

“A MUCH MILDER MEDIUM”:
ENGLISH AND GERMAN WOMEN WRITERS IN ITALY 1840-1880

by

Federica Belluccini

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Dated: December 2, 2011

External Examiner: _____

Research Supervisor: _____

Examining Committee: _____

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In Memory of
Dr. Jane V. Curran

For mamma and papà,
Barbara, Joaquín, and Diana,
and David

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ABSTRACT

Travel writing is by definition an open and hybrid form that encompasses a variety of genres, styles, and modes of presentation. This study focuses on four little-known travel texts about Italy written between 1840 and 1880 by two English and two German women writers and shows how, by exploiting the openness of the form of travel writing, they broadened its scope beyond mere description to provide insight into national ideologies and identities while expanding the boundaries of the female sphere of influence. This study considers the following texts: Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844), Adele Schopenhauer's *Florenz: Ein Reiseführer mit Anekdoten und Erzählungen (1847/48)* (2007), Frances Power Cobbe's *Italics: Brief Notes on Politics, People, and Places in Italy, in 1864* (1864), and Fanny Lewald's *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich 1877, 1878* (1880).

In the first chapter, the four texts under consideration are presented against the backdrop of nineteenth-century sexual ideology of the 'separate spheres' and the conventions of women's travel writing. A survey of the long tradition of English and German travellers to Italy and their writings is provided to establish the context in which the texts were produced. Also considered is the role they play in the narrative of Italian nation-building. In the second chapter, the discussion of *Rambles in Germany and Italy* examines how, by presenting herself as a mother and an educator, Shelley foregrounds the pedagogical purpose of the book, which aims at garnering the sympathy of her British audience for the oppressive political situation of the Italian people and their growing nationalism. The third chapter explores Schopenhauer's attempt in *Florenz* to create her own gendered version of the guidebook for travellers in the style of Murray and Baedeker and to revive the memory of the democratic institutions of thirteenth-century Florence at a time when Italians were fighting for democratic reforms and independence. The fourth chapter shows how, in *Italics*, the representation of Italy in the wake of its partial unification in 1861 is closely intertwined with Cobbe's own thinking on politics, religion, and women's emancipation. The fifth chapter examines how, in *Reisebriefe*, the discussion of the social and political changes that had affected both Italy and Germany in the previous forty years allows Lewald to engage in a reflection on her own femininity and on the role of women in the newly formed German nation.

Shelley, Schopenhauer, Cobbe and Lewald each used travel writing to explore their own identities as women and as writers. Pushing the form beyond exposition into the realm of social commentary, they used it to shape public opinion and to explore new roles for women in society.

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Descending from the Alps into Italy is always like passing from winter into summer.
Be the season of the year what it may, we never fail to feel the same sense
of coming into sunshine, and into the freedom of outdoor life;
[...] we have left behind the atmosphere of black frosts,
moral and physical, and may expand ourselves happily
in a much milder medium.
(Cobbe, *Italics* 1)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Elizabeth Eastlake in her 1845 essay “Lady Travellers” argues that “the *art* of [travelling] in which the English so excel” is to be attributed “to a something still more conspicuous and honourable in the national life – to nothing less than the *domesticity* of the English character” (103). In particular, she suggests that “those very habits of order and regularity which make [the Englishwoman] domestic” make her excel “all others in the art of travelling” (102). Paying tribute to the dominant contemporary ideology that associated women with the domestic sphere, Eastlake not only praises Englishwomen for excelling in their domestic virtues but also recognizes domesticity as a fundamental trait of the national character, which shines at its best while travelling abroad. The activity of travelling is, thus, linked to the performing of national character. And in the case of the English lady travellers, national character manifests itself especially in their ability to apply the domestic virtues and the “power of observation” developed “at home counting canvass stitches by the fireside” to the art of travelling and of travel writing (Eastlake 98). According to Eastlake, when it comes to books of travels, the “peculiar powers inherent in ladies’ eyes,” their attention to “lively details,” their “ease, animation, [and] vivacity,” not only allow Englishwomen to equal, complement, and even surpass the merits of their countrymen but also make them outrank the achievements of other foreign women authors of travel writing (98, 99). Eastlake rhetorically asks her audience: “Where is the foreign lady who combines the four cardinal virtues of travelling – activity, punctuality,

courage, and independence – like the Englishwoman?” (102). She then proceeds to support her argument by examining some examples of the significant contribution to travel writing made by British lady travellers and juxtaposing these texts to the travel books of two German women writers. Eastlake does not judge travel writing by foreign women writers to be up to the accomplishments of British lady travellers on account of the supposed differences in the national character of the foreign authors that make them unfit for the description of travels. Accordingly, she explains:

The German ladies, with all their virtues, are not supposed to excel in rapid observation, or lively delineation. Inward experiences and not outward impressions are their forte [...]. They will give you, therefore, most admirable maps of the winding paths of their own hearts, but they are not of much assistance on the common dusty high roads of other countries. (Eastlake 103)

Eastlake’s suggestion that there are “peculiar powers inherent” in the gender and the national character of women writers that shine in particular in the form of travel writing, affecting the content and the quality of such texts, illustrates the constellation of assumptions and attitudes about the form of travel writing, gender and nation that inspired this dissertation.

Similar to Eastlake’s essay, this study discusses travel writing by English and German women writers. While Eastlake examines women’s travel writing about different countries and continents, however, I focus exclusively on writing about Italy – possibly the most visited and described of all the European countries. And where Eastlake’s essay reviews works published immediately before 1844, I consider travel books composed in the decades following 1844, when travel writing by women became increasingly common and ceased to be considered unusual unless it related journeys to remote or unexplored parts of the world. Specifically, I consider Mary Shelley’s *Rambles in Germany and Italy*,

in 1840, 1842, and 1843, Adele Schopenhauer's *Florenz: Ein Reiseführer mit Anekdoten und Erzählungen* (1847/48), Frances Power Cobbe's *Italics: Brief Notes on Politics, People, and Places in Italy*, in 1864, and Fanny Lewald's *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich* 1877, 1878.

In her study on travel writing, Barbara Korte points out that “women have always travelled – as tradeswomen, as companions to husbands and visitors to relatives, or as pilgrims [...]”; however, “a fashion for women’s travel does not emerge until the nineteenth century” (111). As a matter of fact, although women were frequent travellers at the side of men, it was not until the nineteenth century that they increasingly started to produce written records of their travel experiences. Katherine Turner notes that in England “before 1770 only two travel narratives by women were published,” but towards the end of the century the number started to increase and “the years between 1770 and 1800 see the publication of around twenty travelogues by women, including several voyage narratives” (127). As for travel narratives by women in the German language, Irmgard Schleiter observes that she has found none published before 1780, while for the years between 1780 and 1800 she counts a total of twenty travelogues of which only seven are books and the rest are journal articles (47-48). Schleiter also provides the number of travel narratives by German women appearing between 1800 and 1850, which amounts to sixty-seven publications including essays and journal articles (48). For the same time period, a definitive number of travel narratives published by English women writers is not available, and this is possibly due to the fact that their quantity is very large and that new texts are constantly rediscovered and added to the existing corpus.¹

¹ In 1990, Jane Robinson published *Wayward Women*, a bibliography of women’s travel writing, which includes short biographies of some 400 women travellers writing in English. The book surveys several

Eastlake's review essay represents in itself evidence of how, by the mid-nineteenth century, women's travel writing was so abundant and dealt with so many different parts of the world, that she felt the need to organize her subject by singling out three categories of lady travellers and by limiting her discussion to twelve of the most representative travel books published in the preceding four years.

This wealth of texts began to be rediscovered in the 1970s as part of the feminist revival that aimed at including women in what was perceived as a prevalently male process of history and life writing (Bassnett 226). In the 1980s and 1990s, Virago, a British feminist publishing house, reprinted several travel narratives by Victorian women travellers and, in the same years, various anthologies and studies on female travel writers started to appear (Bassnett 226). As for women's travel writing in the German language, starting from the mid 1980s, the theme 'Frauenreisen' (travelling women) has increasingly attracted the interest of scholars from different fields including history, women studies, feminist literature criticism, and cultural anthropology (Gippert 301). While a large number of texts have been rediscovered in the last decades, not all of them have been made available through new editions or have received proper consideration by critics and scholars.

In bringing greater scrutiny to four little-known travel texts by nineteenth-century women writers, this study may be understood as part of an ongoing process of the rediscovery of travel literature by women. This project has been motivated in the first place by my interest in accounts of travel as texts that, as suggested by Korte, "let us participate in acts of (inter)cultural perception and cultural construction, in processes of

centuries of women's travel writing, but it does not organize the texts in chronological order and it does not distinguish between British travellers and travellers of other nationalities.

understanding and misunderstanding” (5). My particular fascination has been with travel narratives about my country, Italy, because these texts allow me to access an experience that is otherwise precluded to me: the observation of my own country, culture, and customs as they were, and as they were represented, in the centuries past from a foreign point of view. As Korte points out, however, “accounts of travel are never objective; they inevitably reveal the culture-specific and individual patterns of perception and knowledge which every traveller brings to the travelled world” (6). When I began this project, I expected to discuss and compare different representations of Italy that bespoke the distinctive personality, interests, and cultural identities of the writers who had produced them. Instead these women took me on a different journey that led me to explore a more intricate and interesting path. While their writing conveys their perceptions of Italy and their experiences as travellers, it also serves as a record of how travelling and writing worked together in the nineteenth century to shape women’s changing sense of themselves and of their place in society.

Through the act of travel women crossed the boundaries of convention and distanced themselves from the set of values, constraints, and rules of behaviour established by their own culture. Through the confrontation with a foreign culture they not only acquired knowledge and understanding of the visited country but also gained new perspectives on their own society and customs. The distance from their own environment afforded them room to question the boundaries prescribed to them by social conventions and gave them freedom to define their own identity and to experiment with new ways of life. In many cases, the knowledge and the experience acquired through travelling provided women with the confidence and authority necessary to write. And by

writing and publishing the accounts of their journeys away from their homeland, women intervened in shaping public opinion about the places visited as well as about their own country, actively participating in the effort to expand the boundaries of the position assigned to them in society.

Nineteenth-century travel writing by German and English women thus not only reveals much about national ideologies and identities, as Elizabeth Eastlake's example suggests; it also speaks in intricate ways to transformations in women's perspectives and roles in both Germany and England. Section 1 of this chapter presents the four texts examined in this study against the backdrop of nineteenth-century sexual ideology and the conventions of women's travel writing. Section 2 surveys the long tradition of English and German travellers to Italy and of their writings and describes how the four texts that are the object of this study position themselves in relation to this tradition. Section 3 considers what role the texts under consideration play in the narrative of Italian nation-building and addresses the complex, hybrid nature of travel writing and the diversity of forms it encompasses.

1.1 Separate Spheres Ideology and Nineteenth-Century Women's Travel Writing

For the years between 1780 and 1850 – that is for the same period that saw the rising popularity of women's travel and their accounts of it – historians and scholars have employed the concept of 'separate spheres' to describe the delineation of gender difference and the increasing emphasis on the separation of roles and functions that men and women were to occupy in society.² During those years of rapid political, economic,

² In their influential study *Family Fortunes*, the historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall observe: "Something significant changed at the end of the eighteenth century; there was a historic break and a

and social change, the evolving notion of ‘separate spheres’ entailed the progressive association of women with the private domestic sphere of the home, where their principal duties were looking after their home, their husband, and their children’s moral upbringing. Conversely men, in their roles as citizens and as heads of the household, were to occupy themselves in the public sphere of work, politics, business, and law. During the nineteenth century, the ascending middle classes of Europe and North America increasingly identified themselves with the values associated with this division of gender roles, and the ideology of separate spheres contributed to the creation of a distinct middle-class identity.³ In connection with the prevalent domestic role attributed to women, the nineteenth century saw the development of an ideal of womanhood that celebrated women as superior to all earthly desires and characterized them as loving, dependent, and self-sacrificing creatures. The title of Coventry Patmore’s most famous poem, the domestic epic *The Angel in the House* (1854-1862), has commonly been used to identify this Victorian feminine ideal against which middle-class nineteenth-century women were often measured.

The emerging figure of the woman travel writer appears to be at odds both with the concept of the ‘separate spheres’ and with the ideal of ‘the angel in the house’ described by Mary Poovey in the following terms:

Depicted as being completely without sexual desire and delicate to the point of frailty, urged not only to be dependent but to cultivate and display

realigned gender order emerged, more characteristic of modern times, associated with the development of modern capitalism and urbanism. This is not to suggest that there were no continuities. Nor that ideas of ‘separate spheres’ were invented in the 1780s. Rather, existing expectations about the proper roles of men and women were re-worked with a significant different emphasis. Between 1780-1850 enterprise, family, home, masculinity and femininity were re-drawn, negotiated, reformed and reinstalled.” (xvi). For a history of the ways historians have employed the metaphor of ‘separate spheres,’ see Linda K. Kerber’s “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History.”

³ This is the thesis argued by the historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall in *Family Fortunes*.

that dependence, the Victorian angel of the house was to be absolutely free from all corrupting knowledge of the material – and materialistic – world.
(34)

Women travellers completely subverted this idealization of womanhood not only because the object of travelling was precisely the acquisition of knowledge about the world, but also because by leaving the house ‘the angel’ was transformed into an individual who pursued her desires and asserted, thus, her independence and strength. Furthermore, when a woman traveller wrote and published accounts of her journeys, she crossed the boundaries of the domestic sphere in a twofold manner: literally, because as a traveller she ventured out of the domestic circle into the wide world, and in a figurative sense, because as a published writer she became a public individual actively partaking in the public arena. While for men the activities of travelling and of writing and publishing were fully in accordance with the conventional masculine attributes of strength, independence, and prowess, and with the public roles they were expected to assume in society, nineteenth-century women travel writers experienced a tug of war between their desires and aspirations and the need to comply with contemporary feminine ideals and stereotypes. Nineteenth-century women were aware that any deviance from the social norm prescribed for their sex could attract to them the stigma of being considered unfeminine, immodest, or sexually improper. Unlike men’s travel narratives, women’s travel writing often reveals the authors’ attempt to cope with the risk of jeopardizing their respectability and to find ways to negotiate and manipulate the boundaries of the ‘feminine sphere’.

The tension arising from observance of social norms and resistance to them has often been recognized as one of the features shared by most nineteenth-century women’s travel writing and as a trait that distinguishes travel narratives by women from male-

authored texts. In her essay “Through Others’ Eyes: Narratives of German Women Travelling in Nineteenth-Century America”, Linda Worley observes:

Women travellers would most likely have felt conflict between their need to fulfill cultural expectations which viewed them as the weak, passive ‘other’, and their deliberate entrance, perhaps even escape, into a world of danger and difficulty, a world of travel to faraway places. Women’s travel narratives reflect these tensions, tensions missing in men’s narratives. (40)

Worley refers also to other elements often described as characteristic of nineteenth-century women’s travel narratives. She notes that women’s “anxiety” about their accounts manifests itself especially “in their compulsion to justify to the reader both the autobiographical elements of their book and the journey itself, an anxiety not shared by German male travellers” (41). Furthermore, she observes that, when male travellers supply motives for their journey, they use a “voice of authority,” while “the tone of introductory remarks made by women is substantially different [...], exhibiting as it does an apologetic and almost formulaic tone of self-denigration” (40).

In her discussion of travel writing by German women writers of the first half of the nineteenth century, Schleiter makes a similar remark concerning the different ways in which male and female authors, in the introductions to their travel narratives, avail themselves of literary conventions to explain the circumstances of their journeys and the reasons for writing about them. Similar to Worley, Schleiter points out the self-confidence and authority of male authors, who never apologize to their readers for the supposed shortcomings or lack of novelty of their works. By way of contrast female authors seem always to want to ask their readers’ forgiveness because a woman is daring to write (Schleiter 115-116). Schleiter observes also how the literary convention of presenting a work as initially intended for a limited circle of friends, who subsequently

induced the author to publication, is usually employed by male writers to guarantee the authenticity of their narratives and to give the readers the impression of having been admitted to a privileged group of intimates. In contrast, women writers avail themselves of the same convention in order to avoid being reproached for unfeminine and presumptuous behaviour for having published their works and to absolve themselves of the responsibility for possible deficiencies in their texts (Schleiter 116). Schleiter furthermore asserts that nineteenth-century German women writers appear to be much more subdued to the impediments and constraints of the “pudor sexus” than their English counterpart (28). She maintains, for example, that the self-effacement and self-denigration that characterize the introduction to the travel accounts of German women writers are not to be found to the same degree in the travel writing of foreign female authors (125).

Nevertheless, in *Across New Worlds*, a survey of nineteenth-century English women travellers and their writings, Shirley Foster mentions self-effacement and the claim that they never intended their writings for publication as strategies employed by female authors to prove their modesty and guarantee their womanliness (19). Foster reports that Victorian women travel writers often open their works with an apologia, in which they appeal “for leniency towards any subsequent deficiencies,” they “disclaim any scientific or political expertise,” and they “confess throughout to ‘faults’ such as scrappiness, unstructured narrative, the substitution of trivia or domestic gossip for ‘serious’ or intellectual material, second-hand information and prominent self-absorption” (20, 22). One of the purposes of Foster’s book, as she states it in the introductory chapter, is to determine if a female version of travel writing can be

postulated. Therefore, in addition to the strategies used to comply with the notion of ‘appropriate’ femaleness, she indicates other gendered elements that characterize travel writing by women. Among such features she mentions the sympathetic attitude towards a country’s inhabitants, the concern with relationships, human nature, and domestic affairs, and the treatment of topics not generally examined in male-authored travel narrative. Household management, culinary habits, appearance, manners, and status of the women represent some examples of these ‘feminine’ topics (Foster 24). Like Worley, Foster points out the tensions and the paradoxes in which female authors found themselves caught when recording their travel experiences. On the one hand, for women writers the norm of feminine propriety, which applied also to literary conventions, prescribed appropriate subject matters and style, topics related to home and family relations, emphasis on feelings and emotions, and employment of forms such as the journal and the letter that suggested a private and domestic orientation. On the other hand, in order to prove the authority and accuracy of their narrations, women travel writers often had to adopt a masculine voice and to assume the language and the conventions of male travel writing. This language and these conventions have been described as ‘colonial’ or ‘imperialist’ discourse, and Foster indicates among its characteristics “the use of a predominantly ‘objective’ style, careful documentation and the ‘othering’ of the foreign country by emphasising details which will assign it an inferior or alien status” (18).

In her influential study of women’s travel writing and colonialism, *Discourses of Difference*, Sara Mills recognizes that there are tensions and contradictions that emerge in women’s travel writing. Rather than approaching the problem in terms of the similarities shared by women’s travel narratives that distinguish them from male-authored texts, she

employs Foucault's discourse theory and analyzes the dissonances in female travel writing as the result of clashes of discourses. As Mills explains, several discourses can affect, at the same time, the production and the reception of texts (30-31). The discourses of femininity in the nineteenth century, for example, established for middle-class women a range of roles mainly situated in the private sphere and set out a series of sexual and moral behaviour patterns that stressed the concern with the presentation of a well-behaved and proper self (Mills 72, 94-107). Mills argues that nineteenth-century women's travel writing shows traces of compliance and resistance to the discourses of femininity. At the same time, however, these texts are also affected by the pressures exerted by colonial discourses and by the conventions and constraints that characterize travel writing as a genre (72-73).

Recently, historians and literary scholars have started to question the impact that the ideology of 'separate spheres' actually had on the structure of nineteenth-century society, arguing that the boundaries of public and private spheres were less rigid than initially supposed, and showing as evidence the many ways in which women intervened in what was considered male and public domain. For example, Martha Vicinus has tried to bridge the gap "between the prescribed ideal of Victorian womanhood and the actual reality," fighting the notion that all nineteenth-century women were passive, submissive, confined in the house, and had no political or economical power (xi). Joanne Shattock recognizes that "the polarization of the 'public' (male) and the 'private' (female) sphere" was not only part of Victorian ideology, but "it was a very real part of nineteenth-century experience" (3). However, she points out that "one of the ways in which women negotiated this seemingly rigid barrier was through writing" and through their

contribution to “traditionally masculine disciplines such as history, science and political economy” (3, 2). Similarly, Maria Frawley has emphasized the crucial role that Victorian women’s travel writing has played in the critical reassessment of the boundaries posed by the separate spheres ideology (25).

In short, on the one hand, travel writing by women can be considered as a subversive act that, by presenting female characters who openly transgressed the boundaries of the domestic circle, contributed to the progressive expansion of women’s sphere of action and to the creation of alternative, non-domestic models of femininity. On the other hand, nineteenth-century women’s travel writing provides evidence of the pressure exerted by social and cultural norms on women’s decision to travel and to write and of the strategies that they employed to present themselves and their experiences as ‘acceptable’ according to those norms.

The four texts that are the object of this study are representative of this process of challenges to and reinforcement of ideals, conventions, and behavioural norms associated with the roles of women in nineteenth-century society. All were written with the intent of publication by women writers who had already broken the boundaries of the private sphere and were known to the reading public as the authors of novels, essays, newspapers articles, travel narratives about different countries, and other literary genres. This selection has been motivated by my intention to explore if and to what extent women who had chosen to write as a profession and had coped with the decision of becoming public individuals felt the need, in their travel writing, to present themselves as complying with traditional domestic values and to adopt strategies and select topics of discussion that guaranteed the authors’ womanliness and propriety. At the same time, I

chose texts that were expressly written for publication because I wanted to examine whether and how travel writing represents an attempt, on the side of these women writers, to make a conscious public statement about their non-domestic identities as travellers and as writers, in order to dispute the current sexual ideology and to promote the acceptance of women in unconventional public roles.

For all the women authors considered in this study, the decision to write a book about their travel experiences in Italy was taken at a point in their lives when their careers as writers were well established. The first text discussed in this study, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844), is the last work by Mary Shelley (1797-1851) published during her life. Shelley had become a literary celebrity with the publication in 1818 of her first and most famous novel *Frankenstein*. As the daughter of two celebrated writers, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and as the lover and then the wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley was always encouraged to write and expected to prove herself by means of literary creations (Poovey 115). Especially after the death of her husband, when her economical situation became increasingly precarious, Shelley had to turn herself into a professional woman of letters and she began to write also in order to support herself and her son (Sunstein 247). The intent to raise money for a friend prompted Shelley to write *Rambles* (Sunstein 361). But the decision to compose a narrative of two recently taken journeys to Italy was also motivated by the fact that, unlike her works of fiction, travel writing allowed her to include in her account opinions on subjects that she had at heart and memories of her past life, together with a revised portrait of herself and her personality (Sunstein 366).

Adele Schopenhauer (1797-1849), the author of the second work considered in this study, began to write and publish under her own name relatively late in her life and died before she had the time to fully develop her talent and style. Possibly for this reason, she is more often mentioned and remembered as the sister of the famous German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, and for her friendship with Goethe rather than for her literary activity (Seeliger 17). During her life, moreover, Adele lived partially in the shadow of her mother, Johanna Schopenhauer, who made a name as an author with the publication of travelogues and novels. Her works were received with acclaim and made her one of the most famous German women of her time and one of the first to earn a living as a writer (Pickett 301). In the years between 1806 and 1813, Johanna Schopenhauer also established in Weimar a renowned literary salon, where she received as regular guests some of the most important German personalities and artists of the time, including Goethe, Wieland, the brothers Grimm, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and many others (Seeliger 26). Adele grew up in this stimulating environment cultivating her many artistic talents, which included painting, singing, acting, and creating elaborate silhouettes with scissors and paper. This artistic versatility together with her lack of a formal education, which was reserved at the time only to the male members of middle-class families, made it difficult for Schopenhauer to focus her energies exclusively on writing (Seeliger 205). Her first, minor works appeared under a pseudonym, but by the time she started writing *Florenz: Ein Reiseführer mit Anekdoten und Erzählungen* (1847/48) (Florence: A Guidebook with Anecdotes and Stories 1847/48) – the text I examine in this study – she had published two novels using her own name. *Florenz* was an attempt to try her hand at a different genre. It was written with the intent of advancing her career and

could have finally granted her greater renown as a writer. Unfortunately, Schopenhauer died while she was still working on *Florenz*, and the manuscript, which is not complete and suffered the loss of some of its parts, was edited and published for the first time only in 2007 by Waltraud Maierhofer. This study represents the first extensive analysis dedicated to Schopenhauer's *Florenz*.

Unlike Shelley and Schopenhauer, Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), the author of the third text examined in this study, was not related to literary personalities and she never wrote works of fiction in her life. Her first book was a theological treatise that had to be published anonymously in 1855, both because her father did not approve the unorthodox religious ideas she expressed in it, and because theology was not considered an appropriate subject for female writers (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 78-79). After the death of her father in 1857, Cobbe embarked on a solitary journey to Europe and the Middle East and visited Italy repeatedly between 1857 and 1864. In the meantime, she developed a career as a professional journalist and social reformer and wrote important articles and essays arguing for the improvement of the conditions in the workhouses and for the increase of women's educational and employment opportunities. During those years, she also wrote about marital violence, the merits of celibacy for women, and the role of women in philanthropy, and she became involved in the national women's suffrage campaign and the anti-vivisection campaign, of which she would later be a leading figure (Caine 103-106). In her book on Italy entitled *Italics: Brief Notes on Politics, People, and Places in Italy, in 1864* (1864), Cobbe capitalized on her knowledge of Italian matters gathered during her trips to the Peninsula to write a work that allowed her to include in her discussion ideas she had advocated in her previous writings and that, by profiting of the

popularity of travel books, enabled her to address a different and wider audience than she had ever reached with her articles, essays, and theological studies (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 137).

Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich 1877, 1878 (Travel letters from Germany, Italy and France 1877, 1878, 1880), the last text discussed in this study, was written at the peak of Fanny Lewald's (1811-1889) career as a writer. As the daughter of a Jewish middle-class family of Königsberg in Prussia, Lewald received a limited education in spite of her expressed desire to pursue her studies and was destined to manage her father's household until she could be married off to a proper suitor, who could then exert upon her the same patriarchal authority as her father and support her financially. Lewald found in her writing a way to rebel against this destiny and at age thirty-four managed to obtain permission from her father to try to support herself through her work as a writer. In her early novels, Lewald dealt with political, religious, and social issues concerning the emancipation of women and of the Jews and advocated the principles of freedom, equality of rights, and democracy that characterized the German historical and literary period usually referred to as 'Vormärz.' After the 1850s, she continued to write novels, but she also became a contributor to the major magazines and newspapers of the time, wrote essays on women's issues, published an autobiography, and earned a reputation as an author of travelogues (Joeres 92). *Reisebriefe* is the fourth of her five travel books that feature her repeated journeys to Italy as their main subject. Although modern critics have been attracted mostly by her earlier works, *Reisebriefe* was published when Lewald, at almost seventy years of age, had come to be regarded by her contemporaries as one of the major German women writers of the century (Schneider 8).

Many of the elements that have been recognized as characteristic of nineteenth-century women's travel writing are present also in the four texts examined in this study. For example, Schleiter has noticed that: "Gerade in Reiseschriften zeigen sich Frauen – im Unterschied zu Männern – sehr bereit zu Reflexionen über das eigene geschlechtsspezifische Ich"⁴ (14). The four texts considered in this study all share this tendency to present the gender of their authors and definitions of gender roles as subjects of discussion. Even in the texts characterized by a predominant 'objective' style, like Schopenhauer's *Florenz* and Cobbe's *Italics*, the authors point out their gender, starting from the very first pages of their books, and they refer to the specifically female perspective offered by their works as a way to distinguish them from other existing works on the topic of travelling to Italy. All the texts convey, to a lesser or greater extent, the authors' awareness that, as travellers and as writers, they were trespassing the boundaries of the contemporary social norm. This consciousness is particularly evident when they choose topics of discussion that, according to literary conventions, belonged to men's domain and were considered unseemly or inappropriate for women writers. In each text, moreover, it is noticeable that the authors deliberately construct and perform their own identity, firstly as individuals, and then as 'women writers,' attempting to establish and manipulate the way in which they wanted to be perceived by their audience.

Critics have taken different approaches to the crucial issue of the search for identity in women's travel writing. In her essay "Travel Writing and Gender," Susan Bassnett describes "women travellers' search for identity" as a "problematic area of debate about women's travel writing" (233). Taking as an example the famous

⁴ "Especially in travel writing, women – in contrast to men – show themselves particularly willing to reflect on their own gender-specific 'I.'" Unless otherwise stated, all the translations from German and Italian are mine.

globetrotter Isabella Bird, who was a “semi-invalid at home” and an “intrepid explorer” on the road, she observes that, for some women, travel “offered a means of redefining themselves, assuming a different persona and becoming someone who did not exist at home” (234). Bassnett comments on the process of self-fictionalization of female authors in their travel writing, and she goes so far as to argue that “many of the works by women travellers are self-conscious fictions, and the persona who emerges from the pages is as much a character as a woman in a novel” (234).

Frawley tackles the issue of the search for identity in women’s travel writing from a different point of view. She claims that “many Victorian women used their experiences outside of England to forge identities at home with the reading public” (24). However, she does not refer, like Bassnett, to ‘self-fictionalized identities’, but rather to ‘professional identities’ as writers and experts on subjects such as science, anthropology, geology, history, and art that had hitherto eluded women “because they lacked the education that decreed cultural authority” (24). According to Frawley, “travel conferred on many Victorian women a measure of cultural competence that derived not from education but from experience”, and this allowed them to create for themselves public, professional identities and to win recognition for their achievements (24).

Foster suggests that it is precisely because of the “confessional nature” of travel writing, which allows “self-exploration under cover of response to an external reality” and the construction of “a subjective identity within an objective context,” that many women found the genre appealing (19). Likewise, Schleiter considers the search for identity, self-reflection, and self-revelation as inherent to women’s travel writing. She explains that, for women, travelling meant not only leaving the protection of their homes,

but also abandoning the identities that social conventions or family relations assigned to them within the domestic sphere. Outside of the home, their roles as wives, mothers, sisters or daughters were not obvious, and the confrontation with a foreign environment forced women to question the definition of their own self (Schleiter 187-188). Thus, unlike other literary genres such as the novel, travel writing required women writers to deal with the problem of portraying themselves to their reading public. At the same time, writing about their journeys allowed female authors to conceive and establish for themselves new identities detached from the domestic environment. Schleiter notes that it is especially in those passages where women travel writers openly turn their own femininity into subject of discussion that it is possible to observe the process of construction and stylization of their identities (188). In addition to discussions of their femininity, women travel writers also engage in acts of self representation by means of comparing themselves to other women and through the consideration of different ideals of femininity and the discussion of questions of emancipation (Schleiter 188).

In this study, I pay special attention to all the passages in which the authors, directly or indirectly, explore, define, and portray their identity. Objects of observation will be also those passages in which the authors present other women as positive or negative models of femininity or in which the writers express their opinion on the character and morals of the inhabitants of the visited countries. For example, in Catholic Italy, the confrontation with the cult of the Virgin Mary and with the extensive amount of artistic representations of the Madonna generates reactions and responses from the authors of all the examined texts. The different ways in which each of them engages with this idealization of womanhood and with the feminine attributes that the Virgin Mary

symbolizes offer an insight into their self conceptions as women and their ideas about the role of women in society. Through such examples, I show how these women writers, in the examined texts, used their encounter with a foreign culture and their travel experiences abroad to assess their own society, the position of women within that society, and their own identities and roles as potentially subversive agents of the women's status in their countries.

1.2 The Tradition of English and German Travellers to Italy and their Writings

In the course of the centuries, the cultural exchanges with Italy and the fascination with its history, art, and landscape have had a much greater influence on Britain and Germany than on any other European countries. As Manfred Pfister in his *Introduction to Performing National Identity: Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions* puts it, “none of the other European cultures has fallen as deeply in love with Italy as Britain and Germany” (12). From the Renaissance on, travel to Italy became a habit in both British and German culture. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, students from both countries were attracted by Italy's cultural hegemony and went to the Peninsula to study at the numerous Italian universities and to learn from illustrious humanists. Many of the travellers to Italy were also pilgrims en route to the Holy Land or going to Rome to receive indulgences from the pope (Tresoldi 1: 1). The Protestant Reformation started in Germany by Martin Luther in 1517 and the separation of the Anglican Church from Rome between 1529 and 1536 under Henry VIII brought down the number of pilgrims who visited Italy. The subsequent religious wars that ravaged Central Europe and the dangers that both the Inquisition and the assumed looseness of morals associated with popery represented for

Protestant foreigners slowed down the flux of English and German travellers to Italy in the seventeenth century (Brand 7).

Towards the end of the seventeenth century and then increasingly during the eighteenth century, however, Italy became the ultimate goal and destination of the Grand Tour, the traditional trip of Europe according to a standard itinerary that served as the finishing touch to the education of young men of means belonging to the upper, ruling classes. The practice of the Grand Tour is usually associated with Britain but had its equivalents in other north-European countries. In Germany the same custom was called 'Kavaliersreise' (Hachmeister 2) and, as in Britain, it was meant as "an ideal means of imparting taste, knowledge, self-assurance and polished manners to young gentlemen of fortune" (Hibbert 18). The young travellers of the Grand Tour were generally accompanied by a tutor or a 'bear-leader,' usually a man of culture who had done the tour before. The privileged voyagers were expected to mingle with the social, political, and cultural élites of the places visited and to establish connections that could become important for their future careers. The Grand Tour also came to be seen as providing an opportunity for the young men to indulge in social and sexual experimentation, before they had to assume the responsibilities and sobriety of adulthood (Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after" 41). While Paris was valued as the place where the Grand Tourists could acquire "refined manners" and "gracious behaviour", Italy and its major cities (Rome, Florence, and Venice) were regarded as the most "challenging parts of the travelling education" (Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after" 39). There the young gentlemen could come in touch with and learn from the "classical civilisation, both in its original (ancient Roman) and its recreated (Renaissance) manifestations" (Buzard, "The Grand Tour and

after” 39). Thanks to the rediscovery and partial excavation of Herculaneum in 1737 and Pompeii in 1748 and to the publication of Winckelmann’s *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (History of Ancient Art)⁵ in 1764, the importance of Italy as home of classical art and antiquity reached a new apex (Hachmeister 2). As a consequence, a general lack of interest in post-classical art and edifices and in the living inhabitants of the country is noticeable in the travelogues of the eighteenth century (Buzard, “The Grand Tour and after” 40).

In the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, more and more of the lower-born classes took up the practice of the Grand Tour, which began, thus, to lose fashionable appeal (Brand 8). Among these new, non-aristocratic travellers were an increasing number of scholars, writers, and artists who turned to Italy in search for inspiration and renewal (Tresoldi 1: 42). A lively community of German artists was already established in Rome,⁶ when Goethe in 1786 undertook the journey to Italy that was destined to change the course of his life and to influence the perception of the Peninsula for generations of German travellers after him. Shortly after Goethe’s return to Weimar, the turmoil caused by the French Revolution and by its aftermath, in particular by the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), almost closed the Continent to visitors, and for over twenty years only a few German and English travellers managed to go to Italy (Brand 2). During those years, however, the fascination of Italy did not diminish and was, in fact, enlivened both in Britain and in Germany by the publication of works such as

⁵ Chloe Chard points out the importance of Winckelmann’s works for both British and French culture: “the one striking instance of a body of work by a German writer that English and French repeatedly invoke is supplied by the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann” (16).

⁶ Among the important German artists who lived in Rome in the eighteenth century, there were for example the famous painters Wilhelm Tischbein (1751-1829) and Angelika Kauffmann (1741-1807) (Tresoldi 1: 42).

Mariana Starke's pioneer travel guide *Letters from Italy* (1800), Ann Radcliffe's novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), and Goethe's *Römische Elegien* (Roman Elegies, 1795) and *Venezianische Epigramme* (Venetian Epigrams, 1796) (Brand 8). In particular, Madame de Staël's *Corinne; ou l'Italie* (Corinne; or Italy, 1807) and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (published in parts between 1811 and 1817) offered to readers the illusion of travel during the closure of the Continent and fed their imagination with representation of Italy that would deeply influence travellers' perception of the country for the rest of the century.

When the Napoleonic wars ended, the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), which attempted to restore in Europe the political status quo existing before the French Revolution, inaugurated for the Continent a period of relative peace and stability that favoured travelling.⁷ Travel to Italy resumed and both the number of the travellers and their enthusiasm reached unprecedented proportions. With respect to Britain, C. P. Brand observes that, "[a]s far as one can judge from the travel-books and articles published, the years after 1819-28 formed a peak period" (23). As for German travellers to Italy, the publication of the first two parts of Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey) in 1816/17 and of its conclusion in 1829 gave rise to a crowd of enthusiasts, who went to the Peninsula following in the poet's footsteps. The publication of Goethe's travel memoirs also stimulated different responses from several German writers of the time, who in turn wrote their own versions of the Italian journey.⁸ In his *Italienische Reise*

⁷ For an overview of the consequences that the Congress of Vienna had on the Italian territory, see Harry Hearder's *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento 1790-1870*, 172-192.

⁸ Among the German writers of the time who responded to Goethe's *Italienische Reise* with their own version of the Italian journey can be mentioned: Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff (1788-1857), author of *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (From the life of a Good-for-Nothing, 1826); August von Platen (1796-1835), who wrote *Sonette aus Venedig* (Sonnets from Venice, 1825); and Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) with his three Italian *Reisebilder* (Travel Pictures, 1829, 1830, 1831). These authors and works are the object of

Goethe reaffirmed his aesthetic principles based on the cult of Roman and Greek antiquity. The study of classical art and antiquity was one of the interests that had motivated the Grand Tourists of the eighteenth century to visit Italy. In the post-Napoleonic era, the practice of the Grand Tour and the fascination with Italy as home of the classical civilization did not completely disappear; however, different types of travellers driven by other kinds of reasons and purposes found their way to the Peninsula (Buzard, “The Grand Tour and after” 47).

After 1815, the interest in all things Italian developed into an ‘Italomania’ (Brand 3). The cheapness of the cost of living attracted to the Peninsula families in financial troubles; the warm Italian climate was often recommended by doctors to invalids and convalescents; social outcasts, whose scandalous behaviour was not tolerated in their countries of origin, found a convenient refuge in the more relaxed morals and conventions of the Italian society and of the communities of expatriates residing there; artists turned to Italian art, history, and landscape as sources of inspiration, while scholars, historians, and archaeologists went to Italy to pursue their studies (Brand 10-13). Starting from 1810 a group of German painters, later called by the name of ‘Nazarenes’, settled in Rome to study the works of art of the early Italian masters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Tresoldi 2: 2).⁹ In the first half of the nineteenth century, the community of German artists in Rome, which had their meeting place in the famous Caffè Greco, became larger and developed their own institutions, such as the “Deutscher Künstler Verein” (German Artists Society) and the “Bibliothek der

Hachmeister’s study *Italy in the German Literary Imagination: Goethe’s “Italian Journey” and its Reception by Eichendorff, Platen, and Heine*.

⁹ Among these painters the most famous was Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869).

Deutschen” (German Library) (Tresoldi 2: 2-5).¹⁰ All the most important British poets and prose-writers of the time went to Italy. Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Hunt, Rogers, Hazlitt and Macauley travelled there and their works were considerably influenced by Italian history and literature (Brand 9). Landor, Shelley and Byron lived in Italy for extended periods of time. Shelley and Byron in particular became the great poetical interpreters of Italy and brought attention to the political situation of the Peninsula and to its sufferings (Brand 202, 208).

During the Napoleonic wars Italy had become prey of the French, who came as liberators but soon transformed the country into a battlefield, destroying and robbing its treasures. The settlement of the Congress of Vienna brought Austrian sovereignty into Lombardy and Venetia, the richest areas of Italy, and established in the rest of the Peninsula despotic regimes that were all more or less under Austrian influence. The only resistance to these oppressive absolutist regimes came from the members of the secret societies, who at regular intervals organized uprisings and insurrections aimed at securing constitutions and liberal reforms (Thompson 9). Travellers to Italy could not help but notice the widespread degradation and poverty caused by oppression and misgovernment. In their writings they expressed sympathy for the Italian political situation and its submission to foreign powers. This is a recurrent theme, for example, in Shelley’s *Rambles* and in Cobbe’s *Italics*, and Maura O’Connor argues that “English travel writing about Italy, [...] not only contributed to the commercialization of Italian travel and travel writing, but also would eventually help sell Italian nationalism itself to a wider audience” (22).

¹⁰ For more information about the community of German artists in Rome, see Friedrich Noack’s *Deutsches Leben in Rom: 1700 bis 1900*.

The many Italian political exiles, who had to find refuge from the persecutions of their oppressive governments in several European countries, contributed to awaken public opinion to the Italian political situation. Already during the Napoleonic wars and then increasingly after the failure of the uprisings of 1820-21 and of the later insurrections of the early 1830s, several Italian exiles fled to England, where they considerably encouraged and influenced the interest for Italian politics, literature, and history. Among the most important were the poet Ugo Foscolo, who arrived in 1816 and published critical works on Italian literature; Antonio Panizzi, who arrived in 1823, wrote on Boiardo, Ariosto, and Dante and became librarian of the British Museum; and Gabriele Rossetti, the poet and Dante scholar, who arrived in 1824 (Brand 26-27).¹¹ Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72), who found refuge in London in 1837, was the most well known among the Italian exiles, and in the 1840s and '50s, he was the most successful in gaining support for the Italian cause from large sections of the British educated public and middle-class reformers.¹² 'Young Italy', the new secret society he founded in 1831, was supposed to replace the older groups discredited by the failures of the previous insurrections and to grow support to prepare the ground for a revolution, whose aim was to unify the Italian nation under a republican government (Thomson 10). In Britain, the dedication to the cause of the liberation of Italy became, as John Pemble has defined it, "the gospel of a generation" that "acted like a ferment on public, private, and literary life and roused Protestant England to its greatest moral crusade since the campaign against slavery" (10). Between the 1840s and the 1860s, the Italian cause received constant

¹¹ For an analysis of how this generation of Italian exiles influenced the English views about the Risorgimento, see Maurizio Isabella's *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era*, 186-212.

¹² See O'Connor 57-92.

coverage in the British press; it became a significant issue in British politics, advocated by statesmen like Palmerston, Gladstone, and Russell; and it received considerable support by literary celebrities like the Carlyles, the Brownings, Charles Dickens, Algernon Charles Swinburne and many other writers, for whom Italian freedom became the inspiration for poems, plays, novels, and hymns (Pemble 10).

After 1815 the factor that possibly more than any other caused the dramatic escalation of the travellers to Italy was the improvement of travel infrastructures. Napoleon was obsessed with the construction of roads to connect his growing empire, and when travel resumed after his downfall, access to Italy via the Alps became easier than it had ever been before thanks to the great Alpine passes that he had had built. The introduction of steam power on the rails and on the water reduced costs and time necessary for travelling. The first passenger service to cross the Channel began regular operation in 1816, while the first steam-driven vessels on the same stretch were introduced in 1821 (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 41). Steamers along the Rhine started to work in 1828, and in the 1830s steamers were operative also along other major European rivers in France, Austria, and Germany (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 41). Between 1825 and 1844 railways began to appear in many European countries, but there was great disparity from country to country. Britain had over 1,300 miles of track in 1842, while in politically divided countries like Germany and Italy the development was slower. Germany had only four miles of track in 1835, which were increased to almost four thousand by 1850, and Italy had still only 1,118 miles of track by 1860 (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 41-42). Between 1820 and 1850, numerous institutions were established to help travellers organize practical aspects of their journeys including their transport, their

board and lodging, the transfer and exchange of currency, and the attainment of passports and visas.¹³

The handbooks for travellers by the British publishing firm Murray and their German equivalent by the rival firm Baedeker began to appear almost simultaneously around 1835 and rapidly became a prominent feature of the emerging tourist industry. The purpose of Murray and Baedeker was “to put everything the tourists needed to know for the efficient fulfilment of their itineraries between the covers of their handbooks”, in order to make their readers “more *independent* in their travels” (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 48, 75). Murray and Baedeker standardized the form and organization of guidebooks, making efficiency, thoroughness, objective style, and constant updating their main characteristics. Their authoritative tone and their aspiration to be exhaustive contributed to the creation of an inventory and a hierarchy of attractions that were worth visiting in every place, making the acquisition of knowledge and ‘culture’ through travelling a standard and often superficial process. Ironically, the practice of following to the letter the directions and suggestions of the guidebooks made many travellers ‘less independent’ in their views, and far from helping them develop a sense of taste instead hindered its growth by imposing on them a rigid set of aesthetic norms.¹⁴

In the post-Napoleonic period, the improvements in travel infrastructures and the development of the first tourist institutions that helped to reduce costs, risks, and discomforts related to travel made Italy accessible virtually to everybody, and women in

¹³ For information on the development of instruments of finance for tourists and on the establishment of regulations for the issue of passports in Britain, see Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 78-79 and Pemble 33-35.

¹⁴ Even Robert Browning, one of England’s most original poets, was not immune from dependency on guidebooks. As I discussed elsewhere, his poem “The Englishman in Italy” (1849) echoes passages from a guidebook on Naples and its environs that Browning owned. See Belluccini, “Robert Browning’s “The Italian in England” and “The Englishman in Italy”: Two Nationalities Juxtaposed.”

particular took great advantage of these renewed opportunities for travel. After 1815, Continental travel became largely accepted as an unexceptional and highly appealing activity for women. In her 1845 essay on lady travellers, Eastlake could assert that “[m]odern Europe [...] has been tolerably tutored into the anticipation of every English want; and the daintiest woman may now traverse the greatest part of it without a rough road, a sour dish, or a doubtful bed” (119). This was possibly a too optimistic remark, but it indicates, in any case, the widespread existence of female tourism at this time (Foster 34). Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, the number of female travellers had increased so much that, as Pemble observes, “women were outnumbering men among the tourists in southern Europe” (77). While travelling for women was an expression of a new spirit of female initiative and autonomy, at the beginning of the century most still took their journeys within the protection of their families or with their husbands, and if they were single, they were usually accompanied by relatives and friends or went as governesses with their employers’ families (Pemble 77). By the beginning of the twentieth century also this custom had changed and women travelling solo were the rule rather than the exception (Pemble 78).

Women travelling to Italy in the post-Napoleonic era shared with their fellow male travellers the feeling of being surrounded by a crowd of visitors and of having arrived too late on the scene to find something new to say about sites that had been seen and described so many times before (Buzard, “The Grand Tour and after” 49). The Grand Tour of the eighteenth century had been by definition an exclusive practice that served, among other things, to reinforce the sense of belonging to the privileged ruling class and to the refined élite, whose education was based on classical learning. On account of their

gender, women had generally been excluded from the typically male practice of the Grand Tour and from the arena of experiences it supported, which ranged from the acquisition of statesmanship and classical education to sexual experimentation.¹⁵ In the post-1815 atmosphere, therefore, women travellers – whether or not they intended to write about their journeys – needed even more than men new interpretations of the aims and expectations associated with the journey to Italy. Like male travellers, moreover, female visitors of Italy necessitated different paradigms of Italian experiences capable of assuring them originality and novelty amid the post-Napoleonic hordes of tourists and the proliferation of travel writing about Italy.

The models of Italian perception developed by Romantic writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century proved to be particularly apt to be appropriated, manipulated, and re-interpreted into fresh constructions of the Italian experience. Madame de Staël's *Corrinne; or Italy* was one of the works that most deeply influenced the way in which European readers perceived and understood Italy, when the country was re-opened to travellers after the Napoleonic wars. As Kenneth Churchill points out, Madame de Staël “was the first writer to stress consistently the aura of pathos lying over Italy,” replacing “the noble association of Italy with classical literature” with recollections of more recent and tragic events of Italian history (26). De Staël brought attention to different periods of the Italian history and, without disregarding the current situation of the country and of its inhabitants, she traced a panorama of literature about Italy that included, next to the authors of the antiquity, also European and Italian writers of more recent times (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 25). Because the book was at the same time a novel and a guide to

¹⁵ Buzard notes that “the Continental tour and the whole process of acculturation it represents” has always been “culturally coded ‘male’” (*The Beaten Track* 16).

Italy with long descriptions of things to see, it not only contributed to create and propagate a new Romantic canon of sights and a novel Romantic approach to Italy, but it also provided the appropriate mental and emotional reactions to the Italian tour (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 111). As the title of the novel indicates, the poetess and improvisatrice, Corinne, is the embodiment of Italy. Corinne's beauty, vitality, and sensuality came to be associated with Italy, and in the novel these qualities were set in opposition with the rigid morals and gender ideology of the north, represented by the British character of Lord Nelvil. As a result of the popularity of the novel, Italy gained a reputation as a place that encouraged creativity and freedom of spirit, and where sensibility to art, culture, and sentiments could be developed:

Much of the novel's didactic purpose is to display the process by which Nelvil attempts, and fails, to break the coldly rational Northern habits of mind that militate against his acceptance of Italy and his love for Corinne; within this larger struggle, considerable emphasis is given to the matter of what travel may accomplish in educating the feelings and deepening the capacity for emotion. (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 112)

De Staël's personification of Italy as a woman had other important implications in the way the country and its political fragmentation and subjugation to foreign oppressors came to be perceived and interpreted by post-Napoleonic travellers. As O'Connor explains:

In the novel *Corinne*, the woman, the Italian, and the Romantic are interwoven in such a way that Italy is metaphorically cast as a woman [...] in the sense that "she" has been stripped of all temporal power – of military strength and political freedom, what remains are the arts, nature, and religion. Staël's Italy possesses a cultural and spiritual power, but lacks the necessary prerequisites [*sic*] to become a modern nation. (31)

On the one hand, the gendered characterization of Italy as a woman began to be used to justify the fact that the country did not have political autonomy. In the same way as a

woman, according to the patriarchal domestic ideology, was subjected to the authority of the man of the house, so ‘feminine’ Italy and its ‘effeminate’ inhabitants could not be independent and needed to be governed by absolutist authoritarian regimes.¹⁶ On the other hand, by the first half of the nineteenth century, women started to read Italian nationalism and the country’s struggle for independence and freedom as foreshadowing their own redemption and emancipation. Sandra Gilbert, for example, argues that women writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti revitalized the trope of Italy as a woman “using it to transform Italy from a political state to a female state of mind, from a problematic country in Europe to the problem condition of femaleness” (28).

The other Romantic writer, whose works exerted a great and long-lasting influence on the way Italy was internationally perceived, understood and represented after 1815, was Lord Byron. Byron was influenced by Madame de Staël’s *Corinne* and, following her example, he made his readers aware that almost every town in Italy was associated with an important event in history, a great author, or a fictional character (Churchill 36). In addition to re-evaluating the Italian culture and literature of the past, Byron, like de Staël, drew attention to the Italy of his age, paying homage to the Italian artists of the time. Byron spent seven years in Italy, from 1816 until 1823, when he sailed for his fatal expedition to Greece. During this time he came to know Italy and the Italians very well and in his works he managed to explore a wide range of responses to the country (Churchill 30). He felt the contrast between the cold and stern English society and the pleasures and fullness of life that it was possible to experience under the Italian

¹⁶ On the subject of the binary oppositions that came to be established between Italy and femininity and Britain and masculinity between the 1830s and 1860s, see Matthew Reynolds’s *The Realms of Verse 1830-1870: English Poetry in a Time of Nation-Building*, 75-84.

sun (Churchill 42). He basked in the sensuality and joyous exuberance of the South and celebrated the intensity and warmth of emotions that life offered there. At the same time, he saw in Italy the country where the conflicting forces of life and death, of grandeur and decay were constantly at work, and where human beings were continually reminded of their fragile condition and of their limitations. The Italian ruins became for him metaphors of the tragedy of the human condition (Churchill 32). Byron expressed these tensions and conflicts through the Romantic solitary figure of a traveller in his four-canto travelogue poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which together with de Staël's *Corinne* became for nineteenth-century travellers the "guides to the sentiments of the tour" (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 118). Buzard argues that Byron's poetic version of the Italian tour radically reformed and revived the meaning of the Italian journey for post-Napoleonic travellers, replacing the worn-out practice of the Grand Tour with new paradigms of experience:

Where the Grand Tourist had enacted a repetitive ritual of classicism and class solidarity, his nineteenth-century counterpart, self-consciously treading the Grand Tourist's well-beaten path in the midst of inevitable compatriots, would lay claim to an aristocracy of inner feeling, the projection of an ideology of originality and difference. Byron could make even the most familiar routes and stops shed their carapace of clichés and take on powerful new meanings [...]. (*The Beaten Track* 121-122)

By suggesting that travellers should search not only for the historical but also for the literary, emotional, and personal significance of places, texts like those by de Staël and Byron gave the tourist sights a new perspective. Through the emphasis on sentiments and on the personal responses to places, these texts "provided travellers with a script for being original, in the sense of obeying one's unique inner dictates; [they] suggested that

the goal could be accomplished by anyone properly sensitive” (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 111).¹⁷

Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* had a similarly immense influence in shaping the perception of Italy and the responses to the Italian tour of nineteenth-century travellers. For German literature in particular, the importance of the model of Italian experience established by Goethe can hardly be overstated. As Ujma points out, however, literary criticism has too often considered the German writers who attempted literary representations of Italy after Goethe as epigones of the great poet. At the same time, she laments that because of the overbearing attention devoted to Goethe’s representation of Italy, the influence that other European literary works have had on the nineteenth-century German perception of the Peninsula has been underestimated and not adequately studied yet (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 19-21). What made Goethe’s model of Italian journey particularly important for post-Napoleonic travellers to the Peninsula was not so much his cult of antiquity and his insistence upon the aesthetic principles of classicism, but the paradigm of the Italian tour as a life-changing experience that revives the spirit, enlarges the ability of perception, and renovates artistic inspiration. Goethe went to Italy to overcome a crisis that concerned all aspects of his life: he was unsatisfied with his political career in Weimar, his literary creativity was exhausted, and he was unhappy with his relationship with Frau von Stein (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 17-18). From a biographical point of view, Goethe’s journey to Italy represented both a solution to his problems and a ‘Bildungsreise’ (educational journey) that changed the course of his life. This model of Italian experience could be easily appropriated by other travellers to Italy,

¹⁷ Ironically, however, as Buzard points out, “[d]espite their initial anti-touristic valence, Byronic gestures” became in the course of the century “as standard a touristic pursuit as any previous fashion” (*The Beaten Track* 128).

who, identifying themselves with Goethe's travelling persona, could fashion the account of their Italian journey as an educational experience or as a therapeutic solution for their existential problems.

The paradigms of the Italian experience developed in the first decades of the nineteenth century proved to be prolific in generating responses in the following generations of travellers to Italy. Although the significance attached to the Italian tour continued to evolve in the course of the years and changed significantly from traveller to traveller, some of the themes, motives, and metaphors originated in the representations of Italy of the beginning of the nineteenth century had a lasting influence on the travel writing about the Peninsula of the following decades. Byron's Childe Harold chose to see Italy through his own eyes and noticed also contemporary historical circumstances, rather than considering Italy simply an open air museum to be visited with ancient Latin writers as guides, as the Grand Tourists had done. Emphasis on personal impressions and on subjective responses to the visited places, as well as growing attention to contemporary Italy in addition to the Italy of the past, became important features of travel writing about Italy during the rest of the century. And for nineteenth-century writers and artists in particular, travelling to Italy continued to represent a way to educate their taste and to reinvigorate artistic inspiration.

As the following chapters will show, the four texts that are the object of this study all bear traces of the themes, motives, and significances attached to the Italian tour that had been developed in the years following the Napoleonic wars. All of them, however, were written after 1844, a time when the enthusiasm for Italian travel and for travel writing about the Peninsula had passed its peak period. In spite of the large number of

visitors to Italy and of the steady interest for things Italian, which continued throughout the nineteenth century, Brand observes that “[b]y 1850 Italian travel is a ‘hackneyed topic’” (23). Similarly, Buzard points out how, “[a]round mid century, [...] complaints about the superficial subjectivism of travel books [became] a standard refrain” (*The Beaten Track* 172). In Germany the appearance of works that, like Gustav Nicolai’s *Italien wie es wirklich ist* (Italy As It Really Is, 1835), mocked the ‘Italomania’ and the idealist halo associated with Italy constituted a sign of the initial decline of the fashion of the Italian tour (Tresoldi 2: 6). After the 1840s, travel writers who decided to produce an account of their Italian journeys had to cope with two major problems, which Eastlake in her 1845 essay describes in the following terms: “Since the peace of 1815, most of the central European countries have been too completely examined and described for a passing tourist to offer any novelty, while the excellent Handbooks of the day leave no room for contributions of mere roadside information” (104). When the subject of travel writing was a well-known country such as Italy, authors were forced to rely upon novelty to distinguish their accounts from those of their predecessors – and novelty was something difficult to attain for the common tourist. In addition travel writers had to attempt to set their works apart from the emerging form of the guidebooks, such as those produced by Murray and Baedeker. Because the guidebooks excelled at providing travellers with all the directions and information they needed about the visited places, travel writers had to find alternative content and strategies to interest their readers.

All the authors of the texts examined in this study had the advantage over the “passing tourist” of being very knowledgeable about Italy and Italian matters, thanks to repeated visits or long stays in the country. Shelley had lived in Italy with her husband

between 1818 and 1823, could speak Italian fluently, and had an extensive knowledge of Italian literature and history. Schopenhauer spent the years between 1844 and 1848 mainly in Italy, visiting Florence, Naples, Genoa, and staying for longer periods in Rome, where she was part of the lively community of German artists residing there. Both Cobbe and Lewald travelled several times to the Peninsula and became well-versed in Italian matters, working during their stays as foreign correspondents for British and German newspapers respectively. Both Shelley and Schopenhauer, moreover, had close relationships with those writers whose works at the turn of the century had most deeply influenced the perception of Italy. In addition to being Percy Shelley's wife, Mary was an intimate acquaintance of Byron during the time when they all lived in Italy. Schopenhauer knew Goethe since she was a child and was the poet's pet. Admirably, however, neither Shelley nor Schopenhauer exploited their acquaintance with these celebrities to raise interest in their travel writings, and indeed in their works about Italy they both attempted independent and original approaches to the subject.

All the works considered in this study discuss the innovations that had changed the mode of travelling and the object of travel writing in the first half of the century. Both Shelley and Lewald had the chance to travel at different stages of their lives, thus experiencing the rapid evolution that means of transportation and practices related to travelling underwent in the course of the century. When Mary eloped to the Continent with her lover Percy Shelley in June of 1814, she was one of the first travellers to visit central Europe after the end of the Napoleonic wars. In *Rambles*, which relates journeys to the Continent taken in 1840 and in 1842-43, Shelley often has the chance to appreciate how much the means of transport and the facilities available for tourists had improved

from her first visit to the Continent. She is an enthusiast of the new steam-powered transportation, and both Shelley and Cobbe in their travel works offer a political interpretation of the development of railways as agencies capable of overthrowing absolutist regimes and of spreading democracy through the circulation of people and ideas. Lewald, who had travelled to Italy for the first time in 1845/46 and then again in 1867/68 and in 1877/78, is also a warm supporter of progress and of modern innovations. In *Reisebriefe*, nevertheless, she often refers back to the times when amenities and comforts were not readily available for travellers. Her purpose in doing so is to give a specific historical perspective to her travel account and to distinguish herself from the crowds of tourists of her later days.

As for the increasing popularity of guidebooks à la Murray and Baedeker, all the writers considered here come to terms with this emerging sub-genre of travel writing, coping in different ways with the threat that the popularity of handbooks represented for authors of travel literature. Shelley, who wrote *Rambles* less than ten years after the appearance of the first Baedeker's and Murray's guidebooks (published in 1835 and 1836, respectively), still included in her account information about the itineraries she followed and the quality of board and lodging she received at the different establishments where she stayed. Her intention was to make her book useful for other travellers, by endorsing, supplementing, or rectifying the directions provided by Murray's handbooks, which she used during her journeys and often mentions in *Rambles*. As the popularity of guidebooks increasingly grew, and the dependence on them came to be associated with the kind of superficial tourist who travelled "for no other purpose but that of verifying their Murray", travel writers became less inclined to acknowledge their use (Buzard, *The*

Beaten Track 76). And progressively, the kinds of directions and practical information provided by guidebooks tended to disappear from travel narratives. Schopenhauer wrote *Florenz* only a few years after Shelley and was possibly inspired by the appearance of the handbooks for travellers to attempt her own version of them. *Florenz* was intended to be a guidebook, whose purpose was to supply travellers not with practical information but rather with the kinds of stories and legends about the city that were meant to be of particular interest to women. In *Italics*, Cobbe refers to Murray only to engage in the kind of scathing mockery of the average English traveller's uncritical reliance on guidebooks that by 1864 had become conventional in much travel writing of the time (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 76). Finally, in her *Reisebriefe* of 1880 Lewald regrets that the improved organization of the practical aspects of travel had robbed travellers of the pleasure of unexpected adventures, and she bemoans that the standardization of the information accessible to travellers through the guidebooks left less and less room for personal discoveries. In short, it can be said that through their attitudes towards the technological and institutional innovations that brought into existence the phenomenon of mass tourism, these writers reveal a desire to be recognized as travellers in the sense that Paul Fussell defines them, as being in the middle between the two extremes represented by explorers and tourists:

The explorer moves toward the risks of the formless and the unknown, the tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché. It is between these two poles that the traveler mediates, retaining all he can of the excitement of the unpredictable attaching to exploration, and fusing that with the pleasure of "knowing where one is" belonging to tourism. (39)

The works examined in the following chapters show how Shelley, Schopenhauer, Cobbe, and Lewald came to terms with the challenge of offering novelty in their writings

about Italy, and how they managed to create original representations of the country, in spite of the fact that the topic was becoming hackneyed. Like many generations of travellers before them, certainly also these writers went to Italy prompted, among other reasons, by the desire to enjoy the beauty of the Italian landscape with its sunny climate and the lush vegetation, and by the wish to admire the country's magnificent buildings, monuments, and works of art. But these aspects of the Peninsula had remained almost unchanged for centuries and countless visitors had already described them from every possible point of view, contributing to the impression that Italy was stuck in history and excluded from the march of time (Reynolds 77-78). Yet in the course of the nineteenth century and especially towards its second half, great social and political changes were taking place in the country. These changes were difficult to ignore even for those travellers who went to Italy exclusively to enjoy its climate, art, and landscape, and references to the Italian social and political situation are present in most travel writing of the time. The authors considered in this study, however, stand out among their contemporaries, because they made the discussion of the changes that were occurring in the Peninsula one of the principal objects of their works.

1.3 On Narrating Italian Nation-Building and on the Hybrid Character of Travel Writing

By focusing on the aspects of the country that were evolving, rather than on those that had remained immutable in time and had fascinated innumerable travellers before them, the writers considered in this study found a way to be innovative and 'to say something new' about Italy. In particular, these authors devoted their attention to the

struggles fought by Italian people to free themselves from foreign tyranny, describing the events that brought to the formation of a unified Kingdom of Italy and the transformations that the country underwent after the unification. Shelley openly states that the focus of her book is on Italian people “especially in a political point of view”, because she could not find anything new that had not already been said about the most important Italian cities (*Rambles* 1: viii). Cobbe rhetorically asks: “Who can go into Italy now and think of it only as the scene of old classic story, or the great museum of Cinquecento art?” (*Italics* 10). And pointing out that nobody could visit the country at that time, without noticing the changes that were taking place there, she states that the purpose of her book is to present “the facts concerning the new order of things” in the Peninsula in 1864 (*Italics* 11). Lewald avails herself of the fact that she had visited Italy at different stages of its evolution into a united nation-state, and in *Reisebriefe* she offers a survey of how the country had changed in the years between the 1840s and the 1880s. Even Schopenhauer, who in her guidebook mostly narrates legends and events of the past of Florence, emphasizes the stories that refer to the time when the city was an independent republic, in order to comment on the struggle for freedom that Italians were fighting in 1848.

Taken together these texts thus give a fairly accurate account of the major events of the Italian Risorgimento: the insurrections of the 1820s and 1830s that culminated in the revolutions of 1848-49, the formation of a constitutional government in Piedmont, the wars of 1859-60 that resulted in the unification of most of the Peninsula, and the final incorporation of Rome and Venice into the new State in 1866 and 1870 respectively.¹⁸ In

¹⁸ For a comprehensive account of the Risorgimento, see Harry Hearder’s *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento 1790-1870*.

the following chapters I have arranged the examined works in chronological order according to their date of composition, in order to make the timeline of the Italian Risorgimento clear. Chapter 2 considers *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844) and examines how Shelley portrays herself in her role as a mother as a way to cope with her problematic past and to channel the pedagogical purpose of the book, which aims at raising the sympathies of the British audience for the oppressive political situation of the Italian people and for their growing nationalism. Against the backdrop of the hope for democracy that the reforms conceded by the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1847 had inspired in the inhabitants of Florence, Chapter 3 explores Schopenhauer's attempt in *Florenz: Ein Reiseführer mit Anekdoten und Erzählungen* (1847/48) to create her own version of a guidebook and to revive the memory of the democratic institutions of thirteenth-century Florence. Chapter 4 shows how, in *Italics: Brief Notes on Politics, People, and Places in Italy, in 1864* (1864), the representation of Italy in the wake of its partial unification in 1861 is closely intertwined with Cobbe's own thinking on politics, religion, and women's emancipation. Chapter 5 examines how, in *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich 1877, 1878* (1880), the discussion of the social and political changes that had affected both Italy and Germany in the previous forty years allows Lewald to engage in a reflection on her own femininity and on the role of women in the newly formed German nation.

In *The Realms of Verse 1830-1870*, Matthew Reynolds focuses on the poetry of Tennyson, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, and Clough to show how the Italian Risorgimento raised questions about nationality, nationhood, and individual liberty that were particularly problematic for the citizens of the multi-national British Empire.

Similarly, in *The Romance of Italy and English Political Imagination*, Maura O'Connor argues that in the nineteenth century middle-class English men and women used the Italian Peninsula and the layers of meaning that the country acquired in their imagination to better understand England and their Englishness (21). O'Connor uses a variety of texts, including travel writing, to support her argument. The texts that are the object of this study supply further examples of how, through the confrontation with the Italian process of nation-building, these writers were prompted to reflect on their own national identities and to establish their own 'Englishness' or 'Germaness' according to the values that they attached to their country of origin. By endorsing or rejecting certain practices and models of behaviour they observed in Italy and by criticizing or trying to understand Italian people, these writers indirectly expressed opinions on their own societies and national character. And by displacing their thoughts and feelings in the Italian reality, they often managed to express harsh criticism about their own countries. In her book about Victorian women writers, Frawley observes that: "Gender and nationality worked mutually to constitute the public identity of the woman who toured Italy and wrote about her experiences" (68). By juxtaposing works by British and German women writers, I explore how the nationality of the authors comes across in their perception and representation of Italy.

In the Introduction to *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Glenn Hooper and Tim Young describe the crux of the matter in the discussion of travel writing:

One of the most persistent observations regarding travel writing [...] is its absorption of differing narrative styles and genres, the manner in which it effortlessly shape-shifts and blends any number of imaginative encounters, and its potential for interaction with a broad range of historical periods, disciplines and perspectives. In much the same way that travel itself can

be seen as a somewhat fluid experience, so too can travel writing be regarded as a relatively open-ended and versatile form [...]. (3)

The mix of different kinds of writings within the category of travel writing is largely considered its main characteristic. In one of the essays contained in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Jan Borm emphasizes the hybrid character and the loose borders of travel writing and argues that travel writing “is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (13). Within the category of “*the literature of travel*” or “*travel literature*”, which he considers synonyms of “*travel writing*”, he then explains the terms “*travel book* or *travelogue*” as describing a genre, for which he gives the following definition (Borm 13): “*any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator, and principal character are but one or identical*” (Borm 17). This definition of the travel book, as Borm explains, is based on its dominant aspects, but he also repeatedly stresses that “the genre *travel book* mixes different forms of writing, while continuously crossing over into other genres” (25). Barbara Korte seems to agree with Borm’s definition of the travel book when she writes that: “Travel accounts or travelogues are defined by a narrative core; they always tell the story of a journey” (9). Like Borm, Korte emphasizes the flexibility, openness, and variety of modes of presentation of travel writing, and she also understands travel writing as a category that encompasses the genre of the travel book. Indeed, she describes the travel account as “a hybrid genre” (179), while she refers to travel writing “as an essentially ‘hybrid’ or ‘androgynous’ literary form” (9).

According to these definitions of the travel book and the travel account, not all the texts examined in this study can be labelled as such, because they lack the “narrative core” that tells the story of a journey. While all the considered texts refer to journeys that have taken place in reality and are related in the first person, Cobbe’s *Italics* and Schopenhauer’s *Florenz* completely omit the narrative of the journey and Shelley does not include an account of the journey home. All the texts that are the object of this study, however, belong to the category of travel writing and are representative of its hybrid character, as described by the clever definition given by Jonathan Raban:

As a literary form, travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house where different genres are likely to end up in the same bed. It accommodates the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality. It freely mixes narrative and discursive writing. (qtd. in Borm 16)

The texts examined in the following chapters demonstrate the variety of styles and forms encompassed by travel writing. Shelley’s *Rambles* employs the traditional form of the travel epistle and the discursive, self-revealing mode of the memoirs, but the letters assume the character and the tone of scholarly essay of cultural criticism when she describes the Italian political situation. Schopenhauer adopts the objective style of the guidebook and subdivides her subject matter according to the places and monuments described, attempting to suggest itineraries for her readers. Unlike the famous Murray’s and Baedeker’s handbooks for travellers, however, she does not refrain from expressing her sympathies for the Italian people and their aspiration for democratic reform. Cobbe’s *Italics* is a collection of essays written mostly in the objective style and often featuring the persuasive rhetoric, the wit, and the irony that the author had developed working as a professional journalist. Her comments on the many recent achievements and persistent

shortcomings of the newborn Italian nation address issues of crucial importance in the complacent and long-lived British nation. Finally, the letters included in Lewald's *Reisebriefe* are journalistic reports, many of which had previously appeared in German newspapers, and their main object is often to inform the readers about the latest occurrences in Italy. By comparing the process of nation-building in Italy and in the recently formed German Empire, Lewald discusses questions of patriotism and national identity, exhorting her readers to be proud of their hard-achieved national unity at a time of internal social and political conflict. Each of these authors made the most of the open form and hybrid nature of travel writing. It offered to them as writers expressive possibilities ranging from the topical to the self-revelatory and gave them the opportunity to reflect on their national character, broadening their perspectives on their native countries in ways that – as suggested by Eastlake – other genres and forms did not allow.

CHAPTER 2

Fostering Young Generations and Nations: Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843*

Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843, a travel book that grew out of two trips to Italy in the early 1840s, is the last work by Mary Shelley published during her life. Her wide-ranging literary production, which includes plays, poems, literary biographies and criticism besides her more popular novels and short stories, began in 1817 with the publication of another travel account, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, written jointly with Percy Bysshe Shelley. *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* is based on two different journeys to the Continent, which crucially shaped the course of Mary Shelley's life. In 1814, at sixteen she eloped with her married lover Percy Bysshe Shelley and her stepsister Claire Clairmont to embark on a walking tour of France and Switzerland. When lack of funds forced them to return to England after only six weeks, Mary Shelley's social status had irremediably changed to that of a fallen woman and for the rest of her life, even after her marriage with Percy Bysshe Shelley in December 1816, she was ostracized by and banned from British respectable society. The other journey related in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* took place in the summer months of 1816 when the Shelleys with their newborn baby William accompanied Claire Clairmont to meet Lord Byron on Lake Geneva. From the long conversations on the supernatural that the party had during that unusually stormy summer and from Lord Byron's suggestion that each of them should write a ghost-story arose the idea for *Frankenstein*, the novel that made Mary Shelley universally famous (Sunstein 117-124; Seymour 153-163). Thus,

History of a Six Weeks' Tour marks in more than one way Mary Shelley's debut. Her first published book, it refers to the two circumstances – her relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley and her authorship of *Frankenstein* – that for decades have attracted the interest of readers and critics. By way of contrast, as her last published work, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, marks her withdrawal from public life and can be read as a recapitulation of her life and values and as her spiritual legacy for the next generations.

In *Rambles* Shelley leaves a last portrait of herself in her role as a mother who, having lost her husband and two of her children in Italy, fears for the wellbeing of her only surviving son and places all her future hopes and joys in him. For a woman who, as a young girl and author, had sensationally defied the rules imposed both by social and by literary conventions, the self-characterization in her last work in a traditionally domestic role raises several questions and has been largely discussed by critics. In particular, Clarissa Campbell Orr argues that by adopting the literary persona of a “conventional kind of mother, worrying about her university age son” (Orr par. 30), Shelley desired “to live down” (Orr par. 24) her literary celebrity and to be recognized as “a normal member” (Orr par. 30) of the respectable “elite of England whose children attended Oxford or Cambridge” (Orr par. 36). Shelley was a literary celebrity both because of her “transgressive” novel *Frankenstein* and because of her family connections with other writers who had all been involved in scandals (Orr par. 23).¹⁹ Orr contends that, while

¹⁹ Shelley's mother was the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, author of revolutionary writings, who had a premarital affair with an American adventurer, had an illegitimate daughter with him, and twice attempted suicide over his infidelities. Shelley's father, the controversial radical philosopher William Godwin, had injudiciously publicised such facts about his beloved wife in his memorials of Wollstonecraft, written after she died by giving birth to their daughter Mary. Shelley's lover and husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a radical idealist who had been fiercely attacked for his poetry and for having abandoned his first wife, Harriet Westbrook, who subsequently committed suicide. Furthermore, the Shelleys' association

other women travel writers of the time, like Lady Morgan and Frances Trollope, had capitalized on their literary celebrity “as a springboard for authoritative comment on national cultures” (Orr par. 6), in *Rambles* Shelley downplayed her own celebrity and through the “safe persona” of a mother she managed to “insinuate her strong views without confrontation” (Orr par. 32) and to write authoritatively on Italian literature and politics without attracting attention to herself. In agreement with Orr, Jeanne Moskal maintains that Shelley “crafted a persona that stressed her role as a widow and a mother” in order to “enhance(d) her own respectability by suppressing her “fallen woman” status, her husband’s multiple infidelities, and her own role in Shelley’s desertion of his first wife” (“Travel Writing” 256). Conversely, Kathryn Walchester interprets Shelley’s self-characterization in her domestic roles as widow and mother as a reminder to her readers of her literary celebrity and of her connection with Percy Shelley, with whom she had resided in Italy for more than four years. Walchester’s opinion is that: “The domestic in Shelley’s writing is not used as a ‘cover story’ for political writing; instead it affirms her authority as an ‘Anglo-Italian’ to comment upon the political situation in the region” (214-215).

While these explanations of Shelley’s decision to portray herself as a mother appear convincing, I argue that she had an additional reason for presenting herself in this role. By the time Shelley published *Rambles* in 1844, she was a renowned author and a literary celebrity, whose identity was necessarily connected to that of her husband. Her name had become even more well-known a few years earlier with the publication in 1839 of her edition of Percy Shelley’s *Poetical Works and Essays and Letters from Abroad*,

with Lord Byron, who had had an illegitimate daughter with Mary’s stepsister Claire Clairmont, fostered the rumour that they had formed a League of Incest in which the two women were shared in common by both men (Sunstein 119).

Translations and Fragments. Until then all of Mary Shelley's works had appeared either anonymously or under the designation "By the Author of *Frankenstein*" in order to elude her father-in-law's threat to terminate her allowance in case she brought the Shelley name before the public during his lifetime (Sunstein 260-261). In 1838, however, Shelley finally asked and obtained permission from Sir Timothy Shelley to publish his son's poems and prose. Although the old man still objected to the publication of the poet's biography, she was able to include biographical material in her critical notes and to appear as the editor on the title page of her husband's works with the name "Mrs. Shelley" (Sunstein 340-343). As she declared in her Preface to Percy Shelley's *Poetical Works*, her purpose was "to narrate the origin and the history" of his works and to trace the evolution of his thinking, in order "to lay the first stone of a monument due to Shelley's genius, his sufferings, and his virtues" (1: xvi). But in accomplishing this task, which she regarded as her "most sacred duty" (*Poetical Works* 1: xvi), she also inevitably carved out for herself the role of the devoted widow who, after the loss of her "source of happiness, peace, and good", suffered a "harrowing" fate (*Poetical Works* 4: 234) and "years of painful and solitary struggle" (*Poetical Works* 4: 226).²⁰

In *Rambles*, which is her subsequent book and the only one published after her editions²¹ of Percy Shelley's writing, Shelley resumed this representation of herself as the widow of the poet and drew on the memories of the years they spent together in Italy. However, she did not capitalize on her widow's role and on her privileged knowledge of Percy Shelley to turn the recollections of her last trips to Italy into a mere pretext to

²⁰ See Smith 151-152.

²¹ Shelley was the editor of a one-volume edition of Percy Shelley's *Poetical Works* published by Moxon in November 1839, and she also edited the two-volume edition of Percy Shelley's *Essays and Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, which appeared with the same publisher in December 1839 (Schor, *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* xviii).

reveal further biographical material on her husband. Instead, she profited from the genre of the travelogue, which offered room for autobiographical self-reflection, to trace the course of her own evolution during those “years of painful and solitary struggle” (*Poetical Works* 4: 226) that followed Percy Shelley’s death, and she established her own role and identity against the backdrop of Italy and of its developing nationalism. In *Rambles* Shelley adopted the literary persona of a mother and insisted on characterizing herself in this role for reasons that go beyond her need to enhance her respectability by downplaying her problematic celebrity and her questionable past. Shelley’s motives for her self-stylization as a mother are also not to be interpreted exclusively as a way to remind her readers of her connection to Percy Shelley and of the years they spent in Italy for the purpose of validating her authority on Italian matters and her “Anglo-Italian” status (Walchester 214-215).

Like other women writers of the time who in their travelogues stylized their personality to accommodate traditional domestic values and emphasize their femininity, Shelley stressed her femininity by defining her identity primarily in relation to her son. However, in *Rambles* Shelley’s self-characterization as a mother is principally meant to point out the author’s function as a nurturer and an educator and to foreground the pedagogical purpose of the book. In this last work Shelley reaffirmed the lifelong belief inherited from her father Godwin that humanity could be progressively improved through education, and her self-stylization as a mother allowed her to take upon herself the task of leading her readers through a process of education, which involves all their faculties (Guerra 136-137). In *Rambles*, travelling is defined as a higher form of education: “We read, to gather thought and knowledge; travelling is a book of the Creator’s own writing,

and imparts sublimer wisdom than the printed words of man” (*Rambles* 1: 158). By translating her travel experience into “printed words” Shelley’s main purpose is to pass on to her readers the “sublimer wisdom” gained through travelling. In order to achieve this end, she employs different strategies and appeals to her readers’ ability to sympathize with their fellow-human beings. Through the beauty of the natural scenery, through the historical events that took place on the territory visited, through the literature and the works of art produced by the inhabitants of the regions explored, and through their character and customs, Shelley educates her readers’ sensibility and taste and develops in them the sympathy necessary to truly comprehend the social and political situation of the ‘other’ from inside out (Guerra 137).

In *Rambles* the ‘other’ is in particular the Italian populace struggling to free itself from foreign rule and to have its national identity recognized. It has been observed that “*Rambles* comes to term [...] with the political losses [Shelley] shared with a generation of English liberals” and that “in *Rambles*, [she] keeps liberal hopes alive by proposing for them a more limited scope (and a more distant one) [...] the nascent nationalist movement in Italy” (Moskal, “Travel Writing” 247). I argue that Shelley’s role as a mother, who places all her future hopes and joys in her son, points out her trust in the next generation for the realization of those liberal ideals that her own generation had failed to carry out. Rather than a “limited” or “more distant” scope for liberal hopes, Italy represents the place where young people were already struggling to carry them through and the imagery that Shelley uses to refer to the country reflects the hope she places in the new generation of Italians for the liberation of the Peninsula. Instead of resorting to the trope of Italy as a female whose fairness has made her so attractive for foreign

invaders that she has been subjugated and has fallen from her formerly position of power, Shelley sees Italy as a mother whose progeny will determine its political redemption. The feminisation of Italy in literary texts dated back to the Classical literature and was employed also by Italian Renaissance poets like Dante, Petrarch, and Vincenzo da Filicaja, but it was with de Staël's *Corinne; or Italy* and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* that the trope of the Italian Peninsula as a 'fallen woman' had become crystallized in English literary imagery (Walchester 56-70).²² In the same way as Shelley in *Rambles* erases her own identity as a 'fallen woman' by shunning all references to her compromising past and presenting herself as a mother concentrated on her son's prospects, so she obliterates the trope of Italy as a 'fallen woman' and reshapes the identity of the country in relation to its children-citizens (Walchester 68), whose struggle for freedom and unity promises to finally change their mother land's destiny.

When Shelley first visited Italy, she was young and happy, a mother of two accompanied by her dashing and talented husband with her whole life ahead of her. As she re-entered the Peninsula after seventeen years of absence, she was an aging widow accompanied by her only surviving son, fatigued, with limited financial resources, and suffering from poor health. In *Rambles*, while she tries to overcome the fear that Italy could once again bring tragedies upon her life, she also comes to terms with the changes that had occurred to the country and to herself while she was away. Instead of brooding over the past, however, she uses her bygone tragic experiences as a starting point to trace

²² Vincenzo da Filicaja's sonnet, '*Italia, Italia, O tu cui feo la sorte*' was translated by Byron and inserted in stanzas 42 and 43 of Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which convey the trope of female Italy's beauty and fall from power (Walchester 57). Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the opening of *Casa Guidi Windows* (1850) criticizes this trope of Italy. In the essay "*Casa Guidi Windows: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Italy and the poetry of citizenship*," Richard Cronin observes that EBB's attack is explicitly directed against Vincenzo da Filicaja and his sonnet, but the implicit target is Byron who, despite his commitment to the cause of Italian nationhood, had failed to address the issue "in a responsibly civic poetry" (42-43).

the span of her existence and to reflect on the woman she had become as a consequence of her losses. Rather than defining her identity in relation to the past – as the daughter of renowned parents, as the widow of a famous poet, or as the author of influential literary works – she represents herself in a role that, though domestic, hints at further achievements still to be attained in the public domain. Establishing her identity as the mother of a young man of promise, who was destined to become a baronet and possibly to make his fortune in the political arena, Shelley demonstrates not only that she was still able to look at the future with hope, but also that she was ready to assume an active part in it as a guide and an instructor.

In *Rambles* Shelley's role as an educator and her self-representation as a mother are deeply intertwined. The logic she follows to organize the gradual process of education of her readers is complicated by Shelley's less conscious, underlying process of healing from the traumas of her past. In the Preface to *Rambles* Shelley introduces the political scope of the book and declares that its purpose is to "induce some among [her] countrymen [...] to sympathise in the struggle" of the Italians to obtain freedom and independence. This purpose, however, is not fully pursued and developed until the last and largest portion of the book, when the readers' education is complete. Only after the readers have been trained in their ability to sympathize with their fellow-creatures in the first two parts of the book are they ready to be taught about Italian nationalism.

Although the three sections that compose *Rambles* are strictly connected with one other and their subdivision mainly reflects the stages of the journey, each part possesses an internal unity of intents. The readers' education begins in the first section of the book where they are asked to sympathize with Shelley's authorial persona in her role as

bereaved mother and with her overly apprehensive feelings towards her only surviving son. Shelley here employs descriptions of landscapes as a further means to exercise the readers' ability to sympathize with someone else's point of view. In this section her discussion of Italian political matters is relatively limited and cautious. In the second part of *Rambles* Shelley assumes more decidedly the role of a guide and an educator. She does not appear as overcome with motherly anxiety as she is in the first part of the book and her reflections on her role as a mother are mainly channelled through her responses to art. Her commentary on art is also meant to help her readers to refine their taste and to sharpen their sensibility. In this section she describes landscapes as stages of battles and historical events that serve to demonstrate the evils of despotism and are meant to instil in the readers an abhorrence of tyranny. In the third part of the book, Shelley traces a picture of Italian society and of the consequences of despotism in three major Italian regions – the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and the Papal States. She then indicates and explains the signs that proved that Italians were starting to take action to emancipate themselves from tyranny and to achieve unity and independence. These signs and in particular the heroism of the Italian youth and the talent of the new generation of Italian writers are deserving, according to Shelley, of her readers' sympathy. While Shelley continues to act in the role of mentor throughout the third section of the book, the references to her role as a mother occur mainly in relation to her two children who died in Italy rather than to her surviving son Percy. By revisiting the places where the tragedies of her life had taken place, Shelley manages to overcome her fears and her anxiety for her son's well-being. At the end of *Rambles* Italy is portrayed as

a mother whose offspring offer hope of political redemption for the country, much as Shelley herself placed her own hopes for a better future in her son Percy.

2.1 Preface and First Letter: Introducing the Political Scope and the Main Themes of *Rambles*

Unlike other women writers of the time who travelled abroad for the purpose of turning their experiences into travel books, Shelley's decision to write *Rambles* was taken after she returned from her trips to Italy at the end of August 1843. Her letters from that time show that she was looking for an idea to write a new book, principally because she needed money,²³ not for herself, but "to assist a friend of [hers], who thro' unexpected & disastrous circumstances, [had] the very deepest need of help" (*Letters* 3: 95). The friend was Ferdinando Luigi Gatteschi, an Italian political exile she met in Paris on her way back to England, and the book Shelley eventually wrote, in part for his financial benefit, was in the form of an epistolary travelogue drawn from the original correspondence she kept with her stepsister and friends while she was on the Continent. In presenting her idea for *Rambles* to her publisher, Edward Moxon, Shelley points out the advantages of writing in the genre of the travelogue. In the first place she connects her new work with her first travel book, recalling the "many compliments" that "[her] 6 weeks tour" had brought her and anticipating that *Rambles* would "procure [her] many more" (*Letters* 3: 96). Since *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* was "written off hand" and had "pleased most,"

²³ In a letter to her publisher, Edward Moxon, dated September 20, 1843, Shelley wrote: "dont [*sic*] despise me if I say I wish to write for I want money sadly. I dont want it for myself – that is I dont want it so much as to impel me to write – but I do it for another purpose – which will make me exert myself. But now – Is it a novel or a romance you want?" (*Letters* 3: 93). And in a letter to Leigh Hunt dated September 25, 1843, she ponders: "a novel will take so long a time, even if I were equal to it – which I doubt – [...] I find it difficult to know how to employ myself" (Shelley, *Letters* 3: 95).

she argues that also *Rambles* could be expected to receive appreciation on the same grounds. Thus, she expresses her intention to keep her new work “as light – as personal to [herself] – & as amusing” as possible (*Letters* 3: 96). She also notices that the “many facts of expences [*sic*]” and the practical information she could relate from her travel experiences would make the book “useful” for other travellers (*Letters* 3: 96). Finally and most importantly, she mentions that a travel book afforded “long and varied [...] scope” (*Letters* 3: 96), and as it turned out, in *Rambles* Shelley dexterously availed herself precisely of the extensive range of subjects and themes that could be fitted in a travelogue to serve multiple agendas, including her advocacy of Italian nationalism.

This letter – especially the passage where she states that she wanted her new book to be “light,” “personal,” and “amusing” – has often been quoted by those who infer that Shelley did not want to disclose the political intent of her work to her publisher, because she was aware that the topic was considered inappropriate for women writers and she feared that the project could have been rejected.²⁴ Nevertheless, by linking her new work to *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour*, in which everything advocated for liberal politics, from the protagonists’ defiance of parental control and social mores to their travel modes and their celebration of Rousseau, Shelley clearly anticipates the political content of *Rambles*. Politics, and in particular Italian nationalism personified by Gatteschi, gave Shelley the motivation to write her last book and to bring it to an end, even when she felt so discouraged, ill, and bitter towards society that she claimed she would have preferred

²⁴ Moskal notices: “In the planning stages of *Rambles*, Mary Shelley kept silent about any political intentions. In September 1843, she proposed to publisher Edward Moxon a travel book ‘light’, ‘personal to myself’, and ‘amusing’ in subject matter. [...] But in spring 1844, Moxon having agreed, she [...] register[ed] her full-blown conception of the book as a political document” (Moskal “Gender and Italian Nationalism” 189). Walchester also comments: “the fact that she did not mention the political content of the text in her proposal to Edward Moxon, where she noted the text would be ‘light’ and ‘amusing’, suggests her awareness of the unsuitability of the subject for a woman writer” (Walchester 211).

never to publish again.²⁵ Shelley was instantly fascinated by Gatteschi; she imagined him as “a hero & an angel & martyr” (*Letters* 3: 207), and his personality possibly reminded her of her husband. Like Percy Shelley, Gatteschi was a young, handsome, and cultivated aristocrat, who had been repudiated by his parents for his political liberalism. He had joined the Carbonari, participated in the insurrections of 1830-1831 to overthrow Austrian rule in Italian territories, and subsequently lived exiled and destitute in Paris. Shelley convinced Gatteschi to contribute a memoir of Carbonarism and of the uprising of 1831 and she later translated and incorporated his now lost manuscript in her travelogue (Sunstein 360-361). The letters of *Rambles*, presumably drawn from Gatteschi’s account, constitute the political core of the book. The main scope of *Rambles*, as Shelley presented it in the Preface to the book, is political, and it is her consideration of the political that sets her account apart from other travelogues:

Visiting spots often described, pursuing a route such as form for the most part the common range of the tourists – I could tell nothing new, except as each individual’s experience possesses novelty. [...] When I reached Italy, however, and came south, I found that I could say little of Florence and Rome, as far as regarded the cities themselves, that had not been said so often and so well before [...]. It was otherwise as regarded the people, especially in a political point of view; and in treating of them my scope grew more serious. (*Rambles* 1: vii-viii)

Like many women travel writers of the time, Shelley felt obliged to justify her decision to write on a subject – travel to Italy and its description – that had already been treated innumerable times before. Instead of apologizing for her lack of novelty or acknowledging her “presumption in daring to tread on what is noted as well-worn ground” (Foster 20), as was conventionally done by female travel writers, Shelley

²⁵ In October 1843 Shelley wrote to her stepsister Claire Clairmont: “I own myself I am sorry I am writing – But I feel that I shall save poor G– [*Gatteschi*] from starvation – from desperation & the lowest depths of misery – I know this – & write when otherwise I never would – that never my name might be mentioned in a world that oppresses me” (*Letters* 3: 101).

presents politics – a subject considered the proper domain of men and therefore unsuitable for women to discuss in public – as the approach that would guarantee originality to her book. Moskal argues that by using “politics as her claim to novelty” Shelley simultaneously solved “two dilemmas” (“Gender and Italian Nationalism” 188). On the one hand, she managed to differentiate her work from the new genre of the tourist handbook that became increasingly popular in the early 1840s and that usually avoided the discussion of political matters (Moskal, “Gender and Italian Nationalism” 190). On the other hand, “by appealing to the reader’s desire for novelty” and by making her political opinions “part of a palatable mix,” Shelley found a way “to negotiate the taboo against women discoursing in public about the masculine sphere of politics” (Moskal, “Gender and Italian Nationalism” 190, 191, 188). Moskal interprets the fact that “numerous reviewers found *Rambles* unique by virtue of her political observations” and that they mostly saw it “against the background of Murray’s *Handbooks*” as a proof that Shelley’s strategy was successful, because it allowed her to break the boundaries of what was usually considered appropriate subject matter for women writers without exposing herself to the accusation of being unfeminine (“Gender and Italian Nationalism” 198, 190). Walchester also notices that “*Rambles in Germany and Italy* received on the whole favourable reviews, despite of its political content,” but she attributes this circumstance to two different reasons (211). In the first place, Shelley was not vilified by contemporary reviewers for stepping in the masculine sphere of politics, because she did not advocate radical political ideas but moderate and gradual reform (Walchester 212). Secondly, Shelley’s status as a celebrity and her family connections that emphasized her domestic

role as a widow and a mother ensured her propriety and shielded her from the accusation of being unwomanly (Walchester 213).

These observations, though valid and acute, should not prevent the modern reader from appreciating the audacity of Shelley's decision to present politics as the main scope of *Rambles*, especially considering that at the time she wrote the book she had no way to predict the overall favourable responses of her reviewers. On the contrary, Shelley was well aware that, by daring to write on Italian politics, she was likely to expose herself to the same kind of vehement and scathing criticism received by her friend, the writer Lady Morgan, for the liberal political views she expressed in her 1821 travel book *Italy*. A reviewer in the *Quarterly Review*, for example, had accused Lady Morgan of "indelicacy, ignorance, vanity, and malignity" calling her an "utterly *incorrigible* [woman]" (qtd. in Belanger 221), and her book *Italy* was notorious for having been placed on the Vatican's Index of Prohibited Books (Moskal, "Gender and Italian Nationalism" 189). Shelley's boldness in consciously taking the risk of discussing a controversial and inappropriate subject matter is confirmed by the fact that, of all the existing travel books about Italy, she mentions only and precisely Lady Morgan's *Italy* in her Preface to *Rambles*. By singling out Lady Morgan as "the exception" among the travellers to Italy who generally talked about the Italians with "contempt" and by describing her book as "dear to the Italians" (*Rambles* 1: x), Shelley not only recognizes a woman as the establisher of a new and political way of dealing with the country and its inhabitants, but she also places herself and her work in the same current of female writers who dared to challenge the conventional Victorian notion of appropriate feminine subject matters.

Shelley's awareness of the risky topic she had chosen for *Rambles* is reflected in the several strategies she employs throughout the book to present her discussion of politics in terms that made it more acceptable for her contemporary British audience. As was common among women travel writers of the time, Shelley adopts the literary convention of demonstrative modesty and downplays the merits and the quality of her work in order to guard herself from being considered presumptuous and thus unfeminine. In the Preface to *Rambles*, she calls her work "a mere gossiping companion to a traveller" (*Rambles* 1: viii), maintains that what she has put together in the book is "too scant of circumstance and experience to form a whole," and claims that all she could do was "only sketch facts, guess at causes, hope for results" (*Rambles* 1: ix). Towards the end of the Preface she reiterates: "my book does not pretend to be a political history or dissertation. I give fragments – not a whole" (*Rambles* 1: xvi). The lack of unity of the book and its supposed unpretentiousness is suggested also by the title that Shelley chose for her work. According to OED 'to ramble' means not only "to wander or travel in a free, unrestrained manner, without a definite aim or direction" – which is the mode of journeying preferred by Shelley and her party during the two trips to the Continent described in the book – but it refers also to a way of writing or talking "in an aimless, incoherent, or inconsequential fashion, without an ordered sequence of ideas" ("ramble, v."). As a matter of fact, the topics treated in *Rambles* change frequently and not always systematically, they are often occasioned by the places visited, and their variety ranges from the discussion of landscape, people, literature, art, historical events, and political circumstances to the annotation of daily occurrences, expenses, and mishaps interspersed with personal

impressions and memories of the past. Also the tone of the book varies accordingly from informative to confidential and personal, and from learned to nostalgic and elegiac.

Yet the unity of *Rambles* derives not only from its announced political scope, which indeed becomes predominant only in the third part of the book, but also from Shelley's narrating voice that establishes itself from the first page of the Preface as "a guide, a pioneer, [...] a fellow traveller" (*Rambles* 1: vii-viii) and unassumingly cultivates her readers as intimates while accompanying them through their journey of education (Schor, "Mary Shelley in Transit" 239). Her narrating voice in *Rambles* can be described with the same words that Shelley used to praise her mother's authorial persona in her travel letters from Scandinavia: "this *I*, this sensitive, imaginative, native, suffering, enthusiastic pronoun, spreads an inexpressible charm over Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Norway*" (qtd. in Schor, "Mary Shelley in Transit" 237). And in the same way as Shelley remarked that "half of the beauty of Lady Mary Montagu's Letters consists in the *I* that adorns them," (qtd. in Schor, "Mary Shelley in Transit" 237), so it can be said that most of the charm of *Rambles* depends on the author's companionable and sympathetic narrating voice expressed through the personal pronoun 'I'.

From the first pages of the Preface Shelley's narrating voice guides her readers towards a shift in their perception of Italy and of the Italians by encouraging them – as Schor puts it – "to envision the selfhood of the other" ("Mary Shelley in Transit" 250), or in other words to recognize the inhabitants of the Italian Peninsula as entitled to the same rights, freedom, and independence that British citizens already enjoyed in their own country. Later in the book Shelley states: "knowledge, to enlighten and free the mind

from clinging, deadening prejudices – a wider circle of sympathy with our fellow-creatures; – these are the uses of travel” (*Rambles* 1: 158). In the Preface to *Rambles* she addresses some of the “clinging, deadening prejudices” that prevented her countrymen from acquiring real “knowledge” of the Italians and from sympathizing with them as “fellow-creatures,” in spite of the large number of British tourists who constantly travelled to the Peninsula. In the first place, when she maintains that “no one can mingle much with the Italians without becoming attached to them” (*Rambles* 1: viii), Shelley implicitly criticizes the habitual tendency among British tourists sojourning in Italy to socialize only with other foreign travellers, avoiding almost all interaction with the locals (Moskal, “Travel Writing” 249). Because of their lack of acquaintance with the Italians, British travellers usually failed to recognize “their good qualities” (*Rambles* 1: viii). Conversely, because of her ability to single out and praise Italians’ merits – “their courtesy, their simplicity of manner, their evident desire to serve, their rare and exceeding intelligence” (*Rambles* 1: viii) – Shelley indirectly establishes herself as somebody who had “mingle[d] much” with them. She is therefore qualified to take upon herself the mission that her book endeavours to accomplish: “[to] say something that may incite others to regard [Italians] favourably; something explanatory of their real character” (*Rambles* 1: viii-ix).

Rather than “enlighten and free the mind” from prejudices, travellers and travel writing had concurred to spread preconceptions against the Italians. Shelley laments that while in the past “contempt was the general tone” of the books that censured Italians and their customs, in her time and with the exception of Lady Morgan, travel writers continued to “parrot the same” (*Rambles* 1: x) scorn, only because they lacked better and

deeper knowledge of the country and of the substantial changes that were affecting it. In the Preface to *Rambles* Shelley identifies three major signs of transformation in Italy:

Their historians no longer limit themselves to disputing dates, but burn with enthusiasm for liberty; their poets, Manzoni and Niccolini at their head, direct their efforts to elevating and invigorating the public mind. The country itself wears a new aspect; it is struggling with its fetters. (*Rambles* 1: x)

These aspects of change are discussed in detail in the final part of the book. Shelley presents the works of literature and historiography by the best Italian writers of the time and the undertakings of those who were struggling for independence, like the Carbonari, specifically as evidence to demonstrate that Italy was ready to emancipate itself from foreign rule and to become an independent nation (Moskal, "Travel Writing" 249).

"Effeminacy" (*Rambles* 1: x) is mentioned in the Preface to *Rambles* as one of the most common prejudices against the Italians. This charge epitomized all the stereotypes associated with the inhabitants of the Peninsula, and by comparing Italian people with women – that is with individuals subjected to patriarchal control – it characterized them principally as unfit for self-government and independence. In her attempt to eradicate this prejudice from the minds of her readers, Shelley points out that Italians were no longer passively accepting their state of subjugation, but they were "struggling," that is they were manfully taking action to free themselves from their "fetters" (*Rambles* 1: x). The Italians' struggle, moreover, was not directed only against their "material" oppressors, like the Austrian ruler, but also against those moral faults that were so often imputed to them, and among which she mentions "superstition, luxury, servility, indolence, violence, vice" (*Rambles* 1: x). Rather than denying such imputations, Shelley then explains

Italians' moral faults as direct consequences of the tyrannical governments that ruled the country:

If [an Italian gentleman] write a book, it is submitted to the censor, and if it be marked by any boldness of opinion, it is suppressed. If he attempt any plan for the improvement of his countrymen, he is checked; if a tardy permission be given him to proceed, it is clogged with such conditions as nullify the effect. If he limit his endeavours to self-improvement, he is suspected – surrounded by spies [...]. The result of such persecution is to irritate or discourage. He either [...] drag[s] out a degraded existence, or he is irresistibly impelled to resist. No way to mitigate the ills he groans under, or to serve his countrymen, is open, except secret societies. (*Rambles* 1: xii)

Because of the ever-present oppression of tyrannical governments, Italians were forced into inactivity, which was conducive to vices such as indolence, servility, cowardice, and superstition. Even if they found in themselves the strength to react and to fight, however, the only way they had to resist their oppressors was through the association with secret societies, whose mode of action and secretiveness fostered other vices such as violence, treachery, deceitfulness, and mendacity. As Shelley laments, in both cases the result is that Italians' "own moral sense is tampered with, and becomes vitiated" (*Rambles* 1: xiii). Once her audience is thus enlightened on the circumstances that caused the Italians to be blamed for their effeminacy and immorality, Shelley can finally demonstrate the arbitrariness of these prejudices, inviting her readers to recognize their own affinity with the inhabitants of the Peninsula: "When we visit Italy, we become what the Italians were censured for being, – enjoyers of the beauties of nature, the elegance of art, the delights of climate, the recollections of the past, and the pleasures of society, without a thought beyond" (*Rambles* 1: xvi). This passage opens the final paragraph of the Preface to *Rambles* and constitutes the premise on which the outcome of the book is based. Only if her readers are willing to recognize Italians as their "fellow-creatures," "to regard [them]

with greater attention, and to sympathise in the[ir] struggles” (*Rambles* 1: xvi), the “wider circle of sympathy” that Shelley defines as the true “use(s) of travel” (*Rambles* 1: 158) – and indirectly also of travel writing – can be achieved.

The most effective strategy employed by Shelley in her Preface, both to make her discussion of politics acceptable to her readers and to encourage their sympathy for the cause of Italian nationalism, is to present her own country, Britain, as the initiator of the call for freedom and independence that had affected several countries in the preceding decades:

Englishmen, in particular, ought to sympathise in their struggles; for the aspiration for free institutions all over the world has its source in England. Our example first taught the French nobility to seek to raise themselves from courtiers into legislators. The American war of independence, it is true, quickened this impulse, by showing the way to a successful resistance to the undue exercise of authority; but the seed was sown by us. (*Rambles* 1: xi)

As Moskal argues, the British were suspicious about Italian nationalism because they attributed its origin to their archenemy Napoleon, who had been the first to unite part of the country into republics and to use the name ‘Italy’ to define a political entity (“Gender and Italian Nationalism” 191-192). By crediting Britain for the spirit that animated Italian nationalism and by referring to the French (without mentioning Napoleon) only secondarily as propagators of the aspirations for free institutions, Shelley reinterpreted and reshaped the historical course of events to allow her British countrymen to still feel hostile towards Napoleon, while making them consider the fate of Italy in part as their own responsibility (Moskal, “Gender and Italian Nationalism” 194, 196). Through another subtle shift in the usual representation of Italy, Shelley also manages to show how the developments of the Italian struggle for independence could directly affect her

audience, especially “the swarms of English [tourists] that overrun Italy” (*Rambles* 1: xi). She invites her readers to realize that their common idea of Italy “as a discontented province of Austria” (*Rambles* 1: xiii) originated only in recent times, after Napoleon’s defeat and the Congress of Vienna in 1815. For centuries, however, Italy had been “a battle-field, where the Spaniard, the French, and the German, have fought for mastery” (*Rambles* 1: xiv), and Shelley admonishes her countrymen that this was likely to happen again and to cause the disruption of the peace of Europe:

Peace is a lovely thing. It is horrible to imagine the desolation of war; the cottage burnt, the labour of the husbandman destroyed – outrage and death there, where security of late spread smiles and joy: – and the fertility and beauty of Italy exaggerate still more the hideousness of the contrast. Cannot it be that peaceful mediation and a strong universal sense of justice may interpose, instead of the cannon and bayonet? (*Rambles* 1: xiii)

By depicting Italy as a potential land of war and destruction, rather than merely as the place where British tourists enjoyed beauty and entertainment, Shelley reinforces her appeal to her countrymen’s participation in the destiny of the Italian Peninsula.

Shelley concludes her Preface to *Rambles* on a hopeful note, introducing her faith in the education of the Italian youth as the only viable way for the redemption of the country. She points to “the new generation” of Italians who, “emancipated by their courage, their knowledge, their virtues,” will be able to “oppose an insurmountable barrier to foreign invasion and awe their rulers into concession” (*Rambles* 1: xv). Though she supported the cause of Italian nationalism, Shelley nevertheless disapproved of the violent and secretive methods employed by the secret societies to achieve their goal. For this reason she identifies in the poets, in the intellectuals, and in “the most enlightened Italians” of the time the educators who were imparting the knowledge necessary to inspire the new generation with the desire for a free and united mother country without

“relying on the mystery of oaths, the terror of assassination, the perpetual conspiracy of secret associations” (*Rambles* 1: xv):

It is impossible not to hope well for a country, whose poets, whose men of reflection and talent, without one exception, all use the gifts of genius or knowledge, to teach the noblest lessons of devotion to their country; and whose youth receive the same with devoted enthusiasm. (*Rambles* 1: xvi)

The national fervour that imbued the works of the most important Italian writers of the time and the patriotic enthusiasm they excited in the young generations of Italians are the grounds on which Shelley bases both her argument in favour of Italian nationalism and her hopes for a positive outcome of the country’s endeavours for independence.

While in the Preface to *Rambles* Shelley presents Italian politics as the main scope of the book and defines the improvement of the British attitude towards the Italians as its ultimate purpose, in the first letter of the travelogue she introduces many of the other minor topics that recur and develop in her narration as secondary leitmotifs. The theme of education and of hope in the new generations that concludes the Preface to *Rambles* is resumed on a more personal level in the first paragraph of the opening letter of the book. Shelley promptly establishes her identity as a mother and defines her role and function as a travel companion for her own son and for two of his young friends in a journey, whose primary intent is study and education: “My son and his two friends have decided on spending their summer vacation on the shores of the lake of Como – there to study for the degree, which they are to take next winter. They wish me to accompany them, and I gladly consent” (*Rambles* 1: 1). The purpose and the destination of the travel as well as the identities of the travellers are disclosed at once, and the journey acquires the character of a revised version of the Grand Tour. Instead of the older male tutor who typically accompanies a young member of the English élite in his extended trip through the

Continent, however, we have a mother accompanying her son to one main destination. Instead of a journey of education intended to offer refinement, improvement of social skills, and life (sometimes even sexual) experiences, we have a party of college students seeking a quiet and pleasant spot to prepare for a university examination.

The second paragraph of the first letter of *Ramble* further defines Shelley's authorial persona in her feminine and domestic roles as a bereaved mother and widow:

Can it, indeed, be true, that I am about to revisit Italy? How many years are gone since I quitted that country! There I left the mortal remains of those beloved – my husband and my children, whose loss changed my whole existence, substituting, for happy peace and the interchange of deep-rooted affections, years of desolate solitude, and a hard struggle with the world; which only now, as my son is growing up, is brightening into a better day. (*Rambles* 1: 1-2)

Shelley refers only evasively to her previous residence in Italy and concentrates principally on her own experience and point of view when she mentions the deaths of Percy Shelley and of two of their children during their stay in the country. Nevertheless, these hints were possibly enough to evoke in her readers the most important events of her private life, especially her past as the lover and the wife of the famous poet, the unfortunate accident of his death by drowning, and the years of their prolonged stay in Italy that qualified her as Anglo-Italian and gave her a deeper than average knowledge of Italian matters. Significantly, her emphasis is not on the tragic events that marked her first stay in the country and that were generally well known to the majority of her audience. What she points out in this passage are the less known – though not less tragic – consequences that those losses had on her as a survivor. As she explains, her current existence was determined by the years of isolation, financial troubles, and banishment from respectable society that she endured since the death of her husband, as a single

woman who had to protect and provide for her child. Her losses, especially her husband's death, are represented as the events that perturbed the peace and the order of her domestic life, forcing her to assume, besides her feminine role as a mother, the typically male role of head of the family. In conformity with the dominant patriarchal ideology, which saw women as dependent on a male member of the family (usually their fathers and husbands, but often also their brothers or sons), Shelley appears to look forward to her son's adulthood as the change that would restore order and happiness in her household, giving her somebody to rely on and delivering her from the burden of being the primary caregiver. In her case, moreover, her expectations for a better life were concretely connected with her son's coming of age and with his inheritance of the Shelley title and estate at the death of his grandfather, Sir Timothy. At any rate, Shelley's mention of her son in connection with her hopes for a happier future at the end of a paragraph that summarizes the tragedies of her past life not only reconfirms that she defines her identity primarily in her role as a mother but also reveals her determination to look ahead and sets the generally optimistic tone of the book.

The subsequent passage of the first letter of *Rambles* introduces the themes of loss and recovery, of a sorrowful past and hopeful future that are deeply connected both with Shelley's personal experience of Italy and with her political representation of the country:

The name of Italy has magic in its very syllables. The hope of seeing it again recalls vividly to my memory that time, when misfortune seemed an empty word, and my habitation on earth a secure abode, which no evil could shake. Graves have opened in my path since then; and, instead of the cheerful voices of the living, I have dwelt among the early tombs of those I loved. Now a new generation has sprung up; and, at the name of Italy, I grow young again in their enjoyments, and gladly prepare to share them. (*Rambles* 1: 2)

Shelley had truly enjoyed her residence in Italy, and the years she spent there came to represent for her the last time of her life when she felt young and carefree. Italy, however, was also the place where her happiness and youth came to an end with the loss of her husband and children. The image of the graves that have opened on her path and of the tombs among which she has dwelt recalls the idea of Italy as land of the dead, where only ruins and graves have remained of the glorious past and of the illustrious personalities that had made the history of the country. In the same way as Shelley hopes through her son and his young friends to renew her happiness and to experience again the enthusiasm of youth, so in the new generation of Italians she places her hopes for the regeneration and restoration of the country's past glories. Shelley had felt a strong desire to go back to Italy since the first moment she had returned to England in 1823, hoping to get financial assistance from her father-in-law (Sunstein 236-237). In Italy she had left not only the remains of her beloved ones, but also many dear friends and a stimulating social circle in which she was accepted and respected in spite of her past as a fallen woman (Sunstein 254). Lack of funds and Sir Timothy's threat to stop paying for her son's education if she took him away from England prevented her from realizing her dream of going back to Italy (Sunstein 276-277). Her longing to return and revisit the tombs of her husband and children, the memories of the happy life she had lived there, and the solitude and misery she had experienced in England made her think of Italy not only as "magic" (*Rambles* 1: 2), but also as "a paradise": "I was about to break a chain that had long held me – cross the Channel – and wander far towards a country which memory painted as a paradise" (*Rambles* 1: 3). Shelley refers to Italy in these terms on the brink of her departure to revisit it after almost two decades of absence. The image of the country as a paradise is

reconfirmed more than once in the course of the book to emphasize the possibility of recovering joy and hope as a reward for enduring years of troubles and distress.

The first letter introduces a further motif that runs through *Rambles*: that of travel as a cure. Shelley mentions “a nervous illness” and headaches that often interrupted her “usual occupations” (*Rambles* 1: 2). They were possibly the early symptoms of what would prove a fatal brain tumour, and travel was one of the few treatments that nineteenth-century physicians could recommend to such patients (Moskal, “Travel Writing” 253). Shelley’s hope, expressed before her departure, that “travelling will cure all” (*Rambles* 1: 2) characterizes the trip as a healing journey and identifies the author with that large group of sick people who in the nineteenth century travelled in search of health. Moreover, as Foster notices, illness especially for women was considered “a highly respectable” and a “more easily admissible” motive for travelling than the mere desire to enjoy and amuse themselves (Foster 9-10). Mentioning this reason for her journey in addition to the other respectable purpose of accompanying her son as part of her family duties was possibly another way to validate the propriety of her enterprise and to avoid criticism. In the course of the book Shelley frequently refers to her poor health, which often prevents her from joining her son and his young friends in their excursions. Her concern that her presence may become a hindrance to their plans and the priority she gives to their needs and desires emphasize Shelley’s determination to represent herself mainly as a travel companion in a journey intended to amuse, educate, and benefit principally the younger members of her party. At the outset of the journey, she considers how much she has changed from her own youth, when travelling by diligence or even in the comfort of a private carriage used to fatigue and exhaust her, in spite of the fact that

she then enjoyed good health. Noting the opposite effect that the weariness of journeying has on her present ill health, she expresses her faith that travelling will cure her body by healing her mind from the sadness of her past:

Now I complained, and with reason, of most painful sensations; yet the fatigue I endured seemed to take away weariness instead of occasioning it. I felt light of limb and in good spirits. On the shore of France I shook the dust of accumulated cares from off me; I forgot disappointments, and banished sorrow: weariness of soul – so much heavier, so much harder to bear. (*Rambles* 1: 7)

Keeping the promise to her publisher that her work should contain practical information and be “useful” (*Letters* 3: 96) for other travellers, Shelley notes from the first letter of *Rambles* and throughout the book the names of the hotels where her party stayed, the quality of the food and the service they received, the means of transportation they used to proceed from one leg of the trip to the other, and details about the different currency in use in the regions visited. Shelley relied on the famous *Handbook for Travellers* by the English publisher John Murray as her major source for hotel recommendations and prices.²⁶ She repeatedly mentions Murray sometimes to endorse and more often to rectify or update the information provided, especially with respect to the price paid for lodging and transportation (see for example *Rambles* 2: 35). She even goes so far as to mention the name of an Italian coachman who drove her across the Alps and to recommend to other travellers his excellent character and services (*Rambles* 1: 133). Her insistence on these practical details, which interest the modern reader mostly as curiosities, confirms Shelley’s intent that her book should serve as a guide for travellers who wanted to follow the same itinerary.

²⁶ For details on the editions of Murray’s handbooks consulted and mentioned by Shelley, see Jeanne Moskal, “Introductory Note: *Rambles in Germany and Italy*” 55-56.

The themes and motifs introduced in the Preface and in the first letter of *Rambles* are resumed and discussed in the course of the three parts of which the book is composed.

2.2 Part I of *Rambles*: A Sympathetic Education

The first part of *Rambles* records a first visit to Italy in 1840. Shelley, her son Percy and two of his friends left England from Dover in June, and travelled down the Rhine and Mosel stopping only briefly before arriving at Lake Como, where they spent the rest of July and August. In mid-September Shelley was detained in Milan, where she had to wait for a delayed letter with the money she needed to travel back to England. Her son and his two companions went on ahead and she returned alone via Geneva. Shelley's conflicting emotions towards Italy dominate this first section of the book. Her enthusiasm for the country and her hope to recover her happiness and health are checked by the fear that in Italy she could be deprived once more of her only source of joy and that she could again experience a tragic loss, as she had during her first residence in the Peninsula. The shadow of Percy Bysshe Shelley's death by drowning hovers over the whole first section of *Rambles*. This traumatic event is actually never explicitly mentioned in the book, but it is conveyed through the constant references to Shelley's fear of water and to her worry for her son Percy, who shared his father's passion for sailing.

Shelley's self-representation as a mother is expressed mainly in terms of her maternal concern for her son's safety and of the selfless subordination of her own desires to those of Percy. At the beginning of the trip she confesses that she has "horror of [her] sea-voyage" (*Rambles* 1: 4), and at Baden-Baden she speaks with the voice of an anxious mother when she longs to stay there instead of tempting fate in Italy:

With regard to the feelings that hold my wishes in check when I think of Italy, – these are all founded on fear. Those I loved had died there – would it again prove fatal, and do I only please my fancy to destroy my last hope? We are bound for the lake of Como, a place of sad renown for wreck and danger; and my son’s passion for the water is the inducement that leads him to fix on it for his visit. What wonder that I, of all people, looking on the peaceful valley of Baden-Baden, with its mountain torrent that would not sail a paper boat, wistfully incline to stay here and be safe. (*Rambles* 1: 38)

On her first night on the shores of Lake Como, looking at the water she prays that “no ruin, arising from that fatal element, may befall [her]” (*Rambles* 1: 63). The arrival of the boat that Percy had ordered to sail on Lake Como makes her shudder for fear of losing him: “Do not call me a grumbler. A tragedy has darkened my life: I endeavour, in vain, to cast aside the fears which are its offspring; they haunt me perpetually, and make too large and too sad a portion of my daily life” (*Rambles* 1: 74). Only when she sees the boat leave at the end of their stay is she relieved and thankful that her foreboding was mistaken: “P.’s boat has left us. I bade it a grateful adieu, glad that it went leaving me scatheless” (*Rambles* 1: 95). Relating the episode of a dangerous crossing of the stormy lake, when her own life was at risk, she does not miss the opportunity of pointing out that her fears were not due to cowardice, but exclusively to maternal apprehension and love: “I had the pleasure of finding that I had not become quite a coward, and that I feared for P– more than for myself” (*Rambles* 1: 84). Her duties as a thoughtful mother are presented as the cause that prevents Shelley from fulfilling her desire to extend her stay in Italy and to visit Venice and Florence: “[...] in vain I have debated and struggled, wishing to visit Florence or Venice. My son must return to England” (*Rambles* 1: 109). When the mishap of the delayed letter occurs, her son and his needs have again priority over her own, and she takes upon herself the discomfort of waiting in Milan and travelling back alone. Separated from her son she feels “dispirited” and “miserable”

(*Rambles* 1: 114-115). The description of her situation gloomily resembles the end of her first stay in Italy in 1823, when she had to return to England alone with baby Percy, because her husband and her other two children, who had accompanied her at the beginning of the journey, had died in Italy: “I left England with a merry party of light-hearted youngsters; they are gone, and I alone: this, the end of my pleasant wanderings” (*Rambles* 1: 114). On leaving Milan, Percy and his young friends made a perilous passage through the Alps that put their lives at risk. The account of their dangerous crossing written by one of Percy’s friends is included at the end of Part I as a proof that Shelley’s fear that an unknown evil could happen to her son was legitimate and that her apprehension deserved the sympathy of her readers. Shelley’s mixed feelings of anxiety and happiness that characterized her first experience of Italy are thus reasserted at the end of her first re-encounter with the country.

In the nineteenth century descriptions of landscapes were used in travel books as the equivalent of pictures and illustrations, which were at the time more difficult and expensive to reproduce in print than written texts. Starting with the first part of *Rambles*, Shelley employs landscape descriptions, a staple topic of travel literature, to exercise her readers’ ability to get beyond their own point of view in order to sympathize and become one with somebody else’s perceptions and experiences. Shelley endeavours to create a descriptive language that asks for the active participation of readers and a willingness to identify themselves with the narrator’s state of mind, engaging their own imaginations to complete what words cannot convey. At the beginning of the journey, trying to represent the fine scenery that surrounds her while travelling by boat along the German river Mosel, she laments “but words are vain” and she expresses her disapproval of

descriptions characterized by “a vagueness and a sameness that conveys no distinct ideas” (*Rambles* 1: 23). Rather than depicting the scenery she sees around her as if it were a painting, she reproduces the dynamic movement of the boat by evoking the endless succession of vistas that the travellers rapidly approach and leave behind. At the same time, she conveys the temporal progression of the journey by giving a chronological account of the typical day of navigation (Schor, “Mary Shelley in Transit” 239-240):

[U]nless you can be placed beside us in our rough-hewn boat, and glide down between the vine-covered hills, with bare craggy heights towering above; now catching with glad curiosity the first glimpse of a more beautiful bend of the river, a higher mountain peak, a more romantic ruin; now looking back to gaze as long as possible on some picturesque point of view, of which, as the boat floated down but slightly assisted by the rowers, we lost sight for ever – unless you can imagine and sympathise in the cheerful elasticity of the setting out at morning sharpened into hunger at noon, and the pleasure that attended the rustic fare we could command, especially accompanied as it was by bright pure Moselle wine; then, the quiet enjoyment of golden evening, succeeded by still and gray twilight; and last, the lassitude, the fatigue, which made us look eagerly out for the place where we were to stop and repose: – there is a zest in all this [...] and a great sense of novelty, which is lost in mere words: – you must do your part, and feel and imagine, or all description proves tame and useless. (*Rambles* 1: 23-24)

Shelley coaxes her readers into sharing her point of view by placing them beside her on the boat and evoking for them not only the images that she sees while gliding along the river but also the physical sensations she experiences during the journey. The morning vigour, the appetite felt at noon, the refreshing taste of the wine, the weariness that affects the body in the evening, and the anticipation of repose are all mentioned as elements that the audience can use to feed their imagination, but ultimately Shelley places the responsibility for the successful outcome of the description on the readers. Only if they are willing to sympathize with the perceiving subject and to use their own senses and emotions to enliven the written word, can they recreate and experience for themselves the

content of the description. In the first part of *Rambles* the descriptions of the Falls of the Rhine (*Rambles* 1: 51) and of the mountains that surround Lake Como (*Rambles* 1: 67-68) are further examples of how Shelley employs landscapes and their representations to actively engage her audience's sympathetic imagination. Training the readers in the receptive perception of narrated landscapes constitutes a step in the gradual process of education that aims at inducing their sympathetic response to the narration of Italian nationalism.

In the first part of *Rambles* Shelley's observations on the character of the Italians and on the political situation of the country are relatively limited and cautious compared to the extensive and bold treatment that Italian matters receive in the last part of the book. The account of her six-week stay at Cadenabbia on Lake Como focuses mostly on the daily activities that she and her party enjoyed, dividing their time between studying and boating trips to the surrounding areas. Consequently, her remarks on the Italians in this section are occasioned for the most part by the direct observation of the local people she met. Shelley is careful not to exaggerate their merits and her negative comments appear to have the function of indulging the prevalent contempt towards Italian people that her British audience most likely expected in a travel book about Italy. Her eagerness to recognize and acknowledge Italian faults can be regarded as a strategy to guard herself from the accusation of her countrymen of being partial towards Italy and its people. By showing that she is able to acknowledge both the merits and the faults of the Italians, she attempts to position herself as an impartial observer in order to lend weight to her later advocacy of Italian nationalism. The members of the Brentani family who kept the inn where Shelley and her party resided at Cadenabbia, for example, are characterized as

“hard-working, good-humoured, and endowed with all the innate courtesy which forms, together with their simplicity of manner, the charm of the Italians” (*Rambles* 1: 68-69). Shelley, however, does not fail to recognize their tendency to deception and mendacity – the common faults that English tourists usually associated with Italians. “For the rest,” she adds to her praises of the Brentanis’ good qualities, “they of course are not particularly addicted to truth, and may perhaps cheat if strongly tempted, and, I dare say, their morals are not quite correct” (*Rambles* 1: 69-70). With typical feminine attention for dresses and hairstyles, Shelley describes the local girls who work at the nearby silk mill, whom she sees going back to their villages every night, walking and singing in groups. Although she is appreciative of their beauty and of the proper demeanour of the unmarried girls, she also points out their general lack of cleanliness and concludes with an observation that confirms the common prejudice about the alleged loose morals of Italian women: “The unmarried in Italy are usually of good conduct, while marriage is the prelude to a fearful liberty” (*Rambles* 1: 77). The local men are depicted as inclined to drunkenness and apt to fierce anger and violence when under the effect of alcohol. The master she hires to teach Italian to her son and his friends is portrayed as a specimen of Italian incompetence and greediness, and the reference to his unbearable smell of garlic recalls another widespread commonplace about the inhabitants of the Peninsula.

While Shelley wishes for her British audience to regard the Italians favourably, in the first part of *Rambles* she duly acknowledges the popular prejudices against them also to prove her point that misrule and tyranny are the cause of people’s corruption. The passage in which she discusses the faults she observed in the inhabitants of the villages around Lake Como opens with a remark that sounds patronizing in its tone, but in reality

condemns the true culprits for the decay of the country: “I have spoken in praise of the Italians; but you must not imagine that I would exalt them to an unreal height – that were to show that misrule and a misguiding religion were no evils” (*Rambles* 1: 97). In another passage, which resumes the argument she presented in the Preface about the connection between Italians’ immorality and political oppression, she explains:

Their faults are many – the faults of the oppressed – love of pleasure, disregard of truth, indolence, and violence of temper. [...] Under free institutions, and where the acquirement of knowledge is not as now a mark inviting oppression and wrong, their love of pleasure were readily ennobled into intellectual activity. [...] Their habits, fostered by their government, alone are degraded and degrading [...]. (*Rambles* 1: 87)

Ultimately, Shelley attributes the cause for “man’s lost state in this country” (*Rambles* 1: 97) to lack of knowledge, enlightenment, education and civilization. “The root of the evil [...] rests in the absence of education and civilisation” (*Rambles* 1: 100), she laments, and therefore she recognizes signs of hope for the future of Italy in the products of culture and genius that were still blossoming in the country, in spite of the oppressive intellectual climate. The reading of the Ode on the death of Napoleon²⁷ by the famous Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), which Shelley says she heard for the first time during her stay at Lake Como, causes her to exclaim: “It is a double pleasure to find poetry worthy of its better days spring up in modern Italy, showing that the genius of the Italians survives the blighting influence of misrule and oppression” (*Rambles* 1: 86). Shelley understands that Italy is trapped in the paradox of its situation: without knowledge and education people cannot free themselves from misgovernment and

²⁷ The title of the ode, one of the most widely known lyrics in Italian language, is *Il Cinque Maggio* (The Fifth of May).

oppression; however, misgovernment and oppression are precisely the causes that prevent people from gaining access to knowledge and education:

The more I see of the inhabitants of this country, the more I feel convinced that they are highly gifted with intellectual powers, and possess all the elements of greatness. They are made to be a free, active, inquiring people. But they must cast away their *dolce far niente*. They must learn to practise the severer virtues; their youth must be brought up in more hardy and manly habits; they must tread to earth the vices that cling to them as the ivy around their ruins. They must do this to be free; yet without freedom how can they? (*Rambles* 1: 86)

Although in the first part of *Rambles* Shelley does not appear to be completely confident that the country will eventually be able to emancipate itself from tyranny, she starts to suggest that the only way to redeem Italy is through the education of the new generations. Through knowledge, discipline, intelligence, and the manly virtues of activity and initiative young Italian people will have to work against the effeminate tendency to passivity and inertia that restrains their country and makes it impossible for its inhabitants to react to oppression and misgovernment.

During her six-week stay in Italy in 1840, Shelley visited only Lake Como and the city of Milan both situated in Lombardy, the Italian region which together with Venetia was placed under direct Austrian sovereignty in 1815 with the Treaty of Vienna (Header 30, 174). British public opinion was in part convinced that Austrian government in the Italian north-eastern territories and its extended influence over many of the states in which the country was reorganized after the Congress of Vienna had benefitted Italy and had guaranteed a prolonged period of peace.²⁸ In order to be successful, Shelley's argument in favour of Italian nationalism had not only to arouse her readers' sympathies

²⁸ The review of *Rambles*, appeared in the *Athenaeum* of August 10, 1844, criticized Shelley's political views contending that Austrian rule was beneficial for Italy (Moskal, "Introductory Note" 53).

towards the inhabitants of the Peninsula but also needed to demonstrate the negative effects of reactionary and tyrannical regimes on the country. While in the third part of *Rambles* Shelley comments extensively on the consequences of despotism on the social, intellectual, and political dynamics of the Italian regions she visited, in the first part of the book she conveys the effects of the oppressive regime established by the Austrian government in Lombardy mostly by means of hints and allusions. The episode of the English madman who arrived at Cadenabbia brandishing a pistol and for a few hours threatened the lives of those who drew near him represents a first example of how she indirectly exposes the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that characterized the regions ruled by the Austrians. Shelley relates this incident in unusual detail, explaining that, after the man was seized and disarmed, he was taken to her hotel, where she and her party, who were asked to watch over him, had the chance to learn his story by talking to him in his native tongue. The man, who had lived in Milan for a few years, had started to believe, during his fits of madness, that he was a victim of treachery and that Austrian police spied on him and tried to poison him. Although Shelley does not comment on the episode and she only expresses her compassion for her countryman's insanity, it is clear that the form taken by his paranoid delusions bespeaks of the climate of surveillance, treachery, and espionage in place in the Austrian provinces (Crook 85). In another passage she suggests the ruthless severity with which Italians were forced to submit to the Austrian regime by describing how the locals were punished when they committed violent acts:

When these outrages occur, the police carry the aggressors to prison, where they are kept, we are told, ill off enough till they consent to enlist. The life of a soldier in the Austrian service is so hard, ill-fed, and worse paid, that these poor wretches often hold out long; but they are forced, at

last to yield: nor is the punishment ill imagined, that he who sheds blood should be sent to deal in blood in the legal way. (*Rambles* 1: 100)

Observing the beauty of the landscape between Lecco and Bergamo, Shelley infers that the Austrians were taking advantage of Italian prosperity and would not give up their control over the country easily: “Oh, how loth will the Austrian ever be to loosen his gripe of this fair province, fertile and abounding in its produce [...]” (*Rambles* 1: 106).

Shelley’s comments on the harshness of the Austrian government become more explicit towards the end of the first part of *Rambles*. When she reaches Milan, the city where Italian hatred towards the Austrians was possibly more manifest than anywhere else, she first openly expresses her desire to meet members of the most famous anti-Austrian secret society,²⁹ and she then bursts out in an indignant statement about the cruelties of the previous Austrian Emperor:

I wish I could see a few Carbonari; [...] I should like to know how the Milanese feel towards their present Government. Since the death of one of the most treacherous and wicked tyrants that ever disgraced humanity – the Emperor Francis, – the Austrian Government has made show of greater moderation. (*Rambles* 1: 121)

One of the victims of the merciless repression of Italian patriots by Emperor Francis II had been Count Federico Confalonieri, a Carbonarist and one of the most prominent personalities of the time in the struggle for Italian self-determination. Shelley mentions her encounter with Confalonieri at Como. She points out that, even if he was eventually released from his long imprisonment in the dreadful Austrian fortress of Spielberg as a

²⁹ In her article “‘Meek and Bold’: Mary Shelley’s Support of the Risorgimento,” Nora Crook argues that Shelley was a victim of the Austrian surveillance of mail correspondence. Because of her known liberal sympathies and of her expressed wish to meet some Carbonari, her letters were probably considered suspect and intercepted. According to Crook, in Shelley’s account of the mystery of the delayed letter that forced her to stay longer in Milan and in the narration of the crossing of the Alps by Percy’s friend there are clues that indicate that “she intended some of her readers to understand that the Shelley party had been spied upon” (Crook 86).

result of the greater moderation of the government, he was by then reduced to “the shadow of a man” and his life was irremediably “withered” (*Rambles* 1: 121). Among the other signs of greater moderation shown by the Austrian authorities, Shelley notices “the encouragement they give to the education of the poor” (*Rambles* 1: 121). Given her faith in culture and education as the means to improve humanity and spread civilization, she cannot help applauding the initiative of schooling the poor, pleading in favour of free access to knowledge for the largest number of people possible:

From whatever motive this springs, we must cling to it as a real blessing, for the most extensive advantages must result to the cause of civilization from the enlightenment, however partial and slight, of the multitude. Knowledge must, from its nature, grow, and rooting it out can alone prevent its tendency to spread. (*Rambles* 1: 121)

The fact that the Austrian government was concerned about education and was putting a great effort into establishing a schooling system confirmed Shelley’s argument on the importance of educating the new generations. However, it could not escape her notice that the Austrian regime intended to make use of education to mould their subjects’ characters in order to better subjugate them. Thus, Shelley’s censure of Austrian repressive rule in the first part of *Rambles* culminates in her denunciation of the misuse of education in the Austrian provinces and of the special care taken by the government to prevent promising Italian youth from developing their intellectual faculties:

Government allows no schools but its own; and selects teachers, not as being qualified for the task, but as servile tools in their hands. [...] The Austrian hopes to bring up the new generation in the lights he gives, and to know no more than he teaches. He has succeeded in Austria, but in Italy he will not. [...] A hatred of the German is rooted in the nobility of Milan; they are watched with unsleeping vigilance: above all, the greatest care is taken that their youth should not receive an enlightened education. (*Rambles* 1: 122)

Shelley is convinced that, in spite of all its efforts, the Austrian oppressor would never be able to eradicate people's capacity to think for themselves, and hence Italians would continue hating the foreign invaders and rebelling against them: "[H]atred of the stranger must ever be a portion of the air [an Italian] breathes. [...] For the present governments of Italy know that there is a spirit abroad in that country, which forces every Italian that thinks and feels, to hate them and rebel in his heart" (*Rambles* 1: 122-123).

Towards the end of the first part of *Rambles*, in a dream inspired by a short visit to the Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore, Shelley momentarily puts aside her self-representation as a mother to imagine herself in another female role: a queen. This role also bespeaks her desire to be perceived as a nurturer and an educator, whose function is to secure and to hand down to the next generation the ideals of enlightenment and civilization. On the beautiful and secluded Italian island, she dreams of creating a centre for the propagation of culture where she, as the high-minded and beneficent "Queen of Isola Bella" (*Rambles* 1: 131), would offer refuge to all those who suffered oppression and persecution on account of their yearning for knowledge and enlightenment:

I fancied life spent here, and pictured English friends arriving down from the mighty Simplon, and Italians taking refuge in my halls from persecution and oppression – a little world of my own – a focus whence would emanate some light for the country around – a school for civilisation, a refuge for the unhappy, a support for merit in adversity [...].
(*Rambles* 1: 131)

Ultimately for Shelley, Italian nationalism is part of a bigger and progressive process of civilization that will extend enlightenment and education to larger and larger portions of society and to wider and wider regions of the world. For her the essential purpose of all the struggles for freedom and of all the battles against despotism is to make knowledge

accessible to the largest number of people. Shelley reasserts this conviction at the end of the first part of *Rambles*:

The blessing which the world now needs is the steady progress of civilisation: freedom, by degrees, it will have, I believe. Meanwhile, as the fruits of liberty, we wish to perceive the tendency of the low to rise to the level of the high – not the high to be dragged down to the low. This, we are told by many, is the inevitable tendency of equality of means and privileges. I will hope not: for on that hope is built every endeavour to banish ignorance, and hard labour and penury, from political society. (*Rambles* 1: 143-144)

In the previous paragraph she had noticed how in France the manners of the common people had degenerated instead of improving after the July revolution of 1830 that granted them increased freedom. For this reason she insists that the achievement of freedom needs to be accompanied by the progressive spreading of knowledge and education among the people. Only through knowledge and education, will the poor, the oppressed and the disadvantaged have the means to raise themselves from their condition, and the gradual and collective improvement of the whole of humanity be achieved.

2.3 Part II of *Rambles*: Education through Art and History

Part II of *Rambles* covers the first part of Shelley's second trip to Europe, specifically her journey from Antwerp to Prague, which began in the summer of 1842. On her way to Italy, accompanied again by her son and two different friends of his, she travelled via Cologne and Frankfurt to Kissingen where she stopped to take the curative waters. They then moved to Wartburg, Erfurt, Weimar, and Berlin before settling for a month in Dresden, where an unexpected heat-wave worsened Shelley's already poor health. After the account of their adventurous climbing of some of the most scenic mountains of Saxon Switzerland, Part II of *Rambles* ends with their arrival in Prague at

the end of August 1842. In the letter that opens the narration of this second tour of the Continent, Shelley completely omits to mention the interval of about a year and a half that she spent back in London, and she also does not introduce the different travel companions involved in the journey, nor the circumstances that prompted it. However, while her first trip to Italy is presented as motivated principally by her son's desires and needs, at the beginning of the second part of *Rambles* Shelley admits to another and more personal reason that induced her to leave England again – her passion for travelling as a form of activity and entertainment from which she hopes also her health would benefit:

I have a passionate love of travelling. Add to this, I suffer in my health, and can no longer apply to my ordinary employments. Travelling is occupation as well as amusement, and I firmly believe that renewed health will be the result of frequent change of place. (*Rambles* 1: 158)

Although the whole book is imbued with Shelley's enthusiasm for travelling, with her insatiable desire to see as much as she can, and with the sense of freedom and adventure she derives from her rambles, it is in the second part of her account that reflections on travelling really become a recurrent theme. Already at the beginning of her first journey to Italy in 1840, Shelley had rejoiced at the freedom from social conventions that travelling would afford her. In England her scarce financial resources and her social standing and reputation had defined her identity and had greatly limited her opportunities to enjoy amusements and social life. Once en route, she revels in the anonymity and respite from social judgment:

I feel a good deal of the gipsy coming upon me [...]. Among acquaintance, in the every-day scenes of life, want of means brings with it mortification, to embitter still more the perpetual necessity of self-denial. In society you are weighed with others according to your extrinsic possessions; your income, your connexions, your position, make all the weight – you yourself are a mere feather in the scale. But what are these to me now? My home is the readiest means of conveyance I can command,

or the inn at which I shall remain at night – my only acquaintance the companions of my wanderings – the single business of my life to enjoy the passing scene. (*Rambles* 1: 9-10)

At the beginning of her second trip to the Continent, Shelley restates her passion for travelling that makes her overlook the difficulties posed by her limited financial resources and by the discomfort and fatigue encountered during the journey. Other female travel writers of the time, like Fanny Lewald, often include in their travelogues avowals of their attachment to the comfort of their homes and to their domestic duties as a way to reassert their femininity. Conversely, Shelley boldly declares that she prefers travelling to spending her time at home, and she frames her remarks as an answer to a French lady's comment on "the English mania for travelling" (*Rambles* 1: 160). The lady agreed that for rich people, who owned comfortable carriages, travelling could be amusing, but she could not understand that "women, who can command the comfort of an ordinary English house, could leave the same, and by *diligence* and *voiturier*, harassed and fatigued, should find pleasure in exposing themselves to a thousand annoyances and privations [...]" (*Rambles* 1: 160). Shelley's response sounds like a manifesto for an élite of intrepid travellers, whose love for exploring the world must be innate and exceed any other passion:

I have travelled in both ways. To undertake the last, requires a good deal of energy and an indefatigable love of seeing yet more of the surface of this fair globe, which, like all other passions or inclinations, must spring naturally from the heart, and cannot be understood except by those who share it. After having been confined many a long year in our island, I broke from my chains in 1840, and encountered very rough travelling. [...] Now I have set out again, my choice being between staying at home and travelling as I could. I preferred, very far, the latter: I should prefer it to-morrow. [...] What I did see is all gain; and I ought rather to rejoice in the spirit of enterprise that enabled me to see so much, than to grumble at the smallness of the means that forced me to see so little. (*Rambles* 1: 160-161)

Here Shelley completely reverses the traditional Victorian set of values associated with the idea of 'home' intended more extensively also as 'homeland.' In *The Mediterranean Passion*, the historian John Pemble observes that for all Victorians, "Abandoning Britain meant abandoning home. It therefore threatened all the cherished values that Home implied – fidelity, obedience, connubial affection, and a stable and rooted existence" (53). Quoting Pemble's passage, Frawley points out that, since middle-class women in particular were considered responsible for the maintenance of these values, for them to decide to leave home in order to travel abroad meant to challenge the domestic ideals against which they were usually measured. For this reason, Frawley explains, the accounts of Victorian women travellers abroad "are often replete with explanation and justification" and in their travelogues they were usually expected to discover and avow "that there was no place like home" (27). Shelley on the contrary is not afraid to refer to 'home' – or her "island" England – as a prison where "chains" have kept her "confined" and have prevented her from exploring and experiencing the world. She establishes travelling and the knowledge acquired through it as supreme values for which she gladly renounces the comforts of domestic life and willingly endures fatigue and discomfort. And rather than discovering that "there is no place like home," in the course of her journey she repeatedly refers to the places where she resides in Italy as "home" and expresses her reluctance at going back to England where she feels "exiled" (*Rambles* 1: 84).

Shelley's determination to make the most of her travelling experience is so great that, in spite of her resolve not "to grumble at the smallness of means that forced [her] to see so little" (*Rambles* 1: 161), she develops what Smith, quoting the sociologist

MacCannel, calls “touristic shame”: that is “the belief that one is not seeing everything ‘the way it “ought” to be seen” (Smith 166). Especially in the second and third part of *Rambles*, she frequently regrets the circumstances that did not allow her to “linger longer on [her] way, and visit a thousand places left unvisited” (*Rambles* 1: 161). In order to reassure her readers of her intention to be a thorough traveller and to console herself for the attractions she missed, she often expresses the hope of undertaking a more accurate tour of the same places at a later date. For example, after spending only half an hour in Antwerp to contemplate Rubens’ painting *The Descent from the Cross*, she entreats her readers: “Do not despise us! Some day, I mean to make a tour of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Holland” (*Rambles* 1: 159). The same plea and the same intention to go back are repeated in Cologne, where they arrived too late and departed too early to see anything of the city: “Do not despise us: I intend to go there again” (*Rambles* 1: 167). Travelling once again along the Rhine by boat, she recalls the same journey of two years before and the first time she ever visited the region in 1814 during her walking tour with Percy Bysshe Shelley and her stepsister. Then she was “nearly the first English person” who travelled along the Rhine after the Napoleonic wars but, following the route for the third time, she expresses her dissatisfaction at not being able to finally explore the area in depth:

[...] I wanted more: I had seen enough of the Rhine, as a *picture*, all that the steam-voyager sees; – I desired to penetrate the ravines, to scale the heights, to linger among the ruins, to hear still more of its legends, and visit every romantic spot. I shall be very glad some summer of my future life to familiarise myself with the treasure of delight easily gathered by a wanderer on these banks; but as it is – on, on [...]. (*Rambles* 1: 170-171)

Lack of financial resources is often adduced as the impediment that prevents her from seeing more: “You know what it is that enables the tourist to loiter on his way; and

you know how slenderly we are provided with the same” (*Rambles* 1: 159-160). In particular, her “narrow means” do not allow her to command the private means of transportation necessary to properly survey all the attractions of the destinations she manages to reach via public transport. Shelley indicates as her greatest regret in travelling: “my being obliged to deny myself hiring a carriage when I arrive at a strange town, and the not being able to drive about everywhere, and see everything” (*Rambles* 2: 22). In Kissingen she wishes for “horses to visit the surrounding country” referring to them as “the most agreeable luxury” (*Rambles* 1: 196) to be possessed there. And in Florence she “at once env[ies] and despise[s] the happy rich who have carriages” (*Rambles* 2: 134), because they do not use them to explore the environs, but only for their daily promenades. It is not surprising, thus, that Shelley proves to be a great enthusiast of the railroads and steam-powered transportation that made travelling faster, more comfortable, and above all more affordable to “perforce economical travellers” (*Rambles* 1: 49) like her and her companions. She calls steam “a traveller’s blessing” (*Rambles* 1: 54) and feels “eternally grateful” (*Rambles* 1: 5) to railroads for the many places they enabled her to see. She concedes that railroads “spoil rather the beauty of the landscape,” but is willing to excuse all their shortcomings for the great advantage they offer of making the “unknown” readily available to travellers: “a railroad gives such promise of change and novelty to the traveller – transporting us at once from the known to the unknown – that, in spite of all that can be said against them, I delight to see or hear of them” (*Rambles* 1: 166).

In addition to her scarce means, what prevents Shelley from fully enjoying her trip and seeing even more than she did is her poor health. In the second part of *Rambles* in

particular, she complains numerous times of indisposition, illness, and fatigue that forced her to rest and “leave several sights unseen” (*Rambles* 1: 257). Her eagerness to go “everywhere, and see everything” (*Rambles* 2: 22), however, is not an end in itself and she does not belong to that category of travellers “who travel only for the sake of saying that they have travelled” (*Rambles* 1: 265). At an inn in Saxon Switzerland, she meets a lowbrow and snobbish young Englishman, who represents the perfect embodiment of that class of travellers, and while she satirizes his superficial, unsympathetic and pointless way of experiencing the world, Shelley defines her own “ethic of travel” (Schor, “Mary Shelley in Transit” 239):

He was *doing* his Saxon Switzerland; he had *done* his Italy, his Sicily; he had *done* his sunrise on Mount Etna; and when he should have *done* his Germany, he would return to England to show how destitute a traveller may be of all impression and knowledge, when they are unable to knit themselves in soul to nature, nor are capacitated by talents or acquirements to gain knowledge from what they see. We must become a part of the scenes around us, and they must mingle and become a portion of us, or we see without seeing and study without learning. There is no good, no knowledge, unless we can go out from, and take some of the external into, ourselves [...]. (*Rambles* 1: 265).

For Shelley, the essential and ultimate purpose of travelling is “to gain knowledge.” Unless travellers are willing to sympathize with what they see and to be permeated by it, so that they can learn and evolve in response to their new experiences, there is no advantage to be obtained by going about in the world. In other words, knowledge arises from the union of the observers with the things observed: whenever the observers manage to seize the object of their contemplation with all their senses and they succeed in making it part of their own experience, they gain real knowledge of it.

In the quoted passage Shelley suggests that travellers should become one with “nature” and “the scenes around” them, but she adopts the same approach also with

regard to art. Like the majority of travellers of the time, she participated in the customary practice of visiting museums and art galleries. Comments on paintings and statues were usually expected especially in travel books about Italy, and in *Rambles* she devotes increasing portions of her letters to art description and art criticism. Whether she beholds a work of art or whether she looks at a landscape, however, her main desire is to acquire knowledge from the objects of her observation by making them part of herself and her own experience. In an art gallery in Berlin, after admiring some impressive paintings by Raphael, she wishes to absorb and assimilate the images in her mind, so that she would always be able to recollect their beauty: “I desired to learn by heart – to imbibe – to make all I saw a part of myself, so that never more I may forget it. In some sort I shall succeed. Some of the forms of beauty on which I gazed, must last in my memory as long as it endures [...]” (*Rambles* 1: 224). Again in Dresden she spends every morning visiting the art gallery, striving to retain the memory of the objects she observes, so that they would become her own: “I am in a city I have long desired to see, and can store my mind with the memory of a thousand objects, which hereafter I shall look back on as my choicest treasures” (*Rambles* 1: 242).

Her attempt “to make all [she] saw a part of [her]self,” often results in descriptions of paintings and other works of art that can be read and interpreted as projections of Shelley’s own personal experiences and feelings. In her article “Speaking the Unspeakable: Art Criticism as Life Writing in Mary Shelley’s *Rambles in Germany and Italy*” Moskal argues that Shelley “employ[es] her art criticism as autobiographical dream-work, simultaneously revealing and concealing [...] unspeakable portions of her autobiography” (189-190). Moskal notices Shelley’s interest in sacred art that is focused

in particular on representations of the Madonna – a beloved subject of paintings in Catholic countries but also a subject that allowed her to identify herself with a mother figure also named Mary. Without entering into the deep analysis and interpretation of Shelley’s art criticism offered by Moskal in her article, it is possible to recognize an affinity between the way Shelley reads and describes some paintings of the Madonna in *Rambles* and her own state of mind and feelings as a mother. In the first part of the book, which is dominated by her fear and apprehension for her son’s life, she visits and admires Leonardo da Vinci’s famous fresco of *The Last Supper* in Milan, but it is another and less well-known painting of the same artist that attracts her attention:

There is another fragment of his in the gallery – an unfinished Virgin and Child – [...] the attitude is peculiar; with a common artist it had degenerated into affectation: with him it is simplicity and grace, – a gentle harmony of look and gesture, which reveals the nature of the being portrayed [*sic*], – the chaste and fond mother, lovely in youth and innocence, thoughtful from mingled awe and love, with a touch of fear, springing from a presentiment of the tragical destiny of the divine infant, whose days of childhood she watched over and made glad. (*Rambles* 1: 110)

Overwhelmed by her foreboding that an unknown evil may befall her son and by the fear that another tragic loss may affect her life while she is in Italy, Shelley projects the same emotions onto the attitude of the painted Madonna. In the countenance of the Virgin watching over her baby, she does not only see “awe and love” but she also attributes to the figure in the painting the same “fear” and the “presentiment” of the child’s fatal fate that she is experiencing for her own son Percy.

In the second part of *Rambles*, Shelley dwells especially upon descriptions of paintings by Raphael and Correggio that she saw in Berlin and Dresden galleries. Once again the subject of the pictures that please her the most is the Madonna with child, but in

the representations of the Virgin she emphasizes in particular the dignity and majesty of the woman who gave the world its Saviour, rather than the fear of the mother who would eventually lose her son. Shelley's wish for her son to acquire a prominent position in society and her desire that one day she could be vindicated for her years of struggles and confinement through Percy's successes are reflected in the way she describes and interprets the figure of the Madonna and her relation to Baby Jesus in the paintings she admires. In the first painting by Raphael she notices in Berlin, Shelley possibly caught a glimpse of her own identity represented in symbols: "then our eyes were attracted to [a picture] still lovelier in its chaste and divine beauty – a Virgin and Child by Raphael. The Mother is holding a book in one hand, the other arm encircles her infant (*Rambles* 1: 220). Like the Mary in the picture who holds in her arms both her son and a book, Shelley accommodated in her life both her role as a mother and that as a writer. As the Madonna had been glorified on account of her progeny and the sacred scriptures, so Shelley's standing and distinction in society depended on her works and her son's prospective accomplishments. Of a painting of the adoration of the Magi by Raphael she says that it "has given [her] more delight than any [she] ever saw" and she claims to have "dedicated hours" to contemplating it. Once again it is the figure of the Madonna that she likes the best:

I never saw such perfect grace and ideal beauty as in the kneeling figures of the Virgin and her attendant angels. Composed majesty and deep humility are combined in the attitudes. The countenances show their souls abstracted from all earthly thought, and absorbed by pure and humble adoration. Adoration from the adorable: this is what only an artist of the highest class can portray. You perceive that the painter imagined perfect beings, who deserve a portion of the worship which they pay unreservedly to the Creator [...]. (*Rambles* 1: 221-222)

Although the object of the adoration in the scene represented in the painting should be the figure of the baby, Shelley regards the Madonna as the most attractive subject. Her countenance that combines “composed majesty and deep humility” and her attitude that communicates her ability to be completely absorbed in worship become the real object of adoration for the observer of the painting. In the same way as the contemplators of such a sublime expression of art admire the creator/painter together with the perfection of the creatures that he managed to represent, so in the painting the mother of the object of adoration is herself venerated for the perfection of her offspring.

As a mother and an artist who, in her major novel *Frankenstein*, had dealt with the theme of the problematic relation between the creator and the creature, Shelley was aware that her own future reputation and honour would rest for the most part on her son’s prospective achievements as well as on the fame that her literary output would gain her. The Virgin in the painting is, at the same time, artistic creation and creator of the object of the adoration. In the Catholic tradition, moreover, the Madonna as the mother of God is both creator and creature of the divinity; she is the daughter of her own son or, as Dante wrote, “figlia del tuo figlio” (*Paradiso* 33.1) (see Moskal, “Speaking the Unspeakable” 209-210). And Shelley, who deeply felt her responsibility towards and desire to protect her only child but at the same time was conscious of her future dependence upon him, could easily see these thoughts and emotions embodied in the figure of the Virgin Mary. These speculations appear to be confirmed by her description of the *Madonna di San Sisto* by Raphael that she saw in Dresden:

The Madonna is not the lowly wife of Joseph the carpenter: she is the Queen of Heaven; she advances surrounded by celestial rays, all formed of innumerable cherubim, from whose countenances beam the glory that surrounds her. The majesty of her countenance, “severe in youthful

beauty,” demands worship for her as the mother of the Infant Saviour, whom she holds in her arms. And he, the Godhead (as well as feeble mortals can conceive the inconceivable, and yet which once it is believed was visible) sits enthroned on his brow, and looks out from eyes full of lofty command and conscious power. (*Rambles* 1: 236)

The Madonna “demands worship for her” as “the Queen of Heaven,” because having “wed Eternity” – as Shelley wrote in her poem “The Choice” (see Moskal, “Speaking the Unspeakable” 200) – she became “the mother of the Infant Saviour” and is entitled to share in the glory, in the “lofty command and conscious power” of her son. In the same way, Mary Shelley “is not the lowly wife” of the mortal Shelley the poet. Since his death, having created the myth of the ethereal and ideal poet Shelley, she had “wed Eternity” and she had become worthy of honour herself as a writer and as the mother, the instructor, and the guide of their son, who would soon earn for himself “command” and “power.”³⁰

Significantly, the subsequent painting that Shelley describes in detail is the picture of a different Mary, the Magdalene, by Correggio. In the Christian tradition Mary Magdalene has been often described as a prostitute and a sinner, who was converted by the encounter with Jesus into one of his most devoted followers. Shelley is attracted in particular by the mixed expression of despair and hope in the countenance of the painted Magdalene:

She is lying on the earth, in a cavern, supporting her head with her hand, reading the blessed promises of the Gospel. Her eyes are red with recent and much weeping; her face expresses earnest hope – or rather scarcely hope yet, but a yearning which will soon warm into satisfied faith; and she is eagerly drinking in the sublime consolations that speak peace to her

³⁰ As Moskal notices: “After the dismissal of the earthly spouse, Mary Shelley affirms, with an almost excessive elaboration, the divinity of the one to whom the Virgin Mary is now united, the Christ Child, who with ‘Godhead...sit[ting] enthroned on his brow,...eyes full of lofty command and conscious power’ assumes the attributes of an adult, command and power, and thus is more and equal or a spouse to the Virgin than her child” (Moskal, “Speaking the Unspeakable” 200).

heart. Her face is not clouded by grief, though you see that she has grieved with bitterness; nor does it express joy, though you see that she anticipates happiness. Is not this the triumph of art? (*Rambles* 1: 238)

Shelley had experienced in her life the stigma of being considered a fallen woman because of her premarital relationship with a married man, and she could easily identify herself with the figure of Mary Magdalene, the sinner and the rejected by society. The “earnest hope,” the “yearning” for “the sublime consolation,” and the promise of “happiness,” which is not there yet but is soon to come, evidently spoke to Shelley’s heart, who was anticipating “better day[s]” (*Rambles* 1: 2) for herself after years of sadness and struggles. Hope of redemption from the sins and sorrows of the past and confidence that a new beginning, regeneration, and happiness were possible for her through the adulthood of her son were the feelings that animated Shelley to undertake her journey. Inevitably, she recognizes and reads the same emotions in the expression of the painted figure. After all, Shelley’s intention was to describe and include in her discussion only those paintings that attracted her attention because she felt an affinity with them. Knowing how tedious an exhaustive list of artworks seen during a journey could become in a travelogue, at the beginning of *Rambles* she explains her criterion of selection as follows: “A catalogue of pictures is stupid enough, except that I naturally put down those that attract my attention, and try in some degree to convey the impression they made, so as to induce you to sympathise in my feelings with regard to them” (*Rambles* 1: 110). Not only does Shelley share with the readers exclusively the experience of those works of art with which she sympathized, but she also aims at arousing her readers’ sympathy towards the same objects on account of the feelings that they awakened in her. Thus, in addition to the descriptions of landscapes, also the descriptions of works of art in *Rambles* have

the function of educating and training the readers in their ability to sympathize with their fellow-creatures – and with Shelley’s authorial persona in the first place.

The readers’ education through art, however, occurs also on another level and aims at developing and refining the audience’s taste. During her tour of Europe, Shelley herself went through a process of discovery and learning in the field of Fine Arts helped, as she mentions in *Rambles*, by the works of her friend Anna Brownell Jameson (1794-1860) – the first Victorian woman to become an eminent and popular art critic – and by the well-known French art writer Alexis-François Rio (1797-1874). Shelley had read and appreciated Rio’s most famous work *De la poésie chrétienne dans son matière et dans ses formes* (1836) and, having met him and his wife by chance in Germany, she had the opportunity to learn from his art expertise, touring the galleries of Dresden and Rome in his company (Moskal, “Speaking the Unspeakable” 192-193). In *Rambles* she sometimes claims to have “an uncultivated eye” (*Rambles* 1: 222) and she refers to her own “ignorance” (*Rambles* 1: 245), comparing her judgements to those of the “connoisseur” (*Rambles* 1: 244). These statements sound in part like lip-service to the notion of appropriate subject matter for women. Because professional art criticism as a subject was still considered the proper domain of men, Shelley – as Moskal points out – had to work “within the gendered constraints of her time, accepting the role of amateur commentator allotted to women” (“Speaking the Unspeakable” 192). As a matter of fact, in spite of her self-effacement, in *Rambles* Shelley proves to have a cultivated and sensitive taste that was also praised by reviewers of the time.³¹ Most importantly, through her own experience, she demonstrates her belief that taste, like any other faculty, could be

³¹ As Smith reports: “Reviewers agreed that *Rambles* was a guide to aesthetic appreciation; *Tait’s* felt that Shelley’s descriptions of paintings were refreshingly “devoid of the slang and technicalities of criticism (735), and both the *Athenaeum* (727) and the *Examiner* praised her taste” (Smith 168).

developed, improved, and educated through knowledge. At the beginning of her residence in Florence, she states these convictions, distancing herself both from the art experts and from those who believed that taste is an innate and spontaneous ability:

I have not the remotest pretension to being a connoisseur; nor do I say, as some have done, “I do not know what is called good, but I know what pleases me” – giving it to be understood, by these words, that they have an untaught instinct, transcending culture of the student. I believe, in all matters of art, good taste results from natural powers joined to familiarity with the best productions. To read sublime poetry, to hear excellent music, to view the finest pictures, the most admirable statues, and harmonious and stately architecture, is the best school in which to learn to appreciate what approaches nearest to perfection in each. (*Rambles 2*: 140)

During her tour of Europe Shelley based her art criticism not only on her “natural powers,” the spontaneous sympathy that she felt for one work of art rather than another. She also learned from the “culture of the student,” amassing knowledge through experience and becoming one with the best expressions of art and beauty ever created. Her taste is thus “good taste” because it ensues from the union between “instinct” and “familiarity with the best productions.” At the end of a letter of *Rambles*, in which she discusses the merits of ideal art in the Florentine painters of the earlier school, she disclaims her own “knowledge” and “powers of observation” and she maintains that her intention is “just to shew [*sic*] the way towards, not to guide you (for I cannot), in your search after pictorial excellence” (*Rambles 2*: 151). In spite of her disavowals, however, it is clear that Shelley’s pedagogical scope in *Rambles* encompasses also art criticism: by following the authorial persona in her “search after pictorial excellence,” readers would acquire “good taste” which results from the combination of their “natural powers” to sympathize with the feelings inspired in the observer by the objects observed and of the knowledge gained by the contemplation of the “best productions.”

Art descriptions and in particular Shelley's responses to paintings of the Madonna with child represent in the second part of *Rambles* the main channel through which she conveys her reflections on her role as a mother and on her relationship with her son Percy. The theme of loss connected with her fear of water as the cause of tragic events is resumed at the beginning of the second part of *Rambles*, but Shelley does not appear as obsessed with motherly anxiety and foreboding of evils as she is in the first part of the book. Before embarking in London for a rough passage on the stormy sea, she expresses her aversion for what she significantly refers to as "the antipathetic element" (*Rambles* 1: 157) and regards as the source of all her troubles: "I hate and dread the sea; having suffered – oh, what suffering it is! – how absorbing! – how degrading! – how without remedy!" (*Rambles* 1: 156). Once on the Continent, in the span of a single day she endures a series of accidental losses (a passport, a basket, two cloaks, and a carpet-bag) that culminate in the theft of a considerable amount of money from their hotel rooms. These losses serve to remind her of the much greater losses she had suffered in life, which often left her feeling in a state of alarm:

"Welcome this evil, so that it may be the only one!" I said it from my heart; for alas! I ever live with a dark shadow hovering near me. One whose life has been stained by tragedy can never regain a healthy tone of mind [...]. I am haunted by terror. It stalks beside me by day, and whispers to me, in dreams, at night. (*Rambles* 1: 165-166)

Fear of a possible calamity arising from water determines also Shelley's travelling plans and, in particular, her decision to spend the summer in Germany rather than in Tyrol, a region with very beautiful scenery but also with an abundant number of sailable lakes: "I should like the Tyrol [...]; but then I want a few months of peace, and not to be near a lake, so to live in one ecstasy of fear" (*Rambles* 1: 173-174). In the course of the second

part of the book, however, Shelley's references to her traumatic experiences of loss caused by "the antipathetic element" progressively disappear, and ironically it is exactly through water, in the form of the curative waters of a German bath, that she starts a process of healing both from her "nervous illness" (*Rambles* 1: 2) and from the sorrows of her past. With her young travelling companions, she decides to spend a month in Kissingen, a German spa resort situated in the Kingdom of Bavaria, that she chooses based on the recommendations of one of the most authoritative books of the time on the benefits of German baths.³² At the end of her spa treatment, Shelley does not find a considerable improvement in her health and longs to change locations: "I am heartily tired of the waters, the promenade, the dinners, the sick; and the surrounding scenery is by no means interesting enough to compensate for our disagreeable style of life" (*Rambles* 1: 190). Nevertheless, the stay in Kissingen marks a shift in her attitude towards her past and a noticeable improvement in her state of mind – if not a substantial restoration of her physical health. As she predicted at the beginning of her journey, her "brooding thoughts"– especially her fears resulting from her previous traumatic experiences – start to become "scattered abroad" (*Rambles* 1: 2), while the excitement derived from the "frequent change of place" and "the new ideas suggested by travelling" (*Rambles* 1: 158) begin to distract her from her old worries and to boost her spirits.

Shelley's narration of her stay in Kissingen represents also a prelude to the central themes of the last part of *Rambles*: the censure of the abuses of tyranny and the advocacy of Italian nationalism. In three long letters, Shelley refers to the frustration of finding herself amid "a regiment of sick people" (*Rambles* 1: 184) strictly regulated by a daily

³² The book entitled *The Spas of Germany* was written by the English doctor Augustus Bozzi Granville and was first printed in 1837 (Kautz 179).

routine that did not concern only the time, the amount, and the kind of waters that the “*malades*” (*Rambles* 1: 187) needed to drink, but also every other aspect of their lives – from the limited kinds of foods and drinks that they were allowed to consume to the few activities and amusements that they were permitted to enjoy during the period of their “*cur*” (*Rambles* 1: 184). In spite of her initially declared faith in the benefits of the mineral waters,³³ she grows increasingly impatient with the arbitrary regulations enforced on the sick people by the spa physicians and endorsed by the King of Bavaria, who saw in the baths a source of income and worried about their reputation (Schor, “Mary Shelley in Transit” 244). Exasperated by prohibitions imposed on every aspect of the life of the spa-goers, Shelley describes the medical regimen of the cure, using military vocabulary and implicitly comparing the tyrannical authority of the physicians with the political despotism of some European rulers of the time (Kautz 168-170). The restrictions inflicted on the diet of the patients are the most burdensome for Shelley:

So many things are supposed to disagree with the waters, that not only everything substantial, but also butter, fruit, tea, coffee, and milk are prohibited. [...] The King of Bavaria is so afraid that his medicinal waters may fall into disrepute if the drinkers should eat what disagrees with them, that we only eat what he, in conjunction with a triumvirate of doctors, is pleased to allow us. Every now and then a new article is struck out from our bill of fare, notice being sent from this council, [...] to the effect that, whoever in Kissingen should serve at any table pork, veal, salad, fruit &c. &c. &c., should be fined so many florins. (*Rambles* 1: 185-186)

The “pleasures of the palate” are thus “annihilated” (*Rambles* 1: 186) and hardly any other distraction is granted to the sick:

We *malades* are forbidden to exert our intellects. (*Rambles* 1: 187)

³³ At the beginning of her stay in Bad Kissingen, Shelley asserts: “I believe [the waters] to be very conducive to the restoration of health” (*Rambles* 1: 185). And again later on she avows: “Though the *cur* of these waters is not an agreeable process, I have great faith in the advantages that accrue” (*Rambles* 1: 189).

[T]he physicians here discountenance every sort of excitement, and their *malades* are very obedient. (*Rambles* 1: 190)

[T]he despotic decree of the triumvirate of doctors abovementioned, [...] maintain[s] dancing to be absolutely incompatible with drinking the waters. (*Rambles* 1: 191)

[T]he physicians [...] forbid gambling. (*Rambles* 1: 193)

There is another decree of the physicians: children are prohibited, because the mind must enjoy perfect repose, and children are apt to create disturbance in the hearts of tender parents. (*Rambles* 1: 198)

Of course this last restriction in particular must have appeared the more absurd and nonsensical to Shelley, who as a mother knew how distressful the separation from one's children could be. But she pushes the parallel between political tyranny and the despotism of the doctors in Kissingen even further, when she ironically speculates on the opportunity of enforcing postal surveillance on the patients of the spa as well (Kautz 170):

It is surprising that, to forward the cure, all the letters are not opened first by the doctors, and not delivered if they contain any disagreeable news. As yet, they only exhort the friends of the sick to spare them every painful emotion, in their correspondence; but Kissingen will not be perfect, until the post is put under medical *surveillance*. (*Rambles* 1: 198)

During her previous journey of 1840 in the Austrian-ruled Lombardy, Shelley had personally experienced the oppressive atmosphere of a despotic regime, and she herself possibly became a victim of political espionage having had some of her correspondence allegedly intercepted and delayed (see Crook 84-86). That Shelley most likely had in mind the repressive ways of the Austrian government when she described the arbitrary medical regimen of the “*cur*” is suggested also by the fact that the only direct reference to Italian politics in the second part of *Rambles* is to be found in the letters she wrote from Kissingen. Talking about the vegetation of the woods around the German bath, where the

visitors usually took the long walks prescribed by the course of treatment, she remarks: “We find here a few fire-flies: like unfortunate Italian exiles, they gleam with subdued brightness in an ungenial clime, and one wonders how they can endure so northern a temperature” (*Rambles* 1: 187). In the 1830s and 1840s an increasing number of Italians had to leave the country to avoid being persecuted for their liberal political ideas. Many of them went north: some like Giuseppe Mazzini escaped to England, others like Shelley’s friend Gatteschi found refuge in France. Moreover, Italians who committed crimes or were suspected of conspiring against the Austrian regime were sent north to the fortress-prison of Spielberg, as happened to Count Federico Confalonieri. Shelley had previously referred to this famous victim of Austrian tyranny with words that closely resemble her comparison between Italian exiles and fire-flies: “his life [was] withered, as a glorious exotic transported to the North, nipped by frosts it was never born to feel” (*Rambles* 1: 121). Evidently through these apparently casual references and comparisons, Shelley meant to expand the scope of her censure and to hint at more alarming forms of authoritarianism. In the same way as in the letters from Kissingen she criticizes and resists the control that political authorities strive to enforce on medical treatment and on private aspects of the patients’ lives (Kautz 170), in the rest of the book she condemns any kind of coercive, repressive, or restrictive act imposed by despotic governments on the freedom of their subjects.

At the end of her stay in Kissingen Shelley is relieved to go on with her rambles and to remove herself and her young travelling companions from the “infliction [...] to be dieted by the King of Bavaria, and to live [...] surrounded by *lepers*” (*Rambles* 1: 188). However, the impression that Shelley feels frustrated, confined, and sometimes even

manipulated, continues after her departure from Kissingen for the whole duration of her stay in Germany. As has been noted, “she never felt at home in Germany” (Orr par. 42) and this was due mainly to the fact that neither she nor the people in her party could speak or understand the language: “We none of us understood German – confession of shame!” (*Rambles* 1: 162). During her first journey of 1840, after the passage from a French city to a German-speaking region, she observed: “[W]e became worse than deaf, for we heard but could not understand” (*Rambles* 1: 16). In the second part of *Rambles*, she relates several incidents that show how her difficulty in communicating in German made a chore of tending to her basic needs – cleanliness, a comfortable bed, or edible food. Often she feels taken advantage of by rude coachmen who attempt to overcharge her or by greedy innkeepers who force her and her party to spend the night at their hotels by refusing to provide them with horses and carriages to proceed with their journey (see for example *Rambles* 1: 268; 2: 30). In spite of her effort to learn the language “in its native country” (*Rambles* 1: 174), she does not manage to make much progress and has to acknowledge that German remains for her a “crabbed” and “antipathetic” tongue (*Rambles* 1: 195).

As for the country itself, Germany represents for Shelley mainly a “vast, unseen” (*Rambles* 1: 174) region that arouses her curiosity for the unknown and fascinates her principally for the important historical events that took place in its territory:

Tacitus’s Germany – a land of forests and heroes. Luther’s Germany, in which sprung up the Reformation, giving freedom to the souls of men. The land of Schiller and Goëthe. [...] And this, too, is the stage on which Napoleon’s imperial drama drew to a close. What oceans of human blood have drenched the soil of Germany even since my birth. Since I love the mysterious, the unknown, the wild, the renowned, you will not wonder that I feel drawn on step by step into the heart of Germany. (*Rambles* 1: 174-175)

Since her scarce knowledge of the language prevents her from gaining a true comprehension of the character of its inhabitants,³⁴ in the part of *Rambles* that covers her journey through Germany, Shelley focuses mostly on descriptions of the landscape. But while in the first part of the book landscape descriptions are used chiefly as a way to train the readers in their ability to sympathize, here landscapes are represented and interpreted as the stage of battles and events that marked the history of the human struggle for freedom from political and religious tyranny. For example, the domains of the Prince of Hesse Cassel, which she reaches right after leaving Kissingen, are described as the territories where “a scene was enacted” – a cruel act of tyranny that her countrymen possibly remembered without taking into account the human suffering that it involved (Nitchie 38):

When we read of the *Hessians* in the American war, we have a vague idea that our government called in the aid of foreign mercenaries to subdue the revolted colonies [...]. But our imagination does not transport itself to the homes of the unfortunate Germans; nor is our abhorrence of the tyranny that sent them to die in another hemisphere awakened. (*Rambles* 1: 203)

The German poet Schiller had recorded in his tragedy *Kabale und Liebe* (Cabal and Love, 1784) the injustice suffered by the Hessian soldiers sold for money by their own prince, but Shelley laments that history has otherwise neglected to preserve the memory of this abuse. In her opinion, the “duty” of history is precisely to keep “the record and memory” (*Rambles* 1: 205) of such events, so that human beings can learn from them and prevent the same wrongs from happening again. History should teach, in particular, that despotism could at any moment cause similar tragedies, and Shelley is not afraid to call attention to the Russian czardom, one of the most reactionary absolutistic regimes of the

³⁴ At the beginning of her journey in Germany, Shelley laments: “[O]f the people whom I cannot understand, I shall have so little to say” (*Rambles* 1: 175).

time: “And yet what act of cruelty and tyranny may not be reacted on the stage of the world, which we boast of as civilised, if one man has uncontrolled power over the lives of many, the unwritten story of Russia may hereafter tell” (*Rambles* 1: 205).

In Eisenach, she visits the Castle of Wartburg, where Luther spent ten months of his life, busily translating the Bible and writing some of the most important documents of the Protestant Reformation. Her “sense of satisfied curiosity” (*Rambles* 1: 208) at being able to observe the very chamber where Luther lived and worked and where such an important spiritual revolution developed fills her with an enthusiasm that makes her cry out in praise of the initiator of the Reformation:

The honoured name of Luther [...] is rendered sacred by his struggle, the most fearful human life presents, with antique mis-beliefs and errors upheld by authority. [...] Hail to the good fight, the heart says everywhere; hail to the soil whence intellectual liberty gained, with toil and suffering, the victory – not complete yet – but which, thanks to the men of those time [*sic*], can never suffer entire defeat! In time, it will spread to those countries which are still subject to Papacy. (*Rambles* 1: 208-209)

The reference to the Papacy, like the previous reference to Russia, expands her analysis of historical events evoked by the visited sites to examples of tyranny taken from the political situation of her time. The Papacy exercised both religious and political despotism in Rome and in the Italian territories under its direct control (the so-called Papal States), and this comment anticipates the censure that Shelley devotes to the Pope’s rule in the third part of *Rambles*. After leaving Weimar, where she honours the tombs of the German poets Goethe and Schiller, she remarks on the monotony of the “dreary landscape” (*Rambles* 1: 213) that she and her party have to cross on their way to Leipzig and Berlin. Though unappealing in itself, the scenery acquires significance if observed through the lens of history:

[N]othing can be more unvaried or uninteresting than these vast plains; uninteresting indeed, in outward aspect, yet claiming our attention and exciting our curiosity as the scene of a thousand battles, above all, of that last struggle, when yielding the ground inch by inch, mile by mile, Napoleon was driven from Dresden to the Rhine. (*Rambles* 1: 213)

Shelley mentions that the same territories were also “the scenes of battles and victories of Gustavus Adolphus, and Frederic the Great” (*Rambles* 1: 214) but, after presenting the feats and the characters of these two kings of the past, she returns to consider the events of the more recent Napoleonic wars.

Throughout this section of *Rambles*, she appears particularly eager to remind her British audience that Germany was the theatre where the military downfall of their archenemy Napoleon took place and she notices all the sites connected with his defeat. Approaching Leipzig, where the French army of Napoleon received the first big blow in 1813, she points out the seemingly insignificant narrow stream and bridge where the battle was fought and “the fate of an empire” (*Rambles* 1: 214) was decided. In Koblenz, she calls attention to “the monument erected by French vanity at the time of Napoleon’s invasion of Russia to commemorate with pompous vauntings an expedition that caused his downfall” (*Rambles* 1: 169). In Berlin, she observes how the portraits of Napoleon and Josephine, donated to the Germans as “impertinent” presents during the time of the French conquest, were still displayed in the royal palace “as trophies of Prussian victories” (*Rambles* 1: 226). In Bohemia, on her way to Prague she pauses to describe some “bare, sandy, uplands” significant only for having been the combat zone of another of Napoleon’s defeats: “The country round Arbesau is the scene of one of the most fatal battles, the defeat of Vandamme, which caused the overthrow of Napoleon. The landscape is otherwise devoid of interest” (*Rambles* 1: 277). Evidently, Shelley’s purpose is to underscore the disastrous end result of Napoleon’s aggressive politics of conquest.

In her Preface to *Rambles* she had presented Britain rather than France as the initiator of the call for freedom that had spread in several countries over the previous decades. For this reason she neglects to acknowledge that Napoleon helped to propagate the ideals of the French Revolution all over Europe, and she limits herself to celebrating the downfall of his authoritarian imperialistic ambitions by hinting at his military defeats. Through the historical events evoked by the landscapes and the sites visited, Shelley educates her readers in the “abhorrence of (the) tyranny,” informing them about the human tragedies caused by despotism and awakening their sympathies towards the abused people (*Rambles* 1: 203).

This education through history continues in the third part of *Rambles*, and as she approaches Italy Shelley calls attention to two peoples – the Bohemians and the Tyrolese – who like the Italians had been victims of Austrian despotism and of French imperialism respectively. In the letter of *Rambles* dedicated to her visit to Prague, she traces the history of Bohemia, reminding her readers that the region used to be an independent kingdom and that the first spark of the Protestant Reformation was originated there by John Huss. “[N]ow,” she laments, Bohemia, like Italy, is “but a province of Austria” and also Protestantism did not survive the aggressive Catholic Counter-Reformation brought about by the Jesuits supported by the Austrian monarchy (*Rambles* 2: 3). Bohemia had lost its independence and had been incorporated into the Austrian Habsburg monarchy ever since the beginning of the seventeenth century during the Thirty Years’ War, which was triggered precisely by the attempt of the Protestant Bohemian nobles to preserve their right to elect their own king. Shelley recounts these historical events hinting at the fact that at that time, and as was still true in her day, the Austrian rule had always aimed

at erasing the national character of the countries and peoples subjected to its authority. Her description of the political action of the Austrian monarchy in sixteenth-century Bohemia can be easily applied to the countries ruled by the Austrian Empire in the nineteenth century: “The Emperor supported Catholicism, and wished to assimilate Bohemia to his Austrian provinces in language, laws and religion” (*Rambles 2: 3*). And her speculations about how European history could have been different if Bohemia had been able to maintain its political and religious liberty aim at prompting sympathy towards all the oppressed populations who, like the Bohemians, “bear the marks of a conquered people” and “remember that they were once free” (*Rambles 2: 16-17*).

Shelley’s journey through the Tyrol evokes another glorious “struggle for liberty” fought by the Tyrolese people and their heroic leader, Andreas Hofer, to preserve their national identity and independence (*Rambles 2: 44*). The Austrian Habsburg monarchy, which had ruled the Tyrol for centuries with unusual moderation and without “the cloven foot of despotism,” is depicted here as guilty of treachery towards the loyal and virtuous Tyrolese subjects (*Rambles 2: 41*). Napoleon, instead, acts as the true villain and is represented as a cruel and hypocritical tyrant, whose arbitrary politics of conquest disrespected the national character and traditions of the acquired countries and aimed only at their subjugation.³⁵ Shelley poignantly presents the event that triggered the revolt of the Tyrolese in these terms: “It suited the views of Napoleon that the Tyrol should belong to Bavaria [...]; and by the treaty of Presburg in 1805, Austria ceded, with reluctance it is true, but still it ceded, the best jewel of its crown” (*Rambles 2: 42*). The Tyrolese common people and peasantry rose up against the despotism of their new

³⁵ Shelley writes of Napoleon: “his example had taught that the best way to tame a people was to give them new names, and change their local demarcations; and when they revolted against the tyranny [...] he punished without mercy the oppressed, wronged, and insulted insurgents” (*Rambles 2: 43*).

Franco-Bavarian rulers and, with heroic deeds and daring ambushes, united around their brave and popular leader Hofer, they temporarily managed to drive away the French and Bavarian troops. Shelley describes with enthusiasm their acts of heroism and patriotism, pointing out how, in spite of the Tyrolese loyalty to the Habsburg monarchy, the Austrians signed two more armistices with the French that reconfirmed the ceding of Tyrol to Bavaria. Ultimately the Tyrolese were defeated and Hofer was captured and rapidly executed. Shelley openly accuses Napoleon of ordering Hofer's death and censures his merciless behaviour towards the insurgents:

Napoleon, in his haughty contempt and insolent indignation at any opposition to his will, chose to regard the struggle of the Tyrolese for liberty as the lawless tumult of freebooters; he magnified the very few acts of barbarity of which the peasantry had been guilty [...] and had the baseness to set a price on the head of the peasant chiefs. (*Rambles* 2: 56)

By representing Napoleon as a tyrant, who wilfully pursued his imperialistic plans disregarding the national identity of the conquered territories, Shelley intended to discredit the largely accepted conviction among her British audience that Napoleon was the inspirer and initiator of nationalistic movements in countries like Italy. On the contrary, as the historical events that she relates demonstrate, national pride and the aspiration to freedom are to be regarded – in Bohemia and Tyrol as well as in Italy – as the rightful reaction of abused peoples against powerful and despotic regimes, like the Austrian and the French empires. The audience receive this lesson imparted by history, right before Shelley enters the Italian Peninsula. In the previous two sections of *Rambles*, the readers have been educated through natural, artistic, and historical sceneries and they have learned to sharpen their sensibility and become more understanding of their fellow-creatures. At last, in the final section of the book, Shelley delivers her political message

to an audience that she has educated and befriended and that is thus more likely to sympathize with the Italian people and to look favourably on their rising nationalism.

2.4 Part III of *Rambles*: A Lesson in Italian Nationalism

The third part of *Rambles* covers the second part of Shelley's travel through Europe and focuses mostly on the months she spent in Italy (from September 1842 to July 1843), omitting the account of the journey home. From Prague, Shelley and her party rapidly travelled via Linz, Salzburg, and Innsbruck to Trent and entered Italy through Lake Garda. They stayed in Venice for a month and arrived in Florence in November, where they spent the winter. In March they moved to Rome in time to assist at the ceremonies for the Holy Week in the Vatican. From there, they reached Sorrento, where they passed the summer months making excursions to Capri, Pompeii, and Amalfi. The journey from Prague to Venice is suffused with Shelley's impatience to arrive in the Peninsula. Not even the sublime beauty of the nature and the mountain scenery of Styria, where she plans to go back at a later date, can lure her away from her desire to go to Italy and from her interest in Italian people (Schor, "Mary Shelley in Transit" 244):

What a summer might here be spent! – what a life, I would say, had not society and home a claim; – were it not a dream that we can be happy only in the contemplation of nature, removed from all intercourse with our equals. [...] though the thought of Italy reproaches, and for *life*, I should not hesitate to choose between the two. (*Rambles* 2: 33)

As she draws nearer and nearer to the Peninsula, the mountain streams that carry their waters to Italian rivers and lakes, the climate that becomes more pleasant, and the lowering hills covered by vines announce her the entrance into "that divine country" and fill her with a "personal feeling of joy" (*Rambles* 2: 49, 61). Once she arrives in Italian-

speaking Trent, Shelley is “restored to the privilege of speech” thanks to her knowledge of the Italian language³⁶ (*Rambles* 2: 65). She thus regains the direct communication and interaction with common people that she missed so much among the Germans, and she revels in “find[ing] [her]self surrounded by [her] dear, courteous, kind Italians” (*Rambles* 2: 63). As she anticipated in the Preface to *Rambles*, once she reaches the most celebrated Italian cities, of which she “could say little [...] that had not been said so often and so well before,” her attention is turned to “the people, especially in a political point of view” (*Rambles* 1: viii). The structure of the last part of the book reflects this renewed interest in Italian people and politics, alternating letters that describe her sightseeing and museum-going with letters devoted to the analysis of society in the different Italian regions.

In Venice Shelley spent her time wandering through its narrow streets or being rowed by gondoliers along the countless canals of the city. The series of descriptions of famous and unusual Venetian sights filled with names of churches, palaces, and paintings visited during her rambles is interrupted by a letter in which she “endeavour[s] [...] to tell [...] something of the Venetians” (*Rambles* 2: 102). Her portrait of Venetian society aims at putting into perspective British prejudices about the alleged vices and corruption of the inhabitants of the city. She contextualizes what her own husband had written about them, explaining that he did not base his letters on direct knowledge of the Venetians, but rather on the opinions of other English expatriates who had lived there longer and who “chose

³⁶ In Part I of *Rambles*, Shelley had stated her knowledge of Italian, which she had learned during her first prolonged stay in Italy between 1818 and 1823: “I certainly did speak Italian: it had been strange if I did not; not that I could boast of any extraordinary facility of conversation or elegance of diction, but mine was a peculiarly useful Italian; from having lived long in the country, all its household terms were familiar to me; and I remembered the time when it was more natural to me to speak to common people in that language than in my own” (*Rambles* 1: 55-56).

to erect themselves into censor of this people” (*Rambles 2*: 107). She also questions the accuracy of the opinions expressed by Lord Byron, whom she mentions as “Lord B—,” arguing that, if he found so “much to abhor” and “represented [it] as detestable” in Venice, it was because he chose to associate himself with the most vicious and depraved portion of the population (*Rambles 2*: 107). In the same way as in her landscape and art descriptions Shelley encourages her audience to sympathize with the observer’s perceptions, here the readers are asked to go beyond their own point of view and to consider customs and moral rules as relative to the culture and society that produced them. She notices, for example, how in Venice “it is not etiquette for a lady to enter a *caffè*,” so that female English tourists who ignore this custom are regarded as improper when they go into the local coffee shops (*Rambles 2*: 104). “Italian morality is not ours;” she reasons, “but if it falls short in some things, perhaps in others, if we knew them well, we should be obliged to confess its superiority” (*Rambles 2*: 108). Like Lewald and Cobbe, she offers an analysis of the most important aspects of Italian society from the institution of marriage and family relations to the local inheritance practices and their consequences for the structure of the aristocracy. On many of these aspects the Austrians, who after Napoleon’s downfall ruled over Venice and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, had a negative impact. Their attempt to revive the trade in Venice, connecting it to the dry land with a railroad, was motivated by greed, since two thirds of the taxes exacted there went to the Austrian government. The Emperor of Austria fostered the study of science in his dominions, but education for children was bad and inefficient, while in the universities there was “a perpetual check at work, to prevent the students imbibing liberal opinions” (*Rambles 2*: 110). For young Italian men there were no careers

available unless they swore their loyalty to Austria, while members of the aristocracy often already impoverished by the vice of gambling were stripped also of their titles when the Austrians took possession of Venetia and Lombardy. Shelley recognizes lack of knowledge and bad education as “the great misfortune” that afflicts Venetian society (*Rambles* 2: 110). In spite of their “graceful manners” and their “intuitive taste,” Italians lack the “desire for improvement [that] is the salt for the human intellect” and they do not have “a wish to acquire knowledge [that] is natural to a well-conditioned mind” (*Rambles* 2: 106). Education, once again, is suggested as the only possible way for improvement, and even if the Austrian empire preferred its subjects to stay ignorant and did very little to foster their education, she concludes by restating her conviction that: “A little light is better than total darkness; especially in Italy, where the cleverness of the people prevents their ever becoming stupid. They must learn something; and a little good is better than all bad.” (*Rambles* 2: 118).

Also in Florence, when Shelley lays aside her descriptions of the artistic treasures of the city to say something about Tuscan society, she comes to the same conclusion and reasserts the lack of knowledge and education as the bane of the country. After the end of the Napoleonic era and the Congress of Vienna, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, though aligned with Austria, had been governed by two relatively moderate sovereigns, Ferdinand III and Leopold II, who wanted to keep their subjects happy and were averse to the use of strong measures like capital punishments and secret police (Header 76). Also from the point of view of economics Tuscany appeared as a thriving region. Shelley is “struck by the appearance of ease and equality that reign[ed] in Tuscany” and she notices how “the squalid penury, hard labour and famine” that afflicted the poor in England were

uncommon among the Tuscans (*Rambles* 2: 181-182). While the lower classes in Tuscany were comparatively better off than their English counterparts, Tuscans as a whole suffered from another kind of poverty. Shelley calls it “the hunger of the mind” and describes it as the absence of aspirations and of the desire for improvement, which resulted from idle wellbeing and from the awareness, demonstrated by centuries of Florentine history, that oppression followed any attempt at gaining freedom (*Rambles* 2: 185). Making reference to something told to her by an Italian, she summarizes the situation in Tuscany in the following terms:

Tyranny is, with us, a serpent hid among flowers; and I, for one, sympathise with the sentiment of a Florentine poet – *odio il tiranno che col sonno uccide*.³⁷ There are other evils besides those which press upon the *material* part of our nature, and the new generation in Tuscany feels wrongs of another description. The better spirits of our country pine for the intellectual food of which they are deprived. (*Rambles* 2: 188-189)

Tuscany was generally regarded “as the best governed and happiest Italian state,” but Shelley disputes also this stereotype about Italy, uncovering the miseries that even an apparently mild and benevolent despotism could bring about in the population (*Rambles* 2: 161). As a matter of fact, she considers the situation of the Tuscans worse than the circumstances of the Lombards and the Venetians. While in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia the harsh tyranny of the Austrian rule awakened in the population a hatred of the foreign power and a desire for freedom and improvement, in Tuscany the moderate government of the Grand Duke and the relative prosperity of the region lulled its inhabitants into a state of idleness that stifled their nobler aspirations.

³⁷ “I hate the tyrant who kills with sleep.” The quotation is taken from Giovanni Battista Niccolini’s tragedy *Antonio Foscarini*, act I, scene IV.

Once she arrives in Rome, her analysis of society in the Pontifical States exposes the ills of what she regards as the worst of all Italian regimes: the religious and political tyranny of the Pope. Shelley gathers her comments on people and politics in a letter that follows a series of descriptions of her rambles through the city. The way in which she organizes her discussion, distinguishing between Catholicism as a religion and the Catholic Church as a spiritual and temporal institution, sets her apart from the majority of travel writers of the time who dealt with the same topic. Catholicism and the Catholic Church were usually the targets of much contempt and criticism in nineteenth-century travelogues by Protestant authors. In *Italics* and *Reisebriefe* respectively, Cobbe's and Lewald's censure of the superstition, corruption, and beggary associated with the Papacy and the clergy represent an example of the kind of attack commonly addressed to Catholicism in travel books about Italy. Shelley herself refers to this disparaging attitude of her countrymen towards Catholicism, quoting a passage from the book *Rome in the Nineteenth Century* published in 1820 by the Scottish travel writer Charlotte Eaton, who argued that Catholicism, in the countries where it was established, inevitably produced indolence, dirt, and beggary. Shelley refuses to align herself with these general prejudices about Catholicism and she is not afraid of pointing out the advantages of a religion that encourages its believers to sympathize with their fellow-creatures and to be charitable towards their neighbours (*Rambles* 2: 234). Previously, in *Rambles* she had defined the poetry of Dante's *Paradiso* and the "celestial and pure beauty" of religious paintings by early Italian artists as "the sublimest achievement of Catholicism" (*Rambles* 2: 218, 91). In the letter dedicated to the description of the ceremonies of the Holy Week, she admires how in Catholicism aesthetic and artistic beauty are employed in the divine worship to

enable the weak human soul to elevate itself to heaven and to reach “pious ecstasies” (*Rambles 2: 233*). She thus describes the Sistine Chapel as “made sacred by the most sublime works of Michael Angelo,” while the famous Miserere composed by Allegri to be performed in the Chapel exclusively during the Holy Week is characterized as “solemn, pathetic, religious” and capable of inspiring “ardent aspiration for immortality.” Even the traditional illumination of St. Peter is said to imitate “the most sublime act of divine power” and to remind the observer of God’s creation of light in the Genesis (*Rambles 2: 231-232*). Above all Shelley praises Catholics for considering “works of charity” as their “paramount duty” (*Rambles 2: 235*). In Rome the sick, the poor, and the old are assisted by religious confraternities of citizens and charitable institutions, the convents distribute food regularly to the needy, and though the beggars are many, she observes that: “there is no absolute want” (*Rambles 2: 235*).

Although Shelley’s judgement of Catholicism is less biased than that of other Protestant travel writers of the time and she appreciates it especially as a form of social aid and as the inspirer of sublime works of art, she addresses her harshest criticism to the Catholic Church and the Papacy as a form of temporal rule. Against the backdrop of her account of the fatal cholera epidemic of 1837, she contrasts the selfless acts of charity of the religious confraternities and the ordinary clergy with the superstitious and irresponsible behaviour of the government of the Church. The Pope, the cardinals, and the heads of the government first convinced the population that the Holy City of Rome would be spared from the epidemic and encouraged them to spend their money on lamps and candles for “propitiating Heaven” (*Rambles 2: 239*). Then, once the city was plagued by the cholera that the processions and the collective prayers had helped to propagate,

they shut themselves up in their palaces or fled and did nothing to aid the sick. She reports and shares the common conviction that “the temporal rule of the Church is [...] the chief source of the nation’s misfortune” (*Rambles 2*: 244). Because the Popes were not only “the head[s] of a religion that preached equality” but also temporal leaders, in the course of the centuries they became allied with “the sovereigns who aimed at despotism,” and as the faith decayed and the tributes from the Christian world decreased, they “clung more tenaciously” to the territories of the Papal States from which they derived their revenues (*Rambles 2*: 245). Especially after the French Revolution, the government of the Church had become one of the most reactionary. Shelley describes it as based on “a system of clients,” and on the “corruption” and “cupidity” of the Pope and the prelates who lived on public revenue, held all the public offices, and were opposed to “every liberal notion, every social progress” for fear that, “with industry and knowledge, rebellion” would find its way among the population (*Rambles 2*: 246-247). She notices how in Rome the Pope had managed to obtain “passive submission” from his subjects, who lived “in a sort of hazy apathy” as if they were “under a spell” (*Rambles 2*: 242-243). But in the Marches, Romagna, and the other pontifical dominions assigned to the Church after Napoleon’s downfall, the abolition of their former independence and ancient privileges and the heavy taxations imposed “to support in splendour the state and luxury of the Cardinals” had caused discontent and uprising in the population (*Rambles 2*: 248).³⁸

³⁸ Cobbe in *Italics* argues that while locomotion is a sign of civilization, tyranny usually resists the development of roads and railways because it fears movement of individuals and exchange of ideas. Shelley appears to agree with Cobbe’s later claim when she observes that: “The Pope [...] does all he can to keep [the inhabitants of Rome and its neighbourhood] from communicating with the discontented districts. For this reason he is opposed to the construction of railroads; that, as he says, his revolutionary subjects of the East may not corrupt his obedient children of the West” (*Rambles 2*: 243).

On the one hand, in the pontifical dominions of the East of Italy, like the Marches and Romagna, the tyranny of the Papacy stirred up insurrections and rebellion in the population as in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. On the other hand, in Rome, because of the charitable assistance offered to the poor and the relative affluence of the city, the subjects of the Pope like the Tuscans lived in a state of “easy indolence” and ignorance, held back from change and progress. For these reasons, Shelley concludes that: “The papal government is [...] the worst in Italy” (*Rambles* 2: 244). And while she is willing to acknowledge the merits of Catholicism as a religion, she condemns the political regime of the Catholic Church as inadequate: “But it is not eleemosynary charity that is needed – it is the spirit of improvement, just laws and an upright administration – none of these exist; and even scientific knowledge, encouraged in other parts of the Peninsula, is forbidden” (*Rambles* 2: 243). In each of the Italian states visited, Shelley manages to recognize the specific character of the inhabitants and to present the consequences that their different history and distinct governments had on society. In the Papal States, as well as in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and in the Austrian Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, however, she comes to the same conclusion: it was the lack of knowledge and education in which tyranny kept the population that prevented Italians from developing noble aspirations for improvement and independence.

To this discouraging picture of society in the different Italian regions, Shelley contrasts three letters in which she presents her readers with signs that showed that Italians had already started to educate themselves and to take action to bring about those changes that would eventually lead them to free themselves from despotism. In the first place, drawing most likely on the manuscript contributed by Gatteschi, she traces the

history of the most famous Italian secret society, the Carbonarist movement, disclaiming the misconceptions that were circulating about it and explaining its role in the genesis of Italian nationalism. She emphasizes the “Neapolitan origin” of the movement and recounts the story of its heroic leader Capo Bianco, who, in the mountains of Calabria in Southern Italy, founded a sect whose purpose was to fight for “Italian union and independence” under “republican institutions” (*Rambles* 2: 167). While the Catholic Church had turned religion into an instrument of political power and used the institution of confession to spy on “any act or thought inimical to the government or the church”, Capo Bianco founded a “*political religion*” that mingled the political cause with religious and mystic tenets and cloaked it in “impenetrable secrecy” for protection (*Rambles* 2: 175, 168). Since the society was founded in a district inhabited by charcoal burners, the first adherents to the sect received the name of Carbonari. The members had to undergo a terrible rite of initiation and were bound to each other by an oath of secrecy, loyalty, and mutual succour. Shelley insists that Carbonarism was not inspired by Napoleon, but rather it stemmed from hatred of the foreign invaders, and was created to oppose the repressive regime that the French, under the leadership of Napoleon’s brother-in-law Joachim Murat, had established in Southern Italy (Moskal, “Gender and Italian Nationalism” 194-95). The Carbonari were treated as if they were brigands and banditti but, in spite of “the atrocious and sanguinary methods” used by the French to disarm them, Carbonarism spread all over Italy after Murat’s fall. Shelley distances herself from secret societies (“Do not think that I advocate any secret society: the principle is bad”), and while she admires the spirit of the early Carbonari, who were motivated “by deep-rooted love of their country, and detestation of the vice, ignorance, and slavery,” she

condemns the violence and moral degeneration of the later followers of the sect, who committed many crimes sheltered by their secrecy (*Rambles 2*: 175, 177). The Carbonari, however, are credited with the great merit of having “first taught the Italians to consider themselves a forming nation,” helping to destroy the municipal prejudices and rivalries that divided Italy (*Rambles 2*: 180). In her attempt to win her audience’s approval of Italian nationalism, Shelley concludes by clarifying the relation between the Carbonari and the new Italian secret associations, like ‘Young Italy,’ whose leaders and members, who often lived as exiles in England and France, were looked upon as criminals and terrorists by a portion of the public opinion:³⁹

[A]bove all, they sedulously keep awake the spirit of national union. These new societies can never be as powerful as the Carbonari were [...]; but, if they have less power, they have committed no crimes; and work by spreading knowledge and civilization, instead of striking terror. (*Rambles 2*: 178-179).

Dismissing any connection of the new Italian secret societies with violence and criminality, Shelley presents as a major sign of the change that was taking place in Italy the fact that the purpose of the new associations was to save the country from what she regarded as its worst bane, the lack of knowledge.

Shelley recognizes in contemporary Italian literature another important sign that proved that the situation in the country was changing and that raised the hopes for a favourable outcome of Italian nationalism. In the letter that follows her analysis of Tuscan society, she shows how a new generation of Italian writers had already started to produce the “intellectual food” necessary to satisfy the “hunger of the mind” that afflicted

³⁹ Nora Crook points out that: “In the late 1830’s and early 1840’s especially, Italian exiles in Britain were regarded with suspicion by the government and the Tory press. [...] The *Atlas* (no right-wing organ) feared that Young Italy was a terrorist organisation as criminal as the Catiline conspiracy of ancient Rome” (Crook 84).

the country (*Rambles* 2: 189, 185). In England and France everybody reads and authors write to amuse their audience, she argues, but in Italy literature accomplishes the task of educating the readers:

Italian literature claims, at present, a very high rank in Europe. If the writers are less numerous, yet in genius they equal, and in moral taste they surpass, France and England. [...] The uneducated and idle in Italy do not read at all; and an Italian author writes for readers whom he respects, or wishes to instruct [...]. (*Rambles* 2: 190)

She thus introduces the contemporary Italian authors that she intends to discuss as “men who [...] reject letters as a tribute to frivolity, or means to fortune; consecrating them to the advancement of the great interests of their fellow-creatures” (*Rambles* 2: 193-194). According to Shelley, this new generation of Italian writers had restored Italian literature to what made it great at its outset: freedom of invention and “recourse to the real source of inspiration, [...] the national spirit of the age” (*Rambles* 2: 194, 193). Tracing the history of Italian literature, she explains that the first major Italian poets, like Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto, followed “the genuine impulse of their minds” rather than stylistic rules and, animated by “the true soul of poetry, the youth of the spirit,” they were able to condense in their works the essence of their age and their country (*Rambles* 2: 191). After the sixteenth century, Italy never enjoyed political freedom and, with few exceptions, no great literary works were produced by Italian poets. Afraid of incurring the anger of their despots if they attempted originality and novelty of thought, they became strict followers of the Aristotelian rules and imitators of the ancients, concentrating their efforts on grace of diction and elegance of style. At the end of the Napoleonic wars, a new generation of Italian writers had finally arisen prompted by the literary dispute between the classic and romantic schools. As Shelley illustrates, “The Romanticists wished to banish the

mythology – to make poetry patriotic – that is, founded on national faith, chronicles, and sympathies” (*Rambles* 2: 195). “The flower of Italian youth” enthusiastically embraced these principles choosing as subjects of their works national historical events, which they retold and reinterpreted to teach the national spirit of their country to their readers. Like the best Italian poets of the past, the new generation of romantic poets found inspiration in their age and their nationality and for this reason they had to be considered great. “The history of Italian poetry” she claims “confirms the truth, that the poet follows the real and sublime scope of art when he keeps in mind the character of his country and of his age. The highest Italian poetry is truly national” (*Rambles* 2: 191). By equating high poetry with national poetry, Shelley subverts the standard aesthetic criteria applied to the evaluation of literary works and establishes that their worth should depend on their national and historical character and in particular on their capacity to enhance and pass on the national and historical spirit of a country.

Having described Romanticism as founded on nationalism and history, it is not surprising that she esteems as the highest Italian literature of her time works that were romantic and national in their spirit and historical in their inspiration. As anticipated in the Preface to *Rambles*, Shelley regards the poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni and the playwright Giovanni Battista Niccolini as the most influential among the new generation of Italian writers. And she includes in her discussion of Italian literature also the works of two Italian historians of the time, Pietro Colletta and Michele Amari, praising them for their “art of narrating events, and describing men and countries, as well as of deducing philosophical conclusions from the experience of past ages” (*Rambles* 2: 205). As Moskal points out, Shelley thus “broadens the category ‘literature’ to include

history” (“Gender and Italian Nationalism” 196). She then uses literary criticism to address political issues, commenting on works that, by retelling and reinterpreting past events of Italian history, aimed at attacking the current despotism of the Pope and of the Austrians and at awaking national pride in the readers. Manzoni’s *Adelchi*, Niccolini’s *Arnaldo da Brescia*, Amari’s *Guerra del Vespro Siciliano* (*History of the war of the Sicilian Vespers*) and all the other works she mentions as the best Italian literary production of the time fulfilled what Shelley regarded as the highest “duty” of both history and literature: they preserved “the record and memory” of past events for the pedagogical purpose of educating the new generations through the experiences of their ancestors (*Rambles* 1: 205).

Shelley herself contributes to the fulfillment of the duty of history by preserving and spreading the memory of the otherwise little-known events of the insurrections in Central Italy of 1831 and of the French occupation of Ancona of 1832. The “horrible disasters, acts of incredible bravery, admirable instances of self-devotion,” and “atrocious crimes” that characterized those uprisings were “so scattered and individual” that it was considered “scarcely possible to group the events together so as to form a narrative” (*Rambles* 2: 250). However, in the letter that follows her disheartening analysis of the social and political situation in the Papal States, Shelley manages to give an account of the insurrections in Central Italy that demonstrates how the scattered occurrences of those years were actually “worthy to be recorded”, especially because they proved the bravery and the patriotic enthusiasm of the new generations of Italians (*Rambles* 2: 250). In her narrative of the events, she illustrates the reasons that determined the failure of the revolt, showing how the French, the Austrians, and the Papal government exploited the

discontent and the desire for freedom of the insurgents to pursue their own political interests in the Peninsula. During the French revolution of 1830, the new government of Louis-Philippe drove the revolutionaries in Central Italy to believe that they would have had French support in case of an uprising against the misgovernment of the Pope. However, as soon as Louis-Philippe consolidated his power in France, “he deserted the Italian cause” (*Rambles* 2: 251). The Pope refused to yield to the requests of the rebels and sent troops recruited among criminals and brigands to suppress the revolt in Romagna; when these troops failed, he summoned six thousand Austrian soldiers to restore order in the province. The Austrian military occupation of Romagna enforced by the Pope raised the envy of the French, who decided to occupy the city of Ancona in Central Italy, where they were acclaimed by the inhabitants as friends and liberators. As Shelley explains, however, it soon became clear that the French had “no notion of favouring Italian liberty, but intended simply to check Austria, or at least obtain a part of the spoils, if the Pope lost Romagna” (*Rambles* 2: 257). Thus, the disappointing result of the insurrections of 1831 and 1832 was that the misgovernment of the Pope in Central Italy continued and was worsened by the presence of the Austrians and the French, who in Romagna and in Ancona respectively “served as sbirri of the papal power” (*Rambles* 2: 258). Shelley blames “the surviving Carbonari and the heads of the other secret societies” for their “want of talent” and their “absence of military skill” in leading the insurgents (*Rambles* 2: 250, 259). According to her, secret societies, like the institution of confession and the secret police, were responsible for fostering “the worst fault of the Italians”, their “habit of deception” and “their cunning” (*Rambles* 2: 259). And in the

conclusion of the letter, she expresses her final judgement about secret societies, defining them as “bad means for seeking a good result” (*Rambles 2: 258*).

In spite of the negative outcome of the revolt and of the reasons that caused its failure, Shelley manages to recognize in the occurrences of those years in Central Italy a last sign of hope for the future of the country. In her account she emphasizes the patriotic zeal of the Italian youths who participated in the uprisings, and in their untainted enthusiasm and bravery she sees the promise for the ultimate achievement of freedom, unity, and independence in Italy. These “bands of ardent youths” (*Rambles 2: 250*), as she calls them, were the proof that Italians were starting to “cast away their *dolce far niente*” and that they were developing “more hardy and manly habits”, fighting their tendency to effeminate passivity with virile revolutionary activity (*Rambles 1: 86*). Although oppression and discontent were general all over Italy, she points out how these young men were the only ones who “were willing to risk their life and fortune for a cause of which [everybody else] despaired” (*Rambles 2: 250*). Thinking possibly about her own son and about the agony she would have felt at seeing him undertaking such a dangerous enterprise, she describes the young revolutionaries as sons who were willing to desert their own mothers and to break away from the security of their domestic environment, to fight for the higher ideals of a free mother country and of a united homeland:

Five thousand lads, chiefly of good birth, taken from their boyish studies, withdrawn from the caresses of their mothers, from the pleasures of their homes, without experience, without forethought, who had scarcely reached the threshold of life – rash and untaught, embarked on the difficult and dangerous path of revolt. Their only tie in common was the desire of driving the stranger from their country. (*Rambles 2: 251*)

The fact that the insurgents came especially from good families and were thus educated confirmed that knowledge was necessary to fight the idleness and indolence usually

attributed to the inhabitants of the Peninsula. And where knowledge was united with the idealism and rashness typical of youth as it was in the new generation of Italians then there was hope for great “manly” actions.

Shelley points out in the Preface to *Rambles* that, among her British countrymen, the news of insurrections and social unrest in Italy were mostly regarded “with contempt” and they often excited “only a desire of putting an end to them as detrimental to the sufferers” (*Rambles* 1: xi). In her attempt to gain the sympathy of her audience for the Italian cause, she emphasizes the desperate circumstances in which the young rebels undertook the fight and the sad destiny they faced once the revolt failed, detailing the “unfortunate consequences” that the events had on individuals (*Rambles* 1: xi):

The leaders had no boldness, no military skill – the youths whom they commanded showed bravery, but were too inefficient, few, and ill-armed, to cope with a large, disciplined and veteran army. The end was defeat and surrender; then came the violation of treaties, death, and exile. [...] Many a domestic drama of harrowing tragic interest convulsed families, deprived of their noblest offspring; and whether the bereaved parents were base enough to disclaim and cast them forth, or whether they mourned in bitterness over their fate, the misery was the same. It is not yet ended: England and France still swarm with unfortunate exiles – the better portion of the insurgents, who sigh to return to their country, but who will not in hardship and banishment, make those sacrifices of principles which would at once restore them to rank and wealth. (*Rambles* 2: 251-252)

When she wrote these lines, Shelley most likely had in mind the fate of her friend Gatteschi and of other Italian rebels who had been disowned by their families for their participation in the revolts but continued to demonstrate their heroism, preferring exile and destitution to the betrayal of their patriotic ideals. The insistence on the “domestic drama” of the exiled Italian revolutionaries aims at presenting a reassuring image of these young men in their role as unfortunate – albeit honourable – sons in order to discredit the diffused conviction that they were criminals and terrorists. These young Italians, who at

every attempt of rebellion against the local tyrants were willing to take up arms and to sacrifice their lives and freedom for their country, represented for Shelley the “hidden and obscure victims, which each year that power devours that holds them in slavery” (*Rambles* 2: 260). They were, however, also a harbinger of change that, though slow to come and difficult to predict, was certain to happen in Italy.

At the end of the letter, which is the last in *Rambles* to deal directly with political matters, Shelley sums up her opinions about the fate of Italy, alternating optimistic statements with more cautious anticipation for the future of the country:

At present the spirit of revolt is checked, but not quelled in the pontifical states. A volcanic fire smoulders near the surface, ready at every moment to burst forth in a flame. (*Rambles* 2: 258).

It cannot be expected that Italy should be able to liberate itself in a time of lethargic peace like the present. (*Rambles* 2: 260)

The present affords no glimmering light by which we may perceive how the regeneration of Italy will be affected. (*Rambles* 2: 261)

In conclusion, though, she asserts her faith in the positive outcome of Italian nationalism, basing it on the confidence she has in Italian people:

Yet the hour must and will come. For there are noble spirits who live only in this hope; and every man of courage and genius throughout the country – and several such exist – consecrates his moral and intellectual faculty to this end only (*Rambles* 2: 261).

Thus, according to Shelley, the ultimate freedom and independence of the country was guaranteed not only by the signs of change that she points out in the course of *Rambles* (the bravery of the young revolutionaries, the genius of the new generation of Italian writers, and the morality of the early Carbonari), but also by all the “noble spirits,” who by nurturing and spreading courage, knowledge, and virtues among the population, were already accomplishing “the regeneration” that Italy most needed.

In the last two letters of *Rambles* written from Sorrento, Shelley puts aside her political analysis and her advocacy of Italian nationalism to indulge in the beauty and the delights of southern nature. Her fascination with Italian climate and landscape and the memory of the happy time she spent in the Peninsula before tragedy struck her life make her repeatedly refer to Italy as a “divine country” and “a paradise”⁴⁰ (*Rambles* 2: 49, 1: 3). However, it is only when she reaches the South and she sees it for the first time in her life “in all the glory of its summer dress” (*Rambles* 2: 263), that the magnificent beauty of Italian nature is fully disclosed to her and that she feels truly restored to an earthly paradise:

It seems to me as if I had never before visited Italy – as if now, for the first time, the charm of the country was revealed to me. At every moment the senses, lapped in delight, whisper – this is Paradise. [...] Tuscany and Lombardy are beautiful – they are an improved France, an abundant, sunshiny England – but here only do we find another earth and sky. (*Rambles* 2: 262)

The glorious beauty of southern nature does not compare to anything she had experienced before and the luxurious climate and landscape awake her senses to the perception of divinity in the creation:

[I]n all [other enchanting scenes] it was like seeing a lovely countenance behind a dusky veil; here the veil is withdrawn, and the senses ache with the effulgent beauty which is revealed. (*Rambles* 2: 267)

[H]ere, God has let fall upon earth the mantle of glory which otherwise is gathered up among the angels! (*Rambles* 2: 270)

[H]ere, the glory of absolute immeasurable beauty mantles all things at all times. (*Rambles* 2: 277)

⁴⁰ In particular, on the brink of re-entering Italy after almost two decades of absence, Shelley expresses her feelings in the following terms: “after dreary old age and the sickening pass of death, does the saint open his eyes on Paradise” (*Rambles* 1: 60).

These radiant scenes of infinite beauty exhilarate Shelley and suggest to her a new interpretation of the sublime. While Romantic artists conventionally considered the Alps the quintessential sublime landscape, she recognizes a different kind of sublime in the majestic scenery of southern Italy, where nature inspires awe and admiration without being potentially violent or dangerous (Walchester 229-230):

[T]ravellers visit Switzerland and speak of the sublime works of creation among seas of ice and avalanches and towering Alps, bare and craggy, crested with perpetual snow; there, nature is sublime, but she shows the power and the will to harm; here she is gracious as well as glorious; she is our friend, or rather our exalted and munificent queen and benefactress. (*Rambles* 2: 291)

In this passage Shelley feminizes Italian nature, participating in the long literary tradition that associated female imagery with the Peninsula, but instead of resorting to the largely diffused trope of Italy as a ‘fallen woman,’ she identifies the country with a powerful and dignified female role – a “munificent queen and benefactress.” Likewise, in other passages of *Rambles*, when she relies on commonly used epithets that depict Italian cities as female, she avails herself only of those designations that suggest majesty and splendour (Walchester 220-221) – for example “queen of the Ocean” for Venice and “la Bella” for Florence (*Rambles* 2: 79, 131). The trope of Italy as a ‘fallen woman’ emphasized the beauty of the country as the cause that determined its subjugation and its political and cultural downfall. On the one hand, Italy’s beauty made it prey to foreign invaders. On the other hand, the excessive luxury of its climate and landscape debilitated the energies of its inhabitants, turning them into indolent and effeminate lovers of pleasure (Walchester 62-64). In the book Shelley occasionally hints at the languor that affects both locals and tourists when they are exposed to the glorious Italian climate and landscape. For example, she mentions that “the air of Rome inspires lassitude, and

renders their inhabitants inert” (*Rambles* 2: 242), and in the Preface she includes herself among the “enjoyers of the beauties of nature,” noting that both foreigners and Italians are equally subjected to the balmy effects of the country’s delights: “When we visit Italy, we become what the Italians were censured for being” (*Rambles* 1: xvi). Nevertheless, Shelley repeatedly insists that the alleged indolence and lassitude of the Italians were caused by despotic governments and lack of education, rather than by a warm climate and beautiful scenery. And she rejects also the idea that Italy’s attractiveness was the reason for its political subjugation by foreign invaders. Rather than focusing on the glories of the past and portraying Italy as fallen to a degraded position, Shelley redirects the attention of her audience to the achievements that were still ahead for the nation, to the progeny of the country, and to the new generations of Italian artists and heroes who could potentially become as great as those of the past. In Shelley’s opinion “the country of Dante and Michael Angelo and Raphael still exist[ed]” (*Rambles* 1: 87), because she was convinced that Italy was still able to generate great personalities and that among its children-citizens there were, even at that moment, men of genius and heroes able to restore the nation to its glory. In the same way as in Shelley’s own life her son Percy represented her hope for “a better day” (*Rambles* 1: 2), Italy’s ‘sons’ who were fighting for their country with the power of their intellects and with the sacrifice of their lives constituted the promise of a brighter future for the Peninsula.

The emphasis Shelley puts on the Italian youths and on the country’s potential to originate its own regeneration through its offspring allows her to reshape the imagery connected to the trope of Italy as a woman. Her identification of Italian nature with a “queen” and a “benefactress” hints at the strength and dignity inherent to the female

gender for its power to procreate. Stressing the profusion and luxuriance of nature in Italy, Shelley describes it as mighty, impressive, and sublime in a creative rather than in a destructive way. Most importantly, rather than presenting the beauty and abundance of Italy as inexorably leading to its fall and subjugation by a series of foreign powers, Shelley regards these qualities as the attributes that characterize the Peninsula as a fertile, nurturing, and welcoming mother, who lovingly sustains and shelters its progeny. Thus, when Shelley feminizes Italy, she sees it principally in the role of a mother and while she is in the country she refers to its nature and its earth as “bounteous [...] mother”, “fair mother”, and “indulgent mother” (*Rambles* 1: 12, 135; 2: 242). Especially in the South of Italy, she exalts the luxuriant nature for the friendly and benevolent countenance it shows towards its inhabitants, and there, on the island of Capri in the Bay of Naples, she meets a local woman who appears to embody her idea of Italy as a mother. Shelley is particularly fascinated by the woman’s beauty and bearing, and the words she uses to describe her situation can be read as a metaphor that reveals the author’s feelings towards Italy and its condition:

We had several guides; the woman that accompanied me attracted me by her extreme beauty. She had that noble contour of countenance that I so particularly admire; a beauty at once full of dignity and expression. [...] My Juno-looking guide had had four children: one only survived. Poor little fellow! he ran beside his mother; and she looked on him with anxious fondness, for his complexion and figure all spoke disease.

To suffer is a different thing under this sky. They have bad food, they work hard; but Nature is their friend; they are not pinched with cold nor racked by rheumatic pains. Thus my poor woman, in whom I grew interested, had nothing morose – scarcely anything plaintive – about her. “*Sono sempre allegra*,” she said. “I am gay – we ought to be gay.” “*Siamo come Dio vuole*.” “We live as God pleases, and must not complain. My heart aches when I remember my poor children now in Paradise; I cry when I think of them; and that little fellow,” and she cast an anxious, maternal glance on him – “he is not well” (heaven knows, he was not).

“*Ma, allegra, Signora*” – “the Virgin will help us;” and she began, in a sweet voice, to sing a plaintive hymn to the Virgin. Poor people! their religion is hung round with falsehood; but it is a great, a real comfort, to them. (*Rambles 2: 269-272*)

In spite of the loss of her children and of her difficult life condition, the woman in Capri maintained her beauty, her dignity, and her cheerful and enduring spirit, taking care of her only surviving son with anxious maternal love. Like the last living child of the woman, Italy’s ‘sons’ were “not well” and had to strive for development and survival in a political situation full of contradictions. In this process, however, like the “poor little fellow” in Capri, Italy’s ‘children’ were lovingly tended by a fair mother country, which placed in them the hope for a better future and comforted them with the warmth and abundance of its nature.

In the life of this simple peasant mother, as well as in the entire Peninsula, religion played an important, albeit an ambivalent role. Shelley’s attitude towards the religiosity of the woman corresponds to her conflicting analysis of Catholicism in Italy. On the one hand, like the majority of Protestant travel writers of the time, she despises the superstition, bigotry, and ignorance fostered by the Catholic Church because it encouraged passive acceptance of misery and injustice rather than active struggle for improvement.⁴¹ On the other hand, she cannot help but acknowledge the soothing effect that religion supplies to the sufferers, and she admires and almost wishes for the same cheerful and steady confidence that the poor woman finds in her faith. Finally, in the same way as at the beginning of *Rambles* Shelley expresses the desire to help Italy and the Italians through her book, so after her encounter with the mother from Capri she wishes that she could do something to help her: “I should have liked to have tried, at

⁴¹ “Sickness and all evil comes from God, and must be borne, therefore, with patience” Shelley adds to her explanation of the woman’s religiosity (*Rambles 2: 272*).

least, to have done some real good to this woman” (*Rambles* 2: 272). For the peasant woman as well as for Italy, Shelley’s help comes in the form of a denunciation of the social injustice at the bottom of their unfortunate condition. As Shelley explains, because the local peasants were not the owners of the land they cultivated, they were poor, their fare was bad and scarce, and this resulted in frequent sickness and high mortality, especially among their children. Furthermore, Shelley tries to raise the sympathies of her countrymen for the woman and the other inhabitants of the region, objecting to the common complaint that tourists usually had towards them. She points out that: “English tourists get very angry at the perpetual demands made on their purses during their excursions.” “But, poor people,” she remonstrates, “who can wonder! I have told you how they fare” (*Rambles* 2: 273). In short, the mixture of fascination, compassion, and desire to help that the beautiful and unfortunate woman from Capri inspires in Shelley coincides with the writer’s attitude towards Italy and with the feelings that motivated her to compose *Rambles*. And the portrait of this dignified mother, caring for her son and confident in a better future to come, incarnates the image of Italy as a country determined to look ahead and trust in the new generations for its own redemption.

Of course, the resemblance that the bereaved mother from Capri bears to Shelley’s own situation as a mother cannot be ignored, and it is likely that the interest the writer took in her in the first place was at least in part due to the fact that both of them had experienced the harrowing pain caused by the loss of their children. Including her first baby girl, who was born prematurely and survived only a few days (Sunstein 97), also Shelley like the peasant woman had given birth to four children, of whom only one survived. And like the mother in Capri, she was constantly apprehensive for her only son

and considered him her source of joy and hope for a brighter future. Towards the end of *Rambles*, Shelley appears to resemble her alter ego also in her newfound cheerfulness and confident serenity, which contrast with her persistent foreboding of evil and loss that characterizes the beginning of the book. While in the first part of *Rambles* she establishes her identity primarily as an anxious mother, insisting on her relationship with Percy and on her function as a guide and companion to him, in the subsequent sections of the book her narrative and her comments indicate a shift in her self-representation, and here the focus is mostly on her role as a mentor and an instructor for her entire audience. In Part III of *Rambles*, especially in the letters devoted to Italian politics and society, Shelley continues to present herself chiefly in her function as a guide and an educator who attempts to explain and to show in a positive light the complicated state of affairs in the Peninsula to her readers. Interestingly, in this last part of the book, the references to her role as a mother occur mainly in relation to her two children who died in Italy rather than in connection with Percy and her apprehension for his wellbeing. Describing the road to Venice along the banks of the river Brenta, which she had travelled for the first time many years before tending her dying infant daughter Clara, she writes:

[T]his road was as distinct in my mind as if traversed yesterday. I will not here dwell on the sad circumstances that clouded my first visit to Venice. Death hovered over the scene. Gathered into myself, with my “mind’s eye” I saw those before me long departed; and I was agitated again by emotions – by passions – and those the deepest a woman’s heart can harbour – a dread to see her child even at that instant expire – which then occupied me. (*Rambles* 2: 77-78)

It is the revisiting of places connected with the death of her children that, like in the quoted passage, triggers the recollection of those tragic memories and causes her to live again, as if in a cathartic re-enactment, the same feelings and emotions she experienced

then. In Florence, revisiting the Uffizi Gallery that she had seen for the first time when she was mourning the death of her son William (Sunstein 175), she writes: “As I entered the Tribune I felt a crowd of associations rise up around me, gifted with painful vitality. I was long lost in tears. [...] When I revisited these rooms, these saddest ghosts were laid; the affliction calmed, and my mind was free to receive new impressions” (*Rambles 2*: 152). In Rome, where both her husband and her son William were buried in the so-called Protestant Cemetery,⁴² she acknowledges that being able to revisit their graves constituted one of the objects of her rambles: “Besides all that Rome itself affords of delightful to the eye and imagination, I revisit it as the bourne of a pious pilgrimage. The treasures of my youth lie buried here” (*Rambles 2*: 225). By seeing again the places connected with the traumatic events of her past and by facing up to her fears and foreboding that Italy could once again bring tragedies upon her life, Shelley appears to undergo an emotional catharsis that, at the end of the journey, allows her to let go of her anxiety and grief and to enjoy her current and future happiness in the presence of her son.

In Sorrento, the last destination of her Italian stay, she experiences moments of pure bliss immersed in a landscape as beautiful as the “gardens of delight” (*Rambles 2*: 262). Even Percy’s excursions with his sailing-boat – “a wonderfully safe, good boat” – do not cause her to fret, and she often enjoys joining him on the water of a sea that no longer appears to her as treacherous and antipathetic but is described instead as “bright” and “inviting” (*Rambles 2*: 265, 268, 275). “The Cocumella has become a home – it is a joy to return to our terrace, to breathe the fragrance of the orange-flowers – to see the calm sea spread out at our feet [...]” she writes in the last sentence of *Rambles*, virtually

⁴² Sunstein notices that Shelley never managed to find the grave of her son William in the Protestant Cemetery (Sunstein 359).

electing the South of Italy as her abode. More precisely, however, in the final image Shelley left of herself in the last of her published works, she crystallizes her self-representation as the quintessential traveller who regards as home every corner of the earth⁴³ and, as she had previously stated in the book, she confirms that she would always prefer travelling to staying at home. In *Rambles*, moreover, her last self-characterization in the seemingly domestic role as a mother is intertwined with and complicated by the openly political scope of the book, the female imagery connected with Italy, the re-examination of Shelley's past, and her identity as the parent of a young man of promise. In a journal entry of 1838 she wrote:

God grant a happier & better day is near. Percy – my all in all – will – I trust – by his excellent understanding – his clear bright sincere spirit & affectionate heart repay me for sad long years of desolation – His career may lead me into the thick of life – or only gild a quiet home – I am content with either. (*Journals* 2: 557)

Evidently, Shelley anticipated that her role as the mother of a future baronet who was destined to make his fortune in the public arena would lead her again “into the thick of life” and allow her – through her son's guidance and assistance – to participate actively in the realization of those liberal ideals that her own generation had failed to carry out. Similarly, in *Rambles* Shelley's self-representation as a mother foregrounds her determination to intervene in the public domain, acting as a guide and an instructor in the process of education that – by translating into “printed words” the “sublimer wisdom” gained through travelling – aimed at enabling readers to sympathize with their fellow-creatures oppressed by tyranny and to support their political struggle for freedom (*Rambles* 1: 158). Unfortunately, Percy never became actively involved into politics and

⁴³ At the outset of her journeys, Shelley announced: “My home is the readiest means of convenience I can command” and in the course of the book she called “home” several places in which she resided during her rambles (*Rambles* 1: 10).

Shelley, rendered more and more invalid by the brain tumor that would eventually kill her in early 1851, spent the last years of her life “gild[ing] a quiet home” with her son and the woman he married in 1848. Thus, besides being a recapitulation of her experience and values and a tribute to her love for Italy and her passion for travelling, *Rambles* represents evidence that, at the end of her life, Shelley not only still firmly believed in the process of improving humanity through education, but she also was eager to participate actively in it.

CHAPTER 3

Adele Schopenhauer's *Florenz: Ein Reiseführer mit Anekdoten und Erzählungen* (1847/48): Creating a Gendered Version of the Guidebook for Travellers

Presenting her idea to write a book on Florence, Adele Schopenhauer described it in a letter to her prospective publisher dated June 1847 as a “glückliche Mitte zwischen Erzählungen historisch-örtlicher Interessen und Kunstanschauungen mit Kunstgeschichte verwebt.”⁴⁴ “Ein solches Buch” she claimed “existiere noch gar nicht”⁴⁵ and “müßte das Werk für Reisende sehr bequem und für den daheim sich Erinnernden auch unterhaltend und belehrend sein”⁴⁶ (Brandes 125).

In this passage Adele Schopenhauer singles out the two major characteristics of the book she planned to write: it was going to be about Florence and in the form of a mixture, a hybrid, a combination of different contents and genres. Although she was aware of the originality of her idea, she probably did not suspect that those two characteristics would have made her work unique not only among the German travel books about Italy of the nineteenth century, but also as a evidence of the evolution of two literary genres – the travel account and the guidebook – which were not yet totally distinct. At the same time, precisely those two characteristics of the work could be identified as the reasons why it was not possible to find a publisher for it. The book remained in manuscript form for over a hundred and fifty years, was considered lost for a

⁴⁴ “happy medium between the narration of historical and local interests and views about art interwoven with art history.”

⁴⁵ “Such a book does not exist yet”

⁴⁶ “the work would be very convenient for travellers and also entertaining and instructive for those at home who want to recollect.”

long time, suffered the loss of some of its parts, and was rediscovered and finally printed only in 2007.

Why did Schopenhauer decide to write a book about Italy? Why did she choose Florence, a city that was almost totally ignored by the German travel books of the time? Why did she venture to write a guidebook instead of describing her experience of Italy in a subjective and personal travel report? Did she intend to create her own version of the increasingly popular handbooks for travellers à la Murray and Baedeker? Section 1 of this chapter addresses these questions, discussing Schopenhauer's decision to write a book about Florence and how her choice demonstrates her independence from the paradigm of Italian experience established by Goethe in his *Italienische Reise*. Section 2 explores the similarities and the differences between Schopenhauer's *Florenz* and Murray's and Baedeker's handbooks for travellers. Section 3 describes the originality of *Florenz* against the backdrop of nineteenth-century women's travel writing.

3.1 Goethe and Adele Schopenhauer: Rome versus Florence

It is not difficult to guess why Schopenhauer wanted to write a travel book about Italy. Since September 1844 she had lived almost uninterruptedly in the Peninsula, mainly in Rome with her friend Sibylle Mertens-Schaaffhausen, and for shorter stays in Florence and in Naples with Ottilie von Goethe. Schopenhauer's decision to concentrate her artistic efforts on writing had occurred shortly before leaving Germany. Two of her major works – the novels *Anna* (1845) and *Eine dänische Geschichte* (A Danish Story, 1848) – appeared in print while she was already in Italy, and it was almost inevitable that the artistic stimulation and rich material offered by her stay in a foreign country would be

the inspiration for her next book. Her own mother, Johanna Schopenhauer, had acquired a certain renown as an author of travel accounts based on her journeys, and Adele – who after her death arranged and published her memoirs under the title *Jugendleben und Wanderbilder* (Youthful Life and Pictures of Travel, 1839) – was certainly aware that writing a travel book could have been profitable in her own case also. Goethe himself, the undisputed authority in the German tradition of travel literature about Italy, had inspired Adele's enthusiasm for this country and its art. She had met Goethe when she was still a child and he used to be a regular guest at the literary salon established by her mother in Weimar, where they had moved in 1806 after the death of Adele's father. Goethe became a father figure for her. He encouraged her efforts in painting, admired her extraordinary skill in creating elaborate silhouettes with scissors and paper, and praised warmly her talent for acting and reciting (Houben XX-XXIII). Adele was allowed to call him 'lieber Vater' ('dear father'), and she was often invited to his study and private rooms (Pohl 38). There, among the drawings, etchings, and works of art of all kinds collected by the poet, she eagerly listened to Goethe's views about history and art and she soon developed a deep interest in these subjects and a strong desire to see Italy (Houben XXII).⁴⁷

When *Italienische Reise*, the literary reworking of Goethe's 1786/88 travel to Italy, was first published in 1816/17 and then completed in 1829, Schopenhauer was amongst its most ecstatic readers. In her journal she wrote that the reading of the book made her feel like Pygmalion's statue; it awakened her to new life and she cried out: "Ich wache auf und sage: Ich! wieder ich – denn hier ist Leben, wie es in mir ist"⁴⁸ (Schopenhauer, *Tagebücher 2*: 128). Goethe himself, in a letter to Adele dated January

⁴⁷ For the relationship between Goethe and Adele Schopenhauer, see also Brandes 16-22.

⁴⁸ "I wake up and say: I! again I – because here is life, as it is in me."

1830, urged her to read the XXIX volume of his *Werke* (Works), which contained the description of his second stay in Rome (Brandes 21). In her answer to the poet, Schopenhauer reported on the enthusiasm that the reading of the book brought about among her circle of friends:

Eine gar schöne Erfüllung Ihres Versprechens, den fernlebenden Freunden nah zu treten, haben Sie im 29^{ten} Bande Ihrer Schriften gegeben. Wir lesen ihn gemeinschaftlich im Kränzchen, von welchem ich schon früher Ihnen erzählte. Es war ungemein lebendig in und um uns wie in dem Buche selbst! Bald wurde D'Alton laut und hatte dieses Bild, jenes Gebäude, den Menschen wohl gekannt, es ward sogleich eine alte Erinnerung und neue Erzählung eingeschoben.⁴⁹ (Geiger 80)

In *Italienische Reise* Goethe completely disregarded Florence. He reports that he had rushed through the city in a great hurry, and the description of his visit covers less than a couple of sentences. “Die Begierde, nach Rom zu kommen, war so groß” he explained “daß [...] ich mich nur drei Stunden in Florenz aufhielt”⁵⁰ (Goethe 125-26). Goethe’s professed lack of interest in the capital city of the Italian Renaissance was instrumental to the intent he pursued when, more than thirty years after the actual journey, he published his *Italienische Reise*. As literary criticism has clearly pointed out, at the end of his career Goethe wanted to reaffirm his aesthetic principles based on the cult of classical antiquity against the growing Romantic taste and interest in the Middle Ages.⁵¹ Reworking the recollection of his own journey, therefore, Goethe gave it the shape of a ‘Bildungsreise’ (educational journey), in which experiences and places were

⁴⁹ “In the 29th volume of your writings you gave a truly lovely fulfilment of your promise to come closer to your faraway friends. We read it together in the little circle, I have already told you about. It was extremely lively in us and around us like in the book itself! Soon D’Alton became loud and knew everything about this painting, that building, and the people; an old memory was pushed in at the same time as a new narrative.”

⁵⁰ “The eagerness to arrive in Rome was so great, that [...] I remained in Florence only for three hours.”

⁵¹ See for example: Stefan Oswald, *Italienbilder. Beiträge zur Wandlung der deutschen Italienauffassung 1770-1840*, 93-98; Christine Ujma, “Auf Goethe und den eignen Spuren: Fanny Lewalds *Italienisches Bilderbuch*” 57-95; Jörg-Urlich Fechner, “«zugleich völlig wahrhaft und ein anmuthiges Märchen»: Goethes *Italienische Reise* - keine Reisebeschreibung!” 231-255.

described because of their pedagogical importance for the development of classical aesthetical ideals. Most of the readers of the time did not recognize the polemical and pedagogical intent of Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, and they read the book as if it were an objective description of Italy and the report of the author's own educational travel experience in the Peninsula.⁵² The main character of the book, who narrated his journey in the first person, was identified with Goethe himself, leading to the misunderstanding of the literary nature of that figure (Oswald 93). Soon more and more German travellers went to Italy looking for an educational experience, which was to reproduce in its premises and outcomes the model of 'Italienerfahrung' (Italian experience) presented by Goethe in the *Italienische Reise* (Oswald 162). Rome represented the main destination of Goethe's journey, while other cities such as Verona or Assisi deserved to be mentioned in the book only because of their remains of classical antiquity. Conversely, Florence and its expressly Renaissance character were of no interest to Goethe and to all those German travellers who, following his footsteps, went to Italy only to admire the art of antiquity.

In this context Adele Schopenhauer's decision to write a book about Florence appears almost revolutionary. By choosing Florence she broke away from the cult of Rome and the classical antiquity established by Goethe, indirectly placing the ideals of the Renaissance in opposition to it. This stance was unexpected in Schopenhauer, who was a personal friend and a great admirer of the writer and had also developed her artistic inclinations under his direct guidance. Nevertheless, it is precisely Schopenhauer's respect for Goethe and her deep knowledge of his works that explain the choice of Florence as a subject for her book.

⁵² "Man mißverstand das Buch oft als eine objektive Beschreibung des bereisten Landes [...]." ("The book was often misunderstood as an objective description of the travelled land [...].") See: Gunter E. Grimm, Ursula Breymeyer, Walter Erhart, "*Ein Gefühl von freierem Leben*": *deutsche Dichter in Italien*, 7.

As an enthusiastic reader of the *Italienische Reise*, Schopenhauer had surely noticed the absence of a proper description of Florence in the book and the general scarcity of German writings about the city's works of art. Choosing a subject that had not been treated by Goethe or by many other German writers allowed her to avoid the comparison with existing models of representation of the city. At the same time it gave her the opportunity to write a relatively original work in the already existing large body of German travel literature about Italy.

Schopenhauer did not disagree with the paradigm of 'Italienerfahrung' offered by Goethe, as is confirmed by her own stay in Italy, which was spent for the longest part in Rome and its environs rather than in Florence, where she went expressly only to carry out research for the book. Her intention was not to argue against Goethe's preference for Rome and classical antiquity, nor to compete with him by establishing a different cult of the Italian past. In the opening of *Florenz* Schopenhauer explains as the reason for her choice the German experience of affinity for the city:

Weit entfernt, eine so heiße, fast ihn überwältigende Erregung in ihm zu wecken als der Eintritt in das den Abglanz zweier versunkener Welten rückstrahlende Rom, wird Florenz namentlich dem deutschen Wanderer eine beinahe heimatliche Empfindung gewähren, denn es ist unserer Geschichte, unsren Sitten und unsrer Nation und unsrem Charakter analoger. Unsere frühesten Kinderträume umschweben Rom, seine Götter- und Heldengestalten, unser Herz wächst an ihnen heran – unsre zum Bewußtsein ihrer selbst gelangte Jugend sehnt sich nach dem von Kunst und Natur so tausendfach umblüheten Florenz. Die meisten Deutschen sehen es früher als die „Ewige Stadt“ und berühren von *Livorno* kommend seine äußere Mauergränze an der *Porta Romana*.⁵³ (*Florenz* 39)

⁵³ “Far from awakening such a lively and almost overwhelming excitement as the entrance in Rome, which irradiates the reflection of two sunken worlds, Florence will provide almost a feeling of home for the German wanderer, because it is more similar to our history, our morals, our nation, and our character. Our earliest dreams as children float around Rome, around its gods and heroes, our heart grows towards them – our youth, having attained self consciousness, longs for Florence and its thousandfold flourishing art and

In this passage Schopenhauer points out the different impressions that the respective cities make on their visitors not in order to reject the supremacy of Rome, but rather to validate Florence as an alternative experience. If Rome fulfilled her childhood's dreams of gods and heroes as it did for Goethe, the art and nature of Florence, she suggests, could satisfy the longing developed at another stage in life. Moreover, according to Schopenhauer, Florence looked familiar to a German observer, because its aspect resembled that of many German cities. For German travellers coming from the north, Florence represented an intermediate stopping place, where they could still feel at home. On the contrary, at their arrival in Rome, German travellers would find themselves plunged into a completely different world, where the relics of the city's ancient past and the stateliness of its buildings could possibly overwhelm the foreign visitors.

Schopenhauer herself felt overwhelmed by the impressions that Rome inspired in her. Her first journey to Italy from the fall of 1844 to the summer of 1846 was spent mostly in Rome, visiting museums, churches, and ancient monuments. She read and studied, and tried to develop her own sense of beauty by observing the works of art from all periods collected in the city. She felt that art had a great influence on her, but she sensed that she was lacking a deeper knowledge and understanding of the city. To her brother Arthur, the famous philosopher, she wrote in 1846: "Daß mir die Kunst so viel gewähren könne wußte ich nicht. Manches habe ich gelernt, vieles bleibt zu verarbeiten; andres muß erst klar werden"⁵⁴ (Lütkehaus 469). After almost two years spent in the Eternal City she still felt overwhelmed by all that there was to see and to learn in Rome.

nature. The majority of the Germans see it before the "Eternal City", and coming from *Livorno*, touch the external edge of its walls at *Porta Romana*."

⁵⁴ "I didn't know that art could grant me so much. I have learned something, a lot remains to assimilate; other things still need to become clearer."

In the fragment entitled *Italienisches Landleben* (Italian Country Life), written in the summer of 1846 and published for the first time together with *Florenz* in 2007, Schopenhauer explains her feelings about Rome and describes her stay in the Alban Hills, where she had gone to escape from the summer heat:

Ich vermochte plötzlich keine 24 Stunden mehr zwischen den hohen Mauern, den Kirchen, Palästen und Ruinen auszudauern! Diese Versteinerungen tausendjähriger Erinnerung lasteten wie Alpdrücken auf meiner Seele. Ihrem Einfluß fern individuell [zu] denken und fühlen war mir zum unabweislichen Bedürfnis geworden. Kaum wußte ich selbst, ob ich der wachsenden Sommerglut, ob dem überwältigenden Eindruck der riesigen Umgebung zu entgehen strebte.⁵⁵ (*Florenz* 199)

To characterize her own impression of Rome in this passage, Schopenhauer uses the same adjective – “überwältigend” (“overwhelming”) – that in the opening of *Florenz* describes the feelings of most travellers when they see the Eternal City for the first time. Rome and the treasures of its age-long history oppressed her soul instead of stimulating her creativity. In the presence of these treasures and under the influence of what had already been said about them, she did not feel free to develop her own thoughts. It appears almost as if she did not dare to write about Rome. The Alban Hills, however, and their landscape, country life, and few monuments from the past offered her a more modest and less imposing subject-matter. In the same way, not Rome but Florence, which for Schopenhauer was closer to the German character and to herself, represented a more suitable topic for her book.

When she first arrived in Italy, Schopenhauer was still taking her first steps as a writer. She had chosen this career only a few years earlier, mainly to alleviate her

⁵⁵ “Suddenly I was not able to bear another 24 hours among the high walls, the churches, palaces, and ruins! This petrification of millennial memories weighed like nightmares on my soul. To think and to feel as an individual, at a far remove from their influence became an irrefutable necessity for me. I hardly knew myself, if I strove to escape the increasing summer glow or the overwhelming impression of the enormous surroundings.”

difficult financial situation. For a long time her friend Sibylle Mertens-Schaaffhausen had been trying to persuade Adele to write, providing her with incitement and ideas for possible works, but she had always refused to follow her mother and become a writer, never really trusting her own talent (Houben and Elster 228). In Italy the self-imposed discipline of observing and studying works of art helped her to improve her education and enlarged her range of interests. Her taste and discernment became more refined and the way she expressed her ideas acquired clarity and accuracy (Houben L-LI). Between 1845 and 1847 she wrote short stories about Italian artists and folk life, and articles in the form of letters about contemporary painters, writers, and plays. Some of these works appeared in print in German magazines of the time, documenting Schopenhauer's growing expertise in the Italian artistic and literary scene (Büch 317).

The idea of depicting the atmosphere of an Italian city in a book directed especially at travellers matured under these circumstances. Florence, with its history and traditions, excited her enthusiasm, and possibly for the first time Schopenhauer felt confident about her project and her ability to carry it out at its best. To her prospective publisher she explained:

Viele unbekante, gar anmutige Lokalgeschichten, Künstlerleben, Anekdoten, sogar ein großer Reichtum wunderlicher Sitten u[nd] Gebräuche, die noch nachklingen in Florenz, und alle ihre Denkmale hinterlassen haben, geben mir den allerreichsten Stoff, den ich je gehabt zum Schreiben.⁵⁶ (Brandes 125)

The whole book reflects Schopenhauer's fascination with Florence and her enthusiasm at being able to present the German public for the first time with the large amount of little known information she had discovered and collected about the city.

⁵⁶ "Many unknown and delightful local stories, lives of artists, anecdotes, and even a great abundance of quaint conventions and habits, which still linger on in Florence and have all left monuments behind, give me the richest material that I have ever had to write about."

Unfortunately, Schopenhauer's efforts to find a publisher for her book remained unsuccessful, and a few years later the credit for having discovered Florence and the age of the Renaissance as the cradle of the modern European spirit went to the Swiss art historian Jakob Burckhardt (1818-1897). Like Schopenhauer, Burckhardt spent several months in Italy between 1846 and 1848, and he was there again from March 1853 to April 1854 (Maierhofer 28). His epoch-making works – especially *Der Cicerone. Eine Anleitung zum Genuß der Kunstwerke Italiens* (The Cicerone. A Guide to the works of art in Italy, 1855) a history of Italian art in the form of a traveller's guidebook, and *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 1860) – dealt with the same works of art described in *Florenz* (Maierhofer 28). Unlike Schopenhauer, who was largely self-educated, Burckhardt could rely on a broad humanistic education. He had studied history and art history in several universities and later became professor at the University of Basel (Gooch 529). Considered the father of cultural history, Burckhardt showed how the passage from medieval corporate society to the modern individualistic spirit matured in Renaissance Italy between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century (Gooch 531). In his writings he celebrated the Renaissance as a fundamental age for the first time, and from then on the central importance of Florence as a 'Bildungsziel' ('educational destination') became undisputed. Schopenhauer's interest in Florence and her pioneering study of its history and art deserve the credit of pre-dating by more than ten years Burckhardt's writing, which made the city universally popular as the capital of the Renaissance (Maierhofer 28). However, after the publication of Burckhardt's work, Schopenhauer's less erudite, partially incomplete and jotted down Florence manuscript lost all chance of being published, and thus of being remembered as

one of the first German travel books about Italy that emancipated itself from the cult of classical antiquity and the model of 'Italienerfahrung' established by Goethe (Maierhofer 28).

Schopenhauer did not live long enough to see the rising recognition of Florence as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. In March and April 1847 she had started the research for the book in Florence. A second journey to the city was undertaken in October of the same year to carry out the drafting of the manuscript. There she experienced her most creative period as a writer. Full of energy, she looked for information, studied books about the city and its history, read the masterpieces of Italian poets, visited picture galleries, museums, churches, and palaces. She compared her own opinions with the judgements of other scholars (Büch 318). She allowed the beauty of the observed images to bewitch her, then worked hard to represent the charm of the city by means of the written word (Büch 323-324). A renewed outbreak of Schopenhauer's illness – a polyp in the abdomen – caused her terrible pain and forced her to stop writing (Büch 345). The revolutionary turmoil of 1848 and the outbreak of wars in Northern Italy made it difficult to communicate with her friends in Germany. It was not possible to travel to Italy and rescue her because the snow and the cold weather made the journey over the Alps dangerous. She was left at the mercy of her greedy Italian landlady until a mild improvement in her health allowed her to leave Florence. When she finally arrived in Bonn at the house of her friend Sibylle Mertens-Schaaffhausen in May 1848, she had only 15 months left to live (Büch 325).

In the summer of 1848 Adele's condition improved again and she was able to rework her Florence manuscript to offer it again to her publisher Brockhaus, but this

attempt failed as well (Pohl 63). Her desire to go back to Italy and live there for the rest of her life also remained unfulfilled. The journey to Berlin, Weimar, and Jena, undertaken to say goodbye to her closest friends caused her health to worsen again, but this time she was too weak to recover and she died in Bonn on August 25, 1849 (Pohl 63-64). For a few years after her death, her devoted friend Sibylle Mertens-Schaaffhausen tried in vain to realize Schopenhauer's last wish to publish the Florence manuscript (Maierhofer 14). The mixed form of the book, halfway between a subjective travel account and a guidebook for tourists, made its publication a risky venture from a publisher's point of view, even before Burckhardt's writings became widely popular (Maierhofer 29).

3.2 Murray's and Baedeker's Guidebooks for Travellers versus Schopenhauer's *Florenz*

In her second attempt to convince her prospective publisher to accept her manuscript, Schopenhauer stressed its guidebook character and that it was addressed especially to travellers to Florence. In a letter to Brockhaus written after her second stay in Florence and dated October 1848, Schopenhauer defined her work as "ein erzählender Guide"⁵⁷ (Brandes 127), interestingly using the English word 'guide' instead of the German 'Reiseführer':

...Ich hatte als ich nach Florenz kam, ein Buch zu schreiben gemeint, dessen Ausführung jedoch vom Entwurf ziemlich verschieden geworden und, wie ich glaube, zum Vorteil verändert ist. Es ist, wenn Sie wollen, ein erzählender Guide, wie es jedoch gehalten ist, kenne ich kein ähnliches. Was man in Florenz sieht, gib zum Erzählen Anlaß, sodaß geschichtliche Erinnerungen, Bilder und Skulpturen, kunstgeschichtliche Mitteilungen

⁵⁷ "a narrative guide"

über dieselben, Sittenschilderungen u[nd] dergleichen hinein verflochten sind, das ganze aber dennoch ein Guide für den in Florenz Anwesenden wird, nach welchem man sogar ohne Lohnbedienten alles Interessante aussuchen kann. [...] Es gibt gar keinen deutschen Guide für Florenz.⁵⁸
(Brandes 127)

The presentation of the book as “a narrative guide” did not help Schopenhauer to sell it to her publisher and, if possible, it contributed towards its rejection by pointing out that her work would have had to cope with the increasing competition of the guidebooks for travellers produced by Murray and Baedeker. If the purpose of Schopenhauer’s ‘narrative guide’ was to allow travellers to visit Florence with neither servants nor a local guide, as she claimed, then her book lacked both the form and the abundance of practical information that determined the success of Murray’s and Baedeker’s guidebooks.

The publisher John Murray and Son of London had printed the first edition of *A Hand-book for Travellers on the Continent: Being a Guide through Holland, Belgium, Prussia, and Northern Germany* in 1836. From the name ‘hand-book’ – an adaptation from the German ‘Handbuch,’ intentionally chosen to distinguish it from the previous guidebooks for travellers (Maćzak 348) – to the characteristic red cover and small size of the volumes, Murray established many of the features which were to become a standard for this kind of guidebook (Allen 219). The first of Murray’s handbooks enjoyed an immediate popularity and was soon followed by one for Southern Germany, Austria and Hungary in 1837, and by another for Switzerland in 1838 (Mendelson 388). In 1835 the German publisher Karl Baedeker had simplified, updated, and supplemented with

⁵⁸ “...when I arrived in Florence I meant to write a book whose execution, however, turned out to be rather different from the plan and, as I believe, the change is to its advantage. It is, if you like, a narrative guide, but I do not know of anything similar. The sights of Florence are the occasion for the narration, so that historical memories, paintings and sculptures, and art historical information about them, descriptions of customs and similar things are interwoven. And yet as a whole it is a guide for people in Florence, following which they can search out all the objects of interest even without the assistance of servants. [...] There is no German guide for Florence at all.”

practical information a book by Professor Johann August Klein entitled *Rheinreise von Mainz bis Köln* (Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 71). This was Baedeker's first travel book, but in 1839 the German publisher began producing handbooks in German following Murray's model down to the red hard binding of the volumes (Mendelson 389). In the course of the following decades Baedeker's handbooks introduced some slight improvements that by 1870 allowed the German firm to overtake Murray as Europe's leading publisher of guides for travellers. However, the main characteristics of both types of handbook, which determined their enormous success, remained the same as in their first editions.

Both Murray and Baedeker claimed that their guidebooks were "based upon personal knowledge of the countries described" (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* vi). At the same time, though, they adopted anonymity by omitting the name of the author. First editions of new Murray's handbooks sometimes carried the names of the authors, but they would usually disappear in the following editions and the books were commonly called 'Murrays' in any case (Allen 215). The Baedeker guides, on the other hand, always carried the attribution "by Karl Baedeker" independently from their real author and even long after the death of the first Karl Baedeker in 1859 (Allen 219). The name 'Baedeker' was in the end accepted in many languages as a synonym for 'guidebook.' Anonymity and the adoption of a standard style characterized by the first person plural and the present tense served the purpose of distinguishing the work from the usual autobiographical mode of the travel accounts expressed in the first person singular and the past tense (Allen 216). This style emphasized the quasi-scientific objectivity of the facts and information presented (Allen 217). The travellers were invited

to verify the content of the guidebooks and, if necessary, to send corrections of any errors or omissions (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* vi).

Like Murray's and Baedeker's handbooks, Schopenhauer's *Florenz* employs the present tense to introduce and describe buildings and works of art, and occasionally it uses the first person plural 'wir' (we) to lead the reader from one part of the city to another, as in the following passage: "Wir wenden unsre Schritte vom Domplatz über *Piazza della paglia* und *Via Rondinelli* nach der Kirche *San Gaetano o Michele*"⁵⁹ (*Florenz* 107). *Florenz* was not written in the tone of an autobiographical account and Schopenhauer avoided giving details about the dates and circumstances of her own journey. As in Murray's and Baedeker's handbooks, the descriptions of buildings and works of art are factual and not dissimilar to those offered by modern guidebooks. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer did not give up her authorial identity. Although her first writings were published anonymously, by the time she wrote *Florenz* she had finally embraced authorship as a profession, and possibly counted on this book to gain further recognition as a writer. She was aware of the unique nature of her research and proud to introduce it as her own. In the letter to her publisher Brockhaus mentioned above, she explained:

...Hätte ich nicht die außerordentliche Hilfe gehabt, daß mir alle Werke der Privat- und öffentlichen Bibliotheken und alle Sammlungen zu Gebote gestellt wurden, so hätte ich das Buch nicht schreiben können. Es kann aber deshalb kein anderer so leicht vollführen, da Konnexionen und Begünstigungen nötig sind...⁶⁰ (Brandes 127)

⁵⁹ "We turn our steps from the cathedral's square through *Piazza della paglia* and *Via Rondinelli* towards the church *San Gaetano o Michele*"

⁶⁰ "...If I had not had the extraordinary help given by all the works from private and public libraries and collections, which were put at my disposal, I would not have been able to write the book. It could not be carried out so easily by anybody else, since connections and privileges are necessary..."

The information presented by Schopenhauer in *Florenz* could not have been obtained by anyone else. The book was not the collection of facts and data that could have been gathered by any objective observer, as Murray and Baedeker claimed of their own guides. Therefore, unlike them, it was to be published under the author's name. The identity of the author as a German woman is further disclosed and sometimes even pointed out in the text to qualify the limits or the point of view of an observation. Moreover, Schopenhauer does not completely eliminate the use of the first person singular 'ich' ('I'), which she employs especially when she needs to explain her decision to discuss or to overlook a given subject.

The anonymity of the authors, the substitution of the account in the first person singular with a more impersonal style, and above all the omission of any subjective opinions and judgements were all strategies adopted by Murray's and Baedeker's handbooks in order to assert their authority as guidebooks. While local guides were inclined to offer too much information or to overstate the importance of what they described, Murray's and Baedeker's handbooks presented themselves as written by experienced travellers for other travellers and claimed to present the objectivity of a detached view (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* v). They committed themselves to informing their readers about everything that was worth knowing and to presenting an impartial view. At the same time, they saved travellers from wasting time by indicating which places were not considered interesting. Later Baedeker's handbooks developed a system based on stars assigned to the places and things described according to their quality or worth (Mendelson 391). The system was meant to help travellers select sites worth visiting.

Schopenhauer knew that it was impossible for her to include in her guide of Florence information about all of the city's treasures, as promised by Murray and Baedeker. In the text she states repeatedly that she had to limit herself to describing only a selection of places and works of art (*Florenz* 72, 109, 111, 137, 175, 179). Possibly she realized that a book especially meant for travellers had 'to guide' them to choose the most important things to see. The choice of buildings and works of art presented by Schopenhauer is based, as she claims, on "das allgemein Anerkannte"⁶¹ (*Florenz* 111). However, she decides from time to time what to include or omit in her descriptions according to her own interests and taste. In the Duomo (Cathedral) for example, she informs the readers that she will pass over many monuments and tombs, because she assumes that they are important only for the inhabitants of Florence (*Florenz* 85). A few lines later, however, she explains that she will devote some space to describe more accurately the works of Luca della Robbia, which she finds "wundervoll"⁶² (*Florenz* 85). When she needs to leave something out of her description, she always tries to explain or justify her choice. In the church Santa Trinità, the "beschränkter Raum"⁶³ forces her to refer her readers "auf das Selbstanschauen"⁶⁴ (*Florenz* 109). As for the art galleries in Florence, the huge number of works gathered in them prevents Schopenhauer from attempting even a mere enumeration, but she reassures her readers that: "dem in Florenz Anwesenden kein Katalog nötig ist, da ihm in jeder Privat-Galleria ein Verzeichnis der in jedem einzelnen Zimmer befindlichen Gemälde überreicht wird"⁶⁵ (*Florenz* 111). In the

⁶¹ "what is generally accepted"

⁶² "wonderful"

⁶³ "limited space"

⁶⁴ "to see it for themselves"

⁶⁵ "for those who are in Florence no catalogue is necessary, because in every private gallery they will be provided with a list of the paintings located in each single room."

Uffizi Gallery she is often overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of the works of art, and she fears that her readers will also grow weary of long lists of names: “Die große Anzahl hier angehäufter Gußarbeiten [...] aufzuzählen, wäre für die Leser – wie auch für mich – ermüdend”⁶⁶ (*Florenz* 137).

Unlike Murray’s and Baedeker’s handbooks, she does not suggest priorities among the things described. She usually tries to follow chronological order and a logical itinerary when it comes to deciding on what to introduce first. For example, when she presents the church of Orsanmichele she explains: “Es gehört zu den der *Piazza* nicht fernen Gebäuden und ist aus der Zeit des *Palazzo della Signoria*, darum habe ich meine Leser zu ihm hingelockt, anstatt sie erst in die neueren Bauten und zu den Kunstschätzen der *Uffizi* zu führen”⁶⁷ (*Florenz* 78).

Whereas Murray and Baedeker eliminated any subjective judgements and based their authority on impartiality, Schopenhauer does not refrain from expressing her opinions. When she does not like something or when she finds a work particularly beautiful, she says so, and she even goes so far as to criticize the arrangement of paintings and statues in the Uffizi Gallery. About the Neptune fountain in Piazza della Signoria, for example, she points out: “Die Mischung bunten und weißen Marmors in den Satyrn, Nymphen und Tritonen, welche den Gott des Meeres umgeben, ist eigentlich unschön, sie liegt jedoch im Volksgeschmack und mehr noch in dem der Zeit, welcher

⁶⁶ “To enumerate the great number of bronze casts amassed here [...] would be for the readers – as well as for me – wearisome.”

⁶⁷ “It is among the buildings not far away from the *Piazza* and it is from the same period as the *Palazzo della Signoria*, and so I have led my readers to it, instead of guiding them first to the newer buildings and art treasures of the *Uffizi*.”

das ganze Kunstwerk angehört”⁶⁸ (*Florenz* 66). In the Tribuna of the Uffizi, she praises the famous statue of the *Apollino* as “von fast makelloser Schönheit.”⁶⁹ Compared to the bronze one in Rome ascribed to Praxiteles, she finds the *Apollino* of the Uffizi “unsäglich schöner”⁷⁰ (*Florenz* 164, 16). In the picture gallery of the Uffizi, she needs to give voice to her frustration about the disposition of the works of art in the rooms before she can start to describe them: “Die Einrichtung, daß [...] die Kunstprodukte der Architektur und Malerei in steter Unterbrechung wechselnd gemeinschaftlich aufgestellt sind, hat mir nie zusagen wollen, ich halte sie beiden Künsten für ungünstig. Am übelsten kommen die Büsten an den Fenstern weg, alle stehen gegen das Licht!”⁷¹ (*Florenz* 120-21). Schopenhauer disagrees also with the way in which the works of art were numbered and listed in the Uffizi: “Leider sind die Kunstwerke nach den breiteren Fensterpfeilern gezählt und in allem [*sic*] *Guides* so aufgeführt, ich muß diese Einrichtung also beibehalten, um das Zurechtfinden nach meinem Buch zu erleichtern, obgleich mir dieselbe unzweckmäßig erscheint, und beginne mithin mit den Skulpturen. –”⁷² (*Florenz* 121). Schopenhauer notes elsewhere that “Die Gemälde, Statuen, und Büsten tragen alle Namen, was die Anschauung erleichtert”⁷³ (*Florenz* 120).

During the nineteenth century it was not yet the normal custom in museums and galleries to provide works of art with titles and explanations, and also the guidebooks of

⁶⁸ “The mixture of coloured and white marbles in the satyrs, nymphs, and tritons which surround the god of the ocean is actually unattractive, but it is based on popular taste and even more on the taste of the period to which the whole work of art belongs.”

⁶⁹ “of almost spotless beauty”

⁷⁰ “indescribably more beautiful”

⁷¹ “The arrangement that [...] disposes the art products of architecture and painting together, alternating them in constant discontinuity, has never agreed with me, I consider it unfavourable for both arts. The busts by the windows come across as the most objectionable, all of them stand against the light!”

⁷² “Unfortunately, all the works of art are numbered according to the pillars in the windows and are cited in this way in all the *guides*. I have to keep this arrangement too, in order to help my readers find their way with my book, although it seems impractical to me.”

⁷³ “The paintings, statues, and busts all bear names, which makes their observation easier”

the time did not always give this kind of information. The Uffizi Gallery was one of the first collections to be classified and, by the time Schopenhauer wrote her Florence book, a detailed and illustrated catalogue of the Uffizi in several volumes had already been published (Maierhofer 16).⁷⁴ Schopenhauer most likely consulted the catalogues and lists of paintings in Florence's collections, which were sometimes provided for visitors to the galleries. In the text she refers repeatedly to "Guide" or "Guides" (*Florenz* 103, 121) using the English or French word. Once she mentions the Italian word "Guida" (*Florenz* 103) and once she refers to the "italienischen Guides" (*Florenz* 108) without naming any specific title or author. Schopenhauer did know Italian⁷⁵ and by the 1840s there were at least two books with the title *Guida di Firenze* published in Italian that she could have used as a reference.⁷⁶ Although a volume of Murray's handbooks dedicated exclusively to Florence was not published until much later,⁷⁷ the first edition of Murray's *Hand-book for Travellers in Northern Italy* written by Sir Francis Palgrave appeared in 1842 and included an extensive section on Florence. It is very likely that Schopenhauer knew and consulted this handbook, and it can be considered more than a coincidence that she began her Florence book with the description of the four bridges of the Arno, just as Murray does. Moreover, both Schopenhauer's *Florenz* (51) and Murray's *Hand-book* (474) recount the same episode of the collapse of the bridge *Ponte della Carraja* during a representation in 1304, which was first narrated by the old historian of Florence Giovanni Villani (1280-1348).

⁷⁴ Maierhofer mentions the following edition of the catalogue: "Galleria degli Uffizi. [Giovanni Battista Zanoni]; Reale Galleria di Firenze illustrata. 13 Bde. in 5 Abteilungen. Florenz: Giuseppe Molini, [1817-1833]" (16-17).

⁷⁵ In a letter to her brother Arthur dated 1846 she wrote: "Ich habe tüchtig Italienisch gelernt" ("I have been busily studying Italian") (Lütkehaus 469).

⁷⁶ They were: Federigo Fantozzi's *Nuova guida; ovvero, Descrizione storico-artistico-critica della città e contorni di Firenze* (1842) and Emanuele Repetti's *Notizie e guida di Firenze e de' contorni* (1841).

⁷⁷ John Murray (Firm). *Handbook of Florence and Its Environs*. 1861

In Murray's handbook, the section on Florence is preceded by a series of practical entries, giving information about hotels, restaurants, cafés, lodging, bankers, passports, and merchants, which are not to be found in Schopenhauer's book (Murray, *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy* 474-477). This was possibly the most important innovation introduced by Murray and later followed by Baedeker. The two publishing companies promised to provide their readers with all the practical information they might need in a foreign country and to keep this information constantly updated with new and revised editions of their handbooks. For each city they gave lists of hotels, restaurants, and coffee houses, indicating not only the quality that travellers could expect from them, but also the regular prices asked for the food and services offered. In the introduction to each handbook, they informed readers about general usages and customs of the places described. They provided schedules for trains and diligences, tables to convert foreign currencies and measures, and information about the regulations in force in the different states concerning passports and duties. They went so far as to give detailed advice about how much to tip servants and waiters and about which kind of food to choose in the various seasons.⁷⁸ No aspect of the journey was left out. The maps included in the handbooks became more and more detailed in order to help travellers find their way more easily. Routes were also precisely prescribed in the handbooks, which presented the information organized into itineraries with lists of locations that had to be seen along the way and indications of the time needed to cover the distances. The handbooks addressed the needs of an increasing number of middle-class travellers who had not much in common with the previous generation of rich and well educated élite travellers of the

⁷⁸ For example, in *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, it is possible to find the following piece of advice: "Poultry should be avoided in the spring; the fowls at that season feeding upon a peculiar insect which gives them a rancid taste, extending even to their eggs" (Murray 12).

Grand Tour. The 'new' middle-class travellers had limited time, money, and education at their disposal. They wanted to be warned and protected against the risks and dangers connected with travelling; they wanted a guide to prevent any waste of time and money in losing the way or being defrauded, and finally they wanted to be reassured that they were gaining knowledge from their journeys. Murray's and Baedeker's guidebooks supplied all these needs, promoting a standardized collective experience of the country visited and leaving very little room for individual observation or personal interaction with the locals. Furthermore, because the guidebooks by definition were small and could easily be carried everywhere, travellers had the chance to read them in front of the objects described. Thus, they often missed the opportunity to learn and be inspired by the pure contemplation of the works of art and were left with the impression of having gained knowledge through the reading of a summary of standardized facts and information (Allen 219).

Schopenhauer did not have this kind of traveller in mind when she planned her Florence book; the practical needs of the tourist were not taken into consideration at all. She was aware that the majority of the city's visitors did not have enough time at their disposal either to devote the necessary attention to all the buildings and works of art, or to become acquainted with the history and events which gave birth to them (*Florenz* 159). Her effort was directed to all the travellers who, although short on time, still wished for the patient contemplation of art and nature to have an effect on them (Maierhofer 29). For those travellers she not only offered facts, dates, and objective information, but also related a number of historical events and episodes, anecdotes, legends, and stories that helped them imagine the Florence of the past, in order better to understand the present

character of the city as well. Her book was not meant to be ‘consumed on the spot’ and did not claim to be exhaustive; rather it tried to stimulate readers’ curiosity and interest. It aimed at increasing their enjoyment of the place, both in anticipation of the trip and after their return. In the introduction to the Uffizi Gallery she explains: “die Andeutungen, die ich hier zu geben wage, sollen also nur der Erinnerung und Vorbereitung des Genusses dienen. –”⁷⁹ (*Florenz* 120). She expected her readers to consider her book as a starting point only and once they had observed and decided on their own what they found most interesting, to use the names and tips provided to deepen their knowledge of the subject.

Schopenhauer delighted in the history and art of Florence and her purpose was to share with “dem beobachtenden Geiste”⁸⁰ (*Florenz* 53) the events and stories that took place in Florence and that left behind buildings and works of art as silent witnesses of the past. Every stone and every corner, every palace and statue had a story to tell and Schopenhauer tried to give voice to them. For example, the palace known by the name of Bargello, built to be the Palazzo del Podestà and then used as court of justice and as prison, is the occasion for recounting the story of Florence from the time of the Goths and Longobards to the institution of the Signoria. Schopenhauer reports the discovery in 1841 of a fresco by Giotto under a white washed wall of the Bargello. It was described by Vasari but had been supposed lost. The fresco, containing the portraits of the young Dante, Brunetto Latini, Corso Donati, and other celebrated personalities of the time, is presented as a kind of example of the still unknown and fresh treasures from the past that the city continuously offers: “Aber doch einen köstlichen Schatz hat uns in dem

⁷⁹ “the indications that I venture to give here should thus serve only to remember or to prepare for the pleasure. –”

⁸⁰ “the observing spirit”

grausigen Bau die Kunst in unantastbarer Schönheit und Heiterkeit, wie eine Blüte auf einem Grabe, erhalten”⁸¹ (*Florenz* 57).

Schopenhauer’s description of the most famous buildings in Florence is animated by the memory of famous historical figures or by the account of curious events. The small door at the side of Giotto’s Campanile (bell-tower), through which one of the conspirators in the famous ‘Congiura dei Pazzi’ managed to escape, is the starting point for the narration of that bloody event, as a consequence of which Giuliano de’ Medici lost his life and Lorenzo de’ Medici was wounded. The Piazza del Duomo is represented as the background to the religious processions held in honour of the miraculous image of the ‘Madonna dell’Impruneta’ every time the city was plagued by drought, famine, wars, and pestilences. The Piazza is also the place where, according to Schopenhauer, it is almost possible to feel the ghostly presence of all the artists born in Florence:

Manchmal schreiten einem auch über dieser Stätte die geistigen Gestalten der alten Künstler vorüber, deren Werk gestört oder unbeendet geblieben. – *Andrea Pisano* ausgenommen, sind fast alle geborene Florentiner, die hier gewirkt und allerdings in sehr verschiedenem Sinne die drei Hauptgebäude dieses Platzes, den Dom, *San Giovanni*, und das *Campanile* erhoben!⁸² (*Florenz* 90)

On the one hand, Schopenhauer is especially interested in discovering traces of the ancient customs and traditions of Florence perpetuated in the present. She notices, for example, how the big public festivities and celebrations resemble those of the previous centuries: “Im Ganzen gleichen noch heute alle größern italienischen Volksvergnügungen [...], welche damals alljährlich sich erneuerten, jetzt aber mehr auf Wettlauf, Illumination

⁸¹ “And yet art has preserved for us in that dreadful building a delightful treasure of unassailable beauty and cheerfulness, like a blossom on a grave.”

⁸² “Sometimes at this spot the ghostly presences of the old artists pass by, those whose works were destroyed or remained unfinished. – Except for *Andrea Pisano*, nearly all those who worked here were born in Florence and, though in very different ways, they raised up the three main buildings of this square, the cathedral, *San Giovanni*, and the *Campanile*!”

und Feuerwerke beschränkt sind”⁸³ (*Florence* 73). And she points out that the spot on Piazza della Signoria where Savonarola was burned alive on May 23, 1498 was, up to a few years earlier, still covered with flowers on the anniversary of his death (*Florence* 75). On the other hand, Schopenhauer is upset by the fact that ancient palaces, once belonging to the most important and noble Florentine families, were transformed into hotels, banks, and lodgings for foreign tourists: “Schmerzhaft ist es, die meisten dieser ehrwürdigen Wohnungen historisch berühmter edler Florentiner als Wirthäuser, Fremdenquartiere und finanzielle Institute bezeichnen zu müssen”⁸⁴ (*Florenz* 108).

In the large section of the book dealing with the Uffizi Gallery, Schopenhauer seems to enjoy narrating the life and character of the famous painters more than describing and interpreting their pictures. The source for the majority of the stories and anecdotes she relates is Giorgio Vasari’s famous book *Vite de’ più Eccellenti Architetti, Pittori e Scultori Italiani* (1550). Schopenhauer knew it, and possibly used a German translation of it, which had appeared only a few years before she started working on her manuscript (Maierhofer 15).⁸⁵ The story of the painter Andrea del Sarto, who died forgotten and poor because of his desperate and passionate love for a woman who ruined him, is taken directly from Vasari’s book, and Schopenhauer even quotes the last line of it (*Florenz* 112-114). Vasari is also the source of the anecdote about Michelangelo’s *Tondo Doni* for which the buyer wanted to bargain over the price and ended up paying

⁸³ “On the whole, all the big Italian festivities, which at that time were revived annually, are the same still today, but now they are limited especially to races, illuminations, and fireworks.”

⁸⁴ “It is painful to have to name the majority of these venerable dwellings of historically famous noble Florentines as inns, foreigners’ residences, and financial institutes.”

⁸⁵ Maierhofer suggests that Schopenhauer used the following translation of Vasari’s book: “Giorgio Vasari. Leben der ausgezeichnetsten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister, von Cimabue bis zum Jahre 1567. Aus dem Italienischen. Mit den wichtigsten Anmerkungen der früheren Herausgeber, so wie mit neueren Berichtigungen und Nachweisungen begleitet und herausgegeben von Ludwig Schorn (und nach dessen Tode ab Band III v. Ernst Förster). 6 Bde. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1832-1847” (15).

twice as much as the sum initially agreed upon (*Florence* 168). Vasari's name is mentioned repeatedly in Schopenhauer's book also when she has to rectify or totally disagree with his claims (*Florence* 58, 67, 96, 101, 109, 128, 197). Besides being an important source of information, Vasari's book, with its way of mixing facts, legends, and anecdotes, most likely also represented a model and an inspiration for Schopenhauer's own approach and presentation of Florence's art and history in her work (Maierhofer 16).

Schopenhauer knew and quoted from other works of important Italian authors as well, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In particular the old chronicle of Florence written by Giovanni Villani, which had appeared in a new edition in 1844-1845,⁸⁶ supplied Schopenhauer with information about the history of the city (Maierhofer 16). She uses Villani's chronicle as a reference to establish the origin of the Battistero (*Florenz* 96), and for the episode of the masquerade held in 1304, which caused the collapse of the Ponte della Carraja (*Florenz* 51). Villani is also quoted as the source of the story of a tower built by the Guelphs with the express purpose of making it fall on the houses and tombs of the Ghibellines (*Florenz* 96), as well of an episode related as an example of the almost tyrannical executive power established by the Guelph families in the thirteenth century (*Florenz* 59).

Although in the Preface to the first of his handbooks Murray claimed that its superiority to other guidebooks was "based upon personal knowledge of the countries described" (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* vi), he also had to admit that much of the information presented was obtained from other books: "The

⁸⁶ Maierhofer mentions the following edition of Villani's book as the one possibly used by Schopenhauer: "Giovanni Villani *Cronica. A miglior lezione ridotta coll'ajuto de' testi a penna*. Hrsg. von Francesco Gerardi-Dragomanni. 4 Bde. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1844-45" (16).

subject of this volume, and the purpose for which it is written, admit of little novelty, most of the information it contains being necessarily derived from books, modified by actual observation” (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* vi). Murray and Baedeker presented themselves as authorities also with regard to the selection of books and sources of information used for their handbooks. While Schopenhauer drew her information from a few books that she found particularly interesting and from her personal acquaintance with some experts and locals, Murray and Baedeker claimed to have extracted their material from all the most important books available on the subject, including those written in foreign languages and not easily accessible to the common reader. The travellers, therefore, were reassured that nothing important had been overlooked and that they did not need to go and look for further information. As Murray explains in the introduction to his first handbook: “This volume is complete in itself as far as it goes, and is intended to preclude the necessity of resorting to any other Guide Book in the countries which it professes to describe” (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* vi). In the first editions of the Murray, one of the most important and innovative features was the introduction of literary citations. The handbook provided selected passages from famous poems and novels, so that they could be read in the presence of the places and things they alluded to, increasing thus the traveller’s enjoyment of both the texts and the objects described. Murray explained the function of the literary citations in the introduction to the first handbook:

Whenever an author of celebrity, such as Scott, Byron, Rogers, or Southey, has described a place, [the writer of the Hand-Book] has made a point of extracting the passage, knowing how much the perusal of it on the spot, where the works themselves are not to be procured, will enhance the interest of seeing the objects described. (Murray, *A Hand-Book for Travellers on the Continent* v-vi)

In this way Murray's handbooks aimed to be considered as a compendium of all the existing works – scientific and literary – which concerned the places or things described. Including in his handbooks citations from authors such as Scott and Southey, whose works were published by his own company, was also a way of indirectly advertising his products (Allen 220). The citations inserted in Murray's handbooks suggested to readers the emotions and reactions they were supposed to experience in the presence of specific places or works of art. If, on the one hand, the quotations in the handbooks standardized even the outcome of the journey for the travellers, on the other hand, they suggested that a unique and personal experience of the places visited was still a possibility – though reserved to a few special personalities such as the “author of celebrity” (Allen 221). This is possibly the reason why Baedeker's handbooks – which were destined to become more successful than Murray's – progressively reduced and finally eliminated the literary citations, substituting them with more detailed recommendations on hotels, restaurants, and shops, and with more precise information about their prices and quality. Like Murray's handbooks, Baedeker's were also based on other texts, but instead of quoting from them, they provided imposing bibliographies to reinforce the idea that their authority derived from a huge work of research impossible for the individual traveller to undertake (Allen 221).

Murray and especially Baedeker aimed more and more at replacing individual experience with “collectively verifiable information” (Allen 221). Descriptions of local customs and habits were gradually dismissed by both Murray and Baedeker. They did, however, maintain information on peculiarities of the country and its people which could represent a threat to travellers. In this way they propagated national stereotypes and

prejudices about various destinations. In addition, when Baedeker's firm started to produce its handbooks in various languages, their content was changed to suit the needs and what were assumed to be the points of view of travellers of different nationalities (Allen 222). The representation of countries and of travel experiences according to the handbooks became standardized but, at the same time, also customized in conformity with the nationality of the travellers (Mendelson 400-401).

In this respect the social and political turmoil which characterized the history of nineteenth-century Europe, with its frequent wars, uprisings, revolts, and the rapid change in the alliances among the various states, made it necessary and safe for the publishers of handbooks to leave out any comments about the ongoing struggles engaged by the residents of the destinations described in the guides (Allen 222). This kind of information, moreover, could have discouraged prospective travellers from undertaking journeys to politically instable and potentially dangerous destinations, resulting in a financial loss for the publishing companies themselves.

By omitting comments about the political situation of a country and by excluding information about its social customs, the guidebooks progressively transformed the places described into a sort of open-air museums that, from the traveller's point of view, existed only for the enjoyment they were able to provide. Interaction between travellers and locals was restricted to the exchange of money, and thus the guidebooks supplied more and more detailed information about prices. Once the travellers had given to the locals the amount of money indicated in their guides, they could enjoy the spectacle offered by the place without worrying about anything else (Allen 223).

Schopenhauer's *Florenz* resembles in many respects the handbooks' approach to the places described. She was interested in the past of Florence and presented her readers with the city as it used to look like during the Renaissance time rather than in the nineteenth century. There are no comments here about the inhabitants of Florence and, of the contemporary customs and traditions, she mentions only those that originated in the past. Unlike Murray's and Baedeker's handbooks, however, Schopenhauer's attitude towards the locals is not biased and she never resorts to stereotypes about the country and its people. Even when she gives an account of religious legends or of supposedly miraculous events – like the image of the Madonna by Simone da Fiesole, which repeatedly moved its eyes in 1628 (*Florenz* 79), or the withered tree which turned verdant and blossomed in January when it was touched by the coffin with the remains of San Zenobio in 409 (*Florenz* 90) – she does not use an ironic tone, and she never mocks the cult of saints or people's belief in miracles, as was usual among Protestant travellers when visiting a Catholic country.

In the fragment entitled *Italienisches Landleben*, Schopenhauer argues against the attribution of a standardized national character to the Italians. She disagrees with “fast alle deutsche Reisenden, besonders unsern neueren Touristen,”⁸⁷ because they considered “alle Italiener wie große Kinder,”⁸⁸ whose principal characteristics were “Eifersucht, Habgier, Putzsucht und Hang zur Liebesintrige”⁸⁹ (*Florenz* 213). She finds such generalizations “höchst einseitig und oberflächlich”⁹⁰ (*Florenz* 214). In her opinion there are so many exceptions and specific differences that intervene to alter and reverse this

⁸⁷ “almost all the German travellers, especially our new tourists”

⁸⁸ “all the Italians to be like big children”

⁸⁹ “jealousy, greediness, passion for finery, and propensity to love intrigues”

⁹⁰ “extremely biased and superficial”

kind of general judgement that: “Eine solche National-Bezeichnung ist an sich nicht viel genauer als die, daß ein Normal-Mensch zwei Beine und einen Kopf hat”⁹¹ (*Florenz* 214). The tombs of two Italian architects buried in Santa Croce, famous in Italy but completely unknown in Germany, occasion an observation about the different national interests and the exchange of knowledge among the countries: “Und wir rühmen uns doch eines fortschreitenden warmen Interesses an Italien und der Kunst und schelten die große Unwissenheit der Italiener. Liegt aber nicht die Kluft der ganz verschiedenen National-Interessen dieser Unkenntnis mehr als alles andere zu Grunde?”⁹² (*Florenz* 95). Schopenhauer hopes that the building of additional railways, to make travel and the exchange of knowledge easier, will contribute to “einer wirklichen geistigen Annäherung”⁹³ (*Florenz* 195).

Although Schopenhauer was convinced that an English translation of her book would have been successful and therefore profitable for her publisher,⁹⁴ her Florence guide was actually particularly directed to a German public. Like the later Baedeker’s handbooks, Schopenhauer tailored the information offered in her guide to the tastes and interests that she shared with her own compatriots. She often refers to opinions and tastes widespread in Germany: for example, she mentions that the interior of Florence’s cathedral appeared “schmucklos”⁹⁵ and “finster”⁹⁶ (*Florenz* 84) to many Germans; she

⁹¹ “Such a national characterization is in itself not more precise than to say that a normal person has two legs and a head”

⁹² “And we pride ourselves on lively and progressive interest in Italy and art and we scold Italians for their great ignorance? Is it not the gap between the totally different national interests that creates the basis for this ignorance more than anything else?”

⁹³ “a real intellectual rapprochement of the national interests”

⁹⁴ To her publisher Brockhaus she wrote: “Es ließe sich aber auch eine Übertragung ins Englische machen und glückte diese, könnte das Geschäft sehr bedeutend werden” (Brandes 127). (“It would also be possible to make a translation into English and, if this succeeded, the business could become very considerable”)

⁹⁵ “bare”

⁹⁶ “gloomy”

disagrees with the underestimation that the painter Carlo Dolci received in her homeland (*Florenz* 114); and she passes over the description of paintings by Flemish artists, assuming that her readers would have had the chance to admire them in Germany (*Florenz* 146). Since Schopenhauer's manuscript was not published during the nineteenth century, its translation into English remained out of question as well. A translation of *Florenz* for an English audience would, in any case, have required the same kinds of changes that Baedeker introduced to adapt his handbooks to readers of different nationalities.

Schopenhauer was personally affected by the revolutionary turmoil of 1848. The wars in Northern Italy forced her to remain in Florence though seriously ill and unattended, and she was there when on February 17, 1848 the Grand Duke of Tuscany Leopold II under pressure from the revolutionaries granted a constitution (Maierhofer 23). These events from the contemporary history of Florence are not mentioned in Schopenhauer's manuscript, but her attitude towards the political situation in the city is not totally neutral and detached like that of the authors of Baedeker's handbooks. Her book reveals her sympathies for the Italian political situation. It is apparent that she took the side of those who wanted democratic institutions, a constitution, and the union of Italy under a single government with the expulsion of the Austrians from the northern territories.

Schopenhauer describes in detail and with great enthusiasm the democratic institutions of thirteenth-century Florence – like the Podestà, the Capitano del Popolo, the Priori, and the Gonfaloniere della Giustizia – when the power was concentrated in the hands of the middle classes and of the artisans' guilds, while the aristocracy was

excluded from the government. She regrets the end of the democratic government – she calls it “Republik” (*Florenz* 55, 61) – which, in spite of the increasing power of the Medici family and of the changes in some of the institutions, was preserved in its spirit until the death of Savonarola in 1498.⁹⁷ At the end of the account of the evolution of Florence’s government over three centuries, she laments:

Diesen ungeheuren Vorkehrungen zum Trotz fiel darauf die Republik der Aristokratie des Reichtums anheim wie früher der Feudalmacht! Ihre Bürger wurden Fürsten, wurden Herrscher! Alle Versuche, dem Übel zu steuern, blieben vergeblich. Der Luxus ergriff das heilige Szepter, mit welchem es die leicht bewegliche ärmere Volksmasse regiert!⁹⁸ (*Florenz* 61)

The flowers brought to the spot on the Piazza della Signoria where Savonarola was burned alive are mentioned as a sign that the city still mourned the end of the democracy and wished for its restoration: “Am tiefsten trauert um ihn die Republik, denn sie sank ihm nach ins Grab”⁹⁹ (*Florenz* 75).

Schopenhauer also alludes to the “Freiheits-Taumel”¹⁰⁰ of the youth in Florence who, as a sign of thanks for the reforms introduced by the Grand Duke in 1847, decorated the statue of Dante in the court of the Uffizi with a letter about freedom (*Florenz* 119). She was probably present in the city during the first optimistic stage of the Florentine Risorgimento, when the Grand Duke Leopold II was celebrated for a number of administrative reforms such as freedom of the press and especially for the institution of the Guardia Civica (Civil Guard) – a first step towards a more liberal government and the

⁹⁷ The Republic of Florence established by Savonarola in 1496 after the expulsion of Piero de’ Medici, was maintained for another decade, but it finally had to surrender in 1530 under the assault of the Imperial army.

⁹⁸ “Notwithstanding these huge precautions, after that the republic developed upon the aristocracy of richness like formerly upon the feudal power! Its citizens became princes, became rulers! All the attempts to curb the evil remained vain. The luxury seized the holy sceptre with which it governs the easily movable poorer populace!”

⁹⁹ “The republic mourned him more deeply than anyone else; it sank into the grave after him.”

¹⁰⁰ “freedom-rapture”

granting of a constitution (Hearder 80). The Florentines' enthusiastic celebrations of the new Civil Guard, considered as a sign that Italy's long domination by foreign power would soon end, are described in the first part of the famous poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) (Cronin 41). Although the English poet and her husband Robert Browning lived in Florence from 1847 until her death in 1861 in the house not far from Palazzo Pitti which gives the title to the poem, there is no evidence that Schopenhauer knew or met them during her stay in the city from October 1847 to May 1848 (Maierhofer 23). Schopenhauer did not live long enough to see the events described in the second part of *Casa Guidi Windows* written a few years later, when the hopes of the Italian Risorgimento were crushed and the Grand Duke Leopold II returned to Florence accompanied by the Austrian army to establish a completely authoritarian and absolutist regime (Maierhofer 23-24). The words Schopenhauer wrote in the introduction to *Florenz* are proof of the sympathy she felt for the Florentines and of her hope that the ideals of freedom which characterized the past of the city would soon be restored:

Im Ganzen, in der Gesinnung dieses Volkes entfalten sich unaufhörlich die nämlichen Blüten der Empfindung, welche zu Zeiten seiner Republik es belebten, und seine Hoffnungen knospen immer, der Winter starrer Entsagung vernichtet sie nicht! Auf den Straßen, welche aus den Tagen der Freiheit die Namen der sie bewohnenden Gewerke behalten, in welche damals Adel und Bürger eingeschrieben waren, lernt der Bettelbube. An den Palästen erkennt er die Monumente der Geschichte seiner Vaterstadt. An den ihn frei umgebenden Kunstwerken bildet sich sein Auge, und sein frisches Gedächtnis bewahrt die Namen der edlen Meister, denen seine Urväter sie verdankten. Ihm dringt das historisch Bemerkenswerte mit dem ideal Schönen zugleich in die Seele, der Geist der Vergangenheit erzieht ihn für die Gegenwart.¹⁰¹ (*Florenz* 41)

¹⁰¹ "All in all, in the character of the people there unfold incessantly the real blossoms of the sentiment which animated them at the time of the republic, and their hopes are constantly budding; the rigid winter's renunciation does not destroy them! The streets keep the names of the professions, which used to inhabit

3.3 Schopenhauer's "Narrative Guide" *Florenz* and Nineteenth-Century Women's Travel Writing

Schopenhauer's "erzählender Guide" (Brandes 127) is problematic not only in relation to the genre of the handbooks for travellers produced by Murray and Baedeker, with which it shares as many similarities as differences. The hybrid nature of the book becomes apparent also if it is considered as belonging to the large body of nineteenth-century female travel literature. As a travel book written by a woman in the middle of the nineteenth century, Schopenhauer's *Florenz* does not partake in many of the elements that Foster in *Across New Worlds* recognizes as being present to some extent in all the female travel literature of the time and "forming a sense of a generic and gendered discourse" (24). For example, Schopenhauer resists using the autobiographical mode for her book. The journal and letter forms were preferred by many female travel writers for their confessional nature, and sometimes they were adopted as mere formal devices in order to suggest a private and domestic attitude of the authoress, who could pretend to have written about her travel experiences with no intention of publishing them. In contrast, the form of the guidebook employed by Schopenhauer gave her both the tone and the structure for her work.

The causes and circumstances of Schopenhauer's journey to Italy resemble those of the majority of women travellers of the time. In the warmer climate of the Peninsula she hoped to restore her health that had been weakened by a polyp in the abdomen. She also desired to learn from and be inspired by the contemplation of art. Living in Italy

them from the days of freedom, when nobility and the middle-classes were enrolled in guilds. The beggar boy studies in the streets. In the palaces he recognizes the monuments of the history of his home town. The works of art that surround him educate his eye and his fresh memory preserves the names of the noble artists, to whom his ancestors were indebted. What is historically remarkable together with the ideal beauty permeate his soul; the spirit of the past educates him for the present."

would have also improved her precarious financial situation. However, unlike the majority of other women of the time who wrote about their journeys, Schopenhauer did not need to include in her text an explanation of the reasons that moved her to travel. She also did not use any of the strategies adopted by many women travel writers to justify their reasons for publishing yet another book about Italy. Those strategies included among other things an apologia, usually in the form of a preface (Foster 20). There the author would claim, for example, that she was urged by importunate family or friends to publish what she had written only for herself (Foster 19), or she would offer as a justification for her work her intention to comment on areas which had not been treated before.

Schopenhauer wrote her Florence book expressly in order to publish it, and she did not include a preface to justify her intentions to her readers. However, the arguments she uses to convince her prospective publisher of the value of her work resemble in part the recurring justifications for writing adduced by other female authors of travel books. In the already mentioned letter to Brockhaus, Schopenhauer claimed that: “Es gibt gar keinen deutschen Guide für Florenz,”¹⁰² (Brandes 127) and that, for sure, there was no other book which presented the subject the way she did – “wie es jedoch gehalten ist kenne ich kein ähnliches”¹⁰³ (Brandes 127). She explained to her publisher that the worth of her book and her competence to write it ensued from a careful work of documentation. She even appealed to the authority of a friend – the art and architecture historian Sulpiz Boisserée (1783-1854) – who supported the originality of the idea and had confidence in her ability to carry it out: “Ich hatte mir für meinen Freund Sulpiz Boisserée die Idee

¹⁰² “There is no German guide for Florence”

¹⁰³ “however, in the way this is done I do not know of anything similar”

ungefähr aufgeschrieben, und er war ungemein dafür eingenommen [...]. Sulpiz traut mir zu, es zu können”¹⁰⁴ (Brandes 127). In the text, however, with the typical modest attitude employed by many women to conform to the “current criteria of literary femininity” (Foster 19), Schopenhauer disclaims her expertise and downplays her intentions asserting that she does not want “to write a book about art,” but she would like only “to offer a friendly hand to ease the way”¹⁰⁵ (*Florenz* 175).

In the introduction to *Florenz* she compares her “Büchlein”¹⁰⁶ (*Florenz* 40) to the bouquets of unpretentious flowers that Italian girls used to put together and offer to travellers in exchange for some coins:

Denn wie einer dieser mosaikartig zusammengefügt Blumensträuße, welche man diesem Boden abgewinnt und die man in ganz Italien, besonders aber in Florenz dem dahin reitenden Reisenden in den Wagen wirft, so möchte ich in gewissem Sinn dem Leser mein Werk bieten: Blüte an Blüte, Krone and Krone gereiht, in bunter, doch nicht unüberlegter Farbenmischung.¹⁰⁷ (*Florenz* 40-41)

The image of the book about Florence – the city of flowers – offered like a bouquet of modest blossoms implies the idea of an exchange among women, since both those offering and the recipients of the flowers were usually female. Schopenhauer discloses her identity as a woman in her book, and although she did not mean to write exclusively for a female audience, she addresses repeatedly her “Leserinnen”¹⁰⁸ as the principal receivers of the information she is about to give. For example, she mentions the *Sala*

¹⁰⁴ “I had written down approximately the idea for my friend Sulpiz Boissérée, and he was won over by it [...]. Sulpiz believes that I am able to do it.”

¹⁰⁵ “[...] da ich kein Buch über Kunst schreiben, nur eine Freundeshand bieten möchte, den Weg zu erleichtern”

¹⁰⁶ “little book”

¹⁰⁷ “Like one of these bouquets of flowers assembled like a mosaic, for which you acquire a taste in this rich land, and which everywhere in Italy, but especially in Florence, are thrown in the carriages of the riding travellers, in this way, in a certain sense, I would like to offer my work to the reader: flower by flower, crown by crown, arranged in a variegated but not injudicious mix of colours.”

¹⁰⁸ “female readers”

della Scuola Olandese in the Uffizi Gallery because of some “allerliebste Bildchen”¹⁰⁹ by famous painters, and she requests the “freundlichen Leserinnen, ihnen persönlich umso mehr Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken”¹¹⁰ (*Florenz* 160). Occasionally, she asks her male readers, who are supposedly better educated, to endure the further explanations she gives for the sake of their female companions. The local history of Florence and its institution is introduced especially for the benefit of the female audience:

Um nun Auffassung, Verständnis und Genuß dieser so tief in die Vergangenheit rückgreifenden architektonischen Werke großer Künstler zu erleichtern, erlaube ich mir einige fast fragmentarische, historische Andeutungen, welche meine Leser der Leserinnen wegen, freundlich mir verzeihen mögen, da dieser die Phasen der Toskaner und insbesondere der Florentiner Geschichte vielleicht nicht ganz gegenwärtig sind.¹¹¹ (*Florenz* 54)

In other passages it is Schopenhauer’s own womanliness, her lack of a proper education in the classical languages and in the ancient art – the kind of education reserved at that time almost exclusively to men – which prevents her from giving more detailed and specific information to her readers. In the Uffizi Gallery, for example, she declares: “Ich erlaube mir bei den Werken der Antike weder Kritik noch Detail-Erklärung”¹¹² (*Florenz* 121). About the ancient vases she argues that women lack access to the necessary archaeological knowledge to treat the subject in the proper way. As she explains, the description and the interpretation of the images painted on the vases require the observer to be conversant with ancient mythology, with names of gods and heroes, which often change from place to place and which necessitate a knowledge of Greek in

¹⁰⁹ “most charming little paintings”

¹¹⁰ “friendly female readers to pay all the more personal attention to them.”

¹¹¹ “In order to ease the perception, understanding, and enjoyment of these architectural works by great artists so rooted in the past, I allow myself some fragmentary, historical indications. Since these phases of Tuscan, and especially Florentine, history are possibly not completely familiar to my female readers, my audience may kindly excuse me for indulging in these descriptions on account of them.”

¹¹² “I do not allow myself either critique or detailed explanations about the works of the antiquity”

order to be properly understood (*Florenz* 140). Schopenhauer prefers not to write anything about them rather than to spread false or imprecise knowledge:

Ungern möchte ich Urteile aufstellen, welche ohne Basis langjährigen Studiums dem Kundigen ein Lächeln abgewinnen und selbst dem Laien durchfühlen lassen können, daß man sehr gut Romane schreiben und Zeitfragen behandeln kann und dabei dennoch über Antike und Griechentum gar närrisches Zeug sagen! Mein Büchlein soll wenigstens keine meiner Mitschwestern dazu verleiten [...].¹¹³ (*Florenz* 140-41)

In order not to leave gaps in her guide, she refers the readers who want to deepen their knowledge of ancient vases to the writings of the Berlin professor of classic archaeology Eduard Gerhard (1795-1867).

Schopenhauer is almost indignant about women writers who, unlike her, venture to advance opinions about topics they do not know in depth. In *Florenz* she argues against Fanny Lewald's *Italienisches Bilderbuch* (The Italian Sketch-Book, 1847), which is the only work about Italy that Schopenhauer mentions by title and quotes directly. Fanny Lewald was a personal acquaintance of Schopenhauer. They had met in Rome in the fall of 1845 during Lewald's one-year stay in Italy to collect material for her first travel book about the Peninsula. Among the two women there were conflicting feelings and the description Lewald left of their first encounter in the private journal of her trip – *Römisches Tagebuch 1845/46* (Roman Diary 1845/46, published posthumous in 1927) – offers a not very flattering portrait of Schopenhauer. The disliking between the two women must have been reciprocal since in the pages of *Florenz* Schopenhauer uses a sarcastic tone to argue against Lewald's interpretation of the ancient sculpture located in the Tribuna of the Uffizi and known alternatively as *Arrotino* or *Knifesharpener* or

¹¹³ “I am reluctant to advance opinions, which without the basis of many years of studying, will make the expert smile and will leave even the non-expert with the feeling that one can write very good novels and deal with contemporary questions, and at the same time, nevertheless say foolish things about antiquity and Hellenism! My little book at least will not mislead any of my sisters [...].”

Scythian Slave. The plebeian countenance, the attentive expression, and the sharpening of the knife are the main features of the sculpture, which in the course of the centuries led to many different and controversial conjectures about the identity of the represented figure. Schopenhauer agrees with what, since the eighteenth century, was accepted as the correct interpretation: the *Arrotino* was the Scythian waiting to receive instructions from Apollo to flay alive the satyr Marsyas who had dared to challenge the god in a musical contest and had been defeated (Haskell and Penny 156).¹¹⁴ Lewald's interpretation of the *Arrotino* appears almost ridiculous to Schopenhauer:

Allein im "Bilderbuch aus Italien" steht, dem allen sei nicht so! Die Verfasserin sagt, das Messer sei eine Sichel! Der Schleifer aber sei ein Proletarier, welcher anklagend, schmerz- und arbeitsmüde zum Himmel blickt. Wer konnte das ahnen! Ich will lieber meine Unwissenheit gleich von vornherein bekennen; ich habe gar nicht einmal gewußt, daß die Griechen auch Proletarier gehabt!¹¹⁵ (*Florenz* 166)

Schopenhauer's affected modesty in admitting her ignorance is meant to reflect on Lewald for her impudence in daring to disagree with experts' opinions, thus revealing her own lack of knowledge and making a fool of herself. Schopenhauer later quotes a passage from *Italienisches Bilderbuch* in which Lewald explains the similarities she found between the *Arrotino* and the sculpture called *Dying Gladiator* or *Dying Gaul* in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Schopenhauer disagrees with the supposed analogy between the two works and resentfully expresses her point of view: "Daß die Gallier und Skyther so verwandte Züge haben, habe ich wieder nicht gewußt, im Ausdruck aber

¹¹⁴ In *Taste and the Antique*, however, Haskell and Penny notice that "Gronovius, Stosch, Winckelmann and certain other scholars accepted that the figure was indeed the Scythian executioner, but [...] this made little impact on cicerones or guidebooks (and hence on travellers), and right until the middle of the nineteenth century the makers of plaster versions of this still very popular sculpture referred to it as 'the listening slave'" (156).

¹¹⁵ "But in 'Italian Picture Book' it is said that it is not so at all! The authoress says that the knife is a sickle and the grinder a proletarian who, tired of the pain and of the work, looks accusingly heavenward. Who could think this! I prefer to admit my ignorance right from the outset; I did not even know that the Greeks had proletarians!"

scheinen mir diese beiden unsäglich – verschieden!”¹¹⁶ (*Florenz* 168). In conclusion, while reaffirming her own ignorance in archaeological matters, Schopenhauer reverses Lewald’s supposition about the identity of the figure represented in the sculpture of the *Arrotino*, disproving that the knife represented is a sickle:

Ich muß den Gelehrten und der Verfasserin des Bilderbuchs aus Italien dies auszufechten überlassen. Ich verstehe, wie gesagt, gar nichts von Archäologie, aber eine einzige kleine, praktische Bemerkung möchte ich mir erlauben. Das Eisen, was der Proletarier schleift, ist mein Tage keine Sichel gewesen! weder eine antike, noch eine moderne, weder eine skytische, griechische – noch Berliner! Sicheln kenne ich ganz genau. Vom Ufer der Weichsel an bis zum Rhein, zum Tiber und am Arno hin soll mir die Dirn gefunden werden, die mit solchem Eisen der Kuh das Futter zu schneiden vermag! [...] Man kann dergleichen leicht übersehen oder vergessen, und zum Glück kräht kein Hahn darnach!¹¹⁷ (*Florenz* 168)

Apart from this dispute with Fanny Lewald, Schopenhauer does not show a particular interest in female artists. The Renaissance time gave birth to many important women poets and painters. Schopenhauer must have seen in the Uffizi Gallery the impressive painting *Judith beheading Holofernes* by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) – one of the first women artists to be officially accepted by the artistic community (Maierhofer 20). She also must have noticed in the Sala dei Ritratti dei Pittori the self-portrait of Angelika Kaufmann (1741-1807) – the famous Swiss painter well known to Schopenhauer, because she was in Rome with Goethe and appears among his friends in *Italienische Reise* (Maierhofer 20). These paintings, however, are not even mentioned by Schopenhauer, and the only two names of female artists she refers to in her book are

¹¹⁶ “That the Gaul and the Scythian have such kindred features, I did not know, but the expressions of the two appear to me immensely – different!”

¹¹⁷ “I have to leave it to scholars and to the authoress of the Italian Picture Book to fight it out. As already mentioned, I do not understand anything about archaeology, but I would like to allow myself a single small practical remark. The iron that the proletarian grinds was never a sickle! Neither an ancient, nor a modern one, neither a Scythian, a Greek – nor a Berlin one! I know sickles very well! From the bank of the Vistula to the Rhine, from the Tiber to the Arno, I would not find anyone, who could cut forage for a cow with such a piece of iron! [...] You can easily ignore or forget this, but luckily no rooster crows about it!”

Maria van Oosterwyck (1630-1693) and Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) – two Dutch painters specialized in still-lives of flowers (*Florenz* 162).

As in many other travel books by women writers of the time, the choice of topics treated in *Florenz* reflects to some extent the author's feminine taste and viewpoint. For example, beginning with the narrowness of the streets of Florence Schopenhauer moves on to expound upon wedding customs – a topic that would have been difficult to find in a travel book written by a man. She informs that, because it was difficult for carriages to move among the intricate lanes of the city, even a bride until the sixteenth century would have had to ride to the church where she was getting married. The bride was usually accompanied by a crowd of young men, who asked for a pledge to allow her to leave the house of her parents. The pledge was then returned to the bride in exchange for an offer of money that the young men would use to celebrate in her honour (*Florenz* 69). Another observation that would have been hard to find in a travel book written by a man concerns the jeweller's shops on Ponte Vecchio. Women's usual interest for jewellery is shared by Schopenhauer, who indicates to her readers the special pleasure they will enjoy walking on the bridge:

Für uns Frauen ist der Gang über *Ponte Vecchio* sehr unterhaltend, der allerliebsten Gold- und Silberarbeiten wegen, besonders anziehend aber der Anblick all der Kostbarkeiten, mit welchen die putzsüchtigen niedern Volksklassen sich schmücken. Man findet jedoch auch schöne Korallen, Filigranarbeiten, Ketten und Bijouterien für die vornehme Welt hier ausgestellt.¹¹⁸ (*Florenz* 44)

Because of the nature of her book – more oriented towards the past than the present life of the city – this is Schopenhauer's only remark about the appearance of

¹¹⁸ “For us women, a walk on the *Ponte Vecchio* is very entertaining, because of the most charming gold and silver products, but it is also especially charming to look at all the precious things with which the lower classes with their love for finery adorn themselves. You can also find beautiful corals, filigree works, chains, and trinkets for high society displayed here.”

contemporary Florentine women. The costumes, manners, and domestic life of local women, as well as household management, marriage customs, and female status, were very frequent topics in female travel literature of the time, while they were usually ignored by male-authored travel writing (Foster 24). In the fragment *Italienisches Landeleben* written in the tone of an autobiographical account, however, Schopenhauer too shows an interest for such ‘gendered’ topics. She describes in detail the Alban women on their habitual Sunday walks to the Villa Doria, where they wait for the so-called ‘Corso,’ a number of carriages coming from Rome. In her words there are both admiration for the appearance of these women and compassion for their condition, a feeling based on the assumption of a personal and national superiority:

Herrliche Weiber! Berühmt ihrer edlen Formen und stolzen Haltung wegen. Viele in der Albaner Tracht, alle in Seide gekleidet mit großen goldnen Ohrringen, Korallenhalsbändern und, deckt das schöne Haupt kein Schleiertuch, auch mit Filigran-Haarnadeln geschmückt. Sie erwarten so, römische Sitte nachäffend, den *Corso* [...]. Alle halten bunte Fächer in Händen, die sie geschickt handhaben. Auf's *Decorum* wird streng geachtet. Die Mädchen sitzen bei der Mutter, und die jungen Männer haben höchstens als Blutverwandte das Recht, ihnen zu nahen. [...] Jahraus, jahrein wiederholen sich diese Szenen. Keine einzige Italienerin findet dieselben langweilig oder ermüdend in ihrer steten Wiederkehr. Sie kennen wenig andre Freuden.¹¹⁹ (*Florenz* 202-203)

This patronizing tone towards the Italians, characterizes Schopenhauer’s description of the simple life of the inhabitants of Albano. Their amusements, their usages and customs, down to their culinary habits are portrayed as the expression of a rustic and underdeveloped society:

¹¹⁹ “Magnificent women! Famous for their noble forms and proud attitude. Many wear the Alban costume, all are dressed in silk with big golden earrings, coral necklaces, and if their beautiful heads are not covered by a kerchief, there is a filigree hairpin for decoration. They wait for the *Corso*, aping the Roman custom [...]. All of them have colourful fans in their hands, and they handle them artfully. *Decorum* is strictly looked after. The young girls sit close to their mothers and only young men who are close relatives have the right to come close to them. [...] Year after year these scenes are repeated. Not a single Italian woman finds them boring or tiresome in their constant recurrence. They know few other joys.”

[...] der durch die prachtvollen Kirchenfeierlichkeiten eingeführte Geschmack an Aufzügen, Kampf- und Wettspielen, an Feuerwerk und Pferderennen, welcher nach und nach ein Volks- und Lebensbedürfnis geworden, denn die Leute vermögen durchaus nicht mehr, sich auf andre Weise zu erfreuen. Wenn die von allen in möglichst glänzendem Putz besuchte Zwölf-Uhr-Messe beendet, alle zu Ehren der Madonna abgefeuerten Büchenschüsse verhallt [...], so wissen die Landleute nichts mehr zu tun als gruppenweis zusammenstehend sich auf dem Platz noch eine Weile anzugaffen, bis Essensstunde schlägt. [...] Es gibt unzählige Säufer unter dem gemeinen Mann der kleinen Ortschaften! Auch öffnen sich um *Ave Maria* allenthalben *Trattorien*, die Öl gebratene Fische und Fleischfrittüren, heiß dampfend, auf der Straße feilbieten. [...] und der Schmirgeldampf ihrer Speisen hat mich oft bis 10-11 Uhr nachts belästigt.¹²⁰ (*Florenz* 215)

Schopenhauer never abandons her role as an observer. She does not think of her observation of the inhabitants of the place as reciprocal and therefore she does not give an account of the way she is perceived by the local population. She points out that she had hired a Roman widow because she did not know anybody in Albano and wanted to be accompanied during her walks in the environs of the town (*Florenz* 204-205). When the Roman widow turned out to be ill with malaria and only interested in recovering and finding a new husband during her stay in the country, Schopenhauer decided to go on her excursions alone, but she does not mention any inquisitive or surprised reaction on the locals' part, who were not used to seeing unaccompanied women in public.

The predilection for topics connected to the female and to the domestic sphere is not as apparent in the Florence manuscript as in the fragment *Italienisches Landleben*. However, in *Florenz* the selection of works of art described and appreciated by

¹²⁰ “Through the splendid church festivities, the taste for processions, competitions and games, fireworks and horse-races became little by little a requirement for the life of the population, because they cannot enjoy themselves anymore in other ways. When the noon mass ends, attended by everybody attired in the most splendid finery, and all the blank shots in honour of the Madonna are fired [...], people do not have anything better to do than to stand in groups on the square gaping at one another for a while, till the lunch hour strikes. [...] There are innumerable drunkards among the common men of the little towns! Also around *Ave Maria* trattorias open everywhere, which sell hot steaming deep-fried fish and meat on the streets. [...] and the greasy steam of their food often bothered me until 10-11 at night.”

Schopenhauer reveals a further typical female attitude, which she has in common with other women travel writers of the time. As Foster points out, in the nineteenth century “women could not admit to – indeed were not supposed to have – any physical feeling towards the opposite sex” (Foster 64). It was not ‘proper’ for them to notice masculine beauty, and even to discuss the artistic beauty of statues and paintings representing males, especially if naked, could have been considered unbecoming. For these reasons this kind of comment is rarely found in female travel writings of the time. Schopenhauer not only shares with her contemporary female travel writers this constrained awareness of propriety and decency, but she also appears to have a sort of prudery towards both male and female representations of nakedness. She avoids describing works of art that have naked figures as subjects. She occasionally expresses her judgement about them but, surprisingly, she only shows appreciation for male representations of nudity, while her attitude towards female nakedness is almost dismissive. Michelangelo’s *David* is judged to be “schön,”¹²¹ while the *Apollino* in the Tribuna of the Uffizi is depicted as “von fast makelloser Schönheit”¹²² and Schopenhauer confesses a “langjährige Vorliebe”¹²³ for the statue (*Florenz* 71, 164). In the Tribuna she also appreciates *The Dancing Faun* and she notices “die Schönheit der Form dieses überrasch pulsierenden Lebens”¹²⁴ (*Florenz* 164). *Hercules beating the Centaur Nessus* by Giovanni da Bologna (1529-1608) is her favourite among the sculptures underneath the *Loggia dei Lanzi* on a corner of Piazza della Signoria. She prizes it not only for its beauty, but for the way the artist overcame the technical difficulties that the group presented (*Florenz* 68).

¹²¹ “beautiful”

¹²² “of almost spotless beauty”

¹²³ “a long-lived predilection”

¹²⁴ “the beauty of the form of this rapidly vibrating life”

For centuries one of the most admired attractions of Florence had been the so called *Venus de' Medici*, a Greek marble statue of the naked goddess of love and beauty, placed in the middle of the Tribuna in the Uffizi. Archaeologists, art historians, tourists and poets – among them Byron, who had dedicated five stanzas of his *Childe Harold* to the statue – had written everything possible about this Venus. Schopenhauer seems almost annoyed by so much admiration – “Was ist nicht alles über die Venus von Medici geschrieben!”¹²⁵ – and she dismisses the subject, saying that everybody can see on their own “Daß diese Venus ein unsäglich liebliches, ihrer Schönheit bewußtes Weib ist [...]. – Wer etwas anderes erwartet hat, konnte die zahllosen Abgüsse mit einiger Überlegung betrachten”¹²⁶ (*Florenz* 164). In preference to this naked Venus, considered as an ideal of loveliness and erotic charm, she chooses the mantled statue of *Venus Genetrix*, the mythical matronal figure of the first ancestor of Caesar. Schopenhauer compares the two statues and encourages her readers to direct their attention to the less popular of the Venuses: “Im Gegensatz zu der Mediceischen Venus, welche nur ein rundlich reizendes Weib ist, rate ich, diese als Mutter der Götter und Menschen dargestellte Venus als Natur gedachte Statue zu betrachten”¹²⁷ (*Florenz* 149).

Other famous representations of naked Venuses are disregarded by Schopenhauer. She does not describe at all the sensual naked image of Venus painted by Titian and entitled *Venus of Urbino*. She only indicates to her readers that in the Tribuna of the Uffizi there are “zwei berühmte Venus-Bilder Tizians”¹²⁸ (*Florenz* 168), and she informs

¹²⁵ “What has not yet been written about the *Venus de' Medici*!”

¹²⁶ “That this Venus is an unspeakably lovely lady, aware of her beauty [...]. – Anyone who had expected something different, could observe the innumerable casts and think it over.”

¹²⁷ “In contrast to the *Venus de' Medici*, which is only a plump attractive lady, I advise you to consider this Venus presented as mother of the gods and humans, intended as a statue of nature.”

¹²⁸ “two famous Venus-paintings by Titian”

her readers that “Die schönere von beiden, [...] bezeichnet man als die Geliebte eines Mediceer”¹²⁹ (*Florenz* 168). Of Botticelli’s renowned painting *The Birth of Venus*, Schopenhauer gives a brief and pointed list of the figures represented – “Venus auf einer Muschel auf dem Meer, ganz nackt, zwei Zephire blasen sie weiter fort”¹³⁰ – which contrasts with her detailed and enthusiastic description of the *Madonna of the Magnificat*, another less famous painting by the same master (*Florenz* 130-131). The so called *Tondo Doni*, which represents the Holy Family with naked figures in the background, is mentioned as the most beautiful painting by Michelangelo in Florence, but Schopenhauer disapproves of it: “Sein Bestreben, überall sein tiefes Studium des Nackten an den Tag zu legen, stört die Darstellung, man begreift die Gruppen des Hintergrundes nicht”¹³¹ (*Florenz* 168). Schopenhauer does not consider the study of the naked human body and the ability to reproduce it as a valuable achievement for a painter or as the highest aim of art (Maierhofer 27). The famous altar-piece from Santa Croce painted by Bronzino is criticized, precisely because it makes the impression “als sei sie zu einem Studium des Nackten gemalt”¹³² (*Florenz* 178).

On the one hand, Schopenhauer’s aversion for nudity and her disregard for naked representations of Venuses suggest an attempt on her part to reject the ideal of womanliness as physical beauty and erotic charm dominant in these works of art. On the other hand, Schopenhauer’s predilection for representations of the Madonna with child, which was the favourite subject of Renaissance painting reproduced in countless versions, implies her approval for a model of femininity related to spirituality and

¹²⁹ “The most beautiful of the two [...] is identified as the mistress of one of the Medici”

¹³⁰ “Venus on a shell emerging from the sea, completely naked; two Zephyrs blow her farther away”

¹³¹ “His effort to exhibit everywhere his deep study of nudity disturbs the composition; one cannot make out the groups in the background.”

¹³² “as if it was painted as a nude study.”

motherhood. In *Florenz* the descriptions of paintings of the Madonna exceed in number, wealth of details, and enthusiasm the descriptions of any other work of art. She admires Madonnas with child by Andrea Rico (*Florenz* 122) and Fra Filippo Lippi (*Florenz* 128); Titian and Botticelli are appreciated more for their representations of the Virgin Mary than for their universally celebrated Venuses (*Florenz* 157, 130), and about the *Madonna del Popolo* by Correggio she notices:

inbrünstig flehend, weiblich und menschlich, kniet Madonna vor [Christus] und bittet für all das Gesinde mit seinen vielen kleinen Werkeltagssünden und seinem sonntäglichen Gebet – ach, und wie bittet Maria! Darum liebt das Volk die Madonna mehr als Gott Vater und Sohn. Wie käme es doch wohl in den Himmel ohne die liebe, selbst himmlische Fürbitterin?¹³³ (*Florenz* 145)

Schopenhauer was renowned among her acquaintances for her lack of physical beauty and charm, and she suffered the humiliation of seeing all the men she considered as possible partners falling in love and marrying her more attractive friends. It is understandable, therefore, that she felt more inclined towards an ideal of womanliness not exclusively based on physical beauty. Although Schopenhauer was Protestant and childless, the Madonna – represented as mother, care-giver, intercessor, spiritual guide, and promulgator of the Christian message – was a model of femininity she approved of and was able to associate with.

Schopenhauer was aware of the great devotion that Italians felt for the Madonna. She writes about the images of the Madonna believed by Florentines to be miraculous, and she relates traditions and rites connected with the veneration of the Virgin. Moreover, she recognizes that in the Madonna, considered as the mother of humanity, Italians

¹³³ “fervently supplicating, feminine and human, the Madonna kneels in front of [Christus] and pleads for all the servants with their many little sins and their Sunday prayers – ah, and how Maria prays! For this reason people love the Madonna more than God the Father and the Son. How would they get to heaven without the beloved celestial intercessor?”

worship motherly love as a force capable of every sort of wonder. “In Italien ist Mutterliebe eine Leidenschaft, die maßlos, unbedingt des Weibes Herz beherrscht”¹³⁴ (*Florenz* 46), Schopenhauer remarks in her account of the events which brought about the establishment of the two opposed parties of the Guelphs and Ghibellines. On that occasion Madonna¹³⁵ Gualdrada, managed to convince Buondelmonte de Buondelmonti, who had already agreed to marry Reparata de Capo degli Amidei, to break his promise and to marry instead her daughter Beatrice Donati, who was dying of love for him. This outrage caused a series of murders and revenges among the most important Florentine families, which associated themselves either with the Buondelmontis (the Guelphs) or with the Ubertis, who were relatives of the Amideis (the Ghibellines). The conflict between the two parties went on for centuries and later became a struggle to gain political power in the city. This story, based on real events and retold many times till it became part of the popular culture of Florence, is one of the many that Schopenhauer includes in her book. The popular story of Ginevra degli Almieri, dating back in the written record to the sixteenth century and later retold in various forms (Maierhofer 18), is also present in *Florenz* as a sort of concession to the romantic taste of the author and of her female readers. Schopenhauer introduces it as the love story of the city: “Hat diese weite Stätte voll Poesie, Leidenschaft, Rache, Verschwörung und Mord – keine Liebesgeschichte? O doch, sogar eine der vielen Knospen zu *Shakespears Julia* – und doch wie anders!”¹³⁶ (*Florenz* 103). She then tells in detail the story of Ginevra who, forced to marry a man

¹³⁴ “In Italy motherly love is a passion that rules unconditionally and with no moderation over women’s hearts.”

¹³⁵ The term ‘Madonna’ is here used in the sense of ‘lady,’ as it was common in the Italian language of the thirteenth and fourteenth century.

¹³⁶ “Does this large place full of poetry, passion, revenge, conspiracy, and murder – have no love story? Oh, of course it does, and one that blossomed into *Shakespeare’s Juliet* – although very different!”

she did not love, apparently died of a broken heart. Mistakenly buried alive in the cathedral, she managed to escape the crypt only to be taken for a ghost by her family. Nursed back to health by her true love, she was later permitted to marry him.

Some of the accounts included in the book, like that of the ‘Congiura dei Pazzi,’ are actual historical events (*Florenz* 94-96); others are legends, like the story of the foundation of the church of San Firenze by count Ugo von Brandenburg, who had a vision of hideous devils, was converted, and gave his wealth to build seven abbeys in Tuscany (*Florenz* 64). The majority of the narratives involve female historical characters and are associated with a particular building or place in the city, like the story of Camilla, daughter of a destitute nobleman, whom Cosimo de’ Medici met during the construction of the passage which connects Palazzo Vecchio and the Uffizi to the Pitti Palace passing through Ponte Vecchio. The duke fell in love with the girl, took her as a mistress and eventually married her, but he did not give her the title of Duchess, so that when he died his wealth, which was destined for their daughter, was taken by his family. Camilla was shut in a monastery and died alone, cut off from the rest of the world.

The “erzählende”¹³⁷ nature of *Florenz* and its purpose to collect and tell orally recounted and not very well known old stories about the city link the book to the typically female tradition of telling tales. Like a new Scheherazade, Schopenhauer keeps her readers interested in the exploration of the city by telling tales which have their starting points in Florentine people, places, or events. Midway between a guidebook à la Baedeker, a specimen of nineteenth-century female travel literature, and a collection of tales, Schopenhauer’s “erzählender Guide” *Florenz* does not allow for easy classification in any univocal category. Because of the late publication of the manuscript it is not

¹³⁷ “narrative”

possible to guess if this kind of hybrid book, which partakes of different genres and literary traditions, would have been favourably welcomed by the reading public and by the critics of the time. It is interesting, however, that Schopenhauer's idea of a less serious and dry guidebook, which would be enjoyable and entertaining to read, has been realized by modern guidebooks for women. They combine explanations about the city with stories and anecdotes about female historical characters and give advice about amusements and shopping especially addressed to a female public (Maierhofer 18).¹³⁸ More than a hundred and fifty years after its composition, the recent publication of Schopenhauer's *Florenz* turns out to be a forgotten ancestor to this kind of modern and gendered guidebook.

¹³⁸ In the introduction to *Florenz*, Maierhofer mentions as examples of these guidebooks especially meant for women: "Anne Kupka: *Florenz und Toskana. Reiseführer für Frauen*. Zürich: Elster, 1991. – Ros Belford: *Virago Woman's Travel Guide to Rome*. Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1993." (18).

CHAPTER 4

Frances Power Cobbe's *Italics: Brief Notes on Politics, People, and Places in Italy, in 1864: Discovering Alternative Ways of Life for Single Women*

Italics: Brief Notes on Politics, People, and Places in Italy, in 1864 grew out of Frances Power Cobbe's five visits to Italy between December 1857 and May 1864. The youngest of five children and only daughter of an affluent Anglo-Irish landlord, Cobbe left the family estate near Dublin for her first journey to the Continent only a few weeks after the death of her father in November 1857. Until then she had spent almost her entire life in the family home, where she was born in 1822 and where, since the death of her beloved mother in 1847, she had been acting as a housekeeper and companion for her father. Once her duties as a daughter at home had ended, at age thirty-five, unmarried, and with a fair yearly allowance of £ 200, Cobbe found herself free to decide what to do with her life. The planned long trip to Europe and the Middle East evidently represented her way to explore her possibilities and to establish her own identity. Travelling by herself with limited means and often through hardship and fatigue, she saw Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Greece. But it was in Italy, which she visited on both ends of the trip, that she caught a glimpse of what she was looking for and, in the next few years, she often returned there (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 110).

By the time she published *Italics*, Cobbe had undergone a radical transformation. Before leaving the paternal home she was an aging daughter, alienated from her stern evangelical father for her unorthodox religious ideas,¹³⁹ and uncertain about how to live

¹³⁹ *Essay on the theory of Intuitive Morals*, Cobbe's first book, in which she stated her position on religion and morals and rejected Christian revelation as the basis for morality, appeared anonymously in 1855 so as

her life. Less than seven years later Cobbe had become a writer who practiced journalism as a profession, and she had published four important books and twenty articles in influential journals and periodicals. She had made herself a reputation as an essayist on the women's movement and on philanthropic causes like the condition of the workhouses, and her name was internationally recognized for her theological works. Finally, she had developed an interest in the anti-vivisection campaign, of which she would become a leading figure. In her article "From Winter into Summer: the Italian evolution of Frances Power Cobbe," Sally Mitchell argues that the freedom Cobbe experienced in Italy away from her family and the conventions of British society played a substantial role in her transformation (350). In this study I want to show that the book *Italics* mirrors Cobbe's Italian evolution and that she used the popular genre of the travelogue to introduce herself to a wider audience as the woman and the writer she had become in Italy. In *Italics* Cobbe adopted a journalistic and factual style and her report is dense with charts of data and appraisal of statistical information that leave little room for introspection and self-revelation. Nevertheless the book is as much a statement of Cobbe's personality and interests – in particular, of the unconventional female identity that she had developed for herself in consequence of her Italian experience – as it is an account of Italy's emancipation from local and foreign tyrants and of its unification under an independent kingdom.

Cobbe's intention, when she wrote the book, was to offer "a grand survey of Italy under independence" (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 134), capitalizing on the information and personal observations about Italian culture, economy, and politics that she had gathered in the

not to provoke her father and was generally regarded as the work of a learned clergyman. (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 78-79)

Peninsula, especially after she had started to write for the *Daily News* as a foreign correspondent. When *Italics* came out, however, it was immediately clear that the novelty of the book consisted not only in its content, which went beyond the usual accounts of visits to art galleries and tourist attractions, but also in the fact that its author was a woman who made a point of discussing topics that in her opinion should not continue to be neglected by female travel writers and who expressed herself with the kinds of objective and sharp observations that were more common among male rather than female authors. On May 16, 1865 the *Times* published a long review that described *Italics* as “an entertaining book, full of interesting facts and original reflections” and appreciated it for the amount of information supplied by the author on the Italian national reform of economy, education, and jurisprudence and on the development of railways and free press (“Old Italy” 6). Yet the author of the review also pointed out that Cobbe writes “in such racy, masculine English” that the title *Italics* – possibly a hint to the ladylike practice of underlining words to emphasize them – is the only thing that prevents the readers from taking “the name on the title-page for a pseudonym adopted by some male prophet of ‘strong-minded womanism’” (“Old Italy” 6). Similarly, the *Saturday Review*, which had already published scathing reviews of Cobbe’s first essay on women’s university education, accused her of wanting to sound like a man: “with all her would-be manliness of understanding, Miss Cobbe is a mere woman after all – impetuous, headlong, ardent in her hero-worshipping and villain-hating (according to her lights), and eagerly ambitious of being accounted sentimental, poetical, ladylike, gushing, artistic, and aesthetic” (“Miss Cobbe’s *Italics*” 541). The author of this review also protested that in *Italics* Cobbe was “professing to write a book about Italian affairs, but really

inveigling us into reading a series of homilies on the wrongs of her injured sex” (“Miss Cobbe’s *Italics*” 539). Although this last comment is to be regarded as an overstatement biased by Cobbe’s increasing reputation as an advocate of women’s rights, it is true that in *Italics*, besides describing “the facts concerning the new order of things” (*Italics* 11) in Italy, she devoted great attention to topics that were of crucial interest to her. As Esther Schor has observed in her incisive essay “Acts of Union: Theodosia Garrow Trollope and Frances Power Cobbe on the Kingdom of Italy:”

Italics [...] introduces most of the topics around which Cobbe shaped her career as an activist and social commentator: the rights of women to vote, hold property, and divorce; universal education, particularly for the poor; abuses in religion; and the prevention of cruelty to animals, in particular, vivisection. (101)

In other words, once Cobbe had decided to write as a profession, and she had discovered that she could use the pen to spread her views and to fight for the causes of those who were most defenceless in society (the poor, women, and animals), the travelogue offered her the perfect genre to discuss these issues and to establish her personality as a writer. Profiting from the popularity of travel books and from her knowledge of Italian matters, in *Italics* Cobbe found the way to repackage her ideas and interests in a format that allowed her to address a much wider audience than she had ever reached through her previous theological, philanthropic, or feminist writing (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 137). Because of the common prejudice against women, who were not supposed to intervene in the public sphere and to write on subjects considered the proper domain of men, some of Cobbe’s past publications – especially her first theological treatise and a few of her journal articles – had to appear anonymously. Conversely, in a travel book like *Italics*, she could not only benefit from the greater attention that travelogues by women usually

excited, but she also had the opportunity to reflect on and to draw attention to her female identity, presenting herself and the other women she had met in Italy as alternative models of femininity.

Literary scholarship has started to devote increasing attention to Cobbe's activity as a journalist and a feminist. In particular, Susan Hamilton's recent study, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism*, examines Cobbe's writing in the larger context of the history of English feminism and the study of Victorian periodical and newspaper presses. In 2004 and 2005 respectively, two biographies of Cobbe were published – Sally Mitchell's *Frances Power Cobbe* and Lori Williamson's *Power and Protest* – that present, with extensive quotes from Cobbe's letters and writings, exhaustive and detailed accounts of her life and works in the context of nineteenth-century society. The recent internet digitalization of most of Cobbe's major works has made them more accessible to scholars and readers, but new editions of her travel writing and of her autobiography *Life of Frances Power Cobbe* (1894) in particular are long overdue. Although Cobbe's *Italics* is frequently quoted and referred to in studies on nineteenth-century travel and travel writing,¹⁴⁰ no extensive study¹⁴¹ has been devoted to this book yet.

Starting from the introductory pages where Cobbe presents herself and explains the intent of her work, I will explore how she uses the description of Italian development under the newly formed kingdom to introduce the discussion of issues related to her main interests. In particular in commenting on Italy, Cobbe engages with questions and debates

¹⁴⁰ The historian John Pemble uses Cobbe's travel writing as one of his sources for his history of the practice of travel in Victorian and Edwardian England in *The Mediterranean Passion*. In their studies on nineteenth-century women's travel writing Maria Frawley and Shirley Foster often quote and refer to Cobbe's *Italics* in their chapters on travel to Italy.

¹⁴¹ Mitchell's "From Winter into Summer" and Schor's "Acts of Union" are the only two published essays that deal directly with Cobbe's *Italics*.

that were of crucial importance in England at that time. She hints, for example, at the transatlantic anti-slavery movement and at the anti-vivisection cause, she discusses in depth the controversy over the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, she mentions the theological dispute on the existence of hell, and she addresses specific forms of gender debate such as the attacks on ‘strong-minded’ women and women’s suffrage. I will look at the way Cobbe employs comparisons between Italy and England to perform social critique of her native country or to turn especially gender and gender issues into subjects of discussion. I will devote particular attention to the scarce passages of the book in which Cobbe defines her personality by directly talking about herself in the first person. And I will also take into consideration the passages in which, by describing other female characters and by approving or disapproving of them, she further delineates her identity. Finally, drawing from Cobbe’s biography of the years she spent in Italy, I will investigate how her Italian experiences are mirrored in *Italics*.

4.1 “Italia Rinascete”: Cobbe’s Survey of Italy After 1861 in the First Chapters of *Italics*

In the opening chapter of *Italics*, Cobbe points out her female identity, discarding at the same time the preconceived idea that women are interested only in frivolous and superficial matters. “Even a woman” she argues, “is not called upon to spend her time beyond the Alps just now in strolling through galleries, criticising the singers in San Carlo and the Pergola, and choosing mosaics and *merletto antico*” (*Italics* 10). With this sentence Cobbe establishes that she is not the kind of woman who cares only for beautiful things and entertainments, and she invites those of her sisters who appear to have no

deeper interests and those men who are apt to consider them incapable of more serious undertakings to realize that there is much more that a woman can think and do. The adverb “even” at the beginning of the paragraph hints at the dismissive tone used sometimes by the press of the time to talk about women and their achievements. By employing the adverb to refer to herself, Cobbe on the one hand includes herself in the stereotypical Victorian idea of femininity, and on the other hand she takes possession of a masculine form of expression to establish one of the main points of the book: the conventions of society and the prejudices against their gender can no longer prevent women from demonstrating their abilities. *Italics* is presented as the result of what a woman can do – and of what Cobbe actually did – in Italy besides shopping and visiting art galleries and opera houses:

If she can do no more, she may at least keep open her eyes and ears, and ask questions of those who may be willing and able to give her information. She may read on the spot the local publications and periodicals, which carry with them the feeling of the hour, and (if she desire it) she may easily obtain from the kindly and courteous officials of Italy all possible reports and statements illustrative of their work. Perhaps, the result of such superficial inquiries as these must necessarily be of trifling value. They can at best assume to be only of temporary interest [...]. Trusting that this little book will be understood to have no pretensions greater than these, I have ventured to put down as succinctly as may be the facts concerning the new order of things which have become known to me during five visits to Italy [...]. (*Italics* 10-11)

Here Cobbe avails herself of the literary convention of demonstrative modesty most likely with the traditional purpose of gaining her reader’s goodwill by understating the value of her work. However, by referring to her inquiries as “superficial” and “of trifling value” and by calling *Italics* a “little book” “of temporary interest,” she also might have intended to mock the contemptuous language occasionally used by contemporary

reviewers of women's writings in order to anticipate their criticism of her work and to neutralize it.

As a matter of fact apart from downplaying the value of her work, Cobbe disregards the other literary conventions that Victorian female travel writers usually adopted to justify their decision to publish their travelogues and thus to avoid the risk of being considered presumptuous and unwomanly. As Shirley Foster has noted, some of the strategies employed by nineteenth-century women travel writers to prove their modesty included the denial of literary aspirations, the disclaimer of any scientific or political expertise, and the substitution of "self-effacement or self-mockery for more aggressive or positive assertiveness" (Foster 19-22). Foster points out that many travelogues by female writers "are framed by apologia in the form of a preface which appeals for leniency towards any subsequent deficiencies." According to her, these prefaces hardly fail to include an "acknowledgement of the writer's presumption in daring to tread on what is noted as well-worn ground," especially in the case of travellers to Italy, who could not aspire to offer anything new or original to their readers (Foster 20). In her introduction to *Italics*, Cobbe avoids explaining the reason for her repeated journeys to Italy, and she neither offers excuses for her decision to write yet another travel book about the Peninsula nor apologizes for her supposed lack of expertise.

These derogations from the norm of female travel writing, together with her ambiguous employment of the topos of demonstrative modesty, possibly represented sufficient reasons to suggest to the audience of the time that Cobbe's notion of appropriate femaleness challenged the standard Victorian ideal of womanliness. Nevertheless, it was more likely her confident self-assertion and her sharp treatment of

factual material – or in other words her ‘masculine’ voice – that, from the very first pages of *Italics*, must have struck Victorian readers as the uncommonly bold affirmation of a female personality. She showed that she not only believed in the necessity of doing away with the prejudices against women, but also was willing to lay herself open to disapproval and to accusations of being unwomanly by refusing to conform to a standard of femininity that did not allow her to fully develop and employ her intellectual skills. Cobbe, who knew too well the limits and prescriptions of appropriate subject matter and style for women writers, manages throughout the book to force and even to exploit these boundaries, so that her ideas on womanhood are conveyed more through her attitude and the way she approaches and develops the topics of discussion, than with open statements.

The images of regeneration of nature and spirit that open the first chapter of *Italics* represent a conspicuous example of the fact that many parts of the book can be read and interpreted on more than one level. The entrance into Italy is compared to the shift from the cold to the warm season:

Descending from the Alps into Italy is always like passing from winter into summer. Be the season of the year what it may, we never fail to feel the same sense of coming into sunshine, and into the freedom of outdoor life; [...] we have left behind the atmosphere of black frosts, moral and physical, and may expand ourselves happily in a much milder medium.
(*Italics* 1)

This passage can be easily understood as a close representation of Cobbe’s feelings at entering the southern country. The “black frosts” refer not only literally to the rigorous climate of her native island, but also to the restrictions set by British conventions, from which Cobbe learned to free herself once she left her country. In Italy, for example, English-speaking travellers were often able to strike up friendships in hotels and public places, without the formal introductions necessary at home (Mitchell, “From Winter into

Summer” 344-345). In this way Cobbe managed to meet and make friends with English and American expatriates who shared her interests, and she also became part of circles of independent female artists who resided in Florence and Rome. In Italy, moreover, it was not unusual for women to travel unaccompanied by chaperones as Cobbe did, and the practical and unfashionable dress style – skirts short enough to allow her to walk comfortably and loose jackets – that she had adopted for herself since her first journey to the Middle East was not looked upon as improper (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 123-125). In the next paragraph, the arrival in the Peninsula with the rapid passage from the Alps to sweeter slopes covered by vineyards and chestnut woods is said to recall “the summer days of childhood,” when in old country houses the beginning of the good season was inaugurated by the move “from winter to summer dwelling rooms” and the following warm months were like “one long bright holiday” (*Italics* 2). This analogy appears to be taken directly from Cobbe’s happy childhood experiences in her family country estate, where she spent her summers at home from school roaming the woods and playing with her brothers and cousins. The association of Italy with images that are presumably inspired by Cobbe’s personal memories does not, however, lead, as in the case of many other travelogues by women writers, to an actual disclosure of the author’s feelings and impressions originated by the encounter with the foreign country.

The first chapter of *Italics* is entitled “Italia Rinascente,” and Cobbe soon applies the similitude of the passage from the cold to the warm season to refer to the “human Spring” that was reviving Italy “after its long winter of frostbound oppression” (*Italics* 2). The changes that affected Italy in the first years of the 1860s are described as “new life” that was finally resuscitating a country largely considered as the land of the dead and of

the lost forever past. Cobbe presents the Italian Revolution as one of the greatest and unequalled events in modern history, because it had been a slow accomplishment obtained with the effort and sacrifice of the whole Italian population, rather than the result of a sudden outburst of dissatisfaction or of national enthusiasm on the part of a single social class or of a great capital city, as had happened in France. Besides, political tyranny had been replaced not by a republic, for which the country was not yet ready, but by the more moderate democratic system of constitutional monarchy as in England, where it had brought stability and peace. For these reasons, according to Cobbe, the unification of Italy could be considered an experiment to test the application of modern science to the solution of social and political problems. The outcome of the test, if positive, would determine the nature of the human race and of its development in the future. The crux of the issue is posed in these terms:

Can populations, which have for ages been degraded by all the evils of a double despotism, spiritual and political, be raised to steady self-government by that vast machinery which modern science has given us – education, free press, and free locomotion? [...] Can the overthrow of a whole social system lead to social re-organisation and social regeneration, wherein for Ignorance we may find Education; for Brigandage, Commerce and Manufactures; and for Celibacy of clergy the reverence of Marriage and rehabilitation of Woman? (*Italics* 5-6)

In the first chapter of *Italics* Cobbe raises these questions with reference to the changes that were taking place in the Peninsula, but in the course of the book it becomes clear that she also considers women among “the populations” degraded and oppressed by despotism, and she is interested in examining how a regeneration similar to the one affecting Italy could be brought about for all the women through modernization. In *Italics*, thus, Italy and its political and social revival represent on different levels a metaphor and an expression of the personal rebirth that Cobbe had experienced for

herself in the country, as well as of the regeneration that she advocated for all the women through liberation from the oppression of conventions and prejudices.

The first few chapters of *Italics* offer a direct answer to the questions asked in the introduction. They bear titles like “Italy mends her ways,” “Italy sent to school,” “Italy goes to drill,” “Italy tried by jury,” “Italy reads her newspaper,” and they present an overview and a valuation of what the Italian kingdom had accomplished in different fields: transportation and postal services, primary and secondary education, organization of the army and of the judicial system, and quality of the available press. Cobbe is particularly interested in showing that despotism – political and religious – cannot fail to produce absurdities and misgovernment. Italian reforms aimed to mend the abuses of centuries of tyrannical rule, and she especially praises the modern spirit that animated them, even when the results were not yet completely satisfactory or comparable to British standards. The contrast between the underdevelopment of Rome, which in 1864 was still under the absolutist power of the Pope, and the rapid progress of the rest of the kingdom illustrates Cobbe’s point, and she revels in the increasing exclusion of the religious obscurantism of the Catholic Church and of its clergy from the civil life of the country.

Significantly, Cobbe’s opening argument is that, while tyranny always fears and discourages the movement and encounter of individuals and the exchange of ideas, the freedom to travel and the unrestricted circulation of people and information are the main characteristics of real civilizations. Travelling had been for her the first act of release from the boundaries of her traditional patriarchal family, where her father’s authority had resembled that of an absolutist monarch. Likewise, for the newly formed Italian nation, the construction of an extensive and efficient net of roads and railways was the first and

most important way to secure independence and development and to prevent the reaffirmation of despotism. Cobbe points out that, since the time of the Romans, roads have been “the first missionaries of civilization” (*Italics* 14) and that the creation and furtherance of ways for people to move and connect with each other characterize great and prosperous civilizations more than the production of remarkable works of art. As the past Italian history had proved, the most exquisite artistic treasures and refined taste cannot prevent a country from undergoing political despotism and extreme social and moral corruption, while she believes that railways and roads can do something in that respect. She insists that: “Real civilisation, which implies freedom and self-government, is fostered by every journey of every citizen; and, therefore, in countries where it has taken root, equally instinctively is locomotion favoured and respected” (*Italics* 24). The new Italian government had embraced this concept. In spite of great difficulties caused both by the incompetence and indolence of the workforce employed in the effort and by the lack of foundries for the production of rails, engines, and carriages that had to be entirely imported from France and England, the country had surprisingly managed to increase the extension and the volume of traffic of its railroads in a very short time.

Cobbe diligently lists the kilometers of railway built between 1859 and 1864, the regions with the most intense development, the new lines opened in 1863, and the cost of the whole enterprise for the country. But she approves in particular of the kindness and respect of Italian railway officials towards all the travellers because, in her opinion, this attitude represented one of the many signs that the country was developing a real civilization. In contrast, she defines French civilization as “despot’s civilisation” where “Order means Despotism” (*Italics* 23, 34). This consideration is based on her experience

as a traveller in France. Her narrative of the several abuses a traveller undergoes during a trip by train from Boulogne to Marseilles is a masterpiece of irony and wit, in which the passengers are described as ‘criminals’ culpable of the desire to leave their homes and therefore liable to be treated with suspicion and no indulgence by the French officials of the railway represented as the jailers of the supposed culprits. She concludes the account with a criticism that emphasizes the absurdity of the logic often used by powerful authorities to justify every kind of limitation to personal freedom, including slavery:

Some people applaud all this system, and tell us of safety of limb and luggage thereby secured. I can only say the argument seems to belong to the same order as that we often hear in behalf of negro slavery. It must be so pleasant for the black man to have all care taken off his mind! What matters a little durance vile, and being treated as a chattel, and bullied by every overseer, provided you are sure of your dinner, or your bandbox?
(*Italics* 23)

Cobbe had personally met Harriet Beecher Stowe in Florence in 1860, and in 1863 she had become involved in anti-slavery activism, writing, among other articles on the subject, also the first pamphlet published by the Ladies’ London Emancipation Society – a female organization created with the specific purpose of denouncing the evils of American slavery (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 132). In this passage, she manages to score a point in favour of the anti-slavery cause while she argues against despotism in general, and at the same time she keeps her readers entertained with an exaggerated account of travellers’ mishaps and mistreatments, one of the favourite clichés in the genre of travelogues.

The numerous anecdotes that fill the survey of Italy after the unification represent possibly another concession to the taste for oddities and curious cases that readers of the time expected to find in travel books. Cobbe uses them to serve multiple agendas. The anecdotes often entertain by offering in a few lines the description of a singular fact that

exemplifies a general situation mentioned previously, and in many cases they end with a punch line that surprises and amuses the audience. This is the case, for example, of the story told to show the extreme dishonesty and corruption of the Italian navvies employed in the construction of the railway. Cobbe relates that robberies and stabbings were daily occurrences among the workers. Soldiers had to be employed to keep the order among them, and one day a French gentleman in charge of large works in the Roman territories received the following answer from a man who had interrogated him to know if the Roman government punished the crimes committed by the navvies: ““Is it possible?” said the benevolent informer. “No redress at all?” “Too true,” said the Frenchman. “Oh! then,” said the other, “I see I need not be under any apprehensions”; and from that day forth he was the worst robber of the party” (*Italics* 30-31). Almost always the anecdotes are related as facts happened to acquaintances of the author or to the author herself, and in these cases the accounts are often given to confirm the truth of a statement with evidence. For example, after supplying a table with the official data concerning the total development of telegraph cables region by region in 1862, Cobbe observes: “Telegraphs are not only thus doubled in extension, but rendered actually useful to the public, which they could hardly have been said to be formerly” (*Italics* 35). This remark is supported by the account of her experience when sending a telegram from Florence to Rome: in 1860 it was extremely expensive to use the service and the message took an entire day to be delivered, while in 1864 she paid a moderate price and the telegram was received within an hour. In some instances, Cobbe assumes the Italian point of view to describe typical episodes in which British travellers have to come to terms with the different disposition and practice of the inhabitants of the Peninsula. Usually the results are accounts that wink

at the English audience ironizing both the laxness of the Italians and the inflexibility of the British character. Delays in the delivery of mails, for example, were the usual inconveniences that troubled almost every traveller to Italy especially before the unification, when there was no freedom of press or speech and letters were liable to be opened and subjected to examinations by the officials of the old regime. Cobbe applauds the improvements introduced in the Italian mail system – increased number of post offices, pillar boxes for letters, and letter-carriers, affordable prices for the transmission of newspapers and manuscripts etc. – but the differences between the British standards of efficiency and the quality of the Italian postal service still created misunderstandings and nuisances for both foreigners and locals:

As letters and papers multiply by thousands, it is quite clear that their proper distribution becomes a problem which would be fearfully harassing to the Italian soul, if the Italian soul allowed itself to be harassed by its proper business. Troublesome *Forestieri*, whose names, of course, are utterly unreadable, and which, indeed, nobody ever attempts to read [...] are sad plagues in Florence, and Naples, and Genoa, and everywhere. They are always asking for letters – three times a day – though the post comes in but once; and when they do not get them, they make a noise, and stand at the window, and insist on having all the office searched; and then when it happens (as, of course, in the best regulated post-office it may easily do) that three or four of their tiresome banker's letters and other things are found in a different compartment, where they have been a few weeks, they go away abusing the office, instead of being grateful for getting them at last, and saying "Grazie tanto," as any well-bred person would do. (*Italics* 38-39)

In the anecdotes that refer directly to Cobbe's life and experiences, it is possible to catch a glimpse of those aspects of her personality that she deliberately wanted to show to her readers. In a travel book so decidedly spare of introspection and self-disclosure like *Italics*, the stories that Cobbe decides to tell about herself represent a conscious act of self-stylization. It is hardly surprising then that the image of the author's character that

emerges from these anecdotes conforms much more closely to the standard Victorian ideal of womanliness than the progressive notion of womanhood she conveys in the rest of the work. In the first of these stories, told for the declared purpose of illustrating travelling conditions in Italy in the “days of paternal government” (*Italics* 24), Cobbe represents herself almost as the heroine of a gothic novel who, journeying alone by vetturino during her first trip to Italy, once arrived late in the evening in Ferrara, and had to spend the night in a dreary inn. All the elements in the account are described as dreadful and alarming: it is a “dark grey cold evening;” the villas passed on the road have “stone gateways all in ruins” and “beautiful iron *cancelli* falling from their hinges;” the old city of Ferrara is “desolate” and “grass-grown” and its streets are “silent as those of a City of the Dead” (*Italics* 25). When she arrives at the inn, which is an immense old palace with marble stairs and portraits of old lords of Ferrara, she is ushered by the only servant through a series of large, empty chambers covered with faded frescoes of ghastly scenes of battles, dead men, and enraged women, and she is shown the gloomy room where she is supposed to sleep. The story is contrived to raise the expectation that something bad would eventually happen to the narrator, but Cobbe disappoints this anticipation and instead she ends the account confessing her fear and her decision to look for another accommodation:

The reader will forgive me if I add that I sought a less terrible bower, and getting one only a little less solemn, dreamed that a certain marble angel I had seen somewhere in the day came and waltzed up the stairs and down the seven chambers, and finally waltzed off with me, like the statue in *Don Giovanni*. (*Italics* 27)

This image of Cobbe as a lonely and unprotected woman, who lets herself be frightened by the harmless decay of a city and its buildings to the point that what she saw continues

to haunt her in her dreams, is most likely a concession to the stereotypical idea of impressionable and vulnerable femininity, rather than a truthful self-portrait of the author in the situation described. Cobbe had travelled alone through the much more exotic – and sometimes really dangerous – Middle East, and her taste for adventure could certainly not be spoiled by the small mishap of having to sleep in a dreary Italian inn. Yet when she writes about this incident that refers directly to her personality, she prefers to comply with the conventional concept of appropriate femaleness and to offer a representation of herself as the typical easily frightened and suggestible woman, instead of discrediting this prejudice against her gender or boasting about her own courage for travelling alone in a seemingly menacing place.

In the chapter dedicated to describing the reform of the educational system carried out by the new Italian government, Cobbe relates an incident of her life in Ireland to illustrate her point that Catholic countries are generally less educated than Protestant countries, because the Catholic Church has never had a real interest in fostering knowledge among its followers. Cobbe tells how, for three successive years, she organized and opened night schools in an Irish village to provide the local boys and girls with an education in the basic subjects. The subsequent and regular intervention of the priest of the village is ironically depicted as completely uncontrived:

Each year it also happened, that as soon as my schools were opened, the priest of the parish (professing profound respect and gratitude to me and my family) proceeded to open other night schools of his own, and to order all my Catholic pupils to transfer their attendance to the same. When I had acquiesced in this arrangement, contented that education should be given, no matter by whom, or where, and consequently closed my own school, it also *happened* (of course quite fortuitously, but still singularly regularly for three consecutive years) that the priest next week closed *his* schools also, and there was an end of education for that winter among the lads and lasses of the village. (*Italics* 50)

According to Cobbe the policy of the Catholic Church in the field of education is exemplified by this anecdote. In Catholic countries people are left in the deepest ignorance as long as nobody interferes, but as soon as the state or other secular organizations intervene to provide education to the masses, priests, nuns, and Jesuits protest and claim the task for themselves. And she suggests that this explains why the most Catholic countries of the time – the two Sicilies, Ireland, and Spain – were also the most ignorant. Cobbe commends the new Italian government for giving its top priority to the education of the whole nation, and she describes the reforms accomplished and the course of study for the main categories of educational institutions from the universities to the infant schools. She rejoices particularly in the fact that the lay teachers trained in the new Normal Schools especially created for the purpose will eventually replace all the ecclesiastical instructors, so that finally education in Italy will be completely independent from the authority of the Church. In this case, the anecdote taken from Cobbe's personal experiences primarily has the function of supporting her argument about the relation between the Catholic Church and education. Nevertheless, the account also presents the author as the gentlewoman she was when she resided in Ireland. There she employed her time doing charitable work for the benefit of the poor and ignorant Irish peasants of her father's estate, and her activity as a volunteer teacher suggests an image of the author's character conforming to the traditional gender role expectations of the time for a woman of her social class. Thus, once again Cobbe's self-representation in this anecdote is more conservative than the ideas on womanhood and women's rights she advocates in the rest of the book. As in the case of other female travel writers of the time, this has to be regarded as a strategy employed to reassure the audience that the author's own femininity

was not undermined by her unconventional activities outside the domestic sphere and to demonstrate directly through her example that a woman could work, write, travel, and be intellectually engaged without necessarily having to be considered unwomanly.

Throughout the whole book Cobbe constantly and carefully circumstantiates all the pieces of information she supplies by quoting official reports or by mentioning “men possessing the means of understanding the case” (*Italics* 159) as reliable sources for her statements. This is to be regarded as another behavioral strategy often adopted by female writers to guarantee their womanliness (Foster 18-19). By repeatedly declaring that she is acting as the spokesperson of experts and knowledgeable men in possession of factual data, Cobbe on the one hand confers authority and credibility to her report, while on the other hand she manages to take on a masculine voice and to display her assertiveness, safeguarding herself at least in part from the accusation of being overconfident and unfeminine. In the chapter on the Italian reform of education, for example, Cobbe declares she has taken the reported information directly from the Ministry of Education in Turin and other official sources such as a “table of the Infant Schools in Genoa, kindly ordered by the Marchesa Doria, one of their chief patronesses” (*Italics* 71). Even when she analyzes statistics and tables of data, however, Cobbe manages to convey her reading of a situation and her opinion on what she thinks are the causes and consequences of a problem. In the case of education in Italy, for example, she is eager to point out the disproportion still existing between the number of boys and the much smaller number of girls attending Elementary Schools, in spite of the fact that the new government was providing free instruction for both male and female pupils. She also remarks that the number of students in the northern Italian regions was much larger than in the southern

part of the country, and that the disparity between the number of schoolboys and schoolgirls increased dramatically in the territories of the former Kingdom of the two Sicilies, where only one in every two hundred girls attended school. Cobbe does not explain the cause of this imbalance between north and south, but she clearly suggests that the reason was to be found in the fact that, before the Italian unification, the two Sicilies were the most socially and morally corrupted areas of the Peninsula, governed by extreme despotism, and subjected to the strong influence of the Catholic Church. She observes that in those regions “governments existing for the benefit of the governed, not of the governors, [was] a new idea” (*Italics* 33), and therefore it took longer for the population of those areas to accept modernization and progressive changes like free education for boys and girls. To offer a sample of the kind of mentality still predominant in the south and in the Papal State, which at the time was not yet part of the Kingdom of Italy, she talks about an infant school she visited in Rome where little girls were not admitted because, as she was told, “the Papal government would at once close the establishment if so desperate and immoral an innovation were attempted as that of mixing little girls from three to seven with little boys of the same perilous age!” (*Italics* 70-71).

Likewise, for the chapter on the Italian army, Cobbe says that she has gathered the information she presents from an official document, “the *Report of the Commission of 1863 to the Camera dei Deputati*” (*Italics* 74). She describes the differences between the three parts of the army – the Peace Establishment, the War Establishment, and the Reserve – and she details the process of their formation and the whole hierarchy of the army with its subdivisions. In this case, Cobbe constantly draws comparison between the Italian and the British armies in order to point out the extreme financial and

organizational effort undertaken by the new Italian government to create, around the small nucleus of the Piedmontese troops, a military body that counted almost twice the number of soldiers of the army of the Crown of Great Britain and Ireland, including its colonial troops. In this chapter, Cobbe takes the liberty of commenting on an aspect of the foreign country – the physical appearance of the local men – that was usually avoided by Victorian female travel writers because it was widely considered inappropriate for women to express an opinion on such matters. According to Foster, “the sexual attractiveness of foreign men is hardly ever admitted to” (19) by women travel writers, but here Cobbe manifests her appreciation for the looks of the Italian soldiers. First she states her remarks in general terms, noting that: “the physical appearance of the men is exceedingly good – markedly superior in height and strength to the French troops” and that “the Italians are thoroughly soldier-like, well made, and well set up” (*Italics* 81). Then she goes so far as to express her comments in the first person singular, revealing that her appreciation is derived from direct observation of the soldiers:

Happening to spend a couple of months during the last winter, within a few hundred yards of the curious barrack, formed out of the old arsenal of the Galleys, at Pisa, I was frequently struck by the gay and boy-like spirits of the soldiers, as they passed backwards and forwards by twos and threes on their errands into the town. A pleasanter-looking, or better-mannered set of men it would be hard to find in any country. (*Italics* 82)

In these comments Cobbe displays a striking absence of coquetry in her attitude toward the opposite sex. Once again, it is as if she had taken on a masculine voice to judge the aspect of the Italian soldiers, considering them as her peers or as if she was evaluating their suitability for the military life. Her unaffected dispassionateness in talking about the physical appearance of men, however, appears in this case as a spontaneous attitude for Cobbe, rather than a strategy adopted to be able to make observations on a subject

considered taboo for women. As she boasts at the beginning of her autobiography published in 1894, Cobbe had always reveled in her single state and she had never felt the need to share her life with a man in order to be happy: “Perhaps if this book be found to have value it will partly consist in the evidence it may afford of how pleasant and interesting [...] a life is open to a woman, though no man has ever desired to share it, nor has she seen the man she would have wished to ask her to do so” (*Life* 1: 3). Cobbe lived for over thirty years with a woman as a domestic companion in what was widely considered a ‘female marriage,’ and indeed, rather than expressing a conscious desire to break the rules of propriety, her lack of attraction towards men must have allowed her to comment openly on the soldiers’ good looks, ignoring the prudery of the time on the subject.

For the chapter on the judicial reform, Cobbe could not rely on official sources because at the time she wrote *Italics* the new code, which was going to provide the whole Italian kingdom with a uniform system of civil and criminal legislation, had not yet been published by the new government. Therefore, after a short survey of the laws existing in the different Italian states (especially in Tuscany, Piedmont, and Naples) before the unification, she uses a series of anecdotes to illustrate the condition of lawlessness, corruption, and bribery that characterized the administration of justice in Rome. Because the Pope had suspended the old laws in his territory, his subjects were governed “at pleasure” (*Italics* 96), that is according to the decisions that magistrates and judges were taking case by case. Consequently, the trials were usually determined not to the advantage of the injured parties, but of the parties that had managed to better bribe the judge or to buy off the largest number of witnesses to testify in their favour. The problem

of corrupt testimony, however, was common everywhere in Italy and not just in Rome. Cobbe tries to explain the causes of the general attitude of distrust towards laws and justice that, to our days, still characterizes the inhabitants of the Peninsula. She points out that, even in the old states of Piedmont and Tuscany that had fair laws and governments, people were usually reluctant to give testimony against any offender so as to avoid the possibility of turning the culprits, their families or their friends into personal enemies. This sentiment of reluctance and caution increased progressively descending to the southern regions of Italy, and in Sicily it was so ingrained in society and ruled people's behavior so completely that there was a special word to define it, 'omertà.' To this day this word is still used to indicate both the code of silence practiced by criminal organizations like the Mafia and the refusal to give evidence to the authorities about illegal activities. Cobbe explains that in Sicily people who bore witness against a culprit or incriminated the offender for a suffered wrong brought upon themselves consequences that were much worse and more horrible than any of the legal punishments the criminal could receive if condemned by the law. A social behavior like 'omertà' posed an almost impossible conundrum to the authorities responsible for administering justice, and Cobbe cannot help but state that, even if the new government developed "the most perfect laws" and established "the most honestly-intentioned executive" (*Italics* 107), errors and occasional injustices could not be avoided completely.

Although the information Cobbe possesses about the new Italian code is based only on rumors and speculations, she is eager to point out in particular those articles that regulated issues of the greatest interest for her. She mentions, for example, the possibility that the new code included laws that granted women municipal – even though not

political – rights and that allowed the marriage contract to be changed according to the desires of the parties. Most importantly, she comments on the prospect that the code provided for what she calls a “Martin’s Act” (*Italics* 103), that is a law similar to the one promulgated with that name in England in 1822 that made it a crime to treat domesticated animals cruelly or to inflict unnecessary suffering upon them. As she was told, even if such a law was included in the code, it would not have been very effective in Italy because nobody there would have been willing to testify against the culprits of such crimes, and thus incur their hostility, for the mere purpose of protecting animals. Cobbe refutes this conjecture, making reference to the fact that in 1863 in Florence she found 785 people of different social classes who consented to sign a petition she circulated to stop the practice of vivisection in the Florentine Museum of Natural History “La Specola.” As her biographer, Sally Mitchell, notices, this was among Cobbe’s first acts in the creation of an anti-vivisection movement. In November 1863 her first major anti-vivisection piece, “The Rights of Men and the Claims of Brutes,” had appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine*, and shortly thereafter, having heard that the physiologist Moritz Schiff was carrying out cruel experiments on dogs and other animals in the Florentine museum, she wrote an article for the *Daily News* to denounce the practices of the professor and circulated the petition to make him stop (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 134-135). Although in *Italics* there is only this brief mention of the cause that Cobbe would unceasingly support for the rest of her life,¹⁴² it is significant that she does not miss the chance to plead against cruelty towards animals. In the context of the difficulties that characterized Italians’ relations to law and justice, her remark that Florentines showed

¹⁴² As Barbara Caine points out: “a recent history of this movement claims that ‘in the public mind’, Cobbe was ‘the personification of anti-vivisectionism’. She established and ran the Victoria Street Society, the most important organization in the campaign, and edited its newspaper, the *Zoopholist* [*sic*]” (105-106).

themselves not insensitive to the cause of anti-vivisection and her hope that the new code would prove effective in preventing animals' mistreatment are to be read as Cobbe's way to further awaken her law-abiding British readers to this cause: "It is hoped that the strong feeling on the subject [of vivisection] then exhibited will lead to the introduction of a law, which shall not be a dead letter, against all forms of cruelty to animals" (*Italics* 103-104).

In the last part of the chapter on the judicial reform, Cobbe speculates on the contradictions caused by the fact that some of the new laws meant to transform Italy into a modern nation clashed with the deeply rooted Catholicism of the whole country. For example, the new government passed a law that prohibited beggary and treated as a crime a practice that gained a position in heaven for a great number of saints worshipped by the Church (first among them St. Francis of Assisi). The law that permitted civil marriages, on the other hand, potentially allowed members of the clergy to get married. Finally, Cobbe cannot hide her exultation in describing the law that decreed the immediate suppression or gradual extinction of all the absolutely ascetic and idle monasteries and religious orders, and established the passage of their estates and properties into the hands of the government. Although the critique of Catholicism and of its religious practices is the specific theme of several other chapters of *Italics*, in the first section of the book Cobbe is particularly anxious to point out how the influence and interference of the Church in all the fields interested by the reforms constituted an obstacle to the development and the modernization of the country.

The survey of the changes and improvements accomplished by the new government ends with a short chapter on the situation of literature and the press in Italy.

Cobbe sadly observes that it was going to take time to see the positive effects of the newly introduced freedom of press on the Italian literary system, since the previous years of political and religious despotism and censorship had left the country with no national literature. Also the newspapers that had started to flourish after the unification were still at the stage of British publications a century before. However, her overall evaluation of the actions of the new kingdom is completely positive and enthusiastic, and she dares those who blamed the government for not yet having carried out the annexation of Rome and Venice to find another people or country that in less than four years had accomplished so many steps towards the foundation of a real civilization (*Italics* 129).

4.2 “Liberty, Equality, and the Feudal System”: Anglo-Italian Politics in *Italics*

In many of the subsequent chapters of *Italics*, Cobbe starts by dealing with some aspects of Italian politics, culture, or society and ends up tackling issues that were at the center of public debate in her native country and on which she particularly desired to state her opinions for the benefit of her British audience. Cobbe possesses the ability to immediately grasp the crux of an issue, starting from the observation of a concrete situation. She is then able to pose the question in philosophical and abstract terms, so that she can demonstrate the effectiveness of her argument merely through logic and deductive reasoning. The chapter entitled “Liberty, Equality, and the Feudal System” represents a particularly interesting example of how Cobbe uses this talent to argue in favour of women’s franchise, showing that women’s exclusion from voting was illogical according to both aristocratic and democratic principles of government. The discussion starts with an analysis of the social composition of the Italian liberal party (corresponding

to the Whigs in England) and the conservative party (also called 'Codini'). She observes that in Italy the highest classes, including some of the noblest families of the country, the rich bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals were those who first supported the causes of liberty, of national unification under a free constitution, and of rational progress. The party of the 'Codini,' on the other hand, was composed by the old feudal aristocracy attached to the exiled princes through hereditary bonds and by the Catholic clergy that was no longer recruited among the younger sons of the noble families, but came mostly from the lower social classes. Cobbe explains that the change in the constituency of the ecclesiastical body was due principally to the abolition of the Majorat (or law of primogeniture) in favour of an equal distribution of property among all the heirs of a family. Because the younger sons of rich families became entitled to a proportionate part of their fathers' fortunes – while according to the Majorat the inheritance was entirely destined only to the eldest – they were no longer forced to enter the Church as a means of support and could elect a career in the army, in the navy, in the parliament, or simply live on their share of inherited properties. Consequently, the priesthood was chosen by people of lower and lower rank, became less socially respected, and was no longer considered as an advantageous profession for a gentleman. Cobbe explains that in Italian families there were rarely more than three or four children and the daughters were usually married when the father was still alive, thereby losing any claim to inheritance. The same house, moreover, was often shared by more than one related household, so that often there was no need to sell or divide up the property in case of succession. Because of such customs, the abolition of the Majorat had not yet caused the dissipation of rich noble families' fortunes. But she remarks that a further consequence of the introduction of the new laws

of succession would eventually be the transformation of Italian aristocracy into “an order decorated with empty titles which no actual wealth or political influence renders important” (*Italics* 141).

Cobbe, who came from a wealthy and distinguished family and through her entire life remained conservative in her political views (Caine 126), considers here the political and social utility of maintaining a hereditary aristocracy that should occupy a middle place between the king and the parliament, form a second house of legislature as the English House of Lords, and serve as example for the population as representatives of the highest culture, the oldest traditions, and the most polished manners. In order to prove her point, she defines the problem in theoretical terms, questioning the final end of every human government and reaching the conclusion that governments exist so that “right might be done” by “those who know what is right, and whom we have reason to hope will do the right when they know it” (*Italics* 144-145). On the one hand, following the principle of public utility, the power to manage a state should be put in the hands of the best educated, those who possess the deepest knowledge of the matters on which the government has to judge and who are therefore best qualified to know what is right. On the other hand, according to the principle that ignores the ends of government and is based only on the ultimate grounds of morals, every rational being has a right to a voice in the government and laws cannot be binding for those who have not participated in making them. Cobbe claims that the choice between these two principles has long determined the continuing dispute between the two great systems of government, the aristocratic and the democratic. She laments that, because of the imperfect and immature condition of society, the democratic principle had never been fully applied, even in the

most democratic states, and individuals considered inadequate for government have been required to surrender their right to a voice in the administration of their country in order to favour the general interest and the public utility. But she insists that, once acknowledged, the abstract principle of the inalienable right for each free moral agent to vote must be recognized absolutely, with no restriction of age, income, competence, or sex.

At this point of her long reasoning, Cobbe is able to argue that women's exclusion from voting, which characterized all systems of government up to her time, was a grave contradiction from every logical point of view:

Women are "moral free agents" assuredly as well as men. Their mental inferiority may be as great as it may please anyone to assert, but the moral right to political franchise of which we have been speaking, depends, not on any mental quality at all, but simply on moral free agency. If the principle be absolute, and every moral free agent have a natural right to a voice in the state, then assuredly women have this right as well as men. Yet the universal sense of mankind, with very few exceptions, has decided that the exercise of such a right by women would be inexpedient, and the consequence is that no serious attempt has ever been made to secure it for them. [...] Either political rights form the sacred appanage of every moral being, and then every woman and every youth down to the first dawn of ethical responsibility in childhood, must have her and his claims admitted and recognised, never to be set aside for any expediency; or else the community is justified in drawing lines between those who may and may not exercise these rights, and then common sense demands that they be limited to the educated classes. (*Italics* 152-153)

In other words, according to the democratic principle, women should be granted the right to vote because they are moral free agents. But if, according to the aristocratic principle, such right needed to be restricted in order to safeguard the general public interest, then the criterion for the exclusion should not be based on gender, but on knowledge and competence so as to guarantee the accomplishment of the final end of the government. In a footnote to the text, Cobbe concedes that the question of the political rights of women

could not be properly addressed in the context of her book about Italy. Nevertheless, she continues to point out examples of the disadvantages suffered by women because of their exclusion from the franchise, and she concludes with a plea for women's political rights that appears to concern Cobbe herself in the first person:

I have known more than one such woman, able, cultivated, clear-headed, managing large estates with great judgment, well versed in the politics of the times, and associating habitually with the leading minds in various countries; yet these women were denied the rights possessed by the blacksmith who shod their horses, and never read a newspaper in his life, or travelled beyond the neighbouring village. If this difference be justified, let us hear no more of the abstract right of rational moral agents to a voice in the State to which they belong. (*Italics* 154)

Once she has made her point on the issue closest to her heart, Cobbe resumes her reasoning and brings it to an end declaring that the only way to reconcile the two opposed aristocratic and democratic principles is by allowing people to become qualified to use their political freedom through the gradual exercise of their rights, so that they may learn by degrees how to use them wisely for personal and communal benefit. In this process, the role played by aristocracy could either be detrimental (for example, through their encouragement of class prejudices) or contribute to the amelioration of the whole community by offering high standards and refinement to the lower classes. In line with her political orientation and her attachment to social hierarchy, Cobbe hopes that in Italy, as well as in her native country, aristocracy would continue to maintain its social and political importance:

Let it be hoped that neither in Italy or nearer home will the misuse of the great powers possessed by such a class to benefit mankind, cause those powers at last to be withdrawn, and the world deprived of refining and elevating influences which we must, perhaps, wait very long to find elsewhere. (*Italics* 157)

Cobbe's political speculations on the future fate of the newly formed kingdom continue in the next two chapters entitled "Will Italy gain Venice and Rome?" and "Will Italy lose Naples?". From the beginning it is clear that her insightful answers to these two extremely important questions for the survival of the Italian nation are not simply the attempts of an "idle *forestiera*" – as she unassumingly calls herself – to offer some "hints" (*Italics* 158) on these complex issues. In *Italics*, Cobbe as usual affirms in general terms that she has derived her information from official sources and from "those best qualified to form a judgment" (*Italics* 186). In her autobiography published thirty years later, however, she is more specific about her informants and less outwardly modest about her own merits. She admits she possesses the political insight that she had demonstrated while writing her travel book, and she acknowledges that she had gained her understanding of Italian matters through study and with the help of her friend, the Prussian Ambassador, Count Guido Usedom:

Count Guido Usedom – now alas! gone over to the majority – was an extremely cultivated man, who had been at one time Secretary to Bunsen's Embassy in Rome. He was so good as to undertake what I may call my (Italian) Political Education; instructing me not only of the facts of recent history, but of the *dessous des cartes* of each event as they were known to the initiated. He placed all his despatches for many years in my hands, and explained the policy of each nation concerned: and even taught me the cryptographs then in diplomatic use. [...] From him and the Prefects and other influential men who came to visit him at Villa Gnecco, I gained some views of politics not perhaps unworthy of record. (*Life* 2: 331-332)

In *Italics*, Cobbe proves her ability to decode not only the encrypted diplomatic language, but also the intricate network of alliances and conflicting interests at stake in the Italian territory, offering a clear and comprehensive picture of the European political situation in 1864. She systematically lists the causes that prevented the Italian kingdom from attempting the annexation of Rome and Venice, and she explores all the chances and the

possible alliances, of which Italy could take advantage in order to complete its unification. Both the Pope and the Austrians had no intention of giving up their supremacy in Rome and in Venice respectively. The state of affairs was made more complicated by the fact that the French of Napoleon III, who had in their hands the power of tipping the scales in favour of the Italian annexation of both territories, preferred to maintain their influence on the Peninsula by holding the situation as it was. The French not only refused to remove their troops from the Eternal City, where they were quartered to protect the Pope, but they also declined to forge an alliance with the Italian kingdom to expel the Austrians from Venice, and Cobbe poignantly sums up the problem in these terms: “In Rome, France is the obstacle of Italy; in Venice, she might possibly be the all efficient ally” (*Italics* 167).

The cause of the Italian national unity and of its independence from the influence of other European powers was supported by many British expatriates residing in the Peninsula, like for example the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Furthermore, in the first half of the nineteenth century many Italian political exiles, among whom Giuseppe Mazzini was the most famous, had found asylum in England, and from there they tried to awaken public opinion to the question of Italian emancipation from foreign oppression.¹⁴³ Some travel books about Italy, like the one by Mary Shelley, were written at least in part for the same purpose of sensitizing the British audience to the Italian political situation. Cobbe examines the possibility firmly wished for by many British citizens that their government would offer military assistance to the Italian kingdom in its endeavor to wrench Venice from the Austrian rule. She lists all the motives that inspired friendly

¹⁴³ For more information about the Italian exiles in England, see C. P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: the Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England*, 26-35.

feelings and reciprocal sympathy between England and Italy: the supposed similarity of character of the two nations, and especially of the inhabitants of Piedmont (nicknamed the “English of Italy”) with the British (*Italics* 172); the form of constitutional monarchy adopted by the Italians, which made them look with hope and pride at the success of the same system of government in England; and finally, the presence in every Italian town of “swarms of blond Murray-studying” English travellers, who liberally spent their money and often warmly sympathized with the population generously subscribing to popular causes (*Italics* 172). Cobbe’s knowledge of political affairs, however, allows her to recognize that such motives were not usually taken into account by the *raison d’état* and, although she considers the attitude of England towards Italy hypocritical, she makes a point of putting an end to the hopes that an actual military alliance between the two countries could ever be established only on the basis of reciprocal friendship feelings:

In politics, however, popular sentiments only form one element – and that not a very important one – in the decision of such practical questions as a great military expedition. [...] We have taken lately to caring for oppressed nations, not in Cromwell’s way, but in that of a certain order of Jewish philosophers frequently mentioned in Scripture, whose practice it was to say, “Be ye warmed and fed,” but by no means to bestow the means of warmth and food on the objects of their benevolence. Doubtless we are all right. It would be a tremendous business, seriously to adopt for our motto the grand old text, “Deliver him that is oppressed from the hand of the adversary, and be not faint-hearted when thou sittest in judgment.” In any case, as regards the Venetian question, no English Minister would be either justified in the equity of nations nor supported by the British Parliament, in allowing his sympathies with Italy to lead him to give armed assistance to an attack on Austria in her Venetian provinces. (*Italics* 173-174)

Cobbe’s realistic reading of the diplomatic relations between England and Italy is complemented by her pragmatic analysis of the phenomenon of the brigandage in Southern Italy. In the same way as she believes that the enthusiastic feelings of British

people towards Italian nationalism should not have influenced the decisions of the government on the matter of military alliances, she disapproves of the romanticized view of the crimes of brigandage fostered by much English literature, beginning from the extraordinarily popular novels by Ann Radcliffe.¹⁴⁴ Cobbe radically objects to the idea that fiction could transform violent criminals like the true Neapolitan bandits into heroic characters. In *Italics* she does her best to separate the idealized picture of brigandage from the reality of the phenomenon, explaining the social reasons that caused it and exposing the role that the Church and the exiled king of the Two Sicilies, Francis II, played in favouring and exploiting bandits for political purposes. In the chapter entitled “Will Italy lose Naples?” she examines the possibility that Francis II and the Bourbon dynasty could be restored in Naples with the help of the brigands:

Some time ago there seemed some prospects of this. The Brigand robberies and murders, like all crimes committed on a sufficiently large scale, ceased to be called by those humble names, and were elevated to the rank of “Guerilla Warfare.” Europe heard a good deal of these “soldiers” loyally fighting for “their exiled monarch,” for his beautiful Queen, for the Madonna, and perhaps also for plunder; and “Gentle Zitellas,”¹⁴⁵ who desired to spend a little English gold by the shores of Naples, were requested to “banish their fears,” and consider the whole thing purely political. [...] All this, however, has changed of late. Brigandage, if ever pursued from high political motives and loyal devotion, has gradually become a trade like another, and Carusso and Crocco would, we believe, have been nearly as much astonished at being looked upon as martyrs to the cause of Francis II, as one of our garotters to that of Chartism. (*Italics* 190-191)

After demonstrating through a few anecdotes that the criminal actions of the brigands were not motivated by any higher ideal, in the following chapter Cobbe tries to destroy

¹⁴⁴ As Maura O’Connor has noticed: “Ann Radcliffe’s novels helped transform the representation of the Italian bandit into a more complicated and attractive fellow who was capable, at least in fiction, of moral persuasion and political reform.” (42).

¹⁴⁵ The Italian word ‘zitella’ is the derogatory equivalent of the English ‘spinster.’

the mythical image of the Italian bandit, mocking the fascination that so many of her British compatriots felt for such a character:

A Bandit, a true Neapolitan “Brigante” with a peaked hat, a belt full of pistols, and an image of the Madonna round his neck, is a delicious bit of the Middle Ages, preserved for the ecstasy of mankind into the Nineteenth Century. [...] it is impossible not to think of him with some kindness, not to say admiration. The vulgar London garotter, who may meet us this evening round the corner of our own street and give us a choke which shall stop our respiratory processes for the future altogether, is a wretch for whose back the cat is a proper application. But a Brigand among the far away blue Appenines, descending through the cypresses and perfumed orange groves, to carry away into his romantic haunts some rich traveller, who will pay ample ransom, half to be devoted to the Madonna and half to the poor, this Robin Hood of Calabria, is a very different character. Not young ladies alone may be willing to act “Gentle Zitellas” to such “Maseroni”; but men who ought to know better, speak of them with only half-concealed indulgence; and the Church of Rome and *Codino* party everywhere, to their eternal shame, beyond a doubt, favour the ruffians. (*Italics* 209-210)

On the one hand, by repeatedly associating the brigands with the common London killers, Cobbe wants to show to her English audience that, apart from the more exotic Italian settings, there was nothing romantic in the violent actions of the Neapolitan criminals. On the other hand, the disparaging name “Gentle Zitellas,” by which she calls those English women who were more likely to be subjected to the irrational attraction for the Italian brigands, seems to be Cobbe’s way to set herself apart from such category of unmarried ladies. Her discussion of the brigandage, based on official reports and books on the history of the phenomenon, shows that “even a woman” could resist and see through the romanticized view of certain aspects of the Italian Peninsula promoted by some female novelists for the special enjoyment of many female readers. Instead of joining the British swarms of bandits enthusiasts and fantasizing on the character and the life of these figures, she explains that the root of the problem of brigandage was in the pauperism and

in the centuries of ever increasing poverty of the peasants of the Neapolitan region, and she argues that, where the railways and other public works had provided employment and pay for people, the brigandage had disappeared. To further open the eyes of her British readers to the reality of brigandage, she reports the execrable atrocities committed by the most famous bandits of the time. And to discourage those enthusiasts who dreamt about becoming bandits, she tells the stories of some rich and noble gentlemen of different nationalities who, allured to Naples to join the adventurous life of the brigands, inevitably ended their lives in prison or executed by the local authorities for the crimes they committed.

4.3 “Catholic Italy”: Italian Religion and Cobbe’s Feminism in the Central Chapters of *Italics*

Cobbe’s critique of the Catholic Church and of its retrograde influence over every aspect of Italian political and social life unfolds throughout *Italics*. This theme represents almost a leitmotiv in the book and culminates in a five-chapter-long section entirely devoted to the inquiry and the attack of priestcraft and Catholic obscurantism in Italy. Cobbe opens her assault on religion in Italy with a chapter entitled “The Nemesis of a Woman,” in which she advocates her ideas on womanhood and on women’s right more openly than anywhere else in the book. This chapter can be considered as the most ‘feminist’ portion of *Italics* and, although it might appear unusual or even surprising¹⁴⁶ that she uses her critique of the Church to denounce the state of intellectual subjugation

¹⁴⁶ Schor claims that: “among English critics of the Church, Cobbe is unusual for shaping her enquiry around the question of how women are used by, and in turn make use of, the Catholic religion” (“Acts of Union” 103).

suffered everywhere by her own sex, a look at Cobbe's biography shows that for her the themes of religion and of women's emancipation had always been strictly connected. For Cobbe the possibility to doubt Christian revelation, to question orthodoxy, and to reject religion as a result of a loss of faith represented the first right that she had discovered was negated to her because she was a woman. As Barbara Caine has noticed: "it was in her family home, and through the rebellion she staged against her father's attempt to dictate her religious beliefs and observances, that Cobbe established the basis for her feminist beliefs" (Caine 115). In the same way as she gradually rejected the Christian idea of a patriarchal God who often exerted authority with masculine brutality, Cobbe started to resist the despotic will of her father, who was accustomed to receive unquestioning obedience to all his commands, even when it came to impose his stern evangelical beliefs on his children. The realization that her father's authority could have no control over her religious faith and her consequential refusal to be forced to profess a religion she had disbelieved in her heart represented her first vindication of female rights. By casting her observations on the distant reality of Catholic Italy, in *Italics* for the first time Cobbe had the chance to frankly discuss her thoughts on religion and women and to express her daring conviction that for centuries religious faith had been used as an instrument of masculine control over women.

In order to further distance herself from the opinions she is about to express, she introduces her argument with the description of the Mumbo Jumbo,¹⁴⁷ a character she remembers from the children's books about Africa she used to read in her childhood. The Mumbo Jumbo was usually represented in pictures as a sort of "barbaric scarecrow,

¹⁴⁷ According to OED, "mumbo-jumbo" is "a god or spirit said to have been worshipped by certain West African peoples" and "in extended use: an object of superstitious awe or blind veneration" ("mumbo-jumbo, n.").

supported by the solid shanks of a tall negro” (*Italics* 224). Played by a man in disguise who made hideous noises, its function was to appear every now and then in order to frighten women and children into obedience, and Cobbe explains that, while “all the men, of course, know that Mumbo Jumbo is a joke, [...] all the women believe him to be an awful demon, ready to punish every female delinquency” (*Italics* 227). “The great masculine idea of the Mumbo” (*Italics* 224), as she calls it, allows Cobbe to introduce the male conduct she wanted to criticize, representing it in exaggerated terms as it occurred in the context of an apparently remote and primitive society. In this way her British readers could have easily believed that they had nothing in common with the inhabitants of the far off African kraals, and could have readily laughed – as Cobbe herself confesses to have done in her childhood – at the frightened reaction of the women chased by the scarecrow. Furthermore, as Schor has pointed out, the idea of Mumbo Jumbo permits Cobbe “to draw a chain of identities across racial lines: if the condition of women in Catholic Italy resembles ‘Female Negroland’, the condition of women in Protestant England can be seen to resemble, however faintly, that of Italy” (Schor, “Acts of Union” 103-104). Cobbe herself hints at this association of identities, when she suggests that other versions of the concept of the Mumbo Jumbo are present everywhere in the world, also in British society:

Perhaps it might be possible, without going so far as Africa, to find some slight analogy to the great masculine idea of the Mumbo elsewhere. [...] Perhaps, even in England itself, there may be found a few husbands and fathers who choose that their wives and daughters should believe in certain ghostly enemies in whom they themselves have not the smallest credence and are also of opinion that only by such wholesome fears as this belief may suggest can the female character be properly preserved. (*Italics* 227-228)

Cobbe traces the history of the idea of Mumbo Jumbo, that is of similar scarecrows, bugbears, phantoms, and in general of every kind of lie used as moral agent to keep in check not just women, but “all the simpler, younger, or poorer classes of society” (*Italics* 228). She refers in particular to the conviction widespread among learned people since the times of the Egyptians and the Greeks through the entire Christian era that their discoveries in every field from theology to science needed to be hidden from common people. And she observes that, while in modern times scientific knowledge had become accessible also to the non-experts, in the field of theology even in the freer Churches of Protestantism still prevailed the belief that the masses had to be indoctrinated, prevented from exercising critical thinking, and kept under control with the prospect of infernal punishments. Cobbe’s religious crisis and her rejection of the Christian revelation had led her to develop for herself a new set of beliefs based on the idea of a just, rational, and loving God, who did not need to rule like a king and a judge with punishments and revengefulness, because his moral law was evident to humans through their own intuition (Caine 116-117). In this chapter of *Italics*, she comes to the conclusion that disbelief in the absolute goodness of God, truth, and morality, and distrust in human nature’s capacity to rely on these principles lie at the bottom of the conviction that it is necessary to leave people in their mistaken frightful ideas of God and of his will. Cobbe could have easily accused of tyranny those who supported the idea of using intimidating doctrines – or Mumbo Jumbos of any sort – to control the masses (Schor, “Acts of Union” 104). Instead, she starts from the principle that it is not “logically defensible” (*Italics* 235) for a man to believe that truth is good and error bad and, at the same time, to deliberately spread delusion among his fellow men and to prevent them

from knowing and taking advantage of the truth. Therefore, she disingenuously presumes that those who persisted in promoting error and hindering truth did it not because of their craving for power, but because they doubted the goodness of truth and its beneficial effects. She, thus, defines their behavior as “the true and fatal scepticism of our time, and of all time” (*Italics* 232), and she accuses them of being guilty of scepticism, rather than despotism. Then Cobbe observes that: “to this day there is not a country in the world wherein whatever religious darkness may exist is not gathered thickest in women’s minds” (*Italics* 237). This is her starting point for an investigation of the causes that had determined, in the course of the centuries, the continuous and consistent exclusion of the female sex from what she calls “the ancient and almost universal Monopoly of truth among the higher intellects” (*Italics* 236).

Cobbe’s feminism emphasized the differences between men and women and was based on the conviction that the peculiar qualities and capacities of both sexes were equally necessary for the progress of the world. For this reason she insisted on the removal of the legal, social, and economic restrictions that prevented women – but not men – from freely and fully developing their specific potentialities (Caine 148-149). Also in *Italics*, in this discussion of the relation between women and religion, Cobbe points out the intrinsic difference in the nature of men and women as the main cause that contributed to women’s exclusion from the most enlightened religious ideas and to their tendency to superstition and bigotry:

In the great distribution of qualities between the two sexes there is little doubt that, on the whole, men have more Justice and women more Piety – men more Understanding and women keener Intuitions. Women’s piety and quick receptiveness make them as ready to fall into exaggerated forms of religion (*under the conditions of their imperfect education and limited*

knowledge of the world) as the sense of justice and strong understanding of men preserve them from such errors. (*Italics* 238)

While for these differences of character she concedes that nobody can be blamed, she holds fathers, husbands, and brothers responsible for not providing the women in their families with the means to correct their inclination to religious fanaticism. A solid education, the practice of logical reasoning and critical thinking, and the possibility to discuss religious ideas with knowledgeable and open-minded men would have helped women develop their disposition for piety and intuition into “steady and rational” qualities (*Italics* 240). In this way, she suggests that female love and mercy would have perfectly complemented and counterbalanced the male sense of justice, which was by its nature often too rational and unforgiving. “But what is the fact? What is the actual education of young women all over Europe – in England as well as elsewhere?” (*Italics* 241), Cobbe evidently asks these questions with the memory still fresh in her mind of the two miserable years she had spent in a ladies’ boarding-school in Brighton and of the superficial education she had received at home by the family governesses. Her words sound resentful and full of indignation, when she remarks how both in the retrograde Catholic countries, where girls were usually sent to convents for their education, and in Protestant countries, where they were taught at home or in schools, it appeared that “the deliberate purpose” of the parents was to make their daughters “as narrow-minded and bigoted as possible” (*Italics* 242). Most likely she draws from her own experience when she laments that an English lady receives from the men around her:

no encouragement to read or think, no useful guidance to the mode of supplying, by self-culture, the terrible blanks left in her mental education, but always the same soothing voice, “Keep just where you are, it is safe – it is graceful for a woman to believe; the more she can believe the more charming she is. Why should you vex your brains, which are meant for

softer themes, with such hard problems as those of theology? You will gain nothing by so doing, but peril to your soul. Remain orthodox, and you are safe, and women will love, and men approve, you.” (*Italics* 243-244)

Cobbe herself in her youth might have heard these same comments uttered by her father, who strongly disapproved of her interest in theology and was outraged when he found out that she had worked in secret at a theological treatise that she intended to publish (Caine 118-119).

Cobbe’s attempt to explain the reasons for “masculine dislike of female freedom of thought” (*Italics* 245) does not do much credit to the male sex. She ranks as the poorest cause for this behaviour men’s desire to satisfy their vanity using women’s supposed frailness and dullness as a foil to enhance their own strength, courage, and sharp intellect. Then she mentions the more sentimental motive of those men who consider young women as innocent children and wish to preserve their purity by keeping them ignorant and sparing them any struggle of conscience that could compromise their blissful state. Although she grants that this is the feeling that inspires “many of the best class of men” (*Italics* 246) including the poet laureate, Tennyson, who expressed it in his poem *In Memoriam*, it is clear that she disapproves of this infantilization of female intellect. Finally, she lists as the vilest and basest reason of all, the one determined by male disbelief in the virtue of women, by their distrust in female honour, and by the scepticism that faith and morality alone unsupported by what she considers the “*false doctrines*” (*Italics* 247) of infernal punishments and heavenly rewards were enough to keep women faithful and submissive. Cobbe at this point reconsiders her attack on the male sex, putting it into the perspective of the Italian context and specifying that her observations do not apply in the same extreme way to England. Yet the constant reference to her own experiences and to examples taken from her native country leaves

the reader no doubt that the picture drawn concerns British men no less than the male inhabitants of Italy or even of the African kraals. As a matter of fact, the purpose of her argument is precisely to show that in the remote past as well as in the present, in primitive societies as well as in progressive England, and regardless of men's intentions and degrees of fault, women's indoctrination with bigoted religious ideas and their deprivation of the education necessary to develop critical and independent thinking was a universal reality that needed to be changed. This point was crucial for Cobbe and it represented the core of her own feminism. She firmly believed that "women were rational beings with responsibility for their own conscience and with a primary duty to themselves and to their God" (Caine 131-132). Therefore, the recognition of women's moral autonomy – that is of their capacity and freedom to decide in what to believe and to discern for themselves the good from the bad in questions of morality – represented the first and most important of women's rights that needed to be vindicated.

In this chapter of *Italics* entitled "The Nemesis Of Woman," Cobbe employs the rest of the discussion to explain the dangerous social and political repercussions that women's state of ignorance and bigotry could cause on the development of an entire nation. She uses Italy as an example, but because of the universality of the women's condition previously represented and because of the suggested association of identities between England and Italy, doubtlessly the situation described is intended also as a warning for her British readers. Italy had achieved unity and independence, but many difficult challenges still remained to be overcome, and the newborn kingdom could count several enemies who desired its downfall and the restoration of the old order of things. Cobbe outlines the new kingdom's main problem in these terms:

Of all the foes of Italy, none are to be compared for danger to the reactionary priests; in fact, with them and their machinations must sink or swim the cause of despotism or freedom, of disunion or unity. [...] these priests have got, in almost every household in the land, a spy and an accomplice; Jesuits, Capuchins, secular priests, and nuns, – they have between them the women of the upper ranks and of the lower, the matrons who seek them in confession, and the young girls who are placed in their convents for education. [...] as a rule, the women of Italy are mere tools in the hands of the *Neri*. (*Italics* 253-254)

She relates several anecdotes of mothers, wives, and daughters who had been manipulated by their priests and confessors into spying on and betraying the political activities of the men in their families or into convincing them to withdraw their support to the new government. Cobbe takes great care to assure her audience that she is not exaggerating the situation, and she explains that if English books, newspapers, and travellers did not usually report this problem, it was only because foreigners had generally no access to the privacy of Italian homes. The chapter, however, ends on a positive note with the announcement that precisely in Italy, where women's condition was worse than everywhere else in Europe, "the NEMESIS of WOMAN has come indeed" (*Italics* 250) through equal opportunities of education provided by the new government for all the women. Cobbe's mention of the possibility of introducing "London University Examination for Ladies" (*Italics* 258) – a cause that she had been advocating in several essays – closes the argument bringing the chain of association of identities back to England: if the government of backward Italy had understood that leaving half of its population ignorant and under the influence of religious bigotry could have undermined the development of the nation, then also in progressive England the government needed to realize that, for the sake of the whole country, women had to be granted equal access to university education.

Cobbe's critique of Catholic Italy continues in the following chapters with a range of different registers that goes from the humorous mockery of priestly hypocrisy and monkish nonsense to the serious theological objections she raises against the Pope's decision to add a new dogma to the canon. The purpose of her analysis is to show "how utterly in Italy Religion and Morality have been dissevered for ages" (*Italics* 213), but she also expresses her concerns about the increasing indifference and distaste towards religion that Italians were developing as a consequence of "the double evil of a spiritual tyranny, which has been also a political despotism, and which has offered itself as an engine of corruption and oppression" (*Italics* 264). She explains that the majority of Italian men – if not of women – could be defined as "*Indifferentists*" (*Italics* 266), because they were so weary and disgusted by the despotism of the Church that if the Pope had only agreed to give up his temporal power over Rome and allowed the city to become the capital of the new kingdom, they would not have objected to believing in anything the priests said or they would even have done without religion altogether. Among the much smaller portion of Italians who cared for the Church and its doctrine, however, true religious sentiments were almost completely extinct. Cobbe laments that:

Religion to the uneducated Italian means nothing but the sacerdotal enchantment whereby he is to escape from future fires. Give him his *olio santo* [holy oil] passport to bliss, and religion has done for him all it is qualified to do. Of reformation of life, or purification of heart, of love to God or man, he has no more thought when he speaks of religion than if he were talking of the boat which is to ferry him across the river, or the carretta to take him to the neighbouring town. Religion is a machine for getting to heaven, and avoiding hell and purgatory. Having paid the passage money at the proper bureau, and received his ticket, his concern with it is over. (*Italics* 213-214)

The utterly ignorant part of the population (the illiterate peasants, the savage bandits, and the superstitious women from every class) constituted together with the priesthood and

the nobility of Rome, Tuscany, and Naples, the small albeit powerful party of the Papists – also called Codini (tails) or Neri (blacks) – that supported the Church and was opposed to the new government. Cobbe concedes that for this heterogeneous party inspired by very different feelings, relations, class interests, and prejudices, the Church represented “the sole bulwark which yet remain[ed] against universal lawlessness and atheism” (*Italics* 270), and therefore their attachment to Catholicism was not only understandable, but almost touching. For the Italian priests, however, she does not admit justifications, and she lays the blame for the corrupt morals and the distorted religious feelings of the country entirely on the Catholic ecclesiastics. The kind of education that priests received in the seminaries, where their minds were so saturated with doctrines that they were no longer qualified to believe or disbelieve, and their exclusion from a young age from all affections and pleasures and from the prospect of ever becoming husbands and fathers make Cobbe wonder “not that Romish priests should often be bad, but that they should ever be good” (*Italics* 272). According to her, as a result of this system of training, ecclesiastics usually fell under two categories, the honest bigots and the hypocrites, and all of them were so deeply indoctrinated that she expresses serious doubts that they still possessed the capacity to feel guilt or remorse for the base actions they committed in the name of the Church.

From the Pope down to the humble monks, Cobbe finds fault with all the members of the Italian clergy. The priests, who unlike the monastic orders took only the vow of celibacy but not that of chastity, are accused of availing themselves of this difference, setting a bad example with their scandalous behaviour and creating, in the already corrupt moral sense of the nation, the utmost confusion on the subject of chastity.

Pope Pius IX is depicted in an anecdote as an embittered man and a maneuverer, whose hypocritical bonhomie concealed spite and duplicity. Among the different orders of monks and nuns, Dominicans and Jesuits, who were the most wealthy and thus also the most opposed to the new Italian kingdom, are described as “the quintessential spirit of all the ambition, perfidy, and relentlessness of that evil Church [...] dark, haughty, and inscrutable” (*Italics* 279). Only the Franciscans are spared harsh disapproval on account of their sense of humour and their capacity to laugh. Cobbe, who had a jolly and humorous nature, regards this characteristic as a typical Irish trait, and she complacently recognizes in the Capuchin monks the same disposition of character. She declares that: “the Capuchin is [...] like an Irish-peasant – simple, with a spice of humour, open-hearted, wholly undignified, and with an amazing preponderance of the theologic over the moral virtues” (*Italics* 279), and she revels in telling an anecdote that shows Franciscans’ ability to enjoy jokes and reveals at the same time her own sense of humour. To a Capuchin who urged her to do penance by going barefoot, she replies: ““Oh, Padre mio, [...] excuse me. I hope to go to heaven *con buoni stivaletti*’ (showing him a very stout pair of English boots qualified to cope with the pavement of Rome)” (*Italics* 281), sending the monk into fits of laughter.

After this long survey of the wickedness of the Italian ecclesiastics, Cobbe devotes an entire chapter to present the life and personality of Padre Passaglia, an ex-Jesuit who embraced the cause of the Italian unification, declared himself opposed to the temporal power of the Pope, and created a liberal party in the Church. The nine thousand two hundred clergy who signed his petition against the temporalities of the Holy See constituted the so-called Reforming Catholics, the third major party among the Catholics

of the country in addition to the Indifferentists and the Papists. Passaglia and his followers, who were not allowed to exercise their clerical functions and were deprived of any means of subsistence by the Church, are represented as the heroic counterpart to the immoral, malicious, and greedy ecclesiastics described in the previous chapter. But Cobbe uses the figure of Padre Passaglia also to introduce her theological discussion of the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Passaglia was one of the most highly erudite scholars of theology and patristic of the time. Before he became an advocate of the national cause and used his knowledge to demonstrate that the temporal power of the Holy See was not sanctioned by the Fathers of the Church, he was summoned by the Pope to help him find the authority for establishing the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. Cobbe ironically sympathizes with the efforts and the training of memory necessary to acquire the vain and unfounded erudition that allowed Passaglia to prove that Mary of Nazareth was immaculately conceived or, in other words, that she was born without the lack of grace caused by the original sin. The dogma is presented as questionable because it was the product of a process of logic in which no proposition was based on verifiable truth. But the fact that the Pope did not convene a Council (an indispensable requisite for the establishment of any new doctrine) and simply sent letters of acquiescence to all the Catholic bishops is portrayed as verging on the ridiculous. Cobbe, however, does not object only to the substance of the dogma and to the way used by the Pope to establish it. For her the decision to add a new doctrine to the canon presented a contradiction in itself: by definition a dogmatic theology professed to contain the whole scheme of Divine

things, but if it needed to be modified and completed by new truths, this implied that the theology was imperfect and could “admit of *constitutional* Progress” (*Italics* 323).

In the following chapter entitled “Madonna Immacolata,” Cobbe once again uses a recent Italian event (in this case the proclamation of a dogma that interested the religious life of the country) as a starting point to address questions of theology that deeply interested her and that she had dealt with in her theological writings. But while in the chapter “The Nemesis of a Woman,” Cobbe starts from her ideas on infernal punishments and God’s goodness to advocate for women’s rights, in this chapter she points out the misogyny behind the cult of the Virgin and its distortion of female roles. Her purpose is to argue in favour of the concept of God that she had developed for herself and that she had found very closely expressed in the writings of the American Transcendentalist, Theodore Parker.¹⁴⁸ She explains that the ideal Madonna worshipped in the Catholic countries was very different from the historical Mary of Nazareth, who was probably an aged and care-worn Syrian peasant and did not directly teach a single lesson. As a proof of this disinterest in the real Mary, Cobbe mentions that – as she remembers from her travel to Jerusalem and the Middle East – pilgrims most eagerly rushed around all the Sacred Places and honoured them praying, bowing, and kneeling, but they hardly pay any attention to the Virgin’s tomb and they did not even visit it. The idealization of the Madonna was especially evident in the figurative arts, where she was

¹⁴⁸ In her autobiography Cobbe insists that she had come to most of Parker’s conclusions before she read his work *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (1842), but the book was nonetheless “epoch-making” for her, because it reinforced her own ideas and supported them with “adequate erudition” (*Life* 1: 87). Cobbe started a correspondence with Parker soon after she read his book. She sent him a copy of her first theological work *Intuitive Morals* and Parker read and appreciated it. Cobbe managed to personally meet Parker in 1860, about two weeks before he died in Florence, where he had gone when he was already very sick. After his death Cobbe edited the fourteen volumes of Parker’s complete works. She finished by November 1864 and the volumes were published at intervals from 1863 to 1871 (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 111-112, 131).

always represented as extremely beautiful and noble, with the purity of the virgin and the dignity of the mother. And Cobbe observes that in the same way as in art the pictures of Jesus portrayed as the Saviour had been outnumbered by those of the Virgin represented as the prominent figure holding the Infant or alone in her glory, likewise in the hearts of millions of Catholics the worship of the Son had been eclipsed by the cult of the Mother. The scarcity of information about the real Mary of Nazareth had possibly eased the process of idealization that had transformed the humble wife of a carpenter into the Madonna Immacolata. But Cobbe does not believe, as was commonly assumed by Protestants, that the adoration of the Virgin originated mainly from wickedness and that Catholics addressed to Mary the prayers for all the gratifications and lower desires that they were too ashamed or afraid to ask for from God or Christ.

To explain the source of Mariolatry she looks at the history of mankind and at the evolution of religions from polytheism to monotheism. She argues that:

Man needs for his God just so many attributes as at the stage of his progress he perceives to be Divine. First, Retributive Justice and Power; then Wisdom; then Clemency and Mercy; at last, perfect Love. The epoch at which a new conception is to be added to the old must always be one of religious excitement proportioned to the religious earnestness of the nation which receives it and of its advance towards monotheism. (*Italics* 321-322)

While in polytheism the different attributes of God were worshipped as distinct deities and new divinities were added every time a new quality was acknowledged as divine, in monotheistic religions the recognition of a new characteristic of God created great revolutions or radical reforms. In the Madonna, Catholics worshipped the divine attributes of goodness, mildness, and pity. She personified all the feminine virtues of purity, simplicity, humility, but above all she was the idealized mother, the expression of

the purest and most tender maternal love. Cobbe, however, senses that this cult infantilized the worshippers, who, like so many infants, wanted to receive only comfort and gratification from their celestial mother without being responsible for correcting their moral behaviour: “The relation of the devotee to the Madonna is simply a repetition of the sweet and tender drama of infancy, acted in after life with a mother crowned with stars and able to grant all entreaties” (*Italics* 326). And she insists that although the Madonna supposedly was the divinity that personated and exalted all the feminine attributes, in reality human womanhood and natural motherhood as they existed in everyday life received “not honour, but insult through her” (*Italics* 333). As a matter of fact, no woman and mother could resemble the Madonna, because her nature was such that it defied all the laws of creation: she was a mother, but unlike any other mother she preserved the purity of a maiden; she was a woman, but unlike any other being she had been immaculately conceived and made divine not by escaping the weakness and frailty of the human nature, but by setting aside the material laws under which everybody else existed. Women and mothers were vilified by the constant contraposition to the Holy Virgin, while the natural purity and chastity and the sense of sanctity that they inspired were perverted by the contrast to the divinely granted and unachievable example of purity of the Madonna.¹⁴⁹

Cobbe clearly identifies and decidedly condemns the evils resulting from Mariolatry. By creating a new female divinity to personate feminine attributes, the Catholic Church had debased human femininity and encouraged misogyny, and by exalting virginity and divinely granted immaculateness they had desecrated marriage,

¹⁴⁹ For an extensive explanation of the origins, growth, and persistence of the Virgin’s cult and for an examination of its moral, social, and emotional implications, see Marina Warner’s *Alone of All her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*.

motherhood, and natural purity. But the worst of it according to Cobbe was that: “In adding – as it has practically done – a new deity to its Pantheon, the Romish Church has not only gone one step further in Polytheism; it has gone a great way towards severing, even further than hitherto, the bond between morality and religion” (*Italics* 332). The set of beliefs that Cobbe had established for herself after her loss of faith in Christian revelation was based on the idea that God was not only the great judge with the fatherly attributes of severity, powerfulness, and wisdom, but He was also the loving parent, who possessed the motherly qualities of piety, tenderness, and goodness. She admits, therefore, that the Catholic Church recognized a great truth by acknowledging that love, motherly tenderness, and pity were divine and holy and deserved to be adored. Nevertheless, she deplors that they attributed these characteristics not to the almighty and judging God himself but to another inferior being, separating in this way in the hearts of the worshippers the sense of morality from the comfort of love that they sought in religion. At the same time, she blames the Church of England for refusing to recognize the idea of God’s absolute goodness and love and for insisting on the doctrines of eternal punishments, openly ignoring the pressure of the entire nation, who pleaded for the reception of a new attribute of God and thus for the progress of religion. As usual she links her observations about Italian events to the situation in her home country, and although she only hints at the debate on the existence of hell that was taking place at that time in the Church of England,¹⁵⁰ her entire discussion of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception seems to culminate in an appeal to the Church of her nation:

¹⁵⁰ For a comprehensive presentation of the debate on the existence of hell in nineteenth-century England, see Geoffrey Rowell’s *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life*.

How much the world wants this truth, which Catholic Christendom has revealed in its myth of the Virgin's Coronation, there is small need to tell. The heart of humanity longs to rest itself on the compassion of its Creator. We have had enough of hell and "terrors of the Lord." The cry which has come from ten thousand voices of our English clergy in behalf of the dreadful doctrine, does but testify to their sense that its power is passing – nay, has actually passed away. We are sick of such night-mare horrors, and turn away with disgust from the religious systems in which they lie embedded. We crave, one and all of us, for a God whom we can perfectly, spontaneously, absolutely adore. That God is He, and He alone, who unites in one the Father's justice and the Mother's love. (*Italics* 331-332)

What Cobbe pleads for concerns her personally. Not only does she ask that the official religion of her country allow new ideas about God be developed and recognized so as not to drive more and more followers to reject orthodoxy as she herself had done, but she requests that her own concept of God as father and mother be universally accepted.

4.4 "People One Meets in Italy": The Final Chapters of *Italics* and Cobbe's Presentation of Alternative Models of Femininity

If the chapters on Italian religion can be defined as the most feminist of *Italics*, the final section of the book can perhaps be considered as its most feminine portion. Cobbe puts aside statistical data and journalistic reports of Italian events and reforms to treat themes that were more customary in the female travel literature of the time, and she also describes with a subjective rather than a factual style aspects of her journey to the Peninsula that were more decidedly personal. For example, the last three chapters of *Italics* are devoted to what was the quintessential object of travel books: the depiction of places and landscapes. But Cobbe stays away from the most celebrated cities and well-known landmarks, and she offers instead the description of places that were of significance to her. Under the title "Places Where The Author Wrote This Book" she groups her reflections on the peaceful and almost soporific character of Pisa. She then

takes the reader for an imaginary walk to discover the hidden charm of Nervi, where she had a delightful stay especially because the town was commonly ignored by tourists and guide books like Murray on account of its lack of attractions, works of art, and sights. Finally, she sketches the bucolic beauty of Savoy, a region on the west side of the Alps that did not even belong anymore to the Italian kingdom, because it was ceded to France in exchange for its military support in the war against Austria that started the process of the Italian unification in 1858. The chapter “Italian Manufacture,” which in the index of the book is listed under the title “Italian Furniture,” deals with aspects of Italian domestic and everyday life that were usually noticed and discussed more frequently by female rather than male travel writers (Scheitler 176- 177). While she expresses her frustration over the poor manufacture of all Italian furniture and household objects, Cobbe observes that: “This is a side of Italian life of which Englishmen who do not travel have rarely a conception” (*Italics* 362). Even Englishmen who travelled and wrote about their journeys, however, rarely related about these ordinary aspects of the life in a foreign country. These topics were generally considered trivial and uninteresting for male readers, and they soon became typical domain of travel books by women writers,¹⁵¹ who aimed at being original by dealing with less conventional themes that could especially appeal to a female audience (Scheitler 24 -25).

But if domestic life and household goods were traditional feminine subjects, the way in which Cobbe deals with these topics is definitely unusual. The content of the

¹⁵¹ Foster claims that: “it is [...] possible to recognise a distinctive and overtly feminine voice in the women’s texts, ways of seeing and recreating foreign experience which are clearly gender-related. First, there is the treatment of topics not generally explored in any depth in male travel writing. These include the appearance, costume and manners of women; details of domestic life such as household management and culinary habits; behaviour towards children; marriage customs and female status; the importance of ‘space’ in the physical environment. All these often suggest a covert means of challenging the male norm and of establishing a new female-oriented genre” (24).

chapter is turned into a dispute between the past and the present and between English home comfort and Italian aesthetic pleasure. Rejecting the widespread conviction that the past is more romantic, picturesque, artistic, and beautiful than the present, she claims that this idea originates in the “natural law of human feelings whereby everything else, as well as beauty, is exalted when passed away, and contemned while still existing” (*Italics* 350). According to Cobbe, therefore, if old art and all the ancient things of common use like houses, furniture, and dresses appeared more beautiful than those of her time, it was only because the human soul spontaneously attached charm and nobility to everything that did not belong to “the petty interests of daily existence” (*Italics* 353) but lay distant in space or in time. This, however, explained only in part why the perfection and luxury of modern English houses and their contents did not appear particularly beautiful and did not excite aesthetic pleasure. In her opinion, the lack of beauty of the typical English home was due mostly to the fact that: “such a house, by the very perfection of its appliances for Comfort, suggests at every moment that very idea of Comfort which is so distant from the idea of the Beautiful” (*Italics* 356). On account of these preliminary remarks, her observation that Italy was “the true land of the Beautiful” (*Italics* 362), because in Italian houses there was no danger that comfort and luxuries could hinder the gratification of the aesthetic sense, assumes immediately an unexpected ironic twist. Italian rooms usually contained excellent paintings, exquisite sculptures, carved chairs, tables, and beds that offered pleasure to the eyes, but they were completely devoid of all the ordinary household objects and contrivances that were common in English homes and made everyday life comfortable. Cobbe is bewildered by the difference between the elegance and delicacy of the household objects of the time of the Romans exhibited in the

Italian museums and the poor, ill-designed, and badly made manufactures of modern Italy. And she is vexed by the fact that no object was accurately made: no rooms, tables, or chests were well-squared; boxes and lids never matched; tongs, pokers, chisels, saws, corkscrews, and hammers were crooked, clumsy, and completely unfit to perform their offices; window sashes were ill-fitting, the panes loose, and the shutters flew open at every gush of wind; door handles were impossible to operate; doors did not exclude noises and allowed infinite draughts to pass; sofas were huge, unwieldy, and so uncomfortable to appear stuffed with “brickbats” (*Italics* 367). Particularly trying to the patience of a lady was the attempt to use an Italian mirror especially at the moments of crisis when dinner was announced, the dress was still unchanged, and the hair undone:

Looking-glasses [...] are matters of constant exercise, as a Quaker would say, to any unfortunate lady who may chance to be possessed by a curiosity to look at the results of her toilette. As to seeing her “natural face in a glass,” it is what she need indulge in no hopes of doing. Probably she will find her countenance extended laterally in an ellipse, one eye and cheek being much larger than another, so as to give her somewhat the shape of a map of Africa, while her colour will probably vary between drab and a delicate green. [...] Your Italian looking-glass always swings back, with a slow motion, presenting you for a moment with a vanishing view of your chin, and then remaining delicately balanced horizontally, so as to afford all the advantage of its services to the flies on the ceiling. Of course, you push it back to a perpendicular position, and make a furtive effort to adjust the bit of paper, or perhaps hair-pin, which you perceive some previous sufferer has stuck as a wedge or screw to tighten the joint. The result is that this time the glass flaps forward, your forehead appears for an instant in the foreground, and then the mirror remains stationary, face downward. (*Italics* 367-369)

With regard to this passage, Schor has cleverly noticed how the Italian mirror in which Cobbe tries to see herself is not only difficult to master, but “it is as likely to refract one’s search for an image as to reflect a self changed almost beyond recognition” (“Acts of Union” 109). In other words the metaphor of the looking-glass reveals that Italy

can be considered as a mirror in which it is possible to search for one's own identity. More often than not the new image of the self that one discovers proves difficult to grasp, slipping away from the observer and moving in unexpected directions. Cobbe was evidently fascinated by the otherness she had found in Italy and by the country's endeavour to reorganize and reinvent itself as a modern and dynamic nation after centuries of spiritual and political despotism. She was certainly aware of the analogy between Italy – often represented in literature and poetry as a beautiful enslaved woman striving for her independence – and the condition of all the women striving to free themselves from centuries of male prejudices and oppression and to have their fundamental rights recognized.¹⁵² Looking for her own identity in the midst of a country that was in the process of a radical transformation, Cobbe discovered that she herself could change from the aging daughter she was when she first left the paternal home, and she realized that her role as a woman did not have to be confined within the patriarchal boundaries of the domestic sphere. In this sense, perhaps, the Elegiac Stanzas dedicated to an English willow-pattern plate that conclude the chapter on Italian manufacture assume a meaning that goes beyond their jesting tone.

Italian crockery was of such poor quality that all dishware was imported from England, and Cobbe points out her disappointment at finding such familiar objects in exotic Italy: “Well can I recall the shock which the discovery of this fact gave me, when I

¹⁵² As Maura O'Connor has pointed out: “On a metaphoric level [...], Italian freedom represented the triumph of female assertiveness. No longer would Italy be dominated by the patriarchal rule of the pope, a Bourbon king, or the statesmen of Austria. Italy, at least as the English viewed “her”, the once empathetic woman beautifully described and depicted by Romantic and early-Victorian writers and poets, would now have “her” dignity and “her” freedom restored. As Italy was so often cast as a woman, a “femme fatale” in the popular travel literature and poetry about Italy that the English had come to cherish, “her” political liberation could be viewed as a liberation for women themselves. This idea has been suggested for Elizabeth Barrett Browning and several other literary women who made their home in Italy during the nineteenth century” (109-110). In her poem *Casa Guidi Windows*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning invokes the trope of Italy as an enslaved woman only to interrogate and reject it.

had been fancying everything new and marvellous in Italy, the land of Art, – and behold! the vulgar old platters of England were still haunting me [...]” (*Italics* 370). In the Elegiac Stanzas, which she declares she had written at her first arrival in Italy when she was “young” and “foolish” (*Italics* 370), Cobbe describes all the things that had changed for her in Italy: the stars that she could observe from Rome were not the same she could see in the north; the Mediterranean Sea had no tide; the colour of sea-sand was dark; flowers, grass and trees were different; and December was as warm as June. Among all these changes the willow-pattern plate, a common English household object, can be considered as the symbol of the domestic life in her native country that she was trying to put aside and forget in order to create an alternate existence for herself, the outcome of which she could not yet imagine when she wrote these verses:

Last night I stood in Eternal Rome;
I gazed on the midnight sky,
And I noted how Orion blazed
Aloft on the zenith high.

“Even the stars,” I said, “are changed,
All things are changed for me;
My old bright life, like the Northern Wain,
Has gone down into the sea.

In this new year, what other stars
May rise I cannot know [...].
But never – never change shall reach
One thing in mortal state:
One only thing – I see it now –
A WILLOW-PATTERN PLATE. (*Italics* 371 -372)

The inspiration for her new alternative existence came to Cobbe from an aspect of Italian social life that most deeply impressed her, because it represented an answer to the search for her own identity and for her role in society that she had undertaken, once her duties as a daughter in the paternal house were over. Of this aspect of the social life of

Italy she reports enthusiastically and at length in the chapter of *Italics* entitled “People one meets in Italy.” There she promptly clarifies that the social life that gave her greater pleasure than admiring the glories of Italian art and nature was not to be found in the circles of noble or middle-class Italians in which foreigners were rarely accepted, nor in the fashionable coteries of the British high society residing in the Peninsula. The people that Cobbe met in Italy and gave her the inspiration to shape her future life as an independent professional woman writer outside of the traditional domestic and family boundaries were foreigners like her, mostly from England and America, who – as she passionately remarks – “have had the courage to break away from the fetter of custom” (*Italics* 374). With tangible enthusiasm she insists that in Italy more than anywhere else in the world it was possible to meet these people who were leading “*real* lives – lives which they have carved out for themselves and have not merely fitted into – lives which have a definite aim, and that aim a high one” (*Italics* 374). That she herself could lead a life that did not fit the standard Victorian ideal of womanliness and could carve out for herself an existence with a high purpose as a writer and social reformer was the most important discovery that Cobbe made in Italy. And soon enough she became a member of those interesting and lively circles of poets, scholars, archaeologists, newspaper correspondents, sculptors, painters, cameo-cutters, singers, musicians, actors, that one could meet in Italy in those years and that made the social life there so stimulating. Proof that these Italian encounters with unconventional expatriates had a life-changing importance for Cobbe is the fact that, more than thirty years later, this was the only aspect of her several trips to Italy that she still considered worth of recounting in a section of her autobiography. What she wrote in her autobiography follows closely the content of the

chapter of *Italics* on the people she met in Italy, and in both books there are sketches of famous men like the Italian statesman Massimo D'Azelio and the patriot Giuseppe Mazzini, the sculptors John Gibson, Hiram Powers, and William Story, the writers and poets Walter Savage Landor, T. Adolphus Trollope, and Robert Browning.

But Cobbe was deeply fascinated in particular by the women she met in Italy, and her admiration for these extraordinary examples of talented and accomplished femininity reveals itself especially in the portraits of the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the sculptor Harriet Hosmer, and the scientist Mary Somerville. These remarkable women were specimens of what female genius could achieve when it was not restrained by the prejudices and conventions that considered women's intellect weaker and unfit for great artistic creations and rigorous scientific studies. They were also the early representatives of that minority group of educated and independent women that Cobbe hoped to see grow larger and larger as a consequence of the process of modernization, which made education and other fundamental rights increasingly available for women. The previous chapters of *Italics* are filled with demoralizing descriptions of "poor besotted [Italian] women who crowd round the altars of winking Madonnas, and offer tapers for lucky tickets in the lottery" (*Italics* 268). Also when Cobbe considers women's condition in England her surveys are not much more uplifting and present British ladies treated like children and brought up to become "as narrow-minded and bigoted as possible" (*Italics* 242). In contrast, the group of British and American female artists and intellectuals residing in the Peninsula that she portrays in this chapter of *Italics* finally offers a more optimistic view on womanhood and its potential. But before she introduces these exceptional women, Cobbe clearly distinguishes them and herself from another category

of people that one could meet in Italy and that she derogatorily calls “the genus “Tourist,” with its proper female accompaniment” (*Italics* 375).

With the advent of the railway, which made travelling more comfortable and affordable for everybody, a new mass of leisure travellers had started to increasingly crowd the old European destinations of the Grand Tour. The once serious educational experience of a trip to the Continent reserved exclusively to a small privileged élite turned into a pastime open to anybody who could afford it, independent of their social class and education. The ubiquitous presence of this new kind of traveller wherever there were artistic or natural attractions to enjoy had transformed the once more solitary and potentially dangerous adventure of travelling into an increasingly organized and standardized business, which left less and less room for individual experiences. Like many other travel writers of the time who were anxious to portray the originality and uniqueness of their journeys, Cobbe is eager to stress the difference between this superficial and often ignorant category of new travellers – the tourists –, and the ‘real’ travellers who, like herself, spent longer periods in the foreign countries, acquired a deeper knowledge of the local people and culture, and pursued higher aims than passing their time at leisure.¹⁵³ In order to emphasize the distinction between the two categories of travellers and hint at the implicit inferiority of the tourists, she ironically employs the scientific language used to describe zoological species to refer to them. She observes, for example, that hotels and holiday resorts in France, Belgium, and especially Switzerland constituted the “proper *habitat*” (*Italics* 376) for “the genus Paterfamilias, pompous and slow; Materfamilias, fussy and foolish; young ladies with empty faces, and young

¹⁵³ For a dialectical treatment of the concepts of tourist and traveller see James Buzard, *The Beaten Track* 18-79.

gentlemen with empty heads” (*Italics* 375). Although she reports to have “discovered rare specimens” of “this order of Mammalia” (*Italics* 376) also as far south as the Egyptian city of Cairo and as far east as the country of Jordan, she explains that “the genus “Tourist”” (*Italics* 375) was rare over the Alps “till in Italy they form[ed] an inconsiderable proportion of the zoological curiosities at *tables d’hôtes*” (*Italics* 378). On account of its farther distance from the shores of England, of its less widely known language, and of its abundance of attractions that could not be visited (or ‘done’ as tourists liked to say) in a month’s holiday, Italy was less plagued than other countries by this “tribe of Gothic invaders” (*Italics* 376). And Cobbe insists that social life in Italy was more enjoyable than anywhere else, not only because a higher concentration of interesting people lived there, but also because in the Peninsula there were “fewer bores,” that is fewer representatives of “that class of tourists whose society cannot be said to convey any very brilliant gratification” (*Italics* 375).

Humour and mockery towards these new kind of travellers, who hurried through museums and churches indiscriminately and uncritically following the directions of their guidebooks, had become almost a staple in the genre of travelogues. Cobbe for her part does not forgo telling a few amusing anecdotes about them. The name “Murrayolators” (*Italics* 426), for example, which she jokingly gives to the enthusiasts of the first and most popular handbook for travellers, is suggested to her by the episode of a poor Italian sacristan of a church in Rome, who believed that English people were indeed pious because, as he explained to a monsignor: “they go about all the churches and everywhere reading in those red prayer-books – you know, those English prayer-books, with some word like ‘Murray’ on the back!” (*Italics* 426). Another anecdote shows how

standardized and conventional the practice of acquiring knowledge through travelling had become as a consequence of the introduction of the guidebooks. An Italian gentleman, she observes, was favourably impressed by the erudition of all the English girls he met until he discovered that they all quoted the same things and made the same artistic criticism because all their knowledge came from the same source: the Murray guidebook. Finally, she sympathizes with a girl who once observed that “Rome would be a very nice place, if there were no sights,” because as Cobbe explains:

The way in which she had probably been hurried by Paterfamilias every morning through galleries and churches, just verifying Murray, reading those horrid small double columns, and with a rapid glance at the picture or the building, merely identifying the object with the description, and then hurrying on to “do” another gallery and church before luncheon, would be enough to make her hate “sights” for the rest of her natural life. (*Italics* 427)

She decidedly condemns this way of experiencing art and culture, which she defines as “Hurry-Murray” and judges even worse than “hurry-scurry” (*Italics* 427). For her “to receive sublime and beautiful impressions, to have the aesthetic sense touched and elevated” (*Italics* 428) or, in other words, to become enlightened and educated by being exposed to beauty, constituted the whole purpose of contemplating art. And this purpose was completely nullified if, instead of calmly beholding the works of art, people rushed through galleries and museums with their eyes on a guidebook.

Although Cobbe like many other travel writers of the time disapproves of this kind of traveller, she is unique for turning even the commonplace mockery of tourists and guidebooks into a vindication of the condition of women. She observes that “people become stupid, and vulgar, and conceited about themselves and their money” (*Italics* 376), because they lack that higher education which is not to be obtained in schools, but

from being in association with interesting and cultivated minds and from seeing the world's beauty. For many girls and young women, who in the ladies' boarding schools were "taught to *seem* everything, and to *be* nothing" and at home were "walled in by a circle of narrow-minded relatives – perhaps, a vulgar mother intent on pushing her into "society" – perhaps, a coarse despotic father" (*Italics* 377), travelling was the only opportunity they had to enlarge their horizons and to get access to a more stimulating atmosphere. "A son" Cobbe remarks, "is responsible for being as narrow as a narrow-minded father. But a daughter is only to be pitied for being vulgar and worldly, as a vulgar and worldly mother" (*Italics* 379). For this reason and in spite of her expressed dislike for ignorant and vulgar tourists, she hopes that the ennobling and enlightening effects of travelling would continue to become more and more available to those people who most needed them and that women in particular could profit from the experience. According to Cobbe, among the people who benefited most from the inspiring ambience and cultural climate of Italy were American women. She admired their "more marked individuality" (*Italics* 375) and believed that Italy offered a particularly congenial sphere for the development of this quality and in general for appreciating the American character to its greatest advantage.

In her series of sketches of people that could be met in Italy, the first woman she enthusiastically portrays as an example of outstanding female talent is Elizabeth Barrett Browning who, as Cobbe explains, was not American and had never visited America, but was believed to come from there for the great and passionate admiration that so many people in that country felt for her writings. Cobbe emphasizes the devotion and "the enthusiasm of affection [Elizabeth Barrett Browning] inspired in those who knew her

best” (*Italics* 390). While she was still alive, her house in Florence, Casa Guidi, “became a place of pilgrimage” (*Italics* 390), and after her death the municipality of the city honoured her memory with a marble tablet that commemorated her great talent as a poet and her involvement in the Italian struggle for freedom and unity. Cobbe herself confesses to have travelled from Venice to Florence for the express purpose of having the privilege of meeting the author of *Aurora Leigh*. Her description of the impressions she received from this encounter stresses the contrast between the fragile aspect of the poet and her “most “muscular” poems” (*Italics* 391). The whole portrait of Elizabeth Barrett Browning seems to aim at discrediting the common prejudices of the time against learned women by showing how erudition and mental power could go hand in hand with sweetness of character and delicacy of manner. In the second half of the nineteenth century the overly learned women were often labelled with the epithet ‘strong-minded’ and characterized as dogmatic and presumptuous, self willed, arrogant, and disagreeable in manner (Gorham 104). Here Cobbe insists on Barrett Browning’s affability and she describes her as “a great woman, [with] an eye calm and deep, looking through and through the person she addressed” (*Italics* 391). She notices “calm strength” in her mode of speaking and remarks that in her “there was no look of power, – only of fragility and delicacy” (*Italics* 390-391). Young girls and women were usually discouraged from applying themselves too earnestly to studying, because too much learning – especially of the subjects that were usually considered proper domain of men – was believed to damage their femininity and their health (Gorham 103). Cobbe, on the other hand, prizes EBB’s “solid learning and patient culture of her art” and the fact that she “contrived to amass stores of classic learning” in spite of her constantly poor health and of such a state

of suffering and weakness that would have made any other woman a mere valetudinarian (*Italics* 392).

At a time when women were advised to write lyric poetry with an emphasis on individual feeling and domestic experience, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was among the first female poets to write explicitly about child labour, slavery, prostitution, and politics (celebrating in particular Italian nationalism). She also wrote a verse-novel that was both an epic and an autobiography, at a time when emphasis on the self was contrary to Victorian aesthetics and was considered especially disagreeable in works by female authors (Helsing, Sheets, and Veeder 3: 30-47). For these reasons, Cobbe reveres together with EBB's erudition also "her courage and energy" (*Italics* 393), which allowed her to break with the conventions that limited women's sphere of interest and to venture "to write books wherein all the social problems of our time are handled with amazing force and vigour" (*Italics* 392). She mentions in particular Barrett Browning's political poems on the events of the Italian unification, in which, as Cobbe remarks, "breathes unmistakably the fervour of the passionate love she gave to Italy, and the earnestness with which she was able, from her sick room, to throw her heart in to the great struggle" (*Italics* 392).

EBB represented a particularly interesting woman to present as a different model of femininity for an additional reason. Not only were learned and 'strong-minded' women usually considered unfeminine, but it was also believed that the principal purpose of a woman's life was to become a good wife and mother, and thus women were discouraged from undertaking any other interest or activity that could jeopardize their complete dedication to those roles. As a beloved wife and mother as well as an extremely

learned, gifted, and acclaimed poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning represented the actual demonstration that it was possible for a woman to pursue her own aspirations and be cultured and successful without becoming unfeminine and renouncing her traditional domestic role. Interestingly Cobbe suggests that talented and active women had often had unhappy marriages not because of their scarce commitment to their domestic duties, but because of their husbands' petty jealousy, narrow-mindedness, and lack of self-confidence that prevented them from rejoicing in their wives' accomplishments. Therefore, rather than praising EBB for her qualities as a good mother and wife, Cobbe compliments her for her capacity of inspiring love and obtaining devotion from a man who was able to completely appreciate her:

[S]he was every way enviable in her great powers, not only of writing but of loving, and in receiving their natural reward of being beloved by many with enthusiastic affection, and in obtaining from her husband a devotion which has for ever broken the prejudice that Genius and Love cannot long combine together. That the marriages of so many gifted women have been singularly unfortunate may be traced to the simple fact – that *the masculine for their feminine* was not discovered, or perhaps, easily discoverable. Mrs. Browning found a man whose own powers were great enough and his heart large enough to appreciate and to glory in those she possessed. The result, as all the world knows, was one of the happiest unions which have blessed man and woman. (*Italics* 393)

For several months in 1860, Cobbe shared lodging in the Villa Brichieri on the hill of Bellosguardo outside of Florence with one of the most intimate friends of the Brownings, the writer Isa Blagden. They received frequent visits from Robert Browning, but his wife was always too weak to drive to the villa, and Cobbe managed to meet her in person at Casa Guidi only a few times.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ In her autobiography, Cobbe wrote about the time she spent with Isa Blagden at the Villa Brichieri and about her relationship with the Brownings in these terms: "Among our most frequent visitors was Mr. Browning. Mrs. Browning was never able to drive so far, but her warm friendship for Miss Blagden was heartily shared by her husband and we saw a great deal of him. [...] Of Mrs. Browning I never saw much.

While her acquaintance with Elizabeth Barrett Browning remained superficial, the other two women presented in *Italics* as model of alternative femininity became Cobbe's close friends and had a direct influence on the future development of her life. Harriet Hosmer, a pupil of the sculptor John Gibson, is introduced as "the first woman who has combined genius, with opportunity and resolution to study thoroughly under a great master the noble art of sculpture" (*Italics* 413). The mere choice of becoming a sculptor – a profession that was considered physically beyond female capabilities and that was practiced mostly by men – was enough to make Hosmer an unconventional woman. In her portrait of this American artist, Cobbe points out also the many other ways in which she was different from the stereotyped idea of femininity of the time. She remarks, for example, that Hosmer dedicated "such severe application to the theory and practice of her art, as few women are able or willing to give to any study", and the result was the production of "works of constantly-increasing merit" (*Italics* 411). Cobbe introduces some of Hosmer's sculptures, two of which had been presented at the International Exhibition of London in 1862, and she admires in particular the *Sleeping Faun*, which she had seen as a clay model before it was realized in marble. The undeniable character and originality that distinguished Hosmer's works are regarded by Cobbe as evidence of female creative power and as a refutation of the common assumption that women lacked this quality altogether:

No one who studies [Hosmer's sculptures] fairly could, I think, deny to their author that creative power which has been certainly far more rarely

Sundry visits we paid to each other missed, and when I did find her at home in Casa Guidi we did not fall on congenial themes. I was bubbling over with enthusiasm for her poetry, but had not the audacity to express my admiration (which, in truth, had been my special reason for visiting Florence), and she entangled me in erudite discussions about Tuscan and Bolognese schools of painting, concerning which I knew little and, perhaps, cared less." (*Life* 2: 342-344)

bestowed on women than on men – so rarely, indeed, that the doubt might be legitimate whether it were ever in a high measure possessed by a woman. *Secondary creation* – the reproduction of poetry and music and painting, as actresses, singers, pianists, copyists – *this*, women have constantly accomplished well. But to write great poems, to compose music, to paint new pictures, or model new statues, these are things they have most rarely achieved. Simply, then, as a matter of experiment, there is not a little curiosity in the examination of [her] works [...]. (*Italics* 413)

Cobbe's appreciation is not limited to Hosmer's skill as a sculptor. The artist is prized as "a girl who has spent the bloom of her youth in voluntary devotion to a high pursuit, adding to unusual gifts scarcely less unusual resolution and perseverance" (*Italics* 413-414). Even greater enthusiasm, however, is reserved for Hosmer as a woman and a friend for her attractiveness and her joyful personality. Hosmer was not only "a most skilful and courageous horsewoman," but according to Cobbe she possessed "a gift second to none in value to the owner and in charm to the spectator, an inexhaustible flow of wit, drollery, and genial joyous humour" (*Italics* 414). The contrasting combination of masculine strength and feminine levity that characterized Hosmer's nature is summarized in these terms: "Coleridge's "happy elf" of a child, always singing and playing, and a woman creating majestic works of art [...] – a man's courage and steadfastness of purpose, and a young girl's fulness of fresh life" (*Italics* 414). Even more than thirty years later, in her autobiography Cobbe remembers the joyful time spent in Hosmer's company and appears still completely captivated by her personality:

She was in those days the most bewitching sprite the world ever saw. Never have I laughed so helplessly as at the infinite fun of this bright Yankee girl. [...] I have not seen her now for many years since she has returned to America, nor yet any one in the least like her; and it is vain to hope to convey to any reader the contagion of her merriment. Oh! what a gift, beyond rubies, are such spirits! (*Life* 2: 355)

Hosmer lived in an all-female household in a handsome house in Rome rented by the celebrated American actress Charlotte Cushman and shared also by another American artist, the sculptor Emma Stebbins. All of them were vibrant, talented, and unconventional women.¹⁵⁵ In their company Cobbe enjoyed “merry feasts,” “evenings with large assemblies and fine music,” and intimate gatherings “with two or three friends only” (*Italics* 415). Most importantly she learned about “the happy way women club together in Italy” (*Italics* 414) and realized that single women did not necessarily have to age alone and in idleness at home, bereft of stimulating social lives and higher purposes. In Italy she observed women “admirably working their way: some as writers, some as artists of one kind or another, bright, happy, free, and respected by all” (*Italics* 398), and she delighted in the evidence that single women could be independent, pursuing their own aspirations and leading happy lives while enjoying the company of other women. Conscious that the encounter with these extraordinary women represented a life-changing experience for her, Cobbe seems to give thanks to her lucky fate for having had the opportunity of meeting them when she affirms that: “Among all the circles into which the chances of a wandering life may throw us, few, I think, are nearly so charming as that of the great American artists in Rome” (*Italics* 415).

By a happy coincidence, Italy and in particular Florence and Rome were in those years the places where it was possible to meet some of the most remarkable female personalities that the age produced, women who dared to explore professions and fields that were previously exclusively reserved to men and who were to be regarded as pioneers in their achievements and as models for generations of women to come. While

¹⁵⁵ Hosmer, Cushman, and Stebbins were committed abolitionists. Cobbe remarks that Cushman, who had retired from the stage for long, resumed her profession and toured the United States in the summer of 1863 in order to raise money for the Union soldiers and their families (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 124).

she was in Italy Cobbe met some of the most influential among these extraordinary women and, being an intellectual, unconventional, and talented woman herself, it was possibly inevitable that she would be attracted and inspired by them to become one of the first and most important advocates of women's rights. Harriet Beecher Stowe, internationally famous as the author of the deeply influential anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, met with Cobbe in the villa Brichieri on Bellosguardo, where they spent a few hours conversing about the recently deceased friend and fellow worker in the abolitionist cause, Theodore Parker.¹⁵⁶ Kate Field, later one of the first American celebrity journalists and a literary and cultural sensation, had gone to Italy to study singing and there she became one of Cobbe's closest friends, soon after her voice was destroyed by a cold and she had started her career as a foreign correspondent to support herself. George Eliot, one of the greatest English female writers and possibly the first who gained widespread respect as a woman novelist for her impressive artistic achievements, toured Italy in 1860 and stayed in Florence for a few weeks at the house of Thomas and Theodosia Trollope, frequented at the time also by Cobbe.¹⁵⁷

Of all the female celebrities that Cobbe had the chance to meet during her stays in Italy, Mary Somerville,¹⁵⁸ the era's foremost woman of science and one of the first two

¹⁵⁶ In *Italics* Cobbe characterizes Stowe as the woman "to whom Fame was presented in a more tangible and visible shape than probably to any woman since the world began" (416).

¹⁵⁷ Cobbe missed out on the opportunity of meeting George Eliot at the Villino Trollope, and in her autobiography she recalled the incident in these terms: "[Thomas Trollope] had, he told us, a most interesting person staying with him and Mrs. Trollope – Mrs. Lewes – who had written "Adam Bede," and was then writing "Romola." Miss Blagden alone went with him, and was enchanted, like all the world, with George Eliot" (*Life* 2: 347). Mitchell in her biography of Cobbe points out that: "Cobbe did not accept an invitation to meet [George Eliot] because, she explained in a private letter many years later, she had "a very strong old fashioned prejudice in favour of lawful matrimony & against such unions as hers...What infinite pity it was that her real genius allied itself in such base fashion!" (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 111).

¹⁵⁸ In *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace*, Jay Clayton offers a portrait of Mary Somerville that stresses her fame in her time and outlines how she came to be associated with a popularizing and feminized tradition of science. Somerville's work in several fields of discovery, including mathematics and astronomy, was highly regarded by male scientists of the time, and she contributed to the definition and categorization of

admitted to the Royal Astronomical Society, represented arguably the most widely recognized personality that could be presented as an undisputed proof that a woman could embody the traditional domestic roles as wife and mother and, at the same time, have a distinguished place in the sphere usually reserved to men. Born in Scotland in 1780 and daughter of the old and noble house of Fairfax, Mary Somerville with her beauty, her eighteenth-century manners, and with her utter commitment to home (she was twice widowed and had six children) could be considered a real lady, who perpetuated the traditional Victorian domestic values (*Italics* 441). But she was also an extremely intelligent woman, who had devoted herself from an early age to the study of mathematics, astronomy, and physical sciences. And while detractors of women artists could play down their accomplishments ascribing them mostly to inspiration, Somerville's achievements necessarily had to be recognized as obtained by unremitting exertion and investigation like those of male scientists. Because of her acknowledged merits as a scientist and of her undeniable personal qualities and commitment to domestic duties, Mary Somerville "provided an example for both the young women who followed her into science and the orthodox who linked true intellectuality to True Womanhood" (Helsing, Sheets, and Veeder 2: 79). All this would have been reason enough to justify the enthusiastic eulogy that Cobbe devotes to Mary Somerville at the end of the chapter of *Italics* on the people she met in Italy. But Cobbe also felt deep personal admiration and tender affection towards the scientist, who since their first encounter in 1860 welcomed her and treated her as a daughter, spent hours in conversation with her on religious

the individual sciences encompassed by the notion of physical science. As Clayton suggests, however, by the time Somerville was living in Italy, she had been shut out from the increasing professionalization of modern science that she had contributed to establishing and her achievements had come to be regarded as pertaining to the genre of popular science (85-94).

matters, and until Somerville's death at the age of ninety-two maintained a close correspondence with her.¹⁵⁹ Cobbe's portrait of Mary Somerville is a tribute to an example of female excellence that could be widely accepted as a model for a new kind of femininity because, without rejecting the traditional values, she exalted in herself all the virtues and qualities of mind, character, and demeanour that a woman could be capable of:

There is no need to tell the world now that she is the most learned woman (as regards physical and mathematical science), who has ever lived; that her books are masterpieces of their kind; or that her life has been the example to which all who have at heart the elevation of her sex, point to prove that the greatest intellectual height is attainable by the best of wives and mothers. [...] The clearest brain probably ever granted to one of her sex has been vouchsafed, *not* to a woman lacking in tenderness, or simplicity, or vividness of religious consciousness, but to one in whom these have all had their highest development. (*Italics* 437-439)

Cobbe calls her "the HUMBOLDT OF WOMEN" and extols the indefatigable work of the scientist, who at age eighty-three was "completing a treatise which will probably be considered as her greatest work" (*Italics* 438).

Somerville's existence had also been exemplar in many other respects. Cobbe describes how in her old age Somerville was blessed with happiness, surrounded by the care and affection of her children and of her Italian and English friends, and supported by "her firm faith in a yet holier and nobler life to come" (*Italics* 444). Somerville's study of science, far from destroying her faith, had reconfirmed and strengthened her belief in

¹⁵⁹ In her autobiography Cobbe portrays her close relationship with Mary Somerville: "[she] took me to her heart as if I had been a newly-found daughter, and for whom I soon felt such tender affection that sitting beside her on her sofa, (as I mostly did on account of her deafness) I could hardly keep myself from caressing her. [...] Her religious ideas proved to be exactly like my own; and being no doubt somewhat athirst for sympathy on a subject on which she felt profoundly (her daughters differing from her), she opened her heart to me entirely" (*Life* 2: 349-350).

God, and Cobbe revels in disproving the common prejudice that scientific knowledge was incompatible with religious creed:

[E]ducated in such a creed as that of Scotland in the last century, [Somerville] has followed the progress alike of religion and of science, and stands at last in old age abreast of the foremost thought of our time. *This* is a voice to which we listen with thankfulness when it tells us that the result of knowledge is Faith. (*Italics* 440)

Cobbe appears even more exultant when she points out how everything in Somerville's nature and looks contradicted the bias against the stereotyped character of the learned and intellectual woman:

In nearly every respect, indeed, Mrs. Somerville must be a sad stone of stumbling to those who delight to depict that heraldic creature, "the Strong-minded Female," and have established it as a fact that the knowledge of Euclid is incompatible with the domestic affections, and that an angular figure, harsh voice, and brusque behaviour, are the necessary preparatives for feminine authorship. (*Italics* 441-442)

The description of Somerville spending her morning writing in bed surrounded by her beloved pet sparrow, a parrot, and a white Pomeranian dog emphasizes her affection and compassion for animals, and Cobbe does not miss the chance to score a point in favour of the anti-vivisection cause by remarking that even a great scientist like Somerville believed that "the hateful practice of vivisection" (*Italics* 444) disgraced rather than helped the advancement of science. It is understandable, therefore, that thirty years later in her autobiography Cobbe expressed her deep disappointment and indignation for having found out that a declared supporter of vivisection was allowed to be nominated for election as a member of the Council of the Oxford College dedicated to the memory of the anti-vivisectionist and lover of animals, Mary Somerville (*Life* 2: 353-354).

Cobbe concludes her panegyric to Mary Somerville crediting to their encounter and their friendship the supreme pleasure that she derived from all her travels:

[A]mong the greatest of all the pleasures, and the most dear and sacred treasure of memory which many wanderings have given to me, the one for which I am most grateful is, [...] that I have been allowed to see and know and love Mary Somerville – and learn that Age can be so blessed, and Womanhood so perfect, and Immortality so secure. (*Italics* 445)

In her autobiography Cobbe confirms this statement remembering Somerville as “by far the best and dearest of my friends in Florence” and noting that in all her visits to Italy she made “a great object of [her] plans to be for some weeks near her” (*Life* 2: 349-350). They shared religious views, love for serious conversation, and extensive social and intellectual interests and, because of their difference in age, Cobbe also found in Somerville a motherly figure gifted with an intellect she could look up to for inspiration.

In her autobiography Cobbe hints at another reason that possibly made Somerville even dearer to her. Through the circle of American artists living in Rome and apparently because of Mary Somerville’s expressed desire, Cobbe made the acquaintance of Mary Lloyd, the Welsh sculptor who would become her life-long companion. Cobbe discusses this event reluctantly and with much reserve in her autobiography:

One day when I had been lunching at her house, Miss Cushman asked whether I would drive with her in her brougham to call on a friend of Mrs. Somerville, who had particularly desired that she and I should meet, – a Welsh lady, Miss Lloyd, of Hengwrt. I was, of course, very willing indeed to meet a friend of Mrs. Somerville. We happily found Miss Lloyd, busy in her sculptor’s studio over a model of her Arab horse [...]. Then began an acquaintance, which was further improved two years later [...]; and from that time, now more than thirty years ago, she and I have lived together. Of a friendship like this, which has been to my later life what my mother’s affection was to my youth, I shall not be expected to say more. (*Life* 2: 358-359)¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Mitchell questions the accuracy of this account given by Cobbe in her autobiography: “It is interesting that Cobbe’s account of their meeting invokes as proxy matchmaker the respectable elderly widow Mary Somerville rather than the boyish Harriet Hosmer, who was not only on the scene but also a good friend. Lloyd, like Hosmer, did some work in John Gibson’s studio. The carriage ride is also curious, since Lloyd lived at 13 Via Gregoriana, and the Cushman-Hosmer residence was at number 38 on the same street” (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 125).

While they were in Italy, Cobbe and Lloyd developed the spiritual and emotional bond that characterized their relationship until Lloyd's death in 1896 (Mitchell, *Cobbe* 350). In *Power and Protest*, Lori Williamson observes that "Cobbe had discovered 'Love's own deep charm' in Mary Lloyd" (87). Lloyd was Cobbe's ideal companion, who became as important to her as her mother had been in her childhood, and in their "romantic friendship" Cobbe found happiness and deeply fulfilling companionship (Williamson 87, 85).¹⁶¹ In *Italics* Cobbe does not refer at all to her encounter with Lloyd, nor does she record the many ways her life had changed because of the experiences she had had and of the people she had met in Italy.

The book nevertheless provides evidence of the deep affection she had developed for the country and the portrayal of her nostalgia for the sensuous beauty of Italy seems suffused with feelings linked to her relationship with Lloyd. The last three chapters of *Italics*, and especially the one entitled "Nervi With No Sights," are written in a more personal and intimate voice than the rest of the book, and they appear almost as Cobbe's private celebration of a country in which the author discovered how to lead a life that made her happy and fulfilled. Cobbe delights in the beauty of the Italian nature as she describes the wonders of the majestic landscape, the luxuriant vegetation, the vibrant colours, and the sweet climate she enjoyed from the terrace of a villa in Nervi on the Riviera di Levante near Genoa. At the villa she was the guest of the Prussian Ambassador, Count Guido Usedom, and his English wife to whom *Italics* is dedicated. There, under the guide of the Ambassador, she gained insight into that "marvellous poem unrolling before our eyes – the Regeneration of a Nation" to which every day newspapers

¹⁶¹ In *Power and Protest*, Williamson discusses the difficulty of determining the nature of female friendships like that between Cobbe and Lloyd in terms of lesbianism, and she affirms that "it is impossible to conclude whether Cobbe's relationship with Lloyd was lesbian or not" (86-87).

added “another and yet another line” (*Italics* 506-507). There, she wrote part of *Italics*, and she reflected on how the regeneration of Italy from centuries of spiritual and political despotism resembled in many ways women’s struggle for their rights and for independence. Finally, from there she left to return to England in the spring of 1864 accompanied by Mary Lloyd. With this “one true friend” at her side and books to read and to write, Cobbe found in Italy in the little town of Nervi her own paradise, everything that she could ever wish for in order to be happy:

Sitting there in the utter stillness, the ineffable beauty, with the soft waves of the tideless Mediterranean gently playing among the low rocks a few yards away, and the white lateen sails sweeping like swift and silent birds across the waters, one’s heart grew soft and weak, and it seemed as if all the burden and the struggle of our English life were a troubled, senseless dream; and here in this paradise with one true friend and many a book – books to read, and books mayhap to write, would be all we should ever crave in earth or heaven. (*Italics* 498-499)

Once in England Cobbe transplanted there ‘her paradise,’ her newly found way of life. Together with Mary Lloyd she rented a house in London where, in a stimulating social and intellectual context, she could become established as a professional writer. There she embraced “the burden and the struggle of [...] English life” that in Italy had appeared to her to be a “senseless dream” (*Italics* 499). Like the lives of the women she had met in Italy, also her life acquired “a definite aim, and that aim a high one” (*Italics* 374) – striving for the anti-vivisection, anti-slavery, and women’s rights causes, using her writings as an instrument of social reform. By the time Cobbe left Italy in 1864, she herself had become the new kind of “old maid” that in her essay “*Celibacy v. Marriage*” published for the first time in 1862 she had described and presented as a model for the alternative, useful, and fulfilling way of life that single women could lead:

The “old maid” of 1861 is an exceedingly cheery personage, running about untrammelled by husband or children; now visiting her relatives’ country houses, now taking her month in town, now off to a favourite *pension* on Lake Geneva, now scaling the Vesuvius or the Pyramids. And, what is better, she has found not only freedom of locomotion, but a sphere of action peculiarly congenial to her nature. “My life, and what shall I do with it?” is a problem for which she finds the happiest solution ready to her hand [...]. She has not fewer duties than other women, only more diffused ones. [...] she feels that in the power of devoting her *whole* time and energies to some benevolent task, she is enabled to effect perhaps some greater good than would otherwise have been possible. [...] And further, if a woman have but strength to make up her mind to a single life, she is enabled by nature to be far more independently happy therein than a man in the same position. [...] a woman makes her home for herself, and surrounds herself with the atmosphere of taste and the little details of housewifely comforts. [...] Nor does the “old maid” contemplate a solitary age as the bachelor must usually do. It will go hard but she will find a *woman* ready to share it. (“Celibacy v. Marriage” 81)

CHAPTER 5

Fanny Lewald's *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich 1877, 1878*: Defining Women's Role in the Newly Formed German Nation

Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich 1877, 1878 (1880), a collection of letters occasioned by Fanny Lewald's third journey to Italy, is possibly the least known and studied of all her travel books. Lewald's first journey to Italy in 1845-46 was the most important for her life and career. Her autobiography *Meine Lebensgeschichte* (The History of My Life, 1861-62), which describes the author's youth and strict upbringing in a Jewish bourgeois family, ends with her arrival in Italy. Her journey is represented in this work as the happy conclusion of Lewald's struggle to free herself from the constraints of a traditional feminine role and to become a writer. In Italy she met other women who lived lives outside of the domestic sphere, and she finally accepted herself in her role as an artist. Lewald described this first trip to Italy in two books. *Italienisches Bilderbuch* (The Italian Sketch-Book, 1847), published shortly after her return, reports her impressions of the country in colourful sketches which combine the discussions of art, culture, customs, politics, and life in the towns and cities visited. *Römisches Tagebuch* (Roman Diary), completed in 1865 but published posthumously in 1927, recounts the author's personal experience in Rome and should be considered as a continuation of her autobiography. *Römisches Tagebuch* deals with the recollection of Lewald's encounter with Adolf Stahr – a classical philologist from Oldenburg and a married father of five – and the development of their forbidden love affair endorsed by the more relaxed morals of the German expatriate society in Rome.

Fanny Lewald went back to Italy a second time in 1866 as Adolf Stahr's wife. Because of their unconventional relationship, they had to face the disapproval of family, friends, and society, and it was only after almost ten years of Stahr's struggle to obtain a divorce from his first wife that they were finally able to marry in 1855. *Ein Winter in Rom* (A Winter in Rome, 1869), Lewald's and Stahr's only joint book, describes the journey that took them back to Rome to revisit the places where they first met and fell in love. Italy had changed radically in the twenty years since. The entire Peninsula, with the exception of Venice and the Papal States, had been united into the Kingdom of Italy created under the House of Savoy in 1861. Italian cities – especially Florence, which had become the capital of Italy – were undergoing a rapid modernization, which provided a new perspective for Lewald's and Stahr's travel book. *Ein Winter in Rom* deals with recollections of the events of the Risorgimento, comparisons with the past, and descriptions of the poverty and underdevelopment of the papal city in contrast to the rest of Italy.

When Fanny Lewald undertook her third trip to Italy in 1877, her situation in life had changed again. Adolf Stahr had died the year before and Lewald hoped that revisiting her beloved Italy would help her to overcome the loss. Her career as a writer was at its peak, and she was considered amongst the most famous German female authors of the time.¹⁶² Besides her travel books about Italy, her literary output included more than twenty novels, several short stories, essays and feuilletons, her autobiography, and three other travelogues. She was also popular as a contributor to the major magazines and newspapers of the time, where some of her novels were published in instalments. Many

¹⁶² A review of 1874 claimed: "Unter den deutschen Schriftstellerinnen der Gegenwart nimmt Fanny Lewald wohl unbestritten die erste Stelle ein." ("Amongst the German women writers of the present, Fanny Lewald takes unquestionably the first place.") (Lindau 56).

of the letters included in *Reisebriefe* appeared for the first time in the *Kölnische Zeitung* with the title “Letters to the home country”. As journalistic reports by the famous writer abroad, the letters were of great interest to readers, and they often took a prominent place in the newspaper (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 329-30). Lewald happened to be in Rome in a year unexpectedly full of important political events – like the deaths of the first Italian King, Victor Emmanuel II, and of Pope Pius IX – and consequently the purpose of the letters was often to inform German readers about the latest occurrences in Italy. However, because of the topical nature of many of its letters, *Reisebriefe*’s attraction for its audience was short-lived.

Although the title *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich 1877, 1878* seems to indicate that the book relates information about Germany, Italy, and France in equal measure, the work is in fact primarily a travelogue about Italy, since more than 300 of the 475 pages deal with the Italian Peninsula (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 330). In *Fanny Lewalds urbanes Arkadien* (2007) – which offers a comprehensive analysis of all five Italian travel books by Lewald, and contains the only extensive study of *Reisebriefe* – Christina Ujma suggests that the title of the work might be one of the reasons why it has been neglected by studies on both Fanny Lewald and travel literature about Italy. Ujma, however, also laments the general disregard of critics for the late works of the author:

Dem Spätwerk der Autorin wurde bislang wenig Aufmerksamkeit zuteil, was vermutlich auch daran liegt, dass die etablierte Autorin nicht mehr so interessant erscheint, wie die junge deutsch-jüdische Vormärz-Autorin,

deren Werke eine eindeutige Stellung zur Emanzipation der Frauen und der Juden beziehen.¹⁶³ (*Urbanes Arkadien* 330)

As Ujma points out, the attention of the critics has largely been attracted by the author's early works because they convey the spirit and ideals of the 'Vormärz' era and Lewald is one of the pioneering German female writers who tackled political, religious, and social issues concerning the emancipation of women and of the Jews. In dealing with these subjects, Lewald drew on her personal experience in a situation that, as she realized early on in her life, was doubly unfavourable because she was Jewish and a woman. Already as a young child she suffered the humiliation of other children calling out "Jew" after her and her siblings on the streets and from an early age she was conscious that being Jewish meant to be apart from the prevailing culture (Whittle and Pinfold 76-77). Growing up in a middle-class family that was strictly organized according to traditional patriarchal rules, she also soon realized that, while her brothers were encouraged to study and to pursue a career, she and her sisters were educated to become good wives and mothers and were not allowed to earn their own living because it was considered shameful for women and would have undermined their father's authority (Brinker-Gabler). In spite of her drive for knowledge, Lewald had to leave school at the age of fourteen to dedicate herself completely to activities such as household chores, sewing, dance and piano lessons that would prepare her to become an ideal wife (Brinker-Gabler). At the age of twenty-five she defied her father's will, refusing to enter an arranged marriage of convenience to a man she did not love, and it was not until she reached the age of thirty-four that she obtained permission from her father to become a writer and to endeavour to support

¹⁶³ "The late work of the author has received little attention up to now. Probably this is also due to the fact that the established female author does not seem as interesting as the young German-Jewish author of the Vormärz era, whose works take an unequivocal stand on the emancipation of women and Jews."

herself through her work. In her early works Lewald favoured topics that urged greater independence for women and Jews especially as regards issues with which she herself had to cope in her youth.

In her first two novels *Clementine* (1843) and *Jenny* (1844), that according to her father's will had to be published anonymously, she discussed the problem of arranged marriages and the question of discrimination against Jews respectively (Brinker-Gabler). Through her cousin Heinrich Simon (1808-1860), who later became an important figure in the politics of 1840s, she became familiar with the literary works of the so-called 'Young Germany,' writers who advocated political change and greater individual freedom in social questions such as divorce. This theme Lewald explores in her third novel *Eine Lebensfrage* (A Vital Question, 1845), in which she supports the right of escaping intolerable marriages (Brinker-Gabler). In her early works Lewald also directly advocated the principles of freedom, equality of rights, and democracy fought for during the revolutions of 1848. In her memoir *Erinnerung aus dem Jahre 1848* (Memories of the Year 1848, 1850), she reports the events of the uprising she witnessed in Paris in March 1848, expressing her sympathy for the Revolution and her hope for similar progress in Germany (Kontje 168). In her short novel *Der dritte Stand* (The Third Estate, 1846), she examines the question of class, urging an improvement of the standards of living of the poor at the expense of the wealthy classes, and in her novella *Auf rother Erde* (On Red Earth, 1850) she thematizes the rural revolution of 1848 and deals with the topics of national unity and democracy (Brinker-Gabler). After the reactionary period of the 1850s and during the years of her increasing popularity as a writer, however, the themes and political ideas Lewald discussed in her works, as well as the way she represented herself

and her attitude towards the readers, progressively shifted. *Reisebriefe* represents an example of Lewald's later output that reflects this change. Unlike the works of her youth, *Reisebriefe* cannot be easily labelled as belonging to a literary movement or an historical period like the 'Vormärz,' and the ideas she discusses in the book contrast in part with the liberal ideals of democracy and emancipation she had supported in the past.

When Lewald wrote *Reisebriefe*, she was no longer an inexperienced writer, still unsure of the outcome of her choice to live an independent life. Nor was she any longer the single woman who had defied the moral conventions of the time to conduct an affair with a married man. By the time she undertook her third trip to Italy in 1877, Lewald had won the battles that in the works of her youth she had fought for herself as well as for the emancipation of all the women. She had managed to become one of the few successful German female writers, had married the man she had chosen for herself, and had established with him a bourgeois household in Berlin. The weekly informal meetings that took place at their house had developed in the 1850s and 1860s into a renowned salon, which counted among its guests the greatest personalities of the time. In the 1850s Lewald's salon was regularly attended by democrats and radical liberals who had supported the revolutionary upheavals of 1848 (Schneider 113). Over the course of the years – and especially after 1866 and the successes of Prussian prime minister, Otto von Bismarck, in foreign policy – among the guests and closest friends of the couple Lewald-Stahr were an increasing number of National liberals, who considered the unification of Germany as their main political goal and were ready to temporarily sacrifice their liberal aspirations in order to obtain it (Schneider 113-114).

Like many of her liberal contemporaries, Lewald had progressively abandoned the hope that German unification could be realized through a democratic revolution. As Prussia started to gain increasing relevance in the European political panorama and to assert itself as a major power in opposition to Austria, Lewald started to hope that the unification of all the scattered states into which Germany had been divided following the Congress of Vienna of 1815 could be achieved under Prussian leadership. In the same way the Italian unification had taken place in 1861 through the initiative of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and of its prime minister, Count Camillo Cavour, so Prussia and its prime minister Bismarck could play a similar role in the unification of Germany. Lewald had always deplored the provincialism of the German states and believed that political unity was a necessary prerequisite for achieving social progress (Schneider 114-115). Although it was difficult for her to accept Prussia's war against Austria (1866) and the Franco-Prussian war (1870) as part of the unification process, she acknowledged the necessity to recur to extreme means in order to obtain a higher end and praised Bismarck and the King of Prussia as the leaders that made possible the creation of a German nation-state (Schneider 115). The anti-French feelings stirred by the Franco-Prussian war and the enthusiasm excited by the first German victories against the enemy gave rise to "a wave of spontaneous chauvinistic nationalism" (Hughes 125). Lewald took part in it with the publication in August 1870 of a patriotic appeal imbued with fervent nationalist pathos and directed to German women, who were exhorted not to commit treason against their country by socializing and flirting with French soldiers and officials (Schneider 115). At the end of the Franco-Prussian war the German Empire was finally proclaimed in Versailles on January 18th, 1871 and the King of Prussia became German Emperor.

Instead of being achieved through a democratic revolution, the German Empire was brought into being “from above” by means of Prussian diplomatic negotiations with the other German states and Prussian military power (Kitchen 203).

With the proclamation of the German Empire, many of the political goals that Lewald had supported in her youth were, at least formally, achieved. The new German state was a constitutional monarchy with a parliament elected by universal male suffrage, religious equality was recognized, freedom of press was guaranteed, and the bourgeoisie was the leading social class (Schneider 122). Many political and social problems, however, still had to be solved. The authoritarian power of the monarchy remained untouched; the prime minister (or Chancellor) was responsible only to the emperor and not to the parliament, which had limited powers; the nobility retained their privileged position; and sovereignty lay not with the people, but with the princes of the German states, who had joined together to form the empire (Kitchen 203). Bismarck had manipulated liberals and nationalists, leading them to think that the formation of the empire was the first step towards the extension of democracy and the creation of a Liberal Germany (Hughes 132-133). Yet Bismarck had never intended to favour the democratization of Germany; his purpose was to protect the traditional élites, keeping at bay the different political parties (Kitchen 203). In the years following the unification, the government and the conservatives continued to manipulate German national feelings, favouring the spreading of nationalism, as a way to tame conflicting political forces, most notably the liberals and the socialists. By presenting national power as the highest goal of the government, the political parties and the entire country were called to unite their efforts and subordinate everything else to the national interest (Hughes 133). Also as a

nation-state, however, the German Empire was fundamentally incomplete because large German-speaking groups were left outside its borders, while it incorporated sizeable minority groups such as Polish-speaking people, whose integration constituted a major problem (Hughes 128). Furthermore, in the years after its formation the German Empire faced considerable internal social conflict. In the course of the nineteenth century the country had developed from a largely feudal, agrarian economy to a capitalist, industrial economy characterized by an increasingly urban society. At the beginning of the century the middle class had started to emerge as a dominant social force in opposition to the declining feudal nobility (Finney 272). Although the bourgeoisie had managed to assert itself as the leading class in the German Empire, its values and goals had become progressively distinct from those of the rising proletariat and increasing tensions between classes were the cause of constant social unrest.

Patriotism and nationalism, as well as concerns about class conflict and politics find their echoes in Lewald's works published, like *Reisebriefe*, around the time of the German unification. She was convinced that writers and artists had to exert a moral and educative influence on society and that they had to be "Dichter und Bildner ihrer Nation"¹⁶⁴ by contributing to the constant improvement of humanity (Schneider 122). This she considered her first and foremost duty as a writer and all her works, both fictional and non-fictional, were motivated by this ultimate goal. Once Germany had been united, she believed that through a gradual process of democratization, which she held as an overall goal, all the problems could be progressively solved, as long as each citizen fulfilled their established duties in society (Brinker-Gabler). This was her position on the Jewish question. While in her earlier works she had criticized the state for refusing equal

¹⁶⁴ "bards and creators of their nation"

rights to Jews, once Germany was unified and legal equality was granted to Jews in the whole Empire, she grew less sensitive to complaints of anti-Semitism and did not advocate radical changes. Instead she insisted that the Jewish problem could be solved through self-emancipation and complete assimilation (Brinker-Gabler).

She took a similar position on the question of women. The first demands for women's rights and emancipation had found public expression in Germany during the 1840s, and Lewald was among the first women who, together with Louise Otto-Peters (1819-1895), Louise Aston (1814-1871), and Luise Mühlbach (1814-1873), had criticised in her works hegemonic thinking about women's legal status, marriage, education, and sexual mores (Frederiksen 12). After the failed revolution of 1848, however, in Prussia, Austria, and other German states, paternalistic and authoritarian constitutions were set in place that preserved the conservative and aristocratic structures of the states and included laws that banned women's participation in politics (Weedon 35). During the 1850s and 1860s, women's organizations were obliged to present themselves as specifically non-political, concentrating their activism on campaigns in favour of women's access to education and employment (Weedon 35-36). Fiction and non-fiction dealing with women's emancipation grew more circumspect in their handling of these issues than they had been in the 1840s, and it was not until 1865 with the foundation of the 'Allgemeinen Deutsche Frauenverein' (General German Women's Union) that the discussion of themes related to women's rights was fully resumed and revived (Frederiksen 12).

Lewald remained a champion of women's personal, economic, and social independence, and in the 1860s she resumed her writing on women's issues. In *Osterbriefe für die Frauen* (Easter Letters for Women, 1863), she described the life and

working condition of lower-class women, condemned the fact that women were always paid less than men, and argued in favour of better education and apprenticeship for girls of the poor classes, appealing to middle-class women for their help and support in the continuous training of their less privileged 'sisters' (Brinker-Gabler). In her essay collection *Für und wider die Frauen* (For and Against Women, 1870), she addressed the emancipation of middle-class women, advocating their access to all levels of school education, training, and employment, and to all areas of public life (Brinker-Gabler). In particular she saw education and professional training as a road to financial independence for unmarried women. Lewald continued to hold on to marriage as an ideal and strongly supported the idea that middle-class women needed to be given the chance to work to support themselves so that they could marry for love rather than financial convenience. She never argued for radical transformations and she believed that women's situation could be gradually changed not only through reforms in the legislation but also through what she called the self-emancipation of women – women's commitment to duty and self-improvement as a way to prove that they deserved increased independence (Brinker-Gabler; Schneider 106).

Lewald's ideas on the women's question remained rather conservative. Her position was close to that of the moderate wing of the bourgeois women's movement, which conceived of men and women as radically different but complementary and stressed the centrality of women as mothers, striving to expand the influence of their maternal role to the public and political life (Weedon 41). During the 1870s and 1880s, however, more progressive ideas and goals had started to circulate within the middle-class women's movement. Soon this led to the formation of a radical wing, whose

supporters believed that gender differences were cultural not natural and stressed the necessity of equal rights for men and women, calling for suffrage, civil rights, and radical changes in society (Weedon 41). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the growth of the Social Democratic movement and the increasing split between upper and lower social classes gave rise to a lasting breach between the bourgeois and the proletarian women's movement (Weedon 38). While both wings of the middle-class women's movement sought a reform of women's condition within the existing social structure, proletarian women saw the women's question as part of a larger social conflict that could be solved only through class struggle (Frederiksen 13, 14).

Lewald's writing on women issues had remarkable impact and her essays contained in *Für und wider die Frauen* were later called by Gertrud Bäumer, a famous leader of the bourgeois women's movement, "the best contribution to emancipation of the first generation of the women's movement" (Brinker-Gabler). Nevertheless Lewald never became an active member of the movement and never endorsed the more progressive ideas of its radical wing. She accepted patriarchal definitions of gender differences and insisted that, as had happened to her, a woman could gain rights and independence by fulfilling established duties. Her writings about women's emancipation as well as the most important of her late works – her autobiography *Meine Lebensgeschichte* (1861-62) – had largely a didactic purpose rather than a militant feminist agenda (Schneider 103). From the contented position she had reached in her middle age, Lewald wrote to educate and advise women on problems she herself had to tackle in the past. In her autobiography, she related the story of her youth as a steady advancement: challenges and obstacles were overcome thanks to resolution and hard work, while certain events and

accidents also contributed to the happy conclusion, adding up to an overall impression of a life well led (Joeres 93). Recounted in this way, Lewald's story served as an example to inspire other women to become more independent, but it also offered a representation of the author that justified the unconventional choices she had made in her life. The tension between the narrating and the narrated self, which results from Lewald's necessity to come to terms with her own early experiences and her desire to instruct, has been discussed in several studies,¹⁶⁵ and *Meine Lebensgeschichte* – one of the very few existing autobiographies by a nineteenth-century German woman – has played a significant part in the recent rediscovery of the author.

Similar to the autobiography, the form of the travel report that Lewald employs in *Reisebriefe* required her to talk in the first person singular about herself, her experiences, and her opinions.¹⁶⁶ But while *Meine Lebensgeschichte* offers a portrait of the author's younger self which a gap of many years separated from the adult narrator, in *Reisebriefe* Lewald has to cope with her current identity, and here her aspiration to instruct and to become a model for her readers is at odds with the way she represents herself as a writer and as a woman. In *Reisebriefe* Lewald's desire to stand out as an experienced public figure clashes with her will to conform to the traditional feminine ideals of domesticity. On the one hand, she addresses her readers with the authority and self-assurance derived from her success as a writer, her experience as a traveller, and her familiarity with Italian

¹⁶⁵ See for example: Katherine R. Goodman, *Dis-Closures: Women's Autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914*, 147-85; Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance: Nineteenth-Century German Women Writers and the Ambiguity of Representation*, 90-100; Konstanze Bäumer, "Reisen als Moment der Erinnerung. Fanny Lewalds (1811-1889) 'Lehr- und Wanderjahre'", 137-157; Ruth Whittle and Debbie Pinfold, *Voices of Rebellion: Political Writing by Malwida von Meysenbug, Fanny Lewald, Johanna Kinkel and Louise Aston*, 73-99.

¹⁶⁶ As noted by Christina Ujma: "The appeal of the travel report for Lewald is due also to its form, which is open and flexible and whose scope she expanded not only to include autobiography, but also reflections on politics, history and the rights of women and minorities" ("Life as a Journey" 145).

matters. On the other hand, she portrays herself as a mourning widow and a sensible housewife who, unwilling to leave her house, takes inspiration from what she observes around her to reinforce domestic, patriarchal, and patriotic values and to lecture German women on how to be good citizens of their newly formed nation. This apparent discrepancy raises the question of how it is possible to reconcile Lewald's role as a successful writer and the self-confident tone she uses when she discusses topics like art and politics, with her self-stylization as a contented housewife who encourages women to be good wives and mothers. Moreover, in the book through her stylization as a model of domestic virtues, Lewald appears to promote values that seem to hinder, rather than advance, the cause of women's emancipation that she advocated her entire life.

Starting with an analysis of the representation of the author's identity as a woman and as a writer as this emerges from *Reisebriefe*, this chapter will address these issues, exploring how in the book Lewald availed herself of the extensive range of themes and topics that can be fitted in the form of the travelogue to serve agendas that go beyond the main subject of the travel description. In particular, this chapter will look at how Lewald's choice of topics to discuss, as well as the way she employs representations of the Peninsula and comparisons between various aspects of culture and society in her own country and in Italy, indicate the author's intention to engage in a reflection on her own femininity and on the role of women in the newly formed German nation. *Reisebriefe* belongs to the late works of Lewald, published when she was almost seventy. Her experience as a direct witness to an era of rapid modernization and of sweeping social and political change in both Italy and Germany lend her travel account a unique and wide-ranging historical perspective. This perspective informs all the aspects of the book,

from the description of the places she visited to her reflections on the development of the modes of travel. *Reisebriefe* shows the evolution of the author's ideas and beliefs, allowing her the opportunity to re-examine and redefine her earlier stand on issues of gender, class, and national identity.

5.1 “Von Hause fort!” (Away from Home!): The First Letters of *Reisebriefe*

From the outset Lewald carefully crafts her self-representation to convey to her readers a specific image of herself. The first letter of *Reisebriefe*, entitled “Von Hause fort!” (Away from Home!), opens with her confession that, after more than thirty years spent travelling, she has not learned yet to leave her home without feeling troubled. She depicts herself on her way to Berlin's railway station, her thoughts still focused on the locked cupboards and the sofas covered with sheets that she has left behind. “Noch auf dem halben Wege nach Dresden” she adds “zählte ich Bettwäsche und Tischtücher im Geiste, klirrten mir die Schlüsselbunde vor den Ohren, gab ich in Gedanken diese und jene Anordnung, erkannte ich dies und das, was noch besser hätte gemacht werden können [...]”¹⁶⁷ (*Reisebriefe* 2). In this opening passage the author's uneasiness at leaving the house is connected with her duties as a housewife and with the objects of her domestic activities. She seems concerned to show that she considers the house and the role she plays in it as her first responsibility and that abandoning her home represents for her an impediment almost impossible to overcome. Before she starts describing the first city visited, she admits that “Freizügigkeit doch etwas Schönes sei”¹⁶⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 2),

¹⁶⁷ “Halfway to Dresden I was still counting in my mind bed linen and tablecloths, bunches of keys clanked in my ears, in my thoughts I gave dispositions about this and that and recognized what could have been done better [...]”

¹⁶⁸ “freedom of movement is something beautiful after all”

but the hint at her widowhood and the necessity of travelling alone reinforce the impression that she would rather stay at home. Also the Italian motto “coraggio e avanti!” (onward and upward) that she chooses for the trip suggests resignation rather than excitement to set off once again. Of course this apparent lack of enthusiasm and the necessity to find the strength to keep on with life were due to Lewald’s depression following Stahr’s death and to her own delicate health. The journey, however, was intended to be a remedy for her situation and her hope for recovery and enjoyment was the only motive that prompted her to leave. In this unusual introduction to the first letter of *Reisebriefe*, Lewald does not explain anything about the reasons for the trip or its destination. After stating her anxieties as a housewife at leaving her home, she goes on directly with the discussion of the latest works of art and monuments displayed in Dresden and the way the city had changed since her previous visit forty-seven years earlier.

The first letter of *Reisebriefe* ends with the topos of demonstrative modesty (*Demutstopos* or *Bescheidenheitstopos*) that, according to Scheitler, characterizes almost without exception the introductory portion of all travelogues written by German women until the middle of the nineteenth century (115-126). This literary convention was used to gain the readers’ goodwill, usually by understating the value of the work or by declaring that the book was originally written only for a small circle of friends, who later persuaded the author to publish it. In this passage Lewald uses the topos with the traditional rhetorical function of *captatio benevolentiae*:

Auf eine eigentliche, fest zusammenhängende Reisebeschreibung rechnet [ihr] bei dieser ganz auf das Bedürfniß und die Eingebung des Augenblicks gestellten Reise, diesmal nicht. Ich schreibe, um den Zusammenhang mit Euch und den Freunden auch in der Ferne zu erhalten,

Euch Allen durch die Zeitung; und wie sich die Mosaik aus den kleinen einzelnen Steinen zu einem übersichtlichen Gesamtbilde zusammensetzt, so geben hoffentlich diese Briefe Euch in ihrer Gesammtheit, wenn Ihr sie einmal überlesen werdet, das Bild dessen, was ich fern von Euch erlebte, dachte, empfand, und schauend und lesend in mich aufnahm. Laßt Euch gefallen, was ich Euch zu bieten habe und begleitet mich wie sonst mit Eurer Theilnahme.¹⁶⁹ (*Reisebriefe* 8)

Presenting the letters as the product of the inspiration and the necessity of the moment, she indirectly apologizes for their fragmentary character and appeals for lenience towards any other faults of the work. The assurance that her reason for writing is to keep in touch with her friends appears forced because the letters were meant for publication from the beginning. But by mentioning the readers of the newspaper among her friends, she intends to give the reading public the impression of having been included in a private circle of privileged acquaintances (Scheitler 116). The fact that, even as a famous professional writer, Lewald feels the need to resort to a literary device to justify her reason for writing indicates how deeply she was still embedded in the female literary conventions of the time and how self-conscious she was about the way she wanted her readers to perceive her. The stereotypical ending of the first letter of *Reisebriefe* offers a key to interpreting its unusual beginning as well. As Foster points out, travelling for women was “an opportunity to experience solipsistic enjoyment,” but “such desire still smacked too much of self-pleasing and irresponsibility, and so certain strategies were employed to ‘cover’ it, regarding both the journeys and the published accounts” (8). Lewald, who had already travelled so much by that point, is reluctant to reveal that she is

¹⁶⁹ “This time you cannot expect an actual coherent travelogue of this journey undertaken at the necessity and the inspiration of the moment. I write to maintain the connection with you and with friends, with you all even at a distance, through the newspaper. And as the single little stones of the mosaic compose a clear overall picture, these letters, I hope, will give you as a whole, once you have read them over, the image of what I experienced, thought, and felt, while away from you and of what I assimilated through observation and reading. I hope you will like what I have to offer to you, and that you will accompany me as usual with your participation.”

leaving her house once again in search of enjoyment and recovery, and therefore omits her real reason for travelling and offers instead a reassuring image of herself as a scrupulous housewife and dejected widow.

The beginning and the ending of the first letter depart from the descriptive tone typical of the travelogue that she uses in the rest of it. In this sense the first letter of *Reisebriefe* is representative of the alternation of tones and attitudes that characterizes the book as a whole. Lewald is assertive and straightforward when she presents her impressions about the cities visited, compares them with her memories of the places as they used to be, and relates the changes and innovations that have occurred. She discusses and compares works of art with competence and mature judgement and she is resolute when stating her opinions about what she observes. The events of the recent unification of Germany are presented with at times excessive pride and patriotism while, when she talks about herself as a woman addressing other women, her attitude becomes defensive and her tone moralizing. Finally, her tone turns to melancholy and resignation when she remembers her husband and all her friends who have passed away or when she speculates on the transience of human life.

In the following three letters of *Reisebriefe* the travel account is only a starting point that allows Lewald to talk about herself as a writer and to offer a stylized representation of herself. In particular, she employs this section of the book to explain to her readers the principles she follows in her writings and the criteria she uses to select her topics of discussion in order to reassure her audience about the morality of her works. The heat that confines Lewald in her room during her stay at a bathing resort close to Dresden is the pretext she uses to temporarily put aside the description of her journey and

to devote the content of her letter to the recollection of her friendship with the famous German poet Heinrich Heine and of the conversations they had in Paris in 1855. In her youth, Lewald used to be a great admirer of Heine's works, which were banned by German authorities in 1835, because they were considered to be associated with the 'Young Germany' movement. Lewald does not fail to point out here that her admiration for Heine's works had decreased in the course of the years. Nevertheless, she uses the recollection of Heine's character and of his ironic remarks about censorship to introduce and to vindicate her own opinions about freedom of expression and moral self-restraint in writing. By representing herself in friendly conversation with one of the most well-known – albeit controversial – poets of the time, she includes herself in the élite of writers and artists who with their works could mould public opinion and, in particular, could influence the morality of the country. In his comment Heine ironically regretted the abolition of censorship, which had restored to writers – rather than to political authorities – the responsibility of deciding what material would reach the reading public. Lewald does not go so far as to regret the censorship, but she claims that artists should subject their writings to the "möglichst strengen sittlichen Kritik"¹⁷⁰ (*Reisebriefe* 12), keeping in mind all the different kinds of readers that their works might reach.

Lewald argues that the changes introduced by the railway, the telegraph, and innovations in the press industry have made available to everybody experiences and information that once were accessible only to a small privileged group. Because newspapers and journals were now at hand everywhere – even in the poorest households – and everybody read them – not just the head of the family as in the past – she suggests that the greatest attention had to be paid to the influence that the written word had,

¹⁷⁰ "most rigorous moral critique possible"

especially on children and young women. In the anecdote she tells to prove her case, a child (her grandson, or more likely Stahr's grandson, since she did not have children of her own) and a young woman of their acquaintance once saw the dead body of a newborn baby fished out of a canal. The child, upset by the sight, went to Lewald to tell her what he had seen, and she reproached the young lady for not having prevented the child from seeing the baby, killed possibly by a seduced woman. The young lady, however, reacted as if the episode was not really grave. She explained to Lewald that she had read many times about women who had killed their babies and that they were usually just put into jail and not executed. Lewald's point is that the habit of reading about dreadful acts and crimes renders people indifferent to them and undermines the morality of the society. She laments the fact that because of the wide circulation of newspapers, which also publish works of fiction, it has become almost impossible for families to control what young people read, and she points to girls and women who go into raptures over indecent novels and paintings as an example of the endangered morals of the time. Lewald concludes by appealing to German artists for help to maintain the sense of honour of the country:

Wir haben uns in Deutschland der Zucht und Sitte unserer Frauen und Mädchen gerühmt und gefreut. Wir sind stolz gewesen auf die Sittenreinheit der Jünglinge und Männer [...]. Und ich glaube, wir begehen eine Sünde gegen das Vaterland wie gegen uns selbst, wenn wir – ich meine die Schriftsteller und Künstler – uns nicht selbst das Gesetz auferlegen, das Unschöne und Unsittliche von der Darstellung in der Oeffentlichkeit so fern als möglich zu halten.¹⁷¹ (*Reisebriefe* 18)

As a writer of fiction and a contributor to popular newspapers, Lewald is here both the instigator and the recipient of her admonition. But, by explaining her belief that public

¹⁷¹ "In Germany we have prided ourselves on the chastity and morality of our women and girls and have rejoiced. We have been proud of the chasteness of boys and men [...]. And I believe that we commit a crime against the fatherland and against ourselves, if we – I mean writers and artists – do not impose on ourselves the rule to keep what is uncomely and immoral as far as possible from public presentation."

morals should be protected, she distinguishes herself from the ‘immoral’ artists of the time and indirectly declares her works safe for any reader. The comforting image of herself as a grandmother offered in the anecdote appears meant to reassure her readers about the kinds of moral principles that she follows in her writing. And by associating women with children in her concern over the effect that improper readings could have on both groups especially, she seems to indicate that she expects women to be as immature and innocent as children towards worldly matters.

While on the one hand Lewald wants her readers to know that she is conscious and concerned about the effects that her writings could have on society, on the other hand she declines personal responsibility for the actions and opinions represented in her works of fiction. In the letter entitled “Vom Kern der Dichtung” (About the Substance of Literature), Lewald pleads for the independence of the artistic creation from its creator, and she refuses to consider works of fiction as mere expressions of the personalities of their authors. She acknowledges that her early works – she mentions *Jenny*, *Eine Lebensfrage*, and *Der dritte Stand* – had been rightly designated as “Tendenzarbeiten”¹⁷² (*Reisebriefe* 21) because they were based on a specific idea, such as the right to divorce or the situation of the working classes, and they were intended to strive for this idea. She explains, however, that as her experience as a writer increased she always tried to represent a “Kaleidoskop von Ansichten”¹⁷³ (*Reisebriefe* 21) in her works. It would be a mistake, therefore, to ascribe to her all the opinions that her characters express in her works of fiction. She points out that, in order to explore human nature better, she often creates figures that are very different from herself and her own point of view. And she

¹⁷² “works with a purpose”

¹⁷³ “kaleidoscope of views”

adds that, once created, the characters of her novels end up behaving and thinking in accordance with their own inner will rather than according to the author's intentions. She concludes by revealing details about certain concrete situations, objects, and places that inspired her to write some of her novels and short stories.

Lewald's attempt to distance herself from her early writings in particular and in general from all her works of fiction is unmistakable. In order to shift from herself the responsibility for the content of her works of fiction, she describes writing as the result of an almost unconscious process, controlled only in part by the will of the author and prompted by the incentives offered accidentally by outer reality. She claims that at the origin of all her writing is her innate "Lust am Fabulieren"¹⁷⁴ (*Reisebriefe* 20), which, however, she can express only when she is alone with a pen in her hand, because an "unüberwindliche[r] Scheu"¹⁷⁵ (*Reisebriefe* 21) has always prevented her from narrating via the spoken word. This account gives the impression that Lewald had no other choice but to write the stories that sprang spontaneously from her creative imagination. And to reinforce her argument that artistic creations develop themselves in part independently from the author's will, she quotes two other writers who affirmed the same: Henriette Paalzow (1788-1847), a female author of historical novels, who by claiming that her works were given to her by God totally denied her own authorship; and Goethe, who maintained that there is always "etwas Anonymes"¹⁷⁶ (*Reisebriefe* 23) that intervenes in the process of creation. Given the chance to address her readers directly and to reflect on her activity as a writer, Lewald develops a narration in which she represents writing as an unavoidable and involuntary act, so that not only her decision to write but also the

¹⁷⁴ "pleasure to invent stories"

¹⁷⁵ "insurmountable shyness"

¹⁷⁶ "something anonymous"

content of her works appear independent from her will. By defining writing as a process that is spontaneous and partially mysterious to the writers themselves, Lewald may be suggesting that her creative gifts place her in the company of true artists to whom the act of creation is innate. At the same time, however, Lewald appears anxious to let her readers know that the opinions and points of view expressed by the characters of her works of fiction – and in particular the radical and progressive ideas represented in her early novels – do not always coincide with hers. Moreover, when she states that she is “shy” about her creativity and she insists on the spontaneity and involuntariness of the writing process, Lewald gives the impression that she is affecting modesty in order to be perceived by her audience as unpretentious and reserved, in spite of her success as a public figure.

The theme chosen for the subsequent letter allows Lewald to show what kind of woman and what kind of travel writer she is by means of a negative example. This time it is the uneventfulness of the journey by train from Dresden to Lake Constance that affords her an excuse to divert from the account of her trip. The letter is thus dedicated to consider the content of a travelogue about Germany written by an anonymous English woman and entitled *German Home Life*.¹⁷⁷ Lewald takes it upon herself to protest against the disparagement of German family life and to defend especially German women from the attacks and biased opinions expressed by the author of this book. By vindicating the character of German women, she demonstrates not only that she is a better observer and a more reasonable judge of local custom than the English travel writer, but she also presents herself as a model of wisdom and feminine values. From the outset Lewald

¹⁷⁷ The author of the travelogue is Marie Bothmer. A third edition of the book was printed in London in 1877.

states her superiority over the anonymous author of the book and also over the average woman writer:

Sie hatte es gar nicht nötig, zu erklären, daß sie eine Frau sei. Das Buch trägt fast durchweg das Gepräge gerade jener übelen Eigenschaften, welche man den Frauen zuzusprechen pflegt: scharfes, übelwollendes Beobachten fremder Mängel bei völlig mangelnder Erkenntniß der eigenen Fehler, und aburtheilendes Verallgemeinern des gelegentlich beobachteten Einzelfalles.¹⁷⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 29)

By accusing the English author of all the faults usually ascribed to female writers, Lewald distances herself from those shortcomings and implicitly declares herself immune to such criticism. Because she thinks that the value of an opinion depends also on the person who expresses it, Lewald questions the identity of the anonymous writer, who calls herself a lady and appears to be convinced that everybody should live according to the usage and customs of the English upper classes. She mentions, for example, that the English writer is amazed by the fact that German housewives are always at work in their homes and that in Germany the same building is shared by more than one family, while in England people live in single family houses. Lewald explains that all the astonished comments of the English lady originate from the simple and well-known observation that England is richer than Germany. But she contends that the anonymous writer seems to ignore that the lower classes live with limited means in England as well, as described in the novels of famous English authors such as Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot. Lewald challenges the idea of marriage and of what it means to be a lady according to the English author:

¹⁷⁸ “She did not have to explain that she is a woman. The book bears almost throughout the imprint of exactly those bad qualities that people customarily assign to women: biting malevolent observation of foreign defects with quite imperfect recognition of one’s own faults and condemnatory generalization of the occasional observed particular case.”

Der Werth und die Vornehmheit einer Frau beruhen für sie zum großen Theil auf deren möglichst wenigem Thun und Leisten. Je reicher, je müßiger, um so mehr *ladylike*; und was die Ehe in ihren Augen, was sie ihrem Herzen ist, darüber klärt sie uns gleich [...]. Sie sagt: “Die Ehe ist der goldene Schlüssel zu den himmlischen Pforten der Freiheit!”¹⁷⁹ (*Reisebriefe* 37)

Lewald satirizes the notion of marriage as a source of freedom and gives an ironic representation of the life of idleness and luxury that the English writer supposedly expects every married woman to enjoy.

Yet the explanation of German married life that Lewald offers in the following paragraphs of the letter sounds more like an admonishment to her fellow citizens to be proud of themselves and to live according to the model she presents rather than a true description of family relations in Germany. Lewald maintains that because in a marriage the husband provides for the family through his work – and only very few people in Germany have large incomes that allow them to be unemployed – men rightfully expect from their wives that they work in the house and help to manage their earnings scrupulously. She then describes the busy life of German housewives. Because children are not sent to faraway schools at an early age and men do not commute to work in distant cities as often happens in England, women have to take care of the family and have no time to be idle as ladies are. She defends that she finds it “natural” and “beautiful”¹⁸⁰ that young women “sich frohen Herzens an den häuslichen Herd eines geliebten unbemittelten Mannes begeben, um als treue Dienerin des Mannes und des Hauses Alles und Jedes zu leisten, was des Lebens Nothdurft für Mann und Kinder von

¹⁷⁹ “According to her, the worthiness and the gentility of a woman are based for the most part on her doing and accomplishing as little as possible. The richer and the idler she is, the more *ladylike*; and what marriage is in her eyes and what it means to her heart, she clarifies right away [...]. She says: ‘Marriage is the golden key to the heavenly gates of freedom!’”

¹⁸⁰ “Natürliches” and “Schönes” (*Reisebriefe* 41).

ihnen fordert”¹⁸¹ (*Reisebriefe* 41). Finally, she presents herself as the quintessence of domestic virtues and as a representative of all German women:

Das habe ich, trotz meiner in früherer Zeit auch für den Erwerb mir nothwendigen Thätigkeit, durch lange Jahre mit Glücksempfindung unausgesetzt gethan. Drei Treppen hoch, im [*sic*] einem von acht Familien bewohnten Hause, in einer halben Etage von vier Stuben wohnend, mit einer Dienstmagd arbeitend, bin ich mir und meinen Freunden deshalb nicht weniger *ladylike* erschienen, als irgend eine reiche und müßige Frau; und das freundliche Dankeswort, das mein verstorbener Gatte, Adolf Stahr, unter den Jahresabschluß unseres damals sehr bescheidenen Budgets zu schreiben pflegte, wenn ich ihm denselben am 31. Dezember vorlegte, hat mir durch die gesegneten 22 Jahre unserer Ehe wohler gethan, mich mehr erhoben, als irgend eine der literarischen Anerkennungen, an denen es mir nicht gefehlt hat. – Und Gottlob! ich bin nicht die einzige Frau, die in Deutschland so empfindet. Die Mehrzahl fühlt wie ich.¹⁸² (*Reisebriefe* 41-42)

Not only has her work as a writer not prevented Lewald from being an excellent housewife, but she insists that she considers her role in the house more important and more rewarding than her artistic career. This statement, even if sincere, appears forced and raises the question of what Lewald wanted to achieve by presenting herself as a champion of the traditional women’s role. According to Scheitler, these avowals of attachment to domestic life must be regarded as Lewald’s “eigene Rückversicherung, eine wirkliche Frau zu sein und sich in Übereinstimmung mit jenen Idealen zu befinden,

¹⁸¹ “take with happy hearts to the homely hearth of a beloved man of small means, so that as loyal servants of their husbands and the house they provide for every single thing that the necessities of life require of them for husband and children.”

¹⁸² “I have done this happily and continually for many years, in spite of my activity, which in the past was financially necessary for me. Up three staircases, in a house inhabited by eight families, living in a half storey of four rooms with the help of one maidservant, I did not appear to myself and to my friends less *ladylike* than any rich and idle woman. And the word of thanks that my deceased husband, Adolf Stahr, used to write under the annual balance of our at that time very modest budget when I presented it to him on December 31 during the blessed 22 years of our marriage has done me better and has raised me up more than the literary recognitions I have never lacked for. – And thank God! I am not the only woman in Germany who believes this. The majority feels as I do.”

die von den großen Geistern der Nation als die edelsten gepriesen wurden”¹⁸³ (196). As Scheitler notes, although Lewald had constantly pleaded for women’s emancipation through education, she had also always distanced herself from the women’s movement and had never attacked marriage and family or advocated the abolition of disparities between men and women (196). In addition Scheitler observes:

Wie groß Fanny Lewalds Bedürfnis nach Einbindung in die kulturelle Elitegesellschaft und nach Übereinstimmung mit dem Zeitgeist gewesen sein muß, zeigen ihre frühzeitige Orientierung an Goethe [for example in *Italienisches Bilderbuch*], vor allem aber ihre begeisterte Annahme der Gattinnen- und Mutterrolle nach ihrer endlich erfolgten Verheiratung 1855, später ihre goetheähnliche Selbstinszenierung [in *Meine Lebensgeschichte*] und patriotische Bismarckbegeisterung.¹⁸⁴ (196)

Undoubtedly, Lewald’s self-stylization as a model housewife in this letter of *Reisebriefe* reflects her desire to prove that she was living up to the dominant patriarchal ideals and was a success when judged by them even if she had broken out of the domestic sphere through her activity as a writer. At the same time, however, Lewald also presents to her fellow citizens – and to women in particular – the solution she found for herself to reconcile her aspiration towards independence and self-realization with being accepted by society. In other words, besides demonstrating that she conformed to the traditional ideal of femininity of the time, Lewald on the one hand reassures her male audience that working in the public sphere does not necessarily make women unfeminine and indifferent to their duties in the house. On the other hand, she suggests to her female readers a way to accomplish their objectives without breaking with social conventions.

¹⁸³ “own reassurance of being a real woman and of being in agreement with those ideals that were praised as the most noble by the great spirits of the nation.”

¹⁸⁴ “her precocious orientation to Goethe, but above all her enthusiastic assumption of the roles of wife and mother after her long-awaited marriage, which eventually took place in 1855, and later her self-representation in Goethe’s style and the patriotic enthusiasm for Bismarck, show how great Fanny Lewald’s need must have been for integration into the society of the cultural élite and for agreement with the spirit of the times.”

Another passage of the letter better illustrates Lewald's assertion of patriarchal and patriotic values in a way that envisions the possibility for women, as for men, to play more than one role in society:

Wir sind im Kerne unseres Wesens ein demokratisches, ein bürgerliches Volk. Wie jeder Mann neben seinen anderen Berufspflichten und Thätigkeiten auch Soldat und Vertheidiger seines Landes ist, so ist und soll jede Frau, was immer sie außerdem auch kann und leistet, vor allem Andern Hausfrau, Haushälterin sein unter ihres Mannes Dach; und wir rühmen das und heben es mit Lust hervor, wo wir es finden. Bei des Handarbeiters, bei des reichen Mannes Frau, bei der Schauspielerin und bei der Schriftstellerin, wie bei der Königstochter von England, die an des deutschen Kronprinzen Seite einst deutsche Kaiserin sein wird.¹⁸⁵
(*Reisebriefe* 42)

Lewald defines what she believes the main characteristics of the German nation are and should be and thus encourages her fellow citizens to think of themselves as democratic and bourgeois people. In line with the so-called politics of 'Blut und Eisen' (blood and iron) advocated by the German prime minister of the time, Otto von Bismarck,¹⁸⁶ Lewald maintains that every German man must be a soldier and defend the country. Women, on the other hand, should consider it their most important duty to be good housewives and housekeepers for their men. But as the roles of soldiers and defenders of the country do not prevent men from having a profession and from working in their own field in times of peace, for women to be housewives should be a duty that they perform in addition to whatever other occupation they choose for themselves. The fact that Lewald mentions only the artistic careers of writers and actresses as professions that women can have

¹⁸⁵ "We are a democratic and a bourgeois nation to the core. As every man, besides his other professional duties and occupations is also a soldier and a defender of his country, in the same way every woman – besides what she can also do and accomplish – is and should be above all a housewife and a housekeeper under her husband's roof. And we praise this and we delight in emphasizing it, wherever we find it: in the workman's and in the rich man's wife, in the actress and in the female writer, as well as in the daughter of the King of England, who will be one day German Empress at the side of the German Crown Prince."

¹⁸⁶ Bismarck believed that the great questions of the time could not be decided by speeches or votes of majority but only by means of wars and force. See Otto von Bismarck's "Blut und Eisen" speech of 1862, 139-140.

besides their occupation as housewives is possibly a further attempt to justify her own situation in particular. Her intention, however, may also have been to point out the important roles that women can have in society without ceasing to be feminine, and hence she concludes with a reference to the most prominent German woman of the time, Victoria,¹⁸⁷ German empress apparent and eldest daughter of Queen Victoria of England.

Lewald goes on for several pages thoroughly refuting the remarks of the English travel writer. She confutes the observations that in Germany marriages are arranged between families according to their wealth, that men are inconsiderate towards their wives, and that women are too dependent on their husbands. Lewald objects to most of the anonymous lady's comments by accusing her of repeatedly failing to compare what she observes in Germany with the situation in England and of jumping to wrong conclusions. Lewald's intention, however, is not just to demonstrate the incompetence of the foreign writer and to defend Germans from her attacks. Her criticism of the travel book is surely not aimed at improving the opinion of German customs among English readers; she was writing for a German newspaper and for a German audience. Instead, Lewald intends to remind her fellow citizens of their national values and to suggest to women strategies for self-realization within the dominant social conventions. Lewald reaffirms this point at the end of the letter. She goes back to the verses inscribed on the title page of the English travel book, which – as she ironically points out at the beginning of her argument – startled her out of her tranquillity and moved her to read the book in the first place. The verses urge German women to claim their “right denied to nobler labour” and to rise from their unworthiness in order to help their country to achieve the

¹⁸⁷ Victoria Princess Royal of Great Britain and Ireland married Frederick III in 1858 and became German Empress and Queen of Prussia in 1888. Frederick III's reign lasted only 99 days. After his death on 15 June, 1888 from a cancer of the throat, Victoria became known as Empress Frederick (Kitchen 214).

glory and grace it still lacks (*Reisebriefe* 28). Lewald remarks on the importance of Germans' patriotic love for their country. They call it "Vaterland" (fatherland) and fought valiantly to see it finally united in the German Empire. She then describes the heroic self-denial of German women at the time of the last war to show their nobility of character and to prove that they do not need to be admonished to rise from unworthiness. In the last paragraph, she deals with the allegation that German women are denied the right to work. The best thing that can happen to a woman, Lewald maintains, is for her to be truly loved by her husband, literally an affirmation of the importance of the patriarchy. Then she acknowledges the potential need for women to work for their own maintenance:

Daß daneben Denen, welchen das Glück der Liebe und der Ehe nicht zu Theil wird, oder jenen Andern, die es nöthig haben, für den eigenen Unterhalt oder gemeinsam mit dem Manne für den Unterhalt ihrer Familie zu arbeiten, eine freie Bethätigung ihrer Kräfte ermöglicht werde, dies zu erreichen sind wir in Deutschland überall bemüht, von wackern Männern in unserm Bestreben vielseitig gefördert. Wir bedürfen also durchaus nicht der Ermahnung einer fremden Frau, und ihres Mitleid noch weit weniger.¹⁸⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 57)

That women were given the chance to be educated and to work to support themselves was a crucial matter for Lewald. She knew that, as in her own case, women still had to struggle to develop their own interests and activities and that working women were not yet completely accepted by society. In this final passage, by rejecting the English lady's admonishment and pity, Lewald encourages her fellow citizens to strive for women's freedom to realize their potential and praises the bravery of men who assist in the process.

¹⁸⁸ "In Germany we are all striving for a situation where those women who are not bestowed with the happiness of love and marriage and are in need of working for their own support or, together with the husbands, for the maintenance of their family will be enabled to freely exercise their own strengths. And we are assisted in our efforts by brave men. We do not need, therefore, the admonishment of a foreign woman and even less her pity."

5.2 “Einst und jetzt” (Then and Now): *Reisebriefe*’s Letters from Rome

The fifth letter of *Reisebriefe* is the first of the book that has the travel report as main object. The letter opens with what appears to be a second introduction to the book. Lewald discloses the news that she has decided to travel further than she initially planned on leaving home and, once again, she declares that the letters she writes for the newspaper *Kölnische Zeitung* are a way to keep in touch with her friends and readers while she is away.¹⁸⁹ She then reflects on the innovations that have altered not only how people travel but also how the world is perceived and described in travelogues and, once more, she presents the intent of her travel letters in apologetic terms:

Allerdings hat es jetzt der briefschreibende Reisende nicht leicht, wenn sich die Aufgabe stellt, Neues, Ungekanntes zu berichten. Die Erde ist klein geworden seit die Eisenbahnschienen und Telegraphendrähte sie umspannen. Alle Welt hat die Welt gesehen. Das Reisen ist ein Geschäft geworden wie ein anderes, das Reisebeschreiben eben so; und es wird von so Vielen so gut gemacht, daß man viel guten Glauben und viel Zutrauen zu sich selber haben muß, wenn man sich der Einbildung hingeben will, etwas Ueberraschendes zu vermelden, etwas Unbekanntes mitzuteilen: es sei denn, daß man eine Wanderung quer durch Afrika macht, oder durch das ewige Eis nach dem Nordpol vordringt. Daß ich weder das Eine noch das Andere vorhabe, brauche ich nicht zu versichern.¹⁹⁰ (*Reisebriefe* 58-59)

Lewald cannot ignore the direct impact of the most important technological changes of the century on travel writing – one of the literary forms she was best known for. She is aware that, more than ever before in her career, the purpose of writing a travel book

¹⁸⁹ It is possible that Lewald decided the destination and the length of her journey when she was already on her way and, therefore, she did not discuss these matters in the previous letters to the newspaper. However, it is interesting that, when she collected the letters to publish them in book form, she did not move this introduction so that it would appear at the beginning of the work.

¹⁹⁰ “Certainly writers of travel letters do not have it easy now, when they resolve on the task of reporting about something new and unknown. The world has become smaller since railway tracks and telegraph wires have spanned it. All the world has seen the world. Travel has become a business like any other as well as travel writing; and it is done so well by so many that you should have a good opinion of yourself and trust yourself a lot if you want to cherish the illusion of announcing something astonishing or of disclosing something unknown, unless you hike across Africa or make your way through the everlasting ice of the North Pole. I do not need to assure you that I am not planning either the one or the other.”

needed to be justified, but that it would have been foolish to introduce such an intent with the pretension of relating something new and unknown. Therefore, when she claims that she is not going to travel to remote places or describe something original and unusual, she affects extreme modesty. “Ich gehe einfach nach Rom”¹⁹¹ (*Reisebriefe* 59) she states next, explaining that she merely desires to escape another winter in the north and to revisit the city and the places so full of memories from her past. As for the letters that she is going to write from Rome, she unpretentiously refers to them as “einige Blätter”¹⁹² (*Reisebriefe* 59) that she will send home twice a month as she did the last time she was in the city ten years earlier.¹⁹³

After excluding any claim to novelty for the content of her letters, however, Lewald once again avails herself of a literary convention to justify her writing and, at the same time, to arouse her readers’ interest. With particular reference to novelty among nineteenth-century women travel writers, Scheitler observes that: “Eine ganz andere Form, novitas zu ersetzen, ist die Betonung der individuellen Möglichkeiten und der dadurch gewonnenen Einmaligkeit der Darstellung”¹⁹⁴ (122). Lewald uses this strategy to her advantage, pointing out the special historical perspective that, thanks to her repeated visits to Italy, she can offer in her description of the country. First of all, she expresses her hope that the developing phenomenon of mass tourism will not lead humanity into barbarity by jeopardizing individuality and the ability to retreat into oneself. According to Lewald, the expansion and consolidation of the new means of transportation and the

¹⁹¹ “I am simply going to Rome”

¹⁹² “some pages”

¹⁹³ The letters Lewald wrote during her second journey to Rome in 1866-67 were collected and published in the book *Ein Winter in Rom* (1869).

¹⁹⁴ “Another form to replace novelty is by emphasizing the individual possibilities and the uniqueness of the representation obtained in this way.”

establishment of the first organized tours, which led swarms of people to visit the same places and attractions at the same time, have robbed travellers of the pleasure of having unique experiences. She then carefully distinguishes herself from the crowd of modern tourists, explaining that she experienced travelling in a time when the carriage as a means of transportation still allowed travellers to enjoy what she defines as the greatest attraction of journeying: the freedom to decide moment by moment where to stop and what to see. It is apparent, however, that, more than for the old days of the carriages, Lewald feels nostalgia for the time when a trip to Italy was still a privilege that only a limited number of people could enjoy (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 335).¹⁹⁵ With the advent of the railway, which made travelling more comfortable and affordable for everybody, a trip to Italy had lost part of its exclusive character. And by referring to her past journeys, Lewald attempts to regain for herself a privileged status among the mass of new tourists. In his important study on the phenomenon of travel for pleasure, *The Beaten Track*, James Buzard observes with reference to the years 1820-50:

The privileged notion of ‘traveller’ was concurrently redefined in opposition to these new tourist-serving institutions, and it became an expected feature of much travel-writing for authors to set themselves apart from such structures by refuting their assertions of authority, by self-consciously demonstrating independence from them. (47)

When Lewald finally explains how she intends to offer something original to the readers of her letters, in spite of the fact that she is going to Rome – possibly the most visited and described city on earth – she emphasises her unique personal ability to compare the sights of the present with what they used to look like thirty years before. Besides, she defines

¹⁹⁵ At the time of her first trip to Italy in 1845, she had managed to gain that privilege for herself through her literary success and the journey itself represented a reward for her hard work.

this ability as the one that qualifies her as a ‘traveller,’ that is as somebody different, and implicitly better, than the common tourist:

Nie mehr als eben in diesen rastlos gewordenen Zeiten habe ich es begreifen können, wie man eine “*voyage autour de ma chambre*” oder etwa “Reisebriefe eines stillsitzenden Reisenden” schreiben könne; und auf etwas der Art wird es mit den Briefen wohl hinauslaufen, die Ihr von mir empfangen werdet. Das Reisen wird ganz etwas Anderes, wenn man die Gegenden, die Orte, die man berührt, nicht mit dem Auge der Neugier, der Ueberraschung betrachtet, wenn man aus einem Touristen, so zu sagen, ein vergleichender Reisender geworden ist, wenn man neben der Gegenwart die von ihr so weit verschiedene Vergangenheit unwillkürlich im Sinne hat, wie man sie zuerst kennen lernte.¹⁹⁶ (*Reisebriefe* 60)

Because Lewald, thanks to her earlier trips, was already familiar with the places she was about to visit, and because those places had undergone considerable changes and modernizations in the course of the previous thirty years, she promises to describe in her letters not only her journey through space, but also a sort of travel in time through the memories of a past now lost forever.

Lewald follows this intent in the succeeding letters of *Reisebriefe*, and she proves to be a valuable witness of the dramatic transformations that the most important technological innovations of the century introduced in people’s everyday lives in a relatively short time span. She is particularly ready to notice the improvements that directly affected travellers, and she enthusiastically approves, for example, of the development that has transformed little Swiss mountain villages and spa towns into fully equipped tourist resorts with large hotels, shops, and amusements. She is pleased with the comfortable roads that have replaced once narrow and dusty paths, and she delights in the

¹⁹⁶ “I could never have realized better than in these restless times, how you can write a “*voyage autour de ma chambre*” or even “travel letters of an armchair traveller”; and the letters you receive from me will possibly result in something along those lines. Travelling becomes something totally different when you do not behold the countries and places you reach with the eye of curiosity and astonishment, when you are turned from a tourist into a comparative traveller so to speak, when you unintentionally have in mind the past beside the present which looks so different from the first time you saw it.”

new railway stations and the nice promenades with monuments and fountains, which have been built in larger cities. She also admires the speed of the train, which, swiftly hurtling from tunnel to tunnel, has transformed the once adventurous and often dangerous crossing of the Alps into an easy and uneventful route. However, the improvements that aimed at making journeys better organized and more comfortable for a larger number of people had also deprived travellers of that hint of adventure and of those unexpected events that used to make the whole experience exciting and unique. This is the aspect of her past journeys and of the old times in general that Lewald seems to miss the most.

Together with the enthusiasm for innovations and new technical inventions, she often expresses concern over aspects of social life or of human individuality and ability that were likely to disappear as a result of the changes. For example, she observes that the popular guidebooks Gsell-Fels, Murray, and Baedeker provide travellers with such consistent and collective knowledge “dass man einander unterwegs nicht eben viel zu sagen und kaum Jemand um Etwas zu fragen hat, weil Alle ziemlich dasselbe wissen und glauben”¹⁹⁷ (*Reisebriefe* 77). Because of the increasingly wide circulation of those new guidebooks, the process of acquiring knowledge and education while travelling had become standardized; people not only visited the same places and attractions en masse, but they also learned the same information about what they saw. Thus, Lewald regrets that the enjoyment of individually exploring places and of searching for details and anecdotes is virtually lost, together with the pleasure of exchanging information and of socializing with other travellers. About the inventions of the telegraph and of the photography, she expresses similar remarks. She appreciates that, thanks to telegrams, it

¹⁹⁷ “that on the way you do not have much to say to each other and almost nobody has anything to ask, because everybody knows and believes the same things.”

had become possible to keep family and friends constantly informed about the progress of the journey. Nevertheless, according to her, the concise style of the telegram, far from replacing the communication by letter, should increase the pleasure of retreating into oneself and of writing calmly and at length upon arrival (*Reisebriefe* 75). Likewise, although Lewald values the quality of the pictures produced by cameras, she fears that, by constantly using machines to create images, human hands will lose the ability to paint artistic representations of reality (*Reisebriefe* 308).

Even more radical than the transformations that occurred in society and landscape with the introduction of the new technologies were the changes in the political situation of the countries Lewald visited during this third journey to Italy. She capitalizes on her direct recollection of several events that led to the unification of Germany and Italy and never fails to remind her readers of her personal acquaintance with many of the protagonists of the German ‘Vormärz’ era and of the Italian Risorgimento. In Switzerland, she revisits the places she once saw together with Adolf Stahr and her friend Johann Jacoby when they went to meet Lewald’s cousin Heinrich Simon, who lived there in exile. Simon – who fought for the unification of Germany and had to flee to Switzerland to escape a sentence of life imprisonment for his revolutionary activities – did not live to see his dream realized. Lewald describes the monument erected in Switzerland to Simon’s memory as a sign of the “Wechsel der Zeiten”¹⁹⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 66). Germany had been unified as a nation-state and those who once strove, suffered, and died for this cause, were finally celebrated as heroes. Stahr, Jacoby, and Simon had all died since their previous visit to Switzerland, and Lewald, as the last survivor of the party, reflects on her loneliness and on the duty to keep alive the memory of the past and

¹⁹⁸ “Changes of the times”

of those who died. The mention of Simon's monument seems to confirm that Lewald had the authority to accomplish this duty because in her life she had witnessed the events and had known the people who became part of history and were publicly recognized as such. Likewise, in Florence Lewald is able to explain the changes that had occurred in the city in the past thirty years because she was among the few people who had the chance to see it in three different phases of its history: in 1845 when it still belonged to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, later in 1866 when the city had just been proclaimed capital of the newly united Kingdom of Italy, and finally during this third journey in 1877, after the Italian government had been moved from Florence to Rome in 1871. Although in 1877 the rush for modern development that the city had undergone while it was the capital of Italy had come to an end and Florentines appeared poorer because trade had become stagnant, Lewald is able to appreciate that the city had regained part of the original calm and gentle character it used to have when it was still part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

Lewald's knowledge of the events, characters, and development of the Italian socio-political situation during the previous thirty years comes to full display in the letters of *Reisebriefe* she writes from Rome. The sudden death of the first Italian king, Victor Emmanuel II, in January 1878, at the outset of Lewald's stay in Rome, occasions an account of the process that led to the Italian unification, of which the king had been one of the main champions. In the letter entitled "Historisches Erinnern" (Historical Recollections), Lewald puts together memories of her past journeys, descriptions of people she met, personal comments and opinions, and accounts of facts and stories of what happened to her or her friends and acquaintances. The result is a representation of Italy in the years between 1846 and 1878 almost a hundred pages in length, which is at

the same time very personal and anecdotal and well informed and effective. Lewald manages to illustrate the different political situations and atmospheres of the little states in which the Peninsula used to be divided before 1861. She then relates some of the small and larger acts of heroism and the changes in public opinion that contributed to the creation of a strong national consciousness in the Italian people at the time of unification. Finally, she describes Rome before and after the events that led to the end of the temporal power of the Pope with the annexation of the Eternal City to the Kingdom of Italy in 1871. By constantly presenting herself as the direct observer of the facts she relates and as the first-hand recipient of the comments and stories she hears from other people, Lewald appears eager to demonstrate her reliability as a source of information and to provide her account with authority and strength.

Most likely to the same end, she describes her meetings and friendships with numerous personalities of the time. On Lake Geneva in 1866 she had been introduced to Garibaldi through one of his officers, the colonel Frignesi, who later kept her informed about Garibaldi's enterprises in the following years. By chance, Lewald had met the other most important figure of the Italian Risorgimento, Giuseppe Mazzini, in England in 1850 while she was shopping with Thomas Carlyle's wife, who introduced them and instigated their interesting conversation. Daniele Manin (1804-1857) – the patriot who in 1848 had managed to overthrow the Austrian government in Venice and for over a year had been the president of the re-created Repubblica of San Marco – had become Lewald's acquaintance in Paris, where he was sent into exile after the Austrians had regained control over Venice. She recounts in detail her casual encounter with Carlo Luciano Bonaparte Prince of Canino (1803-1857), the eldest son of Napoleon's brother Lucien

Bonaparte, and his companion Dr. Luigi Masi (1814-1872) on the steamboat that took her from Naples to Leghorn on her way back to Berlin in 1846. The prince was heading for Genoa to attend a convention of scholars he had founded to foster meetings and exchanges among Italian intellectuals and patriots. Lewald remembers the interesting conversations about politics and literature they had on the boat, and is anxious to point out that she was invited to take part in the scholarly convention. Finally, she illustrates Luigi Masi's important role at the head of the Italian army when Rome was annexed in 1871. Lewald mentions many other prominent people among her acquaintances, such as the German biologist and zoologist Karl Ernst von Baer (1792-1876), the Italian patriot Ugo Bassi (1800-1849), the German physiologist Moritz Schiff (1823-1896), and the Duke of Sermoneta Michelangelo Caetani (1804-1882). Her keenness on associating herself with great personalities of the time suggests Lewald's desire to be considered among those who – as direct participants or eyewitnesses – took part in an important historical process and were entitled to hand down the memory of these events to posterity.

In this long representation of the Italian Risorgimento offered in *Reisebriefe*, it is also possible to recognize that Lewald aims at drawing attention to the role played by the Germans in the final annexation of Venetia and Rome to the Italian kingdom. She points out repeatedly that both Italian and German patriots had to suffer long years of repression and persecution and that many of them had to sacrifice their lives in the struggle to unify their countries into independent kingdoms. In order to further explain the similar fate of Italians and Germans, she draws a comparison between the personalities of Pope Pius IX and of the Prussian King Frederick William III. Both the Pope and the King had raised

great hopes for democratic reforms at the time of their elections and had later disappointed their subjects by establishing reactionary governments and by firmly believing that their power came directly from God. Because Prussia, the state that led the unification of Germany, had a similar intention to that of the Reign of Piedmont-Sardinia, which guided the unification of Italy, Lewald regrets that Italians did not realize how they could have benefited from an alliance with Prussians in their attempts to wrench Lombardy and Venetia from Austrian rule. Instead, Italians were more inclined to enter into alliances with the French of Napoleon III and had to suffer the humiliation of receiving from his hands both Lombardy (gained thanks to the victorious battles of Magenta and Solferino in 1859) and Venetia. This latter was given by the Austrians to the French in exchange for their non-intervention in the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, and the French subsequently ceded it to the Italians in exchange for Savoy. Lewald describes with bitterness the ungrateful attitude that the Italians had towards Prussia, in spite of the decisive help given by German troops for the expulsion of the Austrians from the Italian territory:

Ueberall hörte man das stolze: *l'Italia farà da sé!* und man dachte schon damals weit weniger als im Kreise der Garibaldiner an den Antheil, welchen die Massen der unter Preußens Führung gegen Oesterreich kämpfenden Deutschen an den Freudentagen hatten, deren man eben jetzt in Italien genoß. Man war vielmehr sehr dazu geneigt, den deutschen Beistand zu verkleinern und zu vergessen, während die neue Erhebung Italiens gegen Oesterreich doch nur durch die Auflehnung und das Vorgehen des mächtigen Preußens möglich geworden war. Man berauschte sich in [*sic*] der Idee nationaler Großthaten, welche die italienische Armee 1866 nicht vollführt hatte. Man warf der Bequemlichkeit halber Oesterreicher, Preußen und alle anderen deutschen Volkstämme in den von den österreichischen Zeiten her verhaßten Namen *Tedeschi* zusammen, wobei denn die alte sehr berechnete Abneigung gegen Oesterreich obenauf schwamm, und das Gute und den Beistand, den

man von Deutschland und namentlich von Preußen empfangen hatte, ganz verhüllte.¹⁹⁹ (*Reisebriefe* 168-169)

She calls it “ein schwerer unheilvoller Irrthum des Verstandes”²⁰⁰ (*Reisebriefe* 199) that Garibaldi was not able to acknowledge the Prussians as better allies for Italy, even after the French troops ended his attempt to capture Rome in 1867 and established themselves in the city to protect the Pope from further attacks.²⁰¹ The battle of Sedan in September 1870 decided the Franco-Prussian war in favour of Prussia and finally allowed the Italians to capture Rome and the Papal States, which were left unprotected by the French garrison recalled by Napoleon III to fight in the pending war. The emphatic words Lewald uses to describe the defeat of the French and the capture of Napoleon III during the famous battle are full of ardent patriotic pride:

Das Gericht hatte sich plötzlich erfüllt. Der von besorgten Gemüthern gefürchteten Knechtschaft der Welt durch den am Tiber und an der Seine wirksamen Bonapartismus, war mit gewaltiger Kraft von der sittlichen Energie, von der Vaterlandsliebe und dem Selbstgefühl des deutschen Volkes ihr: “Bis hieher und nicht weiter!” zugerufen worden. In den wilden Todeschlachten, welche uns vom 4. August bis zum 1. September Tausende und Tausende unserer heldenhaften Männer und Jünglinge gekostet, hatten die vereinten Deutschen die bonapartistische Tyrannei gebrochen, die völkerfeindliche, eitle Selbstüberhebung der Franzosen gezüchtigt, und den Sturz der weltlichen Macht des Papstes vorbereitet. Die Ströme schuldlos vergossenen deutschen Blutes, die Ströme von Thränen, die in Deutschland über dieses theure Blut geweint worden sind,

¹⁹⁹ “You could hear everywhere the proud cry: *l’Italia farà da sé!* [Italy will make it on its own!] And, already at that time, people thought much less than in the circle of the followers of Garibaldi about the contribution that the mass of Germans fighting against Austria under Prussian command gave to the days of rejoicing that they enjoyed in Italy. People were much more inclined to play down and forget the help of the Germans, while the new Italian uprising against Austria had become possible only through the insurgence and the advance of mighty Prussia. People inebriated themselves with the idea of mighty national deeds that the Italian army had not performed in 1866. For the sake of convenience, people threw together Austrians, Prussians, and all the other German tribes under the name *Tedeschi*, which had become hateful since the time of Austrian domination. The old and very justifiable aversion to Austria bobbed up and completely cloaked the good things and the help that people had received from Germany and specifically from Prussia.”

²⁰⁰ “a severe and fatal mistake of judgment”

²⁰¹ Lewald shared this opinion with many other German observers, who believed that Garibaldi’s preference for the French as allies was almost a betrayal to Rome and its history (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 317-318).

haben wie die Wogen des Rothen Meeres den prahlerischen Phrao und sein Heer verschlungen. Wie der blonde Erzengel Michael hat Deutschland den Fuß gesetzt auf des Erbfeindes Nacken, sich flügelkräftig emporschwingend vor dem staunenden Auge der Welt, und mit seinem starken Arm auch für Italien die Pforte erschließend, durch die es leichten Kaufes eingehen konnte ihm bisher vorenthaltene Rom, um sich aufzurichten zu freier Selbstbestimmung, zu freier geistiger Entwicklung in der Reihe der lebenden, fortschreitenden Völker unserer Zeit.²⁰² (*Reisebriefe* 202-203)

This long letter of *Reisebriefe* that deals with historical recollections ends with a quotation of the apologetic message written by the Duke of Sermoneta to the German newspaper *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*. The duke was the head of the provisional government in Rome that settled the annexation of the city to the Italian kingdom. Lewald points out that, in spite of the support for the unification of Italy given by the Prussians through their military victories in Sedan and Sadowa, many Italians were still hostile to Germans. By ending her account with the words of an important Italian who publicly recognizes a debt to the Germans for the help received, expresses the gratitude of all Italians, and encourages his compatriots to be inspired by the “geistige Fortschritt Deutschlands”²⁰³ (*Reisebriefe* 206), Lewald aimed to reinforce national pride in her German readership at a time when the newly formed Empire was beset by deep social and political conflicts. The moral of her account appears to be that the long and heroic struggle of the Italian people to unite and to free their country from the foreign

²⁰² “Suddenly justice had been done. The dreaded slavery of the world through Bonapartism operating on the Tiber and on the Seine, was [ended] with mighty force by the moral energy, patriotism, and self-assurance of the German people and their shout: “To here and no further!” In the fierce mortal battles, which between August 4th and September 1st cost us thousands and thousands of our heroic men and youths, united Germans have broken the Bonapartist tyranny, have castigated the harmful and vain egotism of the French, and have prepared the downfall of the temporal power of the Pope. The streams of innocent German blood shed, and the streams of tears wept in Germany over this blood have devoured the boastful pharaoh and his army like the waves of the Red Sea. Like the blond archangel Michael, Germany has placed its foot on the neck of the arch enemy, lifting itself up with the power of its wings before the astonished eyes of the world. And with its strong arm Germany has opened for Italy too the gates through which it could easily gain access to Rome, previously withheld, in order to stand up for free self-determination and free intellectual development as one of the lively and advancing peoples of our time.”

²⁰³ “German spiritual progress”

oppressors reached a successful end thanks to the decisive intervention of the Germans. Lewald is pleased to show that Italians have finally acknowledged the help received and wants her German readers to be proud of their merit.

That she constantly had her audience in mind – and in particular her German female audience – when she wrote this representation of the Italian Risorgimento appears evident also from her continuous references to women's conditions during that era. Lewald carefully relates all the examples of women's emancipation in the general backwardness of Italy during those years. For example, she recalls that – as she observed when she was in Italy in 1846 – the clergy considered it useless and dangerous for women to learn how to write. Thus, it was very rare to meet an educated woman even among the rich members of the nobility. Nevertheless, Lewald points out that there were exceptions: she personally met a duly recognized poetess and attended a ceremony on the Capitoline Hill in Rome where a female artist was publicly honoured (*Reisebriefe* 126). During her subsequent journey to Italy in 1866, she noticed that the overall situation had not improved much and women were still much less educated than men and remained under the influence of the clergy (*Reisebriefe* 170). However, she mentions it as a good sign that books and pamphlets dealing with the necessity to educate women and initiate them into working activities were circulating everywhere (*Reisebriefe* 159). Moreover, in many cases women had become important actors in the process of the Italian unification. Lewald remembers the outrageous way Milanese women were treated by the Austrians during the revolutions and recounts the heroic behaviour of patriotic Venetian women who endured imprisonment for holding a celebration in honour of the death of Count Camillo Cavour, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and one of the

leading figures in the movement towards Italian unification (*Reisebriefe* 153). She recounts the anecdote of a beautiful Italian lady who refused to talk and to dance with an officer of the Austrian army because she was a patriot (*Reisebriefe* 148), and she describes the wife of one of her friends, the lawyer Venini of Varenna on Lake Como, as a model of domestic and patriotic virtues. This was a highly educated and learned woman, who not only taught her sons at home till they were ready for college, but also inspired in them such a devotion to the Italian cause, that the youngest tried to join Garibaldi's army when he was still a boy. In her house she regularly hosted gatherings characterized by high standards of conviviality, where people could freely discuss the state of things in Italy. There, Lewald recalls meeting many guests who openly complained about the ignorance and indolence of the clergy, and she reports with surprise that even the old mother of the host, who was a fervent catholic, prayed for the final unification of Italy with the annexation of Venetia and the end of the temporal power of the Church in the Papal States. With these recurrent examples of heroic female patriots, Lewald meant to show how women were able to give their contribution to such an important historical process as the Risorgimento even from within their domestic sphere and in a country where the omnipresence of the Catholic clergy discouraged their education and fostered superstition and bigotry among them.

Most likely she hoped that, by reading this account, her German female readers would feel inspired to achieve even more in their country, and, in order to reassure them of their superior capabilities, she makes a point of representing German women as much more accomplished than Italians. For example, she mentions that the increasing number of Italian scholars, who in the course of the 1850s and 1860s attended German

universities to continue their studies, greatly appreciated German lifestyle and domesticity. And she reports with clear satisfaction that a couple of these scholars, who ended up marrying German women, once told her: “Wir können nicht nur deutsche Wissenschaft bei uns noch sehr gebrauchen, es thäte uns auch gut, wenn wir deutsche Frauen mit nach Hause bringen könnten!”²⁰⁴ (*Reisebriefe* 161). Another anecdote she recounts ends with Lewald relating a compliment paid to her by an Italian man. As Lewald was shopping in a bakery in Rome, the man noticed how she inquired about economic matters and he exclaimed:

“Seht einmal! das sind die fremden Frauen! Ich habe das seit Jahren schon beobachtet! die denken an Etwas! die helfen in dem Hause; und selbst vornehme Frauen wie diese thun das. Die wollen nicht nur Ringe an die Finger stecken und die Hände übereinander schlagen, wenn sie in der Karosse sitzen wie unsere Frauen. Wer eine Römerin heirathet, ist ein Narr! Wir müssen Frauen von auswärts nehmen! [...] Unsere Frauen sind zu Nichts gut, als dem Mann ein Vergnügen zu sein und Kinder in die Welt zu setzen, die man ernähren muß. Sie können Nichts, sie verstehen Nichts, sie lernen Nichts und wollen Nichts thun; aber so können die Pfaffen sie am Besten brauchen. Darum werden keine Schulen für sie eingerichtet, darum lehrt man sie Nichts als beten und zur Messe gehen und beichten. Es hat schon Manche ihren Mann in die Gefängnisse gebeichtet.”²⁰⁵ (*Reisebriefe* 187)

German women are appreciated principally for their domestic virtues, which they are able to practice better than the Italians, because they are generally more educated and, thus, more capable of thinking and acting independently for the benefit of the whole

²⁰⁴ “In Italy we can make use not only of German science, it would be good for us if we could take home German women too!”

²⁰⁵ “Look! This is what foreign women are like! I have been noticing this for years! They think about things! They help at home; and even gentlewomen such as her do that. They do not want just to wear rings on their fingers and fold their hands when they sit in the carriage like our women. Whoever marries a Roman woman is a fool! We have to marry women from abroad! [...] Our women are good for nothing, except to be an amusement for men and to bear children, who then have to be fed. They cannot do anything, they understand nothing, they learn nothing, and they want to do nothing; this way the priests can make better use of them. For this reason they do not build schools for them, for this reason they do not teach them anything besides praying and going to mass and confession. There have been already a few of them who sent their husbands to prison by confessing.”

household. By praising German women through the words of Italian men used as direct speech, Lewald reinforces the truth and value of her message: educated women make better housewives and better patriots. By contrast, keeping women in ignorance could turn to disadvantage for the whole country, as happened during the Risorgimento in Italy, where the Catholic clergy used their influence on women to spy on people and to detect attempts at revolution. In brief, while Lewald's German male readers were encouraged by this representation of Italy to be proud of their role as soldiers in the military successes achieved in the wars and of the help provided for the Italian unification, her German female audience should feel proud of being better housekeepers than the Italians and encouraged to promote their education.

The other important event that occurred during Lewald's stay in Rome was the death of Pope Pius IX on February 7, 1878. The Pope had been one of the most controversial figures of the Risorgimento era. Lewald was in Italy at the time of his election in 1846 and had witnessed the enthusiasm of the people for the new Pope. In Ischia she had seen the poor inhabitants of the island wearing as amulets silver coins with the image of Pius IX, and in Naples she was present at the public manifestation of joy for the amnesty given by the Pope to all political prisoners and revolutionaries. Pius IX was considered a patriot and introduced several liberal reforms. However, after the revolutionaries gained the upper hand in Rome in 1848 and he was forced to escape the city in disguise, his political views changed drastically. He appealed to Napoleon III for help, and the French military forces, after crushing the revolutionary republic declared in Rome in 1849, remained in the city for over twenty years, protecting the Pope's rule over the Church State and hindering the attempts of the Italian nationalists to unite the

country. When Pius IX died – Lewald notices – there were no real signs of sorrow in Rome, and this contrasted both with the enthusiasm of the people at the time of his election and with the genuine sadness that all the Italians expressed a few weeks earlier for the death of their king Victor Emmanuel II. She explains that Romans could not forgive the Pope for having allowed foreign troops to occupy and to bombard their city in order to protect his personal power. Moreover, according to Lewald, people disliked Pius IX for having decreed the dogmas of the papal infallibility and of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, which – in deep contrast with the great scientific discovery and technological progress of the nineteenth century – seemed to have brought the Catholic Church back to the times of the Middle Ages. After Rome was taken over by the Italian kingdom in 1871, the king granted the Pope freedom and protection, but Pius IX lived until his death as a voluntary prisoner in the Vatican, and this estranged him even more from the affection of the people.

As an answer to the supposed requests of friends who wanted to know more about the recent events in Rome, Lewald describes the day of the election of the new Pope, Leo XIII, and speculates on the unlikely possibility of transferring the Holy See away from Rome. In the letter entitled “Wie die Dinge sich hier machen” (How things get done here), she gives an excellent explanation of the situation full of contradictions created in Rome by the transition of power from Papal rule to the Italian government. For example, she mentions that, although the monasteries and cloisters were abolished and many of their buildings were used by the Italian government as schools, libraries, and offices, Rome was still full of nuns and monks. This was possible because, even though the state had forbidden the creation of new religious orders and did not recognize them

any longer, nuns and monks were not prevented from renting or buying edifices where they could keep on living as communities. The presence in Rome of both the head of the Church and the head of State also contributed to creating paradoxical situations. The State granted the Pope the right to move freely in the Kingdom of Italy as well as asylum and protection, yet he acted as a prisoner in the Vatican. Conversely King Victor Emmanuel II, who was a devout Catholic, was excommunicated by the Pope, denied admission to the church, and no representative of the higher clergy assisted at his funeral. Lewald evidently disapproved of the obstinate attitude of the Church, which fomented the dispute with the Italian government. In fact in Lewald's opinion, the conflict between the Church and the State was a product of politics and did not actually exist in the hearts of the Italians, who were equally devoted to their country and to their religion. She is confident that Italians, together with the newly elected Pope, would strive for a peaceful process of reconciliation between Church and State. And she introduces the personality of Leo XIII to her readers by translating some passages of his pastoral letters, in which he comes across as a very learned and open-minded man, who recognized the importance of science in the modern era. In these pages, Lewald proves to have a lucid understanding of the complexity of the so-called 'Roman question'²⁰⁶ and shows her ability to put the latest events in Rome into proper historical perspective:

Wir stehen unter den riesigen Trümmern alter Thermen und Tempel und steigen unter ihnen hinunter in die Tiefe ebenso riesiger Trümmer, auf welchen jene Bauten sich erhoben. Eine Welt von Schönheit ist zerstört, zerstört mit einer Gewalt, von welcher wir uns kaum eine Vorstellung zu

²⁰⁶ The 'Roman question' is the name given to the political dispute between the Italian government and the Papacy, which started when Italy became united in 1861 and ended with the Lateran Pacts between Mussolini's government and Pope Pius XI. After the Lateran Pacts were signed in 1929, the Popes did not consider themselves any longer as "prisoners in the Vatican" and began to leave the Vatican regularly to visit other parts of Rome and Italy, and eventually to travel all over the world (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 386).

machen vermögen. Wir blicken hinauf zu den in Goldglanz leuchtenden Gewölben der Peterskirche. Ihre Schönheit reißt uns hin, ihre Pracht und Herrlichkeit überwältigen uns, und wir sagen uns: auch der Jupitertempel wird einst geleuchtet haben in solchen Glanzes Fülle, und er ist untergegangen und in Trümmer zerfallen, als der Götterglaube die Herzen der Menschen, die ihn errichtet haben, nicht mehr erwärmte und erfüllte. [...] Man lernt es, auf die Fragen, welche jeder Blick auf die große historische Weite in uns anregt, die uns hier umgiebt, keine Antwort zu erwarten. Man wird bescheiden hier in Rom; und nur um so bescheidener, wenn man der raschen und unerwarteten Wandlungen gedenkt, welche man in dem Laufe seines eigenen bewußten Lebens sich in der Welt hat vollziehen sehen.²⁰⁷ (*Reisebriefe* 273-274)

These words that conclude Lewald's competent discussion appear particularly wise and sound as an admonition to the Catholic Church to learn from the lesson that Rome's history teaches.

As the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy, Rome was subjected to radical transformations, which concerned not only its government, but also its urban appearance and its city life. The city had to make room for the king, his court, members of the parliament, civil servants, officers, ambassadors, clerks, and all their families – a large number of new inhabitants who needed office premises and living space. The Italian government planned for Rome the same kind of modernization that many other European cities had undergone during the nineteenth century (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 343). The demolition and renovation of old edifices, the construction of a railway station, the creation of new residential quarters and avenues, and the widening of old streets aimed to

²⁰⁷ “We stand amongst the colossal ruins of old thermal baths and temples and we descend under them in the depth of equally giant ruins, on top of which those buildings once arose. A world of beauty is destroyed, destroyed with a violence that we are hardly able to imagine. We look up to the vaults of St. Peter's basilica glowing in gilt splendour. We are enraptured by its beauty, we are overwhelmed by its magnificence and grandeur, and we say to ourselves: Jupiter's temple must have shone in such brilliant opulence, but it declined and collapsed into ruins when the belief in the gods ceased to enliven and to fulfil the hearts of the people who built it. [...] You learn to expect no answer to the questions excited in you by every look on the great historic vastness that surrounds you here. You become humble here in Rome and even more humble when you think of the rapid and unexpected transformations that in the course of your own conscious life you have seen taking place in the world.”

transform Rome into a modern and functional capital city for the entire country. As Ujma thoroughly discusses in the section of her book entitled “Ein Streit um Rom” (A dispute about Rome), intellectuals, writers, artists, and Rome-enthusiasts from all over Europe – and especially from Germany – were against Rome’s modernization and regarded the city as an open-air museum, where even the dirt and vegetation that used to cover the majority of the ancient monuments had to be maintained unchanged. They were worried that the special historical character of the city would have been lost with the renovations, and many wanted to preserve Rome as closely as possible to the representations of the Eternal City given in the previous centuries by famous artists like Goethe. This point of view, however, did not take into consideration the right of Italians to have a modern capital city, where the inhabitants could enjoy the same standards of life and hygiene of any other European metropolis (Ujma, *Urbanes Arkadien* 344-61).

In *Reisebriefe*, Lewald demonstrates that she is not afraid of going against the mainstream, taking a decidedly positive stand on the debate about the modernization of Rome. As in the case of the ‘Roman question,’ she proves to have a deep insight into the dispute, and her great sympathy with the Italian people allows her to recognize the improved living conditions of the inhabitants of Rome as the major argument in favour of the modernization of the city. In the first letter of *Reisebriefe* written from Rome, Lewald is eager to reassure her audience that the political events of the latest years did not affect the beauty of the city, which, as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, appears as fascinating as it used to be when it was ruled by the Pope:

Eine dreitausendjährige Vergangenheit hat dieser Stadt ihr mächtiges Gepräge aufgedrückt. Was wollen daneben die Wandlungen bedeuten, welche sich im Laufe weniger Jahre zu vollziehen vermögen? Ob eine weltliche, ob eine kirchliche Macht die Herrschaft ausübt über diese Stadt,

ihr Charakter ist, soweit es sich im Aeußern kundgibt, bis jetzt noch nicht wesentlich verändert worden. Rom ist als Hauptstadt des Königreiches Italien immer noch das alte, das mit keiner andern Stadt zu vergleichende Rom.²⁰⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 90)

According to Lewald, the eternal character of the city depends on the fact that Rome has witnessed the current of history for over three thousand years, and its eternal nature will always be increased – and not destroyed – by the changes brought about by the progress of the events. She points out that Rome’s major attractions – its mild climate and picturesque landscape, its art treasures and cosmopolitan social life – are not subjected to the changes of the times and will keep on appealing to her and to all the visitors of the city as they did in the past. But this is not all that Rome has to offer. Lewald goes on to explain the essence of the city, why she feels happy and inspired there, and why a stay in Rome often played a decisive role in the life of an artist, as also happened to Goethe:

Man hat oft davon gesprochen, daß selbst in dem Leben eines Goethes der Aufenthalt in Rom zu einem seine ganze spätere Entwicklung bestimmenden Abschnitt geworden sei – und das ist sehr erklärlich. Rom macht, wenn ich den Ausdruck brauchen darf, das Auge des Geistes fernsichtig. Es bringt den Menschen dahin, das Kleinste, das er betrachtet, mit dem großen Ganzen im Zusammenhang zu denken, und während er es eben deshalb nach Gebühr würdigen lernt, es doch nicht zu überschätzen. Dies gilt von den Werken des Menschen wie von den Thaten desselben; von dem aber, was man jetzt mit dem Namen der politischen Vorgänge bezeichnet, zu allermeist. Welche Schlachten sind hier geschlagen, welche die Welt umgestaltende Ereignisse hier vorbereitet und zum Austrag gebracht worden, “und immer zirkuliert ein neues, frisches Blut” [Goethe *Faust: der Tragödie Erster Teil.*]²⁰⁹ (*Reisebriefe* 92-93)

²⁰⁸ “Three millennia of history have given their mighty imprint to the city. In comparison to this, what will the transformations that can take place in the course of a few years matter? Whether a secular or an ecclesiastic power rules the city, its character has not yet been significantly changed, as far as its outward appearance is concerned. Rome is as the capital city of the Kingdom of Italy is still the old Rome, the city that cannot be compared to any other.”

²⁰⁹ “It has often been said that even in Goethe’s life the stay in Rome represented the decisive stage for his whole later development – and this is easily explained. Rome makes the eye of the spirit long-sighted, if I may use the expression. It teaches the human being to connect in his thoughts the small part that he can observe with the great whole, and while for this very reason he learns to duly appreciate it, he also learns not to overestimate it. This is true of people’s works and actions, but above all of what are now designated

Lewald suggests that, because of the great changes and the alternation of glory and devastation that took place in Rome, it fosters in its visitors an appreciation of the vicissitudes of history and an awareness of the transitory nature of things. She recognizes that in Rome there is the risk of becoming too attached to the past and of looking at the future with bewilderment. However, the feeling of eternity that people experience in Rome and that makes the city unique results from the realization that everything is part of a historic process in which the ruins of the past become the foundations of the future in a never-ending cycle. Lewald approves of the changes aimed at freeing Rome from the remnants of the past in favour of making the city serve its current inhabitants better. She argues that, just as the ancient Romans built the Baths of Diocletians on the remnants of older buildings, the Romans of her time had the right to make room for a new residential quarter on the area occupied by the ruins of the Baths of Diocletians. Lewald points out to her readers all the transformations that the city has undergone since her last visit: an old and dreary nunnery has been destroyed, a new quarter with avenues and wide squares has been built, the front walls of many edifices have been moved back to widen narrow ways, old streets have been better illuminated and renamed to celebrate the events of the Risorgimento, the houses in the city centre have been cleaned up, and people looked richer and better dressed. In conclusion, she insists that Rome remains the same old Rome and, if all these changes have altered something in the character of the city, they have altered it for the better, thus they should be appreciated and encouraged.

political events. What battles have been fought here, what events that have transformed the world have been prepared and brought to settlement, “but nonetheless fresh blood comes into circulation”” The quote is from Goethe’s *Faust: The Tragedy, Part One*. Mephistopheles says these words to Faust in the famous scene entitled “The Study.”

Lewald's assertive tone in these well-informed discussions of the issues of modern Rome emphasizes by contrast the more sentimental character of the letters in which she attempts to rediscover for herself and to communicate to her readers her lifelong fascination with the Eternal City. Some of the traditional aspects of Roman life that Lewald had particularly liked during her first trip to Italy in 1846 had indeed disappeared in 1878, and she cannot help remembering them with regret. For example, she notices:

Rom ist bis jetzt von Fremden noch immer leer. Man sagt, die Fremdenzeit beschränkte sich jetzt auf die drei ersten Monate des Jahres, Rom sei allmählich auch nur ein Ort für Durchreisende geworden, wie die anderen Städte Italiens, seit die Eisenbahnen und die Tunnels vom Fels zum Meer führen. Früher war das freilich anders.²¹⁰ (*Reisebriefe* 98)

Before the advent of tunnels and railways, foreign travellers to Italy used to spend the whole winter in Rome because the crossing of the Alps by carriages was dangerous and could only be attempted in the summer and in the spring. As a consequence, every winter a community of foreign visitors, often consisting of artists, writers, and intellectuals from all over Europe, settled in Rome for five or six months, creating a stimulating and cosmopolitan social life. Among the circle of foreigners residing in Rome in the winter of 1846, Lewald had met Adolf Stahr and had enjoyed an intense social life characterized by gatherings and literary salons in private houses, group excursions to the environs of Rome, concerts, balls, nights at the theatre, and every other kind of social amusement. Undoubtedly, Lewald's nostalgic feelings for a lively and interesting community of foreign expatriates in Rome are mingled with the longing for her bygone youth and for

²¹⁰ "Until now Rome is still devoid of foreigners. People say that the foreigners' time is now limited to the first three months of the year. Like the other cities in Italy, Rome too has little by little become only a place for transients since railways and tunnels lead you from the rock to the sea. Of course this was different before."

her companions of that time. Nonetheless, in all the passages that describe the disappearance of Roman folk traditions it is possible to recognize Lewald's disappointment and regret for the loss of features that were distinctive of Rome as much as its history and its ancient architecture.

The Roman Carnival, made famous by the representation that Goethe gave of the festivities in his *Italienische Reise*, used to be the highlight of the winter in Rome and was traditionally described at length in the travel literature about Italy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lewald was an enthusiast of the Carnival, and in her first Italian travel book she had written a long fictional interlude to represent the magical atmosphere of the fancy dress parades she had experienced along the streets of Rome in 1846. In *Reisebriefe*, Lewald deals with the Roman carnival only in a few short paragraphs in which she laments the end of this tradition:

Schon vor elf Jahren hatte der Karneval alle die Heiterkeit und Anmuth eingebüßt, die ihn einst so reizend gemacht und vor allen Volksfesten aller anderen Länder so lieblich ausgezeichnet hatten. Er war häßlich und roh geworden, und da in diesem Jahre die doppelte Trauer um den König und den Papst den öffentlichen Kundgebungen irgend einer Freude ohnehin Zügel anlegte, so sah man von dem Karneval kaum noch die Spur; wie denn von dem alten römischen Volksleben und von den Volkstrachten so gut wie gar nichts mehr übrig geblieben ist.²¹¹ (*Reisebriefe* 267)

The traditional attire of the Roman women, characterized by a red flannel jacket, a silk corset with a white kerchief, and a long silver hairpin, was particularly dear to Lewald. In 1846, she had posed dressed in the Roman costume for a portrait painted by the artist Elizabeth Baumann-Jerichau, and Stahr had especially admired her as a Roman beauty.

²¹¹ “Already eleven years ago the carnival had lost all the cheerfulness and grace that once made it so attractive and so lovely that it distinguished itself from all the folk festivals of all the other countries. It had become ugly and coarse, and because this year the double mourning for king and pope already bridled public demonstrations of joy, there was hardly a trace of carnival to see; likewise of the old Roman folk life and of the Roman traditional costume there is virtually nothing left.”

By 1878 the traditional costume was not any longer the common attire among the inhabitants of Rome, and only a few servants, some nannies, and the people who worked as models for painters still wore it. Even the models, however, had acquired modern habits. They wrapped themselves up in Scottish plaids to keep warm and occupied themselves by reading newspapers while waiting for their next job. Lewald observes that the beauty of ordinary people, which had struck her as remarkable thirty years before, has vanished from the faces of men and women, and the good looks of the typical ‘*donna romana*’ (roman woman), portrayed so many times in the paintings of foreign artists of the past, has become very rare along the streets of Rome. People still danced outdoors at the taverns near the gates of the city in the sunny afternoons or at night by the light of lamps. But because the traditional dance called ‘*saltarello*’ had been replaced by waltz and polka, the old custom of men dancing with men and women with women, which was in part still a common practice in 1878, no longer seems to Lewald as pleasant and agreeable to look at. The singing of young men and the music of mandolins and guitars, which used to animate the mild nights of Rome, had been replaced by the much harsher noises of bells, donkeys, and people speaking in loud voices late into the night in the streets of the city. An annoyed Lewald, whose sleep had possibly become lighter because of her advanced age, complains about these noises that kept her awake at night, and she wonders why her beloved ‘*pifferari*’ (bagpipers) have been banned from the city, since their Christmas songs performed along the streets of Rome at all times had never represented a nuisance for her.

In spite of the occasional regret for the loss of some of the old traditions, Lewald’s enthusiasm and fascination for Rome prevails in the letters of *Reisebriefe* written from

the Eternal City. She is delighted by the brightness of the blue Roman sky and rejoices in the abundance of the vegetation, which she manages to represent by enumerating the endless varieties of thriving trees and blooming flowers with their brilliant colours and delicious scents. She particularly enjoys the arrival of the warm season in Rome and invites the inhabitants of Northern Europe, to whom the Italian winter usually appears as mild and pleasant as springtime in their countries, to experience in the summer the brisk and fervent blooming of the southern nature. The animated life along the alleys of the city fascinates and amuses Lewald, and she likes to dwell on descriptions of the trades and crafts that took place on the ground floors of almost all the houses and of the crowds of merchants and sellers who, carrying their goods on big charts along the narrow streets, continually congested the road circulation. The kind and persisting incitements of the street vendors to buy their inviting goods represent a real temptation for Lewald as she strolls along the streets of Rome. Beautiful flowers, delicious fruit, fresh vegetables, tasty sausages, fine gems, pretty paintings, and all other kinds of merchandise are depicted with an abundance of adjectives appealing to the five senses, and Lewald describes herself torn between her desire to be frugal and thrifty, and the impulse to purchase for small sums goods that in her country are scarce and more expensive:

Vuole? Wollen Sie? Das ist die eigentliche Parole des hiesigen, doch immer noch bunten und den Nordländer erfreulich überraschenden Straßenlebens. Vuole? rufen die an allen Ecken und Plätzen zahlreich vorhandenen Kutscher [...]. Vuole? ruft auf dem Spanischen Platze der Bursche, der eine Reihe kolorirter Ansichten von Rom, den Papst immer an der Spitze derselben, wie eine Fahne vor uns niederschießen läßt! Vuole? fragt sein Nachbar, der Zündhölzchen zu verkaufen hat. [...] Vuole bei mandarini? (ein Dutzend für 40 deutsche Pfennige) Port in cas! (Ich bringe sie Ihnen in das Haus.) Vuole Mädäm! fragen die Krämer mit ihren offenen Kasten voll Mosaiken, Gemmen und Korallen geringer Art. [...] Vuole Mädäm! Rose! Viole! Nespole! Narzisse! Gelsomine! Vuole Reseda? – Ganz große Päckchen für wenig Groschen! Ja, das ist der schwache

Punkt! Du stehst vor diesen Blumen auf dem Spanischen Platz immer wie Zerline im Don Juan! pflegte Stahr oft im Scherz zu mir zu sagen: *Vorrei e non vorrei!* (Ich möchte und möchte nicht), wenn seine Güte mit der Ausgabe von einigen Soldi meinen täglichen ökonomischen Bedenken ein rasches Ende machte. Aber es ist ja für einen Nordländer auch gar nicht möglich, nicht zu wollen und nicht zu kaufen, wenn man ihm mitten im Dezember in goldenem Sonnenschein diese Fülle von Farben, diese Fülle von Duft entgegenbringt. Also das schmutzige Papiergeld – es gibt Scheine von 40 deutschen Pfennigen – und das noch schmutzigere Kupfer, für das ich mir einen eigenen Beutel zur Schonung meines Portemonnaies genäht habe, nur rasch hervor und Blumen in das Haus!²¹² (*Reisebriefe* 103-104)

In this passage Lewald seems anxious to excuse her trifling and generally womanly fault of indulging in unnecessary expenses. The variety and the attractiveness of the goods offered, their economical prices, the contrast with the scarcity of fresh products that she is used to experience in the winter in her own country are mentioned as a series of justifications for behaviour that she appears to feel ashamed of and to consider careless. In the end, the permission to indulge in the expenses comes from Lewald's husband, and the dirty Italian coins and banknotes, which need to be carried in a specially hand-sewn purse, are paid out in exchange for flowers to adorn the house.

This passage appears expressly crafted to reconfirm Lewald's self-representation as a sensible housewife and to show her readers models of behaviour that she would like

²¹² “*Vuole?* Do you want? This is the actual slogan of the local and still colourful street life that pleasantly surprises the inhabitants of the north. *Vuole?* Shout the numerous coachmen at hand at all the corners and squares [...]. *Vuole?* Shouts on the Spanish square the lad, who shows in front of us a set of coloured views of Rome arranged as a fan and with the pope always on top! *Vuole?* Asks his neighbour who sells matches. [...] *Vuole bei mandarini?* [Do you want beautiful tangerines?] (one dozen for 40 German pennies) *Port in cas!* (I bring them to your house.) *Vuole Mādām!* Ask the hucksters with their open boxes full of mosaics, gems, and corals of small kind. [...] *Vuole Mādām! Rose! Viole! Nespole! Narzisse! Gelsomine! Vuole Reseda?* [Do you want, madam! Roses! Violets! Medlars! Daffodils! Jasmines! Do you want resedas?] – Large packages for few pennies! Yes, this is the weak point! You always stand in front of these flowers on the Spanish square as Zerlina in Don Juan! Stahr often used to tell me jokingly: *Vorrei e non vorrei!* (I would and I would not like it), when his kindness put a quick end to my daily financial concerns with the expense of a few coins. But for the inhabitants of the north it is not possible at all not to want and not to buy, when in the middle of December under golden sunshine you show them this abundance of colours and of fragrances. So you quickly get rid of the dirty paper money – there are bills for 40 German pennies – and of the even dirtier copper coins, for which I have sewn myself a special bag in order to protect my purse, and you bring home flowers.”

to see reproduced in her own country. As soon as the attention of the readers is shifted from the streets of Rome to the subject who is experiencing them, Lewald carefully offers an image of herself as a model housekeeper, who worries about the household budget when buying groceries and allows herself to purchase superfluous things for the house only with her husband's consent. Every time she represents herself while interacting with maids, greengrocers, and people from the working classes in general, Lewald comes across as a stern housewife, who inquires about prices, rebukes servants for their oversights, and requires tasks to be redone in case she finds them not well executed. The kindness and the agreeable manners of the Italians appear genuinely to surprise her, and she tells several anecdotes to show the amiability of the people. She is astonished, for example, at receiving an admission of guilt and a sincere apology from a servant she had reprimanded, and she almost cannot believe that a female worker, who had to redo a job for her, declares herself happy to complete the task again without requiring extra money. In Lewald's opinion, the good manners of the inhabitants of the Peninsula are related to the sunny climate and the beautiful nature of their country, and for this reason her German compatriots, though endowed with other important virtues, lack the gracefulness of the Italians:

Ach! es ist etwas Schönes und Großes für den Menschen unter einem sonnigen Himmel, in einer schönen Natur, in einem milden Klima, in einem alten Kulturlande geboren zu werden und als ein Angestammtes in das Leben mit hinein zu bringen, was wir Anderen uns erst mühsam anzueignen haben! Tüchtig, kräftig, beharrlich macht diese Anstrengung uns freilich, und ich bin gewiss die Letzte, die ihres Vaterlandes und ihres Volkes Eigenschaften unterschätzt; aber schön ist die Anmuth in dem Wesen der Südländer, der Romanen, dieser Italiener, die man mit Wenigem befriedigt, und deren freundliche, formvoll höfliche Weise im

täglichen Verkehr für uns, die wir sie nicht gewohnt sind, eben so wohltuend als bestechend ist.²¹³ (*Reisebriefe* 297)

Lewald was clearly charmed by the kind and friendly character of the Italians and wished that her fellow citizens could learn to be more like them.

In one of the letters of *Reisebriefe* entitled “Allerlei Nachahmenswerthes” (All that is worth imitating), Lewald goes as far as pointing out to her audience the innovations introduced by the Italians in their country that she considers deserving of replication in Germany. She starts with a practical suggestion for the German coachmen, who are encouraged to adopt the ingenious method developed by their Italian colleagues for avoiding getting wet when driving in the rain. Then she unexpectedly switches the topic of her discussion to the much more serious subject of women’s education, and the rest of the letter is devoted to acknowledging the improvements accomplished by the Italian government in this field. She particularly admires the new library created in Rome by putting together the large collections of books and manuscripts belonging to different religious institutions in a building once occupied by a Jesuitical school. The library was opened every day from morning till late at night, and there were no restrictions on access to the books and use of the large and brightly lit reading room well supplied with desks and writing materials. Lewald observes that an institution like this Roman library should be present in every big city, and in particular in German cities like Berlin, where in the long wintry evenings it would be a blessing to have such a warm and bright place to read and to write. And, although at night the reading room was frequented mostly by men, she

²¹³ “Alas! It is beautiful and great for people to be born under a sunny sky, surrounded by a lovely nature with a mild climate in an old land of culture, and to bring with you in life as something ancestral, what we have to acquire strenuously! Of course this struggle makes us brave, strong, persevering and I am certainly the last person to undervalue her fatherland and her people’s qualities; but there is a lovely grace in the nature of the inhabitants of the south, of the Romans, of these Italians, who can be gratified with little. Their friendly, formal, and courteous manners in daily relations are for us, not being used to them, both pleasant and impressive.”

emphasizes that women had the same right to use the library freely. Lewald especially praises the girls' school instituted by the city government in an old convent and supervised by important women from cultured Roman society. In the school, which rapidly grew to count more than two hundred girls in their teens, the students learned not only how to read, write, and count, but also many different kinds of handicrafts and enough accountancy to be able to manage trading activities. Lewald hopes that the number of female "Erwerbschulen"²¹⁴ (*Reisebriefe* 245) would increase everywhere in Europe, and she pleads in favour of providing women with the proper education for earning a living:

Denn auf der Erwerbsfähigkeit der Frauen, welche ihnen Zutrauen zu sich selbst, und mit diesem Zutrauen auch Achtung ihrer selbst giebt, beruht ein großer Theil der Lösung jener Frage, welche der nicht genug zu segnende „Verein zur Hebung der öffentlichen Moral“, der im September in Genf getagt, sich zur Aufgabe gestellt hat. Das Wohl und Wehe der Nationen, ihr Emporkommen und Zugrundegehen, hängen nach meiner festesten Ueberzeugung zum großem Theil von dem sittlichen Werth ihrer Frauen ab.²¹⁵ (*Reisebriefe* 245-246)

From the end of the 1870s and for the next three decades, organizations like the "Verein zur Hebung der öffentlichen Moral" ("Association for the advancement of public morals") were established in an increasing number of German cities. The purpose of these organizations was principally to prevent and halt the practice of prostitution, and their existence is a sign of the importance that middle-class consciousness assigned to

²¹⁴ "professional schools"

²¹⁵ "On women's ability to earn a living, which gives them self-confidence and self-respect along with it, depends in great part the answer to that question that the "Association for the advancement of public morals," which can never be sufficiently blessed, meeting in Geneva in September, set itself as a task. I firmly believe that the good and the bad of the nation, its advancement and its decay depend for the most part on the moral value of its women."

public morals.²¹⁶ Lewald argues that education is strictly connected with public morality, and she contends that the progress of a nation depends mostly on its women's decency and respectability. By suggesting that providing women with proper education would not only be good per se, but it would also contribute to preventing the danger of moral decline – a problem at the time generally considered of pressing importance – Lewald was trying to bring national attention to the cause of female education and to the great advantages it would offer Germany.

Despite Lewald's patronizing attitude towards Italian pedagogical initiatives, the description of the progress made by Italy in the field of female schooling is intended to make her German readers realize the importance of improving women's education in their country. She points out that Italy had a long tradition of women who, as wives, mothers, patriots, poetesses, painters, artists, and even as academics in the universities had their achievements recognized and honoured as if they were men. Women were also admitted as members of Italian free academies, and in Padua she recalls having seen a library that collected works by female writers exclusively. Nevertheless, in Italy women were still subjected to the danger of bigotry and of immoral customs like the practice of *cicisbeism*, which allowed married women to be accompanied in public by a professed gallant or a lover (the *cicisbeo*) usually tolerated by their husbands. Lewald argues that Italy had understood the importance of education to improve the country's morality, and for this reason the government was extending to a broader number of women the education once reserved for a limited and privileged group. However, when she compares

²¹⁶ See Andrea Purpus, *Frauenarbeit in den Unterschichten: Lebens- und Arbeitswelt Hamburger Dienstmädchen und Arbeiterinnen um 1900 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der häuslichen und gewerblichen Ausbildung*, 40; Andrew Lees, "Deviant Sexuality and Other "Sins": The Views of Protestant Conservatives in Imperial Germany", 453-476.

the results achieved by the Italians with the situation in Germany, she explains: “Man leistet darin natürlich nicht mehr, sondern vorläufig noch weniger als bei uns; aber es ist hier dennoch mehr und anerkennenswerther, weil unter der päpstlichen Herrschaft Nichts der Art geschehen war und man völlig unvorbereiteten Boden vorfand”²¹⁷ (*Reisebriefe* 247). This conclusion implies that Italian efforts were remarkable only because until a few years before the question of women’s education had been completely ignored there. In other words, if even a backward country like Italy had realized the importance of female education and had begun to improve it, then Germany should also have started to accomplish more for its women, considering that the situation there was better to start with.

In another passage the so-called ‘Scuole superiori femminili,’ which offered further education for girls and were established in Italy to replace the old schools run by nuns, are mentioned by Lewald in order to extend to them the criticism that she had for the same kind of institution in Germany: “Sie werden zahlreich besucht, sind vielfach gewiß sehr anziehend, werden aber eben so wie bei uns nichts Wesentliches nützen”²¹⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 248). In her opinion, neither in Italy nor in Germany did these kinds of schools do anything to redress the general superficiality and incompleteness of female learning. Although they often offered scientific lectures by important scholars, they did not provide women with the same kind of structured and professionally oriented education that men usually received in their secondary schools, and therefore they needed to be reformed. In this letter, supposedly meant to acknowledge the achievements of the

²¹⁷ “Of course, they do not accomplish more there but much less than in our country; for the time being; however, what they accomplish here is to be considered more creditable because under the Papal authority nothing of the kind has ever happened and they found totally unprepared ground.”

²¹⁸ “They are attended in great numbers and are certainly in many cases very appealing, but, just like in our country, they are not of any real use.”

new Italian government, Lewald does not miss the opportunity of remarking on the successes of her own country. She proudly points out that the teachers for the new preschools established in Italy were sent to Germany to receive proper professional training. She also notes that an increasing number of German governesses were hired by Italian families in place of the usual French nannies, and she comments that: “durch die stillen deutschen Frauen eine friedliche Eroberung für das deutsche Wesen in aller Ruhe, sicherlich nicht zum Nachteil der Italiener, vollzogen wird”²¹⁹ (*Reisebriefe* 243).

At the end of the letter, after complaining about the improvements that still needed to be accomplished in Rome, she concludes:

Wenn ich in diesem Briefe nun anerkenne, was die Italiener Gutes mit uns gemeinsam, was sie hier und da vor uns voraus haben, was wir von ihnen annehmen und brauchen könnten, so hätten sie sich doch noch viel mehr Nützlich und Zweckmäßiges von uns anzueignen.²²⁰ (*Reisebriefe* 248)

Since the theme of the letter suggested that in some instances Italians could teach something to Germans and be better accomplished than them, Lewald seems anxious to reassure her fellow citizens of the superiority of their own country. It appears almost as if she felt the need to state that, in spite of her fascination with Italy, her love for the fatherland was greater and that she considered her country better than any other. Besides, as she does on other occasions, Lewald uses the travel report about Italy to tackle issues that she deemed important and to inspire in her German readers pride for their country and the desire to improve it. Of course her enthusiasm for Italian political and social progress is sincere, and she genuinely rejoices when she observes, for example, that

²¹⁹ “the German character is gradually carrying out a peaceful conquest via quiet German women and surely not to the Italians’ disadvantage.”

²²⁰ “Even if I have recognized in this letter the good things that the Italians have in common with us, in which here and there they are ahead of us, and what we could adopt from them and use, nevertheless they would have many more useful and convenient things to acquire from us.”

thanks to the freedom of press, the number of newspapers printed in Rome as well as literacy among common people had enormously increased. Yet the whole travel account is written, so to speak, with one eye on Italy and the other on her own country. Even when Lewald writes to inform her German readers about the latest events in the Peninsula, the topics of discussion she chooses and the comments she expresses are meant to encourage her fellow citizens to think about their own country and to make them better aware of their own national identity. Like Italy, Germany had reached its national unity only a few years before. The changes occurring in Italy after the unification offered Lewald not only new themes for her fourth travel book about the country, but they also gave her an opportunity indirectly to discuss issues that had topical importance for the newly formed Germany too. More or less explicitly, Lewald's German readers were invited to compare what they learned about Italy with the situation in their own country, and they were either reminded of their national qualities and achievements or urged to accomplish further goals in their homeland.

The rest of the letters of *Reisebriefe* that Lewald wrote from Rome and all but one of the letters written from Nice, where she stayed for over three weeks after leaving Italy, deal with the description of art galleries and artists' studios visited in the Eternal City. Art was undoubtedly one of the most traditional themes of discussion in nineteenth-century travel books about Italy, and Lewald was aware that, if she wanted to avoid repetitions and offer something original to her readers, she must refrain from describing the most famous Roman monuments and artistic treasures. For this reason, in *Reisebriefe* she carefully reports only about those works of art – like the frescoes of Villa Farnesina or Prince Torlonia's collection of ancient statues – that were usually inaccessible to visitors

and that she managed to see thanks to her connections. To the same end, she focuses her attention on the new works of art that were being produced in Rome by contemporary artists at the time of her visit, rather than on the well-known Roman art of the past. She devotes one of the letters of *Reisebriefe*, for example, to the description of the atelier of the Polish painter Henryk Siemiradzki (1843-1902), where she was able to admire paintings of his representing scenes from the ancient Roman world for which he was especially renowned. In another letter she describes the ateliers and the works of the Russian sculptor Mark Antokolski (1843-1902), of the Italian painter Achille Vertunni (1826-1897), and of the American sculptor of Jewish descent Moses Jacob Ezekiel (1844-1917). By describing the ateliers of international artists who happened to reside in Rome in the winter of 1878, Lewald actually manages to offer a glimpse into an aspect of the city that was truly peculiar to the time of her visit. For her contemporary audience, moreover, these descriptions represented a way to learn first-hand about the latest production of famous artists even before their works were displayed in exhibitions. As in all the travel books of the nineteenth century, Lewald's descriptions of paintings and statues had the same function as pictures and were used in place of visual representations because images were generally much more expensive to reproduce in print than texts. Although trying to a modern reader, these detailed depictions of obscure works of art represent valuable sources of information for art historians and critics.

In these letters Lewald often discusses more general issues concerning art as well. For example, she compares what she defines as Raphael's idealism with Delacroix's realistic approach to painting; she argues about the importance of colour in contemporary art; and she criticizes the artists of her time who had adopted the eccentric fashion of

decorating their studios magnificently in order to attract more visitors. Of course, Lewald does not miss the opportunity to point out to her audience the accomplishments of German artists working in Rome, and she encourages the government of her country to do more to improve and promote national art. She notices that, whereas France had had an established arts academy in Villa Medici in Rome since the time of Louis XIV and French artists received scholarships from the government to live, study, and exhibit their works there, Germany did not provide anything for its national artists residing abroad. In 1846 Lewald had been part of the large colony of German artists who were in Rome at their own expense and who, without support from their country, had established a meeting place in Palazzo Fiano, where they used to offer entertainments and social events for all the Germans living in the city. She remarks that in 1878 the colony of German artists in Rome was still the only centre of social life for all their fellow citizens residing in the city. In their new seat of Palazzo Poli, they offered free access to a library and casino, and they organized occasional balls, concerts, and social events. Finally, she concludes this denunciation of Germany's negligence towards its artists with an emphatic rhetorical question: "Das thun die deutschen Künstler für die Deutschen in Rom! Was aber thut Deutschland für die deutschen Künstler in der ewigen Stadt?"²²¹ (*Reisebriefe* 279). Lewald also takes it upon herself to defend works of art by German artists displayed in the hall of the German embassy in Rome from the attacks of Italian and French newspapers. She explains that the exhibition had been improvised by putting together works that German artists who happened to live in Rome for a short time had produced to support themselves and had not yet managed to sell. She objects, therefore,

²²¹ "This is what the German artists do for the Germans in Rome! But what does Germany do for the German artists in the Eternal City?"

that the newspapers should not have compared this German exhibition with those organized by the French academy, which presented on display only the best works by the top French artists worthy of receiving a scholarship from the government.

The letter entitled “Letzte Tage im Süden” (Last days in the South) concludes Lewald’s travel account of her third journey to Rome. In this letter she tells about her trip from Nice to Marseilles, and she describes the bustling and fascinating life along the streets of this port city. The presence in the harbour of big steamboats for Africa and India, the variety of the exotic goods sold, and especially the way in which the colourful products were displayed in the market gave the city a strikingly oriental character, and Lewald grapples with the thought of parting from the vivacity of southern life. From Marseilles a quick trip through Lyon and Geneva brings her after less than three days to Bern, where she declares her Rome journey ended: “Und mein dritter, mein einsamer Römerzug ist nun beendet. – – Möchten die Erinnerungen an denselben, die ich in diesen Briefen festzuhalten suchte, Ihnen lieb sein, so wie mir”²²² (*Reisebriefe* 375). Although Lewald bids farewell here to the memories of her trip and to the readers with whom she has shared them, this letter is not the last of *Reisebriefe*. The book includes eight additional letters written from different places in Switzerland and Germany, which she visited before returning to her house in Berlin. But once she had left Italy and the south, Lewald evidently lost interest in reporting about places and people she experienced during her journey.

²²² “And my third, my lonely flight to Rome is now finished. – – May the memories of the journey, that I have tried to record in these letters, be dear to you as they are to me.”

5.3 “An die deutschen Frauen” (To the German Women): The Last Letters of *Reisebriefe*

Only two of the remaining eight letters of *Reisebriefe* are actual travel letters, in which she describes a few not very well-known small towns in Germany that she found strikingly picturesque. Like the part of the book written before she entered Italy, the section composed after she left the country mostly uses the form of the travel letter to deal with issues that Lewald wanted her readers to take into consideration for the advancement of her homeland. In particular, four of the eight letters are addressed to “the German women,”²²³ and they are occasioned by the two failed attempts to assassinate the German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm I, on May 11 and on June 2, 1878. Both Emil Hoedel, the author of the first attack, and Dr. Karl Nobiling, who shot the German Emperor on the second occasion, seriously wounding him, had had minor contacts with the Social Democratic Party and were later involved in anarchism. But while the act of Emil Hoedel, unemployed and coming from an impoverished background, was at first dismissed as the insane deed of a desperate member of the lower classes, public opinion was shocked that Karl Nobiling, who came from a wealthy family and was part of the cultured élite, having earned a doctorate in political economy, could be culpable of an attempt on the life of the emperor.²²⁴ Germans were stunned that the outrages suffered by

²²³ three letters are entitled “An die deutschen Frauen” (To the German women) and one carries the title “Die Frauen in der Familie und der Sozialismus” (Women in the family and socialism).

²²⁴ “Although the police did not turn up evidence revealing a widespread anarchist-terrorist conspiracy, the fact that Nobiling stated he was driven to complete the task started by Hoedel [...] was sufficient for Chancellor Bismarck to take action. He had already prepared antisocialist legislation but was thus far unable to have the bills passed by the German Reichstag. In the heated atmosphere following the Hoedel and Nobiling attacks, Bismarck dissolved the Reichstag and called for new elections. A more conservative constituency was voted in, and the Socialist Law was passed on 19 October. Designed to halt the spread of socialism in Germany, the law contained provisions prohibiting the publication of socialist books and periodicals, gave the government the authority to close down any organization with socialist, anarchist, or communist orientations, and limited public agitators’ freedom to speak on socialist topics” (Miller 41).

Kaiser Wilhelm I could happen in their country, and Lewald's purpose in these letters was to look for an explanation by pointing out wrong behaviour within society that, in her opinion, had made it possible for such criminal acts to take place within the nation. She argues that, even if the offences against the emperor were isolated crimes committed by immoral individuals, they were nevertheless the sign and product of corruption among the whole society and could be avoided by improving the moral conduct of the country.

The reason why these letters are addressed in particular to German women and not to the whole nation is indirectly explained at the beginning of the first one. Lewald feels that the special relationship she has established with her readers, arising at least in part from her defence of German women and her advocacy for increased educational and employment opportunities for them, entitles her on this sad occasion to remind her female audience of the duties and responsibilities that come with the rights of being recognized as active members of society and full citizens. Lewald once again insists that the main duty for women is to be the core of the family in their educational and caring roles as mothers and housewives because the collective good depends, according to her, on the virtues of individuals and of the families in which they are raised:

Der sittliche Werth eines Volkes hängt von dem sittlichen Werthe seiner einzelnen Bürger, und ganz gewiß nicht zum geringsten Theile von dem sittlichen Werth der Frauen, von dem ernsten Sinn der Mütter, von der Tüchtigkeit der Hausfrauen, von der Sinnesreinheit der Mädchen, mit einem Worte, von dem Geiste ab, den die Frauen in der Familie pflegen. Auf dem tüchtigen Geiste der einzelnen Familie beruht die Tüchtigkeit der Gesammtheit.²²⁵ (*Reisebriefe* 378)

²²⁵ "The moral value of a nation depends on the moral value of each of its citizens, and certainly not in lesser degree on women's moral value, on the earnest sense of the mothers, on the efficiency of the housewives, on the purity of wits of the girls, in a word on the spirit that the women in the family foster. On the sound spirit of each single family relies the efficiency of the whole."

She believes that it is the responsibility of parents to prevent the moral decline of the family and to maintain obedience, order, morality, and civilization among its members. Therefore, if the children of the so called educated classes become guilty of atrocious and disrespectful crimes against the leader of the nation, then parents have to question themselves about what they did or omitted that rendered their children capable of such insolent behaviour. Before she starts her analysis of the habits and customs that in her opinion prejudice family and public morality, Lewald explains why she is fit to accomplish the task of reminding her fellow citizens of their responsibilities:

Ich für mein Theil kann weit zurücksehen in die Vergangenheit. Von mehr als zwei Menschenaltern habe ich ein deutliches Erinnern an persönliche und an allgemeine Zustände, an das Familienleben und an die große Ereignisse der Zeit. Ich habe die Erinnerung einer Hausfrau und zugleich die einer Schriftstellerin, die seit fast vierzig Jahren, mit Guten vereint, bei vielfachem Irren und unter wechselnden Ansichten bemüht gewesen ist, das Gute, das Wahre und das Schöne in ihrem Kreise und in dem Vaterlande fördern zu helfen, so weit ihre Einsicht und ihr Können es ihr möglich machten.²²⁶ (*Reisebriefe* 382)

Lewald presents herself as housewife and writer to show that her long experience in the domestic and the public spheres gives her the authority to address issues that concern both. In the following pages, Lewald suggests to German women what they can do in the domestic sphere to help the country to become a better and greater nation, and she emphasizes the fundamental role that mothers and housewives have in fostering moral values in their children. Because Lewald had the chance to exert an influence in both the domestic and the public spheres, she managed to act as an educator and promote moral

²²⁶ “For my part I can look far back in the past. For more than two generations I have a clear recollection of the personal and general state of things, of family life and the great events of the time. I have a housewife’s memories and at the same time a writer’s, who for almost forty years with other good people and despite numerous mistakes and changing points of view has exerted herself to help fostering the good, the truth, and the beauty in her circle and in her fatherland as far as her understanding and her capabilities have made it possible for her.”

values not only for her own family but for the whole country. In this way she presents herself as an example of the important function that women can have in society as a whole: as educators and advocates of virtuous conduct within the family and, if given the opportunity, within the public sphere as well.

As she points out, her age allows her to compare the current habits and customs with what the situation used to be like a generation or two before. But she specifies that, unlike the majority of older people, she does not think that everything was better in the past, and she starts her argument by recognizing the progress and improvements recently achieved by society. Absolutism, slavery, peonage, and serfdom had been abolished, plagues and famine were less frequent and devastating, wars had become more human, workers' conditions had improved thanks to machines that did most of the fatiguing jobs, the new inventions and scientific discoveries had made life better and easier for everybody, and what in the past was considered as a rare enjoyment reserved for the richest and most privileged people had become a common need even in the lower and poorer classes. Nevertheless, Lewald observes that people were happier and more satisfied in the past, and she suggests that the reason is that the goals pursued in the past were idealistic and full of faith, while in her time people had started to strive for materialistic and creedless purposes, incessantly and quickly passing from one desire to the next. Lewald argues that idealists are not dreamers because they pursue the fulfilment of their moral ideals in the reality of life. They are able to put aside their own wishes in order to obtain a greater good for all and, in this way, they can reach satisfaction and happiness. Materialists, on the other hand, pursue the satisfaction of their personal desires in a society kept together only by the enforcement of law, where each individual

considers their own gratification as the highest goal. Because their demands constantly regenerate and increase, materialists can never be satisfied. According to Lewald, in the past parents were idealists and believers, because they used to teach their children to have faith in a God who spoke through the conscience and, at the end of the day, would reward or punish them in accordance with their actions. Children could look up to an ideal man who sacrificed himself to save humanity, and they were taught to practise the ideal rule of loving their neighbours as themselves, rather than learning the laws of natural science, according to which individuals have to fight for survival. Lewald believes that parents should keep on educating their children according to the precepts of Christian morality and through the great historic examples of patriotism and self-sacrifice in the past, so that young people can learn to aspire to something more important than material possessions. She concludes the letter by doubting that children's upbringing in her current time can be considered as strict and earnest as it used to be in the past.

The following letter is more directly addressed to German women, who are accused by Lewald of being inconstant and inconsistent in their desire to do good and pursue a wise way of life. She observes that, during the war, German women demonstrated that they were capable of much efforts and self-denial, but because they had not been educated for persistent and coherent work, they later proved to lack strong will and good sense in their conduct. Lewald criticizes in particular women belonging to the bourgeois families, who had recently and rapidly become extremely rich, for their insensitive ostentation of wealth, which had contributed to increasing discontent among the poor and resentment between the classes. From the big wedding celebration with countless guests and plentiful food and drinks, Lewald describes the typical beginning

and course of life of a rich bourgeois family, pointing out all the empty and foolish displays of wealth: the long and extravagant honeymoon, the parties given by the newlyweds to show their richly furnished house, the money wasted on attending the first night of operas and plays, the costly clothes of the wife, and the large expenditures on the newborn first baby, which would be enough to provide for at least six poor children. She insists that children should not be brought up in the lap of luxury, because this causes them to believe that happiness depends exclusively on wealth. On the contrary, young people must be taught to be neat and obedient: they must learn that they are not allowed to do and have whatever they want, and must show respect to their parents even in the way they address them. She argues that, if children address their parents as 'lieber Vater und liebe Mutter' ('dear Father and dear Mother') as was usual in good middle and working class families, they will later be inclined to honour their 'Vaterland' (fatherland) and 'Mutterspache' (mother tongue) as well, while the French names 'Papa und Mama' ('Daddy and Mummy'), used in some rich households, do not communicate the same degree of respect. Lewald was clearly worried about the changing relations between higher and lower classes and the increasing social conflict. For this reason, she urges the well-off families to become more considerate towards the lower classes and to set an example for them by being modest and sparing in their households and strict in their children's upbringing.

In the following letter, she comments on the new quarters built on the outskirts of many cities and inhabited especially by underprivileged people of the lower working classes. Lewald concedes that the living conditions in these quarters were much better than they used to be when disadvantaged people had to live in the less expensive

apartments in the basements or courtyards of town houses. However, she believes that the separation between the rich and the poor brought about an increasing class-consciousness that made relations among people less human and sympathetic. She contends that in the past it was easier for the rich to know if somebody was in need and to offer help, while the poor in return knew how to be of service. In the past, servants, apprentices, and students used to live in the houses of their masters and teachers, and they could learn from the good example offered by the family life of their superiors to become in turn sensible heads of family. In her current time, on the other hand, she observes that a young man wants to be independent from his employer and his kin; he works for wages, but at the end of the day of work, he wants to consider himself equal to his master. Lewald realizes that it is impossible to go back to the past, but she is convinced that it is women's duty to take care of the needs of the less privileged and to strive for maintaining compassionate relations among people:

In diese patriarchalischen Verhältnisse können wir leider nicht mehr zurückkehren. Aber gerade den Frauen liegt die Pflicht ob, durch werkhätige Theilnahme von Person zu Person, die Entfremdung der Menschen untereinander zu verhüten. Wie dies anzufangen ist, darüber muß jede in ihrem besonderen Kreise und unter ihren besonderen Verhältnissen selber mit sich zu Rathe gehen.²²⁷ (*Reisebriefe* 423)

She refers her readers to her previous works *Osterbriefe für die Frauen* and *Für und Wider die Frauen* where she had already explained to women how to behave towards young female attendants and how to accomplish their share of duties in the family. But she complains that in Germany there were still too many idle women, who constantly looked for all kinds of amusements to escape boredom, while in England women from all

²²⁷ “Unfortunately we cannot go back any more to these patriarchal relations. But to women belongs the responsibility of preventing estrangement among people by an active participation with each person. Everybody must consult themselves and find a way to take this up in their particular circle and according to their special circumstances.”

classes joined charitable associations and used their time productively working for the welfare of the whole society.

In the last of the four letters addressed to German women, Lewald reminds the new generations of the times when it was a crime to sing German patriotic songs and to strive for a united German nation. She describes love for one's country as a religious feeling that needs to be cultivated in families, and thus she encourages German women to be "Priesterinnen"²²⁸ (*Reisebriefe* 427) on the altar of patriotism by teaching children to revere the emperor and to sing traditional national songs. Lewald claims that she does not want to give rules of conduct to her readers,²²⁹ nevertheless in this letter she sums up and repeats the recommendations that she considers more important in the form of exhortations. Women have to protect their houses and their children from immoral images and writings, and they have to encourage young people to read the great national poets. Writers must be responsible for the morality of their works, and they have to refrain from publishing content not suitable for all kinds of audiences. Biographies of great historical figures and patriotic essays should be published in short booklets to be distributed cheaply in the streets, railway stations, and schools, in order to make them available also in the poorest households. Women have to maintain the dignity and unity of marriage and family, forgoing unnecessary extravagances, embracing self-sacrifice, and overcoming their vanity in matters of appearance. In conclusion, Lewald appeals directly to German women urging them to be the backbones of society in their traditional roles as housewives and mothers in the patriarchal family and, if possible, also as benefactresses of the less privileged:

²²⁸ "Priestesses"

²²⁹ "Ich bin weit davon entfernt, Ihnen Lebensregeln geben zu wollen" (*Reisebriefe* 433). ("I am far from wanting to give you rules of conduct.")

Seien Sie Hausfrauen und Mütter in dem Sinne des Wortes, der das Große stets im Auge behält und das Kleinste nicht zu gering hält für seine Beachtung. Adeln Sie Ihr Leben durch Ernst, und ein edles Geschlecht heranzubilden, und erhalten Sie mit eifriger Beflissenheit einen hilfreich fördernden persönlichen Zusammenhang zwischen sich und den weniger gut gestellten, weniger bemittelten, weniger gebildeten Leuten innerhalb Ihres Hauses, und so weit die Hand und das Auge einer Jeden reichen, ohne die Pflichten im eigenen Hause darüber zu versäumen, auch außerhalb desselben. Ein Mann, der ein rechtschaffener Herr in seinem Hause ist, eine Frau, die einem solchen Manne in Gehorsam sich freiwillig unterordnet, die erziehen gute Kinder, gute Dienstboten, wirken durch ihr Beispiel weiter, tiefer als sie glauben. Sie bilden gute Bürger heran und aufbauen in der neuen Generation das Vaterland, wo ihm jetzt Gefahren drohen durch Selbstsucht und durch Leichtsinns. Und somit Jeder an seinem Platze freudigen Muthes an die Arbeit!²³⁰ (*Reisebriefe* 436-437)

Since the purpose of these letters was not to plead for women's rights, but to remind her female audience of their responsibilities and to reprove them for their senseless and inconsiderate behaviours, Lewald insists here on the importance of women's duty in the domestic sphere.

The addressees of these letters were in reality not all the German women, but specifically the women from the wealthy bourgeois classes, who did not need to work for their own maintenance. For this reason, she admits for them the possibility to be active outside of the house for charitable purposes, only provided that they did not fail to accomplish first of all their family obligations. While on the one hand Lewald considered it crucial that women from the lower middle-classes were given increasing educational and employment opportunities to allow them to support themselves and their children in

²³⁰ "May you be housewives and mothers in the sense of the word, who always keep in view the large picture and do not consider the smallest detail too little for their attention. Ennoble your lives through sternness in order to educate a noble generation, and maintain with eager assiduity and by being helpful a personal connection with the less privileged, less well-off, less educated people within your house and, as far as your hand and your eye can reach without neglecting your duties in your own house, also outside of it. A man who is a righteous master in his own house, a woman who voluntarily subordinates herself in obedience to such man, the well brought up children, the good servants produce with their example much wider and deeper effects than you believe. They form good citizens and build in the new generation the idea of the fatherland, which is now threatened by danger because of selfishness and foolishness. And in this way each of you should get to work in their own place with joyful spirit."

case of necessity, on the other hand she feared that the extreme affluence of the higher middle-classes would make women idle, interested only in amusements and neglectful of their domestic duties. To all the women she suggests that the most important (and in the majority of the cases the only possible) way to realize themselves as individuals was within the bourgeois norm of the patriarchal family, through hard work and by fulfilling at best the duties connected with their primary roles as wives and mothers. According to Lewald, this was also the only way for women to show that they were pivotal in the development of society, since they were the educators of the new generations and their important responsibility was to hand down to the youth fundamental values like self-sacrifice and patriotism. By accomplishing their essential tasks in the family, women could demonstrate that they deserved to be considered citizens of the country to all intents and purposes and to have access to equal rights and opportunities especially regarding education. Moreover, by proving that they were up to the central role that they had in the family, women could aspire to extend their influence and activities to the public sphere, for example, by promoting relations and mutual help among people from different classes through charitable organizations, or by acting as educators for the whole society, as Lewald herself had done through her literary works.

Once again, Lewald presents herself as a model of femininity, and she stages her own life experiences as an example that women can follow to achieve self-realization and be useful for the whole society. She does not urge women to pursue their emancipation through a radical restructuring of gender relations that would allow them to take fully part in all the spheres – as advocated by the radical wing of the feminist movement. Instead, she encourages women to strive to fulfil their potential within the boundaries of the

patriarchal family as she had supposedly done herself, valuing and accomplishing first of all her primary domestic duties as daughter, wife, and mother, and only in the second place her career as a writer. As a matter of fact, in her youth Lewald had broken with the dominant social conventions by refusing a marriage of convenience, leaving her father's house to travel and to pursue a working career as a writer, and conducting an affair with a married man. As previously stated, the recognized approval she had managed to achieve as a writer and her final marriage with the man she had chosen for herself turned her life into a story of success. In her mature works Lewald capitalized on her experiences, writing to educate and advise other women and lecturing them about the possibility of pursuing happiness and self-realization in their domestic roles without breaking with social conventions. To this end, in *Reisebriefe* she downplays the fact that in her youth she had chosen her personal aspirations over her traditional domestic duties, and she emphasizes, instead, her image as a contented housewife, showing at the same time that she was living up to the dominant patriarchal ideals.

In one of the letters addressed to the German women Lewald declares that she is not nostalgic of the former times, yet she constantly uses her own past, her family life and education, the patriotism and the social relations as she had experienced them in the course of her life as the point of reference according to which she measures and judges her current times. For example, she writes that in her own family and at school she had learned the fundamental educational principle of obedience, and she remembers how her mother had taught her to address her parents with respect and to sing patriotic songs. To prove how much the aspiration to material possessions had increased, she observes that, in spite of the fact that her father was a fairly prosperous wine dealer, fifty years before in

her family's house they did not own many of the things that in her current days were considered absolutely necessary even in the households of the working classes. As for her own relation with wealth, she confesses that, because she has always had to earn to support herself and to save for the days in which she would not have been able to work, the sumptuous banquets and the expensive dresses of the rich people have often made her think of the days and months she could have lived abundantly with the money wasted for such superfluous luxuries. Thus, she considers how much more offensive and inconsiderate these foolish displays of wealth by the rich must appear to indigent people. Lewald represents herself as a member of the bourgeoisie, who had been brought up in the sternness of morals and ideals of the previous generations, had witnessed the middle classes' strenuous efforts to obtain national unity, democracy, and equality of rights, and had lived long enough to proudly enjoy the partial actualization of these goals. As she points out, her lifelong experience observing the state of things in her country had gained her a perspective on the present, while her desire to promote "das Gute, das Wahre und das Schöne"²³¹ (*Reisebriefe* 382) in her nation moved her to urge her fellow citizens. According to her, the final achievement of national unity and the rapid transformations that had occurred in the meantime in the structure of society and in the relations among classes had created a sense of disorientation in the country, and thus Germans needed to be reminded of fundamental moral values and rules of conduct.

In agreement with the famous motto attributed to the Italian patriot and statesman Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866) – "L'Italia è fatta. Ora restano da fare gli Italiani" ("We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.") – Lewald believed that her German compatriots were not quite mature citizens. In spite of the fact that Germany was finally a

²³¹ "the good, the truth, and the beauty"

united country, the national identity of its inhabitants had yet to take shape. She was convinced that in this process the educated middle classes must be the pillars of society and set the example for the other classes by being model citizens of the newly formed state. But while in the past the aspiration to a united country and the struggle for the actualization of the liberal ideals had contributed to define the character and the values of the middle classes, the partial achievement of those goals, the increasing economic disparity among representatives of the same class, and the lack of a serious common purpose created questions both of class and of national identity. The attempt on the life of the emperor by a German representative of the bourgeoisie stood as proof of a crisis of values and called for a reconsideration of middle-class political ideals.

The whole *Reisebriefe* is deeply imbued with discourses of Germanness and of bourgeois morals, which are in turn tightly intertwined with Lewald's discussion of gender related issues. The directness of the form of the journalistic travel letter and the fact that the main destination of the journey was Italy – a country whose culture and political situation Lewald knew very well and whose process for the achievement of national unity presented many points of contact with Germany – allowed her to address agendas that went beyond the traditional travel description. In *Reisebriefe* her self-stylization as a sensitive housewife is instrumental in conveying the moderate views on the question of women's emancipation that she had developed in her maturity and wanted to pass along. At the same time, her avowals of attachment to domestic life must be considered as a reassurance of her own femininity and of her compliance with the dominant patriarchal ideals, in spite of her working activity and of her unconventional past. Likewise, her self-representation as a member of the former middle class, who

believed in their ideals and participated in their struggles, serves her purpose of reminding her fellow citizens of their origin and identity, making them proud of their past accomplishments and committed to the advancement of their country. She clearly assumes that her readers belonged, like herself, to the middle classes, and thus she generally employs a condescending tone when she refers to servants and representatives of the lower classes. The use of a rather confidential tone to address her audience aims to create a sense of class belonging, while the juxtaposition with Italian culture and history helps her to define by contrast the notion of German national identity she wanted to promote. Furthermore, Lewald's image as a champion of patriotism and her insistence on advocating national and moral values can be considered as a way of reaffirming her own German identity, downplaying the fact that, because of her Jewish origin, she belonged strictly speaking to a marginalized minority that had suffered centuries of social and legal restrictions in the German territories. Until unification in 1871, even the most assimilated and economically powerful German Jews were subjected to such restrictions, whose consequences Lewald and her family had personally experienced as well as episodes of anti-Semitism. In 1842 she had published the novel *Jenny* that dealt with themes of Jewish emancipation, and in 1848 she had supported the ideals of the revolution, which for the first time gave also to German Jews the opportunity to take part in politics. Legal equality for Jews was gradually introduced in Prussia and in the other German regions in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and the unified Germany finally granted it in 1871-72.²³² The recognition of legal equality to Jews together with the

²³² New waves of anti-Semitism, however, continued to surface periodically in Germany especially as a result of economic crises. See Chris Weedon, *Gender, Feminism and Fiction in Germany, 1840-1914*. 151-157. The progressive development of streams of German nationalism and of waves of anti-Semitism deeply influenced the reception of Lewald's literary works in the decades after her death. See Ruth Whittle, "The

creation of the German nation-state represented the major achievements of the social and political process of democratization that Lewald had witnessed during her life, and she was undoubtedly eager to be considered an insider and to show her devotion to a country that had finally abolished any distinction between German and Jewish citizens.

In brief, in *Reisebriefe* Lewald intervenes to redefine the role and the place of women in the family and in the wider society, dealing at the same time with the class specific morality and set of ideals that in her opinion have to constitute the meaning and the essence of the national identity in the newly created Germany. The form of the travel account allows her to portray a representation of her own identity that matches the ideas she wanted to pass along, downplaying the aspects of her life that deviate from the norm she wanted to establish. As I have argued, in *Reisebriefe* she not only educates and instructs her readers, but she also has the chance to restore her own image, showing her compliance with the domestic, bourgeois, and patriotic ideals that once she had challenged and that towards the end of her life she wanted to be considered to live up to.

The last letter of *Reisebriefe* is entitled “In meinen vier Wänden” (“Within my four walls”) and is written from Lewald’s house in Berlin. This ending seems almost a way to reconfirm her message that for all the women the conclusion of every journey and the only place to come back to is necessarily home, in spite of the great and important things that they can achieve outside the domestic sphere. And in the last image of the book, Lewald represents herself as happy in her house in the presence of the objects that she had found it hard to leave behind, and busy at work in her own place. She urges every

Reception of Women’s Political Writing about the 1848 Revolution in the Context of the German Search for Identity.” 263-282.

woman and every German to adopt the same attitude and to keep happily busy in their occupations to secure a prosperous future for their country.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

It has been observed that “in the medley of a travel account, everything can potentially be included which the traveller/writer sees fit” (Korte 5). In the open and hybrid form of travel writing, the authors discussed in this study found the room and freedom to address ‘a whole world’ of issues, questions, and subject matters that reveal not only their cultural identities as women but also the complex and evolving texture of the societies and times they were living in.

In the travel writing examined in this study we find evidence of the societal pressures exerted on nineteenth-century women as a result of the sexual ideology of the time and the norms of middle-class behaviour and morals. The self-representation of some of these writers in traditionally domestic roles, such as that of a mother for Shelley and of a model housewife for Lewald, bespeaks in part their desire to comply with dominant feminine ideals. Yet these self-stylizations in conventional feminine roles also have specific rhetorical functions for the messages that these authors wanted to convey in their travel works. In *Rambles*, Shelley portrays herself in her role as mother in order to foreground the pedagogical purpose of the book, while in *Reisebriefe* Lewald represents herself as a sensible and thrifty housewife to reinforce and promote the values and class identity of the German bourgeoisie at a time of rising political and social conflicts.

All the writers presented in this study make use to a lesser or greater extent of the conventions and strategies commonly employed in women’s travel writing to underscore

the womanliness and modesty of their authors. In particular, all of them downplay the value and the merits of their works, pointing out their fragmentary, superficial or “gossiping” (*Rambles* 1: viii) character and referring to them as “little book[s]” (*Italics* 11; *Florenz* 40). The convention of demonstrative modesty, however, appears in most of the cases as an empty rhetorical device employed without conviction as a sort of lip-service to the notion of appropriate femaleness. And Cobbe seems to resort to this convention mainly to mock the disparaging and patronizing language often used by contemporary male reviewers of women’s writing. The modesty and self-effacement that these writers at times display in the introductory pages of their works are at odds with the assertive and confident tone they use when they present their opinions on Italian art, customs, and society, or when they argue in favour of their convictions on politics, religion, and women’s emancipation. While they comply with the necessary conventions of their time, these authors are nevertheless aware of the value of their works and eager to display the cultural competence acquired through their travel experiences.

In particular their discussions of topics such as politics and religion which at the time were usually considered the proper domain of men, their criticism of their own country, and their advocacy of women’s rights must be interpreted as intentionally subversive acts. By intervening in matters typically outside the purview of women, these writers expand the female sphere of influence beyond the home and into matters of public import. Whereas Shelley and Lewald believed that women could expand their range of action and contribute to the improvement of humanity from within their domestic roles as wives and mothers, acting in the first place as guides and educators for their own families, Schopenhauer and Cobbe found in Italy alternative ways for single women to

employ their lives in productive and meaningful occupations. For all of them, however, their travel writing about Italy constitutes a conscious public statement about their identities as writers and as travellers, through which they intended to dispute the current sexual ideology and promote the acceptance of women in unconventional public roles.

In *Unfolding the South*, Chapman and Stabler argue that “in the nineteenth century, [...] assisted by the rapid growth of affordable transport to the continent, Italy became a utopian space for women” (4). In particular Chapman and Stabler suggest that “Italy is an imaginative and liberating space of possibilities and revelations, opening up the ‘travelling heart’ to new experiences, pleasures and subjectivities” (11). This is certainly true for the women writers examined in this study. Their fascination with the country, often depicted as a sort of paradise, exudes from the pages of their travel books, and the passages in which they endeavour to convey their enthusiasm for Italian landscape, vegetation, art, climate, and people are amongst the most charming of these texts.

Italy, however, does not represent only “a utopian space” for these authors. In spite of its ideal beauty and attractions, between 1840 and 1880 Italy was a country afflicted by many social and political problems and plagued by backwardness, resulting from centuries of political and religious despotism. In all the works examined in this study, the authors display an open-minded and sympathetic attitude towards Italy and its inhabitants, demonstrating a genuine desire to understand the situation of the country in order to be able to explain it to their readers and to inspire in them good-will towards the Peninsula. For all these women writers, Italy represented also the yardstick against which they measured their own countries. The enthusiasm with which they describe the efforts

of the Italians to free themselves from foreign despotism and the satisfaction with which they salute the rapid improvements achieved by the country after its unification are often accompanied by commentaries on the state of things in their own nations. While they evaluate and describe the Italian process of nation-building, they obliquely assess the sets of values on which they define their own ‘Englishness’ and ‘Germanness’ respectively. In her Preface to *Rambles*, for example, Shelley reminds her audience that what characterized England was its foundation on long-lived “free institutions” and that it was therefore a moral obligation for Englishmen to support the spreading of democracy in the countries that had been inspired by its example (*Rambles* 1: xi). In *Reisebriefe*, Lewald reminds her German readers of their heroic past and attempts to instil in them, through a comparison of the formation of the Italian and German nation-states, a renewed sense of patriotism and national identity.

As Elizabeth Eastlake suggests in her 1845 essay “Lady Travellers”, nineteenth-century travel writing by German and English women reveals much about national ideologies and identities. But just as importantly it speaks to the transformation taking place in women’s role in society in both Germany and England. By broadening its purpose beyond mere description, each of the writers – Shelley, Schopenhauer, Cobbe, and Lewald – breathed new life into the form of travel writing. Freed from the confines of their homes, countries, and cultures, these writers explored through travel writing the possibility of reimagining and expanding the boundaries of women’s sphere of influence.

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