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Stefania Arcara

**CONSTRUCTING THE SOUTH: SICILY, SOUTHERN ITALY AND
THE MEDITERRANEAN IN BRITISH CULTURE, 1773-1926**

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INTRODUCTION

In the past few years a number of critical studies have been entirely or partly devoted to an analysis of the role played by the Mediterranean in British literature and culture during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. These studies include Robert Aldrich's *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* (1993), James Buzard's *The Beaten Track* (1993), and John Pemble's *The Mediterranean Passion* (1987).¹ In Paul Fussell's *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1980), which may be considered a precursor to these, the author observes that "to sketch the history of the British imaginative intercourse with the Mediterranean in modern times is virtually to present a survey of modern British literature"; he goes on to stress that "the Mediterranean is the model for the concept *south*, and it is a rare Briton whose pulses do not race at the mention of that compass direction".² It is the concept "south" in this statement, situated in the area of literary and cultural studies, which constitutes the focus of this thesis.

In a range of contemporary academic disciplines, the compass directions, ordered in two pairs of symmetrical oppositions - west/east, north/south - recur as terms whose meaning is both complex and shifting. In 1978, Edward Said's Foucaultian approach in *Orientalism* first suggested that concepts such as "Orient" are not geographical and historical entities which can be taken for granted, but cultural constructions operated by "Western discourse". A critical look at the use of these geographical oppositions on a discursive level reveals the mechanisms of cultural production articulated on the

¹Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

²Paul Fussell, *Abroad: Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp.130-1.

basis of what Said calls "imaginative geography": "We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography".³

From this perspective, Said points out that such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Thus, after the work of Said and the elaboration by critics in the field of colonial discourse analysis such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, drawing on a body of theory which goes under the names of deconstruction and poststructuralism, today, as Dennis Porter sums up:

We are no longer inclined to take for granted the apparently given identities or fixed positionalities of our discourses that have traditionally defined, for example, the differences between the races and the sexes or between us and them, East and West, North and South in our various cultures.⁴

In the present world of transnational capitalism and mass media culture, in academic fields ranging from postcolonial and cultural studies to politics, economics, and international relations, the two pairs of compass directions belong to what has been called "a geopolitical imaginary",⁵ where the analogous pair "centre/periphery" also frequently makes its appearance. The enormous cultural significance and the problematic nature of these sets of oppositional terms which construct and attempt to define different cultural and geographical entities emerge clearly, as the work of Said and others demonstrate, when they are considered as belonging to what Foucault calls "discourse": west and east, north and south, then, can be interpreted as produced by and entangled in a set of power relations. The complex nature of these terms and the entities they create and refer to, pose questions which are inseparable from a wide range of issues relating to imperialism, economics, history, philosophy, politics, and aesthetics.

³Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), pp.4-5.

⁴Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.7. On colonial discourse analysis and theories of the postcolonial see *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); *Colonial discourse / postcolonial theory*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994); *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996).

⁵Porter, p.19.

The way in which "north" and "south" are conventionally used in the area of international relations, for example, is one which encompasses the geography of the present world as a whole, which is generally divided into two sections on the basis of economic criteria and the unequal distribution of military and technological power. As a critic in the field observes, talking about north/south relations, there is "an economy of abstract binary oppositions that we routinely draw upon and that frame our thinking", for instance: "developed/underdeveloped, first world/third world, core/periphery, metropolis/satellite, advanced industrialized/less developed, modern/traditional, and real states/quasi states".⁶ The areas of economics and international relations provide perhaps the most evident instance of how entities such as "north" and "south" do not correspond to the commonly held notions of compass directions as defined by the positivistic sciences of geography and map-making: they are, instead, determined exclusively by economic and political criteria, by which, for example, a country such as Australia belongs to the "north". Thus, certain contradictions in terms arise from the use of general oppositional categories such as north and south, contradictions that are also evident in the increasing impasse created by the large use in academia of the category "the West" and its recurrent corollary, "Eurocentrism".

The conventional terms "West" and "Western civilisation" are used over and over again in the media and in a range of academic fields, where the theoretical validity of these large abstractions is seldom questioned, and where the fact that these polar terms are constructed and changeable often tends to be forgotten. Occasionally, some critics have made a point of delimiting the scope of the terms used: for instance, historian and economist Samir Amin, discussing the term "Eurocentrism" in his 1988 study of the same title, recognises that the choice of this word is open to discussion, and specifies that he uses "Eurocentrism" to refer to "an essential dimension of the

⁶Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.2. Doty's innovative book programmatically adopts an interdisciplinary approach, by bringing discourse theory from cultural and postcolonial studies into the field of international relations, which has traditionally eschewed dealing with questions of representation (see Doty, pp.1-5).

ideology of capitalism". Amin goes on to explain that its manifestations are characteristic of all the societies in the developed capitalist world, whose centre is composed of Western Europe, North America, Japan and a few other states (Australia, New Zealand, Israel). He then stresses that "the very center of these centers is North America", from which follows the contradiction in terms that the ideology of Eurocentrism applies first and foremost not to the geographical entity known as Europe but to one in the North American continent.⁷

Similar questions arise in the field of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory. In *Colonial Desire* (1995), Robert Young summarises the present state of this field of study pointing out that "while there has been a remarkable (...) growth of analysts researching in this area, an increasing tendency has been to produce new archival material rather than to develop further the theoretical parameters set up by Said *et al*".⁸ While theoretical challenges have come from various directions, a recurrent criticism of colonial discourse analysis has been that of exposing its tendency to homogenise the category not only of the "Third World", but also that of the "West".⁹ In this sense, Young remarks that such general categories as the "West" have become "increasingly troublesome".¹⁰

The need to specify and delimit certain broad categories used in academic criticism appears more and more urgent, in order to avoid the risks of dangerous theoretical generalisations and a crystallisation into fixed academic conventions. Too often,

⁷See Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. by Russell Moore (London: Zed Books, 1988), pp.xii-xiii. One specific contradiction in the use of generalised geographical terms is pointed out by Amin himself, when he observes that historians classified Carthage - a Phoenician city - as "Oriental", whereby the rivalry between Rome and Carthage "is said to prefigure the conquest of the 'Maghreb' Orient' by imperialistic Europe, which is a curious contradiction in terms since Maghreb in Arabic means *West*!" (Amin, p.93).

⁸Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.163.

⁹As Said states, Orientalism "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (*Orientalism*, p.12).

¹⁰Young, p.165. Speaking of the two central categories, "Europe" and "the West", "which are still largely unexamined", Maryon McDonald comments that they "seem, for many social and political scientists worldwide, to have become important metaphors of blame or of self-castigation" (Maryon McDonald, 'The Construction of Difference: An Anthropological Approach to Stereotypes', in *Inside European Identities: Ethnography in Western Europe*, ed. by Sharon MacDonald (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1993), 219-36, p.222).

different and changing cultural, political, historical and economic entities, enmeshed in complex sets of power relations, are classified and thrown into largely comprehensive categories linguistically defined by the apparently objective and scientific terminology of geography, as if oblivious to the fact that geography itself, as a form of representation, can be considered a type of discourse, where the presence of power may be located.¹¹

The problems arising from the prevailing tendency to use "Western Europe" as a general, stable, and homogeneous category are manifest especially in the works of some American scholars: in a recent book such as Dennis Porter's *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (1991) the author sets out to explore what he awkwardly calls "the Europeans' attitudes (...) toward themselves", by which he means for instance that of D.H. Lawrence searching for primitive life in agricultural Italy. This is one of the most evident cases where the general, unspecified category "Europe" becomes an ambiguous and deficient critical tool. The writing and travels of Lawrence in Italy are informed by the heavy play of discursive power relations, and are centred around a conscious, perpetual opposition of a north and a south within Europe (an opposition through which Lawrence defines Englishness and modernity at the same time), which has profound ideological connotations.¹² While, from the point of view of strictly "objective" geography, Lawrence in Sicily or Sardinia is a European writing about other Europeans, the contradiction of critics such as Porter lies in the fact that this geographical term is *also* used as a synonym of, or an analogous term to, "Eurocentric", or "Western", in discussions where "European" is

¹¹See J.B.Harey, 'Deconstructing the Map', in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, ed. by Trevor J.Barnes and James S. Duncan (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 231-247 and Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

¹²Porter, p.18. Porter also studies travel writing about non-European countries; his choice of texts is confined to British and French travellers. An analogous example of the use of "European" for "northern European" is provided by Frank Turner, who, in his well informed study on classical education in Britain, writes at length on the nineteenth century rise of a "European" interest in the classics, using this adjective as interchangeable with "British and German", and as exclusive of other countries, tacitly placed outside the modern category "European"; for this critic, Greece and Italy are associated solely with their classical past: they are mentioned as objects of interest and study for British and German nineteenth century scholars, i.e. for "European" scholars; see Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

deployed while debating questions of imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism, and power relations on a global dimension.¹³ These contradictions arise when general terms have not been specified beforehand, and are used both in the innocent, neutral meaning of geographical positions *and* as conventional indicators of cultural and discursive constructions in the play of power.

Mary Louise Pratt is one of the few critics who have felt the need to specify the terms used, demonstrating an awareness of the complexity hidden behind the signifier "Western Europe": although she also uses the confusing expression "European travel books about Europe", elsewhere she clearly states that "European (...) refers above all to a network of *Northern* Europeans".¹⁴ In the introduction to *Imperial Eyes* (1992), her study of travel writing as part of the history of imperialism since the Renaissance, Pratt makes a point which is especially relevant here, affirming that:

Readers of European travel books about Europe have pointed out that many of the conventions and writing strategies [associated] with imperial expansionism characterize travel writing about Europe as well. (...) The eighteenth century has been identified as a period in which Northern Europe asserted itself as the center of civilization, claiming the legacy of the Mediterranean as its own. It is not surprising, then, to find German or British accounts of Italy sounding like German or British accounts of Brazil.¹⁵

Thus, Pratt briefly raises the question of the heterogeneous nature of the category "Europe" as used in the context of the study of imperialism and colonial discourse, and declares that the term is used conventionally in her book to signify "Northern Europe".

It is precisely on the north/south opposition within Europe that the present study concentrates, while also suggesting that a look at the British representation of the European south and the related discourse on a north/south dichotomy (often exemplified in the nineteenth century by England and Italy), can help to investigate how the identity of modern Britain came to be constructed in relation to discourses of

¹³In this second sense, then, the problematic conclusion should be drawn in Lawrence's case, that the southern Italians he writes about are not "European".

¹⁴Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.38 (my emphasis).

¹⁵Pratt, p.10. Another scholar who is more specific about her geographical terminology is Roxanne Doty, who in her introduction to *Imperial Encounters* declares that her study deals with "the encounters between the *Anglo-European* world and the imperialized countries" (Doty, p.3, my emphasis).

power. This study does not attempt to elaborate theoretical questions on the problems of representation and discursive practices, but it may indirectly contribute to raise the question of the non-homogeneity and the changeable nature of categories such as "Europe" and "the West", "north" and "south", as they are often used in contemporary scholarship written in English.

Today, a north/south opposition tends to be theorised in the areas of economics, international relations and postcolonial studies in the context of global capitalism, and to be thus inscribed in the geopolitical dimension of the whole planet, whereby it is possible to speak of a north and a south of the world, as well as a core and a periphery. In the nineteenth century, however, the use of the terms "north" and "south" in the English language indicates a more limited geographical opposition, situated within the European continent. In British, and later American, culture from around the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, the category "south" generally refers to the Mediterranean.¹⁶ In different areas of culture including travel writing, fiction, poetry, historiography, as well as the narratives of the new sciences such as geology, volcanology, and archaeology, the term "south" recurs over and over again with a fluctuating meaning. It is an ambiguous and shifting term: its definition covers at times all the European countries of the Mediterranean, while more often it is equated specifically with Italy and Greece, and most of the times excludes Africa and the Levant. It is upon this nineteenth century use of the term "south", partly carried over to the early twentieth century, that the present study focuses.¹⁷

In the period analysed here, in British literature and culture, the concept south is often conflated with that of the Orient, and its origin and use within the British discourse of imperialism is closely related to that of the east. On the other hand, however, as this

¹⁶This meaning still partly survives in the twentieth century: Paul Fussell's remark, quoted above, that the Mediterranean is the model for the concept south, refers to British culture between the wars (see p.i).

¹⁷It may be interesting, however, to investigate how the nineteenth century and the contemporary use of the north/south opposition are related, and whether a study of the one can contribute to a better understanding of the other.

thesis also attempts to show, the discourse relating to the south is distinct and different in many ways from that of Orientalism as theorised by Said.

The convergence of various southern themes in diverse texts suggests how, both in the aesthetic and the scientific fields, the discourse of the south in British culture from the late eighteenth century onwards provided rich material with which attitudes were shaped, literary and pictorial genres were cultivated, explorations were made, classifications took place. In British late eighteenth century and Romantic culture a parallel of the use of the south can be found in representations of the Orient, also functioning as exotic locales. An analogous analysis of Oriental images and themes in British Gothic fiction and in the visual arts of the same period has been carried out by various critics.¹⁸ What emerges has been called by Said "popular Orientalism", identifiable for instance with the writings of Beckford, Byron and Goethe (all of whom, incidentally, travelled to the Mediterranean). In some ways, then, the discourse of the south and that of the Orient are inextricably intertwined: in *Orientalism*, Said briefly notices how "in some cases" the Oriental representations in Gothic tales can be associated with Piranesi's prisons, or with Tiepolo's luxurious ambiances, and also, in other cases, with the exotic sublimity of late eighteenth-century paintings.¹⁹ However, he glosses over the fact that the source of this exoticism in British culture was the picturesque Mediterranean south as much as the Orient. What the author of *Orientalism* notes about the late eighteenth century could be asserted, as this analysis hopes to demonstrate, of the Mediterranean south, without considerable changes:

Sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy: the Orient as a figure in the pre-Romantic, pretechnical Orientalist imagination of late-eighteenth-century Europe was really a chameleonlike quality (...). But this free-floating Orient would be severely curtailed with the advent of academic Orientalism.²⁰

¹⁸Said provides a selected bibliography of studies on the Orient in British literature in *Orientalism*. See also Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

¹⁹Said, *Orientalism*, p.118. Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), a Venetian engraver active in Rome, enjoyed large popularity in England especially for his views of classical ruins and for his extravagant series of drawings *Le Carceri*, showing fantastic and claustrophobic architecture which were greatly admired both by Coleridge and De Quincey. The fame of Piranesi's *Carceri* in England could be read as one more example of the fascination with the Italian south in its dark aspects related to incarceration and the underground.

²⁰Said, *Orientalism*, p.119.

By substituting "Mediterranean south" for "Orient" and "Britain" or "northern Europe" for "Europe" in this passage, the picture would maintain its coherence. As Said suggests here, with the nineteenth century an important event took place: Orientalist structures were laid, their boundaries defined. In a sense, the function of "academic Orientalism" which Said sees as a basis for modern Orientalist structures, was analogously fulfilled, in the case of the south, by the consolidation and intensification of nineteenth-century classical, antiquarian, and archaeological discourse. This discourse entailed field studies and observations in Greece and, more frequently, in the territories of Magna Grecia. It was intimately bound up with the related Romantic phenomenon of Hellenomania, with the long-lived British tradition of classical education, and, later, with Victorian aesthetic Hellenism: academic, classical, and high culture formed a substantial part of the "Mediterranean passion" which inspired crowds of Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals to flock to the south.

Thus, it may be argued that the terms "south" and "Orient" in nineteenth-century British culture stem from, and are articulated within, the same discursive framework, and in particular from the problematic attempt to construct a coherent cultural, national and imperial British identity. When the term south features in British texts, it serves to evoke an alterity through which cultural, political and aesthetic issues about Britishness are voiced. Questions and anxieties which are essentially British are expressed and debated via the concept south, as well as through the evocation of a colonial Other.

Said has amply demonstrated how the earliest phases of modern Orientalism originated during the latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.²¹ Concomitantly, from the late eighteenth century onward, the concept "south" appears in British and, later, American texts, recurring with increasing insistence throughout the following century.

²¹Said, *Orientalism*, p.201.

Like that of Orientalism, the emergence of the discourse of the south in British culture may be linked to socio-economic and political circumstances. As Marxist historians have noted, with the Renaissance begins a two fold phenomenon: the crystallisation of capitalist society in Europe and the European conquest of the rest of the world. As has been observed, embryonic forms of capitalism could be found in the Mediterranean (particularly in the Arab-Islamic and Italian regions); however, industrialisation and the development of capitalist modes of production, emerge not in the Mediterranean area, but in Britain: "the driving forces of development emigrate from the shores of the Mediterranean toward the peripheral regions of the European Atlantic north-west (...). The capitalist world system is therefore fashioned around the Atlantic, marginalizing in turn the old Mediterranean centre".²² Amin's study *Eurocentrism* attempts to demonstrate that the basis for the "European" claim of superiority and its conquest of the world lies in the capitalist mode of organisation of its society. If this viewpoint is accepted, the way that capital spread and developed geographically in the European north can throw light, on a discursive level, on the cultural formation of the nineteenth century concept "south".

Besides being active centres of finance and trade, during the Renaissance, the Italian city states enjoyed the unquestioned fame of European centres of art, learning, rhetoric and philosophy. Larry Wolff, writing about the conceptualisation of Western and Eastern Europe also notes that "from the age of the Renaissance to the age of Enlightenment, Europe's centers of culture and finance had shifted from the treasures and treasuries of Rome, Florence, and Venice to the now more dynamically important cities of Paris, London, and Amsterdam".²³

This historical phenomenon has been noted from a different viewpoint by culture and art critic Richard Jenkyns, who, in his study on *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980) draws attention to the shift of power northwards in contrast with the more unified European culture up to the Renaissance, pointing out that "the Atlantic Ocean,

²²Amin, p.73.

²³Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.5.

and not the Mediterranean was now the world's central sea. (...) England prospered and Italy decayed, and English noblemen used their prosperity to make the Grand Tour and see Italy for themselves".²⁴

The gradual shift of power northwards was also concomitant with the religious split within the Church brought about by the Reformation. Studying the shape of modern Europe, historian Victor Kiernan writes about the north/south opposition in the light of these religious and cultural transformations, whereby "the old division between eastern and western, Greek and Latin Churches was promptly succeeded by a new division between Catholic and Protestant, broadly between south and north".²⁵ The formation of modern Europe is described in economic terms by the same historian, who points out that the real growing-point was the north-west (including Britain, Holland, and northern France), where the "explosive economic force of the coming age, capitalism, was maturing", and which "formed the vital area, a surprisingly small part of the continent as a whole, the *truly 'European'* area in terms of future development".²⁶

Kiernan does not expand the point, but his remark, while throwing light on the emergence of the north/south cultural dichotomy examined in this thesis, is also illuminating in regards to the ambivalence of the term European as it is often used today. In order to grasp its relevance, especially for the contemporary use of terms such as European and Eurocentrism, it may be useful, as this study attempts to do, to look at the construction of a British identity from the late eighteenth century onwards, a construction within which the concept of the European south, making its manifest appearance, plays a crucial role.

The present analysis will seek to demonstrate that there is a way in which British nineteenth century culture strives to construct a national and imperial identity not only

²⁴Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp.40-41.

²⁵Victor Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (London: Serif, 1969; repr.1995), p.12.

²⁶Kiernan, p.13 (my emphasis). Similarly, Amin notes that the claim of a well known version of Western history, that a progression can be **identified** from Ancient Greece to Rome to feudal Christian Europe to capitalist Europe, has led to the formation of what today is commonly called Eurocentrism (see Amin, pp.89-90).

through its opposition to the Orient, or the peoples of its colonial territories, but also in relation to Europe and the Mediterranean. The cultural process of the construction of a British identity can be viewed not solely in the context of the discourse of Orientalism or colonial discourse, but also within what has been named here the discourse of the south.

Britain defined itself by what it was not - the Orient, and by 'what it was not-but partly it was' - the (Mediterranean) south. In fact, as will be argued in the following pages, the concept south in British culture is not merely the unprivileged term in the simple binary opposition north/south.

Far from being homogeneous and fixed, the discourse of the south is rather variegated and contradictory. It includes the language of savagery and primitivism, the opposition civilised/uncivilised characteristic of the narratives of the colonial encounter, and, concomitantly, a language of heritage and kinship: the south is for nineteenth-century Britain simultaneously an exotic, distant, and different entity, opposed (and often inferior) to itself, *and*, literally, a mother (or father) land, the locus of its cultural origin, the "cradle of civilisation", from which Britain and the north proceed in a genealogical line of progress.²⁷ There were certain elements of the south, mainly crystallised in classical art and Greek philosophy, and at other times in the achievements of the Roman empire, which were seen as being passed on, or rather "bequeathed", from the Mediterranean to the north. A rich evolutionary vocabulary of origins, kinship, inheritance, including metaphors of childhood and adulthood, is constantly at work in the nineteenth-century discourse of the south. Exposing one of its main contradictions, nineteenth-century Britain increasingly claimed a kinship with the classical Mediterranean (namely Italy and Greece), a claim made with a mixture of reverence and admiration, while, at the same time, it frequently theorised its own cultural and racial superiority over those "decayed" southern countries (and over the

²⁷For the language of savagery characteristic of colonial discourse and deployed especially in the encounter between Europe and America, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

rest of the world), utilising the vocabulary of decay and degeneration which was a familiar feature of racial and colonial discourse in imperial Britain.²⁸

The conflation and reciprocal reinforcement of imperialism, Orientalism, and the discourse of the south is evident, for instance, in John Ruskin's 1870 Slade Lectures at Oxford. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said quotes at length from the 'Inaugural Lecture', demonstrating how questions of politics and aesthetics are enmeshed in Ruskin's firm belief in the imperial destiny of England. It is interesting to note, however, that in the passage quoted by Said, Ruskin's theorisation of England's imperial destiny and the superiority of English culture is also centred on certain discursive elements which clearly belong to the north/south dichotomy circulating at the time, an aspect which Said's analysis chooses to ignore. In the 'Lecture', a British imperial identity is constructed by Ruskin not only in opposition to the east and the distant colonies, but also through a number of unequivocal, albeit indirect, references to the south:

We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood. (...) And we are rich in an inheritance of honour, bequeathed to us through a thousand years of noble history.²⁹

In this passage, what is stressed is not so much Britain's racial purity but its "northernness", and the reference to the north in "northern blood" obviously implies its complementary opposite, the south. That the south which Ruskin refers to is the classical Mediterranean becomes manifest not only in his use of a vocabulary of "heritage", one of the topoi of the discourse of the south, but also in his remark on the uncorrupted state of the English race, in implicit contrast with the "degeneration" which the south had undergone, in the eyes of Ruskin and his contemporaries, and which is also a recurring feature of nineteenth-century literature and travel writing about the Mediterranean. After proclaiming his nation's imperial destiny in

²⁸Annie E. Coombes, reporting on the use of terms such as 'decay', 'deterioration' and 'degradation' in early British ethnography and anthropology observes that these concepts were already familiar in Britain, in relation to the representation of the 'Orient', as demonstrated by Said. See Annie E. Coombes, 'The Recalcitrant Object: Culture Contact and the Question of Hybridity', in *Colonial discourse / postcolonial theory*, 89-114, p.94. As will be apparent in the following chapters, the concepts of decay and degeneration equally recur in representations of the Mediterranean south.

²⁹John Ruskin, 'Inaugural Lecture' (1870), quoted in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p.123.

triumphant rhetorical prose, Ruskin finally concludes by emphasising that "the England who is to be mistress of half the earth (...) must become (...) a *sacred Circe*, true Daughter of the Sun", who "must guide the human arts, and gather the divine knowledge, of distant nations".³⁰ As will be illustrated in the following chapters, in the literature and travel writing of Ruskin's time the Homeric mythical figure of Circe (a semi-goddess with magical powers) is routinely used as a personification of Italy; it is an image which perfectly combines the ambivalence of the south for British intellectuals, travellers and poets, for whom that "feminine" country elicited both sensual attraction and moral repulsion.³¹ The epithet "Circe" chosen by Ruskin for his rhetorical personification of imperial England, is not chosen randomly: the implication is that England has to be another glorious (classical, Renaissance) Italy, but one from which all negative connotations of sensuality are erased; Ruskin's personification of England as female decidedly excludes the morally ambivalent elements commonly associated with the figure of Circe, who is therefore radically modified through the addition of the adjective "sacred". At the same time, the use itself of a Homeric reference, which could be recognised by Ruskin's classically educated audience, functions as an allusion to the prestigious cultural bond claimed by Ruskin's England with classical Italy, Greece, and the ancient Mediterranean.

The present work does not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of the British attitudes to the Mediterranean south, and although a general chronological approach has been adopted, it offers itself more as a case study on a number of selected texts that may help to show the continuities and discontinuities of the discourse of the south.³² After a first introductory chapter outlining the emergence of the concept and the general features of the discourse of the south, the analysis will concentrate on a range of British, and partly American texts, which refer to a geographically limited

³⁰Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.125 (my emphasis).

³¹The Circe image is used as late as 1921 by D.H. Lawrence in *Sea and Sardinia*.

³²Because of the limited scope of this thesis, the present work, conceived as a case study, can only hint at how the discourse of the south stands in relation to imperial and colonial discourses at large, or at the theoretical question of how power relations and discursive practices create general categories such as north and south, east and west.

area, that of southern Italy and Sicily. Although general continuities in the discourse of the south may be found in texts on Italy at large, as well as on Greece (as suggested in Chapter One), the southern Italian regions including Sicily can somehow be set apart as an area holding special interest for British and later American travellers, partly because, from a historical point of view, these regions share a common glorious past as Magna Grecia, and partly because they are often perceived as European 'margins', the locus itself of an amorphous border with non-European geographical Others: Africa and the Levant. For these reasons, southern Italy and Sicily, lying at the extreme southern boundary of Europe, may be considered as the epitome of the concept south.

The emergence of the idea of a Mediterranean south as opposed to Britain and the north, takes place in the eighteenth century, the period of the voyages of discovery, when travel writing was one of the main literary genres, and travel accounts were among the most popular texts read in Britain. The eighteenth century seems an appropriate point of departure for this study as "the entire age was dominated by travellers".³³ While British scientists, adventurers, colonisers, explored the rest of the globe, much attention was also directed to southern European countries, especially Italy. There was, of course, a very long tradition of travel to Italy dating back to humanism and the Renaissance, but in the latter part of the eighteenth century this tradition was modified and reinforced by its convergence with the new taste for "discovery" characteristic of the age, and travellers were attracted to the extreme south, the "margins" of continental Europe: the Italian regions south of Naples, and the island of Sicily - then known collectively as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies - became favourite destinations.³⁴ The year 1773, when the Scot Patrick Brydone was

³³Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984), p.20.

³⁴Southern Italy and Sicily were dominated by the Spanish for centuries: "the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies" is a nomenclature dating back to King Alfonso in the 1440s who called himself *Rex utriusque Siciliae*. In 1816 the Bourbon King Ferdinand I used the title again officially. See Denis Mack-Smith, *A History of Sicily* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), pp.352-353.

responsible for what was announced as the "discovery" of Sicily by northern Europe, provides the starting point limiting the historical scope of this work.

Many of the texts analysed in the following chapters belong to the area of travel writing - accounts, memoirs, guidebooks - but although this study draws largely from the literature of travel, many examples have been selected from other fields of textuality, in the hope of illustrating the close correlation of various areas of culture, including the visual arts. As the following pages seek to demonstrate, there are many ways in which the reports of travellers influenced, and were influenced in turn by a series of texts belonging to fiction, poetry, the theatre, as well as historiography, archaeology, geology, etc., while a set of interconnected discursive practices can be individuated which link these areas to others such as architecture and the figurative arts.

Following a cultural studies approach, in the present work distinctions between categories of fiction and non-fiction, literary and non-literary texts, and between the various literary genres have been as it were by-passed, and texts have been selected ignoring the dictates of the canonical status of authors. Therefore, an obscure minor poet such as Barry Cornwall is analysed together with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and quotations from history and archaeology texts are combined with passages from novels and travel guidebooks. Each individual text has been analysed and placed next to the other in order to look at their context; a number of texts differing in terms of style, status, and genre have been considered as moments in the production of a larger discursive phenomenon, so as to examine each textual instance against the general framework of the discursive practices circulating at that time in Britain's cultural history.

The concluding Chapter concentrates on the works of E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence, as main representatives of the modernist elaboration of the discourse of the south: the date which closes the historical period of this analysis - 1926 - is the year of publication of Lawrence's story 'Sun', which is set in Sicily. This has been chosen as a rough, conventional date after which the strands of the discourse of the south begin to

change more drastically, as a result of the modified circumstances both of travel and cultural production. Although there is no clear-cut division between texts written before and after that date, and some large continuities may be traced in twentieth century British and American attitudes to the Mediterranean, an analysis of those after the Second World War would require a look specifically at film and mass media culture, and at the cultural practices of mass tourism and the "Westernisation" of the globe.

With the development of mass tourism, whose beginning dates back to Thomas Cook's first organised excursion in 1841, the ways of cross-cultural representations have been changing, and they have changed more drastically, as has been noted, in the twentieth century: "there is no denying the post-World War II boom in mass tourism, the widespread availability of air travel and the corollary erasure of the 'primitive' and the 'exotic'".³⁵ Also, as James Buzard argues in *The Beaten Track*, in the twentieth century the tourist/traveller dichotomy, which can be historicised as a feature of modern culture, is increasingly emphasised.³⁶ Lawrence can be considered one of the last "travellers" to the Mediterranean south: his ardent desire not to be confused with "tourists" along the "beaten track", and his conscious search for unexplored, primitive, and marginal places make him a true modernist heir both to his Victorian predecessors and to the late eighteenth century "discoverers" of Sicily such as Patrick Brydone, while he also perfectly epitomises the specific anxieties of a problematic modernity.

The discourse of the south as will be examined in the following chapters may serve to throw light on a phenomenon which has vast implications in the cultural history of Britain, is intertwined with many other discourses, and may also be connected with

³⁵Jacinta Matos, 'Old Journeys Revisited: Aspects of Postwar English Travel Writing', in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. by Michael Kowalewski (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 215-229, p.215. For Cook's 1841 first organised tour, see Kowalewski, p.5, and Buzard, pp.47-50.

³⁶In the introduction to *The Beaten Track*, Buzard specifies his use of the term "European tourism" in his sub-title, and explains that for him this is "a phenomenon of determinate historical origin in the modern industrializing and democratizing nations of *northern* Europe and, later, America" (Buzard, p.4, my emphasis).

developments in the present English speaking world. From the analysis conducted in this work, it should also become apparent that the concept south combined positive and negative connotations, was used for different purposes, and in the service of, or in conjunction with, contrasting ideologies, in what could be considered subversive as well as conservative ways. In any case, it illuminates an important part of the culture and the history of Britain and, in some ways, of what is today known as "Europe".

There is a remark in John Pemble's *The Mediterranean Passion* which may be used to sum up the relevance which a critical study of the nineteenth-century discourse of the south may hold. Pemble's comments on Victorian and Edwardian travellers may be extended to the whole period examined in the present work, and from travel to other areas of culture:

If their [the Victorians'] visits contributed little to an understanding of the Mediterranean, they have contributed much to an understanding of the Victorians. Although the South did not reveal itself to them, they revealed themselves to the South.³⁷

³⁷Pemble, p. 274.

CHAPTER ONE

"A SUNBURNT OTHERWISE": THE NORTHERN PICTURE OF THE EUROPEAN SOUTH

Out of a gothic North, the pallid children
Of a potato, beer-or-whisky
Guilt culture, we behave like our fathers and come
Southwards into a sunburnt elsewhere.

W.H.Auden, *Good-Bye to the Mezzogiorno*, 1958¹

One of the countless examples of the British fascination with the Mediterranean south in the twentieth century is W.H. Auden's poem *Good-Bye to the Mezzogiorno* (1958). The entire poem is centred on the opposition between the north and the south of Europe, typified respectively by England and Italy, where the south becomes, quite explicitly, an "elsewhere": the poem is constructed around a set of images belonging to what Fussell calls "the standard British mythology of the Mediterranean as the Other Place".²

Throughout the text, however, there runs a visible vein of self-irony. Auden's poem is particularly revealing as the author seems well aware of the conventionality of the images he uses, he plays around with them, simultaneously embracing and mocking the attitude of the north (to which he feels he belongs) towards the south (to which he feels inevitably attracted). It is precisely this tone of subtle irony which reveals the connection to a long tradition (Auden's phrase "we behave like our fathers") of literary and other kinds of discourses which cluster around the north/south dichotomy within Western Europe, a tradition which flourished in Romantic and Victorian

¹W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p.486.

²Fussell, *Abroad*, p.178.

Britain and whose emergence can be traced back, as will be shown, to the end of the eighteenth century.

Auden's pervasive irony can be best appreciated when *Good-Bye to the Mezzogiorno* is compared to a poem written in 1881, dealing with precisely the same theme, and bearing a similar title: *Italia io ti saluto!* by Christina Rossetti. Unlike Auden, Rossetti writes in a highly solemn vein:

To come back from the sweet South, to the North
Where I was born, bred, look to die;³

In her poem, the south, identified, as in Auden, with Italy, is repeatedly called "sweet", while the north, represented by England, is "bleak": these adjectives, like the analogous pair in Auden's poem ("sunburnt/pallid") create an insoluble antagonism; they correspond to a polarity which was constantly reiterated in various forms and in countless places in Romantic and Victorian culture. The concept "south" appears in a number of late nineteenth-century British and American texts, literary as well as non literary (in some of these the figure of the "south" also makes its appearance in the title, for instance in J.A.Symonds' poem *Southward Bound*, 1878, F.M.Crawford's history book *The Rulers of the South*, 1900, and many others). In this sense, Auden's poem testifies to the fact that, as Robert Aldrich notes, "the strength of classical and southern European themes is suggested by the long life they enjoyed".⁴

In order to understand how the numerous themes related to the north/south opposition within Europe have been passed on and elaborated in contemporary culture, it seems relevant to look at the cultural and historical context within which the construction of such opposition took place. As has been pointed out, it is important to understand "the birth of our modern exoticisms", which "originated and were consolidated between

³*The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, ed. by R. W. Crump, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), II, p.74.

⁴Aldrich, p.161.

the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, as today we are substantially their inheritors".⁵

This is also the time when, in the context of Romanticism, the geographical and cultural division of Europe into a north and a south started to be elaborated. The idea of the south and of a typical "spirit" of the south was perpetuated in various forms and with various implications throughout the nineteenth century, and it often resembled, was analogous to, or combined with, that of the Levant or the Orient, to the extent that the south was sometimes explicitly associated with or made to correspond with the east.⁶ The idea of the south may be interpreted as originating from, and being part of, the same tradition of hegemonic Western discourse that Said has exposed and analysed in *Orientalism*. The construction of the south was related in varying degrees with discourses of race, national character, climatic determinism, the idea of progress and its imperial implications.⁷ At the same time, however, the category "south" and

⁵Clara Gallini, in "Le radici dell'immaginario esotico", *Democrazia e diritto*, 6, Nov.-Dec. (1989) xxix, 267-279, affirms: "i nostri esotismi moderni ..., come i razzismi ad essi connessi - si formano e consolidano tra '700 e '800, in rapporto al sorgere della moderna società di classe e dei moderni colonialismi;... ancora oggi ne siamo sostanzialmente gli eredi" (p.277). In the same way, it could be argued, literary authors such as W.H.Auden, D.H.Lawrence, E.M.Forster and many others who wrote about the "south", can be considered the inheritors of Christina Rossetti and her age. In this light, John Pemble has defined D.H.Lawrence as "a true heir of his Victorian literary predecessors" (Pemble, p.156).

⁶Richard Jenkyns, in *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, quotes several examples from British nineteenth century authors: in *The Stones of Venice*, John Ruskin compares the architecture of an English and an Italian cathedral, contrasting the sterility of the Gothic style with "the character of Southern and Eastern nations"; in *The Giaour*, Lord Byron considers the Greek climate "as much oriental as southern" (Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.50); John Addington Symonds associates late Greek literature with the "effeminacy" of the east: "the Hellenism of the decadents languishes in an atmosphere swimming with oriental odours" (Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.297).

⁷Philip D. Curtin, in *Imperialism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), points out that "full-blown racist theories of history and society began to appear in the first half of the nineteenth century" (p.xvi); also around the middle of the century, the imperial implications of the new pseudoscientific racism were drawn out by a British biologist, Robert Knox of Edinburgh; around the same time, the idea of progress was intimately bound up with a racial theory of world history, as expressed in 1841 by Thomas Arnold in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of History at Oxford, where he argued that civilisation progressed by being transmitted from one race to another. As has been noted, Arnold was typical of his age, "both in his sense of a Germanic distinctness and in his desire to claim a kinship with the Mediterranean world" (Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.166). Arnold elaborated a conception of the south as the geographical and cultural area of the origins of civilisation, of the Greeks, the Romans and the Jews, races from which, he admitted, the new race of the English did not descend, but... "morally how much do we derive from all three" (Thomas Arnold, *Introductory Lectures on Modern History*, Oxford, 1842, p.36).

its representations in various cultural products, also contained a number of contradictions, which point to the fact that the south, far from being a uniform, coherent and fixed idea, originated from, and perpetuated in turn a set of conflicting and competing discourses.⁸ In a large variety of texts, and within the same text, different discourses associated with the south were negotiated and counterbalanced, discourses such as, among others, decadent Hellenism, anti-Christian esoterism, political radicalism, the cult of (homo)sexuality.⁹

In various areas of culture, the opposition of the two compass directions acquired a symbolic significance, and stood for various literal and metaphoric contrasts: as will be shown, the north/south dichotomy contained, and was associated with, a set of binary oppositions, such as Romantic and classic, modern and ancient, Christianity and paganism, industry and agriculture, progress and backwardness, Protestantism and Catholicism, pessimism and optimism, cold and warmth, moral integrity and sin, introspection and sensuality, sexual repression and sexual freedom, etc.

⁸ The parallelism that, to a certain extent, is being suggested between the construction of the Orient and that of the south, however, should not lead to the conclusion that one, monolithic, hegemonic discourse of power always operates in the representation of "the Other" in the case of the category "south". In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that Said's argument in *Orientalism* has been criticised by Dennis Potter for "finding always the same triumphant discourse where several are frequently in conflict" (Dennis Potter, "'Orientalism' and its Problems", in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983, p.160). For Potter, Said has failed to note that the hegemonic discourse in Orientalist texts and the power relations which it entails, are not fixed and coherent, but, as Potter writes, are "continually reasserted, challenged, modified" (Potter, p.152), especially in literary texts. This perspective can also be useful in the study of texts dealing with the concept "south".

⁹ James Buzard, writing about Victorian travel to Italy, notes that 'the south' could carry the promises and dangers of difference from 'normal' life for the homosexual no less than for the heterosexual visitor (Buzard, p.133). Along the same lines, John Pemble analyses the relationship to Italy of both John Ruskin and J.A.Symonds (Pemble, p.254).

i) The Romantic Invention of the South

As Richard Jenkyns observes, "the Alps are, undeniably, a large geographical fact; yet they come to have a symbolic importance, whether as the meeting point of north and south or as the barrier between them".¹⁰ The north/south polarity - the distinction between two parts of Europe divided (or united) by the Alps - frequently recurs in British Romantic and Victorian culture, and plays an important role in many areas of that culture, from literature and the visual arts, to historiography and the new sciences such as archaeology, volcanology and climatology. In nineteenth-century Britain, the emphasis on this geographical distinction goes hand in hand with the rise of a widespread interest in the Mediterranean countries of Europe, namely Italy, Greece, the south of France, and to a lesser degree Spain, a phenomenon that has been variously described as the "cult of the South" or the "Mediterranean passion",¹¹ and which is particularly evident in the rise of modern tourism and the vogue for travelling south,¹² in the massive importation of works of art, both modern and from antiquity, from various southern countries,¹³ as well as in the recurrence of classical and Mediterranean themes in literature and the visual arts.

¹⁰Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.48.

¹¹Marilyn Butler devotes one chapter of her study *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) to "The Cult of the South: the Shelley circle, its creed and its influence". "The Mediterranean passion" is the title of John Pemble's book on Victorian and Edwardian travel to the south (a term inclusive, in this case, of Egypt and the Levant).

¹²James Buzard considers the rise of modern tourism as a by-product of late eighteenth-century industrialisation, and the corresponding emergence of new urban middle classes, and as a form of broadly accessible leisure travel which, especially after the Napoleonic Wars and with the advent of locomotion, differentiated itself from the Grand Tour of previous centuries. Particularly significant was the establishment of the Thomas Cook company, which provided the middle and lower English classes with an organised tourist service. After the first organised excursion from Leicester to Loughborough in 1841, by the mid-1860's Cook had become a highly visible tourist authority organising trips to a large number of destinations in Europe, Egypt and Palestine (see Buzard, pp.48-65).

¹³In the late eighteenth century, wealthy English tourists took home with them many paintings by Claude, Poussin, Salvator Rosa, the Carracci, Carlo Dolce and others, while a good number of drawings by Raphael, Michelangelo^{and} Leonardo da Vinci were also present in English collections (see C.P.Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-century England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, p.138). The archaeological and antiquarian interest

A specifically cultural distinction between a north and a south of Europe was popularised at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Madame de Staël in her celebrated work *De l'Allemagne* (1810; first translated into English, 1813), where she understands such a distinction as an unavoidable structural opposition, indispensable for a "philosophical" analysis of literature:

If we do not acknowledge that paganism and Christianity, the North and the South, antiquity and the Middle Ages, chivalry and Greek and Roman institutions, have divided the realm of literature, then we shall never succeed in judging the ancient and modern taste philosophically.¹⁴

De Staël therefore proceeds to discuss the existence of two dominant cultural traditions in Europe, one classical and Mediterranean, the other Northern or Germanic. In her opinion, the latter, which - as she makes clear - is constituted by the unified culture of the Germans and the English, has become the most vital and imaginative intellectual force of the time.¹⁵

Some of these ideas had been expressed, in a more extensive and systematic way, by August Wilhelm Schlegel in *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809; translated into English 1815), a remarkably influential work, which De Staël herself highly praised.¹⁶ In Schlegel's *Lectures*, as in De Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, the north/south opposition is inscribed within the literary debate on Romanticism and

which arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century, supported by the proceedings of the Society of Dilettanti, and the actual participation of wealthy private collectors, "a busy crowd of English amateurs, excavators and agents" in archaeological excavations especially in southern Italy (Brand, p.160), resulted in English museums "stuffed with treasures of Mediterranean art, and private houses cluttered with the mementos of journeys to the south" (Pemble, p.4). Another analogy, in the century of British imperialism, between the Mediterranean south and the Orient can perhaps be found in the common destiny of works of art which have been appropriated by the British Museum. As Pemble has noted, "by 1830 the British Museum was already one of the richest repositories of Greek and Roman antiquities in the world, and during the Victorian era it both expanded these collections and added rare specimens from Egypt, Carthage, and the Levant. Personal collections of Mediterranean memorabilia abounded, the trophies of vandalising expeditions to historic sites and ancient monuments" (Pemble, p.4).

¹⁴Madame de Staël, 'On Germany', in *On Politics, Literature, and National Character*, trans. by Morroe Berger (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p.287.

¹⁵See M. Butler, p.120. In 'On Germany' De Staël calls England "the most renowned of the Germanic nations" (De Staël, p.287).

¹⁶Madame de Staël had personally seen A.W. Schlegel deliver his lectures on dramatic art in Vienna in 1808, and formed the opinion that his lectures "capture the essence of every literature with the imagination of a poet" (De Staël, p.293). According to Jenkyns, the influence of Schlegel's *Lectures* in Britain was wide and lasting (Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.42).

classicism, the art of the "moderns" and that of the "ancients", but it also acquires a larger significance that goes beyond mere literary criticism. Schlegel's starting point is the idea that "the groundwork of human nature is no doubt everywhere the same".

However, he goes on to say that:

Throughout the whole range of nature, there is no elementary power so simple, but that it is capable of dividing and diverging into opposite directions. The whole play of vital motion hinges on harmony and contrast.¹⁷

Thus he postulates the necessary recurrence of symmetrical structural oppositions "in the history of man", and proceeds to apply this theory to the history of poetry and the fine arts. He contrasts, like Madame de Staël, modern or Romantic art with ancient, or classical art, and shows how this contrast "runs symmetrically, (...) almost systematically, throughout every branch of art": in music, rhythm and melody (typical of the ancients) are contrasted with harmony (distinctively modern); in the visual arts, the spirit of the ancients was "plastic", that of the moderns, "picturesque"; in architecture, the "Grecian style" is opposed to the "Gothic, or old German". At one point, however, in this orderly set of polarities that was supposed to run smoothly "in the history of man", something intervenes to disturb this balanced duality: the ancients were not Christian. Schlegel concedes to the civilisation of the ancients, at its best, "a refined and ennobled sensuality"; whereas, at its worst, the ancient world was in a state of "exhaustion and debasement". He thus individuates an element of "degeneration" in the process of transition from antiquity to modernity, a degeneration from which the civilisation of modern Europe was redeemed by the intervention of that "sublime and beneficent religion", Christianity. This historical fact leads Schlegel to make the following claim:

After Christianity, the character of Europe has, since the commencement of the Middle Ages, been chiefly influenced by the Germanic race of northern conquerors, who infused new life and vigour into a degenerated people (25).

¹⁷A.W. Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. by John Black, 2nd edn. (London: George Bell, 1904), p.21. (Further references to this text will be given in parenthesis after quotations).

Here the idea of a natural (geographical) north/south polarity plays its most significant role. As Jenkyns points out, Schlegel, oblivious to the tradition of "southern" Christian mysticism of Assisi and Avila, associates the south with paganism and antiquity, the north with Christianity and modernity.¹⁸

According to Schlegel, the spirit of the ancients (that is of the Greeks, i.e. of the south) is a "cheerful spirit"; they possess a sensuality ("the free sportive development of the senses") and their poetry is the poetry of "enjoyment". On the other hand, the moderns (that is, the "northern nations") have a natural tendency to introspection, possess an "earnestness of mind", "their fancy is more incorporeal, their thoughts more contemplative": their poetry is that of melancholy and desire. The geographical distinction north/south is thus explicitly constructed as a cultural distinction between modernity and antiquity.¹⁹

One of the fundamental implications in Schlegel's *Lectures* is that the "northern nations" are the true inheritors of the light of European civilisation which originated in ancient Greece but found no correspondence in the modern, degenerated Mediterranean; such light was passed on to the Germanic races, who, (thanks to their "earnestness of mind") were ultimately morally superior, at least since they became Christian, and this was demonstrated by:

The honest cordiality with which Christianity was welcomed by all the Teutonic tribes, so that among no other race of men, has it penetrated more deeply into the inner man (25).

Schlegel, however, admits to the importance of the classical inheritance for the moderns, and when he attempts to define modern civilisation, he finds himself compelled to talk of heterogeneity:

Modern civilisation is the fruit of the heterogeneous union of the peculiarities of the northern nations and the fragments of antiquity; whereas the civilisation of the ancients was much more of a piece (22).

The characteristic contradiction within this Romantic view of European geography and history is revealed here by the implicit recognition that modern/northern culture is

¹⁸Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.43.

¹⁹Schlegel's arguments in the *Lectures* are implicitly but heavily based on the pseudoscientific theory of climatic determinism, discussed below in this chapter.

somehow troubled or tormented by the self conscious task of reconciling its own "peculiarities" with the "fragments" of classical/southern culture, a culture which instead, possessed - though only in the past - some sort of serene unity and harmonious integrity. A similar point is made by de Staël, when she talks of "the simplicity of the ancients" and "their characteristic pristine power", as opposed to the "intimate and manifold feelings" of which the moderns are capable.²⁰ The main assumption that lies behind both Schlegel's and De Staël's theory, as well as behind the variety of contradictory attitudes of Romantic and Victorian Britain towards the south, is the recognised "historical" fact that European civilisation originated in ancient Greece.²¹ The principle of intellectual light, the basis of civilisation, represented by ancient Greece as the "epitome of Europe", at some point in history had been miraculously and necessarily passed on to the modern/northern nations.²² As the above quotation shows, even the "northern" Schlegel was paying his respects to that southern Mediterranean culture, ancient Greece, which "was much more of a piece". As has been noted, Schlegel's theory gets him into predictable difficulty, since, after all, the main subject of his *Lectures* was Greek drama.²³

²⁰De Staël, p.288.

²¹See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987), vol. I, p.31. In this eminent study Bernal proposes a fundamental revision in the historiography concerning the Greeks. He discusses the existence of an "Ancient Model", viewing Greece not as essentially European or Aryan, but as more Levantine, on the periphery of the Egyptian and Semitic cultural area. He points out that the "Aryan Model", which replaced the Ancient one, developed only in the first half of the nineteenth century: "[The Ancient Model] was overthrown for external reasons. (...) For 18th- and 19th-century Romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites." (p.2) In particular, "the Ancient Model had placed a barrier in the way of the new faiths that Greek culture was essentially European and that philosophy and civilization had originated in Greece" (p.31).

²²Bernal, p.2.

²³See Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.43. The contradiction embedded in the attitude of Christian Romantic Philhellenism had already been **identified** in the nineteenth century by Søren Kierkegaard, who, in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) made a passing reference to "men who [...] proclaim that a light shines over the Christian world and darkness broods over paganism. This has always seemed to me a singular statement to make when every thorough thinker and every serious artist is still rejuvenating himself in the eternal youth of the Greeks" (*Fear and Trembling*, trans. by R. Payne, London: Oxford University Press, 1939, p.68). In relation to the Philhellenes, Martin Bernal observes that as young men Hegel and Friedrich Schlegel loved the Greeks, but as they grew older and increasingly conservative they turned

Schlegel's view, which had a major influence in Britain, and was shared by Coleridge and other Romantic writers, ultimately implied that civilisation and Christianity constituted a European inheritance which needed to be rescued and protected from the degeneration of paganism and atheism, and cherished and enhanced in the context of a linear, triumphant progress located in the north. These ideas also seemed to agree very well with, and be confirmed by, the shift of political and economic power northward, and the material success of imperial Britain and its ruling classes, who, in their travels to the south, were typically appalled by the cultural and political decline of modern Italy and constantly reiterated the clichéd theme of "past glory and present decay" of Italy and Greece.

As Jenkyns points out, in the nineteenth century "the British stood amazed at the sudden importance of their small island", and, as the same critic notes, in imperial Britain it was hard to resist the sense of a special Anglo-Saxon destiny, especially when this was contrasted to that of present Italy, once the seat of glorious civilisations and the powerful Roman empire.²⁴ While, on the one hand, the superiority of the British tended to be explained through the more or less scientific theorisation of some fundamental difference, be it of climate, race or temperament, between the countries of the north and those of the south, on the other hand, there was a strongly felt desire to claim a kinship with the old Mediterranean. This is particularly evident in the typically Victorian phenomenon of "Hellenomania", and the extraordinary importance which was placed in Britain on classical education.²⁵ By virtue of this, the British tried to combine in a perfect mixture - to use Schlegel's words - the "peculiarities of the northern nations" and the "fragments of antiquity", with the result of attributing to themselves a sort of honorary southern citizenship: this has been well noted by Cyril Connolly, who talks of "an old prescription from the eighteenth century which we call

to Christianity, while the Left Hegelians, including Marx, preserved the young Hegel's passionate interest in Greece (Bernal, p.289).

²⁴Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.40 and p.166.

²⁵Martin Bernal devotes two chapters to Hellenomania in *Black Athena*; see also Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*.

a classical education, an education which confers (...) the benefit of *dual nationality, English and Mediterranean*".²⁶

The interest and the fascination for the Mediterranean south and its classical past, therefore, can be partly explained in the context of an imperial discourse positing a racial and cultural superiority of the Germanic peoples. In Romantic culture, this type of discourse tends to equate the south with the past, and from this association a set of very different ideological assumptions proceed: for some such as Schlegel and many nineteenth-century writers and historians, the south represents a former step of civilisation, worthy of admiration, but mainly constituting the necessary opposite pole against which the superior north could be defined. This discursive framework, however, is not simply fixed and free of contradictions: on the contrary, it includes other related but very different discourses circulating around the north/south polarity and the idea of a spirit of the south: the equation of south and past was also constructed as a means of criticising and subverting the dominant ideology of progress and Protestant morality, by writers who exalted the south precisely because it was different from the north, and who preferred certain religious, spiritual, and moral values which they saw embodied in the spirit of the south. These contrasting strands of the discourse of the south first emerge in the literary production of the so called "younger Romantics", such as Shelley, Keats, Byron and the literary group associated with them.

As Marilyn Butler observes, "their movement defines itself by what it is not. It is not the literature of the North - German Romanticism, in Madame de Staël's account of it, which is introspective and Christian (...). The English liberal writers (...) are extrovert and not introvert, and pagan not Christian".²⁷ They were opposed in a polemic way to the taste of Wordsworth and Coleridge. However, it can be argued that their attitude

²⁶ Quoted in Fussell, *Abroad*, p.136, my emphasis.

²⁷ M. Butler, pp.123-4. Marilyn Butler emphasises the importance of the idea of the south in English Romanticism and talks of "the cult of the south" of Shelley and his circle.

originated within the same discursive framework of an irreconcilable north/south, past/present binary opposition: their interest lay in the postulation of a "spirit of the south", and their taste was inspired by what they thought was characteristically Greek: the elegant and the harmonious. The cultural production particularly of poets and intellectuals such as Shelley and Thomas Love Peacock, shows an intense fascination with paganism and ancient religions, "the raging literary fashion for Pan-worship and 'nympholepsy'".²⁸

The south was ultimately constructed for these intellectuals in an analogous way to that of the German tradition mediated by De Staël and advocated by Coleridge and Wordsworth: the south was distinct from the north, and this geographical distinction stood for a cultural one. In the works of the Shelley circle, the cultural landscape that emerged was represented differently, and to different ends, but such representation was inscribed within the same discursive practice articulated and elaborated around the opposite, complementary concepts of "north" and "south": Schlegel's critical association of the south with negatively connotated sensuality became in the younger Romantics a celebratory and joyous cult of sexuality opposed to the life-denying mystical tendencies of the gloomy north; various forms of southern paganism were studied as an alternative and a challenge to the repressive tendencies of institutionalised Christianity; the extrovert, Mediterranean spirit of the south was exalted by Shelley and his circle over what was seen as the sterile, ascetic northern solipsism of the Lake poets.²⁹

²⁸ M. Butler, p.131.

²⁹ Butler observes that "the younger poets proclaimed their rejection of the political ideology of the older poets primarily via their challenge to religious orthodoxy" (p.136). The interest in paganism and ancient religions which became manifest in Shelley's poetry, had mostly found expression at the end of the eighteenth century in underground circles: Sir William Hamilton wrote an *Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus*, published in 1786, together with Richard Payne Knight's *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, and its Connexion with the mystic theology of the ancients* (discussed in Chapter Three). At least one member of the Shelley's circle, J.F. Newton, was immersed in the study of the ancient esoteric religion of Zoroastrianism (M. Butler, p.121). See also Albert J. Kuhn, 'English Deism and the Development of Romantic Mythological Syncretism', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 1094-1116.

The south, equated with antiquity, paganism and the glorification of sexual love, thus came to represent a whole ideal of harmony, naturalness and beauty which functioned, at times, as a subversive, counterhegemonic theme. In Byron's poem *Don Juan*, for example (which has been defined as "the one assured epic of the cult of the South"), anti-imperialist sentiments are voiced within the context of a Mediterranean setting, and his Romantic celebration of sexual libertarianism is located in exotic environments, whether oriental or southern.³⁰

Shelley's fascination with the south is evident not only in the details of his biography, in which, like for so many of his contemporaries, Mediterranean travel played such a central role, but also in the majority of his literary production. Many of his poems deal with Greek mythological themes, and among the poets, he was, as has been noted, "unique in challenging accepted sex mores in his prose as well as his verse".³¹

Shelley, like other Romantics, saw the south as the place of sexual liberation and spiritual liberty, but this view simultaneously corresponded to a conceptualisation of the south as the land of the past. Significantly, when Shelley occasionally refers to contemporary Italy, he uses the same images of degradation and degeneration which occur in Schlegel's conservative theorisation of Romantic art, and thereby indulges in the recurrent literary topos of past glory and present decay. Shelley's first impression of the Italians, for example, was that they were degenerate and dull, and when he met a party of convicts in Piazza San Pietro in Rome, he commented on the contrast between the sight of those chained men and the "deep azure beauty of the sky and the

³⁰ M. Butler, p.123; Caroline Franklin, 'Juan's Sea Changes: Class, Race and Gender in Byron's *Don Juan*', in *Don Juan*, ed. by Nigel Wood (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), 57-89. Franklin shows how Byron's poem "becomes necessarily inscribed with the discourses of orientalism" (p.75), and notes that the characters of Julia and Haidée "are both given Moorish blood, which is climatically, biologically and racially associated with their fertility and capacity for extremes of passion" (p.81).

³¹ Louis Crompton, *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th Century England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.284. Shelley began a translation of Plato's *Symposium*, and also wrote 'Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients Relative to the Subject of Love' (in *The Complete Works of P.B.Shelley*, ed. by Roger Ingpen and Walter Peck, 10 vols., New York: Benn, 1965, VII, 223-29), considered "the second essay in English on the subject of homosexuality presently known to us" (Crompton, p.289).

magnificence of the architecture around". For him, this was "the emblem of Italy - moral degradation contrasted with the glory of nature and the arts".³²

In the literary, poetical and critical production of English Romanticism, therefore, it is possible to individuate a discourse of the south informing various kinds of texts whose central core is the north/south opposition, and which underlines all textual representations of the Mediterranean and its "spirit", whether to admire it and exalt it or to theorise it as necessarily lacking and inferior. Such discourse can equally be traced in the Victorian period, where it was elaborated and articulated together with discourses of race, history, progress, and imperialism.

ii) The Cradle of Civilisation: Southern Childhood, Northern Adulthood

Both older and younger Romantics constructed the south as the land of the past, and this image was reinforced in Victorian Britain, as Matthew Arnold's melancholic verses in *Empedocles on Etna* (1852) suggest:

And we shall fly for refuge to past times,
Their soul of unworn youth, their breath of greatness.³³

To this day, the Mediterranean is often designated as "the cradle of civilisation",³⁴ an image which acquires its full significance when connected to the late eighteenth-

³²Quoted in R.S.Pine-Coffin, *Bibliography of British and American Travel in Italy to 1860* (Florence: Olschki, 1975) p.21.

³³Matthew Arnold, 'Empedocles on Etna' (1852) in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott (London and New York: Longmann, 1979), Act II, lines 383-4. The legendary suicidal death of the Greek philosopher Empedocles in Etna's crater was the subject of a painting by Salvator Rosa, *Empedocle nella voragine*, whose work is discussed in the following section of this Chapter. See *L'opera completa di Salvator Rosa*, ed. by Luigi Salerno (Milano: Rizzoli, 1975).

³⁴See, for example, Denys Hay, *Europe: the Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p.4. The phrase also frequently recurs in contemporary tourist guidebooks to Southern Italy and Greece. When the expression "the cradle of civilisation" appears today, in fact, it usually seems to refer to the Mediterranean in the sense of "the Mediterranean countries of Europe", that is, in the tradition of classicism and Hellenism, specifically Greece and Italy; Bernal observes that this definition once referred to Egypt, and that "despite the triumph of Hellenism and dismissal of Egypt in

century idea of human progress, and to the notion of history as the writing of various "biographies of races" in constant evolution.³⁵ As has been pointed out, "Greece (...) was rapidly seen as the 'childhood' of the 'dynamic' European race"; from these concepts emerged the increasingly "northern" picture of ancient Greece that developed in the late nineteenth century.³⁶ The metaphor of the Greeks as "children", and the related association of the European south with youth, joyfulness, serenity, but also with simplicity and immaturity, is a recurrent image in nineteenth-century culture. One of the clearest expressions of the belief in the progress of the human race is that of Bishop Frederick Temple, who, in 1860, theorised the idea of cultural evolution thus:

We may (...) rightly speak of a childhood, a youth, and a manhood of the world. The men of the earliest ages were (...) still children as compared with ourselves, with all the blessings and (...) disadvantages that belong to childhood.³⁷

According to Bernal, this new concept of "childhood" which developed in the eighteenth century, "comes at the intersection of 'progress' and Romanticism".³⁸ Another example of the recurrence of the childhood metaphor with all its implications, can be found in the "young Hegelian Karl Marx", who also embraced the view of the Greeks as "sweet simple children".³⁹ For G.W.F.Hegel himself the Mediterranean was "the centre of World-History", "the heart of the Old World", and Greece was "the focus of light in History".⁴⁰ In the section devoted to the "Geographical Basis of History" in *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel describes the

academic circles, the concept of Egypt as 'the cradle of civilization' never completely died" (Bernal, p.30).

³⁵Bernal, p.32.

³⁶Bernal, p.189 and p.441.

³⁷Frederick Temple, *Essays and Reviews* (1860), quoted in Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.170.

³⁸Bernal, p.208.

³⁹See Jenkyns, p.170. Bernal also observes that Marx's view resembles Hegel's vision of the Orient as the childhood of mankind (p.295).

⁴⁰G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover 1956), p.87. Frank Turner draws attention to the influence of Hegel on Victorian Hellenism and observes that "Hegel's concept of the historical development of Greek philosophy (...) suggested that Greek thought and culture held particular relevance for the Victorian experience"; see F. Turner, p.12.

European continent as divided into three geographical areas: "Southern Europe"; "the heart", or "centre of Europe" (where France, Germany and England are the principal countries) and finally the "north-eastern States of Europe - Poland, Russia, and the Slavonic Kingdoms". Of the first category of countries looking out towards the Mediterranean, he says:

North of the Pyrenees, mountain-chains run through France, connected with the Alps that separate and cut off Italy from France and Germany. Greece also belongs to this part of Europe. Greece and Italy long presented the theatre of the World's History; and while the middle and the north of Europe were uncultivated, the World-Spirit found its home here.⁴¹

Hegel's association of the European south (identified, as in English Romanticism, with Italy and Greece) with an earlier stage in the development of civilisation, by virtue of which classical Italy and ancient Greece were looked at reverentially but problematically, also finds expression in nineteenth-century history of art: John Ruskin was widely preoccupied with the subject of the Greeks, and in *The Stones of Venice* he saw Greek architecture as the fount of all that came afterwards: "All European architecture (...) is derived from Greece through Rome".⁴² In an analogous way, in the preface to *Hellas* (1821), the radical Shelley exclaimed in a famous fit of

⁴¹Hegel, p.102. In the "Introduction to the Dover Edition" (1956) of *The Philosophy of History*, the commentator C.F.Friedrich, in an attempt to save Hegel's statements from misunderstanding, explains that when the philosopher speaks of the Orient, the Greek and Roman world, and the Germanic world, he is not talking of modern nation states, but of "the great cultures or civilisations". Friedrich summarises Hegel's conception of World-History by saying that after the coming of Christ, "the Germanic peoples, i.e. *Western civilisation*, were assigned the task of realising the full implications of the Christian message" (my emphasis). He then adds a footnote: "These [the Germanic peoples], *nota bene*, include the French, the English and the rest of Western culture, as well as the Germans, and Sibree [Hegel's translator for the Dover edition] is very wrong in translating Germanic (*Germanisch*) as German (*Deutsch*)". It is not clear, however, what precisely is meant in this statement by "the rest of Western culture", what essential elements the French, the English and the Germans have in common in their belonging to Western culture, and how the contemporary descendants of Hegel's "Greek and Roman world" would relate, in the context of the trajectory of World-Spirit, to the modern expression "Western civilisation". The ambiguity and contradiction emerging in this defence of Hegel points to the fact that both terms "West" and "civilisation" are highly problematic.

⁴²Quoted in Jenkyns, p.19. In the same work, Ruskin writes about Italian architecture, - St.Mark's cathedral, in particular - in terms of a constant opposition to the architecture of the "north", and the terminology he uses emerges from the discourse of the north/south opposition, for example when he talks of the "northern builders" in contrast with Venetian architecture, which, he also stresses, possesses the charm of the east.

enthusiasm: "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece".⁴³

When the Victorians travelled south, they were thus paying homage to the cradle of civilisation and actualising a return to their motherland. In the nineteenth century, "not only did the northerner come to the south, but modern man returned to the ancient world".⁴⁴ A reverential attitude towards Italy and Greece appears in a large number of texts by British and, later, American travellers, soon becoming a topos of travel literature which still recurs today. This attitude once again belongs to the same discourse which equates the south with the past. The Mediterranean countries, through the prestige of their antiquity, provide inspiration and instruction for the modern northerners: as the American novelist and historian Henry T. Tuckerman put it, Italy was the most important of the countries,

where the most momentous historical events occurred and civilization first dawned... The history of these lands affords one of our most attractive sources of philosophical truth, as the reminiscences they induce excite poetical sentiment.⁴⁵

The south, associated with an early stage of history, thus represents the locality of the past, whose role and validity lies in the "reminiscences" it induces and in the artistic inspiration it provides, while its counterpart, the north, is leading the way towards progress, albeit a progress symbolised by the not always positive form of industrialisation. A corollary to this association was the view of many British travellers to the Mediterranean, who saw the south as the fertile, unchanged place of traditional agriculture, as opposed to the modern, industrialised north. For John Addington Symonds, one of the most important Victorian experts on the Mediterranean, the south was exemplified by pre-industrial southern Italy, where

⁴³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to 'Hellas' (1821), in *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.447.

⁴⁴ Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.42.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Pine-Coffin, p.9. Henry T. Tuckerman was author of the novel *Isabel, or Sicily* (New York, 1857), a fictionalised account of his travels in southern Italy and Sicily.

pastoral poetry had been invented by Theocritus - a paradise immersed in an idyllic dimension of arcadian happiness:

On the Mediterranean shores (...) the same occupations have been carried on for centuries (...). The same fields are being ploughed, the same vineyards tilled (...) as those in which Theocritus played. (...) City and country are not yet wholly harmonised by improved means of locomotion. Then the people of the south are perfectly unchanged.⁴⁶

Symonds contrasted the fresh air of the countryside, as well as the luminosity of the south, with the pollution of "our sombre northern towns", thus conflating economic and climatic arguments to support, and to be supported by, the cultural opposition of north and south. Symonds, however, was not unique in appending cultural connotations to the climatic contrast between the luminosity of the south and the mist of the north. The climate was in fact a crucial, recurrent factor in the textual discourse of the south.

iii) The Importance of a Mild Sky: Climatic and Topographic Determinism

When, in his *Lectures*, Schlegel attributed a "cheerful spirit" to the Greeks, he added an apparently inconspicuous detail: "under a mild sky".⁴⁷ This is one of the rare visible signs, in Schlegel's text, of a pervasive discourse which runs across the Romantics' systematisation of the ancients/moderns debate: the theory of climatic determinism.

The antagonisms between paganism and Christianity, classic and Romantic, antiquity and modernity all contribute to the notion of a north and a south which are culturally (and morally) not only different, but opposed and incompatible: their opposition is objectively and ultimately proved (as well as caused) by the unquestionable difference in the basic material conditions of life, that is, primarily, the climate and the land. It is

⁴⁶John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, quoted in Jenkyns, p.44.

⁴⁷It is interesting to note that Hegel used a very similar expression, "the mild Ionic sky" in *The Philosophy of History* (Hegel, p.80).

on the objective basis of the "stern nature of the North" which "drives man back within himself" (22), that Schlegel justifies his claim that the Germanic peoples (or the "Teutonic tribes", or the "northern nations") are prone to introspection and to contemplation; therefore the stern north becomes the true repository of virtue, honour, honesty, and (Christian) religion itself. On the other hand, the ancients were enthralled in "heathen worship" and the "free sportive development of the senses"; this was so, not solely because they happened to live before Christianity, but at the same time because they happened to live "under a mild sky". Before Schlegel, the most influential scholar of German classicism, Johann Winckelmann, had also stressed the importance of the material circumstances of life for Greek art, and associated the artistic achievements of the Greeks with the physical climate of their country.⁴⁸ This thread runs through much nineteenth-century discourse about the Mediterranean, and what in Schlegel is implicit in the rhetorical formula of "a cheerful spirit under a mild sky", recurs in a variety of texts where it is theorised much more explicitly.

Romanticism, especially in Britain, Germany and France, placed considerable stress on the importance of a particular soil and a particular climate for the character and the evolution of a nation or a race.⁴⁹ The Aristotelian and pseudo-Platonic scheme of climatic and topographic determinism of races can be traced back, as Bernal has demonstrated, to eighteenth-century authors such as Montesquieu and Rousseau, and

⁴⁸According to Winckelmann, the warm air and abundant sunshine of Greece were responsible for the Greek habit of wearing little or no clothing, and this elicited in artists the appreciation of the natural beauty of the human body. See Johann J. Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, 2. vols., trans. by G. Henry Lodge (Boston: James J. Osgood, 1880), i, pp.286-289. This view was also inevitably intertwined with the image of the Greeks as children. As Frank Turner observes, Winckelmann's views were transmitted to Britain through translations of his own works and through those of later German writers such as the Schlegel brothers and Goethe, for all of whom "Greece functioned as a metaphor for a golden age inhabited, if not by prelapsarian human beings, at least by natural children"; see Turner, pp.40-41.

⁴⁹For the use of the image of the tree in Romanticism, see Bernal, p.205. A tree pattern was largely adopted in nineteenth-century disciplines such as linguistics and historiography: it was used to illustrate the progress, or growth, of a single language, race or nation, which, according to the Romantic view, was rooted and nourished in a particular soil and a particular climate, and thus indicated a simple past and a complex and expanding present/future, in the form of the multiplication of its branches.

was passed on to later Romantics, who nearly always saw "the misty and mountainous North of Europe (...) as the true repository of human virtue".⁵⁰

Theories of climatic and topographic determinism recur in several places of Victorian historiography. Henry Thomas Buckle, author of the *History of Civilization in England* (1857) - a work renowned for having introduced scientific method into historiography - wrote that the human race was chiefly influenced by four physical agents: "Climate, Food, Soil, and the General Aspects of Nature", while Bishop Connop Thirlwall began his eight-volume *History of Greece* by arguing that "the character of every people is more or less closely connected with that of its land".⁵¹

The authority of Aristotle was often quoted by historians as an example of how the Greeks themselves believed in such ideas. In the *Politics*, Aristotle had talked of the privileged geographical position of the "Hellenic race", an argument which was successfully used in nineteenth-century theories of race.⁵² In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel also quoted the Greek philosopher, and proceeded to express his own conviction that there are some natural conditions "which have to be excluded once and for all from the drama of World's History", such as those of "the Frigid and the Torrid zone", where "the locality of World-historical peoples cannot be found". For Hegel, "the true theatre of History is therefore the temperate zone; or, rather, its northern half...".⁵³

⁵⁰ Bernal, p.204. This attitude was satirised by Byron in the first Canto of *Don Juan*: "Happy the nations of the moral North! / Where all is virtue, and the winter season / Sends sin, without a rag on, shivering forth..." (Canto I, st.63). However, elsewhere Byron also writes within the discursive framework of climatic determinism when in the same poem he associates the passionate character of Haidée with the hot climate of her country.

⁵¹ Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, quoted in Jenkyns, p.164. In this influential book, the Victorian historian claimed that the civilisation of Europe was superior to that of other continents because it was based on the subordination of nature to mind, rather than the subordination of mind to nature (Pemble, p.61). Henry Buckle also travelled extensively in the Mediterranean (see Pemble). Connop Thirlwall, *History of Greece*, 8 vols. (London, 1835-44), quoted in Jenkyns, p.164. For Thirlwall's cultural background and his role in Hellenomania, see Bernal, pp.320-23.

⁵² See Bernal, p.202.

⁵³ Hegel, p.80 (my emphasis).

The most immediate difference between the north and the south of Europe was perceived to be the climate, and at the same time, it was precisely this difference in the climatic and material conditions of life which allowed for a cultural opposition between northern and southern peoples, their "spirit", and their art. In Jenkyns' words: "that compelling sense of the polarity between north and south fed a belief in the importance of climate and was fed by it in turn"; the same critic underlines how Aristotle's climatic argument was often quoted in the last century for the understandable reason that it could be adapted to apply neatly to Britain. Perhaps it was "the absence of a too enervating climate, too unclouded skies" that had made the Anglo-Saxon race superior to the rest of the world.⁵⁴

The discourse of climatic determinism thus appears inherently linked with much nineteenth-century racial theory, especially in its most extreme forms, such as when a direct, explicit causality was established between the climatic and the moral conditions of a country and its people. Climatic determinism proved to be precious material for novelists, poets and dramatists who used the idea of the Mediterranean south in their texts. In English Romantic literature, a large number of authors privileged Italy as a setting for their works. Besides examples in canonical poets such as Byron and Shelley, sometimes more univocal and unrefined expressions of climatic determinism can be found in less known literary authors. Anne Manning, in her collection of *Stories from the History of Italy* (1831) simplified and took to the extreme what Schlegel had only discreetly hinted at - the moral opposition, on a climatic basis, of two peoples, the southerners and the northerners, in this case represented, as usual, by the Italian and the English:

Unhappily the energy and violence which marked their [the Italians'] national character was often directed to evil purpose by such dark and vindictive passions as, in these more temperate times, we find it difficult to account for or excuse. It is hard for us to credit the strength of the stormy passions in southern climes... The emotions of hatred and jealousy which in our colder climate occasionally ruffle our bosoms, and are mastered by steady principle and placid temperament, there burn with an intensity which makes their unhappy victims the objects of our pity no less than reproach.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, pp.165-166.

⁵⁵Anne Manning, *Stories from the History of Italy* (London, [n.pub.], 1831), p.59.

The awkward ethical problem posited by a climatic and topographic determinism of moral conduct is illustrated in the last line, by the contradictory mixture of condemnation and commiseration that the English, as a necessarily morally/geographically superior people show towards the unfortunate southerners. This attitude is similarly evident in the moral contrast expressed in the title of a novel, *Italian Vengeance and English Forbearance* (1828), by Selina Davenport, which belongs to a long tradition of antimachiavellian themes popular in British literature since Elizabethan times, which emphasised the strength of unrestrained southern passions and in particular the corrupt, violent, lustful character of the Italians.⁵⁶

In similar terms, the discourse of climatic determinism circulated in the visual arts. In Romantic and Victorian Britain, Italian or Italian-inspired paintings enjoyed widespread popularity and contributed to an increasing idealisation of the exotic south. The paintings of Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) were immensely admired and often referred to by novelists and travellers alike; with their depiction of the wild landscapes of southern Italy - mountains and caves infested with notoriously hot blooded and bloodthirsty banditti - they constituted for the British an undeniable, as well as fascinating testimony of the unrestrained passions typical of the southern climate.⁵⁷ Concomitantly, a different, but analogous type of idealisation of the south was represented by the British predilection for the genre of paintings depicting sunny, friendly, agricultural landscapes.⁵⁸ These paintings of peasants, festas and grape-

⁵⁶Selina Davenport, *Italian Vengeance and English Forbearance*, 3 vols., (London: A.K.Newman, 1828). A classic study on the literary stereotype of the evil Italian in English literature is Mario Praz's 'The Politic Brain: Machiavelli and the Elizabethans' in *The Flaming Heart* (New York: Doubleday, 1958). Praz quotes a sixteenth-century anonymous pamphlet, *The Subtlety of the Italians* (1591), where the theory of climatic determinism makes one of its earliest appearances. The anonymous author divides Europe into "Septentrional and Occidental" peoples on the one hand, and "Meridional nations" on the other, and with a strong anti-Italian feeling, traces the cunning and craftiness attributed to Machiavelli and his countrymen to the "subtlety of the air" (Praz, p. 91).

⁵⁷Beside the importation of Rosa's paintings in England, the success of Rosa's style and subject matter is demonstrated by the fact that, as Brand observes, "there were numbers of English painters who occasionally produced a group of bandits in wild precipitous landscape in the true Salvator tradition" (Brand, p.147).

⁵⁸See the exhaustive chapter 'English interest in Italian painting, sculpture and architecture' in Brand.

harvests, in glittering sunny vales and classic groves, constitute the perfect visual equivalent of J.A.Symonds' description, quoted above, of the unchanged, harmonious Mediterranean shores, the land of pastoral poetry. Climatic determinism was thus also linked with the view of the south as the enchanted land of the glorious, classical past, the pastoral setting of serene agricultural economy: with striking candour, Symonds believed that the Greeks lived amid "perpetual sunshine and perpetual ease - no work ... that might degrade the body...". His argument goes still further when he claims that even the modern Greeks live in a land where "Summer leaves them not." Their labours are lighter than in northern climes and their food more plentiful.⁵⁹

Painters and poets alike agreed that the climate was a main feature of the south, and often one which brought about a new, positive, artistic sensibility. In this vein, Leigh Hunt, referring to his stay in Italy, declared: "You learn for the first time in this climate what colours really are. No wonder it produces painters".⁶⁰ Shelley attributed the inspiration for his poem *Prometheus Unbound* to the influence of the favourable Italian climate: it was "the bright blue sky of Rome and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate and the new life with which it drenches the spirits" which provided the inspiration for that drama.⁶¹

The sun, the light and the heat, therefore, as well as being associated with alluring but ultimately morally suspicious passions, were also regarded as positive natural elements, liberating and beneficial in influencing the mind and the body.

This view can be found in most of the scientific literature of the new discipline of climatology, which emerged in Britain at the same time as modern tourism to the south, the two being related by the belief in the therapeutic value of the climate in southern countries. For Victorian society, the motive of health for travelling south became as important as cultural reasons; this was expressed in the formula of being

⁵⁹Quoted in Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.171.

⁶⁰Quoted in Brand, p.169.

⁶¹ Quoted in Brand, p.166.

"ordered south" (*Ordered South* is the title of an illustration which appeared in an issue of *The Illustrated London News* in 1892, depicting the deck of a ship on which reclines a delicate and pale woman, presumably ill, surrounded by luggage and shaded by an umbrella) (fig.1).

One of the reasons for what has been called "the Mediterranean passion" of Victorians and Edwardians, which made them flock to the shores of France, Greece, but above all, Italy, was precisely the belief in the therapeutic value of the southern climate, on the assumption that "sunshine meant health".⁶² A number of medical studies explored the beneficial effects of wintering in the south for various diseases such as consumption and bronchitis, but also for "ladies fatigued by the London season".⁶³ Climatology included texts such as *The Sanative Influence of Climate* (1841), *Medical Climatology* (1862) *Climatic Treatment* (1887), according to which Mediterranean climates ranged from relaxing (Pisa, Rome) through intermediate (Malaga) to moderately exciting (Cannes, San Remo, Menon) and very exciting (Algiers, Nice, Naples).⁶⁴ Some of these texts, like Dr.Madden's *On Change of Climate* (1864), discussed among the possible causes of physical illness in the English, psychological factors such as stress and depression, "professional struggles", "worry and disappointment", and "anxiety of the mind". These conditions could be removed, and the illness cured, by travelling south. The south was thus explicitly associated with a different frame of mind, and this association, while running parallel in the fields of literature and the arts, was now made in the context of scientific, medical discourse: in the south the travellers' health would improve not only because the sun and the warm air would positively influence the physiology of their lungs, but also, it was implied, because these factors would affect their minds.

⁶²See Pemble, p.84 .

⁶³William Marcet, *The Principal Southern and Swiss Health Resorts* (1883), quoted in Pemble, p.87.

⁶⁴See Pemble, p.93.

In 1896, this view of southern climate and the complementary idea of the magical, therapeutic power of the Mediterranean shores was proclaimed in one of the most rhetorical passages of English writing about Italy, that by Lord Lytton in his famous novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834):

Clime that yet enervates with a soft and Circean spell - that moulds us insensibly, mysteriously, into harmony with thyself...Whoever visits thee seems to leave earth and its harsh cares behind - to enter the Ivory Gate into the Land of Dreams.⁶⁵

The use of the pronoun "us" emphasises the centrality of the experiencing subjects - the author and his audience - who, from their northern starting point encounter the south, "visit" Italy whether by travel or by reading Italian travel books and novels. The passage emphasises the miraculous, liberating effects which the visitors experience in their encounter with Italy's different climatic reality. Italian climate thus becomes for the Victorian intellectual a means of forgetting his gloomy northern home and quite literally stepping into a realm of fantasy. Many writers of the period voiced this conception of the south as a sunny paradise, by virtue of which the Mediterranean countries, and especially Italy, were ideally projected into a dreamlike dimension. For Lytton and his contemporaries, Italy is the "Land of Dreams", an enchanted, warm and sunny realm to be magically entered and experienced. This "Land" where desires are projected, is made even more attractive by its possessing a dark, menacing side. Climatologists, in fact, also warned Victorian enthusiasts of the south against the possible disastrous effects of the unfamiliar climatic conditions encountered in the Land of Dreams. In 1830 Dr. James Johnson unequivocally stated: "Where climate supplies constant stimulation for the senses, passion will predominate over reason; and where the passions are indulged, the range of existence will be curtailed".⁶⁶ In this context, the above quoted passage by Lytton, with its ambiguous classical reference to Italy's "Circean spell" is particularly revealing: the Mediterranean south possesses the alluring qualities of the classical Circe - a favourite

⁶⁵Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (London, 1834), p.202.

⁶⁶Dr. James Johnson, *Change of Air, or the Pursuit of Health* (1830); quoted in Pemble, p.251.

epithet referred to Italy by many travel writers. Italy-Circe offers the voluptuous pleasures of her body in the form of sun, heat, and mild skies; in her naked state of nature and timelessness, oblivious of morality, she is both attractive and threatening, casting her spells on the modern, English speaking Ulysses.

iv) The Feminised South as the Location of Desire

A long literary tradition dating back to Renaissance and Elizabethan times identified Italy with the mythical figure of Circe, the powerful semi-divine seductress who imprisons Ulysses with her spells.⁶⁷ In the nineteenth century, the construction of the Mediterranean south as a woman - of Italy in particular - is perpetuated and expanded through a textual discourse intertwined with the other analogous and reciprocally reinforcing discourses discussed above: the idea of the "femininity" of Italy clearly emerges in various British and American texts, including fiction, poetry, travel writing and historiography. In his study of Browning's poetry, Robert Viscusi points out that "Italy is, as most nineteenth century writing seems to have agreed, a woman," while James Buzard observes that "the Italian nation was the more easily moulded to a stereotypical womanhood".⁶⁸ Robert Browning's poem 'By the Fire-Side' (in *Men and Women*, 1855) is perhaps one of the most explicit examples of this. The Victorian poet addresses Italy thus:

Oh woman-country, wooed not wed
Loved all the more by earth's male lands
Laid to their hearts instead!⁶⁹

⁶⁷See G.B. Parks, 'The Decline and Fall of the English Renaissance Admiration for Italy', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 31 (Aug. 1968), 341-357.

⁶⁸Robert Viscusi, 'The Englishman in Italy: Free Trade as a Principle of Aesthetics', *Browning Institute Studies*, 12 (1984), 1-28 (p.8); and Buzard, p. 133.

⁶⁹Robert Browning, *The Poems*, ed. by John Pettigrew (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), i, 553; quoted in Buzard, p.133.

Schlegel's "northern nations" become, in Browning's poetical image, "earth's male lands". A map of Europe is established on the basis of sexual difference, with the Alps, as Buzard observes, "often serving as the boundary between masculine North and feminine South".⁷⁰

The femininity of the south is constructed and revealed by its various associations with feelings, emotions, and passions, and is often implicitly contrasted with the rationality of the north through the opposition "northern rectitude/southern pleasure", a view which in turn was strongly reinforced by the discourses of climatic determinism and Romanticism discussed above.

As Viscusi notes, Italy is for Browning (as for the dominant discourse about the south), "a paradise of 'feminine' colour and feeling".⁷¹ The feminine south is thus an object of desire and possession, and yet, as Browning's verses reveal, it is ultimately unattainable ("not wed"). The charm of this feminine Land of Dream, and her Circean spells, perhaps consists precisely in its being the object or the location of a never fulfilled desire: all the masculine north is left to do is lay it/her to his heart. As has been noted, travel writers often employ metaphors of courtship and sexual union with a place, as in the case of Henry James, whose desire for an intimate contact with the city of Venice leads him to refer to it as "a changeable and nervous woman", to which he adds: "You desire to embrace it, to caress it, to possess it; and finally, a soft sense of possession grows up, and your visit becomes a perpetual love-affair".⁷²

Another sign of the feminisation of the south operated by the imagination and representational practices of the north can be observed in the (male) traveller/writer/painter's preoccupation with the idea of the south as an object to behold, observe and survey. Over and over again, the textual and visual discourse

⁷⁰Buzard, p.134.

⁷¹Viscusi, p.9.

⁷²Buzard, p.136; Henry James, *Portrait of Places* (1883), quoted in Buzard, p.136. Buzard also points out the associations of Venice with 'the East' and with Orientalist stereotypes of languorous sensuality (p.136).

around the south posits Italy and other southern countries as lands, landscapes, places, scenes, scenarios. They are there as a spectacle, or a feminine beauty to be dreamt of, longed for and subsequently looked at, observed, painted, written about and represented for the public at home.

However, this "woman-country" happens to be inhabited by human beings, and this unavoidable fact leads authors to strive towards a set of various, compromising representational strategies. Robert Browning again provides an interesting example of the textual articulation of the dominant discourse about the south. The Victorian poet spent a considerable part of his life in Italy, his literary production abounds with Italian themes, and in many of his poems he indulges in detailed descriptions of the appearance of Italian fishermen, peasants and children. Italy and its inhabitants are used by the poet as material for artistic inspiration by means of a total objectification which denies Italians any existence as subjects. The nature of Browning's appreciation of things Italian is significantly revealed in his private correspondence, where he lucidly reflects on what Italy is for him. In a letter to his wife in 1845 he refers to his "old belief" that:

Italy is stuff for the use of the North - and no more. Pure Poetry there is none, nearly as possible none, in Dante even - materials for poetry in the pitifullest romanticist of their thousands, on the contrary - strange that those great black wide eyes should stare nothing out of the earth that lies before them.⁷³

Such extreme devaluation of Italian literature and even of its most canonical author, Dante, is the necessary presupposition for the negation of Italians as subjects, and especially as creative subjects. Italians, like the rest of "things Italian" are for Browning objects ("those great black wide eyes") which happen to be part of the larger object that is Italy, the "woman country", his muse and beloved source of artistic inspiration. In this sense, modern Italians constitute a redundant presence.⁷⁴

⁷³*The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett*, ed. by Elvan Kintner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), I, 50 (30 April 1845), quoted in Viscusi, p.2.

⁷⁴It has been observed that, during his long stay in Italy, Browning never actually mixed with Italians: as Barbara Melchiori argues, "his life remained remarkably English and his circle of friends in Florence (...) were the usual English colonies settled there" (Barbara Melchiori, 'Browning in Italy', in *Robert Browning*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975, 168-83, p.168). The same

Later on in life, Browning negates even more explicitly any possibility that Italians and Italian language possess subjectivity and creativity. In a letter of 1866, he comments on:

the uninterestingness of the Italians individually, as thinking, originating souls: I never read a line in a modern Italian book that was of use to me - never saw a flash of poetry come out of an Italian *word*: in art, in action, *yes* - not in the region of ideas: I always said, they *are* poetry, don't and can't *make* poetry...⁷⁵

This forceful statement once again demonstrates the extent to which the construction of the south as feminine took place within Victorian culture: Italy and the Italians do not and cannot belong to the "region of ideas". For Browning they are precluded from thought and from language, excluded from the masculine logos, they cannot and must not express themselves. Italian language ("Italian word") is denied any creative faculty, and Browning's concession that Italians are good at "art" (presumably in the sense of visual arts and music), only makes them closer to the "feminine" realm of the senses. This feminine Italy is thus nothing but a muse, who cannot speak for herself but is there to provide inspiration, and the people who inhabit it are therefore constructed as material serving the male northern artist ("they *are* poetry"). Alternatively, Italians are disturbing elements when considered as historical and social subjects. Significantly, a very similar attitude can be found in many texts of travellers to Italy, for whom the presence of the "locals" often spoils the landscape and becomes a spurious element.

Occasionally modern Italians are incorporated into the landscape by travellers and painters as decorative figurines (peasants, fishermen, gondoliers) but, when they do not conform to exotic or picturesque aesthetic criteria, they emerge as annoying presences spoiling the otherwise "perfect" view.⁷⁶ One of the numerous examples of

critic also points out that the Brownings seem to regard modern Italians as 'natives' much in the way that E.M. Forster's characters were later to do (p.170).

⁷⁵ *Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. by Edward C. McAleer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951, pp. 238-39 (19 May 1866); quoted in Viscusi, p.3.

⁷⁶ Speaking of a British painter of classical ruins irritated by the presence of modern Arabs, Rana Kabbani observes that "the fact that it (the Orient) was actually peopled by natives (rather than an

this attitude can be found in the passage by Shelley, already quoted, referring to a party of convicts in Piazza San Pietro, who, in the poet's eyes, become a symbol of moral degradation which sharply contrasts with the beauty of the view.

In the vast majority of nineteenth-century texts dealing with Italy and the concept of the south, the question of the character of the Italians is raised. Especially in travel writing, a body of knowledge about southern people and their characteristics is presupposed, largely based on discourses of climatic and biological determinism. Modern Italians, particularly Italian men, are often negatively perceived by northern visitors. In many nineteenth-century travel guidebooks to Italy, travellers are advised to watch out for Italian men's hot temperament and excessive sexuality, this latter particularly threatening for British women. The moral and physical menace represented by Italian masculinity had been confirmed and reinforced, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, by Gothic novels of Italian setting, abounding with lustful monks plotting in dark cloisters and animal-like bandits hiding in mountain caves (visually documented in Rosa's paintings). Thus, when the first authoritative travel guide book to the south of Italy appeared (Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy*, 1858), it contained a section on 'Italian Adventurers (A Caution to English Ladies)', where the author warned women travellers that "Too much care cannot be taken in forming acquaintances with southern Italians".⁷⁷ A

empty theatre for the Westerner's benefit) was in itself annoying" (Kabbani, p.11). The Western/Eurocentric textual practice of the objectification of foreigners has been studied and amply documented in Said's *Orientalism* as well as in Kabbani's *Imperial Fictions*. As Robert Aldrich notes, this representational practice can equally be found in accounts of the Mediterranean south by British and German male homosexual writers:

"For the northerners, the southerners were exotic. Europeans' contacts with others, especially the 'natives' of Africa and Asia, were generally seen through a lens of exoticism. European writers liked to categorise foreigners according to their particular traits (...) to establish a hierarchy of races and ethnicities. The 'otherness' of these people was an endless source of fascination, scientific and social observation and exploitation. (...) Italians were not so different from northerners, nor so exotic, as Berbers, Senegalese or Polynesians, but they were different none the less. Some of the same traits which mark European works on more distant people are evident in literary and artistic works by northerners on Mediterranean people, for example, the objectification of foreigners" (Aldrich, p.171).

Susan Bassnett similarly notes the aspect of the objectification of foreigners in British travel about Italy, and provides the example of the traveller J.B. Scott of Bungay (1792-1828), who comments at length on the Italians he encounters during his journey; Bassnett observes that "there is an anthropological note to [his] account of the women and men of Leghorn, that transforms them into objects, creatures

whole textual attitude can thus be traced in nineteenth-century culture at large, contributing to the construction of the stereotypical Italian/southern man as "a moustache-twirling, debt-ridden adventurer eager to prey on the ingenuous hearts of Northern maidens",⁷⁸ climatically destined to be dominated by an uncontrollable sexual appetite.

Occasionally, Italian men are positively incorporated into the feminised image of Italy. As in Browning's poetry, this is brought about through the obliteration of any sign of modernity, and social and historical identity: Italian men are thus viewed and represented as the descendants of the Romans or the ancient Greeks. Their facial and physical features are observed and associated with those of classical sculpture and art. In this way, Italian men become bodies to be admired for their classic proportions, timeless beauty and perfect virility.

This type of representational practice, as Aldrich has amply documented, is particularly evident in the myth, widespread to this day, of the homoerotic south, of the "seduction of the Mediterranean" - created and perpetuated by generations of male homosexual writers and artists who travelled or lived in the Mediterranean, and especially in southern Italy.⁷⁹

Italian women, on the other hand, are described in various texts as mysterious figures, veiled and dark, leaving behind clouds of perfume: they are, for instance, rich young widows passing out to their gondolas, or innocent great beauties forced to confinement in the house by their possessive male relatives; they are often skilled in the art of playing musical instruments and singing, the most obvious expression of their Italian/southern emotional nature. Alternatively, they are classical nymphs from

who acquire substance because he bestows it upon them" (Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), p.93.

⁷⁷ Blewitt, Octavian, *Handbook for Travellers to Southern Italy: Being a Guide for the Continental Portion of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies* (London: John Murray, 1853); quoted in Pemble, p.271.

⁷⁸ Buzard, p.148.

⁷⁹ Aldrich, pp.ix-x. Aldrich points out that since the Renaissance, sodomy was referred to, in northern Europe, as the 'Italian vice' (p.34).

past centuries disguised in the modern dress of a peasant girl at work in the fields. They constitute objects of admiration, desire, and sometimes conquest (often seen as liberation) on the part of the enlightened northerner. Italian women thus appear to represent desire in the widest sense. The beauty and the charm of local women is, for the northerner, often analogous to that of the landscape and even of the food. As Viscusi argues, Italy is the land of appetite: "All that is missing in England, all that exquisite food and sunshine, and random ancient religion, is there."⁸⁰

On the other hand, the feminisation of Italy also brings about a logical conclusion: just as modern Italy as a whole country is considered historically and morally degenerate, having lost the splendour of its classical past, Italian women in old age are perceived to suffer a quick, monstrous decay of their splendid beauty. They elicit a peculiarly fierce antipathy in British travellers and writers, who insist with remarkable frequency on their hideous aspect, and are obsessed by the transformation from perfect classical beauty to horrific aesthetic degradation, a transformation which seems the necessary symbolic counterpart to that of the modern south at large in the eyes of the northerner. The derogatory description of old Italian women is a recurrent theme in travel writing, and it similarly makes its appearance in fiction, as Lytton's explicit comments in *The Last Days of Pompeii* clearly illustrate:

Perhaps in no country are there seen so many hags as in Italy - in no country does beauty so awfully change, in age, to hideousness the most appalling and revolting.⁸¹

If Italy (and the south in general) is a woman and it is experienced, written and spoken about by northern travellers in terms of a gendered encounter, the theme of an actual sexual union between "northern male visitor and (usually Italian) Continental female" is even more recurrent, and it constituted the plot of English novels long before Lord

⁸⁰Viscusi, p.24.

⁸¹Lytton, p.220. This long lived cliché can be found to this day in some tourist guidebooks and other texts about Italy, as well as in films, where the stereotype of the fat Italian *mamma* who was once slim and beautiful frequently appears, based on the British and American belief that Italian women have a special tendency to put on weight with age which is inherent to their nationality. See Daniel Golden, 'Pasta or Paradigm: The Place of Italian-American Women in Popular Film', *Explorations in Ethnic Studies*, 2, Jan. 1979, 3-10.

Byron popularised the image of the debauched romantic lover/traveller to the Mediterranean.⁸² As has been observed, Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754) already staged the love of an English nobleman and an Italian young woman; Madame de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), an enormously popular novel in Europe, also centred on the love of a northern man for an Italian woman - the protagonist - in whose character the very idea of "Italianness" is summed up.⁸³

The idea of a male northern longing for the feminine south is the central theme of Benjamin Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming* (1832), a novel which in many ways is exemplary of the nineteenth-century construction of the Mediterranean south - represented by Italy - through the various intertwining discourses of race, climatic and topographic determinism, Romanticism and gendered geography.⁸⁴

The emblematic name that gives the title to the novel is indicative of the protagonist's mixed parentage, Scandinavian and Italian, a fact which allows the author to insist over and over again on the "coming home" of the aristocratic hero from the extreme north to his lost "mother-land" in the south, Italy. A recurrent theme in the book is that of a parental connection between the modern civilisation of the north and that of the classical south, in line with the argument of dominant nineteenth-century historiography: Disraeli, who, incidentally, was an admirer of Salvator Rosa's painting, elsewhere makes the drastic statement that "if all that we have gained from the shores of the Mediterranean was erased from the memory of man, we shall be savages".⁸⁵

⁸² See Buzard, p.132.

⁸³ As Buzard points out, the reader soon finds out that Corinne is actually only *half* Italian. Her father is English, therefore she possesses an "un-Italian degree of rationality", with which she is able to "explain" Italy to the reader. In so far as she is Italian, on the other hand, she embodies the femininity of her mother country (p.134).

⁸⁴ This term is borrowed from Buzard's *The Beaten Track* (p.130), where it appears as the title of a section dealing with the "sexual mapping of Europe" operated by the tourist/traveller.

⁸⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, *Venetia* (London: Henry Colburn, 1837), quoted in Pemble, p.8.

Contarini Fleming, written in an autobiographical form, recounts for over three hundred pages the story of the young Contarini, born in an unspecified "north" to a Scandinavian father and a Venetian mother, and of his adolescent attraction to Italy and the south which will form the focus of his entire life. At the beginning of the narrative some emphasis is placed on the details of Contarini's genealogy, through passing references to the different "races", northern and southern, to which he simultaneously belongs: his father, Baron Fleming, was "a Saxon nobleman of ancient family", who married in Venice the daughter of the noble house of Contarini, an "illustrious race". Contarini, whose mother is now dead, lives in the north with his two step-brothers (of entire northern blood): the unhappy hero remarks that "their blue eyes, their flaxen hair, and their white visages claimed no kindred with my Venetian countenance".⁸⁶ Contarini, endowed, like a true Italian, with "the blackest and most beautiful eyes" (16), repeatedly refers to his half brothers as "my white brethren" (5). The climatic argument is soon brought forward: "There was no sympathy between my frame and the rigid clime whither I had been brought to live" (5). His adolescence is troubled throughout by his longing for Italy ("each day I languished more for Italy") (48) and his obligation to stay in a country which he detested, "with a climate which killed me" (60). He soon starts on a quest for his lost mother land, Italy, where he could one day live "under the influence of a glowing sky" (250). Having converted to Catholicism, he finally reaches Italy. Just after crossing the Alps, he is overwhelmed by the rich landscape and enraptured by "the black eyes and picturesque forms that were flashing and glancing about me in all directions" (201). He soon possesses this feminised country in the form of a specific woman, his Venetian cousin, the beautiful and aristocratic Alceste: "I caught her in my arms; yea! I caught her in my arms, that dark-eyed daughter of the land I loved" (233). He saves her from an arranged marriage

⁸⁶ Benjamin Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Romance*, 4 vols., (London: John Murray, 1832), pp.4-5; quotations refer to the 1845 new edition. Further references will be given in parenthesis after quotations.

and the arrogance of her jealous brothers, and finally marries her. However, after a short period of bliss spent in a Greek island, theirs turns out to be a tragic, impossible union. With his future paternal role in mind, Contarini had been concerned with "the long line of northern ancestry, of which I wished my child to be the heir" (242), but the perfect union of northern father and southern mother is broken by Alcesté's death and that of their child at birth. This tragic turn in the plot thus seems to symbolise the impossibility of a north/south harmonic union. The hero retires to a Palladian palace that he purchases in the "highly picturesque" countryside of southern Italy, where, surrounded by the works of art of his classical and oriental collections, and having become a poet and a philosopher, he spends the rest of his life in melancholy: "Here let me pass my life in the study and the creation of the beautiful" (372). At the novel's conclusion, the romantic northern hero has settled in the south, and he can now make use of Italy entirely as material for his creativity.

While numerous other nineteenth-century texts deal with the theme of the Mediterranean south, Disraeli's novel, which remained in print until 1927, is so radically structured and so fully centred on the north/south opposition and the northern longing for the south, that ^{it} is emblematic of the circulation and articulation of a dominant discourse of the south and its inherent contradictions. The Mediterranean south is constructed, alternatively and more often simultaneously, as the location of the classical past and the cradle of civilisation, as a necessary but inferior stage in the progress of Western European history, as a feminine "woman country", a muse for the northern poet, and as the Land of Desire, a symbolic space ruled by emotions and appetites.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAVEL TO THE SOUTH AND THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY "DISCOVERY" OF SICILY

The central role of travellers' tales in constructing the image of another culture and producing knowledge about it, has been recognised and studied by cultural criticism at least since Said's *Orientalism*. Said exposes the vicious circle created by the "textual attitude", the authority assigned to the traveller's text (or indeed any other book), producing

a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experiences.¹

Rana Kabbani's attempt to show and criticise Europe's myths of Orient also takes as a starting point the analysis of travellers' texts; Mary Louise Pratt devotes an entire study to travel writing as part of the history of European imperialism since the Renaissance, while Sara Mills analyses in Foucaultian terms the discursive practices in women's travel literature. As Susan Bassnett points out, "contemporary readings of accounts of travel (...) expose subtexts beneath the apparently innocent details of journeys in other lands".² In order to explore how British, and later American, culture developed a construction of the south, it is crucial to look at the context of travel and travel writing, and see how its subtexts can be linked to other textual discourses circulating in various areas of culture, such as poetry, the novel, the theatre and the visual arts. Furthermore, it can be useful to see how these literary or artistic discourses run parallel to, or intersect with, discourses in the new sciences, such as

¹Said, *Orientalism*, p.94.

²Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: MacMillan, 1986); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, p.92; see also Susan Bassnett, "At the edges of the world: drawing new maps", *Comparative Criticism*, 15, 1993, 35-56.

geology and volcanology, so that a set of interconnected discursive practices can be individuated and the potency of their reciprocal reinforcements exposed. Travel and travel writing represent crucial elements in the cultural phenomenon of the discourse of the south, and the long life enjoyed by the British tradition of the Grand Tour testifies to the cultural importance of travel and its relevance in the discursive practices of nineteenth-century Britain.

i) Travelling South: a British Tradition

Since Renaissance times, when Britain looked at the Mediterranean south what it usually saw was Italy. According to John Pemble, the southern European countries most frequently visited by Victorians and Edwardians were Italy and the south of France, while Greece and Spain, although associated with Romantic sensibility (especially after the publication of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*), attracted ^{fewer} visitors.³ As another critic observes, Italy was the primary destination in the south: it was easily accessible in the nineteenth century (in the late 1800's by the quick means of train or ship), and it was the repository of classical ruins which northerners were interested in seeing.⁴

Many critical studies have been written about or partly devoted to British and American travel to Italy, a large number of which cover the period of the so called Grand Tour.⁵ This expression first appeared in English in Richard Lassell's *Voyage to*

³Pemble, p.48.

⁴Aldrich, p.164.

⁵For British travel to Italy, see Henry Neville Maugham, *The Book of Italian Travel, 1580-1900* (London: Grant Richards, 1903); Ernest S. Bates, *Touring in 1660: A Study of the Development of Travel as a Means of Education* (Boston and New York: Constable, 1911); Boies Penrose, *Urbane Travellers, 1591-1635* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942); J.W.Stoye, *English Travellers Abroad 1604-1667* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952); Arthur Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travellers: The Italian Influence on Englishmen in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964); R.W.Frantz, *The English Traveller and the Movement of Ideas: 1660-1732* (London: Octagon Books, 1968); Edward Chaney, 'The Grand Tour and Beyond: British and American Travellers in Southern Italy, 1545-1960', in E. Chaney et al. (ed.) *Oxford, China and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on His Eightieth Birthday* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984). For

Italy (1670),⁶ and came to indicate the conventional journey which initially was a privilege of young English gentlemen as part of their education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and which, in the following century, became more and more standardised and tended to include a wider public of men and women of the middle classes. An ever increasing number of these travellers produced a variety of texts, in the form of accounts, diaries, journals, letters, guidebooks: throughout the eighteenth century the travel book "was one of the primary and most international literary genres, and it was so appealing that almost every writer of consequence worked in that mode".⁷ Travel to Italy increased steadily, and towards the beginning of the nineteenth century became the natural culmination of the widespread Romantic interest for the Mediterranean south: as one critic puts it, English Romanticism was characterised by an extraordinary passion for Italy, a real *italomania*.⁸ To the steady flow of enthusiastic travellers to Italy between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century corresponded a considerable expansion, almost a saturation, of the English market for Italian travel books, to the extent that in the 1840's they appeared at the rate of four a year (many of which, by now, written by women); the travel book of Italian subject became so conventional and derivative that authors often filled their prefaces with apologies for treating such well known material.⁹

American travel to Italy, see Van Wyck Brooks, *The Dream of Arcadia: American Writers and Artists in Italy 1760-1915* (New York: Dutton, 1958); Paul R. Baker, *The Fortunate Pilgrims: Americans in Italy 1800-1860* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), and Nathalia Wright, *American Novelists in Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965).

⁶See Richard S. Lambert, *The Fortunate Traveller* (London: Melrose, 1950), p.58

⁷Barbara Maria Stafford, 'Toward Romantic Landscape Perception: Illustrated Travels and the Rise of "Singularity" as an Aesthetic Category', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, vol. 10, 1981, 17-75, p.17. For the importance of travel writing in the eighteenth century, see also George B. Parks, 'The Turn to the Romantic in the Travel Literature of the Eighteenth Century', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 25, (1964), 22-33.

⁸The historian Franco Venturi draws attention to the cultural phenomenon of English *italomania* in "L'Italia fuori dall'Italia", in *Storia d'Italia*, ed. by Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti, 3 vols. (Torino: Einaudi, 1973), III, pp.1188-1194. The term was first used by an Italian exile, the writer Augusto Bozzi Granville, in the first issue of *L'Italico*, a review published in London which he founded in 1813. Bozzi Granville reports how "every cultivated person" in London at this time is devoted to the study of the Italian language (quoted in Venturi, p.1193).

⁹See Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.29. Brand remarks that "the numbers of travel-books on Italy published after the Napoleonic Wars rose steadily until 1820, when at least thirteen new works appeared, and remained high throughout the 1820's, when the lengthy descriptions of scenery, antiquities and art-treasures overflow constantly from the Tours into newspapers, magazines, novels and volumes of poetry" (Brand, p.16).

For a large part of the nineteenth century, Italy was politically divided into a heterogeneous group of small and larger states.¹⁰ The conventional itinerary of the Grand Tour, or *Giro d'Italia*, diligently ran through the most famous of its cities, Venice, Florence, and Rome, becoming so standardised that specific times of the year were devoted to certain cities.¹¹ As Pemble documents in *The Mediterranean Passion*, "until well into the 1870's travelling Victorians followed the itinerary of the eighteenth century Grand Tour, (...) they spent the autumn in Florence, went to Rome for Christmas and the New Year, moved on to Naples for the remainder of the winter, and then returned to Rome for Holy Week and Easter".¹²

The Grand Tour very rarely included stops further south than Naples, and the travellers who ventured further on to Sicily were generally considered "intrepid", even if their number grew quickly throughout the nineteenth century.¹³ Sicily's ambiguous position with regard to the tradition of the Grand Tour can be explained from more than one point of view. Its exclusion from the conventional itinerary was largely due

¹⁰ The political situation of Italy for most of the nineteenth century constantly attracted the attention of British travellers, and among the British public at home the question of foreign rule over Italy was discussed frequently in newspapers, reviews and books. Britain's military and economic presence in the Western Mediterranean between 1794 and 1816 is connected with the resolute attempt to contest the expansion of Napoleonic France (see Vincenzo D'Alessandro and Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'Unità d'Italia* (Torino: UTET, 1989). The British themselves had of course a political and military interest in the destiny of Italian states, as testified to by the British intervention in Sicily led by Lord William Bentinck in the years 1811-1814. Britain's support of the Italian unification process had obvious connections with the expansion of its own power; as a contemporary historian declared, "Italy consolidated into one great and independent state would become our natural ally" (Gould Francis Leckie, *An Historical Survey of Great Britain for the years 1808, 1809, 1810, with a view to explain the causes of the disasters of the late and present wars*, London: E. Lloyd, 1810, p.47, quoted by Venturi, p.1191). This attitude of historians is paralleled by that of the Romantic poets, who "were outspokenly pro-Italian: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats all made some protest against the tyrannous governments in Italy" (Brand, p.21). In fact, as Venturi observes, "the root of British italomania in the nineteenth century was primarily artistic and literary", and could be found in the British admiration for the glorious Italian past in classical and Renaissance times (Venturi, p.1195, my translation).

¹¹ Aldrich notes that in the traditional itinerary "such cities as Turin and Genoa were skirted because they were too 'northern' and increasingly too industrialised, not quite artistic enough for most tourists", while the highlights of the tour remained Florence and Rome (Aldrich, p.164).

¹² Pemble, p.41. Edward Chaney notes that in the 1630's, after Charles I and Philip IV signed a treaty of peace, the Grand Tour established itself "in the conventional form it was to retain for well over a hundred years" ('British and American Travellers in Southern Italy', in *Blue Guide: Southern Italy*, ed. by Paul Blanchard, London and New York: Ernest Benn, 1982, 47-59, p.49). For the conventional itinerary of the Tour, see also the introduction to R.S. Pine-Coffin's *Bibliography*.

¹³ This trend is evident in the increase of travel books devoted to southern Italy and Sicily documented in Pine-Coffin's *Bibliography*.

to geographical and historical factors: difficulties of travelling there by land, including few roads and unsafe woods, and the fact that Sicily and southern Italy were ruled by the Spanish for centuries.¹⁴ On the other hand, however, Sicily occupied a central position at the intersection of the most important Mediterranean naval routes to Africa and the Levant, which meant that it was never isolated from contact with other cultures, both European and non-European. Sicily, in fact, emerges as a geographical entity whose cultural definition has long been problematic. It exists more as what Marie Louise Pratt calls a cultural "contact zone", a space where Europe and "non-Europe" (Africa, the Orient) not only face and encounter each other, but amalgamate in a complex way: this hybrid quality of Sicily and southern Italy may explain the special place of these territories among British historians and travel writers, who, simultaneously disturbed and fascinated by this cultural and racial hybridity, have been keen to observe and comment upon the cultural encounter with "non-Europe" taking place in these southern regions, often striving, with various ideological purposes, to individuate and separate the diverse elements involved in the combination.¹⁵

The notion of what constitutes the European south has always been problematic, and the southern border of Europe was not easily fixed. Where Italy ended and where it began to merge with a geographical and cultural "Other" was not a simply defined question, and its definition tends to change in different historical periods, although the feeling that a border does or "should" exist is always present. In the seventeenth century, northern travellers considered Naples to be a border city: George Courthope, a young gentleman travelling on the educational Grand Tour to France and Italy, visited Naples in 1636, and called it "the last city in Italy". He then decided to extend

¹⁴See the works of historians Mack-Smith, D'Alessandro and Giarrizzo.

¹⁵For the concept of "contact zone", see Pratt. Another geographical area in Italy - that of Venice - has been considered a "contact zone" for its association with the Orient by Daryl Ogden in 'The Architecture of Empire: "Oriental" Gothic and the Problem of British Identity in Ruskin's Venice', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol.25, 1997, 109-120, p.112.

A cliché which recurs in nineteenth-century historiography about Sicily is that of the island as "the playground of magnificent civilisations". This aspect, and its racial implications, are discussed extensively in Chapter Four.

his travels as far as the Levant, and proceeded southwards to Sicily, even though by doing so he was contravening his father's orders "not to come out of Christendom".¹⁶ The view of Naples as the last city in Europe survives until well into the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the French traveller Creuze de Lesser stated in 1806: "L'Europe finit à Naples, et même elle finit assez mal. La Calabre, la Sicilie, tout le rest est de l'Afrique", a comment often echoed in similar terms by other travellers.¹⁷ Probably the most authoritative of these is Goethe, who, in a more celebratory note, wrote in *Italienische Reise* (1816-29): "To me Sicily implies Asia and Africa, and it will mean more than a little to me to stand at that miraculous centre upon which so many radii of world history converge".¹⁸

The south is often perceived as the problematic site where classicism and European civilisation on the one hand, come into contact with Africa and Asia on the other, and where the boundaries of Europe become dangerously uncertain.¹⁹ In fact, the association of Sicily and the Italian south with Africa and the Levant coexists and contrasts with the image of the classical south, of southern Italy as the glorious *Magna Grecia*. The former view questions or denies the "Europeanness" of southern

¹⁶The Memoirs of Sir George Courthope, 1616-1618', ed. by Mrs. S.C.Lomas, in *The Camden Miscellany*, vol.11, 1847, 125-132.

¹⁷Creuze de Lesser, *Voyage en Italie et en Sicilie* (Paris, 1806), quoted by Atanasio Mozzillo in *Viaggiatori stranieri nel sud* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1964), p.7. For more references to Naples as the furthest corner of Europe, see Mozzillo and Salvatore Orilia, "La Sicilia nei resoconti di alcuni viaggiatori, stranieri e no, tra '700 e '900", *Il Ragguaglio Librario*, 56, 1989, 257-261.

¹⁸J.W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*, trans. by W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (n.p.:Pantheon Books, n.d), p.212; entry dated 26 March 1787. Echoes of Goethe's comment are clearly heard still in the twentieth century, when D.H.Lawrence repeated almost literally some of the German poet's views on Sicily (see Chapter Six, p.188).

¹⁹The Western Mediterranean constitutes a crucial geographical area where Europe's southern border was established over the centuries through wars and invasions: as historian Fernand Braudel observes, the first stage in the defining of Europe's geographical shape occurred after the 395 division of the Roman Empire, with the creation of a "dangerous frontier" in the south following the success of the Muslim conquest, "all the more so because of successive 'defections', by North Africa (hitherto Christian), by Spain and then by Sicily. In the West the Mediterranean became a Muslim lake" (Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilisations*, trans. R. Mayne, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995, p.309). In reaction to this, Christianity launched its own attack, the Crusades, which "completed the process whereby the West's southern borders were fixed" (Braudel, p.312). For prehistoric relations between southern Europe and Africa, see J.G. Frazer's overcautious comment in the preface to *The Golden Bough*: "How far the facts point to an early influence of Africa on Italy, I do not presume to say. The prehistoric relations between the two continents are still obscure and still under investigation" (J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, London, Macmillan, 1922, abridged edition, p.vii).

Italian regions, operating an implicit cultural rejection of these "remote lands", implicitly pointing to the historical process of orientalisation or africanisation which they underwent through the centuries. The other view, the association of the south of Italy with classical antiquity, tends towards a form of reverential, though problematic inclusion, attributing to these now decayed territories the cultural prestige of having once cradled the splendour of ancient Greek civilisation. Both attitudes recur regularly and intersect each other constantly in travellers' accounts and other texts about Sicily, thus revealing the variegated contradictions in the British view of the Mediterranean south.

ii) The Discovery of Sicily, Land of Oblivion

One of the earliest records of Sicily in British travel writing is that of Sir John Mandeville, who devoted to the island a chapter of his *Travels* (c.1356), listing it as one of the four possible routes for pilgrims to Jerusalem.²⁰ A relatively large number of British travellers - pilgrims, traders, adventurers, soldiers - did visit Sicily during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but for the most part they were not conventional "grand tourists", and they arrived in the island by sea and usually for different motives than personal education. Written documents of their travels exist, but they have rarely, if at all, been considered in the critical studies of travel literature to Italy or Sicily. Some of these obscure texts include the accounts by the diplomat Sir Thomas Hoby (the translator of Castiglione's *The Courtier*) in the sixteenth century, by the erudite Cambridge scholar, translator, and statesman George Sandys, by the Scottish adventurer William Lithgow who visited the island on three different occasions, by the botanists John Ray and Philip Skippon of the Royal Society, by the royal ambassador Lord Winchelsea, and several others throughout the seventeenth

²⁰*Sir John Mandeville's Travels*, ed. by Malcom Letts (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953); for other early accounts of travel to Sicily, see George B. Parks, *The English Traveller to Italy: From the Middle Ages to 1525* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1954).

century.²¹ At the same time, numerous references to Sicily recur in Elizabethan and later plays (including the Sicilian settings of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Winter's Tale*), while both Milton and Spenser used Sicilian images and allusions in their works.²²

However, the prevailing British view of Sicily for the most part of the eighteenth century - at the height of the Grand Tour tradition - was that of a remote and dangerous island, rarely visited by travellers, a sort of forgotten appendix to Italy: "Sicily is a ground very few Englishmen have trod before me as observers", claims the grand tourist John Breval in *Remarks on Several Parts of Europe* (1723).²³

It is generally agreed that in the year 1773, what was to be considered the European "discovery" of Sicily took place, as a result of the publication of a greatly successful book, *A Tour Through Sicily and Malta* by the Scot Patrick Brydone (1736-1818). Well equipped with a set of scientific instruments, Brydone, who was Fellow of the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh, of the Society of Antiquaries, and a Freemason, made a tour of the island in 1770 as "travelling preceptor" of the young Lord Fullarton. In the *Tour*, he skilfully constructs a narrative centred on the

²¹Sir Thomas Hoby, *The Travails and Life of Me, Thomas Hoby*, ed. by Edgar Powell, London, Camden Society Publications, Third Series, vol. 4, 1902. For Hoby, see Lewis Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance in England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1902) and Walter Raleigh, 'Sir Thomas Hoby', in *Some Authors: A Collection of Literary Essays 1896-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923). George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun A.D. 1610* (London, W. Barnett, 1615). Sandys' book saw nine editions in fifty years, as pointed out by Percy G. Adams (p.152); for more on Sandys see Richard Davis Beale's biography *George Sandys: Poet Adventurer* (London: The Bodley Head, 1955). William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Yeares Trauall...* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1906). John Ray, *Travels Through the Low Countries, Germany, Italy...* (London: J. Walthoe, 1738). Sir Philip Skippon, *An Account of a Journey...* (London: J. Walthoe, 1732). Heneage Finch, Earl of Winchelsea, *A True and Exact Relation of the Prodigious Earthquake and Eruption of Mount Etna* (London, 1669). For a discussion of these and other travel accounts, see my 'British Travellers to Sicily in the 16th and 17th centuries', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, July 1992. See also Luigi Mongia, 'The Discovery of Sicily by English Travellers in the 16th and 17th Centuries', *Arba Sicula*, vol.13, no.1&2, Spring-Fall 1992, 80-93.

²²See Marcello Cappuzzo, 'Shakespeare e la Sicilia: Appunti per una ricerca', in *Viaggio nel Sud*, ed. by E. Kanceff and R. Rampone (Moncalieri - Geneva: CIRVI-Slatkine, 1991), 283-290, and the exhaustive study *Milton e la Sicilia*, by the same author (Palermo: Libreria Dante, 1987), also including the Italian translation of the most significant passages of English travellers to Sicily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For Shakespeare and Sicily, see also R.W., Desai, "'What Means Sicilia? He Something Seems Unsettled': Sicily, Russia and Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale*", *Comparative Drama*, vol.30, Fall 1996, no.3, 311-324.

²³John Durant Breval, *Remarks on Several Parts of Europe*, 2 vols. (London, 1723-1726), I, p.iv.

novelty and the unusualness of the subject matter, emphasising the value of his exceptional journey of "discovery". Following one of the eighteenth-century conventions in travel writing, the *Tour* is written as a collection of letters addressed by Brydone to a friend at home. In the first of his letters, dated "Naples, May 14, 1770", the author illustrates why, having reached that city, he now wants to proceed south to Sicily, which lies outside the conventional route of the Grand Tour:

Dear Beckford,

I remember to have heard you regret, that in all your peregrinations through Europe, you had ever neglected the island of Sicily; and had spent much of your time in running over the old beaten track, and in examining the thread-bare subjects of Italy and France; when probably there were a variety of objects, not less interesting, that still lay buried in oblivion in that celebrated island. We intend to profit from this hint of yours.²⁴

The novelty of his account is thus established: Sicily is a land that has been neglected so far, and even "buried in oblivion", despite the fact that it is a "celebrated island", i.e. the site of a glorious classical past. Brydone's next step is to represent his visit to Sicily as a courageous enterprise, an adventure for exceptionally bold explorers; he continues his letter by underlining the difficulties that he is about to face on the island:

[A journey] which even the Italians represent as impossible: as there are no inns in the island, and many of the roads are over dangerous precipices, or through bogs and forests, infested with the most resolute and daring banditti in Europe.²⁵

The first problem, however, is to actually reach the island. Brydone was dissuaded from his original plan to proceed by land from Naples to Sicily, because:

On making exact enquiry, with regard to the state of the country, and method of travelling, we find that the danger from the banditti in Calabria and Apulia is so great, the accommodations so wretched, and inconveniences of every kind so numerous, (...) that we soon relinquished that scheme; in spite of the terrors of Scylla and Charybdis, and the more real terrors of sea sickness (the most formidable monster of the three) we have determined to go by water.²⁶

These passages, strategically placed on the first pages of the book, reveal Brydone's textual attitude, whereby, on the authoritative basis of his first hand experience as traveller, he constructs a clearly defined image: Sicily is an island remote even in the eyes of Italians, separated from Italy by savage, impenetrable regions or by the

²⁴Patrick Brydone, *A Tour Through Sicily and Malta*, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1773), I, pp.1-2.

²⁵Brydone, I, p.2. (The word *banditti* is an English corruption of the Italian *banditi*. However, since the majority of the texts that will be quoted have the English spelling, this ^{former} will be used throughout).

²⁶Brydone, I, p.3.

terrible sea currents personified by the proverbial mythological monsters, Scylla and Charybdis. Besides, Sicily itself is a primitive region lacking elementary signs of civilisation, such as good roads and inns for travellers; its natural environment is wild and literally "dangerous", and to this is added the equally menacing danger represented by the indigenous species of local outlaws.

The extent of Brydone's textual manipulation is demonstrated by the fact that in the rest of the *Tour* he openly diverges from this perspective, expressing for the most part a very positive and appreciative view of the island, which he seems to admire greatly, and he frequently dwells on many of its classical associations as part of the Greek and Roman civilisations. Brydone, therefore, appears to be consciously constructing the image of a remote and dangerous island (though "celebrated") waiting to be discovered; once Sicily is discovered, it is revealed as a most fascinating place. Brydone's emphasis on his "discovering" Sicily, in fact, perfectly fits in the context of late eighteenth century culture: the *taste* for discovery was indeed a typical feature of such culture, particularly evident in the flourishing of the travel book as literary genre, and, as has been argued, as important an aesthetic category as the Picturesque.²⁷

The idea of a European discovery of Sicily found its ultimate legitimation in the authority of J.W. Goethe, who visited the island in 1787 and extolled its virtues in *Italienische Reise*, making the unequivocal statement that "to have seen Italy without having seen Sicily is not to have seen Italy at all, for Sicily is the clue to everything".²⁸ His confident assertion that Sicily was "so to speak revealed to foreign nations in the second half of the eighteenth century" did much to canonise the idea of the island's remoteness until that time.²⁹ The German poet was familiar with Brydone's *Tour*, and several borrowings from Brydone and other British travellers

²⁷See Stafford, 'Toward Romantic Landscape Perception', p.64. See especially the chapter 'The Taste for Discovery' in the same author's *Voyage into Substance*, where she argues that the taste for discovery "flourished throughout Europe alongside that for the Picturesque, and indeed it was its rival" (p.3).

²⁸Goethe, *Italian Journey*, p. 240 (entry dated 13 April 1787).

²⁹Goethe, *Philipp Hackert*, quoted by Atanasio Mozzillo, 'Le ragioni dell'immaginario: Mito e percezione della realtà nei viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia tra Cinquecento e Seicento', in *La Sicilia dei grandi viaggiatori*, ed. by F. Paloscia (n.p.: Edizioni Abete, 1988), 1-80, p.4.

have been individuated in the *Reise*.³⁰ Thus, Goethe's travel narrative played an important role in confirming and perpetuating the idea of Sicily as an island buried in oblivion, which needed to be discovered by the rest of Europe (or rather its northern half, as Hegel would put it): this kind of image fitted very well in the context of the Romantic ideal for uncontaminated, picturesque, primitive, and occasionally dangerous places far removed from the familiar space of Britain and the north, where the travelling hero (poet, painter, scientist) could roam at will and experience the exceptional joy of discovery.

Brydone's *Tour* is generally considered the first travel book in English devoted specifically to Sicily. The effectiveness of his textual manipulations and his construction of Sicily as the island of oblivion, assured - in the favourable cultural climate of the time (with the rise of the categories of singularity and of the Picturesque) - a large success to his book, to the extent that at least twenty-three English editions were published by 1850. The *Tour* was immediately translated into German (1774) and French (1775), and constituted the source of many later accounts. The popularity of Brydone's book was so great that in 1776 an earlier, previously unpublished account of Sicily by John Dryden the younger appeared, *A Voyage to Sicily and Malta*, intended by the publisher to be used as a companion to Brydone's *Tour*, although it referred to a journey which had taken place in the year 1700. Finally, Brydone was admired and praised by readers such as Dr. Johnson and Fanny Burney.³¹

Brydone's *Tour* marks the beginning of the construction of Sicily as the epitome of the Mediterranean south, the perfect Romantic space, the island which he enthusiastically called "the most beautiful, wild and romantic country in the world".³²

³⁰See Hélène Tuzet, *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia nel XVIII secolo*, trans. by A. Bellomo (Palermo: Sellerio, 1988) p.129.

³¹See Charles L. Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), p.105. On Brydone see also Paul Fussell, 'Patrick Brydone: the Eighteenth-Century Traveler as Representative of Man', in *Literature as a Mode of Travel*, ed. by Paul Fussell (New York: New York Public Library, 1963), pp.53-67.

³²Brydone, II, p.102. It is worth noting that the idea of the eighteenth-century discovery of Sicily and its geographical and cultural remoteness recur regularly and uncritically in many modern studies on

His book contains many and varied themes, which will circulate for a long time thereafter in British travel writing about Sicily. On the one hand, with his "proto-Romantic sensibility",³³ Brydone is inclined to note many "picturesque" and "sublime" features of Sicilian scenery, he indulges in certain Sicilian elements which possess a Gothic flavour, such as Catholic superstition, banditti, caves and underground convents; and he also employs the elegiac theme of meditation upon ruins and past glory, another vital strand of the discourse about the south which will acquire special significance for Victorians in imperial times; on the other hand, however, Brydone also represents the scientific explorer mapping new territories, he carries his scientific instruments to the top of the volcano Etna, and adopts the role of rigorous observer and reporter, often constructing and emphasising the collision between "British scientism and Mediterranean superstition".³⁴

The combination of these different ingredients met with and reinforced the British interest in the Mediterranean south, making Brydone's book one of the most popular publications in the latter part of the century, a period which saw the publication of further volumes featuring Sicily in the title, among which Henry Swinburne's *Travels*

British travel to Italy. An entire chapter of Camillo Von Klenze's *The Interpretation of Italy during the Last Two Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907) is spent explaining how Sicily has been neglected "for a long time", and its importance not appreciated "until late" (p.59). In *The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1914; repr.1972), William E. Mead affirms that "there is no lovelier part of Europe than Sicily, yet in the eighteenth century only an occasional tourist found its way thither" (p.275), while in *The Grand Tour in Italy (1700-1800)* (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1952) Paul F. Kirby refers to Sicily, Corsica, and all of Italy south of Naples as "lands of oblivion" (repeating Brydone's expression nearly two centuries later); he affirms that only with the passing of time did they become extensions of the classic tour of Italy, since "in all of these places there hovered a golden aura of romantic adventure" (p.147). The same concept is reiterated in more recent critical studies: Hélène Tuzet observes that, before Brydone, Sicily remained for the majority of Europeans an obscure, remote and mysterious land, "as though it belonged to a different continent" (Tuzet, p.15, my translation), while Maria Carla Martino talks of a "still virgin, unknown land," offering itself/herself to the curiosity of late eighteenth-century travellers (Maria Carla Martino, *Viaggiatori inglesi in Sicilia nella prima metà dell'Ottocento*, Palermo: Edizioni e Ristampe Siciliane, 1977, p.9; my translation). Similarly, the idea of the late eighteenth-century discovery of Sicily appears in other studies, such as Atanasio Mozzillo, 'La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi', *Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione*, 61, 1978, 51-68, and *La Sicilia dei grandi viaggiatori*, ed. by F. Paloscia (n.pl.: Edizioni Abete, 1988).

³³Mozzillo, 'La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi', p.56. Fussell observes that Brydone's comments on the once glorious city of Syracuse anticipated Gibbon in finding significance in declines and falls (Fussell, 'Patrick Brydone', p.58.)

³⁴Fussell, 'Patrick Brydone', p.58. As the same critic notes, one of the most important themes in Brydone's *Tour* is the triumph of science over superstition (p.58).

in the Two Sicilies (1783), also a very influential book, and Reverend Brian Hill's *Observations and Remarks in a Journey through Sicily and Calabria* (1792).³⁵ Concomitantly, Brydone's success abroad and the increase in the popularity of Sicily among other European travellers resulted in turn in a large number of German and French travel books about Sicily being translated into English.³⁶ Within the increase of Italian travel books in the first half of the nineteenth century, those devoted expressly to Sicily became more and more numerous to the extent that it is possible to speak of the emergence in this period of a real "fashion" for travelling to Sicily.³⁷

iii) Picturesque Sicily

The complexity and relevance of the late eighteenth-century discovery of Sicily in British taste is well illustrated by Rose Macaulay:

It required the classical antiquarianism of the mid-eighteenth century and the romantic poeticism of a few years later to send the enthusiastic addicts of the picturesque and of Salvator Rosa to the very home of picturesque ruin. Ruins were scattered about Europe and Asia; but in Sicily there were ruins everywhere, and ruins set in landscapes of wild mountain scenery, against seascapes of startling

³⁵Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in the Years 1777, 1778, 1779 and 1780*, 4 vols. (London: J. Nichols, 1790); Brian Hill, *Observations and Remarks in a Journey through Sicily and Calabria in the year 1791* (London, 1792). Paul Fussell emphasises the fame reached by Brydone's *Tour*, which was "the third most popular item with borrowers in Bristol [Library] for the two years following publication, and during the next eleven years it became the second most popular" (Fussell, 'Patrick Brydone', p.53). For a discussion of Swinburne's and Hill's accounts of Sicily, see Tuzet. An interesting paradox develops around this time: texts about Sicily continued to be produced in increasing number after Brydone, and each of them, more or less explicitly, claimed for itself the prestige of dealing with a subject treated only by few.

³⁶Among the numerous translations, see for example, Johann Hermann von Riedesel [Reise durch Sicilien und Grossgriechenland, 1771, dedicated to Winckelmann] *Travels through Sicily and that Part of Italy formerly called Magna Grecia*, trans. by J.R. Forster (London, 1773); Friedrich Leopold zu Stolberg [Reise in Deutschland, der Schweiz, Italien, und Sicilien] *Travels through Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Sicily*, trans. by Thomas Holcroft, 2 vols. (London, 1797); Joseph Hager [Gemalde von Palermo] *Picture of Palermo*, trans. by Mrs. Mary Robinson, (London, 1800) (the translator, Mary Robinson, is also author of the play *The Sicilian Lover*, examined in Chapter Three). From the French: Dominique Vivant Denon [Voyage pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et Sicilie], *Travels in Sicily and Malta* (London: G.J.&J.Robinson, 1789).

³⁷See Tuzet, p.18. As A. Mozzillo points out, at a later stage travel to Sicily became so fashionable that Stendhal stated in his *Voyages* that he had travelled extensively in the island; however, it has been amply demonstrated that the French author never set foot in Sicily (see Mozzillo, 'La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi', p.57).

loveliness, overrun by banditti and pirates and liable to be destroyed by convulsions of the earth without parallel.³⁸

The success of Brydone's *Tour*, Sicily's increased popularity among British as well as French and German travellers, and heightened interest in Sicily within British literature and culture can be better understood in the context of the rise of picturesque aesthetics and Romantic sensibility, to which the contemporary fascination with the image of the Mediterranean south is closely related.

The discourse of the south is variously articulated in interconnected areas of culture: it includes elements of the picturesque, the sublime, the Romantic, the Gothic as well as the pastoral and the classical.³⁹ Textual connections can be found which closely link travellers' accounts, picturesque paintings of Italian subject and the Gothic novel between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The rise of the picturesque and its implications in various areas of British culture are illustrated by Christopher Hussey:

The relation of all the arts to one another, through the pictorial appreciation of nature, was so close that poetry, painting, gardening, architecture and the art of travel may be said to have been fused into a single "art of landscape". The combination might be termed "The Picturesque".⁴⁰

This reference to "the art of travel" is further expanded when the same critic remarks that the British interest in landscapes was a "direct result of the Grand Tour". As Elizabeth Manwaring points out, late eighteenth-century British taste was largely influenced by Italian and French landscape painters, and the rise of picturesque aesthetics was intimately related to Italian travel and art collection.⁴¹

³⁸Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1953), p.222.

³⁹As Marilyn Butler observes, 'antique' styles such as the classical and the Gothic were often interchangeable: Richard Payne Knight, the theorist of picturesque aesthetics, built himself a Gothic house, Downtown Castle, while he was also an expert on Greek coins, classical art and antiquities (M. Butler, p.18).

⁴⁰Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque* (London and New York: G.P.Putnam, 1927), p.4. Malcom Andrews notes that the term picturesque "[came] into vogue in the early eighteenth century as an anglicization of the French *pittoresque* or Italian *pittresco*. Initially it carried no particular reference to landscape but meant the kind of scenery or human activity proper for a painting." See Malcom Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), p.viii). The main theorists of picturesque aesthetics in England were William Gilpin (1724-1804), Uvedale Price (1747-1829), and Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824). Payne Knight's Sicilian journey is discussed below in this chapter.

⁴¹See Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring, *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England: A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa on English Taste 1700-1800* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1925; repr.1965).

In this context, the work of the Neapolitan Salvator Rosa was very influential: many of his paintings were imported to Britain, where he was imitated and revered as a genius together with the French Claude Lorrain.⁴² As Manwaring documents, Rosa's influence was decisive in establishing the association of beauty and horror, and he is considered by critics largely responsible for the common identification of the picturesque with the irregular and the wild.⁴³ His paintings show landscapes and scenery of his native country, southern Italy, and they contributed enormously to form among the British public a certain visual image of the Mediterranean south. Rosa's pervading and long-lasting influence on British aesthetic taste is revealed by the striking recurrence of references to his name made by both British and American travellers up to the nineteenth century. To cite only a few, in 1780 Henry Swinburne desired to have "the powers of a Salvator Rosa or a Poussin" to illustrate the beauties of "the sublime style" of northern Sicily, while in 1857 Herman Melville described the Calabrian mountains seen from the opposite coast of Sicily mentioning the "Salvator Rosa look of them".⁴⁴ Thus, while Rosa's paintings, largely imported, helped to shape picturesque taste and were constantly imitated in Britain, British travellers in turn looked for "Rosa effects" in the south.

The connection between pictorial arts and travel to the south is further demonstrated by the affirmation of the European vogue for illustrated travel books, or *voyages pittoresques*. From the late eighteenth century and throughout the first half of the nineteenth, a large number of these were devoted by British and French artists to Italy and Sicily. The French diplomat and art collector Dominique Vivant Denon (1747-1825) inaugurated the series of these *voyages* with the publication of the four volume

⁴²By the early nineteenth century over a hundred Rosas were in English collections (see Andrews, p. 26). Horace Walpole compared Rosa's genius to that of Shakespeare; see Salerno, p.10.

⁴³See Manwaring, p.169.

⁴⁴H. Swinburne, IV, p.169; Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant: October 11, 1856 - May 1857*, ed. by Howard C. Horsford, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955), p.175 (entry dated February 15th, 1857). Barbara Stafford also points out that Salvator Rosa "figures prominently in the reports of the Picturesque travelers" (Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, p.15).

Voyage Pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et Sicilie (1781-86), a collection of illustrations from nature taken during his tour.⁴⁵ Publications of this kind, collections of etchings or drawings of picturesque views executed by professional painters in their travels to the south, and often containing little written text, became very popular at the turn of the century, and were highly requested in Britain: in the first half of the nineteenth century many British artists prepared *voyages pittoresques* devoted to Sicily, among which *Sicilian Scenery* (1823) by the water-colour painter Peter De Wint (1748-1849) and *Sicily, its scenery and its antiquities* (1853), by William Henry Barlett.⁴⁶

The intimate connection between travel to the south and the rise of picturesque aesthetics is best confirmed by the example of Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824), one of the main theoreticians of the new aesthetic sensibility in Britain and author of fundamental texts on the picturesque, who visited Sicily in 1777.⁴⁷ His travelling experience had a major influence on his work, and his water-colour views of Italian landscapes were much sought after in Britain. He travelled in the company of two other painters, Charles Gore and the celebrated German artist Philipp Hackert, of

⁴⁵Dominique Vivant Denon, *Voyage Pittoresque ou description des royaumes de Naples et Sicilie*, v vols. (Paris, 1781-86) (translated into English, 1789); this work is referred to by Goethe in *Italienische Reise*. See Emanuele Kanceff, 'Il compasso e il pennello: Immagini della Sicilia tra Illuminismo e Romanticismo', in *La Sicilia dei grandi viaggiatori*, 87-99, p.93. Denon participated as official illustrator in Napoleon I's Egyptian campaign, and founded the Musée Napoleon, where the works of art from all the countries occupied by France were to be gathered. As he himself stated, it was his journey to Sicily which stimulated in him the passion for arts and objects of antiquity. See Gianni Carlo Sciolla, 'Il viaggio pittorico: l'immagine della Sicilia negli artisti stranieri dei secoli XVII-XIX' in *La Sicilia dei grandi viaggiatori*, ed. by F. Paloscia (n.p: Edizioni Abete, 1988), 153-171, p.160.

⁴⁶See Sciolla, p.166. Other British artists who produced water-colours of Sicilian subject are John Robert Cosenz (1752-1797) and Thomas Hearne (1744-1817), who, according to Sciolla, show a distinctive "pre-Romantic dramatic quality" (p.158). It is interesting to note that the term 'picturesque' is frequently attached to Sicily throughout the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century. In present day Sicily, countless tourist postcards bearing the motto "Sicilia Pittoresca" are printed and sold to foreigners. The vogue for picturesque travel in the south was followed by another significant British artist, better known as author of poetry and surrealist humour, Edward Lear (1812-1888). Lear, who travelled extensively in the Mediterranean, and spent the last seventeen years of his life in San Remo, visited Sicily from May to July 1847, and produced sketches that recall "the landscapes of (...) eighteenth century masters" (Pemble, p.121). For Lear in Sicily see Martino, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷Richard Payne Knight's most influential works are *The Landscape, a didactic poem* (London, 1794) and *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne, 1805); he was also author of scholarly works on ancient mythology, Greek coins and the Greek alphabet.

whom Goethe compiled a biography. Payne Knight kept a journal of his travels in Sicily which was translated into German by Goethe.⁴⁸

These "painting travellers" were often engaged in the discovery of the Mediterranean or Italian light.⁴⁹ Frequently, northern artists refer to the special kind of luminosity found in the south, a feature also repeatedly emphasised by Goethe in the *Reise*.⁵⁰ As Stafford observes, it is a commonplace of picturesque practice that in temperate climates, and particularly in Italy, "a visible rarefaction transfigures and dematerialises objects bathed in pleasing vapours", a pictorial device invented by Claude in his scenes of the Roman Campagna.⁵¹ This type of representation of picturesque places in a soft mist that renders everything delicate and mellow, visually transposes southern landscapes into a dream-like, unreal dimension, and, while on the one hand it is related to climatology, on the other it is implicitly linked with the idea of the Mediterranean as the land of classical antiquity, remote in a suffused arcadian past. The softness of colours and the special southern luminosity reflect the pleasant remoteness of the country that in 1834 Lord Lytton would call "the Land of Dreams".⁵²

⁴⁸The manuscript of Payne Knight's travel journal, for reasons that are not clear, ended up in Goethe's hands. Goethe's translation appears as: "Tagebuch einer Reise nach Sicilien von Henry [sic] Knight", and is included in the biography of the painter Philipp Hackert which Goethe compiled (*Philipp Hackert*, Tübingen: J.G.Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1811). A modern English edition is Richard Payne Knight, *Expedition into Sicily*, ed. by Claudia Stumpf (London: British Museum Publications, 1986). Many of the paintings and drawings of Hackert and Gore were given to the British Museum through the Knight Foundation. For more on Payne Knight, see Michael Clarke and Nicholas Penny, *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight 1751-1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), where he is described as "in love with classicism" (p.157).

⁴⁹The definition is Charles Batten's (Batten, p.106).

⁵⁰See Kanceff, pp.84-87. According to Kanceff, the themes of luminosity and colour are central in Goethe's *Reise*.

The German poet was accompanied in his travels to Sicily by the painter Cristoph Heinrich Kniep (1755-1825). Goethe himself drew some sketches, but most of the work was done by Kniep.

⁵¹Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, p.196.

⁵²Lytton, p.202.

iv) Gothic Sicily: *A Sicilian Romance*

As has been pointed out, pictorial and literary images influenced and reinforced each other, as suggested by John Constable's statement that "Salvator Rosa is a great favourite with novel writers, particularly the ladies".⁵³ This association is especially relevant in the case of Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), the celebrated Gothic writer, whose early novel, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), provides an illuminating example of how various strands of the discourse about the south converge unto the centrality of a Sicilian setting.

Radcliffe's first novel had been the rather unsuccessful *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbanye* (1789), set in Scotland. Her next choice of a Mediterranean setting is significantly commented upon by a modern critic who reiterates the usual terms of the discourse of the south: "Her genius which felt cramped in the bleak atmosphere of the Highlands in her first novel, now blossomed forth in the luxurious climate of the sweet south".⁵⁴ This critic naively overlooks that a luxurious climate, especially in opposition to that of the gloomy north, was part of a wider discourse about the south, a discourse which also circulated in travel narratives and the visual arts. Radcliffe consciously draws together the strands of this discourse into her fiction^{and} combines travellers with landscape painters, demonstrating a highly original ability at textual manipulation.

A Sicilian Romance is structured around the typically Sicilian elements of picturesque landscape and pastoral natural scenery, and around certain Sicilian features which Radcliffe skilfully constructs as Gothic, endowing them with a superbly dark, disturbing quality: subterranean passages, mountain caves, precipices, castles, convents, and of course bloodthirsty banditti. As Percy G. Adams observes in *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, there is clear evidence that Radcliffe (who never travelled to the Mediterranean) drew a substantial part of her material from

⁵³Quoted in Manwaring, p.52.

⁵⁴Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), p.89.

travel accounts, and from Brydone's *Tour* in particular.⁵⁵ In *A Sicilian Romance*, descriptions of wild scenery and underground caves follow very closely Brydone's account: one element in the plot - the hero and heroine trapped in the banditti's subterranean refuge crowded with the corpses of previous victims - is unmistakably inspired by Brydone's report of the mummified bodies of the dead of noble families kept in an underground convent in Palermo.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Radcliffe's choice of highlighting the Sicilian setting in the title of her novel could well have been suggested by the popularity achieved by Brydone's book a few years earlier, which had rendered things Sicilian interesting to a large reading public.

Sicily appears in Radcliffe's novel as a simultaneously fascinating and menacing place. Rapture for the picturesque and pastoral landscape is constantly alternated with repulsion for the terrifying and mysterious underground passages, closed convents, and ancient castles, these latter described as "the seat of luxury and vice".⁵⁷ Radcliffe repeatedly mentions the "wild and picturesque scenery of Sicily", uses adjectives such as "grand and sublime," (5) "wild and mountainous" (32) "bold and picturesque," (33) "beautiful and romantic," (36) "sublime and striking," (40) to render the features of the Sicilian landscape, in a way much reminiscent of Brydone's descriptions. Throughout the novel, the Sicilian setting appears to possess a dream-like quality, a touch of unreality which reminds one of the scene of an exotic fairy tale. Sir Walter

⁵⁵See Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1983). According to Adams, Radcliffe is indebted to Brydone's account as source for mountain caves, banditti, various descriptions of landscapes, smoking mount Etna, abbeys and convents, lustful priests, and cruel relatives (Adams, pp.137-138).

⁵⁶Alison Milbank, in her introduction to Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), comments on the character of the Marchioness Louisa Mazzini incarcerated in a subterranean cave: "there is something particularly Sicilian about such an arrangement (...) as Radcliffe would have read in the travellers' descriptions of the subterranean gardens of the Capuchin monastery near Syracuse and the use of interconnecting caves for burial chambers" (p.xxv). The association of Sicily with caves and caverns is further confirmed by the fact that "Thomas Warton distinguishes Sicily for its 'caverns hung with ivy-twine' in his *Ode XVII*, while Tasso's Aurora in his pastoral *Aminta*, lives in a cave on the same island" (Milbank, p.xxv). The mummified bodies of noble families of which Brydone and many other travellers report in their accounts can still be seen today in the underground chambers of the Convento dei Cappuccini in Palermo.

⁵⁷Ann Radcliffe, 'A Sicilian Romance', in *The Novels* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974, (facsimile reprint of the 1824 edition), p.3. Further references will be given in parenthesis after quotations.

Scott, commenting on the novel's setting, observes that "the imagery and scenery by which the action is relieved, are like those of *a splendid oriental tale*".⁵⁸ Like the travellers' and the painters', Radcliffe's Sicily is a land of oblivion, a land of dreams, desire and enchantment: and it is best described in the language of painting.⁵⁹ The natural scenery surrounding the protagonist, Julia, and her governess Madame de Menon, who are riding through the interior of the island to flee from their persecutors, appears thus:

The landscape was tinted with rich and variegated hues; and the autumnal lights, which streamed upon the hills, produced a beautiful effect upon the scenery. All the glories of the vintage rose to their view: the purple grapes flushed through the dark green of the surrounding foliage, and the prospect glowed with luxuriance.

They now descended into a deep valley, which appeared more like a scene of airy enchantment than reality. Along the bottom flowed a clear, majestic stream, whose banks were adorned with thick groves of orange and citron trees. (42)

In another place, the picturesque and pastoral connotations of the Sicilian landscape are indicated when the characters descend into "a rich valley, where the shepherd's pipe sounded sweetly from afar among the hills", and where "the evening sun shed a mild and mellow lustre over the landscape, and softened each feature" (64). At the same time, however, and often in the same page, the same geographical space becomes suddenly dreadful and threatening, the scene of obscure passions:

They turned into a narrow winding dell, overshadowed by high trees, which almost excluded the light. The gloom of the place inspired terrific images. Julia trembled as she entered. (...) The place appeared fit only for the purposes of violence and destruction. (43)

Descriptions of numerous caves and subterranean passages, which regularly constitute the culminating points of suspense and terror in the narrative, emphasise the dark and menacing elements of the otherwise sunny and picturesque island. There is a mysterious underground Sicily, containing unrestrained and untamed passions in the bowels of the earth, in its rocky vaults and caverns where the most evil deeds are perpetrated: "They now entered upon a dark abyss. (...) They were now enclosed in a vault strewn with the dead bodies of the murdered" (62). During the various journeys

⁵⁸[Sir Walter Scott], 'Memory of the Life of the Author', in *The Novels of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Hurst, Robinson & co., 1824), p.iv (my emphasis).

⁵⁹See Lynne Epstein, 'Mrs. Radcliffe's Landscapes: The Influence of Three Landscape Painters on Her Nature Descriptions', *Hartford Studies in Literature*, 1 (1969), 107-20.

of the characters across the island, serene, pastoral, and sunny environments, described at length in lyrical style, repeatedly turn sinister and nocturnal, with the appearance of "the mouth of a cavern", "a high vaulted cavern, which received a feeble light from the moon-beams that streamed through an opening in the rock above" (64-65).

This dark and menacing side of Sicily, with its subterranean and closed environments, is exemplified by the most vicious and depraved villains in the novel (the diabolical Marquis of Mazzini, the cruel Duke de Luovo, the ambiguous Abate of St. Augustin's monastery), characters belonging to a long tradition of anti-Italian and anti-machiavellian attitudes which associate the south with excessive passions and moral corruption.⁶⁰

In the end, Sicily turns out to be irredeemable and irreconcilable with Radcliffe's moral stand, and has to be rejected: once the intricate plot is solved, the main characters all decide to leave the island. The happy ending is signalled by the move of the protagonists' residence to Naples, where Julia could forget that "she had ever been otherwise than happy" (74). The castle of Mazzini is abandoned and left to decay, "its magnificent remains" acquiring an air of ancient grandeur in the northern shore of Sicily.

From Radcliffe's novel it is possible to understand the extent to which literary and pictorial images influenced and reinforced each other, as well as how Sicily, through the crucial contribution of travellers' accounts came to represent the epitome of the south with its contradictory aspects. Radcliffe's descriptions of Sicilian landscape are indebted to Brydone's *Tour* and inspired by the pictorial taste of the time, a taste which in turn influenced travellers to the south. Her use of Sicily as subject matter for achieving certain artistic effects was soon imitated by other writers. As has been noted, the Gothic - both as literary genre and architectural style - was intrinsically

⁶⁰See Praz, *The Flaming Heart*. The emphasis on vice, corruption, voluptuous and morbid sensuality, etc., projected onto a far away and exotic location, is, of course, a central theme in Gothic literature, which in fact reserves a very similar treatment to the Orient. The association of the Mediterranean with morally ambiguous features constitutes a strand of the discourse of the south which will continue to circulate in various forms and places up to the twentieth century.

bound up with exoticism, and many Gothic novels were set in Mediterranean and eastern countries.⁶¹ "Exotic" Sicily thus provided rich material for Gothic writers: among the countless novels set in Italy, a relatively large percentage are set in Sicily or contain Sicilian references. Sicilian Gothic titles include: *The Sicilian, A Novel* (1798), *The Sicilian Pirate, or the Pillar of Mystery, a Terrific Romance* (ca.1800); *The Demon of Sicily, A Romance* (1807); *The Ruins of Selinunti, or The Val the Mazzara* (1813); *Sicilian Mysteries, or the Fortress Del Vechii, A Romance* (1818).⁶²

⁶¹See Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (London: Constable, 1950).

⁶²For these and further references, see Montague Summers, *A Gothic Bibliography* (London: Fortune Press, 1964) and Jacob Brauchli, 'Bibliography', in *The English Gothic Novel: A Miscellany in Four Volumes*, ed. by Thomas Meade Harwell (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1986), I, pp.279-341. The majority of these novels were written by women. An interesting Sicilian allusion can be found in the recurrence of the name Rosalia in numerous early nineteenth-century sensational novels imitating the successful formula of Mrs.Radcliffe. Kenneth Churchill points out the recurrence in almost every 'Italian' novel or story of the name Rosalia and its variations Rosa, Rosalie, Rosolie, Rosaline; see Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930* (London: MacMillan, 1980), p.19. Rosalia, patron saint of Palermo to this day, is mentioned in a number of travel accounts: Brydone enthusiastically describes the Sicilian celebrations for the saint, and recounts the legend of her life, which presents many Gothic and picturesque overtones, such as the element of a cave in the mountain. According to the legend, Saint Rosalia was a young nun of aristocratic descent, who retired to live as a hermit in a secluded cave overlooking the sea on Mount Pellegrino near Palermo, and died there in 1160. Goethe visited the spot, and was enraptured by the beauty of the place; he also writes that the saint's name has become "universally famous through Brydone" (Goethe, *Italian Journey*, p.225; entry dated 6 April 1786). Churchill notes that "the name seems to have struck the novelists as peculiarly Italian and an essential part of the creation of an Italian atmosphere"; it became so popular among writers that Rosalia characters appeared also within a plot that had no resemblance to the story of the saint's life: "when it is not the name of the heroine, Rosalia is the name of the servant girl, or even, on one occasion, of a horse" (Churchill, p.19). Churchill suggests that the Sicilian name acquired popularity in England through Brydone's *Tour*, but he seems unable to explain why this particular name struck the novelists: he probably ignores the story of the saint's life and therefore fails to see its specific appeal on Gothic writers.

v) Classical and Pastoral Sicily

In Britain, between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, classicism was not opposed, but coexisted with Romantic, picturesque and Gothic taste, with which it is often found intertwined.⁶³ Classicism of course immediately brought to mind its geographical association with the Mediterranean south, with Greece and Italy. Sicily and southern Italy had long been known as *Magna Grecia*, "Great Greece", where Greek civilisation had flourished, magnificent temples and theatres had been built, before the same lands became a province of the Roman empire, of which they also bore significant testimonies. Sicily and southern Italy were the home of renowned figures such as Pythagoras, Empedocles, Archimedes, Theocritus, and they were part of Greek and Latin history, literature and mythology, where constant references to this region could be found.⁶⁴

The theme of classical antiquity represents a dominant and permanent feature in British travel literature on Sicily and southern Italy, where it is often found in association with picturesque aesthetics. As Brand notes, "the ruins had the further, strictly non-classical attraction of being eminently 'picturesque'".⁶⁵ In his account significantly called *A Classical Tour* (1819), the British traveller Sir Richard Hoare provides an example of how Sicilian scenery perfectly combines picturesque effects with classical architecture.

Hoare describes the Greek temples at Agrigento in Sicily:

Hitherto I have visited no spot so well adapted to afford scope to the pencil, by uniting the beauties of landscape with the elegance of the art; the ruins seem as if designedly paced on the eminences to form the subject of a picture, or to serve as ornaments of a villa.⁶⁶

⁶³As Harry Levin states, "there was never a time, during the Romantic movement, when the classics were completely disregarded. Greek and Latin were still the staple of education and most Romantic writers were brought up on them". (Harry Levin, *The Broken Column: A Study of Romantic Hellenism*, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1931, p.20).

⁶⁴To cite only a few, the city of Syracuse in Sicily was involved in the Peloponnesian wars against Athens, of which many Greek historians wrote at length; Plato is supposed to have lived in Syracuse for a certain time and to have thought of realising his Republic there.

⁶⁵Brand, p.164.

⁶⁶Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *A Classical Tour through Italy and Sicily*, 2 vols. (London, 1819), II, p.164.

Similarly, S.T. Coleridge, in Sicily in 1804, is fascinated by the Greek temples in Agrigento, and in his notebooks depicts the arcadian scenery which he saw there, blending classicism and picturesque aesthetics: "the shore to which we are approaching, before us, stretching and curving, the left and the right (...) green, woody, pastoral - the pillars of the Temple of Jupiter in the distance straight before us". Further on, near Syracuse, the landscape abounds with more pastoral and mythological allusions: "The view up the river - is wild, *Pan* like, & water rushing into the River from a small stream hidden in reeds, (...) most divine beauty".⁶⁷

However, it was perhaps those who never visited Sicily who were most inclined to dwell on its classical associations, as in the example of William Wordsworth's reference to the island in the *Prelude*. Wordsworth rhapsodises classical Sicily in a long passage of the poem, where it is described exclusively as an idealised classical land, appearing through the mist of the past to the dreamy eyes of the poet, sitting by the fireside back in England:

Child of the mountains, among shepherds reared,
 Ere yet familiar with the classic page,
 I learnt to dream of Sicily; (...)
 A pleasant promise wafted from her shores,
 Comes o'er my heart: in fancy I behold
 Her seas yet smiling, her once happy vales;
 Nor can my tongue give utterance to a name
 Of note belonging to that honoured isle,
 Philosopher or Bard, Empedocles,
 Or Archimedes, pure abstracted soul!
 That doth not yield a solace to my grief (...)
Thus I soothe
 The pensive moments by this calm fireside,
 And find a thousand bounteous images
 To cheer the thoughts of those I love, and mine.⁶⁸

⁶⁷*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn, 4 vols., (New York: Pantheon, 1961) II, p.2211(entry dated 15 October 1804). Coleridge visited the famous Greek theatre in Taormina, of which he wrote a detailed description in his notebooks, where he also commented: "The view on the Path from Taormina to the Theatre, & from the Theatre itself, surpasses perhaps all I have ever seen" (p.2688, October 1805).

⁶⁸William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. by J.C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp.459-461. The poet's mention of the fireside emphasises the distance and remoteness of Sicily both in time and space, conferring to it a sort of magical aura. His knowledge of Sicily comes from literature rather than from personal experience: on the poet's own admission, such visionary idea of Sicily as an enchanted land is based on his knowledge of the classics and of ancient history.

Among this "thousand bounteous images", appear "Etna's summit, above earth and sea", Greek temples ("those temples, where they in their ruins yet / Survive for inspiration"), and the fountain of "pastoral Arethusa". Wordsworth also makes a lengthy reference to Theocritus, the Sicilian Greek celebrated as the initiator of pastoral poetry. That Sicily was the home of Theocritus and therefore of pastoral poetry is a fact which came to acquire more and more importance, was regularly mentioned by travellers and increasingly served to construct the image of a green arcadian land inhabited by carefree shepherds playing pipes and singing about love. This, once again, contributed to the association of Sicily with a remote past and an unreal dimension in the sunny, far-away south. Moreover, many Greek myths well known to British literati through classical education, refer to Sicilian locations, such as, for instance, the myths of Demeter and Persephone, Arethusa, the Cyclops, and Acis and Galatea.⁶⁹

The latter provides the subject matter for Barry Cornwall's narrative poem *The Death of Acis* (1820), beginning with the lines:

Listen, my love, and I will tell you now
A tale Sicilian: 'tis of fabulous times
When the vast giants liv'd and spirits dwelt
In haunted woods and caves beneath the seas.⁷⁰

The tone and the atmosphere of the poem tend to create the effect of a fairy tale, in a similar way to Radcliffe's descriptions of pastoral Sicily in *A Sicilian Romance*. The young shepherd Acis is transformed into a stream, according to the myth, and thus the origin of pastoral song is explained:

Noises were heard and plaintive music, like
The songs you hear in Sicily. Shepherd swains
For many an age would lie by that lone stream
And from its watery melodies catch an air,
And tune it to their simple instruments,
Hence, as 'tis thought by some, did many songs
Originate, and oh! most likely 'tis
That pastoral music first had some such birth.⁷¹

⁶⁹See Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, 3rd ed. (London: Cassell, 1961).

⁷⁰Barry Cornwall [pseudonym of B.W.Procter], 'The Death of Acis', in *A Sicilian Story and Other Poems* (London, 1820), p.117.

⁷¹Cornwall, 'The Death of Acis', p.125.

The pastoral and classical image of Sicily is a relevant aspect of the discourse of the south: initially it is used by travellers, writers, and poets to create a fairy tale atmosphere, emphasise the remoteness of the island and idealise its Greek and Roman past, playing on the north/south opposition which identifies the south with the land of by-gone classical times; interest in this aspect increases throughout the nineteenth century, when with the rise of Romantic and Victorian Hellenism, the classical south is often claimed as a "fatherland", and its image as a sunny, agricultural, "natural" place, is manipulated in order to be revived and resuscitated; in addition to this, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the pastoral and theocritean connotations of Sicily will acquire a special relevance in the way they are utilised by some late Victorians as a textual strategy for treating transgressive themes of sexuality in coded representations.⁷²

⁷²See Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE

SICILY AND THE VOLCANIC SOUTH

Now let hot Aetna cool in Sicily,
And be my heart an ever-burning hell

William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*

As well as being the age of picturesque aesthetics, Gothic taste, and travel writing, the eighteenth century is characterised by the proliferation of narratives of the new sciences, the flourishing of organisations such as the Royal Society of London and other groups of scholars and intellectuals -such as the Lunar Society - whose purpose was that of devoting scientific attention to natural phenomena in the fields of astronomy, geology, mineralogy, botany, etc., and of classifying them by employing the descriptive apparatus of Linnaean taxonomy.¹ This interest emerged in association with voyages of discovery, made in increasing number whether to the New World, or to "remote" areas of the Old. As Mary Louise Pratt points out, this impulse to a "systematising of nature" was a basic element of the European knowledge-building project and its related economic and political expansion. As already noted, Pratt, however, clarifies that in this case the term "European" is used in the sense of "a network of literate *Northern* Europeans, mainly men from the lower levels of aristocracy and the middle and upper levels of the bourgeoisie", and that the "Nature"

¹See Michel Foucault's classic analysis of eighteenth-century thought, *The Order of Things: an archaeology of the human sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970). See also Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*. The Royal Society was founded in 1660 by Charles II; the Lunar Society, based in the Midlands and made up of prominent scientists, industrialists and intellectuals, was founded in the 1760's. In the same period, other organisations were founded which were related to the study of archaeology and the classics, such as the Royal Society of Antiquaries and the Society of Dilettanti, founded in 1732. Often, wealthy intellectuals were members of more than one of these societies, of both the scientific and the classical type. For a long time, membership to all of these societies was restricted to men: the Royal Geographical Society, for instance, did not admit women until 1913; see Dea Birkett, *Women and Travel* (Hove, Sussex: Wayland, 1991), p.31.

they explored "meant above all regions and ecosystems which are not dominated by 'Europeans', while including many regions of the geographical entity known as Europe".² This last point is particularly relevant in the case of British travel and scientific exploration in the "European south", a geographical entity whose ambiguity, as noted above, clearly emerged in the comments of those travellers denying or questioning the "Europeanness" of Sicily and other Italian regions south of Naples.

i) Science, Art and Empire

As early as 1665, the botanists John Ray and Philip Skippon, members of the newly founded Royal Society, in their journey to the Continent stopped in southern Italy and Sicily, observing and collecting specimens of plants, minerals and various rarities: Ray's journey has been praised by one critic as "the most thorough-going scientific exploration of Italy which had yet been made by an Englishman".³ Later, the "discoverer" of Sicily, Patrick Brydone, as well as his numerous imitators, also described at length the flora of the island, which is partly of a tropical and subtropical type (sugar-cane, cactii, palms, papyri, etc.). This richness in exotic vegetation stimulated the travellers' scientific interest, their enthusiasm for detailed classifications, as well as their fascination for the picturesque appearance of the island, although at times its exoticism could clash with the aesthetic expectations of a classical land.⁴

²Pratt, p.38, my emphasis. For Pratt's specification of the term "European" as "Northern European" see Introduction, p.ix.

³A. Lytton Sells, *The Paradise of Travellers* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.226. John Ray (1627-1705) has been defined³⁵ "the father of English natural history" by Marjory Hope Nicolson, in *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: A Study on the Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959), p.253. Ray's extensive travels in Europe are described in his *Travels Through the Low Countries, Germany, Italy and France, with curious observations, natural, topographical, moral, physiological, &c. Also a catalogue of plants...* (London: J. Walthoe, 1738). A description of the same journey is given by his travelling companion Sir Philip Skippon, *An Account of a Journey made thro' part of the Low Countries, Germany, Italy and France* (London: J. Walthoe, 1732).

⁴See Tuzet, pp.193-201.

The main objects of scientific interest that the south could offer, however, were not of a botanical, but of a geological nature. Southern Italy and Sicily, seismic areas with two major active volcanoes - Vesuvius and Etna - and the constant volcanic activity of the Aeolian islands, represented an especially attractive destination for those interested in geology, mineralogy, and volcanology. These places were already visited for other reasons, i.e. for being the site of classical antiquity, where testimony of the origins of civilisation could be found. Sicily offered both an abundance of picturesque classical ruins and the fascination of unparalleled convulsions of the earth. As Rose Macaulay sums up, "Sicily was obviously the spiritual home of those who loved convulsions, the mouldering of past greatness, desolation, the lizard among the ancient stones, as well as of those who loved classical history and art".⁵

In addition to this, there was a much more concrete side to the British interest in Sicily: the possibility of military and political control over the island during the Napoleonic Wars, around 1800. At this time, Britain was involved in a struggle for power over the Mediterranean against French expansion, and a British intervention in Sicily became a crucial move in this process.⁶ Britain came to have 17,000 soldiers in Sicily, and in 1812 General William Bentinck, the British commander and "virtual governor of Sicily" devised a new constitution for the island moulded on the British

⁵Macaulay, p.222.

⁶As historian Giuseppe Giarrizzo notes, around 1805 "British public opinion (...) urges its government to seek in the oppressed parts of Europe the alliance of 'patriots' (as opposed to 'legitimists'), and to guarantee constitutional regimes in place of the administrative monarchies imposed by Napoleon, as successors to the removed dynastic governments. As for Sicily, the option being discussed is therefore between government reform (with the collaboration and consensus of the Sicilians themselves) and the annexation to Great Britain. The most resolute supporters of a total occupation of the island (...) are found among the British military command in the Mediterranean" (see D'Alessandro and Giarrizzo, p.632, my translation). Historian Denis Mack-Smith also observes that "Napoleon's victories resulted in the occupation of the island becoming an urgent strategic necessity for Britain" (Mack-Smith, p.335), while other Italian historians note that Britain's intention was at least to establish a permanent protectorate over the island (Mack-Smith, p.353). The British intervention in Sicily initially took the form of military protection for the Bourbon King of the Two Sicilies, Ferdinand, against the French: when Napoleon's army invaded Naples in 1798, the King fled from that city to Sicily on Nelson's flagship. Admiral Nelson - the "Anglo-Sicilian hero" - was later rewarded with a huge feudal estate in Sicily, and the title of Duke of Bronte, "with all the perquisites of feudal jurisdiction and a large income which once had more usefully endowed the Palermo hospital" (Mack-Smith, p.336). The Bourbon royal family sought refuge once again in Sicily in 1806, and by that date British troops and subsidies had been showered on the island.

one, while considerable investments of private capital were made from London.⁷ Meanwhile in Britain, heated debates over what type of government best suited Sicily and what policy should be adopted to deal with the island, took place on the pages of the *Quarterly Review* and other periodical publications. The first two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a huge rise in the number of books devoted to Sicily by British travellers who now aimed at providing useful information on the resources of a territory which was, or could be, in British hands. In this climate, the years immediately after 1810 saw an intense production of texts about Sicily, especially of an encyclopaedic nature, written by travellers with the explicit intention of describing to the public at home the "resources" of the island which represented a potential part of the British empire. Not surprisingly, then, many of these texts were written by a particular type of traveller, that is by men serving in the British army or involved in the British diplomatic service. Charles Boothby, Captain of the Royal Engineers, wrote about his stay in Sicily in the years 1805-7 in *Under England's Flag*; Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Edward Bunbury collected his observations on the island in *Letters from Sicily*. The majority of authors produced encyclopaedic works collecting information about Sicily from all "useful" points of view, as their full titles illustrate: Thomas Wright Vaughan wrote *A view of the present state of Sicily: its rural economy, population and produce (...) with an appendix containing observations on its general character, climate, commerce, resources, & c.* (1811), while Edward Blaquiére was author of *Letters from the Mediterranean, containing a civil and political account of Sicily, Tripoly, Tunis and Malta, with (...) observations*

⁷See Mack-Smith, pp.341-342. During the time of the British occupation of Sicily, both the King and the Sicilian government received large British subsidies. Private capital was invested mainly on the wine industry which John Woodhouse of Liverpool had started in Marsala in 1773, and whose production of a celebrated dessert wine similar to Port was incremented in 1804 by Benjamin Ingham, a Yorkshireman who established the firm of Ingham and Whitaker. This firm still flourishes today under Italian ownership. During the Napoleonic wars, when other sources of supply were cut off, Marsala wine achieved great popularity in Britain, and Nelson left for the Nile with over forty thousand gallons of Sicilian wine aboard (see Martino, p.11; and Mack-Smith, p.389). After a complex series of events, involving the Austrian army reconquering Naples for King Ferdinand, Bourbon absolutism was restored in 1816 and the constitution abolished in Sicily. See Mack-Smith; and John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck and the British Occupation of Sicily, 1811-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).

illustrative of the present state of those countries, and their relative situation with respect to the British Empire (1813), a work in two volumes of which the first is entirely devoted to Sicily.⁸

Science and the most advanced technology of the time were employed by the British government to obtain and collect data about various aspects of the island: map-making was one of the very first steps in this process, and the Office of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty published *The Atlas of Sicily* (1823).⁹ This publication was intended to be accompanied by a text providing data and useful information on the island. Due to the political changes, however, this text was published only in 1834, and it later acquired fame as a travel account on its own right: *Memoir descriptive of the Resources, Inhabitants, and Hydrography of Sicily and its Islands, interspersed with Antiquarian and Other Notices*, written by William Henry Smyth, "Captain of the British Flotilla of Sicily during the time of our military

⁸Charles Boothby, *Under England's Flag (...) The memoirs, diary, and correspondence of Charles Boothby, Captain of the Royal Engineers*, ed. by M. S Boothby and C.E. Boothby (London: Black, 1900); Henry Edward Bunbury, 'Letters from Sicily', in *Memoir and literary remains of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Edward Bunbury*, ed. by Sir C.J. F. Bunbury (London: privately printed, 1868); Thomas Wright Vaughan, *A view of the present state of Sicily: its rural economy, population and produce (...) with an appendix containing observations on its general character, climate, resources, & c.* (London: Gale & Curtis, 1811); Edward Blaquiére, *Letters from the Mediterranean, containing a civil and political account of Sicily, Tripoly, Tunis and Malta, with (...) observations illustrative of the present state of those countries, and their relative situation with respect to the British Empire*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1813). For similar texts of the same period, see Pine-Coffin's extensive *Bibliography*. One of the most famous books about Sicily written in these years is W.T. Thompson's *Sicily and its inhabitants, observations made during a residence in that country in the years 1809 and 1810* (London: Henry Colburn, 1813). This text is often quoted by historians, as it provides a clear example of one of the dominant attitudes in the British debate about Sicily; Thomson writes that "Every Englishman travelling in Sicily must lament the badness of its government and the oppression and poverty which its inhabitants labour under", and concludes that "One cannot help pitying the country and notwithstanding their faults, admiring the many amiable qualities of its inhabitants (...) I am not one of those who would tamely allow Sicily to be wrested from us" (Thompson, p.14 and p.29). The insistence on the poverty and the wretched situation of Sicily which could be improved with the help of the civilising mission of a British intervention, became a topos of travellers' accounts in these years. Lord William Bentinck, coming back from India, did not hesitate to describe the court of Palermo as "Exactly resembling a native Indian durbar" (quoted in Mozzillo, 'La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi', p.52).

⁹That the activity of map making is not ideologically neuter, but can serve as an instrument of hegemony, has been pointed out by critics; as Susan Bassnett observes, "the map-maker, the translator and the travel writer are not innocent producers of text. The works they create are part of a process of manipulation that shapes and conditions our attitudes to other cultures while purporting to be something else" (Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, p.99).

occupation of the fortresses".¹⁰ This is probably the most ambitious and comprehensive text produced in this period, at the same time an encyclopaedic treatise on the island and the personal account of an Englishman in Sicily. In the introduction to the book, dated 1821, Smyth laments the defective state of the Charts of the Mediterranean sea, and expresses the British anxiety on the delicate subject of defining - and controlling - the southern boundary of Europe, a process in which Sicily functions as focal point. Smyth reports the concerned comment of one of the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty:

Our knowledge of the coasts and neighbourhood of Sicily is extremely deficient; (...) this constitutes a most serious error, as the Esquirques (sic), Keith's Reef, and various other dangers, at present scarcely known, lie in the fair-way, and nearby mid-channel between the Sicilian and African shores.¹¹

Captain Smyth himself is a firm believer in the British imperial enterprise, and in "the great superiority of the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of Great Britain" (117); with the enthusiasm of the explorer of a new territory lying at his disposal, he employed a wealth of financial resources and scientific instruments to carry out a most detailed geographical (as well as historical) survey of the island, a survey which includes, for instance, lengthy lists of the fish and mollusc found in the waters of Sicily, classified in three columns with their different Sicilian, Italian, and English denominations. In the same text, the local flora and scenery of Sicily are illustrated in colour plates drawn by "Mr. Daniell" of the Royal Academy, whose reputation as illustrator had been established in previous years by his drawings of India, in a similar information-gathering project carried out by artists-scientists working at the service of Empire.

Smyth's *Memoir* was published much later than he intended, and he points out that his original mapping project in Sicily had been much more ambitious, as his intention was that of establishing the "true" geographical position of Sicily:

¹⁰William Henry Smyth, *Memoir descriptive of the Resources, Inhabitants, and Hydrography of Sicily and its Islands, interspersed with Antiquarian and Other Notices* (London: Murray, 1834). For Smyth's account see Mozzillo, 'La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi', and Martino.

¹¹Smyth, pp.xiii-xiv (subsequent page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations).

I was unable, from the subsequent political changes, to execute the design I had projected, of cutting a meridian through the island, and measuring a permanent base-line for the final determination of its true position, extent, and form" (xxiv).¹²

However, he managed to personally conduct accurate topographical surveys between 1814 and 1816, and he assures readers that the mapping of the island's territory was carried out by himself and his collaborators in the most scientifically accurate manner: "The survey was executed on a chronometric basis, connected with geodetical operations. The utmost precision was used by laying down the astronomical data" (xxiv).

Smyth's *Memoir* and similar contemporary texts aim at mapping and studying Sicily, and gathering information on its resources for explicit political, military, and imperial purposes; what emerges from these texts is that the imperial, scientific, and artistic enterprises of travellers were never completely separated, and the proliferation of British works about Sicily and the Italian south in this period indicates that the interest in the south span the diverse fields of geology, volcanology, archaeology, and while the British travelled there for various purposes, constructing an image of the south in their texts, multiple strands of the discourse of the south simultaneously circulated in other areas of culture, such as literature and the visual arts.

ii) The Appeal of Southern Volcanoes

In the years around 1800, the appeal of southern Italy and Sicily on British science-oriented travellers lay mostly in the field of volcanology. Volcanoes had long been the objects of interest, as the famous book *Mundus Subterraneus* (1665) by the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher testifies. This influential work, including descriptions of Vesuvius and Etna, was published in English as *The Volcanos; or, Burning and Fire-vomiting*

¹²Smyth's intention, explicitly expressed in this passage, to establish Sicily's "true position", epitomises the positivistic epistemology at the basis of map-making, and perfectly illustrates J.B. Harey's comment that "From at least the seventeenth century onward (...) European map makers increasingly promoted what we would describe today as a standard scientific model of knowledge and cognition. The object of mapping is to produce a 'correct' relational model of the terrain. Its assumptions are that (...) systematic observation and measurement offer the only route to cartographic truth" (Harey, p.234).

Mountains, Famous in the World (1699), and was later much admired by Coleridge.¹³ Towards the second half of the eighteenth century, volcanoes increasingly started to attract much attention, in the context of the rise of the young science of geology. The status of volcanoes was raised as the study of their activity could throw light on the question of the age of the earth and the chronology of Creation, and volcanology, together with geology, contributed to cast doubts on the foundations of natural religion, configuring the cultural process which later culminated in the Victorian debates about evolution. Eruptions and earthquakes as studied by volcanologists began to acquire a subversive connotation and to have an impact on theology, in a similar way as the fossils studied by geologists became "a subversive presence in the naturalist's cabinet".¹⁴ Moreover, analogies were drawn between volcanic and industrial activity, the natural energy of the volcanoes being paralleled to that of the furnaces of the newly born British industry.¹⁵ Volcanicity thus acquired a special place in the cultural imagination of the period: interest in volcanoes, caves and geological strata was a basic component of the explorations of eighteenth-century travellers throughout the globe, as Barbara Stafford's *Voyage into Substance* amply documents. Travellers visited the most remote and geologically interesting regions both in the extreme north and the extreme south of the European continent. Another area of volcanic interest lay in fact in the extreme north of Europe: Iceland was explored and described in the early nineteenth century by Sir George Mackenzie, whose *Travels in the Island of Iceland* (1811) became an extremely successful book.¹⁶ Well into the Romantic and the Victorian age, the volcanic ruggedness of Iceland was

¹³Athanasius Kircher, *The Vulcanos: or, Burning and Fire-vomiting Mountains, Famous in the World* (London: John Allen, 1699). For its influence on Coleridge, see M.H. Nicolson, p.171.

¹⁴Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-1890* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p.118.

¹⁵See G.M. Matthews, 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley', *English Literary History*, vol.xxiv, Sept. 1957, 191-228, pp.196-197. Matthews emphasises the relevance of volcanoes in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British culture, pointing out that "to many of Shelley's contemporaries the (...) pine-shaped cloud over Vesuvius bore something of the same momentous importance as the mushroom-shaped cloud over the Pacific bears to our own civilization" (p.196).

¹⁶George Mackenzie, *Travels in the Island of Iceland, during the summer of the year 1810* (Edinburgh: [n. pub.], 1811); this book received much publicity and reached a second edition the following year; Shelley admired it and quoted from it; see Matthews, p.197.

associated with cold and barrenness, and therefore with the northern virtues of restraint and self-discipline.¹⁷ The north was also connected with ideas of strength and masculinity, and Joseph Acerbi, travelling in Sweden and Finland at the close of the eighteenth century, commented that expeditions to the far north "will be undertaken by those only who have a just and masculine taste for nature": these "hardy" quarters, he claims, are remote from the "effeminacy" of southern Europe, and this northern region "does not, by any means, hold out the same allurements of climate, and the same temptations to pleasure that are presented by a more genial and inviting soil".¹⁸ Femininity and pleasure thus characterise the geography of the south, and many science-oriented male travellers did not fail to experience the appeal of a land where heat, lava streams, earthquakes and eruptions made matter seem more alive, where the earth and its mysterious recesses were ready for observation: the volcanoes of the south were the sites where nature's transformational phenomena could be viewed, studied and scrutinised at will, and with pleasure.¹⁹

By the late eighteenth century these Mediterranean regions became a favourite destination for professional and amateur volcanologists: as Stafford points out, southern Italy and Sicily developed into "a laboratory for travellers like Patrick Brydone, William Hamilton, Henry Swinburne (...) who earnestly sought matter's deeds recorded as cataclysm".²⁰ Art and science were frequently associated in the enterprise of the majority of male travellers, who sometimes were simultaneously

¹⁷See Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, p.52.

¹⁸Joseph Acerbi, *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland, to the North Cape, in the Years 1798 and 1799*, 2 vols. (London: Joseph Mawman, 1802) I, p.x. Northern regions were also connected with the emotional state of 'melancholy', which Schlegel considered characteristic of the poetry of the north (see Chapter One). This was a "Lowness of Spirits", related to climate and geography to the extent that it was referred to as "the English Malady": in 1733 its cause was attributed by Dr. George Cheyne to several factors, among which the "dampness of the English climate" (George Cheyne, *The English Malady, or a Treatise of nervous diseases of all kinds* (London, 1733), quoted in Andrews, p.42).

¹⁹Moreover, the volcanoes of the south were directly connected with ideas of fertility: in the south, volcanic ashes render the soil particularly rich for agriculture, a characteristic observed since classical times in the region of *Campania Felix* and the fertile plain around Etna. In addition to this, according to one of the most advanced geogenic theories in the late eighteenth century, "the continents and islands of the globe, worn continually down into the sea by attrition, were continually replaced by subaqueous material thrust up by volcanic fire", and this contributed much to the Romantic idea of volcanoes as creative rather than destructive forces (Matthews, p.227).

²⁰Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, p.249. See also Macaulay and M.H. Nicolson.

artists, classical scholars, archaeologists and geologists, and were all attracted by subterranean caves, volcanic craters, archaeological excavations, and any opening of the earth which southern lands offered to their observation.²¹

The scientific and artistic discourses about the south converged: southern lands and climate, with their "allurements" and "temptations", also provided the occasion for artistic inspiration, for experiences of sublimity and the pleasure of intense emotional states. Washington Irving, observing the rocky coast from his ship approaching Sicily was impressed by the view and remarked: "So enchanting a scene was sufficient to inspire the poet - nor do I wonder that this climate should be particularly productive of poetry and romance".²² A mountainous landscape in the hot and luminous south was bound to have very different connotations from that of the gloomy north. As has been noted, mountains and rocky precipices constituted much sought-after scenery for the taste of ^{the} late eighteenth century and onwards, as the influence of Salvator Rosa's paintings testifies. But, in addition to this, southern Italy and Sicily offered an especially awe-inspiring and singular view, that of volcanoes, mountain caves and abyssal craters, which were the active site of the forces of nature.

Patrick Brydone, who climbed Etna equipped with the latest scientific instruments to measure pressure and temperature, expresses his gratification at having reached the top, and writes an enraptured description of sunrise from this exceptional point of view. Brydone's often-quoted passage inaugurates the "I survey the world" topos which was destined to play a large part in subsequent travel writing about Sicily, whenever a traveller reached the top of the volcano (or claimed to have done so):

No imagination has dared to form an idea of so glorious and so magnificent a scene. Neither is there on the surface of this globe, any one point that unites so many awful and sublime objects. - The immense elevation from the surface of the earth, drawn as it were to a single point, without any neighbouring mountain for the senses or imagination to rest upon; and recover from their astonishment in their way down to the world. This point or pinnacle, raised on the brink of a bottomless gulph, as old as the world, often discharging rivers of fire, and throwing out burning rocks, with a noise that shakes the whole island. Add to this, the unbounded extent of the prospect, comprehending the greatest diversity

²¹The eighteenth century is also the time of the sensational discovery of the remains of Herculaneum (1719) and Pompeii (1748) in southern Italy, which had enormous resonance in Britain's intellectual circles as well as the larger public. This aspect is treated extensively in Chapter Four.

²²Washington Irving, *Journals and Notebooks*, ed. by Nathalia Wright (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p.144.

and the most beautiful scenery in nature; with the rising sun, advancing in the east, to illuminate the wondrous scene.

The whole atmosphere by degrees kindled up, and shewed dimly and faintly the boundless prospect around. Both sea and land looked dark and confused, as if only emerging from their original chaos; and light and darkness seemed still undivided; till the morning by degrees advancing, completed the separation. The stars are extinguished, and the shades disappear. The forests, which but now seemed black and bottomless gulphs, from whence no ray was reflected to shew their form or colours, appear a new creation rising to the sight: catching life and beauty from every increasing beam. The scene still enlarges, and the horizon seems to widen and expand itself on all sides; till the sun, like the great Creator, appears in the east, and with his plastic ray completes the mighty scene. - All appears enchantment.²³

Brydone's emotional and aesthetic reaction is in perfect accordance with the theorisation of the taste of the time: volcanoes were especially associated with beauty and horror, the principal elements of the category of the sublime. As a critic observes,

The image of the erupting volcano was very much a vehicle for expressing the contemporary pre-Romantic aesthetic embodied in Edmund Burke's influential *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756), whereby the forces of Nature could take on dramatic and threatening aspects that inspired human responses of awe and horror.²⁴

This is further confirmed by the opinion of the most influential theoretician of picturesque aesthetics, Richard Payne Knight, for whom Etna was "the most truly sublime sight" that he knew.²⁵ Another example of the interconnection between aesthetic and scientific discourse can be found in the first modern treatise of geology and volcanology which appeared in Britain in 1778: *Inquiry into the original state and formation of the earth* by John Whitehurst (1713-88), Fellow of the Royal Society and founder-member of the Lunar Society. The author of this unequivocally scientific text refers to "craggy rocks and mountains (...) and subterraneous caverns" as "romantic appearances".²⁶ What Barbara Stafford calls "the aesthetic influence of

²³Brydone, I, 202-204. This description reveals the fundamental aesthetic component of late eighteenth century scientific observation; Fussell comments that here Brydone "performs a juxtaposition of the Sublime and the scientific" (Fussell, 'Patrick Brydone', p.61). This passage has been considered especially important in the history of travel writing, as, according to Charles Batten, Brydone was the first travel writer to discover how to "paint like Nature", and he influenced subsequent travellers who devoted increasingly greater amounts of space to such imaginative descriptions (Batten, pp.102-105). Interestingly, travellers after Brydone questioned the truth of his assertions, and doubted that he had ever reached the top of Etna (Tuzet, p.196).

²⁴David Fraser, Introduction to *Wright in Italy* (catalogue of the exhibition of the same title at Gainsborough's House, 8th August-20th September, 1987), p.4.

²⁵Quoted in Brand, p.171.

²⁶Quoted by David Fraser in "Fields of Radiance: the scientific and industrial scenes of Joseph Wright", in *The Iconography of Landscape*, ed. by Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119-141, p.125.

geology",²⁷ however, is best exemplified by the artistic career of the painter Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-97), a friend of Whitehurst, and also member of the Lunar Society. Like many of his contemporaries, Joseph Wright travelled to Italy and was fascinated by the "stupendous remains of antiquity" in Rome. In Italy, he claimed, "the artist finds (...) whatever may facilitate and improve his studies":²⁸ his personal artistic interests however, lay in volcanoes. He painted over thirty views of the eruption of Vesuvius which he witnessed in October 1774, and further views of Mount Etna (fig. 3). He commented upon the volcanic eruption in a letter: "Tis the most wonderful sight in nature".²⁹ Wright achieved considerable popularity in Britain thanks to his specialisation in scenes involving bright light, fire and flames, especially volcanic views.³⁰ Other British painters, contemporaries of Wright, William Marlow (in Italy 1766-68) and Jacob More (in Italy 1773-93) also painted the same subject. Wright's case is particularly revealing for the clear overlapping of his artistic and scientific interests and his personal connection with scientific circles. If the geologist Whitehurst saw "romantic appearances" in the subterranean caves he was studying, and the art connoisseur Richard Payne Knight saw in Etna "the most truly sublime sight" he knew, it is hardly surprising that the painter Joseph Wright devoted such a large attention to the subject of the erupting volcanoes of the south.

²⁷Stafford, 'Toward Romantic Landscape Perception', p.17. For a detailed study of the connection between the painter and the geologist, see the section 'Landscape and geology: Wright and Whitehurst' in David Fraser, 'Fields of Radiance'.

²⁸Letter from Wright to his sister, 22nd May 1774, quoted by William Bemrose, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright* (London and Derby, 1885), p.32.

²⁹Quoted in Bemrose, p.35.

³⁰Wright acquired a certain celebrity in England as the first painter of "industrial" scenes, such as his famous *Arkwright's Mill by Moonlight* (1782), where his fascination with vulcanicity found a parallel in the industrial energy of the mill, glowing in a dark valley like a volcanic crater, and powerfully showing, as Fraser observes, the "resonance of the primordial in the industrial" (Fraser, p.136).

iii) Sicily and the Subterranean Passions of the South

From the late eighteenth century onwards, an emphasis was placed on volcanicity as the primary geological force, and the interest of geologists and volcanologists in the Italian south resulted in the exploration, observation and description of caves and grottoes, whose origin was connected with volcanic phenomena and convulsions of the earth. These subterranean regions appealed to scientific discourse and became an object of interest, as they were now seen "to expose the universal matrix of matter":³¹ thus they came to represent a separate and autonomous world which intrigued scientific explorers, especially when these were inclined to perceive in the newly discovered dynamism of matter a sign of the mysterious powers of nature, still uncomprehended, but not incomprehensible, to the philosopher-scientist. Volcanoes and caves were closely related: the acclaimed mineralogist Déodat de Dolomieu, in his treatise on Etna and other Mediterranean volcanoes, outlined the manner in which the lava forms underground galleries.³² Caves were identified as a kind of natural laboratory where the mysterious phenomenon of the "regrowth of minerals" took place.³³ Together with volcanoes, they were the site of a chthonic drama, where nature's underground forces flowed unseen, and perpetually transformed themselves, until they occasionally thrust out in the open with the ferocity of an eruption or an earthquake.

In the Italian south, the volcanologists' fascination with craters, caves, and the primordial energy of the earth flowing underground, converged in the fields of art and

³¹Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, p.112. For the new scientific interest in mountains and the affirmation of popular interest in geology in the eighteenth century, see also M.H. Nicolson, pp. 113-183.

³²Déodat de Dolomieu, *Mémoire sur les îles Ponces et catalogue raisonné des produits de l'Etna; pour servir à l'histoire des volcans* (Paris: Cuchet, 1788), p.291.

³³See Stafford, 'Toward Romantic Landscape Perception', p.22. M.H. Nicolson quotes an eighteenth-century poet, specialising in geological subjects, Thomas Yalden, who wrote about English mining districts: "Seek Nature's depth, and view her boundless store / The secret cause in tuneful measures sing, / How metals first were fram'd, and whence they spring" (M.H. Nicolson, p.343). As the same critic points out, to Yalden mining districts were ugly only as a woman in labour: "Earth, distorted with her pregnant womb" (M.H. Nicolson, p.342).

classical mythology, especially when the travellers were simultaneously volcanologists, archaeologists, and classical scholars.

One figure who sums up the interests in the Mediterranean south at the end of the eighteenth century is Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803), whose presence in southern Italy and Sicily was primarily connected to Britain's military and political expansion in the Mediterranean. He was, in fact, the British Ambassador to Naples, and resided in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies between 1764 and 1800 (a period including the years in which Wright painted his volcanic views), where he passionately and meticulously cultivated his geological, archaeological, and mythological interests.³⁴ Besides playing a crucial role in the Napoleonic Wars and being an extremely powerful diplomat, Hamilton (friend of Admiral Nelson and husband of the famous Lady Emma) was a Fellow of the Royal Society, of the Society of Antiquaries, and a member of the Society of Dilettanti. He was a devoted student of volcanology, and he kept a diary of the volcanic activity of Vesuvius and Etna for the benefit of the Royal Society: during the first thirteen years he made fifty-eight visits to the crater, and was on the mountain two-hundred times, as well as conducting observations through a telescope.³⁵ The results of his study were published in works such as *Observations on Mount Vesuvius, Mount Etna and other Volcanos* (1772) (which ran through three editions in two years) and *Campi Phlegraei, Observations on the Volcanos of the Two Sicilies* (1776).³⁶ Hamilton was especially fascinated by subterranean caves and underground passages, associated with the flow of the earth's mysterious energy; in *Supplement to the Campi Phlegraei* (1779), he describes one of his explorations in the bowels of the earth:

After an Eruption, I have walked in some of those subterraneous, or cover'd galleries, which were exceedingly curious; the sides, top, and bottom being worn perfectly smooth, and even in most parts,

³⁴For Hamilton in Sicily see Tuzet, p.43 and Mozzillo, 'La Sicilia nel giudizio dei viaggiatori inglesi', p.54. See also Hamilton's biography by Brian Fothergill, *Sir William Hamilton: Envoy Extraordinary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

³⁵See Matthews, p.196.

³⁶Sir William Hamilton, *Observations on Mount Vesuvius, Mount Etna and other Volcanos in a Series of Letters addressed to the Royal Society* (London, 1772); *Campi Phlegraei, Observations on the Volcanos of the Two Sicilies as they have been communicated to the Royal Society of London* (Naples, 1776).

by the violence of the current's of the red hot Lava's, which they had convey'd for many weeks successively; in others the Lava had encrusted the sides of those Channels with some very extraordinary Scoriae beautifully ramified. White salts, in the form of dropping stalactites were also attached to many parts of the ceiling of those cover'd galleries...³⁷

The Ambassador is speaking here with the scientific voice of the volcanologist and the mineralogist. In Hamilton, however, who was a fervent admirer of Greek paganism, the passion for scientific scrutiny was intimately combined with that for the civilisations of the ancient Mediterranean. His geological interest in the underground caves of the south soon spilled over to the fields of archaeology, mythology and pagan religion.

In Naples, Hamilton, who had received a classical education, became extremely interested in archaeology - an interest initially stimulated in him by the nearby excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum (which he studied concomitantly as a volcanologist), and which induced him to roam through the territories of Magna Grecia in search of archaeological specimens to collect. Over the years, he accumulated an extensive collection of Greek vases (some of which are now in the British Museum, while the rest was lost in a shipwreck during the transportation from Italy to England) and, as an archaeologist, he was author of *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases...discovered in Sepulchres in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies*.³⁸ Finally, as a passionate student of ancient Greek religion and paganism, Hamilton wrote an essay in a rather iconoclastic vein, *Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus*, dealing with fertility cults and ancient rites connected to sexuality. From the artefacts recovered in southern Italy he was able to reconstitute the rituals and iconography of the cults inspired by Dionysus whose traces could still be observed, according to Hamilton, in the religious practices of local Catholic peasants.³⁹ Hamilton's study first circulated privately, and in 1786 was distributed to the Society of Dilettanti by no other than Richard Payne Knight, another member, who

³⁷Sir William Hamilton, *Supplement to the Campi Phlegraei, being an account of the great Eruption of ... Vesuvius in ... August 1779* (Naples, 1779) pp.3-4.

³⁸Sir William Hamilton, *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases mostly of Pure Greek Workmanship discovered in Sepulchres in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies*, 4 vols. (Naples, 1791-5).

³⁹See Marilyn Gaull, *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1988), pp.185-186.

concomitantly produced his own *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, and its Connexion with the mystic theology of the ancients*.⁴⁰ Hamilton and Knight were both writing on the wake of the enlightenment rationalism of the philosophes, and their study of ancient myth easily turned into an attack on contemporary Christianity: "parallels between Christian and pagan myths allowed them to suggest that Christianity was neither historically unique nor morally pure".⁴¹

Hamilton and Knight both wrote about the rites of ancient religion and their symbols: the gods of fertility - they observed on the basis of archaeological evidence and classical authorities - were connected with caves and the underground. These authors' works contributed to associate the south with sexuality and eroticism, and although mainly distributed to the restricted circles of the Societies, they came to have considerable influence on the artistic circle of the younger Romantics, especially Percy Bysshe Shelley and Thomas Love Peacock.⁴²

Sicily and the south, with its caves and classical associations, was seen as representative of a paganism that was felt to be morally unrestrained and liberatory. Richard Payne Knight's "revolutionary classics" had such an impact in Britain and were considered so scandalous that the bookseller Richard Carlile was imprisoned for

⁴⁰The two essays by Hamilton and Knight were published jointly as: *Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus lately existing in Isernia, in the Kingdom of Naples, ... to which is added a Discourse on the Worship of Priapus, and its Connexion to the mystic theology of the ancients* (London: T. Spilsbury, 1786). Knight's 'Discourse' was later modified and issued to the general public as *Inquiry into the Symbolic Language of Ancient Art and Mythology* (London, 1818). For more on Hamilton, Knight, the Society of Dilettanti and their frequentation with Romantic intellectuals such as Thomas Love Peacock and Percy Bysshe Shelley, see M. Butler, pp.130-137.

⁴¹Turner, p.80. Hamilton's and Knight's view of Greek myths was later spurned by the majority of Victorian commentators, who tended to rationalise or excise the sexuality involved in this aspect of antiquity, and it was not until the time of Walter Pater and J.A. Symonds that Greek mythology was studied again in unexpurgated ways, without "filtering myth through a mesh of decorous and sunny gentility" (Turner, p.82). For Pater and Symonds, see Chapter Five.

⁴²See M. Butler, p.130. In *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, Knight expresses his enthusiasm about Greek religion and its celebration of the generative principle; he also clearly implies that organised religion had been an instrument of political oppression through the centuries. Knight's text, however, was considered scandalous especially for its thesis that the origin of religion was to be found in sexuality, a vision later shared by the Shelley circle; as Gaull observes, "[Knight's] recognition of phallic and vulvular symbolism in Christian as well as pagan ceremony 'sexualized' (...) the study of myth, anthropology, and religion" (Gaull, p.186). Shelley's pagan inclinations were also encouraged by his friendship with John Frank Newton, who introduced him to his personal version of Zoroastrianism, which combined Persian, Indian, and Greek mythology (see Gaull, p.197; M. Butler, p.121).

six years for reprinting Knight's books between 1817 and 1819.⁴³ Knight's studies, probably through the mediation of Thomas Love Peacock, another scholar of paganism and ancient religion, had a considerable influence on the mythopoieic repertoire of Shelley. As has been pointed out by critics, Shelley's poetry is full of volcanic imagery, and abounds with references to earthquakes, caves, abysses, fire, etc.⁴⁴ Shelley had himself climbed Vesuvius in 1818, and there is strong evidence that he was familiar with Hamilton's work.⁴⁵ This suggests that the poet and the Ambassador may have shared the same view about paganism: both authors produced texts about the south which, in similar ways, were transgressive in respect to current religion and accepted morality and pointed, in a somewhat esoteric and elitist manner, to alternative values inspired by southern paganism.

Shelley and Hamilton certainly shared a fascination with caves, which are a recurrent image in Shelley's poetry.⁴⁶ His poem *The Witch of Atlas* (1820), for instance, describes the birth of a mythic female figure occurring marvellously and spontaneously in a cave. Shelley writes: "...In that cave a dewy splendour hidden / Took shape and motion: with the living form / Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm". Once the Witch is born, all sorts of wild animals and a whole variety of classical mythological figures, especially of a "satyric" type, flock to the cave to pay her homage: there are Polyphemes, Centaurs, Satyrs, as well as "old Silenus", "Faunus", "universal Pan", and - of course - "quaint Priapus". These are all attracted by the "deep recesses of her odorous dwelling", the mysterious cave, in relation to

⁴³M. Butler, p.131. Knight had been forced to withdraw his book, containing explicit illustrations, from circulation; as Gaull remarks, "while the use of Greek erotica was acceptable for decoration or entertainment, Knight's study presented a serious challenge to Christianity, especially the moral and emotional austerity of contemporary Evangelical faith" (Gaull, p.186).

⁴⁴Gaull points out the influence on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* of Knight's *Discourse*, and M. Butler notes that Knight's descriptions of fountains, caves, and symbolic animals which accompanied the gods of fertility, contributed to Shelley's mythopoietic repertoire (Gaull, p.203; M. Butler, p.130). Speaking of the thematisation of the forces of nature in Romantic poetry, M.H. Nicolson observes that "Byron and Shelley (...) shared the relish (...) for thunderstorm and tempest, earthquake and volcanic eruption" (M.H. Nicolson, p.380).

⁴⁵See Matthews, p.199.

⁴⁶In his study on Shelley and volcanology, Matthews remarks that the concept "cave/cavern" is commonest in the 720 lines of *Alastor* (1816); in *Prometheus* (1819) the commonest concept is "storm", and the second commonest is again "cave" (Matthews, p.195).

which unequivocal images of femininity abound, such as when the poet wonders "how the enwombèd rocks / Could have brought forth so beautiful a birth".⁴⁷ These images are clearly reminiscent of the Greek fertility myths studied by Hamilton and Knight, as well as of those geological theories on the regrowth of minerals and matter's generative power enthusiastically debated by contemporary volcanologists.

Shelley, who never visited Sicily, wrote two poems inspired by Greek mythology and set in the classical atmosphere of the island. In one of them, *Arethusa* (1820), the poet tells the story of the water nymph whose stream, according to the myth, flows in Sicily, "in Enna's mountains", "in the cave of the shelving hill", and "in the rocking deep of the Ortygian shore" (*Arethusa*, to this day a water spring in the island of Ortigia in Syracuse, had been described at length by Brydone and other travellers). The other poem, *Song of Proserpine (While Gathering Flowers on the Plain of Enna)* (1820) recalls the myth of the goddess who was raped by Hades, Lord of the underground, and who was the daughter of Demeter, goddess of fertility, corn and harvest, also known as Mother Earth.⁴⁸

With this poem, Shelley creates an important textual precedent, as the myth of Demeter and Persephone, together with the related myth of Dionysus, was destined to fascinate many intellectuals, writers and poets for a long time to come.⁴⁹

Shelley's southern paganism, extolling the joys of a natural sexuality, however, had a darker, Gothic, counterpart: the caves of the volcanic south provoked a different, but closely related, set of associations in the British literary imagination than the recollections of a joyful mythical age.

Burning passions associated with the underground, with oppressing architecture and claustrophobic spaces, are typical features of Gothic fiction. In a large number of

⁴⁷Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Witch of Atlas', in *Poetical Works*, pp.372-375.

⁴⁸Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Arethusa', and 'Song of Proserpine (While Gathering Flowers on the Plain of Enna)', in *Poetical Works*, p.611 and p.612. One of the versions of the myth of Demeter and Proserpine is set in the plain of Enna, the central rural region of Sicily; for this and Dionysus' myth, see Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, 3d ed. (London: Cassell, 1961); see also Chapter Five, footnote n.47.

⁴⁹This myth was increasingly utilised in the discourse of the south to construct the Mediterranean as the imaginary space of a mythic fertility, of natural contact with the earth, and a liberated sexuality, an image which sparked off a range of artistic possibilities and philosophic speculations in Victorian Hellenism and in some Modernist writers (see Chapters Five and Six).

novels, as in *A Sicilian Romance*, the appeal and terror of the underground is combined with and reinforced by the Mediterranean setting. Also, the femininity frequently attributed by travellers to southern lands adds to the interpretation of Gothic taste given by Mario Praz (with somehow unthinking simplicity, before the advent of feminist criticism):

An aesthetic theory of the Horrid and the Terrible had gradually developed in the course of the eighteenth century, but why (...) should people have begun to feel the horrible fascination of dark forests and lugubrious caverns, and cemeteries and thunderstorms? The answer is: just because of its feminine character.⁵⁰

As already noted, banditti and caves were a fundamental component of the Gothic fiction of Ann Radcliffe, through the mediation of Brydone's account of Sicily. A similar association of sensuality and the underground, burning passions and subterranean passages, can be found - in a most spectacular expression - in William Beckford's Gothic masterpiece *Vathek* (1786), "the most famous Oriental tale in the English language".⁵¹ In this influential novel, which Byron called his Bible,⁵² the protagonist is engaged in the magic quest for "the palace of subterranean fire", but he and his lover are eventually destined to be imprisoned and tortured for eternity in the nightmarish Hall of Eblis. This infernal underground place is crowded with wretched souls who wander about in a trance while their hearts are eternally on fire. A number of Oriental sources have been traced to account for the rich exoticism of Beckford's novel: he was immersed in Oriental history and literature, particularly *The Arabian Nights*, and had read many accounts of travellers to the East.⁵³ However, what may have also inspired the author of *Vathek*, with its innumerable references to underground fire, is the fact that he himself travelled to the Mediterranean, and explored at length the volcanic regions of southern Italy, where he came into close contact with William Hamilton.

⁵⁰Mario Praz, 'Introductory Essay' in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. by Peter Fairclough, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.9. See also Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

⁵¹Varma, p.52.

⁵²See Praz, *Three Gothic Novels*, p.23.

⁵³For Beckford's sources in travel accounts, see Adams, p.137 and p.171. See also Said's brief comments on Beckford in *Orientalism*, p.118.

At the age of twenty, William Beckford (1760-1844), a wealthy and extravagant intellectual, went on the customary Grand Tour of the Continent, following the conventional route and stopping in Naples to spend the winter of 1780. This was the time when Sir William Hamilton was the British ambassador in Naples, and the young Beckford stayed at Hamilton's villa at Posillipo, near Vesuvius (the two friends were also related, Hamilton being the cousin of Beckford's mother).⁵⁴ The two men, one interested in volcanic eruptions and pagan sexuality, the other an eccentric fanatic of Gothic architecture and Oriental tales, must have found underground fire, caves, and burning passions a common object of interest. Beckford visited the country around Naples, of which he gives a highly original description in *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*.⁵⁵ This unusual travel account is saturated with mythological and classical references, which serve mostly to evoke the infernal and satyric connotations of the Neapolitan region and its caves, in a conflating argument of picturesque landscape and pagan energy: "Now I turned my eyes to the ridge of the precipices, in whose grotts and caverns Saturn and his people passed their life" (234). In his explorations, Beckford wishes that "the Cimmerians would start from their subterraneous habitations": "'Twas here", he explains, that "the mysterious race (...) performed their infernal rites" (240). The influence on Beckford of Hamilton's theories on pagan rituals is evident, but the novelist proceeds to enhance the Gothic fascination of this southern land with his own personal tale, whose subject is not classical or mythological, but set in the present age.

Beckford visits the region around the "grotto of Posillipo": "My mind was full of the tales of the place, and glowed with a vehement desire of exploring the world beyond the grot" (242). Having mentioned in passing that the inhabitants of the region are

⁵⁴For the life of William Beckford see Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979).

⁵⁵William Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (London & New York: Ward, Lock & co., 1891) (page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations, and refer to this edition). *Dreams* was published originally in 1783, but most copies were immediately burned at the insistence of Beckford's parents; according to some biographers, his parents feared that the book, containing offensive material, would compromise Beckford's parliamentary career. Beckford published the book again in 1834, in a revised edition with the new title *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*. See Batten, p.30-31.

"infamous for depredations and murders", he immediately feels the impulse of the late eighteenth-century explorer of mysterious, feminine lands, and explicitly declares: "No parties of smart Englishmen and connoisseurs were about. I had all the land to myself, and mounted its steeps and penetrated into its recesses, with the importance of a discoverer" (243). His explorations result in the accidental meeting with an old, witch-like peasant woman, who lives by herself in a concealed hut near the grottoes. Here, even the exotic vegetation seems to give hints of infernal omens, and the traveller perceives signs of a sinister subterranean energy:

"Above the hut (...) dark ivy crept among the crevices, and dwarf aloes with sharp spines, such as Lucifer himself might be supposed to have sown. Indeed, I knew not whether I was approaching some gate that leads to his abode, as I drew near a gulph and heard the hollow gusts which were imprisoned below" (245).

Here, the future creator of the Hall of Eblis is practising literary strategies that heavily use the exoticism of southern geography and its volcanic, infernal connotations. He continues by reporting the tale of events recently occurred in that spot, which the old woman personally witnessed and narrated to him: a rich young Neapolitan, "unable to fix any bounds to whatever became the object of his desires", having seduced his best friend's fiancée and poisoned his own father, fled to hide in the caves and precipices of these regions; tortured by remorse, one night he finally hung himself to the branch of a tree bending over a dark precipice among the rocks; he was followed by his desperate lover and accomplice, who, with a furious leap, threw herself "into the abyss" (250-251). This tale, passed by Beckford as the narration of real events happened in the Kingdom of Naples, seems to anticipate some of the most memorable episodes of *Vathek*, where the protagonist and his lover Nouronihar descend into passages, caves, underground palaces and eventually in the abyss of the Hall of Eblis, never to return.⁵⁶

⁵⁶It is worth noting that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Gothic and classical connotations of the Mediterranean south were never opposed, nor completely separated; Beckford provides a striking example of their coexistence: the text of his travel account to southern Italy, abounding with Gothic stories such as the one analysed above, also includes a myriad of classical references. Visiting the country near Naples, he exclaims: "When I cast my eyes around the savage landscape, transported myself four thousand years into antiquity, and half persuaded myself I was one of Aeneas' companions"; and: "I looked anxiously on a sea, where the heroes of the Odyssey and Aeneid had

Later on, in nineteenth-century culture, the Mediterranean south, with its volcanic aspect, is still frequently seen as the repository of vice and immoral passions, and this dominant view was related both to the climatic and geographic determinism developing within Victorian science, and to the ever-present range of anti-Catholic feelings. The association of subterranean fire and volcanic activity with immoral passions, sin and punishment, was, of course, a very old one. As Nicolson notes,

For centuries, like the plague or comets, earthquakes and volcanoes had been associated in the popular mind with the punishment of sinful men by a God of Vengeance. (...) This was generally the position of the medieval Fathers, combined frequently with a theory of a central fire, which supplied heat and flames to both Hell and volcanoes.⁵⁷

Etna and other volcanoes were often referred to as "the Gates of Hell" by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English travellers. From the late eighteenth century, with Brydone's "discovery" of Sicily, and the rise of scientific interest and Romantic aesthetics, the Mediterranean south was increasingly viewed as the land of femininity and the country of passion: a place where the heat of the sun and of the African *scirocco* wind was paralleled by that of the streams of red hot lava flowing underground, and where the geological phenomena of volcanic vapours and convulsions of the earth acquired a symbolic resonance. Climatic determinism intervened to provide a "scientific" explanation of how these material conditions could not fail to influence "character". Although a theorisation of climatic determinism occurred later on in the wider context of nineteenth-century imperialistic discourse, the specific instance of the influence of volcanoes on the character of the people was a very old one. Back in the twelfth century, the English clergymen Peter of Blois had called Sicily "a land that devours its inhabitants", an "infernal kingdom", where men are swallowed by the earth and descend living into hell", and opposed the "sweetness of (...) English air" to the poisonous air of Sicily, "where the mountains always vomit infernal fire and sulphurous smell", and the inhabitants are "deceitful

sailed in search of fate and empire, then closed my eyes, and dreamed of those illustrious wanderers (Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p.244 and p.235).

⁵⁷M.H. Nicolson, p.339.

friends and secret abandoned betrayers".⁵⁸ The apocalyptic rhetoric of the Middle Ages gives way to the scientific attitude of the "discoverer" of Sicily in the eighteenth century, Brydone, but the main idea is virtually unchanged: "Where the air is impregnated with sulphur and inflamed with vapours, men are perverse and evil in the highest degree".⁵⁹ In Elizabethan drama, many playwrights, including Shakespeare, used the image of the proverbial fury of the Sicilian volcano as a metaphor of their characters' burning passions.⁶⁰ This long lasting association of volcanoes, underground caves and passions, made Sicily and the Italian south the ideal location for Gothic tales as well as for melodrama, especially when the ingredient of Catholic superstition and corruption was added.

The interconnection of paganism and Catholicism in Italy is a constant feature in the discourse of the south, but its interpretation by travellers varies considerably. William Hamilton, in his *Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus*, referred to the survival of phallic symbolism in the ceremonies of eighteenth-century Italian Catholicism, and his studies on ancient religion, together with those of Richard Payne Knight, found a literary correspondence in the fascination with the pagan of the Shelley circle. However, a very different counterpart to this favourable attitude to paganism can be found in the majority of texts dealing with the Italian south. Most travellers detected, like Hamilton and Shelley, a connection between paganism and Catholicism in the south, but they were strongly inclined to judge this as a vice, and as a demonstration of Protestant moral superiority: Protestantism represented the true Christian religion, while the south was left behind in the darkness of barbarism and superstition. Countless examples of this attitude recur in travel accounts throughout the nineteenth century: Captain Smyth, a fervent Protestant, provides one of the most explicit instances in his *Memoir*, which, covering virtually all aspects of Sicily, also

⁵⁸Translated from Latin by G.B. Parks, in *The English Traveller to Italy: From the Middle Ages to 1525* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1954), p.219.

⁵⁹Brydone, II, p.93. See also Mozzillo, 'Le ragioni dell'immaginario', p.51.

⁶⁰See William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, iii, 1, 242. A character in Marston and Barksted's *Insatiate Countess* (c.1610) declares: "Lust is like Aetna, and will ever burne". For this and similar uses of the image of Etna, see R.W. Dent, *Proverbial Language in English Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

has an ample section on 'Religion and Religious Orders' in the island. Here Smyth denounces contemptuously the vast repertoire of Catholic paganism found in Sicily, which in his eyes amounts to a real "system of idolatry":

It is curious to observe, in Sicily more than elsewhere, the striking analogy apparent in the mysteries of Pagan and Roman Catholic polytheism: [Sicilian religion] exhibits (...) popular superstition, and a sensualizing ritual, instead of real piety. Confraternities, cryptic worship, changing of sacred vestments, and processions; sanctuary, tonsure, and burning incense; lustral water, phylacteries, sacred lamps, and votive offerings, with the custom of decorating paintings and statues with garlands, rings, necklaces, ribands, and the nimbus, are all decidedly Pagan (61-62).⁶¹

The association of Roman Catholics with paganism, viewed in this negative light, contributed and helped to reinforce the idea that priests and persons belonging to the religious orders in Italy were at best false and corrupt, and more often lustful and violent criminals. Of course this was nothing new: the Italian Catholic church had long been associated in Britain with vice, corruption, lust, and all sorts of excesses, to the extent that the Italian Catholic priest had become a conventional villain in English fiction.⁶² Southern convents and churches frequently featured in Gothic stories, and Matthew Lewes' novel, *The Monk* (1795) is probably the most famous example of how Catholic clergymen represented the embodiment of the most repulsive and immoral instincts.

Thus, when in a text religion, caves and volcanoes feature in a southern setting, Gothic and sensational effects are easily reached for the pleasure of the British audience. Around 1800, many texts containing such ingredients exploited Italian and Sicilian settings, testifying to the proliferation of the discourse of the south in British culture.

S.T. Coleridge's poem *The Mad Monk* (1800) exemplifies the way in which these various elements of the discourse of the south could be combined to achieve an intense Gothic atmosphere, dwelling on lust, madness and murder. The poem's full title reads: *The Voice from the side of Etna; or the Mad Monk: An Ode in*

⁶¹Smyth also comments on other Sicilian religious practices adding that "in the worship of bones, and the kissing of relics, a kind of parallel may be found among the savages of North America" (p.63).

⁶²See Brand, p.220. See also Praz, *The Flaming Heart*.

Mrs. Ratcliff's (sic) *Manner*. The poet hears a mysterious voice coming from a cave in the volcano, telling "in mournful tone" the story of a murdered maiden:

I heard a voice from Etna's side;
Where o'er a cavern's mouth
That fronted to the south
A chestnut spread its umbrage wide.⁶³

The central figure of the mad monk acquires a special mysteriousness as the only sign of his presence is a voice coming from the cave, and only later in the text does the reader discover that the monk himself is the murderer, who killed an innocent maiden (whose name, predictably, is Rosa)⁶⁴ because she refused him. Now the guilty monk, secluded in his cave with the agony of remorse, only longs for his own death. As in Radcliffe's novels, here the typical Gothic elements of love, passion, and murder are intertwined with the geographical setting. Interestingly, Coleridge had first hand experience of Sicily, but he acquired it only some years after writing *The Mad Monk*. He spent nearly two years in Malta (from 1804 to 1806) and often visited Sicily. In a letter to his wife in 1804, he affirms that he climbed Mount Etna twice, and in his notebooks he describes at length the wild vegetation on the island, and the caves and grottoes which aroused his curiosity;⁶⁵ he writes about the landscape that he observed during the ascent to the volcano: "Savage scenery, of various, leaping Outline, & cut-glass Surface / and the Clouds, & the Crater of Etna rising above".⁶⁶ Coleridge's literary use of the theme of the volcanic cave - *before* he travelled to Sicily - demonstrates the force of the discourse of the south circulating in Romantic culture.

Caves and grottoes often feature in early nineteenth century poetry, especially in that kind of poetry aiming at effects of pathetic sensationalism. Another example of

⁶³*Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Poems*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p.347. The poem was first published in *The Morning Post*, October 13, 1800. Coleridge describes the monk's musical lamentations as "In melody most like to Sicilian song"; the mention of a specifically "Sicilian" type of song is an erudite reference to Theocritus and the Sicilian origin of pastoral poetry (see Chapter Two).

⁶⁴See footnote n.62, Chapter Two.

⁶⁵*Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Leslie Griggs, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), I, p.332. (Letter dated December 12, 1804).

⁶⁶*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, II, p.2212 (October 1804) and p.2688 (October 1805).

Sicilian Gothic themes in poetry can be found in Barry Cornwall's *A Sicilian Story* (1820), the tale of a young girl who chooses to die for love, which the author specifically addresses to the female public ("Sweet ladies, listen and believe, / If that ye can believe so strange a story"). This long narrative poem is the rewriting, with considerable alterations, of the story of Isabella from Boccaccio. In the same year, John Keats published *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*, where the original Sicilian setting of Boccaccio is transferred to Tuscany, perhaps to avoid the Gothic connotations which Sicilian references might evoke.⁶⁷ Cornwall on the contrary, aiming at more sensational and picturesque effects, emphasises the Sicilian element in the title, and passes the story as an old tale "still believed through Sicily". The setting of the events, typically, "was a spot like those romancers paint". At the climax of the narrative, a cave in the mountain features in conjunction with passion, jealousy, madness and despair, as well as the Sicilian themes of volcanoes, picturesque landscapes and, finally, classical references to pastoral poetry. Like Coleridge's monk, the desperate protagonist of *A Sicilian Story* takes refuge in a mountain cave in the wilderness:

She went alone, a craz'd, heart-broken thing:
And in the solitude she found a cave
Half hidden by the wild-brier blossoming...⁶⁸

from where she proceeds to sing "a melancholy rhyme". In addition, a volcanic image contributes to highlight the sense of the ominous and tragic forces of destiny overpowering the heroine:

And, far away, the mountain Etna flung
Eternally its pyramid of flame
High as the Heav'ns, while from its heart there came
Hollow and subterraneous noises deep.⁶⁹

⁶⁷An analogous transposition, from Sicily to Tuscany, has recently been made in a contemporary British film, *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) by Kenneth Branagh, a film version of Shakespeare's play. The original text by Shakespeare is set in Sicily, near the port of Messina, but Branagh transfers the scene to the interior of Tuscany, where the film was shot, perhaps for reasons similar to Keats' in 1820: today a Sicilian setting would have powerful connotations of mafia, banditry, violence, "Godfathers", etc., whereas the image of Tuscany still offers a more tamed and refined version of Italy to the British (often sold by the modern tourist industry to the wealthy elite as a sunny replica of the English countryside):

⁶⁸Barry Cornwall [pseudonym of B.W.Procter], 'A Sicilian Story' in *A Sicilian Story and Other Poems* (London, 1820), p.27.

⁶⁹Cornwall, 'A Sicilian Story', pp.9-10.

Finally, the use of a Sicilian setting with dark connotations can equally be found in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theatre, also influenced by picturesque and Gothic taste, which saw a relatively large use of the theme of southern caves and volcanoes for sensational effects, especially in melodrama. Ann Radcliffe's Sicilian novel was adapted for the theatre with the title of *Sicilian Romance, or the apparition on the cliffs*, by Henry Siddons in 1794.⁷⁰ Two years later, another play of Sicilian setting appeared, written by Mary Robinson (1758-1800). Some of the scenes in her play, *The Sicilian Lover*, whose plot inevitably included the appearance of banditti, take place in: "A Gothic Hall in the Castle", "The Internal Rock", "The inside of a Cavern".⁷¹

In 1823 a successful poet and playwright, Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793-1835), wrote *The Vespers of Palermo; A Tragedy in Five Acts*, staged at Covent Garden in London as well as in Edinburgh.⁷² Again, the setting evokes typical picturesque and Gothic themes of the south: "A Ruined Tower, surrounded by Woods", "Entrance of a Cave, surrounded by Rocks and Forests", "A Hermitage, surrounded by the Ruins of an ancient Temple". Finally, a volcanic scene completes the picture of the island where, according to the events in the play, blood is shed continuously, tyrants and traitors abound, and the rebellious spirit of the inhabitants spares none of their foes:

Why, such scenes
In their primeval majesty, beheld
Thus by faint starlight, and the partial glare
Of the red-streaming lava will inspire
Far deeper thoughts than pillar'd halls, wherein
Statesmen hold weary vigils. - Are we not
O'ershadow'd by that Etna, which of old
With its dread prophecies, hath struck dismay
Tho' tyrants' hearts, and bade them seek a home

⁷⁰Henry Siddons, *A Sicilian Romance, or the apparition of the cliffs*, Libretto by William Reeve, [n.p.] (1794).

⁷¹Mary Robinson, *The Sicilian Lover* (London, 1796). Robinson also translated into English a travel account by the German Joseph Hager, *Gemalde von Palermo* (*Picture of Palermo*, London, 1800). See footnote n.36, Chapter Two.

⁷²Felicia Dorothea Hemans, *The Vespers of Palermo; A Tragedy in Five Acts* (London: John Murray, 1823). See also the introduction to *Romantic Context: Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830*, ed. by Donald H. Reinman (New York & London: Garland, 1978), p.ix.

In other climes? - Hark! from its depths e'en now
What hollow moans are sent!⁷³

Etna and its burning crater represented a precious occasion for spectacular effects on stage, and the melodramatic adaptation for the theatre of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* features a Sicilian setting. *Frankenstein, or the Man and the Monster!* by H.M. Milner, was performed at London theatres in 1826: the curtain opened on "The Estate of Prince del Piombino, near the foot of Mount Etna". Some unexplained adventures have brought Dr. Frankenstein and his "Monster" from Germany to Sicily, that "Picturesque Country". After various scenes set in intricate forests, gloomy cellars, hermits' caves and secret subterranean passages "hollowed in the Mountain", the play triumphantly closes on "The Summit of Mount Etna". Stage directions indicate that "the Crater occupies the middle of the stage" and "the Volcano during the scene throws out torrents of fire, sparks, smoke, &c., as at the commencement of an eruption".⁷⁴ This is the background for the final duel between Frankenstein and the Monster, who, after stabbing his master to death, leaps in despair into the burning crater and is swallowed by flames.

iv) Incarcerated Nuns

Writing about the history of England, the historian Samuel Dales commented in 1809:

The most indecorous actions of a London brothel shrink to nothing, when compared with these idolatrous receptacles of filthy friars and consecrated nuns.⁷⁵

Nunneries and monasteries of the south were perceived by the British to be places of luxury and vice rather than devotion, or awful prisons where innocent maidens were

⁷³Hemans, p.32 (Act II, Scene 4).

⁷⁴H.M. Milner, 'Frankenstein, or the Man and the Monster! A Peculiar Romantic, Melo-Dramatic Pantomimic Spectacle, in two acts' (1826), in *The Hour of One: Six Gothic Melodramas*, ed. by Stephen Wischhusen (London: Gordon Fraser, 1975). Inevitably, the name of one of the female characters in the play is Rosaura (see footnote n.62, Chapter Two).

⁷⁵Major Samuel Dales, *An Essay on the Study of the History of England* (London, 1809), p.25; quoted in Levine, p.77.

forced to live their entire lives by the cruel rules of Catholic clergy and by the inescapable imposition of their own families.

Many travellers to Sicily comment on the convents of the island, and this subject became one of topoi in travel writing on the Mediterranean south. Most of the times, nuns were depicted as innocent victims unjustly incarcerated, and thus they elicited both pity and attraction in the reading public who was steeped in Gothic taste. Often, a Protestant contempt against Catholicism was combined in British travellers to the south with feelings of pity and an obsessive voyeuristic curiosity for the female members of the Catholic clergy. The attention directed at Catholic nuns and priest continued to be a recurrent feature of travel writing throughout the nineteenth century; as Pemble remarks, "the imagination of Victorian travellers dwelt with prurient obsession on the supposed erotic vices of Mediterranean Christians - especially those locked away in convents and monasteries".⁷⁶

Sicilian nuns feature in Brydone's *Tour*, where he reports his visit to a convent in Messina, and his attempt at communicating with some of these beautiful veiled captives. The "discoverer" of Sicily confidently states:

None of them had sincerity enough (...) to acknowledge the unhappiness of their situation. All pretended to be happy and contented and declared they would not change their prison for the most brilliant situation in life. However, some of them had a soft melancholy in their countenances, that gave the lie to their words...⁷⁷

Brydone's observations and comments on Sicilian convents and the life of nuns were used by Ann Radcliffe for the sub-plot of her *Sicilian Romance*, centred on the pathetic episode of a beautiful young woman who resorted to taking the vows on account of an unlucky love, and eventually died in her cell. In the same novel, the heroine herself, Julia, is repeatedly threatened by the sly and corrupted Abbot of the convent, where she naively seeks refuge from the rage of her father the Marquis and where she closely escapes being forced to take the vows.

⁷⁶Pemble, p.221. Suspicious Victorian travellers to the south comment more or less explicitly on the practice of celibacy in the Catholic clergy: in their texts "innuendos and imputations (...) were the commonplaces of Protestant invective against celibacy, which was popularly understood to be a sanctification of fornication and sodomy" (Pemble, p.221).

⁷⁷Brydone, I, p.61.

In a specific section on Sicilian nuns, Smyth also comments in his *Memoir* on "the seclusion of the females (...) who are shut up in the numerous nunneries with which every large city abounds" (56).

Claustrophobic environments and closed spaces were a major component of Gothic fiction, and when this element was combined with that of Catholic superstition in a Mediterranean setting, the atmosphere of exoticism and eroticism is immediately produced. Sometimes the theme of nuns incarcerated in claustrophobic convents explicitly takes on a darker connotation, when associated with the lustful and murderous passions thought to characterise Sicilian male clergy. Among the travellers, it is none other than Captain Smyth the one to recount the most morbid tales of Sicilian clerical horrors. Despite the scientific rigour of his *Memoir*, Smyth reports Gothic stories with macabre and sadistic overtones, the most extraordinary perhaps being that of a lustful priest who, having stabbed a virgin on the altar of a church, keeps her corpse hidden in the crypt of Syracuse.⁷⁸

The theme of the corrupted clergy and the incarceration of their victims in convents is recurrent in Gothic fiction, and many novels set in Sicily emphasise it with the aid of the unique geographical features of the island, so often described by travellers. Besides crypts and secret underground passages, some Gothic novels feature the typically Sicilian precipices by the sea, menacing and fascinating at one and the same time: both in Louisa Sidney Stanhope's *The Nun of Santa Maria di Tindaro* (1818) and in Anne Hatton's *Cesario Rosalba* (1819), the heroines are imprisoned in sinister

⁷⁸For the cultivation of sadistic tastes and the fascination with the macabre in Romantic culture, see Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*. In this extensive study, Praz refers to the novel *Zeluco* (1790), by Dr. John Moore, which provides a clear example of the fascination with sadistic tendencies projected unto a southern, specifically Sicilian, setting. The novel is partially set in Sicily and the Sicilian origin of *Zeluco*, the protagonist, is frequently stressed. His character functions as the epitome of violent passions, absurd and brutal rage ingrained in an individual from birth; the fact that he was born and raised in Sicily, therefore, does not seem accidental. *Zeluco* demonstrates his monstrous lack of humanity even as a young boy, when he squeezes his tamed sparrow to death in his hands. Moore's novel was rather successful, as proved by Byron's reference to *Childe Harold* as "a poetical *Zeluco*" (Churchill, p.16). It has been noted by Churchill that "*Zeluco*'s popularity doubtless contributed to (...) the general belief among novelists that nowhere was so suited to tales of villainy and horror as a setting in Italy" (Churchill, p.16), a statement which seems even more fitting when referred to Sicily.

Sicilian convents on a cliff-top overlooking the sea, respectively near Messina and near Palermo.⁷⁹

The space devoted to this aspect of southern culture in British travel accounts on Sicily may be paralleled to a certain extent to that of travellers towards the analogous situation of the Oriental harem. The attention to the harem has been recognised as a self-perpetuating topos of travel literature by Rana Kabbani, whose comment that "anecdotal accounts became the staple offering of travellers who felt obliged to describe the seraglio for their compatriots' entertainment" could equally be referred to the British travellers' interest in Sicilian convents.⁸⁰ In both cases, a group of exotic young women, southern or oriental, are perceived to be incarcerated against their own will by a barbarous and primitive society inclined to a voluptuous sensuality: they thus become "interesting victims" to the eyes of the travellers, while both themes of Catholic nunneries and Oriental harems feature in Gothic fiction and popular melodrama.⁸¹

⁷⁹Louisa Sidney Stanhope, *The Nun of Santa Maria di Tindaro: A Tale*, 3 vols. (London, 1818); Anne Hatton, *Cesario Rosalba, or, the Oath of Vengeance: A Romance*, 5 vols. (London: A.K. Newman, 1819).

⁸⁰Kabbani, pp.76-77.

⁸¹See Tuzet, p.394.

v) Romantic Banditti

Figurative art largely contributes to confirm the connection of the Mediterranean south with wild and unrestrained passions, a connection that visually emerged in the form of landscapes with rocky precipices and mountain caves in the wilderness, mostly inhabited by groups of banditti.

In the visual arts, Vitruvius' theorisation in the seventh book of *On Architecture* constituted an influential authority revered by painters. As E.H. Gombrich points out, the authority of Vitruvius was largely followed in the history of visual arts, especially his famous comments on three different modes of representation: the Latin author explains the distinct properties of the tragic, the comic and the satyric scene. For the satyric scene he prescribes trees, caves, mountains and other rural images. As Gombrich remarks, in Italian art the caves of Vitruvius' satyric scene were elaborated in a sinister mode when they became the subject matter of Salvator Rosa.⁸²

Numerous works of Rosa show mountainous scenes with banditti, such as *Banditi su una costa rocciosa* (1656 ca.), *Paesaggio con banditi* (1638 ca.), and many others.⁸³ From the late eighteenth century, and throughout the following century, Rosa's name became increasingly associated in Britain with the colourful passions of the south and its wild natural environment. In 1824, Lady Sydney Morgan, a renowned travel writer and expert on Italy wrote a biography of the painter, *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, - a subject which, again, clearly agreed with the interest in the Romantic south - where she suggested that Rosa himself had lived for some time on the mountains in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the company of these outlaws ("those picturesque

⁸²E.H. Gombrich, *Norm and Form* (London: Phaidon, 1966), pp.119-120.

⁸³For a complete catalogue of the works of Salvator Rosa see *L'opera completa di Salvator Rosa*, ed. by Luigi Salerno (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975). For Rosa's banditti paintings in particular, see also the section 'The Bandit in Art' in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (Worcester and London: Trinity Press, 1969). The titles of Rosa's banditti landscapes do not specify the exact location of the scene, but it is easy to imagine that they referred to some secluded area in his native Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, notably infested with dangerous outlaws (see Salerno, p.11).

brigands which he would portray endlessly later on").⁸⁴ Thus, the visual image of the Mediterranean which was conveyed in Britain through Rosa's works confirmed and reinforced that circulating in Gothic novels set in the Italian south, and, as Brand points out, "the wild, bandit-infested landscapes of Salvator Rosa exerted a strong appeal to a public accustomed to the romantic scenery of the terror-novels".⁸⁵ In a letter from Italy, Horace Walpole, generally considered the initiator of the Gothic genre, thus exclaimed on seeing the Alps: "Precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings, Salvator Rosa!".⁸⁶

The fame of Rosa grew in the Victorian period, when Sir Joshua Reynolds in his *Lives* praised the Neapolitan artist for his characteristic style: "his Rocks, Trees, Sky, even to his handling, have the same rude and wild character which animated his figures".⁸⁷ His figures being, of course, the ubiquitous banditti, whose "rude and wild" character fascinated northern artists, travellers, and writers for a long time. The subject matter of Rosa's paintings was largely appropriated by British artists, "the British Salvators", as one critic calls them, who frequently produced "banditti landscapes".⁸⁸ Among these, there was no other than Joseph Wright of Derby, the geologist-painter who, when not occupied in depicting spectacular volcanic phenomena, produced a number of suggestive scenes of grottoes with banditti, such as "A Grotto by the Sea-side in the Kingdom of Naples, with Banditti" (1778), considered the most haunting and mysterious of all his paintings (fig. 4).⁸⁹

On the first page of his *Tour*, Brydone had affirmed that Sicily was infested by "the most resolute and daring banditti in Europe". He also informed readers that, in the area of Sicily appropriately called Valdemone, it was impossible for the local government to rid the region of these dangerous outlaws because of the numerous

⁸⁴Morgan, Lady Sydney, *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, 2 vols. (London: [n.pub.], 1824), I, p.84.

⁸⁵Brand, p.147.

⁸⁶Quoted in M.H. Nicolson, p.25.

⁸⁷Quoted in Manwaring, pp.49-50.

⁸⁸Manwaring, p.72.

⁸⁹See Benedict Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*, 2 vols., (London and New York: Pantheon, 1968).

mountain caves and subterranean passages which the volcano offered as cover and impenetrable refuge. Since Brydone, Sicilian and southern Mediterranean banditti, living in mountain caves and usually organised in bands, exerted an increasing fascination on travel writers, novelists and painters, a fascination that combined both fear and admiration. Well into the nineteenth century, many accounts show how strong the expectations of travellers were, when they reached the Mediterranean south: according to most of them, in Sicily dangerous banditti lurked at every turn of the road, ready to rob and, perhaps murder. These fears and expectations, and even the hopes of catching a glimpse of these mysterious figures, were practically always frustrated, but this only augmented the legend around them and the tales of the banditti's cruelty as well as their nobility.⁹⁰

The image of the independent, courageous and desperate banditti, living in constant danger and in contact with the wild and picturesque nature of the south, highly appealed to Romantic taste. Bandits rejected society and were rejected by it, thus acquiring the qualities of rebels and tragic heroes, simultaneously attracting and repulsive, animal-like and noble at one and the same time. Mediterranean banditti were, in some sense, an indigenous southern version of the Byronic hero.⁹¹ Samuel Rogers, in his poem *Italy* (1822) - a celebration of the south which was very popular throughout the century and became a required preparatory reading for those embarking on the Grand Tour - presents these characters as the main feature of southern Italy. Rogers expresses his pity as well as his admiration for Italian banditti, as they are men who lead "a wild life, fearful and full of change"; the typical southern outlaw is depicted by the poet as one "...who couches for his prey / At the bridge-foot in some dark cavity".⁹² The appeal of the bandit figure did not decrease as the century

⁹⁰See Tuzet, pp. 175-180. Tuzet points out that during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, out of 24 foreign travellers in Sicily, only one, the reverend Brian Hill, had a direct experience of banditti, which was however, of no consequence to his person.

⁹¹See Venturi, p.1199.

⁹²Samuel Rogers, *Italy, A Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), p.185. As has been noted, for two generations, this poem "remained the ideal present for those about to leave for Italy"; it was praised by Wordsworth and was sold especially in its 1830 illustrated edition, reprinted until 1890, with works by Turner and other painters engraved by the finest craftsmen available. See *The Italian Journal of Samuel Rogers*, ed. by J.R. Hale (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p.110.

progressed, on the contrary, even if actual instances of robbery were extremely rare, the alleged presence of banditti in southern Italy and Sicily never failed to preoccupy Victorian travellers, and as late as 1873 John Addington Symonds reports that in the island's hotels the talk of foreign guests was of "brigands and nothing but brigands".⁹³ The banditti motif as it emerges in travel writing and in literary works of the nineteenth century confirms the ambivalence and contradiction of the British attitude to the south: the banditti myth on the one hand functions as proof of the passionate national character attributed to southern peoples, whose excesses are determined by the environment, and on the other, it represents them as admirable figures, full of redeeming traits such as courage, nobility, independence, and the ability for a spontaneous contact with nature.⁹⁴

The variety of these examples points to the fact that Sicilian and southern themes spread and acquired a certain favour in popular culture as well as in the high poetry of the cultivated Romantics. Underground caves, in association with volcanoes and wild, mountainous landscapes, are viewed, in a variety of texts, as the scene of intense emotions, whether of a liberated and joyful pagan sexuality, or, more often, of repulsive, excessive, and violent passions such as jealousy, lust, and vengeance. The former view, that of the Shelleyan paganism of the younger Romantics and of various other literati, persists, sometimes underground, throughout the rest of the nineteenth century; it will eventually develop and re-emerge into certain strands of late Victorian Hellenism and aestheticism, which celebrated paganism and the (homo)eroticism of the south, as testified in the works of writers such as Walter Pater, J.A. Symonds, and Oscar Wilde. The latter view, held by the vast majority of Victorian travellers and

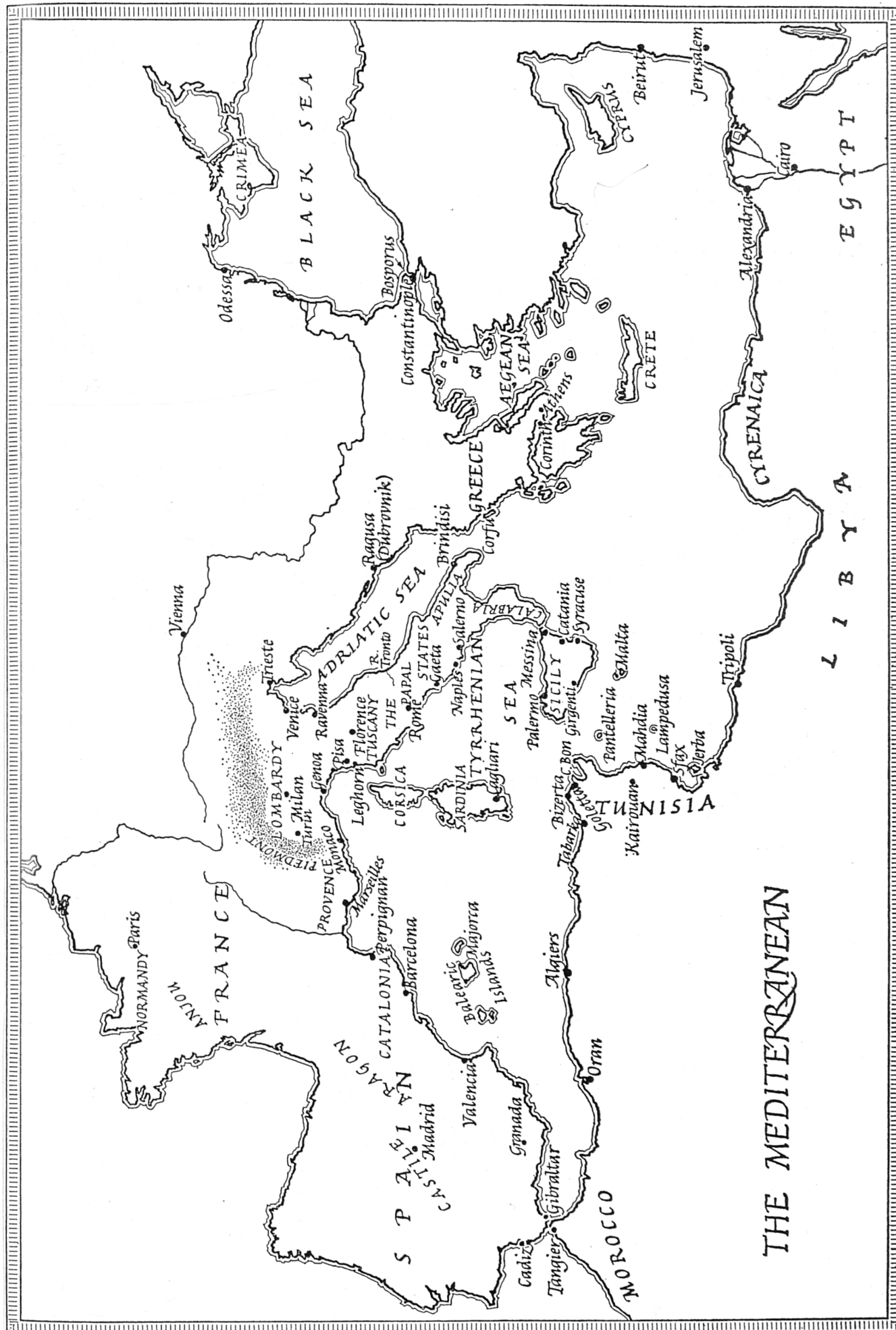
⁹³*The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, ed. by Herbert Schueller and Robert Perters, 3 vols., (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967-69), II, 285-86.

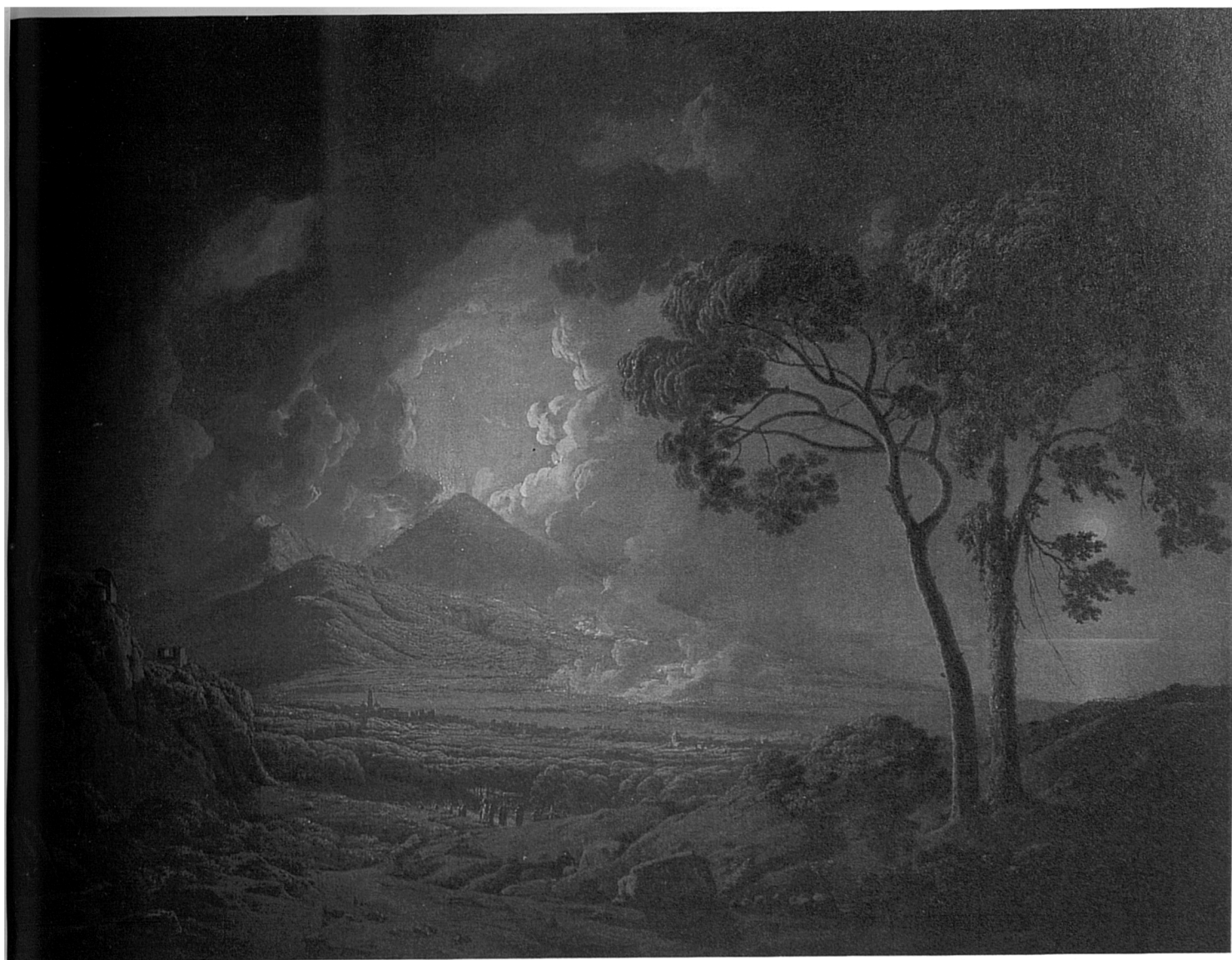
⁹⁴The theme of banditti recurs in various Gothic and Romantic texts, and it is often, but not always found in combination with a specifically southern Mediterranean setting. An important literary influence on the British treatment of this theme was that of Friedrich Schiller's drama *Die Räuber* (1781), translated into English in 1795 as *The Robbers*. The drama is set in Germany, features the bandits as noble and just Rousseauian characters, and glorifies their free life in the forest. Schiller's "Brigands" were immensely popular in Britain, and contributed to inspire both the Gothic fiction of Ann Radcliffe, and William Wordsworth's tragedy in blank verse, *The Borderers* (1795-96) (see Varma, p.124 and p.192). For Schiller's treatment of the noble bandit figure, see also Hobsbawm, *Bandits*.

writers, is intertwined in the course of the nineteenth century with imperialist and racial discourses, the cultural construction of a British superiority and the legitimization of the Empire.

These views, however, are co-existent throughout, often combined with each other within the same author or the same text, and could indeed be considered the sides of the same coin. Increasingly, in nineteenth-century Britain, the notion of the south was used to construct and define an identity for the north, and specifically for the British. The idea of the Mediterranean south and the discursive practices associated with it which emerged in late eighteenth-century and Romantic culture, develop and proliferate in nineteenth-century Britain: Victorians and Edwardians were either the heirs or the enemies of the south (or both simultaneously), but they felt that they could not avoid a confrontation with this "other" geographical and cultural entity.











Front.

THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII

BY

THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYTON

"Such is Vesuvius! and these things take place in it every year. But all eruptions which have happened since would be trifling, even if all summed into one, compared to what occurred at the period we refer to."

"Day was turned into night, and light into darkness; an inexpressible quantity of dust and ashes was poured out, deluging land, sea, and air, and burying two entire cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii, while the people were sitting in the theatre!"—DION CASSIUS, lib. lxxvi.

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MANCHESTER AND NEW YORK

1892



6.



Sicilian (Arab type)



Sicilian (Greek type)



Norman and Saracen types



8.



10.

CHAPTER FOUR

RUINS REANIMATED: SOME VICTORIAN (RE)CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SOUTH

i) The Discourses of History, Classics and Archaeology

In 1833 Lord Edward Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873), novelist and statesman, visited Italy for health reasons. His visit resulted in the publication, the following year, of one of the most successful Victorian novels, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, reprinted throughout the century.¹ Lytton's goal in the book may be seen as being in common with the vast majority of nineteenth-century intellectuals infatuated with the south, whether in the fields of literature, visual arts, architecture, or in the disciplines of history, antiquarianism and archaeology: that of resuscitating the civilisation of the classical Mediterranean. The site of Pompeii, in southern Italy, where excavations, begun in the first half of the eighteenth century, had uncovered the remains of a whole city, provided the inspired traveller and novelist with a most congenial opportunity for the evocation of a southern past:

On visiting those disinterred remains of an ancient City, which, more perhaps than either the delicious breeze or the coldless sun, the violet valleys and orange-groves of the South, attract the traveller to the neighbourhood of Naples (...) it was not unnatural, perhaps, that a writer (...) should feel a keen desire to people once more those deserted streets, to repair those graceful ruins, to reanimate the bones which were yet spared to his survey; to traverse the gulf of eighteen centuries, and to wake to a second existence - the City of the Dead!²

The appellation "City of the Dead" was repeatedly attached to Pompeii as well as to other archaeological sites in Sicily and southern Italy. The peculiarity of this

¹Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (London: Routledge, 1834).

²Lytton, p.v. For a story of the archaeological excavations conducted at Pompeii and Herculaneum, see Christopher Charles Parslow, *Rediscovering Antiquity: Karl Weber and the Excavation of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabiae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

archaeological site, where a whole city, buildings and people, had been preserved by volcanic ash virtually untouched, in exactly the same position as at the time of its destruction in 79 A.D., caused a sensation among the general public and specialists alike, feeding the appetite of nineteenth-century Britain for the buried civilisations of the Mediterranean. In the field of history and archaeology, studies of Rome and Pompeii, and of Greek temples in Sicily continued to appear throughout the 1840's, while the general public was offered the possibility of seeing these archaeological sites for themselves: by 1864 Pompeii was reached by Thomas Cook's arranged excursions.³ Among the countless Greek and Roman ruins scattered around southern Italy and Sicily, Pompeii elicited a special fascination: it was a fragment of the classical past "frozen" and preserved so as to testify to the splendid life of the much admired ancients, while at the same time it forced the *modern observer to reflect on* the terrible fate of a sudden, violent death.

Shelley opened his *Ode to Naples* (1820) by addressing "the City disinterred"; on visiting Pompeii, Sir Walter Scott's only remark is reported to have been: "The City of the Dead! The City of the Dead!"⁴ The Mediterranean south, with its "dead cities" was more and more associated with the idea of a dead, but immensely valuable, past. Pompeii, as well as other archaeological sites, inspired the Victorians with melancholy feelings, and simultaneously with an increasing confidence in the possibility of reviving the dead classical past through artistic creation and/or scientific (historical, archaeological) study. The desire to make the ancient past live again, which since the mid-eighteenth century was fuelled by the enthusiasm for Pompeii, is also exemplified in British architectural and decorative taste: Josiah Wedgwood copied designs from Pompeii, and adapted them to dishes, platters and various kinds of porcelain that he produced for middle-class dining rooms at the Staffordshire

³Brand notes that some Englishmen personally conducted archaeological excavations in Italy: Sir William Gell, the "Resident Plenipotentiary" of the Society of Dilettanti, published standard works on Pompeii and the topography of Rome (Brand, pp.161-164). For Cook's excursions to Pompeii, see Aldrich, p.164.

⁴*Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.616. Lytton, p.141.

factory he called Etruria.⁵ Antique designs for interior decoration continued to be produced in the nineteenth century, while the buildings of the Victorian upper-class featured a 'Pompeian' or 'Etruscan' room.⁶

The belief in the possibility of resurrecting the past, of bridging the gap of centuries separating the Victorians from the ancients, so clearly expressed in Lytton's introduction to his novel, emerges on various levels in nineteenth-century culture: the south becomes a repository of precious, literally buried, "dead" material, waiting to be resuscitated and revered by the Victorian intelligentsia. What legitimated and fostered this cultural and material appropriation of the Mediterranean on the part of Victorian Britain was the emergence and professionalisation of the discipline of history, and its reverent fascination with the past. As illustrated by Philippa Levine, the Victorians' historical consciousness, apparently wholly devoted to the past, was indeed peculiarly preoccupied with posterity: the Victorians' interest in the past, along with their fascination with ideas of death and decay, resulted in an invocation of the future.⁷ In nineteenth-century Britain a sense of being the descendants, the heirs, as well as the continuators of the ancient classical civilisations of the Mediterranean became increasingly widespread. Among the countless examples, Lady Eastlake's comment upon visiting Rome in 1858, is representative of this conviction: "I felt proud that my nation was more truly the descendant of that matchless race than any other in the world".⁸ As has been noted, Victorians interpreted their own age in terms of that past: this implied a strongly teleological conception of history, a history governed by

⁵See Gaull, p.185, and Brand, p.161. Gaull notes that Wedgwood copied the designs not from the originals, but from Sir William Hamilton's four volume *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases* (see Chapter Three).

⁶See Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), p.49. As Gaull observes, at the turn of the century, "magazine articles abounded on what was believed to be Greek fashion in furniture and costumes, codified by Thomas Hope in *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (1807) and *Costumes of the Ancients* (1809)" (Gaull, p.185).

⁷See Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarian, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.4. For the Victorians' fascination with death see Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁸Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, *The Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, ed. by Charles Eastlake Smith, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1895), II, p.107.

Providence, reaching towards the triumph of imperial Britain. A line of progress was identified in Western civilisation, and the Victorians generally regarded themselves as the rightful heirs of that long and fine tradition.⁹

As critics such as Levine and Bernal amply document, historical studies were a fundamental part of Victorian culture, and both disciplines of history and classics generally fulfilled a specific ideological role in sustaining the *status quo*.¹⁰ History established itself as an academic entity within the universities especially in the latter part of the century, when a close relationship can be individuated between historians and the political establishment, while "mainstream historical thinking (...) successfully stormed the worlds of literature, poetry, visual arts and architecture".¹¹ The discipline of history, together with that of classics, had a major role in the ideological formation of the ruling class, and the future leaders of Britain were educated - paradoxically - by studying pagan authors in order to become "Christian Gentlemen".¹²

In the first half of the nineteenth century the new German discipline of *Altertumswissenschaft* (Science of Antiquity) considerably influenced the British approach to the study of the classics, whose cultivation was incremented in Britain by early Victorian educational reformers such as Thomas Arnold: as the century progressed, the discipline of classics acquired an increasingly central role in the curriculum of British universities. In the first half of the century the study of what was called *Literae Humaniores* was established at Cambridge and Oxford, and in 1830 the authorities decided that humane letters included "the histories of Greece and Rome, rhetoric and poetry and moral and political science".¹³ What was frequently stressed, however, was that the classics had to be studied in relation to the modern world - an

⁹See Levine, p.176.

¹⁰Bernal, p.282 and Levine, p.162.

¹¹Levine, p.142 and pp.175-76.

¹²See Levine, and Bernal, pp.288-89. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the most influential promoter of the ideal of the "Christian Gentleman" was Thomas Arnold, who, inspired by German scholarship, exalted the study of Antiquity in all its aspects as a moral and intellectual training for the elite. See Bernal, p.320.

¹³M.L. Clarke, *Classical Education in Britain, 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pp.98-99.

approach put into practice, among others, by Benjamin Jowett (1817-93), who began lecturing on Plato at Oxford in 1847, emphasising that the purpose of university education was "to produce not scholars or researchers but statesmen and men of the world".¹⁴ Thus, the study of antiquity in all its aspects was considered crucial in the moral and intellectual formation of the elite, and became a pillar of the Victorian educational system.¹⁵

As has been argued, the classics performed a crucial role in the construction of a national identity in British culture. Greek was generally held in a higher esteem than Latin (the ability to master Attic prose was regarded as essential in the Oxford curriculum of the 1840's, and in comparison Latin literature was neglected). As has been noted, Greek antiquity was studied by a range of national intellectual communities "whose character bore the distinctive imprints of their respective political structures, university organisation, and religious confession": their study of Greece reflected the "particular political, religious, and philosophical preoccupations of the national culture".¹⁶ The study of classical antiquity in general, and the correlated interest in the Mediterranean, were important features of a nineteenth-century discourse on national culture in Britain, which also increasingly included discussions in archaeology, anthropology and comparative religion.¹⁷

Matthew Arnold's influential work *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) occupies a special place in the nineteenth-century attitude to the study of the classics and of Greece in particular; his theorisation of a humanistic Hellenism, and his belief that Greece embodied "spontaneity of consciousness", had a considerable impact in the Victorian age, and the complexity, contradictions, and ideological implications of his views

¹⁴Clarke, p.103. As has been observed, Jowett attempted to establish the field of Greek studies as a "ground of transcendent value alternative to Christian theology"; Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.xiii.

¹⁵See Bernal, p.281 and pp.317-326.

¹⁶Clarke, pp.99-100; Turner, pp.8-9.

¹⁷In *Black Athena*, Bernal draws attention to the ideological implications of the discipline of classics in the nineteenth century; as Young sums up, Bernal has demonstrated the way in which "the allegedly objective historical scholarship of an apparently non-political academic discipline, Classics, was in fact determined by its own cultural and political history - in this case of racism and eurocentrism" (Young, p.160).

have been much discussed by critics. What is relevant in the context of the discourse of the south is that the Arnoldian version of ancient Greece, crystallised in the famous formula "sweetness and light", was one expunged of sensuality and materiality, which idealised Greek culture as a sunny paradise of superior beauty and harmony, and this symbolised and pointed to a set of fundamental moral and cultural values which to Arnold were of the utmost importance for the life of modern Britain.¹⁸

Heated scholarly debates about the 'Homeric question' equally epitomise the Victorian tendency to discuss contemporary issues in terms of Greek antiquity: the Homeric epic narratives were considered by Arnold and other Victorian scholars as "the Bible of the Greeks", and were revered as a source of major ethical values for modern European culture, a kind of "secular Bible of mankind". While Arnold attempted to impose humanistic values on the poems, for some they contained moral lessons similar to those of Christianity.¹⁹ In fact, around the middle of the century, the most authoritative Victorian readings of Homer emphasised the sacred value of his poems in the context of Christianity. In *Studies on Homer* (1858) William Ewart Gladstone, who enjoyed fame as the most important Homeric expert, likened the most noble Homeric characters to Christian gentlemen: "The Homeric king (...) should be emphatically a gentleman, and that in a sense not far from the one familiar to the Christian civilisation of Europe"; in the same years, Cardinal Henry Newman in *The Idea of a University* (1859) described Homer as "the first Apostle of Civilisation (...), invested with the office of forming the young minds of Greece to noble thoughts and

¹⁸Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by Samuel Lipman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994). For Arnold's Hellenism see Turner's extensive discussion, pp.17-36. As Turner points out, there is a rich and variegated range of Victorian attitudes to ancient Greece, some of which differ considerably from that of Arnold's (Turner, p.18; see also Chapter Five). However, Arnold's version of Hellenism has long been canonised, and its influence has been considerable within and without scholarly communities: "selections from Arnold's discussion of Hellenism were (...) frequently included in anthologies of English literature and became part of the standard literary canon. To this day Arnold's remarks are what most people believe constituted the Victorian concept and understanding of Greek culture" (Turner, p.18). For the little studied connection between Arnold's Hellenism and contemporary racial theory, see the chapter "The Complicity of Culture: Arnold's Ethnographic Politics" in Robert Young's *Colonial Desire*, pp.55-89.

¹⁹The Homeric poems were called "the Bible of the Greeks" as early as 1830 by Henry Nelson Coleridge, in *Introduction to the Study of the Greek Classic Poets* (London, 1830), quoted in Turner, p.155. For the range of Victorian readings of Homer, see Turner, pp.135-186.

bold deeds".²⁰ Although very different critical readings were made in the latter part of the century, such as those of J.A.Symonds and Samuel Butler, emphasising in contrast Homer's historical realism, in any case, as has been noted, Homeric scholars appropriated the texts of an ancient Greek author "to specifically nineteenth century preoccupations".²¹

As Turner remarks, "writing about Greece was in part a way for the Victorians to write about themselves", a statement which can equally be extended to Rome, as illustrated by the examples of Victorian novels set in Roman Italy such as Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* and Walter Pater's *Marius The Epicurean* (1885), where the texts function as locus for the discussion of contemporary issues of history, religion, and morality.²² Both novels are set in the first centuries of the Christian era, in a difficult period of transition from paganism to Christianity which had special resonance for the Victorians and their age, which they also saw as deeply troubled by religious anxiety. Moreover, both Lytton and Pater similarly avail themselves of the comparison between the Roman and the British empire, thus presenting the novels as directly relevant to their audience: finally, both texts display the palpable presence of a narrator, who, while striving to reconstruct the minutest details of ancient life, is firmly situated in the nineteenth century and makes constant references to his own historical age.

²⁰William Ewart Gladstone, *Studies of Homer and the Homeric Age*, 3 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1858), III, p.47; John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. by Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Longmans, 1947), p.224.

²¹Turner, p.135. Butler's reading of Homer is discussed in Chapter Five.

²²Turner, p.8. Walter Pater, *Marius The Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (London: Macmillan, 1885). Lytton's and Pater's novels deal extensively with classical Greek culture: as Jenkyns notes, "*The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Marius the Epicurean*, despite being set in Italy under the empire, are concerned as much with Greek civilisation as with Roman" (*The Victorians*, p.79).

ii) Victorian Pompeii: Southern Past, Northern Present

The ideological implications of historical thinking and of the study of classics in Victorian Britain emerge quite clearly in Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The novel is set in the first century of Christianity, and it presents a variety of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian characters. However, the author states in the introduction that the creed and customs of the classical age present little that is sacred or attractive to "our northern imaginations". Why, then, has Lytton chosen such subject matter? His didactic and edifying purpose is revealed in its bare simplicity in the author's following statement: "it was the first century of *our* religion".²³ Lytton endorses the mainstream view of Victorian historical thinking: on the one hand he has a reverential attitude for the semidivine civilisation of the Greeks, and on the other he reads in moral terms the collapse of the majestic but hollow Roman empire, which sank in luxury and corruption while the new values of Christianity emerged. Therefore, one of Lytton's purposes in *The Last Days* is that of describing the early struggles of the new religion with the heathen superstition of the south. In fact, although the Mediterranean was undeniably the first geographical setting of Christianity, the implication of Lytton's argument is that the south does not constitute its proper place. After originating and spreading there, the true religion moved north, while in the south - he argues - superstition has never been eradicated. The obsessively recurrent opposition "past glory/present decay", associated with the idea of the south, functions here in the specific field of religion, and is inextricably enmeshed with the fervent anti-Catholicism of the period. In first-century Pompeii the early Christians had to fight against heathen worship, especially eastern influence, and the firm determination and fresh vigour of the early Church is glorified by Lytton, an admiration shared by Victorian historians and clergymen. The false pagan gods of the south, however, never disappeared; indeed they are still alive in the present Mediterranean. Lytton thus warns his readers in an abrupt digression on contemporary southern Italians:

²³Lytton p.vi, my emphasis. Page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations in the text.

In their own climes, at this hour, idolatry has never thoroughly been outrooted: it changes but its object of worship; it appeals to innumerable saints where once it resorted to divinities; and it pours its crowds (...) to oracles at the shrines of St. Januarius or St. Stephen, instead of those of Isis or Apollo (194-95).

As has been noted, this theory was prevalent with the majority of British travellers to the south: certain manifestations in the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church, judged as corruptions and accretions of the pristine spirit of the early Church, were condemned as remnants of paganism: to the eyes of the Victorians they "signified a supine surrender on the part of the churches of the South to pre-Christian, heathen traditions".²⁴

The underlining historical thesis of *The Last Days of Pompeii* identifies moral corruption as the cause of the decay of the Roman empire, and, in a circular argument, proceeds to the exaltation of the early Christians ("the fathers of our faith") (163) and the downgrading of contemporary Catholicism, finally culminating in a moral lesson to be learnt by readers: Victorians and their empire descend from the ancients (Greeks and Romans) but are different from them, as they possess the indispensable advantage of a true religious spirit, in a context informed by the paradigms of race and progress. This was a typical element in the attitude of Victorians towards the south, the idea that its decline "was a result, as well as a cause of moral failure".²⁵

Consequently, the characters in *The Last Days of Pompeii* are saved or destroyed by the fury of the eruption according to their moral conduct and their religious belief: the protagonist, Glaucus - a handsome and heroic Athenian - and his fiancé, the Neapolitan Ione, both newly converted to Christianity, are miraculously saved and move to Athens; the rich and venial Roman merchant Diomed is buried alive together with his family and his now useless treasure, while the hideous villain, the Egyptian Arbaces, priest of Isis, is spectacularly swallowed by a torrent of red hot lava.

²⁴Pemble, p.220. The same argument, in various versions, recurs in virtually all British travel literature on the Mediterranean south up to the present day, and while the association of Catholic saints with pre-Christian divinities is a well grounded and much studied thesis in anthropology and comparative religion, the contempt of certain travellers and their ideological bias emerge constantly in their comments.

²⁵Pemble, p.234.

Lytton's treatment of the character of the evil Arbaces is particularly interesting: it perfectly illustrates, in literary terms, Bernal's argument on nineteenth-century British and German historiography as discussed in *Black Athena*. According to Bernal, this historiography, along with the rise of a systematic racism and the development of Eurocentrism, constructed Greece as the epitome of Europe and utterly denied the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilisation, successfully delegitimatising Egyptian philosophy and religion.²⁶

Lytton's description of the Egyptian Arbaces is made in the most evident racial terms, emphasising the darkness of his complexion and the details of his features, clearly intended to inspire the readers' profound dislike: "His shaven skull was so low and narrow in the front as nearly to approach to the conformation of that of an African savage" (47).²⁷ However, what Lytton mostly insists upon is the hypocrisy and wickedness of Egyptian religion and philosophy, which Arbaces, priest of Isis, is associated with:

All the fierce and lurid passions which he inherited from his nation and his clime, at all times but ill conceived beneath the blandness of craft and the coldness of philosophy, were released in the breast of Arbaces" (283).²⁸

The elaboration of an opposition between Greek and Christian civilisations on the one hand, and the Egyptian on the other, is exemplified in the contrast between the character of the evil Arbaces and that of the loyal hero Glaucus, who incarnates the ideal of Greek virtues and ultimately reaches moral perfection by integrating them into his final conversion to the Christian faith. Another positive character, that of the Epicurean sage Sallust, who remains untouched by the new faith and leads a dignified

²⁶Bernal describes this process in *Black Athena* as the substitution of what he calls the "Ancient Model" with the "Aryan" one.

²⁷The controversy in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholarship about what "race" the Egyptians belonged to is explored by Bernal in the section of *Black Athena* "What colour were the Ancient Egyptians?" (pp.240-245).

²⁸The crafty and lustful Arbaces is also known at some points in the narrative with the appellation "Hermes of the Burning Girdle", a definition in which cultivated readers could detect an attack on contemporary currents of occultism and esoteric philosophies associated with Egypt such as Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Gnosticism and Hermeticism. On the complex relationship between Christianity and "Egyptian Wisdom" in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, see Bernal.

life of spiritual travail, also has a special relevance, serving as a motif of reflection on the question of religious doubt and faith so dear to the Victorians.

The Last Days of Pompeii is a "historical novel", as its author is eager to prove - in a long argument in the introduction - by comparing his own historical fiction to that of Sir Walter Scott. Lytton continuously stresses the historical accuracy on which his text is based, and constantly resorts to digressions, several pages long and saturated with erudition, in which he describes interiors, buildings, artefacts and practices of the ancients with a dry and definitively scientific tone; the tone is that of the antiquarian and the archaeologist, making use of dates and of Latin or Greek words written in italics.²⁹ Lytton bases his descriptions of Pompeian architecture on the archaeological works of Sir William Hamilton, and those of the eruption on the geological works of the same author, thus claiming the maximum scientific rigour: "I believe my description of that awful event is very little assisted by invention, and will be found not the less accurate for its appearance in a Romance" (427).³⁰

Lytton's insistent claims of historicity and scientificity coexist throughout the text with his self-conscious attempt to describe the ancients with constant parallels to the Victorians. As he declares in the introduction, his intent is that of repeopling the

²⁹In the early twentieth century, testimonies of Greek and Roman civilisations were still, undoubtedly, the most sought-after feature of the Italian south, and in 1905 the Victorian nostalgia for the "dead" classical past that characterises *The Last Days of Pompeii* reappears in the title of a guide-book to the remains of ancient art in the island, *The Dead Cities of Sicily*, by A. Rivela and H.V. Pernull (Palermo: Virzì, 1905). In this curious book, addressed specifically to tourists with archaeological interests, photographs of ruins and half collapsed columns as they stand today are shown side by side to detailed drawings of hypothetical reconstructions of the original temples and theatres, as they must have appeared in classical times, crowded with classically clad people.

³⁰Lytton's obsessive claims of historical accuracy and his archaeological approach to the classical setting of his novel also coexist with his treatment of the Gothic theme of caves and the underground which was associated with southern Italian regions. Lytton may have been inspired not only by Hamilton's scientific works, but also by the reports of travellers such as William Beckford (see Chapter Three), and their insistence on the dark, menacing aspects of the south. A central part of the plot of *The Last Days of Pompeii* features the character of "the Witch of Vesuvius", on whose figure is based one of the most sensational and melodramatic episodes in the novel. This relates the meeting of the protagonists, the lovers Glaucus and Ione, during a stormy night, with the disturbing and mysterious "ancient" woman who dwells in the country near Pompeii, in a spot "entangled with wild vines and dangerous with precipitous caverns" (214). The powerful and wicked Witch exclaims from the depth of her cave: "Hell is beneath us!" (223). In an additional "Note" at the end of the text, which testifies to the popularity of this Gothic theme of infernal southern caves, Lytton comments on the character of the Witch, claiming a sort of anthropological faithfulness for his depiction: "The Witch of Vesuvius - her spells and her philtres, her cavern and its appliances, however familiar to us of the North - are faithful also to her time and nation" (427).

buried streets and "reanimating the bones" of the dead ancients, and he accomplishes this task by dressing up contemporary Victorians as Romans and Greeks, and making them speak an English awkwardly interspersed with Latin terms: "'Ah!' said Sallust, 'it is *a lustrum* since I saw you'" (71) and "'*Habet!* (he has got it!) *habet!*' cried they (...) '*Non habeo*, ye liars; I have not got it!'" (97).

In the episode describing "a dinner party at the house of Diomed", Lytton's Pompeian characters simply behave as Victorians in fancy dress, whose amiable conversation about contemporary poetry or the latest gladiators' combat resonates with the modern tones of social formality, an attention to propriety, and a sprinkle of adulation and mundane gossip. But for the togas and the amphorae, the conversation could take place in a British upper-class drawing room: the underlying assumption is that the Romans were much like the Victorians.³¹

The parallel between Victorian Britain and the Roman empire was commonplace in the nineteenth century, a textual attitude of which Lytton's novel, with its evident ideological implications, provides one of the most self-conscious examples. The Roman and the Victorian empires were both compared and contrasted. In one sense, the British felt that they were the true inheritors of the Roman spirit, and it was in terms of the Roman precedent that the Victorians justified their own pursuit of imperial power over the globe.³² At the same time, however, the fall of Rome and the decline of its empire - invariably interpreted in moral terms - had powerful resonances for Britain in the age of imperialism. The patriotic prose of contemporary historians abounded with such ideas:

Another empire has sprung into being, of which Rome dreamt not (...) Her empire is threefold that of Rome in the hour of its prime. But power is not her brightest diadem. The holiness of the domestic circle irradiates her literature, and all the arts of peace flourish under her sway. Her people bless her. We may (...) learn (...) on the one hand to emulate the virtues that adorned her [Rome's] prosperity, and

³¹Lytton's fondness for classical dress and design was shared by his contemporaries and is also evident in the visual arts of the period; see section IV in this Chapter.

³²For the motif of the Roman heritage claimed by Victorian Britain in travel literature, see Pemble, pp.62-65. For the ideological role of history in the building up of this theme, see Levine, pp.82-83.

on the other to shun the vices that were punished by her downfall. The sceptre which Rome relinquished, we have taken up. Great is our Honour - great our Responsibility.³³

This is the context in which *The Last Days of Pompeii* and its success with the Victorian public should be read. On the one hand, Lytton's reconstruction of first century Italy intends to pay homage to the splendid civilisation of the Mediterranean shores where the Victorians' ancestors resided, while on the other, it serves to illustrate to the Victorian audience the triumph of northern/modern Christian civilisation over the pagan and corrupt south. In any case, Lytton's "historical" novel is conceived and centred on the idea of a southern past, a textual construction whose ultimate purpose is that of defining and constructing in turn a northern present, a cultural identity for Lytton himself and his contemporaries.

Curiously, Lytton's fanatical appropriation of classical past is not confined to the realm of fiction and textuality: his obsession with the City of the Dead must have found special satisfaction when two human skulls from the excavations of Pompeii were presented to him in 1859 by his friend, John Auldjo, accompanied by a letter referring to them as "the skull of Arbaces the Egyptian and that of Calenus from Pompeii". Both skulls were preserved at Lytton's residence at Knebworth.³⁴

iii) History Written on the Shores of the Mediterranean

The example of the Pompeian skulls brought to Britain and presented to Lytton was by no means exceptional, as enthusiasm for collecting all sorts of artefacts, vases, coins, etc. from the ancient civilisations of the south was enormous among Victorian men. In Victorian Britain, as Pemble observes, "personal collections of Mediterranean memorabilia abounded, the trophies of vandalising expeditions to historic sites and ancient monuments".³⁵

³³John Collingwood Bruce, *The Roman Wall: A Historical, Topographical and Descriptive Account of the Barrier of the Lower Isthmus* (London and Newcastle: J. R. Smith, 1851), pp.40- 49; quoted in Levine, p.82.

³⁴K.G., the Earl of Lytton, *Bulwer-Lytton* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1948), p.51.

³⁵Pemble, p.4.

Interest in the classical south permeated various levels of culture, and on the one hand was actualised at textual level in Victorian literature, art and historiography, and on the other at an economic and specifically material level in the very concrete activities of archaeologists and travellers. These interconnections are pointed out by Rose Macaulay:

While archaeologists examined and identified fragments of columns, and artists made drawings of the sculptures, and poets mused and wrote, the ordinary visitors (...) gaped at the monuments, fitfully recalled their classics, pocketed fragments of antiquity, and cut or wrote their names on ancient columns.³⁶

Antiquarianism, a discipline associated with history and archaeology, was one of the areas that played a large part in the cultural construction and appropriation of the south: in Britain a large antiquarian community, whose work spanned excavation and collection, grew throughout the century, and antiquarians and collectors formed numerous societies. As Levine notes, historical studies were, in this period, a combination of antiquarian and specifically archaeological interests.³⁷ As the same critic observes, the large historian, antiquarian and archaeological communities were composed by intellectuals who were overwhelmingly male, middle class, Anglican, and largely university educated. They often had multiple membership of various bodies, such as the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Numismatic Society and the British Archaeological Association, which was founded in 1844.³⁸

Archaeology, which only gradually emerged as an independent discipline, started as an ancillary activity to historical studies, and was conceived in such a way as to confirm and reinforce history's teleological approach: its main idea was that the progress of "Man" was documented in ruins and artefacts from the past, especially those found in the cradle of civilisation, the Mediterranean.³⁹ This attitude is in fact

³⁶Macaulay, p.161.

³⁷Levine, p.1.

³⁸See Levine, p.8.

³⁹Another new discipline which emerged alongside archaeology was that of anthropology. Writing about the rise of this new field of study in the nineteenth century, Johannes Fabian comments on the idea of 'cultural evolution' in early anthropology (still not distinct from ethnography and ethnology), and its use of a concept of Time adopted from models of geology; this was significantly intertwined with questions of religion and history: "little more had been done than to replace faith in salvation by faith in progress and industry, and the Mediterranean as the hub of history by Victorian England". At this time, the epistemological premises which history and archaeology share with anthropology are

part of a persisting discourse in historiography, and it recurs unchanged in 1907 in G.M. Trevelyan's comment on Rome as "the heart of Europe and the living chronicle of man's long march to civilisation".⁴⁰ Both metaphors are revealing, and the reference to a modern Italian city as a "living chronicle" is strikingly similar to commonplace expressions of nineteenth-century historiography describing Mediterranean places as "documents" and "testimonies".

The function of archaeology was that of recovering these documents and helping to read the history "written" on them. This view is clearly expressed in an issue of the *Archaeological Journal* in 1851:

The record of the Human Past is not all contained in printed books. Man's history has been graven on the rock of Egypt, stamped on the brick of Assyria, enshrined in the marble of the Parthenon - it rises before us a majestic presence in the piled up arches of the Coliseum.⁴¹

The concept that "Man's history" is written in the land and ancient buildings of various Mediterranean countries, turning the south into a material document to be read, deciphered and interpreted, is reminiscent of the geological interests of many scientific oriented travellers of the late eighteenth century, and it is not surprising that early archaeologists collaborated with geologists in the uncovering of remains.⁴² As Levine illustrates, archaeological activity flourished in Britain itself, where excavations were carried out and incremented by barrow diggers and Roman numismatists: however, archaeology was primarily connected with travel abroad. Many Englishmen acquired their archaeological interests through travel in the south, and some of them received funding from the British Museum in order to conduct excavations in Assyria, Greece and Palestine.⁴³

evident in the outlook adopted by the latter, in which "not only past cultures, but all living societies were irrevocably placed on a temporal slope, a stream of Time - some upstream, others downstream. Civilisation, evolution, development, acculturation, modernization (...) are all terms whose conceptual content derives (...) from evolutionary Time"; Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.17.

⁴⁰George Macaulay Trevelyan, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic* (London: Longmans, 1907), quoted in Pemble, p.66.

⁴¹Charles Newton, 'On the Study of Archaeology', *Archaeological Journal*, VII (1851), 1-26, p.1; quoted in Levine, p.31.

⁴²See Levine, p.90.

⁴³See Levine, p.5 and pp.32-34. Macaulay points out that it was with the expulsion of the Turks in 1833 that the era of the archaeologist in Athens began (Macaulay, p.164).

Archaeology and travel are also associated with the changes in architectural taste occurring with the movement of the Greek Revival between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. The archaeological interest in classical architecture was combined with the tendency of British architects to go back to Greek models, which resulted in a large number of nineteenth-century buildings, in London and in other main cities, resembling Greek temples and adorned with columns of all known types of orders - Tuscan, Ionic, Doric, Corinthian, etc.⁴⁴ As Brand points out, "it was in Italy, in Magna Grecia, that many of the architects had their first and only sights of Greek buildings."⁴⁵ British architects had looked to Italy for inspiration since the Renaissance, and in the nineteenth century the teleological view predominant in historiography was adopted simultaneously in the field of architecture: an advance from south to north was theorised in matter of architectural taste, on the basis of the belief that the knowledge of correct architecture had progressed northward, from Greece to Italy, and from Italy - to England. Thus, as Jenkyns observes, it was inevitable that "the progress of architecture should come to be seen as a sort of archaeological process, a gradual recovery of the true antiquity".⁴⁶

Concomitantly, travel to the south and the rise of archaeological interests were intertwined with the cultural phenomenon of Hellenism.⁴⁷ In Jenkyns' words: "an interest in architecture and a taste for travel and topography were the dominant forces

⁴⁴For a discussion of the Greek Revival movement in architecture, see the chapter 'The Architectural Inheritance' in Jenkyns' *Dignity and Decadence*. Jenkyns argues that in the Greek Revival "the archaeological impulse met with the ideological impulse", as architects found in Greek buildings a perfect model for the "primitive strength and simplicity" they were looking for. As the same critic observes, the Greek Doric became almost the symbol of the Revival; it was an order utterly unfamiliar in Britain until then, and it had not been used by the Romans: it came to embody qualities such as discipline, severity, grandeur and "austere masculinity". Examples of the Doric style were found in the temples of Sicily and southern Italy (Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*, pp.49-51).

⁴⁵Brand, p.162.

⁴⁶Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, pp.10-11.

⁴⁷English Hellenism was first studied by the American critic Harry Levin, in his seminal essay *The Broken Column: A Study of Romantic Hellenism* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1931), followed by Bernard H. Stern's *The Rise of Romantic Hellenism in English Literature 1732-1786* (Menasha: G. Banta, 1940). Richard Jenkyns' studies *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* and *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* have considerably expanded this area, while Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* represents the most recent and significant work on the subject of Greece as studied and interpreted by British historiography. The association of the discourses of Hellenism and homosexuality in Victorian intellectual circles has been recently explored by American critics such as Richard Dellamora and Linda Dowling, and is dealt with in Chapter Five.

leading Englishmen towards Hellenism".⁴⁸ As has been noted, the rise of Hellenism in Britain can be dated back to the second half of the eighteenth century, with the Society of Dilettanti, whose members were active in various expeditions to classical sites in the south, and whose toast recited: "To Grecian Taste and Roman Spirit".⁴⁹ The transportation of the fronts and metopes of Athens' Parthenon (the so called Elgin Marbles) to London - which were put on public display in 1807 and finally purchased by Parliament for the nation in 1816 - stimulated a fervid interest in the public, and constituted the zenith of Romantic Hellenism and a solid basis for the later Hellenism of the Victorian age.⁵⁰

Historians, archaeologists, writers, travellers, all shared at least a sense of affinity, or, more often, a feeling of bonding with the Mediterranean, on whose shores they were eager to read signs, find significance, reconstitute the past from the fragments scattered all around. The intention of reading history in the south was often associated with an infatuation with, and a reverence for, Mediterranean art, landscape, and literature. To Charles Kingsley the Mediterranean was "the sacred sea; the sea of all civilisation and almost all history, girdled by the fairest countries in the world".⁵¹

In 1833, the same year of Lord Lytton's Italian journey, another British intellectual started on his pilgrimage to the cradle of civilisation: the young John Henry Newman (1801-1890). The Oxford clergyman was abroad for the first time, and on reaching the sacred shores he enthusiastically wrote home:

What has inspired me with all sorts of strange reflections (...) is the thought that I am on the Mediterranean - for how much is implied in that one circumstance! Consider how the Mediterranean has been on one sense the seat of the most celebrated Empires and events, which have had their day

⁴⁸Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.13.

⁴⁹See James M. Osborn, "Travel Literature and the Rise of Neo-Hellenism in England", in *Literature as a Mode of Travel: Five Essays and a Postscript*, with an introduction by Warner G. Rice, (New York: New York Public Library, 1963), 31-52, p.39. See also Jenkyns, *The Victorians*.

⁵⁰At the beginning of the century, Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin, who was British ambassador to Constantinople, obtained permission from the Turkish authorities "to take away any pieces of stone with old inscriptions or figures thereon" from the Parthenon in Athens. See Osborn, p.47. For the reception of the Elgin Marbles by British intellectuals, their contribution to the British taste for Greek sculpture, and the rise of nineteenth-century Hellenism, see also Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, pp.13-14.

⁵¹Quoted in Pemble, p.8. Similar hyperbolic comments on the Mediterranean as the centre of history recur constantly in the Victorian age, and are echoed in the early twentieth century: for R.H. Bruce Lockhart writing in 1936 the Mediterranean sea has "more history in one of its waves than the Atlantic has in the whole expanse of its 24,000,000 square miles" (quoted in Fussell, *Abroad*, p.131).

upon its coasts - think of the variety of men, famous in every way in history to whom the sea has been known...⁵²

Newman sailed in the Mediterranean on board the packet *Hermes*, stopped at Malta and Corfu and landed in Sicily in February 1833. He then proceeded to Naples and Rome, a visit which filled the future Cardinal with ambivalent feelings. Newman then decided to return to Sicily alone, while his travelling companions proceeded on their way back to England. Being in Sicily in springtime was to him "the nearest approach to Paradise, of which sinful man is capable" (266). Newman's enthusiastic admiration is unrestrained: "What a country it is! a shadow of Eden, so as at once to enrapture and to make me melancholy" (277). He calls Sicily "a wild country": the beauty and magnificent scenery of the island at that time of the year elicit in him Romantic feelings and the desire "as Wordsworth would say, to commune with high nature" (277), even though he claims to despise "sentimentality and "the Shelleyism of the day". Newman's peculiar fascination with Sicily, however, was mostly due, as has been noted, to the island's symbolic value as a monument to paganism.⁵³ The testimonies of the several civilisations that lived on the island held a special significance for the English clergyman: "it is so beautiful and so miserable that it is an emblem of its own past history, i.e. the history of heathen countries" (247). The typical view of Victorian historiography, of the Mediterranean as a document of "Man's progress", to be read by the historian in moral terms, clearly emerges in Newman's metaphor describing Sicily as "a most noble record stone over the grave of high hopes and aims, pride, sin and disappointment" (247). Newman thus enumerates the stages of Sicilian history:

Its history begins with the earliest times and lasts thro' Greek and Roman annals, down to the eras of the Saracen invasions and Norman chivalry. In it I read the history of all that is great and romantic in human nature, and the man in all his strength and weakness, with high aims and manifold talents corrupted by sin and humbled by continual failure (248).

⁵²*The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman: Volume Three, New Bearings*, ed. by Ian Ker and Thomas Gornall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp.155-56. Page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations in the text.

⁵³Ian Ker, 'Newman and the Mediterranean', in *Creditable Warriors: English Literature and the Wider World, Vol. III, 1830-1876*, ed. by Michael Cotsell (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Ashfield Press, 1990), 67-81, p.76.

Of all these peoples, it was the Greek which fascinated and mostly interested Newman: "Greece has ever made my heart beat, and Sicily is Greece in a way." Although Newman's view of the south is more refined and complex than Lytton's and that of mainstream Victorian historians, his comments confirm how this "historical" attitude to the south, and its associations with questions of morals and religion, was widespread among Victorian literati, who tend to produce triumphant narratives about the progress of European civilisation, within which they can locate their own British identity.

John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), one of the most representative Victorian intellectuals fascinated with the idea of the south, who devoted the major part of his work as historian, essayist and poet to the Mediterranean, provides a further example of the importance which was obsessively attached to the south in Victorian culture. In most of Symonds' writings, contemporary historical reality is denied to the Mediterranean, which becomes an enchanted land of dreams. Lytton's attitude in *The Last Days of Pompeii* and his interest for the City of the Dead are perpetuated and reinforced: Victorian intellectuals such as Symonds travel to the south in order to resuscitate a historical past of which they feel they are the inheritors, and they experience their travels to the Mediterranean essentially as cultural pilgrimages. Symonds' poem 'Southward Bound' (1878) is a true manifesto of this Victorian obsession, prescribing a visit to the south as an indispensable improvement for the cultivated northerner and as a means of acquiring a new symbolic citizenship:

Yea, from the very soil of silent Rome
You shall grow wise; and, walking, live again
The lives of buried peoples, and become
A child by right of that eternal home,
Cradle and grave of empires, on whose walls
The sun himself subdued to reverence falls.⁵⁴

Here Symonds goes as far as contemplating the possibility of an ideal adoption ("become a child ... of that eternal home") of the northern intellectual by the land of the south: this adoption is a legal one, due to the northerner "by right", through the

⁵⁴John Addington Symonds, 'Southward Bound', in *Many Moods* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1878), p.3.

implicit legitimization of a history and a set of values claimed to be in common between Britain and the ancient Mediterranean. Although Symonds' position in matters of religion and ethics are very far from those of Lytton or Newman (as shown in the following chapter), he shares with them the ideological assumption of a linear progress northwards. In fact, Symonds' attitude is profoundly ambivalent, as his reverence for the "eternal home" that is the south so lyrically sung in the poetical text of 'Southwards Bound', is counterpointed in his travel writing by a profound dislike for the present reality, for anything which recalls the vulgarity and degeneration of contemporary Italy, in sharp opposition to the memories of classical glory.

In 1873 Symonds sailed on a ship off the coast of Sicily, "in the bay of Drepanum where Aeneas instituted the games for Anchises", and - overwhelmed by classical associations - longed to see the nearby ruins of the Greek temple at Segesta. However, he was prevented from landing by contrary winds and by "the brigands who infest the coast". The Sicilian brigands (a presence "felt though unseen") are an irritating obstacle located in the crude present reality:

The ruins of Segesta, where stands a splendid doric temple, and where was built the Herôon of Philippos, are only twelve miles distant. Yet to get out of the port and to drive to Segesta would be culpable of imprudence in the face of these brigands. Had I known how bad it is, I should not have come here.⁵⁵

The resentment and the indignant irritation expressed by the writer in the last sentence point to a rejection of contemporary Sicilian reality, precisely because it is a reality which separates the British cultural pilgrim from the realm of those classical paradises that he believes belong to him "by right". It was the contact with the rich Sicilian past, in fact, the only feature to make Symonds' journey worthwhile, and which enormously pleases this Victorian "expert" on the Mediterranean, for the simple fact that that Sicilian past can provide his own artistic creativity with precious subject matter:

I have little doubt, in spite of this grumbling about brigands and the sea, that this journey will yield pleasant subjects for composition. Palermo is a most beautiful place and is rendered interesting by the

⁵⁵*Letters and Papers of John Addington Symonds*, ed. by Horatio F. Brown (London: Murray, 1923), p.54; letter dated 13th April, 1873.

odd jumble of its history - Saracens, Normans, Frenchmen, Germans, and Spaniards having left some traces on a city which lies in a landscape worthy of Theocritus.⁵⁶

Symonds walked about Syracuse devoutly carrying "his Thucydides" with him and reading descriptions of famous sea fights: he was enraptured by the countless classical associations of Sicilian sites. His attention is only briefly turned to the modern inhabitants of the island, when he comments in passing, with the coolest nonchalance, that "the people of Sicily are ugly and repulsive and brutish". On the whole, his trip was a good and useful one: "I have brought home a store of pleasant memories and much material for writing new landscape studies".⁵⁷

iv) White Marbles and Azure Skies: Victorian "Olympian" Painting

In nineteenth-century Britain, the Mediterranean similarly becomes "material" for artistic creation in the field of the visual arts, as shown by that group of most acclaimed Victorian painters significantly known as the "Olympians".⁵⁸

The intense exchange and interconnection between the cultural realms of written and pictorial texts can be illustrated once more with a reference to Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The popularity reached by this novel was carried on to the visual arts, where many Victorian artists produced 'Pompeii' paintings inspired by the book's most famous episodes. Joseph Severn's *The Witches' Cavern: Glaucus and Ione*, shown at the Royal Academy in 1840, was the first Pompeii painting to appear after the publication of the novel; "in the next sixty years, during which the novel continued to be reprinted and read as a modern classic, well over thirty-five Pompeii paintings are recorded".⁵⁹

⁵⁶*Letters and Papers of John Addington Symonds*, p.55.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, pp.57-58.

⁵⁸See Christopher Wood, *Olympian Dreamers: Victorian Classical Painters, 1860-1914* (London: Constable, 1983) and Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*.

⁵⁹See Richard D. Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), pp.461-462.

One critic notes that "despite its date, *The Last Days of Pompeii* has something of a late Victorian air; it seems of a piece with the paintings of Poynter and Tadema".⁶⁰ The works of painters such as Sir Edward Poynter and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema are revealing of the circulation of a visual discourse of the south which intersects and mutually reinforces that of the writers and historians examined so far.

As Victorian literature and Victorian historiography, Victorian painting - increasingly in the 1870's and 1880's - was pervaded by classical themes, subjects from Greek and Roman mythology, and by references to classical architecture; simultaneously, the use of the nude went hand in hand with the revived classicism of the period, epitomised by the Olympian school of painters. During his long career, its leading figure, Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-96), "of all the Victorian painters the most thoroughgoing in his Hellenism", painted pictures nearly exclusively of Greek subjects.⁶¹ Having travelled widely in Italy and Greece (he owned a cast of the Parthenon frieze in his studio), he acquired enormous popularity during his life time, was knighted and became president of the Royal Academy: "his abnormal success", as Jenkyns notes, "may tell us something about the tastes and aspirations of his age".⁶²

Leighton's contemporary, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912), also visited Italy and drew his subjects from the ancient world. Initially inspired by Egypt, he increasingly turned his attention to Italy, where he was impressed by the archaeological remains of Pompeii and Herculaneum: he produced paintings of the domestic lives of Romans and Greeks, abounding with meticulous reconstructions based on archaeological evidence, where, however, it was easy to recognise once again "Victorian people in classical clothing".⁶³ Tadema's imitator, Sir Edward Poynter (1836-1919), also devoted his attention largely to classical subjects, acquired public fame and became president of the Royal Academy after Leighton. The production of these artists was intimately bound up with the expectations of their

⁶⁰Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.85.

⁶¹Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*, p.201. For the life and works of Leighton, see pp.202-235.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p.202.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p.239.

public, and their paintings are conspicuously inhabited by Victorians in togas, by characters depicted "in a world as wealthy and leisured as that of [the painter's] patrons - young women lounging on marble terraces lit up by the intense blue of sea and sky, or swimming untoga-ed in baths (...), recreated from the latest archaeological research".⁶⁴ Although, has been observed, at a closer look contrasts and differences emerge in the so called "classical school" of British late nineteenth-century painting, the ancient world can be seen as providing at this time "a common stock of forms, stories and allusions upon which the artists can draw for widely varied purposes".⁶⁵

Leighton's austere Hellenism often had the purpose of expressing a puritan moral sensibility and a typically Victorian sentimental chastity through the means of classical subjects, where the Mediterranean setting and the accurately reconstructed Greek architecture have the flavour of stage props for the ever recurring masquerade of Victorians in ancient dress. As Arnold did in the same years in literature, Leighton tended to exclude sensuality from his Hellenism, as in the "dutiful nudity" of his *Venus Disrobing* (1866) and the emphasis on sentimentality in his *Nausicaa* (c.1878).⁶⁶

The production of the Olympians constitutes perhaps the most immediately evident example of the Victorians' fascination with the possibility of resuscitating the classical past, and their desire to actualise a reincarnation of the spirit of the ancients in their own bodies and appearances: this reincarnation took place not only through artistic creation in written or pictorial works, but also through the factual, specific device of travesty and costume dressing. The extent of this cultural phenomenon is only partly demonstrated by the extensive production of works depicting "Victorians in togas", and by certain instances of imperial sculpture, where an official statue of Prince Albert portrays him in the full attire of a Greek warrior, showing his bare legs and feet (fig.6), while one of Robert Peel represents the Prime minister as a Roman

⁶⁴Gilmour, p.45.

⁶⁵Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*, p.234-235.

⁶⁶For a discussion of the paintings, see Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*. One of Leighton's works, *The Syracusan Bride* (1865-66) was inspired by a few lines from Theocritus.

statesman, wrapped in a toga.⁶⁷ Besides, Victorians literally dressed up in classical costumes: when Lord Leighton painted his self-portrait, he chose to dress himself as Pericles; as one critic comments, his is "unmistakably a portrait of the artist as hero. It is also a picture of an ancient Greek who has somehow been reincarnated in Victorian England".⁶⁸ Alma-Tadema was also fond of dressing up: as Jenkyns reports, "Whistler was startled to encounter him at a costume party, barefoot and swathed in a toga, wearing a wreath and a pair of iron-rimmed spectacles".⁶⁹

At the same time when, in poetry, Symonds fantasised on the adoption "by right" of the northern child by the "eternal home" of the south, in painting, Leighton, Tadema, and their followers constituted a British school of classical painting subscribing to the dominant assumptions of the discourse of the south. In many ways, their works may be read as visual equivalents to the narratives of kinship with the classical Mediterranean, and of the progress of civilisation northwards which circulated in other areas; they similarly demonstrate how the south functioned in the context of the construction of Britishness, and how it could be appropriated in order to assert the superiority of a British identity, through the pretension, or the illusion, of paying homage to magnificent past civilisations, but really claiming those civilisations as necessary *a priori* entities, essentialised and eternal, existing to justify a British present. To this construction, the contribution of the paradigms of race and progress was to prove of paramount importance.

⁶⁷Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*, p.84 and p.112.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p.219.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p.238. An anticipation of the Victorian taste for classical disguise can be found in the so called 'Attitudes' performed earlier in the century by Lady Emma Hamilton (1761?-1815), wife of Sir William Hamilton, at their villa in Posillipo near Naples. Emma's 'Attitudes' were a sort of *tableaux vivants* in which she impersonated Greek historical and mythological characters. This practice was inspired by the rituals depicted in her husband's collection of vases and bas-reliefs (*Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases*, 1791-95). She performed her Attitudes, with the help of Greek-styled draperies, togas and garlands, displaying her beauty and sensuality, to the amusement and often scandal of the Ambassador's guests in Naples (among whom was Goethe, who praised her performance in *Italienische Reise*); Emma Hamilton achieved international celebrity as artists and travellers raved about her beauty and her accomplishments. See Flora Fraser, *Beloved Emma: The Life of Emma Lady Hamilton* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986); see also Gaull, pp.185-186.

v) Race and Progress: Europe's Amorphous Southern Border

As noted by critics such as Said, Levine, and Bernal, in the nineteenth century the discourse of history became increasingly entangled with discourses of race, progress and empire. From these emerged, among other concepts, the idea of a "civilising mission" as a moral duty of Britain towards the rest of the globe. This mission, and the implicit theorisation of a British superiority were not limited to the territories under colonial rule, but applied to the rest of the European continent and its history as well. Patrick Brantlinger's comments on the imperialist ideology exemplified in the writing of Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) - one of the most widely travelled of Victorian authors - throws light on this point:

[Trollope] fully believes in the racial superiority of white Europeans (and of the English over all other Europeans). And he believes that, wherever the British flag flies, he and his compatriots have a responsibility to import the light of civilization (identified as especially English), thus illuminating the supposedly dark places of the world. In short, he believes in the "civilizing mission" of Britain, greatest nation in history.⁷⁰

Trollope's view can be considered characteristic of the dominant discourses of race and empire in nineteenth century Britain. In those territories which were subject to British colonial rule, the moral duty of Britain's civilising mission was used as justification for the exercise of economic and military power; but on a discursive level, when, as in the Mediterranean south, the British visited regions which were political states in their own right, this imperial attitude was maintained, and is expressed at its fullest in some of the travel writing and history books about Italy and Sicily in the age of empire.

As Pemble observes in *The Mediterranean Passion*, British historians and travellers often "approached the south expecting to encounter turpitude; and predictably enough, what they expected to find, they did find".⁷¹ One of the commonest beliefs in the dominant Victorian ethics of puritanism was that the poor, both at home and

⁷⁰Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.8. As Pemble reports, until 1867 Trollope "combined writing with official duties in the Post Office which entailed trips to Ireland, Egypt, the West Indies, and the USA. In the 1870's he also visited Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, South Africa, and Iceland" (Pemble, p.195).

⁷¹Pemble, p.236.

abroad, were to blame for their own misery, and this attitude frequently emerges in the texts of travellers to the south, who are appalled by the presence of beggars and idlers in the streets of Mediterranean cities, a repugnant sight which offends the civilised northerner. Travellers tend to see poverty and moral degradation as intrinsically linked, and to associate these to a fatal moral taint in the national or racial character of the modern peoples of the south. Often, Italians, and especially southern Italians and Sicilians, remind British travellers of another troublesome national category, the Irish, in their eyes equally left behind by progress and incapable of improvement on their own right.

Momentarily forgetting her own Irish origin, the philanthropist and feminist social crusader Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904), travelling in Italy, is repelled by the sight of Neapolitans: "They resemble more closely in ignorance, squalor and degradation the most wretched Irish who dwell in mud cabins amid the bogs, than any other people in Europe", while Anne Buckland - travel writer, novelist, and author of popular books on anthropology - wrote of the same people that:

They form the element of national discord, the Irish of Italy; (...) quick, gay, careless, noisy and impulsive; but vindictive, cruel, discontented, indolent; a people always ready to give trouble to their rulers, but never likely to improve their own condition.⁷²

Comparisons and parallelisms between Sicilians and Irish were also formulated frequently in the travel literature of the century, and make their appearance in the majority of travel books devoted to the island.

Similar comments clearly belong to the discourse of British imperialism which was employed mainly in relation to the colonies; but when they refer to territories and peoples of the Mediterranean south, they continue to serve the fundamental function of constructing an imperial identity for Britain. In fact these comments, made on a moral, racial and geographical basis, are derived from (and reinforced by in turn) the general idea of a degeneration of the modern Mediterranean, in relation to which a

⁷²Frances Power Cobbe, *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe, By Herself*, 2 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1894) i, p.226; Anne Walbank Buckland, *The World Beyond the Estrelles*, 2 vols. (London: Remington, 1884), ii, p.164. Buckland was active in 1870-1900.

British superiority could be theorised within Europe, as the light of civilisation had progressed northwards, towards what Schlegel had called "the Teutonic tribes".⁷³

When travellers and historians in the south shifted their attention from the contemporary reality of the modern south, to its distant historical past, they found a wealth of evidence for the fact that the present situation in Europe (the degradation of the former splendid civilisations of Italy and Greece, and the flourishing of Britain, once a marginal province in the Roman empire) had been brought about by a long process of clashes and struggles among different "races", some of which had survived and progressed, while others had decayed or disappeared: as the century advanced, a distinct vocabulary of race was increasingly employed in British and American historiography and travel writing about the Mediterranean south.

In the course of the nineteenth century, theories of race and progress became more prominent in various areas, such as historiography, linguistics, and other, non-academic areas of culture, such as fiction, travel accounts and tourist guide-books. As historian E.J.Hobsbawm observes, in the 1880's "humanity was divided by 'race', an idea which penetrated the ideology of the period almost as deeply as 'progress'".⁷⁴ The discourse of race principally developed in association with that of history, and theories of race based on various biological or anatomical differences became more and more influential: as Lionel Trilling points out, in late nineteenth-century culture, "racial theory, stimulated by a rising nationalism and a spreading imperialism, supported by an incomplete and mal-assimilated science, was almost undisputed".⁷⁵ The concept of "race" in turn supported history's teleological approach and its emphasis on the idea of progress. An extreme example of this is the deployment of both racial and religious arguments in the writing of a zealous Protestant historian such as Charles Kingsley, who, reacting against the common British claim of kinship with the Mediterranean, insisted on a quest for the northern forerunners of the English

⁷³See Chapter One.

⁷⁴E.J.Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1987), p.32.

⁷⁵Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (1939; reprint ed. New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p.214; quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, p.232.

race, stressing its Germanic descent in a clear-cut theorisation of Teutonism. Hardly concealing his resentment for the high status held by classical/southern civilisations in British culture, Kingsley produced a text, *The Roman and the Teuton* (1864), where he strives to construct a distinctly British (Saxon, Teuton) identity in opposition to the Greek and the Roman:

We have at least awakened to the fact that Greece and Rome do not exhaust the world's stock of wisdom and greatness (...) that the soil of Teutonic Christendom has brought forth as deep and enduring systems (...). We have at least learned where to look for our own fathers (...). The thrones of the North stand firm amid the convulsions of Europe, (...) peace and order still reign supreme in the realm alike of Harold Hardrada and of Harold the son of Godwin, while the land of the Conqueror is tossed to and fro by interstine broils.⁷⁶

Thus, a doctrine of Saxonism, its nobility and moral superiority, are predicated through the explicit contrast with the decadence of the modern south, whose degeneration is a proof of northern/modern supremacy. As has been noted, the trope of "degeneration" was an important idea for the post-Darwinian world, and it was intensely and variously deployed in British culture as the century progressed.⁷⁷ "Degenerationism" becomes increasingly recurrent in the British discourse of the south, where discursive practices - whether in history, travel writing, or fiction - function more and more around an advance/backward binarism, implying that the splendour of past civilisations, whether oriental or southern, was gone once and for all, being replaced by the degradation and degeneration of formerly flourishing peoples or races.⁷⁸ As Bernal remarks, "other ancient civilisations could be completely appropriated by Western scholarship because the modern inhabitants, it was argued, (...) in their decadence, had 'lost' the high culture of their ancestors".⁷⁹

Said's comments on the academic debate about Orientalism in the late nineteenth century are especially relevant in this context, and they can be equally referred to the classical civilisations of the Mediterranean:

⁷⁶Charles Kingsley, *The Roman and the Teuton: A Series of Lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge* (London: 1864), quoted by Levine, p.80.

⁷⁷See William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.1-2.

⁷⁸See Said, *Orientalism*, p.206.

⁷⁹Bernal, p.235.

The modern Orientals were degraded remnants of a former greatness; the ancient, or "classical" civilisations of the Orient were perceivable through the disorders of present decadence, but only (a) because a white specialist with highly refined scientific techniques could do the sifting and the reconstructing, and (b) because a vocabulary of sweeping generalities (the Semites, the Aryans, the Orientals) referred not to a set of fictions but rather to a whole array of seemingly objective and agreed-upon distinctions.⁸⁰

The recurrence of terms such as "race" and "stock" in texts about southern Italy and especially Sicily, points to the fact that it was the cultural ambience described by Said which similarly produced the construction of the Mediterranean south by British and northern European scholarship. Discussions about the various "races" that dominated Sicilian history crystallised in the enumeration of the racial characteristics that could be found in contemporary Sicilians, who were scientifically observed, photographed, and written about by historians and travellers, through the use of precisely the racial terminology referred to by Said.

To the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historian, Sicily represented a particularly fascinating and problematic object of study because of its geographical position at the extreme southern border of the continent, and its contacts with non-European peoples in various ages - such as the Phoenicians and the Arabs - and, at the same time, because of its classical prestige as a splendid colony of the Greeks and, later, a wealthy province of the Roman empire.

Thus, historians and travel writers dealing with the Mediterranean south found in Sicily an especially notable example of the passing and meeting of different civilisations and peoples. The terms "race" and "stock" abound in the treatment of Sicilian history in academic works as well as guidebooks and travel accounts of this period. The most recurrent image was that of Sicily as "the playground of magnificent civilisations", but Newman's early view - melancholic and sympathetic - was often replaced by a much more simplistic one, based on racial arguments, with evident ideological implications: there had been and there were superior and inferior races, advanced and backward peoples, and this was clearly testified in Sicily, where the historian and the tourist could find and personally scrutinise the traces of the progress of European civilisation, and its vicissitudes over the centuries. This reading of the

⁸⁰Said, *Orientalism*, p.233.

Sicilian past perfectly justified the conception of history as the "biographies of races", characteristic of mainstream nineteenth-century historiography, and indeed the Sicilian past was thus constructed precisely as its demonstration and documentation. The new paradigms of "race" and "progress" informed the discourse of history in such a way that scholars debated advanced, dynamic civilisations (it was self-evident that the greatest "race" was the European or Aryan one) as opposed to static societies like those of Asians or Africans; in other words, "history (...) consisted of the triumphs of strong and vital peoples over weak and feeble ones".⁸¹

Among the countless examples, this attitude visibly emerges in the works of Francis Marion Crawford, American historian and novelist, who expresses probably the most clear-cut ideological interpretation of Sicilian history and of the Mediterranean south. This wealthy intellectual and extremely prolific writer, who lived in Rome and purchased a splendid villa near Naples, acquired a reputation as the most respectable "expert" on the south, a subject which he put at the centre of his immense textual production, from books of history to works of fiction.⁸² Crawford produced an ambitious historical work, *The Rulers of the South* (1900), a title that betrays his ambiguous feelings of fascination for the Mediterranean, despite the fact that the central thesis of the book is the demonstration of the intrinsic inferiority and "femininity" of that part of the world. In this voluminous text, covering the history of Sicily, Calabria, and Malta, from prehistoric times to the present, Crawford's straightforward argument is that:

The Italian south (...) has never at any time been the independent arbitrator of Europe or of civilization. (...) It has never been the source of an individual power that began in it, spread from it, and enveloped others. It has lacked strength of its own from the beginning, it has lacked the genius without which strength breeds monsters, it has been wanting in the original character (...) it has produced no race

⁸¹Bernal, p.32. The new scholarship emerged in Britain around 1830-1860 and was responsible for the rise of what Bernal calls "the Aryan Model".

⁸²For Crawford's life and works see Brooks Van Wyck, *The Dream of Arcadia: American Writers and Artists in Italy, 1760-1915* (London: J.M.Dent, 1958). Francis Marion Crawford was author of numerous novels, in particular a series of five novels dealing with the saga of a Roman family, "The Saracinesca", as well as novels set in 'Oriental' territories, such as *Khaled: A Tale of Arabia*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1891) and *Mr. Isaacs: A Tale of Modern India* (London & New York: Macmillan, 1895). He also wrote novels set in the Italian south: *The Children of the King: A Tale of Southern Italy*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1893) and *Corleone: A Tale of Sicily*, 2 vols. (London & New York: Macmillan, 1897).

which another has not been able to enslave; one people after another has taken possession of it, each amalgamating in some degree with the last, but the welding of races has not become a great race (...). It has been the prize of contending warriors, it has been the playground of magnificent civilizations, but it has neither acted the part of conqueror itself, nor has it ever produced a civilization of its own.⁸³

The argument of Victorian historiography, that the light of civilisation originated in the Mediterranean south in order finally to move north with the true spirit of Christianity, is here modified and taken to its extreme consequences, insofar as any claim to civilisation by the Italian south is denied by the American historian. The south is seen exclusively as a passive victim, lacking capability for action and without original character, that is, without the "strength" and the "genius" necessary to "enslave" others. Where does the attraction of the Italian south reside, then, since this historian and novelist devotes so much attention - indeed, his life's work - to this topic? He continues his argument with a heavily gendered rhetoric, using the same metaphor of "the south as woman" that recurs in numerous nineteenth-century authors.⁸⁴ Again, the argument is taken to its extremes by Crawford, who affirms uncompromisingly:

In the balance of the world's forces Sicily has been feminine and reproductive rather than masculine and creative; endowed with supreme natural beauty, she has been loved by all, she has favoured many, and she has borne sons to a few, sons such as Archimedes and Theocritus, Dionysius and Agathocles (...). In the story of Sicily the continuous, reasonable cause of change lies in the unmatched attraction of Sicily, a charm so strong and lasting as to be a source of interest in itself, so that we may figure the island as the undying heroine of an unending romance, wooed, won, and lost by many lovers who have met and fought and have conquered, or have been vanquished in the struggle for the possession of her beauty. Sicily has been the Helen of a European Epos.⁸⁵

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, travel and tourism to Sicily significantly increased, reaching an apogee around 1900, an increase testified to by a significant rise in the publication of Sicilian travel guide books by British and American writers. A look at the titles of some of these texts may give an idea of the renewed popularity of the island among English speaking travellers: at the turn of the century, Douglas Sladen (1856-1947), a "prolific hack" of Australian origin, was author of *In Sicily* (1901) and *Sicily: The New Winter Resort* (1905), while his wife Norma Lorimer

⁸³Francis Marion Crawford, *The Rulers of the South: Sicily, Calabria, Malta*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Macmillan, 1900), p.12.

⁸⁴See Browning's comments on Italy in Chapter One.

⁸⁵Crawford, *The Rulers of the South*, pp.12-14.

produced the fictionalised account *By the Waters of Sicily* (1901) and the novel *On Etna* (1904); they also co-authored *Queer Things About Sicily* (1905).⁸⁶

In these and similar texts, a popularised version of Victorian historical thinking and ideology emerges in the reiterated oppositions north/south, present/past, glory/decay, masculine/feminine, etc., as well as in the insistence on a specifically racial interpretation of Sicilian history. In the type of guide-books written by Sladen and other contemporary authors, travellers are urged to search for the countless testimonies of the fascinating historical past scattered around Sicily, while the island is presented as a sort of life-size museum, offering, at one and the same time, a moral lesson on the transitoriness of human glory, and a historical and scientific confirmation of the supremacy of one race over another.

In the historical introduction to one of his books, Sladen rhapsodises on "the long procession of the nations which have tramped through Sicily from the age of the Greek and Phoenician to the yesterday of the Spaniard".⁸⁷ Sicily is interesting because it is seen as "dead", as a document or a book illustrating past glories, where the people themselves are turned into specimens of past civilisations: travel writers indefatigably recount how they were able to identify the racial characteristics of Arabs, Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans in the facial features of contemporary Sicilians, and some of them emphasise their scientificity with the support of photographic evidence. A classificatory system on the basis of physiognomic criteria is carefully arranged in William Agnew Paton's *Picturesque Sicily* (1902): photographic portraits of Sicilian peasants, beggar girls and mountain dwellers are constructed with the aid of a theatrical apparatus: contemporary Sicilians, chosen as models, are dressed in Greek draperies and adorned with laurel crowns, or, alternatively, with Oriental looking

⁸⁶Douglas Sladen, *In Sicily, 1896-1898-1900*, 2 vols. (London: Sands, 1901); *Sicily: The New Winter Resort, an Encyclopedia of Sicily* (London: Methuen, 1905). Norma Lorimer, *By the Waters of Sicily* (London: Hutchinson, 1901); *On Etna: A Romance of Brigand Life* (London: William Heinemann, 1904); Douglas Sladen and Norma Lorimer, *Queer Things About Sicily* (London: Anthony Treherne, 1905). The definition of Sladen as "a prolific hack" can be found in *More Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Murray, 1985, p.77). Sladen wrote a book on American poets which Wilde reviewed.

⁸⁷Sladen, *Sicily: The New Winter Resort*, p.5.

head covers and exotic paraphernalia, according to the racial category to which Paton assigns them.⁸⁸ The photographs are accompanied by short explanatory descriptions: a bare-chested dark youth, with a white scarf about his head resembling a turban, bears the label "Sicilian (Arab type)"; a classically clad youth with a crown of laurel leaves is defined as "Sicilian (Greek type)", and two little girls, one fair and one dark, sitting together, are representative of the "Norman and Saracen types" (fig. 7). Similarly, in 1905, Douglas Sladen has an entry on "Sicilian Eyes" in the encyclopaedia on "Things Sicilian" contained in one of his travel books, explaining the colour differences in the various parts of the island according to whether they were dominated by Greek or other "races".⁸⁹

In the same years, the American Will S. Monroe, in *Sicily, The Garden of the Mediterranean* (1909), remarks that, geologically, Sicily is "the bridge between Europe and Africa", an apparently neutral geological fact, which, however, has important cultural implications. With the same scientific attitude, a few pages later, Monroe elucidates his readers on the racial mixture of Sicilian blood:

Racially, Sicilians are as little of Italian ethnic stock as the Americans are of English stock (...) through their veins streams Aryan, Semitic, and Egyptian blood, with a slight trace of the negroid stocks of Northern Africa.⁹⁰

Travellers are constantly engaged in distinguishing the characteristics of one "stock" from those of another, often rejoicing when they can isolate the Greek one. For this reason the western area of Palermo, having had intense contact with Africa for centuries, elicited the most antipathy, while the east of the island possessed the glory of having been colonised by the Greeks. Monroe's racial argument proceeds thus:

In the western part of the island the negroid type - black woolly hair, stumpy upturned nose, and thick lips - is sometimes met, particularly among the women. In the south-eastern provinces, on the other hand, one meets the regular features, the arched brows, and the straight noses commonly associated with the Greeks.⁹¹

⁸⁸William Agnew Paton, *Picturesque Sicily* (New York & London: Haper & Brothers, 1902).

⁸⁹Sladen, *Sicily: The New Winter Resort*, p.172.

⁹⁰Will S. Monroe, *Sicily, The Garden of the Mediterranean: The History, People, Institutions, and Geography of the Island* (Boston: L.C.Page & Co., 1909), p.110.

⁹¹Monroe, p.110.

The racial discourse permeating the texts of these travellers and historians points to a preoccupation with the notion of a European racial identity: the insistence on observing and distinguishing the various races of Sicily inevitably results in the establishment of a hierarchy of peoples and civilisations, so that the ancient Greek, when identifiable in present Sicily, is taken to mark and reinforce the boundary of Europe at its southern fringes, whereas the traces of non-European races are spurious and worrying elements - however exotic and intriguing - to be studied scientifically, and culturally rejected.

J.A. Symonds' view of Sicily, in *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece* (1898) is perhaps a little more kind to the non-Greek elements, and less extreme than that of overtly racist historians, but it utilises the same racial argument:

Sicily (...) has been the meeting-place and battle-ground of the races that contributed to civilise the West. (...) The eastern coast, which is turned towards Greece and Italy, has been the centre of Aryan civilisation in the island. (...) The western end, which projects into the African sea, (...) became the centre of Moslem rule.

Symonds' preference is clear: his favourite Sicilian places are Girgenti and Syracuse, which "are pre-eminent for the power of bringing back the Greek past forcibly before us".⁹²

Thus, between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the Victorian intention of reviving the classical past persisted and was encouraged by racial theory. The racial emphasis in these texts reveals the flourishing of racial theory in those years, while at the same time, the discourse of race, far from being detached from those relating to history and the classics, adds to their reinforcement, so that a set of interconnected discursive practices contributes to develop a construction of the Mediterranean south as the land of the past, of classics, and of the origins of European civilisation.

⁹²John Addington Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), pp.290-291.

CHAPTER FIVE

ALTERNATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SOUTH: LATE VICTORIAN VIEWS

The fabrication of the Mediterranean south as an imaginary space identified with an eternal past, a past relevant to British modern identity, and one that constitutes a cultural background and a starting point against which a northern, British present can be measured, is a constant feature of nineteenth-century culture and - as with the Romantics - a range of authors and artists of the *fin de siècle* utilise it in various ways. Some aspects of Simon Gikandi's interpretation of colonial narratives and British travel writing about colonial or ex-colonial territories in the age of empire can be referred equally to the narratives concerning the Mediterranean: if, as seen in the previous chapter, within the dominant discourses of history, classics and archaeology, the south provides the British traveller and intellectual with the possibility to produce triumphant narratives based on what Gikandi calls "such imperializing categories as teleology and cartography", at other times, there are many ways in which "the same space provides opportunities for a sustained critique of the domestic space" of Britain.¹

Many of the constructions and interpretations of the south in the works of authors mainly related with the aesthetic movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century, represent a shift from previous attitudes, while coexisting with the main assumptions perpetuated in the dominant discourses of Victorian historiography and classics examined in Chapter Four. The south thus comes to represent the terrain where a complex and variegated cultural debate on questions of national identity, history, sexuality, and modernity takes place.

¹Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p.113 and p.161.

The latter part of the century has a historical importance as the moment in which a crisis of belief in the efficacy of colonialism makes itself manifest, and this crisis invests British culture as a whole and its dominant terms: as has been observed, "while it is true that the ideal of empire dominates cultural discourse in England as much in the 1890's as it had fifty or so years earlier, the imperial spaces can no longer be conceived - or represented - as spaces that secure English identity".² A similar claim can be made about the space represented in British culture by the Mediterranean south, which, as the century draws to its close, no longer can be easily, nor mainly, utilised in order to construct a coherent imperial identity, but increasingly serves contrasting purposes, calling into question, for instance, the Arnoldian idea of Greek culture, the value of organised religion, the restrictions of accepted sexual morality - questions related to a set of problematic issues anticipating the cultural crisis of the unified imperial subject which will eventually manifest itself in modernist narratives.

i) Unorthodox Views: The Case of Samuel Butler's Sicilian Odyssey

Samuel Butler (1835-1902), the author of *Erewhon* and *The Way of All Flesh*, was quite alien to the movement of aestheticism, but was nonetheless "an enemy of Victorian conventions":³ his interest in the Mediterranean as a traveller and in the classics as a Homeric scholar can be placed in the context of those interpretations of the south which diverge from the dominant discourse and create a tension within it. In 1897 Butler published a study with the title *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, where he argued that the Homeric poem had been written by a young woman who lived near Trapani in Sicily. Butler devoted the latter part of his life to collecting evidence for his theory and to tracing the route of Odysseus in the vicinity of the island: he made

²Gikandi, p.165.

³Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.215.

his first trip to Sicily in 1892, a journey which he would repeat almost every year until his death, equipped with admiralty charts, maps and a camera.⁴

Butler's book on the female authorship and the Sicilian origin of the *Odyssey* differs in form from the scholarly works produced within the Victorian Homeric debate: the author avoids adopting the moral and religious approach of experts such as Gladstone, using in contrast an irreverent and entertaining tone, for which he was promptly attacked in a fierce anonymous review, 'How to Vulgarise Homer'.⁵ Nonetheless, as has been argued, Butler's theory on the authorship of the *Odyssey* and its Sicilian setting "fits directly into the context of Victorian Homeric commentary and criticism".⁶ His work may be read as a reaction against the current Victorian interpretations of Homer and the Homeric age, which were laden with ideological implications in their effort to construct the Homeric pre-classical civilisation as an ideal past from which the whole of European civilisation had stemmed and from which it could learn moral lessons: "for Gladstone, Homer signified virtue, even Christian virtue; for Arnold, nobility and good taste; for Symonds (...) the heroic. None of these approaches were designed to appeal to Butler".⁷

Butler's interest in Homer was not limited to the question of authorship; in fact, this had arisen at a later stage, while he was studying and translating both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and he wrote *The Authoress* partly in the hope of creating a market for his translations, which, to his disappointment, were rejected by publishers for years.⁸

⁴Samuel Butler, *The Authoress of the Odyssey, Where and When She Wrote, Who She Was, the Use She Made of the 'Iliad', and How the Poem Grew Under Her Hands* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897). For Butler's life and works see Peter Raby, *Samuel Butler: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1991); on Butler and the Homeric question, see Turner, pp.183-186.

⁵'How to Vulgarise Homer', *The Spectator*, 23 April 1892; this acid review refers to a lecture given shortly before by Butler on 'The Humour of Homer', and to a letter to *The Athenaeum* that he sent at the same time: in both the lecture and the letter Butler made public for the first time his discoveries on the Sicilian origin of the Homeric poem, which were later expanded and published in *The Authoress*.

⁶Turner, p.184.

⁷Raby, p.239.

⁸Butler's biographer, Peter Raby, reports how by December 1894 nearly thirty publishers had refused his translation of the *Odyssey*. Finally, Butler's translations were published as: *The Iliad of Homer rendered into English prose for the use of those who cannot read the original* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898) and *The Odyssey rendered into English prose for the use of those who cannot read the original* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900). His books were largely ignored by the academic establishment, and Butler could count his readers in tens: by his death, *The Authoress* had sold 176 copies, the *Iliad* 177, the *Odyssey* 121 (see Raby, p.164). In his own time, Butler's thesis in

Both in *The Authoress* and in his Homeric translations, Butler did not elevate nor idealise Homer; indeed, his interpretation was so radical and challenging to the classical establishment that he proposed a young, unmarried woman in place of the Victorian myth of the blind and bearded classical bard. As has been noted, Butler's "authoress" resembles more a middle-class lady, and he assimilated her to the image of a kind of Greek Brontë or Jane Austen.⁹

But what was more subtly radical was his reading of the *Odyssey* with an emphasis on its realism, the precision of its social context, the attention to the domestic details of everyday life (which for him was one of the proofs of female authorship), and the poem's humour and simplicity. Consequently, Butler compared Telemachus to Nicholas Nickleby, and turned Odysseus into an anti-hero, denying the presence of the heroic, and the sense of grandeur and decorum associated with an ancient Greek text. What he substituted for these was an historical realism which for him gave the action and background a sense of authenticity. His treatment of the characters in the *Odyssey* has been defined by one critic as an "ironic bourgeois reduction", whereby Odysseus and Penelope "are all too real and all too much like the local tradesman and his spouse".¹⁰ This aspect of Butler's textual approach was destined to have unexpectedly important consequences in twentieth-century literature: while figures such as George Bernard Shaw and Robert Graves were fully convinced by Butler's thesis, critics have *identified* a definite influence of Butler on James Joyce.¹¹

The Authoress was generally met with indifference, notably that of Jowett (see Raby, p.247); in this century some have pursued his line of study: see Lewis Grenville Pocock, *The Sicilian Origin of the Odyssey: A Study of the Topographical Evidence* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1957), and Jane Bertolino, 'The Sicilian Origin of the Odyssey', *Arba Sicula*, vol.12, n.I and II, Spring and Fall 1991, 79-93.

⁹See Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.209.

¹⁰Turner, p.185.

¹¹Robert Graves adopted Butler's thesis in his novel *Homer's Daughter* (New York: Doubleday, 1955). According to Stanislaus Joyce, Butler's was one of only two translations used by James Joyce (Raby, p.264). Hugh Kenner suggests that the reading of *The Authoress* may have inspired Joyce's whole conception of *Ulysses*; see Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp.46-51; on Joyce and Butler see also Michael Seidel, *Epic Geography: James Joyce's Ulysses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p.x, p.47, pp.84-86.

The objective of Butler's reading of Homer and his quest for the authoress was not so divergent from dominant Victorian interpretations as would seem at first sight.¹² Like his contemporaries, Butler was searching for a way to re-invest the epic poems with authenticity, relevance and significance for the modern public. He did this in his own way, in contrast to the dominant academic establishment, for whom "the interpretation of Homer formed a secular safety valve to the religious controversies of the age".¹³ Butler approached the question and the texts in a very concrete and down-to-earth manner, remote from the lofty academic approach of other Homeric scholars: instead, he put his faith into the methods of the emerging disciplines of anthropology and archaeology. Although he was not trained in either of them, he was supported by his enthusiasm for travelling and seeing things for himself, which led him to spend a large amount of his time engaged in field work: explorations, topographical surveys, accurate measuring and reconstructions, were all made personally by Butler in Western Sicily during his customary annual trips.¹⁴ He was warmly received by the people of Calatafimi, who became fervid supporters of his theory, and with their help he managed to identify virtually all the places mentioned in the poem with specific geographical sites in and around Sicily, down to the smallest rock in the harbour of Trapani. Butler visited local caves, among which ^{was} one called to this day "the Cyclops' cave", and also climbed Mount Etna on a ten hour night expedition to see the lava stream.¹⁵

This was his own way of restoring to life the ancient poem: in the role of writer and translator, as well as traveller and improvised archaeologist in the Mediterranean,

¹²As Peter Raby notes, the apparent eccentricity of Butler's thesis is reduced when some wilder theories of his contemporary Gladstone are re-read today, although the solemn and moral tone of Gladstone's commentaries was firmly refused by Butler.

¹³Raby, p.239.

¹⁴Butler was accompanied in some of his trips by his long time friend and companion Henry Festing Jones, who, in turn, produced a number of texts about Sicily, among which ^{was} the successful travel account *Diversions in Sicily* (London: A. Rivers, 1909). Butler travelled to Sicily for the last time in 1902, the year of his death, against his doctor's advice; he declared that "he intended to go to Sicily if it cost him his life": shortly afterwards he fell ill (Raby, p.288).

¹⁵For Butler in Sicily, see Raby, pp.245-247, and Henry Festing Jones, *Samuel Butler: A Sketch* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921). In memory of their English friend, the inhabitants of the Sicilian town of Calatafimi, where Butler resided, named a street after him ('Via Samuel Butler').

Butler, as his biographer remarks, liked "to inhabit and give new life to the dead".¹⁶ He wrote in his note-books: "If a person would understand (...) any (...) ancient work, he must never look at the dead without seeing the living in them, nor at the living without thinking of the dead. We are too fond of seeing the ancients as one thing and the moderns as another".¹⁷

In one sense, *The Authoress of the Odyssey* can be regarded as a "suppressed novel",¹⁸ despite Butler's appeal to the rigour of topographical evidence supporting his "discovery". In his intention of reviving the vanished past, Butler's attempt, however challenging and original in certain aspects, is firmly inscribed in the general framework of the Victorian discourse of the south. As seen in previous chapters, the longing for a resurrection of the glorious southern past motivated many literati in the Victorian age, who propounded their own interpretations in order to demonstrate the relevance of that past for the northern present. In doing so, the majority of them, in diverse ways - such as Lytton in fiction, Arnold in poetry and criticism, and Gladstone in Homeric commentary - treated that past, more or less explicitly, as the counterpart of a British present, a present where, in opposition or in relation to the south, they could assume that "true" Christian values resided, or profess that high culture should be cultivated in the service of an organicist nationalism. In Butler, the intention of resuscitating the southern past and to construct its relevance for modern Britain, takes a highly original form which constitutes a different strand in the discourse of the south: Butler's secularised and prosaic treatment of Homer, and his way of studying antiquity, are linked to the author's religious scepticism and to his imaginative rationalism, whereby his construction of Homeric characters, which can be extended to ancient Greek culture, and to the hypothetical Sicilian authoress herself, brings the idealised view of many of his contemporaries down to a disillusioned, materialist and simultaneously bourgeois dimension; it is not surprising that Butler was derided for much of his theories in his own time, but, ironically, he comes back

¹⁶Raby, p.242.

¹⁷*The Note-books of Samuel Butler*, ed. by Henry Festing Jones (London: A.C.Fifield, 1912), p.193.

¹⁸Raby, p.245.

with a vengeance in the twentieth century: it is revealing that Butler's unorthodox view of Homer should have interested an author such as Joyce, who took as starting point for the composition of *Ulysses* the meticulous rewriting of a story from the ancient Mediterranean replaced and displaced in the setting of modern Dublin, eventually producing one of the fundamental texts of Modernism.

ii) Victorian Aesthetic Hellenism and the Call of the South

Butler was not alone in proposing new and alternative interpretations of antiquity, and providing different constructions of the south from those of the mainstream historians and scholars examined in the previous chapter. The latter part of the century saw the emergence of what has been termed "aesthetic Hellenism", and some of its main exponents, such as Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds, adopt a range of new approaches to the idea of the south and its past.¹⁹ These and many other writers - as well as painters and artists - in late Victorian culture, use southern settings for their works, and persistently treat themes relating to antiquity, the Mediterranean, Greece, Italy, Sicily, paganism and mythology, which in many cases constitute the core of their entire production.²⁰ The British culture of the *fin de siècle* is informed by an ever-present contrast between north and south, which becomes increasingly enmeshed with the analogous contrast between modernity and antiquity. Like Butler, writers (and travellers to the south) such as Pater, Symonds and Wilde, while perpetuating some of the dominant Victorian attitudes, also modify them, and find new ways to interpret and furnish the concept "south" with additional meanings. Their production may be read as an attempt at defining questions of identity, aesthetics, history, and sexual politics through the use of the south both as a cultural entity (occasionally

¹⁹See Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.274.

²⁰The works of Pater and Symonds, both critical and literary, revolve around subjects from the ancient Mediterranean; these writers also devoted much attention to the Italian Renaissance.

providing the possibility for coded representations of transgressive themes) in a cultural debate at home *and* as a geographical space for personal transgression in their travels.

As Jenkyns points out, talking of the Victorians and ancient Greece, "people of very different kinds shared the desire to assimilate the people of bygone ages to themselves: just as the middlebrows turned the Greeks and Romans into Victorian middlebrows, the aesthetes turned them into aesthetes".²¹

As illustrated in Chapter Four, the dominant view of the south emerging from the hegemonic discourses of history, classics, and archaeology, was that of the Mediterranean as the location of the past, a previous stage of "Man's history", revered as "the cradle of civilisation" and the birthplace of Christianity. Simultaneously, this view implied that the "pagan" south had been left behind by progress, was degenerate and corrupt, a place where a deterministic climate induced unrestrained and obscure passions. However, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the discourse about the south circulating in British culture, far from being static and monolithic, emerges as punctuated by different and contrasting ideological positions.

As seen in Chapter Three, between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, such writers as William Hamilton, Richard Payne Knight and Thomas Love Peacock had treated themes of paganism, sexuality and eroticism within a clearly defined southern context (the Italian volcanic south), and these themes resonated in the so called "cult of the south" of the Shelley circle. These writers had constructed the south as the land of the past, but of a past that was happily pagan and liberated (as well as fascinatingly dark, erotically Gothic and cave-like), and in doing so they had defied the dominant interpretations of Christian morality, and their works had to face problems of censorship. As the century reached its end, a similar discourse re-emerged, which somehow appeared to connect the writings of Hamilton, Knight, and Peacock - whose studies on Greek mythology and paganism often circulated privately - with the production of late Victorian Hellenists and aesthetes such as Pater,

²¹Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.86.

Symonds, Wilde, and many other less known literati, whose works, in some cases distributed in underground private circles, offered multiple levels of readings and coded representations of potentially subversive themes.

A definition of Victorian aestheticism can help to illustrate the cultural terrain in which these authors utilised the discourse of the south:

Victorian aestheticism - an 'ism' which was identified at the time with the poetry of A.C. Swinburne, D.G. Rossetti, and William Morris, and the prose of Swinburne and Pater - includes other discourses, such as philosophy (moral and aesthetic), Christianity, visual art, fashion, craft, and literature. (...) The politics of aestheticism has come in the late twentieth century to be openly regarded as *gendered*, and specifically, but not exclusively implicated in the cultural history of gay male discourse in general, of homoeroticism, and of classical, especially Greek studies.²²

The phenomenon of Hellenism and the special attention given to Greek studies in the Oxford curriculum of *Literae Humaniores* was often a force for cultural conservatism, especially in the view of Matthew Arnold which combined English humanism and German aesthetic Hellenism.²³ Around the middle of the century, Arnold's version of Hellenism, with his interpretation of the Greek spirit as "sweetness and light", was a concentration of traditional humanist values, completely expurgated of corporeal and sensual aspects, to render it free from sexual connotations.²⁴ In the second half of the century, however, Hellenism underwent a series of interpretations which were of a "variously rebellious, idealistic and erotic" kind, until, after Oscar Wilde's trial for sodomic indecency, the word "Hellenism" became utterly suspicious.²⁵

Arnold's Hellenism and the dominant view of the Mediterranean were modified and counteracted by new interpretations given, among others, by critics such as Pater and Symonds, who produced a large body of writings about classical art, ancient mythology and paganism. The discourse of aesthetic Hellenism used the same

²²Laurel Brake, *Walter Pater* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p.2. Two recent key studies have explored the cultural phenomena of Victorian Hellenism and aestheticism in relation to the emergence of a modern male homosexual discourse: Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) and Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

²³Turner, p.22.

²⁴In Richard Dellamora's words: "Arnold's Hellenism includes residues of bodily anxiety and homophobia" (Dellamora, p.61).

²⁵Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1830-1890* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p.43; Dowling, p.35.

arguments of the Mediterranean as location of the past and of pagan religion, elaborated in the fields of history, classics and archaeology throughout the Victorian age: in the culture of the *fin de siècle*, however, these arguments were rearranged in some instances in such a way as to displace and reverse their conservative implications. They were used, for example, in opposition to the exaltation of a northern Christian orthodoxy and its rigid morality made by mainstream Protestant historians. Within the hegemonic discourse of teleological and providential Victorian historicism, which supported the *status quo* of a society based on Christian, Protestant values, Greek and Roman paganism was generally considered as a fascinating but necessarily inferior and backward form of religion. This was counteracted by the less vociferous but relatively powerful cultural production of some Victorian intellectuals who, on the contrary, regarded ancient paganism with utmost respect and, in some cases, went so far as advocating a restoration, or at least a modern relevance, of Greek values in the context of a disavowal of Christianity.

This is evident in the work of John Addington Symonds, "one of the most ardent Victorian Hellenes",²⁶ who reiterated in his texts the idea of the south as "a lost fatherland", the ever recurring theme of a Victorian kinship with the classical Mediterranean, but - at times - he did so while radically altering the ideological implications of such argument. Symonds saw Christianity as the creed which had destroyed the genius of Antiquity, and even argued for its rejection and a return to Greek ideals.²⁷ Although, like his contemporaries (or even in a larger measure), he was prone to fall into dreamy reveries on the glorious classical past, and often indulged in lyrical descriptions of Hellas - its sunny skies, olive trees, bare-chested

²⁶Aldrich, p.81.

²⁷See Aldrich, p.81. An analogous point to Symonds' is made by Algernon Charles Swinburne, and although the latter attacked Symonds for being "the Platonic amorist of blue-breeched gondoliers", they shared a passion for paganism and a dislike of Christianity (Dellamora, p.163). Swinburne notably expressed his anti-Christian feelings in the dramatic poem 'Hymn to Proserpine', where the narratorial voice laments the fate of the pagan gods in early Christian Rome ("O Gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day!") and thus addresses the figure of Christ: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath"; see Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Hymn to Proserpine', in *Poems and Ballads* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866). See also footnote n.47 below.

youths, etc. - he sometimes voiced very lucid assertions on the possible relevance of Greek antiquity in the modern age.²⁸ In his works he generally supported the possibility of a synthesis of Greek aesthetics and Christianity,²⁹ but in a highly controversial footnote in *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873) his feelings of antipathy for the Judeo-Christian tradition are declared unequivocally:

The separation between the Greeks and us is due to something outside us rather than within - principally to the Hebraistic culture we receive in childhood. We are taught to think that one form of religion contains the whole truth, and that one way of feeling is right, to the exclusion of the humanities and sympathies of races no less beloved of God and no less kindred to ourselves than were the Jews. At the same time the literature of the Greeks has for the last three centuries formed the basis of our education; their thoughts and sentiments, enclosed like precious perfumes in sealed vases, spread themselves abroad and steep the soul in honey-sweet aromas. Some will always be found, under the conditions of this double culture, to whom Greece is a lost fatherland, and who, passing through youth with the *mal du pays* of the irrecoverable land upon them, may be compared to visionaries, spending the nights in golden dreams and the days in common duties. Has then the modern man no method for making the Hellenic tradition vital instead of dream-like - invigorating instead of enervating? There is indeed this one way only - to be natural: we must imitate the Greeks not by trying to reproduce their modes of life and feeling, but by approximating to their free and fearless attitude of mind.³⁰

"To be natural" is a value which Symonds suggests can be relevant today: he is advocating a return to that natural behaviour and that state of "nature" which he could still detect as a living reality in the contemporary agricultural south, as his travel writing clearly illustrates.³¹ This passage is followed in the text by praise of Walt Whitman, and, according to one critic, it reveals Symonds' "homosexual utopianism".³² Symonds was indeed much preoccupied with the subject of "Greek love" and devoted an entire study to its discussion.³³ However, to interpret this passage, and Symonds' view of the south, exclusively, or mainly, as an expression of the author's concern with male homosexuality would be a reductive reading. One

²⁸For Symonds' idealised treatment of the Mediterranean as a land of dream, death and decay, see Chapter Four.

²⁹Robert Aldrich notes that Symonds "promoted, unconvincingly, a synthesis of Greek aesthetics, Christianity and science" (Aldrich, p.81).

³⁰John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1873), p.144. Aldrich also notes that such sentiments as Symonds' advocacy of natural behaviour "were heretical in nineteenth century Britain" (Aldrich, p.82).

³¹See Chapter One, pp.17-18.

³²Aldrich, p.81.

³³Besides being a pre-eminent interpreter for the Victorians of classical thought, Renaissance history and Mediterranean travel, Symonds published privately the essay *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) which is considered the most famous apologia for homosexuality, and the most scholarly study of Greek homosexuality, written in English in the nineteenth century. See Aldrich, p.78 and p.82. Symonds' essay was published exactly a century later as *Male Love: A Problem in Greek Ethics and Other Writings*, ed. by John Lauritsen (New York: Pagan Press, 1983).

intrinsic aspect of aesthetic Hellenism (destined to be perpetuated by some modernist writers) is the construction of an image of the Mediterranean south, which not only identifies it with the classical civilisations of Greece and Rome, but also with the location of a pre-industrial, eden-like state of human society in harmony with nature, which was also ethically unproblematic: "The Greeks", the argument went, "had been unconscious of sin",³⁴ and the same is implicitly true of their descendants, the modern inhabitants of the Mediterranean, who are often depicted by travellers as leading a carefree and joyful existence.

For Symonds and his contemporaries, the question of "Greek love" is connected with the idealised image of a morally unscrupulous and carefree south, and his defence of homosexuality is only one of the aspects, or consequences, of a larger view in which, reversing the dominant argument, not only is the south, with its pagan past, opposed and superior to the north, but also functions as the locale of an arcadian "natural" present, immune from social problems, in contrast with the modern, industrial north, its class prejudice, and its puritan ethics, which, among other things, reject (homo)sexuality.³⁵

Symonds' writings reveal a use of the image of the classical south which is, in one sense, the antithesis of that of Lord Lytton. Whereas the author of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, from his northern, Protestant, and historically "advanced" standpoint, pities the empty and shallow "fancy" of pre-Christian religions, criticising with disdain the survival of paganism in the modern south, Symonds exalts precisely that which Lytton despises. This he does in his books of travel as well as in his poetry: in 'Southward Bound', addressing Italy's classical cities and their solemn ruins, Symonds rejoices at the sight of pagan testimonies, and indulges in a poetic reverie on the survival of the old gods:

(...)

There Christ in Phoebus' shrine is consecrate;
Titles of pope and priest surmount the gate

³⁴Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.281.

³⁵Symonds was writing during the years when homosexuality was declared a criminal offence in Britain. See footnote n.80 below.

Where Caesar's legions trampled: yet in vain
Age strives with age; for still the old gods reign:

Pale gods in cere-cloths, ghosts of bye-gone Greece,
Rule in their marble sepulchres: the halls,
Through which we pass, with dead divinities
are gleaming; and the voice of Hellas calls
Clear from her grave: nought but the pedestals
Belong to Christ: the cavern shapes above
Still breathe and smile with life of ancient Love.³⁶

The references to caves and to a type of pagan, non-Christian "Love", are reminiscent of the satyric caves of Rosa's paintings, as well as of the radical writings of the Shelley circle, and their interests in studies on comparative religion and cults of fertility. Their poetical call for a freed, natural, pantheistic love - sexual and spiritual at one and the same time - exemplified by the idea of the south, clearly re-emerges in the works of Symonds and other Hellenists, enriched with new implications, this time in a specific, albeit generally implicit, homoerotic framework.³⁷

A major author in this context is Walter Pater (1839-94), one of the arbiters of late Victorian culture and a leading figure of Hellenism, active in the same intellectual circles as Symonds and Wilde. Pater devoted much of his work to subjects related to the Mediterranean south, such as the classics, mythology, and history of art, besides being author of the novel *Marius the Epicurean*.³⁸

This novel, set in second-century Rome, skilfully incorporates a myriad of erudite classical references, a celebration of both pagan and early Christian religion, and the commonplace parallel between nineteenth-century Britain and the Roman empire, while also containing veiled references to homoerotic masculine friendships.

As in Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Pater's narrator is a central presence in the text, and is firmly anchored in the nineteenth century. In the long narrative process illustrating the spiritual and intellectual travail of his hero, the author pauses for a

³⁶Symonds, 'Southward Bound', p.4.

³⁷Like the writers of the Shelley circle before them, the Victorian writers dealing with such arguments were often operating in private circles, and a specific cultural space was defined which was characterised by homosexual and homoerotic themes: a number of magazines became a covert vehicle for homosexualist writing. Many well known authors, such as Pater, Symonds, and Wilde read and wrote for both mainstream and smaller publications, providing different levels of available meanings in their texts. See Dowling, p.27 and Brake, p.3.

³⁸See Chapter Four, p.104.

moment and explicitly asserts: "That age and our own have much in common - many difficulties and hopes. Let the reader pardon me if here and there I seem to be passing from Marius to his modern representatives - *from Rome, to Paris or London*".³⁹ Clearly, in Pater's reference to a modern equivalent of his hero to be found in England or France, the progress of civilisation northwards is delineated once more, modernity is associated with a northern metropolis, while Pater's Rome seems to possess a meaningful existence only in the past. This past, which functions not as mere background, but as a structural and ideologically charged element in the novel, is treated by Pater so that its (cultural, aesthetic, moral) relevance for a modern readership situated in Paris or London may be revealed. However, Pater's view of the classical past is far from the simplistic one of Lytton, and his text is refined, complex and at points ambiguous as to the position of the author, who, for instance, appears to admire simultaneously paganism (to the study of which he devoted his life) and early Christianity. As has been noted, *Marius* tends to be "a muted celebration of both".⁴⁰ The attraction of the early Church of Rome in Victorian Britain is evident in both Lytton's and Pater's novels, but while in *The Last Days of Pompeii* the early Christians are portrayed as admirable heroes, exemplary figures working for the spread of the "true religion" of which Lytton and his Anglican contemporaries are the only rightful heirs, for Pater, the Church of Rome in the age of the Antonines represents one special, but brief, moment when harmony had been reached within an organised religion: "For a little while, at least, there was no forced opposition between the soul and the body, the world and the spirit, and the grace of consciousness itself was pre-eminently with the people of Christ" (275). Pater appreciates the synthesis which the early Christian church was operating in relation to other traditions: "the wonderful liturgical spirit of the church (...) was rapidly re-organising both pagan and Jewish elements of ritual, for the expanding therein of her own new heart of devotion" (277). This view is in opposition to that of Lytton and his fierce dislike of anything

³⁹Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, p.195 (my emphasis). Further references will be given in parenthesis after quotations.

⁴⁰Brake, p.44.

pagan as superstitious, and to that of the numerous Protestant travellers to the south who were horrified by the remnants of paganism they detected in the modern south. Besides, the setting in the first age of Christianity offers Pater a range of variegated possibilities: especially in the chapter 'The Martyrs' this historical setting allows him to dwell on his own obsession with the theme of death, on the torture and horrors of the Roman circus, and on the brutality of the pagan world in general, elements entirely absent from Lytton's edifying and fairy-tale atmosphere. *Marius the Epicurean* and Pater's copious production of art and literary criticism reveals his intense fascination with ancient Greek culture in all its aspects. As Turner notes, this author's version of Hellenism tends to include (and perhaps emphasise) the presence of "those irrationalities in Greek life and art that Arnold chose to ignore",⁴¹ as well as the sensuous qualities of classical art. Thus, "Pater provided an alternative pattern for the humanistic appreciation of Greece during the next fifty years".⁴²

One of Pater's most innovative and controversial texts was his essay on 'Winckelmann' (1867), which signals the emergence of a new interpretation of classicism, characteristic of the aesthetic Hellenism of the latter part of the century. Pater constructs Winckelmann's classicism as "sensuous", a classicism which is entirely different from "the disembodied, sanitized Hellenism of Arnold's 'sweetness and light'".⁴³ He praises the great eighteenth-century German scholar (and homosexual) for his capacity "to deal with the sensuous side of art in the pagan manner".⁴⁴

It is precisely classical or pagan religion - that religion which Matthew Arnold had described and banished as "the religion of pleasure"⁴⁵ - which mostly interests Pater, who, in various places in his works rejects Christian dogmatism, or alternatively, openly praises Catholicism for its alliance with the pagan. What was also new in

⁴¹Turner, p.69.

⁴²Turner, p.70.

⁴³Walter Pater, 'Winckelmann', *Westminster Review*, 31, 1867; Brake, p.23.

⁴⁴Quoted in Dellamora, p.110. For Winckelmann's life, travels and controversial death in Italy, see Aldrich.

⁴⁵Matthew Arnold, "Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment", quoted in Dellamora, p.102.

Pater's treatment of paganism and mythology is his attention to the concrete material testimonies of Greek culture, which had come to light in the excavations of archaeologists - an anthropological approach to the southern past which he shared with his contemporary Samuel Butler. Besides looking for descriptions of artefacts in the vast textual area of classical literature which he knew so well, Pater (who was never in Greece or southern Italy) was interested in examining the holdings of museums in Britain, Germany, France and Italy, which he visited.⁴⁶

He devoted himself to the study of the Greek myth of Demeter, goddess of fertility, and her daughter Persephone, a myth which powerfully impressed itself upon the minds of Victorian poets and artists. These mythological figures, which had inspired Shelley's 'Song of Proserpine' in 1820, also feature in Swinburne's anti-Christian 'Hymn to Proserpine' (1866), and in Tennyson's 'Demeter and Persephone' (1887), while Dante Gabriel Rossetti produced no less than seven versions of his painting *Proserpine* (1874), representing the young goddess as a sensual, melancholic figure.⁴⁷

⁴⁶See Brake, p.40. Although Samuel Butler and Walter Pater are very different intellectual figures, they share a belief in the importance of an "archaeological" approach, the search for material evidence in the study of Greek culture.

⁴⁷One version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone (also known by the Latin names Ceres and Proserpine) is set in Sicily, on the central plains of Enna, where Persephone, daughter of Demeter, was kidnapped by Hades, god of the underworld, while gathering asphodels in a meadow (see Graves' *Greek Myths*). John Stuart Mill, who was very fond of Sicily, was disappointed during his tour of the island, because he thought that the landscape was not "mythological" enough; he commented to his wife: "I much fear the flowery meads of Enna from which Proserpine was carried off were mere wastes like the one I have just crossed... There are no meadows properly so called in any southern country" (quoted in Pemble, p.127). While Swinburne's poem does not have a precise geographical setting, both Shelley and Tennyson use the Sicilian version of the myth, with references to the vale and the fields of Enna. For Shelley's poem see Chapter Three, p.79. For Swinburne's poem see footnote n.27 above. In Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine', echoes of the philosophy of Pater's *Marius* are clearly heard: this dramatic monologue sung by an Epicurean after the proclamation of Christianity in Rome represents one more instance of the Victorian fascination with that historical period of religious transition; see Samuel C. Chew, *Swinburne* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1928, repr., 1966), pp.94-95. Swinburne's fondness for the myth of Proserpine is also demonstrated by the fact that in the same 1866 collection, *Poems and Ballads*, which contains the 'Hymn to Proserpine', he also included the poem 'The Garden of Proserpine'. Lord Alfred Tennyson's 'Demeter and Persephone', in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, 1969), III, pp.162-169, suggests that Tennyson knew Pater's essay (*Dellamora*, p.174). As Ricks observes, the hint to a Christian prophecy in the conclusion of Tennyson's poem also shows that the author partly intended the text to be a reply to Swinburne; Tennyson, however, had long been attracted by the myth, and translated in his youth 'Claudian's "Rape of Proserpine"' (*The Poems of Tennyson*, I, pp.7-12); he utilises the Sicilian setting, and dwells on a number of erudite references to mythological figures and places, such as Aetna, "the pleasant vale" and the "field of Enna". In the dedication 'To Professor Jebb', preceding the poem, Tennyson expresses the typical Victorian wish to make the past live again: "So may this legend for a while, / If greeted by your classic smile, / Though dead in its Trinacrian Enna / Blossom again on a

The significance of the myth of Demeter and Persephone is enormous for Pater, and although today his interest in ancient mythology has been read as part of a Hellenising pose, a "fastidious paganising", as one critic defines it,⁴⁸ the author stresses that the study of myth is an intellectual effort worth making on moral grounds: for Pater and his circle, ancient myth can hold a relevance for the modern world (or rather for an intellectual British elite). In the opening page of 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone' he declares:

No chapter in the history of human imagination is more curious than the myth of Demeter, and Kore or Persephone. (...) Following its changes, we come across various phases of Greek culture, which are not without their likenesses in the modern mind. (...) And it is in itself full of interest and suggestion, to all for whom the ideas of the Greek religion have any real meaning in the modern world.⁴⁹

Although Pater shared his belief in the modern relevance of Greece with the whole discourse of Victorian Hellenism, his study of the myth of Demeter significantly counteracts the Arnoldian view of a unified and serene Greece bathed in sunshine, as the legend of the two goddesses could be seen as the product, not of carefree and untroubled, but of "sorrowful, wistful, anxious people" (a definition which perhaps could be referred to the Victorians themselves). This disturbing pagan myth, in his view, clearly proved that the "worship of sorrow" was an integrating part of Greek religion.⁵⁰ Besides, it is the choice itself of this particular myth, and of the other related myth of Dionysus, which distinguishes the work of Pater from mainstream classical scholarship; in the author's words, the myth of Demeter:

Alien in some respects from the genuine traditions of Greek mythology, a relic of the earlier inhabitants of Greece, and having but a subordinate place in the religion of Homer, (...) yet asserted its

colder isle" (*The Poems of Tennyson*, p.163). 'Trinacrian' is an erudite adjective for 'Sicilian' derived from ancient Greek.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti treated classical subjects very occasionally in his paintings, but he believed that his *Proserpine* (for which the model was his beloved Mrs. Jane Morris) was probably the best work he produced; see Evelyn Waugh, *Rossetti: His Life and Works* (London: Duckworth, 1928).

⁴⁸Gilmour, p.236.

⁴⁹Walter Pater, 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', in *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays*, ed. by C.L. Shadwell (1895; London: Macmillan, 1928), 68-133, p.68.

⁵⁰Quoted in Turner, p.70. Turner comments on the contrast between Arnold's and Pater's Hellenism: "Whereas the Hellenism of Arnold (...) and that of the art critics with its preservation of good taste had been conservative in their bias, Pater's was generally progressive" (Turner, p.74). In fact, Pater's Hellenism, if placed in the context of Victorian aestheticism and its "sexual politics", as in the studies by Dellamora and Dowling, emerges as powerfully subversive.

interest, little by little, and took a complex hold on the minds of the Greeks, becoming finally the central and most popular subject of their national worship.⁵¹

Both myths of Demeter and Dionysus are marginal or antecedent to the Homeric age, and therefore constituted a somehow unorthodox area of study for those scholars used to regarding the Homeric texts as "the Bible of the Greeks". In addition to his innovative choice of subject in treating Greek antiquity, Pater was also able to mention archaeological evidence demonstrating that Greek religious practices involved fetishes and "superstitious idolatry". The myth of Demeter and the related subject of chthonic worship attracted Pater, as they had attracted Shelley a century earlier, for their manifest sensual and corporeal character, and also for their dark, tragic overtones. Fertility and the mythological element of southern caves were once more centre-stage:

The worship of Demeter belongs to that older religion, nearer to the earth (...). She is the goddess of dark caves, and is not wholly free from monstrous form. (...) She is the mother of the vine also; (...) she knows the magic powers of certain plants, cut from her bosom, to bane or bless; and (...) herself presides over the springs, as also coming from the secret places of the earth. She is the goddess, then, (...) of the fertility of the earth in its wildness.⁵²

As in the case of Symonds, in Victorian Hellenism the idea that the ancient Greeks lived in a state of nature is associated with the image of an agricultural, pastoral south, which is often conceived as it were suspended in time, outside a historical temporal dimension.⁵³ The theme of a pre-industrial "state of nature" also emerges in Pater's essay, as the myth of Demeter is the "peculiar creation of country-people", and this leads the author to comment that "the temper of people engaged in the occupations of country life, so permanent, so 'near to nature', is at all time alike".⁵⁴ The implicit counterpart of this agricultural dimension associated with an eternal past, and the participation in the life of nature, is of course, the industrial and metropolitan world of

⁵¹Pater, 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', p.68.

⁵²Pater, 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', pp.87-88. See the discussion of Shelley's poems 'The Witch of Atlas', and 'Persephone' in Chapter Three.

⁵³Far from being exclusive to elitist circles of aesthetes, this image recurs in a popularised version in contemporary travel guide-books: in 1907 the journalist and travel writer Douglas Sladen affirmed that the long succession of civilisations in Sicily has left the island's "simplicity of life" unaltered, and that "the life of the people in Sicily is the life of primitive peoples in all ages" (Sladen, *Sicily: The New Winter Resort*, p.5).

⁵⁴Pater, 'The Myth of Demeter and Persephone', p.89.

modernity, which Pater dislikes and tacitly criticises: north and south are opposed once more, but the terms of the opposition are reversed.⁵⁵

Similarly, agricultural images recur in Pater's essay on Dionysus contained in the same collection *Greek Studies* (originally called '*Dionysus*' and *other Studies*), centring on the image of the god of the vine, "the dispenser of the earth's hidden wealth", who is intimately bound with the seasons and agricultural life. The associated figure of Pan is also given much attention, and he is defined as "but a presence: the *spiritual form* of Arcadia".⁵⁶ Pater discusses various versions of the Dionysian myth and cult, dwelling on the corporeal and sensual aspects of Greek mythology as well as the religious and spiritual ones.⁵⁷ The figure of Dionysus, in fact, allows Pater to treat not only the sensual but also recondite and taboo aspects of Greek religion, such as human sacrifice, cannibalism, and intense suffering.⁵⁸

On the whole, Pater's studies of Greek mythology and his aesthetic Hellenism, with his attention on the sensuous and the irrational, contributed to reinforcing the image of the Mediterranean south as the home of paganism; however, Pater's paganism, like that of Symonds, was a genuine and superior form of religious sentiment, a sentiment which could serve as inspiration for the modern Victorian intellectual who was spiritually hostile to or dissatisfied with the possibilities offered by the Judeo-Christian tradition and by the dominant culture of the modern, industrialised world. North and south are thus also contrasted in terms of the material conditions of life, the

⁵⁵The contrast between an idyllic south and an industrial north affected by the malaise of modernity re-emerges in Modernist writers, and notably in the works and life of D.H. Lawrence, who, in this sense, reveals a substantial intellectual debt to his Victorian predecessors. See Chapter Six.

⁵⁶Walter Pater, 'A Study of Dionysus: The Spiritual Form of Fire and Dew', in *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays*, ed. by C.L. Shadwell (1895; London: Macmillan, 1928), 1-41, p.7 (Pater's emphasis).

⁵⁷The fact that Pater had originally intended to collect his essays on Greek mythology for publication in the year 1878, but decided to abort the planned volume '*Dionysus*' and *other Studies*, is revealing once more of the subversive potential of Pater's subject matter in Victorian culture: as one critic explains, Pater may have been influenced in his decision by the hostile climate in the debate about aestheticism in and around that date, when the libel trial of Whistler v. Ruskin took place: "Pater was aware that in addition to Ruskin, W.H. Mallock and Richard Tyrwhitt (whose disapproving article on 'The Greek Spirit in Modern Literature' had appeared in March) might be counted on to fulminate against his new volume. An important factor was its 'Greek' contents" (Brake, pp.38-39). As Dellamora observes, "Dionysus, the beautiful young male god, bisexual and even hermaphroditic, was an attractive focus for fantasies of male-male desire" (Dellamora, p.176).

⁵⁸See Brake, p.39.

one representing the dislikable progress of alienated industrial modernity, the other the bliss of an eternal, agricultural past and participation in the life of nature. If the classical south were representative of a state closer to nature, the modern, contemporary south, was also ideally associated by late Victorian aesthetes with the potentiality for a more satisfying and fulfilling life, both spiritual and corporeal: it was in the sunny south, whether modern or ancient, that sexual desire was more vivid and real, and that the possibility of a more liberated form of sexuality was perceived to exist.

iii) The (Homo)Erotic South and the Appeal of "Sicilianness"

As illustrated in previous chapters, the south tended to be associated with passions and sensuality, and this association was predominantly used by Protestants throughout the century as a moral argument to devalue Catholicism and exalt the puritan virtues of the north. As the examples of Pater and Symonds show, however, some writers held a different view, one which in various ways claimed the superiority of the southern way of life. Thus, the south provided a terrain where questions of morals and sexuality were discussed in late Victorian culture, through simultaneous attempts at distinguishing a British identity from a Mediterranean one, claiming a hereditary link with the south, or even, in some cases, theorising the superiority of southern sexual morals.⁵⁹ As with the interpretation of paganism, and the moral value given or denied to it by British historians, critics and novelists, the question of sexuality in the context of the discourse of the south is debated with contrasting attitudes in British culture.

The popular view according to which Mediterranean peoples were passionate, excitable, and prone to carnal extremes increasingly turned into an appreciation of

⁵⁹Some of these attitudes can be traced in the works of modernist writers such as E.M.Forster and D.H.Lawrence. The exaltation of the more natural, spontaneous sexuality of the Mediterranean is a recurrent theme in Lawrence, for whom it leads to a radical rejection of his "northern" citizenship. This aspect is treated more fully in Chapter Six.

these characteristics as qualities rather than vices. The negative moral judgement of the behaviour and character of Italians, could be turned into a positive one when considered through the perspective of an idealised "state of nature" possible in the south. Sexual behaviour implicitly fell into the wider category of "natural" behaviour advocated by Symonds as a "Greek" value relevant in the modern world: in this way, sexual desire was not subject to the suffocating laws of northern puritanism. Because sexual behaviour was theorised as being instinctual, spontaneous and natural among southerners, the traditional, suffocating, "northern" moral categories, it was argued, did not apply to it: indeed their very validity was therefore questioned. Thus, sexual desire, associated with southern spontaneity and naturality, was not seen negatively as nearer to animality and base passions (as in a traditional, religious moral interpretation) but, in some writers' view, could be surrounded and purified instead by an halo of moral innocence.

While some Victorian travellers "dwelt with prurient obsession on the supposed erotic vices of Mediterranean Christians - especially those locked away in convents and monasteries", as the century advanced there were others who often admired the unproblematic, instinctual life of the senses supposedly lead by the people of the south.⁶⁰ Southerners were unrestrained and liberated, and would make unmatched lovers: their brown colouring was associated with health and vigour, and was considered sexually attractive. When this was combined with arguments of climatic determinism, the picture was complete. The Irish Protestant Mabel Crawford, visiting Italy in 1859, even hints at a sort of northern envy for the Italians' natural ability to experience pleasure:

To the colder, graver temperament of Northern climes, the huge draughts of pleasure that can be swallowed by the impulsive, excitable natures living under Southern skies must prove a subject of surprise; and to some, perhaps, may assume the aspect of a privilege to be envied.⁶¹

⁶⁰Pemle, p.221; see also section IV, Chapter Three.

⁶¹Mabel Crawford, *Life in Tuscany*, (London: Smith, Elder & co., 1859) p.88; quoted in Pemle, p.143.

The writer and traveller Ouida (1839-1908) filled the pages of her countless novels with swarthy and passionate Italian characters. Her novel *In Maremma* (1893) features the character of Daniello, a Sicilian sailor, described thus:

He was very handsome, with a glowing, sun-warmed beauty, like one of his Sicilian fruits. (...) He was a Sicilian; he had fire in his veins, fancy in his brain, passions in his heart; he had been born under the flame and snow of the mighty Etna. (...) He looked eager and passionate, and youthful and handsome as a young sea-god.⁶²

This type of sensuality can be admired as a value precisely because it is depicted against a southern geographical and cultural setting, the image of the Mediterranean as a vital, sensual land, where life is led "naturally" and people act freely and spontaneously. Daniello describes life in his own country with images of sensuous abundance, and with a tone of innocence: "Where I come from the land is beautiful as the sea is; the shores laugh; the hills are rich as a mother's breast for her first-born; men and women live on fruit and wine, and song and love."⁶³ In her works, Ouida, who resided in Italy for many years and considered herself Italian by adoption, claims to draw her knowledge of the south from the observation of real life around her, and her novel *In Maremma* is set in contemporary Italy; her description of southern sexuality therefore refers to the present, rather than to a classical past.⁶⁴ Thus, for Ouida and other late Victorian travellers and writers, sensuality and sexual desire are not sinful but natural in the modern south.

Indeed, some authors, who were steeped in the classics, believed that this had always been so, at least since the times of the Greeks. The travellers' view of the modern south as a sensual paradise agreed with the image of the classical south in the works of Victorian Hellenists who, like Pater, were fascinated by the sensuous aspects of classical art and ancient paganism, and put the emphasis on the corporeal and the carnal.

⁶²Ouida (pseudonym of Louise de la Ramée), *In Maremma: A Story* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1893), pp.129-130.

⁶³Ouida, p.129.

⁶⁴On Ouida see Eileen Bigland's biography significantly called *Ouida, the Passionate Victorian* (London: Jarrolds, 1950).

Once again, the work of John Addington Symonds, who was both a classicist and a traveller to the south (he spent most of his life away from England), provides an unequivocal example and one of the most refined versions of the idealisation of the Mediterranean as a simultaneously sensuous and sinless paradise which was shared by many late Victorian intellectuals. The modern and the ancient south are conflated in his rhapsodic portrayal of life in (contemporary) Capri - where even the air is "innocent" - in the poem 'Southward Bound'; here he dwells on an enchanted pastoral atmosphere punctuated with sensuous details, along with explicit, inevitable references to ancient Greece:

Capri, the perfect island - boys and girls
Free as spring-flowers, straight, fair, and musical
Of movement; in whose eyes and clustering curls
The youth of Greece still lingers; whose feet fall
Like kisses on green turf by cypress tall
And pine-tree shadowed; who, unknowing of care,
Draw love and laughter from the innocent air.⁶⁵

Sensuality is legitimated and innocence is conveyed through the poet's use of the combined images of Greece and youth, springtime and nature.

Certain aspects of classicism, in particular the field of Greek studies, as cultivated by late Victorian Hellenes, thus unexpectedly converge with the popular view of a highlighted, natural southern sexuality expressed by travellers and novelists who were quite remote from the elitist circles of the aesthetes. In these intellectual circles of late Victorian Britain, questions of morality, sexuality and cultural identity are raised and debated with constant references to the Mediterranean, both to the classical and the modern south. Concomitantly, while the discourse of the south circulates in increasingly complex ways in the late nineteenth century, and becomes intertwined with discourses of sexuality and homoeroticism, the south itself constitutes the favourite destination of a swelling number of male homosexual travellers and intellectuals from Britain and Germany.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Symonds, 'Southward Bound', p.4.

⁶⁶See Aldrich.

As has been observed, especially in the years before the Wilde trial in 1895, the area of Greek studies operated as a "homosexual code", with many late Victorian intellectuals engaged in "developing out of (...) Hellenism a homosexual counterdiscourse able to justify male love".⁶⁷ If, especially in the first half of the century, classicism, forming the solid base of British education, played the part of a culturally conservative ideology, on the other hand, as Jenkyns remarks, the classics were always "potentially subversive".⁶⁸ As critics have noted, the study of the classics provided the possibility, under cover of a respectable tradition of high culture, to dwell on certain aspects of sexuality which were considered transgressive by the dominant morality.⁶⁹ Linda Dowling, speaking of Jowett and the innovation of the Oxford curriculum, comments that:

The historical study of Greece (...) embraced both an ethically centered providentialism and an ethically relativizing historicism. With the first insisting on the extraordinary value and relevance of the Greek achievement for the English, while the second was minimizing the relevance of English moral categories for the Greeks, such students of Oxford Hellenism as Symonds and Pater and Wilde would find that Greek pederastia was (...) brought vividly and compellingly to life (...).⁷⁰

A body of homoerotic poetry developed in the wake of Victorian Hellenism, supported by the protection of the literary convention of anonymity and by a small number of specialised publications, such as the aestheticist magazine *The Artist*.⁷¹ A group of homosexual literati, who called themselves 'Uranians', produced a wealth of poetical texts saturated with references and homages to the Mediterranean.⁷² A large

⁶⁷Dowling, p.xiii.

⁶⁸Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.280. The same critic notes that "the classics were kept as a masculine preserve not least because they initiated young gentlemen into the mysteries discussed in the smoking room or over the port before the company joined the ladies" (p.280).

⁶⁹Linda Dowling observes that "so great was the success of Victorian liberal Hellenism in coming to represent all the dimensions of human experience denied under the Calvinist dispensation of religious fundamentalism or starved under the materialist regime of industrial modernity that it would open - in a way wholly unanticipated by the liberals themselves - the possibility of legitimating male love" (Dowling, p.35). Thus, the discourse of the south is connected in many ways with the emergence in the public sphere of a modern discourse of male love in the late Victorian age, as also Aldrich's *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* demonstrates. Besides male homosexuality, other forms of illicit and ethically problematic sexual desire found a coded expression in the context of Victorian Hellenism and the discourse of the south: the poetry of Swinburne (that had to face censorship), the paintings of Solomon, as well as certain passages of Pater's prose, which all have southern settings, reveal, at one possible level of reading, allusions to themes of lesbianism, sadomasochism and necrophilia.

⁷⁰Dowling, p.73.

⁷¹On *The Artist*, see Dowling, p.27.

⁷²On Uranian poets see Aldrich, pp.86-88. The term 'Uranian' was a reference to Plato's *Symposium*, where Aphrodite the daughter of Dione and goddess of earthly love is contrasted with Aphrodite

part of their poetry openly romanticises the south and insists on the theme of the north/south opposition, where the south is constructed with highly positive connotations through images of pastoral landscapes, sensuous beauty, and romantic (male) love. As one critic affirms, "the call of the South, classical or modern, served as the base for the Uranians' view of the world and their call for masculine friendship".⁷³

The longing for this idealised south is expressed distinctly by the 'Uranian' Alan Stanley in 'From North to South' (1894), where the northern poet is the desiring subject and the southern youth the oblivious, unattainable object of his desire. The composition revolves around the overused contrast "northern bleakness/southern fairness", spelled out in the hypnotic refrain of the poem:

For the South is fair and the North is bleak,
And I know my true love wanders there,
And twines the vine leaves in his hair,
And crushes the grape against his mouth;
Nor does he know my fretting care,
As he wanders blithe and debonair.
But O, how I long and yearn to be there,
For the North is bleak and the South is fair.⁷⁴

The image conjured up in these lines, of a carefree boy idly feeding on grapes, vividly resonates with classical and pastoral connotations (an exact visual equivalent to Stanley's poetical subject can be found in the photographs of Baron von Gloeden, depicting Sicilian boys in classical draperies and Arcadian settings, complete with wreaths of vine leaves.)⁷⁵

In the context of late Victorian homoerotic poetry, the island of Sicily came to occupy a special place. The favourite poetical genre adopted by the underground current of *fin de siècle* poets known as Uranians was, in fact, the pastoral: this genre of poetry -

Urania, presiding over heavenly love, purely devoid of earthly passions (see Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, pp.285-287). The definitive work on the Uranians to this date is: Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

⁷³Aldrich, p.88.

⁷⁴Alan Stanley, *Love Lyrics* (London: Gay and Bird, 1894), pp.22-23; quoted in d'Arch Smith, p.93.

⁷⁵According to d'Arch Smith and Jenkyns, it was Gloeden's series of photographs which inspired the composition of much Uranian poetry. See d'Arch Smith, pp.62-64 and Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, pp.291-292. On Gloeden, see section IV of this Chapter.

which, according to tradition, had been invented in Sicily by Theocritus in the 3rd century B.C. - became a specific vehicle for homoerotic themes. As Jenkyns points out, "whenever the name of Theocritus crops up in later Victorian literature, or any reference to Sicily, homosexuality is seldom far to seek".⁷⁶

The choice of the pastoral, related to the Greek myth of Arcadia and the golden age, may be explained from more than one perspective. In one sense, it functions as a textual strategy, through which some authors seek the cover and legitimization of classicism for the expression of illicit themes: thus they choose the pastoral genre and a Sicilian setting as a useful device for codification. The legitimization of high culture came along with any references to classical authors, and the Greek aspect of Sicily was enhanced by the Uranians, who chose to obliterate the other cultural and racial connotations of the island so keenly noticed by contemporary historians.

As the young John Henry Newman had observed earlier in the century while travelling on the island, "Sicily is Greece in a way", and it was in Sicily that Italy and ancient Greece came together.⁷⁷ Major German figures such as Winckelmann and Goethe never saw Greece for themselves, and came into contact with classical art in Italy; the same is true of many British intellectuals steeped in the classics who searched for a taste of antiquity in Italy. Pater, who was never in Greece, was one of them, and both Symonds and Wilde visited Sicily.

If, on the one hand, ancient Greece provided respectability and a fertile context for the Hellenists' discourse of male love, on the other hand, modern Italy, where, unlike Britain, homosexuality was not criminally persecuted, was the favourite destination for the majority of male homosexual travellers to the south. Many of them were intellectuals and artists, and Robert Aldrich, who devotes an entire study to the

⁷⁶Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.290. For a history of the pastoral genre and its fortune in English poetry see the essay by Richard Jenkyns, 'Pastoral' in *The Legacy of Rome: A New Appraisal*, ed. by Richard Jenkyns (London and New York: BCA, 1992), 151-175. For "pastoral Sicily" see also Chapter Two.

⁷⁷For Newman's comment, see Chapter Four, p.116. The association of Sicily with Greece operated by Victorian homosexual intellectuals has enjoyed a long life: Richard Dellamora, in his study *Masculine Desire* (1990) goes as far as confusing the two countries, displaying a certain deficiency in geographical notions: despite the fact that there are no volcanoes in Greece, Dellamora begins his long and detailed comment on Matthew Arnold's poem "Empedocles on Aetna" introducing it as "another major Victorian poem set in ancient Greece" (Dellamora, p.71, my emphasis).

Mediterranean in homosexual art and writing, remarks that for these "cultural interest and sexual longing went hand in hand, and in the Mediterranean the British could try to satisfy both appetites".⁷⁸

To the classically educated aesthetes, the specific form of the pastoral genre brings with it a wealth of images of Arcadia, edenic countryside, shepherds, love songs, contact with nature and the earth. This type of imagery may be read as an erudite version of primitivism: the pastoral, like the primitive, exists in an archaic, mythic dimension that precedes sin and the law, a dimension where established moral categories do not apply.⁷⁹ In this sense, arcadian imagery is not simply a set of literary conventions: more often it serves, in the texts of the Uranians as well as of late Victorian travellers, to mirror their attraction for the unproblematic social environment which could be found in the south. Compared to the legal and moral restrictions of the north, the Mediterranean was for intellectuals such as Wilde and Symonds, a real space for liberation, both from the oppression of class barriers and from the intolerance for dissident sexual behaviour at home. The majority of these authors, in fact, were writing around or after the time of the appearance in Britain of strict legislation which criminalised homosexuality (the notorious Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885).⁸⁰ As illustrated by Pemble, many travellers to the south note how its society was much less rigidly hierarchical and consequently "it was easy for rich and educated Englishmen to make and maintain contact with complaisant young fishermen, gondoliers, facchini, cocchieri, urchins, sailors and boulevard boys".⁸¹

⁷⁸Aldrich, p.69.

⁷⁹Whereas the pastoral is utopian and serene, the primitive is simultaneously attractive and threatening; some traits of Sicily deemed primitive will attract D.H. Lawrence a few decades later (see Chapter Six).

⁸⁰Homosexuality was declared a criminal offence in Britain, not only in public, but in private, by the Labouchere Amendment, part of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885). See Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), p.1. Pemble observes that this measure "inaugurated the era of persecution of homosexuals by blackmailers and moral-purity brigades like the National Vigilance Association" (Pemble, p.159).

⁸¹Pemble, p.160.

Thus, towards the close of the century, southern Italy and "Greek" Sicily in particular, constituted a favourite geographic and cultural space for homosexual literati, both as tourist destination in their travels *and* as literary locus for coded representations of male love.⁸² Through a deliberate appropriation of the pastoral genre and the name of Theocritus, Sicily and its Greek past became the legitimate means for the expression of illicit sexual themes, a classical subject whose ambivalence allowed the possibility for a variety of meanings to different readers.⁸³ The theme of "Sicilianness" became the epitome of the homoerotic south, conveyed through images of classical youth, bronzed limbs and male beauty.

One of the most audacious homoerotic texts in the production of the Uranians, and one frequently quoted by contemporary gay criticism, is the poem 'To a Sicilian Boy' written by the Oxford educated Theodore Wratislaw (1871-1933). The poem, published in *The Artist* in 1893, is an overtly erotic text where the poet dwells on sensual details and theorises the superiority of male over female eroticism: as has been noted, the poet relies on the ambiguity of the "Sicilian" adjective, which hints both at ancient Greece, and therefore at the legitimation of Platonic love, and to modern Italy, where homosexual literati notoriously had liaisons with local youths.⁸⁴ Similarly, Lord Alfred Douglas (Wilde's lover) wrote the poem 'Sicilian Love Song', and many other minor authors used references to Sicily and Theocritus.⁸⁵ Their poems, filled with homoerotic imagery, feature the theme of "Sicilianness", generally

⁸²The fact that Baron von Gloeden, the renowned homosexual photographer, resided in Sicily contributed to intensify its association with homosexuality (see section iv, below). Another favourite destination for northern tourists was Capri, visited among others by Goethe, Nietzsche, Gide, and Wilde, which increasingly became a celebrated "homosexual paradise". See Aldrich, 'The Capri circle', pp.125-134, and James Money, *Capri: Island of Pleasure* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986). In the twentieth century Capri also hosted a group of lesbians, of which the most famous were the American couple Kate and Saidee Wolcott-Perry; their remarkable story is told in Compton MacKenzie's novel *Extraordinary Women: Theme and Variations* (London: Martin Secker, 1928).

⁸³As Jenkyns observes, the corpus of Theocritean works contains very few homosexual allusions, and mainly treats heterosexual love, often with a touch of explicit licentiousness. However, Victorian Hellenists appropriated the figure of Theocritus for their own aims, constructing the Sicilian poet as celebrator of chaste and sentimental male love (Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.291).

⁸⁴Theodore Wratislaw's 'To a Sicilian Boy' is included in his *Caprices: Poems* (London: Gay & Bird, 1893). See Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.292, d'Arch Smith, pp.84-87, and Dowling, p.27.

⁸⁵Lord Alfred Douglas, 'Sicilian Love Song', in *"Two Loves" and Other Poems: A Selection* (East Lansing, Mich.: Bennett and Kitchel, 1990).

in order to invoke a legitimating parallel with antiquity and the world of the classics: frequently, a celebration of boys' life at school or English lads at their sports, is conveyed through the evocation of pastoral poetry and a Sicilian atmosphere.⁸⁶ As late as 1913, Compton MacKenzie would make Wilmot, the Hellenising homosexual hero of his novel *Sinister Street*, exclaim: "How wonderful to be at school! How Sicilian! Strange youth, you should have been sung by Theocritus".⁸⁷

The use of Sicily by some more cautious authors, troubled by moral doubts, occasionally denotes an unresolved ambivalence, such as that of Reverend Edward Cracroft Lefroy (1855-1891), who, torn between Greek and Christian philosophy, explicitly attacked the "carnal inclinations" of Pater's and Symonds' aesthetic Hellenism, but also published a volume of sonnets with the title *Echoes From Theocritus* (1883), abounding with pastoral, arcadian, and mythological themes in a Sicilian setting.⁸⁸

Sicily, however, was more often appropriated by militant and less ethically confused Uranians such as Wratishaw, and largely used as a code for the expression of "the love that dare not speak its name". Symonds, for instance, was more explicitly homoerotic

⁸⁶See Dowling, p.28 and Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.290.

⁸⁷Compton MacKenzie, *Sinister Street*, 2 vols. (London: Martin Secker, 1913), quoted in Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.290. See also Dowling, p.153.

⁸⁸Significantly, Lefroy's poetical works were much admired by Symonds, who wrote a critical estimate accompanying the posthumous edition of the sonnets: Edward Cracroft Lefroy, *His Life and Poems, including a Reprint of Echoes From Theocritus, with a Critical Estimate of the Sonnets by the late John Addington Symonds*, ed. by Wilfred Austin Gill (London & New York: John Lane, 1897). For Lefroy see d'Arch Smith, pp.71-73, and d'Arch Smith, 'Some Uncollected Authors, xxx: Edward Cracroft Lefroy, 1855-1891', *Book Collector*, 10, 4 (Winter 1961), 442-5. See also Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, pp.284-285. Lefroy's poetical compositions bear titles such as: 'A Sicilian Night', 'A Summer Day in Old Sicily', 'The Goatherd in Love', 'At the Shrine of Pan', and so forth. *Echoes From Theocritus* also contains poems about sportsmen, in praise of athletes' beautiful bodies, such as 'A Football Player', 'The Cricket-Bowler', and 'A Palaestral Study'. With a certain amount of naiveté, Lefroy attempts to use Sicily with a purifying intent, believing that through its classical associations he could sing the idealised, noble Platonic love in which he believed and which agreed with his deeply felt Christian faith. Indeed, invoking the legitimization of Greek ideals of transcendence and the Greek virtue of temperate self-control was a strategy frequently adopted by writers, and at least until the scandal of Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895, the discourse of homoeroticism could claim respectability and moral legitimization through the invocation of Platonic love and a declaration of sexual innocence. Similarly, any emphasis on physicality and sensuality which emerged in aestheticism, could be legitimated by the classical reference to a disinterested love of beauty and by invoking the standards of Greek sculpture or the healthy vigour of Greek athleticism (as in Lefroy's sonnets on Greek athletes). But Lefroy's attempt was destined to have ambiguous results, and today his texts are read by critics in the context of homoeroticism and the emergence of a gay political consciousness.

in his poetic use of Sicilian references, especially in his poem 'In the Syracusan Stone-Quarries', the lament for a "free-born Athenian" now enslaved in Sicily, whom his friend addresses with loving admiration for his muscular beauty ("Oh, god-like limbs! How beautiful in slumber...").⁸⁹

The theme of Sicilianness was utilised in a highly conscious and skilful way by the main figure of Victorian aestheticism, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), who gave Greek or Italian titles to many of his poems and filled them with classical allusions and references to the Mediterranean. For Wilde, classicism was not solely a literary exercise as for many minor poets such as Lefroy, but it forcefully came to life in the actuality of his travels to the south. In September 1897, Wilde wrote from France: "I am trying to get some money to go to Italy, and hope to be able to find my way to Sicily, but the expenses of travelling are frightening".⁹⁰ Wilde was in Sicily twice (in December 1897 and in April 1900):⁹¹ he considered Palermo "the most beautifully situated town in the world", and started friendships with several local youths, some *cocchieri* ("... most daintily finely-carved boys. In them, not in the Sicilian horses, is race seen"), and a fifteen-year-old seminarist from Palermo Cathedral, Giuseppe, of whom Wilde was particularly fond ("every day I kissed him behind the high altar").⁹² Wilde's literary use of "Sicilianness" is immediately revealed in the title of one of his poems, inevitably called 'Theocritus', where he addresses the ancient poet thus:

O singer of Persephone!
In the dim meadows desolate,
Dost thou remember Sicily?⁹³

Wilde's appropriation of the Sicilian theme is even more evident when this is manipulated in order to create a context for an appreciation of male classical beauty. The long composition 'Charmides' begins with the lines:

⁸⁹John Addington Symonds, 'In the Syracusan Stone-Quarries', in *Many Moods: A Volume of Verse* (London: Smith, Elder & co., 1878), p.30.

⁹⁰*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963), p.638.

⁹¹See Rupert Croft-Cooke, *The Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde* (London & New York: W.H. Allen, 1972).

⁹²*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, pp.820-821.

⁹³'Theocritus' in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, introduction by John Gilbert (London: Spring Books, 1963), p.657.

He was a Grecian lad, who coming home
With pulpy figs and wine from Sicily
Stood at his galley's prow, and let the foam
Blow through his crisp brown curls unconsciously.⁹⁴

Here reappears the figure of the sensuous Mediterranean youth, in touch with nature and blessed by the serenity of moral unawareness, "unconsciously" letting the wind blow through his dark hair.

On the one hand, then, Wilde utilised pastoral and classical references as a vehicle for treating the subject of Greek love in such a way as to escape censure and in order to romanticise and sanitise the subject for the Victorian audience,⁹⁵ while on the other, he personally used the Mediterranean south as a space for transgression and liberation (it was in Naples, and then in a villa in nearby Posillipo that Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas lived together in order to flee from London and their hostile families after Wilde's time in prison).⁹⁶

As Aldrich notes, "from Byron to Forster, the Mediterranean attracted English homosexuals. In a variety of literary genres, the classical Mediterranean was portrayed as the true spiritual home of homosexuals, with modern Italy (...) as a hospitable contemporary environment".⁹⁷ The south is thus configured as the depository of alterity - eroticism, desire, freedom - through which some authors challenge the dominant culture and valorise different, alternative ways of living and of sexual behaviour, but it is worth noting that at the same time, the south does not cease to be a figure of alterity against which other authors could reiterate the nationalist and imperial discourse of a British superiority.

The overtly positive and erotic connotations of the Mediterranean in the poetry of the Uranians provoked some criticism among those who believed in the moral superiority of the north; thus, Reverend Edwin Emmanuel Bradford expresses his own moral view on the north/south opposition, in a polemical tone against the one theorised by the Hellenes:

⁹⁴'Charmides' in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.638.

⁹⁵See the section on 'Oscar Wilde' in Aldrich, pp.88-91.

⁹⁶See Rupert Croft-Cooke. Posillipo had also been the residence of Sir William and Lady Emma Hamilton, and of William Beckford a century earlier (see Chapter Three, p.81).

⁹⁷Aldrich, p.99.

Is Boy-Love Greek? Far across the seas
The warm desire of Southern men may be:
But passion freshened by a Northern breeze
Gains in male vigour and in purity,
Our yearning tenderness for boys like these
Has more in it of Christ than Socrates.⁹⁸

What Bradford is proposing here is not a refusal of homosexuality, but a Christian, purified and moral version of it, one that is proudly British and northern. In fact, Bradford, who was a Uranian poet himself (he was, indeed, "the most prolific of Uranian authors"), is promoting a xenophobic and nationalistic version of Uranian love, expurgated from the corrupting elements of Mediterraneanophilia so spread among Uranian circles.⁹⁹ As in the traditional view of climatic determinism, the north and the cold are associated by Bradford with "vigour" and "purity", the south with "warm desire", thus theorising a northern moral superiority and deprecating the languor and indolence of the sunny south. As has been observed, "the contrast between northern manliness and southern decadence" is used here "to purify English Uranianism".¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the belief in the quicker decay of physical beauty, both male and female, in the south, is expressed by another defender of Britishness in the context of homoerotic aesthetics, the photographer and art critic Robert Crust, who comments on the aesthetic qualities and differences of southern and northern models:

It is remarkable (...) that in general the Italian juvenile model very soon loses that charm of beauty for which he or she is supposed to be so noted (...) the average English lad is quite the equal, if not the superior of the Italian. Moreover, from his active habits of life he retains his youthful grace of proportion much longer.¹⁰¹

By stressing the importance of physical exercise for the preservation of the superior beauty of English youth, an implicit contrast is suggested once more with the idleness

⁹⁸Reverend Edwin Emmanuel Bradford, *The New Chivalry and Other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, 1918), p.31.

⁹⁹d'Arch Smith, p.123. This critic points out how a "religious" version of homosexuality can be found in the Uranian movement, where authors such as Bradford propounded "a Christian paganism wherein Christ bears the resemblance of a handsome youth, and any attractive adolescent, by this token, bears on him the stamp of the Deity" (d'Arch Smith, pp.138-139). This attitude, in the case of Bradford, is interestingly intertwined with the affirmation of a northern, English identity, whereby a religious, moral, and national superiority is claimed together with the theorisation of the purity and superiority of male-male relationships.

¹⁰⁰Jenkyns, *The Victorians*, p.292.

¹⁰¹Robert H. Hobart Crust, 'Photographic Studies', *Photogram*, iv, 42 (June 1897), 157-58. Quoted by d'Arch Smith, p.64.

of Italian boys in southern climates. Thus, within a cultural debate around sexuality and homosexuality, aesthetics and morals, the north/south dichotomy is used once more and related to the configuration of a national identity.

The discourse about the south in Victorian culture was thus intrinsically combined with that of male love and homoeroticism, and in the late Victorian age, Douglas, Wilde and Symonds were considered the spokesmen of what would be called the "Greek movement".¹⁰² On the one hand, the south was seen as the repository of noble Greek virtues, of classicism and the disinterested love of art and beauty, of which the British could play at being the proud and deserving heirs. References to the classical south would bestow respectability upon the subject of the "love that dare not speak its name". On the other hand, the south was simultaneously a space of transgression for the northerner, where what was considered the spontaneous and passionate nature of Mediterranean peoples permitted the liberation of sexual desire in a way that was outside or beyond traditional moral categories.

iv) Eroticised Images of the South

The theme of Mediterranean sensuality and the eroticised south recurring in Wilde's works, Uranian poetry, and in the production of Hellenist critics such as Pater and Symonds, has evident connections with the concomitant discourse of classicism circulating in the visual arts. The insistent references to Sicily and to Mediterranean youth recurring in so many texts of late Victorian literature can be better understood when the context of the contemporary developments in visual arts - painting and photography - is also taken into account.

In painting - as in literature, poetry and criticism - the theme of eroticism in the arcadian or classical south recurs in some of the works of late Victorian artists, and although there is no clear cut division between the paintings of the Olympian school

¹⁰²Dowling, p.28.

and those of minor painters flourishing at the close of the century, some tendencies are more evident in certain authors. Within the Olympian group, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and his imitator Edward Poynter make frequent use of the nude, against a background of carefully reconstructed classical interiors, featuring the massive presence of marble. As one critic notes, for these painters, marble was "that passport to respectability" which allowed teasingly erotic pictures to pass the censor.¹⁰³ Theirs may be regarded as a manipulation of classicism and a use of the ancient Mediterranean in order to treat illicit themes under the cover of high culture, a representational device analogous to that adopted precisely in the same years by the Uranians.

Just as Pater and Symonds had counteracted the Arnoldian sanitising tendency in literature, some other, less acclaimed painters provided alternative uses of classicism and southern settings to those made by the Olympians such as Leighton, producing works which offer different levels of possible readings.

A lesser known Victorian painter who spent much time in Italy and made a great use of male nude in classical poses was Henry Scott Tuke (1858-1929), who was also a friend of Symonds and himself author of Uranian verse.¹⁰⁴ The more famous Simeon Solomon (1840-1905), whose work was much admired by his friends Pater and Swinburne, during his career increasingly concentrated on the homoerotic treatment of mythological subjects, as in his painting *Bacchus* (fig.8) described by Pater as "a complete and very fascinating realisation of the melancholy and brooding figure of Dionysus Zagreus".¹⁰⁵ Both Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas were fond of Solomon's work, and the latter owned a collection of his drawings. Solomon's fame eventually deteriorated after he was arrested on charges of homosexuality and spent some time in prison.¹⁰⁶ His work provides an example of how, in the visual arts as in literature, the classical south functioned in coded representations of transgressive

¹⁰³Gilmour, p.45.

¹⁰⁴For Tuke see d'Arch Smith, pp.60-61 and Aldrich, p.138.

¹⁰⁵Quoted in Aldrich, p.142.

¹⁰⁶ See Wood, pp.192-193. See also Aldrich, pp.142-143.

sexuality. It may be argued, in fact, that Solomon did in painting what the Uranians were doing in verse, in that some of his visual texts offer a variety of explicit and implicit meanings. His most famous painting, called *Habet!* (1865), which his contemporaries considered his best work, is emblematic of this multiplicity of possible readings: the painting shows a group of Roman matrons attending a gladiators' combat at the circus, and represents these richly dressed women as sensual and bloodthirsty, excited by the sight of violence and exercising their power over the life of the fighting men (summed up in the painting's title, the Roman formula shouted by the public to deny mercy on the fallen gladiator). Swinburne, who encouraged the young painter in his career, highly praised this work, which also acquired fame among the general public. The atmosphere of this painting is remote from that created by Leighton's or Alma-Tadema's azure skies, Mediterranean flora and polished marbles, and is closer to certain descriptions of the atrocities of the Roman circus in Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*. Despite its disturbing quality, *Habet!* was very well received by critics and the public when exhibited for the first time at the Royal Academy in 1865. As one critic notes, "whatever private meaning the picture had for Solomon and Swinburne, its public meaning was not necessarily transgressive; it could be read as a censorious depiction of Roman cruelty, rather than a picture revelling on immorality for its own sake".¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Solomon's fascination with illicit sexuality and sadomasochism could still be detected in the picture by some.¹⁰⁸

Within the context of the discourse of the south, the most evident interconnection between visual arts and literature in the culture of the *fin de siècle* is illustrated by the Sicilian photographs of a German artist, who acquired international fame and was much influential in Britain: Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden (1856-1931).

¹⁰⁷Michael Liverside and Catherine Edwards, eds., *Imagining Rome: British Artists and Rome in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1996), p.130.

¹⁰⁸However, if Solomon's transgressions could be coded in his art, they were too evident in his life; he lived openly as a homosexual and after the scandal in which he was involved, he was abandoned by his friends and protectors, spent many years in poverty, forced to selling his drawings in the street, and eventually died of drink in the workhouse. His talent has been recognised again today, and probably he would have never suspected that, about a century later, his *Sappho and Erinna* would hang in the Tate Gallery (the purchase of Solomon's painting by the Tate Gallery was celebrated in the columns of *Gay News*. See Wood, p.192).

While in Sicily, Wilde made the acquaintance of Gloeden, who became a key figure in homosexual cultural history, and who was in turn acquainted with Italian intellectuals such as Gabriele D'Annunzio.¹⁰⁹ Gloeden spent most of his life in the picturesque Sicilian town of Taormina, which had long attracted tourists for its magnificent Greek and Roman ruins, and around the turn of the century, along with Capri - the other celebrated gay paradise of the south - became a favourite destination for homosexual travellers. Gloeden specialised in picture postcards of ancient ruins, classical landscapes, and Sicilian street life which were sold in large numbers and won him the title of the 'Baron of Taormina'. However, what brought him most popularity, artistic recognition and a series of prizes, was his main specialisation in portraits of male nudes. Gloeden produced a large number of photographic portraits of naked Sicilian boys, depicted in natural settings or among broken columns and ancient ruins. The young models are often adorned with flower garlands, laurel or vine leaves. They are mostly nude, but sometimes wear leather sandals, tunics or togas, and play the flute or recline against large amphorae (fig.9 and fig.10). These pictures were sold in large quantities and circulated both among the northern European public in general and in specifically homosexual circles and their specialised artistic magazines. Gloeden's work was reproduced for the first time in England in an 1893 issue of the *Studio*, a periodical edited by poet and art critic Joseph Gleeson White, who was deeply involved with the Uranian circle.¹¹⁰

As d'Arch Smith points out, "through the medium of White's magazine, Gloeden showed England the glamour of Sicily"; as suggested by the same critic, the publication of the Baron's work effected a considerable sale of his prints in England and to Englishmen who flocked to visit his Sicilian studio, while its impact on the production of the Uranians is evident in Wratishlaw's notorious poem 'To a Sicilian

¹⁰⁹Wilde presented the German photographer with a copy of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. For Gloeden, see d'Arch Smith, pp.62-64; Aldrich, pp.143-152 and Pietro Nicolosi, ed., *L'Arte di Gloeden: Il Barone Fotografo* (Taormina: Giovanni Malambri, 1979).

¹¹⁰Gloeden's photographs appeared as illustrations of Joseph Gleeson White's article 'The Nude in Photography: with Some Studies taken in the Open Air', *Studio*, I, 3 (15 June 1893), 103-108.

Boy', most probably inspired by Gloeden's photographs.¹¹¹ J.A. Symonds was also acquainted with Gloeden's nudes, of which he owned some reproductions, that he sent to his friend the Uranian C.K. Jackson.¹¹²

What is interesting in Gloeden's work is that, while his photographs of nude ephebes display an unmistakably homoerotic nature, the nakedness of his subjects is legitimated by the invocation of classicism and high art: a classical aura, and a Greek atmosphere in particular, are conveyed by the setting in pastoral landscapes or among broken columns, by the pose of the models, and by the set of accessories (sometimes through simple expedients such as the Greek-style border design in the boys' draperies).

Gloeden portrayed Sicilian peasants and fisher boys in the role of ancient gods, heroes and athletes, in such a way that their nakedness could be considered appropriate and corresponding to classical aesthetic standards. Thus, when Gleeson White published Gloeden's pictures in the *Studio*, he quoted Ruskin's authority and his appeal to climatic determinism (in turn derived from Winckelmann) as a moral defence for male nudity in art and photography: "in climates where the body can be more openly and frequently visited by sun and weather, the nude comes to be regarded in a way more grand and pure, as necessarily awakening no ideas of the base kind (as pre-eminently with the Greeks)".¹¹³ Despite this, Gloeden's pictures clearly show a variety of sexual and homoerotic imagery, which could be easily **identified** by the more limited public of Uranians and initiated aesthetes. The overt 'Greek' connotation creates a confusion between the subversive impact of the homoerotic theme and the reference to the standards of classical and academic art where the tradition of nudes

¹¹¹d'Arch Smith, pp.62-63. Among Gloeden's visitors in Sicily were Rudyard Kipling, Richard Strauss, Guglielmo Marconi and Eleonora Duse, as well as wealthy tourists from the Morgan, Rothschild and Vanderbilt families. Gloeden is buried in the Protestant section of Taormina cemetery.

¹¹²See d'Arch Smith, p.18.

¹¹³Quoted in d'Arch Smith, p.64. As Turner notes, "Winckelmann associated the artistic achievement of the Greeks with their particular physical climate and cultural environment. The warm air and plentiful sunshine, and the gymnastic exercises required, allowed them to go about nude or with little clothing on numerous occasions. As a result, their artists had frequent opportunities to observe the natural beauty of the human body". Winckelmann's view of the Greeks as an aesthetic people resembling innocent children completed the picture, and was transmitted to Victorian Hellenism (Turner, pp.40-41).

was central and long accepted. Gloeden's use of classicism was intentional and conscious: he declared himself to have been inspired by "Homer and Theocritus' Sicilian poetry". While, on the one hand, his picture postcards were being sold to tourists by numbers, on the other, his work achieved considerable fame at the highest levels of cultural institutions: Gloeden received a gold medal from the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain in 1893.¹¹⁴

Gloeden's Hellenism and his use of classical Sicily can be inscribed in the discursive framework of the south as the land of the past, which reiterated the idea that in the south ancient civilisations continued to live or could be revived, and where the modern traveller was magically transported from the present to an unproblematic, arcadian dimension of antiquity. In this sense, Gloeden's art is, in many ways, the perfect visual equivalent of the literary production of late Victorian aesthetes, where the south is constructed as an earthly classical paradise, a new Hellas where perfect beauty and harmony could still be found. Gloeden's photography implicitly demonstrated that classical beauty could *still* be attained in the modern Mediterranean, and, as Aldrich notes, Gloeden created for his public "a sylvan, natural utopia".¹¹⁵ The comments of the *National Geographic Magazine* on Gloeden's photographs in 1916 emphasise precisely this aspect of his work, and indicate the sort of reading which his contemporaries made of his art:

The present day descendants of the early Greek colonists of Sicily retain the grace of pose and the symmetry of form which distinguished their ancestors of two thousand years ago. Here is a youth who might have been the original for one of the matchless marbles of Praxiteles or for a figure on a Phidian frieze.¹¹⁶

During the same years in which travel writers illustrated their books on Sicily with photographs of modern Sicilians dressed as Greeks, investing them with racial ideological connotations, Gloeden was performing a similar transposition in order to eroticise the same subject matter: in the former type of visual discourse Sicily was constructed as the locale of the austere Greek race with its civilising impact on the

¹¹⁴See Aldrich, p.143.

¹¹⁵Aldrich, p.152.

¹¹⁶Arthur Stanley Riggs, 'Italy: The Gifted Mother of Civilization', *National Geographic Magazine*, 30 (October 1916), p. 289. Quoted in Aldrich, pp. 151-152.

West, triumphing over other non-European races such as the Arabs, while in the homoerotic discourse of Gloeden's pictures, legitimated by the reference to classical art and particularly Greek sculpture, Sicily is the liberating space where the freed sexuality of the ancient Greeks is revived in the present for the joy of the northerner's eye, in the context of the cautious, early emergence of gay political consciousness. In a similar way to the poetry of the Uranians, and the works of Pater, Symonds, and Wilde, Gloeden's representations of the south call for a dimension where other values can exist, and suggest their possible relevance to the modern world.

Thus, the dominant view "south equals past" elaborated earlier on in the context of Romanticism, and perpetuated in the course of the century, is confirmed, modified and deployed with different ideological purposes in the culture of the *fin de siècle*.

CHAPTER SIX

MODERNIST ECHOES: THE MEDITERRANEAN NARRATIVES OF FORSTER AND LAWRENCE

Commenting on the rise of tourism and on what he names "the bourgeois vogue" for "romantic primitivism", Paul Fussell observes: "from James 'Ossian' Macpherson in the late eighteenth century, to D.H. Lawrence in the early twentieth, intellectuals and others discovered special virtue in primitive peoples and places".¹ As seen in previous chapters, the Italian south, and Sicily in particular, at least since the late eighteenth century, have been perceived by British travellers as lands remote and isolated ("buried in oblivion"), unexplored until Brydone's discovery. This image which placed the Italian south in the realm of the "primitive" coexisted with the long lived associations with classicism, pointing in the direction of the south as the cradle of civilisation.²

Both associations, with primitivism and civilisation, re-emerge as a strongly antithetical polarity in the early twentieth century, creating ambivalent tensions in the texts of many travellers to the south: the life and works of writers as diverse as E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence epitomise such tensions and contradictions characteristic of the modernist attitude to the Mediterranean.

¹Fussell, *Abroad*, p.38.

²As Marianna Torgovnick affirms, through the eighteenth century the term "primitive" referred to "the first, earliest age, period, or stage", and it could be used to describe the Greeks and Romans, while its references to "aboriginals", "inhabitants of prehistoric times", "natives" in non-European lands date from the end of that century. Brydone's description of Sicily as a primitive, remote land and simultaneously as a "celebrated" classical island, may seem contradictory only in relation to the modern use of the term "primitive", which designates "certain social formations within relatively isolated areas of Africa, Oceania, South America (...) characterised (...) by the absence of tools and technology widely available elsewhere"; Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.18.

As has been argued, primitivism, or the search for a pre- or non-civilised dimension, was the necessary counterpart of modernism, in the sense that it was the imaginary depository of values that modern civilisation had denied, and it came to represent the condition itself through which modernity could be understood and indeed defined.³

As Faber observes about the outlook adopted in the discipline of anthropology: "the posited authenticity of a past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present (the uprooted, évolués, acculturated)".⁴

As argued by Simon Gikandi, the crisis of the modern subject manifesting itself at the turn of the century, a crisis around which developed the cultural, aesthetic and literary phenomenon of modernism, is staged in a large measure, larger than previously recognised by criticism, in foreign spaces, away from Britain and from Europe. The historical moment of the emergence of modernism is also, as the same critic notes, the era of late colonialism and of the increasing decline of imperialism: modernist narratives employ their rhetoric of failure in the colonial space; examining the examples of Conrad's and Greene's texts about the African continent, Gikandi attempts to explore how the "triumphant narratives of empire (...) become transformed into that discourse of melancholy and death whose apogee is T.S.Eliot's *The Wasteland*".⁵

The narratives of those British writers of the early twentieth century dealing with the Mediterranean can be inscribed precisely within the cultural context thus delineated, and it is significant that many of these authors also wrote about non-Mediterranean countries, as testified, to name but two examples, by Forster's *Passage to India* (1924) and D.H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* (1926).

The Mediterranean provides a space for the staging of modernist themes which, of course, has different associations and a different history from Africa or India, but where some analogies can usefully be found: modernist narratives, whether they are staged in African, Indian, or Mediterranean spaces, are produced by the same type of

³For an analysis of primitivist discourse in modernism and postmodernism, see Torgovnick.

⁴Faber, pp.10-11.

⁵Gikandi, p.162.

discourse - the rhetoric of failure, the valorisation of primitivism, the crisis of cognitive and aesthetic values, the desire for a lost moment of origins and innocence - in the attempt to secure or negotiate an identity for the modern British and European subject at a time of crisis. Both Forster's and Lawrence's Mediterranean narratives continuously oscillate between two extremes: on the one hand, the appreciation of southern vitality and sensuality, and the strong belief in the regenerative power of primitivism (or pre-classical Greek paganism); on the other, a despairing sense of *déjà vu*, the recognition of the worn out familiarity of the Mediterranean mythical space, of its age-old connection with precisely that civilisation these writers are so dissatisfied with, and a consequent feeling of disillusionment and disenchantment - revealed in an imagery of death, decay, and degeneration.

Forster and Lawrence, both as travellers and novelists, wrote about the Mediterranean Other in order to speak about themselves: through the image of the south in their writings, they voiced their own dissatisfaction with, and rebellion against, values and ideals of contemporary Britain and expressed their anxiety about the state of European civilisation in the twentieth century.

This element of revolt was not new: within the long bourgeois tradition of British travel to the Mediterranean dating back to the Grand Tour, the south always constituted an ambivalent destination: as Pemble observes, "it was (...) part of the ambiguity of British travel to the South that it signified both social conformity and moral dissidence".⁶ It was precisely as part of their self-conscious distancing from the culture at home, that writers as different as Forster and Lawrence both fiercely disliked "tourism" (epitomised by Cook's organised tours and Baedeker guide-books), and strove to distinguish themselves, in their own different ways, from the mass of their compatriots touring the Italian south.⁷ Forster and Lawrence are representative of a reaction against the intellectualism of their literary predecessors, regarded as sterile and oppressive and contrasted with the instinctual life of the senses that it was

⁶Pemble, p.99.

⁷For the dichotomy travel/tourism in British culture see Buzard.

possible to lead in Italy. Thus, during their stay in Italy, they were dissatisfied with or turned away from museums and galleries: they searched for a closer, more genuine contact with the lands of the south, and were attracted by what they perceived as the regenerative power of a southern *genius loci*.

In the twentieth century, in the years between the wars, British culture was characterised by what Fussell calls "the British Literary Diaspora", the great flight abroad of writers from England in the 20's and 30's.⁸ Many of them went to the Mediterranean south, some to other continents or both, but in any case their travels acquired a conscious, rebellious connotation and were actualised as a cultural rejection of "the tightness of England".⁹ For authors and travellers such as Forster, Lawrence, and many of their contemporaries, the south came to represent, more and more explicitly, the possibility for cultural and moral rebellion: theirs was often a form of voluntary exile, of the type anticipated in some aspects by Wilde's experience abroad; in this they were not dissimilar from some of their predecessors, those eccentric or rebellious figures who had found in the south a means of escape: "from the time of Byron to that of Oscar Wilde the outlawed, the unfrocked, and the black-labelled made their way to Italy - Shelley's 'Paradise of exiles'".¹⁰

What Gikandi observes about modernist writers in Africa - that "the journey into the world of the primitive was conceived as a form of transgression" - may also be referred to the writings of Forster and Lawrence about Italy.¹¹ In the Italian south, these writers were searching for the signs of a pre-modern, pre-industrial and pre-capitalist stage of humanity, a humanity still untouched by the taint of civilisation. For both novelists, the Greek associations of these lands could be interpreted as symbolic of an arcadian past of spontaneity and natural sexuality. And it is significant that the Greek mythical figures appearing in their texts are chosen among those dear to late Victorian Hellenists - Pan and Priapus - elusive divine forces, remote from the serene

⁸Fussell, p.11

⁹*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. and with an introduction by Aldous Huxley (London: William Heinemann, 1932), p.106 (letter dated 18 February 1913).

¹⁰Pemble, p.102.

¹¹Gikandi, p.182.

Olympian deities of the classics, and associated instead with the Dionysian. In his search for authenticity, Lawrence also focused on an even more remote past, one preceding the beginning of "Western history", and was fascinated with the prehistoric traces of obscure and mysterious peoples such as the Sicans in Sicily and the Etruscans in Tuscany.

What Forster and Lawrence shared, and shared with other writers about non-European countries, is a drive towards a space where the modern subject comes to term with its repressed self; this drive is both generated by, and deployed as a statement against the changing global economic and cultural system they witnessed in the first decades of the century.¹²

As seen in the previous chapter, the theme of the Mediterranean as a space for authenticity and spontaneity, an eroticised land of desire embodying cultural and moral values alternative to those dominant in contemporary British society, was one of the features which emerged in the discourse of the south circulating in aesthetic Hellenism and Uranian poetry. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the north/south opposition was still alive in British culture, and the image of the south served even more explicitly to voice certain writers' dissatisfaction with the dominant culture. As Fussell observes:

Browning and Symonds and Ruskin and Pater could transfer much of their affection for the Mediterranean without experiencing a correlative contempt for home. (...) But with Lawrence and Douglas and Huxley and Graves (...) and later Durrell, Isherwood, and Auden, departure is attended by the conviction that England is ^{un}inhabitable because it is not like abroad.¹³

The feeling of a need to escape to a place not like home is revealed both in these writers' travel experience, and in their other writing where the Mediterranean setting features as a constituent element in the text, the locus which makes their narratives constantly oscillate between expectation and disillusionment. Their writings often dwell on the uncontaminated nature and the powerful sun of the Mediterranean and on the pleasure they elicit on both the body and the mind. The eroticism of the south, its

¹²These are also the terms in which Gikandi analyses Graham Greene's travel writing about Africa (pp.178-189).

¹³Fussell, p.15.

potential to awaken sexuality, which was a coded or a subterranean theme in the works of late Victorians, is spelled out by modernist writers, who reiterate the north/south opposition and further elaborate certain images of previous generations.

A contemporary of Forster and Lawrence, Norman Douglas (1868-1952) - who became an honorary citizen of Capri - epitomises the faith in the regenerative power of the south, when, for instance, he writes in *South Wind* (1917) that the Mediterranean sun is the cause of "paganism, nudity and laughter", and opposes its climate to that of northern countries, "lands adapted only for wolves and bears".¹⁴ In *Siren Land* (1911) the same writer, using the old dichotomy north/south, us/them, asserts that: "many of us would do well to *mediterraneanise* ourselves", and advocates a "period of *katharsis*, of purgation and readjustment" in southern Italy, the Homeric land of the Sirens.¹⁵

Precisely in the same decade, a racialised discourse insisting on images of degeneration also circulated in travellers' texts, as deployed, for instance, by the American traveller and historian Ralcy Husted Bell, author of *Taormina* (1916); writing of the modern inhabitants of the Sicilian town, this writer adopts a rich vocabulary of degeneration, disease and corruption:

As for the residents of Taormina, I should not call them *âmes bien nées*. (...) The old passionate stock had died out with the sugar cane and the grape, leaving only salacious dregs; the blood has become so dilute with exotic sordidness, so feeble through waste, so acrid by disease [sic] and corrupt by want and cruel by woe, that its divine color has faded and its strength departed from it. (...) Today what remains? Beautifully colored dust of ruins shimmering in the sun and beside it pools of shadowy gloom. These are the sad memories called *history*."¹⁶

The apparently opposed positions expressed in a simplistic way by these travellers, counteract and compensate each other: while Douglas exalts the regenerative power of an essentialised south, eternally pagan and serene, untroubled by modernity, Bell insists on the decline of the once glorious south, combining the melancholy for a lost world with the attraction/repulsion for the corrupted state of a putrefying present which may be devoid of meaning.

¹⁴Norman Douglas, *South Wind* (1917; London: Martin Secker, 1927), p.98.

¹⁵Norman Douglas, *Siren Land* (1911; London: Martin Secker, 1929), p.46.

¹⁶Ralcy Husted Bell, *Taormina* (New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1916), pp.89-90 (Bell's emphasis).

The attitudes of Forster and Lawrence fluctuate in more complex ways between these positions, their faith in the redemptive quality of the south constantly undermined by the realisation of a southern past that is lost forever in the modern age. These authors embody the tension between different strands in the modernist elaboration of the discourse of the south, and it is in the Mediterranean that these very different writers show how much they have in common.

i) Forster's South: a Space for Emancipation or "a Refuge for Cowards"?

The writing career of E.M. Forster (1879-1970) begins with his travels after he graduated from Cambridge. Forster visited Italy accompanied by his mother in 1901-1902, and was painfully frustrated by the constraints of travelling as a conventional middle class tourist: he went to churches and museums daily, stayed at English *pensioni*, made no Italian friends and never entered an Italian home.¹⁷

However, it was in Italy, and precisely in Naples, that Forster began to write his first short story, 'The Story of a Panic'.¹⁸ The south continued to play a crucial role in his writing: two of his novels and several short stories have Italian settings, while Greece also appears in his texts.¹⁹ The importance of the Mediterranean in Forster's work has been noted by critics, who have pointed to the fact that the foreign and exotic element (whether Italian or Indian) occupies a central place in the symbolic economy of his fiction. Furbank observes that Forster's early writings, which he produced during his visit to Italy, centre on the theme of "Southern warmth and love of life, as against the ghosts and glooms, the self-denial and self-consciousness, of the Gothic North";

¹⁷Norman Page, *E.M. Forster* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp.6-8.

¹⁸E.M. Forster, 'The Story of a Panic', in *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 3-38.

¹⁹For instance, in the short story 'The Road from Colonus' (1904), in *The Celestial Omnibus and Other Stories*, 125-143, and in *Maurice* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971).

during his stay in Italy, Forster reminded himself: "Cherish the body and you will cherish the soul. That was the belief of the Greeks".²⁰

Pemble's comment that "Forster's experience of sexual emancipation in the South was an obvious and important influence on his fiction" is best epitomised in the short story 'Albergo Empedocle', first published in the periodical *Temple Bar* in 1903: as has been noted, this is the most explicit work of fiction of homoerotic interest Forster published during his lifetime.²¹ In this early work, the novelist utilises the theme of Sicilianness as a homosexual coding, which becomes increasingly explicit as the story develops. In a way typical of the Hellenists and the Uranians, he identifies Sicily with an ideal space offering the possibility of pleasure and liberation.²² In fact, Forster deals cautiously with the subject of male homosexual desire, and, in much the same manner as the Uranians, it is precisely the Sicilian setting and the reference to Greek love, with their aura of high culture, which allow the writer to hint at homosexuality and sexual desire while avoiding being explicitly transgressive.

'Albergo Empedocle' features a narrator who tells the sad story of a friend, Harold, whose mysterious experience during a visit to Sicily results in his being shipped back to England and confined to an asylum for the rest of his life. Harold is travelling in Italy on a conventional tour (the "Continental scramble") with his fiancée Mildred and her family: having reached Naples, they decide to proceed further south for a quick visit to Sicily. The narrator is invited to join them by letter, but refuses to do so, and we are given a suggestive reason: "Sicily was then a very sacred name to me, and the thought of running through it in no time, even with Harold, deterred me. I went afterwards..."²³ At the most visible level of meaning in the text, this can be read as a typically Fosterian remark on the narrowness of conventional British tourists who would debase the glory of a classical land by touring it in a rush, according to the

²⁰P.N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.90.

²¹Pemble, p.161. Bristow, p.64. E. M. Forster, 'Albergo Empedocle', in *Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings*, ed. by George H. Thomson (New York: Liveright, 1971), 5-36.

²²For Forster and the Uranian circle, see the author's 'Terminal Note' in *Maurice*.

²³Forster, *Albergo Empedocle*, p.6. Subsequent page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations.

dictates of their inseparable "Baedeker" ("the guide books say you can run through it in no time"). In addition to this, another possible reading emerges for the initiated, for whom the emphasis placed on the "sacredness" of Sicily refers to the island as the home of Theocritus and "Greek love".

The English party arrive at Girgenti to visit the famous Greek temples, and take lodgings at a hotel called Albergo Empedocle: during the visit to the temples on a hot sunny afternoon, Harold falls asleep on the grassy ground between two fallen columns. During his sleep, he is close to nature and the earth:

Harold's limbs lay in utter relaxation, but he was tingling with life, glorying in the bounty of the earth and the warmth of the sun (...) the lines faded out of his face as he grasped the greatest gift that the animal life can offer. (19)

On awakening, Harold declares: "I've lived here before". Mildred is excited by the thought: "You are a Greek! You have been a Greek!", but all Harold can remember is that: "I was a lot greater then than I am now". Further on, Forster dares to become more explicit, and has Harold state: "I loved very differently". After this climax, the story proceeds towards catastrophe: back at the hotel Harold completely loses his sense of identity, and all of the party believe that he has gone mad, probably as a result of sunstroke. The narrator tells how for a certain time back in England, Harold utters strange words which resemble ancient Greek, and at the end of the story the narrator draws his conclusion: "I firmly believe that he is a Greek - nay, that he is a Greek, drawn by recollection back into his previous life" (36).

As has been noted, the protagonists of Forster's fiction often experience forms of initiation and transformation which take place without their own active participation.²⁴ His characters are passively "possessed" and transformed by a redemptive power which the environment itself emanates over them. And it is precisely those who are least erudite or acquainted with the classics who are given the privilege of sudden revelations in the south. With an implicit attack on "the authoritative discourse of English classicism", Forster reserves to his most simple and

²⁴See Buzard, pp.299-300.

uneducated characters the possibility of contact with the "spirit of the South".²⁵ As in the example of Harold's quintessential sleep in 'Albergo Empedocle', the chosen one, in a state of passivity, can be transfixed simply by the influence of the place, by the spirit of that precise geographical spot, a *genius loci* with a predilection for northerners: it is in the heat of the sun, among ancient columns, and in contact with the grass and the flowers of Sicily that Harold's transformation into a Greek takes place.

While simultaneously functioning as a homosexual code, the idea at the centre of the story, of the soul of an ancient Greek reincarnated into a modern Englishman quite clearly belongs to the long lived nineteenth-century British tradition of claiming a kinship with the Mediterranean. Harold's magical revelation is the dream of the male British intellectual come true, but there is no catharsis in Forster's story, and the transformation is aborted with its sad ending in the asylum, because it cannot be understood or accepted by the current philistine society. Thus, the south functions as a possibility of escape, as indicator and proof that "another" type of life and an authentic kind of culture can and do exist. However, for Forster, the transformation of the British man into a Greek child of nature cannot be accomplished in its totality, and its value is ambiguous: "Most certainly he is not unhappy", the narrator says of the transformed Harold at the end of the story:

He looks out of the window hour after hour and sees things in the sky and the sea that we have forgotten. But of his fellow men he seems utterly unconscious. (...) He does not know that we exist (36).

Harold has become closer to nature, and like an ancient Greek, his perception of things is a more primitive, pure and natural one, he possesses a vision that modernity has lost ("we have forgotten"). However, Harold is trapped in the past, a past that is certainly glorious, "for the greater has replaced the less", but he cannot actualise his fulfilled desire in the present, and can only experience it in a state of alienation, in a permanent, childish dream.

²⁵Buzard, p.301.

A similar transformation from British into southern, from modern into primitive, is at the centre of 'The Story of a Panic', where the emancipating and regenerative power of the south takes the form of the god Pan itself. The presence of the god is mysteriously felt when a party of British tourists picnicking in the countryside near Naples are "panic" stricken for no apparent reason; on their return after their irrational flight, goat's footprints are found on the ground, the only visible sign of the animal-like god. On this occasion, the protagonist - the 14-year-old Eustace - undergoes an amazing and inexplicable transformation, from a feeble and sullen adolescent into a passionate youth who roams in the woods, responds to the corporeal calls of nature, and appreciates the company of the Italian waiter Gennaro. As with Harold in 'Albergo Empedocle', the emancipation from conventional British tourist into a child of nature is signalled by physical contact with the soil: Eustace's hand is "convulsively intertwined in the long grass" (14). Eustace's newly acquired personality leads him to shock the other tourists, as when he escapes from the tightness of his hotel room to feel the grassy ground: "[he] was standing in his nightshirt saluting, praising, and blessing the great forces and manifestations of Nature" (28). As in a long tradition, southern Italy is represented as the locus of the survival of paganism: for Forster, it is the setting where the god Pan himself still resides, that undefined and ambiguous figure of Greek mythology whose identity is associated, and at times confused, with that of Priapus and Dionysus, the god whom Pater had described as "but a presence: the *spiritual form* of Arcadia".²⁶

In such pantheistic surroundings the Italian waiter Gennaro goes about bare-chested and bare-legged: in the description of this character, as of other Italian men in other places of his fiction, Forster dwells on the male body and its physicality, and Gennaro is made to embody sexual potency and a positive animality: in an analogous way to Lawrence's Italian peasants, this character represents an eroticised physical power which is both ennobling and menacing to the British author/observer.

²⁶See Chapter Five, p.150.

As argued by Aldrich, 'The Story of a Panic' "contrasts the constrained, tortured English with the Italian child of nature; the story represents the revelation of the Arcadian world to Eustace. The boy has visions of a Mediterranean world, a place alive and magical, not pallid and prim like England".²⁷ But the significance of both 'Albergo Empedocle' and 'The Story of a Panic' does not reside exclusively in the treatment of homosexuality: this theme is in fact intertwined with social, cultural and political issues in Forster's artistic and personal search for completion. As has been argued by Levine, for this writer, completion will result from the conjunction between the realm of the "savage" and that of the "tame", a completion which will allow the tame to achieve fuller humanity. In most of his work, to the world of the tame, of the civilised, intellectual man, is opposed "the sexual potency of the savage [which] arises out of his being a 'natural' man in the Rousseauian sense". The province of the savage "lies outside the English ruling class: its representatives are either foreign - Mediterranean, Eastern - or working class English and educated not by a university but by a tribe or self".²⁸

Thus, the Mediterranean functions as the locus of alterity, and is made to represent a set of alternative values which, in Forster's vision, question and counteract the unsatisfactory state of modern British culture. This is also evident in Forster's first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), in which the south and the north of Europe are explicitly contrasted: the change of scene witnessed by the British tourists while crossing the Alps on their way to Italy is described in aesthetic, social and moral terms: "the vegetation changed, and the people ceased being ugly and drinking beer, and began instead to drink wine and to be beautiful".²⁹ In the same novel, the central character, Philip, who is enamoured of Italy, exclaims: "I do believe that Italy really purifies and ennobles all who visit her". As Bristow points out, the novel finally revolves around the relationship between the two main male characters, the English

²⁷Aldrich, p.97.

²⁸June Perry Levine, 'The Tame in Pursuit of the Savage: The Posthumous Fiction of E.M.Forster', *PMLA*, vol.99, n.1 (1984), 72-88, p.72.

²⁹E.M.Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905; London: Edward Arnold, 1965), p.106 (subsequent page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations).

Philip and the Italian Gino, his social inferior.³⁰ The latter is portrayed as a highly attractive and desirable man, and once more his fascination resides in his belonging to a natural, a-historical realm outside civilisation: "The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature" (155).

Forster's descriptions of Italian men, as in the examples of Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and Gennaro in 'The Story of a Panic', often dwell on the men's physical features, and tend to establish a subject/object relation. The same textual strategy reappears later in Forster's fiction, this time in a colonial setting, where the descriptions of the virile body of Aziz in *A Passage to India* echo those of Italian men in his Edwardian novels: they all involve a situation in which an Englishman's homoerotic gaze is directed at the native, a practice belonging to what Sara Suleri has called a "hidden tradition of imperial looking".³¹

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, it is also the menacing aspect of Gino's animality which is emphasised - symbolised by his deviousness, his occasional brutality, and his use of physical violence.³² At the same time, the Italianness represented by Gino is contrasted with the social constraints and moral repression of the British bourgeoisie, and functions as a mechanism to reveal its hypocrisy. Forster is often engaged, through the subtle and dry irony of his prose, in a fierce criticism of the conventions and bigotry of middle class life in Britain, exposing it as puritan, philistine and inhibited. He does so by contrasting life in Italy, a place which he constructs as a natural paradise of spontaneity and cultural authenticity, thus perpetuating some of the discursive practices of the late nineteenth century. Forster's use and interpretation of Italy can be inscribed in the discursive framework analysed in previous chapters, insofar as he continuously constructs an image of the south in opposition to that of the north, in order better to define and criticise the north to which he knows he belongs; his Italian fiction can be placed in the context of the counterhegemonic discourse

³⁰Bristow, p.66.

³¹Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p.132. Suleri's comments on Forster's imperial gaze are also extremely useful for the analysis of Lawrence's descriptions of Italian men (see section II in this Chapter).

³²Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p.111.

which, dating back to the mythological studies of Hamilton and Knight and the paganism of the Shelley circle, had developed especially in late Victorian Hellenism, and had emphasised certain elements of the south as positive qualities lacking in the north. The south is the place of sexual and moral liberation, and Forster's work sums up "the continuing power of Italy to effect sexual revelation (whether heterosexual or homosexual)".³³

However, Forster was not satisfied with this use of the south, which is occasionally felt as an inadequate category, and elsewhere in his fiction, as in the posthumous novel *Maurice* (1971) the supposed simplicity, spontaneity and authenticity represented by and through the south are projected instead onto the English countryside. In a similar way to Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Forster's homosexual novel presents the fulfilment of the union between the protagonist and a gamekeeper in an English rural setting, a space that, as the south of his Italian fiction, permits the overcoming of class barriers through a disinhibited love of the body, and the leading of a spontaneous life close to nature.³⁴

The shift from the Mediterranean to England of Forster's arcadian utopias is accompanied in *Maurice* by the expression of a disillusionment with the values represented by ancient Greece. In this text, Forster recognises that the classical south is only an erudite, intellectualised cultural device (as, notably, in the poetry of the Uranians) utilised to permit the expression of desires and values which he now attempts to locate instead in his own country. As Bristow observes, Forster proposes an "idealised version of England - domesticated, fertile, maternalised, liberal, comradely".³⁵ In the conclusion of *Maurice*, as another critic argues, "the world of technology [is] well lost for love because another world - the England of countryside,

³³Aldrich, p.100.

³⁴Forster commented on the character of the gamekeeper Alec in *Maurice* (a novel written in 1913-14, and revised several times): "He is senior in date to the prickly gamekeepers of D.H.Lawrence, and had not the advantage of their disquisitions, nor (...) would they have had more in common than a mug of beer" ('Terminal Note', in *Maurice*, p.219). Although the author attempts at downplaying the similarity by the reference to a mere "mug of beer", this image denotes precisely the element of Englishness and of social class common to both Forster's and Lawrence's gamekeepers, who also share their belonging to a non-industrial, rural environment.

³⁵Bristow, p.79.

tradition, and spirit - has been gained"³⁶. And yet, this idealised English setting is too blatantly utopian and far from satisfactory for Forster, who, in the rest of his homoerotic writing, shows "little or no faith in the consolations of pastoral England".³⁷ Forster subsequently looked at the distant colonial territories of the East; but for Cyril Fielding, the protagonist of *A Passage to India* (1924), who has known Italy from his youth, "the Mediterranean is the human norm. When men leave that exquisite lake, whether through the Bosphorous or the Pillars of Hercules, they approach the monstrous and extraordinary".³⁸

Forster's ambivalence towards the Mediterranean is one which combines in "that exquisite lake" the authority of origins and tradition, the regenerative power of a primitive, pre-classical paganism, and the disillusion of death and decay. These elements coexist throughout in his work, where the south is associated with death and degeneration as early as in 'Albergo Empedocle'; a description of the Sicilian landscape in this story includes the following comment on the dichotomy between past and present:

And far below at the bottom of the yellow waste was the moving living sea, which embraced Sicily when she was green and delicate and young, and embraces her now, when she is brown and withered and dying (13).

Besides perpetuating the mythical image of liberation and eroticism in the south, Forster at times implies, with dignified despair, that that imagined world is now dead and it is futile and utopian to go back to ancient times. In *Maurice*, the protagonist does discover homosexuality through the classics, but eventually finds a lover who is English and working class, while the "Hellenic" Clive, the other main character in the novel, travels to Greece only to find it "a dead land":

³⁶J.P.Levine, p.78.

³⁷Bristow, p.82.

³⁸E.M.Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), pp.270-71. Fussell comments: "that's what's the matter with India: it's too far from the olive trees and the grapes, too far from the great continuous opposition between Christianity and 'Rome' in the old sense that so superbly enacts the perpetually interesting quarrel between spirit and flesh in mankind" (*Abroad*, p.136). For a discussion of Forster's homoeroticism in this novel, see Bristow. Said has commented on Forster's political views on Indian independence in *Culture and Imperialism*. On Forster's colonial discourse in *A Passage to India* see especially Suleri.

Clive sat at the theatre of Dionysus. The stage was empty, as it had been for many centuries, the auditorium empty; the sun had set though the Acropolis behind still radiated heat. He saw barren plains running down to the sea, Salamis, Aegina, mountains, all blended in a violet evening. Here dwelt his gods (...)

But he saw only dying light and a dead land. He uttered no prayer, believed in no deity and knew that the past was devoid of meaning like the present, and a refuge for cowards.³⁹

The young Englishman's disenchantment has turned into a vision of southern decline and death. This is perhaps one of the most extreme expressions of Forster's disillusion and pessimism, one that places this author in the context of a radical critique of modernity. In the statement that the past - in particular the Greek past - is "a refuge for cowards" not only does Forster distance himself from the British tradition of aesthetic Hellenism, but he undermines the main assumption of the nineteenth-century discourse of the south examined in previous chapters, the assumption of the crucial importance of ancient Greece for modern Britain: Clive's meditation in front of the empty theatre of Dionysus reveals Forster's lucid awareness that the traditional British attraction for southern past is an inadequate myth, incapable of curing modernity's dissatisfaction with the present.

ii) D.H.Lawrence's South: Regeneration / Degeneration

The modernist discontent with the state of twentieth-century European civilisation has been expressed most forcefully among British writers by D.H.Lawrence, who provides perhaps the best example of an Englishman abroad to escape Englishness itself.⁴⁰ This author does not make a mystery of the loathing for his own country, but his attitude toward his national and cultural identity is more complex and contradictory than he himself was ready to recognise.

³⁹Forster, *Maurice*, p.104. Aldrich argues that Forster's work sums up the cultural phenomenon begun at the time of Byron, in which the classical Mediterranean was portrayed as the spiritual home of homosexuals, but it also signifies the evolution and the change of this modern myth, testified in his early work by the unresolved ending of 'Albergo Empedocle', and later confirmed by the complete rejection of Greece in *Maurice* (see Aldrich, pp.99-100).

⁴⁰See Porter, p.202.

In 1929 Lawrence wrote from Paris to Aldous and Maria Huxley: "I don't want to go north, don't want to *be* North, shan't have any peace till I see the Mediterranean again, all the rest hell!"⁴¹ The north/south opposition which recurs in much of Lawrence's writing closely resembles that anticipated in the works of late Victorians such as Pater and Symonds, an opposition encapsulating sets of polarities such as industry/agriculture, sin/pleasure, repression/liberation, puritan/pagan, Protestant/Catholic, and so forth. Lawrence's revolt against the constraints of the north, and the Mediterranean myth through which he voices this revolt, make him, as one critic remarks, "a true heir of his Victorian literary predecessors - with this difference, that what in their work had been an undercurrent creating subtle tensions and half-hidden sadness, in his became a surface tide, relentless and strident".⁴²

The Mediterranean is a central theme in Lawrence's life and works: he devoted three books to Italy, *Twilight in Italy* (1916), *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), and the posthumous *Etruscan Places* (1932).⁴³ Lawrence travelled extensively in Italy from 1914, starting in the north and progressively moving south. As one critic observes, Lawrence was attracted to Sicily, and then to Sardinia in his search for a kind of life "that had retreated to the margins of continental Europe".⁴⁴

In December 1919 he and his wife Frieda stayed in Capri, which he found "gossipy" and "villa-stricken".⁴⁵ It was to Sicily that Lawrence decided to go from there, and in February 1920 he and Frieda rented a spacious villa in Taormina called Fontana Vecchia, which they kept for two years.⁴⁶ From time to time they would travel again northwards, but Lawrence acutely felt the fascination of the south, and rejoiced at the recognition of Sicily's connection with Greece and the east; on his return to Taormina in October 1921 after a visit to Germany, he expresses his relief:

⁴¹*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, p.790 (undated letter).

⁴²Pemble, p.156.

⁴³Collected in *D.H. Lawrence and Italy: Twilight in Italy, Sea and Sardinia, Etruscan Places* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

⁴⁴Porter, p.203.

⁴⁵Quoted in Eliot Fay, *Lorenzo in Search of the Sun: D.H. Lawrence in Italy, Mexico and the American South-West* (London: Vision, 1955), p.20.

⁴⁶See the section 'Taormina' in Fay, pp.15-34.

The north always makes me feel weak and hopeless... I'm so thankful to be back in the south, beyond the Straits of Messina, in the shadow of Etna, and with the Ionian Sea in front: the lovely dawn-sea where the sun does nothing but rise toward Greece, in the morning-past, and towards the east.⁴⁷

In another letter, Lawrence reiterates the image of Sicily as "the end" of Europe in very similar terms to travellers of past centuries. With distinct echoes of Goethe, mixed with his own characteristic ebullience and evident racial overtones, he gives voice to the excitement he feels on such an ambivalent geographical border-zone:

I like the strong Saracen element in the people here. They are thin and dark and queer. It isn't quite like Europe. It is where Europe ends, finally. Beyond is Asia and Africa. One realises, somehow, how non-European, how Asiatic Greece was - tinged with Phoenician.⁴⁸

These comments on the Sicilian mixture of races ~~are~~, of course, nothing new, as previous as well as contemporary travellers and historians reiterated their interest in the complex racial past of the island as "the playground of civilisations", and noted its visible traces in the modern Sicilians' physical features.⁴⁹ Lawrence's attitude can thus be placed within the racial discourse circulating in the age of imperialism, but his originality lies in a conscious reversal of the dominant discursive construction of those historians and travellers who privileged the Greek Sicilian element: it is, instead, the African and Asian elements which attract him.

In *Sea and Sardinia*, Lawrence reiterates at length the old opposition between the Phoenician and Arab past of western Sicily, and the Greek history of the eastern part of the island, but he does so in terms which betray his fascination with what is non-European; he describes the sun setting on the western coast: "this great red, trumpet-flaring sunset had something African, half-sinister, upon the sea: and it seemed so far off, in an unknown land, whereas our Ionian dawn seems near and familiar and happy".⁵⁰ The appeal of Africanⁿess, associated with danger and the unknown, is counterpointed by the uninterestingness of the serene Greek element: the possessive

⁴⁷*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, pp.525-26 (letter dated 17 October 1921).

⁴⁸*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, pp.501-2 (letter dated 15 March 1920). Lawrence's stay in Sicily provided the inspiration for several poems and stimulated his talent as translator; he published three volumes of translations from the Sicilian novelist Giovanni Verga (1840-1922): *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (London: Seltzer, 1923), *Little Novels of Sicily* (London: Seltzer, 1925), and *Cavalleria Rusticana* (London: Cape, 1928). See George Malcom Hyde, *D.H. Lawrence and the Art of Translation* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

⁴⁹See Chapter Four, section V.

⁵⁰*D.H. Lawrence and Italy*, 'Sea and Sardinia', p.42.

adjective "our" places Lawrence, together with his readers, on the Greek side, and denotes the African continent, and all that is non-Europe, as the depository of alterity. The western coast of Sicily is the space where Lawrence's self, constructed through the old Victorian addition 'modern British plus ancient Greek equals European' confronts (and is attracted to) the African, non-European Other.

This is also why Lawrence is fascinated by Mount Eryx, on the western end of Sicily, a place rich with pre-classical associations: in prehistoric times the mountain was the site of the cult of the goddess Astarte, described by Lawrence as "Venus of the aborigines, older than Greek Aphrodite".⁵¹ By evoking the notion of the primitive, through terms such as "aborigines" or, elsewhere, through references to the prehistoric Sikans, Lawrence is using an essentialised, primitivised southern past as a mechanism to write about and understand his own troubled modern subjectivity: he is expressing his "unconscious desire for a 'pre-historic' self".⁵² The modern writer regresses to a lost past in order to define and criticise the present, but in doing so, he is far from freeing the notion of primitivism from the idea of progress, which is one of the founding categories of the civilised present he is so dissatisfied with.

Besides, in a typically contradictory way, Lawrence never repudiated the importance of ancient Greece. Greek references denote the use of a southern past as authentic and opposed to the mechanised and mercantile northern present in the short story 'Sun', written in December 1925 and published the following year. The story is set in Sicily, and the Sicilian natural environment and its Greek associations feature prominently in the text, enabling the narration of a process of personal transformation, through which the author expresses his typical preoccupation with modernity, his anxiety and frustration over the dualism between mind and body, spirit and flesh, and the search for reconciliation and cosmic harmony.

Lawrence's choice of the sun image in this text can be partly read as a recrudescence of the climatic determinism of the previous century, with its insistence on the

⁵¹Ibid., p.33.

⁵²Porter, p.215.

therapeutic effect of southern climate on the northern tourist: as noted by Fussell, in the culture of the years between the wars, the therapeutic value of the sun - the Mediterranean's "most ubiquitous natural asset" - for the northerner accustomed to a "puritanical weather" was reaffirmed.⁵³ However, while in the nineteenth century experts and moralists had also warned about the risks of the southern climate, now the potential of the hot and sunny south to take one to excesses and liberate passions (according to climatic determinism's old formula) was generally regarded positively and valued as a means to attain or re-gain that vitality which was felt to be lacking in the north.⁵⁴

Lawrence utilises all the possibilities offered by the potent symbol of the sun, and constructs his story very simply around the idea of a masculine, phallic sun and its power to awaken to sexuality a frustrated and frigid woman. But the other ingredients of the story 'Sun' are also relevant: the sun in question is the Mediterranean, Sicilian

⁵³Fussell, p.137 and p.22.

⁵⁴'Sun' was commissioned from Lawrence by Harry Crosby (1898-1929), an eccentric American who settled in France, established a publishing house in Paris called Black Sun Press, and worshipped "the Sun God"(see Fussell, *Abroad*, p.139). The 1920's and 1930's were the years of the peculiar cultural phenomenon which Fussell calls "the new heliophilia", the obsession with the sun both on a symbolic and an actual level: the sun motif recurs in the literature and art of the period, the word "sun" appears obsessively in the titles of novels, while the belief in the therapeutic power of the sun's rays culminated in the diffusion of the practice of nude sunbathing. See Fussell, *Abroad*, pp.137-141. To this vogue contributed the publication in 1923 of *Heliotherapy*, an influential medical treatise written by a Swiss physician, Auguste Rollier, trans. by G. de Swietochowski (London: Humphrey Milford, 1923). The vogue was also reinforced by the spread of spiritualism, occultism and magic in the twenties and thirties, testified by eccentric figures such as Crosby (the commissioner of Lawrence's story), and Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), a leading figure of occultism who also found in Sicily a space for sunbathing and personal liberation. In the spring of 1920, at the same time when Lawrence rented his villa in Taormina, Crowley, another Englishman from the Midlands, settled in Sicily; a heavy drug user and a major figure in occultism, nominated Head of the Golden Dawn in 1904, Crowley rented a villa in the fishing village of Cefalù on the northern coast of Sicily, and turned it into the 'Abbey of Thelema', where he practised magic including, allegedly, sex orgies and animal sacrifices, until he was expelled from Italy by Mussolini in April 1923. Crowley provides one more example of transformation in the south through the spirit of the place, in his case with the assistance of his esoteric doctrines: on arriving in Sicily he praised the local gods for directing him to the villa, and his first act of sex magic in Cefalù had for its object: 'Salutation to the Gods and Goddesses of this place!' (John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, London: Rider, 1951, pp.151-152.) Crowley was a prolific writer, author of fiction, poetry, one tragedy, and many occultist books; he fictionalised his experience in Sicily in his *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1922; York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1970), where his tale of personal transformation, however, is set in Greece, and Cefalù becomes 'Telepylus'. Crowley writes that there "We were re-born (...) a sense of innocence pervaded us. (...) our sense of time and space had been destroyed. (...) In Telepylus, our time-keeper was the Nature of which we were part." (*Diary of A Drug Fiend*, p.308.) Crowley's stay in Sicily has inspired a short story by Leonardo Sciascia, 'Apocriphi sul caso Crowley', in *Il mare color del vino* (Torino: Einaudi, 1973); 'Apocryphal Correspondence re Crowley' in *The wine-dark sea*, trans. Avril Bardoni (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985).

sun, shining on the body of an American woman. Throughout the text, images of "grey" and "gloom" recur in conjunction with the figure of her pallid husband, an American businessman who represents all that is repellent to Lawrence ("so like graveyard worms"), while the narrative abounds with descriptions of sunlight, blue skies, and the brilliance of the luxurious Sicilian landscape. As may be expected, Lawrence indulges on the erotic connotations permitted by the choice of images such as the woman's "union" or "mating" with the sun.⁵⁵

As one critic has pointed out, "Lawrence's people discover their identities through their response to place".⁵⁶ Like Forster, he emphasises the liberating power of the Italian south to awaken sexual desire, and constructs a narrative centred on the spirit of the place and its beneficial influence on a woman's sexuality (or Lawrence's idea of a woman's sexuality).⁵⁷ Once more, the Sicilian *genius loci* is at work on the unsatisfied, English speaking "northerner".

The description of the Mediterranean landscape which welcomes the protagonist, Juliet, as she arrives in Sicily, could be mistaken for a passage from J.A.Symonds' travel writing, or indeed of any Romantic or Victorian traveller writing about the south:

She had a house above the bluest of seas, with a vast garden, or vineyard, all vines and olives, dropping steeply in terrace after terrace, to the strip of coast plain: and the garden full of secret places, deep groves of lemon far down in the cleft of earth, and hidden, pure green reservoirs of water; then a spring issuing out of a little cavern, where the old Sicules had drunk before the Greeks came; and a grey goat bleating, stabled in an ancient tomb, with the niches empty. There was the scent of the mimosa, and, beyond, the snow of the volcano.⁵⁸

The construction of the place as arcadian paradise is typical, while the references to a Sicilian cave and pre-classical peoples resonate with interest in primitivism and paganism. The Greek past is more specifically evoked through the character of Marinin, an old local woman working as Juliet's servant, whom Lawrence repeatedly

⁵⁵The word "womb" recurs no less than twenty-one times in the text.

⁵⁶Fussell, *Abroad*, p.143.

⁵⁷'Sun' has been analysed in feminist and psychoanalytic terms by Judith Ruderman, in *D.H.Lawrence and the Devouring Mother: The Search for a Patriarchal Ideal of Leadership* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984).

⁵⁸D.H. Lawrence, 'Sun', in *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories*, ed. by Dieter Mehl and Christa Jansohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19-38, p.20. Subsequent page numbers will be given in parenthesis after quotations.

describes as "a woman of Magna Grecia" and "a woman from the past", with "dark-grey eyes that had all the shrewdness of thousands of years in them" (24). Here again is the topos of the rich Sicilian past, a past which extends backwards for millennia but is still visible in the physiognomy of a modern Sicilian woman (who, therefore, is not really "modern").

Unlike the protagonists of Forster's short stories, whose personality changes are sudden and unexpected, in Lawrence's 'Sun', Juliet alters gradually, undergoing a profound spiritual and bodily transformation with the daily practice of nude sunbathing. The transformations of both Forster's and Lawrence's characters, however, share a magical, irrational quality, that of being intrinsically linked with their specific location. Juliet chooses a secluded and sunny cactus grove under a cypress tree, on the edge of a cliff on the Sicilian coast, and there she exposes herself to the sun rays, remembering that "the Greeks had said, a white, unsunned body was unhealthy, and fishy" (24). And this is an ideal place indeed to think of the Greeks: it is "an eternally wild place", possessing "the vivid wilderness of the old classic places, that have known men for so long" (31).

The Lawrentian revolt against the modern mechanised world emerges blatantly when the south and the sun become emblems of a "cosmic influence", opposed to "the vast cold apparatus of civilisation" (27). Ancient Greece, past history, Sicilian landscape, the Mediterranean sun, all stand for what is vital and harmonious: the south is the ideal space which enables the actualisation of an idyllic relationship with the cosmos. What is more, in the second part of the story, Sicily also provides the potential for Juliet's sexual fulfilment, in the person of a local peasant. This nameless character is sketched with strong, vital and animalistic traits: "the hot, inarticulate animal, with such a hot, massive blood-stream in his great veins!" (37).

The character's body is repeatedly described by adjectives such as "powerful" and "strong", while his gestures are "sudden", "a little violent and over-generous" (29); the point of view from where the gaze proceeds shifts ambiguously between the narrator

and Juliet: "such a broad red face, such a great chest, and rather short legs. Too much a crude beast for her to think of, a peasant" (30).

This type of description is similar in many respects to the series of sketches of Italian men made by Lawrence, mainly in *Twilight in Italy*, where the author regularly situates himself as the detached observer, the invisible agent of an "imperial" gaze (which often, for all his proclaimed heterosexuality, is also characterised by an evident homoeroticism).⁵⁹

The peasant in 'Sun' possesses life and vitality, but does not take the initiative. The Mediterranean man, Lawrence insists, will never make the first move, will wait for the (northern) woman to make the advance. The description that Lawrence gives of this anonymous male figure could be read as applying to the south at large:

He was the type of Italian peasant that wants to make an offering of himself, passionately wants to make an offering of himself (...) He would hang round in a long, consuming passivity of desire, hoping, hoping for the woman to come to him. But he would never try to advance to her: never. (...) Only he would hang round, within reach. (37)

It would seem at first sight that Lawrence operates a reversal of the usual feminisation of the south: here the northerner is a woman. The key word "passivity", however, shows that the reversal in the discourse of genderised geography is only, in fact, apparent. The south is represented by a male figure, but he is animal-like, primitive, inhabits the world of primary instincts and has no access to the word; Lawrence's south is a passive, receptive space, waiting for the northerner to possess it: it patiently hangs round, "within reach".

It is through the mere presence of this "inarticulate animal" - the Sicilian peasant working in the land near her villa - that Juliet's transformation takes place: she has turned from the nervous, frigid, New York woman into a relaxed, sensual being, described, with a Greek reference, as "alluring as a nymph" and in tune with nature and the universe ("I am another being", she said to herself") (27). But, as in Forster,

⁵⁹The most quoted of these sketches is perhaps that of a grafter of vines named by Lawrence 'Il Duro' ('The Tough') in *Twilight in Italy*: in this case the Italian rural worker is transfixed by Lawrence's hallucinatory prose into a Pan-like figure, where, as in the peasant in 'Sun', the animal quality of the man is emphasised (he is "half goatlike"). For Porter, Lawrence's descriptions of Italian men are simply "celebratory portraits (...) of male types" (p.210).

the story takes a darker turn, which denies the possibility of catharsis, and the conclusion allows for no ultimate liberation. Although Juliet will stay in Sicily and never return to her New York flat, her union with the Sicilian peasant is only fantasised about and she will have to remain with her grey husband and have his child. The narrator's voice comments at the very end of the story: "She could not help it. She was bound to the vast, fixed wheel of circumstance, and there was no Perseus in the universe, to cut the bonds" (38).

Lawrence wrote in 1929: "The North has all gone *evil* - I can't help feeling it morally and ethically. I mean anti-life".⁶⁰ The implicit counterpart of this statement is that a different, vital dimension exists somewhere else, and this somewhere is represented, in Lawrence's Italian writings, by the image of the Mediterranean south. But at the end of 'Sun', the southern promise of life - like Juliet's sexual desire - remains unfulfilled, and it is the grey husband, symbol of the "evil" north, of modernity, commerce, and mechanisation, who will prevail, with law, order and convention on his side.

Like Forster's, Lawrence's is ultimately a depleted, dying south, and although it may offer promises of union and reconciliation, harmony and vitality, it is eventually found unsatisfying.

As early as 1864, after his visit to Italy, Charles Algernon Swinburne, one of Lawrence's most admired poets, had utilised death images in relation to the south and expressed his dislike for "the weary Mediterranean, drear to see (...), one dead flat sapphire, void of wrath".⁶¹ For Lawrence too, the south, because it is so incommensurably old, shows the profound signs of its age, it is fatigued, overworked.

⁶⁰*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, p.790 (undated letter).

⁶¹Quoted in Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Charles Algernon Swinburne* (London, Macmillan, 1917), p.67. Lawrence often ranked Swinburne with Shelley as the greatest English poet; see Ross C. Murfin, *The Poetry of D.H. Lawrence* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p.11. The association of the Mediterranean with death and decay was present in much nineteenth-century discourse of the south, from the novelists', travellers' and archaeologists' obsession with the City of the Dead to the historians' intention to read the Mediterranean dead past, to J.A. Symonds' poetical meditation on the glory of Italian classical ruins: "Great cities, greater in decay and death, / dream-like with immemorial repose" ('Southward Bound', p.3). As seen in previous chapters, the theme of death and decay in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with continuous attempts at reconstructing and resuscitating the dead past.

In *Sea and Sardinia*, he gives voice to a feeling of disillusionment, echoing Swinburne's images, in a prose full of typically Lawrentian sexual images, summing up one of the main aspects of the modernist attitude to the south, that of a profound, melancholic discontent:

One begins to realise how old the real Italy is, how man-gripped, and how withered. (...) Life is so primitive, so pagan, so strangely heathen and half-savage, and yet it is human life. And the wildest country is humanised, half brought under. It is all conscious. Wherever one is in Italy, either one is conscious of the present, or of the medieval influences, or of the far, mysterious gods of the early Mediterranean. Wherever one is, the place has its conscious genius. Man has lived there and brought forth his consciousness there and in some way brought that place to consciousness, given it its expression, and really, finished it. The expression may be Proserpine, or Pan, or even the strange "shrouded gods" of the Etruscans or the Sikels, none the less it is an expression. The land has been humanised, through and through: and we in our own tissue consciousness bear the result of this humanisation. So that for us to go to Italy and to *penetrate* into Italy is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery - back, back down the old ways of time. Strange and wonderful chords awake us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness. And then - and then - there is a final feeling of sterility. It is all worked out.⁶²

In this passage, the ambiguous shift of names, pronouns and possessive adjectives from the impersonal "one" to the general "man", to "we" / "us" / "our", indicates that Lawrence is addressing a public who is placed on the same side, a very specific side indeed, as the author. This side is not, as Lawrence himself and the majority of his critics easily suggest, that of the modern "European" man: "for us to go to Italy" indicates how limited the Lawrentian claim of speaking for a universal modern subject is, and to what extent his Britishness permeates his work, an extent hardly dissimilar to travellers to Italy of the previous centuries. The use of the italicised "*penetrate*" points to a feminisation of Italy which has a long history in the discourse of the south, and illustrates how Lawrence's themes and textual strategies are both personal and inscribed in pre-existing discursive frameworks: in the context of the discourse of the south, Lawrence's much celebrated originality in the modernist canon loses a great deal of its obviousness.

The Lawrentian regressive journey through history starts from a present punctuated by images of degeneration ("withered", "sterility"); besides, in a similar way to Forster, Lawrence feels compelled to admit the rejection, however sad, of ancient Greece, even of the myths dearest to Victorian Hellenism, those of Proserpine and

⁶²'Sea and Sardinia', pp.122-123 (Lawrence's emphasis).

Pan. Finally, the author is discarding a feminised Mediterranean as old and sterile, a south which has ceased to be a regenerative, fertile space for self-discovery: in his life and writings the European south will give way to the non-European "masculine" primitivism of Mexico and the American south-west.⁶³

Pessimism, unresolved anxiety, and a sense of disillusion characterise both Forster's and Lawrence's use of the south, a use which in other aspects clearly echoes that of their nineteenth-century predecessors. Both authors see in the south a possibility of escape, but, having advocated such escape, they find that it is ultimately unattainable. In Forster's Edwardian fiction and Lawrence's travel writing on Italy, the reaction against the dominant British culture, expressed in distinctly different voices by the two authors, posits challenges which both writers take up, and contradictions which they are unable to solve: their narratives are equally pervaded by a sense of failure and inadequacy, by images of death and decay, which counterbalance those of regeneration, vitality, and desire.

In their modernist narratives, when death images appear, they are entirely negative: the dead south is dead once and for all. Not only is there no possibility of reviving the southern past, as there was for the Victorians, but, what is more significant, in the end there is no *intention*, no incentive for reviving it: that past is dead for ever, and it is modernity that has to face the consequences.

When Forster and Lawrence propose the figure of the south as the embodiment of an alternative value system, a place where, for instance, the antagonism between flesh and spirit could be solved; when they try to escape from Englishness and from an industrialised, commodified modernity (as in their aversion for tourism), they are trapped in a paradox: they are representing the south as the locus of alterity, but they are doing so from their position as writers located within the bourgeois culture of

⁶³Torgovnick observes that "Lawrence's gendered versions of the primitive retell in personal terms the two major stories (...) he inherited from the nineteenth century: primitive peoples as dangerous and irrational, something to be feared; primitive peoples as the idealised noble savage, something to be emulated. The first, for Lawrence the 'feminine' version, is the primitive as degeneration, as a cautionary tale for the modern West; the second, the 'masculine' version is the primitive as regeneration, as the last best hope for the modern West" (Torgovnick, p.159).

British modernism. As Peter Bürger notes speaking of a Wyndham Lewis novel, "the polemical reaction of bourgeois culture merely adds another chapter to its history".⁶⁴ Forster and Lawrence did not and could not escape from the cultural constraints and the symbolic economy of the discursive framework in which their different personal attempts at rebellion remain firmly located. But within the British discourse of the south their ambivalent use of the Mediterranean signals a considerable modification: it points in the direction both of a weary repetition of its topoi, and of a dissolution of such discourse in the twentieth century. The enthusiastic late eighteenth-century and Romantic theorisation of a north/south dichotomy within Europe, which contributed to the construction of a British cultural, national, and imperial identity, even when re-used and re-affirmed by Forster and Lawrence, is finally revealed as inadequate both in their works and in their travel experience: the forces of modernity are felt to invest the subject in a wider dimension than that of the European continent, and it is increasingly difficult for them to secure a bourgeois, intellectual, British identity in a world of collapsing boundaries.

⁶⁴Bürger also notes: "the artist who defines himself in anti-bourgeois terms despises the culture of the bourgeois world which is repudiated as inappropriate to the age (...). Yet at the same time his own work remains bound to this culture (...)". Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, trans. Nicholas Walker, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.131.

EPILOGUE

The range of texts from the late eighteenth to the first decades of the twentieth century analysed in the course of this work reveals the complex play of a type of discourse which has been called here the discourse of the south. For well over a century, the term "south" recurs in association with a set of dichotomies, making up the context and rhetoric of a process of national and cultural self-definition: the textual production of British authors and artists of various moral, aesthetic, political and ideological stances, occurs within a discursive framework which negotiates a set of binary oppositions, where Britishness could be defined through the invocation of alterity.

The textual analysis of the discourse of the south carried out in this work points to the fact that the invocation of a colonial Other in nineteenth-century British culture, largely investigated in the field of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial studies since Said's *Orientalism*, is paralleled and reinforced by that of a European Other, represented by the Mediterranean; this is generally epitomised by Italy and is especially evident in travellers and texts dealing with southern Italy and Sicily.

The attraction^{felt by} British travellers, historians, scientists, archaeologists, volcanologists, architects, painters etc., for the territories of the Mediterranean south has been constant in the time span examined, and has been associated with changing and contrasting ideologies, and diverse aesthetic and political attitudes. The south as a figure of alterity has taken various shapes since the "discovery" of Sicily in 1773: explorations of a scientific and archaeological kind have been made while the south has served an aesthetic function as an exotic setting for Gothic novels and picturesque paintings; it supplied rich material for Victorian historical novels, the critical writings of *fin de siècle* aestheticism and the poetry of the Uranians; it provided a visual rhetoric of empire for architectural styles and for the works of Royal Academy painters. The figure of the south has been variously deployed to discuss issues of morals, sexuality and religion by authors who admired the qualities associated with an

image of the Mediterranean or who denigrated its vices. Victorian historians, utilising arguments of race and degeneration have been able to construct and test their theories of linear, imperial progress in the lands of the Italian south, the ambiguous contact zone between Europe and non-Europe. The shores of the Mediterranean have been constructed simultaneously as the locus of the origins of European civilisation and as the geographical space of its decay and degeneration. Concomitantly, some British theorists constructed the idea of Britain as the northern European nation which had taken up the light of civilisation and was invested with a civilising mission, which justified its imperial enterprise. A vocabulary of kinship, heredity and descentance has been deployed by British authors and travellers in relation to the south: discursive practices have varied from affirmations of a northern superiority, made in the context of the construction of an advanced, Protestant, imperial British identity, and appreciations of a southern, pagan "spirit", elaborated in the context of a critique of British dominant culture and the invocation of a return to a primitive, spontaneous, pre-capitalist state of nature in the arcadian south. An internal critical discourse questioned the validity of certain aspects of the dominant culture, and counteracted the triumphant discourses based on positivist, teleological, or religious criteria by proposing the adoption of alternative values associated with the south.

The discourse of the south developed, in the context of the construction of a British identity, through a complex play of difference and identity, negativity and affirmation. The northern, British identity thus constructed was a hybridised identity, containing elements from the Mediterranean; throughout the nineteenth century British culture underwent a sort of mediterraneanisation, witnessed by the recurrence of southern images and references in so many different areas, from architecture and painting to literature and historiography. Thus, Victorians dressed themselves as ancient Greeks and Romans, owned cups and plates decorated with Pompeian designs, and lived amid buildings displaying all known classical orders of columns.¹

¹Daryl Ogden comes to a similar conclusion about Ruskin's Orientalism and its influence on imperial architecture, in 'The Architecture of Empire: "Oriental" Gothic and the Problem of British Identity in Ruskin's Venice', where he argues that "The erstwhile arch-imperialist Ruskin begrudgingly played an

In one sense, then, the Mediterranean south as epitomised by Italy may be regarded as yet another of Britain's Others, while it also functions as a former Self, an ancestor, linked to the north by a bond of genealogy which legitimises the British claim to double citizenship: a northern nationality which incorporates certain southern elements (whether the glory of the Roman empire and the pristine spirit of the early Church, or the instinctual 'Greek' life of the senses and the regenerative values of a sunny climate) - a range of images selected for different ideological purposes, which as a whole make up the discursive formation encapsulated in the term "south".

The confrontation with the figure of the south contributing to the construction of a British identity in the nineteenth century is carried into the twentieth century: the age of modernism found in the south the location for the staging of a crisis of the modern subject, and, in their quest for primitivism, modernist writers eventually turned the cradle of civilisation into a place of death and decay. Forster and Lawrence found the south unsatisfactory, and searched for more distant settings for their narratives of crisis. When Lawrence was in Italy in the 1920's he was particularly disappointed by the signs of modernity that he could detect there: the increasing industrialisation of some Italian regions at the time, denied him the possibility to construct Italy as the Other as easily as writers before him had done.²

This fact suggests the possible directions that further investigation in this field might take: in order to explore the survival, development, and modification in the twentieth century of what has been called here the discourse of the south, socio-economic changes, such as the dynamics of the geographic spread of capital and the concomitant "westernisation" of the globe would need to be taken into account. Questions relating to the theory of representation in cultural studies would need to be asked in the context of the study of postmodernism, postcolonialism and global politics.

Forster's and Lawrence's disillusionment with the south may suggest at first sight that, even more at the end of the twentieth century, in a global economy of transnational

unintentional part not only in bringing about the Orientalization of English architecture but also in Orientalizing the face of imperial England itself" (Ogden, p.118).

²See Porter, pp.211-212.

capital, an age of collapsing boundaries, the death of the subject, and nomadic subjectivities, the discourse of the south as has been described so far has little or no place in British cultural production. However, it is still possible to explore the survival of certain strands of nineteenth-century discourse in contemporary culture.

It may be argued that the discourse of the south still emerges in certain places of textuality in British culture of the present day. As Linda Colley observes,

Shorn of its imperial extensions, Britain (...) has ceased to be able to control Europe or to avoid it. It has become part of it, and, so, is unable any more to define itself comfortably against it, though the difficulties that British politicians and voters of all partisan persuasions have in coming to terms with the dictates of the European Economic Community indicate how rooted the perception of Europe as the (predominantly Catholic) Other still is.³

While the definition of a British identity is threatened after the dissolution of the empire, and by internal nationalisms at home, narratives are still produced today in the English language where the main assumptions of the nineteenth-century discourse of the south re-emerge. An analysis of film and media production in English (influenced by the mafia and gangster genre of American films such as *The Godfather* series), as well as of contemporary journalism and travel writing about the Italian south may reveal connections with some aspects of nineteenth century discourse, and show how this has survived or has been modified in the changed cultural circumstances.⁴

The equation of the Italian south with the dimension of a pre-capitalist, natural past is reiterated in the contemporary publicity industry, which for instance, in 1997 advertised a Sicilian type of British pizza through images of horses on cobbled streets, church bells and old peasant women dressed in black. In the realm of popular fiction, a Mills and Boon romance of 1990, *Sicilian Vengeance*, depicts Sicily as a place where no one has heard of Michael Jackson.⁵ One of the most recent tourist

³ Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (October 1992), 309-329, p.328.

⁴ One analogy worth exploring between contemporary and nineteenth-century representations of the Italian south may be found in the depiction of mafia criminals in the myriad American films of the gangster genre, which echo that of picturesque banditti in Romantic and Victorian literature and painting.

⁵ Sara Wood, *Sicilian Vengeance* (Richmond, Surrey: Mills and Boon, 1990). The title of this novel echoes those of the Gothic novels also written by women and set in Sicily about two centuries earlier; see Chapter Two. Another example of the recurrence of certain themes can be found in a booklet of

guidebooks about Sicily published in Britain, belonging to the successful Rough Guide series, affirms that in terms of women's liberation "Palermo still labours in the Dark Ages", while it warns British women travelling in Sicily that they will be assumed to be easy because they are "radiating freedom and independence", in contrast with the local female population.⁶ Thus, in the modern, westernised age, and within a relatively unified Europe, a type of British identity is still being constructed through an opposition to a primitive Mediterranean south.⁷

However, the term "south" in the English language has acquired new resonances: it appears today to have lost its immediate reference to the Mediterranean, and is now referred more often, by the media and academic scholarship alike, to a wider, global dimension, as in the expression "the south of the world". The relation between this use of the term and that in the nineteenth century could provide a fertile field of analysis for postcolonial theorists, as the shift of meaning may serve as a cautionary tale against the risk of essentialisations.

On the one hand, the analysis carried out in this work points to the fact that the construction of an imperial and modern British identity needs to be viewed in the context of Britain's relation to Europe and the Mediterranean, as well as to the colonial Other. On the other hand, it also suggests that the study of culture should be informed by the awareness that general categories such as north and south, east and west are cultural constructions, situated in historical moments and constantly shifting and changing.

Italian words for British tourists published in 1993, which reproduces the familiar dictates of climatic determinism suggesting that Sicilian men are sexually aggressive towards British women because the "sun has cooked their brain" (Howard Tomb, *Wicked Italian for the Traveller*, London: Harper Collins, 1993).

⁶ Robert Andrews and Jules Brown, *Sicily: The Rough Guide* (London: Harrap Columbus, 1989; repr.1993), p.42.

⁷ The tourist industry in southern Italy and Sicily has long exploited the connotations of primitivism and authenticity, by selling foreign and northern Italian tourists precisely the image of an enchanted location untouched by modernity, but laden with cultural treasures, where the classical heritage is the principal attraction.

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