

A painting of Thomas Jefferson in Italy, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a white coat over a red waistcoat. He is seated, looking out over a landscape with ancient ruins and Mount Vesuvius in the background. In the foreground, classical statues are visible behind a low wall.

# JOURNEY TO ITALY: Paradise and Exile

October 30, 2020



# Last Week's Discussion (Nationhood & Freedom)

# Leopardi, “Wild Broom, or Flower of the Desert”, 1836

- ALL TOGETHER
  - What is happening in this poem?
  - What does the broom (a type of flowering bush) symbolize for Leopardi as it grows on the slopes of Vesuvius? What, in turn, might Vesuvius symbolize?
  - What is the tone of Leopardi’s close of the first strophe: “The ‘magnificent and progressive fate’ / of the human race / is depicted in this place.” (ll. 51-53).
  - What role does the past (the past of Italy, of Naples/Pompeii) play in these poems?
  - Is Leopardi doing anything we have seen before? (Symbolism we have seen? Themes we have seen? Etc.)

# Elizabeth Barrett Browning

- British poet and political activist (1806-1861)
- She met her husband, the writer Robert Browning, late in her life, through his admiration of her poetry
- She married Robert secretly, for her father disapproved. She was disinherited when he found out and in 1846, she and Robert moved to Italy, where she lived until her death.
- She was a major influence on American poets such as Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe. Her most famous works are most often cited as Sonnet 43, "How do I love thee?" (1845) and *Aurora Leigh* (1856).
- In Italy "Engrossed in Italian politics, she issued a small volume of political poems titled *Poems before Congress* (1860) 'most of which were written to express her sympathy with the Italian cause after the outbreak of fighting in 1859'. They caused a furor in England, and the conservative magazines labelled her a fanatic." (*Wikipedia*)



# Barrett Browning, “Casa Guidi Windows I-III”, 1851

- ALL TOGETHER
  - What is happening in this poem?
  - What might be significant about the year it was written, based on what we saw in the timeline of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?
  - In a way that is similar to the women writers we have read before, I wonder how you see Barrett Browning’s introduction to the theme of liberty and nationhood as different from the men writers who are writing on similar themes?
  - What role does the past (the past of Italy, of Florence) play in this poem?

# Petrarch, selections from *Il canzoniere* (1327-1368)

- *Il canzoniere* is 366 poems, written and organized across 45 years, largely dedicated to Laura, as well as to the themes of desire, isolation, unrequited love, as well as religion, poetry, politics, time, and glory.
- Exile and Paradise are our themes for today.
  - It was a Grand Tour commonplace, with its origin in Petrarch, to consider Italy paradise.
  - But we are going to focus on ‘exile’ in Petrarch.
- His exile was partially voluntary
  - His use of exile as a theme demonstrates this.
- He treats it, like Dante, as something sacred. Exile as pilgrimage and the wandering pilgrimage through exile as an allegory for life.
- There is also something ‘touristy’ about it.
  - Petrarch “traveled widely in Europe, served as an ambassador, and (because he traveled for pleasure, as with his ascent of Mont Ventoux), has been called ‘the first tourist.’” (Wikipedia)



## Discussion Questions

- Petrarch's father was exiled from Florence and Petrarch, himself, was born into exile. He wandered Tuscany and beyond for his entire life, feeling homeless (as he said, without 'patria'). Exile, along with Laura, solitude and passing time, is a recurrent theme in his poetry and other writing.
  - In sestina 80, he refers to exile. To what do you think he is referring?
  - In sonnet 94, what does exile refer to?
  - What in this sestina and in the following Petrarchan sonnets is reminiscent of other poems we have read?

# Goethe, *Italian Journey*

- Why did I include the frontmatter to Goethe's *Italian Journey*?

# Et in arcadia ego.

- What is Arcadia?
  - It is a real place in Greece.
  - It is the mythical home of Pan, the Greek god of the wild, shepherds and flocks, nature of mountain wilds, rustic music.
  - After the fall of Rome, Arcadia (the real one) remained a beautiful, secluded area, and its inhabitants became knowns as shepherds who led simple, happy pastoral lives. It was so renowned that Arcadia began to refer to some imaginary idyllic paradise, especially after it was immortalized as such by Virgil's *Eclogues*.
  - By the time of Renaissance Italian art, Arcadia was celebrated as an idyllic wilderness. Again, imaginary.
    - It is a precedent/counterpart to the concept of Utopia, in many ways.

# Et in arcadia ego.

- The phrase used by Goethe, famous today, first appeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Italy when the painter Giovanni Guercino produced a painting in which the Latin inscription can be read. It means “Even in Arcadia, there am I,” and it is interpreted as being spoken by Death.



# Et in arcadia ego.

- Poussin made it really famous in one of two paintings he did with these words inscribed.
- Goethe quoted it in *Faust*, as well as in *IJ* [Auch ich in Arkadien!].
- Felicia Hemans wrote the 1824 poem “And I too in Arcadia”.
- *Arcadia* is also a really great Tom Stoppard play, about Lord Byron and ruins and picturesque landscapes.
  - See it if you get a chance.



## Discussion Questions

- Why did I include the frontmatter to Goethe's *Italian Journey*?
- Who do you think that Goethe is referring to with his 'I', and what do you think the tone of his phrase is? Is it a memento mori?

## Shelley, *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.*, 1821

- This is a pastoral elegy (that is a poem of serious reflection, often upon a death), of 55 stanzas and 495 lines.
- We have read the ending, which is focused on Rome.
- John Keats died 2 months before Shelley wrote this elegy (Shelley died 14 months later).
- The title is modeled after ancient titles (like the Roman poet Statius's *Achilleis*, about Achilles).
- Adonis is the Greek god of beauty and desire, and the lover of the goddess, Aphrodite. He suffered an untimely death by a wild boar while hunting.

## Discussion Questions

- In his elegy to the poet John Keats, Shelley instructs his listeners to head to his grave, at the protestant graveyard near the Pyramid of Cestius in Rome. Ironically, Percy Shelley, himself, will be buried there the following year (as will Antonio Gramsci in 1937).
  - What role does Rome play in his elegy?

# Shelley, Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation, 1821

- As noted in the reading questions, this is a conversation between Shelley (**Julian**) and Byron (**Maddalo**), set in **Venice**.
- We have read it in its entirety.
- **The Maniac** is meant to be the Renaissance Italian poet, Torquato Tasso.
  - “Tasso was established as a prototype of the Romantic poet, loving passionately but hopelessly, the victim of political oppression, maintaining his dignity and essential nobility of heart through intense and prolonged suffering, the hypersensitive creative artist at odds with society, wandering restlessly from court to court or in a lunatic’s cell.” Weinberg, 66
- **The daughter** (Allegra Byron).
- There is a duality in Venice that is expressed in the titular characters as well
  - Julian (Shelley) is positive/romantic, he sees in Venice, Italy, Freedom, paradise for exiles
  - Maddalo (Byron) is negative/realist, he sees in Italy a madhouse
- Whose view prevails?

# Shelley, Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation, 1821

- It is worth noting:
  - The idea of ‘Utopia’ is increasingly popular in the time period as European men (like Shelley) are increasingly atheists and thus must search for a Paradise on earth.
  - The idea of Paradise here is abstracted from the actual local situation, accessible only through the traveler’s privileged position as transient and middle-upper class.
    - The central issue in “Euganean Hills” and *Julian and Maddalo* is philosophical, and ultimately independent of Italy.
  - Virgil’s Eclogue 10, about Gaius Cornelius Gallus (Roman poet and politician), is quoted at the beginning.
    - Who can say why this might be relevant?



## Discussion Questions

- In *Julian and Maddalo*, Count Maddalo is a fictional Lord Byron, while Julian is Percy Shelley, himself, and the Maniac is Torquato Tasso, an Italian Renaissance poet who was a supreme tragic heroic figure for writers like Goethe, Byron, and Shelley.
  - Why is the quotation of Virgil's 10<sup>th</sup> eclogue relevant to the course discussion today?
  - Line 57 , "Thou paradise of exiles, Italy!" mingles our two keywords for this class. What do you make of the fact that Shelley rewrites his exile co-star, Byron, as an Italian count?
  - How do you think this claim of Italy as a paradise can be situated in the context of the conversation between Maddalo and Julian?

# Leopardi, “Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd in Asia” 1831

- When we consider Leopardi and Rossetti, we are considering difference.
  - Leopardi is Italian, not a tourist in Italy.
  - Rossetti is a woman, rather than a man, and her exile is inverted as compared to Byron and Shelley.
- It is worth keeping in mind how their poetic perspectives are different due to their own differences.

## Discussion Questions

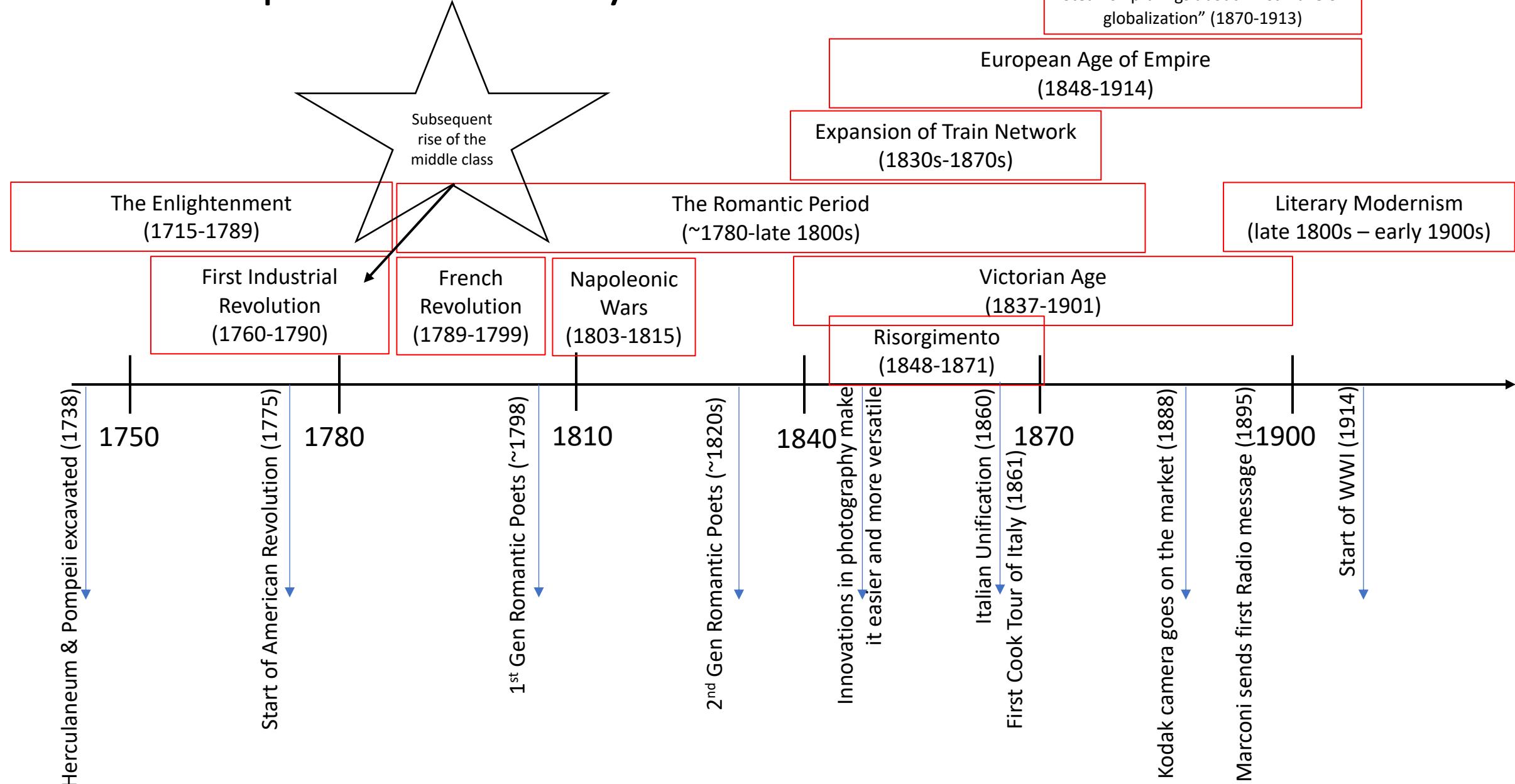
- Petrarch, Shelley, and Byron all set themselves up as lone wandering poets flung across the Italian landscape. Leopardi's wandering is imagined in Asia, what do you make of this?
- How is his shepherd's wandering similar to and different from the British Romantics' imagery, setting, and themes?

# Christina Rossetti

- Italian British poet and political activist (1830-1894)
- Her father, Gabriele Rossetti, was a poet and political exile in Italy. Christina was born in London.
- Christina Rossetti is a firmly Victorian poet.



# European History Timeline



# Christina Rossetti

- Italian British poet and political activist (1830-1894)
- Her father, Gabriele Rossetti, was a poet and political exile in Italy. Christina was born in London.
- Christina Rossetti is a firmly Victorian poet.
- Rossetti's most famous collection of poems is her 1862 *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, and she was hailed as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's successor, after Browning's death the year before its publication.





## Discussion Questions

- Christina Rossetti was an Italian-British poet, who was born in London while her Italian father was in exile in England. How does her treatment of Italy differ from those who seek refuge there?
- How does her treatment of Rome differ from the other poets we have read?



## Discussion Questions

- FINAL THOUGHTS
- Where do you think these poets are locating ‘paradise’ ‘utopia’ or ‘Arcadia’?
- What is the relationship between exile and paradise, in your opinion, or as you see it expressed by these poets?
- Do you see these themes as correlated to any other of the course themes we’ve looked at thus far?
  - The sublime
  - The picturesque
  - The beautiful
  - Gothic literature
  - Nationhood
  - Freedom/liberty
  - Sentimentality/Emotion/Feeling
  - Ruins
  - Mortality/decay/march of Time
  - Moon