatever, so truly pathetic' and, in order to be sure that readers shall miss none of the pathos, he prints in italics what he considered the 'more moving passages'.[4] In Durrant Breval's report we find the same interest in the pathetic aspect of the story: '*Torre di Fame* [...] remarkable for the disastrous End of Count *Ugolino* and his four or five Sons, pathetically, described by the Great Dante [my underlining]'.[5] In accordance with one of the trends in the English literature of the time, in those days the Ugolino story was appreciated because of its potential for *pathos*, a characteristic which Chaucer had equally emphasised in his own version of the episode. The monk's tale about 'Hugelino Comite de Pize', in fact, starts in this significant way:

> Of the erl Hugelyn of Pyse the langour
> Ther may no tonge telle for pitee.[6]

In spite of the fact that in the *Commedia* the episode is narrated by Ugolino himself while in the *Canterbury Tales* the speaker is the monk, it is in Chaucer's version that the emotional aspect of the story is absolutely overwhelming. When Ugolino and his sons realize that they have been condemned to die of starvation, Dante thus describes the reaction of the children:

> piangevan elli; e Anselmuccio mio
> disse: 'Tu guardi sí, padre! che hai?' (XXXIII. 50 – 51)

3. Ibid., p. 204.
4. Ibid., p. 301.
5. Ibid., p. 204.
6. Ibid., p. 11

Chaucer's version of the same terrible moment is remarkably different from the original:

> His yonge sone, that three yeer was of age,
> Un-to him seyde, 'fader, why do ye wepe?
> Whan wol the gayler bringen our potage,
> Is ther no morsel breed that ye do kepe?
> I am so hungry that I may nat slepe.
> Now wolde god that I mighte slepen ever!
> Than sholde nat hunger in my wombe crepe;
> Ther is no thing, save breed, that me were lever.'[7]

Sir Joshua Reynolds, the leading portrait-painter of the eighteenth century and an accomplished Italian scholar, chose exactly this terrible moment in the life of Ugolino as the subject of one of his paintings. This work was exhibited in 1773, at the Royal Academy, under the title:

Count Hugolino and his children in the dungeon, as described by Dante, *in the thirty-third canto of the* Inferno.

> 'Io non piangeva, sí dentro impetrai:
> Piangevan Elli, ed Anselmuccio mio
> Disse: Tu guardi sí, Padre! Che hai?
> Perciò non lagrimai, né rispos'io
> Tutto quel giorno, né la notte appresso.' (XXXIII. 49 – 53).[8]

and it was highly praised by many scholars of the time. Joseph Cooper Walker, for example, significantly focusing on the pathetic value of the work, declared that:

> it requires the genius of a Dante, or a Reynolds
> to seize on the true pathetic point of time in this
> interesting story[9] [my underlining].

This painting moreover, became so famous that in an article on the *Quarterly Review* for January 1823 it is stated that 'Dante was brought into fashion in England by this picture'.[10]

7. Ibid., pp. 11 – 12.
8. Ibid., p. 343.
9. Ibid., p. 545.
10. Ibid., p. 343.

In the eighteenth century, though, Ugolino's story started to be read as a tale of gothic fiction (the tower, the imprisonment, the unspeakable torture he is condemned to are all *topoi* of the genre) and Ugolino was perceived as the protagonist of a gothic story, as we can clearly see again in Durrant Breval's report:

> History scarce affords a severer Instance of
> Prelatical Revenge, than an whole Family immur'd
> in a Dungeon, and the keys of it thrown
> into the River, to cut off all Possibility of Relief. [11]

The translators of the period (apart from Joseph and Thomas Warton), in fact, tend to increase dramatically the horror of Ugolino's episode adding gore or other typical gothic devices. A comparison of the Italian version of the first three lines of canto XXXIII of the *Inferno* with the translations of Gray, Carlisle and Jennings gives clear example of what is meant by "gothic devices". When Dante says:

> La bocca sollevò dal fiero pasto
> quel peccator, forbendola a' capelli
> del capo ch'elli avea di retro guasto (XXXIII 1 – 3)

Gray translates:

> From his dire Food the griesly Fellon raised
> His Gore-dyed Lips, which on the Clotter'd Locks
> Of th'half devoured Head he wiped. [12]

His version is more similar to Jennings's

> His gory Mouth,
> From the raw neck, he rais'd, and with the Hair
> O' th mangl'd Head, wiping it. [13]

11. Ibid., p. 204.
12. Ibid., p. 232.
13. Ibid., p. 521.

or even to Carlisle's

> Now from the fell repast, and horrid food,
> The Sinner rose, but first (the clotted blood
> With hair depending from the mangled head)
> His jaws he wiped. [14]

(who needs an extra line to add horrid details to the situation) than to the original.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, Ugolino becomes a sort of heroic outcast, a tormented victim and a tormenting revenger. If we compare the last verses of Richard Wharton's translation, published in 1804, with the original, we find a remarkable variation. Where Dante writes:

> Quand'ebbe detto ciò, con li occhi torti
> riprese il teschio misero co' denti,
> che furo a l'osso, come d'un can, forti. (XXXIII. 76–78)

Wharton translates (and adds):

> The Spectre ceas'd: and kindling with disdain
> Snatch'd the torn scalp with eager fangs again.
> Still as he gnaws, the flesh, the vessels grow;
> Still as he quaffs the purple currents flow:
> Still o'er th'eternal would the fibres spread:
> Such is their mutual doom: and such th'atonement paid. [15]

emphasising the burning desire for revenge that *still* consumes Ugolino in the other world. An anonymous translation published in 1821 introduces alterations of the text that suggests the idea of Ugolino as an unrepentant and vengeful 'fiend':

> Thus spake the Fiend; and as he spake, his eyes
> Shot forth askaunt the wrath that never dies.
> With grin malign he clenched the traitor's head,
> And to the vengeful task his teeth indurate sped. [16]

14. Ibid., p. 334.
15. Ibid., p. 661.
16. Paget Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature,* II, p. 333.

The Romantic idea of Dante as a Satanic and gloomy *personaggio*, the consequence of their ignorance or inaccurate knowledge of his works which was generally limited to the *Inferno*, owes something also to the Ugolino fashion which promulgated an undue identification between the author and one of his characters. Around 1840, though, with the 'discovery' of the *'Vita Nova'*, the Satanic Dante is neglected in favour of Dante as Beatrice's lover and, consequently, also the episode of Ugolino gradually loses its popularity.

Choosing Ugolino's episode to close his collection *Field Work*, Heaney puts himself in the line of the early tradition of English Dantean studies.

In *Field Work*, the figures of Ugolino and of his arch-enemy Archbishop Roger are introduced to us in 'An Afterwards', the second poem of the third section (the first poem of which starts with an unmistakably Dantean echo: 'In the middle of the way'), where Heaney makes reference to Dante's ninth circle of the *Inferno*. 'An Afterwards' deals with the relationship between art and life: Heaney imagines his wife visiting, with Virgil's wife, the ninth circle of the *Inferno* where the traitors suffer the torment of their punishment and where she would 'plunge all poets'. Her reproach to her husband, in fact, is the following:

> Why could you not have, oftener, in our years
> Unclenched, and come down laughing from our room
> And walked the twilight with me and your children –

He has neglected his wife and children for the sake of poetry and is aware of being a frustrating husband and father, in a sense a traitor to his family. But this is only half of the truth.

He puts himself among the traitors because he is conscious that by translating Ugolino's episode and by placing it in a totally different (Northern Irish) perspective he radically transforms, or somehow 'betrays', it. Moreover, his references to Ugolino obviously anticipate his translation of the Ugolino's passage that closes *Field Work*.

Heaney's translation, entitled 'Ugolino', is based on canto XXII (124 – 139) and canto XXXIII (1 – 90) of the *Inferno*. Instead of the Dantean *terza rima*, Heaney chooses to use a scheme of three lines linked more frequently by assonances than by rhymes and most of the lines are iambic pentameters. Heaney starts from

canto XXXII, line 124: 'noi eravam partiti già da ello' translated into 'we had already left him'. In Dante's *Commedia*, 'ello' (him) is referred to Bocca degli Abiti, a Ghibelline who in the Battle of Montaperti fought on the Guelf side and who is plunged to the neck in the frozen Lake of Cocytus like all the other traitors. Bocca is reported to have treacherously approached the standard-bearer of the Florentines and cut off his hand at a crucial moment of the battle, throwing them into panic and confusion and making them lose the day. Dante's condemnation of this bloody act is part of a more general attack on the cruel methods used indiscriminately by the Guelphs and the Ghibellines in their fight for power and leads on to a general rejection of factional violence. Ugolino's terrifying experience, coming after the encounter with the cruel Bocca, seems neither isolated nor peculiar but, in spite of its terribleness, appears simply as one out of the many examples of human brutality deriving from sectarian hatred.

In the *Commedia* there are no doubts that the pronoun 'ello' (him) stands for Bocca, the soul Dante speaks to immediately before Ugolino; in the same way, in Heaney's 'Ugolino', 'him' could be Francis Ledwidge, the protagonist of the elegy immediately preceeding the translation. Ledwidge was an Irish poet who died fighting in the English Army during the Great War while his countrymen were dying fighting against England. In this way the Ugolino episode is collocated in an Irish perspective from the very beginning. Thomas Foster has observed that the problem of belonging which permeates the poem creates a complex and awkward situation 'worthy of Dante'.[17] The fact that Heaney follows the poem with translation of the Ugolino cantos seems then more than appropriate.

The continuity between the elegy for Ledwidge and the translation is underlined also by the fact that the last line of Heaney's poem, '...all of you consort now underground', implying a sort of common destiny for all the victims of political violence regardless of which side they are on, is redolent of Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting', a poem actually written during the First World War and centered on the same theme:

17. Thomas Foster, *Seamus Heaney*, Dublin, 1989, p. 90.

"Strange friend," [...]
"Whatever hope is yours,
was my life also [...]
I am the enemy you killed, my friend [...]
Let us sleep now..."[18]

Heaney himself, in 'Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet' takes notice that in this poem 'Dante's informing presence has been given a deliberate place'.[19]

Heaney's translation continues with a remarkable alteration of the Italian text. When he describes Ugolino gnawing Ruggieri's head, he says:

I [...]
saw two soldered in a frozen hole
On top of other, one's skull capping the other's,
Gnawing at him where the neck and head
Are grafted to the sweet fruit of the brain,
Like a famine victime at a loaf of bread.

The reference to 'famine', absent in the Italian text, stresses again the connection with Ireland established with 'we had already left him' related to Ledwidge. 'The sweet fruit of the brain' is Heaney's invention, there is nothing like this in the Italian version:

[...] io vidi due ghiacciati in una buca,
sí che l'un capo a l'altro era cappello;
e come 'l pan per fame si manduca,
cosi 'l sovran li denti a l'altro pose
là 've 'l cervel s'aggiunge con la nuca (XXXII. 125 – 129)

Five lines later, referring to the metaphor of the brain as a fruit, he adds a completely new similitude conveying a new image. The *terzina:*

18. Wilfred Owen, *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, London, 1983, pp. 148 – 9.
19. Seamus Heaney, 'Envies and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet', *Irish University Review*, 15 (1985), 5 – 19 (p. 6).

non altrimenti Tideo si rose
le tempie a Menalippo per disdegno
che quei faceva il teschio e l'altre cose. (XXXII. 130 – 132)

becomes:

So the beserk Tydeus gnashed and fed
Upon the severed head of Menalippus
As if it were some spattered carnal melon.

The extremely suggestive pictorial character that these two variations add to the description of this gruesome scene is perfectly consistent with Dante's almost 'visible' language and, at the same time, reveals Heaney's deep assimilation of the master's style.

At the beginning of the invective against Pisa which closes the Ugolino episode, Heaney again completely alters Dante's words. The famous:

Ahi Pisa, vituperio de le genti
del bel paese là dove 'l sí suona (XXXIII 79 – 80)

becomes:

Pisa! Pisa, your sounds are like a hiss
Sizzling in our country's grassy language.

The insistence on the sibilants creates a linguistic counterpart to the idea of Pisa as a treacherous town, as treacherous as a hissing 'snake in the grass' of the Italian language. The 'bel paese là dove 'l sì suona' obviously is Italy, as Dante himself has made clear in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, where he declares:

Nam alii *oc*, alii *oil*, alii *si* affirmando locuntur,
ut puta Yepani, Franci et Latini. (Lviii, 6)

Nevertheless, by alluding to such a peculiarly native English expression like 'snake-in-the-grass', Heaney subliminally trasports us to a different linguistic area and to a different country, his anglophone Ireland. In 'Belfast', an essay written in 1972, apropos of the Anglo-Irish language, Heaney declares:

> I think of the personal and Irish pieties as vowels, and the literary awareness nourished on English as consonants.[20]

The hissing sound of the sibilant consonants which characterize the treacherous Pisa, then, is definitely to be understood as an 'English', as opposed to 'Irish', sound.

This contraposition is strengthened also by the fact that the snake sizzling in the grass is reminescent of the warbling convoy of armoured English cars 'all camouflaged with broken alder branches' in 'The Toome Road', a poem in the first section of the collection. These cars are described while approaching furtively down what Heaney calls his roads 'as if they owned them' taking advantage of the fact that 'the whole country was sleeping'. Their 'warbling' is one of the many 'comfortless noises' to which Heaney refers at the end of 'Sybil' – the central section of the poem 'Triptych' – , as comfortless as the sizzling sound of a snake in the grass. The Shakespearean echo in this context indicates that Heaney, a sort of Irish Caliban, far from being limited to cursing, has been able to forage both into the English and into the Italian tradition to his own advantage.

Moreover, according to a well-known legend, there are no snakes left in Ireland. St Patrick, patron saint of the island, is credited with having driven them all into the sea to their destruction. The suggestion of the presence of a snake 'sizzling' in the grass of Ireland, then, carries the double negative connotation of betrayer and dangerous intruder.

The fact that Dante is both openly quoted in the elegy for Colum McCartney and obliquely present in the elegy for Ledwidge transforms Ugolino into the last of the victims of political feuds who are portrayed in *Field Work*. Dante's sympathy goes to the four innocent sons but does not comprehend Ugolino, who is damned for his sin: at the end of his invective against Pisa, he harshly criticises the injustice done to the innocent children but firmly condemns Ugolino's sin:

> Ché se 'l Conte Ugolino aveva voce
> d'aver tradita te de le castella,
> non dovei tu i figliuoli porre a tal croce.
> Innocenti facea l'età novella,
> novella Tebe, Uguiccione e 'l Brigata
> e li altri due che 'l canto suso appella. (XXXIII. 85 – 90)

20. Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 3rd edn. London, 1980, p. 303.

Heaney's version

> [...] For the sins
> Of Ugolino, who betrayed your forts,
> Should never have been visited on his sons.
> Your atrocity was Theban. They were young
> And innocent: Hugh and Brigata
> And the other two whose names are in my song.

differs from the original in details which allow him to put more emphasis on Pisa's 'atrocity' (a word which does not appear in the original and which, for a British reader, has an unmistakable Northern Irish connotation) than on the innocence of Ugolino's sons. The cross they are crucified upon in the Italian version evokes immediately Christ's sacrifice and innocence; this image from the Gospels by Heaney substitutes words that recall curses typical of the Old Testament:[21]

> [...] For the sins
> Of Ugolino, who betrayed your forts,
> Should never have been visited on his sons.

and which sadly portrays the situation in Ulster, where the 'sons' are still paying for the sins of the 'fathers'. Ugolino's betrayal – the sin for which he is punished in this circle and because of which his sons have been so cruelly starved to death – is transformed by Heaney in the more generic and, in some way, less condemning, plural 'sins'. In this subtle way Heaney gives this statement also a more 'national' and extensive implication.

The fact that Heaney is more sympathetic with Ugolino than Dante, is evident in many other passages of his translation. Where the Italian original is:

> Ma se le mie parole esser dien seme
> che frutti infamia al traditor ch'i' rodo,
> parlare e lagrimar vedrai insieme. (XXXIII 7 – 9)

21. Numbers 10; Joshua 17; 2 Samuel 21. 1 – 9 and, of course, Genesis 3.

Heaney translates:

> Yet while I weep to say them, I would sow
> My words like curses-that they might increase
> And multiply upon this head I gnaw.

In this *terzina,* for instance, starting with 'Yet while I weep', Heaney gives priority to the image of Ugolino crying rather than to the desperate cursing which is in the Dantean original.

Later on, in order to give more emphasis to the anguish which afflicts Ugolino in the *Torre della Fame*, Heaney introduces repetitions which cunningly show how the claustrophobic space of the prison affects Ugolino's way of thinking. Dante's:

> Breve pertugio dentro da la Muda,
> la qual per me ha 'l titol de la fame,
> e 'n che conviene ancor ch'altrui si chiuda,
> m'aveva mostrato per lo suo forame
> piú lune già, quand'io feci 'l mal sonno
> che del futuro mi squarciò 'l velame. (XXXIII. 22 – 27)

becomes:

> Others will pine as I pined in that jail
> Which is called Hunger after me, and watch
> As I watched through a narrow hole
> Moon after moon, bright and somnambulant
> Pass overhead, until that night I dreamt
> The bad dream and my future's veil was rent.
> [my underlining]

The repetition of the verb 'to calm' in 'So then I calmed myself to keep them calm', which translates the Italian 'Queta'mi allor per non farli più tristi' (XXXIII 64) stresses the idea of an identification between Ugolino and his sons which is suggested some lines before, when he says:

> [...] I saw
> The image of my face in their four faces

and which is there also in the Italian original:

> [...] e io scorsi
> per quattro visi il mio aspetto stesso (XXXIII. 56 – 57)

Nevertheless, not only does Dante never go back to the same idea (thereby not giving the identification between Ugolino and his sons the same strength we find in Heaney's version) but in his lines he refers first to the faces of the children then to Ugolino's, while Heaney does exactly the opposite, altering the impact of the image.

The horror of Ugolino and his sons' agony is accentuated by the fact that Heaney's version makes their situation even worse than the one described by Dante. Ugolino's desperate *cri-de-coeur*:

> ahi dura terra, perché non t'apristi? (XXXIII. 66)

in English is no longer a question but becomes a definite statement:

> And earth seemed hardened against me and them

which once again underlines the fact that the Count and his sons are sharing the same terrible predicament and accentuates the pathos of the situation.

Significantly, the well-known Dantean passage:

> Ben se' crudel, se tu già non ti duoli
> pensando ciò che 'l mio cor s'annunziava;
> e se non piangi, di che pianger suoli? (XXXIII. 40 – 42)

is thus rendered in English:

> (If your sympathy has not already started
> At all that my heart was foresuffering
> And if you are not crying, you are hardhearted)

The key word in Heaney's version is "sympathy", a word which is utterly absent in Dante's version and which somehow connects Heaney to the early English 'misreadings' of the episodes. Obviously, his version is not emotional to the overwhelming and exaggerated degree present in Chaucer's tale and in some of his followers' adaptations but Heaney's Ugolino is certainly far from

being presented as a gothic hero or as the Satanic field of the Romantic period. He is unquestionably depicted as a victim who openly entreats the readers' sympathy and who – contrary to Dante's character and similarly to the Chaucerian and the eighteenth century's Ugolino – has already obtained the author's. Despite these similarities with some of his precursors, Heaney fully succeeds in appropriating the register of the early English Dantean tradition in a completely original, almost idiosyncratic way.

In 'The Harvest Bow', the penultimate poem of the third section, Heaney investigates the possible connection between art and peace, by means of a quotation from Coventry Patmore: 'The end of art is peace'. It has been observed that this quotation can have different meanings: it could mean that the aim of art is peace but it could also state that peace, in a way, denies art, it is the end of it because it eliminates a situation of tension which is supposed to prompt creativity.[22] Heaney has clearly declared what he means by the use of that quotation in an interview with Randy Brandes, in which he clarifies also the relationship which, according to him, exists between art and life:

> No matter how turbulent, apocalyptic, vehement or destructive art's subject is or that which is contained with art, no matter how unpeaceful the thing previous to art is – once it has been addressed and brought into a condition called art, it is, if not pacified, brought into equilibrium. For a moment the parallelogram of forces is just held. The minute after art, everything breaks out again. Art is an image. It is not a solution to reality, and to confuse the pacifications and appeasements and peace of art with something that is actually attainable in life is a great error. But to deny your life the suasion of art-peace is also an unnecessary Puritanism. It is an unneccessary extreme.[23]

22. Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, London, 1986, p. 151.
23. Randy Brandes, 'Seamus Heaney: An Interview', *Salmagundi*, 80 (1988), 4 – 21 (p. 21).

In the poem itself Heaney points out that 'the end of art is peace' can only be 'the motto of this frail device' referring both to the bow on which the motto is inscribed and to his own poetry.

The quotation from Coventry Patmore comes to Heaney through Yeats's: in a passage from 'Samhain: 1905' which constitutes Heaney's *Preoccupations* epigraph, Yeats borrows Patmore's line:

> if we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said, 'The end of art is peace,' and the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupations it demands.[24]

In the essay 'Yeats as an Example?' Heaney declares that, in Yeats's poems 'the finally exemplary moments are those when [the] powerful artistic control is vulnerable to the pain or pathos of life itself'.[25] Since, 'all life has the same root', the exemplary moments are those in which the possibility of 'sympathy' is magnified.

Heaney's translation can certainly sustain a close engagement with Dante's original, especially because he has been capable of respecting the Dantean text and concentrating on himself at the same time. He has managed to understand his own mind and the things that were striving to utter themselves through it and to apply them to the text in a very appropriate way. He has been able to move his readers and to create the magical equilibrium by which 'the parallelogram of forces' and the artistic image can hold. Furthermore, the merit of Heaney's translation is that, for all its artistry, it never ceases to be 'vulnerable to the pain or pathos of life'. Heaney's version, far from being inert, provides the original with an alternative which creatively renews it and gives it a new life beyond the moment and place of its creation. For his readers the original episode of Ugolino will never be the

24. Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 14.
25. Ibid., p. 109.

same again: it is impossible not to hear Heaney's echo while reading it because he has successfully managed to create the conditions for a significant exchange between his version and the original.

This movement of restitution is considered by George Steiner as the fourth step of the fourfold hermeneutic motion. The four movements can be thus summarized: trust, aggression, incorporation, restitution. The first step is an act of trust in the meaningfulness of the adverse text, the translator grants '*ab initio* that there is 'something there' to be understood, that the transfer will not be void'.[26] That Heaney fully 'trusted' the *Commedia* is first witnessed by the quotation from *Purgatorio* that he puts at the beginning of 'The Strand at Lough Beg'.

Trust is followed by aggression which means that the translator encircles and ingests the text. Steiner suggests that the very use of the preposition 'into' after the verb 'to translate' implies that each act of comprehension must appropriate another entity.[27] When the *alter* entity is assimilated, it fuses (to various degrees) with the translator's *ego*. At the end of 'The Strand at Lough Beg', Heaney returns the episode described by Dante rewriting it with different characters (himself as Dante and Colum as Virgil): his assimilation of Dante's text and his fusion with the Florentine poet, in fact, starts with this poem.

Heaney's identification with Dante in the double role of passive observer and poet of a hellish reality which he closely relates to Ulster, results in what (in Steinerian terms) can be defined as an 'original reproduction' of Ugolino's episode, which is based both on a higher degree of assimilation and on a sophisticated and creative elaboration of it:

> where the most thorough possible interpretation
> occurs, when our sensibility appropriates its
> object while, in this appropriation, guarding,
> quickening that object's autonomous life, the
> process is one of 'original repetition'.[28]

26. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 2nd edn, Oxford, 1992, p. 312.
27. Ibid., p. 314.
28. Ibid., p. 27.

Dante's influence, then, seems to be absolutely crucial as far as Heaney's change of perspective from *North* to *Field Work* is concerned. In *Field Work*, the collection which constitutes Heaney's first step to escape the perverse logic of sectarianism and to rely on poetry as a means both to express and to achieve moral freedom, the traitor Ugolino is turned into a victim. Heaney forgives him his sin[s], the fact that, like the protagonist of the poem 'Casualty' (and somehow like himself), he had broken 'his tribe's complicity'. In Heaney's own words:

> the shift from *North* to *Field Work* is a shift in trust: a learning to trust melody, to trust art as reality, to trust artfulness as an affirmation and not to go into the self-punishment so much.[29]

29. Kinahan, Frank, 'Artists on Art', interview with Seamus Heaney, *Critical Inquiry*, 8, (1982), 405 – 14 (P. 412).