

# The Reception of Byron in Europe

Volume I: Southern Europe, France and Romania

Edited by Richard Gardwell



The Athlone Critical Traditions Series:  
The Reception of British Authors in Europe

Series Editor: Elinor Shaffer  
School of Advanced Study, University of London

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Volume I: Southern Europe, France  
and Romania**

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THOEMMES CONTINUUM  
*A Continuum imprint*  
LONDON • NEW YORK

First published 2004 by  
Thoemmes Continuum

The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX  
15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010

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Series concept and Series Editor's Preface © Elinor Shaffer

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 0-8264-6844-6

**Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

The reception of Byron in Europe/edited by Richard Cardwell.

p. cm.—(The Athlone critical traditions series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents: v. 1. Southern Europe, France, and Romania—v. 2. Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe.

ISBN 0-8264-6844-6

1. Byron, George Gordon Byron, Baron, 1788–1824—Criticism and interpretation—History.
2. Byron, George Gordon Byron, Baron, 1788–1824—Influence.
4. European literature—English influences.
5. Europe—Relations—Great Britain.
6. Great Britain—Relations—Europe. I. Cardwell, Richard Andrew II. Series.

PR4387. 4. E85R43 2004  
821'.7—dc22

2004051752

Typeset by Tradespools, Frome, Somerset  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG, Bodmin, Cornwall

# Contents

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## Volume I

- Series Editor's Preface *Elinor Shaffer* viii
- Acknowledgements xiii
- List of Contributors xiv
- Abbreviations xx
- Timeline: European Reception of Byron** xxi  
*Richard A. Cardwell and Paul Barnaby*
- Introduction** 1  
*Richard A. Cardwell*
- French**
- 1 **'Infernal Magnetism': Byron and Nineteenth-Century French Readers** 11  
*Joanne Wilkes*
- 2 **From Pichot to Stendhal to Musset: Byron's Progress Through Early Nineteenth-Century French Literature** 32  
*Peter Cochran*
- Swiss**
- 3 **'A Meteor in the Sky of Literature': Byron and Switzerland** 71  
*Ernest Giddey*
- Italian**
- 4 **The Fortunes of Byron in Italy (1810–70)** 80  
*Edoardo Zuccato*
- 5 **Translation, Biography, Opera, Film and Literary Criticism: Byron and Italy after 1870** 98  
*Giovanni Iamartino*

## **Spanish**

- 6 **'The Immortal Byron' in Spain: Radical and Poet of the Sublime** 129  
*Derek Flitter*

- 7 **'El Lord Sublime': Byron's Legacy in Spain** 144  
*Richard A. Cardwell*

## **Portuguese**

- 8 **'Tempting Demon': The Portuguese Byron** 164  
*Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa*

## **Romanian**

- 9 **The Byron Phenomenon in Romanian Culture** 188  
*Mihaela Anghelescu Irimia*

Bibliography 199

## **Volume II**

Abbreviations viii

## **German**

- 10 **The Reception of Byron in the German-Speaking Lands** 235  
*Frank Erik Pointner and Achim Geisenhanslüke*

## **Dutch**

- 11 **'A Splenetic Englishman': The Dutch Byron** 269  
*Theo D'haen*

## **The Czech Lands**

- 12 **Byron in Czech Culture** 283  
*Martin Procházka*

## **Polish**

- 13 **Pilgrimage or Revolt?: The Dilemmas of Polish Byronism** 305  
*Miroslawa Modrzewska*

## **Hungarian**

- 14 **'This Century Found Its Voice in Him': Some Aspects of the 'Byron Phenomenon' in the Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Literary Criticism** 316  
*Orsolya Rákai*

<b>Russian</b>	
15	<b>'No Great Mind and Generous Heart Could Avoid Byronism': Russia and Byron</b> 333 <i>Nina Diakonova and Vadim Vatsuro</i>
<b>Bulgarian</b>	
16	<b>Images of Byron in Bulgaria</b> 353 <i>Vitana Kostadinova</i>
<b>Danish</b>	
17	<b>'Look to the Baltic': Byron between Romanticism and Radicalism in Denmark</b> 365 <i>Jørgen Erik Nielsen</i>
<b>Norwegian</b>	
18	<b>'Lover of Freedom and Teacher of Nations': Byron's Reception in Norway</b> 375 <i>Bjørn Tysdahl</i>
<b>Swedish</b>	
19	<b>'Dissolve All Dissonance': The Fortunes of Byron in Sweden</b> 381 <i>Ingrid Elam</i>
<b>Armenian</b>	
20	<b>Byron and Armenia: A Case of Mirrored Affinities</b> 386 <i>Anahit Bekaryan</i>
<b>Georgian</b>	
21	<b>Liberty and Freedom and the Georgian Byron</b> 406 <i>Innes Merabishvili</i>
<b>Greek</b>	
22	<b>A 'Very Life in ... Despair in the Land of Honourable Death': Byron and Greece</b> 419 <i>Litsa Trayiannoudi</i>
<b>Turkish</b>	
23	<b>Byron, Turkey and the Orient</b> 439 <i>Massimiliano Demata</i>
	Bibliography 453
	Index 480

# 5 Translation, Biography, Opera, Film and Literary Criticism: Byron and Italy after 1870

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Giovanni Iamartino

## I

The year 1870 might readily be chosen as an apt divide between the early and late reception of Byron's works in Italy. In fact, the chain of events immediately preceding and following that date mark a turning point in Italian political and social history. The intertwining of socio-political and literary issues has been made clear in Edoardo Zuccato's study in this volume on the early reception of Byron in Italy. Thus, it will come as no surprise to discover that a new political climate and literary sensibility gave rise to a different, that is, a more balanced and detached, reception of Lord Byron's works in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italy.

In 1861 the Piedmontese sovereign, Vittorio Emanuele II, was proclaimed King of Italy; Venetia and the Papal States remaining the only territories outside his control. The annexation of Venetia came in the aftermath of the 1866 war between Austria and Prussia, when Italy joined forces with Prussia in the so-called Third War of Independence, whereas the Italian troops entered Rome in 1870 as a consequence of the war between France and Prussia of the same year. Although many political, economic and social problems were still to be faced and solved, the unified Italy of the late nineteenth century was the felicitous culmination of the Risorgimento movement and of its struggle for national independence and a unified country.

Byron's figure and works, therefore, lost most, if not all, of their extra-literary appeal after 1870: his fight for personal and political freedom and his death as a martyr for liberty were no longer celebrated as it was no longer necessary to stir people to action against foreign powers. Censorship was no longer exercised on his works, their appearance in Italian translations did not arouse heated argument. Moreover, from a more specifically literary point of view the debate between Classicists and Romantics – when Byron had been used as an offensive or defensive weapon by the opposing parties – had subsided and his name was hardly, if ever, mentioned in the literary *querelles* of the following decades.

The history of Byron's later reception in Italy, therefore, is very different from the preceding one. With the exception of the uninterrupted flow of

translations of his works, the decades after 1870 manifested a novel and continuing interest in the places where Byron had lived, his life and the people – the women, especially – he had met in Italy, while the waning of Byronism as a literary and cultural phenomenon was counterbalanced by the rise of modern literary criticism of the poet's works.

## II

### Translations of Byron

When dealing with the Italian translations of Byron's works that were published in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italy, it has to be admitted that it is virtually impossible to trace and list all of them: apart from pirated editions and privately printed ones,<sup>1</sup> the same translation was often reprinted in different editions by the same or different publishers. Moreover, an Italian edition of Byron's Complete or Selected Works was often produced by assembling various translations by different translators or, vice versa, the most popular texts from a Complete Works edition were often reprinted individually. Instead of aiming at bibliographical exhaustiveness,<sup>2</sup> therefore, the available data will be used to make a thumbnail sketch of Byron's translated works in the period under scrutiny here and to draw some conclusions on his Italian reception.

What must first be noted and stressed is the continuity between the pre-1870 production and the published translations of the following decades. In fact, the various editions of Byron's Complete Works that appeared between 1875 and the Second World War (and occasionally even later) all relied on early and mid-nineteenth century versions: for instance, the Neapolitan edition of Byron (1875a) still reproduced the early nineteenth-century translations by Giuseppe Gazzino, Michele Leoni, Giuseppe Nicolini and others. This was not a disincentive to the purchase of the book, since the same translations were later reprinted by several Neapolitan publishers, among them

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<sup>1</sup> Although a royal decree of 17 February 1861 imposed copyright laws in southern Italy too – now a part of a unified country – pirated cheap reprints were still being produced and sold. For a survey of the book trade since the unification of Italy, see Turi (1997) and Ragone (1999). As an example of a privately printed edition of a poem by Byron, see the anonymous 1875 leaflet *Per le nozze della signorina Antonietta Negroni Prati col nobile Giorgio Casati* (For the nuptials of Miss Antonietta Negroni Prati with the nobleman Giorgio Casati) which includes an Italian edition of the *Lament of Tasso*.

<sup>2</sup> The bibliographical data on late-nineteenth-century translations of Byron's works refer to the editions listed in *CLIO* (1991, vol. 1). Since there is no comparable bibliography for the twentieth century, my list was compiled by collecting data from the archives and card indexes of various libraries in Milan and elsewhere in Italy, as well as the historical and current catalogues of the most important Italian publishing houses. Although I have not been able to consult every single bibliographical item included in my list, the available secondary literature on the Italian reception of Byron's works has often helped me to piece the bibliographical facts together.

Perrone (Byron 1887a) and Bideri (Byron 1891a; 1900).<sup>3</sup> Another striking example of an edition that made use of the same, previous and well-known translations, while bridging an even larger timespan, is the five-volume Byron (1852–53), reprinted in 1858–59, and again in 1917, 1922 and 1926.<sup>4</sup>

If one is looking for different translators and new translations then, the late-nineteenth-century Italian editions of Byron's selected or single, rather than complete, works should be considered. A case in point is Andrea Maffei – famous in his time for his versions of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust* and Schiller's plays – a translator who rendered many of Byron's works, versions which were frequently published after the translator's death in 1885. Though no more than a decent versifier, Maffei adopted and followed a successful strategy: after translating *Cain* (Byron 1852), *Heaven and Earth* (Byron 1853a), *The Prisoner of Chillon* and 'Darkness' (Byron 1853b) in the 1850s – none of them very popular at that time – he was shrewd enough to enlarge Byron's Italian canon by rendering works that had been neglected by the poet's early translators: the dramas *Sardanapalus*, *Marino Faliero* and *The Two Foscari* (Byron 1862). Once he had made himself accepted and admired as a translator of Byron's historical tragedies, Maffei widened the scope of his translations by republishing his early versions together with his new translations of those poems that still had the widest appeal in Italy. As a result, Maffei's translations were brought out by three different publishers in an impressive sequence. In his successful Florentine edition of 1868 (Byron 1868) Maffei cunningly mixed the less popular and palatable *Cn* and *HE* with some of the well-known tales. Moreover, after his version of *M* (Byron 1870a), he turned the Byronic clock back some fifty years by translating and publishing his *Pellegrinaggio del Giovane Aroldo* (Young Harold's Pilgrimage) and more Oriental Tales (Byron 1872; 1874; 1882a; 1883; 1884a). Both the latest Hoepli editions (Byron 1886 and 1887b) and the Le Monnier late reprints of *Misteri e novelle* (Mysteries and tales) were published after the translator's death in 1885.

Andrea Maffei's work is representative of the Italian translators' and readership's attitude to Byron's poems in the late nineteenth century: the traditional, time-honoured appreciation of the British lord's narrative poetry coexists with the desire to explore his whole canon. On the one hand, a strong sense of continuity is provided, for example, by an edition of Byron's poems and tales (Byron 1882b), which was taken over in the same year by another Milanese publisher who reissued it many times between 1882 and 1957 as a volume in his series *Biblioteca Universale Sonzogno* (Byron 1882c). On the other hand, those decades also witnessed the first attempts at an Italian poetic translation of *Don Juan*. The challenge was first met, though only partially, by the poet Vittorio Betteloni (1840–1910), who translated the Haidée episode

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<sup>3</sup> Only rarely can some adjustments be discerned: for instance, Pasquale Perrone published his own translation of *Manfred* in Byron (1887a) while the publisher Bideri used an anonymous translation of *Manfred* for his Byron (1891a) edition and returned to Carlo Rusconi's nineteenth-century translation (in Byron 1840–42) for his 1924 reprint.

<sup>4</sup> These editions are mentioned and commented on in Zuccato's essay in this volume.

(Byron 1875b). The following year the Milanese publisher Natale Battezzati brought out Enrico Casali's complete translation in octaves (Byron 1876a). Another partial translation by Betteloni (Byron 1880a) and a sample version from the Third Canto translated and published by Giovanni Danelli (Byron 1880b) were followed by a metrical version by Angelo Calvino (Byron 1891b) and, finally, by Betteloni's complete *Don Giovanni* (Byron 1897), certainly the best nineteenth-century Italian *DJ*, a translation that was often to be reprinted in the following century.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, Byron's Italian canon was virtually complete.<sup>6</sup> Those of Byron's works first translated into Italian after the end of the nineteenth century are rare. Two notable examples are the Italian versions of *Hebrew Melodies* (Byron 1901) and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (Byron 1935). The translations that have not been mentioned so far, those published between 1870 and the end of the Second World War, might figure within one of the following categories.

1. Quite a number of late-nineteenth- or early twentieth-century translators, even when less dedicated than Maffei or less talented than Betteloni, were instrumental in presenting to their Italian readership those poems by Byron which had been translated in the early nineteenth century but not subsequently reprinted. Consider, for example, the following: a) Guglielmo Godio's first published

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<sup>5</sup> Although the critical reception of Byron's works will be dealt with in a subsequent section of the present survey, this is perhaps the place to point out that translators were not usually influenced by critics in their choice of works to be translated. At least, this can be inferred, for example, from the opinion expressed by the critic Giacomo Zanella in the period when the first Italian translations of *DJ* were being made and published: 'Just as *The Prisoner of Chillon* and *Mazeppa* are more beautiful than the other works, they do not offend morals at all. It is a bad sign of present opinions and mores that the most widely read and admired of his poems is nowadays *Don Juan*' ('*Il Prigioniero di Chillon* ed il *Mazeppa* come avanzano gli altri componimenti in bellezza, così non offendono in parte alcuna il senso morale. E' brutto indizio delle opinioni e de' costumi presenti, che oggi il più letto ed ammirato de' suoi poemi sia il *Don Giovanni*', Zanella 1887, 35). When not stated otherwise, the English translations of Italian critical and literary excerpts are mine.

<sup>6</sup> Secondary evidence of this situation is provided by a kind of annotated bibliography where the best Italian books are recommended by one hundred famous writers and scholars (Anon. 1892); a passage from it runs as follows in my translation: 'Among the foreign authors, of whom an Italian translation is recommended, Darwin and Shakespeare come first, with 16 and 11 votes respectively; these are followed by such German authors as Schiller, with 7 votes, Goethe and Humboldt, both with 6 votes, while no other foreign author got the same number of votes' ('Degli autori stranieri di cui si raccomandano le traduzioni italiane primeggiano Darwin con 16 voti, e Shakespeare con 11, poi i tedeschi Schiller con 7, Goethe e Humboldt con 6, mentre nessun altro autore straniero ebbe un'eguale votazione', Anon. 1892, VII). What emerges from these statistics is that Italian readers apparently do not need any translations from Byron's works, probably because there are so many of them and, possibly, because Byron no longer figures among the favoured reading lists of the Italian intelligentsia at the end of the century.

translation of *LT* (Byron 1873a) after Pietro Isola's early nineteenth-century rendering.<sup>7</sup> b) Ignazio Virzì preceded Maffei in bringing out his translation of *Maz* (Byron 1876b), then only available in the older editions of Nicolini. c) Giuseppe Mannelli's translation of *Oscar of Alva* was reprinted in 1887 after it had appeared thirty years before (Byron 1857).<sup>8</sup> d) *The Prophecy of Dante* was first translated and published earlier in the century by Michele Leoni and others, and in the 1850s by Giovanni Giovio and Melchiorre Missirini.<sup>9</sup> The same poem reappeared in 1904, now translated into Italian tercets (Byron 1904).<sup>10</sup>

2. The publication of new versions of well-known and easily available translations can only be ascribed to a translator's (often, an amateur translator's) wish to display his skills and/or to a publisher's (often, a minor publisher's) wish to carve out a niche for himself in a steady market. Such is the case with *The Corsair* translated by both Luigi Serenelli Honorati (Byron 1870b) and Carlo Rosnati (Byron 1879); *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by Carlo Faccioli (Byron 1873b), and 'Darkness' by Filippo Chiarella (Byron 1880c).
3. Some of the best-selling texts by Lord Byron, in either old or new translations, once more caught the Italian readers' attention when published in a successful book series, often with expressly commissioned forewords and notes, and sometimes with parallel English and Italian texts. The Biblioteca Universale Sonzogno (Sonzogno Universal Library, Milan) is a case in point. This series has already been mentioned apropos of a long-selling miscellaneous edition of *Poemi e novelle*, number 8 in the series (Byron 1882c), later including a prose *S* as number 77 (Byron 1884b). Around 1915 there appeared a new Italian edition of Byron's *DJ* in the series *Gli Immortali e altri massimi scrittori* (The immortals, and other very great writers) published by the Istituto Editoriale Italiano of Milan. This two-volume edition (Byron 1915?) made use of Betteloni's version and also included the Italian translation of Hippolyte Taine's well-known essay on Byron in addition to Betteloni's foreword. In the years immediately before and after the first centenary of Byron's death, the Biblioteca Sansoniana Straniera (Sansoni foreign library, Florence) published parallel-text editions of *Cn* (Byron 1922), *Parisina* and *PC* (Byron 1923), *M* (Byron 1924) and *CHP* (Byron 1924–25). More recently, the Collana di Traduzioni: I Grandi Scrittori Stranieri (Translation series: great foreign writers) by UTET of Turin issued a volume comprising *The Giaour*, *Lara*, *HM*, and *Cn* (Byron 1932a) and a further volume of Byron's historical tragedies: *MF*, *S* and *TF* (Byron 1956).

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<sup>7</sup> Godio's translation of *LT* was published together with some of his own poems. For Pietro Isola, see the relevant passage in Zuccato's essay.

<sup>8</sup> Mannelli's translation had been preceded by that of Pietro Gencrini (Byron 1842).

<sup>9</sup> Leoni's work is dealt with in Zuccato's essay. The other translations mentioned are Byron (1856) and Byron (1858).

<sup>10</sup> A few years later, Agostino Bartolini published his translation of *PD*, Canto the First (Byron 1911).

The real break with the nineteenth-century tradition of Italian renderings of Byron's works took place after the Second World War. The evolution of the Italian literary language and a new sensibility made the old translations unusable. Some of the translations were republished, their quality making them exceptionally resistant to the wearing effect of time or as part of a conscious antiquarian fashion. The new translations were no longer commissioned to meet the demands of a cultivated and relatively large audience, rather the select readerships of local history enthusiasts or university students. As a consequence, the traditional figure of the well-read but amateur translator was replaced by a more competent specialist, very often a teacher or university professor of English literature.

These assertions can be substantiated by referring to some Italian late-twentieth-century translations of *DJ*: Vittorio Betteloni's translation of an abridged *Don Giovanni* was first published in 1880 (Byron 1880a) but often reprinted up until 1980 (Byron 1939). Professor Attilio Brilli used the same translation for his edition of *DJ* (Byron 1982), but including only the first four cantos. This was followed by three very different translations: in 1987 a small publishing house, Zanetti of Montichiari (near Brescia), published a complete prose translation of *DJ* (Byron 1987a); in 1991 a selection from *DJ* was brought out by Newton Compton Editori of Rome (the publisher of low-cost, popular editions) and in 1992 the major publisher, Rizzoli, issued Giuliano Dego's sophisticated poetic translation of *DJ*, Canto Primo (Byron 1992a).

A similar coexistence of different interests, levels of competence and prospective readerships is often found in various late-twentieth-century Italian translations from Byron's works, especially *M* and *Beppo*. In 1984 Franco Buffoni, a professor of English literature and a poet, published his translation of *M*, with English parallel text and a critical introduction (Byron 1984). Ten years later, the publisher Mursia brought out a new parallel-text edition of *M*, a prose translation apparently meant for students (Byron 1994).<sup>11</sup> More recently, a new translation was published, this time with an eye to the theatre. A prose translation had been completed by Giorgio Manganelli, writer and essayist, for a stage performance of Schumann's *Manfred* that took place in 1966; this was subsequently revived and edited by Luca Scarlini, a drama critic and translator (Byron 2000). *Bo* was translated and edited by Attilio Brilli for his students at Parma University (Byron 1972). Ludovica Koch, a professor of German philology and Scandinavian literatures with a vested interest in translation, included *Bo* in her edition of *Maz*, *Bo* and *The Vision of Judgement* (Byron 1987b), which was in turn followed by a further edition of Byron's *Bo* and *VJ* (Byron 1993a).

Strikingly different editions of *C* met the needs of different types of Italian readers. In the introduction to his translation, *Il Corsaro* (Byron 1963), Giancarlo Monti humbly declared his debt to his critical sources – Maurois (1930) or, more probably, the Italian translation of 1953, and the Byron chapter in Praz (1937) – both very respectable, though limited and somewhat outdated sources; for this reason his prose translation is correspondingly plain,

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<sup>11</sup> Another editor and translator who certainly had secondary school students in mind was Giovanni Salvatore (Byron 1990).

if not uninspired. By contrast Giovanna Franci and Rosella Mangaroni's joint translations of the *Racconti turchi* (OT), comprising *Cn*, *G*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Tale of Calil*, *C*, *L* and *The Siege of Corinth* (Byron 1988),<sup>12</sup> reveal a mature critical awareness since Franci, a university professor of English literature, had a trained ear for the melodramatic-sounding lines of Byron's tales, verses that are rendered into a rhythmic prose not unlike Italian nineteenth-century literary language.

The philologist Francesco Bruni and the English scholar Loretta Innocenti returned to earlier nineteenth-century versions. Their co-edition of *PD* made use of both Michele Leoni's 1821 translation in unrhymed hendecasyllables and Lorenzo da Ponte's terza rima translation of the same year (Byron 1999). By contrast Cesare Dapino translated and edited the shorter poems and lyrics which had been largely neglected – indeed, hardly ever translated if at all – during the first decades of the Italian *fuore* over Byron. The poet's *Domestic Pieces and other poems*, including *HM* and some occasional pieces (Byron 1986a), were now available to the interested reader. *HM* were recently given a new, highly readable translation by Francesca Romana Paci, a university professor of English literature, published in an elegant volume edited by her colleague Carla Pomarè (Byron 2003). The parallel English and Italian texts are followed by brief, interesting comments on the translator's own work and preceded by a lucid, scholarly introduction by the editor.

A brief mention must also be made of the few other editions that were fostered by a local topographical interest in Byron's works. A case in point is Byron's *Poemi ferraresi* (a collection including *P*, *LT*, the stanzas on Ferrara in *CHP*, Canto IV and the 'Stanzas to the Po'), edited by the translator Mario Roffi, with a preface by Professor Masolino d'Amico and an Appendix on the iconographic apparatus of the volume by the art critic and publisher Lucio Scardino (Byron 1986b). Also prompted by a local interest is Vincenzo Pepe's translation and edition of *Hints from Horace* (Byron 1992b), which appeared in Venosa, the small town in the south of Italy where Horace was born.

This present survey of Italian translations from Byron must close with reference to the only ample, though partial edition of Byron's poems published in recent years: the *Opere scelte* (Selected Works) translated and edited by Tomaso Kemeny (Byron 1993b). Kemeny, a professor of English literature and a poet himself, chose to translate single excerpts from most of Byron's works, thus producing a fully representative and truly enjoyable selection.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> As the editors make clear in their introduction, the translation of *Cn* precedes the proper OT as Cain is a symbol of the human condition which is mirrored in the leading characters of Byron's tales (Byron 1988, XII–XIII). From Franci and Mangaroni's edition the same publisher brought out *Il Corsaro* a few years later (Byron 1995).

<sup>13</sup> What remains to be listed in this survey are single poems, fragments or excerpts from Byron's translated texts which were published in a myriad of anthologies. These can either mix authors from different literary traditions (e.g. Maffei 1870; Lo Forte Randi 1903; Betteloni 1946) or focus exclusively on English writers (Wiel 1906 or Frigieri 1944), or even offer a thematic selection (Fornelli 1931 or Kirby 1960). Two recent works deserve a specific, though very brief, mention: in

As a conclusion to this historical and bibliographical presentation, some general comments must be made on the quality of the translations surveyed. A large-scale analysis in a historical perspective will automatically tend to highlight the more general trends and, while appreciating the most original and mould-breaking productions, will explain away the less valuable results as a consequence of the dominating cultural milieu rather than of individual deficiencies. That said, the following conclusions might be drawn from a survey of the available late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian translations of Byron's works.

Prose translations dominate the 'Byron phenomenon'. This is not necessarily a handicap to access Byron since a controlled, economical and rhythmic – in one word, a poetic – prose is often better suited to reproduce the variegated poetic texture of Byron's poems than any pre-established and systematically applied rhythmic structure adopted from the Italian poetic tradition. Consider, for instance, Franci and Mangaroni's prose translation of *C* (in Byron 1988), a rendering which is certainly more than adequate and, therefore, more engrossing than the uninspired verse *Corsaro* by Carlo Rosnati (Byron 1879) and the flat, diffuse prose translation by Giancarlo Monti (Byron 1963). Needless to say, verse translations are successful only in the hands of true poets, such as Betteloni in the late nineteenth century (Byron 1897) and Kemeny (Byron 1993b) or Buffoni (Byron 1984)<sup>14</sup> in recent years.

In some cases, both a prose and a verse translation warrant examination. Brillì's prose *Bo* (Byron 1972) compares favourably with Koch's verse translation (in her Byron 1987b volume) and vice versa. Finally, the choice of the literary medium is sometimes conditioned by the prospective audience and is, therefore, in some ways predetermined. After Maffei published his verse version of *S* (Byron 1862), the anonymous *Sardanapalo* published in the Biblioteca Universale Sonzogno (Byron 1884b) appeared as a prose translation meant for a specific readership, while Mario Giobbe returned to verse for his dramatized version published in the late 1920s (Byron 1928).<sup>15</sup> A historian of translation can exercise sound judgement by contextualizing and comparing the different translators' work and by considering their intentions and opinions of their own and other translators' output. If one reads, for example, the prefaces to the Italian verse translation of *DJ* mentioned above, the following conclusions might be drawn.

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Alessandra Lanzoni's Italian edition of John William Polidori's *The Vampyre*, a translation of Byron's *Fragment* is appended to Polidori's text (Polidori 1984). The well-known translator Roberto Mussapi (1996) edited a volume which collected his translations of some odes and poems by Shelley, Keats and Byron, the latter being represented by some thirty octaves from *Bo* and as many from *DJ*.

<sup>14</sup> Buffoni (1989b, 126–38) also translated some of Byron's shorter lyrics, among them 'She Walks in Beauty', 'So, We'll Go No More A-Roving', and 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year'.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to see the version of *S* in Byron (1937). I do not know if the translator, Giovanni Lenta, opted for a prose or poetic translation. At all events, this edition represents a further typology (and presumably is aimed at yet another readership) as it has parallel English and Italian texts.

Enrico Casali, the author of the first complete verse translation of *DJ* (Byron 1876a), declares that he worked on Byron's English text, although he readily admits that he sometimes consulted Rusconi's prose translation (Byron 1840–42) as an aid to comprehending some obscure passages. Casali briefly dismisses the earlier verse translations of Antonio Caccia (Byron 1853c) and Antonietta Sacchi Parravicini (Byron 1864) as insignificant and reductive, while he patronizingly admits that the young Betteloni 'thus far contented himself with producing a fine sample'.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, he still makes a list of Betteloni's shortcomings in a long note. After he completed his *DJ* in 1897, Betteloni was ready to repay Casali in kind; after saying that Rusconi's translation of the mid-nineteenth century was written 'in lugubrious prose' ('in lugubre prosa'), he adds that 'Mr Enrico Casali lately translated the poem in octaves. But he did not translate Byron's text; he rendered Rusconi's bad prose in bad lines, not even omitting the glaring mistakes with which the latter embellished his own version'.<sup>17</sup> In his edition of *DJ*, Attilio Brilli reprints Betteloni's translation, one, he writes, 'that constitutes an extraordinary contribution of the late *Scapigliatura* to Byron's reception' in Italy, since the modern critic appreciates 'the extraordinary forcefulness of Betteloni's octave, that had been reconstructed out of the lexical and stylistic features of an old Italian mock-heroic tradition, from Pulci to Tassoni and Casti'.<sup>18</sup> Brilli, however, is all too ready to annotate those passages where Betteloni drifts away from the original text and to provide a literal translation in these cases. Finally, Giuliano Dego, the latest and, probably, the most daring translator of Byron's masterpiece in octaves, writes that Betteloni's lines make 'hard reading' and show 'occasional paralysis', the more so as Betteloni, when translating Byron, drew his inspiration from early nineteenth-century neo-classicism instead of his own more modern and freer poetic diction. Thus 'Byron's cheerful and breezy voice came to be quenched by a kind of language that, from the first lines on, ranges from the literary and mannered to the staid and high-flown'.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, Betteloni's merits can only be discerned in those passages where Byron's text tends to the lyric mood and diction.

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<sup>16</sup> 'si contentò per ora di produrne un buon saggio' (Byron 1876a, vii). As an attempt to thwart Betteloni in his project to complete his rival translation of *DJ*, Casali persuaded his brother Eugenio to edit a booklet (Casali 1878) where the most favourable reviews of his own version were collected.

<sup>17</sup> The quotations are from the translator's foreword to the edition of *DJ* published by the Istituto Editoriale Italiano: 'il signor Enrico Casali tradusse tuttavia il poema in ottave. Ma egli non tradusse il testo di Byron; voltò in cattivi versi la cattiva prosa del Rusconi, non omettendo naturalmente i grossolani errori, dei quali quest'ultimo infiorò la propria versione' (Byron 1915?, 1: 66).

<sup>18</sup> 'che costituisce uno straordinario contributo della tarda *Scapigliatura* alla fortuna di Byron' (Byron 1982, xxii–xxiii); 'la resa straordinaria dell'ottava rima di Betteloni ricostruita sul lessico e sugli stilemi di una lunga tradizione eroicomico italiana, dal Pulci, al Tassoni, al Casti' (Byron 1982, xxiii).

<sup>19</sup> 'versi di faticosa lettura, e occasionali paralisi' (Byron 1992a, 40); 'la voce gaia e scanzonata di Byron finì così con l'essere obliterata da un linguaggio che, sin dai primi versi, va dal letterario di maniera al serio e all'aulico' (Byron 1992a, 41).

While the above survey of critical assessments confirms the present writer's belief that Betteloni's translation is better than Casali's, and Dego's better than Betteloni's, it also makes clear that each generation of readers – and critics – can sometimes appreciate the literary efforts of past translators. As a rule, however, intellectual interest and emotional investment can only be aroused by the best contemporary translations. That is why, in an ideal ranking of the Italian translators from Byron, the top places would nowadays be taken by Kemeny (Byron 1993b) and Buffoni (Byron 1984) for their polished versions, by Koch (Byron 1987b) for her fluent and easy style and by Dego (Byron 1992a) for the naturalness of his octaves. The primacy of these among the most recent translators makes sense if one realizes that they can play two simultaneous roles – roles that had often been kept apart in the past – the professional translator and versifier on the one hand, and the educated man of letters on the other. When one's literary taste is nourished with mature critical awareness and one has full command of the poetic technicalities of the two languages involved, the translation is likely to be a good one.<sup>20</sup>

### III

#### **Byron's literary impact**

Translations from Byron's works were widely published in late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italy. Yet the steady output of renditions was very different from the translation fever of the previous decades in more than one way. Translations were no longer published as a due (and financially rewarding) homage to a highly admired poet, rather as a more or less routine procedure to complete and update the Italian canon of a foreign writer. With the passing of time, such completion and updating meant that Byron's late satiric poetry was given priority over his early narrative production. Finally, and most significantly in the present context, despite the huge quantity of translations, Byron's poetry no longer exerted any profound influence on the evolution of Italian literary taste and cultural trends from the 1870s onwards. It is also very difficult to trace any references or echoes in the literary masterpieces of that period.

The Italian literary scene of the late nineteenth century was dominated by the figure of the poet and critic Giosuè Carducci (1835–1907). In his crusade against the tired and hackneyed Romanticism of the period, he made it clear that Byron's poetry belonged to a past age and a different social background. Thus, Byron's epigones and admirers, he argued, cannot be understood:

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<sup>20</sup> As an appendix to this section on the Italian translations from Byron, this is perhaps the place to mention that some of his works were sometimes published in an English-text edition in Italy to meet the needs of either Italian students of English, or a bilingual or international readership. To the first group belong Byron (1885; 1930; 1932b); to the second Byron (1916). These are only illustrative examples and many more could be quoted, especially from the 1950s onwards.

I would maintain that the moment of Byron's poetry has passed. Inspired as it was by a wild selfishness – be it as sublime as you wish – his poetry was the last sigh of desire and, I would almost venture to say, the gloomy death-rattle of the old aristocracy. . . . This being the case, we do not understand Byron's individualism, much less that of the Byronists.<sup>21</sup>

However, in his later poetry – that is to say, when Byronism as a literary phenomenon was dead and forgotten in Italy – Carducci did not scruple to refer familiarly to Byron by calling him 'Aroldo'. In a sonnet of 1891, included in his anthology *Rime e ritmi* (Rhymes and rhythms) and entitled 'A C.C. mandandogli poemi di Byron' (To C.C. on sending him Byron's poems), Carducci tells his addressee that 'to you comes Harold, the handsome bard'.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, Carducci suggests by implication that Byron's sacrifice in Greece has made a hero of him,<sup>23</sup> and that he has even earned a place near Dante.<sup>24</sup>

In the same period the Decadent movement in Italy took up once more various features of Romantic sensibility, including those made popular by Byron and his poetry. Only two works, both of them interesting and revealing in their own way, where the English poet and his poems are mentioned have been identified. The first is Gabriele D'Annunzio's novel *Il piacere* (*The Child of Pleasure*), the second 'L'amica di nonna Speranza' (Grandma Hope's friend), a poem by Guido Gozzano. D'Annunzio (1863–1938) and Gozzano (1883–1916) represent, so to speak, two sides of the same coin of the Italian Decadent movement. The former took up the role of the bohemian, unconventional artist, typical of Romanticism and turned him into a Decadent aesthete in the person of Andrea Sperelli, the protagonist of D'Annunzio's *Il piacere*, the masterpiece of Italian aestheticism published in 1889 (appearing between Huysmans' *A Rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884) and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Gozzano, the leading exponent of

<sup>21</sup> 'Direi che della poesia del Byron sia passato il tempo. Spirata da un egoismo selvaggio, sia pure quanto vuoi sublime, essa fu l'ultimo anelito, e, direi quasi, il rantolo funereo della vecchia aristocrazia. . . . A questo essendo le cose, noi non intendiamo l'individualismo del Byron e anche meno quello dei Byroniani' (cited from 'A proposito di Byron' (Speaking of Byron), originally published in *La Nazione* (The nation) [Florence], 14 November 1861, quoted in Carducci 1943, 318; see also Poli 1958).

<sup>22</sup> 'a te viensene Aroldo bel cantore', l. 2 (Carducci 1944, 189). A note to this sonnet reveals that the addressee's name was Carlo Chiarini and that the edition referred to in the title was an English one, i.e. Byron (n.d.) (Carducci 1944, 271).

<sup>23</sup> In the poem 'Scoglio di Quarto' (Quarto Rock), composed in 1889 and included in the anthology *Odi barbare* (Barbaric odes), the rock near Genoa is defined as the 'abode where Byron had thirst for heroic Messolongi' (Carducci 1950, 112) ('dimora onde Aroldo / siti l'eroico Missolongi', ll. 35–36, Carducci 1944, 69).

<sup>24</sup> 'La chiesa di Polenta' (The church in Polenta), in *Rime e ritmi* (Rhymes and rhythms) is a poem describing the place where Dante is said to have spent his last years. When the angelus bell is rung, 'mere mortals bare their heads; / Dante and Harold both / bend their brow' (Higgins 1994, 220) ('i piccioli mortali / scovrono il capo, curvano la fronte / Dante ed Aroldo', ll. 114–16, Carducci 1944, 243).

the early twentieth-century literary movement entitled *Crepuscolarismo* (from 'crepuscolo', twilight), revived and gave poetic voice to now conventional Romantic feelings: the poet's – and man's – sense of solitude, anguish over the rift between the individual and society, a lack of confidence in the future. Yet the *mal du siècle* is counteracted by means of irony and a simple poetic diction quite unlike D'Annunzio's. In *Il piacere*, Andrea Sperelli's father is defined as 'his Byronizing father' ('padre byroneggiante') (D'Annunzio 1988, 11; 1991, 75). He is described as follows:

That father, who had grown up in the midst of the last expiring splendours of the Bourbon court of Naples, understood life on a large scale, was profoundly initiated into all the arts of the voluptuary, combined with a certain Byronic leaning towards fantastic romanticism.<sup>25</sup>

Later in the novel two lines from Byron's English text of *CHP* and *DJ* are quoted, when D'Annunzio describes Andrea's inner life and feelings:

The landscape became to him a symbol, an emblem, a sign to guide him through the labyrinthine passes of his own soul. He discovered secret affinities between the visible life around him and the intimate life of his desires and memories. 'To me, high mountains are a feeling.' – and as the mountains were to Byron, so the sea was to him *a sentiment*.<sup>26</sup>

Why stretch out his hand towards the tree of knowledge? 'The tree of knowledge has been plucked – all's known!' as Byron said in *Don Juan*.<sup>27</sup>

Both kinds of Byronic references in *Il piacere* – to Andrea's father and to the son's own feelings and musings – underline D'Annunzio's view of Byronism as a personal attitude, outer or inner depending on the circumstances, but in any case more related to Byron's myth than to a mature appreciation of his works.

Weaker and more indirect still is the link between Byron's poetry and a passing reference to *P* in Gozzano's 'L'amica di nonna Speranza', a poem first published in 1907 and later included in his collection *I colloqui* (The colloquies) of 1911. Speranza, then a young lady, is dreaming of her first love, yet to come, and in her reverie she romantically asks the moon:

<sup>25</sup> D'Annunzio (1991, 24). 'Questo padre, cresciuto in mezzo agli estremi splendori della corte borbonica, sapeva largamente vivere; aveva una scienza profonda della vita voluttuaria e insieme una certa inclinazione byroniana al romanticismo fantastico' (D'Annunzio 1988, 36).

<sup>26</sup> D'Annunzio (1991, 97). 'Il paesaggio divenne per lui un simbolo, un emblema, un segno, una scorta che lo guidava a traverso il laberinto interiore. Segrete affinità egli scopriva tra la vita apparente delle cose e l'intima vita de' suoi desideri e de' suoi ricordi. "To me – High mountains are a feeling." Come nel verso di Giorgio Byron le montagne, per lui erano *un sentimento* le marine' (D'Annunzio 1988, 135).

<sup>27</sup> D'Annunzio (1991, 101). 'Perché mai dunque avrebbe egli di nuovo stesa la mano all'albero della scienza? "The tree of knowledge has been pluck'd, – all's known." "L'albero della scienza è stato spogliato, – tutto è conosciuto" come canta Giorgio Byron nel *Don Juan*' (D'Annunzio 1988, 141) Eng. trans.: Harding, 1991.

Did you see the deserted houses of fair Parisina?  
Aren't you perhaps the one loved by young Werther?<sup>28</sup>

Here two easily recognizable intertextual references and allusions to Romantic tragic love and existential despair are joined together – seriously by the ingenuous and sentimental young lady, ironically by the poet. But that is all, all the more so as the interplay of sentimentality and irony marks the gap between the past admiration for Romantic poetry and a new artistic sensibility.<sup>29</sup> D'Annunzio and Gozzano, then, made no extensive and significant use of Byron's poetry and were not really interested in reviving enthusiasm for it. Neither were Futurism and early twentieth-century *avant garde* movements. Thus Byron virtually disappeared from the pages of Italian literary works, the only exception I have found being a short chapter in an unconventional book by an unconventional writer of the early and mid-twentieth century: *Giudizio universale* (The Last Judgement) by Giovanni Papini (1881–1956). In this book, composed between 1941 and 1952 and left unfinished at his death, Papini gives voice to a long list of men and women (either well known or obscure or, very often, imaginary, from atheists to apostles and prophets, from monarchs and politicians to soldiers and magicians, from scientists to artists, from unhappy women to poets) each of them having his own story to tell before being admitted to God's presence. Byron's self-justification is worth citing in full:

I have no wish whatsoever to be judged. I refuse to be judged. Go and tell your Master that no one has such a right over Lord Byron. Not even the Almighty. He made me a wretched weakling, my flesh restless, overborne by passion, dominated by sensuality, a prey to pride, overwhelmed by a rousing imagination, tempted by manifold sins. So why call my life to account and condemn me? Should He rule in favour of my innocence, I still would not deem Him my legitimate, lawful judge. He forced me, a tiny-winged, frail-winged bird into the whirlwind of life. How can He

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<sup>28</sup> Guido Gozzano, 'L'amica di nonna Speranza', in Gozzano (1980, 183–89 (188)) 'Vedesti le case deserte di Parisina la bella? / Non forse sei quella amata dal giovane Werther?' (ll. 89–90).

<sup>29</sup> Not only had the artists' sensibility changed but also that of the man in the street, as is clearly explained in a critical essay of 1911: 'We did not think like Byron, like Leopardi any longer . . . , the businessmen had already been emerging: they did not invoke death, but the Stock Exchange list: no longer the Ortis mania, but the frenzy of gain and pleasure to be soon enjoyed . . . on payment.' 'Non pensavamo più alla Byron, alla Leopardi . . . ; ma già spuntavano gli uomini d'affare: non più si invocava la morte, ma il listino di borsa: non più la mania dell'Ortis, ma la febbre del guadagno e delle voluttà presto godute . . . a pagamento' (Lucini 1911, 58). Of course, a new attitude and sensibility do not rule out the possibility that minor references to Byron can still be gleaned from (or, more often, met by chance in) very marginal literary figures of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. For example, Luigi Forti appended – somewhat inappropriately, one might add – his 'Byron moribondo: poesia lirica' (Dying Byron: a lyric poem) to one of his high comedies (Forti 1874). The following year, Adele Butti published a poem on Byron in Greece (Butti 1875), and Domenico Pagello (Pagello 1886) wrote a sonnet entitled 'Ai greci in morte di Lord Byron' (To the Greeks on Lord Byron's death).

punish me now for not being able to soar up towards the stars and for plunging into this earthly slough? Is this rightful justice? Where is all the celebrated pity He prides himself on?

And He who knows all, does he not know the desperate plight of a genius bound to the weight of his very flesh and to the company of inferior beings? Does He not know the tragic fate of a soul of fire, buried and suffocated in a tainted and unwilling body?

I was lame and lustful, yet my soul aspired to greatness, truth, poetry and great things. I composed poems so as not to commit crimes: by using words, I rid myself of base instincts and of the pressure of folly. Art saved me from the excesses of perversity and madness. I could do no better.

I suffered, I sang, I battled against my very own self, I cried, I sought and found death at thirty-six, when my life and fame were in their prime. What else do you expect of me? Do you not believe I have fully expiated my sins?<sup>30</sup>

This is vintage Byron. Papini has caught the essence of Byron's world view perfectly. Lord Byron is acting and speaking as Conrad, Lara or Cain, the defiant heroes of his OT and dramas, the descendant of Milton's Satan. It could be argued that this sketch of Byron's self-defence – which, according to Papini's diary, was composed on 7 October 1941 – owed much both to the traditional view of Byron as a Byronic hero himself and to Mario Praz's influential critical analysis of the Byronic hero in *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (The flesh, death and the Devil in Romantic literature) (Praz 1930c), translated into English as *The Romantic Agony* (1933).

All considered, however, this is not much, and it is fair to say that Byron's literary influence proved to be a little more substantial and lasting on twentieth-century Italian performing arts, opera and drama,<sup>31</sup> than on literature.

<sup>30</sup> 'Io non voglio essere giudicato. Mi rifiuto d'esser giudicato. Dite al vostro padrone che Lord Byron non può essere giudicato da nessuno. Neppure Dio ha il diritto di giudicarmi. Se mi creò debole e infelice, fatto di carne inquieta, intriso di passioni prepotenti, succubo della sensualità, tentato dall'orgoglio, travolto dalla fantasia, sottoposto in cento forme al peccato, quale ragione può aver mai di chiedermi conto della mia vita e di condannarmi? Anche se volesse assolvermi non lo riconoscerò mai come legittimo giudice. Ha gettato nel vorticoso vapor della vita una creatura colle ali corte e fiacche e vorrà punirmi perché invece di volare verso le costellazioni son caduto nei pantani della terra? Che giustizia è mai questa? E dov'è la sua vantata e celebrata misericordia? / E non sa forse, Lui che sa tutto, qual sorte tremenda sia quella del genio finché è legato al peso della carne e alla società degli inferiori? Non conosce forse il destino atroce di un'anima di fuoco sepolta e soffocata in un corpo guasto e riluttante? / Ero zoppo e lussurioso ma l'animo mio aspirava alla grandezza, alla verità, alla poesia, alle cose grandi. Composi poemi per non commetter delitti; mi liberai colle parole dagli istinti perversi, dall'urgere della demenza. L'arte mi salvò dagli estremi eccessi della malvagità e della pazzia. Di più non potevo fare. / Ho sofferto, ho cantato, ho lottato con me stesso, ho gridato, ho cercato e ottenuto la morte a soli trentasei anni, nella pienezza della vita e della fama; cosa volete ancora da me? Pensate forse ch'io non abbia espiato abbastanza?' (Papini 1957, 1214–15).

<sup>31</sup> There are no reliable and systematic indexes of Italian operatic and theatre productions covering the period before the late twentieth century; I think, anyway, that the sketch given in the following paragraphs is representative enough.

## IV

**Byron's dramas**

No Italian opera based on a Byronic subject has ever been particularly successful or popular.<sup>32</sup> None is regularly and frequently produced nowadays. Verdi's *I due Foscari* (*TF*) has been staged at La Scala of Milan only three times in the last twenty-five years – between December 1979 and January 1980, between January and February 1988, and in May 2003.<sup>33</sup>

A little richer and more varied is the picture of Byron's dramas as they came to be performed in Italian playhouses. *M* takes the lion's share, although other works reached the stage more recently. The German composer and Byron enthusiast, Robert Schumann, wrote the score for *M* and had it performed in Weimar in 1852,<sup>34</sup> since he thought of his music as the appropriate background for and a comment on Byron's text. Thus, when Andrea Maffei's translation of *M* appeared in 1870 (Byron 1870a) everything was in place for the first Italian performance of Byron's dramatic poem.<sup>35</sup> A performance took place at the Teatro Piccolini in Florence in 1899. *Manfred* was subsequently performed at La Scala in 1963, but the real modern success of this drama came in 1966 when the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma put on *Manfredi*, translated by Giorgio Manganelli and directed by Mauro Bolognini.<sup>36</sup> Ten years later, a genuinely innovative production was produced and directed by the actor, Carmelo Bene, who also translated and adapted the English text. Bene's production was first staged at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome in May 1976, followed by a nationwide tour in 1979. It was re-staged at La Scala in October 1980.<sup>37</sup> More recently, Schumann's music and Byron's text in German translation were performed, again at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia,

<sup>32</sup> See the concluding pages of Zuccato's essay in this volume. The extemporary notes in Antonini (1973) mention a very peculiar work, which mixes operatic music, a modern rewriting of the Byronic myth and a translation into Italian: in 1955 Tennessee Williams composed the libretto for *Lord Byron's Love Letter*, an opera by Raffaello de Banfield. The American playwright's libretto was translated into Italian by Paola Ojetti and published by Ricordi (Williams 1955).

<sup>33</sup> The 1979–80 performances were the first for more than a century. *I due Foscari* was first put on at La Scala in 1845, and then in 1847, 1849 and 1858 only. See Vitalini (2003).

<sup>34</sup> Although this is not the place to explore Schumann's passion for Byron, it is fair to refer to Zanoncelli (1981) as an indirect but not irrelevant Italian contribution to the critical reception of Byron's works.

<sup>35</sup> The composer, Errico Petrella (1813–77) wrote his own *Manfredo*, an opera that was on the bill at the Teatro San Carlo of Naples in 1872 but fell flat. Another *Manfredo*, a symphonic poem based on Byron's drama, was written by the composer Attilio Staffelli (1894–1957) and performed in Naples on 15 June 1916.

<sup>36</sup> Manganelli's translation has already been mentioned above together with other late-twentieth-century Italian translations of *M* (see Byron 2000). Unfortunately, I have not been able to see the programme published for the 1966 performance (Byron 1966) which includes an essay on the writing and reception of *Manfred* (D'Amico 1966).

<sup>37</sup> Bene's translation and adaptation was first published in Bene (1980) and later reprinted in Bene (1995, 919 ff.).

in 1995. A fringe theatre performance entitled *Byron: Manfred Oratorio* was put on in Benevento in 1999, based on a script by Claudio Di Palma and music by Roberto Soldatini.

Drawing inspiration from Byron, Arnold Schoenberg composed his 'Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte' in 1941, set for piano, string quartet and narrator. His music converted Byron's text into a sweeping universal indictment of tyranny and it is no accident that it was performed by the Accademia Filarmonica Romana on 30 April 1947, shortly after Italy had been liberated from Fascism and Nazi occupation.

Yet music was not always instrumental in bringing Byron's dramas and poems to the stage. Mario Giobbe has already been mentioned for his translation and dramatization of Byron's *S*, performed, according to the published version, 'on the evening of 29 November 1928, at the theatre Fiorentini in Naples' ('la sera del 29 novembre 1928, al teatro Fiorentini di Napoli', Byron 1928). More recently, the actor Massimo De Rossi wrote, produced and directed *Don Giovanni*, a dramatization of Byron's masterpiece that was performed at the Teatro di Porta Romana, Milan, in the 1979–80 season. In January 1988 *The Deformed Transformed* was put on by Severino Saltarelli and Simona Volpi at the theatre Metateatro in Rome. In February 1989, to celebrate the bicentenary of the poet's birth, *Lord Byron prova la rivolta* (Lord Byron practises his revolt) was staged, a drama drawing on *MF*. The play, written by Mario Roberto Cimnaghi, recreates a scene in Venice where Byron's present and past friends, wives and lovers assemble while he writes *MF*. Thanks to the director, Luigi Squarzina, and to the actor, Corrado Pani, who played the part of the old Doge, this version of Byron's tragedy was successfully performed. By contrast, Cimnaghi's original re-working of the poet's life was less popular.<sup>38</sup>

*Cn* is the most recent to reach the stage. The actor Nuccio Siano produced and directed his *Caino* at the Teatro Colosseo, Rome, in November 1998. In 2000 Paolo Billi rewrote, dramatized and directed *Paradisi* (Heavens), freely based on Byron's *Cn*, for a drama workshop held in the Pratello remand home in Bologna.

Owing to the fragmentary and certainly incomplete data available, it is not easy to offer concluding remarks concerning the influence exerted by Byron's works on Italian late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and the arts. Tentatively, it is arguable that Byron's influence was not profound and, in most cases, it was more the result of élite experimentalism than widespread cultural interest; evidently it did not reflect a popular vogue.

## V

### Byron biographies in Italy

Except for the limited circle of men of letters, however, Byron's poetry did not make a great impact at least until after his death. Then a great vogue of

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<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Cimnaghi's text, including some critical essays on Byron, has been made available in Cimnaghi (1992).

Byronism swept both verse and prose, reviving above all the Byronic heroes of the narrative poems. (Brand 1973, 16)

C.P. Brand is certainly correct in linking the rise of Byronism in Italy to the poet's death in Greece, an event which opened the floodgates to the translations, adaptations and imitations of Byron. At the same time, the 'Byron phenomenon' stimulated a great interest in the poet's life or, rather, in the interplay between biographical events and literary production. This is attested by the many biographies published in Italy as well as elsewhere in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> After Byronism and the literary appreciation of the poet's works waned towards the end of the century, biographies or biographical essays continued to be published in Italy, but with some differences. Firstly, most of the earlier biographies, written between the late nineteenth century and the 1950s, concentrated on the places where Byron had spent his life in Italy and, naturally, on the women he had met. They were usually characterized by a mixture of obsessively detailed historical reconstruction and an idealized portrayal of the poet, lover and fighter for freedom. Secondly, the later essays, by more critically minded scholars, clarified the less casual and more meaningful relationship between the places where Byron had lived in Italy and his literary output. Thirdly and finally, quite a few writers, both in past and more recent years, tried to whet and satisfy the popular appetite for fictional or semi-fictional biographies of Lord Byron.

It is odd that few essays deal with Byron's life in Venice. Bernardi (1881) offers the first survey, followed by Wiel (1905), which, despite its title, devotes only half of its pages to Byron's stay in Venice. Meneghetti (1910) deals with the poet's life and works in Venice by mixing chapters on Venetian literary salons, Byron's lovers and *Bo*. In modern criticism, two volumes stand out: in the survey of Venice in *Modern Literatures* edited by Carlo Pellegrini (1961), Lord Byron is only hinted at in F.C. Roe's essay (1961, 57–58). Robert Escarpit, however, explores 'the specific role played by his Venetian stay in the psychological life of our poet and in the history of the maturation of his talent'.<sup>40</sup> Father Mesrop Gianascian (1961) concentrates on Byron's study of the Armenian language.<sup>41</sup> Much more interesting is the volume on Byron and Venetian culture (Marra and others 1989), which, divided as it is in sections – 'Byron and Venice: history and biography', 'Venetian perspectives in Byron's work' and 'Byron, Venice and Italy: mythopoetic correspondences' – offers seventeen papers from British and Italian experts.

Ravenna is, of course, the setting for the poet's love affair with Teresa Guiccioli and for his involvement with the local Carbonari. Both themes have inspired a succession of books, generally speaking more narrative and semi-

<sup>39</sup> Since Byron's life, works and death caused a *furor* all over Europe, the Italian readership enjoyed both translated biographies and biographical essays written by Italian authors. The first Italian *Life* was Cantù (1833), followed by Giuseppe Nicolini's three-volume biography of 1835 (see Iamartino 1991, n. 6) and by Guerrazzi's translation of Lake (1826).

<sup>40</sup> 'le rôle exact qu'a joué le séjour de Venise dans la vie psychologique de notre poète et dans l'histoire de la maturation de son talent' (Escarpit 1961, 108).

<sup>41</sup> For further detail, see the essay of Anahit Bekaryan in the present volume.

fictional than historical in character, such as Rava (1929), Randi (1950), Benini (1960), Ragazzini (1989) and Graziani (1995). More useful are the memoirs of the Guiccioli family (Guiccioli 1934–35) and a brief, but documented, study of the last two months of Byron's stay in Ravenna (Casadio 1999, adapted and translated into English in Casadio 2001) and the account in McCarthy (2002).

Byron's short sojourn in Bologna in June 1819 on his way to Ravenna and his visit a few weeks later with Teresa and her husband, are related in a recent book by Chierici Stagni (2001).<sup>42</sup> Here, the study of the poet's relationship with the Bolognese nobility and Cornelia Martinetti's literary salon is followed by other essays, one of them on Pietro Gamba, Teresa's brother.<sup>43</sup>

In the survey of Pisa, Byron's name is nearly always paired with Shelley's. Tribolati's biography of 1874 is only superseded by Cacciatore (1961). But two important projects researched by Professor Mario Curreli (1985) are the catalogue of an exhibition on Shelley and Byron's stay in Pisa and a joint study (Curreli and Johnson 1988) which collects the papers read at an international conference held in Pisa during the exhibition.

While in the above studies emphasis is laid on the places where Lord Byron spent his Italian years,<sup>44</sup> others have been published concerning the women Byron loved, be they his wife, daughter or countless lovers (naturally Teresa Guiccioli has pride of place). I have been unable to access Sharp Arceri's book (1924) on Byron's family relationships with his mother and stepsister, a particularly delicate problem to tackle in what must have been a celebratory study published in the centenary of Byron's death. Other studies on Byron's daughter Allegra – Biondi (1899), Veggi Donati (1985)<sup>45</sup> and the 1992 Italian translation of Origo (1935) – were certainly less problematical. It goes without saying that Byron's lovers have often captured the attention of the poet's biographers. The studies post-1945 – all of them mixing fact and fiction – include Adami (1946), Borgese (1949), Cervellati (1966), Paccosi (1984), Mazzeo (1988) and Graziani (1995).

There is no shortage of more comprehensive biographies on either Byron's Italian years or his whole life. Italian translations of foreign studies outnumber original native biographies. To the former group belong Castelar (1875 [1873]), McMahan (1922 [1906]), Fauré (1928), Quennell (1948 [1941]), Maurois (1953 [1930]), Kenyon 1966, Prokosch (1971 [1968]), Longford (1978 [1976]) and Massie (1992 [1988]). To the latter belong the shorter biographical essays by Galletti (1924), Miele (1924), Messinese (1937) and Odierno De Lorenzo (1950), and the book-length biographies by Zacchetti

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<sup>42</sup> More detailed information on Byron in Bologna can be found in Cantoni (1926; 1927a; 1927b), Murolo (1986) and McCarthy (2002).

<sup>43</sup> Chierici Stagni (2001, 9–23 and 57–72 respectively). Pietro Gamba, who was to accompany Byron to Greece, wrote a diary, the Greek section of which was first published in English and, nearly a century later, translated into Italian: see Gamba (1825).

<sup>44</sup> Other, less successful studies would include: Benvenuti (1884), Angeli (1914), Mancini (1914), Battaglia (1920) and Cottini (1991).

<sup>45</sup> Byron's biography and Italian local interest in it is underlined by the fact that this study of Allegra was published in Bagnocavallo, where the poet's daughter died in 1822.

(1920), Renzulli (1935) and Sanesi (1966). In both groups, novelized biographies such as Kenyon (1966) or Prokosch (1971), alternate with reports that are closer to reality as in Quennell (1948 [1941]) and Sanesi (1966). McCarthy (2002) offers the most measured assessment overall.

## VI

**Byron and the silver screen**

In the first half of the twentieth century Byron's life and love affairs also aroused the interest of Italian screen writers. Between 1908 and 1909 Arrigo Frusta wrote a scenario called *Gli amori di Lord Byron* (Lord Byron's love affairs) for the Ambrosio film company of Turin (see Frusta 1952, 36, where this scenario is mentioned as the first in his prolific career in film-making). Nothing came of the project but the scenario manuscript is preserved in the archives of the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin (Collection Frusta, 344.16) and is worth consultation.<sup>46</sup> The subject was taken up twenty years later by Andrea di Robilant, whose screen play appeared in print (di Robilant 1938) although, once again, no film on Byron was produced. The reason is more understandable on this occasion since the Englishman's sacrifice for the freedom of Greece could not be looked on with favour by a repressive Fascist and Anglophobe regime. It was not until 1971 that Byron appeared, though indirectly, in an Italian film. His stay in Rome, his diary, and a poem that he was supposed to have written in Italian were the starting points of a five-part TV serial called *Il segno del comando* (The token of command), directed by Daniele D'Anza and starring Ugo Pagliai, Carla Gravina, Rossella Falk and Massimo Girotti. In this highly successful serial – something between a thriller and a detective story – a Cambridge Professor of English literature is invited to Rome to give a lecture on Byron and is drawn into a mysterious story that revolves around a magic talisman.<sup>47</sup> Giuseppe D'Agata, who wrote the script together with Flaminio Bollini,

<sup>46</sup> The manuscript opens with a quotation from the final sentence in the Italian translation of Castelar's biography (1873): "I forgive you because you loved very much", as history can relate. And our own age, when discovering Byron's Apollonian head crowned with both sunbeams and shadows, will be able to exclaim: here is my own icon, my own symbol! ("Ti perdono perché ai molto amato", gli può dire la Storia. E l'età nostra, scoprendo la testa apollinea di Byron, ricinta di raggi e d'ombre, potrà esclamare: ecco la mia immagine, ecco il mio simbolo!). After this quotation (here reproduced as in Frusta's manuscript, not an exact copy of its source in Castelar 1905, 108), Frusta supposes that three different films can be made on Lord Byron's love affairs, dealing respectively with Margherita Cogni, Teresa Guiccioli and Haidée – a nice blend of fact and fiction. In Frusta's scenario the story ends with a feverish vision experienced by Byron, where an image of his lovers dissolves into a group of soldiers; he dies after giving them the signal to attack. My thanks to Dr Federica Villa of the University of Turin, for the information on Frusta's scenario.

<sup>47</sup> This serial had such wide appeal that a remake, directed by Giulio Questi and starring Robert Powell, Jonathan Cecil and Elena Sofia Ricci among others, appeared on TV in 1989.

also published the story in book form (D'Agata 1987). Only recently did Byron's life become the subject of a film, a short by Franco Masotti and Fabrizio Varesco (1988) shown during the Byron exhibition held in Ravenna between August and October 1998.

## VII

### **Byron's letters and diaries**

With reference to biographies in book form, Italian versions of Byron's life should be read in the light of one of the modern Italian editions of his letters and diaries, all of them published in the 1980s after Leslie A. Marchand's monumental twelve-volume edition (Byron 1973–82). Both Byron (1983) and Byron (1985) represent a selection of the poet's letters written during his Italian sojourn from 1816 to 1823, while Byron (1989a) offers an Italian translation of his diaries. Finally, Byron (1989b) represents the richest one-volume Italian collection, since the editor and translator, Masolino d'Amico, aimed at documenting all the different stages of the poet's life and career from 1804 until his death, thus allowing the poet to speak with his own voice. This edition also offers the best notes and commentary on the 318 letters included. As far as Byron's biography is concerned, then, an Italian twentieth-century readership has shown a continuing interest in the poet's life and a decided preference for his sojourn and love affairs in Italy, seldom making any essential distinction between the historical and the fictional.

## VIII

### **Byron in literary criticism**

Some sense of continuity is discernible between this Italian passion for Lord Byron's life and the development of a modern literary criticism of his works by Italian scholars. In fact, the historical and biographical interest in the places where the English poet spent his Italian years can be said to be paralleled by the critical interest in the comparisons and relations between Byron and some of the most famous Italian authors, an approach that has always accompanied the development of Byronic criticism in Italy.

Some essays concentrate on the writers said to have influenced Byron, such as Dante (Monti 1887b; Dobelli 1898; Bruni 1999), Petrarch (Levi 1901), Casti (Sangiorgi 1951) or Alfieri (Zanco 1941).<sup>48</sup> Most Italian critical essays, however, deal with the influence exerted – or not exerted – by Byron's works and personality on the most important nineteenth-century Italian writers: Ugo Foscolo (Levi 1909; Praz 1961; 1966; Domenichelli 2002; Crisafulli 2002b); Giacomo Leopardi (Monti 1887a; Olivero 1931, 248–54);<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> A synthesis of Byron's interest in Italian literature from Dante to Alfieri can be found in Foà (1935, 55–152).

<sup>49</sup> Monti's essay is, in a way, preceded by hints in Zanella (1885) and (1887). The former book includes a chapter on 'P.B. Shelley e G. Leopardi' (Zanella 1885,

Alessandro Manzoni (see Bellezza 1897; Porta 1923b);<sup>50</sup> and Giosuè Carducci (see Poli 1958).<sup>51</sup> More general surveys of Italian Byronism include Muoni (1903; 1907), Porta (1923a) and Bosco (1924), whereas Byron's versions from Italian works of art are the subject of Guidi (1953), Lograsso (1959) and Buffoni (1989b).

Italian literary criticism of Byron's works was also able, from an early period, to move away from Italy-related subjects to deal with the comparative analysis of the poet and other English or foreign writers. Naturally, the relations between Byron and Shelley are given pride of place (Mignaty 1889; Curreli 1985; Curreli and Johnson 1988; Restivo 1994), but Wordsworth (Callegari 1909), Beecher Stowe (Latino 1906), Ruskin and Lawrence (Bonadeo 1984), Chénier (Fini 1959) and even Pushkin (Vuotto 1999) are also studied in comparison to Byron.<sup>52</sup>

Only with the passing of time did the comparative approach give way to critical evaluations of his poetry as such, even though essays of the older, biographical and anecdotal type were still being published. If the timespan between 1870 and the end of the Second World War is considered, the old-fashioned accounts appeared until about the second decade of the new century (see Chiarini 1891; 1900; Lumbroso 1903; Meneghetti 1907; Gambarin 1914, 134–36; Baretta 1917–18; Gutierrez 1918), although the first attempts at textual criticism straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *M* is the subject of Brangi (1889) and Gaggero (1909), *L* is dealt with in Sorrentino (1905), *G* in Onorato (1905), and *DJ* in Alonzo (1931). More general critical surveys of Byron's poetry include Buttafava Valentini (1901–1914b) and

245–74), where Byron is often mentioned. For instance, the critic writes: 'I can detect echoes of Byron's *Corsair* in Leopardi's *Consalvo*. . . . Also the lines in *Parisina* after the kiss remind me of those by Leopardi' ('Trovo nel *Consalvo* leopardiano un'eco del *Corsaro* del Byron. . . . Anche i versi della *Parisina* dopo il bacio chiamano alla mente que del Leopardi', Zanella 1885, 256). Zanella also draws a parallel between Leopardi's 'L'appressamento della morte' (Approaching death) and Byron's *P* (1887, 190, 199).

<sup>50</sup> Bellezza and Porta agree that Manzoni was neither fascinated by Byron's personality nor influenced by his works.

<sup>51</sup> Maramotti (1931) may be added to this list, as it deals with Byron's influence on the poet Enrico Casali, a very minor literary figure but the author of the first complete Italian verse translation of *DJ* (see Byron 1876a and section II above).

<sup>52</sup> Bonaventura Zumbini's posthumously printed 'Divagazioni romantiche e byroniane' (Romantic and Byronic digressions) compares Byron's poetry with both Italian and foreign works and, as such, cannot easily fit into either of the above groups. His essay – written before Zumbini's death in 1916 – is, however, worth consultation as an illustrative example of Byron criticism in early twentieth-century Italy. Firstly, Byron's influence on Italian literature is analysed and the lack of a deep understanding of his works is lamented. Secondly, the similarities between Byron and Shelley are commented on, both being inspired by the relics of Italian past greatness. Thirdly, Byron is said to share his admiration for Tasso with such great figures as Goethe, Shelley, Leopardi and Pellico. Fourthly and finally, Byron was influenced by some Italian poets of the past, and in turn he did influence contemporary and later Italian writers (see Zumbini 1996).

Scrocca (1918), while Boschetto Giardini (1914) offers a monograph on the poet's pessimism.<sup>53</sup>

If there is a moment when modern and mature criticism of Byron's works becomes firmly established in Italy, the year 1924, the first centenary of Byron's death, is arguably the watershed. Apart from new Italian editions of single or complete works (Byron 1924; Byron 1924–25; and the reprint of Byron 1900), that centennial year saw the publication of commemorative articles, essays and even full-length studies (Miele 1924; Galletti 1924; Franzero 1924; Sharp Arceri 1924). At the same time Byron studies were reinvigorated by the first-rate criticism of some of the best scholars in Italy: Arturo Farinelli, Umberto Bosco, Giuseppe S. Gargano, Emilio Cecchi and Mario Praz.<sup>54</sup>

Before his 1924 volume, Arturo Farinelli (1876–1948) had already published two essays (Farinelli 1921a; 1921b) in which Lord Byron and his works are harshly criticized. 'Carried away by the heat of his feeling, the poet examines nothing and solves nothing; he shouts his maxims from the rooftops and toys with thought, like a tired and listless young boy'; his poetry is 'all theatricalism and ranting heat' and the product of 'the most insane loose living, bacchanalia and orgies'. His different works, he continues, are really 'one and the same fictitious adventure that repeats itself, with very few variants, uniformly, therefore monotonously, despite the effort to appear new and original each time'.<sup>55</sup> Even his liberalism and his claims for political freedom are viewed with suspicion:

Can the British lord lead to true freedom, absorbed in himself as he is, an eternal prey to the wildest passions, with no firm convictions, with no beacon shining in front of him, and no message to deliver and accomplish?<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The end of the Second World War is an obvious divide since it brought Italy into contact with Western (especially Anglo-American) culture once more, after the illiberal attitude of the Fascist regime. Strictly speaking, the period 1870–1945 includes the production of the two most important Italian literary critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Francesco De Sanctis (1817–83) and Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). De Sanctis, who read English literature in translation only, shared the ubiquitous nineteenth-century infatuation for Byron's poetry and his person. Croce was able to discern the most extreme and caricatural aspects of Byron as a Romantic poet and to distinguish them from his genuine love for liberty. Since neither critic dedicated much space to Byron's poetry, for the present survey the reader is referred to Lombardo (1953, 131–32; 1956, 103–07).

<sup>54</sup> Of particular interest is the last essay in this list, where Byron's ideas are used as a weapon against the Austrians at a crucial stage of the First World War.

<sup>55</sup> 'Il poeta nella sua foga nulla sviscera e nulla risolve; getta le sue massime ai venti e si balocca col pensiero, come fanciullo stanco e svogliato' (Farinelli 1921a, 110), 'tutta teatralità e foga declamatoria' (97), 'dalle sregolatezze più dementi, dai baccanali e le orgie' (99), 'una sola romanzesca avventura, che si riproduce, con poche varianti, uniforme, monotona quindi, malgrado lo sforzo di apparire sempre nuova ed originale' (160).

<sup>56</sup> 'Davvero può condurre a libertà vera il Lord britannico, chiuso in sé, preda eterna alle passioni più tumultuose, senza ferme convinzioni, senza un faro di luce che innanzi gli splenda, e un messaggio da compiere?' (Farinelli 1921b, 200).

Fortunately, he adds, the day came when the public realized that ‘worshipping Lord Byron ... was a frenzy of the past’ (‘il culto per Lord Byron ... era un delirio del passato’).<sup>57</sup> Farinelli’s severe criticism was somewhat tempered in his 1924 volume, where he published a course of six lectures delivered in May of the same year on various aspects of Byron’s poetry. When these lectures were republished in Farinelli (1944), the critic himself explained why he had altered his opinion, in part at least:

An essay of mine on Lord Byron [Farinelli 1921a; 1921b] gave a very brief synthesis of Byron’s poetry. This synthesis had, in a way, been designed as a rebellion against my own Byronism – something I was victim of during my most troubled and passionate youth – and was therefore made deliberately harsh and severe. The refusal is tempered in the new study [Farinelli 1924]. I do not rebel and I do not condemn; I try reaching the soul of that shattered, yet powerful character, that was also able to seduce Goethe for such a long time.<sup>58</sup>

Farinelli’s more detached attitude is confirmed in his further works of the late 1920s: in the three-volume Farinelli (1927), Byron is often mentioned and always dealt with in a historical and balanced perspective; in Farinelli (1928) the geographical and cultural distance vouches for a similar objectivity.<sup>59</sup>

A similar attempt to balance merits and defects is in Gargano (1924). The critic makes clear that, as far as Byron’s poetry is concerned, ‘opinions have changed drastically within the space of a hundred years; or better, they have reversed almost completely’ and that ‘the Victorian period is the main cause of this devaluation of Byron’; at all events, ‘the time has perhaps come to redress the balance’.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike Farinelli and Gargano, a negative critical stance was persistently adopted by Emilio Cecchi (1884–1966), whose *Storia della letteratura inglese nel secolo XIX* (History of English literature in the nineteenth century) is ‘a

<sup>57</sup> Farinelli (1921a, 99). Farinelli (1921a) and (1921b) were reprinted together as Farinelli (1921c).

<sup>58</sup> ‘Un mio saggio su Lord Byron ... offriva una sintesi brevissima dell’opera byroniana, concepita un po’ come ribellione al mio proprio byronismo, sofferto nella mia gioventù più tribolata e accesa, e resa quindi deliberatamente aspra e severa. Nel nuovo studio la negazione è temperata. Non insorgo e non condanno; tento di giungere all’anima di quella individualità sconvolta, eppure possente, che seduceva anche Goethe per tanto spazio di vita’ (Farinelli 1944, IX). Farinelli (1944) does not offer an account of the relations between Byron and Ibsen, rather two different essays published together.

<sup>59</sup> In order to complete this survey of Farinelli’s interest in Byron’s poetry, one further essay must be noted: Farinelli (1946) is the reprint in book form of an essay, first published in 1896, on the myth of *Don Juan* in European literature. Byron’s poem is briefly mentioned in chapter 12 under the title ‘Romanticismo e tempi moderni’ (Romanticism and modern times, Farinelli 1946, 187–207).

<sup>60</sup> ‘Le idee si sono venute nello spazio di cento anni profondamente modificando: meglio, si sono quasi completamente rovesciate’; ‘il periodo vittoriano è il principale responsabile di questa svalutazione di Byron’; ‘il tempo di ristabilire un giusto equilibrio è forse venuto’ (Gargano 1924, 1).

memorable work of criticism, that produced a far-reaching effect on English studies in Italy'.<sup>61</sup> The chapter on Lord Byron (Cecchi 1915, 265–90) starts by comparing and condemning Scott and Byron, since 'the one is the exact equivalent to the other: the second slice of the same rotten apple' ('l'uno è l'esatto corrispondente dell'altro; il secondo spicchio della stessa mela bacata', 268). His poetry being false and affected, he insisted, it did not last, as in the case of most of D'Annunzio's poetry. Goethe's appreciation of Byron is explained away; in Italy, 'Lord Byron's Romanticism flows into the worst operas of Verdi and Donizetti' ('il romanticismo di Lord Byron sgorga nel peggior melodramma del Verdi e del Donizetti', (275). Byron's repeated depiction of the same themes, feelings and heroes is captured in a striking image:

Byron makes the pitiful impression of a cyclist who, held round the waist by an invisible and inescapable bond, turns over and over, pivoting thousands and thousands of times at a terrific speed, following the same tracks, without ever budging an inch.<sup>62</sup>

Even though Cecchi is ready to admit that Byron's ottava rima is usually successful and that *Bo* and *DJ* are justly recognized as his best poetry, the Italian critic stresses the fact that 'among Byron's works, *Don Juan* is appreciated as a caricature of the poet himself and his collaborators, as a red parody of black Harold'. In other words, '*Don Juan* acts as a retrospective spur to reconsider Byron's poetry in jest'.<sup>63</sup>

In his 1924 article on the centenary of Byron's death, Cecchi writes that the worst Italian criticism had resented his previous essay, while he had then sided with the best British criticism. At all events, *DJ* has justly come to be acknowledged as a better poem than *CHP*. While commenting on the Italian critical tendency to pass a moral judgement on Byron's life rather than a literary one on his poetry, Cecchi claims,

Byron's immorality ought to be shown when confirmed by his prosody. And his relations with women are no more equivocal and shady than his relations with words. Therefore, while demolishing him from a moralistic point of view, one should not go as far as to forget completely that Byron

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<sup>61</sup> 'Un' opera critica memorabile, che ha agito profondamente sull'anglistica italiana' (Lombardo 1971, 136). In Mario Praz's opinion, Cecchi's (1915) book 'left its mark on the history of English studies in Italy; here for the first time rising to international importance' ('segna pure una data nella storia degli studi inglesi in Italia, qui per la prima volta assurti a importanza internazionale', quoted in Lombardo 1971, 136n.). Cecchi (1915) was later reprinted as *I grandi romantici inglesi* (The great English Romantics, Cecchi 1961).

<sup>62</sup> 'E il Byron fa l'effetto pietoso d'un ciclista che tenuto a cintola per un invisibile, inesorabile laccio, compie, intorno a un perno, centinaia di migliaia di giri ad andature folli, calpestando sempre le stesse tracce, senza distaccarsi d'un centimetro mai' (Cecchi 1915, 279).

<sup>63</sup> 'Il Don Giovanni piace dentro l'opera del Byron, quale caricatura dello stesso poeta e dei suoi collaboratori, quale rossa parodia del nero Aroldo'; 'il *Don Giovanni* porge uno stimolo retrospettivo a ripensare in burla la poesia byroniana' (Cecchi 1915, 282, 283).

was a precursor, however uncouth and coarse. He invented the figure of the cursèd poet who, with stereotyped traits, we meet again in Poe and Baudelaire, this time endowed with glorious musicality and monumentality.<sup>64</sup>

Emilio Cecchi's third and final piece of criticism on Lord Byron appeared in 1929. After repeating the same, on the whole negative, judgements passed on his poetry, Cecchi is ready to acknowledge that,

On the contrary, his basic quality was unharnessed energy, an elementary life force that led him to act, to prey, without regard to the meaning and the consequences of his own actions; like fire, that sets light to whatever it touches. Such relentless, anarchical strength was only counteracted by an equally exceptional faculty of humorous dualism. So to say, Byron was a tragic hero and his own jester at the same time.<sup>65</sup>

1924, then, was a pivotal year in the history of Byronic criticism in Italy. Yet one further piece of criticism – an articulate one – might be mentioned: the 15 April 1924 issue of the monthly journal *La cultura* (Culture) where five different articles were collected. Leaving aside those on Byron's reception in France, Germany and Russia, the remaining two papers by Bosco and Praz deserve careful consideration. Bosco (1924) – a concise supplement and amendment to Porta (1924) – makes clear that 'the Byronic phenomenon is much more psychological than literary' in Italy. This, Bosco argues, is the reason why Byronism came to decline in the second half of the nineteenth century: '[Byronism] being born for reasons that were largely extraneous to the artistic value of Byron's works, Byron is now forgotten irrespective of how they are appreciated'.<sup>66</sup>

Mario Praz's essay in the same journal is very important for two different reasons. Firstly, this was the first detailed Italian survey of the reception of Byron's works in England, and therefore it broke new ground in connecting Italian Byron criticism to the British. Secondly, as it was Praz's first critical essay on Byron, it set the tone for his subsequent work on the poet. After

<sup>64</sup> 'La immoralità del Byron converrà sempre mostrarla confermata dalla sua prosodia. E i suoi rapporti con le donne non son più equivoci e loschi dei suoi rapporti con le parole. Così, nella demolizione moralistica, non bisogna eccedere fino a dimenticare del tutto che, comunque rozzo e sgangherato, il Byron fu un precursore; e inventò la figura del poeta maledetto che, con tratti stereotipi, ritroviamo da Poe al Baudelaire dotati, frattanto, di musicalità e monumentalità gloriose' (Cecchi 1915, 54–55).

<sup>65</sup> 'Egli ebbe, invece, come qualità fondamentale, una sfrenata energia, una potenza di vita elementare, che lo portava ad agire, a predare, senza riguardo al significato e alle conseguenze delle proprie azioni; allo stesso modo che il fuoco brucia dove tocca. Tale forza implacabile, anarchica, trovava soltanto il contrapposto in una non meno eccezionale facoltà di sdoppiamento umoristico. Per così dire, il Byron era a un tempo l'eroe tragico e il buffone di sé stesso'. The 1929 essay 'Ombre byroniane' (Byronic shadows) is quoted from Cecchi (1954, 9–14 (13))

<sup>66</sup> 'Questo fenomeno byroniano è assai più psicologico che letterario'; 'Nato per cause in gran parte estranee al valore artistico delle opere di Byron, indipendentemente dall'apprezzamento di esse Byron è dimenticato' (Bosco 1924, 252, 262).

inviting (rather sardonically, one may add) Italian critics to set great store by British criticism,<sup>67</sup> Praz writes that,

Byron can roughly be defined as a member of the latter caste [the aristocracy], in which the eighteenth-century elements come to the extreme limit of their maturation and deny themselves in a conscience that is anxious to overcome them. Far from being that happy mixture that Goethe presumed him to be (Euphorion), Byron was, so to say, biform, but his biformity was hybrid. Whoever does not realize this fundamental trait of his, will not be able to understand why he found his most perfect expression in a hybrid genre like the burlesque poem, that is to say in *Don Juan*, a poem that was justly defined as the epic of the Regency.<sup>68</sup>

This is perhaps why, as far as the poet's influence on the later English writers of the nineteenth century, 'it is as if Byron had never existed' ('Byron, è come se non fosse esistito', Praz 1924, 245). After his fame declined in the 1830s Byron was totally neglected during the early and middle Victorian period. Yet, he continued,

the period between 1880 and today can be described as a period of settlement and approach to the definitive balance . . . : Byron must be given an important place among British poets, though a good many steps lower than the peak he had originally been assigned. What is generally admitted is the lack of 'magic', of felicity in Byron's style; its strength, however elementary and grossly expressed, is emphasized; the need to judge his poetry as one is reaffirmed; his excellence in the field of satire is stressed: *The Vision of Judgment* and *Don Juan* are unanimously seen as his masterpieces.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> 'It would not be a bad idea if the Italians, so hasty in glorifying the poet Byron especially for sentimental and political reasons, tried quickly to inspect the judgements passed on an Englishman's poetry by the Englishmen themselves, to whom a certain expertise on the subject will not be denied' ('Non sarebbe male cioè che gl'italiani, così corrivi a esaltare il Byron poeta, soprattutto per ragioni sentimentali e politiche, cercassero di passar rapidamente in rassegna i giudizi dati sulla poesia di un inglese dagli inglesi, ai quali non si vorrà disconoscere una certa competenza in materia', Praz 1924, 241). Mario Praz (1896–1982) is, of course, well known among scholars in both England and Italy as a Professor of Italian in the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester between 1915 and 1934, and as a Professor of English literature in Rome from 1934 to 1966. Apart from publishing very many works of literary and comparative criticism, he also founded and edited *English Miscellany*, the first Italian journal of English literary studies.

<sup>68</sup> 'Il Byron può esser definito all'ingrosso come un individuo di quest'ultima casta, nel quale gli elementi settecenteschi, giunti allo stremo di lor maturazione, si negano in una coscienza ansiosa di superarli. Lungi dall'essere quel felice incrocio che il Goethe immaginava (Euphorion), il Byron era sì, per così dire, biforme, ma d'un'ibrida biformità. Chi non si renda conto di questa sua caratteristica fondamentale, non potrà capire perché l'espressione più perfetta egli dovesse trovarla in un genere ibrido come il poema burlesco, cioè nel *Don Juan*, che fu giustamente chiamato l'epopea della Reggenza' (Praz 1924, 241).

<sup>69</sup> 'Il periodo dal 1880 ai giorni nostri può definirsi di assestamento e di approssimazione all'equilibrio definitivo . . . : al Byron vien riconosciuto un posto importante tra i poeti britannici, sebbene di parecchi gradini più basso del

The following year he revised and expanded his 1924 essay into a book (Praz 1925a) divided into two sections, dealing respectively with Byron and the English society of his times, and his posthumous reception in England. In the same year a critical introduction to Byron's poetry and some sample translations from his works were included in Praz's anthology of nineteenth-century English poets (Praz 1925b). 1930 was an *annus mirabilis* in Mario Praz's career, especially with the publication of *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (Praz 1930c), a study that was to appear in an English translation three years later as *The Romantic Agony* (republished in 1960). Lord Byron appears in chapter 2, entitled 'Metamorphoses of Satan', as he is said to have brought to perfection the image of the rebel angel, a distant descendant of Milton's Satan. After commenting on the Giaour, the Corsair and Lara as fallen angels who experience 'le bonheur dans le crime' ('a pleasurable thrill in the crime'), Praz deals with Byron's contribution to the vogue of vampirism in Romantic literature. In the same year Praz offered more material on Lord Byron: a critical essay (Praz 1930b), a survey of recent Byron literature (Praz 1930a) and the Byron entry in the most important Italian encyclopaedia of the time (Praz 1930d). Although they add nothing new to Praz's critical overview, two other essays deserve mention: the pages on Byron in his *Storia della letteratura inglese* (History of English literature, Praz 1937) and a section in his collection of essays (Praz 1958). Both studies were very influential, the former for generations of students and teachers of English literature in Italy, the latter for the research community in Italy and elsewhere. The Byron chapter in Praz (1937) is a convincing synthesis of his criticism and includes a short section on the reception of Byron in nineteenth-century Italy. The Byron section in Praz 1958 – entitled 'Un cimelio di Byron' (A Byron relic) and here quoted from the revised edition of 1995 – reveals the critic's method and central ideas. While describing a nineteenth-century clock containing a miniature portrait of Lord Byron he had found in an antique shop in Rome, he is moved to offer a critical opinion. Praz writes that he is not 'a Byron enthusiast',

although as a young man one of the first things I read in English was *Childe Harold*. I soon came to share the opinion of Emilio Cecchi who, in his *Storia della Letteratura inglese nel secolo XIX*, did not take Byron very seriously.

Then Praz insists on the interplay between the poet's life and his poetry and on the mythical stature attained by his persona:

This fullness of life, which the poet was unable to communicate to many of his lines – that remind us, with Cecchi, of worn-out tunes in dead melodramas – the man instilled into the things that came into contact with him. With other great writers their lives count for much less and can even,

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fastigio che gli era stato originariamente assegnato. In genere si ammette la mancanza di "magia", di felicità nello stile del Byron, se ne sottolinea la forza sia pure elementare e rozza espresa, si riafferma la necessità di giudicarne l'opera in blocco, si insiste sulla eccellenza nel campo della satira: la *Vision of Judgment* e il *Don Juan* sono all'unanimità ritenuti i capolavori' (Praz 1924, 249–50).

in some cases, be ignored; but with Byron poetry was only one of the aspects of his life. Byron is an atmosphere, a climate of feeling, a trend of the spirit, rather than a line of verse or a specified group of lines; in truth, when we think of Byron, the first thing that comes before our eyes is a physical presence, a profile. (Praz 1964 [1958], 145–47)<sup>70</sup>

As a result of the influential writings of such critics as Farinelli, Cecchi and Praz, Byron scholarship in Italy became more mature and critically aware, as is shown by two essays published in the mid-1930s. The first by Foà (1935), is a synthesis of early twentieth-century studies on Byron, dealing as it does with Byron criticism from 1865 onwards, Byron and Italian literature from Dante to Alfieri, and Byron's relations with contemporary Italian writers and the Carbonari. The second, by Niccolai (1937), is the first bibliographical survey of Byron studies in Italy. It lists 13 translations from Byron's works, 35 essays on his poetry and 31 on the relations between Byron and Italy.<sup>71</sup>

After the Second World War, the cultural autarchy of the Fascist regime was replaced by a renewed interest in Anglo-American culture. While the reading and translation of contemporary writers such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway contributed much to an Italian appreciation of modern writing, Italian critics also benefited from a renewed contact with the critical work of their British and American colleagues. Lord Byron, inevitably, formed a part of the canon. This

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<sup>70</sup> 'Un fanatico di Byron'; 'benché da giovane *Childe Harold* fosse una delle mie prime letture inglesi, presto mi allineai coll' opinione di Emilio Cecchi, che nella *Storia della letteratura inglese nel secolo XIX* non prendeva Byron molto sul serio'; 'Quella carica di vita che il poeta non seppe comunicare a tanti suoi versi, che ci fan pensare, col Cecchi, a logore arie di defunti melodrammi, l'uomo l'ha data alle cose che ebbero contatto con lui. Per altri grandi scrittori la vita conta assai meno, si può, in certi casi, perfino ignorare, ma per Byron la poesia non ne era che uno degli aspetti. Byron è un' atmosfera, un clima, una disposizione di spirito, più che un verso o un determinato gruppo di versi; in verità, quando pensiamo a Byron, la prima cosa che ci si offre dinanzi agli occhi è una presenza fisica, un profilo' (Praz 1995 [1958], 157–59)). It is not possible to trace all references and brief comments on Byron in Praz's later production, very often made up of newspaper articles or very short essays, but it can safely be said that Praz did not change his mind on the English lord. The essays and books referred to here do not include Praz (1961) and (1963), that are cited above.

<sup>71</sup> Niccolai's bibliography is, of course, incomplete, especially the section on Byron's translations where he offers no more than a representative sample. It is worth noticing, however, that this bibliography came out as his ninth list in the *Bulletin of the British Institute of Florence* and as part of a larger plan for the diffusion of English studies in Italy. Since its foundation in 1917, with the exception of the years of the Second World War, the British Institute has played an important role in developing cultural understanding between Great Britain and Italy through the teaching of their respective languages and cultures and the maintenance in Florence of a library. The foundation of the Institute, together with the contemporaneous setting up of the first university chairs of English in Italy, is mentioned in Migliorini and Baldelli (1972, 331) as the starting point for the study of English at an advanced level in Italy. The *Bulletin* was published between 1932 and 1940, at the height of Fascist Anglophobia.

renewed contact developed extensively in the following decades. It is therefore possible to trace some trends in the post-1945 Italian critical reaction to Byron's poetry.

As far as literary criticism is concerned, both short essays and book-length monographs would include Foà (1953?), the first Italian study of Byron as a satirist. More recent criticism at the level of international scholarship includes Melchiori (1972), Vitale (1984), Righetti (1988), Bugliani (1989), Portale (1991), Sportelli (1999), Innocenti (2002), Pala (2002), Angeletti (2002a; 2002b), Fini (1948), Pilla (1955), Jannattoni (1959), Cialfi (1963), Antonini (1973), Guzzetta (1978), Munafò Giardelli (1984), Panaro (1988), Pozzani (1988) and De Crescenzo (1988). The introductions to Italian editions of Byron's poems are also worth consultation: Ludovica Koch's 'Introduction' in Byron (1987b, 11–26), Masolino d'Amico's foreword in Byron (1986b, 5–10), Claudio Gorlier's refined 'Preface' in Byron (1986a, V–XIII) and above all Innocenti's critique in Byron (1999, 7–34). Post-1945 Italian critical essays on Byron's Italian years are rare with the exception of Cordiè (1950) and the translation and reception of his works (Iamartino 1991; 2003). Finally, general surveys for a wider public include Anon. [Rizzatti, Maria Luisa] (1968), Spagnoli (1992) and Domini (1988), this last item an exhibition catalogue with some high-quality contributions.

While the above list is meant to show the extent of modern Italian criticism on Byron's poetry, its depth can only be gauged by considering the studies published by the Italian Byron specialists of recent decades, all of them Professors of English literature. Giorgio Melchiori, who wrote fine essays on Byron and Italy (Melchiori 1958; 1977; 1980; 1981), and one on Byron's dramas (Melchiori 1986) deserves mention here as does Attilio Brilli who published an excellent monograph on *DJ* (Brilli 1971a), two further essays (Brilli 1971b; 1988), and critical introductions to his own editions of *Bo* (Byron 1972, 5–36) and *DJ* (Byron 1982, XI–XXIII). Tomaso Kemeny's translation and edition of Byron's Selected Works (Byron 1993b) is in itself a noteworthy piece of criticism. The choice of passages to be translated and edited, the clear introduction (7–35), the long and detailed chronology (37–84), the rich bibliography (85–90) and, especially, the introductions and notes to the single excerpts, all make for an outstanding contribution to Byron studies in Italy.<sup>72</sup> Franco Buffoni has already been mentioned as a translator of Byron's poetry. His version of *M* (Byron 1984), with a critical introduction, was followed by several essays (Buffoni 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1997) and a monograph on English Romanticism where further contributions on Byron's poetry are included in the reprint of earlier papers (Buffoni 1992). 1988 was Byron year for Giovanna Franci: apart from co-editing an Italian translation of the OT (Byron 1988), she published three essays on Byron (Franci 1988a; 1988b; 1988c), with a further essay in the following year (Franci 1989).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> In an essay on the theory and practice of poetic translation, Kemeny further comments on two passages from Byron's *Bo* and *CHP* (Kemeny 1998, 56–57, 60).

<sup>73</sup> Professor Franci is currently corresponding member of The International Byron Society for Italy.

Two scholars of a younger generation also deserve mention in the present survey: Diego Saglia, who published an essay on *Bo* (Saglia 1994), a monograph on Byron and Spain (Saglia 1996), and two works on Romanticism (with many references to Byron) (Saglia 2000; 2002) and Gabriele Poole, who studies the Byronic hero (Poole 1996; 1998; in press a) and more recently *G* (Poole 2000; in press b). Finally, the name of Professor Lilla Maria Crisafulli deserves mention. Although she is a Shelley rather than a Byron specialist, Crisafulli is a co-founder and the current Director of the Centro Interdisciplinare di Studi Romantici (Interdisciplinary Centre for Research and Documentation on Romanticism),<sup>74</sup> in the University of Bologna. In that capacity, she has edited three books on English Romanticism (Crisafulli and others 1988; Cheyne and Crisafulli 1990; Crisafulli 2002a), the first two the proceedings of conferences she has organized.<sup>75</sup>

As a conclusion to this section on Italian criticism of Byron's poetry, the unified nature of Italian Byronic scholarship over time should be underlined: its sense of uninterrupted development, of gradual transition and change from a gossipy interest in Byron's life to the rigorous study of his works, from a prevalently sentimental and superficial vogue for the poet's early work to a deep appreciation of his more mature, satiric and later poetry and, finally, from a marked preference for the literary relations between Byron and Italy to the active involvement in the international critical debate on the work of the noble Lord.

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<sup>74</sup> See the Centre website at [www.lingue.unibo.it/romanticismo](http://www.lingue.unibo.it/romanticismo). The Centre promotes the publication of a series of books called *Romanticismo e dintorni* (Romanticism and its surroundings) and of the *Rivista Interdisciplinare di Studi Romantici* (Interdisciplinary journal for Romantic studies). It is perhaps worth adding that during the latest conference organized by the Centre, jointly with the British Association for Romantic Studies (*The Language(s) of Romanticism*, Bologna, 28 February–2 March 2003), seven papers on Byronic subjects were read by Italian scholars.

<sup>75</sup> Both conferences ('The Romantics as Moderns', Rome 1986, and 'The Romantics as Expatriates', Rome 1988) were organized with the help of the British School at Rome, the British Council and, above all, the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association (KSMA). The latter has, of course, performed an active role in fostering scholarly interest in the British Romantic poets – and Byron among them – since its foundation in 1906. The 1956 issue of the *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* was a monograph on Byron (Hewlett 1956). Before the two conferences mentioned above, the former Director Joseph Cheyne organized an exhibition on the English Romantic poets and Italy and published its catalogue (Anon. 1980). In 1985 lectures on Romantic theatre were delivered at the British Council under the auspices of the KSMA, and later appeared in book form (Cave 1986). The same kind of activities are being pursued by the current Director, Catherine Payling. See the KSMA website at [www.keats-shelley-house.org](http://www.keats-shelley-house.org).

## **Conclusion**

The aim of the present survey of the reception of Lord Byron's life and works in Italy from the late nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century has been to provide and evaluate the most relevant data and to highlight the main critical and popular trends. Some closing remarks may perhaps be added in order to show how the different areas of Byron's reception in Italy – Byron translations, his impact on Italian culture and society, Italian criticism of his poetry – overlap and influence each other. After 1870, Byron as the unconventional hero and fighter for liberty no longer aroused any great admiration; he was simply studied and written about. At best critics attempted to reconstruct his Italian years on a firm historical and factual basis, at worst Byron appeared as the subject of semi-fictional romantic stories. Byron as a poet took decades to be studied in his own right and in his own language. Even though the virtual absence of references to Byron's poetry in Italian literary works of the late nineteenth century may be said to correspond chronologically to the neglect of Byron's works in Victorian England, the reason in Italy was not social stigma or moral deprecation, but simply sheer ignorance of the English language on the one hand, and a different orientation of the Italian literary tradition on the other. There were translations from Byron's works, of course, but, apart from being for the most part in prose, verse translations generally tended to make use of traditional poetic forms and diction, thus cutting themselves off from the most recent and innovative literary trends. In the translators' defence it must be said that Byron's literary models – Pope on the one hand, Pulci and Casti on the other – drew them to the more traditional forms of literary expression; that it would take many years to appreciate how modern, in more than one way, his satiric poetry was. The different pace of Italian translations and criticism of Byron's works has already been noted, translations usually preceding criticism. However, in the final decades of the period translations were able to take advantage of the accomplishments of critical reflection in the same way that Italian criticism came to benefit from and interact with the international critical output on Byron's works.

Italy is the land where Byron spent the best part of his short life and wrote the poems of lasting value – life and poetry being the two sides of the same Byronic coin. This caused Professor Melchiori to write that 'Perhaps without his Italian experience Byron's poetry would not be still so alive today' (1980, 69). It is also a matter of fact that such intertwining of biography and poetry could not help giving the Italian reception of Byron's poetry a particular colour. And even though Byron's literary reputation suffered, in Italy as elsewhere, when sociological criteria in judging works of art were superseded by purely aesthetic ones, Lord Byron has never stopped being remembered and appreciated in Italy, as a man, a mythical figure and a poet.

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## Chapter 5

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## Chapter 6

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